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RESEARCH ARTICLE

WRITTEN REPORT OF UNILEVER AS A CONTRIBUTOR TO PLASTIC WASTE IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Unilever, one of the world's largest fast-moving good companies, has been criticized for its contribution to plastic waste in Indonesia. This report explores the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), its importance for companies, and delve into the history of the company and its role in Indonesia's plastic waste crisis. The paper also discusses the challenges faced by the CreaSolv technology for recycling plastic sachets in Indonesia and possible solutions to address the issue. In addition, the paper discusses how the company could improve the recycling process, redesign packaging to be more sustainable, and scale up the recycling technology to have a larger impact.

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Introduction:-

Unilever is a multinational good consumer goods company that has built a strong reputation over the years. However, recants concerns its contribution to plastic waste in Indonesia have raised question about the company's commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR). In this report, we will explore the concept of CSR, its importance for companies, and delve into the history of Unilever and its role in plastic waste in Indonesia.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to a company's commitment to conduct business in an ethical and sustainable manner by taking responsibility for its impact on society and the environment. It is a way for companies to go beyond profit making and consider the well-being of all stakeholders, including consumers, employees, communities, and the environment. CSR is important because it helps companies improve their brand image, attract, and retain customers, and engage employees (Fernando, 2023)

Social responsibility is vital for companies for various reasons. Firstand foremost, it enhances the reputation and credibility of businesses. By actively engaging in socially and environmentally responsible practices, companies can build trust among their consumers, employees, and stakeholders. Additionally, it can leadto increased customer loyalty and even attract new customers who value ethical and sustainable practices. Furthermore, socialresponsibility helps companies avoid legal issues and potential lawsuits that might arise from disregarding environmentalregulations.

Unilever, a conglomerate with a diverse range of products, has a noteworthy history. With origins dating back to 19th century, Unilever has become one of the largest fast-moving consumer good companies globally(Unilever, 2023). Its portfolio comprises various well-known brand such as Dove, Lipton, and Magnum, which have gained considerable popularity among consumers worldwide.

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Unilever is no stranger to social responsibility. With a history spanning over a century, it has established itself as a socially responsible company, initiating various sustainability programs. However, its involvement in plastic waste in Indonesia has overshadowed its efforts. Indonesia, being the second-largest contributor to marine plastic pollution, has been struggling to manage its plastic waste, with the lack of proper infrastructure and waste management systems exacerbating the problem (UNEP, 2020). Unilever, as one of the leading distributors of plastic waste in Indonesia, has faced criticism for its contribution to the plastic waste crisis. The company's products, such as shampoo bottles, food packaging, and cleaning products, generate significant plastic waste that often ends up in rivers and oceans. The improper disposal of plastic waste not only harms marine life and ecosystems but also poses a threat to public health.

Recognizing its responsibility towards addressing this issue, Unilever initiated the CreaSolv program. This program aimed to develop a technology that would enable the recycling of multilayer packaging waste, which is commonly used by Unilever for its products. The idea behind CreaSolv was to dissolve the plastic layers, facilitating the separation of different materials for recycling purposes (Fraunhofer IVV, 2023). Unfortunately, the CreaSolv program faced significant challenges and ultimately failed to meet its objectives. The process of dissolving multilayer packaging proved to be technically complex and economically unviable at a large scale. However, despite this setback, Unilever can still learn from other companies that have implemented successful social responsibility initiatives.

One such company is The Body Shop, known for its ethical and environmentally conscious practices. The Body Shop has been a pioneer in promoting sustainable packaging and reducing plastic waste (The Body Shop, 2023). They have implemented various initiatives, such as using recycled materials for packaging, promoting refill stations for products, and actively advocating for less plastic consumption. Unilever can learn from The Body Shop's success by implementing similar strategies. By reducing the use of plastic packaging and exploring alternative materials like biodegradable or compostable packaging, Unilever can significantly contribute to reducing plastic waste in Indonesia. Additionally, Unilever can collaborate with local communities, waste management organizations, and government bodies to develop effective recycling and waste management systems.

Unilever As a Contributor to Plastic Waste in Indonesia

Unilever is a British global consumer goods corporation created on September 2, 1929, by the merging of British soap manufacturer Lever Brothers and Dutch margarine producer Margarine Unie. Unilever PLC and N.V., the firm's holding company, has an Anglo-Dutch structure, and its registered office is in Port Sunlight, Merseyside, UK, but its head office is in London, UK. With over 400 brand names in over 190 countries, Unilever is one of the world's leading consumer goods firms (Unilever, 2023).

Unilever As a Goods Company

Unilever Grown to Become One of The World's Largest Fast-Moving Good Companies Globally

As a goods company, Unilever has a purpose for making sustainable living commonplace, and it has made five key strategic choices to drive its business growth and make a positive difference to the world. These choices include:

1. 190+ countries where our brands are available.
2. 3.4 billion people use our products every day.
3. 50% of the plastic packaging used in Unilever North America product packaging is post-consumer recycled plastic.
4. Gender balanced at the managerial level and above.
5. 16.7% increase in spend with diverse suppliers from 2019 to 2020.

Unilever's product portfolio includes food, beauty and personal care products, beverages, home care products, vitamins, minerals, and supplements marketed under a variety of brand names, including Bango, Ben & Jerry's, Hellmann's, Knorr, Magnum, The Vegetarian Butcher, Wall's, Axe, Dove, Lifebuoy, Lux, Rexona, Sunsilk, Domestos, Omo, Seventh Generation, Equilibra, and many more (GlobalData, 2023). Every year, the firm invests roughly €900 million in research and development and employs customer information, as well as the greatest ideas and thinking from experts outside of Unilever, to create superior brands and products (Unilever, 2023). Unilever sells its products to brick-and-mortar store partners, small family-owned shops, internet retailers, and value retailers across the Americas, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa, and the Middle East.



Figure 1:- Unilever's logo brand.

Unilever in Indonesia



Figure 2:- Unilever's Products in Indonesia.

Unilever Indonesia is one of Indonesia's leading consumer products producers. Unilever Indonesia, established on December 5, 1933, has grown to become one of Indonesia's leading Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) companies, with products such as Pepsodent, Lux, Lifebuoy, Dove, Sunsilk, Clear, Rexona, Vaseline, Rinso, Molto, Sunlight, Wall's, Royco, Bango, and others (Unilever, 2023). Unilever Indonesia's product portfolio includes soaps, detergents, and cosmetics, as well as foods and refreshment items such as margarine, dairy goods, ice cream, tea, and fruit juice. The company has more than 40 brands and nine factories located in the industrial areas of Jababeka, Cikarang, and Rungkut, Surabaya. Unilever Indonesia markets its products through a network of over 800 independent distributors who serve hundreds of thousands of retailers throughout Indonesia (Unilever, 2023). Each Indonesian home is predicted to use the company's products. Unilever Indonesia's shares were originally made available to the public in 1981, and the company has been listed on the Indonesia Stock Exchange since January 11, 1982.

Unilever As a Contributor to Disposable Plastic Waste in Indonesia

Due to overconsumption of single-use plastic and poor waste management practices, Indonesia's ecosystem is facing a plastic waste emergency (Shahab, 2021). With over 600,000 tons of plastic garbage poured into the ocean each year, Indonesia is the second-largest contributor to marine plastic pollution behind China (Gardiner, 2023). Plastic pollution has polluted Indonesian rivers, the ocean, and the country's coral reef systems, which are among the world's most biodiverse and significant. Plastic waste pollutes Jakarta's notoriously contaminated rivers, accounting for 74% and 87% of all human-generated debris found in five rivers and three holding facilities, respectively (Gokkon, Andarani, & Gratzner, 2022). To address the plastic waste problem, Indonesia has set a target of reducing marine plastic litter by 70% compared to business as usual by 2025, and the government has released

new legislation on trash management and marine debris management. However, ineffective regulation has posed a barrier, and plastic bags are still frequently used in traditional marketplaces.

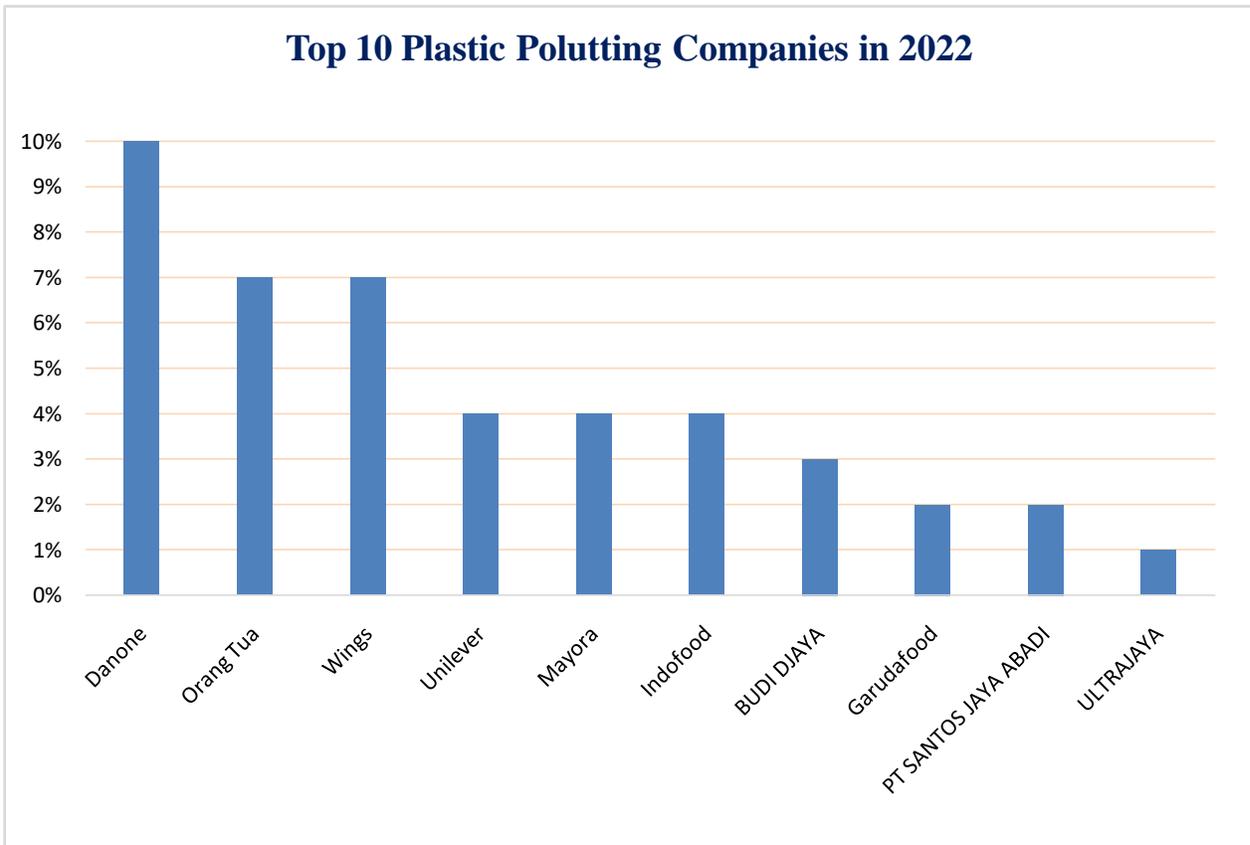


Figure 3:- Plastic waste piled up along the sea wall in the GedongPompa neighborhood of Jakarta. Image by Jonas Gratzler for Mongabay.

In the 1990s, the "sachet economy" of single servings at low costs aimed at poorer consumers spread over most of the developing world. These vividly colored palm-sized packets, sold at shops and booths across Southeast Asia and Africa, contain anything from shampoo to coffee. However, because to their bulk and multilayered construction, they are nearly hard to gather and recycle. They are the ultimate symbol of throwaway culture in Indonesia, which lacks trash infrastructure, accounting for 16% of all plastic garbage. According to the World Bank, Indonesia generates 7.8 million tons of plastic garbage each year, with 4.9 million tons going uncollected, abandoned, or left in poorly managed landfills (McVeigh, Cahya, & Fosse, 2022). An estimated 4.5% of total plastic waste, or around 350,000 tons, ends up in the ocean.

Plastic pollution in Indonesia is mostly the result of excessive consumption of single-use plastic and poor waste management. The extensive usage of plastic bags, combined with a lack of understanding about the environmental harm caused by plastic waste, is most certainly contributing to Indonesia's current situation. Single-use sachets from Unilever have been highlighted as a substantial source of plastic waste in Indonesia. In Indonesia, sachets account for 16% of all plastic waste, with Unilever sachets being among the most popular (McVeigh, Cahya, & Fosse, 2022). Unilever has been accused of contributing to Indonesia's trash culture by manufacturing billions of single-use sachets in landfills and oceans.

Graph:- Sungai Watch Impact Report 2022.



CreaSolv from Unilever to Indonesia



Figure 4:- CreaSolv process animation.

Unilever created CreaSolv, a recycling technique that attempts to recycle high-value polymers from worn and dirty multi-layer sachets so that they can be reused to make safe, non-food packaging (Unilever, 2018). The CreaSolv method includes dissolving the sachets in a solvent to split them into their component layers. The high value

polymers are subsequently extracted from the solvent, leaving any residual contaminants behind. Following that, the recovered polymers are recycled into new goods such as non-food packaging. The CreaSolv technology, which allows for the efficient separation of plastic composites and polluted post-consumer waste, has been heralded as a breakthrough in recycling technology (Fraunhofer IVV, 2023). Here is how the CreaSolv technology works to recycle plastic sachets:

1. Step 1: Collection: Used and dirty, multi-layer sachets are collected from waste banks and other sources.
2. Step 2: Separation: The Sachets are then separated into their individual layers using the CreaSolv process, which involves dissolving the sachets in a solvent.
3. Step 3: Recovery: The high-value polymers are then recovered from the solvent, leaving behind any contaminants.
4. Step 4: Reprocessing: The recovered polymers are then reprocessed into new products, such as non-food packaging.

However, the CreaSolv method for recycling plastic sachets has encountered various problems, including:

1. Logistical difficulties: According to reports from local investors, logistical challenges in sachet collecting made it difficult for the CreaSolv initiative to run efficiently. The cost of collecting, sorting, and cleaning the sachets was also an issue. Indonesian waste collectors, waste-pickers, and environmental organisations have reported that Unilever abruptly stopped its collection scheme, leaving uncollected waste outside waste banks (McVeigh & Cahya, 2022). Some collectors burned uncollected sachet waste to create air pollution, while others found it too low in value to collect. The Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (Gaia) Indonesia called the scheme an "expensive failure" due to low recyclability and the low value of the waste. The company has not empowered waste-pickers or provided them with an income.
2. Livelihood disruption: The abrupt suspension of the CreaSolv project has affected the livelihoods of waste pickers who were working on the project (Unilever). Sutarti, a veteran wastetrader of 15 years from Bangkingan village, started collecting sachet waste from Unilever five years ago. She initially bought the waste for around 500 rupiah per kilogram, but after two years, the scheme stopped due to a factory fire. Unilever promised to resume sachet collections last year, but Sutarti has not received any news about the continuation of the scheme. The scheme was initially offered to her waste bank, but it has since been discontinued.

Despite the apparent practicality of physical recycling technologies such as CreaSolv, firms like as Unilever have been accused of utilising scientific discoveries as small-scale trials while continuing to mass-produce hard-to-recycle plastics that pollute the environment.

The Body Shop: A Cosmetics Industry Beacon of Sustainability and Success

The Body Shop (TBS), based in Littlehampton, England, has demonstrated that a commitment to sustainability and social responsibility can lead to success and growth. The company was formed with the goal of making a beneficial effect on the world, and it has succeeded in doing so through innovative and environmentally friendly business practices. The Body Shop's Community Trade program, which gets ingredients from small-scale producers all around the world, is a fundamental driver of the company's success.



Figure 5:- The Body Shop's logo.

Commitment The Body Shop for Being The Most Sustainable Business

The Body Shop not only supports sustainable agriculture by collaborating with local communities, but it also supplies high-quality ingredients for its products. The Community Trade program has made a real difference in the

lives of thousands of people in communities all over the world, and it has received numerous awards for its beneficial impact.



Figure 4:- Image of Return, Recycle, Repeat recycling box © ReWorked.

In addition to its Community Trade program, The Body Shop has made significant investments in waste reduction and resource conservation. Several steps have been implemented by the corporation to reduce packaging, employ recycled materials, and promote the recycling of its products. These initiatives not only decreased trash, but also aided in environmental protection and resource conservation. The Body Shop's Return, Recycle, Repeat campaign is becoming bigger than ever. It is now accessible in all UK stores, with plans to expand to 800 locations in 14 countries by the end of 2022. And it has no intention of stopping there.

The Body Shop do empower for society to embrace the circular economy and help eliminate waste by making refill stations across 720 of The Body Shop stores globally and they are launching a further 130 in 2023 (The Body Shop, 2023). By making closet zero waste packaging choice as easy, convenient, and accessible as possible, it can make a big difference. Switch to refill and collectively, The Body Shop could save over 1 million plastics by the end of 2023. Indonesia is one of the countries that has presented the body shop refill station. The Body Shop has been in Indonesia since 1992 (The Body Shop® Indonesia, 2023). Refill station owned by The Body Shop is present in Indonesia not only to inspire more people not to immediately throw away a package, but also to reuse it. Using The Body Shop's aluminum refill bottle pack can save more than 25 tons of plastic every year. These small steps will make Indonesia reduce excessive consumption of single-use plastic and make the earth better.



Figure 5:- The Body Shop refill station.

Unilever: Could Learn The Corporate Social Responsibility Activities That Implemented by The Body Shop

Unilever and The Body Shop are in the cosmetics and personal care industry, they have different ownership structures, product offerings, and values. Unilever owns several brands and has made commitments to sustainability, while The Body Shop is a standalone brand that has made commitments to reducing its environmental impact and being cruelty-free. However, according to a personal opinion, Unilever as the world's third largest multinational company can certainly try to conduct corporate social responsibility activities by The Body Shop, although there must be different challenges.

The Body Shop's well known corporate social responsibility activities that TBS taken as their core values of products:

Support Community Trade:

TBS has introduced a program called 'community trade' to promote economic development and empowerment for disadvantaged producers, particularly women and indigenous people. The company reconfigures the value chain to benefit producers by reducing mark-up inefficiencies and exploitative middlemen. TBS recognizes that community development is crucial for effective development. They introduce fair trade by purchasing ingredients and resources from those with higher prices, such as KuapaKokoo Company in Ghana, which has over 30,000 small-scale farmers.

Protect Our Planet:

TBS has made good use of the 3R principle, which stands for reuse, recycle, and repeat. The corporation encourages customers to return empty product containers to their stores after usage. 100% recyclable plastic bottles and paper bags were introduced in early 2008. TBS organized campaigns to educate people about their role as citizens of the Earth to conserve the environment.

TBS's corporate social responsibility activities has produced an entirely new generation of consumers who are concerned with ethical living. TBS has taken a very wise move in not only establishing consumer loyalty based on distinguishing ethical ideals, but also benefiting from gaining a high name and fame for being environmentally friendly and contributing to the public.

As a multinational company, Unilever can implement corporate social and responsibility owned by The Body Shop how to make good interactions with partners in successful programming and in keeping the Earth from disposable waste, although there must be some challenges that Unilever will face considering that there are differences from ownership structures, product offerings, and values between Unilever and The Body Shop.

Unilever can learn to apply the importance of building community development as part of corporate social and responsibility from the company, considering there are some distrusts of Unilever's workers, especially those workers from the CreaSolv program in Indonesia. Where, the abrupt suspension of the CreaSolv project has affected the liveliness of waste pickers who were working on the project (Unilever). One of waste picker who was working on the CreaSolv project said that Unilever was promoted to resume sachet collections last year, but she had not received any news about the continuation of the CreaSolv project. The project was originally offered to her waste bank, but it has since been discontinued. From this small point of view, the public's confidence in the effectiveness of Unilever's CreaSolv project is diminishing and can be a boomerang for Unilever too.

From The Body Shop's 3R (return, recycle, and repeat) principle, Unilever has implemented a recycling station program in several stores selling Unilever products. Unilever's in-store refill station pilot in Indonesia has not been reported as a failure. The pilot refill station is in a shop in Bintaro, Jakarta, and offers such products as Rinso, Molto, Sunlight, Super Pell, Lifebuoy, and Dove. The refill station aims to provide provincial alternatives for consumers who want to use Unilever's products while reducing the use of disposable packaging. Unilever has not disclosed the exact number of refills in Indonesia, but it is known that there are at least three refills in Jakarta. The refill stations aim to provide provincial alternatives for consumers who want to use Unilever's products while reducing the use of disposable packaging (EPR Indonesia, 2022). Although it is not labeled as a failure, in my opinion, of course, the refill station program is not enough to solve the problem of disposable plastic waste pollution in Indonesia, considering that there are only three refills from Unilever located in Jakarta from 34 Indonesian provinces that use Unilever products to meet their household needs.

Various Methods of Addressing CreaSolv Indonesia's Challenging

Indonesia's government has set a goal of reducing plastic waste by 70% by 2025, with a commitment to allocate USD 1 billion annually. However, the country's efforts to combat plastic usage and production have been less effective than other countries. To truly protect the environment, Indonesia must implement more aggressive and impactful measures. In fighting the use of plastic waste, it can not only be done by the Indonesian government. For all companies that distribute their products in Indonesia, and still use disposable plastic waste, they must participate in ending the use of disposable plastic. Like Unilever who should understand well that they should contribute to fighting the use of disposable plastic, which is one of the multinational companies whose products are used the most by the Indonesian people. Unilever must improve its corporate social responsibility activities that handle the waste recycling sector, The CreaSolv Project.

The challenges faced by the CreaSolv technology for recycling plastic sachets in Indonesia can be addressed in several ways, including:

Improving the collection process:

The logistical challenges of collecting and separating plastic sachets can be addressed by improving the collection process. This can be done by working with waste pickers and local communities to increase awareness and incentivize the collection of sachets.

Enhancing the technology:

The CreaSolv method can be improved by addressing the technical challenges of the process. This can be done by optimizing the process to reduce waste feedstock and improve the recyclability of the product.

1. **Redesigning packaging:** The root cause of the sachet waste problem is the design of the packaging. To address this, companies like Unilever can redesign their packaging to make it more sustainable and easier to recycle.
2. **Scaling up the technology:** The CreaSolv technology can be scaled up across Southeast Asia to increase its impact and reduce the amount of sachet waste in the region.

By adding to the community movement in implementing practices such as using reusable bags and bottles while rejecting disposable plastics, society not only provides positive examples for all societies but also actively reducing our environmental footprint. Because I believe that nature can heal if we all do our part. There is no action that is too tiny to make a difference.

Conclusion:-

This report discusses Unilever as a contributor to plastic waste in Indonesia and possible solutions to address the issue. Unilever is a multinational consumer goods company with many well-known brands. While it has a history of social responsibility initiatives, its role in plastic waste, especially single-use sachets, has come under criticism. Indonesia has a severe plastic pollution problem due to overconsumption of single-use plastic and poor waste management. Unilever's sachets account for a significant portion of Indonesia's plastic waste, ending up in rivers, oceans, and landfills.

Unilever launched the CreaSolv program to recycle multilayer plastic packaging waste. However, the program faced challenges due to logistical difficulties in collecting sachets, technical issues with the recycling process, and disruption to waste pickers' livelihoods. The company launched the CreaSolv program to recycle multilayer plastic packaging, but the program faced challenges due to logistical difficulties in collecting sachets, technical issues with the recycling process, and disruption to waste pickers' livelihoods.

The Body Shop is an example of a company that has implemented sustainable packaging and waste reduction initiatives successfully. The report recommends that Unilever could learn from companies like The Body Shop that have implemented successful sustainability programs. The Body Shop supports sustainable sourcing, uses recycled materials for packaging, and promotes refill stations to reduce plastic usage. Unilever can adopt similar strategies from The Body Shop, like redesigning packaging, collaborating with local communities for better waste management, and scaling up recycling technologies. To address CreaSolv's challenges in Indonesia,

Unilever could improve the sachet collection process, enhance the recycling technology, redesign packaging to be more sustainable, and scale up the recycling technology to have a larger impact. In conclusion, while Unilever has a

history of sustainability efforts, its involvement in Indonesia's plastic waste problem shows there is room for improvement in its corporate social responsibility activities. The company could take steps like The Body Shop to reduce plastic usage and waste, having a more positive impact on society and the environment.

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