Written report from the thematic side events during INC-3
Nairobi 14-17 Nov 2023

Theme 12: Socio-economic considerations in the transition to circular approaches to plastics, including human rights approaches and inclusion of the informal waste sector

Date: Friday, 17 November 2023 from 1:30 to 2:45 pm at CR 14, United Nations Office at Nairobi.

Number of participants and breakdown of types of participants: 65 participants (of which 32% Male; 66% Female and 2% prefers not to disclose)

Key messages:

- **Decent Work Agenda**: Advocating for the incorporation of a decent work agenda, based on employment, international labour standard, social protection, and social dialogue in the global plastic treaty. This is deemed essential for all workers, regardless of their formal or informal status.

- **Just transition**: Emphasizing the significance of a just transition by aligning ILO definitions of Just Transition. This ensures a common understanding across diverse multilateral processes.

- **Occupational safety and health**: ensuring safe and healthy working environments for workers across the production and waste life cycle of plastics including the need to prevent exposure to chemicals and microplastics through the production and recycling processes.

- **Inclusion of waste pickers**: Acknowledging the importance of including waste pickers in the treaty discussions, recognizing their challenges, and emphasizing the role of cooperatives, voice, and compensation determination by waste pickers themselves.

- **One health concept**: Highlighting the importance of the “one health” concept, connecting environmental protection, human health, and occupational safety and health. This approach is considered essential for addressing the triple crisis, particularly in the context of the plastic crisis as a health crisis.

- **Concrete references**: Calling for specific references in the treaty, such as occupational safety and health, and urging negotiators of the INCs to consider a broad spectrum of instruments beyond multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

- **Public investment**: Advocating for public investment in modern infrastructures, public services, water sanitation, and waste management. The focus is on creating sustainable decent jobs, reducing plastic pollution, and providing opportunities for a just transition, especially for waste pickers transitioning from informal to formal sectors.

- **Capacity building and innovation**: Recognizing the challenges in formalizing waste pickers, the need for innovative solutions, and the importance of capacity building extending beyond recycling. This includes exploring value addition and upskilling skills development.

- **Local self-determination**: Raising questions about ensuring local self-determination in the global framework of circularity. Emphasizing the historical value of "no one left behind," focusing on the inclusion of workers and communities most impacted in decision-making processes.

- **Coherence across multilateral processes**: Stressing the need for coherence across multilateral processes beyond environmental agreements, encompassing international labor standards, regulatory frameworks from safety and health, and other policy areas.
Summary of the thematic side event:

The session was moderated by Dr. Manal Azzi, Team Lead on Occupational Safety and Health, LABADMIN/OSH, GOVERNANCE Department, ILO.

Dr. Mustapha Kamal Gueye, Director of the Priority Action Programme on Just Transitions towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies (AP/JT), ILO, welcomed panelists and participants to the INC-3 Side Event 12.

Dr. Ayub Macharia, Director of the National Environment Management Authority, Kenya, Government of Kenya, emphasized his role in enforcing the Sustainable Waste Management Act and working towards a just transition for waste pickers. He highlighted the composition of waste in Kenya, with a significant percentage being recyclables, particularly plastics like HDPE, PET, and LDPE. Dr. Macharia discussed the lack of standardized prices for these plastics, leading to challenges for waste pickers. He outlined government initiatives, including the establishment of an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) system, pricing discussions with producer organizations, and efforts to register waste pickers. The government aims to link them with recovery facilities, collection points, and cooperatives, emphasizing the importance of personal protective equipment. Dr. Macharia concluded with an overview of the ongoing government actions and plans for waste picker integration and support.

Ms. Daria Cibrario of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to phasing out plastics, focusing on two key components of just transition: decent work and occupational health and safety. She presented images illustrating the challenges faced by workers in various stages of the plastic supply chain, emphasizing the adverse impact on human health and the environment. Ms. Cibrario highlighted the importance of social dialogue in the transition process, urging collaboration between workers, employers, governments, academia, and NGOs. She emphasized the need to build on the ILO definitions of just transition, and underscored the significance of substantial investments in public service infrastructures for a sustainable transition away from plastics.

Ms. Christina Jäger, Co-founder and Managing Director of Yunus Environment Hub, highlighted their global social business network addressing plastic pollution through socially inclusive circular innovations. Ms. Jäger emphasized the power of entrepreneurship to combat environmental challenges and outlined their approach of integrating circular principles with socioeconomic objectives in the plastics value chain. She shared two programme examples, including the Circular Rice Accelerator in Kenya, where one of the supported social businesses produces reusable sanitary pads, preventing 61 millions of disposable pads from reaching landfills till date and creating jobs for marginalized groups. The second programme focuses on empowering waste pickers through training programs, contributing to social inclusion and a just transition. Ms. Jäger concluded with a quote from Nobel Peace Prize laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus, emphasizing the entrepreneurial potential of impoverished communities.

Ms. Amira Halabi, Africa Coordinator of the International Alliance of Waste Pickers (IAWP), highlighted the importance of healthcare workers in the global economy and the environmental impact of the healthcare sector. She emphasized that healthcare workers, particularly women who make up 64 percent of the sector, face a 20 percent gender pay gap and are exposed to hazardous chemicals during medical procedures, posing health risks. While acknowledging the indispensability of plastics in the health sector, she called for special consideration and defined distinctions between essential and non-essential plastic use. Ms. Halabi advocated for the
global plastics treaty to address these concerns and ensure a just transition, emphasizing the need to eliminate hazardous chemicals and avoid general exemptions for the health sector. She stressed the importance of a holistic health system and called for a transition away from fossil fuels, promoting a sustainable approach to single-use medical products. Ms. Halabi invited further exploration of their online resources, including a video on just transition and health.

Mr. Yasuhiko Kamakura, Sectoral Policies Department (SECTOR), ILO, emphasized the urgency of a just transition to sustainability in managing the life cycle of plastics, highlighting the ILO Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all (2015). The ILO Just Transition Guidelines’ principles include strong social consensus, upholding fundamental principles and rights at work, addressing gender dimensions, ensuring coherent policies, creating frameworks for decent jobs, tailoring policies to country-specific conditions, and promoting international cooperation. He emphasized the alignment of these Guidelines with the Decent Work Agenda’s pillars: employment, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue. He stressed the importance of enterprises, workers, trade unions, and informal workers. He highlighted the pivotal role of workers, trade unions, and stakeholders in addressing plastic pollution through a just transition, utilizing the ILO's international labour standards to confront challenges and ensure collective progress that leaves no one behind.

Questions and Answers session:

An expert from the UNEP asked what key terms and definitions were anchored to the future plastic treaty. The panelists are then asked to identify their top two asks for the global plastic treaty. The first panelist emphasizes the need to include just transition and references the ILO definition. The second ask is for a reference to decent work as a framework, encompassing employment, rights at work, social protection, and social protection, particularly occupational health and safety.

The concept of "one health" is also advocated, connecting environmental protection, human health, and occupational health and safety. Concrete references to occupational health and safety, as well as the Chemicals Convention, 1990 (No. 170) on the management of chemicals, are suggested.

The idea of creating an intercession expert group on just transition is proposed to provide text options for negotiators. One panelist highlighted the plastic crisis as a health crisis and called for a dedicated program of work on health. She stressed the importance of transitioning to a healthier planet through a just transition.

Another panelist emphasizes sustainability in job opportunities and links it to just transition, human dignity, and behaviour change. Skills development was underscored as crucial for uplifting lives. A question is raised about how to ensure local self-determination in the global framework of circularity.

A panelist suggested that just transition should be embedded across all UN treaty provisions, not limited to its own provision. The ILO expert supported the idea of public investment in modern infrastructures, public services, and waste management. The importance of coherence across multilateral processes is acknowledged.
Another panelist emphasized the challenges in formalizing waste pickers due to taxation issues. He called for innovative solutions, expanded value chains, and capacity building beyond recycling. The importance of voice, cooperatives, and compensation determination by waste pickers is highlighted.

One panelist emphasized the urgency of a just transition to sustainability in managing the life cycle of plastics.

In summary, the discussion covers key asks for the instrument, including Just Transition, references to ILO Just Transition Guidelines and decent work, the concept of “one health,” and the need for public investment in infrastructure. The challenges and importance of including waste pickers in the treaty are also emphasized.

Annex I: Agenda of the event

INC-3 Side Event 12, Friday, 17 November 2023 from 1:30 to 2:45 pm, CR 14, United Nations Office at Nairobi
Socio-economic considerations in the transition to circular approaches to plastics, including human rights approaches and inclusion of the informal waste sector

Objectives
This side event is intended to explore the socio-economic dimensions of circular approaches to plastic pollution, with a specific focus on human rights-related issues within the world of work. The side event will aim to address the following key questions:

1. What will be the implications of addressing plastic pollution in the world of work?
2. What opportunities and challenges will arise for enterprises and workers, particularly those operating within the informal economy?
3. How can a future treaty leverage existing human rights treaties, including the International Labour Standards?
4. What role should non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play in this process?

By delving into these questions, we aim to provide insights into how addressing plastic pollution will impact the world of work, the opportunities and challenges it presents, how human rights principles can be incorporated into a future plastic treaty, and the involvement of NGOs in the process.

Context
A just transition to sustainability is necessary and urgent. A human rights-based or a human-centered approach is essential for achieving economic, social and environmental sustainability through the life cycle of plastics. A human rights-based approach focuses on capacity development, both of duty bearers to meet their obligations and of individuals to claim their rights. The 111th International Labour Conference, held in June 2023, adopted the Conclusions focused on the definition of "just transition", emphasizing the importance of promoting environmentally sustainable economies in a way that is inclusive, by creating decent work opportunities, reducing inequality and by leaving no one behind. The Conclusions acknowledge that the transition to a greener and more sustainable future will have profound implications for jobs and livelihoods, and therefore the conclusions both endorse the ILO Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all (2015) as well as a reinvigorated framework for action. Such a framework covers the social dimension of environmental and climate change broadly through four supportive elements; namely: (i) promoting inclusive, sustainable and job-rich economies; (ii) advancing social justice; (iii) managing the process of just transition; and (iv) financing a just transition. A human rights-based approach emphasizes prioritizing individuals in marginalized or vulnerable situations who face significant barriers to realizing their rights. The ILO Just Transitions Guidelines serve as a means to implement a human-centred approach by promoting just transitions. Well-managed, environmentally sustainable economies and societies’ response to plastic pollution can ensure decent work for all, social inclusion, and the eradication of poverty. The four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda—social dialogue, social protection, rights at work, and employment—are crucial components of sustainable development and should be central to policies aimed at fostering robust, inclusive, and sustainable growth and development. In order to achieve a just transition, it is crucial to ensure that enterprises and workers, including those in the informal economy, are not left behind during the transition. Addressing the informal waste sector, which plays a significant role in managing plastic waste, particularly in developing countries, is a key aspect of the just transition. Workers, trade unions and stakeholders can play vital roles in addressing
plastic pollution through a just transition. In this regard, along with the international human rights law, the ILO’s international labour standards offer a robust framework for addressing the challenges to the world of work associated with the greening of the economy and, more broadly, with the transition towards sustainable development and poverty eradication. They serve as a testament to the power of collective action, vision and a deep understanding that progress holds true meaning only when no one is left behind.

Provisional Agenda

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