

# Questioning the sustainability of voluntary plastic waste initiatives: the case of Indonesia

I.Rucevska<sup>1</sup>, M., Tsakona, M.<sup>1,2</sup>, B. Wermter<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Waste and Marine Litter Programme, GRID-Arendal, Arendal, N-4836, Norway

<sup>2</sup>Qgreen, Melissa, Attica, 15127, Greece

<sup>3</sup>PO 580126, 10411, Berlin

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Presenting author email: [maria.tsakona@grida.no](mailto:maria.tsakona@grida.no)

Plastic pollution is one of the global crises, along with the climate change and loss of biodiversity. Since 2015 South-East Asia has been repeatedly pointed out as one of the hotspots of plastic leakage into the marine environment ranking Indonesia as the second in the mismanagement of plastic waste. The reason is directly linked to non-existing or poor waste management systems of municipalities where mainly the informal recycling sector provides collection of valuable recyclables, including plastics. As a result, low-value plastic waste ends up in landfills, dumpsites or the environment.

In response to the plastic pollution crisis, many plastic waste initiatives established by developed economies and corporate industries have emerged in Indonesia, creating a bubble of a high-profile immediate response to waste management in communities. Tackling the leakage of plastic waste into the environment by starting a rapid transfer of technology and “know-how” from developed countries has been one of the main objectives of the initiative providers. However, the imperialistic approach to waste management creates disturbance in existing practices of the Global South and impacts the livelihoods of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Under this emerging reality, the paper aims to scrutinize whether these plastic waste initiatives are the catalysers to sustainable waste management in communities and if a just transition of the informal waste sector is possible under the circular economic framework.

The research analyses and assesses several plastic waste initiatives in Indonesia. Data collection methodology is based on a literature review, scoping fieldwork and interviews with relevant stakeholders including local waste management authorities, representatives of the assessed initiatives, academics, and the informal recycling sector. In addition, cross-checking of information and validation have been performed in comprehensive and systematic manner. The Strength Weakness Opportunities Threats (SWOT) framework built on a set of analytical questions has been used to provide robust results about the effectiveness of the initiatives.

Preliminary results conclude that attention to plastic waste initiatives carries away from critical regulatory gaps, without which waste management systems improvement at the macro level is challenging to achieve. Furthermore, differences in cultures, economic markets, and resources between developed and developing countries lead to some unique challenges that need to be addressed when it comes to improving the waste management system of the latter in a sustainable manner. Finally, the research points to opportunities which can enable to shift the course of action into sustainable direction.

## References

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