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Plastic Free Rivers and Seas for South Asia

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“High-Level Roundtable Discussions on Plastic Waste Management Challenges and Solutions in Bangladesh”

High-Level Roundtable Discussions | Bangladesh | 30 September 2024



Event: High-Level Roundtable Discussion

Theme: Plastic Pollution Interventions in Bangladesh

Topic: High-Level Roundtable Discussion on Plastic Waste Management Challenges and Solutions in Bangladesh

Date: 30 September 2024

Time: 10:00 AM to 13:00 PM - Roundtable Discussion | 13:00 PM onwards - Lunch

Venue: Crystal Ballroom, InterContinental Hotel, Dhaka

Moderator: Nalaka Gunawardene, Senior Communication Consultant, The World Bank

Discussants: Senior representatives from the Government of Bangladesh, United Nations agencies, multilateral financial institutions, bilateral donors, Non-Governmental Organizations and civil society networks, corporate sector, think tanks, and academia

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BELA	Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association
BPCL	Bangladesh Petrochemical Company Ltd.
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BUET	Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology
CDIP	Centre for Development Innovation and Practices
DNCC	Dhaka North City Corporation
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
ESDO	Environment and Social Development Organization
INC	Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee
INC-5	Fifth Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee
MoEFCC	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PLEASE	Plastic Free Rivers and Seas in South Asia
RGB	Regional Block Grants
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SACEP	South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
WASA	Water Supply and Sewerage Authority
WB	World Bank

Introduction:

The High-Level Roundtable Discussion on Plastic Waste Management in Bangladesh was held on 30 September 2024 at the Hotel Intercontinental in Dhaka. This event, hosted by the Plastic Free Rivers and Seas for South Asia (PLEASE) Project, was organized by the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) with support from the World Bank and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

Since March 2024, PLEASE Project has organized similar roundtable discussions in other South Asian countries to foster knowledge sharing and collaborative strategies to address plastic pollution. This Bangladesh-focused roundtable centered on three key themes: policy and regulatory frameworks, development partner initiatives, and corporate and civil society contributions.

With 70 participants—58 of whom were invited guests from the Government, international organizations, corporate sectors, and civil society—the event was structured to address the multifaceted challenges of plastic waste management in Bangladesh.

The objectives of the Roundtable Discussion were to:

- Create a platform for discussing policy and practice-level measures to tackle plastic pollution in South Asia undertaken by different stakeholders
- Identify existing interventions and innovations, as well as discuss strategies for scaling up successes and overcoming bottlenecks
- Explore opportunities for collaboration in plastic waste management
- Promote greater coordination among development funders and corporate sponsors active in this sector to reduce duplication of efforts and optimize results
- Discuss policy and regulatory matters and challenges related to waste and plastic waste in the context of Bhutan
- Showcase initiatives by international development partners
- Present Initiatives by PLEASE Grantees and wider civil society and private sector perspectives on the issue
- Involve many stakeholders and strengthen synergies in tackling plastic waste in the country

Through in-depth discussions, participants tackled various aspects of plastic waste management, including policy gaps, regulatory challenges, and the need for robust enforcement. Emphasis was placed on extended producer responsibility (EPR), the transboundary nature of plastic pollution, and the necessity of regional cooperation to address waste flowing into Bangladesh's waterways. Overall, the roundtable underscored the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement, community-led solutions, and sustained international cooperation to tackle plastic pollution and promote sustainable waste management practices in Bangladesh.

Roundtable Discussion Summary :

Opening Remarks

Speakers:

1. Rokeya Khaton, Director General of SACEP
2. Gayle Martin, Operations Manager at the World Bank
3. Sudhir Muralidharan, UNOPS Country Manager for Bangladesh
4. Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Adviser to the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC)

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Adviser to the MoEFCC, passionately advocated for a plastic-free society in Bangladesh, drawing attention to the severe environmental and health risks, including microplastics in consumables like fish and salt. She emphasized the urgent need for a comprehensive approach to plastic management, advocating for stricter enforcement of Bangladesh's existing plastic regulations. Rizwana highlighted that Bangladesh's plastic waste management policies lack enforcement, leading to substandard recycling practices. She stressed the need for certified recycling standards and urged development partners to work with local agencies, especially in coastal areas, to manage plastic at the source. She underscored the transboundary nature of the plastic crisis, with waste from upstream countries accumulating in Bangladesh rivers and flowing into the Bay of Bengal. Rizwana also noted the role of EPR and called for private sector collaboration in a unified national plastic waste management strategy.

Gayle Martin, Operations Manager at the World Bank, highlighted the World Bank's commitment to sustainable development in Bangladesh, noting the surge in urban plastic consumption over the last 15 years. She cited the Bank's recent environmental analysis, which found that Bangladesh's recycling saves approximately USD 108 million annually, though more aggressive actions are necessary. Martin reaffirmed the World Bank's support for the PLEASE Project, which focuses on institution building, public awareness, and regional cooperation, and commended Bangladesh's recent ban on single-use plastics in markets and supermarkets. She also addressed the economic impact of plastic waste, noting the millions lost each year to environmental degradation and health costs. Martin called for strengthened policy frameworks, innovation, and community engagement and recognized that regional collaboration would be essential in addressing the transboundary aspects of plastic pollution.

Rokeya Khatun, the outgoing Director General of SACEP, underscored SACEP's commitment to reducing plastic pollution through regional cooperation, highlighting its role as a catalyst for Bangladesh's initiatives in this space. Through the PLEASE Project, substantial grants were awarded to organizations like BRAC, BPCL, and others to empower communities to implement their own waste management practices. She emphasized that such funding builds local capacity and reinforces SACEP's commitment to fostering community-led sustainability. Additionally, Rokeya pointed out that plastic pollution is a shared challenge across South Asia, calling for the region to adopt joint solutions to

tackle the problem across borders. She noted that Bangladesh's contributions would be highlighted at INC-5 in Korea, advocating for transformative, unified action across South Asia.

Sudhir Muralidhara, UNOPS Country Manager for Bangladesh, framed the plastic crisis globally, noting that billions of tons of plastic waste contribute to an annual economic loss of USD 13 billion due to marine pollution alone. He explained that per capita plastic consumption has tripled in Bangladesh, putting significant pressure on ecosystems. He discussed UNOPS's role as the implementing partner for the PLEASE Project, including operational support in grant management and monitoring. Sudhir praised Bangladesh's progress on its National Action Plan for Sustainable Plastic Waste Management, viewing this roundtable as a vital opportunity to build on these efforts incrementally. He highlighted that while the scope of the plastic crisis is immense, coordinated small steps could have a significant impact over time, especially with ongoing community involvement and policy refinement.

The roundtable discussion was structured into three rounds or sessions, each focusing on a specific theme:

1. Policy and regulatory matters related to plastic waste management in Bangladesh
2. Initiatives of Bilateral and Multilateral Development Partners (UN and donor agencies representatives)
3. Showcasing work by corporate and civil society entities (including PLEASE grantees)

Session 1: Policy and regulatory matters related to plastic waste management in Bangladesh

The first session focused on the policy and regulatory challenges related to plastic waste management in Bangladesh. Key officials and experts discussed the country's approach to addressing plastic pollution and highlighted recent advancements and persistent challenges in the regulatory landscape.

Tapan Kumar Biswas, Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Environment, provided an overview of Bangladesh's plastic waste management issues, emphasizing environmental and health impacts. He noted a sharp rise in plastic consumption in urban areas, with per capita usage increasing from 3 kilograms per person per year in 2005 to 9 kilograms in 2020, contributing to a total of 1.2 million tons of plastic waste generated annually. Biswas highlighted that much of this waste is non-biodegradable, which clogs drainage systems, pollutes rivers, and eventually fragments into microplastics that enter the human food chain. He underscored the importance of regional cooperation, given that a significant portion of marine plastic in Bangladesh's waters originates from upstream neighboring countries, requiring collective efforts to manage cross-border plastic waste. Biswas also reviewed recent policy advancements, such as the 2021 National Plastic Waste Management Policy and the Environment Conservation Act, noting that a new Mobile Court Act, effective November 1, 2024, will enhance enforcement against plastic waste violators. He emphasized the government's target to reduce plastic waste by 50% by 2050, calling for a collaborative approach to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Md. Salim Ullah, Additional Secretary from the Ministry of Industry, discussed the measures embedded in the 2023 National Plastic Industry Development Policy to foster sustainable practices in the plastic industry. He highlighted that Dhaka's per capita plastic consumption, averaging 22.25 kilograms annually, is significantly below the global average of approximately 45 kilograms. This gap underscores the importance of leveraging international best practices to guide future strategies and improve plastic waste management. The policy, he explained, mandates Environmental Management Systems (EMS) in production facilities and focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. He also outlined initiatives to improve water use efficiency, track plastic waste generation, and enforce chemical management standards. Salimullah further emphasized a collaborative action plan between the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Environment, including a ban on plastic scrap imports under the 2024-2027 Import Policy Order.

Professor Gawsia Wahidunnessa Chowdhury, from the University of Dhaka, provided insights into the challenges of managing microplastic pollution, especially in the Sundarbans region. She described a feasibility study aimed at repurposing plastics from discarded fishing nets by mobilizing female fishers in coastal areas. This project, supported by the World Bank, aims to create a sustainable supply chain for collecting and repurposing fishing nets. She also noted that several policies within the National Plastic Waste Management Action Plan remain ineffective due to limited local capacity, lack of coordination, and high costs of alternative materials. Professor Gawsia emphasized that increasing public awareness, strengthening producer-consumer relationships, and implementing cost-effective solutions are critical to addressing plastic waste in rural areas.

A. K. M. Showkat Alam Mozumder, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, provided insights into the global context of plastic production and import, emphasizing the need for Bangladesh to control plastic imports, particularly duty-free ones, by imposing higher duties or selective bans, especially on low-cost products from the U.S. and China. He also proposed banning single-use plastics in educational institutions and government offices to promote responsible usage. Mazumdar stressed the importance of public awareness and an integrated approach combining strict regulations and education to reduce plastic waste.

Najneen Parvin, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, discussed Bangladesh's significant logistical and spatial challenges in managing plastic waste, including limited landfill space and recycling capacity. She proposed banning single-use polythene bags in supermarkets and local markets and emphasized the need for stricter enforcement of existing regulations. Parvin advocated for regular monitoring and penalties for non-compliance to reduce plastic waste and improve environmental cleanliness.

S.M. Mehedi Ahsan, the Bangladesh Institute of Planners, pointed out the value of the plastic circular economy, stressing that solutions must involve all stakeholders, from producers to waste pickers. He highlighted the local government's critical role in waste management and the need for interventions at multiple social levels for effective results.

Tariq Bin Yousuf, former Additional Chief Engineer at Dhaka North City Corporation, highlighted a gap between policy formulation and local implementation, pointing out a lack of resources and capacity to enact existing policies on the ground.

Farzana Jhumu, UNEP Youth representative, urged Bangladesh to prioritize regional cooperation over financial aid in addressing plastic pollution, emphasizing South Asian unity in tackling the issue.

Numan Haq, Senior Adviser, Climate Change from Save the Children, discussed the harmful effects of plastic pollution on children, emphasizing their heightened vulnerability and the need to focus on this demographic in policy considerations.

Kadeem Mahmood Yusuf, CEO of BPCL, raised concerns over the informal sector's role in plastic pollution, especially the production of unregistered plastic bags, advocating for behavior change strategies and alternatives to plastic bags.

Key Takeaways:

- Bangladesh has made progress in policy development for plastic waste management, but effective enforcement remains challenging.
- Regional cooperation is necessary to address the transboundary movement of marine plastic pollution in Bangladesh waters.
- Improved coordination is needed between government ministries and alignment of policies at various levels is critical for consistent waste management.
- The 2023 National Plastic Industry Development Policy introduces new standards and collaborative initiatives to promote sustainable practices in the industry.
- Public awareness and initiatives promoting producer and consumer accountability are essential to effectively reducing plastic waste.
- Involving local governments and addressing capacity gaps can enhance waste management outcomes in both urban and rural areas.
- Support for technological innovations and cost-effective solutions is needed, especially in addressing microplastic pollution in vulnerable regions like the Sundarbans.
- Low-income communities' reliance on affordable single-use plastics underscores the need for affordable and sustainable alternatives.
- Including informal sector players in waste management discussions can improve outcomes, particularly by addressing the unregulated production of plastic bags.
- Plastic pollution's health impacts on children should be prioritized, as they are more vulnerable to toxin exposure.
- EPR is critical for effective waste management, requiring cooperation between producers, consumers, and waste collectors.
- A complete ban on single-use plastics, especially in public institutions and markets, and public awareness campaigns, is recommended to curb plastic pollution.

Session 2: Initiatives by Bilateral and Multilateral Development Partners (UN and donor Agency representatives)

The second segment of the Roundtable Discussion centered on initiatives led by bilateral and multilateral development partners, including representatives from the UN and various donor agencies. This session showcased innovative strategies and approaches funded by development partners in Bangladesh to combat plastic pollution and advance sustainability. Attendees included representatives from the World Bank, the French Embassy in Bangladesh, the Swedish Embassy, ADB, the Norwegian Embassy in Bangladesh, UNIDO, and UNDP, who each shared their ongoing initiatives and strategic efforts to reduce plastic pollution in the country.

Bushra Nishat, Environment Specialist from the World Bank, discussed the critical issue of plastic waste management in Bangladesh, highlighting the World Bank's involvement since 2019 in supporting the government. She shared findings from a study in Dhaka that showed significant plastic waste is either discarded into the environment or left in landfills, with only a small percentage recycled. She noted the rising costs of managing plastic waste, citing the \$23 million spent by Diwasa on cleaning sewers, which included significant plastic waste, and the indirect costs like dengue outbreaks linked to plastic waste. Bushra emphasized the importance of policy tools like EPR to fund waste management and the need for improved infrastructure to tackle e-waste and plastic recycling. She also shared ongoing projects with fishers in Cox's Bazar, focusing on the economic viability of collecting and recycling plastic fishing nets. Bushra highlighted ongoing research, including a study on the use of plastic waste in road construction, a practice already implemented in countries like India and Bhutan. Bangladesh is exploring this technology with the World Bank's support to manage plastic waste and create more durable infrastructure.

Marie Masdupuy, Ambassador of France to Bangladesh, praised the approach of involving multiple stakeholders, including market owners and syndicates, to address plastic waste. She stressed the importance of raising customer awareness and implementing fines for businesses that continue using polluting plastic bags. While recognizing the role of jute, she also pointed out the need for other alternative materials, emphasizing that the responsibility of managing plastic waste lies with individual countries as well as on a global scale. The Ambassador also encouraged Bangladesh to take a stronger stance in international negotiations on plastic pollution, particularly advocating for more vocal participation in the upcoming INC-5 negotiations (fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee). She further recommended incorporating climate change and environmental protection into the national curriculum to build awareness among future generations.

Nayoka Martinez Backstrom, First Secretary, Embassy of Sweden, highlighted Sweden's commitment to reducing plastic production, banning harmful plastics, and tackling ocean pollution. She shared lessons learned from Sweden's cooperation with Bangladesh, particularly in the legal and policy frameworks around plastic waste. She lauded the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) for their legal efforts in holding polluters accountable and emphasized the importance of revisiting legal frameworks to optimize waste management policies. Miss Backstrom

also stressed that plastic waste management should be integrated into a comprehensive solid waste management system, sharing Sweden's experience in piloting waste management solutions in Teknaf, a municipality in Bangladesh.

Zaki Zaman, UNIDO, Country Director, presented the UNIDO's efforts towards sustainable plastic use and marine litter prevention in Bangladesh. UNIDO is leading a project funded by the Norwegian Government in collaboration with the Department of Environment and other local stakeholders. The project has four main components: policy development to reduce indiscriminate plastic waste, enhancing the use of recycled plastics, promoting product and process innovation, and facilitating consumer awareness programs. A key initiative is the creation of Eco Clubs in Cox's Bazar, working with underprivileged schoolchildren and fishermen to reduce plastic waste. The project also focuses on recycling, industry resource efficiency, and developing small-scale recycling facilities. Zaki emphasized that collaboration between different stakeholders, including industries and local governments, is crucial for addressing the challenges of plastic waste management in Bangladesh.

Open discussion:

During an open discussion, **Rashik Hasan, CEO of Ecovia**, highlighted concerns regarding the absence of a comprehensive waste management plan, particularly in segregating waste and establishing state-owned recycling and composting facilities. He pointed out that while alternatives to plastics, like compostable materials and jute, are gaining ground, the lack of proper waste segregation hinders their effective disposal. Rashik urged a more structured waste management system to make alternative solutions like compostable packaging more viable nationwide.

Debashish Roy, UNDP, highlighted Bangladesh's relatively low per capita plastic waste consumption compared to other countries but pointed out the challenge of managing the generated waste. UNDP is developing an app to track the movement of plastics across the supply chain, which will be tested in Chattogram. This initiative aims to enhance the circularity of plastic waste and improve its management by better monitoring and recycling practices.

Shahila Akter, Deputy Secretary at the Ministry of Industries, emphasized the role of jute in reducing plastic use. She pointed out the need for stronger monitoring and enforcement of laws related to jute bag usage, which can serve as a sustainable alternative to plastic bags. Shahila also stressed the importance of behavioral change, particularly in rural areas, where awareness about plastic pollution is limited. She urged more targeted initiatives to drive this change and reduce plastic waste.

Captain Mohammad Fida Hasan, Chief Waste Management Officer at Dhaka North City Corporation, discussed the scale of waste management challenges in Dhaka, particularly the 10,000 tons of waste produced daily, of which a significant portion is plastic. He mentioned ongoing efforts such as waste-to-electricity projects and the closure of landfills to reduce methane emissions. He acknowledged the difficulty in managing such large volumes of waste but highlighted that solid waste

management rules introduced in 2021 are helping guide efforts towards more effective waste segregation and recycling. He also mentioned the importance of involving communities and raising awareness, particularly among schoolchildren, to foster responsible waste management practices. He shared optimism that the continued efforts of local governments, along with strong policies, will improve waste management systems in the coming years.

Bushra Nishat, Environmental Specialist at the World Bank, also contributed by emphasizing the importance of waste segregation at the household level and the need for a cultural shift in how citizens manage waste. She shared her experience of promoting reusable bags and underscored that small changes in consumer behavior could have a significant impact. Bushra also acknowledged the progress made by the Ministry of Environment in creating awareness and encouraging businesses to reduce plastic usage while noting that the challenge remains in making waste segregation a habit for all citizens.

Rahul Matthew from World Vision raised a pertinent question about collaboration among stakeholders on plastic waste issues. He suggested that more effective collaboration is needed to address the challenges comprehensively. Rahul emphasized the importance of focusing on sustainable consumption patterns as part of the broader solution to the plastic pollution crisis.

Key Takeaways:

- Bangladesh faces significant issues with plastic waste management, including improper disposal, minimal recycling, and the rising cost of managing waste (e.g., US\$ 23 million spent on sewer cleaning).
- Stronger policies like EPR and improved infrastructure for recycling e-waste and plastic are essential for tackling plastic pollution.
- Effective solutions to plastic pollution require the involvement of various stakeholders, including market owners, syndicates, and local governments.
- Bangladesh should take a more active role in international negotiations on plastic pollution to influence global policies.
- There are ongoing initiatives like the World Bank's research on recycling plastic fishing nets and using plastic waste for road construction, as well as UNIDO's efforts to promote recycling and awareness in Cox's Bazar.
- Bangladesh faces issues like the lack of waste segregation and inadequate state-owned recycling facilities, requiring structured waste management systems to support alternatives like compostable packaging.
- Public education is key to fostering responsible waste management practices, especially in schools. Promoting sustainable consumption habits, such as reusable bags, can also significantly reduce plastic waste.
- Stronger enforcement of laws for sustainable materials like jute and promoting behavioral change, particularly in rural areas, are essential to reducing plastic waste and encouraging more eco-friendly alternatives.

Session 3: Showcasing work by corporate and civil society sectors:

The third segment of the Roundtable Discussion highlighted efforts from the corporate and civil society sectors in addressing plastic waste. This segment specifically showcased solutions and innovative projects by the PLEASE project grantees working on plastic waste management in Bangladesh. This session also highlighted a range of innovative approaches and strategies to reduce plastic pollution and promote sustainability.

Khadem Yousuf, CEO of BPCL, shared BPCL's commitment to the PLEASE Project, emphasizing its aim to set up seven collection hubs to gather 5,000 metric tons of plastic. This initiative will directly benefit 1,050 small scrap dealers and 7,600 waste pickers, addressing challenges such as the rising costs of plastic due to the control by middlemen. He outlined BPCL's approach to reestablish connections between small collection shops, waste pickers, and large recycling businesses by partnering with local entities and NGOs like CDP. Social interventions, including healthcare, PPE, microcredit support, and childcare facilities, will also be provided to enhance workers' well-being. The goal is to create a traceable supply chain and achieve significant plastic recycling targets.

Imamul Azam Shahi, Head of the Urban Development Program, BRAC, discussed BRAC's work under the PLEASE Project, focusing on a human-centered and comprehensive waste management approach, particularly in Cox's Bazar and the Rohingya camps. He highlighted the severe plastic pollution in Cox's Bazar, with 34.5 tons of plastic waste dumped daily. BRAC's interventions aim to reduce plastic use and waste through multi-sector collaboration, including local businesses, government bodies, and community engagement. Additionally, BRAC is addressing waste pickers' unregistered status by improving their capacity and integrating them into a formal system. Shahi also mentioned the construction of a recycling facility with the local municipality, which will support small entrepreneurs, especially women, in utilizing collected plastic.

Jannat Munia, Deputy Director of RedOrange Communication, presented RedOrange Communications' work on the plastic pollution issue in the Kallyanpur area, Dhaka. She emphasized the organization's innovative approach, combining community awareness, floating barriers to collect plastic waste, and integrating with existing recycling systems. Through a partnership with Ocean Bound, the project aims to reduce plastic pollution downstream while promoting behavioral change and recycling practices. Munia emphasized the importance of small-scale interventions and how innovation in combining technical solutions with community engagement can drive meaningful change. The project has already implemented a pilot barrier and aims to transform polluted canals into clean, vibrant spaces.

Rakibul Hasan Mukul, Executive Director of Arannayk Foundation, spoke about the Arannayk Foundation's initiative to reduce plastic pollution in the Sundarbans, an internationally significant ecosystem. With partners like ESDO and Recycle Jar Ecosystem, the project focuses on understanding how plastic pollution enters the region's rivers, analyzing the data for informed policymaking, and involving waste pickers in the collection process through an app-based tracking system. Mukul noted

the importance of addressing plastic waste in forest ecosystems, where waste often accumulates due to inadequate disposal practices. The project aims to raise awareness among local communities and tourists while providing actionable insights to policymakers for sustainable waste management solutions.

Dr. Shahadat Hossain, Institute of Marine Science, Chattagram University, presented his institute's ongoing work on plastic pollution and circular economy practices in Bangladesh. Collaborating with UNESCO and local partners, the project focuses on microplastic pollution in marine ecosystems and its impact on the food chain. Dr. Hossain outlined the project's five main outcomes: capacity building, awareness programs, and promoting responsible fishing practices to prevent ghost fishing. A key aspect of their work involves educating various occupational groups, including waste pickers and recyclers, and addressing the harmful effects of microplastics on marine biodiversity and human health.

Mr. Maqsood Sinha, Co-Founder & Executive Director of Waste Concern, highlighted the growing seriousness of plastic waste, emphasizing that while certain plastics are recyclable and economically valuable, packaging materials that emerged in the last two decades present significant challenges. These materials are non-recyclable and add to environmental and societal problems. He discussed the decline in national recycling rates from 45% in 2005 to 30% today, attributing this to the lack of economic value in certain plastic types. He underscored the importance of the Solid Waste Management Handling Rule of 2021, which includes EPR, aiming to engage manufacturers, consumers, and recyclers in waste management. He also stressed the importance of data collection in setting realistic, achievable recycling targets and called for better collaboration between the private sector and government to drive effective recycling solutions.

Dr. Shariar Hossain, Founder of ESDO, emphasized the urgent need for regional and international cooperation to address the transboundary movement of toxic plastic waste. He pointed out that Bangladesh, a delta-based country, faces significant challenges from upstream waste, and solving this issue requires regional collaboration. He highlighted Bangladesh's active participation in the plastic treaty negotiations, which could lead to positive changes regarding plastic and toxic waste movement. He also reflected on Bangladesh's pioneering role in banning plastic bags, noting that the continuous process and collective responsibility of all citizens are crucial to solving the plastic waste problem.

Shamima Akter, Director of Brand Partnership and Communication, Unilever, shared insights on Unilever's role in addressing plastic waste, emphasizing the company's efforts to manage plastic packaging through collaborations with local municipalities. She discussed the challenges of using recycled plastic, particularly with flexible packaging, and the need for certification to ensure quality for reuse in production. She outlined Unilever's reduction targets, including an 18% decrease in virgin plastic use and 25% recycled plastic by 2030. Shamima stressed the importance of EPR, noting that Unilever has voluntarily engaged in this system and is committed to working with the informal sector and local authorities to improve waste collection and recycling infrastructure, ultimately contributing to a circular economy.

Debabrata Roy Chowdhury, Secretary and Head of Legal & Taxation, Nestlé Bangladesh Limited, discussed Nestlé's global commitment to sustainability, including plastic waste management. He highlighted the importance of involving informal waste sectors in EPR systems, as over 70% of waste is generated by this sector. Roy emphasized the need for a holistic approach that includes all stakeholders, such as corporate entities, local government institutions, and consumers. He also stressed the importance of integrating sustainability education into school curriculums to build awareness early on.

Latifur Rahman, Head of Geocycle, LafargeHolcim, Bangladesh, shared Geocycle's role in sustainable waste management, particularly through the cement kiln process, which is suitable for waste disposal due to its high temperatures and long residence time. Since 2017, Geocycle has been actively managing waste in Bangladesh. In 2022, the organization launched a project to sustainably dispose of waste and has, to this date, successfully processed 50,000 tons of plastic waste. As part of its efforts, Geocycle has established a state-of-the-art Material Recovery Facility (MRF) in Bangladesh, dedicated to segregating municipal solid waste and plastic waste. Following an intensive pre-processing stage, Geocycle is leveraging this waste to recover energy, further contributing to sustainable waste management and environmental protection. Rahman highlighted the company's collaboration with Sylhet City Corporation to recover 250 tons of single-use plastic daily, preventing marine litter and contributing to energy recovery in cement production.

Professor Ijaz Hossain, Former dean of the engineering faculty, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), offered an academic perspective on plastic waste management. He pointed out that the main issue is not the plastic itself but the widespread littering and poor solid waste management systems in Bangladesh. He argued that it could be effectively managed if 100% of plastic waste could be collected. Ijaz also stressed that the public's habit of littering is the primary cause of the plastic problem and that focusing on managing plastic waste before it reaches unintended places is crucial. He concluded by comparing the presence of microplastics in different regions, suggesting that plastic management is more about collection than elimination.

Key Takeaways:

- Efforts are underway to establish structured plastic collection systems that support informal waste workers, reduce intermediary costs, and create traceable supply chains.
- Community-based waste management approaches are focusing on reducing plastic usage, empowering local entrepreneurs, especially women, and improving recycling infrastructure.
- Localized interventions aim to address urban plastic pollution through public awareness, simple collection technologies, and integration with existing waste systems to shift behavior.
- Projects are analyzing plastic pollution sources in natural ecosystems, engaging informal waste collectors through digital tools, and generating data to inform policy decisions.
- Research and education initiatives are targeting microplastic pollution in marine environments while promoting responsible resource use and sustainable practices.

- Concerns have been raised about the growth of non-recyclable plastics and falling recycling rates, prompting calls for stronger policies and collaboration among stakeholders.
- Regional and global cooperation is seen as essential for addressing cross-border plastic waste challenges and advancing shared accountability in plastic reduction efforts.
- Private sector actors are committing to reducing virgin plastic use, increasing recycled content, and improving waste management systems through partnerships and policy engagement.
- Advocacy continues for inclusive policy frameworks that involve informal sectors and encourage collaboration among businesses, governments, and communities, including through education.
- Industrial solutions are being applied to transform non-recyclable waste into energy while supporting large-scale waste collection and reducing environmental leakage.

Closing session:

1. **Dr. Farhina Ahmed, Secretary and National Focal Point for the PLEASE Project at the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change**

In the closing session, Dr. Farhina Ahmed, Secretary and National Focal Point for the PLEASE Project at the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, emphasized the importance of the round table discussions for advancing Bangladesh's plastic waste management efforts. She acknowledged the ministry's limitations in resources and environmental prioritization but expressed optimism fueled by the support of stakeholders across sectors, including businesses, NGOs, civil society, and development partners. Dr. Ahmed highlighted the need for a responsive approach from citizens, businesses, and organizations to address plastic pollution. She shared the progress in finalizing the EPR policy, which aims to guide the recycling industry and ensure sustainable practices. With the support of the World Bank, green financing projects will foster the adoption of clean technology and responsible waste management practices. Addressing market reliance on plastic, she stressed the need to empower citizens to drive demand for sustainable alternatives. Additionally, she noted the importance of technical and resource support in enforcing plastic bans, particularly in creating consumer awareness and behavior change. She called for comprehensive, countrywide campaigns to advance plastic pollution solutions.

Overall key takeaways and recommendations:

The key takeaways from the discussions highlight the need for a multi-stakeholder approach to address the plastic waste crisis.

- Plastic waste and pollution are increasing globally, with Bangladesh seeing a rise from 3 to 9 kilograms of waste per capita over the last 15 years.
- The environmental and economic costs of plastic pollution far outweigh the cost of addressing it.
- Bangladesh has 21 policies addressing plastic pollution, including the 2002 ban on polythene shopping bags and newer policies focusing on reducing single-use plastics.
- The government is re-evaluating its plastic ban strategy, focusing on reducing consumerism and raising awareness through supermarkets and retailers.

- Bangladesh is making progress toward implementing EPR guidelines, with voluntary participation from multinational companies.
- The plastic industry policy (2023) includes measures for waste management, energy efficiency, and inter-ministerial coordination between the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Industries.
- Multi-stakeholder collaboration is essential, involving unregistered plastic manufacturers, recyclers, and new actors such as e-commerce platforms.
- Addressing plastic pollution's disproportionate impact on children, who are affected from birth, is critical.
- Civil society and community engagement are increasingly recognized as essential in the fight against plastic pollution, with citizen education key to driving behavioral change.
- The private sector, particularly multinational companies, is essential in driving EPR policies and a circular economy.
- The Ministry of Environment faces challenges prioritizing environmental issues due to competing national priorities, such as poverty alleviation and basic needs.
- Prioritize a legally binding global treaty with specific targets for reducing plastic production and promoting waste reduction strategies.
- Bangladesh should lead the process of shaping the treaty to secure financial mechanisms supporting plastic pollution management in developing countries, with differentiated responsibilities based on economic capacities.
- Regional cooperation on transboundary plastic waste is needed to address illegal movement and strengthen enforcement mechanisms.
- Empower consumers and communities through information campaigns and public engagement to drive behavioral change and sustainable practices.
- The packaging industry must be integrated into EPR frameworks, addressing packaging waste from e-commerce and online retail.
- Plastic manufacturing facilities should institutionalize environmental management systems focused on waste treatment and greenhouse gas reduction.
- Strengthen collaboration between ministries to address the entire plastic lifecycle, from production to disposal.
- Promote market-driven alternatives to plastic and nature-based solutions to reduce dependency on plastics.
- Leadership from the government is crucial to overcoming political and business-related challenges, with continuous support from all sectors required to tackle plastic pollution effectively.

Conclusion:

The high-level Roundtable Discussion on Plastic Waste Management underscored Bangladesh's commitment to a comprehensive approach that integrates policy enforcement, private sector accountability, community engagement, and international collaboration. Bangladesh's proactive efforts, including in the PLEASE Project, showcase its potential to lead sustainable waste management initiatives in South Asia.

Annex 1: Agenda

Timestamp	Segment	Description
10:00 - 10:30 AM	Opening Remarks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Advisor, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Rokeya Khaton, Director General, SACEP Gayle Martin, Operations Manager, World Bank Sudhir Muralidharan, UNOPS Country Manager Bangladesh
10.30 - 11.15 AM	1st Open Discussion [45 mins]	<p>Theme: Policy and regulatory matters related to plastic waste management (state sector representatives)</p> <p><u>Presentation 10 mins</u> Presentation on the Policy and Regulatory Framework for Plastic Waste Management in Bangladesh. Tapan Kumar Biswas, Additional Secretary (EPC & Law Wing), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change</p> <p><u>Speakers 5 mins each</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Md. Salim Ullah, Additional Secretary, Policy, Law and International Cooperation), Ministry of Industries <p><u>Open Floor Discussion 30 mins</u></p>
11:15 - 11:55 PM	2nd Open Discussion [40 minutes]	<p>Theme: Initiatives by Bilateral and Multilateral Development Partners (UN and donor Agency representatives)</p> <p><u>Presentation 10 mins</u> Presentation on "Progress Towards Sustainable Plastic Management in Bangladesh-Multi-sectoral Action Plan" by Bushra Nishat, Environment Specialist, The World Bank</p> <p><u>Speakers 5 mins each</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> H.E. Ambassador Masdupuy, Ambassador of France to Bangladesh, Dhaka Nayoka Martinez-Bäckströms, First Secretary/Deputy Head of Development Cooperation Environment and Climate Change, Embassy of Sweden Bangladesh James Gardener, US Embassy, Economic Division Zaki Zaman, Country Representative, UNIDO <p><u>Open Floor Discussion 10 mins</u></p>

11:55 - 12.45	3rd Open Discussion [50 mins]	<p>Theme: Showcasing work by corporate and civil sectors</p> <p><u>Presentation 05 mins each</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presentation on the plastic recycling industry and the PLEASE project by Mr. Khadem Mahmud Yusuf, Managing Director and CEO of Bangladesh Petrochemical Company Limited. 2. Presentation on Plastic waste management interventions of PLEASE project in Cox's Bazar by Imamul Azam Shahi, Head, Urban Development Program, BRAC <p><u>Speakers 05 mins each</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jannatul Munia, Deputy Director, Red Orange Communication 2. Rakibul Hasan Mukul, Executive Director, Aranyak Foundation 3. Dr. Shahadat Hossain, Professor, Institute of Marine Science (IMS), Chattogram University 4. Dr. Shahriar Hossain, Founder of ESDO (Eco-Social Development Organization) 5. Abu Hasnat Md. Maqsood Sinha, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Waste Concern 6. Shamima Akter, Director, Brand, Partnership and Communication, Unilever Bangladesh <p><u>Open Floor Discussion 10 mins</u></p>
12:45 - 13:00	Closing Remarks and Key Takeaways	<p>The session will conclude with a summary of key takeaways and insights from the discussions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prakriti Kashyap, Plastic Expert, SACEP <p>Closing remarks by SACEP National Focal Point for Bangladesh</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Farhina Ahmed, Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (National Focal Point)
13.00 PM onwards	Lunch & Networking Session	

Annex 2: List of Participants (67 Representatives)

Government of Bangladesh (9 Representatives)

1. Ms. Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Advisor, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
2. Dr. Farhina Ahmed, Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
3. Tapan Kumar Biswas, Additional Secretary ((EPC & Law Wing), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
4. A. K. M. SHOWKAT ALAM MOZUMDER, Joint Secretary(Law), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
5. Najneen Perveen, Joint Secretary (Environment), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
6. Md. Salim Ullah, Additional Secretary, Policy, Law and International Cooperation), Ministry of Industries
7. Captain Mohammad Fida Hasan (E), PSC, BN, Chief Waste Management Officer, Dhaka North City Corporation
8. Shahila Akter, Deputy Secretary at the Ministry of Industries
9. Tariq Bin Yousuf, former Additional Chief Engineer at Dhaka North City Corporation

Academia and Civil Society (6 Representatives)

1. Professor Dr. Akter Mahmud, Former President, the Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP)
2. Professor Ijaz Hossain, Former dean of the engineering faculty at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.
3. Gawsia Wahidunnessa Chowdhury, Professor, Department of Zoology, Dhaka University
4. Abu Hasnat Md. Maqsood Sinha, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Waste Concern
5. Dr. Shahriar Hossain, Founder of ESDO (Eco-Social Development Organization)
6. Md. Borhanul Ashekin, Senior Reporter, Channel 24,

Private Companies (8 Representatives)

1. Shamima Akter, Head of Brand, Partnership and Communication, Unilever Bangladesh
2. Debabrata Roy Chowdhury, Secretary and Head of Legal & Taxation - Nestlé Bangladesh Limited
3. Md. Latifur Rahman, Senior Manager, Geocycle, Head of LafargeHolcim's Geocycle Division
4. Fahim Uddin, Founder, CEO and Managing Director, Garbaseman
5. Tamrin Chowdhury- Business Development Head, Geocycle
6. Ziaur Rahman, Founder & CEO, Recycle Jar Ecosystem
7. Rashik Hassan, Co-Founder, ECOVIA
8. Rishat Zaman, Co-Founder, ECOVIA

The World Bank (3 Representatives)

1. Bushra Nishat, Environment Specialist, The World Bank
2. Gayle Martin, Operations Manager at the World Bank
3. Nalaka Gunawardene, Senior Communication Consultant, The World Bank

Bilateral & Multilateral Development Partners (8 Representatives)

1. Zaki Zaman, Country Director, UNIDO Bangladesh
2. Morshed Ahmed, Senior Adviser, Norwegian Embassy
3. Debashish Roy, Private Sector Partnership Specialist, UNDP Bangladesh
4. Marianne Rabe Knævelsrud, Deputy Head of Mission, Norwegian Embassy
5. Nayoka Martinez-Bäckströms, First Secretary/Deputy Head of Development Cooperation Environment and Climate Change, Embassy of Sweden Bangladesh
6. Marie Masdupuy, France Ambassador to Bangladesh
7. Md. Maruf Hossain, National BCDP Coordinator, Asian Development Bank
8. Gubair Bin Arafat, UNIDO

INGOs/INGOs (5 Representatives)

1. Farzana Faruk Jhumu, Youth Advocate, UNICEF
2. Nauman Haque, Senior Adviser-Climate Change, Save the Children
3. Bareesh Hasan Chowdhury, BELA
4. Dr. Rahul Mathew, Deputy Director, World Vision
5. Sharmin Nahar Nipa, Coordinator, BRAC C3R

UNOPS (15 Representatives)

1. Sudhir Muralidharan, Country Manager of UNOPS in Bangladesh,
2. Iftekhar Ahmed, UNOPS Bangladesh
3. Shirin Sultana, Partnership Advisor, UNOPS Bangladesh
4. Kuldip Malla, Partnership Specialist, UNOPS
5. Musfika Sultana, Communications Focal Point, UNOPS
6. Obidul Islam, Project Manager, PLEASE Project, UNOPS
7. Hasan Ahmed, Technical Expert-Environment, PLEASE Project, UNOPS
8. Nusrat Jahan, Project Support Officer, PLEASE Project, UNOPS
9. Lian Zang, Programme Management Advisor, UNOPS South Asia Multi-country Office (SAMCO)
10. Jaime Alarma OLMOS, Project Management Specialist, UNOPS
11. Prodyut Paul, Partnerships Intern, UNOPS
12. Sivakumaran Sithamparanathan, Environmental Specialist, UNOPS
13. Dinithi DE ALWIS, Communication Officer, UNOPS
14. Labio Bala, Finance Specialist, UNOPS
15. Harshi Bhagya, UNOPS

SACEP (3 Representatives)

1. Rokeya Khaton, Director General, SACEP
2. Prakriti Kashyap, Plastic Expert, SACEP
3. Kapila Mahesh Rajapaksha, Environment and Social Development Specialist, SACEP

PLEASE Grantees (10 Representatives)

1. Imamul Azam Shahi, Head, BRAC Urban Development Programme

2. Ruksar Sultana, Manager, BRAC
3. Mr. Khadem Mahmud Yusuf, Managing Director and CEO of BPCL
4. Aminiul Islam Sohan, Manager, BPCL
5. Jannatul Munia, RedOrange Communication
6. Alak Mojumdar, RedOrange Communication
7. Rakibul Islam, Executive Director, Aranayak Foundation
8. Shahadat Hossian, Professor, IMS-CU
9. HM Fayeem , Manager, Aranayak Foundation
10. Md. Borhanul Ashekin, Senior Reporter, Channel 24,