PLEASE Project
Plastic Free Rivers and Seas for South Asia

OFFICIAL REPORT

Plastic Free Rivers and Seas: A Vision for South Asia

REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

7 - 8 APRIL 2025 | COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

Ministry of Environment

Implemented By: SACEP

Supported by: UNOPS

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Contents

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ALDFG	Abandoned, Lost, and Discarded Fishing Gear
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
ESG	Environment, Sustainability and Governance (ESG)
FMCG	Fast Moving Consumer Goods
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GNH	Gross National Happiness
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
HDPE	High-Density Polyethylene
IG	Innovation Grant
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IWWs	Informal Waste Workers
LDPE	Low Density Polyethylene
MFA	Material Flow Analysis
MLPs	Multi-Layer Packaging
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRF	Material Recovery Facility
NGO	Non Government Organization
PET	Polyethylene Terephthalate
PIU	Project Implementation Unit
PLA	Polylactic Acid
PLAST	Plastic Pollution Assessment Methodologies Suitability Toolkit
PLEASE	Plastic Free Rivers and Seas for South Asia
PPP	Public–Private Partnership
PROs	Producer Responsibility Organisations
R & D	Research and Development
RBG	Regional Block Grants
RBU	Recycling Business Unit
SACEP	South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme
SDF	Sustainable Development Fund
SUP	Single Use Plastic
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
WB	The World Bank

Overview

The Plastic Free Rivers and Seas: A Vision for South Asia Regional Roundtable Discussion was convened in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on April 7, 2025. This two-day forum was the final in a series of high-level national roundtable discussions aimed at consolidating efforts to combat plastic pollution in South Asia.

The regional roundtable discussion was hosted by Sri Lanka's Ministry of Environment and organized by the Plastic Free Rivers and Seas for South Asia (PLEASE) project, a regional initiative supported by the World Bank , implemented by the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) and, with the implementation support by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). PLEASE is the region's largest initiative to combat plastic pollution and promote sustainable plastic use, driving innovation through public-private partnerships, competitive grants, and circular economy solutions.

The regional roundtable brought together over 200 participants, including senior government officials, environmental leaders, development partners, the business community, PLEASE project grantees, academia, and civil society from across South Asia, along with other speakers from Southeast Asia and Europe.

Participants engaged in action-oriented discussions to address the region's growing plastic crisis, sharing knowledge, evidence-based results, expertise, and practical skills. The event underscored a sense of urgency, coupled with a need for decisive action and a deep commitment towards forging regional collaboration.

The discussions emphasized the interconnected and trans-boundary nature of plastic pollution, and the need for a unified approach that crossed national borders to achieve tangible environmental benefits. The level of engagement and contributions from participants signaled a strong willingness to work together and implement meaningful strategies for a plastic-free future for the region's waterways and marine ecosystems.

The roundtable directly contributed to the PLEASE Project's development objective of strengthening coordination among public, private, and non-government stakeholders to advance circular plastic economy approaches across the region.

The two-day agenda was a mix of five panel discussions and six mini-workshops. The panels tackled policy gaps and regional coordination, while the mini-workshops offered a space for technical deep dives and peer learning across the plastic value chain.

The agenda highlighted local innovation, with grantees of the PLEASE Project and winners of the Youth Hackathon sharing practical solutions and data-driven models for reducing plastic waste. This multi-stakeholder and pan South Asian

structure encouraged regional dialogue and identified institutional pathways for carrying the PLEASE initiative forward.

The Regional Roundtable Discussion was successful in:

- Exploring policy, technical, and market-based solutions to plastic waste management challenges in South Asia;
- Promoting innovation and fostering collaboration across sectors and countries;
- Providing a platform for knowledge exchange through opening speeches, panel discussions, and community-led sessions;
- Offering in-depth exploration of specialised topics through targeted mini-workshops, and
- Fostering regional dialogue and partnerships for more effective and scalable plastic waste solutions in South Asia.

High level delegates from across South Asia join the opening day of the Regional Roundtable Discussion.

Overall Key Takeaways and Recommendations

The **Plastic Free Rivers and Seas: A Vision for South Asia** Regional Roundtable Discussion was strategically designed to foster tangible action through a combination of expert-led panel discussions, focused and interactive workshops, and engaging participatory discussions. A powerful message echoed across the sessions: regional coordination and collaboration are essential to tackling the transboundary challenge of plastic pollution in the marine system and waterways in South Asia.

South Asia faces a mounting plastic crisis, with growing production, consumption, and leakage into the land and waterways threatening human health, ecosystems and economies. Yet, amid sobering statistics and shared concerns, the roundtable also spotlighted the growing momentum and innovation. From pioneering circular economy initiatives and EPR frameworks to community-led recovery systems and digital disclosure tools, the region has shown its potential to turn the tide on plastic pollution.

Several cross-cutting priorities emerged from the event:

Strengthen Policy and Accountability Systems: Participants stressed the need for clearer regulatory frameworks, robust enforcement mechanisms, and real-time data tracking to meaningfully convert good policies, like Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), into practice.

Foster Regional Collaboration: South Asia's seas and rivers know no borders. Many problems of plastic waste in South Asia are transboundary. Governments were urged to move beyond siloed action and adopt regional approaches and platforms for sharing knowledge, harmonizing standards, and coordinating interventions, especially on transboundary issues like marine plastic litter and ghost gear.

Empower the Informal Sector and Local Communities: The roundtable repeatedly highlighted the central role of informal waste collectors, small recyclers, and community entrepreneurs. Future solutions must center around these actors not just as beneficiaries, but as key implementers with greater access to financing, training, and market linkages.

Scale Financing Mechanisms: Whether through plastic credits, blended finance, or public-private partnerships, sustainable funding remains the linchpin for scalable impact. Governments were encouraged to leverage innovative tools to close infrastructure gaps without overburdening public budgets.

Support Innovation and Localized Solutions: From youth-led hackathon winners to scalable deposit-return pilots, many of the most effective ideas are born and field tested locally. Participants emphasized the importance of adapting global international best practices to local contexts, rather than applying one-size-fits-all models.

Sustainability Onwards: A series of discussions urged that the long-term success of sustainable initiatives depended on three key actions: promoting reusable packaging, community-based recycling incentives, and local business support. These initiatives create resilient circular economies through grassroots partnerships which focus on environmental stewardship and resource efficiency.

The South Asia regional roundtable discussion was more than a forum; it was a call to action. Across stakeholder groups, ministries, sectors, and borders, a clear consensus emerged: South Asia must forge a shared path to tackle plastic pollution with urgency, innovation, and equity at its core.

While the challenges are complex, from fragmented governance to financing hurdles, the solutions are increasingly within reach. What is needed now is follow-through: political will, institutional commitment, and enhanced continued collaboration. Participants left not just with talking points, but with policy models, pilot results, and new partnerships to pursue.

As the region navigates the road from pilot to policy and from pledge to practice, this roundtable stands as a milestone in the journey, one that reaffirmed South Asia's collective resolve to protect its land, rivers, seas, and communities from the growing tide of plastic pollution.

Opening Remarks

Mr. Norbu Wangchuk, Director General of SACEP, in his welcome remarks emphasized the urgency of addressing South Asia's plastic crisis and called for collective action across the region. He highlighted the PLEASE project as a vital platform for advancing a circular plastic economy and fostering long-term resilience. Reflecting on the momentum built through the national-level roundtable discussions held during 2024, in Colombo, Kathmandu, Islamabad, Male, Dhaka and Thimphu, he said that the PLEASE project had demonstrated new approaches to fostering circular economy solutions, technological innovation, and transboundary cooperation.

"Plastic pollution threatens our rivers, our seas, and our livelihoods. This is not just a discussion, it's a call to action to embed circularity and sustainability into our economies."

Mr. Norbu Wangchuk
Director General, South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP)

Referencing the Clean Sri Lanka Programme initiated by the Government of Sri Lanka in 2025, and the National Action Plan on Plastic Waste Management 2021 - 2030, Mrs. R. H. M. P. Abeykoon emphasized the country's commitment to reducing plastic pollution. She echoed Mr. Wangchuk's sentiments of the regional significance of effective plastic waste management, highlighting its relevance for environmental sustainability. Mrs. Abeykoon stressed the need for harmonized regional policy frameworks to address transboundary plastic pollution. She also underscored the importance of adopting and implementing EPR systems to ensure accountability across the plastic value chain.

"Every year, over 430 million metric tons of plastic are produced, and 10 million tons flow into the ocean. This roundtable discussion is an important opportunity for all of us to find common ground and prepare for the upcoming INC-5.2 discussions."

Mrs. R. H. M. P. Abeykoon
Additional Secretary (Environmental Policy and Planning), Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka

Speaking on the transboundary effects of plastic pollution, Ms. Cecile Fruman noted that discarded plastics have been found in locations across South Asia, including in the Himalayan peaks and the depths of the Indian Ocean. She illustrated the transboundary nature of the problem with findings from the National Geographic Society's Sea to Source: Ganges expedition, a recent GPS-tracked bottle study that showed plastic waste moving almost 3,000km through the Ganga-Brahmaputra river system in just 94 days. She emphasized the role of robust institutions such as SACEP in enabling collective action, supporting eco-entrepreneurs, promoting policy coherence, and advancing science-based solutions. The PLEASE project, she noted, had contributed significantly to tackling

plastic pollution through distributing competitive grants, technical assistance, and policy engagement. Ms. Fruman urged stakeholders to move beyond siloed efforts and toward a shared regional vision that prioritized long-term sustainability, institutional resilience, and inclusive solutions.

"While each one of us has a role to reduce our plastic footprint, no single country can fix this problem. We need 'all hands on deck' and a regional approach which brings together advocacy, public education, corporate responsibility, and policy making."

Ms. Cecile Fruman
Director of Regional Integration and Engagement for South Asia at the World Bank Group

Delivering a deeply personal reflection, Mr. Charles Callanan spoke as a development practitioner and a father who worried about the world his children would inherit. He voiced concerns over the growing plastic crisis and the mounting health risks posed by microplastics, describing the issue as both an environmental and moral imperative. He called for integrated, cross-sectoral solutions that aligned environmental protection with public health and economic resilience. Mr. Callanan also cautioned against relying on fragmented efforts, noting that bans, alternatives, or enforcement alone were insufficient. His message resonated with urgency: the scale of the crisis demands leadership that is bold, united, and immediate.

"No one country can solve this (plastic pollution) alone. That is why we are here together, and I trust much of the solution is in this room."

Mr. Charles Callanan
Director of the South Asia Multi-Country Office at UNOPS

Representing the host country, Hon. Jayakody called on the member states to serve as a catalyst for transformative partnerships and bold coordinated action across the region to address the growing plastic crisis. He highlighted Sri Lanka's national strategies to combat plastic pollution, including bans on single-use plastics (SUPs), nationwide efforts such as the recently launched Clean Sri Lanka Programme, and a growing emphasis on EPR frameworks. Warning of the transboundary threat posed by plastics, which now infiltrates ecosystems, disrupts economies, and jeopardizes public health, he called for evidence-based policymaking, stronger governance, and deep community engagement as the building blocks of scalable, lasting solutions within the region.

"Our oceans are the lungs of the planet. It generates 50% of the oxygen we breathe. Their protection is non-negotiable."

Honourable Anton Jayakody
Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka

Thematic Panels

THEMATIC PANEL 1

Policy and Regulatory Challenges

South Asian Leaders Call for Coordinated Regional Action

PANELISTS
High Level delegates from across South Asia

Dr. Farhina Ahmed
Secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bangladesh

Mr. Sachin Limbu
Chief Environment Officer at the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Bhutan

Mr. Pravir Pandey
Additional Secretary and Financial Advisor at the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India

Honourable Ahmed Nizam
Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Maldives

Mr. Shailesh Kumar Jha
Joint Secretary at the Department of Environment, Ministry of Forests and Environment, Nepal

Honourable Dr. Shezra Mansab Ali Kharal
Minister of State at the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Pakistan

Mrs. R. H. M. P. Abeykoon
Additional Secretary for Environment Policy and Planning at the Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka

Mr. Nalaka Gunawardene
Moderator

The first thematic panel addressed policy and regulatory barriers to managing plastic waste across South Asia. Senior officials from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka reflected on challenges such as weak enforcement, fragmented regional coordination, and the complexity of shifting public behaviour. Despite these hurdles, they showcased national progress — from Bhutan's zero-waste approach and India's circular economy programs to the Maldives' decentralized island waste systems and Bangladesh's proposal for a regional plastic action plan.

The consensus was clear: South Asia's environmental challenges are transboundary, and the solutions must therefore also be transboundary. "This is not just an environmental issue," Dr. Farhina Ahmed, Secretary of Bangladesh's Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change said. "It is intricately linked to climate, biodiversity, health, and development." She cited stark figures: the region generates over 26 million metric tons of plastic waste annually, with only 11% formally recycled. The remainder is burned, dumped, or pollutes rivers like the Ganges. Dr. Ahmed called for a coordinated regional action plan, facilitated by SACEP, aligned with the forthcoming global plastics treaty. "Microplastics are now found in our brains, in the placenta, in newborns. This is alarming."

The PLEASE Project received recognition from speakers as a driving force for both national policy transformations and international partnership development. The project is well acknowledged for its support of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and its backing of grassroots innovations that lead to the development of scalable solutions. SACEP and its leadership in the sector has been strengthened and SACEP is recognized as a trusted and reliable platform for regional environmental cooperation.

Representing Bhutan, Mr. Sachin Limbu emphasized community engagement and accountability. "We observe a Zero Waste Hour every second day of each month," he noted. "It's about behavioural change — my waste, my responsibility." Bhutan's digital waste tracking, bans on single-use plastics (SUPs), and innovative programs, such as paying parking fees with plastic waste, have produced creative outcomes.

India's Mr. Pravir Pandey reported on the scope of India's EPR system, which now covers over 11 million tons of plastic and includes more than 48,000 registered brand owners. Highlighting the Clean India campaign and circular economy initiatives, he emphasised the importance of regional cooperation and said that South Asia must lead with "urgency and innovation".

Dr. Farhina Ahmed, Secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bangladesh

Mr. Sachin Limbu, Chief Environment Officer at the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Bhutan

Mr. Pravir Pandey, Additional Secretary and Financial Advisor at the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India

Honourable Ahmed Nizam, Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Maldives

Mr. Shailesh Kumar Jha, Joint Secretary at the Department of Environment, Ministry of Forests and Environment, Nepal

Honourable Dr. Shezra Mansab Ali Kharal, Minister of State at the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Pakistan

Mrs. R. H. M. P. Abeykoon, Additional Secretary for Environment Policy and Planning at the Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka

The Maldives' Deputy Minister Nizam Ahmed described a decentralized approach, phasing out 12 SUP items and developing island-level systems tailored to local needs. "We're integrating sustainability into schools and working with UNEP on toolkits and training," he said.

Nepal's Mr. Shailesh Kumar Jha spotlighted the need for data and evidence-based policymaking. "Microplastics have been found in the snow on Mount Everest," he warned. With plastics forming 16% of Nepal's daily waste, he emphasized the importance of national inventories and standardized regional policies.

Pakistan's Dr. Shezra Mansab Ali Kharal underlined the critical role of the informal sector, which manages over 80% of the country's plastic waste. Noting that progress included EPR regulations and a plastic pact, she urged South Asian countries to consider a regional treaty as global negotiations continue. "Regionalism is not an option—it is a necessity," she said.

Sri Lanka's Mrs. R.H.M.P. Abeykoon highlighted gaps in waste management, with only 11% of plastic waste being recycled and nearly 40% leaking during collection and transportation. Despite SUP bans and pending EPR legislation, cultural and economic barriers remain. Alternatives are expensive, and illegal imports are on the rise.

Audience Q&A Highlights

A question about India's processing capacity revealed that infrastructure was being built to accommodate six times the current volume, in anticipation of future growth. Other countries urged India to share its EPR framework regionally via SACEP. Bangladesh acknowledged that weak enforcement had undermined its early efforts to ban plastic bags.

Participants agreed that voluntary industry action was not enough. Binding rules, harmonized plastic design, and political will are needed. A recycler's plea for uniform plastic composition highlighted the importance of technical coordination in unlocking regional recycling solutions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Plastic pollution is a transboundary crisis requiring shared solutions and regional frameworks.
- EPR systems and SUP bans are expanding, though unevenly enforced—sharing best practices is crucial.
- Informal waste workers are essential but under-supported; inclusive strategies are needed.
- Behavioural change and community accountability are vital for systemic impact.
- The PLEASE Project has successfully catalyzed policy alignment and innovation across countries.
- SACEP was reaffirmed as the regional mechanism for coordinating and scaling collective action on plastic waste across South Asia.

THEMATIC PANEL 2

Seas of Plastic

PANELISTS

Dr. Gayathri Lokuge
Team Leader for Livelihood and Employment at the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), Sri Lanka

Dr. Gawsia Chowdhury
Marine Biologist and Professor at the Department of Zoology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Dr. Janaka de Silva
Independent consultant and fisheries biologist specializing in marine and coastal issues in Sri Lanka

Ms. Zofeen T. Ebrahim
Moderator

Setting the tone for the panel discussion, moderator Ms. Zofeen T Ebrahim reported that 640,000 tons of fishing gear were lost in the ocean each year. The ocean has become a silent graveyard for lost plastic fishing nets and ghost gear, choking marine life, crossing borders, and quietly seeping into the food chain. The second panel of the regional roundtable focused on one of the most elusive but dangerous forms of marine plastic: Abandoned, Lost, and Discarded Fishing Gear, or Abandoned, Lost, or Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG).

Dr. Gayathri Lokuge, Team Lead for Livelihood and Employment at the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), Sri Lanka, shared key findings from the fisher surveys documenting the rising ALDFG accumulation along Sri Lanka's coasts. "This is not just a national issue. The gear that washes up on our shores can come from thousands of kilometers away," she said. International shipping lanes, entanglement accidents, and poor disposal systems all contributed to the problem, she said. "When we talk to fishers, what we hear is clear: the sea is shared. The waste is shared too."

Dr. Gawsia Chowdhury, Marine Biologist and Professor at the Department of Zoology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, brought data to life with the story of a single plastic bottle. Launched as part of a National Geographic-supported expedition, the bottle was fitted with a satellite tracker and traveled 3,000 kilometers in 94 days. "It's one thing to know marine plastic moves. It's another to watch it happen in real time," she said. Her team's work in the Sundarbans revealed microplastics at every trophic level, with early signs of organ damage in fish and trace contamination in Bangladesh's national fish, the hilsa (*Tenualosa ilisha*). "We are not just polluting ecosystems. We are poisoning ourselves," she warned.

Dr. Janaka de Silva, independent consultant and fisheries biologist specializing in marine and coastal issues in Sri Lanka, added a systems perspective, explaining the work of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to harmonize data through the Plastic Pollution Assessment Methodologies Suitability Toolkit (PLAST). "Without a common methodology, we are all measuring different things. That means we can't align efforts or track progress efficiently," he noted. His emphasis was on the power of regional coordination, not just in science, but also in policy-level commitments, and adequate funding.

Panelists discussed how ghost gear, once collected, could become a resource. From sunglasses and watch straps to innovative reuse by low-income fishing communities, the reuse potential is limited only by imagination. But challenges remain. "We lack the infrastructure. We lack investment. And sometimes, we lack the policy frameworks to make this viable," said Dr. Lokuge, referencing pilot recycling projects in Sri Lanka that still struggle to scale up.

Dr. Gawsia Chowdhury speaks during the panel discussion.

The discussion also ventured into inclusion and collaboration. Dr. Chowdhury spoke about her journey as a woman researcher working in coastal communities. "This work is not easy. But when we tell the story with evidence and with emotion, it starts to make change," she said. Her call was not just for better data, but for better communication between scientists and fishers, between researchers and policymakers, and between media and the public. "If we don't tell these stories in a way people understand, nothing will change."

Audience Q&A Highlights

The Q&A session that followed revealed concerns and ideas for regional action. A participant from Nepal questioned how financial tools could draw in private sector support. Dr. Lokuge emphasized the need for better waste infrastructure and government-backed innovation in Sri Lanka, citing promising upcycling models from Southeast Asia and Europe.

A Bangladeshi researcher shared findings from a PLEASE-funded study about mapping ghost gear hotspots, calling for a regional consortium to unify data collection efforts, a proposal backed by IUCN's Dr. Janaka De Silva, who noted the need for standardized monitoring protocols.

The idea of a Bay of Bengal regional consortium gained traction. Such a group could jointly map ALDFG hotspots, standardize fishing gear data, and support regional monitoring. "We already have pockets of success," said Dr. de Silva. "What we need now is alignment."

The audience's questions also touched on grassroots efforts and opportunities that had been overlooked. A representative from Sri Lanka's Pearl Protectors raised concerns over the lack of recycling pathways for retrieved nets. While formal systems are absent, Dr. Lokuge pointed to new collaborations with local universities and a national ALDFG steering committee.

Panelists, including Dr. Gawsia Chowdhury, stressed the role of citizen science and relatable education campaigns to engage fishing communities. Concerns over microplastics' health impacts, particularly in fish, added urgency to finding solutions. As the session closed, all panelists underscored the critical role of media in bridging the gap between science and public awareness. Dr. Gawsia Chowdhury noted, "Storytelling is how we turn facts into action."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

| ALDFG is a significant transboundary marine plastic issue.

| Better data collection and standardized methodologies are needed to understand the scale of ALDFG pollution.

| Regional coordination in science, diplomacy, policy, and funding is crucial.

| Collected ghost gear can be a resource, but infrastructure, investment, and supportive policies are needed for viable recycling.

| Inclusion and better communication among scientists, fishers, policymakers, and the public are essential for progress.

| A Bay of Bengal regional consortium to map biodiversity hotspots, standardized data, and support monitoring gained traction.

THEMATIC PANEL 3

Market-based solutions for plastic waste

PANELISTS

Mr. Thierry Sanders
Founder of KOLEKT, Netherlands

Ms. Athalie Reyes
EPR and Consulting Manager at PCX Solutions, Philippines

Mr. Kartik Kapoor
Waste and Resource Management Expert, India

Ms. Komal Sinha
Senior Director of Government & Policy Engagement at Verra, India

Ms. Richa Malik
Senior Project Manager at Dalberg Advisors, India

Mr. Nalaka Gunawardene
Moderator

This panel of regional and global experts explored ways of incentivizing responsible plastic use and waste management through economic mechanisms to reduce environmental impact. The discussion spotlighted EPR, plastic credits, and financial innovations as critical levers for change.

"Zero plastic may be an ideal or a slogan, but can today's humanity really live without it, given that plastics have a very diverse range of uses including in areas like medicine & aeronautics?" Mr. Nalaka Gunawardene said in his moderator's introduction. The answer, as the panelists made clear, lies not in eliminating plastic altogether but in redesigning how it is produced, consumed, and recovered.

At the heart of the conversation was EPR, a concept that holds producers financially and operationally responsible for managing their products' waste at the end-of-life. Mr. Thierry Sanders, Founder of KOLEKT, Netherlands, highlighted EPR's untapped potential in South Asia, estimating that mandatory EPR systems could generate over USD 7 billion annually in the region, excluding India. "Governments are missing out on a massive opportunity to finance waste management," he said. India now offered one of the most advanced EPR models globally, having shifted from fragmented systems to a centralized framework under the Central Pollution Control Board. Mr. Kartik Kapoor, waste and resource management expert from India, affirmed that while EPR was not a silver bullet, it could create a separate waste management stream that increases collection and recycling rates and shifts responsibility from municipalities to producers. But for EPR to work, it must be mandatory and enforced by an independent regulator, and not by governments' environment ministries, which often lack the political clout to ensure corporate compliance.

Ms. Athalie Reyes, EPR and Consulting Manager at PCX Solutions, Philippines, shared how her organization initially piloted a voluntary EPR program in 2019. "We sold 40,000 metric tons of plastic credits over three years. Then, in just one year after the EPR law was introduced, we sold over 130,000," she said. "Compliance really is a big driver."

India's experience offered lessons beyond infrastructure. Ms. Richa Malik, Senior Project Manager at Dalberg Advisors, India, described how EPR targets prompted major FMCG brands to redesign their products. For example, Unilever shifted from multi-layer to single-layer packaging on their haircare sachets. Still, she warned that not all recycling was equal, calling for a differentiated system that rewarded closed-loop systems and harder-to-reach waste streams. Ms. Malik also shared a personal scuba diving story that made her passionate about this cause, after she watched a sea turtle mistake a plastic bag for a jellyfish. "Turtles can't spit plastic out. It stays. That, for me, was the turning point," she said.

The panel also discussed plastic credits, an emerging tool that channels private finance into verified waste collection and recycling projects. Ms. Komal Sinha, Senior Director at Verra, India, explained how these credits could help bridge the funding gap while supporting inclusion. “Plastic waste management is not designed to be a profitable venture,” she said. “That’s why private sector involvement requires clear incentives. Plastic credits align financial flows toward good-quality projects.” She stressed that for these mechanisms to be credible, they must adhere to environmental and social safeguards. For example, Verra’s plastic credit program includes rigorous third-party audits and requires projects to prove their actions contribute to an inclusive circular economy, such as efforts to integrate informal waste workers through improved labor standards and fair compensation.

Ms. Reyes echoed the point, noting that plastic credits should offer incremental income to grassroots projects, not replace existing livelihoods. The panelists also emphasized that EPR and plastic credits must be tailored to countries’ context. For countries like Bhutan, which rely heavily on imports, EPR can be applied at the point of customs clearance, using import data to calculate fees.

The panel called for integrity in relation to green claims. Ms. Sinha raised the growing threat of greenhushing, where companies deliberately underreport or stay silent about their environmental efforts, even when those efforts are genuine, due to fear of scrutiny. Others pointed to the need for strong verification and transparency to prevent greenwashing – the deceptive practice of making misleading or false claims about the environmental benefits of a product, service, or company.

The session made clear that market-based solutions could help, but only when backed by strong regulation, inclusive design, and a collective will to transform systems from the ground up.

Ms. Richa Malik shares her perspective and insight during the panel discussion.

Audience engagement during Thematic Panel 3.

Audience Q&A Highlights

The Q&A session looked at the practical tensions between EPR schemes and plastic credit systems. One question was whether the two mechanisms were compatible or competitive. Panelists from PCX and Verra emphasized their complementary nature: EPR serves as a regulatory backbone, while plastic credits offer flexible financing for high-impact or hard-to-reach initiatives. Verra also addressed concerns about overlap, explaining that safeguards such as transparent registries and third-party audits were needed to prevent double counting.

Questions from Nepal and Bhutan pushed the discussion into the realities of implementation in small and import-dependent economies. In response to concerns about high certification costs, Verra pointed to group project models that allowed smaller recyclers to pool resources and share administrative burdens.

On the issue of ensuring credits fund new, not routine, activities, Verra outlined a three-tier test to verify real impact. A question from Bhutan highlighted the challenge of managing EPR without local production; panelists suggested levying fees at the border during customs clearance, paired with subsidies or phased rollouts to avoid burdening consumers. All panelists underscored the importance of locally tailored EPR policies, inclusive governance structures, and coordinated regional action through platforms like SACEP.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

| EPR has significant untapped potential in South Asia and mandatory systems could generate over USD 7 billion annually in the smaller economies, excluding India.

| While not a perfect solution, mandatory and independently regulated EPR can increase collection and recycling rates.

| Plastic credits can channel private finance into verified waste collection and recycling projects and help bridge the funding gap while supporting inclusion.

| For credibility, plastic credit mechanisms must adhere to environmental and social safeguards, including third-party audits and fair treatment of informal waste workers.

| EPR and plastic credits need to be context-specific, considering factors like import reliance in smaller countries. One size does not fit all.

| There is a need for integrity in green claims, with strong verification and transparency to prevent greenwashing.

| Market-based solutions can be effective when supported by strong regulation, inclusive design, and a collective will for system transformation.

THEMATIC PANEL 4

Fostering greater regional collaboration to tackle plastic pollution

PANELISTS

Mr. Shahadat Hossain
Professor, Department of Marine Sciences, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh, **PLEASE Grantee**

Mr. Karma Yonten
Co-founder Greenerways, Bhutan
PLEASE Grantee

Mr. Shantanu Srivastava
ThinkThrough Consulting (TTC), India

Ms. Hafsath Aleem
Clean Maldives, **PLEASE Grantee**

Dr. Anjana Singh
Professor, Former Head, Central Department of Microbiology, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Dr. Zillay Mariam
CEO of ISP Environmental Solutions Pakistan, **PLEASE Grantee**

Mr. Chaminda Rajapakse
Island Climate Initiative, Sri Lanka
PLEASE Grantee

Ms. Zofeen T. Ebrahim
Moderator

The fourth panel discussion brought together stakeholders from across South Asia, several of them PLEASE Project grantees, to examine how strengthened regional collaboration can drive collective action.

"Plastic doesn't need a visa or a passport to cross borders," said Mr. Shahadat Hossain, Professor, Department of Marine Sciences, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh (PLEASE Grantee). He called for regional institutions like SACEP to become more proactive, effective and efficient to make a difference. Panelists agreed that regional differences must be set aside in favor of a unified response.

Mr. Shantanu Srivastava, ThinkThrough Consulting (TTC), India, suggested creating a South Asia Plastic Abatement Task Force to streamline efforts. “There’s a scope, there’s urgency, and countries already have the intent. Let’s stitch it together into something meaningful,” he urged. He also proposed common labeling and standards for recycled products to boost regional trade and align sustainability efforts across borders. "Waste is wealth today," he added, "But infrastructure must be planned where waste flows, and that’s where regional cooperation becomes key."

Speakers from smaller nations highlighted challenges and innovations. Ms. Hafsath Aleem, from Clean Maldives (PLEASE Grantee), detailed the grassroots campaigns conducted and announced the country’s first hard plastic recycling facility, which will turn waste into durable furniture. She also shared how biodegradable paper bags were being introduced to replace plastic bags on boats to protect marine life. “We've seen dolphins and turtles starve to death, because they mistake plastic bags for food, she said.

Mr. Karma Yonten, Co-founder Greenerways, Bhutan (PLEASE Grantee), credited his country’s Gross National Happiness (GNH) framework for making environmental advocacy easier. "Plastic management is part of our GNH," he said. "It’s about conservation, well-being, and societal responsibility. That philosophy helps us communicate why waste management matters."

From Nepal, Dr. Singh, Professor, Former Head, Central Department of Microbiology, Tribhuvan University, described her connecting microplastics to disease vectors and antibiotic resistance. “Plastic waste creates microenvironments that support the breeding of disease-carrying mosquitoes,” she explained. She mentioned the role of biofilms on plastics that shield bacteria from antibiotics, linking plastic pollution to rising antimicrobial resistance. Her appeal was clear: “We need regional collaboration to scale and mitigation, especially when our facilities are limited.”

The moderator, Ms. Zofeen T. Ebrahim, introduces the panel.

Dr. Zillay Mariam, CEO of ISP Environmental Solutions Pakistan (PLEASE Grantee), highlighted that private sector-led decentralized solutions played a vital role in plastic waste management. She said ISP began with small-scale waste collection and now operates in five cities, producing eco-bricks from plastic waste and engaging more than 40,000 students through university partnerships. “Policies exist, but implementation is still weak,” she said. “We need awareness, decentralized systems, and support for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).”

Mr. Chaminda Rajapakse of the Island Climate Initiative, Sri Lanka (PLEASE grantee), stressed the economic potential of tackling plastic waste. “Let’s reframe plastic as an opportunity,” he said. “Cross-border trade and traceability using technologies like QR codes and blockchain can help make EPR systems more effective.” He highlighted Sri Lanka’s move toward QR-coded bottles to improve tracking and reduce plastic leakage, and drive accountability and circularity.

The discussion also touched on the role of youth, the importance of inclusive policymaking, and the need to move beyond geopolitics. “If we come together for this common cause, it sends a loud message,” said Mr. Yonten. Ms. Aleem agreed, citing the enthusiasm of students to be involved in reducing plastic and their willingness to pay more for sustainable products.

Looking ahead, panelists called for knowledge-sharing platforms, harmonized EPR systems, and science-based policymaking that empowered academics and communities alike. “If we can perfect what works for our region, we will be setting an example for the world”, Mr. Rajapakse concluded.

Audience engagement during Thematic Panel 4.

Audience Q&A Highlights

The Q&A session revealed the need for South Asia to bridge its political and economic differences to fight plastic pollution together. The audience asked questions which demonstrated the immediate need for a common knowledge platform, unified policies and the implementation of new waste management technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI).

Dr. Shahad Hussein from Bangladesh requested SACEP to establish a unified knowledge database for regional data sharing. A participant asked about using AI in plastic waste management, which led panelists to discuss both the advantages and restrictions of AI systems across different economic systems. Bhutan's Karma Yonten recognized AI implementation difficulties for small waste streams, yet India demonstrated success with smart segregation and Sri Lanka has started using traceability technology through QR-coded PET bottles.

Questions were asked about political will and local leadership. The panelists stressed that environmental urgency, and not geopolitical interests, should unite regional entities to pursue common action.

Dr. Anjana Singh explained that microplastic pollution and its related public health effects such as mosquito-borne diseases required scientific collaboration between different sectors and across national borders. Multiple speakers advocated for regional EPR policies that were inclusive and enforceable and emphasized the private sector's responsibility for financing and innovation. The discussion ended with a clear message that South Asia could achieve both regional benefits and global environmental leadership through a common goal alignment across technical, financial and human resources.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

| Regional collaboration is crucial to tackling the transboundary issue of plastic pollution.

| Existing regional institutions need to be more proactive and effective.

| A South Asia Plastic Abatement Task Force could help streamline regional efforts.

| Common labeling and standards for recycled products can boost regional trade.

| Research highlights the connection between plastic pollution, disease vectors, and antimicrobial resistance (AMR), necessitating regional collaboration.

| Decentralized waste management solutions and support for SMEs are vital.

| Reframing plastic as an economic opportunity through cross-border trade and traceability technologies can improve EPR.

| Knowledge-sharing platforms, harmonized EPR systems, youth engagement and science-based, inclusive policymaking are needed for future progress.

THEMATIC PANEL 5

Beyond PLEASE: Sustaining Momentum

PANELISTS

Mr. Imamul Azam Shahi
Head of Programme, Urban development, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Bangladesh
PLEASE Grantee

Mr. Ugyen Yeshi Dorji
Project Implementor, Bhutan Ecological Society, **Bhutan, PLEASE Grantee**

Dr. Mizna Mohamed
Director Science and Innovation, Small Island Geographic Society (SIGS), Maldives, **PLEASE Grantee**

Mr. Pankaj Panjiyar
CEO, Doko Recyclers, Nepal, **PLEASE Grantee**

Mr. Salman Tariq
Co-Founder and CEO, Davaam Life, Pakistan, **PLEASE Grantee**

Mr. Buddhika Prabhaswin
Project Manager, Ecocycle Lanka, Sri Lanka, **PLEASE Grantee**

Mr. Nalaka Gunawardene
Moderator

The fifth and final panel discussion focused on how the PLEASE Project's impact can be sustained beyond the life of the project. It brought together six grantee representatives.

Mr. Imamul Azam Shahi, Head of Programme, Urban development, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Bangladesh, spoke of the importance of continued financial support for sustainability, and how BRAC has pledged its commitments beyond the PLEASE project. The organization is already operating at a national scale and plans to replicate the project's successful plastic waste initiatives in cities beyond the pilot areas. He pointed towards community behavioral change, source segregation, and coordinated stakeholder platforms as key enablers. Notably, BRAC is investing in one of Bangladesh's first recycling facilities and supporting the municipality to strengthen its leading role in the sector. "We all know that in a city, the municipality is the key system and BRAC will continue supporting this process even after the project period," he said.

Mr. Ugyen Yeshi Dorji, Project Implementor, Bhutan Ecological Society, spoke about the importance of strengthening partnerships, community engagement and creating marketable products to sustain momentum. "We've trained nearly 4,000 people to become environmental stewards," he said. Mr. Dorji shared the story of a monastery that replaced hard-to-recycle tetra packs with recyclable PET bottles for ceremonial offerings, illustrating how grassroots education can drive enduring behavioral shifts. He also highlighted plans to convert plastic waste into durable school furniture, creating a circular, closed-loop reuse model in Bhutan. "We're confident to make sure our initiatives will continue beyond the project," he said.

Dr. Mizna Mohamed, Director Science and Innovation, Small Island Geographic Society (SIGS), Maldives, described how the project had sparked a science- and innovation-led movement in the Maldives. PLEASE funding allowed SIGS to establish the country's first plastic innovation lab focused on bioplastics, as well as the launch of a children's TV show to promote environmental stewardship. "The students were really interested in the TV shows and watched episodes, ensuring awareness amongst the next generation," she said. The project also opened doors to deeper collaboration with policymakers.

Mr. Salman Tariq, Co-Founder and CEO, Davaam Life, Pakistan, a startup promoting automated refill stations, shared how his team approached PLEASE with a business mindset from the outset. "Even if you're passionate about plastic reduction, you have to think like a businessperson so as to bring long-lasting benefits for all," he said, highlighting the importance of incentivizing customers. The refill model, which saves consumers 20–30% on everyday

products, is based on customer incentives and has expanded from Karachi to five cities in Pakistan and recently attracted private equity investment. Davaam is now exploring expansion to Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

From Nepal, Mr. Pankaj Panjiyar, CEO, Doko Recyclers, outlined four pillars for building a sustainable waste management enterprise: correct infrastructure, operational efficiency, financing mechanisms (like EPR and plastic credits), and policy alignment. "Waste management is capital-intensive," he said, calling for stronger government incentives and innovative product designs. "Think about how you'll manage the waste before the product even enters the market," he advised, adding that continuous innovation is essential in a world where new products and new forms of waste emerge rapidly.

Mr. Buddhika Prabhaswin, Project Manager, Ecocycle Lanka, Sri Lanka, discussed how industry can drive sustainability. Embedded within a major cement company, Ecocycle manages plastic waste through industrial co-processing while supporting women-led microenterprises. "This is not CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility). This is a business model grounded in triple bottom line thinking." He stressed the need to commercialize innovations from the PLEASE project, warning, "If these ideas just remain in reports, the effort will be a waste."

Throughout the discussion, panelists made a call for greater regional coordination. They proposed forming an alliance of like-minded actors across South Asia to share ideas, synergize collective efforts, and advocate together. "We are already victims of plastic pollution," said Panjiyar. "Let's not become victims of fragmented responses too."

Others stressed the need to bridge the gap between private innovators and governments. "We need policy makers to hear the solutions, not just deliver the speeches."

Audience Q&A Highlights

During the Q&A session, participants shifted their focus from technical solutions to long-term planning and partners and grantees discussed sustaining the PLEASE project momentum after funding ends. The responses indicated that sustainability goes beyond funding because it needs institutional backing and grassroots involvement and market-based innovation.

- BRAC, as one of the region's leading development organizations, said that they would expand community-based waste management systems into nationwide programs while making local governments responsible for the process.
- BES said it had established three essential elements - partnership, community empowerment and product innovation - to ensure project sustainability.
- SIGS combined scientific with youth-led innovation through the establishment of a bioplastics laboratory and children's educational television programming. The initiatives proved that civic engagement along with behavioral change campaigns could survive beyond the period of

Attendees engage with the panel of PLEASE grantees from across South Asia.

Private sector grantees emphasized that organizations should adopt startup thinking in their operations.

- Pakistan's Dawam received equity funding through the project which enabled the expansion of its smart refill stations and attracted partners from neighboring countries.
- Doko Recyclers of Nepal presented a business structure that relied on four essential components: source-to-destination logistics, infrastructure investment, operational cost recovery and supportive policy.
- Eco-cycle from Sri Lanka showed how cement industry waste-to-energy operations could generate profits while protecting the environment.

Panel members from all organizations supported the establishment of a regional alliance under SACEP leadership to combine knowledge resources and shape policy direction. One speaker noted that "small is beautiful, but scale is necessary" which became a motivation to transform individual pilots into larger scale solutions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

| Building sustainable waste management enterprises requires correct infrastructure, operational efficiency, financing mechanisms and policy alignment.

| Science- and innovation-led movements can ensure enduring impacts.

| Approaching plastic reduction with a business mindset, including commercializing innovations and embedding sustainability within business models, together with incentivizing customers, can drive greater sustainability.

| Strengthening partnerships, community awareness and engagement are crucial for sustaining plastic waste initiatives.

| Bridging the gap between private innovators and governments is vital for successfully implementing any solution.

| Greater regional coordination is needed to share ideas, avoid duplication, scale ideas and advocate together, and is key for sustainability.

PLEASE Project Exhibition

The PLEASE Project Exhibition showcased the achievements of 28 grantees: 12 Regional Block Grantees (RBGs) and 16 Innovation Grantees (IGs). It brought to life a wide range of practical, community-driven solutions to plastic pollution. From recycled construction materials to digital waste tracking and upcycled consumer goods, the exhibition offered snapshots of how local innovations were driving circular economy efforts in a sustainable approach across South Asia.

PLEASE Grantees from across South Asia set up an exhibition of their innovative products and interventions.

BANGLADESH

"We have reduced inefficiencies in the plastic recycling chain by directly purchasing from small collection shops and Informal waste workers and replacing the multiple layers of middlemen."

Khadim Mahmud Yusuf

Managing director and CEO of BPCL

NEPAL

"What happens when a plastic bottle is tossed away upstream and ends up miles downstream in someone's fishing net, farmland or a distant coastline? This has resulted in 20,000 tons of plastic waste entering Nepal's rivers every year."

Sujata Koirala

CREASION General Secretary

BHUTAN

"We have made remarkable progress turning plastic waste into valuable resources, while uplifting communities."

Tojit Saring

Civil engineer, The Green Road Initiative

PAKISTAN

"If we are innovative, we can redesign the supply chain and create consumer behavior change, but also convince producers to avoid plastic waste."

Salman Tariq

CEO and co-founder of the Davaam Life

MALDIVES

"This lab is very significant for us since Maldives lacks the needed to combat plastic pollution, and we feel that this is a stepping stone for us to continue local research."

SIGS

SRI LANKA

"In the plastics value chain where is the biggest leakage? It is the consumer. We aim to increase convenience and instant gratification for them through our innovations, and in turn reduce plastic pollution."

Himesh Fernando

Founder and CEO of Chakra Suthra

Mini-workshops

Six mini-workshops provided a vital space for exchange and knowledge sharing on important topics around plastic pollution control, management and transitioning to circularity. These interactive sessions brought together experts, innovators, policymakers, and local champions to explore the details of plastic solutions. The six workshops were designed as 90-minute parallel sessions to allow for in-depth discussion and participant engagement. Spanning themes from financial incentives for recyclates to EPR system design and scalable plastic alternatives, the workshops sparked grounded, forward-looking dialogues that bridged policy and practice, and spotlighted the ingenuity powering South Asia's transition towards a region free of plastic pollution.

MINI-WORKSHOP 1

Alternatives for Single-Use Plastics (SUPs) in South Asia

Exploring trajectories of SUP ban policies and regulations in the South Asia Region; understanding the challenges and bottlenecks involved, and what viable choices are available to both consumers and manufacturers

FACILITATOR

Dr. Jane Gilbert
Carbon Clarity, United Kingdom

CO-FACILITATORS

Ms. Nina Tsydenova
Environmental Specialist,
World Bank Group

Ms. Prakriti Kashyap
Plastics expert, PLEASE project

This mini-workshop focused on a pressing challenge for the region: what realistic alternatives exist to SUPs, and how are countries in South Asia prepared to adopt them? The session examined the policy landscape, supply chain capacity, and infrastructure readiness for SUP alternatives.

South Asian countries have been at the forefront of SUP bans, with various degrees of implementation and enforcement efficacy. Bangladesh was among the first globally to ban plastic bags in 2002 and is now reinforcing its ban, starting with supermarkets. The Maldives, too, has made significant strides, having phased out 12 categories of SUP items between 2020 and 2023. These examples reflect a broader trend, as municipalities and local authorities often lead on pilot bans before they scale nationally.

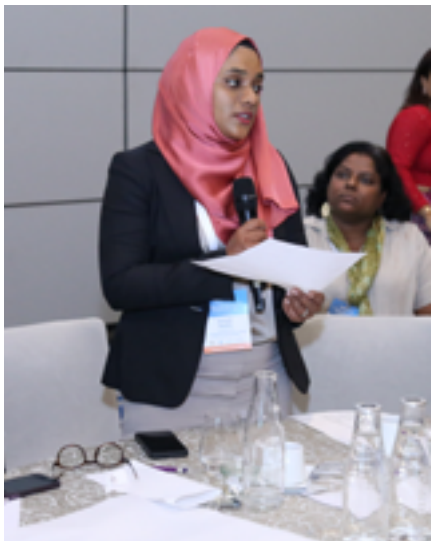
Dr. Jane Gilbert presented findings from a recent study that examined the availability and potential of SUP alternatives across seven South Asian countries. These alternatives fall into two broad categories: compostable materials like polylactic acid and starch-based plastics, and natural fiber-based options such as jute, bamboo, and palm leaves. However, confusion remains widespread regarding biodegradable versus compostable products. Dr. Gilbert cautioned participants that oxo-degradable plastics, often marketed as environmentally friendly, break down into harmful microplastics rather than safely composting. “These products may disintegrate, but they do not disappear. They create new environmental risks,” she said.

The readiness study also revealed uneven levels of manufacturing and capacity across the region. India has emerged as the regional hub, with strong capabilities in polymer production, product manufacturing, and exports. In contrast, countries like Bhutan and the Maldives rely heavily on imports. Composting infrastructure is another significant bottleneck. While India and Sri Lanka have decentralized composting systems in place, countries such as Bhutan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh face limitations in processing compostable materials at scale. “Without the right infrastructure at the end of the supply chain, even the most sustainable materials cannot fulfill their potential,” Dr. Gilbert said.

The second half of the session featured group discussions where participants, divided into teams by country, mapped their national capacity across various segments of the value chain.

Ms. Prakriti Kashyap co-facilitated the discussion.

- India reported a well-developed ecosystem supported by both national policy and grassroots engagement.
- Nepal identified natural materials such as hemp and banana fiber as key assets, but acknowledged gaps in polymer production and downstream processing.
- Bangladesh emphasized its long-standing jute industry and successful use of natural bags, but noted that its composting systems needed further development.
- Sri Lanka pointed to strong composting potential and raw material availability but limited industrial-scale production.
- Bhutan and the Maldives both highlighted ongoing efforts to explore local materials, although current reliance on imports remains high.



A workshop participant presents her group's discussion.

Participants collectively emphasized that policies alone were not enough. There is a need for coordinated market transformation. Investments in technical training, support for small and micro-enterprises, and harmonized standards across borders were identified as priority actions. One participant summed up the urgency: "We cannot afford to keep our innovations trapped in pilot mode. They need to scale."

The session concluded with a call for stronger regional collaboration, including a shared platform for grantees and innovators to exchange knowledge, develop common strategies, and advocate together. The conversation also echoed a sentiment shared in other sessions of the roundtable: policymakers must not limit their involvement to symbolic openings. Instead, they should remain engaged through the solution-building phases. Transitioning away from SUPs is not just about replacing materials. It requires transforming manufacturing systems, aligning trade and policy frameworks, and reshaping public awareness and consumer behavior across the region.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

| South Asian countries are actively implementing SUP bans with varying degrees of enforcement.

| Viable SUP alternatives include compostable (polylactic acid, starch-based) and natural fiber-based (jute, bamboo, palm leaves) materials.

| Oxo-degradable plastics are harmful as they break down into microplastics.

| Manufacturing and capacity for SUP alternatives is uneven across the region, with India being a regional hub.

| Composting infrastructure is a bottleneck in many South Asian countries.

| Coordinated market transformation, investments in technical training, support for SMEs, and harmonized standards are crucial.

| Stronger regional collaboration and continued engagement of policymakers beyond initial stages are needed for successful transition from SUPs.

MINI-WORKSHOP 2

Plastic Disclosure Data

Experiences in plastic data collection, plastic flow analysis, riverine and marine litter monitoring in South Asia and beyond

FACILITATOR

Mr. Shantanu Srivastava
Practice Leader, ThinkThrough Consulting (TTC), India

In a region where plastic pollution continues to surge, one fundamental gap keeps stalling progress: data. At this mini-workshop, participants recognized the urgent need for reliable, standardized plastic-related data across South Asia and beyond. From riverine and marine litter to corporate plastic footprints, the session delved into the complexities of plastic flow mapping, data disclosure, and the persistent barriers between evidence and policy.

Mr. Shantanu Srivastava leads the workshop discussion.

"This is where everything begins," said Mr. Shantanu Srivastava, "Unless you quantify the problem, you cannot design meaningful solutions." The workshop opened with a clear call to action: better data collection must be the foundation of long-term waste management strategies. A wide range of methodologies was discussed, from traditional waste audits and material flow analyses to AI-powered mapping and drone-assisted surveillance.

"These emerging tools can pinpoint pollution hotspots and trace plastic's journey from origin to ocean," one participant said. Other participants emphasized the growing importance of citizen science, highlighting its ability to foster community ownership and bridge the gap between informal and formal data systems.

However, challenges remain daunting. Standard definitions for terms like 'leakage' or 'mismanaged waste' are lacking, which leads to inconsistencies across countries and sectors, and underscores the need for harmonized language. The informal sector, central to waste collection in South Asia, often operates without documentation, creating major blind spots in data ecosystems. Meanwhile, corporate transparency is limited, and government ownership of baseline data remains weak in several countries.

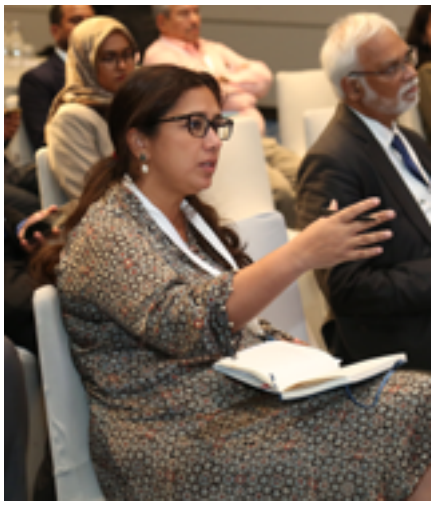
Participants shared case studies from across the region. Bangladesh, for instance, is developing the Dhaka Plastic Action Plan and gathering city-level data, but still struggles to integrate information from the informal sector, while Nepal faces significant data scarcity. In India, initiatives like Mission LiFE (which seeks to combat climate change and promote sustainable living in alignment with the SDGs) have bolstered national alignment on data and policy.

The session also addressed the role of corporate disclosure under EPR regulations. "We're seeing new rules pressuring companies to reuse containers like candy jars and paint buckets before producing more," the facilitator noted. These efforts reflect a broader shift toward embedding plastic accountability into business models.

Material Flow Analysis (MFA) emerged as a valuable planning tool. "MFA allows us to forecast waste volumes, identify intervention points, and even determine where recovery facilities should be located," a participant explained. Examples from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Thailand showed how this approach could guide infrastructure investments and policy decisions.

Participants also questioned the biases in AI-generated data, the credibility of greenwashed statistics, and the feasibility of collecting river samples in remote catchments. "You can't just collect data and assume it tells the full story," one expert warned. "You need interpretation, human oversight, and ground-truthing to make it actionable."

Closing the session, one participant summed it up: "We cannot solve what we cannot see. And we cannot build policy on invisible foundations." By strengthening plastic data systems, South Asia has a clearer path toward accountability, innovation, and sustainable impact.



A workshop participant asks a question during the session.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

| Lack of reliable, harmonized and standardized plastic-related data is a fundamental gap stalling progress in addressing plastic pollution in South Asia.

| Better data collection is crucial for designing meaningful and long-term waste management strategies.

| Various data collection methodologies such as traditional waste audits, material flow analyses, AI-powered mapping, drone surveillance, and citizen science can be utilized.

| Challenges in data collection include a lack of standard definitions, undocumented informal sector activities, limited corporate transparency, and weak government ownership of baseline data.

| Corporate disclosure under EPR regulations is increasing, pushing companies towards greater plastic accountability.

| Material Flow Analysis is a valuable tool for forecasting waste volumes and informing infrastructure and policy decisions.

| There are concerns about biases in AI-generated data and the credibility of greenwashed statistics.

| **Proposed Next Steps:** Develop standardized data collection frameworks across the region. Digitally integrate informal sector contributions. Encourage government leadership in setting data baselines. Align local realities with global frameworks. Foster collaborative data-sharing protocols.

MINI-WORKSHOP 3

Plastic Recycling: making sense of many ways to process, finance, and export recycled plastics

Understanding recycling standards, guidance, certifications, and export standards

FACILITATOR

Mr. Thierry Sander
Founder, KOLEKT, Netherlands

Plastic recycling in South Asia is anything but straightforward. In this workshop, participants tackled the tangled web of recycling processes, financing models, and export hurdles shaping the region's waste ecosystem.

Mr. Thierry Sanders opened the session with a personal story about shifting from financial technology to waste management in Indonesia, where he found inspiration in the informal recycling economy. "I followed waste collectors for three weeks," he recounted. "They told me everything about the prices of PET, aluminium, cardboard... So we decided to create something like an Uber for waste."

Mr. Thierry Sander leads the workshop discussion.

As part of the mini-workshop, the participants were divided into four groups -- Segregation and Collection, Processing and Recycling, Government and Policy, and Buyers and Exporters -- each examining their role in the plastic value chain. The workshop's central theme revolved around aligning recycling infrastructure with local realities, rethinking pricing incentives, and ensuring that EPR schemes and plastic credits worked not just in theory but on the ground.

On Segregation and Collection, one of the clearest messages was the critical role of waste collectors, who Mr. Sanders called "our best deposit return scheme." The session emphasized that modern, expensive garbage trucks were often poorly suited to the South Asian context, where decentralized, manual collection systems were more efficient. Participants agreed that simple practices like separating wet and dry waste at the source could dramatically reduce contamination and costs. As Mr. Sanders put it, "You can hire a whole village to sort waste more efficiently than a million-euro AI machine."

However, the challenge remains that not all plastics are created equal. While high-value materials like PET are already being scooped up, low-value plastics like sachets and multilayer packaging remain neglected. Mr. Sanders argued for a radical repricing strategy, to combat this issue. Manual Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) were praised as low-tech but high-impact solutions that could lift recycling rates and incomes. "Introducing even a basic MRF can take you from 8% to 48% in recycling," he noted, referencing a project in Nairobi. Baling equipment, he added, can reduce transport costs by fourfold.

Participants engage during the workshop session on plastic recycling.

On the processing side, the session showcased innovations like plastic lumber and pyrolysis, a technique that converts waste into oil. Investments vary greatly, from $1,500 per ton for PET recycling to multi-million-dollar setups for advanced chemical recycling. A standout example came from Nepal, where modular compressed plastic composite boards were being produced from low-value plastics, with similar characteristics to plywood, and used for furniture and construction.

Exporting recycled material emerged as a particularly thorny issue. While technically possible, exporting to Europe is a steep climb due to stringent hygiene and traceability rules. “For food-grade plastics, it must never have touched the hand,” Mr. Sanders said. India offers a more accessible regional option, particularly for landlocked or small nations like Nepal and Bhutan, but even that route demands certifications and import licenses. The absence of standardized recycling processes and certifications for recycled products in Asia is a critical issue, and a significant impediment to the growth of the recycling market in the region.

The conversation then turned to financing, where platforms like PCX, Verra, and Ocean Bound Plastic (OBP) offer plastic credit mechanisms. But enthusiasm was tempered by realism. “Demand for plastic credits is still limited, and the verification process is costly,” Mr. Sanders explained. “Unless you bring a buyer to the table, it doesn’t make sense to go through the process.” He emphasized that low-value plastics deserved higher credit prices to drive collection, while high-value materials like PET do not need the same subsidy.

Participants also raised key policy concerns. One participant from Pakistan pointed out that Western-designed EPR schemes often ignored the realities of informal sectors. Another stressed the need for product redesign mandates to tackle hard-to-recycle items. “If EPR fees are higher for sachets or labels that are hard to recycle, companies will stop using them,” Mr. Sanders noted, citing European examples where EPR fees reach $1,500 per ton.

In closing, the workshop made a strong case for context-driven policy, targeted financing, and decentralized infrastructure as the keys to building a resilient and inclusive recycling ecosystem.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

| Decentralized, manual waste collection systems are often more efficient in South Asia.

| Low-tech manual MRFs can substantially increase recycling rates and incomes.

| Repricing strategies are needed to incentivize the collection of low-value plastics.

| Exporting recycled plastic, especially to Europe, faces challenges due to stringent hygiene and traceability rules. India is a more accessible regional option.

| Demand for plastic credits is still limited, and the verification process can be costly.

| EPR schemes and financing mechanisms need to be adapted to the realities of the informal sector in South Asia.

| Product redesign mandates and differentiated EPR fees can discourage the use of hard-to-recycle items.

| Building a resilient and inclusive recycling ecosystem requires context-driven policy, targeted financing, and decentralized infrastructure.

MINI-WORKSHOP 4

Working with the International Finance Corporation (IFC)

Mechanisms of partnering with IFC, the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in emerging markets, and a member of the World Bank Group

FACILITATOR

Ajeya Bandyopadhyay
South Asia Lead on Climate Change, IFC India

Mr. Ajeya Bandyopadhyay, led a session introducing the inner workings of IFC, laying out a roadmap for how emerging market innovators could access sustainable finance to scale circular economy solutions. He said this was a relatively new area for IFC: "We are calibrating our approach almost on a daily basis to meet the needs of private sector players in this evolving space."

Mr. Ajeya Bandyopadhyay presents during the workshop session.

With a globally committed portfolio of USD 80.2 billion, IFC's offerings range from long-tenure loans and equity investments to blended finance and co-financing with third parties. The institution actively works across the plastic value chain, from waste collection and sorting to mechanical recycling and plastic-to-energy ventures. The organization also pilots forward-looking initiatives such as green supply chain finance and eco-industrial parks. One standout example shared was IFC's support for Indorama Ventures, which received the world's first blue loan to build PET recycling capacity in Southeast Asia.

IFC's value proposition goes beyond finance. Mr. Bandopadyay detailed the institution's layered advisory approach: shaping policy environments, enabling project development, and scaling investment. He highlighted IFC's advisory work with a global beverage company, helping it restructure packaging supply chains by investing in biopolymers, decarbonized glass, and zero-carbon metals, which will be documented in relevant case studies. This is paired with strict environmental and social safeguards, which may screen out small-scale projects that do not meet performance standards.

He emphasized IFC's openness to innovation. "If a project has growth potential, say it can scale from six to 40 million dollars, we might consider equity investment or co-development." A common question raised by participants was whether small grantees could pool efforts under a unified funding platform. Mr. Bandopadyay responded positively, noting that IFC was exploring modalities to accommodate umbrella proposals. "If there are multiple borrowers with smaller ticket sizes, we could develop a broader project platform."

The workshop was rich with practical insights. To qualify for IFC funding, Mr. Bandopadyay advised, companies should prepare strong sustainability plans. These should include bankable business models,

clear environmental roadmaps, and ESG-aligned governance structures. He also noted that loan terms could be linked to sustainability performance, as in the case of Sustainability-Linked Loans where interest rates were adjusted based on progress towards ESG goals.

The conversation extended to challenges on the ground. One participant pointed out that informal recyclers often relied on high-interest credit from local middlemen. "They're a huge part of the plastic value chain, but most of the profit is taken away," the speaker said. Mr. Bandopadyay acknowledged the issue, and pointed to IFC's microfinance collaborations such as IFC's work with Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) in Bangladesh to support informal plastic recyclers as a potential way forward. While IFC typically funds projects valued at USD 25 to 30 million, smaller ventures could access support indirectly through partner funds such as Circulate Capital, which finances projects in the USD 500,000 to 2 million range.

Participants were encouraged to think big, plan strategically, and not be discouraged by ticket size alone. "What matters most is the scalability of your idea and whether you can fund the required equity," Mr. Bandopadyay said. "You've already received significant support through PLEASE; use that as leverage." The workshop concluded with a clear call to action. "IFC is not just a financier, we're a partner in your development journey. Let's see your sustainability plans, and let's keep the conversation going," he said.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

| IFC is actively working to finance circular economy solutions in emerging markets, adapting its approach to the evolving needs of the private sector.

| IFC's financial offerings include loans, equity investments, blended finance, and co-financing, targeting various stages of the plastic value chain.

| Beyond finance, IFC provides advisory support in shaping policy, enabling project development, and scaling investment, along with environmental and social safeguards.

| While typically funding larger projects (over USD 25-30 million), IFC is exploring options for smaller projects through umbrella proposals and partner funds like Circulate Capital.

| To qualify for IFC funding, companies need strong sustainability plans with bankable business models, clear environmental roadmaps, and ESG-aligned governance.

| Loan terms can also be linked to sustainability performance through Sustainability-Linked Loans.

| IFC is exploring ways to support informal recyclers through microfinance collaborations.

| Scalability of the idea and the ability to fund required equity are key factors for potential IFC investment.

| IFC positions itself as a partner beyond just a financier and encourages ongoing dialogue with potential beneficiaries.

MINI-WORKSHOP 5

Value chain of recycling fishing nets

Sharing and discussing the findings of a case study in Bangladesh led by World Bank and published in 2024

FACILITATOR

Dr. Gawsia Chowdhury
Marine Biologist and Professor at the Department of Zoology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

At the heart of mini-workshop 5 was a critical question: How can South Asia transform ghost fishing gear (ALDFG) from a hazard into a circular resource? The session drew on insights from a 2024 World Bank study in Bangladesh and featured innovation stories from across the region, including India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives.

The environmental threat of ALDFG was a key topic. Dr. Chowdhury shared the results of extensive pre-feasibility and feasibility studies conducted along the Ganges River basin, spotlighting the dual burden and strong connection between plastic pollution and poverty. She noted how communities most affected by ALDFG were often those least equipped to address it.

Supported by the World Bank and National Geographic's Sea to Source Expedition, Dr. Chowdhury's team used a citizen science approach, driving grassroots data collection, involving thousands of community members, especially
women, to map net pollution, assess biodiversity impacts, and identify polymer compositions.

Participants from Bangladesh's Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF) also presented a compelling community model: community banking systems led by women fishers who help collect nets for potential recycling. "We have 54,000 fishers mobilized through this project," SDF's representative said.

Q&A and interactive discussions during the session

Yet challenges persist. Despite community enthusiasm and large volumes of collected nets, formal buyers remain elusive. Issues of contamination, lack of transport infrastructure, and inconsistent materials further complicate recycling efforts. As one Maldivian participant recalled: "We set up an informal contract with a recycling company, but they eventually refused to take the nets due to chemical contamination and high processing costs."

Efforts to tackle these barriers are emerging in the region. Sri Lanka, for example, has introduced color-coded plastic standards for new nets to ease future sorting and recyclability. "We can start with transparent nets for nylon, yellow for HDPE, and green for PP. This way, we can at least standardize what's coming next," one participant said.

In Tamil Nadu, India, a pilot program by the state pollution control board is showing early signs of success. Fishers are incentivized with Indian Rupees (INR) 40 per kilo of ALDFG brought to recycling centers. "We've collected over 12,500kg and distributed Indian Rupees (INR) 5.2 lakh to fishers," one participant said. The aim is to de-risk the sector and attract private investment, not through corporate social responsibility, but by demonstrating profitability.

Across the board, gender inclusion was a recurring priority. "Women have always played a role in fishing economies, but their work has been invisible," Dr. Chowdhury said. Her team's approach involved inviting fathers, husbands, and brothers into discussions to gain support for women's participation. "If there's monitoring and real value, families will support their women stepping forward," she said.

The session concluded with a consensus, a regional strategy, toolkits, formalized business models, and shared legislative efforts were all recommended to move the value chain for fishing nets from concept to scale.

Dr. Gawsia Chowdhury presents during the workshop session.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

| Turning ghost fishing gear into a circular resource is a critical question for South Asia.

| ALDFG poses a significant environmental threat and is linked to poverty, affecting vulnerable communities the most.

| Community-led data collection and community banking systems involving women fishers are effective for net collection.

| Challenges in recycling ALDFG include contamination, lack of transport infrastructure, and inconsistent materials, hindering formal buyer engagement.

| Initiatives like color-coded net standards in Sri Lanka and fisher incentives in Tamil Nadu show potential for improving sorting and attracting private investment.

| Gender inclusion is a priority, recognizing the vital but often invisible role of women in fishing economies.

| A regional strategy, toolkits, formalized business models, and shared legislative efforts are recommended to scale the value chain for recycling fishing nets.

MINI-WORKSHOP 6

Development of High Functioning EPR Schemes, Focusing on Accountability Systems

Going in depth into technical details of EPR systems

CO-FACILITATORS

Komal Sinha
Senior Director of Government & Policy Engagement, Verra, India

Kartik S. Kapoor
Waste and resource management professional, India

In a region where plastic waste continues to mount and EPR schemes remain in various stages of evolution, a critical question was posed at the sixth mini-workshop: "How can we guarantee that the plastic reported under EPR is actually being processed, and what kind of monitoring systems are in place to ensure that?"

The session brought together stakeholders from across South Asia to dig deep into the verification and accountability systems that underpin successful EPR frameworks. The workshop laid out the core premise of EPR as a tool to shift both financial and physical responsibility for waste away from consumers and municipalities and onto producers. Yet, As Mr. Kartik S Kapoor noted, "We can't just have guiding documents, we need legislation, enforcement, and real-time data to back it up."

Ms. Komal Sinha opens the workshop session.

Participants acknowledged that most countries in the region faced similar barriers: underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of reliable data, unclear roles among stakeholders, and low producer buy-in due to unrealistic targets and burdensome reporting requirements, which restricts nations from developing high-functioning plastic collection systems.

The session highlighted several critical elements for building accountable EPR systems. These included strong legislative frameworks, clearly defined responsibilities, and systems for independent third-party audits. "Transparency and accountability are everything," Ms. Komal Sinha added. "You need robust data, and you need to be able to verify that data." Participants explored international models such as Brazil's social agreement frameworks as examples that could be tailored to South Asian realities. A dual-model approach from Bangladesh was presented, combining a government-managed pooled fund with compliance mechanisms led by producer responsibility organizations. The proposed hybrid model, Mr. Kapoor explained, aims to "combine the strengths of both systems: flexibility, government oversight, and improved effectiveness in financing and enforcement."

Plastic credits have emerged as a potential game-changer. These credits, verified through Verra's international standard, represent one ton of collected or recycled plastic. Ms. Sinha said that "Plastic credits are a powerful tool for unlocking finance and scaling infrastructure". She emphasized the importance of avoiding double-counting and fraud, which can be addressed through

centralized public registries. “Integrity comes at a price but it’s what the investor community and the public expects,” she said.

The session also examined the stages of EPR development. Countries were encouraged to identify their position (exploratory, transitional, or enforcement) and align their policy tools accordingly. “Not every country needs to leap to mandatory EPR immediately. It’s about readiness and phased implementation,” Ms Sinha said.

One persistent concern was how to prevent the financial burden from being passed on to consumers. As a participant from Bhutan pointed out: “If producers just shift the cost to the customer, what’s the point of EPR? Where is sustainable consumption?” Another added, “We want accountability, not just another cost that ends up on the consumer’s plate.”

Recommendations for strengthening accountability included establishing centralized registries, publishing compliance data, conducting third-party audits, and allowing EPR expenses to be treated as business costs. These systems, participants agreed, should not be overly complex but must be rigorous enough to build trust and ensure compliance.

As the workshop closed, the facilitators left participants with a call to action: design systems that are locally grounded but globally credible. “Without accountability, EPR becomes just a label. With it, it becomes a lever for real change,” Mr. Kapoor said.

Mr. Kartik S. Kapoor presents during the workshop session.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

| High-functioning EPR schemes require robust verification and accountability systems to ensure reported plastic is actually processed.

| Successful EPR frameworks need strong legislation, clearly defined responsibilities, and independent third-party audits. Transparency and verifiable data are crucial.

| Plastic credits, verified by international standards, can unlock finance and scale infrastructure, but require centralized registries to prevent fraud and double-counting.

| Countries should align their EPR policy tools based on their stage of development (exploratory, transitional, or enforcement). Phased implementation may be necessary.

| Accountability measures should prevent the financial burden of EPR from solely being passed onto consumers.

| EPR schemes should be locally grounded but globally credible to ensure real change.

| Recommendations for strengthening accountability include centralized registries, public compliance data, third-party audits, and treating EPR expenses as business costs.

Lightning Talks Session

PLEASE Community Sharing

Joint Moderators

Zofeen T Ebrahim and Nalaka Gunawardene

The Regional Roundtable invited the 28 PLEASE project grantees from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to collectively present highlights of their project work, their accomplishments and learnings through a 3-minute inspiring talk. Summaries of their presentations are captured here.

Bangladesh

REGIONAL BLOCK GRANTEES

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC)

A comprehensive, sustainable waste management system in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, a popular tourist destination and the world's longest sea beach.

More information here.

Addressing the lack of source segregation, the core issue of plastic waste management, through targeting households, forming waste management committees, providing segregated bins and collection vehicles, together with provision of biodegradable alternatives. The collected plastic waste is directed to BRAC's new recycling facility.

Key Achievements to date:

40,000+ kg of plastic recovered, **1 MRF**, **5 women's organizations** supported, **20,000+ people** reached through plastic mitigation initiatives, **1700+ IWWs** supported, **20+ decent jobs** created.

Bangladesh Prochemical Company Limited (BPCL)

Combating plastic pollution by creating a circular economy, recycling discarded PET bottles into new bottles and polyester fiber.

More information here.

Directly engaging with informal waste workers (IWWs) through seven Recycle Business Units, eliminating exploitative middlemen and ensuring fair pricing. BPCL's digital App tracks transactions and facilitates formal payments to IWWs. Provision of life skills training, safe working conditions, health check-ups, childcare, and formal ID cards, enhancing dignity for IWW's.

Key Achievements to date:

7 MRFs, **5 recycling facilities**, **260,000+ kg plastic** recovered (over 50% recycled), **1600+ people** reached through plastic mitigation initiatives positively affecting behaviour change, **2600+ IWWs** supported, **270+ decent jobs** created.

Bangladesh

INNOVATION GRANTEES

Arannayk Foundation
More information here.

Plastic Reduction Initiative in Sundarbans Transboundary International Natural Ecosystems (PRISTINE) project in Bangladesh uses an App-based system to track and monitor plastic waste, and facilitate the sale of collected SUPs in the Sundarbans.

Key Achievements to date:
Preventing around **1.8 metric tons of SUPs** from polluting the environment, formally integrating **200+ IWWs** while providing them with training and health support.

Red Orange Communications
More information here.

The Blue Wave initiative in Dhaka, Bangladesh, addresses severe pollution in the Polandur Canal, through a locally designed, sustainable floating waste interception barrier that captures plastic and prevents flooding.

Key Achievements to date:
Intercepting **1,200kg of plastic** daily, training **100+ IWWs** and **44** sorting center owners, engaging **10,000 community members**.

The Institute of Marine Sciences University of Chittagong
More information here.

Reducing plastic waste in the Chittagong City Corporation through capacity building, health and safety training, hotspot mapping, waste bin capacity assessment, business networking, and school awareness campaigns.

Reducing Ghost Fishing and ALDFG Management: Modeling ALDFG hotspots in four commercial areas and training local fisher communities (especially women) on managing, repurposing, and recycling old gear.

Key Achievements to date:
Approximately **19,000 marine fishing crafts** created from repurposed material.

Bhutan

REGIONAL BLOCK GRANTEES

Greener Way

Bhutan Waste Banks (BWB): An innovative way to reduce, reuse and recycle plastic waste in Bhutan.

More information here.

Greener Way, guided by sustainability and circularity, employs a bottom-up approach with its Bhutan Waste Banks. These strategically located BWBs, supported by a digital App for tracking green credits, incentivize communities to deposit waste. This initiative has contributed to increasing collection, formalizing Bhutan's informal waste sector, driving behavioral change by valuing waste, and directly engaging primary waste handlers, who are predominantly women (85%). Greener Way also recycles PET waste into eco-poles for electrical fencing and operates a PET washing and shredding line to reintroduce recycled materials into the product lifecycle.

Key Achievements to date:

10 BWBs, intercepting over **415 tons** of waste.

Bhutan Ecological Society (BES)

Reimagining effective partnerships for tackling river pollution and plastic waste in the Wangchuk River.

More information here.

The Wangchuk River is a vital water basin in Bhutan. BES focuses on innovative, partnership-driven projects to ensure lasting impact. The project employs a three-pronged approach: short-term cleanups and waste collection, medium-term community-led action and capacity building, and long-term youth empowerment for sustainable behavior. BES has established community waste storage systems, stream waste interceptors, and supported a youth and women-led recycling facility producing eco bricks and PET pellets.

Key Achievements to date:

Collecting **over 300,000 PET bottles**, reaching more than **2,500 people**, of which **60% are youth**.

Bhutan

INNOVATION GRANTEES

Clean Bhutan
More information here.

Clean Bhutan has successfully initiated a process to produce polyester wool from PET bottles, to be used in cushions, jackets, and stuffed toys. While this technology is proven, its adoption remains limited within South Asia, including in Bhutan. By manufacturing polyester wool domestically, Clean Bhutan aims to decrease reliance on imports. This initiative also focuses on community engagement, creating awareness and providing opportunities for women and youth to participate in the polyester wool production value chain.

Key Achievements to date:
Supporting **17 IWWs**, recycling over **10,000 plastics**, creating **11 decent jobs**.

The Green Road Initiative
More information here.

This initiative repurposes waste plastic for road construction and has supported local entrepreneurship by providing three plastic shredders. It also prioritizes education and awareness. They have gained a significant policy achievement through enabling the mandatory use of shredded plastic in road construction, according to Bhutan's schedule of rates (effective May 2024).

Key Achievements to date:
Exceeding its initial 12-ton collection goal by intercepting **52 tons**, with 40 tons already utilized; creating **20 jobs, 90% of which are held by women**; reaching **9000+ individuals**, including over **5,000 students** through awareness.

Eco Waste Solution
More information here.

To enhance recycling and upcycling, Eco Waste Solution has expanded their MRF through the PLEASE project. This MRF employs both manual and mechanical sorting to maximize the recovery of waste and significantly reduce the amount sent to landfills. Although challenges like improper waste segregation were encountered, they were successful in addressing this through community engagement, awareness campaigns, and collaborations with local leaders and the private sector. As the second MRF in the nation, Eco Waste Solution plans to replicate this model in other regions facing similar waste crises.

Key Achievements to date:
A women-owned organization, recovering more than **55,000kg of plastic** (**recycling about 80%**), physically reaching over **1,500 people** in plastic mitigation actions, creating **7 decent jobs**.

Maldives

REGIONAL BLOCK GRANTEES

Maldives Authentic Crafts Cooperative Society (MACCS)
More information here.

This project in Kulhudhuffushi, Maldives, aims to combat plastic pollution and improve the lives of its 10,000 residents, while serving as a model for other islands that lack recycling capabilities. Women-led cooperative MACCS, focusing on sustainable sourcing for handicrafts, is leading this community-wide effort. Their work includes awareness, training, reusable alternatives, and policy support, building on their contribution to the national plastic phase-out plan. A key success is the nearly operational MRF, where MACCS has successfully partnered with the Kulhudhuffushi City Council, crucial for the MRF's sustainability. It has also facilitated the council's engagement with the state waste management company, Vamco.

Key Achievements to date:
A women-led organization supporting **23 women's groups**, physically reaching **1600+ people**, establishing **1 MRF** and recovering **491kg of plastic**.

Small Island Geographic Society (SIGS)
More information here.

This project focuses on two main areas: (1) piloting a bioplastic bag production facility and establishing a lab in the Maldives to analyze bioplastic degradation and local production resources, aiming to reduce SUP bag usage; and (2) raising awareness and engaging the community through initiatives like a children's innovation TV show on YouTube (where children developed solutions for plastic pollution) and an SUP alternative expo that connected communities and businesses. The awareness efforts involved schools, parents, and NGOs to build credibility and promote sustainable practices.

Key Achievements to date:
Reaching 800+ people through mitigation of plastic pollution initiatives, **500+ people** reached through SUP alternative expo.

Maldives

INNOVATION GRANTEES

Clean Maldives
Reducing plastic pollution through collaboration.

More information here.

NGO Clean Maldives and Indian nonprofit Climate Collective partnered to reduce plastic pollution in the Maldives, including a plastic innovation challenge. This led to establishing a local plastic recycling facility, piloted at the Siyam World resort. The resort converts plastic waste into furniture with machinery and expertise from Indian social impact startup 'Eco-conscious'. Clean Maldives collaborated with the Kudafari Council that collects plastic waste from a local island nearby for this initiative.

Community empowerment linkage (CEL)
Eliminate SUPs on Meemu Mulah island, preventing ocean-bound polythene bags and plastic bottles.

More information here.

Key Initiatives:

1. Provide Alternatives: Distribute glass bottles to households, restaurants, and fishing vessels; offer eco-friendly buckets to fishermen instead of polythene bags.
2. Install Purification Machines: Deploy water purification machines in various locations, including households, government buildings, businesses, fishing vessels, and eateries, to decrease plastic bottle usage.

Key Achievements to date:
Over **130 people** reached through mitigation of plastic pollution initiatives.

Nepal

REGIONAL BLOCK GRANTEES

Center for and Sustainable Development Nepal (CREASION)
More information here.

Project CAP (Collaborative Approach for Preventing Plastic Leakages in Rivers of Nepal) addresses plastic waste management challenges in the country caused by geography, infrastructure limitations, and lack of recycling policies. The project aims to establish an inclusive model empowering communities, improving recycling, and preventing river pollution across seven municipalities, in an attempt to combat the 20,000 tons of plastic waste that enters Nepal's rivers annually. Collaborating with local governments, waste workers, youth, and fishing communities, it developed a PET recycling facility (which also recycles green PET, previously not recycled before in Nepal), and MRFs.

Key Achievements to date:
Collected over **250kg of plastic**, directly reaching over **3,500 people** through awareness including **40 youth campaigns**.

Biocomp Nepal Pvt. Ltd.
More information here.

The RIVER+ plus project, a partnership between People in Need and Biocomp Nepal, establishes a recycling value chain for low-grade plastic in Nepal. It empowers women, youth, and migrants by providing health safety and social protection training, while linking them to government schemes such as health insurance. The gender-responsive project ensures fair compensation and decent work, and is facilitated by MOUs with over 30 aggregator centers. It produces affordable, waterproof plastic boards through its recycling efforts, as an alternative to plywood and cement boards.

Key Achievements to date:
Launching **Nepal's first low-grade plastic recycling facility**, currently processing **10 tons daily** with plans to expand to 20, and recovering **100 tons** of plastic.

Nepal

INNOVATION GRANTEES

Center for Integrated Urban Development (CIUD)
More information here.

Nepal produces over 150,000 tons of waste annually, with about 16% being plastic, of which only 9% is recycled. To address the challenge of unsegregated waste, CIUD introduced special bags and trained communities, including women's groups, in household-level waste segregation. The project also established an efficient collection system that allows collectors to sell plastic at a better price. Additionally, CIUD supports women's entrepreneurship in waste management through training. The project aims for a comprehensive, safe, and circular economy for plastics within communities by managing waste at the source, rather than just banning plastics.

Key Achievements to date:
Diverting approximately **93kg of waste daily** to recycling and upcycling centers.

Doko Recyclers
More information here.

Doko Recyclers, a social enterprise, operates a Plastic Recovery Facility (PRF) established through the PLEASE project. Contracted by Kathmandu municipality to process 43 tons of daily dry waste, they utilize source segregation for high-quality recyclables. While recovery is efficient, finding markets for low-value plastics is the main challenge. They currently supply another grantee and seek partnerships with upcyclers, and plan to explore supplying RDF fuel to cement factories.

Key Achievements to date:
Doko Recyclers new PRF can process roughly **2,500 tons of mixed waste monthly**, including **1,200 tons of plastic**.

Department of Applied Sciences and Chemical Engineering Tribhuvan University
Project Waste to Wealth: Plastic Free Himalayan Rivers to Advanced Functional Materials

More information here.

Focus Areas:

1. Knowledge Dissemination: conducting plastic collection, segregation, and management programs; planning a plastic conference.
2. Innovation: Developed four low-cost machines (shredder, extruder, melt electric spinner, hot press) using local materials. These process diverse plastics into 6-10mm particles for porous plastic bases. Non-toxic melt electric spinning creates microfibers for energy storage carbon materials. A hot press creates safe, tested sal leaf bowls.

Key Achievements to date:
352kg of plastic waste recovered (43% recycled), reaching over **300 individuals**.

Pakistan

REGIONAL BLOCK GRANTEES

Altas Pak Waste Management Pvt. Ltd.
More information here.

Pakistan produces 3.3 million tons of annual plastic waste with little recycling. Hyderabad District alone contributes 150.88 tons, openly disposed of and impacting the Indus River. Atlas, a Hyderabad-based waste management company with 1,100 tons capacity and 2,000 employees, currently recycles low-grade PE. Atlas' expansion of its recycling facility, supported by the Sindh government, will divert about 3% of Hyderabad's plastic waste from polluting the environment. Atlas also supports local green jobs and women's organizations through seven local action groups for awareness.

Key Achievements to date:
Processing up to **328kg of plastic**, expanding with a five-ton recycling facility that has the capacity to **convert around 3,000kg of daily plastic waste into products** like anti-theft manhole covers.

ISP Environmental Solutions (Pvt) Ltd (ISP)
More information here.

The project aims to achieve plastic-free rivers and seas through advocacy, incentivized collection via a reward App-linked Reverse Vending Machine, innovative reuse of plastic waste (including MLP/LDPE into eco-bricks with over 35% plastic), and collaborative partnerships with government, NGOs, and educational institutions.

Key Achievements to date:
Capacity building and awareness created in over 25 schools, 4 universities, 15 colleges for over **250 teachers, 779 university students, 1,110 school students**, gender-responsive programming amounting to **over 50% staff being women**, and training over **25 women workers** and **three women-led organizations**.

Pakistan

INNOVATION GRANTEES

Davaam Life

More information here.

The project aims to catapult behaviour change in Pakistan, through Innovations for Waste Reduction, that will incentivize consumers through cost saving and increasing their access to essential items.

1. Refill Stations: Consumers can refill containers with everyday items (shampoo, soap, etc.), reducing waste and saving money. This is especially important with inflation in countries in South Asia. The project intends to expand to university laundry facilities.
2. Sanitary Napkin Vending Machines: The project collaborated with a large FMCG company to supply unpackaged napkins, eliminating MLP packaging and reducing plastic waste.

Key Achievements to date:

The distribution of **60 refill stations** in Karachi factories has enabled 220 textile workers to refill cooking oil monthly. **30 sanitary napkin vending machines installed in 20 female washrooms** now meet urgent needs, while preventing waste. Existing machines prevent **7.2 tons of annual plastic waste** from polluting the environment.

Otium Consultancy

Project PlasteTech-PK: Revolutionising Plastic Waste Management.

More information here.

Pakistan's poor waste management causes urban flooding, congestion, and overflowing landfills. Otium's App in Punjab addresses this by creating a B2B marketplace connecting plastic waste buyers and sellers (for a minimum 10kg). Expansion plans involve Punjab Government collaborations (including the green credit program) and university partnerships. Future developments include an integrated payment system and rider network based on user feedback. Market readiness has exceeded expectations, and the App aims for a user-friendly, end-to-end integrated design.

Key Achievements to date:

Transactions on the App have exceeded **500,000 PKR**. The App also incentivizes **female informal waste workers (currently 516 of 1,643 users)** with differentiated rates.

Sri Lanka

REGIONAL BLOCK GRANTEES

Negombo Recycling Club Pvt. Ltd. (NRC)
More information here.

Project BLUECAP in Sri Lanka collaborates with two organizations for technical recycling and social mobilization, educating school children, fisher communities, and women's societies in various communities on reducing plastic consumption. It has supported waste collection, especially informal collectors, and established successful women-owned MRFs nationwide. BLUECAP installs river trash barriers and provides electric bicycles for efficient collection. The BLUECAP Recycling Facility established in Kalutara is developing wood-plastic composites (using coco dust) and sending non-recyclable textiles for high-value product creation (e.g. sunglasses) to countries such as Germany.

Key Achievements to date:
Recovered **450 tons of plastic** (over 14 tons collected through cleanups), **5 women-owned MRFs**, awareness created amongst **54,000 people**.

Island Climate Initiative (ICI)
More information here.

ICI tackles Sri Lanka's issue of excessive reliance on imported virgin plastic, FMCG packaging and limited downcycling, by creating a circular economy through a recycled plastics certification system (GP Certificate). This covers product and process, involving MRFs and recyclers via SOPs and ESG guidelines to enhance recycled plastic quality. A green label will denote certified packaging, ensuring safety and ethical production to boost consumer acceptance.

Key Achievements to date:
Initiated the **GP Certificate** which aims to cut Sri Lanka's 17,000 metric ton plastic imports, potentially saving over 25 million USD in foreign exchange, with just **10% recycled plastic in FMCG packaging**.

Sri Lanka

INNOVATION GRANTEES

Chakra Suthra Pvt. Ltd.
Trash2Cash Smart Technologies

More information here.

Chakra Suthra or 'circular solutions' offers a two-pronged approach to the plastic crisis. Their on-demand home collection system allows users to schedule recyclable/reusable pickups and receive immediate recycling credits. Additionally, their Smart Recycling Bins in underserved communities outside Colombo, located in church spaces, offer one rupee per item deposited. Leveraging faith leaders for behavioral change, the bins show early success. An App integrates both solutions, providing instant gratification through rewards usable for bill payments and data purchases via partnerships with all Sri Lankan telecommunication providers. Chakra Suthra aims to significantly shift consumer recycling behavior through enhanced convenience and rewards.

Key Achievements to date:
Empowered a local woman entrepreneur to manage a smart recycling bin.

INSEE Ecocycle Lanka Pvt. Ltd.
Empowering Women for a Circular Plastic Economy: A Sustainable Solution to Tackle Mixed Plastics Recycling Model in Sri Lanka

More information here.

INSEE's PLEASE project expands its circular resource recovery with two strategies: establishing a women-led MRF in Puttalam for community plastic waste collection, together with beach cleanups, and youth awareness, while providing skills training for waste workers. It also has a R&D component aiming to incorporate up to 50% recycled plastics into product packaging (successfully tested for viability) for INSEE's products, demonstrating sustainable practices for other producers.

Key Achievements to date:
Successfully recovering over **19,000kg of plastic**, recycling over **28,000kg of plastic**, supporting **11 IWWs,** reaching **230+ individuals** with plastic mitigation efforts.

Save a Life
More information here.

Save a Life, a Sri Lankan youth environmental NGO, focuses on plastic waste management in Jaffna. It supports local governments to build strategic plans and waste management systems, including plastic traps in drainage channels. Innovations include smart bins and public engagement through a plastic zero challenge.

Key Achievements to date:
Conducted **55 beach cleanups**, established a center for alternative products, and implemented **single-use plastic bans in 304 educational institutions**, including the Faculty of Management at Jaffna University. The project has collaborated with **24 youth climate champions** for awareness together with creating **35 short films** for increased engagement.

Special Event

Meet South Asian Youth Innovators!

A special event turned the spotlight on the next generation of environmental changemakers, bringing together the regional winning teams of the PLEASE Hackathon 2025, which concluded on 6 April 2025 showcasing youth solutions designed to combat the region's plastic crisis.

The PLEASE Hackathon drew over 250 applicants aged 18 to 30 from eight South Asian countries, who formed 98 multidisciplinary teams. Through national-level selections, 23 finalists emerged to present their solutions at the regional final held on April 6 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. From biodegradable packaging prototypes to AI-driven recycling platforms, the competition offered a diverse view of the ingenuity and urgency driving youth action. A panel of independent South Asian experts judged the entries, selecting the most promising innovations to be awarded and amplified.

The atmosphere during the Hackathon winners' showcase was charged with optimism and determination. As Sonam from EcoPet remarked, "Our goal isn't just to recycle plastic, we're trying to stop the next generation of waste before it begins."

JOINT MODERATORS

Ms. Zofeen T Ebrahim
Mr. Nalaka Gunawardene

INNOVATORS

Chathura Madusanka &
Pabodha Theekshani Manchanayak
Regional Winner (Sri Lanka)

Ankit Agrawalla &
Anubhav Kumar Bhagat
First Runner-up (India)

Sonam Chophel Dorji
Second Runner-up (Bhutan)

The regional winning teams of youth innovators at their panel discussion.

REGIONAL WINNER

MycoBox by White Root

Sri Lanka

A biodegradable alternative to styrofoam fish boxes, made from mycelium-based insulation and aluminum-lined cardboard. Fully compostable within 45 days, MycoBox is designed for South Asia's fisheries sector and other use cases. Produced from agricultural waste and fungi, it costs significantly less than plastic or styrofoam boxes, and is the only such product tailored to the region.

"We have the IP, the know-how, and the waste. What we need now is funding to scale."

FIRST RUNNER-UP

Green Alchemy

India

A biotech solution using enzyme pellets to break down PET plastics into monomers within 40–72 hours, achieving up to 95% degradation efficiency. The innovation targets use in water treatment plants and coastal zones. Currently at TRL-6, the team aims to scale across South Asia within three years with a $95,300 budget and a five-phase rollout plan.

"The plastic crisis isn't waiting—neither are we."

SECOND RUNNER-UP

EcoPet

Bhutan

A mobile gamified App that promotes sustainability by rewarding users for real-world recycling actions. Players earn EcoPoints through in-App challenges, which unlock tangible rewards. The App is designed to be offline-friendly and scalable across the region. Revenue is generated through plastic monetization, eco-product advertising, and sponsorships.

"EcoPet is not a silver bullet—but it's a tool to help young people form lasting green habits."

Sonam Chophel Dorji (above) from EcoPet.

Chathura Madusanka (top) & Pabodha Theekshani Manchanayak (above), from MycoBox by White Root

Ankit Agrawalla (top) & Anubhav Kumar Bhagat (above) from Green Alchemy.

Annexes

Annex 1: Agenda

Day 1: Monday, 7 April 2025

<table>
<tr><td>09:30 – 11:00</td><td colspan="3">Inaugural Ceremony
— Lighting of traditional oil lamp
— Welcome speech by Mr. Norbu Wangchuk, Director General, SACEP
— Welcome speech by Mrs. R. H. M. P. Abeykoon, Additional Secretary (Environment Policy & Planning), Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka
— Opening remarks by Ms. Cecile Fruman, Director, Regional Integration and Engagement, South Asia, World Bank Group
— Speech by Mr. Charles Callanan, Director, South Asia Multi-Country Office, UNOPS
— Address by Honourable Anton Jayakody, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka
Group Photograph</td></tr>
<tr><td>11:00 – 11:30</td><td colspan="3">Tea/Coffee/Networking</td></tr>
<tr><td>11:30 - 12:30</td><td colspan="3">Thematic Panel 1
Policy and regulatory challenges of managing plastic waste: South Asian experiences
Panelists: High-Level Government representatives from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were invited.
— Farhina Ahmed, Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bangladesh
— Sachin Limbu, Chief Environment Officer, Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Bhutan
— Pravir Pandey, Additional Secretary & Financial Advisor, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India
— Honourable Ahmed Nizam, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Maldives
— Shailesh Kumar Jha, Joint Secretary, Department of Environment, Ministry of Forests & Environment, Nepal
— Honourable Shezra Mansab Ali Kharal, Minister of State, Ministry of Climate Change & Environment Coordination, Pakistan
— R. H. M. P. Abeykoon, Additional Secretary (Environment Policy & Planning), Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka
Moderator: Nalaka Gunawardene</td></tr>
<tr><td>13:00 – 14:00</td><td colspan="3">Lunch break</td></tr>
<tr><td>14:00 - 15:30</td><td>Mini-workshop 1
Alternatives for SUPs in South Asia: Exploring trajectories of SUP ban policies and regulations in the South Asia Region; understanding the challenges and bottlenecks involved; and what viable choices are available to both consumers and manufacturers.
Facilitator:
— Jane Gilbert, Carbon Clarity, UK [via weblink]
Co- facilitators:
— Nina Tsydenova, World Bank Group &
— Prakriti Kashyap, Plastics Expert, PLEASE Project</td><td>Mini-workshop 2
Plastic Disclosure Data: Experiences in plastic data collection, plastic flow analysis, as well as riverine and marine litter monitoring in South Asia and beyond.
Facilitator:
— Shantanu Srivastava, ThinkThrough Consulting (TTC), India</td><td>Mini-workshop 3
Plastic Recycling: Making sense of many ways to process, finance, and export recycled plastics: There are many ways to process plastic, and many export standards. Trying to make sense of recycling standards, guidance and certifications.
Facilitator:
— Thierry Sanders, Founder – KOLEKT, The Netherlands</td></tr>
</table>

15:30 – 16:00	Tea/Coffee/Networking
16:00 - 17:30	**Thematic Panel 2** **Seas of Plastic:** Panelists: — Dr Gayathri Lokuge, Team Leader - Livelihood and Employment, Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), Sri Lanka — Dr Gawsia Wahidunnessa Chowdhury, Professor, Department of Zoology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh; researcher on marine plastic pollution — Dr Janaka de Silva, Independent Consultant, Fisheries biologist specializing in marine and coastal issues, Sri Lanka Moderator: Zofeen T Ebrahim
17:30	End of sessions for Day 1
19:00 - 21:00	**Welcome dinner reception** Hosted by the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP)

Day 2: Tuesday, 8 April 2025

09:00 - 11:00	**Lightning Talks Session: PLEASE Community Sharing** — Bangladesh: 2 RBGs & 3 IGs (total 5 grantees) — Bhutan: 2 RBGs & 3 IGs (total 5 grantees) — Maldives: 2 RBGs & 2 IGs (total 4 grantees) — Nepal: 2 RBGs & 3 IGs (total 5 grantees) — Pakistan: 2 RBGs & 2 IGs (total 4 grantees) — Sri Lanka: 2 RBGs & 3 IGs (total 5 grantees) Moderators: Zofeen T Ebrahim & Nalaka Gunawardene
11:00 - 12:00	**Thematic Panel 3** **Market-based solutions for plastic waste:** Panelists: — Athalie Reyes, EPR & Consulting Manager, PCX Solutions — Kartik Kapoor, Waste & Resource management professional, India — Komal Sinha, Senior Director of Government & Policy Engagement, Verra — Richa Malik, Senior Project Manager, Dalberg Advisors — Thierry Sanders, Founder, KOLEKT Moderator: Nalaka Gunawardene
12:00 - 13:00	**Thematic Panel 4** **Fostering greater regional collaboration to tackle plastic pollution:** Panelists: — Shahadat Hossain, Professor, Department of Marine Sciences, University of Chattogram, Bangladesh — Karma Yonten, Co-founder Greenerways, Bhutan — Shantanu Srivastava, ThinkThrough Consulting (TTC), India — Hafsath Aleem, Clean Maldives, Maldives — Anjana Singh, Professor, Former Head, Central Department of Microbiology, Tribhuvan University, Nepal — Zillay Mariam, Founder and CEO, ISP, Pakistan — Chaminda Rajapakse, Project Director, Island Climate Initiative (ICI), Sri Lanka Moderator: Zofeen T Ebrahim
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch break

14:00 - 15:30	**Mini-workshop 4** **Working with the International Finance Corporation (IFC):** IFC is the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in emerging markets, and a member of the World Bank Group. Facilitator: — Ajeya Bandyopadhyay, South Asia Lead - Climate Change, IFC India	**Mini-workshop 5** **Value chain of recycling fishing nets:** Sharing and discussing the findings of World Bank led case study in Bangladesh [published in 2024] Facilitator: — Gawsia Wahidunnessa Chowdhury, Professor, Department of Zoology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh	**Mini-workshop 6** **Development of High Functioning EPR Schemes, Focusing on Accountability Systems:** While panel 4 explores the same topic in general, this workshop goes deeper into some technical details. Co-facilitators: — Komal Sinha, Senior Director of Government & Policy Engagement, Vera; — Kartik S Kapoor, Waste & Resource management professional, India
15:30 – 16:00	Tea/Coffee/Networking		
16:00 - 16:30	**Special Event: Meet South Asian Youth Innovators!**		
16:30 – 17:45	**Thematic Panel 5** **Beyond PLEASE: Sustaining Momentum** Panelists: — Imamul Azam Shahi, Head of Programme, Urban development, BRAC, Bangladesh — Ugyen Yeshi Dorji, Project Implementor, Bhutan Ecological Society, Bhutan — Dr Mizna Mohamed, Director Science and Innovation, SIGS, The Maldives — Pankaj Panjiyar, CEO, Doko Recyclers, Nepal — Salman Tariq, Co-Founder and CEO, Davaam, Pakistan — Buddhika Batheegaman, Project Manager, Ecocycle Lanka (Pvt) Limited, Sri Lanka Moderator: Nalaka Gunawardene		
17:45 – 18:00	**Closing remarks** By Priyankari Alexender, Programme Officer, SACEP		
18:00	**End of Regional Roundtable**		

Annex 2: Participants

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

| Dr. Farhina Ahmed, Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bangladesh
| Shamima Begum, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bangladesh
| Razinara Begum, Director, Department of Environment, Headquarters, Bangladesh
| Sachin Limbu, Chief Environment Officer, Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Bhutan
| Sonam Peday Zam, Legal Officer, Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Bhutan
| Sonam Chuki, Asst. Environment Officer, Department of Environment and Climate Change, Bhutan
| Pravir Pandey, Additional Secretary & Financial Advisor, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India
| N. Subrahmanayam, Additional Director/Scientist E, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India
| Mayank Purbey, Scientist D, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), India
| Hon. Ahmed Nizam, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Maldives
| Aishath Rashfa, Assistant Director, Waste Management and Pollution Control Department, Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Maldives
| Fathimath Shamra, Senior Environment Analyst, Waste Management and Pollution Control Department, Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Maldives
| Shailesh Kumar Jha, Joint Secretary, Department of Environment, Ministry of Forests & Environment, Nepal
| Sushil Pakuwal, Section Officer, Ministry of Forests and Environment, Nepal
| Hon. Dr. Shezra Mansab Ali Kharal, Minister of State, Ministry of Climate Change & Environment Coordination, Pakistan
| Samiullah Khan, Director General, Environmental Protection Agency-Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan
| Khadim Hussain, Director, Environmental Protection Agency-Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan
| Hon. Anton Jayakody, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka
| Mrs. R. H. M. P. Abeykoon, Additional Secretary (Environment Policy & Planning), Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka
| S. Muralitharan, District Secretariat, Kilinochchi, Sri Lanka
| Jeewanthi Ranasinghe, Assistant Director (Environment Pollution Control & Chemical Management), Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka
| G.M.C. Weerabangsa, Development Officer, Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka
| Oshadi Wickramaarachchi, Development Officer (Environment Pollution Control & Chemical Management), Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka
| Navoma Karunarathna, Assistant (Environment Pollution Control & Chemical Management), Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka
| Dr. Ananda Jayalal, Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka
| Padmasiri Moonamale, Central Environmental Authority (CEA), Sri Lanka
| Shakeela Bandara, Environmental Officer, Central Environmental Authority (CEA), Sri Lanka
| Vihanga Sandeepanie, Marine Environment Protection Authority, Sri Lanka
| Neelaka Abeyrathne, Photographer, Media Unit, Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka

EMBASSIES AND HIGH COMMISSIONS

| H.E Andalib Elias, High Commissioner of Bangladesh in Sri Lanka
| H.E. Purna Bahadur Nepali, Ambassador of Nepal in Sri Lanka
| H.E Major General (R) Faheem Ul Aziz- High Commissioner- Islamic Republic of Pakistan in Sri Lanka
| Wajid Hassan Hashmi- Minister/ DHC- High Commission of Pakistan in Sri Lanka
| Trevor Ludowyke, Senior Development Officer, Canadian High Commission in Sri Lanka

BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

| Liviana Zorzi, Specialist, National Plastic Action Partnership, Global Plastic Action Partnership (GPAP), World Economic Forum, Switzerland
| Md. Ibrahim Meah, SPHRi, CDIP, Bangladesh
| Richa Malik, Senior Manager, Dalberg Advisors, India
| Habibpriya Karthigesan, Sustainable Financing Specialist, Expertise France
| Khema Wijegoonawardane, Deputy

Project Manager – Technical CIRCULAR, Expertise France
| Budhikka Gunasekera, GIZ, Sri Lanka
| Dinithi Samarathunga, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Sri Lanka

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, THINKTANKS AND CONSULTING COMPANIES

| Thierry Sanders, Founder, KOLEKT, Netherlands
| Shantanu Srivastava, Practice Leader, ThinkThrough Consulting (TTC), India
| Zofeen T Ebrahim, Independent Journalist, Pakistan
| Athalie Reyes, EPR and Consulting Manager, PCX Solutions, Philippines
| Komal Sinha, Senior Director of Government & Policy Engagement, Vera, India
| Maleesha Gunawardana, The Pearl Protectors, Sri Lanka
| Muditha Katuwawala, The Pearl Protectors, Sri Lanka
| Mohamed Inaz, Nexia Maldives
| E M Yasomanike, Manike MRF, Sri Lanka
| Errol Abeyratne, Programme Manager- Green Finance, Biodiversity Sri Lanka
| Sujon Weasly Biswas, M&E Specialist, Bangladesh Sustainable Coastal and Marine Fisheries, Social Development Foundation (SDF), Bangladesh
| Dr Janaka de Silva, Independent Consultant, Fisheries biologist specializing in marine and coastal issues,
Sri Lanka
| Dr Gayathri Lokuge, Team Leader - Livelihood and Employment, Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), Sri Lanka
| Kartik Kapoor, Waste & Resource Management professional, India
| Shaikh Muhammad Mehedi Ahsan, Bangladesh Institute of Planners

CORPORATE SECTOR

| M M Hanan, Coca-Cola BeVerages, Sri Lanka
| Duneshke Gunawardena, John Keells (Group Sustainability), Sri Lanka
| Pasan Senadheera, John Keells Holdings PLC Plastic Cycle, Sri Lanka
| Janith Uduwela, John Keells Holdings, Sri Lanka
| Shamima Akhter, Director - Corporate Affairs, Partnerships & Communications, Unilever Bangladesh
| Uthpala Uyanwatte, Multi Tech Solutions (Pvt) Ltd, Sri Lanka
| Sumit Yadav, Mantra Incorporation Pvt Ltd, Nepal
| Sharika Senanayake, MAS foundation for change, Sri Lanka

ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

| Dr Gawsia Wahidunnessa Chowdhury, Professor, Department of Zoology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh
| Anjana Singh, Professor, Former Head, Central Department of Microbiology, Tribhuvan University, Nepal
| Chamini K Hemachandra, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka
| Prof. R Senathiraja, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka
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| Voravate Chonlasin, Executive Director, Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand

THE WORLD BANK

| Stephan Massing, Senior Operations Officer, Sri Lanka, World Bank Group
| Joseph Ese Akpokodje, Senior Environmental Specialist, India, World Bank Group
| Siddarth Merchant, Environmental Specialist, India, World Bank Group
| Nina Tsydenova, Environmental Specialist, World Bank Group
| Bushra Nishat, Senior Environmental Specialist, Bangladesh & Bhutan, World Bank Group
| Disna Bandara, Senior Environmental Specialist, Sri Lanka and Maldives, World Bank Group
| Annu Rajbhandari, Senior Environmental Specialist, Nepal, World Bank Group
| Mahwish Bukhari, Consultant, World Bank Group, Pakistan
| Nalaka Gunawardene, Senior Communications Consultant, World Bank Group
| Heenaben Yatin Doshi, Procurement Specialist, World Bank Group
| Enoka Wijegunawardene, Senior Finance Management Specialist, World Bank Group
| Asela Dissanayake, Senior Operations Officer, World Bank Group
| Claire Kfouri, SAROS, Manager, World Bank Group
| Steve Danyo, Program Leader, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Nepal, World Bank Group
| Ajeya Bandyopadhyay, South Asia Lead - Climate Change, IFC India, World Bank Group
| Kanchana Abeywickrama, International Finance Corporation, IFC Sri Lanka, World Bank Group

SACEP

| Norbu Wangchuk, Director General, SACEP
| K. Harshanamali Wijayawardhana,

Administrative Officer, SACEP
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| C. Priyankari Alexander, Programme Officer, SACEP
| P. A. Menaka R. Wijesekara, Junior Programme Officer (ICT), SACEP
| Augusta J. Mullegama, Accounts Assistant, SACEP
| W. M. Dinendra Thilaka, Database Assistant / Secretary, SACEP
| R. M. Dasuni Navodya, Secretary, SACEP

UNOPS

| Mr. Charles Callanan, Director, South Asia Multi-Country Office, UNOPS
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| Yoo Gyoung Kim, Partnerships Specialist - Liaison, UNOPS, SAMCO
| Sudhir Muralidharan, Country Manager - Bangladesh and Bhutan
| Karki Komal, Country Manager - Nepal
| Vinod Mishra, Country Manager - India

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION UNIT - PLEASE PROJECT

| Anjalie Devaraja, Project Director, PLEASE Project, SACEP
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| Mariyam Samha, Technical Expert - Environment- Maldives, UNOPS
| Mohamed Hamdhaan Zuhair, Project Manager - Maldives, UNOPS
| Bishal Rai, Project Management Support - Bhutan, UNOPS
| Kezang Lhamo Dorji, Project Manager - Bhutan, UNOPS
| Nusrat Shaheen, Technical Specialist - Environmental, UNOPS
| Jigme Lhazin Dorji, Intern - Bhutan, UNOPS
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| Samantha Leslie Jane Nouvel, Partnerships Officer, UNOPS Sri Lanka
| Nupe Hewage Prasanna Wijayanath, Project Technical Associate
| Walimuni Asan Maduranga De Silva, Construction Engineering Technician
| Sivakumaran Sithamparanathan, Construction Engineering Technician, UNOPS Sri Lanka
| Priyanga Jayaseka, Project Management Support - Senior Officer, UNOPS Sri Lanka
| Dinali Jayasinghe, Grants Management Specialist, UNOPS Sri Lanka
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| Labio Bala, Finance Specialist, UNOPS

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| Imamul Azam Shahi, Head of Programme, Urban Development, BRAC, Bangladesh
| Rukhsar Sultana, Manager, BRAC, Bangladesh
| Khadem Yousuf, Managing Director and CEO, Bangladesh Petrochemical Company Limited, Bangladesh
| Mifta Naim Huda, Executive Director, Bangladesh Petrochemical Company Limited, Bangladesh
| Shahadat Hossain, Professor, Department of Marine Sciences, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh
| Mohammed Alamgir, Department of Marine Sciences, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh
| Murad Bin Aziz, Arannayk Foundation, Bangladesh
| H. A. M Fayeem, Programme Officer-Climate, Carbon and Forests, Arannayk Foundation, Bangladesh
| Jannatul Munia, Deputy Director, RedOrange Communications, Bangladesh
| Arnob Chakrabarty, Managing Director, RedOrange Communication, Bangladesh
| Sonam Wangmo, Project Director, Bhutan Ecological Society, Bhutan
| Ugyen Yeshi Dorji, Gross International Nature, Bhutan Ecological Society, Bhutan
| Karma Yonten, Co-founder, Greener Way, Bhutan
| Diksha Adhikari, Project Manager, Greener Way, Bhutan
| Nedup Tshering, Executive Director, Clean Bhutan, Bhutan
| Sonam Delkar, Finance Officer/ Administrative Officer, Clean Bhutan, Bhutan
| Dorji Tshering, Engineer, The Green Roads, Bhutan
| Yadap Koirala, Plant Manager, The Green Road, Bhutan
| Jigme Singye, CEO, Eco Waste Solution, Bhutan
| Kinley Dorji, Founder, Eco Waste Solution, Bhutan
| Aminath Abdulla, Chairperson, MACCS, Maldives
| Shifna Saeed, Project Manager, MACCS, Maldives
| Hudha Ahmed, Environment and Waste Management Consultant, MACCS, Maldives
| Dr. Mizna Mohamed, Director, Science and Innovation, Small Island Geographic Society, Maldives
| Ahmed Jameel, Vice President, Small Island Geographic Society, Maldives
| Hamza Moosa, Small Island Geographic Society, Maldives
| Hafsath Aleem, Founder, CLEAN Maldives, Maldives
| Jui Joshi, Climate Collective, India
| Ahmed Hassan, Founder, Community Empowerment Linkage, Maldives
| Ali Ahmed, Vice President, Community Empowerment Linkage, Maldives
| Ibrahim Areef, Project Coordinator, Community Empowerment Linkage, Maldives
| Sujata Koirala, CREASION, Nepal
| Aanand Mishra, President, CREASION, Nepal
| Maarten Nijhof, Biocomp Nepal
| Astha Pradhanang, People in Need, Nepal
| Nabin Bikash Maharjan, Centre for Integrated Urban Development, Nepal
| Sudarshan Rajbhandari, Centre for Integrated Urban Development, Nepal
| Pankaj Panjiyar, CEO, Doko Recyclers, Nepal
| Raghavendra Mahto, Doko Recyclers, Nepal
| Nagendra Bahadur Amatya, Department of Applied Science and Chemical Engineering
| Birendra Thapa, Department of Applied Science and Chemical Engineering, Tribhuvan University, Nepal
| Muhammad Anas, ltasPak Waste Management Company (Pvt) Ltd, Pakistan
| Syed Ziauddin, AltasPak Waste Management Company (Pvt) Ltd, Pakistan
| Samina Parveen, AltasPak Waste Management Company (Pvt) Ltd, Pakistan
| Ali Imran Khan, AltasPak Waste Management Company (Pvt) Ltd, Pakistan
| Zia-ud-din, Project Lead/CFO, AltasPak Waste Management Company (Pvt) Ltd, Pakistan
| Dr. Zillay Mariam, Chief Operating Officer, ISP Environmental Solutions (Pvt) Ltd., Pakistan
| Dr Waqas, Co-Lead, ISP Environmental Solutions (Pvt) Ltd., Pakistan

| Salman Tariq, Co-Founder and CEO, Davaam Life, Pakistan
| Omer Ghazanawi, Chief Operating Officer, Davaam Life, Pakistan
| Muhammad Kaleem Sindhu, OTIUM Consultancy Services (Pvt) Ltd., Pakistan
| Roshatey Jannat, OTIUM Consultancy Services (Pvt) Ltd., Pakistan
| D.M.S. Priyankara, Negombo Recycling Club (Pvt) Ltd., Sri Lanka
| Supun Lakmal Udawatta, Negombo Recycling Club (Pvt) Ltd., Sri Lanka
| Nishantha Perera, Negombo Recycling Club (Pvt) Ltd., Sri Lanka
| Damitha Samarakoon, Negombo Recycling Club (Pvt) Ltd., Sri Lanka
| Chaminda Rajapakse, Project Director, Island Climate Initiative (ICI), Sri Lanka
| Ms. Irushinie Wedage, Project Manager, Island Climate Initiative (ICI), Sri Lanka
| Mr. Yugantha Perera, Technical Expert, Island Climate Initiative (ICI), Sri Lanka
| Himesh Fernando, CEO/Project Director, Chakra Suthra, Sri Lanka
| Senuda Ranawaka, Technical, Chakra Suthra, Sri Lanka
| Thilini Peiris, Project Manager, Chakra Suthra, Sri Lanka
| Alex Perera, Operations, Chakra Suthra, Sri Lanka
| Buddhika Prabhaswin, Project Manager, INSEE Ecocycle, Sri Lanka
| Sujith Gunawardhana, General Manager, INSEE Ecocycle, Sri Lanka
| Lalantha Ruwan, Technical Expert, INSEE Ecocycle, Sri Lanka
| Rakavi Kirubananthan, Save a Life, Sri Lanka
| Jeyanthy Suntharam, Save a Life, Sri Lanka
| Rakulan Kandasamy, Save a Life, Sri Lanka

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS OF THE PLEASE GRANTEES

| Thavashi Viji, MRF Batticaloa, Sri Lanka
| Malinbadage, Eco Spindles, Sri Lanka

PLEASE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IMPLEMENTING FIRMS

| Ali Abdullah, Senior Analyst, Project Procurement International, Pakistan [Pakistan TA]
| Shilshila Acharya, Founder, Director, Team Leader, AVNI Ventures Pvt Ltd, Nepal [Nepal TA]
| Nihal Dedigama, Director, Board member, Resources Advancement Team, Sri Lanka [Joint Venture Partner for Nepal TA]
| Priyantha Seresinghe, Managing Director, Board Member, Resources Advancement Team, Sri Lanka [Joint Venture Partner for Nepal TA]
| Anupama De Silva, Team Leader, X.O Concepts Private Limited [Maldives TA]
| Dulantha Balasooriya, Director of Business Operations, X.O Concepts Private Limited [Maldives TA]
| Uthpala Uyanwatte, Managing Director, Multi Tech Solutions (Pvt) Limited [Sri Lanka TA]
| Prof. Mahesh Jayaweera, Team Leader, Multi Tech Solutions (Pvt) Limited [Consultant for MTS, Sri Lanka TA]

PLEASE HACKATHON NATIONAL AND REGIONAL WINNERS

| Seyam Bin H Rahman, Plastic 2.0, Bangladesh
| Taki Tajwaruzzaman Khan, Plastic 2.0, Bangladesh
| Ahabab Imtiaz Risat, Plastic 2.0, Bangladesh
| Tasnim Ashraf, Plastic 2.0, Bangladesh
| Jafrin Shaila, Plastic 2.0, Bangladesh
| Shendrup Palden, Eco Pet, Bhutan
| Sonam Chophel Dorji, Eco Pet, Bhutan
| Ankit Agrawalla, Green Alchemy: Plastic Breakdown, India
| Anubhav Kumar Bhagat, Green Alchemy: Plastic Breakdown, India
| Mohamed Aruham, EcoConnect, Maldives
| Ali Ahsan Saeed, EcoConnect, Maldives
| Abdul Badeeu Najeeb, EcoConnect, Maldives
| Ahmed Yooshau, EcoConnect, Maldives
| Mohamed Aiham, EcoConnect, Maldives
| Sushila Shrestha, Himalayan Knowledge Hub, Nepal
| Yunish Ghimire, Himalayan Knowledge Hub, Nepal
| Pratik Bajracharya, Himalayan Knowledge Hub, Nepal
| Toseef Nawab, ECO PAVE, Pakistan
| Thalegampala Gamage Chathura Madusanka, Myco Box by White Root, Sri Lanka
| Manchanayakage Pabodha Theekshani Manchanayaka, Myco Box by White Root, Sri Lanka

MEDIA

| Malaka Rodrigo, Mongabay / The Sunday Times
| Nisthar Cassim, Daily FT

Annex 3: National Roundtable Reports

High-Level Roundtable Discussion on Plastic Waste Management Challenges and Solutions in Bangladesh

High-Level Roundtable Discussion on Plastic Waste Management Challenges and Solutions in Bhutan

High-Level Roundtable Discussion on Plastic Waste Management Challenges and Solutions in Maldives

High-Level Roundtable Discussion on Plastic Waste Management Challenges and Solutions in Nepal

High-Level Roundtable Discussion on Plastic Waste Management Challenges and Solutions in Pakistan

Navigating the Waves: Strategies, Challenges, and Collaborative Solutions in Mitigating Plastic Pollution in Sri Lanka


PLASTIC FREE RIVERS & SEAS: A VISION FOR SOUTH ASIA
REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION


Tracking Plastic from Land to Sea:
Tools, Trends & Data-Driven
Solutions for South Asia


PLASTIC FREE RIVERS & SEAS:
A VISION FOR SOUTH ASIA
REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

PLEASE Project

Plastic Free Rivers and Seas for South Asia

Implemented By:

SACEP

Supported by:

UNOPS

Supported by:

WORLD BANK GROUP