

# Gender and Social Dimensions of Marine Litter Pollution

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Sweden  
Sverige



SEA  
circular  
solving plastic pollution at source



# Marine plastic litter pathway

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# Gender, Human Rights, and Marine Plastic Pollution

How does it all connect?



# The gender and human rights dimensions of marine plastic pollution

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**Vulnerability** to the social, economic, environmental and health consequences of marine plastic litter differs among different societal groups.

**Risks** are borne differently according to socio-economic characteristics and divisions such as class, caste, ethnicity, religion, age and gender.

**Rights** of people are harmed by the impacts of marine plastic litter and duty bearers- states and businesses must protect these rights

# Framework for social and environmental protections

Are we doing enough?





THE  
**OCEAN**  
CONFERENCE  
UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, 5-9 JUNE 2017

*“prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, particularly from land-based activities, including marine litter, plastics and microplastics”*

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948)

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966)

Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (London Convention, 1972)

Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL, 1973/78)

United Nations Convention on the Law of the SEA (UNCLOS, 1982)

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (Rio Declaration, 1992)

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, 1992)

FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995)

Jakarta Mandate on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine and Coastal Biological Diversity (1995)

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention, 1998)

Manila Declaration for the Protection of the Marine environment (2012)

United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015)

*Policies that **advance, protect and promote gender equality and human rights** while significantly **addressing the challenges and effects of marine plastic litter** are lacking at multiple scales*

# **Vulnerable groups to marine plastic litter**

**Who are they and how  
are they impacted?**



# Health impacts on workers

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Women workers in the plastics industry face higher exposure to hazardous chemicals that can place their reproductive health at risk.



# Health impacts on consumers

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Existing gender norms mean that...

Women tend to be greater users of plastic through the purchasing of household items and cosmetics

Women's have higher responsibility for waste management in households



# Health impacts through food

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Marine plastic litter can threaten coastal communities and small-scale fisheries' livelihoods

Seafood and water contaminated by plastics disproportionately affect coastal communities



# The informal waste sector: plastic waste and its collectors

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Women and children are concentrated in unprotected, unregulated, low-earning and insecure occupations in waste collection and recycling.

## Structural inequalities reflected in:

- ❖ Low wages
- ❖ Precarious work
- ❖ Little to no social protection
- ❖ Vulnerability to sexual harassment
- ❖ Exposure to occupational hazards



# **Economic Repercussions of Marine Plastic Litter**



# Economic consequences of marine plastic litter

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## Ecological impacts

Injury to marine organisms and destruction of habitats

## Economic consequences of marine plastic litter

### Tourism

- destruction of aesthetic and recreational value
- human casualties

### Fishing and aquaculture

- damage to fishing gear
- interruption of operations
- damages to equipment and facilities
- human casualties

### Shipping

- interruption of operations
- damages to equipment
- human casualties

# Economic Impacts by Sector

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## Tourism



- ❖ Marine litter cost the tourism sector in Asia-Pacific rim countries around **USD 622 million/year**
- ❖ Global estimate of clean-up costs for coastlines was **USD 55 billion/year**
- ❖ In the APEC region, the cost of cleaning marine plastic litter is around **USD 1500/metric ton** of waste

## Fishing



- ❖ Damaged eco-system means threatened livelihoods
- ❖ Case study in Scotland estimated that the cost incurred from marine plastic litter was up to **USD 14 million/year** (5% of annual revenue)

## Shipping



- ❖ Damages caused to shipping is approx. **USD 279 million/year** in the APEC region
- ❖ Navigational hazard: coast guard rescues cost approx. **USD 2.8 million**

# Summary

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- Legally binding and non-binding international frameworks exist but we need multi-level policies that respect and promote human rights
- Plastic producers, consumers and waste management workers, particularly women, children and coastal communities are most vulnerable
- Economic impacts from ecosystem damage and interruption to businesses operations are experience but cost of clean up is worse

# Knowledge Gaps

What do we need to know  
more of?



# Research needs, particularly in SEA

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- ❖ Needs of women and other vulnerable groups and enabling conditions for leadership
- ❖ Gendered differences in plastic consumption
- ❖ Gender roles in waste management
- ❖ Efficacy of policy interventions in addressing gender and human rights impacts on vulnerable groups
- ❖ Sectoral contributions to marine plastic pollution



# Key Recommendations



# Actions and ways forward

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- ❖ Develop inclusive policies where duty bearers- states and businesses integrate, respect and promote gender equality and human rights principles
  - ❖ Safeguards and social protections for workers and consumers
  - ❖ Carrot and stick policy measures such as taxes or subsidies
  - ❖ Research and public awareness to better understand health and environmental risks
- ❖ Promote gender and human rights champions in both the public and private sectors
- ❖ Recognizing and empowering waste workers

# Thank you!

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