

Knowledge material with information on plastic waste management and gender aspects

This briefing sheet is based on the findings from the following reports developed by IETC's Project on sustainable plastic waste management funded by the Government of Japan:

Reference 1: [Working paper on Environmentally Sound Management of Plastic Waste](#)

Reference 2: [Working paper on Plastic Waste Management Strategies](#)

Reference 3: [Working paper on Approaches to Plastic Waste Management in a Carbon-neutral Society](#)

Main findings

1. Plastic waste crisis is also a critical gender issue

The waste sector is assumed to be gender neutral, but gender inequalities and norms are embedded in almost every aspect of waste management, leading to a gendered division of labour, hitting harder on special vulnerable groups, such as women in rural or poor communities. As a result, **women often bear the brunt of informal and hazardous waste collection and recycling efforts**.

One example on this comes from Ghana (Reference 2), where men constitute about 61 per cent of labour force participation in the wide plastics value chain, however women are found to be predominant in the informal sector (64%) and in recycling companies as washers and sorters (68%). In the formal economy -where social security is present and salaries are higher-, men constitutes a blatant 88% of the workforce.

2. Gender inclusiveness as an aspect to be considered for the identification of best plastic waste management practices

The potential strategies and techniques for sound plastic waste management are countless and can greatly vary depending on local waste management infrastructure and social and economic aspects.

To support decision processes on this regard, the paper on Environmentally Sound Management of Plastic Waste (Reference 1) lays out a framework for the comparison and evaluation of different plastic waste management techniques, against eight key criteria: (1) Waste characteristics and compatibility; (2) Land use; (3) Cost effectiveness; (4) Economic benefits (5) Technical feasibility; (6) Positive environmental impact **(7) Social acceptability**, and (8) Regulatory compliance.

Gender inclusiveness is mentioned as a sub-criterion of **Social acceptability**¹, and as a critical element for the consideration and integration of gender perspectives throughout the entire plastic waste management chain, including formal and informal sectors, as well as investment and project-design stages.

¹ Other sub-criteria are: Transparency; Consensual decision-making; Local community acceptance; Public health and safety considerations; and Community impacts.

Gender inclusiveness applied to the decision-making process can represent **increased entrepreneurship opportunities for women** as well as **more equitable distribution of burdens and benefits** related to plastic waste management (Reference 2).

3. Stakeholder engagement needs to be gender-responsive

The paper on Plastic Waste Management Strategies (Reference 2) sketches a hub for stakeholder engagement of plastic waste management sector, with eight concrete steps² for an effective and equitable coordination mechanism. Step 4 (Agree on core principles, actions points, and targets) stands for the identification of core principles to guide the organization and implementation of the stakeholder hub, as well as to define common goals and priority action.

Access to information is one of the core principles underpinning this approach, **and gender-responsiveness** is mentioned as one of the characteristics that must be part of information processes, not just for direct stakeholders, but also to the wide community, as **a tool to promote environmental education and raise awareness about gender aspects in the waste management agenda**.

Asian Development Bank tries to follow this path by considering gender-responsiveness as one of its environmental and social standards for stakeholder engagement. Yet, more information is needed to understand the implementation and effectiveness of such endeavour.

The paper on Approaches to Plastic Waste Management in a Carbon-neutral Society (Reference 3) further highlights the importance of the **engagement of communities in the participatory design and implementation** to ensure that waste management strategies align with local needs and cultural contexts. In fact, it is widely recognized that women's knowledge and community-based networks, as well as their (often voluntary) engagement with local waste management activities -clean-ups, street sweeping and even primary collection of waste-, can lead to improved waste management.

4. Achieving a zero plastic pollution future necessitates a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics within plastic waste management systems

A genuinely successful strategy requires more than just equal participation. The paper on Approaches to Plastic Waste Management in a Carbon-neutral Society (Reference 3) explains that the initial step **requires recognizing the gendered dimensions of plastic waste management**. Women often bear the brunt of informal and hazardous waste collection and recycling efforts, highlighting the need for policy frameworks that transcend mere inclusion and aim for **transformative change**.

Gender-responsive policies and strategies must also address the **unequal distribution of knowledge and resources for plastic waste management**, as women from marginalized communities often face higher barriers than men to accessing information and training on efficient waste management practices.

² 1. Identify the central actor/s; 2. Stakeholder mapping; 3. Establish organizational and membership parameters; 4. Agree on core principles, actions points, and targets; 5. Public consultations and pilot testing; 6. Execution and launch; 7. Monitor and Evaluate; 8. Keep the momentum.

Nuances like this require **targeted decision-making processes** and **tailored objectives**, as well as **targeted awareness initiatives**, **capacity-building programs sensitive to gender and cultural nuances** and the development of **technology accessible to women**, to ensure a world where men and women equally share the responsibilities and benefits of a sustainable environment free from plastic pollution.

As a concrete starting point, **gender action plans** should be mandatory under major national policies and strategies on waste management. Such pieces of legislation are fundamental for the integration of gender aspects in the policy implementation, including responsibilities, beneficiaries, time allocation and the distribution of access and control over resources and decision-making processes within pivotal sectors such as governments, marketplaces, communities and families.

UNEP International Environmental Technology Centre is strongly committed to being a leader of global conversations around [gender and waste management](#).

For more information and access to our materials, visit our [dedicated webpage](#).