



Social Procurement Sector Spotlight on **Plastic Waste**

An initiative by **Yunus Social Business** and **WASTE**

 **yunus**
social business





Social Procurement Sector Spotlight on Plastic Waste



AN INITIATIVE BY



Photo: Second Life

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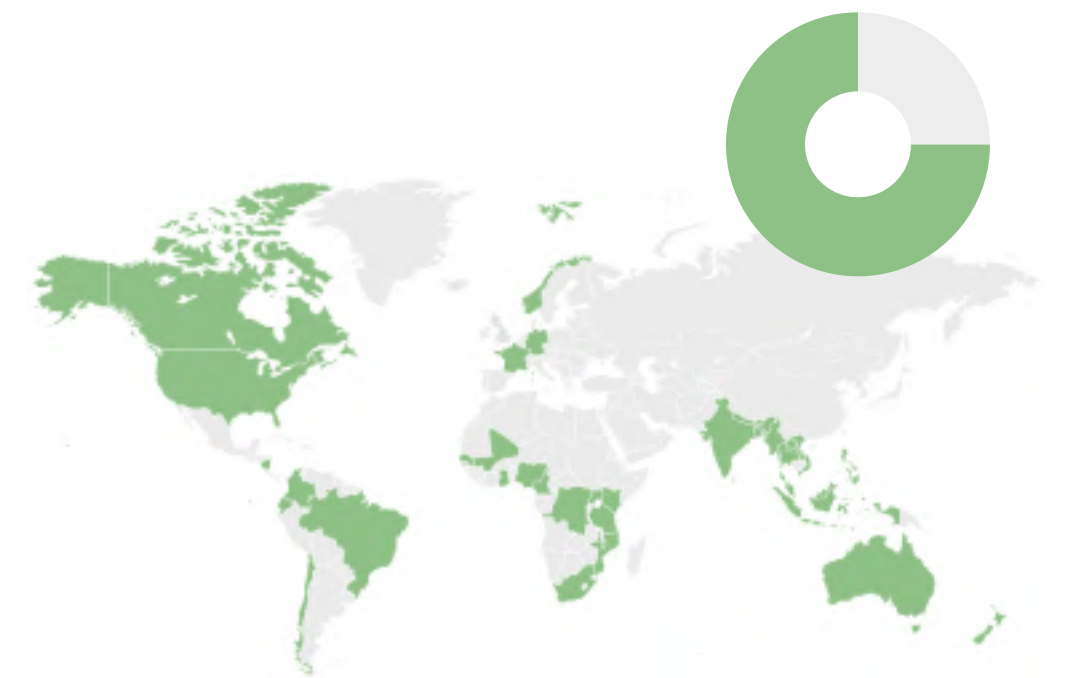
Photo: Buy Food with Plastic

Executive Summary

Plastic pollution is a growing problem that cannot be ignored any further, as widely analyzed and researched by experts globally. It is even more relevant in a world where stakeholders (consumers, investors, and governments) increasingly demand ethically-produced, environmentally friendly, and socially relevant products and services from corporations.

While the environmental impact of plastic pollution is evident, social impacts are often overlooked. The production and disposal of plastic products have negative effects on human health and well-being. Although it is impossible for plastics to be completely removed from our systems, the prospect of establishing a circular and environmentally friendly plastic economy is within reach, including sustainable production, use and disposal.

Yunus Social Business developed a survey for social entrepreneurs and impact-focused ventures in the plastic waste industry to understand their offerings for corporations, their current capabilities, and their main challenges to grow in the sector. More than 60 social businesses participated in the survey globally, representing 6 continents and 41 countries.



The survey shows that the vast majority (more than 75%) of social businesses in plastic are working on recycling plastic waste, therefore contributing to the circular economy by providing corporations with recycled plastics sourced and produced in fair working conditions.



Many of the surveyed social businesses work with informal waste workers, who reduce pollution both by removing waste from the environment and by selecting the most appropriate recycling systems. These social businesses provide workers with a safe, healthy, and humane working environment, which they would otherwise lack access to.

The plastic sector holds an immense opportunity to drive positive social change by supporting social businesses around the world in growing and scaling their impact. **90% of social businesses surveyed generate both a social and environmental impact.**

Social businesses have capabilities that often exceed the expectations and understanding of potential contractors. More than 50% of social businesses already partnered with international companies, across various industries (cosmetics, fashion, furniture, packaging, food & beverage). They help corporations increase transparency and traceability throughout their supply chain. Among the social businesses surveyed, 20% process more than 500 tons of plastics per month, which is a strong indication of scale.

Currently, social businesses face three main barriers in plastic value chains to create impact at scale: **Lack of funding, lack of contact and visibility and volume requirements that currently exceed their production capabilities.** Adapted procurement practices such as providing visibility on the procurement requirements or the co-development of new products are key to building sustainable partnerships that create a bridge between the corporation and the social businesses, both usually sitting at the opposite end of a globalized value chain.

While impact investors, governments and other actors play a tremendous role in creating a more just and sustainable economy, this complex and global mission requires support from all stakeholders, including corporations. With their global reach and established processes, corporations from various industries have the possibility to leverage their buying power into a force for good, by integrating social businesses into their supply chain and helping them to flourish.

VOLUME REQUIREMENTS THAT CURRENTLY EXCEED THEIR PRODUCTION CAPABILITIES

- Lack of funding** (Icon: Stacks of coins)
- Lack of contact and visibility** (Icon: Document with magnifying glass)
- Volume requirements** (Icon: Square with four arrows pointing outwards)



Plastic pollution is a growing problem that cannot be ignored any further.

Throughout the last decades, plastic has become an integral part of our daily lives, making it unavoidable to engage with or encounter it. Its unique properties and its low production costs make plastic an excellent material for a broad range of applications. It therefore has become an essential material in nearly every industry, from packaging to car parts, construction to textiles - you name it! One of the key benefits of plastic is that it is designed to last, but it is also the reason for the alarming amount of plastic waste today.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, only a small amount of plastic was produced, and as a result, plastic waste was relatively manageable. However, between the 1970s and the 1990s, plastic waste generation more



According to the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, the equivalent of **one garbage truck of plastic is released** into our **oceans every minute.**¹

Not only does it end up in the ocean, but it can take up to 500 years to decompose.²

than tripled. In the early 2000s, the global amount of plastic waste generated rose more in a single decade than it had in the previous 40 years.³

Plastic negatively impacts the environment across its entire life span, through destructive extraction, chemical-and-energy intense processing, microplastic release during usage, and ocean pollution if not disposed of properly. Most plastic items never fully disappear, but instead indefinitely break down into smaller pieces. These microplastics have the ability to enter the human body through the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe. Microplastics have been found in human lungs, livers, spleens and kidneys, and, however the consequences on human health are still unknown.³

The good news is that there are social businesses that work to solve these issues from a range of angles including collection, sorting, recycling, and processing of plastic waste, all while supporting marginalized communities that are often overshadowed, such as informal waste workers or people living in remote areas.

“The only way to tackle plastic pollution is to create effective, affordable and inclusive waste management systems which are driven by decent local jobs with transparent and traceable plastic waste flows”.

Sophie van den Berg,

Lead Expert FINILOOP Plastic Waste Free Cities

¹ [United Nations; World Environment Day; 2023](#)

² [WWF; The Lifecycle of Plastics; 2021](#)

³ [UNEP; Our planet is choking on plastic](#)



Introduction

In this light, the plastic sector holds an immense opportunity to drive positive social change by supporting social businesses around the world in growing and scaling their impact. It is even more relevant in a world where stakeholders (consumers, investors, and governments) increasingly demand ethically-produced, environmentally friendly, and socially relevant products and services from corporations. One example of a more sustainable product are the OTTO shipping bags made from recycled plastics by Wild Plastic.⁴

The **Sector Spotlight series** aims to shed light on the various opportunities for social businesses to get integrated in global value chains of various sectors. It shows the major role social businesses can play in the plastic circular economy, by offering different types of goods and services to corporations, while generating both social and environmental impact. Ultimately, the goal of this series is to support social businesses to unlock market opportunities and scale their impact, while triggering behavioral change among corporations, who can leverage corporate buying power as a force for good through the practice of Social Procurement.

In the Social Procurement Manual, YSB defines ‘social procurement’ as the purchase of goods and services by corporations from social businesses. Through social procurement, corporations integrate social businesses into their supply chains with the explicit intention of creating social or environmental impact through their procurement.

“On average, 50% to 80% of a company’s cost basis goes toward external spend. That is an incredible amount of purchasing power and an enormous opportunity for value creation. By linking social businesses to corporate value chains, Chief Purchasing Officers and their teams can use that power to not only create financial value, but also to create impact. Social procurement provides a way for corporations to move beyond risk toward positive impact – enabling them to stay ahead of the curve, actively contribute to solving the world’s most pressing problems – and help engender a sense of purpose within their teams.”⁵

Jana Lessenich,
CEO of Yunus Social Business

⁴ Wildplastic; OTTO x Wild Plastic, Die erste Versandtasche, die die Umwelt aufräumt

⁵ McKinsey; A new era for procurement: Value creation across the supply chain; 2023



This report was created by **Yunus Social Business** with support from **WASTE**.

Yunus Social Business tackles poverty and the climate crisis from two angles. First, YSB provides patient capital to social businesses in East Africa, Latin America & India, to help them grow their impact. Second, YSB works together with corporations and large companies to help them create a positive impact in their operations and bring their purpose statement to life.

WASTE is an international development organization working to strengthen waste management, sanitation and clean water systems in marginalized communities around the world. This is achieved through uniquely bringing together key stakeholders from across sectors to pilot, upscale and deliver innovative programmes and catalyze solutions.

Together, **YSB** and **WASTE** established the **Take a Stake consortium**, which combines the expertise and capital of impact investors, business leaders and technical experts to strengthen small and growing businesses in the WASH and waste sectors, in India and East Africa. The consortium includes organizations such as IKEA Social Entrepreneurship and SIDA.



Photo: Mr. Green Africa



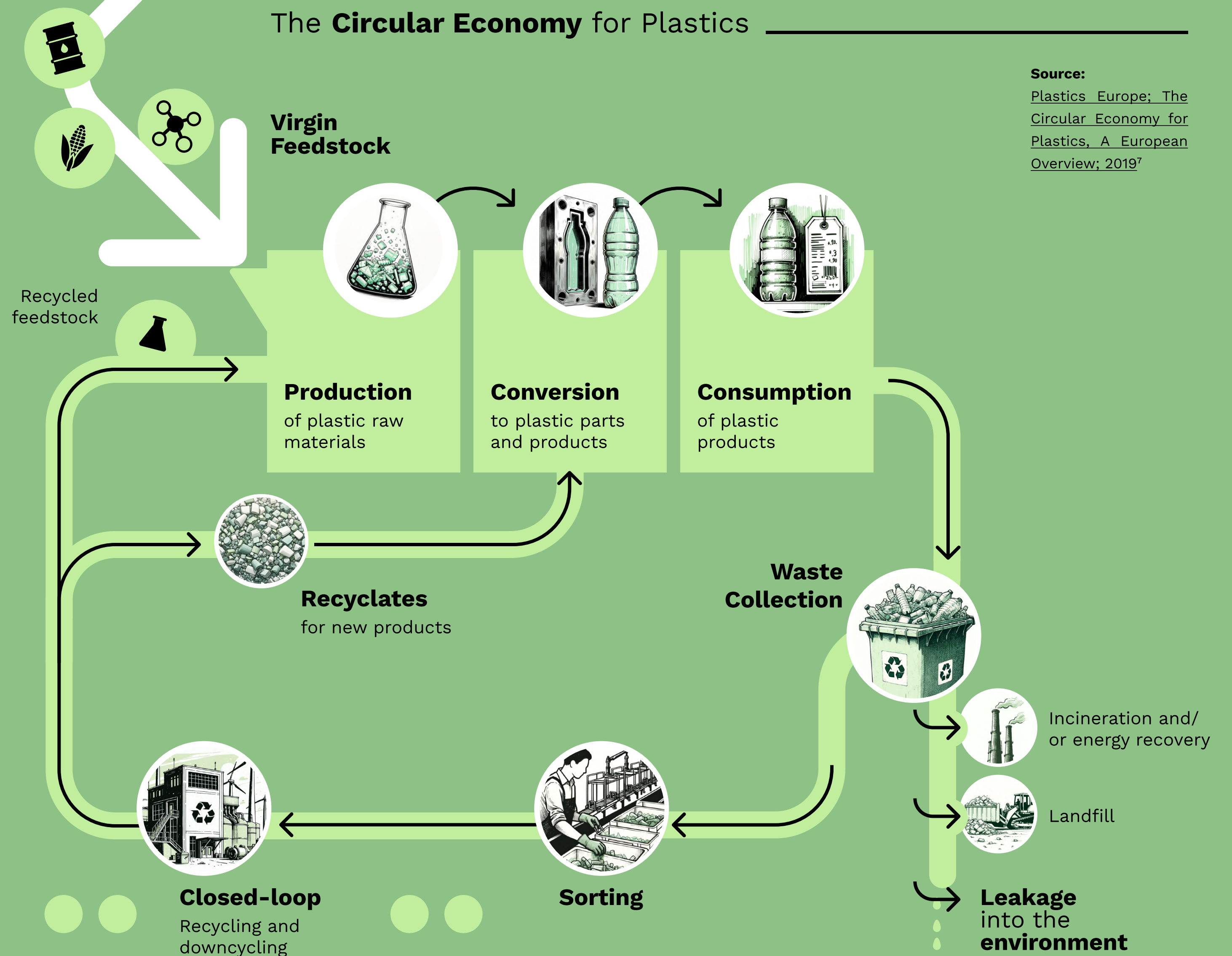
Overview of the **Plastics Sector**



Changing the plastics economy

While plastic is often touted as the nemesis of the environment, plastic is not inherently harmful to the planet. Instead, the way we utilize and dispose of plastic via traditional, linear value chains - where plastic is disposed of at the end of their life cycle into landfills or through incineration - create the problems we are faced with today. For example, **only about 27% of PET bottles and less than 20% of all recyclable PET plastic waste are collected to be recycled.**⁶

One solution to the world's increasing plastic problem is to shift from a linear value chain to a circular economy - in which the concept of waste in itself becomes redundant. This model promotes reusing and recycling plastic waste to transform it into plastic raw materials and new plastic-based products.



Source:
Plastics Europe; The Circular Economy for Plastics, A European Overview; 2019⁷

⁶ McKinsey; Filling the gap: Boosting supply of recycled materials for packaging; 2023

⁷ Plastics Europe; The Circular Economy for Plastics, A European Overview; 2019

Overview of the Plastics Sector

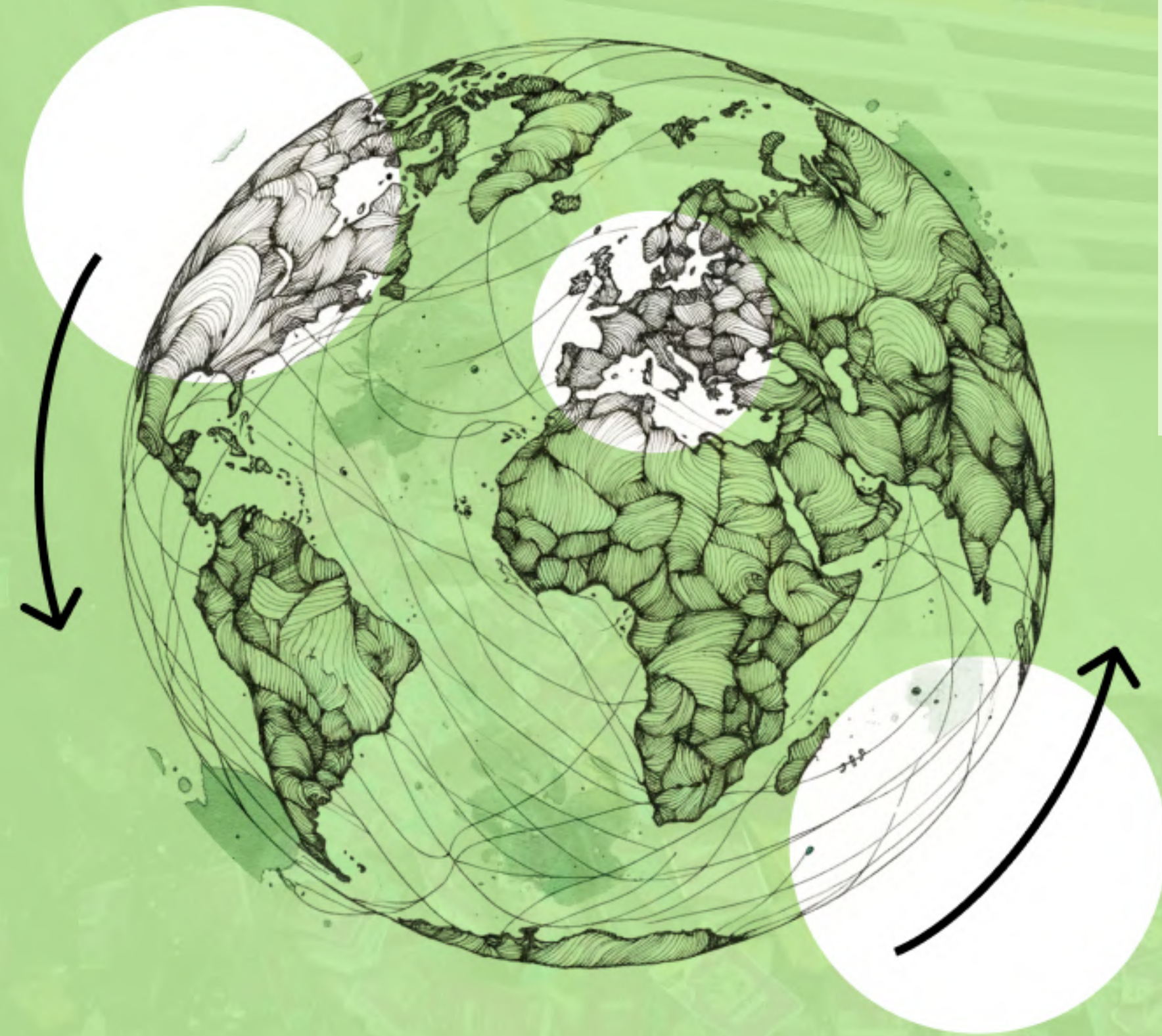


Circular thinking requires corporations to break operational silos and calls for collaboration, across organizations and industries. This is especially true in the plastic waste sector, as there are a multitude of processes and materials involved in the life cycle, which determine its quality and adequacy for recycling. When speaking about circular economy, only materials that are turned into an equal or higher quality good can be considered a circular product. When the end product is of lower quality or a product that then cannot be further recycled, the process is considered a form of downcycling. An example of this are companies using recycled PET bottles in their products. Food-safe PET is a high quality material, which, in an ideal circular scenario would be recycled into new food packaging. Nonetheless, if a textile company uses materials sourced from used PET bottles to produce clothes, these do not only lack the food safety and health standards the food industry requires, but also become difficult to recycle. In summary, while downcycling can be considered a better option than disposal, it is not the ultimate solution to the plastic waste problem.

A positive example of cross-sector collaboration in the circular economy would be the Swiss bag manufacturer Freitag that gives recycled truck tarps a new life, by using it as their primary fabric in their bags.



Photo: Second life



Plastic waste exports

For years, European countries have been exporting their waste to countries outside Europe, especially to countries in the Global South. Even though plastic waste exports have been reduced by 50% from 2016 to 2020⁷, half of the plastic collected for recycling is still exported to be treated in countries outside of Europe.⁸

Some countries receiving plastic waste were not able to manage such immense volumes and therefore started to implement waste import bans from Europe. China started in 2017, followed by Malaysia and India.⁹ Even in countries that continue to receive European plastic waste, some of it ends up in landfills. This is for example the case in Turkey, as revealed by a recent Greenpeace investigation. Turkey became the main receiver of British waste, after the ban from China. While exported waste was determined to be recycled in Turkey, in fact, most of it was dumped into landfills or burned. As a result, Greenpeace urges the UK government to take responsibility for these scandalous environmental damages.¹⁰

According to European regulations, plastic waste should not be exported to countries unless it is going to be recycled.¹¹ However, most plastic exported for recycling is not recycled at all and ends up in landfills or even in the ocean.¹² This is due to a lack of waste management infrastructure, as most countries in the Global South lack the necessary funds to build it. Due to the high export volumes of plastic waste from the Western hemisphere to the Global South, the topic affects the most vulnerable communities. However, the issue also creates an opportunity for social entrepreneurs to develop innovative solutions tackling waste management.

⁷ [Plastics Europe; The Circular Economy for Plastics, A European Overview; 2019](#)

⁸ [EU Monitor; Plastic waste and recycling in the EU; 2023](#)

⁹ [National Institute of Health; Circular Economy and the Changing Geography of International Trade in Plastic Waste; 2022](#)

¹⁰ [Trashed, How the UK is still dumping plastic waste on the rest of the world, Greenpeace, 2021](#)

¹¹ [The Guardian; UK plastics in Turkey dumped and burned; 2021](#)

¹² [Bishop, G. et al.; Recycling of European plastic is a pathway for plastic debris in the ocean; 2020](#)



Current Regulatory Framework

Public awareness of plastic pollution is growing, and so is the number of international initiatives. Unilateral efforts have more than doubled in just five years, with the emergence of global coalitions like the [Plastic Pact Network](#) or the [Alliance to End Plastic Waste](#), which bring together private, public and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to tackle the issue.¹³

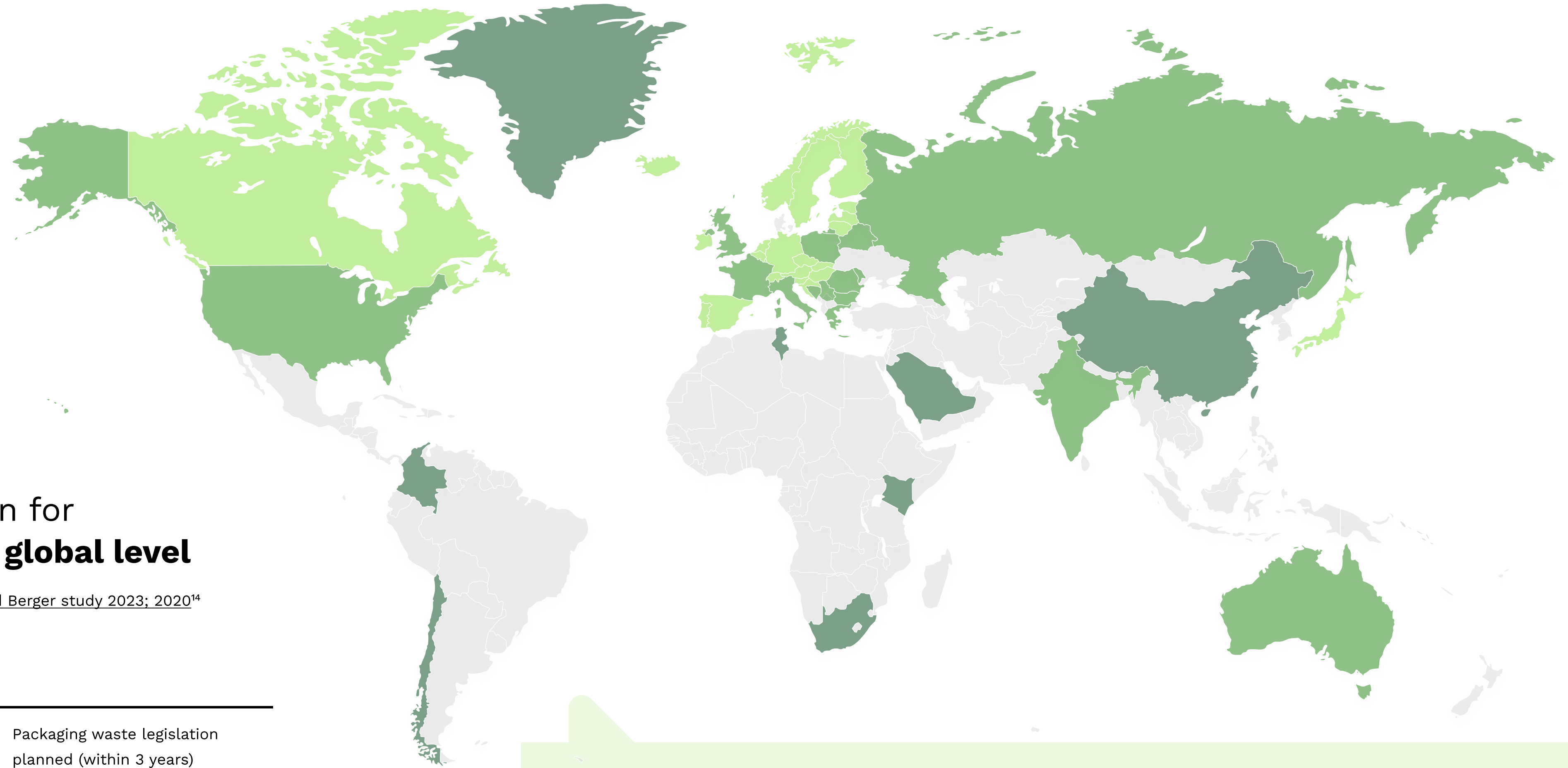
While this indicates an increasing awareness and understanding that the status quo cannot be maintained, voluntary joint initiatives alone are not sufficient to reshape the entire plastic system. A growing number of countries are implementing regulations to reduce plastic waste. One of the most prevalent initiatives is the ban or taxation on single-use plastic items, i.e. plastic bags. Similar regulations have already been adopted by 115 countries around the world.¹³

Initiatives towards international collaboration are underway, spearheaded by the European Union. However, existing policies fail at addressing the issues adequately and numerous governments are not directing their policies towards the sources of plastic pollution. In two-thirds of countries which have some form of plastic-related legislation, regulations focus only on single-use plastic bags. But these bags account for only 7% of plastic waste found in beach cleanups.¹³

Hence, it is crucial to develop a standardized framework at a global level to adhere to universal regulatory standards and limitations.

¹³ BCG & Ellen McArthur Foundation; The business case for a UN Treaty on plastic pollution; 2020





Overview of legislation for packaging waste at a **global level**

Source: Packaging sustainability 2030, Rolland Berger study 2023; 2020¹⁴

Legislative overview:

- Packaging waste legislation in place, high performance
- Packaging waste legislation in place, performance issues
- Packaging waste legislation planned (within 3 years)
- Packaging waste legislation not in place/not sufficiently enforced

The first global initiative: UN Plastic Pollution Treaty

In 2022, the UN Member States agreed to start negotiating a new global treaty to eradicate plastic pollution. Negotiations will continue until the end of 2024, to develop an international legally binding instrument that encompasses all stages of the plastic life cycle, including design, production, and disposal. This is an extraordinary step for the path to a circular plastic economy.



The Intertwined Environmental and Social Impact of Plastic Pollution



While the environmental impact of plastic pollution is apparent, social impacts are often overlooked. The production and disposal of plastic products have negative effects on human health and well-being. Although it is impossible for plastics to be completely removed from our systems, **the prospect of establishing a circular and environmentally friendly plastic economy is within reach, including sustainable production, use and disposal.**

This is closely tied to the notion of Environmental Injustice: individuals, communities, and marginalized groups are frequently excluded from decision-making processes relating to the land they inhabit.¹⁵

According to the UN Environment Programme, widespread plastic waste results in damage to ecosystems and human health worth US\$300 billion to US\$600 billion a year.¹⁶ In Europe, which is the region with some of the highest recycling rates in the world, 65% of post-consumer plastics waste is still sent for energy recovery or to landfills, contradicting the concept of circular economy.¹⁷

¹⁵ UN Environment Program; NEGLECTED: Environmental Justice Impacts of Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution; 2021

¹⁶ UN Environment Program; Turning off the Tap: How the world can end plastic pollution and create a circular economy; 2023

¹⁷ Plastics Europe; The circular economy for plastics - A European Overview; 2022



The Role of the Informal Sector

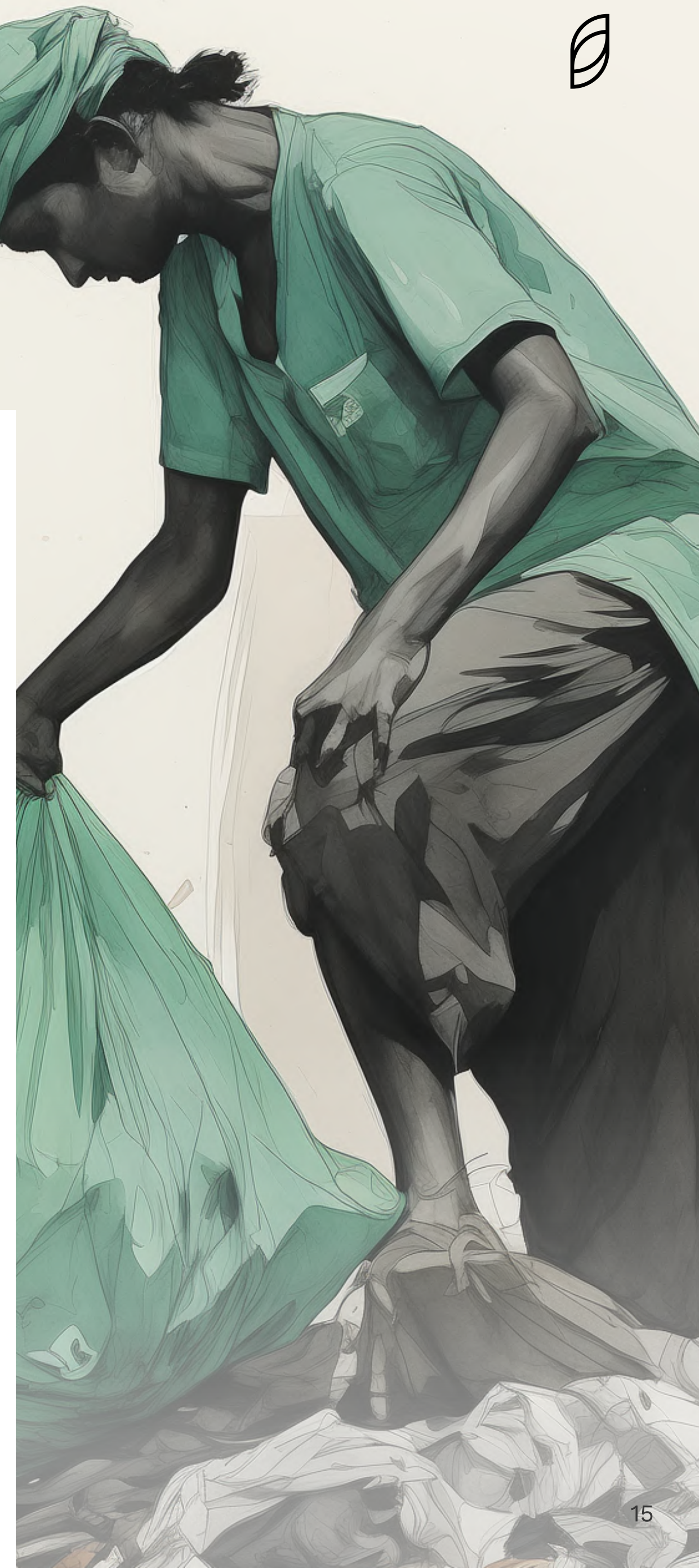
DEFINITIONS

An informal **waste worker** is a person or groups of people informally engaged in the collection and recovery of reusable and recyclable solid waste from the source of waste generation the streets, bins, material recovery facilities, processing and waste disposal facilities for sale to earn their livelihood.

Informal waste collectors are individuals, associations or waste traders who are involved in sorting, selling and purchasing recyclable materials.¹⁸

OVERVIEW

In countries that lack formal and effective waste management systems and which tend to suffer the consequences of plastic pollution the most, the informal sector plays a crucial role in the collection and recycling of plastic waste. Informal waste recycling is often carried out by the poorest and most marginalized communities, who resort to waste picking as a source of income. **They work in precarious conditions, lack government support, receive low or inconsistent incomes, work long hours and lack access to information, markets, financial resources, skill-building and technology.**¹⁹ **Nonetheless, informal waste workers have come to play a pivotal part in the global recycling economy.**



¹⁸ Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change; Solid Waste Management Rules; 2016

¹⁹ IUCN; Waste pickers role in plastic pollution reduction: the ones we cannot leave behind; 2021

Plastic waste has become a commodity that can be sold and traded. This creates an immense opportunity for informal waste workers to play a vital role in a future circular economy, especially in emerging markets, as they prioritize profit-maximizing solutions that avoid downcycling of collected plastic. Many regions in the Global South do not possess proper waste collection systems. Here, informal waste workers represent the only group that can avoid waste to be disposed of in landfills or in our oceans. Through the targeted selection of waste types that offer different levels of revenue, depending on the waste quality, they simultaneously mitigate the severe pollution resulting from open burning and dumping practices, while ensuring the recyclability of the collected materials. **This means that informal waste workers reduce pollution both by removing waste from the environment, and also by selecting the most appropriate recycling systems.**

¹⁵ [UN Environment Program; NEGLECTED: Environmental Justice Impacts of Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution; 2021](#)

²⁰ [Plastics Europe; The circular economy for plastics - A European Overview; 2022](#)



It is estimated that 15-20 million people globally work as informal waste workers. In India alone, this sector includes more than 2 million people, indicating the scale at which they operate, and the enormous amount of time that they dedicate to recycling.¹⁵

Informal waste workers possess specialized knowledge to recognize different types of plastics, as they recognize the value of these plastic waste materials. They can be considered plastic waste experts. According to Plastics Europe, plastic waste recycling rates are 13 times higher when collected separately compared to mixed collection schemes, which highlights the benefits of having collection experts who can differentiate among the types of plastic.²⁰

Overview of the Plastics Sector

According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, “many developing countries are building up after-use (waste) infrastructure, making this a critical crossroads moment. Investments made now will determine the infrastructure for the coming decades. Coordinating action and agendas across the value chain could catalyze impact.”²¹ Social businesses provide informal waste workers with a range of benefits including a steady income, social security, and safe working conditions, which in turn enables them to continue to collect more plastic in a safe, sustainable way, hence pushing progress towards closing the loop on the plastic economy. This shows that social businesses are playing an essential role in this transition. YSB has invested in a range of social businesses providing after-use infrastructure, and believes that now is a pivotal moment for corporations to play their part and become part of the solution.

Regulations around informal waste workers



While waste pickers manage 30 to 80%²² of the waste in many cities, they are typically not considered in plastic-related regulations. Waste pickers have therefore joined forces and created the International Alliance of Waste pickers, representing their opinion in the constitution of new regulations. Among others, the organization participates as an active member of the UNEA Plastic Treaty process. Their main demands are the recognition of their role in plastic waste management, fair compensation, and the implementation of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) norms.

Another example of integration of the informal sector into formal systems is in Latin America. In some countries, such as Colombia and Brazil, informal waste workers have obtained official recognition for their occupation as an employment category. In addition, the Colombian Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá (ARB), won a legal victory which allows informal waste worker associations to participate in bids for municipal solid waste management contracts.²³



Photo: Buy Food with Plastic

²¹ Ellen MacArthur Foundation; *The New Plastics Economy*; 2016

²² International Alliance of Waste Pickers; *Global Alliance of Waste Pickers highlights of 2021 by International Alliance of Waste Pickers*; 2021

²³ WASTE NL; *Gender & Recycling: Tools for Project Design and Implementation*; 2020



Social Procurement in the Plastic Waste Sector

Photo: Buy Food with Plastic

Social Procurement in the Plastic Waste Sector

In YSB's experience, corporations tend to start the sustainability journey by increasing visibility on their supply chain, then by ensuring compliance and driving specific ESG priorities across their value chains. These ESG goals usually focus on improving the sustainability performance of their current suppliers and reducing potential harm. **Through social procurement, corporations can move from reducing harm and mitigating risks to driving positive impact, both social and environmental, as part of their daily business operations and for products or services they require for their operations.**

With regard to plastic, many corporations have adopted the 4R strategy: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Recover. By working with social businesses and integrating them into their operations, corporations can easily put their strategy into practice with tangible cases.



Given the social and environmental challenges faced in the plastics industry and increasingly firm regulation, social businesses have catalytic potential to drive positive change in plastic value chains.



Photo: Plastic Bank





Opportunities to Integrate Social Businesses into your Value Chain

Social businesses can become suppliers for either **direct expenditure**, which includes all aspects directly related to the core product or service provided by the company contracting them, or **indirect spend**: everything else a firm spends money on: such as logistics, office management, software and end-of-life services. In the plastics industry, corporations can buy a diverse range of products and services from social businesses, as shown below.

Plastic recycling and the use of recycled plastics can reduce the negative impacts of plastic pollution and the production of virgin plastic. Therefore, many social businesses have identified it as an opportunity to support their communities, by reducing plastic production and consumption, improving waste management systems, and promoting sustainable alternatives to plastic products.





YSB developed a survey targeted at social entrepreneurs and impact-focused ventures in the plastic waste industry to understand their offerings for corporations, their current capabilities, and their main challenges to grow in the sector.

The survey was answered by more than 60 social businesses across the globe, located on 6 continents and 41 countries. As indicated in the map below, the sample includes a large concentration in India, followed by Indonesia, Vietnam, and Nigeria - parts of the world where plastic pollution is at an extreme level.





Product & Service offering

Photo: Plastic Bank



75%+
working on recycling plastic waste

The vast majority (more than 75%) of social businesses in plastics are working on recycling plastic waste, therefore contributing to the circular economy.



The Circular Economy for Plastics

Source: Plastics Europe; The Circular Economy for Plastics, A European Overview; 2019⁸

Post-consumer waste collected: packaging, plastic bottles, recyclable finished products, etc.

Collecting plastic waste

Sorting

Recycling into raw materials

Recycling into finished products

Recycling

into pellets

into sheets

Legend:

- Number of social businesses carrying this activity
- % of social businesses selling finished products within this specific industry

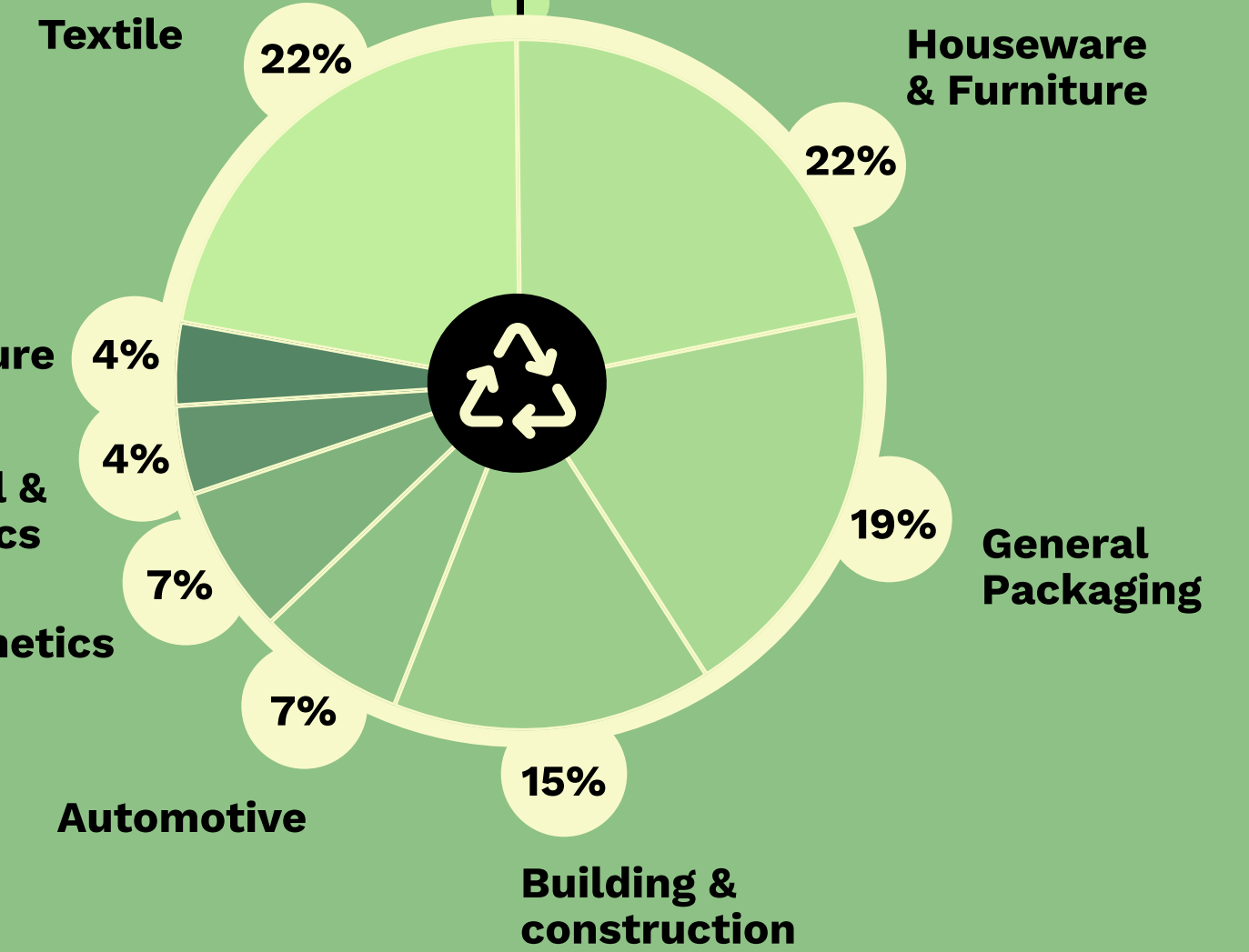
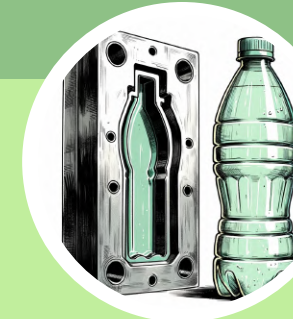
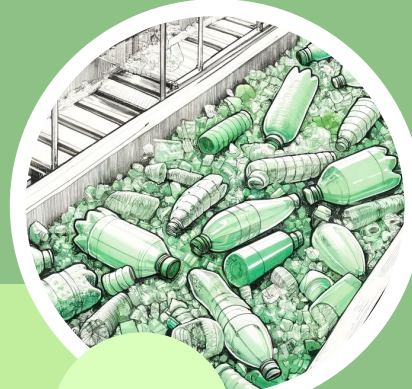
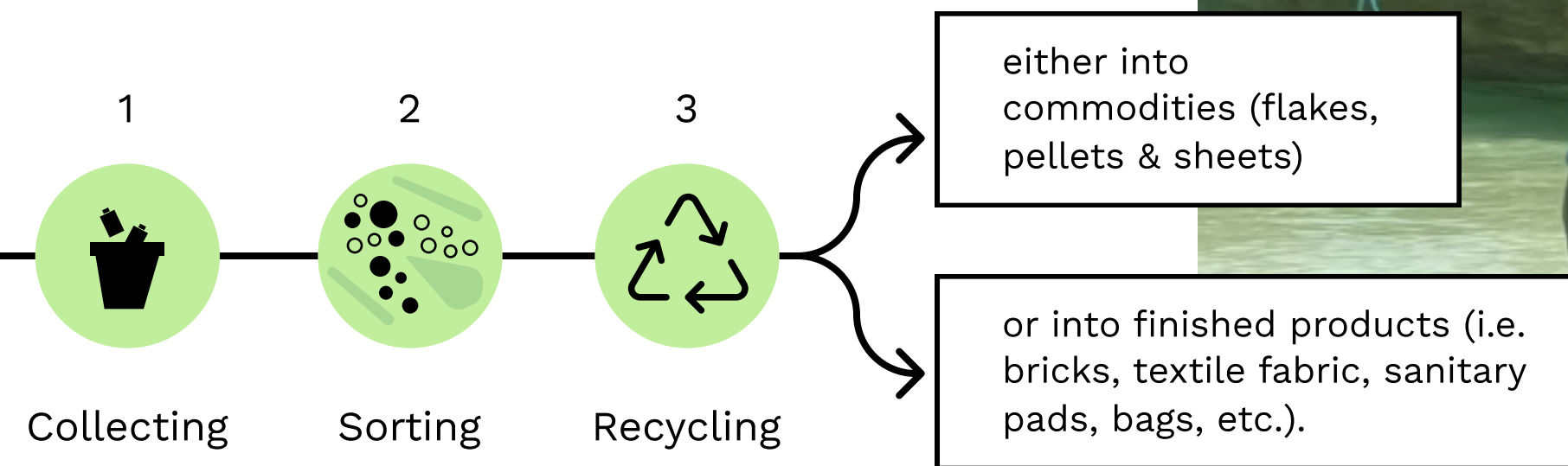


Photo: Buy Food with Plastic

Social Procurement in the Plastic Waste Sector



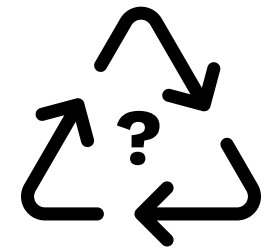
Social businesses are positioned at various stages of the plastic recycling value chain. While some focus on only one segment of the value chain, there are social businesses that integrate several activities. These include:



The other segment of social businesses (25%) offers other types of services and products that do not fall into recycling activities, such as the production of alternatives to single-use plastics, awareness training on plastic pollution and tools that allow corporations to track their waste management.



Photo: Plastic Bank

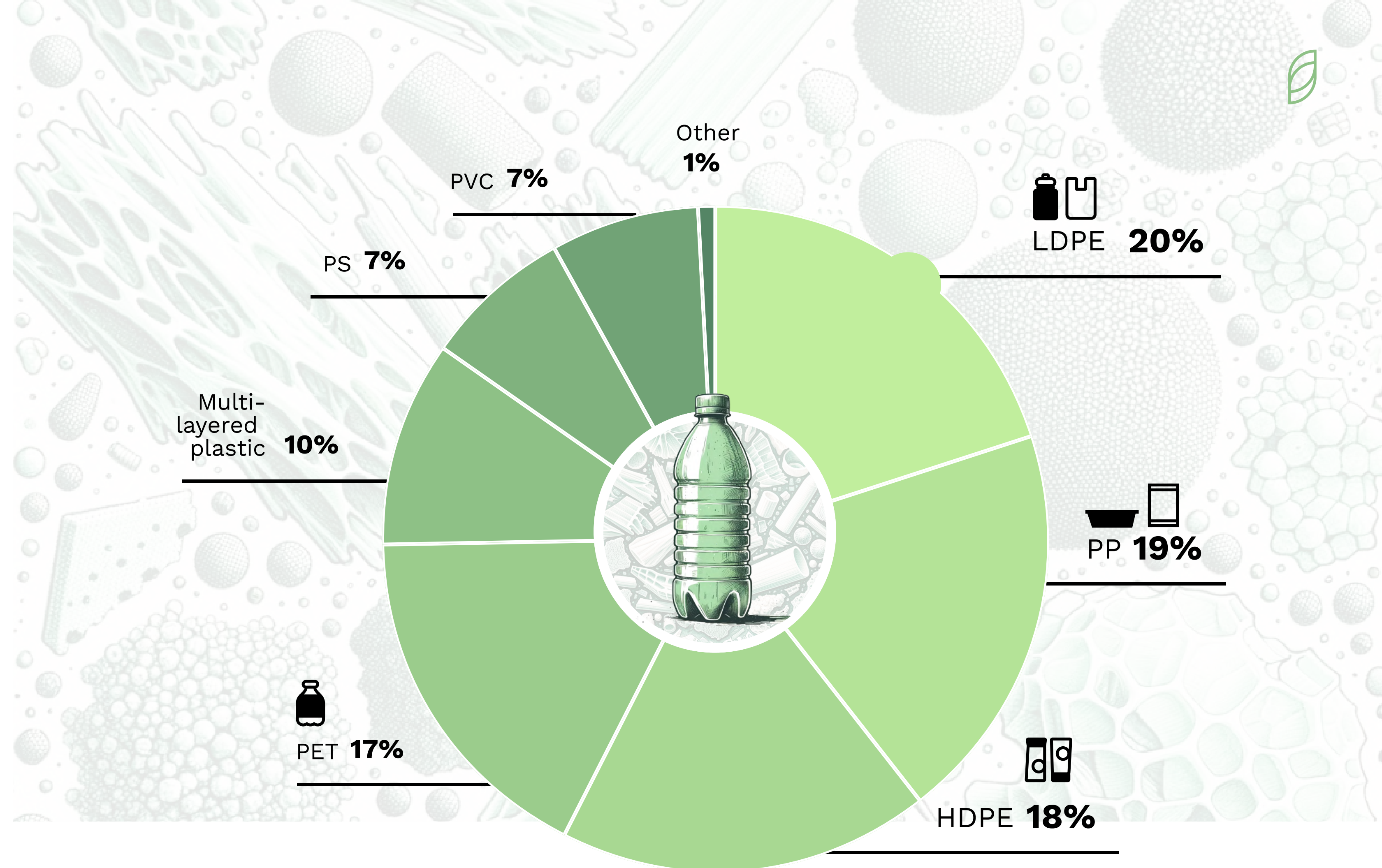


Types of plastic social businesses work with

The plastic types that social businesses work with the most are: LDPE (Low-Density Polyethylene), PP (Polypropylene), HDPE (High-Density Polyethylene) and PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate), which are the most commonly used types of plastics. Nonetheless, the social businesses surveyed do process all types of plastics.

1 out of 3 social businesses process on average 100 to 500 tonnes of plastic per month, and overall, 50% process more than 100 tonnes of plastic.

There is no significant difference in volumes processed between social businesses that collect plastic and the ones that recycle it.



PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate)
→ Found in water and soft drink bottles

HDPE (High-Density Polyethylene)
→ Found in shampoo bottles, chemical and detergent bottles

PP (Polypropylene)
→ Found in microwave dishes and chip bags

LDPE (Low-Density Polyethylene)
→ Found in rubbish bags and squeeze bottles

PVC (Polyvinyl Chloride)
→ Found in cosmetic containers, found in cling wrap

EPS and PS (Polystyrene or Styrofoam)
→ Found in plastic cutlery, water station cups, takeaway foam shells

MLP (Multi Layered Packaging)
→ Found in sachets, packaging for snacks

Padcare Labs

PadCare has developed and launched the world's first sustainable menstrual hygiene management service that helps align with women's empowerment, sustainability and maintaining dignity. They are serving more than 500,000 females, recycling more than 2 million pads, and conserving -107 metric tons of CO2 every month.

PadCare is an unprecedented hygiene management solution that completes the loop of the menstrual hygiene economy by generating harmless, recyclable output out of soiled pads. It started its journey in 2018 and expanded its reach to corporations, housing societies and community-level projects.

Padcare provides end-to-end solutions to Menstrual hygiene management, and is creating an impact through:

PadCare Bin - segregated disposal at source for providing the highest hygienic conditions to female users with PadCare Vap technology.

Green disposal system - PadCare uses patented 5D technology to process the pads, and converts them into recyclable wood pulp and plastic which is then used in paper, packaging, and chemical and textile industries.

Client Dashboard - PadCare provides a client dashboard where the client can check the data and impact in real-time with 100% transparency.

Certifications - Alignment with great places to work, green building norms, UN SDG and Zero waste landfills goals.

PadCare Vend - Automated sanitary napkin vending machine for female lavatories with multi pad dispensing option.



The initiative has been recognised by the Indian central government and various National and international organizations. They currently serve more than 500+ clients including Persistent, Mahindra, Mercedes, Raymond, Taj Hotels, and ICICI Lombard, across 13 cities in India.





eTrash2Cash

Founded in 2016, eTrash2Cash is a plastic waste collection and recycling social business. It establishes trash banks in Nigeria, which are local waste collection points across local/grassroot communities. These banks allow low-income communities to earn and save direct cash incentives in exchange for their everyday trash. All collected trash is then sorted, reprocessed and/or recycled into reusable raw materials and finished products.

The organization recycles different types of plastics: PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate), HDPE (High-Density Polyethylene), PP (Polypropylene) and LDPE (Low-Density Polyethylene). This collected plastic waste is then reprocessed into pellets, sheets or other finished products. eTrash2cash processes 50 to 100 tonnes of plastic on average per month.

To date, the organization has established 32 trash banks, works with 165+ trained informal collectors and collected 38,000 tons of waste. It provided livelihoods to more than 25 thousand people coming from low-income communities thanks to its direct cash incentives, which has enabled them to access more food, healthcare or education from "trash" savings.





EL FUTURO NO ES DESECHABLE

Social Procurement Sector Spotlight on Plastic Waste



Impact

Photo: Buy Food with Plastic



90%

of social businesses generate both **social** and **environmental** impact.

Social businesses can not only support corporations in their social and environmental missions, but also create synergies across different departments or strategies.

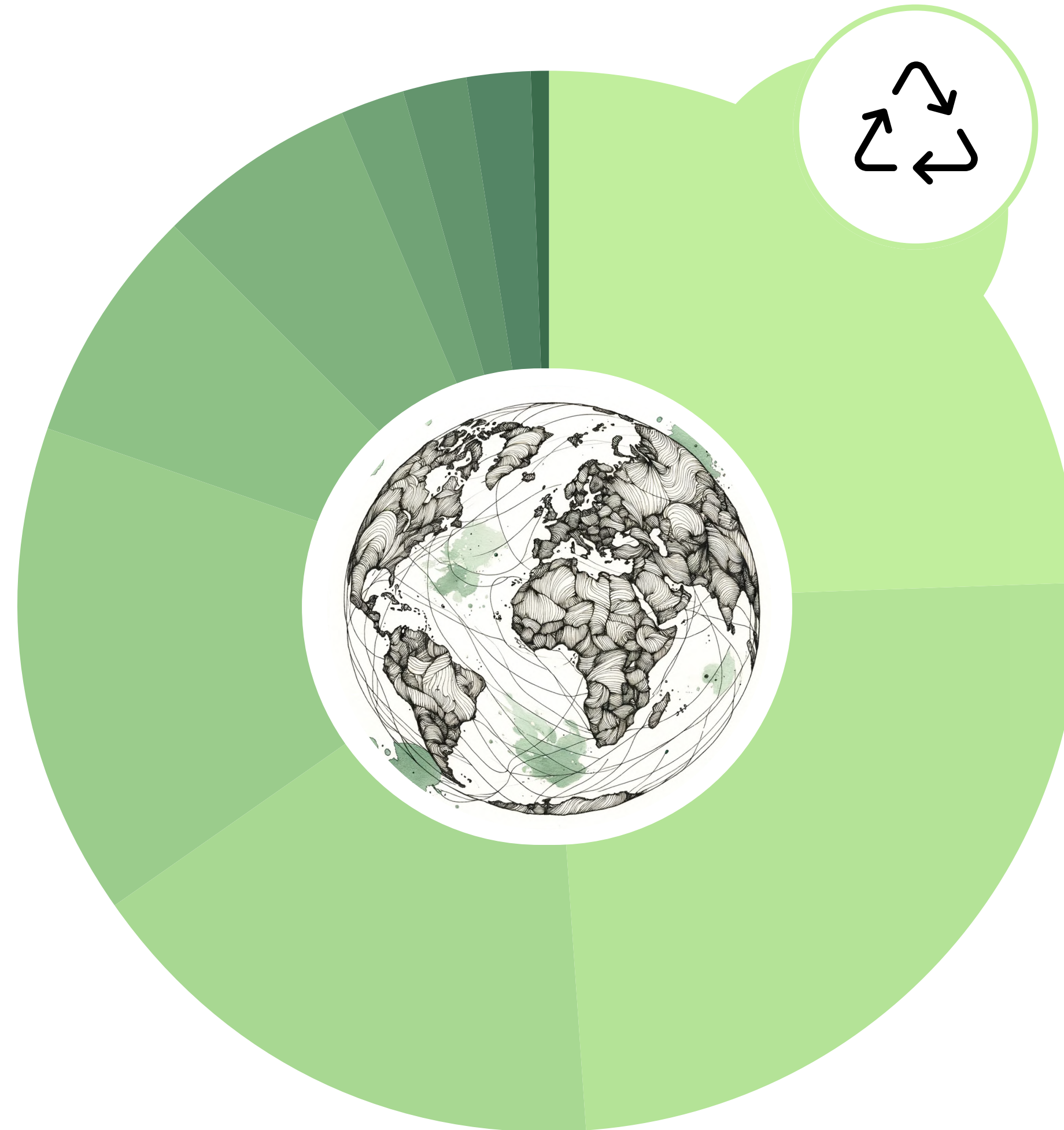




Environmental impact

All social businesses offer solutions to eliminate plastic pollution. However, they contribute to reducing plastic waste in different ways: by collecting plastic, or recycling it, providing a waste management tool, or offering an alternative to single-use plastic products, therefore overall reducing the negative effects of plastic pollution and extraction. Examples include:

- Bricks made of plastic waste, used for construction - by **Ghetto Research Lab**
- Fabrics (i.e. polyester) made of plastic waste - by **Green Fabrics**
- Alternatives to single-use plastic: notebooks, bottles, pocket bags... - by **Banlastic Egypt**
- Recycled granules (HDPE, LDPE, PP) and recycled packaging - by **Lucro**



Type of Environmental impact

25%	Recycling & upcycling
25%	Waste reduction & management
16%	Sustainable alternative materials & products
15%	Carbon reduction & climate change
7%	Waters protection
6%	Localised production & consumption
2%	Renewable energy
2%	Sustainable & organic & regenerative agriculture
2%	Forest & land & biodiversity protection

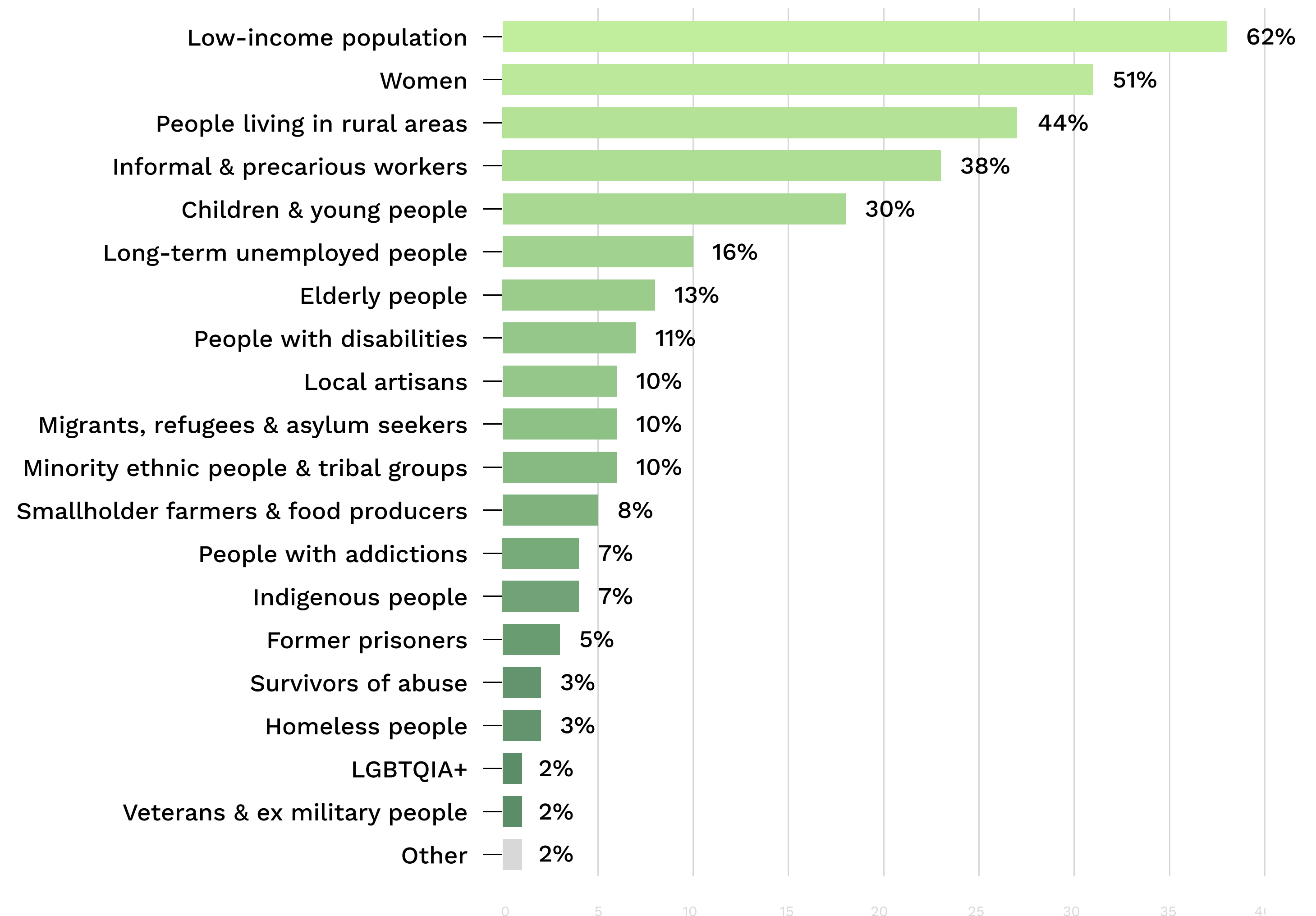


Social Impact

Social businesses in their definition exist primarily to create positive social impact, while generating revenue. They aim at improving the livelihoods of marginalized communities and minorities through a range of direct and impactful activities including:

- Providing fair wages and safer working conditions to informal workers and waste pickers;
- Providing direct employment to disadvantaged groups such as women, migrants and refugees, people with disabilities, low-income communities;
- Providing social benefits to informal workers on top of their incomes for the collected waste;
- Providing sanitation facilities and toilets (made of plastic bricks) in slums, thus increasing hygiene and decreasing the number of diseases;
- Incentivizing citizens to collect their waste, in exchange for food and drinking water

Target people impacted





Buy Food with Plastics

Buy Food with Plastic is a global social business headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland, that has built a plastic recycling model in Nicaragua, Ghana, and India which allows the public to buy food in exchange for returning plastic bottles. The plastic is then locally upcycled into new products to close a circular economy and complies with the Ocean Bound Plastic (OBP) standards.²⁴

They are financed through partners, donors, and members, as well as the sales of plastic products and plastic commodities.

Until today, they have rescued 157,864 plastic bottles, distributed 79,924 meals, employed 67 people directly, and have reached 228 members worldwide.

At their factories in Nicaragua, Ghana, and India, they transform waste into opportunities. Their unique selling proposition lies beyond upcycling, in impact creation. The plastic they use has a story — it was once used by locals living in extreme poverty to buy a hot meal. It then follows its journey into sustainable products, fostering environmental responsibility while promoting economic growth. Their work is more than recycling: it's a cycle of empowerment, bringing together environmental sustainability, poverty alleviation, and local empowerment.

Their goal is for the projects to become self-sustaining through the plastic economy cycle, thereby empowering individuals to transition into the middle class. Currently, they have collaborated with corporations such as Nestlé, Brückner Group, Herrmann Ultraschall, Aldi Suisse, Volvic, Goldman Sachs Gives, Bain & Company, Zurich Insurance Company on the sale of charity packages, and would like to evolve the partnership to the sale of plastic products.



Their country operations are divided in the following way:

Sales of OBP plastic in Nicaragua, India, and Ghana

Plastic compensation programs for corporations in Nicaragua.

CSR/charity packages for corporations and individuals are available worldwide.

Sale of 100% upcycled (HDPE/PP) such as Jenga game, Surf combs, and customized products for B2B such as phone cases, eyeglass frames, spectacle cases, shoehorns, flower pots, outdoor blankets, and everything up to 130 grams.



“Buy Food with Plastic actions bring happiness to the people, and the removal of plastic waste helps eliminate breeding sites for mosquitoes. This signifies that our initiatives contribute to mitigating the dissemination of infectious diseases within the community. This insight has significantly reinforced our motivation, leading us to understand that our impact is far more profound than initially perceived.”

Mrs. Bosomtwe from the community Dwabor, Elmina in Ghana

²⁴ Ocean Bound Plastic Certified; 2023



Business opportunities



54%

of social businesses have already supplied to international companies, such as Unilever, H&M, Caudalie, NIVEA or The Body Shop.





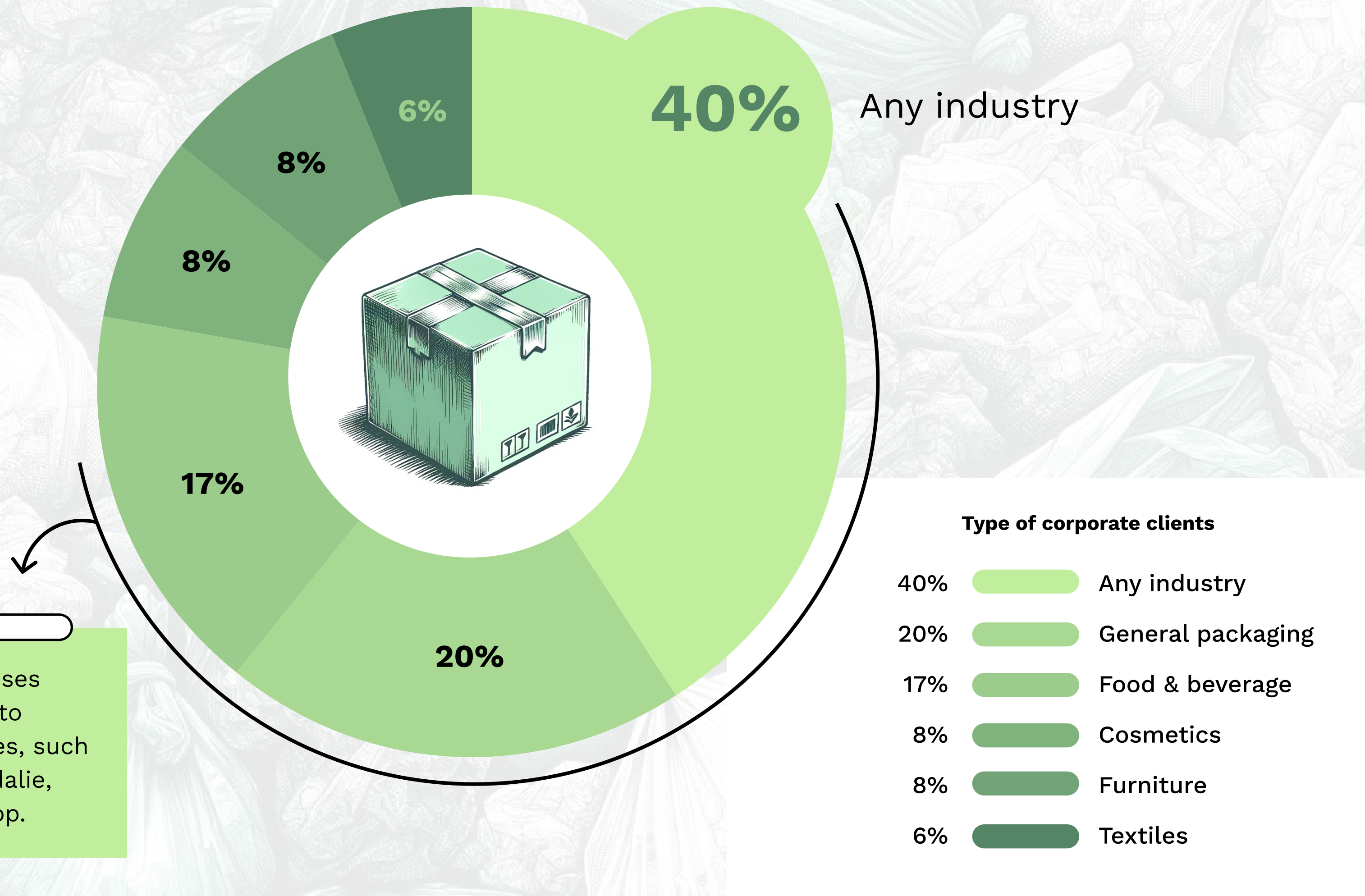
Business opportunities

Social businesses have capabilities that often exceed the expectations and understanding of potential contractors. Most respondents have worked with international companies across various industries (cosmetics, fashion, furniture, packaging, food & beverage). They help corporations increase transparency and traceability throughout their supply chain.

54% of social businesses have already supplied to international companies, such as Unilever, H&M, Caudalie, NIVEA or The Body Shop.

Type of Corporate Clients

Source: Global Alliance of Waste Pickers²⁵





Hasiru Dala Innovations

Hasiru Dala Innovations is a social business in India that develops innovative, circular economy business models that help create a waste-free world and transition waste pickers to entrepreneurs and predictable livelihoods as an integral part of the evolving circular economy value chain. It refers to it as Inclusive Circularity™.

The organization provides waste management services and fair-trade plastic waste. It also recycles sanitary pads in collaboration with another start-up. The social business has an international reach and supplies global brands including Unilever, H&M and Cofresco. YSB supported Hasiru Dala Innovation with a long-term loan, thus helping the business to grow and scale its impact.



HDI and H&M

Since 2022, HDI has developed a partnership with H&M. It buys plastic waste from waste pickers, scrap dealers and other micro waste entrepreneurs and then supplies button manufacturers with the plastic waste. These manufacturers then turn it into buttons that the H&M Group's Tier 1 suppliers buy and feature on clothing sold worldwide. All H&M Group apparel Made in India and sold globally are now using buttons with 30% recycled PET made from fair-trade plastic waste, sourced exclusively from HDI.

Bottles to recycled buttons



HDI WPF: Hasiru Dala Innovations Waste Picker Franchisee DWCC: Dry Waste Collection Center





HDI creates better and safer livelihoods for waste pickers and informal waste workers. They engage and promote waste micro-entrepreneurs who are responsible for collecting and segregating waste, including plastics.

The organization has been awarded the FICCI Circular Economy Award 2022 and is the only multi-stream waste management company that is Fair Trade Guaranteed by the World Fair Trade Organization.

22 waste picker entrepreneurs empowered

300+ predictable livelihoods created

122% average increase in income

Over 90,000 tons of waste diverted away from landfill since inception





The story of Lotfar

From Waste Picker to a Successful Entrepreneur

Lotfar previously used to pick up waste from the road and sell it for a living. But the access to waste, as well as the quantity and quality of collected waste was unpredictable, hence the income was unstable. He was often stopped by the police and citizens suspecting him to be a thief. There was no dignity of labor and constant humiliation at work.

Hasiru Dala Innovations partnered with leading residential and commercial properties, and gave Lotfar access to these properties for waste collection. The organization helped Lotfar to become an entrepreneur and get fair prices from waste collection. Today, Lotfar employs other waste workers, has his own waste collection vehicles and manages a Material Recovery Facility. He has assured waste collection from 4631 households from Bangalore's premium properties. He now lives in a pucca house (a permanent home).



Plastic credits

In recent years, the number of plastic offset and credit schemes has steadily increased. A plastic credit is a transferable certificate representing the collection of a specified volume (e.g. one kilogram, one metric ton) of plastic waste recovered or recycled that would otherwise have ended up in a landfill. Like carbon credits, companies can buy plastic credits to offset their plastic footprint and go 'plastic neutral' by eliminating as much plastic waste from nature as they use.

These plastic credits can finance any type of project in which plastic is either collected or recycled, creating a new source of revenue for social businesses.

While the plastic credit market requires more structure and regulation and certainly does not replace waste reduction, it represents an opportunity for social businesses to diversify their income. Additionally, selling plastic credits enables them to further invest in their recycling infrastructure, as social businesses are meant to reinvest their profits into growing their operations and generating more impact.

Social businesses such as Empower, Gem Corp Recycling & Technologies, ReCircle, Plastic Bank, Second Life and Seven Clean Seas are examples of social businesses which have already started to sell plastic credits.



Seven Clean Seas

Seven Clean Seas builds ocean plastic recovery, river plastic interception and coastal community waste management projects that provide fair, formalized jobs and clean the ocean. Seven Clean Seas generates plastic credits through their activities: 1 credit corresponds to 1,000kg of plastic recovered from the marine and environment. They use the sale of third-party certified plastic credits to fund the development of their projects. To ensure this is holistic, they work with corporations to measure their plastic footprint, identify opportunities to reduce their plastic usage, offset their impact by purchasing plastic credits and further generate education and engagement plans. This approach is a step towards integrating corporate accountability around plastic usage into wider CSR strategies.

To date, they have recovered over 2 tons of plastic pollution from the marine environment and are on track to recover 10 tons of plastic pollution by 2025, providing 200 formal jobs to waste collectors in the process.



Second Life

Second Life is also a social business providing plastic credits, and the first Verra-certified plastic collection and recycling project focused on supporting informal collectors in island communities. This certification was launched initially for carbon offsetting, however, it is now expanding to plastics.

Initially launched in 2020 as a spin-off of PUR Project and sponsored by Caudalie, Second Life has since

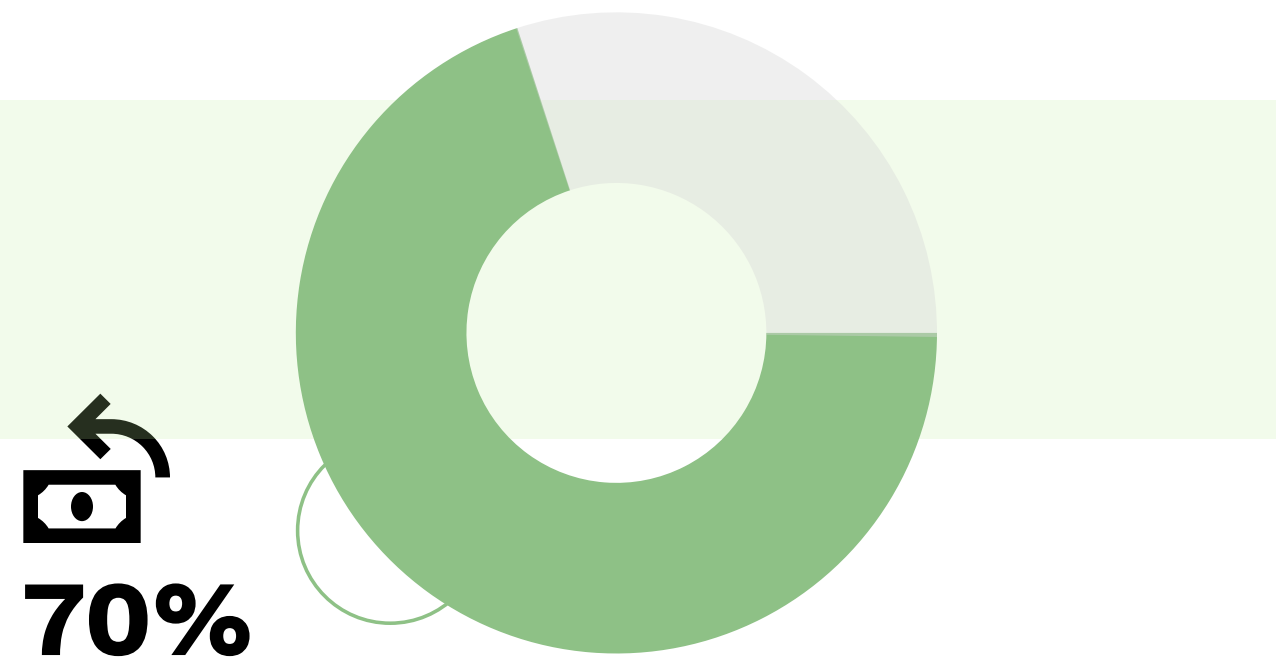
carved out as a separate company dedicated to developing circular plastic waste supply chains, with a focus on ocean plastics in particular.

They collect over 2 million kgs of ocean plastic each year, making them one of the largest beach clean-up operations in the world. Over 150,000 informal collectors have registered under the Second Life program since it started.



Barriers and Issues to Overcome

Photo: Buy Food with Plastic



70%
of social businesses surveyed see the **lack of funding** as their main **challenge**.

LACK OF FUNDING

Securing funding is a persistent challenge for social businesses and the most effective way to address this challenge is by establishing long-term partnerships with corporations. Access to funding in many emerging markets is difficult for social entrepreneurs as interest rates can be unaffordable or traditional banks are simply not engaging in the social economy that is not focused on financial profits (for instance, 10.5% in Kenya²⁵ or 12.75% in Brazil²⁶ as we publish the report).

To tackle this issue, YSB and WASTE have launched the 'Take a Stake' consortium, in cooperation with organizations as IKEA Social Entrepreneurship, to provide funding to small and growing businesses in the waste sector and help the ecosystem grow.

While impact investing is growing in the sector, corporations can also contribute to the solutions by facilitating upfront payments in their contracts in order to enable their suppliers to cover for their operating expenses and reduce the need for external financial support which might be more costly for social businesses and can jeopardize their competitiveness.

LACK OF CONTACT AND VISIBILITY

Social businesses struggle to find the right contact in purchasing teams within large companies. On the side of corporations, given the speed of production, procurement teams tend to always be chasing orders, and don't have the time to research more sustainable and impactful alternatives to the ones they are currently buying from. This highlights the need for intermediaries, such as YSB, that can create a common understanding and awareness within the corporations on the concept and opportunities of social procurement, and help building bridges between social businesses and corporations.

²⁵ Trading Economics; Kenya Interest Rate; 2023

²⁶ Trading Economics; Brazil Interest Rate; 2023



VOLUME REQUIREMENTS

The third main challenge that social businesses face are the volume requirement from corporate clients. Indeed, it's often difficult for them to quickly meet high volume requirements, as it requires large investments in infrastructure and export capabilities. Most of the respondents ideally seek corporate contracts with a volume between 1,000 and 5,000 items.

One solution to this challenge is the development of long-term partnerships. If an initial pilot between the social business and the corporation is successful, the best outcome is to follow with a long-term partnership in which the social business becomes a standard supplier in a constant stream of production.

This is crucial for social businesses, especially as they invested a significant part of their limited funding in training, sampling, machinery, and research to meet the volume requirement. The long-term commitment to orders is actually one of the three main opportunities for growth that social businesses highlighted.

Top 3 opportunities for growth





Case Studies

Photo: Buy Food with Plastic

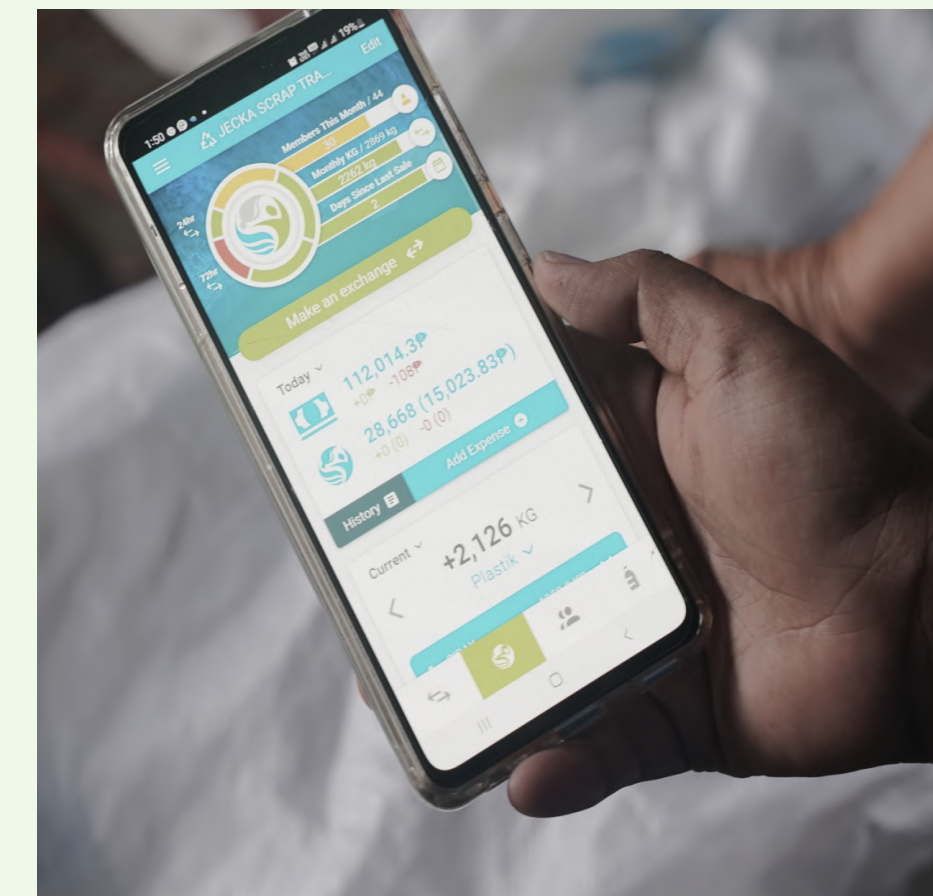
Plastic Bank

To date, Plastic Bank has stopped 99.3 kg of plastic from entering the ocean - the equivalent of 4.9 billion plastic bottles with the help of over 600 collection branches and over 39,000 collection members across Southeast Asia, Latin America and Africa. Their HQ is in Vancouver, Canada but they operate in the Philippines, Indonesia, Brazil and Egypt.

Plastic Bank envisions a wasteless world. They empower the Social Recycling movement that stops ocean plastic and helps alleviate poverty. Their collection communities exchange plastic waste as currency for income and life-improving benefits. Exchanges are recorded through a proprietary blockchain-secured platform that enables traceable collection, secures income, and verifies reporting. Collected material is processed into Social Plastic® feedstock for reuse in products and packaging.

Plastic collection is enabled in 50 kilometers of ocean-bound waterways and coastlines. Their communities gather plastic waste directly from local beaches, riverbanks, neighborhoods, and even households – so they are able to stop ocean plastic directly at the source.

Plastic Bank's Impact Program allows everyone to purchase plastic collection credits to offset their plastic footprint. The Supporter Program, on the other hand, is designed for businesses and brands that aim to make annual or monthly contributions to support plastic recycling and collection community members. Meanwhile, the Social Plastic® Program empowers businesses to integrate ethically processed plastic feedstock into their manufacturing supply chain. All partnerships help stop ocean plastic and alleviate poverty by funding ethical collection communities in vulnerable coastal areas.





Reform Plastics *part of Evergreen Labs*

ReForm Plastic is a social business transforming low-value plastics into versatile, durable, value-added products that can be used for various applications, including construction and furniture industries. Its solution portfolio addresses all hard-to-manage plastic waste streams to complement existing operations or start tackling waste from the ground up. These cost-effective technologies can be applied to various contexts, volumes, feedstock streams, and operators around the world.

Currently, ReForm Plastic has a total of 14 social franchise factories in operation or being installed across South Asia and Africa, including Vietnam, Philippines, Laos, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Ghana, and Mozambique. Its solutions, processes, and technology are being scaled via a social franchise model that empowers local entrepreneurs or organizations while removing unusable waste from the environment, globalizing its impact.

ReForm Plastic operates across the entire value chain and closely engages in building collection schemes for feedstock securitization (through MRFs, recovery programs, etc.) and this can also support corporate partners seeking to establish traceable collection (e.g. for EPR or plastic credit schemes). The social impact at ReForm Plastic is strengthened through its social initiative called “The Collector Network,” which empowers local, informal waste collectors (mainly women) with training, access to healthcare, recognition from the local government, and other support services.



14 factories operating or being installed globally

+700 informal collectors supported





ReForm Plastic solves the plastic waste challenge through an inclusive and circular approach that converts low-value plastic waste into durable, technical, premium products through a unique and proven process. Unlike other recyclers, ReForm Plastic technology can convert any type of plastic, even non-recyclable, low-value plastic waste, into uniquely crafted and functional, competitive products. Through its impactful work, ReForm Plastic is empowering local waste workers in order to improve not only the environment but also people's livelihoods.

ReForm Plastic has engaged with various corporations and private sector partners throughout the years of development and operations. Some of these collaborations were transactional purchases of the final products (i.e., waste bins made from upcycled plastics), while other corporate partnerships include integrated approaches involving building partner factories in developing countries. ReForm Plastic is open to exploring various types of partnership models to bring value to all types of plastic around the world and provide local, processing infrastructure and collection schemes to remove low-value plastics from our environment altogether.





Mr Green Africa

Mr. Green Africa is a fully integrated plastic recycling company that collects and buys back plastics from communities, sorts it, and then produces high-quality Post Consumer Recyclates sold to renowned brands. Their goal is to replace the virgin plastic traditionally used in packaging production, thus closing the loop and ensuring plastic waste gets a circular life-cycle. While at it, Mr Green Africa is committed to fairness and inclusivity in the transactions with the informal recycling sector and an emphasis on local manufacturing to maintain value creation in Kenya.

Mr Green Africa is based in Kenya and was founded in 2014. It is the first recycling company to be a B Certified Corporation on the African continent. It leverages business as a force for good to realize sustainable, long-term, social, environmental and economic impact through the collection, conversion and selling of post-consumer recyclates from plastic waste. The principal activity of the company is that of trading and processing recyclable materials.

Its technology-driven plastics collection model enables waste collection at the source, integrating informal waste workers, micro-entrepreneurs and

consumers into a formal value chain, increasing the amount of post-consumer plastic waste aggregated. The company collects and provides stakeholders the chance to earn a fair, predictable and transparent income and benefits. They make the informal waste sector part of its solution and partner with FMCG companies to position social and environmental impact at the core of a financially sustainable and scalable business, while still creating decent and sustainable jobs in and for the informal market.

They process an average of 400MT of plastic every month, directly employing 137+ people, with up to 4337+ registered waste collectors as of 2023. They are inclusive and act on a local scale, ensuring that they are able to collaborate effectively with the entire ecosystem at a truly global scale. They focus on the inclusion and integration of marginalized communities and make them part of a fair and sustainable value chain as well as building resilient local value chains based on local value addition with a multi-stakeholder collaboration strategy.

They have worked with corporations internationally, including Unilever Kenya and DOW.



Barriers and issues to overcome



Yunus Social Business was founded in Germany in 2011 by Prof. Muhammad Yunus, Saskia Bruysten, and Sophie Eisemann to expand on the success of social businesses from Bangladesh and ignite it around the world. YSB tackles poverty and the climate crisis from two angles. First, YSB provides patient capital to social businesses in East Africa, Latin America & India, to help them grow their impact. Second, YSB works together with corporations and large businesses to help them create positive impact in their operations and bring their purpose statement to life. Combined, these two approaches bring together multiple stakeholders to provide innovative solutions to complex social and environmental problems, like those posed by the waste sector.

YSB's vision is a world of three zeroes: zero poverty, zero unemployment and zero net carbon emissions. A world with zero carbon emissions requires a circular economic system where the concept of waste is eliminated. Simultaneously, a world with zero poverty can benefit from a circular economy system to employ disadvantaged communities in the transition.

As an example, the informal sector dominated by waste pickers is responsible for a major part of the recycling effort in many developing countries, however their lives are plagued by low and irregular incomes, low social standing, as well as unfair pricing. By being employed directly by social businesses, both the social and environmental issues can be tackled at once.

Partnerships between social businesses and corporations prove to be particularly effective for creating solutions in the plastic waste sector due to the complementary strengths the two actors bring to the table. Social businesses, those with a social and/or environmental impact embedded deep in their business models, often possess in-depth knowledge of local issues and are able to respond quickly and innovatively to opportunities. Corporations, on the other hand, hold powerful resources, operational scale, and financial capital that can turn ideas into influential forces in the world.

To help corporations engage with social businesses and integrate them into their value chains, YSB created the program Unusual Partners that includes training programs for corporate managers to create a common understanding of social business and social procurement, scouting and match-making with relevant social businesses that fit with their business needs, and supplier integration programs to help the selected social businesses increase their capabilities to meet the company's requirements.

Interested to learn more?

Contact us at unusual.partners@yunus.sb.com

Barriers and issues to overcome

About



WASTE is an international NGO committed to creating cleaner, healthier futures for all. Together with local partners, WASTE works to strengthen waste management, sanitation and clean water systems in marginalized communities around the world. WASTE uniquely brings together key stakeholders from across sectors to pilot, upscale and successfully deliver innovative programs and catalyze solutions. In all that they do, WASTE strives for impact that is locally relevant by building local capacity, sharing technical expertise and increasing access to finance.

WASTE specifically addresses the plastic pollution challenge through its FINILOOP program. A city-level plastic waste program focused on improving solid waste management systems while at the same time improving the livelihoods of informal waste workers and fostering the growth and scale-up of plastic waste enterprises.

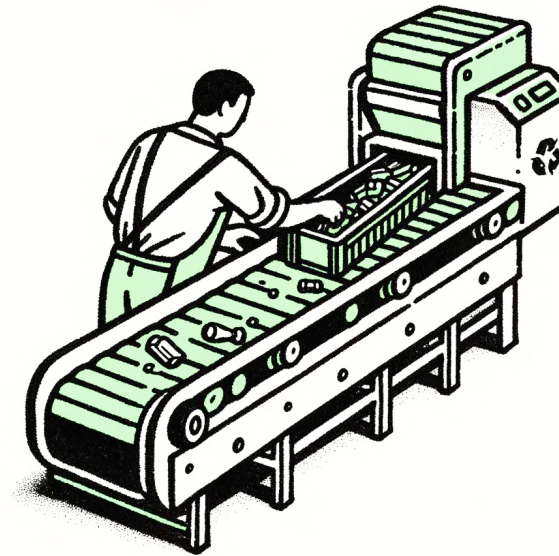
Building on its more than 40 years of experience, WASTE uses proven approaches such as the ISWM model and Diamond approach, to mobilize all actors in the plastic waste value chain and to catalyze change. All focused on its vision of creating plastic waste-free cities with more effective, affordable, and inclusive waste management systems.

In the first year of its existence FINILOOP established connections between the key stakeholders facilitating the growth of plastic waste start-ups and enterprises. The social enterprise “Parichay” is one of the start-ups who will receive mentorship through the program. Parichay is a social impact and craft-based start-up in Udaipur, registered under Startup India. Parichay focuses on sustainable fashion and sustainable livelihoods. They are helping artisans to sell their products in national and international markets, alongside supporting them to become skilled in digital literacy through free training sessions. They are upcycling fabric and plastic waste to make sustainable and eco-friendly fashion products.



See more about the FINILOOP programme: [Financial Inclusion and Improved Livelihoods Out of Plastics | FINILOOP - WASTE](#)

Glossary



Commercial waste: Waste that comes from shops, retail outlets and other generators that are neither residential or industrial. It sometimes includes institutional or public-sector waste.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR): A policy approach under which producers are made responsible (either financially or physically) for the end-of-life management of the products and/or packaging they sell.

Incineration: Incineration is a waste treatment technology dedicated to the thermal treatment of waste, with or without recovery of the combustion heat generated.

Informal Waste Workers: people working in the waste value chain for collection, sorting, selling solid waste but not paid by the municipality or other formal institutions and receive employment or other related benefits.

Informal Sector: Collective term for informal waste workers, smaller-scale aggregators, and recyclers that operate without full licenses and permits.

Landfill: Landfills are disposal sites for waste. They are a waste treatment approach that involves a final placement of waste in or on land in a controlled or uncontrolled way.

Plastic recycling supply chains: A system, which can consist of formal and/or informal actors, through which discarded plastics can be recycled. Typically includes collection, aggregation, pre-processing, reprocessing, and manufacturing into new goods.

Recycling: Processing of waste materials into products, materials, or substances, either for the original or another purpose, excluding energy recovery or fuel generation.

Reuse: Plastic packaging that can be used many times over a prolonged period without reducing its functionality.

Solid waste: Solid waste is waste with a low liquid content. It includes municipal garbage, industrial and commercial waste, sewage sludge, waste resulting from agricultural and animal husbandry operations and other connected activities, demolition waste and mining residues.



Social business:

a concept coined by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Prof. Muhammad Yunus, a social business is a company 100% dedicated to addressing a social or environmental problem — rather than maximizing profits for shareholders. After recouping the original investment, all further profits are invested back into the venture for expansion and improvement, and no dividends are taken.



Social enterprise:

a broader definition of altruistic businesses that exist primarily to deliver a specific social or environmental goal. This can include businesses which give dividends, social businesses, which do not give dividends, or partially sustainable models, such as innovative NGOs with a revenue aspect.

While there is a distinction between a social business and a social enterprise, for the purpose of this report and for more clarity, both social enterprises and social businesses will be referred as ‘social businesses’, as the outcome of the findings are not impacted by a differentiation between these two terms.

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