

Shaping Policies to Combat Plastic Pollution in Indonesia

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Policy Context: Indonesia is one of the world's largest contributors to marine plastic debris. The Indonesian government has committed to an ambitious target of 70% marine debris reduction by 2025 in its National Action Plan (NAP) through the [National Plastic Action Partnership on Marine Debris Reduction](#).

Key Findings: Responsibilities for waste management between different levels of government remain unclear, leading to weak enforcement of regulations. Inadequate investment in waste collection and sorting infrastructure, coupled with human practices shaped by cultural norms and limited awareness of the impacts of plastic pollution, exacerbates the issue.

Advice: An inclusive stakeholder network can play a crucial role in addressing poor governance and overcoming persistent financial sustainability and accountability challenges. Key strategies include shifting social norms and strengthening the informal recycling sector. When supported by adequate funding and technical capacity, these efforts can significantly improve waste collection and management efficiency.

Key research findings

A system-wide assessment of the plastics value chain at the national and regional levels reveals:

- > **Sachets, which are products in small, multi-layered plastic-aluminium packaging, account for a large part of the environmental plastic pollution.** Their popularity is due to their affordability and accessibility, particularly for low-income consumers. However, their widespread use presents significant challenges due to their low recyclability and low value.
- > **Systemic challenges arise from local variability in human practices, infrastructure, governance and community needs.** Inadequate waste collection services, the lack of technical capabilities, and inefficient use of financial resources in many communities lead to widespread dumping and open burning, contaminating air, water, and soil and threatening water and food security, and public health. These locally specific challenges amplify the economic, environmental, and social burdens of plastic waste, escalating the pollution crisis and undermining sustainability efforts and long-term resilience.
- > **Weak regulatory enforcement.** Inconsistent compliance with the plastic waste reduction and management regulations and the lack of enforcement and penalties reduce policy effectiveness, leaving waste collection and management services underfunded. Consequently, attracting investment, strengthening regulations, shifting consumer behaviour, and improving value recovery remain challenging, leading to widespread pollution.
- > **Decentralisation and overlapping responsibilities among governmental levels.** The political landscape influences local governance, with leaders often prioritising short-term, electorally focussed initiatives over long-term sustainable waste management strategies. Overlapping responsibilities creates ambiguity and uncertainty over responsibility. This lack of clear accountability weakens policy enforcement and slows progress in addressing pollution.

Policy recommendations

To cultivate an enabling policy environment for combating plastic pollution in Indonesia, policymakers should implement the following actions:

- > **A location-specific analysis is crucial for identifying suitable social and material-based interventions to drive change.** When combined with national policy interventions, these targeted strategies can effectively reduce plastic pollution by ensuring a comprehensive restructuring of the food, water and waste collection services provided to enhance sustainability and efficiency.
- > **Clarify roles and responsibilities among national, regional, and local authorities to facilitate cohesive policy implementation.** A unified strategy should be developed that articulates clear lines of communication and accountability across all levels to ensure cohesive policy enforcement through collaboration among government entities, the private sector, and civil society.
- > **Establish enforcement mechanisms for compliance with existing regulations.** This may involve increased inspections, penalties for disposal and mismanagement activities, monitoring, and training for personnel supervising waste management practices.
- > **Invest in capacity-building programs for local governments to improve technical expertise in waste management.** This could include workshops, knowledge-sharing platforms, and partnerships with NGOs and international organizations.
- > **Launch public education campaigns to raise awareness of plastic waste issues and promote responsible consumption.** Involve community stakeholders to increase engagement and participation in local grassroots community-driven initiatives while tracking changes in consumer behaviour.
- > **Establish comprehensive, measurable metrics for monitoring plastic waste management performance in Indonesia,** including environmental metrics (e.g., reduction in plastic waste and recycling rates), economic metrics (e.g., cost-effectiveness and revenue from plastic taxes and retribution fees), social metrics (e.g., public participation rates and awareness levels), and technical metrics (e.g., compliance rates with EPR regulations and quality of recycled materials) to enhance accountability and drive continuous improvement.

Work with us

Dr Eleni Iacovidou is a Senior Lecturer in Environmental Management and Director of the Centre for Pollution Research and Policy at Brunel University of London. An expert in lifecycle sustainability assessment, resource efficiency, waste management and environmental engineering with over a decade of interdisciplinary research.

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