

# Terms of Reference

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

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, Maldives, India, Maldives, Pakistan, and Maldives 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 (Maldives, 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 Maldives, 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 Maldives, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Maldives 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 Maldives**

The Maldives, renowned for its pristine coral reefs, diverse marine biodiversity, and thriving tuna fisheries, faces a growing environmental crisis due to marine litter, particularly plastic pollution. This issue threatens the delicate marine ecosystem and the livelihoods of fishing communities dependent on the ocean's resources.

In 2019, the Maldives generated approximately 43,134 metric tons of plastic waste. However, inadequate waste segregation and collection systems resulted in 66% of this waste being mismanaged. A more recent study reveals that 87% of plastic waste—amounting to 17,200 metric tons annually—is not properly managed, leading to a per capita mismanagement rate of 32.9 kg per year, nearly three times the global average. Additionally, the country produces over 860 metric tons of waste daily, a significant portion of which is plastic. The majority of this waste is openly burned, causing environmental and health concerns.

Although the government has introduced the Single-Use Plastics Phase-Out Plan to curb plastic dependency, enforcement remains inconsistent, and viable alternatives to plastic remain inaccessible, particularly in remote islands. Inadequate waste management infrastructure exacerbates the crisis, as seen on M. Mullah Island, where a population of 1,900 struggles with accumulating plastic waste, including discarded fishing nets and bottles. Despite awareness of the problem, communities lack formal waste collection systems and the resources needed for proper waste management.

The impacts of plastic pollution extend beyond environmental degradation, affecting economic stability. Coral reefs, essential breeding grounds for marine life, are suffocating under plastic debris. The fishing industry, a key contributor to the Maldivian economy, is experiencing a decline in fish stocks and seafood quality, with fishermen frequently discovering plastic in their catch. This raises serious food safety concerns and intensifies financial pressures on fishing communities.

To combat these challenges, various initiatives have been implemented, including the Plastic Free Rivers and Seas for South Asia (PLEASE) project, which promotes improved waste management, sustainable practices, and regional cooperation. The South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) has also introduced national and regional action plans to enhance recycling and reduce plastic waste. However, significant gaps remain in marine litter management, requiring further strategic interventions.

A comprehensive approach is necessary to overcome these challenges. Strengthening regulations, expanding waste management infrastructure, promoting sustainable alternatives to plastic, and increasing community engagement—particularly empowering women in environmental initiatives—are critical steps. Regional collaboration is also essential to ensure the long-term success of these efforts.

By adopting these strategies, the Maldives can mitigate plastic pollution, protect its marine ecosystems, and safeguard the livelihoods of its coastal communities. Addressing this crisis effectively will not only ensure environmental conservation but also position the Maldives as a leader in sustainable waste management among island nations. With sustained efforts and collective action, the Maldives can pave the way for a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable future.

## **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: 03 PLEASE project Activities are being implemented in Maldives.**

	<b>Title</b>	<b>Objective / key activities</b>	<b>Grantee / Consulting Firm</b>
<b>RBG #1</b>	<p>Improving the wellbeing of H. Dh. Kulhudhuffushi people and ocean through plastic pollution prevention</p> <p><i>[22 Sep 2023 – 30 September 2025]</i></p>	<p>Reduce plastic waste generation and improve plastic waste management, resulting in improved health of people, land and ocean in and around Kulhudhuffushi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Introducing Reusable alternatives to SUP e.g. reusable cloth bags made from second hand clothes</li> <li>✓ Establishing material recovery facility (MRF)</li> <li>✓ Policy review and assessment</li> </ul>	Maldives Authentic Crafts Cooperative Society (MACCS)
<b>RBG #2</b>	<p>REmove PLAstics from our Coastal Environment (REPLACE)</p> <p><i>[15 Feb 2024 - 31 July 2025]</i></p>	<p>Develop eco-friendly compostable bags and start pilot production, and increase awareness and outreach on SUP issues and alternatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Production of eco-friendly bags; Research into improvement of eco-friendly bags and use of new locally available source materials for bag production</li> <li>✓ A SUP alternatives expo to inform businesses and</li> </ul>	Small Island Geographic Society (SIGS)

		<p>increase their bringing of alternatives into markets</p> <p>✓ A Kids vs plastics TV show to bring innovative solution to plastic pollution and challenge kids to test their ideas</p>	
<b>IG #1</b>	<p>Plastic Innovation Challenge for Hospitality and Food service sector in Maldives</p> <p>[20 June 2024 - 15 June 2025]</p>	<p>Reduce single use plastics (SUP) in foodservice and hospitality sector</p>	CLEAN MALDIVES
IG #2	<p>NO PLASTIC ISLAND "HEAVENLY MULAH"</p> <p>[14 June 2024 - 31 May 2025]</p>	<p>Offering multiple solutions for community to phase out plastics of their daily use activities such as water purification machines to reduce dependency on bottled water, mobilizing a small facility of water refilling and bottling station, promoting the use of glass bottles instead of plastic bottles, biodegradable shopping bags, reusable buckets to fishermen etc.</p>	<p>Community Empowerment Linkage (CEL)</p>
<b>TA</b>	<p>Design &amp; Development of end-to-end smart solid waste management</p>	<p>Overall IT-based interventions on waste management,</p> <p>✓ Development of IT based Waste Tracking System, e.g. track the movement of waste within the</p>	XDOTO Concepts Pte Limited

	system in Maldives  [1 March 2024 – 31 Dec 2025]	national boundary, Ensure regulatory compliance  ✓ Purchasing of IT server and equipment	
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### 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.

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 Marine Litter Consultation

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

**Community Consultation:** Acknowledging the disproportionate burden borne by coastal communities and vulnerable populations due to plastic pollution, consultation will be conducted by engaging local stakeholders, including community leaders, fishermen, 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. 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): Hanimadhoo or Kulhudhuffushi***

**National high-level Consultation:** A high-level national stakeholder consultation engaging diverse stakeholders from national, sub-national and local government agencies, policy makers, international organizations, academia, research and think-tank institutions, and private sector representatives to bring country's perspective and highlights of the existing policy and regulatory background on marine litter, and assess, review and evaluate the country's progress in implementing marine litter management actions, while identifying areas for further development to effectively address this critical issue of marine litter. ***Tentative Location(s): Mal'e***

## 5. Key Tasks

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

i) **Marine Litter Assessment:** Review country's marine litter status, provide an overview of institutional, regulatory and policy frameworks regarding marine litter, and assess policy responses to marine litter reduction, control and management.

ii) **Design and develop an approach for the community consultation, and high-level 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.)
- 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
- 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 Maldives.

## 6. Duration of the Consultancy

The consultancy is expected to last for approximately 30 days spread, starting from the signing of the contract. 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
Report on Marine litter in Maldives	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
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 the <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Community Consultation report</li> <li>2. National high-level</li> </ol>	Comprehensive reports summarizing key discussions, agreements, and actionable recommendations for stakeholders at different levels



consultation report 3. Combined (recommendation) report incorporating findings from both consultations	
Final report submission & Consultancy Closeout Meeting with PLEASE Project Team	Incorporating feedback from SACEP, PIU, and WB

## 8. Consultant's Profile: Qualification and Skills Requirements

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

- A postgraduate degree in environmental science, environmental policy, marine biology, or a related field.
- 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 Maldives, particularly on marine and coastal issues.
- Strong knowledge of marine litter issues, environmental policies, and the local context of Maldives, and South Asia Region.
- Excellent communication and facilitation skills, with the ability to engage a diverse range of stakeholders
- Proficiency in English and local languages, both spoken and written.
- Prior experience in report writing and documentation.

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