Global Plastic Ban Could Save $8 Trillion

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Global Plastic Ban Could Save $8 Trillion: WWF-Earth Action Report

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Context:

The global plastic pollution crisis has reached alarming levels, severely affecting ecosystems, human health, and economies. In this backdrop, the **World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)** commissioned a study by **Earth Action (EA)** to assess the **economic and environmental implications** of banning or phasing out high-risk plastic products. The findings suggest that such measures could save the global economy **$4.7–$8 trillion between 2025 and 2040**.

This study gains significance as the world prepares for the **Global Plastics Treaty negotiations**, aiming to forge legally binding solutions for plastic pollution.

About the Study:

- **Commissioned by**: **World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)**
- **Conducted by**: **Earth Action**
- **Data Source**: Based on the **Plasteax dataset**, a global database of plastic product and waste data.
- **Objective**:
    - To assess the **costs, benefits, and timelines** of banning or phasing out **high-risk plastic products**.
    - To compare scenarios such as **immediate ban**, **phased ban**, and **staggered ban** against **business-as-usual (BAU)** models.

Key Findings of the Study:

1. Economic Savings Potential:

- An **immediate global ban** could lead to savings of up to **$8 trillion** between **2025 and 2040**.
- A **phased ban approach** could save around **$7 trillion**.
- A **staggered ban model** could yield savings of **$4.7 trillion**.
- In contrast, continuing with **business-as-usual plastic use** would result in an estimated cost of **$10 trillion** globally.

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2. Targeted Plastic Products:

- The study identified certain plastic items as **high-risk** due to their environmental impact and lack of recyclability:
    - **Expanded Polystyrene (EPS)**
    - **Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)**
    - **Polystyrene Packaging**
    - **Single-use plastic items** such as:
        - **Straws**
        - **Cotton buds**
        - **Cutlery and plates**

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3. Environmental Gains:

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- Estimated reduction of **173–224 million tonnes** in overall **plastic use** by 2040.
- Reduction of **51–74 million tonnes** in **mismanaged plastic waste**, which often ends up in oceans or landfills.
- Significant improvement in **marine and terrestrial ecosystems**, with positive impact on biodiversity and public health.

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4. Cost of Inaction vs Action:

- Under **business-as-usual**, global plastic use will create economic burdens up to **$10 trillion**.
- In contrast, the **ban scenario** would cost only **$2 trillion**, leading to a net saving of **$8 trillion**.
- Waste management cost savings alone would reach **$50 billion** due to reduced disposal and landfill burden.

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5. Private Sector Transition Costs:

- The estimated **transition cost** for industries is relatively low at **$143 million**.
- These costs would be offset by:
  - **Long-term savings**
  - **Reduced environmental liability**
  - **Emerging business opportunities** in sustainable alternatives and innovation in packaging.

Relevance to UPSC:

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- The study is important for topics under:
    - **Environment and Ecology**
    - **Sustainable Development**
    - **Climate Change and Waste Management**
    - **GS Paper III – Environmental Conservation, Waste Management, and Pollution Control**
- Aligns with **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**:
    - **SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production**
    - **SDG 13 – Climate Action**
    - **SDG 14 – Life Below Water**
- Supports India's efforts like:
    - **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 (amended in 2022)**
    - **Swachh Bharat Mission**
    - **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework**

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