

Terms of Reference

Stakeholder Consultations on **Riverine Litter Actions in Bhutan**

Terms of Reference (TOR) for Hiring a National Consultant for Plastic Free Rivers and Seas for South Asia (PLEASE) Project Implementation Unit

1. Background

1.1 Marine Litter Situation in South Asia Region (SAR)

Marine plastic litter is becoming a pressing environmental issue across the globe. Marine Plastic litter in South Asia is visible in the five coastal countries, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka comprising the Northern part of the Indian oceans, along with parts of the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. Escalating mismanaged land-based plastic waste is to be mainly attributed to such transboundary movement of plastics into Oceans through the shared transboundary river systems. The region's transboundary river systems - Indus River System (Afghanistan, India, Pakistan), the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna River (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal), act like highways to transport mismanaged plastic to oceans.

Marine plastic pollution in the region affects its pristine and rich marine biodiversity like the Gulf of Mannar, coral atolls of the Maldives, coastal lagoons like Chilika in India and Puttalam in Sri Lanka, vast mudflats of the Gulf of Kutch and Sundarbans, large sea grass beds in the Gulf of Manner, the mangroves of the Sundarbans, and Pakistani coastal belts, marine mammals like dolphin, Dugong, and whales in the Indian Ocean. Additionally, economies relying on fishing or tourism are badly affected, with livelihoods of coastal communities are at direct risk of increasing marine litter.

Despite risks of marine litter, individually, no South Asia country has specific legislation or legal frameworks governing marine litter. Some countries do have waste management such as ban or phase out of single use plastics and coastal zone policies and strategies that are indirectly related to marine litter; however, these too are very weak in enforcement and are disjointed.

Regionally, to address the complex and transboundary plastic pollution, the South Asian Region (SAR) came together under the South Asian Seas Programme (SASP), one of 18 regional seas programmes of UNEP. The South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) serves as the secretariat of SASP. The SASP Action Plan was adopted by the region's five maritime countries Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka on 24 March

1995, New Delhi, India, with each country designating a National Focal Point for coordinating SASP activities. With the establishing of a Regional Seas Programme, and recognizing the importance of a Regional Marine Litter Action Plan, the Regional Marine Litter Action Plan for South Asian Seas Region was developed for South Asian Seas Region and adopted on 6th November 2019 at the Sixth Intergovernmental Meeting of Ministers of the SASP. This Regional Marine Litter Action Plan for South Asia Seas Region lays out the regional strategy and recommended plan of action with activities to support litter free seas. It, however, underlines challenges in managing marine litter in the region due to lack of a consolidated marine litter database, poor Institutional system for management of Marine litter, non-availability of legal framework for marine litter management and insufficient enforcement of international Conventions, Agreements, laws, regulations and treaties. It thus emphasizes the necessity for coordinated efforts and improved research and data collection and policy implementation to effectively reduce plastic consumption, manage plastic waste, and mitigate marine pollution across South Asia. Some key objectives identified in the Regional Marine Litter Action Plan have been integrated into the scope of the Plastic Free Rivers and Seas for South Asia (PLEASE) project, ensuring alignment with regional priorities and enhancing the project's overall impact on marine plastic waste management. This alignment strengthens regional cooperation and reflects a cohesive approach to tackling plastic pollution across South Asia.

1.2 Riverine Litter Situation in Bhutan

Bhutan faces plastic pollution challenges. Mismanaged plastic wastes litter the country's beautiful mountains as well as rivers. The occurrence of microplastics in Riparian Soils in Bhutan is also becoming evident. Despite being land-locked countries, plastic waste from Bhutan still reaches the ocean via rivers. South Asia's transboundary rivers act as highways for plastic pollution to flow from mountains to the ocean. Bhutan has four major river basins viz Amohchu, Wangchhu, Punatsangchhu, and Manas with a catchment area of around 47,000 square kilometers, which covers around 9% of Brahmaputra basin. These rivers are fed by the Himalayan glaciers and the monsoon rains that flow through the Indian states of Assam and West Bengal, to join the Brahmaputra River in India. According to the latest study by the World Bank, in total, without considering any barriers, the model indicates that around 316,911 MT/year of plastic waste potentially leaks into the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna River system from the four countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal).

2. Project Context

The Plastic Free Rivers and Seas for South Asia (PLEASE) Project, funded by the World Bank, and implemented by the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP), with technical support from the United Nations Office for Project Support (UNOPS), aims to catalyze actions that reduce the flow of plastic pollution into South Asian Seas creates a platform for steering the discussions and actions against marine plastic pollution.

The PLEASE Project provides a platform to take forward actions on preventing and controlling marine plastic pollution through conducting stakeholder consultations, and supporting and promoting circular economy approaches that are restorative and regenerative by design, which will ultimately reduce the leakage of plastics into rivers and seas. The Project consists of the following components:

Component 1. Supporting Competitive Block Grant Investments to Reduce Plastic Waste

Component 2. Leveraging Public and Private Sector Engagement and Solutions

Component 3. Strengthening Regional Integration Institutions

The intermediate Results (IR) Indicator 2.4 of the Component 2 of the PLEASE Project is dedicated to conducting consultations on marine litter actions with the targeted people and/or organizations in participating South Asia Region (SAR) Member States. These marine litter action consultations aim to contribute to citizen engagements, as well as complement the SACEP-led convening of SAR member states around the need for action on marine debris and marine plastic pollution.

Table 1: PLEASE Project portfolio in Bhutan

	Title	Key activities	Grantee / Consulting Firm
Regional Block Grant (RBG) #1	Bhutan Waste Banks (BWB): An innovative way to reduce, reuse and recycle plastic waste in Bhutan [15 Feb 2024 – 30 September 2025]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Establishment and operation of 12 Bhutan Waste Banks ✓ Develop BWB Mobile App with modules on waste collection services, pricing, waste bank location, waste calculator, waste deposits passbook, customer care, waste bank literacy etc. ✓ Upscale plastic waste into poles for fencing farmlands, traffic etc. ✓ Establish & operationalize PET Washing and Shredding Plant to recover as PET flakes to be exported for raw materials 	Greener Way Private Limited
RBG #2	Reimagining Effective Partnerships for Tackling Plastic Waste and River Pollution [15 Feb 2024 - 31 October 2025]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Establish 14 plastic waste collection centers in 8 target areas ✓ Plastic waste management and segregation at Household level ✓ Establish Recycling Hub to produce UR (useful recycle) Bricks for semi-permanent & temporary shelters 	Bhutan Ecological Society (BES)

		✓ Waste interceptors along 14 streams joining the Wangchhu river	
Innovation grant (IG) #1	Eco Waste Solutions Initiative: Advancing Waste Management through Material Recovery Facility in Wangdue Phodrang [1 July 2024 - 31 March 2025]	Material Recovery facility (MRF) construction in Wangdue Phodrang's and recover plastic waste to be supplied to the local recyclers for making bricks/pavers.	Eco Waste Solutions
IG #2	The Green Initiative to Reduce Plastic Pollution [1 July 2024 - 31 March 2025]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Establish a waste collection and recycling system that targets both soft and hard plastic waste materials ✓ Reduction of plastic pollution through innovative road materials and product development 	The Green Roads Bhutan
IG #3	Circular Bhutan Innovations Project: Pioneering Sustainable Development with Recycled Plastics [1 July 2024 - 31 March 2025]	Convert all PET flakes into polyester wool for local market for products like cushion/pillows by the local tailoring units.	Clean Bhutan
Technical Assistance (TA) #1	Nationwide GIS mapping of waste facilities, data collection of waste streams and GHG emissions from waste sector [20 Nov 2024 - 31 July 2025*]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Nationwide GIS mapping of solid and plastic waste facilities ✓ Update National Waste Inventory Survey Report 2019 ✓ Development of nationwide solid and plastic waste management infrastructure master plan ✓ Calculation of GHG emission and a mitigation plan of the waste sector as input into the formulation of Nationally Determined Contributions 3.0 	In Partnership with UNDP Bhutan
TA #2	Clean Thimphu, Clean Paro Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Regular and massive cleanup activities in Thimphu, and cleaning of rivers in Bhutan ✓ Street Sweeping & Drain Cleaning 	Technical Assistance modality with BES

	[20 Feb 2024 - 30 Sept 2025]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Smart Bins/Dumpsters and Waste Storage Facilities construction ✓ Beautification and Grass Planting ✓ Smart waste surveillance through CCTV installation ✓ Community engagement and awareness raising 	
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3. Objective & Scope of the Riverine Litter Consultation

The objective of the riverine litter consultation is two-folds. The consultation with community stakeholders is to acquire valuable insights on riverine litter issues and solutions from riverine communities who have first-hand experience and knowledge of marine litter and its impacts on their lives and livelihoods. By organizing a national level consultation, it is to address the complex and prevailing challenges posed by riverine plastic litter in the country and explore solutions through a truly multifaceted strategy involving dialogue and collaboration with relevant parties including government, private sector and civil society. The consultations are expected to demonstrate an increased awareness for riverine litter issues across relevant stakeholder groups. Such consultations aim to help ensure that the PLEASE Project continues to align with national and regional priorities, maximizes its impact, and contributes effectively to the shared goal of reducing riverine and marine litter in the South Asia Region.

Both the community and national-level consultations are to be designed and planned in alignment with the PLEASE Project Grants and technical assistance activities, as applicable.

4. Scope of the Riverine Litter Consultation

This Terms of Reference (TOR) outlines the responsibilities of a national consultant who will lead the planning, development of background materials, organization, facilitation, and documenting and reporting of two major stakeholder consultations on riverine litter actions in Bhutan: one at the community level and another at the high-level policy and decision-making level.

Community Consultation: Acknowledging the disproportionate burden borne by riverine communities and vulnerable populations particularly women due to plastic pollution, consultation will be conducted by engaging local stakeholders, including community leaders, fishers, local CBOs/NGOs, and marginalized groups to gather their perspectives, identify local issues, concerns and challenges regarding marine litter, and examine existing initiatives and discuss opportunities and solutions on riverine litter in their communities. Special attention

should be given to gender-sensitive approaches. These community consultations, wherever applicable, will engage beneficiaries of PLEASE Grantee projects as part of the beneficiary feedback mechanisms adding community's lived experiences and perspectives as the evidence base for the PLEASE Project's impact on the country's riverine plastic pollution actions. ***Tentative Location(s): Thimphu***

National high-level Consultation: The high-level national stakeholder consultation will engage diverse stakeholders from national, sub-national and local government agencies, policy makers, international organizations, academia, research and think-tank institutions, and private sector representatives. The goal of the consultation will be to highlight the existing policy and regulatory background on riverine litter, assess, review and evaluate the country's progress in implementing riverine litter management actions, define roles and responsibilities of public and private entities and identify areas for further development, including developing stronger coordination mechanism within organizations to effectively address this critical issue of riverine litter. ***Tentative Location(s): Thimphu***

5. Key Tasks

The Consultant will report to the PLEASE Project Director. The specific activities will be planned in consultation and coordination with the SACEP, PLEASE PIU, and the World Bank Country focal point.

The key task of the national consultant is to design and facilitate two consultations in Bhutan and document and report the findings of the consultations. Some specific tasks include

i) **Assessment on Riverine Litter Actions:** Review country's riverine litter status and actions implemented/ planned in the country, country's commitments and follow ups on international and regional marine litter programmes and frameworks, overview of institutional, regulatory and policy frameworks regarding marine litter, and identify roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders/organizations, and coordination mechanisms within entities to combat riverine litter reduction, control and management.

ii) **Design and develop an approach for the community consultation, and high-level national stakeholder consultations** by ensuring it is inclusive and participatory. The consultant should:

- **Identify and engage Stakeholders:** Identify the target communities (inclusive of women, indigenous groups) and key stakeholders (from government, private, academia, civil society, bi/multilateral organizations etc.), for the community and high-level consultations respectively
- **Develop a tailored consultation methodology:** Draft consultation agenda (addressing the consultation themes and priority topics, including policy frameworks,

legislative tools, industry contributions, and regional cooperation); Participant list; invitation letter, and develop key discussion materials (such as background documents, presentations, guiding questions etc.), and beneficiary feedback form

- **Development and Distribution of Background Material:** Develop and distribute background materials/report/presentation to inform participants prior to the consultations, as required.
- **Support planning of the logistics:** including venue selection for both consultations, transportation and equipment and materials

iii) **Facilitate the Consultations**

- Facilitate /moderate discussions and feedback sessions on the causes, impacts, and possible solutions to riverine litter - Ensuring clear communication with participants and providing opportunities for all stakeholders to contribute their perspectives and concerns. Integrate gender-sensitive approach during the consultation.
- Gather data and feedback on local needs, challenges, and opportunities related to riverine litter

iv) **Documentation and Reporting**

- Provide comprehensive reports summarizing key discussions, agreements, and actionable recommendations for stakeholders at different levels (government, private sector, international/national/civil society organizations. community) and PLEASE Project Implementation Unit, and SACEP
- Highlight specific recommendations and actions required for the regional cooperation for effective riverine litter mitigation in South Asia from the experience of Bhutan

6. Duration of the Consultancy

The consultancy is expected to last for 30 working days spread across a month. The estimated timeline is between August 2025 - February 2026.

The 30 days consultancy services are for

- Inception report and logistics planning
- Conducting Community-level consultation, and High-level stakeholder consultation
- Final report submission.

7. Deliverables

The consultant is expected to deliver the following:

Deliverable	Description of the Deliverable
Deliverable 1: Preparatory work	
Report on Riverine litter in Bhutan	A snapshot report with data on riverine litter, institutional, policy, regulatory details on marine litter, challenges and solutions
Consultations planning and design	Design outline and itinerary, modality of the Consultations, list of participants, invitation letter, logistics planning, consultation documents, consultation feedback form
Deliverable 2: Consultation & reporting	
Community Consultation	Convene the communities to discuss the riverine litter issues - with signed attendance sheet, photographs and evidence of the event
National high-level Consultation	National consultation organized - with signed attendance sheet, photographs and evidence of the event
Submission of draft & final report: Consultation Report (with recommendation) report incorporating findings from both the community and national consultations	Comprehensive reports summarizing key discussions, agreements, and actionable recommendations for stakeholders at different levels

8. Consultant's Profile: Qualification and Skills Requirements

This is a national call for an expert of Bhutanese nationality. The consultant should possess the following qualifications:

- A postgraduate degree in environmental science, river/marine biology, sociology, or a related discipline.
- A minimum of 7 years of experience with a focus on riverine, marine plastics and circular economy, policy and regulatory frameworks, standards, methodologies, and tools, technical solutions and business models for marine litter management.
- Demonstrated experience in facilitating both community as well as high-level consultations, workshops, and stakeholder engagement, especially in the field of environmental or marine issues.
- Proven experience in coordinating with national governments and/or enforcement authorities, managing stakeholder relations with other key players, including

academic, civil society, business, and international organizations, government agencies, NGOs, and local communities in Bhutan, particularly on marine and coastal issues.

- Strong knowledge of marine litter issues, environmental policies, and the local context of Bhutan and South Asia Region.
- Excellent communication and facilitation skills, with the ability to engage a diverse range of stakeholders.
- Proficiency in English and local language, both spoken and written.
- Prior experience in report writing and documentation.

The successful Consultant with the highest rank will be requested to enter a Contract to compete for scope activities in the TOR.