



Providing climate justice for marginalised groups in the implementation of the UN Global Plastics Treaty in Brazil



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CONTEXT

The voices of the communities most affected by plastic pollution are rarely heard when new plastics laws and regulations are being formulated. Negotiations around the first UN Plastics Treaty exemplify this type of climate injustice.

The Universities of Surrey and São Paulo have been working together to identify the challenges facing marginalised groups in Brazil threatened by plastic pollution and understand the barriers that currently exclude them from policymaking discussions.

We also shared the key issues identified by Brazilian stakeholders with representatives of the plastics science, governance, manufacturing and NGO sectors in the UK. The goal was to identify practical ways forward and opportunities to use international collaboration to restore climate justice, helping to advance a number of UN Strategic Development Goals.



WORKSHOP I

JUNE 16, 2025 | BRASILIA



Representatives of marginalised communities, policymakers, academia, the plastic industry and NGOs participated in a Ketso exercise to identify the key issues affecting plastic waste governance in Brazil from each group's perspective. [Ketso](#) is a collaborative tool designed to allow anyone to contribute equitably no matter their background or education. Participants listed their key challenges, solutions, barriers to implementation and highlights for policymaking on colour-coded leaves.

Challenges



Solutions



Barriers to implementation



Policy highlights



Each stakeholder group brought its own lens and priorities:

Government focused on regulation, enforcement, and public health frameworks.

Academic specialists emphasised technical solutions, research, and innovation.



Private sector highlighted cost-efficiency, market mechanisms, and regulatory clarity.



Traditional communities centred discussions on justice, visibility, and local empowerment.

Civil society organisations pushed for accountability, transparency, and consumer-focused policies.

Despite different perspectives, several themes appeared across most or all groups:

Health concerns, such as chemical exposure, contamination, and risks to workers and communities, were especially important for government, traditional communities, and civil society organisations.

Environmental protection of ecosystems, particularly ocean and biodiversity, was viewed as critical by all groups.

Economic tools, such as Payment for Environmental Services, gained support from government, private sector, and community groups.

Environmental education was mentioned by all stakeholder groups, though with varied emphases (e.g., formal education, public awareness, consumer behaviour).

Political barriers, especially lack of political will and conflicts of interest, were a recurring concern.



WORKSHOP 2

SEPTEMBER 16, 2025 | SURREY

The second workshop translated the findings from Brasilia into stimulus items for a follow-on Ketso exercise, this time involving UK stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds. This innovative use of the Ketso method was intended to identify opportunities for international collaboration and knowledge exchange to address the challenges raised in workshop 1.



HIGHLIGHTS FOR POLICYMAKING

Opportunities identified in the Ketso exercise included:

- Creating an interdisciplinary regulatory agency with legal status to coordinate efforts against plastic pollution.
- Learning from different countries' experiences of introducing Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes.
- Implementing trans-boundary EPR to prevent plastic waste being exported to developing nations.
- De-funding the fossil fuel industry.
- Harmonising net zero policies in light of the climate-plastic nexus.

- Financially supporting poorer nations' attempts to adopt sustainable practices.
- Ensuring a just transition for marginalised communities and smaller businesses to sustainable ways of working.
- Introducing internationally consistent governance of new materials, assessing all aspects of sustainability (eg. Life Cycle Analysis)
- Developing shared material inventories based on consistent criteria and making them accessible to all nations.

THE WAY FORWARD

The challenges identified during the workshops intersected multiple sectors, stakeholder types and stages of the plastics cycle, and so too must their solutions. The exclusion of marginalised communities from policymaking is both a climate injustice and a symptom of the wider failure of governance addressing the wicked problem of plastic pollution to incorporate the full range of perspectives needed to solve it.

The threats faced by marginalised groups today will afflict ever greater sections of society in the future if plastic pollution is allowed to grow apace. Preventing this means cutting off plastic waste at the source. It means producing less plastic, retaining it in the value chain for longer and ensuring none of it becomes pollution.

Attempts to forge such legislation, including the Global Plastics Treaty, have been contested by multinational corporations and well-coordinated international coalitions who wish to continue to profit from manufacturing plastic using fossil fuels. Efforts to end plastic pollution will need to be just as well-coordinated in order to overcome them.

