

Social enterprise to recycle waste fishing nets and increase marine protection in the Philippines

Overview

We have developed a scalable supply chain solution to ghost fishing nets in the Philippines. We remove this hazardous plastic waste and recycle it into nylon yarn used in carpet tiles and clothing, whilst providing opportunities for coastal communities to generate additional income, access financial services and increase ocean protection.



"Now people do not throw their nets along the coast, now they collect the nets and sell them" – Edrich Baron

Local solutions

Communities collect discarded nets, clean and sell them locally, before packing and transporting them for export.

Fishers sell nets direct into the supply chain at end of life, eliminating ghost fishing and creating a circular economy.

Nets are bought and sold through self-help savings groups which provide vital financial services, with the addition of an environment fund.

Key successes

Sustainability: Starting as a conservation project, ZSL launched Coast4C as a social enterprise in 2020 to drive ocean and climate restoration through inclusive value chains for end-of-life fishing nets and regenerative seaweed.

Scale: The model has been replicated in Cameroon, Indonesia and is being scoped in Bangladesh and India.

Supply chain: This connects remote, island communities in the Global South with international businesses, and provides them with the supply of socially-sourced post-consumer Nylon 6 using fairly-traded principles.

267

million metres

of discarded fishing net diverted from the ocean and regenerated into high value carpet tiles, reducing ghost fishing

5,766

hectares

of the ocean protected in eight community-based marine protected areas that are 45 times the national average size

Recommendations for the Plastics Treaty

1. Ensure solutions are equitable and locally appropriate, prioritising vulnerable communities
2. Recognise that plastic pollution is disproportionately affecting human and environmental health in the poorest and most biodiverse areas of the planet
3. Address the market challenges for recycled plastics that cannot compete with that from virgin oil, which needs to be enabled by appropriate financial incentives
4. Ensure that recycling technologies are only part of the solution, focus on circular economy, and do not cause environmental harm
5. Create more opportunities for socially just and equitable supply chains that connect poor communities to international markets

Local impact of plastic pollution

Fishing communities in the Global South lack any waste management systems so plastic accumulates quickly, resulting in:

- **Species:** negative impacts on threatened species due to entanglement and ingestion of plastics
- **Ecosystems:** mangroves and reefs choked with plastic pollution leading to reduced fisheries
- **Livelihoods:** poor health and sanitation in communities due to excessive waste and no institutional waste management systems. Overfishing with plastic nets further damages livelihoods and food security

Future project ambitions

Re-establish supply chains: identify and sell nets to environmentally-friendly recycling facilities at a fair price that keeps value in communities.

Establish bulk buying systems led by women's groups to reduce plastic waste on islands, as piloted at one Philippines site to date.

Explore upstream solutions to reduce plastic, particularly those generated by international business that target the poor, such as multi-film sachets.

Reduce plastic pollution: reduce local sources of litter and plastic on land and at sea.

Expansion and scale: test and implement in Bangladesh and India following successful scoping studies.

Explore bioplastic potential from seaweed farming.

Ensure strong community inclusion and links to biodiversity conservation, for people, planet and prosperity.



Credit: Northern Ranglands Trust

“I am hoping that one day all nets will be gone from the shore because people will imitate what we are doing”
Cristina Pepito

Lessons learnt

Key lessons:

- Linking business models to marine protection has helped build independence from the 'boom and bust' cycle of grant funding and empowered communities to make their own decisions.
- A cleaner, healthier environment is as much as a driver for waste net collection by island communities as the income generated.
- We can redesign global supply chains to replenish the ocean and tackle poverty in the most marginalised and biodiverse parts of the world.

Challenges:

- Changes in costs and pricings during the Covid-19 pandemic have disrupted supply chains and negatively impacted the business model.
- The price of recycled plastics competes directly with virgin oil, creating vulnerability in business models due to price fluctuations.
- Nylon 6 is a high value product in the recycling market, but other common waste items are not, notably multi-layer sachets.
- No permanent solution exists to dispose of collected waste, highlighting the need to reduce the amount of waste produced.

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