

UN-Habitat inputs to the SG background note for the preparatory meeting of SDG 14 Conference – Waste and waste water management in coastal cities

- About 40% of the world's population lives within 100 kilometres of the sea. Most of the world's megacities are located in the coastal zone and deltas, which have offered access points to marine trade and transport historically.
- Population density in coastal zones is greatly higher than non-coastal areas and urbanization trend combined with world population increase will accelerate the ongoing population migration to coastal areas.
- This trend has already had significant environmental impact on sea and oceans and one of the main causes of this is the lack of environmentally sound waste management in coastal cities.
- At the same time, lack of environmentally sound waste management in new coastal urban areas is hardly inevitable; in fact, the economies of scale and critical mass that cities generally provide are a basic prerequisite for most waste management infrastructure. When cities plan in advance and are supported by adequate legislation and financing, they are able to provide much better waste management than non-urban coastal areas.
- Nevertheless, currently at least 2 billion people do not have access to regular waste collection and large portion of these uncollected waste end up in waterways and ocean and become marine debris.
- Dumpsites are major source of ocean pollution and marine litter because a lot of them are located on waterways and nearby seashore. Leachate generated in uncontrolled dump sites also pollutes surface and ground water that finally reaches sea.
- Plastic bags are a particularly problematic source of marine litter, most notably embodied by the enormous 'island' of plastic waste in the northern Pacific Ocean that, by some estimates, is as large as China. A number of cities around the world have recently instituted plastic bag 'taxes', incentives for biodegradable alternatives or banned plastic bags altogether.
- The lack of waste water treatment facilities in coastal cities can harm ocean ecosystems. Due to the lack of treatment facilities, collected human waste and waste water are dumped directly into river and oceans in many cases. This is also increasingly hindering the tourism industry.
- In many coastal cities slum or informal settlements are formed on the coastal lines, without access to basic services such as waste collection and waste water treatment system. UN-Habitat estimates that only 5% of its waste collected in these squatter settlements. These marginalised communities are not only vulnerable to climate change impacts but also not providing basic services to these urban poor has significant impacts on coastal environment.
- To protect coastal and ocean environment, much more proactive urban planning and massive efforts and greater investments in waste and waste water management are urgently needed in coastal cities.
- Beyond the issue of waste management, coastal cities are extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change. These include increased frequency and severity of storms, which lead to storm surges, sea level rise and the salinification of groundwater and soil. Much greater care needs to be

taken to plan new urban areas and retrofit existing ones in ways that work with, rather than against, ecological systems so that development avoids low-lying vulnerable areas as much as natural habitat that provides critical ecosystem services (e.g. coastal wetlands that serve as buffers against storm surges, shore erosion and loss of breeding ground for fish, which are the backbone of many urban informal economies).

- New Urban Agenda adopted in the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development advocates sustainable management of resources and environmentally sound waste management as well as universal access to sustainable waste management systems.
- To implement New Urban Agenda, United Nations will continuously commit to support national and local governments to implement compact, integrated and connected urban planning, develop and enforce environmentally sound waste management policy and legislation, achieve universal access to sustainable waste management, promote 3R and extended producer responsibility, establish environmentally sound recycling and treatment systems in the waste stream and safe waste disposal.
- United Nations also will make greater efforts to support better planning of coastal urban areas and achieve universal access of basic services including informal settlements and marginalised communities in coastal cities.