MAINTAINING AFRICA'S POSITION ON SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION & CONSUMPTION -AMCEN19/2

Background

During the nineteenth ordinary session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN 19) under the theme "Seizing opportunities and enhancing collaboration to address environmental challenges in Africa," African ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the development of an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, by calling for:

1. The Objective of the future plastics instrument to end plastic pollution in all environments, bringing plastic production and consumption to sustainable levels and achieving a safe circular economy protective of human health, the climate system and biodiversity throughout the life cycle of plastics.
2. The global instrument to eliminate the most harmful and high-risk plastic categories, including problematic polymers, chemicals of concern, products and applications, and brings overall plastic production to sustainable levels.
3. The core obligations on plastic production to align with Africa's commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 12 [SDG 12] and commit to supporting measures for the sustainable production and consumption of primary plastic polymers and eliminating specific problematic polymers, chemicals, products and applications of concern.

At AMCEN 20, taking place from 14-18 July 2025 in Nairobi, Kenya, African Ministers must continue to uphold the positions on sustainable production and consumption decided at AMCEN-19, for these core reasons:

Africa Did Not Start it, but Can End it:

- Africa is responsible for only **5% plastic production and 4% consumption globally** and yet it is the region most severely affected by plastic pollution and lack of global measures to effectively address it. (WHO, 2023).
  - The global production of plastics accounted for 400Mt in 2022. China was the largest producer of plastics (32%), followed by Oth Asia (15%), USA (14%), EU28 (14%), Middle East (5%), India (5%), Africa (4%), Japan (3%), and ROW (8%). (Houssini et al., 2025).
  - In terms of consumption, China was the largest consumer of polymers with 20% of the global consumption. The second largest consumer of Plastics is the USA (18%), followed by EU28 (16%) and the Other Asia region(12%). India and Japan accounted for 6% and 4% respectively, while the Middle East and Africa accounted for 7% and 5% of the global consumption. (Houssini et al., 2025).
- Whilst many countries in Africa produce oil and gas, very few have large scale polymer production and petrochemical industries, and therefore, committing to a global target to reduce plastic production would not significantly impact the region's economy.
  - Collectively the top oil & gas producing countries [i.e.Nigeria, Angola, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, South Sudan, Ghana] in Africa produce only about 6 - 7% of global oil production.
- **50%-60% of polymer demand in Africa is still imported due** to limited downstream infrastructure - Global consumer brands are expanding in Africa, likely driving a rise in imports without matching investment in infrastructure for plastic waste disposal. (Fuhr & Franklin, 2019).

Continuing uncontrolled production is a financial risk and no longer a viable option for economic growth:

- With capacity exceeding demand, rising production costs, falling virgin plastic prices, and uncertain investment returns, the plastic production sector is facing economic distress. Many facilities are already operating at as low as half their normal capacity (Bloomberg), and costly facility closures are already underway (S&P Global).
- Credit rating agencies are already downgrading investments in plastic production to negative (S&P Global), due to weak financial performance (IEEFA).

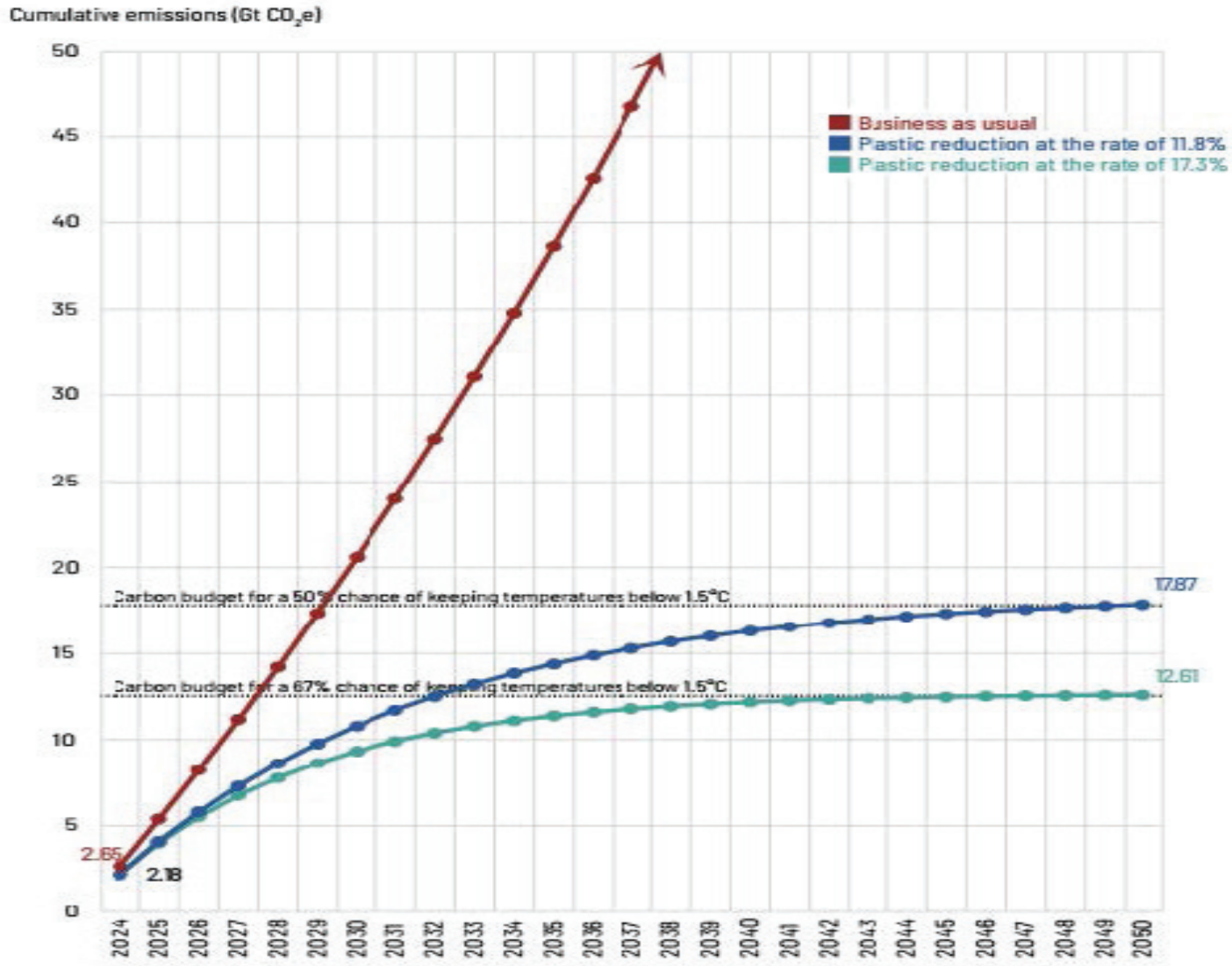
Production Expansion Does Not Translate to the Right to Development:

- The math does not add up: The global plastic market of USD 627 billion represents only **0.6% of the world's economy**, of which 7**5% is concentrated in just ten countries. Yet the societal cost of plastic pollution**, estimated between USD 2.2 trillion and USD 4.4 trillion per year, e**xceeds the "so-called" value of the plastic industry by up** to 7 times, and up to 10 times in low-income countries compared to high-income countries.
- **The Global South countries are exploited at every stage of the plastic lifecycle**: as raw material extraction sites for fossil fuels, then locations for refining and polymer production due to weak regulations and cheap labour, and finally as dumping grounds for plastic waste and waste trade from the Global North. **The current fossil fuel-based "development" model creates a cycle of poverty and environmental degradation**.
- Reducing plastic production is compatible with and necessary for sustainable, equitable development that balances the economic, social, and environmental aspects.
  - Development in Africa must be redefined beyond the simplistic equation of plastic production with progress. The current paradigm, where Africa becomes a dumping ground for the Global North's waste and outdated technologies, is not development—it's waste colonialism.
  - Blanket exemptions for health care plastics & the military sector in Africa are shortsighted under the right to development narrative.
    * Leading health organisations, including the WHO, recommend phasing out certain plastics and chemicals. A more nuanced approach with sunset periods for exemptions (3-4 years) would better serve both health and environmental needs and obtain regulatory approval for non-regrettable, affordable, accessible alternatives that meet clinical safety, efficacy and quality standards.
    * Plastic use in healthcare is not exempt from environmental harm.
    * A 2023 WHO report notes significant plastic waste from health systems, especially post-COVID.
    * Reuse and redesign of systems (sterilizable containers, reusable PPE where safe) can reduce costs and waste, especially in resource-constrained settings, generate jobs and economic opportunities.
    * Relying solely on virgin plastic in health care has long-term environmental and economic costs.
    * The military exemption pushed by some nations must be examined critically to ensure it doesn't undermine broader development and environmental goals and perpetuate further human rights impacts.

Devastating Climate impacts from Plastic Production:

- Over the last 2 years, deadly floods have ravaged across several African countries such as the DRC, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Mauritius, Kenya and South Africa.
- Plastic production is a major climate threat. 90% of the greenhouse gas emissions from plastics come from the production phase (Our World In Data).
- A major new report from Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in the U.S. finds that in 2019, plastic production emitted 5.3% of global greenhouse gas emissions, or four times as much as global aviation. This is a much higher footprint than previous studies found. 75% of these emissions occur in steps prior to polymerization: extraction, refining, monomer production, etc. This means that the treaty must address these upstream steps if it is to tackle the climate pollution from plastics.
- Even under a decarbonized power grid, plastics production would account for 17-22% of the remaining global carbon budget to keep global average temperatures at 1.5°C, surpassing the energy and transportation sectors (Lawrence Berkeley Lab).
- To keep to the 1.5 °C and net zero by 2050 goals established by the Paris Agreement, total Primary Plastic Production must be reduced by at least 12% to 17% each year. This is an ambitious target and implies faster, deeper cuts than previously else has called for. Unlike long-term goals, these annual targets would allow for year-by-year accountability and ensure countries take early action.

GHG emissions from plastic production by scenario:



Uncontrolled production = more exposure to toxic chemicals

- Current plastic production levels are exposing us, daily, to more than 16,000 chemicals, with 4,200 of them identified as a hazard for the environment and human health (PlastChem).
- More production means more exposure for communities living around and working in production facilities. Plastic production workers are at increased risk of a myriad of health conditions from leukemia to brain cancer and decreased fertility. The communities living in the areas surrounding plastic production and waste disposal facilities - known as ‘’fenceline communities ’ have increased risk of health issues including cancers, asthma and cardiovascular disease, amongst others. (Minderoo-Monaco Commission on Plastics and Human Health)

Failing Waste management in Africa due to Global Plastic Production Flows and Global North Dumping.

- Waste management systems simply cannot keep up with the amount of plastic produced globally that enters the marketplace (legally and illegally) in Africa. According to UNEP (2018), in 2012, the continent produced an alarming volume of 125 Mt of municipal solid waste (MSW) which is projected to double by the year 2025 and only 4% of municipal solid waste (MSW) is currently recycled. Plastic waste was also found to account for 13% of MSW in Sub-Saharan Africa.
  The manifestations of waste colonialism in Africa come in all shapes and forms, from electronic waste in Ghana’s most notorious E-waste dump to 282 illegal containers of plastic waste was exported from Italy to Tunisia as mixed municipal waste, to Accra’s markets & Kenya’s rivers flooded with the Europe’s addiction to fast fashion and the US illegally exporting harmful PVC plastic into the Nigerian economy.
- In Africa, 90% of waste is dumped in unregulated sites, with open burning releasing toxic gases and causing disease outbreaks. (UNEP, 2018; Manisalidis et al., 2020)
- Over Capacitated landfills are deadly, with recent landfill slides occurring in Mozambique (2016) and Uganda (2024) killing dozens due to heavy rains.
- Plastic pollution costs South Africa $60.72 billion annually, with major cities like Cape Town and Durban facing heavy cleanup costs and urban flooding risks. (Dalberg, 2021)
- Plastic represents a massive subsidy from the public to consumer goods and petrochemical companies. These companies benefit from plastic packaging but do not pay for the costs of collecting and disposing of the plastic waste.
- Waste management is already the largest single budget item in most municipal budgets.
- Even so, no waste management system in the world is capable of capturing all the plastic waste that is generated; even in wealthy countries such as the U.S., a huge amount of plastic waste escapes management systems and ends up in the ocean. So there is no way that waste management can keep up with the exponential growth in plastic production and waste generation.

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