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CLEAN CITIES, BLUE OCEAN



CONSERVING MARINE BIODIVERSITY BY COMBATING OCEAN PLASTICS



PHOTO: STUNATURA

THE CHALLENGE

Plastic is a relatively inexpensive, durable, and lightweight material—as a result, plastic use has increased at an alarming rate in recent decades. But plastic products are not always disposed of in ways that are safe and sustainable for humans, economies, or environments. Marine environments are particularly vulnerable to plastics’ impacts, threatening some of the world’s most biodiverse and natural resource rich locations.

Plastics enter our oceans in numerous ways, with 80 percent coming from land-based waste streams. Marine pollution can be greatly reduced when waste leakage is prevented at the source. Rapidly growing cities across low- and middle-income countries face unique challenges in managing and mitigating wastes’ environmental impacts—including rapid urban population growth, often outdated and undersized waste management infrastructure in close proximity to coastal areas and waterways, and rising incomes that enable the purchase of more disposable goods. Because of these challenges, many countries are not equipped to implement the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, and recycle), and waste and potential recyclables often go uncollected or end up in leak-prone open dump sites.

Marine biodiversity degradation – Once in waterways and oceans, the buoyancy of plastics allows them to easily disperse over long distances and results in materials ultimately coming to rest in delicate and important marine environments where they may take centuries to fully decompose. Examples of some of the ways that marine environments are impacted by improperly managed plastics and waste include:

- **Limited or unestablished waste collection services** result in household waste often being discarded in public areas, providing an easy path into inland waterways and, eventually, the ocean.
- **Unlined and informal dumping sites**, common across low- and middle-income countries, enable toxins to leach out of plastics and other wastes and into groundwater sources and open bodies of water. Chemicals and other toxins pollute marine life and can kill sea mammals, corals, and fish—and those that depend on them.
- **Uncovered landfills** are often located near oceans or inland bodies of water, where uncovered waste easily blows away, enters the ocean, and threatens marine life.
- **Poorly designed or overflowing stormwater drains** also provide an easy path for plastic to make its way from cities into the ocean, with the amount of plastic pollution in nearby waters proportional to the city’s population.

AT A GLANCE

Every minute, the equivalent of one garbage truck full of plastic flows into the ocean—an estimated **11 million tons** of plastic each year.

Plastics make up **80** percent of all marine debris from surface waters to deep-sea sediments.

The visible plastic waste that litters beaches and coastlines represents only a fraction of the plastics impacting our oceans—an estimated **95** percent lies beneath the surface.

Implications for marine animals – When plastic products enter marine environments, they can result in ingestion, suffocation, or entanglement of marine animals, including those that are endangered as well as fishing stocks that coastal communities rely on for food and income. Some of these species mistake plastics for prey and choke on or fill their stomachs with plastic, while others suffer lacerations, infections, and limited ability to swim after becoming entangled in plastic waste.

Impacts on global resiliency, food security, and health – The damage done to the world’s oceans subsequently affects the millions of people who depend on them for their livelihoods. In addition to harming income-generating marine habitats and fish stocks, plastic waste breaks down from saltwater exposure and releases contaminants that make their way back into our food chain. These contaminants have been found in food and beverage products intended for human consumption. They can contribute to a range of health problems such as cancer and developmental, reproductive, neurological, and immune disorders.

OUR APPROACH

Engaging local communities, raising awareness about the impact of plastic waste and ways to practice the 3Rs, and improving solid waste management systems all have the potential to drastically scale back the problem of ocean plastic pollution.

USAID’s Clean Cities, Blue Ocean (CCBO) program works across the globe to implement local solutions to address these global challenges. Through local, national, and international technical expertise, paired with a global grants program, CCBO tests, scales, and shares locally-led, innovative, and proven solutions with governments, communities, and businesses. As USAID’s flagship program for addressing ocean plastic, CCBO tackles plastic pollution at the source in more than ten countries and 25 cities across Asia, the Pacific Islands, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Through CCBO, local solutions are developed and implemented to include:



Complementing ongoing national marine biodiversity conservation and debris programs to develop and implement effective national action plans and strategies that conserve biodiversity and greatly reduce, or eliminate, ocean plastics. By supporting local governments to strengthen local solid waste management plans and strengthen their waste systems, CCBO helps partner countries address specific components of their national marine debris plans and strategies and offers recommendations to enhance effectiveness in reducing the flow of trash and ocean plastics from land- and water-based sources.



Strengthening local waste management systems through improved services, infrastructure, and planning. CCBO has safely managed more than **384,000** metric tons of waste, including more than **51,000** metric tons of plastic—the equivalent of nearly **5.5 billion** one-liter plastic bottles.



Promoting social and behavior change that addresses fundamental social, economic, and culturally-influenced behaviors that perpetuate littering, unsustainable consumption habits, and waste disposal practices. By modernizing municipal waste management and introducing more sustainable at-home practices, the program has reduced usage of single-use plastics and increased reuse and recycling rates.



Developing partnerships for enhanced infrastructure and investment that strengthen basic city services, systems for recycling and reuse, and local governance to create the enabling environment required for marine-friendly solid waste management. CCBO provides technical assistance and guidance to local public and private sector partners to right-size and implement innovative systems and technologies for managing waste. The program has leveraged more than **\$8.3 million** from the public and private sectors.



Supporting strategic U.S. government priorities—such as the Save Our Seas 2.0 Act, which aims to reduce mismanaged waste and catalyze investment from donors, partner countries, and the private sector.

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