



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

CLEAN CITIES, BLUE OCEAN



**GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**



PHOTO: PZC FOR CLEAN CITIES BLUE OCEAN

THE CHALLENGE

Across the globe, women play a critical role in the solid waste management (SWM) and recycling sectors. They serve in both formal and informal positions as waste collectors, owners or employees of small recycling centers and junkshops, workers in plastic and pre-processing companies, and sometimes as owners or workers in upcycling enterprises. In the sector, women face gendered structural barriers that limit their earning power and constrain their access to opportunities for upward mobility. For example, because women have limited access to credit, training, and time, they tend to work in the informal SWM sector where they receive lower wages, few health and safety protections, and are at heightened risk of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment. Globally, women are virtually absent from the middle reaches of the SWM value chain and represent a fraction of SWM sector leaders.

Given women's deep involvement in the first stages of the waste value chain, they have a significant role to play in establishing more effective waste systems that advance a wide range of environmental and social development objectives—from intercepting waste to reduce ocean plastic pollution, to mitigating climate change through more efficient and cleaner waste processing. Plastic contributes to the climate crisis by releasing damaging greenhouse gases when incinerated or disposed of improperly, choking carbon-offloading mangroves and coral reefs, as well as clogging urban drainage systems that communities depend on to alleviate climate-linked flooding and to protect them from mosquito-borne diseases. Because of women's significant and often differentiated roles in managing plastic waste, empowering women as economic actors who are meaningfully participating—including in household decision making and as leaders in the sector—is critical to achieving sustainable development, gender equality, and women's empowerment goals.

Through Clean Cities Blue Ocean (CCBO), USAID is working to eliminate ocean plastic pollution, while contributing to global climate mitigation and adaptation efforts. The program strengthens local SWM systems and circular economies, empowering and supporting women as leaders in the process. In the Philippines, for example, CCBO is partnering with women-led waste collection and recycling businesses to prevent environmental leakage; supporting the development of a skilled waste sector workforce with access to safe working conditions; and working with the public and private sectors to strengthen the enabling environment for these services and other waste reduction, recycling, and reuse initiatives.

KEY FACTS

Globally, discriminatory gender norms dictate that work in the formal waste management sector is most suitable for men; however, **women predominate** in the informal waste sector

Women in the Philippines own approximately **1 of every 3** junk shops—small-scale businesses that sell previously-used materials to larger aggregators and recyclers

In some cities in Vietnam, women make up **65%** of waste collectors and over **70%** of junk shop owners

Women's work in solid waste management and recycling is essential to **reducing ocean plastic pollution**, as well as other linked environmental stressors like **climate change**

OUR APPROACH

USAID seeks to further gender equality, women’s meaningful participation, and economic empowerment in all levels of the SWM sector to achieve multiple development outcomes. Gender-transformative approaches are integrated in the program’s global approach, with focused activities that increase gender equality across its focal countries in Asia (Indonesia, the Maldives, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam) and in Latin America and the Caribbean (the Dominican Republic and Peru). The program addresses gender-related sectoral challenges that include women’s limited access to SWM jobs that provide a decent living-wage, as well as issues that affect women’s broader well-being, such as gender-based violence. Addressing these issues and other gender inequities expands opportunities for women and, in turn, expands SWM services.

ACTIVITIES

Cross-Cutting Focal Country Activities – The program partners with local organizations, community members, and the public and private sector to implement innovative and holistic stakeholder-led initiatives for gender equality and women’s economic empowerment, such as:

- Supporting workforce development programs for women;
- Advocating for and developing employment opportunities that offer equitable, living wages and accommodations for women;
- Supporting women-owned upcycling and reuse businesses to establish or expand their operations;
- Assisting local women and girls to develop leadership skills as champions and leaders for the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle); and
- Engaging with local government officials to add women’s perspectives to policies and plans.

Women in Waste’s Economic Empowerment (WVEE) Activity – WVEE

empowers women to advance through the SWM value chain by establishing or expanding their livelihoods and businesses. WVEE offers innovative business and personal empowerment training to increase women’s technical and foundational skills, as well as a small business incubator program with funding and mentorship opportunities. The activity is tailored to Filipino and Indonesian women working at all levels of the SWM and recycling sectors—from waste collectors and junk dealers to women with established waste upcycling/repurposing businesses, enabling women to be part of a supportive network with access to larger markets and public sector contracts.



In the Philippines, USAID is empowering female independent waste collectors—called “eco-warriors”—with its grantee, Project Zacchaeus. The project builds skills, fosters leadership and empowerment, and increases safety protections and livelihood opportunities while improving community waste services for reduced plastic pollution. One of these activities includes working together with eco-warriors to design and custom-tailor uniforms for the waste collectors that not only protect them from high temperatures and sun, but also increase the respect they receive from the community.

CLEAN CITIES, BLUE OCEAN is USAID’s flagship program on ocean plastic pollution, working at the global level and in specific, rapidly urbanizing focal countries to target ocean plastics directly at their source. The five-year (2019-2024), global program is implemented by Tetra Tech, in partnership with a consortium of organizations that include the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and The Manoff Group. Other partners include national and local governments, members of the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and local women’s and youth organizations. CCBO’s gender equality and women’s economic empowerment efforts are funded, in part, by USAID’s women’s economic empowerment fund.

FOR MORE INFORMATION please visit www.urban-links.org/ccbo or email info@cleancitiesblueocean.org.

Sources:

Ocean Conservancy, The Role of Gender in Waste Management - Gender Perspectives on Waste in India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam, June 2019. / USAID, Women’s Economic Empowerment and Equality (WE3) Technical Assistance, Municipal Waste Management and Recycling WE3 Gender Analysis Report, April 2019.