

Press Release

Three Years After India's Single Use Plastic Ban, Violations Persist Across Major Cities, Finds Toxics Link Study

Survey of 560 locations across four cities finds banned plastic items still present in 84 percent of sites

New Delhi, March 25, 2026: Three years after India implemented a nationwide ban on several single use plastic (SUP) items, banned plastic products remain widely available across cities. A new study by Toxics Link finds **that 84 percent of 560 surveyed locations across Delhi, Mumbai, Guwahati, and Bhubaneswar still use or sell banned plastic items. Titled “Revisiting Single Use Plastic Ban”, the report highlights major gaps in enforcement and calls for nationwide urgent action to strengthen implementation.**

The field study, conducted by Toxics Link between April and August 2025, assessed the on-ground effectiveness of the ban across a wide range of establishments including **street vendors, juice stalls, markets, small restaurants, grocery stores, religious sites, railway platforms, and organised retail spaces.**

Across the four cities surveyed, the study found that **Bhubaneswar recorded the highest availability of banned SUPs at 89 percent of survey locations, followed by Delhi at 86 percent, Mumbai at 85 percent, and Guwahati at 76 percent.**

“The continued presence of banned plastic items in a majority of locations suggests that enforcement remains inconsistent,” said Ravi Agarwal, Director of Toxics Link. “Unless implementation improves and the supply of these products is controlled, the ban will not effectively address plastic littering and pollution.”

Key Findings

The findings indicate the variations in progress of the ban both by sector and geographies, and the enactment-enforcement gap. More efficient monitoring and public sensitisation will be the critical drivers of compliance. The study found:

- **Widespread presence of banned SUP items with sectoral variations:** Thin plastic carry-bags, disposable plastic cutlery, cups, plates, and straws were widely found across informal markets and small commercial establishments.
- **High use among small vendors:** Local and informal vendors such as street food vendors, juice shops, coconut water sellers, vegetable vendors, ice cream parlours, and weekly markets showed complete or near complete presence of banned plastics.

- **Better compliance in organised retail:** Malls and larger retail outlets showed significantly better adherence to the ban compared to informal markets.
- **Consumer demand remains a major driver: 91 percent of small vendors said customers still ask for carry bags,** while the same proportion cited, higher cost of alternatives as a key barrier to switching. Interactions with vendors also revealed that **while 55 percent reported customers bring their own bags,** many consumers still expect vendors to provide free carry bags.

Alternatives Exist but Are Not Widely Used

Despite the nationwide ban on many SUP items, implemented by Government of India the gap between implementation and enforcement exists, findings show. Interestingly it is not because alternatives to the SUP are absent. Items such as paper cups and plates, newspaper wraps, wooden cutlery, steel utensils, aluminium foil containers, bagasse plates, cloth bags, and thicker reusable plastic bags above 120 microns are available in many locations.

“Vendor reluctance to transition away from single-use plastics (SUPs) is partly influenced by customer preferences. Customers also perceive disposable plates and cutlery to be more hygienic than reusable items. Our survey found that this perception, along with the cost advantage of SUPs, continues to drive their use among small and local vendors, although the intensity of this preference varies between rural and urban areas,” said Satish Sinha, Associate Director of Toxics Link.

Production and Supply Remain Key Challenges

The continued presence of banned plastic products points to gaps in production control and distribution. Despite enforcement drives, these products continue to be manufactured and supplied making them easily accessible. Their continued supply and widespread availability are further reinforced by limited public awareness about the environmental harm.

Recommendations

Following the **Fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution held in Geneva in 2025**, the report calls for **stronger national action by all stakeholders including government, SUP manufacturers, retailers and consumers** to ensure effective implementation of the SUP ban. The recommendations include:

- **Strengthen enforcement and monitoring mechanisms** through regular inspections, coordinated action among regulatory agencies, and consistent penalties to ensure compliance with the ban on single-use plastics.



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- **Targeted monitoring** depending on the categories of compliance should be prioritised by the regulators for more efficient monitoring, with stricter and regular vigilance for “zero compliant” locations such as juice shops, coconut water vendors, vegetable stalls, weekly markets, cigarette retailers, and party/decoration shops. However, checks should be in place to ensure that “high compliant” locations such as malls do not reduce their compliance level.
- **Improve the availability and affordability of sustainable alternatives** by supporting local production, strengthening supply chains, and facilitating market access for environmentally friendly substitutes.
- **Promote sustained public awareness and behaviour change** campaigns that encourage consumers to shift toward reusable products and reduce demand for single-use plastics.
- **Provide targeted support and incentives for small vendors** to help them transition to alternative materials, including financial assistance, capacity-building initiatives, and access to affordable substitutes.
- **Public awareness through mass media and other public platforms on ban of SUP products.**
- **Tighten regulation of the production and distribution of banned plastic products** by strengthening oversight of manufacturing units and monitoring informal supply channels through which these products continue to enter the market.

“India must move beyond bans towards sustained behaviour change and systemic solutions,” said Sinha. “Better enforcement, affordable alternatives, and stronger control of plastic production are essential to reduce plastic pollution.”

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About Toxics Link

Toxics Link is an Indian environmental research and advocacy organisation set up in 1996, engaged in disseminating information to help strengthen the campaign against toxics pollution, provide cleaner alternatives, and bring together groups and people affected by this problem. Toxics Link’s Mission Statement - “Working together for environmental justice and freedom from toxins.”

More at: www.toxicslink.org

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