BEYOND SACHETS: BUILDING A REUSE ECONOMY

SACHETS ARE A SIGNIFICANT SOURCE OF PLASTIC POLLUTION.

Made from fossil-fuel-based plastics, sachets are inherently polluting throughout the value chain from extraction, production, consumption to disposal. Heavily marketed by international fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs) corporations in developing economies, sachets contribute significantly to the global plastic crisis. An estimated 855 billion sachets are sold globally each year (Greenpeace 2020). Sachets are small, single-use, lightweight and often constructed from multiple layers of materials. These attributes make them non-recyclable, non-reusable and extremely hard to capture in waste management systems.

The scale of usage, the harm caused and the availability of alternative methods of delivering products means that sachets should be removed from sale with the utmost urgency.

HOW CAN THE GLOBAL PLASTICS TREATY ADDRESS THE PROLIFERATION OF PLASTIC SACHETS?

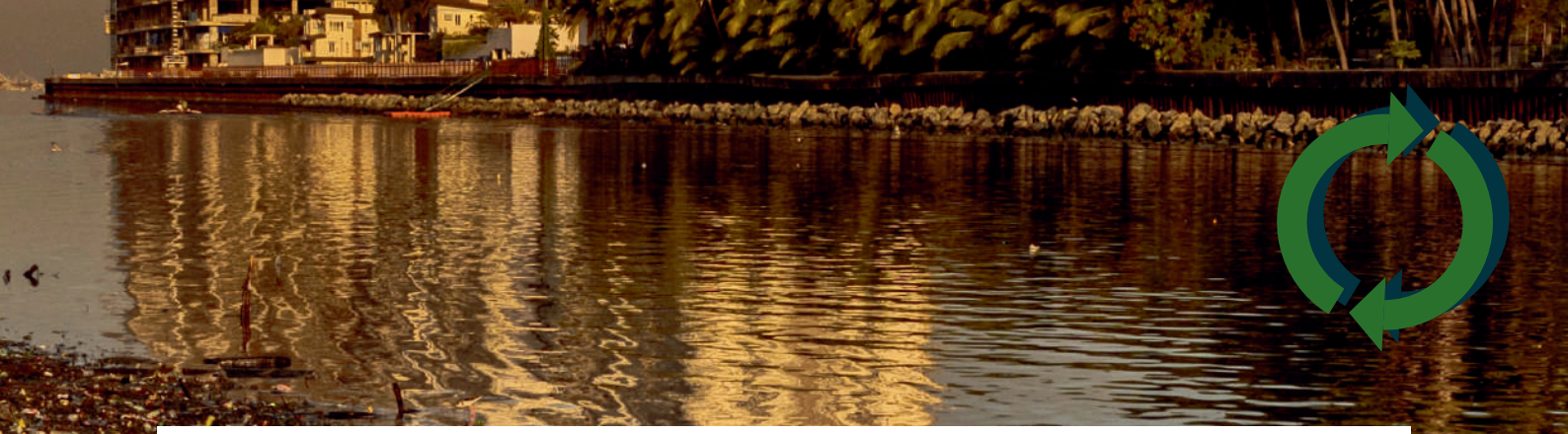
Plastic sachets pose a significant challenge to environmental sustainability and human health. Measures on problematic and avoidable plastic products must include the restriction on the production and sale of sachets as a priority.

Sachets as a Primary Plastic Pollution Culprit:

- **Prevalence and composition:** Sachets are designed to be sold in extremely high volumes, and are used for seconds as a single-use product. The majority of sachets are constructed of multilayered materials making them close to impossible to recycle. These factors result in them easily escaping waste treatment. Global brand audit efforts over five years found sachets to be the third most common plastic pollution type across both Africa and Southeast Asia (Break Free From Plastic 2022).
- **Environmental impact:** From clogging waterways to releasing harmful chemicals, sachets inflict severe environmental damage throughout their lifecycle. Their contribution to microplastic pollution is particularly concerning.

The Misconception of Sachets as Pro-Poor Packaging:

- **Misleading claims:** Companies often position sachets as essential for reaching low-income consumers. However, this ignores the substantial costs borne by the same communities for waste management and pollution, not to mention the impact of producing primary plastic polymers—the building blocks of sachets and other plastic packaging—across the plastic life cycle.



- **Disproportionate impact:** The burden of sachet waste disproportionately falls on marginalized communities and countries suffering from the highest burden of plastic pollution. The producers of sachets rarely contribute to the collection and treatment of sachet waste, and in jurisdictions with Extended Producer Responsibility laws, the costs are not fully covered considering the high leakage rate of sachets from waste management systems. The task of collecting sachets often falls to informal waste pickers, who must collect an astonishing amount on these tiny packets to receive payment - a backbreaking task. (The Guardian 2022)

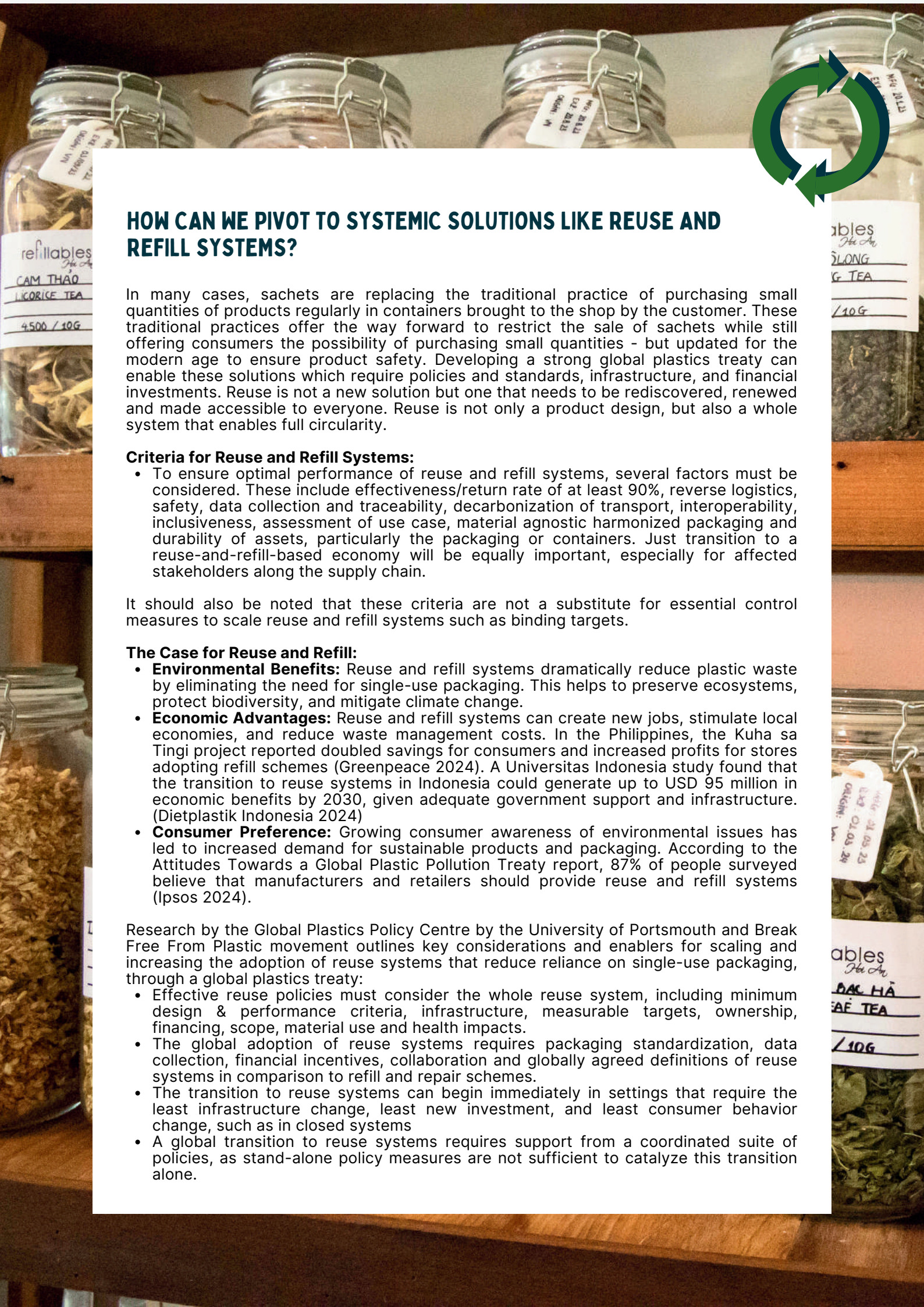
Ineffective Mitigation Strategies:

- **Focus on end-of-life:** Industry efforts have centred on attempting to recycle sachets and improving collection and waste management, rather than addressing the root cause: the sachet packaging itself.
- **False solutions:** Proposed solutions for waste treatment of sachets such as waste-to-energy and chemical recycling are often environmentally harmful. Attempts to develop chemical recycling for sachets have failed due to the ineffectiveness of the process and the challenges with collecting sufficient amounts of the tiny packaging format. (GAIA 2022)
- **Harmful open burning:** communities are often left with an astonishing quantity of sachets to deal with, and open burning them is common. This creates toxic air pollution and the release of persistent organic pollutants. (UNEP 2024)

Need for a Comprehensive Approach: A global plastics treaty offers the necessary platform to:

- Phase out single-use plastics, including sachets: By imposing strict regulations and timelines for the restriction of sachets, the treaty can drive innovation towards reusable and refillable packaging systems.
- Hold corporations accountable: The treaty can establish clear responsibilities that operationalize the polluter pays principle for producers, by holding them to account for the waste caused by their products, ensuring adequate remedies, and preventing future plastic pollution.
- Support safe and sustainable alternatives: By investing in research and development, the treaty can identify areas that cannot be replaced with reuse and refill systems and foster the transition to specific needs-based alternatives that are safe and sustainable.
- Protect vulnerable communities: The treaty can prioritize the rights and well-being of communities affected by plastic pollution by ensuring equitable access to resources and remediation.

A global plastics treaty presents a critical opportunity to address the plastic sachet crisis and build a more sustainable future. By phasing out sachets, the global community can significantly reduce plastic pollution and protect human rights, including human health.



HOW CAN WE PIVOT TO SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS LIKE REUSE AND REFILL SYSTEMS?

In many cases, sachets are replacing the traditional practice of purchasing small quantities of products regularly in containers brought to the shop by the customer. These traditional practices offer the way forward to restrict the sale of sachets while still offering consumers the possibility of purchasing small quantities - but updated for the modern age to ensure product safety. Developing a strong global plastics treaty can enable these solutions which require policies and standards, infrastructure, and financial investments. Reuse is not a new solution but one that needs to be rediscovered, renewed and made accessible to everyone. Reuse is not only a product design, but also a whole system that enables full circularity.

Criteria for Reuse and Refill Systems:

- To ensure optimal performance of reuse and refill systems, several factors must be considered. These include effectiveness/return rate of at least 90%, reverse logistics, safety, data collection and traceability, decarbonization of transport, interoperability, inclusiveness, assessment of use case, material agnostic harmonized packaging and durability of assets, particularly the packaging or containers. Just transition to a reuse-and-refill-based economy will be equally important, especially for affected stakeholders along the supply chain.

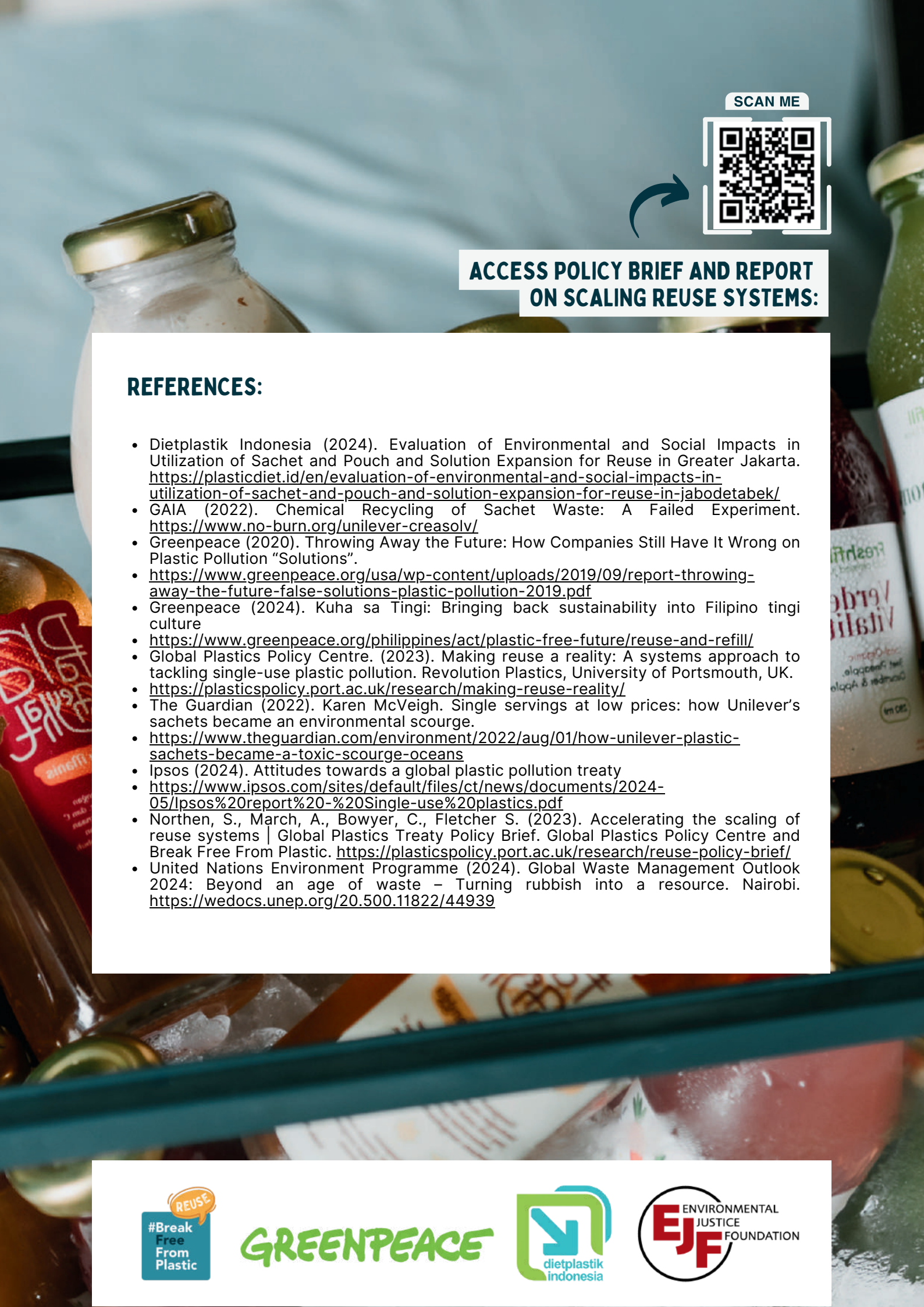
It should also be noted that these criteria are not a substitute for essential control measures to scale reuse and refill systems such as binding targets.

The Case for Reuse and Refill:

- **Environmental Benefits:** Reuse and refill systems dramatically reduce plastic waste by eliminating the need for single-use packaging. This helps to preserve ecosystems, protect biodiversity, and mitigate climate change.
- **Economic Advantages:** Reuse and refill systems can create new jobs, stimulate local economies, and reduce waste management costs. In the Philippines, the Kuha sa Tingi project reported doubled savings for consumers and increased profits for stores adopting refill schemes (Greenpeace 2024). A Universitas Indonesia study found that the transition to reuse systems in Indonesia could generate up to USD 95 million in economic benefits by 2030, given adequate government support and infrastructure. (Dietplastik Indonesia 2024)
- **Consumer Preference:** Growing consumer awareness of environmental issues has led to increased demand for sustainable products and packaging. According to the Attitudes Towards a Global Plastic Pollution Treaty report, 87% of people surveyed believe that manufacturers and retailers should provide reuse and refill systems (Ipsos 2024).

Research by the Global Plastics Policy Centre by the University of Portsmouth and Break Free From Plastic movement outlines key considerations and enablers for scaling and increasing the adoption of reuse systems that reduce reliance on single-use packaging, through a global plastics treaty:

- Effective reuse policies must consider the whole reuse system, including minimum design & performance criteria, infrastructure, measurable targets, ownership, financing, scope, material use and health impacts.
- The global adoption of reuse systems requires packaging standardization, data collection, financial incentives, collaboration and globally agreed definitions of reuse systems in comparison to refill and repair schemes.
- The transition to reuse systems can begin immediately in settings that require the least infrastructure change, least new investment, and least consumer behavior change, such as in closed systems
- A global transition to reuse systems requires support from a coordinated suite of policies, as stand-alone policy measures are not sufficient to catalyze this transition alone.



SCAN ME

ACCESS POLICY BRIEF AND REPORT ON SCALING REUSE SYSTEMS:

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