WRAP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CATALYSING SYSTEMIC ACTION AGAINST PLASTIC POLLUTION

A short summary of how purpose driven funders can tackle this urgent global priority

Tackling plastic pollution is a powerful, high-leverage investment that cuts across multiple global priorities; protecting marine ecosystems, slowing biodiversity loss, reducing climate impacts and safeguarding human health.

Plastic pollution is a critical threat to our planet and our societies

It is inflicting lasting damage on our oceans

Plastic pollution is rapidly pushing the ocean toward irreversible harm, killing marine species, weakening the ocean's capacity to store carbon and eroding ecosystem resilience.[11, 12, 13, 14]

It is fuelling the climate crisis

Emissions from plastic production are predicted to rise by 60% by 2040, threatening to consume around 5% of the entire global carbon budget and undermining climate goals.[5, 14]

It is degrading land ecosystems

Microplastics are leaching harmful chemicals into soils[15, 16], degrading soil health and fertility, threatening food production and accelerating biodiversity loss.

It is risking the lives of vulnerable workers

40 million informal waste workers in low- and middle-income countries[21, 22], mainly women, work in unsafe conditions without secure income or healthcare[24, 25], yet their vital contribution prevents millions of tonnes of plastic from leaking into the environment each year. This is a systemic social injustice embedded in the current broken system.

It is significantly threatening public health

Evidence of multifaceted threats ranges from hormone disruption and reproductive harm from ingestion in food chains[6, 30, 13] to increased disease transmission driven by flood events caused by mismanaged plastic waste.[33]

Unless we act now, global plastic pollution is on a trajectory to triple by 2040. Reducing global mismanaged plastic waste by 90% by 2040 is an ambitious but achievable goal. Currently, most funding, around 80%, goes to downstream (recovery and recycling) solutions, and funding is heavily skewed towards high-income regions, while upstream measures, as well as the countries in the global south most affected by plastic pollution, remain most underfunded. Philanthropic investment is critical for catalysing the innovation, evidence and early action needed to unlock private sector finance at scale.

Purpose driven funders' unique role

Tackling plastic pollution and reducing plastic production cuts across many major philanthropic priorities. It is essential to protecting marine ecosystems, slowing biodiversity loss, mitigating climate impacts, tackling social injustice and safeguarding human health. It enables action at the root cause of multiple environmental and social issues, unlocking sustainable system level change.

By investing in solutions to the plastics crisis, funders can activate system-wide interventions that advance multiple strategic goals.

Interventions already making an impact:

Supporting a just transition

The Circulate Initiative's Responsible Sourcing Initiative in Asia, Africa, and Latin America works to ensure progress to more circular plastics chains improving the lives of informal waste sector workers and pickers living in poverty in the global south.

Supporting systems change

A project in Argentina is incorporating previously low value waste plastics into new products, boosting recycling, keeping them out of landfill, reducing virgin plastic use and creating new income streams for low-income waste workers.

Supporting the advancing of evidence, data and learnings

The Global Commitment has resulted in unprecedented transparency on the plastic packaging data of many major companies.

Supporting movement building

The Global Plastics Pact Network is tackling the root causes of plastic pollution, co-creating solutions with business, government, local communities and the informal waste sector to protect oceans, slow biodiversity loss, reduce climate impacts and improve lives for low-income workers in the global south.

A value for money investment

Investing in plastic pollution reduction delivers exceptional value for money, preventing long-term environmental degradation that is significantly more expensive to reverse.

Funding initiatives to reduce plastic pollution helps build resilient circular economies, generating local jobs, supporting enterprise growth and future proofing supply chains.

With wide-ranging co-benefits for climate, health, marine ecosystems and livelihoods in low-income communities, reaching multiple SDGs, plastic pollution reduction initiatives represent a high-impact investment for social and environmental funders.

Recommendations for funders

WRAP's extensive consultation with stakeholders has highlighted seven levers where funding can catalyse change. We are calling on funders to focus on and fund these levers to drive long-term, systemic impact.

LEVER 1: Supporting game-changing solutions

- Support the trial and scaling of sustainable alternative materials to plastic packaging and other items
- Develop, expand and strengthen reuse projects in settings where policy, business or consumer appetite is receptive
- Innovations in materials and design to improve circularity and value of plastics
- Development of new/expanded end markets for low value recycled plastic e.g. films

LEVER 2: Championing policy and governance

- Support the development of National Action Plans to end plastic pollution in high-impact and small or remote countries
- Supporting advocacy at the Global Treaty and related forums
- Capacity building for policy makers in vulnerable regions e.g. Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

LEVER 3: Shifting social norms and behaviours

- Investing in the behavioural science, research and programme development that will encourage citizens to take more sustainable behaviours in a circular plastics system – including reduction in plastic consumption, increase in reuse and recycling behaviours that improve collection of plastics
- Support campaigns for improved recycling, reduce plastic leakage and advancing reuse and refill

LEVER 4: Centring livelihoods and a just transition

- Support expansion of successful programmes to support and integrate the informal waste sector (in all key global south markets)
- Advancing and expanding inclusive collection and responsible sourcing of plastics that integrates and uplifts informal waste workers
- Support entrepreneurial and skills capacity building programmes to empower informal waste sector organisations and leaders
- Development of added value services for the informal sector e.g. refill services

LEVER 5: Strengthening infrastructure and systems

- Support and strengthen the expansion of successful infrastructure programmes to new cities or markets – helping leverage large scale private and public investment
- Scaling collection and recycling of low-value plastic materials, e.g. films and flexibles, and strengthening end markets to build better systems – derisking and enabling private and public investment
- Support trialling and scaling of recycling and reuse systems that can operate in remote and rural locations
- Programmes that support, train and equip MSMEs in the collection, sorting and recycling sectors in global south markets

LEVER 6: Advancing evidence, data and learning

- Transparent data systems and commitments that can track and address national and global plastic flows including the fate of plastics, fugitive plastics and micro-plastics
- Investment into the human health impacts of plastics and plastic pollution
- Assessment of global and regional plastic trends that can help support increased action by governments, investors and business sectors

LEVER 7: Supporting people to captain and coordinate change

- Inclusive convening of stakeholders from across the supply chain to drive collective change
- Support proven global, regional and national platforms and initiatives that can unlock solutions, advance progress and share learning and best practices
- Support global, regional or national innovation and design challenges

We urge purpose driven funders to act now

Invest in the rapid, scalable solutions that can protect our oceans, slow climate change and improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable workers in the world.

Read the full report:
Catalysing systemic action against plastic pollution – a Roadmap for purpose driven funders