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Technical assistance and capacity-building

Written statement* submitted by "ECO-FAWN" (Environment Conservation Organization - Foundation for Afforestation Wild Animals and Nature), a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[27 January 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Mitigation of Micro –Nano Plastic Concerns on Health through Sustainable Practices, with Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Measures in India

Plastic pollution has emerged as the second most ominous threat to the global environment, after climate change. The annual production of plastic has increased from 1.7 million metric tons in 1950 to 322 million metric tons in 2015. More than eight billion tons of plastic have accumulated on earth. Plastic has become so ubiquitous that some have characterized the current stage of human history as the “Plastics Age.”

The huge and rapidly rising volume of plastics is harming the environment and human health. When incinerated, it pollutes the air, in addition to the impact from generating the energy used in the process. The disposed plastics in water bodies not only contaminate but also becomes a threat to all aquatic life forms. Much of the plastic waste has ended up in the oceans, with estimates ranging from 93 to 236 thousand metric tons floating in the oceans. Plastic is increasingly invading the food chain, with birds and animals directly and indirectly consuming vast amounts of plastic. It is estimated that 90 per cent of seabirds have ingested plastic debris (Freedman, 2016; Mathieu-Denoncourt, et al., 2015). According to a 2017 study, 83 per cent of tap water samples from across the world contained plastic pollutants. As plastic products are not properly disposed, micro plastic debris is entering the air directly, contributing to respiratory problems. Plastics are also a major source for CO₂ emissions.

These tiny plastic particles are present in everyday items, including cigarettes, clothing and cosmetics. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) research shows that continuous use of some of these products increases microplastics' accumulation in the environment.

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2) in Nairobi unanimously approved a resolution to end plastic pollution, setting the stage to create a legally binding treaty by 2024 to prevent and reduce global plastic pollution. The reduction of plastic production and use through a circular economy. The tiny plastic particles present in everyday items, including Microplastics, which can be up to five millimeters in diameter, enter the ocean from marine plastic litter breaking down, run-off from plumbing, leakage from production facilities and other sources. When ingested by marine life such as birds, fish, mammals and plants, microplastics have both toxic and mechanical effects, leading to issues including reduced food intake, suffocation, behavioral changes and genetic alteration.

The continuous production and widespread applications of synthetic plastics and their waste present immense environmental challenges and damage living systems. Microplastics (MPs) have become great concern in various ecosystems due to their high stability and decomposition into smaller fragments such as nano-plastics (NPs). Nevertheless, MPs and NPs can be removed from the environment using several physical, chemical, and microbiological methods. It highlights interlinkages between the sustainable development goals (SDGs)—specifically SDG 14—and plastic pollution. Overall, priority for research and development in the field of MPs and NPs impacts on ecological ecosystems is a must as this will enable the development of scientific policies driven by global collaboration and governance which in turn will develop tools and methodologies that measure the impacts and risk of plastic pollution.

Plastic pollution is a fast-rising environmental catastrophe, Micro/nanoplastics (MP/NPs) are emerging global pollutants that garnered enormous attention due to their potential threat to the human health, aquatic environments and ecosystem in virtue of their persistence and accumulation. Micro-Nano plastic concentrations were estimated to be about $2.4 \pm 1.3 \times 10^5$ particles per liter of bottled water, about 90% of which are nanoplastics. This is order of magnitude more than the microplastic abundance reported previously in bottled water. Sources of plastic pollution to the environment include plastic packaging, automotive industries, textile industries, electronic industries, and poorly discarded plastics in the environment.

India does not have a policy on microplastics yet, however, in July 2022, the government announced a ban on certain single-use plastic items such as plates, cups and polystyrene (Thermocol). India's Plastic Waste Management Rules were also amended in 2021 to increase the permitted thickness of plastic carry-bags. Sikkim, became the first Indian state to ban disposable plastic bags, in 1998 is also among the first to target single-use plastic bottles.

The Goa administration in India has set up Solid Waste Management (SWM) Facilities in North and South Goa where it has banned single use-plastic and aims to be plastic free soon. For habitual offenders, the administration has amended the Plastic Waste Management by-laws to provision a fine upto Rs 3 lakh.

Plastic Problem Addressed Uniquely with Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Measures in India

The hot drinks offered in plastics, food served in thin plastic films in hotel and food industry is a catastrophe on human and animal health. The hot tea often served in plastic only aggravates the fragile health of humans, where nano plastics make way into human body's. To address above concerns, potters who traditionally make earthen/ clay pots, jars, glasses/cups and utensils are given technical assistance and capacity building measures which in end cater to safe health practice outcomes and create environmental friendly atmosphere.

Skill Upgradation and Financial Support

The project target 18 trades, viz. Carpenter, Boat Maker, Armourer, Blacksmith, Hammer and Tool Kit Maker, Locksmith, Goldsmith, Potter, Sculptor, Stone breaker, Cobbler/Shoemaker/Footwear artisan, Mason, Basket/Mat/Broom Maker/Coir Weaver, Doll & Toy Maker (Traditional), Barber, Garland maker, Washerman, Tailor and Fishing Net Maker wherein all the alternative to plastics is encouraged and sustaining employment generated.

The government of India's unique programme supports and promotes such traditional employment generation opportunities, impetus is given under 'Vishwakarma Project' wherein the government extends financial support and skill upgradation(technical assistance) in all the handmade and traditional employment opportunities where plastics is not promoted/used. Through the project Sustainable development goals of 1.No poverty, 2. Zero Hunger, 3. Good health and wellbeing, 10 Reduced inequalities, 12 Responsible consumption and production, 13. Climate actions, 14. Life below water and 15 Life on land SDG's are addressed.

Benefits to the Artisans and Crafts Persons

The Scheme envisages provisioning of the following benefits to the artisans and crafts persons:

- Recognition: Recognition of artisans and craftspeople through PM Vishwakarma certificate and ID card.
- Skill Upgradation: Basic Training of 5-7 days and Advanced Training of 15 days or more, with a stipend of Rs. 500 per day.
- Toolkit Incentive: A toolkit incentive of upto Rs. 15,000 in the form of e-vouchers at the beginning of Basic Skill Training.
- Credit Support: Collateral free 'Enterprise Development Loans' of upto Rs. 3 lakh in two tranches of Rs. 1 lakh and Rs. 2 lakh with tenures of 18 months and 30 months, respectively, at a concessional rate of interest fixed at 5%, with Government of India subvention to the extent of 8%. Beneficiaries who have completed Basic Training are eligible to avail the first tranche of credit support of upto Rs. 1 lakh. The second loan tranche is made available to beneficiaries who have availed the 1st tranche and maintained a standard loan account and have adopted digital transactions in their business or have undergone Advanced Training.

- Incentive for Digital Transaction: An amount of Re. 1 per digital transaction, upto maximum 100 transactions monthly will be credited to the beneficiary's account for each digital pay-out or receipt.
- Marketing Support: Marketing support is provided to the artisans and craftspeople in the form of quality certification, branding, onboarding on e-commerce platforms such as GeM, advertising, publicity and other marketing activities to improve linkage to value chain.

The above programme has sustainable outcomes with poverty alleviation by employment, it ensures that no plastics are promoted, besides PM vishwakarma, the schemes under Khadi and Village Industries Commission agencies also don't support plastic production in any state. The ECO FAWN Society is actively engaged in complete plastic reduction, recycling existing plastics in circulation, educating women self-help groups, youth organizations, Panchayats and block level officials to implement Sustainable Waste Management Practices in rural villages, the society is also engaged with educational institutions on environment education which involves management of plastic at source, circulation and at final stage of garbage.

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