

**Statement of the Honorable Michelle Bekkering**  
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**U.S. Agency for International Development**

Subcommittee  
on the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs  
Committee on Appropriations  
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“Ocean Plastic Pollution”  
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Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Leahy, Distinguished Members of this Subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the important role the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) plays in preventing and reducing ocean plastic pollution. It is an honor to be here with you today. USAID is grateful for the ongoing collaboration with this Subcommittee as we work to align our programming in this area with the scope and complexity of the challenge.

**The Problem of Ocean Plastic Pollution and the Developing World**

The scope of the marine debris challenge is profound. An estimated 80% of this debris is plastic, and by 2050 there may be more plastic than fish by weight in the ocean. Dr. Jenna Jambeck’s pioneering study from 2015 estimated that eight million metric tons of plastic enter the ocean every year, 80 percent of which comes from land-based sources. This same study highlighted that the developing world is at the heart of this global challenge. Solving this problem requires a strategy that employs a holistic approach to solid waste management that creates a financially sustainable value chain for recyclable materials. Recognizing that plastic is an important and unique component of the waste stream, lasting prevention and reduction of ocean pollution is only accomplished when all components of the solid waste stream are managed effectively.

The speed and scale of population growth, urbanization, and economic expansion in the developing world has led to an unintended consequence: a dramatic increase in waste. By 2050, waste generated in low-income countries alone is expected to triple. Yet while solid-waste management often comprises 20 percent or more of municipal budgets in developing countries, less than half of all waste is collected. The waste-collection that does happen often depends on the urban poor, who serve as “waste-pickers” in the informal sector. In low-income countries, approximately 90 percent of waste is disposed of in unregulated dumps, or is openly burned.

The result is that much of the plastic that enters the ocean each year comes from cities and municipalities in developing countries that lack the systems, policies, infrastructure, and innovations necessary to manage their waste effectively.

Exacerbating an already-challenging situation, these local systems have little resilience to external shocks. The current pandemic, for example, is stressing waste-management systems in many countries. Responding to COVID-19 has resulted in an increase in the amount of waste

generated -- particularly disposable plastic products like masks and take-out food containers -- while simultaneously disrupting the essential services provided by informal waste-collection workers.

Addressing waste-management at the municipal level is also particularly challenging because there is no one-size-fits-all solution -- any solution has to be tailored to the local context, and what works in one community might not work in another. It requires convening all stakeholders involved in local waste-management: governments -- especially city and municipal ones-- as well as civil society; local communities; and, most important, the private sector, including local grocery stores, restaurants, shopping malls, national and multinational companies in the plastics value-chain, and investors. Governments also often lack capacity: to develop appropriate policies and regulations; to find sustainable financing solutions; to implement the enforcement, transparency and accountability needed to attract the private sector; and to encourage and sustain behavior change in the public.

USAID recognizes that public resources alone will not solve these challenges. Developing countries need the financial resources, technical expertise, and global networks of the private sector to help drive innovation, catalyze investment in needed infrastructure, and create more sustainable business models. To that end, USAID is forging innovative partnerships with businesses - large and small; local and multinational - across waste-management and recycling value-chains around the world.

USAID is pleased with the strong bipartisan support in Congress, especially the members of this Subcommittee, to increase international engagement to prevent ocean plastic pollution. We also are pleased the Save Our Seas Act of 2018 acknowledged the complexities of addressing this challenge globally. The law set the stage for increased U.S. Government efforts, and encouraged USAID to expand our programming on this issue. USAID appreciates the close cooperation with the members of this Subcommittee and the authors of the Save Our Seas 2.0, which makes it clear that improved capacity underlies a lasting solution to this challenge.

### **USAID's Approach to Addressing Ocean Plastic Pollution**

Waste-management is almost always the responsibility of local governments and communities. So solutions to the challenge of ocean plastics must start at the local level in the cities and towns where most ocean plastic pollution originates.

That is where we typically focus our efforts at USAID:

- Working with local governments to improve waste-management services so that less plastic ends up in the water;
- Working with local schools and community groups to change behavior around recycling and the proper disposal of waste disposal;
- Working with local companies to promote new innovations and business models; and
- Working with informal waste-collectors, who are often women, and form an essential part of the waste-management system in the countries where we work.

In other words, we work on locally led solutions to help communities in target countries solve their own development challenges - what we call the Journey to Self-Reliance, which is our guiding approach as an Agency.

Ocean plastic pollution is an important issue for USAID, because, if not addressed, mismanaged waste can undermine USAID's core development objectives in the environment, governance, economic growth, and health. In support of the U.S. Government's efforts to combat marine debris and improve plastic waste management, USAID focuses on three pillars of action:

- Build national capacity for the management of solid waste and the “3Rs” (reduce, reuse, recycle);
- Incentivize recycling in collaboration with the private sector, while empowering women and protecting workers; and
- Promote innovation and investment in locally appropriate business models, technologies, and infrastructure.

Much of our work focuses in Asia, which is home to the top five largest ocean-plastic polluting countries, who collectively produce an estimated 23 percent of the world's waste. We are also increasingly expanding our efforts in Latin America in countries like the Republic of Perú and the Dominican Republic and exploring programming options in Haiti through an assessment of solid-waste management.

We are implementing this strategy through a suite of programs and collaborations:

#### **USAID's Clean Cities, Blue Ocean**

Launched last year, our flagship, five-year, \$48 million global program, Clean Cities, Blue Ocean (CCBO), has an initial set of eight partner countries in Asia and Latin America: the Dominican Republic; the Republics of India, Indonesia, Maldives, The Philippines, and Perú; the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka; and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Implemented by Tetra Tech, CCBO offers state-of-the-art international technical expertise and sustainable, locally led solutions through its local-grants program. CCBO is organized around four primary objectives to achieve between 2019 and 2024:

First, promote reducing, reusing, and recycling—the “3Rs”—and strengthen markets for recycled plastic. The “3Rs” and improved waste-management systems are effective ways of reducing the volume of plastic that flows into our oceans and waterways, but rely on strong, incentivized recycling markets, supportive infrastructure, and a suitable enabling environment. To accomplish this, CCBO works to identify and establish incentives for strengthened markets for reuse and recycling, improve infrastructure through locally relevant innovative technologies, and enhance service-delivery models for increased efficiency and revenues. The program prioritizes locally centered strategies that empower individuals, provide increased economic opportunity for women and men, and address sectoral health and safety challenges.

Second, improve local implementation and enforcement of laws, policies, and regulations. Although many countries have local- and national-level laws to safeguard public health and the environment, regulate the management and reduction of waste, and even incentivize and

strengthen markets for recycling and reuse, implementation and enforcement often suffers from limited support, resources, and systemic complexity. CCBO supports partners in the eight focal countries to develop, implement, and enforce regulatory measures that address local challenges; improve financing options; and enhance the livelihoods of the millions who work in, or are otherwise affected by, the sector.

Third, build social and behavior change for the “3Rs” and sustainable solid-waste management. CCBO works to shift ingrained behaviors around recycling and the disposal of solid waste in households, businesses, and governments. The program uses a participatory approach, by working hand in hand with community members, local organizations, women, youth, and independent waste-collectors, with support from both the public and private sectors.

Fourth, forge new private-sector partnerships for improved impact, sustainability, and forward-looking commitments. Around the world, momentum and interest in combating ocean plastics pollution is rapidly increasing; however, we cannot solve this problem alone. Success depends on strong partnerships, good coordination, and improved evidence about what solutions are most effective, and in which contexts. CCBO works to build sustainable partnerships, increase the capacity and knowledge of those that can offer support, and garner commitments from the public sector, multi-stakeholder alliances, and intergovernmental organizations for continued progress—within and beyond the program’s lifetime.

In collaboration with global, regional, national, and local stakeholders, CCBO will test, scale, and share inclusive and sustainable solutions to promote “3R” practices, improve the management of waste, and combat plastic pollution in key countries at the heart of the crisis of ocean plastic pollution.

CCBO is dedicated to identifying local challenges, opportunities, and practices to develop locally relevant solutions tailored to individual public- and private-sector actors, local realities, community members, and waste value-chains.

### **USAID’s Municipal-Waste Recycling Program**

The Municipal-Waste Recycling Program (MWRP), launched by USAID in October 2016, has provided grants to 30 locally led projects with innovative and sustainable solutions in Indonesia, The Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. According to the 2015 Jambeck report, these four nations are the top source countries of ocean plastics after the People’s Republic of China: in total, they contribute more than 3.4 million metric tons of mismanaged plastic waste each year.

Managed by a small business, Development Innovations Group, MWRP’s grants have focused on three key topics:

- 1) Strengthening local actors and their collaboration to render urban systems more effective in managing solid waste and reducing marine plastics pollution;
- 2) Applied research to identify locally appropriate technology and improve decision-making processes related to the recycling and management of urban solid waste; and

- 3) Enabling the private sector to develop and implement market-driven solutions to marine plastics pollution and strengthen the recycling value-chain.

MWRP grantees have supported governments, national and local, of the four target countries in reviewing, revising, and strengthening enforcement of existing laws and regulations and introducing new regulations. More than 40 local governments across Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam have committed to combating plastic waste. The accomplishments of the 30 MWRP grantees include creating more than 1,300 jobs in solid-waste management, more than half of which have gone to women; recycling more than 3,100 metric tons of plastic waste; improving working conditions for more than 2,500 independent waste-collectors; and engaging more than 96,000 youth and more than 163,000 households, businesses, and schools on improving their waste-management behaviors.

MWRP is developing valuable lessons learned from these grant projects that inform not just USAID's broader efforts on this issue, but also those of the global community, including other donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and national governments. USAID is sharing these lessons actively in various national, regional and international fora, such as the Fisheries and Chemical Working Groups of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum. USAID also has shared lessons learned in Asia with other regions, such as with the Workshop on Marine Debris held under the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR).

### **Private-Sector Engagement**

USAID firmly believes that private enterprise is the single most-powerful force for lifting lives, strengthening communities, and accelerating self-reliance. As such, working collaboratively with the private sector is central to USAID's approach to combating ocean plastic pollution. USAID's development expertise helps private-sector solutions to flourish by addressing foundational issues, like improving governance, supporting policy and regulatory reforms, and incentivizing innovation and behavior change within host countries.

This year, USAID launched a partnership with the Alliance to End Plastic Waste, a coalition of more than 40 leading companies that have committed to invest \$1.5 billion towards solutions to end plastic waste. This partnership is exciting because it brings together companies from across the globe involved in all stages of the plastics value-chain — including businesses that make, use, sell, process, collect, and recycle plastics, as well as retailers and consumer-goods and waste-management companies. Through CCBO, USAID and the Alliance will deploy innovative, locally appropriate technologies, infrastructure, and business models to improve waste-management and recycling in cities and communities at the heart of the crisis in ocean plastics pollution. Our partnership will also work to improve the livelihoods, health, and safety of waste workers — both formal and informal.

USAID also recently launched a blended-finance partnership with impact investor Circulate Capital to catalyze investment in the recycling value-chain in South and Southeast Asia. To incentivize and de-risk additional lending in this sector, USAID is providing a \$35 million, 50-percent loan-portfolio guarantee through the U.S. International Development Financing

Corporation (DFC). The partial loan guarantee is a tool designed to attract private capital to a blended-finance fund and offer protection to investors by lowering the downside risk of loss, which makes investment in developing markets more appealing. As a result, Circulate Capital has been able to raise more than \$100 million from multinational companies such as PepsiCo, Procter & Gamble, Dow, Coca-Cola, Chevron Phillips, Danone, and Unilever to invest in much-needed recycling businesses and infrastructure.

I am pleased to note that, in April 2020, Circulate Capital made its first loan backed by this guarantee to Tridi Oasis, an Indonesia-based, women-owned recycling company. Tridi Oasis recycles plastic bottles into new packaging and textiles that are made of recycled plastic. This investment will enable the company to set up a larger recycling facility and expand operations to recycle additional types of plastic, and is particularly meaningful because it aligns with another priority for USAID: women's economic empowerment.

### **Women's Economic Empowerment**

While the challenge of ocean plastics is clear, one important aspect of the solution is often overlooked — the role of women. From waste-pickers to recycling entrepreneurs, educators to advocates, women play a crucial role in improving the systems, policies and practices for how we manage plastic waste.

I am proud that all of our programs and partnerships have a strong focus on empowering women as entrepreneurs and decision-makers in the traditionally male-dominated waste-management sector, like the Tridi Oasis investment under Circulate Capital. Women also play an important role in household decision-making. For example, in Sri Lanka, our local partner is working with 17 community-based organizations to train women leaders in household waste-management, recycling and composting. These community organizations are, in turn, training thousands of their neighbors in separating waste at the source and linking them to independent waste-collectors that are operating in their communities.

In Vietnam, our local partner collaborated with the Women's Union in Da Nang city to recycle more than 42 metric tons of plastic waste that previously went uncollected. Engagement with female neighborhood leaders helped gain community buy-in to improve the management of solid waste.

### **Results from Selected Countries**

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenge of ocean plastics. Achieving progress requires local solutions tailored to the unique contexts of each country and region. Understanding the unique dynamics, constraints and opportunities in each locality is essential for successful programming. For that reason, I would like to provide some additional detail on promising results from a few key countries of interest.

**Vietnam:** Vietnam is the fourth-largest source of ocean plastics pollution. Its growing urban populations and demand for consumer goods with increased plastic packaging continue to outpace its waste system's capacities, which has led to environmental leakage. With rapid

urbanization, especially in the last decade, Vietnam’s urban population is expected to surpass its number of rural residents by 2050.

Vietnam has a coastline of more than 2,100 miles and sits astride the Mekong and Red Rivers, which pick up plastics from communities along their paths and ultimately flow through to the ocean. To address the already crisis levels of plastics in marine and other natural environments and prepare for continued urban growth, Vietnam must shift to a more robust waste-collection, recycling, and disposal system with enhanced infrastructure, more sustainable production and consumption habits, and strengthened or alternative markets for recycled and reusable products.

In Vietnam, USAID’s grantees have helped inform a new *National Action Plan on the Management of Marine Plastic Debris*, issued in late 2019. The national plan includes efforts to scale good practices in the collection, separation, transportation, and treatment of plastic waste in coastal and marine areas; facilitate the development of suitable facilities to collect and store solid waste; mobilize international and private-sector partnerships to produce alternative products, increase recycling, and shift to a circular economy and green growth; and research, develop, apply, and transfer technologies and techniques to treat and minimize ocean plastics. USAID’s CCBO program will aim to build on MWRP’s successes and support Vietnam’s National Action Plan. CCBO will focus work in Phú Quốc, Da Nang, Bien Hoa, and Hue City.

MWRP’s grantees in Vietnam have engaged in private-sector partnerships to reduce plastic waste, empowered women and independent waste-collectors, created local models of cleaning up cities that can be scaled, and developed effective local and national policies. An MWRP grantee in Ho Chi Minh City improved the livelihoods, health, and working conditions of more than 1,900 independent waste-collectors, including by successfully advocating to double fees paid by households to these collectors. Empowering women and independent waste-collectors helped initiate the segregation of waste in more than 68,000 households and establishments across all MWRP’s target cities in Vietnam and diverted more than 1,100 metric tons of plastic waste from the ocean.

**The Philippines:** The Philippines—composed of more than 7,500 islands—is the world’s third-largest plastic polluter of the marine environment. Keeping waste out of the ocean is a challenge because of rising consumer consumption—with the country generating 2.7 million tons of plastic waste annually—and ineffective waste-management systems. Much of the country’s solid waste ends up in open dumping sites, which allow leakage to waterways and threaten livelihoods in key sectors such as tourism and fishing.

National laws, such as the Republic Act (RA) 9003/Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, and local regulations around the management of solid waste have been in place in the Philippines for many years. However, local government units that are responsible for waste-management have inadequate financial resources, limited capacities for enforcement, and low public awareness of the harmful impacts of plastics in the environment. Across the Philippines, local governments struggle to keep pace with the volumes of waste being generated, including the more than 163 million single-serving plastic “sachets” bought especially by the urban poor for their daily needs like shampoo, coffee, and oil.

In the Philippines, CCBO seeks to develop, test, and implement new models that promote the “3Rs” and enhance the management of solid waste; facilitate partnerships and investment around key needs, such as infrastructure; and strengthen local systems to build the Philippines’ resiliency and self-reliance. CCBO will focus work in Metro Manila, Batangas City, and Iloilo City.

MWRP’s grantees in the Philippines worked to support the cleanup of Manila Bay, achieve impact through private-sector partnerships, introduce the innovative delivery and scaling of zero-waste approaches, and develop effective policies and infrastructure. For example, SM Supermalls, which owns and operates 74 malls nationwide that welcome 4.3 million visitors a day and, through social media, reach an additional four million people, worked with an MWRP grantee to carry out information and communication initiatives in 50 malls around Manila Bay. Through exhibits, movies, and social media, millions of mall tenants and customers are learning about the issue of mismanaged plastic waste. In Bacolod City and nearby towns on the Visayan island of Negros in the center of the country, an MWRP grantee is reducing plastic packaging from consumer products by establishing eight zero-waste convenience stores (called *Wala Usik* - “Nothing Wasted” - in the local language of Hiligaynon) where consumers buy bulk products by using their own reusable containers.

**Indonesia:** Research shows that Indonesia contributes as much as 1.29 million metric tons of plastic waste to the ocean annually, which makes it the world’s second-largest polluter by total mass of mismanaged plastic debris. The Government of Indonesia is pursuing national-level strategies and policies for the management of solid waste and is implementing a national action plan to address ocean plastic pollution. Local governments, though, often lack the funding needed to implement city-level initiatives. As the fourth-most populous nation in the world and a nation with a massive coastal population, Indonesia represents a critical opportunity to confront the challenge of ocean plastic pollution.

MWRP’s grantees in Indonesia have focused on establishing partnerships with the private sector, bolstering sustainability and self-reliance in their communities, developing scalable models for effective and inclusive waste-management, and using geospatial data and technology in innovative ways to confront the challenge of ocean plastic pollution. For example, one of the MWRP’s grantees is providing geospatial data to the city government of Denpasar, crowdsourced by youth volunteers through a mobile app that helps the city map transfer points and illegal dumping sites. These data are helping build the capacity of the municipal government and the private sector to improve the collection and recycling of plastic waste. Also, in Semarang in Central Java, an MWRP grantee launched a public-private partnership between local authorities; 54 local waste banks that are serving more than 6,500 households; and companies, including the major food-manufacturing company PT Indofood. The partnership with PT Indofood specifically focuses on increasing the recycling of low-value plastics, such as noodle wrappers, to reduce the leakage of plastic waste into the city’s waterways. In Kepulauan Seribu (the “Thousand Islands”), north of Jakarta, an MWRP grantee is expanding recycling services by connecting the informal sector to recycling companies. The MWRP grantee, with the private sector, is also promoting bulk sales in stores where customers can refill reusable containers with



daily household products to reduce plastic packaging waste, which is especially important on small islands where the first step is to reduce the volume of plastic waste to manage.

### **Looking Forward**

Throughout all our activities, USAID identifies and pilots innovative approaches; employs rigorous evaluation and metrics to identify what works and what does not work; and gathers and shares the evidence with partners, other donors, and the private sector to scale up programs that are effective and efficient.

While the challenge is daunting, there are tremendous opportunities. USAID has significantly increased our work to address these challenges, and we will continue to expand our investments in this area using well-designed, sustainable approaches at the national and sub-national levels to make progress on the ground and reduce waste. With Missions around the world eager to engage, USAID is well-placed to support the USG in playing a leading role to confront ocean plastic pollution.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to answering your questions.