



Handling The Plastic Menace

This editorial is based on “The Gaps in the Plan to Tackle Plastic Waste” which was published in The Hindu on 28/12/2021. It talks about issues associated with draft regulations on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and other challenges to tackling plastic waste.

For Prelims: Single Use Plastic, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Draft regulations on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), Plastic Waste Management rules 2016

For Mains: Challenges Associated with Draft Notification on EPR, Promoting the idea of Circular Economy for Plastic Waste Management, Menace of Plastic Waste Management in India.

Out of the many sustainability challenges that impact societies, [climate change](#) and plastic waste have a special significance.

In this context, the Environment Ministry recently published [draft regulations on Extended Producer Responsibility \(EPR\)](#) under [Plastic Waste Management rules 2016](#).

These regulations, however, denote a backslide, particularly with respect to integration of the informal sector and inclusion of different types of plastic.

Such frameworks for plastic waste management can only be effective if they **address the issue of plastic waste management in tandem with the existing machinery**, minimise duplication and lead to a positive environmental impact along with **adequate monitoring mechanisms**.

Plastic Waste and Management

- **Global Scenario: Mismanagement of more than 7.7 billion metric tonnes of plastic waste globally** over the next 20 years is expected, which is equivalent to 16-times the weight of the human population.
 - A 2019 report by the **Center for International Environmental Law** suggests that by 2050, **Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions** from plastic could reach over 56 gigatonnes, **10-13% of the remaining carbon budget**.
- **India's Waste Generation and Collection:** India generates 9.46 million tonnes of plastic waste annually out of which **40% plastic waste goes uncollected**.
 - According to the [Central Pollution Control Board \(CPCB\)](#), India generates close to 26,000 tonnes of plastic a day and over **10,000 tonnes a day of plastic waste remains uncollected**.
 - 43% of all plastics produced in India are used for packaging, majority being [single-use plastic](#).
- **Draft EPR Notification - Initiative for Plastic Waste Management:**
 - It mandates producers of plastic packaging material to collect all of their produce by 2024

- and **ensure that a minimum percentage of it be recycled** as well as used in subsequent supply.
- It has also specified a system whereby makers and **users of plastic packaging can collect EPR certificates** and trade in them.
- **Only a fraction of plastic that cannot be recycled** such as multi-layered multi-material plastics **will be eligible to be sent for end-of-life disposal.**

Challenges to Tackling Plastic Waste

- **The 3 P's Neglected by Draft EPR:**
 - **People:** Viewed from the angle of livelihoods, plastic waste management **makes up about half of the income of 1.5- 4 million waste-pickers** in India.
 - They are not only **excluded from the guidelines as stakeholders**, but also the guidelines direct producers to set up a parallel plastic waste collection and recycling chain **dispossessing waste pickers of their means of livelihood.**
 - **Plastics:** The EPR guidelines are **limited to plastic packaging while a large part of plastics produced are single-use** or throwaway plastic packaging.
 - Other multi-material plastic items like sanitary pads and polyester have been left out of the scope of EPR.
 - **Processing:** Processes other than recycling such as waste-to-energy, co-processing and incineration have been **proven to release carbon dioxide and particulate matter.**
 - The draft regulations have **legitimised them to justify the continued production of multi-layered plastics.**
- **Problem of Multilayered Plastics:** Multi-layered and multi-material plastics form an abundant type of plastic waste.
 - These are **low weight and voluminous and thus expensive to handle** and transport. Being primarily used in food packaging, **they often attract rodents, making storage problematic.**
 - Even if this plastic is picked, **recycling is technologically challenging** as it is a heterogeneous material.
 - The Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 mandated the phase-out of these plastics. However, **in 2018, this mandate was reversed.**
- **Improper Implementation and Monitoring:** In spite of the notification of the Plastic Waste Management (PWM) Rules, 2016 and amendments made in 2018, local bodies, **even the biggest municipal corporations, have failed to implement and monitor segregation** of waste.

Way Forward

- **Scope of Improvement in EPR Guidelines:** The government should **reconsider the draft guidelines to involve informal workers.**
 - The scope of plastics covered by the guidelines could be altered to **exclude those plastics which are already efficiently recycled** and to **include other plastic and multi-material items.**
- **EPR Funds for Informal Waste-Pickers:** The EPR funds could be **deployed for mapping and registration of the informal sector workers**, building their capacity, upgrading infrastructure, promoting technology transfer, and creating closed loop feedback and monitoring mechanisms.
- **Circular Economy for Plastic Management:** A circular economy **depends on reuse, sharing, repair, refurbishment, remanufacturing and recycling** of resources to create a closed-loop system, minimising the use of resources, generation of waste, pollution and carbon emissions.
 - Circular economy is not just applicable to the global currents of plastic and clothes, but can also **contribute significantly to the achievement of sustainable development goals.**
- **Increasing Market Value for Recyclable Plastics:** **Flexible plastics are recyclable**, but due to their contamination with organic waste the costs of recycling are prohibitively expensive relative to the market value of the output.
 - What can be done is - **increase the market value for these plastics by increasing the demand and use of recycled plastics** in packaging, thus creating the value to accommodate the current costs of recycling.
- **Behavioural Change:** Citizens have to bring behavioural change and contribute by not littering

and helping in waste segregation and waste management.

- **Raising awareness amongst the public of the harm caused by plastic pollution** through education and outreach programs to modify behavior.
- A movement against plastic waste would have to **prioritise the reduction of single-use plastic** such as multi-layer packaging, bread bags, food wrap, and protective packaging.

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss the measures that can be taken to handle the problem of plastic waste management in India.

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