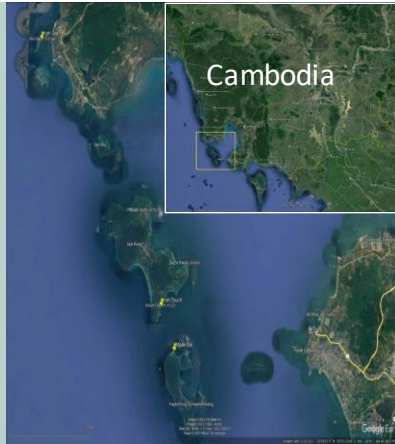


Addressing single-use plastic pollution in Marine Protected Islands in Cambodia: A pilot project

Koh Rong & Koh Sdach Archipelagos, Preah Sihanouk & Koh Kong provinces, Cambodia

Overview

Fauna & Flora's Cambodia team is working with island communities and tourists to reduce the use of single-use plastic items and impacts on the environment.



Local solutions

Supported development of Cambodia's first National Action Plan on marine litter: Worked with the Cambodian government and in collaboration with CSIRO's Global Plastic Losses project to gather national baseline data for marine litter monitoring.

Community engagement: Initial consultations with island communities across key Marine Protected Areas about plastic pollution issues and solutions. Regular meetings and workshops continue to engage and include community members in decision-making.

Initiated trial to test the long-term viability of locally appropriate solutions: To reduce use of single-use plastics and support communities towards a more sustainable model.

Promotion and awareness raising: Utilised posters and signs to increase awareness and buy-in from community members and tourists about the single-use plastic reduction pilot.

Key successes

Pilot projects tackling two prevalent single-use plastic items – plastic bags and water bottles: Introduced 3 sizes of reusable shopping bags and water refill stations.

Behavioural change: Increased interest of communities and good uptake of plastic intervention tools, and requests to expand solutions to other items.

More sustainable tourism: Installing water refill systems in guesthouses to reduce tourist consumption of single-use plastic water bottles.

"As a coastal community we are on the frontline of the never-ending influx of plastic pollution. We demonstrate that we want, need and can create positive change for our communities and biodiversity"

– Mali Sorn, community member on Koh Sdach



Credit: Vanny Khom

Recommendations for the Plastics Treaty

1. Must include local knowledge holders, especially underrepresented communities that are particularly vulnerable to plastic pollution
2. Ensure solutions are equitable, relevant to local conditions and nationally appropriate
3. Measures must provide the necessary means to support communities on the frontline of plastic pollution – e.g., financial support
4. Avoid false solutions, such as plastic credits, that do not stem the flow of plastic pollution

Local impacts of plastic pollution

Single-use plastic items are clogging up rivers and heavily impact coastlines, communities and biodiversity. Most prevalent items include plastic water bottles, bags, polystyrene, Styrofoam food containers, cups, food wrappers and fishing gear. Without upstream systemic changes in plastic usage, plastic debris will continue to accumulate and impact the environment and communities.

- **Species:** The scale of plastic waste in Cambodia poses a threat to multiple species, including fish, seabirds, sea turtles and whales via entanglement and ingestion
- **Ecosystems:** Coral reefs are heavily impacted by Abandoned, Lost, or Discarded Fishing Gear, affecting fisheries and tourism
- **Livelihoods:** Plastic waste increases flood risk, contributes to economic losses, e.g., tourism and clean-up costs, and negatively impacts human health



“Water dispensers have reduced the use of small plastic water bottles in local businesses, cutting costs for business holders and tourists while engaging users in plastic issues” - Chanrout Ren, Community Engagement Officer, Fauna & Flora Cambodia



Credit: (Upper) Enrico Barilli / Fauna & Flora; (Lower) Majel Kong / Fauna & Flora

Lessons learnt

Key learning:

- Solutions must consider the local context and behavioural change elements
- Education and inclusion of community members in decision making is key to a successful project.
- Implement locally appropriate solutions – e.g., water refill systems that are widely used in Cambodia
- Seeing the benefits of everyday plastic reduction, such as better health, cleaner environment and improved tourism, community members can feel empowered to make positive changes and expand measures

Challenges:

- Accumulation of debris in coastal areas is >10 times higher than in river and inland sites in the same region.
- 9 years of underwater data collection around established and planned Marine Protected Areas show that plastic debris accounted for 71% of waste collected and fishing gear accounted for 47%. This highlights the urgent need to move away from a single-use model and enforce better management of fishing gear.

Future project ambitions

Continue to conduct monitoring surveys of the intervention tool to understand behavioural change and assess impacts of the work.

Expand solutions to other single-use plastic items (e.g., reusable bottles, cups and food containers) and other target groups (e.g., schools and grocery shops), and identify further opportunities to reduce waste and generate sustainable models for local businesses.

Continue regular marine litter monitoring assessment & capacity building of government officials to help generate empirical evidence to inform policy development, and to guide appropriate solutions for plastic pollution, especially on marine-protected areas and other ecologically significant islands around the country.

Contact

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