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PARTNERING WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO REDUCE PLASTIC WASTE FROM TOURISM

Tourism has become a critical economic sector in Sri Lanka following the end of the country's long civil war. Many new hotels, guesthouses, and other businesses cater to both domestic and international tourists. However, there is limited planning and capacity to manage the growing amount of solid waste from this sector, much of which ends up as marine plastic pollution. In Arugam Bay, a tourist destination on the east coast of the country, the Waste Less Arugam Bay (WLAB) project aims to change behaviors related to plastic pollution of three key demographic groups: school children, small business owners, and tourists. Key areas of focus include educational activities, establishing a waste segregation system for plastics in the municipality, and working with local tourism sector businesses to separate plastics, reduce plastic consumption, and collect recyclable plastic waste for sale to recycling companies.

ENABLING SUSTAINABLE, GREEN TOURISM

The project centerpiece is a plastic recycling demonstration and learning center, and associated sales shop, located in a high traffic area of Arugam Bay (average 5,000 tourists per day during past high seasons). The center carries out group and individual educational activities using customized learning materials and games developed by project partners Waste-Less India and the Colombo Design Center. The center offers tourists and community residents a low-cost filtered water dispensary to reduce the volume of plastic water bottles purchased in the community, showcases equipment that turns plastic waste into new upcycled products, and raises awareness of the importance of reducing, reusing, and recycling plastic. The project also provides local business owners with a reliable waste collection and segregation system by distributing collection bins for businesses to separate plastic bottles from the standard waste stream. A collection vehicle provides daily service and brings the plastic bottles to a project location on Arugam Bay's busy main street to be baled and then sold to a Colombo-based manufacturer of clothing fabrics.

A SCALABLE MODEL FOR OTHER TOURISM DESTINATIONS

The project is creating a social enterprise model—based on the business of sustainable plastics collection and recycling/upcycling—that can be replicated in other tourist-intensive locations. It is also expanding its network of stakeholders, which includes the Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment, Keells supermarket, Coca Cola, and the Asia Foundation. The project team is discussing with Coca Cola the production of an upcycled plastic belt buckle for a Colombo school uniform made entirely from Coca Cola red bottle caps as a promotional project to encourage recycling and upcycling. The project also partners with Getwater.lk (www.getwater.lk) to map out where travelers and residents across the country can find water bottle filling stations, to reduce plastic waste.

PROJECT: Waste Less ABay (WLAB) | **DURATION:** March 1, 2017 – March 31, 2020 | **IMPLEMENTER:** Lanka Upcycles (Private) Limited | **LOCATION:** Arugam Bay in Sri Lanka | **BUDGET:** \$87,707

HIGHLIGHTS TO DATE

- The project has collected and recycled **6 metric tons of PET bottles** (~200,000 plastic bottles) from hotels, restaurants, and illegal dumps. The majority of baled PET bottles are sent to the firm Eco Spindles in Colombo to be recycled into polyester yarn.
- **More than 170 local businesses** now participate in waste segregation and recycling collection.
- Through its water-bottle refilling station and community activities, the project has distributed **1,484 liters of drinking water**.