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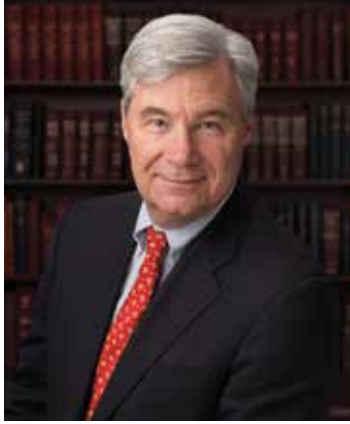
PHOTO: USAID

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**SAVE OUR SEAS**  
INITIATIVE

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**New Countries,  
New Partnerships**  
ANNUAL REPORT 2023–2024



Together with Senator Sullivan, we passed the bipartisan Save Our Seas Act 2.0 into law in 2020. That law is guiding the federal government's start in tackling the global plastics crisis. Using funding we secured through the appropriations process and direction from SOS 2.0 to lead international efforts and build partnerships abroad, USAID launched the Save Our Seas Initiative to support implementation of Save Our Seas 2.0. Through this program, USAID has supported 14 country and regional programs in areas that represent 40 percent of total global mismanaged plastic waste. USAID has prevented over 1.2 million metric tons of plastic and other materials from leaking into the environment – equivalent to over 127 billion plastic bottles. The team at USAID is doing remarkable work to protect our oceans for generations to come. There is much more work to be done and I look forward to building on our progress together.

—U.S. SENATOR SHELDON WHITEHOUSE (D-RI)



I commend Administrator Power and her team on the continued successes of the Save Our Seas Initiative, and continue to be impressed at the progress made since the passage of my Save Our Seas 2.0 bill. Since the Initiative's inception, USAID has focused on willing overseas partners who are not only eager to clean up plastic pollution, but are willing to oversee an upgrade of the entire waste management system, using local input. This upgrade has included updating laws and regulations, training workers and educating the public about what can be done to prevent trash in our oceans. This focus on the whole waste management system brings about sustainable and impactful improvements that can serve as a model elsewhere. There remains much work to be done, but USAID can be proud of the significant and lasting impacts that the Save Our Seas Initiative already demonstrates. I look forward to continuing work together on these one-of-a-kind partnerships abroad that concretely tackle the challenge of marine debris.

—U.S. SENATOR DAN SULLIVAN (R-AK)

June 2024

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# THE SAVE OUR SEAS INITIATIVE

“Imagine a garbage truck full of plastic: old food containers, water bottles, wrapping from packages delivered to your door. That’s the amount of plastic waste that is dumped into the ocean every single minute. What’s worse, as demand for plastics grows, experts estimate that by 2030, this rate will increase to the equivalent of two garbage trucks per minute—and by 2040, three garbage trucks per minute.”

—USAID ADMINISTRATOR SAMANTHA POWER.

The best way to tackle this crisis is to prevent plastic from entering the ocean in the first place. Most plastic pollution arrives in the ocean from mismanaged waste, much of it from rapidly urbanizing cities along rivers and in coastal areas. In low-income countries, up to 90 percent of waste is openly dumped or burned because the countries lack effective solid waste management systems. Worldwide, nearly two billion people (or one in four) have no way of disposing of waste properly.

In 2020, the U.S. Congress passed the Save Our Seas 2.0 Act to accelerate efforts to combat the complex challenge of ocean plastic pollution. This bipartisan legislation directed USAID to craft strategies and implement programs to prevent ocean plastic pollution. The global Save Our Seas Initiative, launched in 2022, supports comprehensive on-the-ground programming in 14 key countries that account for 40 percent of all global mismanaged plastic waste. Total funding for the Save Our Seas Initiative has reached \$138.7 million to date (in FY 2021, FY 2022, and FY 2023 funding).

## WHY IS OCEAN PLASTIC POLLUTION INCREASING?

- Proliferation of single-use plastics
- Absence of basic waste management infrastructure in many countries makes it impossible to safely manage ever increasing volumes of waste
- Lack of policies and incentives to reduce, reuse, and recycle (3Rs)
- Weak recycling markets for plastics
- The informal sector, often responsible for collecting most plastic waste, is under-resourced and not well integrated into cities solid waste management systems





**In the second year of the Save Our Seas Initiative, USAID accelerated the creation of new country partnerships and programs to fight ocean plastics.**

USAID’s focus is on setting up and maintaining long-term relationships with country governments who are central partners in solving this global problem. We also focus on joining forces with other actors, namely the private sector, to expand the effectiveness and reach of limited public sector resources.

**The goal of the Save Our Seas Initiative is to end the flow of plastic pollution into the ocean by 2040.**

## IMPACTS TO DATE



Prevented the equivalent of **more than 127 billion** plastic bottles (1.2 million metric tons of plastic) from polluting our environment



Strengthened the **capacity of 31 cities** to reduce, reuse, recycle (3Rs) and manage solid waste



Improved solid waste services for **11.3 million people**



Catalyzed **\$138 million** of private sector and public funding commitments for solid waste management and recycling

# HOW USAID IS TACKLING OCEAN PLASTIC POLLUTION

## THE SAVE OUR SEAS INITIATIVE IN ACTION

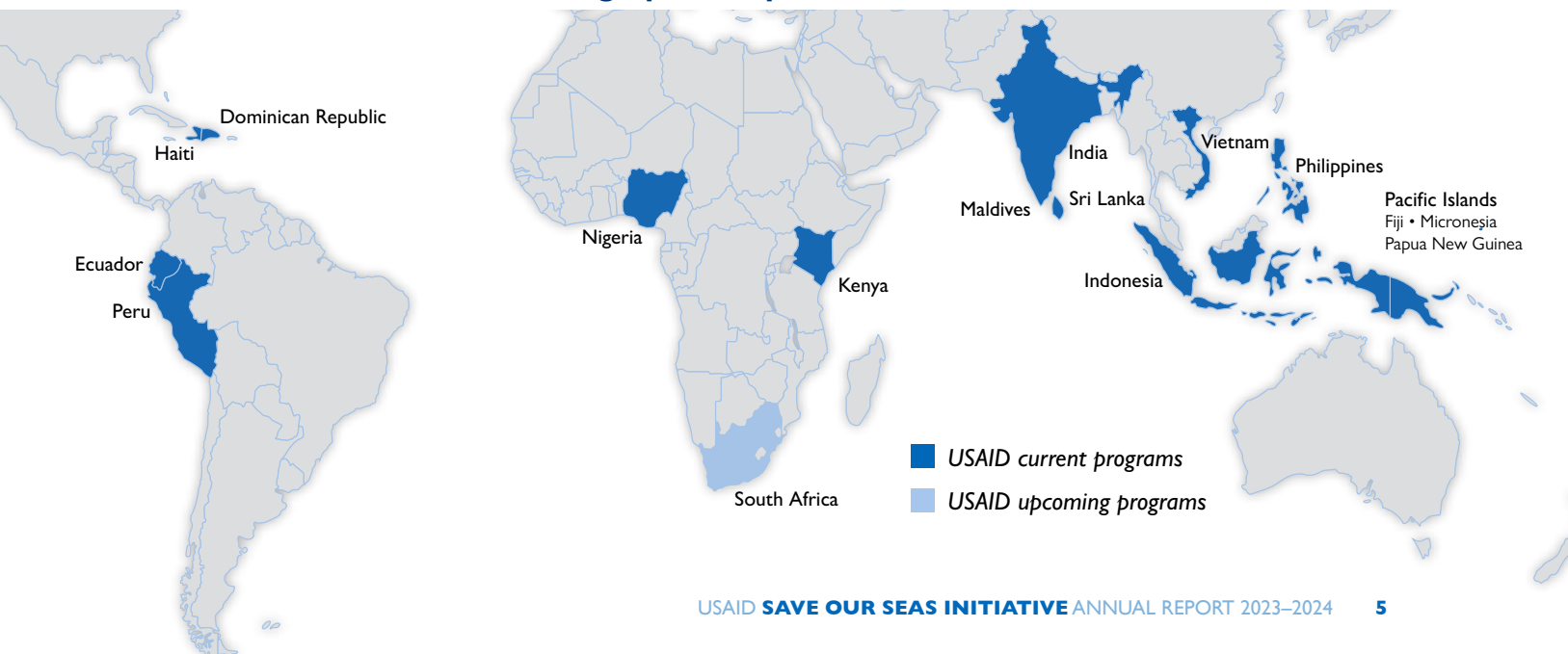
The Save Our Seas Initiative focuses on reducing plastic leakage into the ocean by strengthening solid waste management systems and creating inclusive circular economies together with local and national governments, communities, and the private sector. The initiative draws on effective methods for reducing mismanaged waste in partner countries developed under USAID's Clean Cities, Blue Ocean program. The Save Our Seas Initiative also leverages the expertise and relationships of our field missions to expand country-level and regional programs to scale these efforts and catalyze greater private sector, donor, and interagency funding and partnerships to crowd-in additional funding.

Save Our Seas Initiative programs focus on key island and coastal nations with the greatest potential to reduce mismanaged plastic waste polluting the environment. Through these key country partnerships, The Save Our Seas Initiative is scaling up efforts to prevent plastic from getting into the oceans. In its first year, the Save Our Seas Initiative launched country programs in Vietnam, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. This year we launched new programs in **six countries** in India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Kenya, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic. These new programs enable USAID to work in more cities and with more partners to tackle difficult development problems that overlap with root causes of ocean plastic pollution.

The Save Our Seas Initiative works in three main ways:

- 1** Direct partnerships with key countries and cities.
- 2** Partnerships with the private sector.
- 3** The global Clean Cities, Blue Ocean program.

### Save Our Seas Initiative Geographic Scope



# YEAR 2 HIGHLIGHTS

Over the past year, USAID expanded efforts to combat ocean plastics:

PHOTO: SONYA EDELMAN, T3 KENYA



**LAUNCHED NEW MULTI-YEAR COUNTRY PROGRAMS** in the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Kenya, and Nigeria.

PHOTO: USAID



**CREATED THE CIRCLE ALLIANCE**, a new \$21 million public-private partnership with Unilever and EY to reduce plastic use and tackle plastic waste.

PHOTO: USAID



**EXTENDED OUR GLOBAL FLAGSHIP CLEAN CITIES, BLUE OCEAN PROGRAM** with its training already reaching waste professionals from 100+ countries.

# NEW SAVE OUR SEAS INITIATIVE PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Building on the global Clean Cities, Blue Ocean program and the initial slate of bilateral country programs, in 2023 and 2024, USAID launched new ocean plastics programs in **six key countries**, with a combined population of more than **two billion people**, significantly expanding the reach of the Save Our Seas Initiative.

## SAVE OUR SEAS INITIATIVE COUNTRY PROGRAMS

### New Programs

**India:** The Innovations for Reducing Plastics for a Cleaner Environment in India (inREPLACE) program is our largest country partnership to date. The program aims to reduce plastic pollution by improving solid waste management at the city and state level and advancing a plastics circular economy through innovations.



**Indonesia:** Through the Sustainable Municipal Solid Waste Management and Partnership (SELARAS) USAID is increasing by 5-fold the number of Indonesian cities receiving support for sustainable and integrated solid waste management and recycling systems.



**Nigeria:** The Nigeria Plastic Solutions Activity will tackle the critical challenge of plastic waste management in Nigeria through innovative recycling solutions in partnership with the Coca-Cola Foundation. Funded equally by Coca-Cola and USAID, the primary objective of the Nigeria Plastic Solutions Activity is to recover approximately 49,000 metric tons of plastic waste by improving capacity for plastic collection, sorting, aggregating, and processing.



**Kenya:** Save Our Seas Initiative activities in Kenya address plastics policy (Plastic Producer Responsibility project), encourage innovations among aspiring entrepreneurs (Mombasa Plastics Prize Incubator Program, follow up on the Mombasa Plastics Prize), improve plastics collection and recycling operations (Coastal Plastic Circular Initiative project), and promote a circular economy waste management model (Unlocking the Plastic Value Chain project).



**Ecuador:** The Recycling, Adaptation, Development, Adjustment and Renewal (RADAR) project in Ecuador aims to support environmental conservation of the biodiversity-rich Galápagos Islands by reducing plastic pollution that reaches the ocean through improving integrated solid waste management systems in the provinces of Galápagos and Manabí.



**Dominican Republic:** The Dominican Republic Solid Waste Reduction Program will work in the northern coast of the country to reduce waste in municipalities, leading to cleaner oceans, building on work conducted by Clean Cities, Blue Ocean.



## Ongoing Programs

**Sri Lanka and the Maldives:** Launched in 2022, the Ocean Plastics Reduction Activity in Sri Lanka and the Maldives aims to reduce plastic pollution by decreasing industrial use of plastic and improving integrated solid waste management practices, working alongside local partners to target system inefficiencies and areas of reliance on virgin plastics.



**Vietnam:** Launched in 2022, the Vietnam Action Against Plastic Pollution program works with local and national governments, communities, and the private sector to reduce plastic pollution by supporting implementation of Vietnam's Extended Producer Responsibility law, introducing effective solid waste management models, and demonstrating single use plastic reduction measures. Launched in 2021, USAID/Vietnam's Reducing Pollution Activity also continued to support local organizations to work with stakeholders to develop models for plastic waste collection, sorting, and recycling in Ho Chi Minh City.



Since 2016, USAID has partnered with the Government of Vietnam to reduce marine plastic pollution across several cities and at the national level.



## Featured Programs

### SPOTLIGHT ON INDIA



As a rapidly urbanizing and industrializing country with a population of 1.4 billion, India is experiencing rapid growth in plastic consumption. Its large riverine network and coastal belt also makes the country a prime source of ocean plastic pollution. In partnership with the Government of India, USAID recently launched the five-year Reducing Plastics for a Cleaner Environment in India (inREPLACE) with an initial investment of \$11.25 million, making it the largest country program as of 2024 under the Save Our Seas Initiative. Led by an India-based consortium, the program will be implemented across diverse geographies including smaller and larger cities along coasts, rivers, and island settings. The program aims to (a) improve solid waste management policies, planning, infrastructure, and services focusing on plastic pollution, and (b) address the lifecycle impact of plastic by promoting a circular economy and innovations. Key activities will include working hand-in-hand with local governments to develop and implement Plastic Reduction Action Plans and collaborating with the private sector to invest in recycling and plastic-alternative innovations. The program also seeks to promote social and behavior change in schools to reduce plastic use and waste, and supports informal waste workers.

## SPOTLIGHT ON INDONESIA

With the world's fourth largest population and second longest coastline, Indonesia is a key partner in addressing ocean plastic pollution. USAID launched the Sustainable Municipal Solid Waste Management and Partnership (SELARAS) with the Government of Indonesia to support Indonesia in achieving their ambitious goals, including their objective to reduce marine plastics pollution by 70 percent by 2025. The program works at national, provincial, and local levels to reduce land-based sources of ocean plastic pollution and methane emissions (a harmful byproduct of solid waste that is generated when the waste is not managed properly) by promoting sustainable and integrated solid waste management and recycling systems in cities in partnership with the private sector, civil society, and city governments.

PHOTO: USAID

## SPOTLIGHT ON ECUADOR



Ecuador is a country famous for its coastal areas and home to the Galápagos Islands. Inadequate solid waste management systems and overflowing dumps threaten biodiversity and conservation efforts. USAID launched the Recycling, Adaptation, Development, Adjustment and Renewal (RADAR) Initiative to reduce plastic pollution that reaches the ocean with the aim of creating improved integrated solid waste management systems in the provinces of Galápagos as well as Manabí on the mainland. With its financial, social, and ecological sustainability focus, RADAR aims to strengthen existing solid waste management systems and to connect these systems with profitable and sustainable markets to build a more circular economy. The project will support communities—including informal recyclers—by creating business opportunities and encouraging residents to reduce and classify waste appropriately.

PHOTO: USAID/ECUADOR

## NEW GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP

### **CIRCLE Alliance: Catalyzing Inclusive, Resilient, and Circular Local Economies**

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In June 2024, USAID, Unilever and EY announced the launch of the flagship public-private partnership under the Save Our Seas Initiative: The CIRCLE Alliance is a new \$21 million public-private initiative to scale solutions that will reduce plastic use and tackle plastic waste. Founded by Unilever, USAID, and EY, its aim is to support women's economic empowerment, improve livelihoods, and protect the environment by accelerating the development of circular economies. CIRCLE will build on the successful approaches developed by enterprise accelerator TRANSFORM and by USAID's Save Our Seas Initiative.

The new Alliance responds to the urgent need for collective action on plastics in South and Southeast Asia. It also recognizes the critical contributions informal workers make in the circular economy and the importance of creating jobs that respect their human rights.

CIRCLE will work across three areas:

- Developing social enterprises, offering a mix of grant funding and business consulting to organizations bringing plastics into circular economies;
- Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, providing tailored support for women-led businesses in the sector; and
- Supporting effective and transparent mandatory Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies and implementation that contribute to a circular economy.





PHOTO: USAID

*Through ongoing programs, USAID has been working to empower women as leaders of local circular economies and the businesses that underpin them.*

It is anticipated that CIRCLE will help enterprises across the local plastic value chain to scale their collection and recycling capabilities, avoiding landfill and incineration, and develop and scale reuse-refill models to reduce plastic use. CIRCLE will initially focus on India, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. It will provide country-specific grant funding and bespoke technical assistance from 2024 through 2029.

In addition to their combined funding and convening power, each of the lead organizations brings specific knowledge and business skills to support entrepreneurs and small businesses. USAID has technical expertise in plastic waste reduction in Southeast Asia, experience in empowering women in plastic waste value chains, and long-standing local relationships with national and local governments, civil society, and multilateral bodies. Unilever brings knowledge and supply chain access through its growth and sustainability strategy. EY is experienced in providing professional support and specialized technical assistance to businesses of all sizes, helping them grow, transform and operate. CIRCLE will be implemented by Resonance, which brings strong experience leading and managing multi-stakeholder partnerships to drive inclusive market-based solutions to critical climate, social, and sustainability challenges.

CIRCLE has an open ambition to scale and expand to wider markets and materials by bringing in new organizations with additional funds to invest.



*In Indonesia, USAID's support has inspired community members across three cities to become champions of the 3Rs and reinvigorated critical facilities, like waste banks, that underpin local circular economies.*



## GOING FURTHER WITH CLEAN CITIES, BLUE OCEAN

Clean Cities, Blue Ocean is our global, flagship Save Our Seas Initiative program working in more than 25 cities in ten countries. The program was originally slated to conclude in 2024; however, USAID extended Clean Cities, Blue Ocean for an additional year and invested an additional \$10.9 million, which includes \$750,000 that was donated by the Government of Norway, due to the program's high demand and historic impacts in reducing ocean plastic pollution. In its final year, Clean Cities, Blue Ocean will have the opportunity to maximize its legacy of strengthening solid waste and 3R (reduce, reuse, recycling) systems in rapidly urbanizing countries in Asia, the Pacific Islands, Latin America, and the Caribbean. By working with national and local governments, local organizations, and the private sector, Clean Cities, Blue Ocean and its partners have prevented the equivalent of more than **127 billion plastic bottles from entering the environment—approximately 1.2 million metric tons.**

This past year, Clean Cities, Blue Ocean has continued to expand with new projects that focus on improving waste management services, engaging the private sector, furthering policy reforms, promoting social and behavior change, and supporting informal workers, particularly women workers. The following examples display the range and depth of Clean Cities, Blue Ocean's activities.

## WASTE MANAGEMENT SERVICES AND SYSTEMS

### Solid Waste Management Online University

USAID has trained over 17,000 individuals on solid waste management from more than 100 countries. Lessons from these trainings were consolidated into a [Virtual Training Hub](#) — a free online, publicly available platform hosts trainings, webinars, and online resources to help cities strengthen their local systems, including topics such as siting and designing sanitary landfills, solid waste planning, material recovery facility operations, and identifying funding options for improving waste systems. Among the tools made available through the training hub is the [Solid Waste Capacity Index for Local Governments \(SCIL\)](#), which enables local governments to self-assess their strengths and weaknesses with respect to waste management. The SCIL has been piloted in four languages in 20 cities across ten countries.



## PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS FOR GREEN JOBS

### Innovation Challenges for Plastic Alternatives

The private sector plays a critical role in tackling plastic pollution by providing financial resources, driving innovation in packaging design, catalyzing investment in recycling infrastructure, and creating more sustainable business models. In Sri Lanka, industry leaders and the country's National Innovation Agency participated in a Demo Day and [Innovative Trade Show](#) that unveiled groundbreaking solutions incubated by a USAID grantee, which now receives industry support for product development. During the event, innovative solutions were showcased, including biodegradable alternatives to single-use plastics made of organic waste and portable machinery to decentralize plastic waste processing.

## KEY POLICY REFORMS

### Global Negotiations on Plastic Pollution Agreement and Extended Producer Responsibility

To address the plastics crisis the UN Environment Assembly adopted a historic resolution in 2022 to develop a binding international agreement to end plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, across the entire plastic life cycle. Since then, there have been four negotiating sessions held in Uruguay, France, Kenya, and Canada. A final agreement is expected with the last negotiation round in Korea later this year. USAID has shared lessons on a key component of the treaty—developing and implementing inclusive Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) systems that incentivize increased recyclability, promote higher recycling rates, and enhance the accountability of producers for environmentally sound management of plastics and plastic products throughout their life cycle. In the lead-up to the negotiations in Nairobi, USAID released the Extended Producer Responsibility: A System for a Circular Economy case study, which shared lessons learned from supporting Sri Lanka's efforts to pilot a national EPR system.







With its local implementing partner, Sostenibilidad 3Rs, USAID Clean Cities, Blue Ocean is engaging youth across Samaná Province, Dominican Republic.

## BEHAVIOR CHANGE TO REDUCE SINGLE-USE PLASTIC

### Green Schools

Working with youth as change agents can help sustain community-wide social and behavior change efforts. In the Dominican Republic, USAID set up a school recycling program called “Green Friday,” which is teaching students, teachers, and their families in schools in Samaná Province about the 3Rs—reduce, reuse, recycle—and invites them to bring their used plastics to school to be collected and returned to the local circular economy.

In its first weeks, the program recovered more than 300 pounds of plastics—equivalent to roughly 15,000 plastic bottles. USAID partner and local recycling company, Reciclajes Bahia, collects the materials and delivers them to Cilpen Global, one of the country’s leading recycling companies, where they are processed and returned to the local and global circular economy, thereby reducing the leakage of plastics into the environment and the need for new plastic production. Because of its success, the Green Friday Program is now a national template to involve youth throughout the country as “Guardians of the Sea.”



PHOTO: USAID

## SUPPORT FOR INFORMAL WASTE WORKERS AND EMPOWERING WOMEN

The Women in Waste's Economic Empowerment (WWEE) activity in the Philippines and Indonesia offers women a transformative training program, focusing on building business skills, personal empowerment, and gender-based violence prevention, and a small business incubator program to become successful entrepreneurs in the waste sector. In addition to establishing or expanding waste and recycling businesses that have increased their income and livelihoods, participants reported newfound confidence to share their ideas with others, form relationships with their peers, and trust themselves.

In the Philippines, WWEE continued supporting its graduates to make market linkages, with more than 20 women registering as associate members of Linis Ganda Cooperative—the country's largest junk shop network. In Indonesia, more than 50 women (representing 38 enterprises) completed the WWEE Advanced Business Training and received their small business grants. To date, more than 700 women have graduated from the WWEE program, and 133 women have received grants to expand 98 businesses. Together, they have prevented an estimated 190 metric tons of waste from entering the environment.



*Meet the Indonesian women leading the fight against plastic pollution.*



*In Indonesia, women working in the waste sector are now better able to access international recycling markets through training, mentorship, and small grants to strengthen their businesses.*

In Peru, USAID Clean Cities, Blue Ocean is empowering women as leaders of emerging local circular economies.

PHOTO: USAID



## LOOKING FORWARD

With the international plastics agreement on the horizon, USAID will continue to play a vital role in strengthening the capacity of partner countries to implement their commitments to reduce plastic pollution. The Save Our Seas Initiative's programs and partnerships are having a significant impact on the ground to combat ocean plastics. As the global program Clean Cities, Blue Ocean enters its final year, USAID is establishing new multi-year regional and country programs in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean to scale the approaches that have proven successful over the past five years. Our expanding programs strengthen the capacity of governments at the national and local level, leverage private sector knowledge and resources, empower women in the waste sector, and advance inclusive and implementable EPR systems and other policies to support a circular economy.

New high-impact partnerships, such as the CIRCLE Alliance with Unilever and EY, are extending our resources and reach. The challenges before us in stemming the deluge of plastics entering the ocean will take a concerted and committed effort from all actors rowing together: governments, businesses, civil society, and informal waste collectors. As USAID looks to the future, we will be exploring more ways for local and global partnerships to build a circular economy and end plastic pollution.



PHOTO: USAID



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COVER PHOTOS: USAID

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