

# Terms of Reference

## **Stakeholder Consultations on Marine Litter Actions in India**

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 Marine Litter Situation in India**

India's growing population, rapid urbanization, shifting consumption pattern and changing lifestyles have resulted in the mismanagement of plastic waste, leading to the riverine and marine litter. India's river systems, namely, Krishna, Godavari, Kollidam, Hooghly, Mahanadi, Damodar, Tapti, Sabarmati, Narmada, Brahmani, and Vasai creek are major sources of plastic leakage. India is also a part of the two major transboundary river basins, Ganges-Brahmaputra Meghna (GBM, that includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal) and the Indus River basin (including Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan) are the major carriers of plastics into the oceans. About half of all plastics found on beaches in the Northern Indian Ocean come from the Bay of Bengal, highlighting the importance of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna system as a significant source of plastic pollution. Sixty-eight percent of Afghanistan's plastic leakage, 66 percent of Pakistan's leakage, and 1.5 percent of India's leakage flows into the Indus. According to Swachh Sagar, Surakshit Sagar campaign, 2022, an average of 0.98 metric tonnes of trash per km stretch of coastline, averaging a weight concentration of 0.012 kilograms per metre square, accumulated along the Indian coastline. Considering the size and scale of the fisheries sector, sea-based debris coming from commercial fishing and boating activities as well as a large quantity and variety of nets used by fisher communities are a major problem in India. The country ranks third globally in terms of marine fish capture and an estimated 0.5–0.6 million fishing gears are used in the marine industry. Abandoned, Lost or otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG), foam plastic (insulation), rope, fishing nets, traps and buoys; tied bottles and cans. Additionally, land-based sources of marine litter in India are single-use plastics (SUPs).

India is one of the few SACEP member countries that prepared a country report in 2018 as an initiation to prepare a Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter. The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), Government of India (GoI) through its National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR) Chennai, prepared the Country Report on Marine Litter in India. Currently, India does not have a national marine litter policy or an action plan, but preparation is underway. A National Action Plan on Marine Plastic Litter from Sea based sources is also under preparation. Initiatives like *Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana* (PMMSY) involve sustainable and responsible development of the fisheries sector. As a part of *Swatch Bharat Abhiyan* / Clean India Mission, support under PMMSY supports prevention of pollution of oceans and seas and protection of their ecology through *Swachh Sagar, Surakshit Sagar* / Clean Coast, Safe Seas initiative. The Swachh Sagar, Surakshit Sagar is a 75-day citizen-led initiative aimed at improving coastal and ocean health via community action by the Ministry of Earth Sciences and information compiled by National Centre for Coastal Research. Beach cleaning activities were carried out simultaneously along India's entire coastline. The coastal cleanup campaign took place at 75 beaches across the country, with 75 volunteers for every kilometer of coastline. Another nation-wide cleanliness-cum-awareness drive under *Swachh-Nirmal Tat Abhiyan*, conducted cleanliness-cum-awareness drive conducted at 50 identified beaches located in 10 coastal states / Union Territory of India.

The Government of India also undertakes research projects. The National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM) conducts extensive field assessment of marine litter and microplastics along the Indian Coast and the oceanic islands. India's National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR) continuously monitors the marine litter in beaches and oceans and working with Cefas (UK), CSIRO (Australia), JAMSTEC (Japan) and Norway towards the development of techniques for quantification of marine litter and mitigation of marine plastic debris. Fishery Survey of India (FSI), Govt. of India is conducting regular field assessment of plastic litter including ghost nets at fishing grounds in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In addition, FSI is lead agency in the International Maritime Organisation (IMO)-Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) Glolitter partnership project.

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)- Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), is conducting studies on various aspects of marine litter, abundance of marine litter in fishing grounds and beaches, developing litter maps, assessing presence of microplastics in oceanic environment and in biological systems.

Some of the bilateral engagement for monitoring / scientific research on plastic flows and ocean surface microplastics in India are:

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) implemented a project funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) "Promotion of Countermeasures against Marine Plastic Litter in Southeast Asia and India" developed countermeasures to reduce plastic waste in the Ganga Basin and Mumbai by conducting surveys and outreach activities.

Under the Commonwealth Litter Programme (CLiP), India's NCCR launched a pilot project to understand deteriorating seawater quality due to marine litter, and creating a strong scientific evidence base to bring out India's National Marine Litter Strategy.

The India-Norway cooperation project on capacity building for reducing plastic and chemical pollution in India (INOPOL) is a part of the India-Norway Joint Marine Pollution Initiative and involved partnerships of key Indian and Norwegian organizations working in the sustainability space to explore various dimensions of plastic and chemical pollution in India, with particular focus on Gujarat, and to jointly develop a holistic action plan for its mitigation. Latest is the World bank project "Tamil Nadu Sustainably Harnessing Ocean Resources and Blue Economy (TN-SHORE)", also known as Tamil Nadu Coastal Restoration Mission. Component 4 "Pollution Abatement" primarily focuses on plastic waste reduction and management in riverine, coastal and marine environment with activities including identifying plastic hotspot and installing plastic capture booms, Ennore creek restoration, implementation of awareness and incentive programmes for communities to effectively manage ALDFG, and undertaking strategic initiatives to prevent and combat marine pollution by investing in river systems.

## **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.

### 3. Objective & Scope of the Marine Litter Consultation

The objective of the marine litter consultation is two-folds. The consultation with community stakeholders is to acquire valuable insights on marine litter issues and solutions from coastal 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 marine 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 marine 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 marine litter in the South Asia Region.

### 4. Scope of the Marine 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 marine litter actions in India: one at the community level and another at the high-level policy and decision-making level.

**Community Consultation (3):** Acknowledging the disproportionate burden borne by coastal 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 marine 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 marine plastic pollution actions. ***Tentative Location(s): Coasts of Tamil Nadu or Karnataka; Sundarbans delta, West Bengal***

**National high-level Consultation (1):** 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 marine litter, assess, review and evaluate the country's progress in implementing marine 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 marine litter. ***Tentative Location(s): New Delhi***

## 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 India and document and report the findings of the consultations. Some specific tasks include

i) **Assessment on Marine Litter Actions:** Review country's marine 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 marine 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 marine 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 marine 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 marine litter mitigation in South Asia from the experience of India.

## **6. Duration of the Consultancy**

The consultancy is expected to last for **90 working days** spread across 6 months. The estimated timeline is between **August 2025 – February 2026**.

The **90 days** consultancy services are for:

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

## **7. Deliverables**

The consultant is expected to deliver the following:

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Description of the Deliverable</b>
<b>Deliverable 1: Preparatory work</b>	
Report on Marine litter in India	A snapshot report with data on marine 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
<b>Deliverable 2: Consultation &amp; reporting</b>	

Community Consultation	Convene the communities to discuss the marine 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 Indian nationality. The consultant should possess the following qualifications:

- A postgraduate degree in environmental science, marine biology, sociology, or a related discipline.
- A minimum of 7 years of experience with a focus on 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 Bangladesh, particularly on marine and coastal issues.
- Strong knowledge of marine litter issues, environmental policies, and the local context of India, and South Asia Region.
- Excellent communication and facilitation skills, with the ability to engage a diverse range of stakeholders.
- Proficiency in English, Hindi and local language(s), 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.