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Analysis of the Deadlock in the Negotiations on the "Global Plastics Treaty" and Pathways for Breakthrough

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Abstract. The negotiations on the Global Plastics Treaty aim to formulate a legally binding international instrument to address pollution across the entire life cycle of plastics. After five rounds of intergovernmental meetings, the negotiation process has exhibited several characteristics: the coexistence of time pressure and ambitious objectives; the intertwining of procedural and substantive issues; and multiple layers of division among interest-based blocs. Core controversies center on key questions such as whether to prioritize upstream production controls or downstream waste-management measures, how to balance binding obligations with nationally determined governance approaches, how to design an effective financial mechanism, and how to operationalize the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. The current deadlock stems primarily from structural tensions, including imbalanced responsibility allocation, deeply entrenched industrial interests, and ambiguous financial commitments. In response, it is essential to construct a differentiated responsibility framework, establish pathways for industry-wide coordination, and develop mechanisms for robust financial support to break the impasse.

Keywords: Global Plastics Treaty, plastic pollution governance, international environmental negotiations, life-cycle management, common but differentiated responsibilities

1. Introduction

Global plastic pollution—particularly marine plastic pollution—has become one of the most pressing environmental challenges of the twenty-first century. According to an assessment report released by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the total volume of plastic pollution continues to grow, and this trend has yet to be fundamentally reversed. An estimated 11 million tonnes of plastic waste enter the oceans every year, posing severe threats to marine ecosystems, biodiversity, and human health [1]. These alarming figures underscore the fact that the existing international governance framework is increasingly inadequate in addressing this transboundary environmental crisis.

Prior to the launch of the Global Plastics Treaty negotiations, the global landscape of plastic pollution governance was marked by pronounced fragmentation. Although several international instruments—such as the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships

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(MARPOL)—address plastic-related issues, each covers only specific stages of the plastic life cycle, such as transboundary waste movement, marine environmental protection, or vessel-generated garbage. What is lacking is a systematic regulatory framework that governs plastics from upstream production to end-of-life disposal. As scholars have sharply observed, "to this day there is still no mandatory, authoritative, and comprehensive international legislation or governance mechanism" [2] capable of managing plastics throughout their full life cycle. This fragmented approach—marked by overlapping mandates, inconsistent rules, and regulatory blind spots—has proven incapable of halting the escalating spread of plastic pollution.

The widening gap between rapidly worsening pollution and lagging global governance capacity has intensified calls within the international community for a legally binding, comprehensive international plastics treaty. Against this backdrop, in March 2022, the resumed session of the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2) adopted the landmark Resolution 5/14, End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument. The resolution established an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) tasked with completing, by the end of 2024, the development of a legally binding international instrument aimed at addressing plastic pollution, including in the marine environment [3]. The adoption of this resolution marked a pivotal first step toward building a systemic, life-cycle-based global plastics governance framework, and it set the stage for the far-reaching negotiation process that followed.

2. The negotiation process and evolutionary features of the "global plastics treaty"

2.1. Evolution of the negotiation stages

The work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) has unfolded across five major sessions. The process—marked by recurring cycles of consensus-building and contention—clearly traces the tortuous path through which the treaty text has progressed from broad conceptualization to concrete provisions.

2.1.1. Launch and the emergence of initial divisions (INC-1, November 2022, Punta del Este, Uruguay)

The first session marked the formal commencement of the treaty negotiations. More than 2,300 delegates from 160 countries participated, demonstrating the international community's high level of concern. At the opening ceremony, UNEP set a demanding timeline, emphasizing that the negotiations must conclude by the end of 2024. While delegates reached a preliminary consensus that the treaty should cover the full life cycle of plastics, fundamental disagreements quickly emerged regarding the treaty's structure: whether to draft a dedicated treaty with binding obligations —an approach supported by the EU, developed countries, and environmental organizations—or to adopt a looser framework convention combined with nationally determined action plans, preferred by major plastic-producing states and many developing countries seeking greater autonomy. Furthermore, disputes over Rule 37 on voting rights delayed the election of the Bureau, introducing procedural uncertainties that later affected negotiation efficiency. Despite early signs of division, INC-1 nonetheless set the schedule for subsequent sessions and authorized the Secretariat to prepare an "options paper" for the elements of the treaty, laying the groundwork for the next phase [4].

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.30730

2.1.2. Institutional structuring and preparation of the zero draft (INC-2, May 2023, Paris, France)

The second session achieved critical procedural progress by completing the election of the Bureau, ensuring the proper functioning of the negotiation mechanism. The meeting also temporarily resolved the contentious voting issue through an interpretative statement. Substantively, INC-2 established two contact groups: one focusing on treaty objectives and core obligations, and the other on means of implementation. This shift signaled a transition from general discussions to the systematic identification of substantive elements. Input from 119 countries was collected with the aim of integrating these views into a comprehensive options paper. On this basis, the Secretariat was formally authorized to draft the treaty's first negotiating text—the Zero Draft. The main achievements of INC-2 lie in constructing the organizational architecture for the negotiations and clarifying a life-cycle approach that balances binding and voluntary measures. Nonetheless, debates over whether to establish caps on plastic production had already surfaced, foreshadowing one of the most contentious issues in subsequent negotiations [5].

2.1.3. Formation of the first textual framework (INC-3, November 2023, Nairobi, Kenya)

The third session represented the first substantive turning point in the negotiation process. The release of the Zero Draft ushered the negotiations into genuine text-based deliberations. The draft established the initial structure of the treaty, outlining principles, scope, core obligations, and implementation measures. To manage the workload efficiently, three contact groups were established: Groups 1 and 2 were tasked with reviewing objectives, core obligations, and implementation measures, while Group 3 addressed placeholders concerning principles and scope, as well as intersessional work. During negotiations, developed countries and the Alliance of Small Island States pressed for explicit provisions on reducing single-use plastics and limiting primary polymer (virgin plastic) production. These proposals met with firm opposition from major petrochemical-producing countries and several Asian states, resulting in an impasse on these issues [6]. INC-3 ended with an updated draft that consolidated discussions from all contact groups and designated it as the basis for INC-4. Recognizing the need for further technical deliberations, the session also authorized intersessional work to support upcoming negotiations.

2.1.4. Clause refinement and entry into the deep-water phase (INC-4, April 2024, Ottawa, Canada)

The fourth session aimed to transform the options-heavy text produced at INC-3 into a more consolidated draft. To this end, the two original contact groups were expanded into five technical subgroups covering objectives and scope, products and chemicals, waste management, finance and capacity building, and final clauses. These subgroups engaged in paragraph-by-paragraph and line-by-line review. While this structure enhanced technical depth, it also pushed the negotiations into their most complex and polarized phase. A major institutional development at INC-4 was the establishment of a legal drafting group, signaling the beginning of efforts to ensure the text's legal coherence and implementation feasibility. The group was expected to begin its work at INC-5. However, no consensus was reached on critical issues such as the detailed design of the financial mechanism or the degree of upstream production control. To break the deadlock, delegates agreed to establish two expert groups to conduct intersessional research on financing sources/mechanisms and standards for plastic products and chemicals [7]. Although procedural progress continued, the initial

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goal of completing the final text at this stage was not met, highlighting the immense difficulty of the negotiations.

2.1.5. The final push and the work left unfinished (INC-5, November 2024 in Busan, South Korea; and August 2025 in Geneva, Switzerland)

The fifth session, divided into two parts, became the decisive moment for determining whether the treaty could be finalized on schedule. The first part (INC-5.1), held in Busan, convened under strong political expectations to complete negotiations by the end of 2024. Four contact groups were set up to negotiate product and chemical controls, waste and legacy pollution, finance and capacity building, and objectives and final clauses. Nevertheless, profound disagreements persisted over issues such as product bans, extended producer responsibility (EPR), just transition, and the financial mechanism. Divergent positions between developed and developing countries—as well as between producer and consumer states—proved difficult to bridge. As a result, INC-5.1 concluded without finalizing the treaty text. Delegates agreed to suspend the session and reconvene in Geneva in August 2025, using a streamlined Chair's text as the new basis [8].

The second part (INC-5.2), held in Geneva, was intended to make the final breakthroughs. Working again in contact groups, delegates reviewed the Chair's December 2024 text article by article. While limited consensus was reached on procedural or non-core issues such as the designation of the Depositary and the treaty's official languages, large segments of the text—particularly those concerning treaty scope, the design of the financial mechanism, and standards for chemicals control—remained heavily bracketed. Many delegates voiced concern that the number of brackets was rising rather than shrinking. Ultimately, the negotiations failed to meet the 14 August deadline. The session adjourned early, and parties agreed to extend the negotiation process into the future [9]. The convoluted trajectory of INC-5 demonstrates that deep divisions rooted in core economic interests, environmental responsibilities, and equity considerations remain difficult to reconcile in the short term.

2.2. Overall characteristics of the negotiation process

A review of the entire negotiation trajectory from INC-1 to INC-5 shows that the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) advanced only with great difficulty and amid repeated setbacks. Several distinct characteristics emerged throughout this process, not only highlighting the inherent complexity of plastic pollution but also revealing the structural tensions embedded in the global environmental governance system.

First, the negotiation process was marked by a coexistence of strong time pressure and highly ambitious goals. From the outset, the negotiations were placed under an exceptionally tight timetable—far more compressed than the timelines of major environmental agreements such as the Paris Agreement. In sharp contrast to this urgency, however, the treaty's ambition and scope were unprecedented, aiming to establish an international regime for the systemic regulation of plastics across their entire life cycle. This model of "high ambition on a short timeline" provided strong political momentum on the one hand, but on the other hand laid the groundwork for missing the original deadline. Ultimately, the second part of INC-5 failed to reach agreement within the planned schedule, resulting in a decision to extend negotiations—an outcome that itself underscores the extreme difficulty of reconciling deeply entrenched differences within limited time.

Second, the agenda revealed a complex intertwining of procedural issues and substantive disagreements. Rather than directly entering the substantive content of pollution control, the

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negotiations were hampered from the very beginning by procedural disputes. These procedural barriers consumed valuable time and political trust, and continued to pose latent institutional risks throughout the process. Meanwhile, substantive disagreements unfolded layer by layer and persisted throughout, ranging from early strategic disputes on the legal form of the treaty, to intense mid-stage debates over production caps and chemical controls, and later to protracted disagreements on funding mechanisms, producer responsibility, and other implementation details. The interweaving of procedural and substantive issues made progress exceedingly difficult.

Third, the positions of participating states exhibited multi-layered bloc differentiation and entrenched core conflicts. The alignment of interests was far more complex than a simple North–South divide. Instead, it reflected diverse combinations of industrial structures, development stages, and geopolitical considerations. Petrochemical-exporting countries such as Saudi Arabia and Russia sought to focus the treaty on waste management and recycling while firmly opposing restrictions on primary plastic production. In contrast, small island developing states severely affected by plastic pollution, along with the European Union and several developed countries, pushed for upstream production reduction and global reduction targets. Meanwhile, long-standing disagreements between developed and developing countries over the operationalization of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) resurfaced prominently: developing countries argued that developed countries must 承担 greater obligations in finance, technology transfer, and capacity building, while some developed countries sought to downplay differentiated responsibilities and favored unified binding obligations for all. These core tensions reappeared throughout all five negotiation rounds, becoming even more pronounced and difficult to reconcile in the final stages of INC-5.

Fourth, the negotiation outcomes showed a notable imbalance: significant procedural progress but limited substantive consensus. Undeniably, the INC process made steady procedural advancements—establishing organizational structures, developing text bases, and refining working methods. Yet these procedural gains could not conceal the lack of substantive breakthroughs on hard issues such as plastic production reduction, binding obligations, or financial responsibility sharing. By the end of INC-5, the treaty draft still contained extensive bracketed text, symbolizing unresolved disagreements. This reflects the inherent difficulty and inevitable compromises of ambitious global environmental governance efforts when they confront states' core economic interests and development space. These overall characteristics of the negotiation process provide the most direct illustration of the deeper reasons behind the current negotiating deadlock.

3. Core controversies and underlying causes in the negotiation of the "global plastics treaty"

3.1. Key points of contention in the negotiation

Throughout the entire negotiation process of the Global Plastics Treaty, parties held highly diverse positions. The core controversies can be summarized into five major areas. These areas not only affect the effectiveness and equity of the future global plastics governance system but also represent concentrated collisions among national economic and industrial interests, environmental demands, and global responsibility norms.

3.1.1. Pathway conflict between upstream production restrictions and end-of-life management

One group of actors—including the EU, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), and many environmental NGOs—insists that the treaty must cover the full life cycle of plastics and advocates

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.30730

legally binding limits or caps on upstream production of primary plastic polymers. They argue that without reducing the scale of fossil fuel conversion into plastics at the source, downstream recycling and waste management alone will not reverse the worsening trend of pollution. Studies indicate that "without fundamental innovations in production and design, relying solely on downstream recycling and clean-up will not address the exponential growth of plastic pollution" [10]. However, this position has been strongly opposed by major plastic-producing countries such as Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iran, and others with high dependence on petrochemical industries. These countries argue that the treaty should focus strictly on improving waste management and promoting circular recycling, claiming that production limitations would undermine their economic development sovereignty and national interests. They tend to frame global pollution primarily as a consequence of inadequate waste management systems. This fundamental pathway divergence has made clauses related to "production" the most heavily bracketed and contentious sections of treaty drafts from INC-1 to INC-5.

3.1.2. Choice between binding obligations and national autonomy in governance models

Developed countries, represented by the EU, strongly advocate for a treaty with strict, legally binding global obligations that require countries to assume uniform and measurable reduction and control responsibilities, supported by robust compliance mechanisms. They argue that only such an approach can ensure consistency and effectiveness in global action, preventing the treaty from becoming merely symbolic.

In contrast, the United States and some developing countries prefer a framework convention combined with nationally determined action plans. Under this model, states would set their own reduction targets and policies based on national circumstances, with much lower binding force. Supporters claim this approach is more flexible and can attract broader participation, especially given vast differences in development levels, responsibilities, and capacities across countries. This disagreement directly affects the legal phrasing of the treaty's core obligations and is crucial in determining the treaty's future effectiveness.

3.1.3. Responsibility allocation between a new dedicated fund and existing financial channels

Many developing countries—especially the African Group and small island states—strongly call for the creation of a new, dedicated global plastics fund. They argue that plastic pollution is a global problem for which developed countries have historical responsibility and greater financial capability, and should therefore take the lead in providing adequate and predictable funding for capacity building, technology transfer, and pollution control projects. Major donor countries, however, prefer utilizing and expanding existing international financial channels and oppose establishing a new fund that could impose substantial fiscal burdens. They also express concern that a new fund might suffer from complex governance structures and inefficiency. This controversy has persisted through INC-4 and INC-5 and is central to whether developing countries can meet and implement the treaty's obligations—an unavoidable issue for achieving equitable global governance.

3.1.4. Operationalizing the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR)

As a foundational principle of international environmental law, the application of CBDR in the plastics treaty has become a classic point of disagreement between developed and developing countries. Developing countries insist that the treaty must explicitly recognize and implement

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CBDR and the principle of respective capabilities, requiring developed countries to provide greater financial support, technology transfer, and capacity building, and to bear responsibility for historical contributions to plastic pollution. They emphasize that "countries are at different developmental stages, and plastic consumption varies greatly," noting that per capita plastic use in some developed countries is more than ten times that of many developing nations [11]. Some developed countries, however, tend to downplay or avoid explicitly incorporating differentiated responsibilities in the treaty text, arguing that all countries—regardless of development stage—should take universal binding actions and attributing pollution mainly to poor waste management in developing states. This confrontation shapes the wording of the treaty's "Principles" section and permeates through all core obligations.

3.1.5. Balancing efficiency and equity between consensus and majority voting

Some countries insist on the principle of consensus, meaning all decisions must be adopted without objection. While this protects minority interests and prevents any country from being forced into unwanted obligations, it also grants every state a veto power, potentially resulting in extremely low decision-making efficiency and even blocking critical actions. Another group argues that when consensus is not achievable, a qualified majority voting mechanism should be introduced to preserve the decision-making capacity of the treaty's governing body. This debate first surfaced in discussions on the Rules of Procedure during INC-1 and INC-2 and will ultimately influence the treaty's ability to respond flexibly and effectively to new challenges, adopt future annexes, or implement strengthened measures.

3.2. Deep-seated causes of the negotiation deadlock

3.2.1. Imbalanced allocation of common and differentiated responsibilities

A primary structural cause of the stalemate in the negotiations for the Global Plastics Treaty lies in the failure to give fair and effective expression to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), resulting in a severely unbalanced allocation of obligations. Developing countries generally maintain that developed countries—being the main producers and consumers of plastic products—bear historical responsibility for the cumulative emissions that have driven today's global plastics crisis, and that their per-capita plastic consumption remains far higher than that of developing states. Accordingly, they insist that developed countries should undertake clearer and more substantial obligations in financing, technology transfer, and capacity building, while respecting developing countries' right to development and policy space. However, some developed countries have deliberately downplayed historical responsibility and differentiated treatment in the negotiations, favoring instead a uniform framework of mandatory obligations for all countries, and even shifting the blame to developing countries by pointing to deficiencies in their waste-management systems. This stance disregards the realities of the international division of labor along the global plastics value chain and the structural disparities in stages of development. At its core, it constitutes a form of responsibility shifting. Without a responsibility-tiering framework that reflects equity and differences in capabilities, developing countries' willingness and ability to comply will be significantly undermined—an outcome that would inevitably erode the fairness and effectiveness of global governance.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.30730

3.2.2. Treaty control measures are tightly interlocked with national industrial interests

Another key source of the negotiation deadlock is that the treaty's proposed control measures are deeply intertwined with countries' core industrial interests and economic security, resulting in structural tensions that are difficult to reconcile. The plastics industry—particularly the upstream petrochemical sector—is a critical economic pillar and revenue source for many countries such as Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the United States. Thus, any proposal to cap the production of virgin plastic polymers, phase out single-use plastics, or impose stringent controls on specific chemicals directly touches the economic lifelines of these states. Driven by the imperative to safeguard national economic sovereignty and industrial competitiveness, these countries strongly resist extending regulatory measures to upstream production, instead insisting that the treaty focus narrowly on downstream waste management and circular-economy approaches. Such path dependence positions them as the staunchest opponents of full life-cycle governance. The tug-of-war seen in negotiations is thus not merely a debate over environmental policy; it is a fierce contest between the future trajectory of the global plastics economy and entrenched industrial interests. Any substantive concession would entail major structural adjustments and domestic redistributions of economic benefits—hence the extreme difficulty in achieving progress.

3.2.3. Ambiguity in funding obligations widens the capacity gap

Financing arrangements are essential for ensuring effective treaty implementation—particularly for developing countries—yet the current ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding funding obligations have widened the global capacity gap and emerged as a major underlying obstacle. Many developing countries face acute shortages of governance funding and technical capacity. They have therefore strongly advocated for a new, adequately resourced, and predictable global fund dedicated to plastics governance, with developed countries—those bearing historical responsibility and possessing greater economic capacity—assuming the principal financial burden. Major developed countries, however, tend to prefer relying on or reforming existing mechanisms such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), motivated by the desire to reduce their fiscal commitments and avoid creating a new institution over which they may have limited control. The debate between establishing a new fund and utilizing existing mechanisms essentially reflects deeper disagreements over the allocation of financial responsibilities. Without an independent, adequately funded, and easily accessible financial mechanism, developing countries will lack the resources needed to translate international commitments into domestic action, seriously constraining both their willingness and capacity to implement the treaty.

3.2.4. Disputes over rule-making authority and decision-making procedures

In addition to substantive disagreements, procedural issues—particularly disputes over rule-making authority and future decision-making mechanisms—have also hindered negotiation progress, revealing institutional weaknesses that undermine the search for consensus. Since INC-1, controversy over voting rights under Rule 37 of the Rules of Procedure obstructed the election of the Bureau, consuming precious negotiating time and political goodwill. Although INC-2 temporarily defused the crisis through an interpretative statement, the underlying disputes over the decision-making rules of the future Conference of the Parties remain unresolved. One group of states insists on consensus-based decision-making to avoid being compelled to accept unfavorable provisions; another contends that a qualified-majority voting mechanism is necessary to maintain the treaty

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body's decision-making efficiency and capacity for action when consensus fails. This divergence directly concerns who will wield agenda-setting and rule-making power in future global plastics governance, and how new challenges, binding protocols, or amendments will be addressed. A governance mechanism vulnerable to gridlock or procedural loopholes would undermine the treaty's long-term effectiveness. Consequently, no party is willing to make easy concessions on these procedural provisions, making this a persistent source of institutional deadlock.

4. Pathways for building consensus in the negotiations of the global plastics treaty

4.1. Developing a responsibility-tiering pathway based on equity and differentiated capacities

To break the persistent deadlock in implementing the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), it is essential to move beyond the binary opposition between uniform obligations and absolute differentiation. A refined, tiered responsibility system must be constructed, one that links national obligations to objective, quantifiable indicators of historical responsibility, current capabilities, and future development needs.

A multidimensional classification framework should therefore be established. Instead of relying solely on the conventional developed/developing country divide, this framework should integrate indicators such as per-capita plastic consumption, historical and current primary plastic production, plastic intensity per unit of GDP, and national waste-management capacity indices. Based on these metrics, the treaty should assign differentiated core obligations. For developed countries with high per-capita consumption and significant historical production, the treaty should impose legally binding absolute reduction targets with more urgent timelines, alongside mandatory responsibilities for finance and technology transfer. For developing countries that are emerging plastic producers, intensity-reduction targets or longer transition periods may be appropriate. For countries with the weakest governance capacities, the primary obligation should be to formulate and implement national action plans with international support, focusing on capacity building. This tiered CBDR framework would reflect fairness while preserving the overall level of global ambition.

4.2. Creating a coordinated pathway that balances regulatory control and industrial development

To ease the resistance from major upstream producers and plastic-dependent industries, it is crucial to shift the narrative from a dichotomy of "control versus development" toward one of "transition and opportunity," thus designing a coordinated pathway that accommodates environmental goals while respecting industrial interests.

The treaty should not limit itself to restrictive targets alone; it should also guide and support a just global transition toward a circular plastics economy. For economies heavily dependent on traditional petrochemical sectors, the treaty could establish an international cooperation framework for just transition, assisting these countries in diversifying their economic structures and investing in next-generation circular plastics infrastructure. By doing so, potential industrial disruptions may be transformed into competitive advantages in emerging green sectors.

At the level of specific obligations, the treaty should strongly promote extended producer responsibility (EPR), requiring plastic manufacturers and brand owners to bear both economic and physical responsibility across the entire life cycle of their products, especially post-consumer collection and disposal. This would internalize environmental costs, encouraging companies to redesign products, reduce plastic use at the source, and increase recyclability. At the same time, the

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treaty could establish legally binding global minimum recycled-content standards to create a stable and growing international market for recycled materials, linking restrictions on virgin plastics to incentives for circular-value-chain development. This would help production-oriented countries identify new economic growth opportunities during the transition and soften their opposition to comprehensive production controls.

4.3. Establishing a sustainable and predictable pathway for financial and technological support

A sustainable and predictable financial and technological support mechanism is the lifeblood of effective treaty implementation—especially for provisions targeting developing countries. To move beyond the current zero-sum debate over financing mechanisms, a diversified, adequate, and equitable support structure must be designed.

A priority task is to promote the creation of a new global fund dedicated to plastics governance. Beyond being a symbol of political trust, such a fund would serve as a practical response to the urgent needs of developing countries. Its financial sources should reflect both the "polluter pays" and "ability to pay" principles, with developed countries contributing initial capital and ongoing funding in proportion to their historical plastic waste generation and economic capacity. Innovative financing channels should also be explored to ensure sufficiency and sustainability.

In terms of technology, the treaty should establish a mandatory framework for technology transfer and cooperation. This would require developed-country parties to provide developing countries with access—through concessional terms, joint research, and capacity-building programs—to advanced technologies for plastic-alternative materials, waste segregation, recycling, and resource recovery. While lessons may be drawn from the operational experience of the Global Environment Facility, the new fund must ensure inclusive governance structures and simplified, efficient disbursement processes, allowing the countries most in need to access resources easily and effectively, thereby bridging the capacity gap for implementation.

4.4. Building a flexible and efficient pathway for negotiation, decision-making, and implementation

To prevent future treaty governance from falling into decision-making paralysis and implementation fatigue, a flexible and efficient institutional pathway must be established during the final negotiation stages and in the treaty's design.

During negotiations, to overcome the textual gridlock exhibited at INC-5, the Bureau could be authorized—before the reconvened session—to consolidate similar options across contact groups and present a streamlined "package compromise text" for political decision-making, reducing bracketed text and facilitating consensus. For the future decision-making mechanism, the treaty should maintain the principle of making every effort to achieve consensus, while establishing a qualified-majority voting system as a fallback option.

On the implementation side, a standing compliance committee should be created, but its orientation should be facilitative rather than punitive. The committee would review national action plans and progress reports, identify shared challenges and country-specific bottlenecks, offer technical and policy advice, and help countries access the necessary financial and technological support. Additionally, the treaty should encourage active participation from non-state actors—including businesses, NGOs, research institutions, and local governments—through public–private partnerships, voluntary industry initiatives, and other collaborative models. Such engagement would

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strengthen societal oversight and implementation capacity, ensuring that international rules translate into concrete, on-the-ground action.

5. Conclusion

The arduous negotiation process of the Global Plastics Treaty has vividly revealed the common challenges faced by the global environmental governance system when confronted with transboundary and compound crises. These challenges include not only institutional weaknesses—such as fragmented governance and insufficient compliance mechanisms—but also deep-seated divergences among states concerning industrial interests, historical responsibilities, and the right to development. Yet the urgency of plastic pollution leaves no room for international retreat. Looking ahead, only by constructing an equity-based tiered responsibility framework, guiding industrial transformation toward a circular economy, establishing sustainable financial and technological support systems, and designing flexible and efficient decision-making and implementation mechanisms can the international community identify the greatest common denominator among diverse interests.

The treaty negotiations are not merely a test of political will among nations; they also constitute a historic opportunity to advance global full life-cycle plastics governance and to promote healthy marine ecosystems and sustainable development.

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