

Fishing for Ghosts

Cities Combatting Plastic Entering into Marine Environment (CCP-ME)



Commissioned by : Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMUKN)



Project partner: Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)



Project timeline: July 2020 – March 2025



Budget : EUR 5.8 million



Locations: Kochi, Kanpur, Port Blair

SDGs addressed:



Near the island town of Port Blair, Somesh Rao bends over the fresh catch on the floor of his boat, peering intently. Among the mackerel, tuna and trout, his keen eyes spot the shining pieces of ‘un-treasure’ he is looking for: plastic.

Every day, fishermen like Rao set out from the Junglighat fish landing centre in Port Blair to spend a few days on the sea. Unfortunately, even as these fishermen happily bring back their haul to sell on the docks, some of what they have carried with them, for example, plastic packaging from ration items, old or torn nets, useless gear, find their way into the sea.

“At the first awareness session for fishermen that I attended, I was horrified to realise that I had been responsible for hurting the sea that sustains me", says Rao. “I had never thought that an empty plastic packet tossed overboard into the vast sea could break down into tiny pieces that could wind up in the stomach of a fish, and ultimately into our bodies. I vowed to be careful with how I discarded plastic onboard from then on. Now, I carry back not only all the plastic packaging I bring on the boat, but also the plastic materials found among the catch, instead of tossing it back into the sea. There are special bins at the fish landing centre for fishermen to dispose of this plastic waste brought back from the sea.”



However, plastic packets are not the only thing that fishermen are in danger of leaving behind in the sea. Fishing nets or gear, made up of synthetic non-biodegradable material, are often lost, abandoned or discarded by fishermen. This gear sinks to the bottom of the sea where it continues to ‘fish’ by entangling and capturing marine life. This unmanned ‘ghost gear’ can even smother and damage sensitive habitats like coral reefs. Ghost gear makes up an estimated 10% of marine litter and marine creatures entangled in it stand no chance against scavengers.

“After learning about ghost gear and the effect it has on marine life, I have made it a point to try and prevent any of my own nets from becoming ghost gear. I mend my nets on time, and when I see signs of irreparable wear and tear, I deposit it in the special bins set up by GIZ for unusable gear at the fish landing centre”, shares Rao.

Initiatives like these, namely awareness and training sessions for fishermen, special ghost gear disposal and plastic recycling bins at the fish landing centre, are part of the Indo-German cooperation project ‘Cities Combatting Plastic Entering into Marine Environment (CCP-ME)’. The project also worked in close collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) to promote waste segregation and resource recovery in the cities of Kochi, Kanpur and Port Blair.



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“In the multicultural Andamans, our Swachhta Awareness Team consists of men and women from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, which helps in greater outreach during our awareness activities”, says Vijay Kumar, Senior Sanitation Inspector, Junglighat. “Our team regularly visits residents in their localities, puts up awareness shows at schools and colleges and initiates coastal cleaning drives in various wards. Thanks to the trainings and inputs by GIZ, the team is equipped to collect feedback and conduct community awareness programmes, even writing their own songs about waste segregation. We have already achieved a success rate of 80% in waste segregation at source and we are aiming for even higher.”

As the fishermen and residents of coastal towns and cities in India commit to becoming custodians of the sea, marine ecosystems can begin to heal and flourish.