

(Output Paper)



India



Maldives



Sri Lanka

# PROMISE Regional Policy Roundtable on Marine Litter Prevention in the Lakshadweep Sea

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## Project Contribution to SDGs:



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## 1. Roundtable Introduction

The *Regional Policy Roundtable on Marine Litter Prevention in the Lakshadweep Sea* was convened in Malé, Maldives, on 03 and 04 June 2024 as part of the EU-funded PROMISE project (2020–2024), implemented under the SWITCH-Asia Programme. The roundtable built upon a series of national policy dialogues previously conducted in India, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka, and aimed to elevate national learnings into a coherent regional cooperation framework for addressing marine litter in the Lakshadweep Sea.

The Lakshadweep Sea is a shared marine ecosystem bordered by India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka, making marine litter a transboundary challenge. Waste leakage from land-based sources, tourism activities, fisheries, and inadequate waste management systems has resulted in significant marine pollution, including plastics, abandoned fishing gear, and microplastics. Recognising that unilateral national action is insufficient to address these interconnected challenges, the roundtable was designed to foster regional dialogue, policy alignment, and joint solution prototyping.

The roundtable brought together delegates from government ministries, local authorities, development organisations, research institutions, civil society, and private sector actors from all three countries. A key institutional focus of the discussions was the Lakshadweep Zero Waste Alliance (LOWA), established under the PROMISE project, and its potential role as a regional coordination, knowledge, and fund management platform.

### Objectives

- Foster regional cooperation among India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka on marine litter prevention
- Identify shared and country-specific challenges related to marine litter
- Develop actionable regional policy recommendations
- Prototype regional cooperation mechanisms and implementation frameworks
- Strengthen and expand the role of LOWA as a regional coordinating entity

### Structure and Flow of the Sessions

The two-day roundtable followed a participatory and solution-oriented approach:

**Day 1** focused on setting the context and identifying gaps. Opening sessions introduced the PROMISE project, existing national and regional policy initiatives, and the role of LOWA. This was followed by in-country group discussions to analyse policy gaps, implementation challenges, and immediate actions. Afternoon sessions shifted to regional group work, where participants explored opportunities for regional cooperation, developed joint policy recommendations, and mapped relevant actors.

**Day 2** emphasised solution prototyping and consolidation. Regional groups continued refining cooperation frameworks, with a strong focus on LOWA's functionality, governance, and sustainability. Peer presentations allowed groups to share outcomes, receive feedback, and align proposed solutions. The roundtable concluded with reflections on next steps and pathways for implementation.

## 2. Challenge Identification

During facilitated group exercises, participants documented key challenges related to marine litter prevention using structured brainstorming tools. These challenges, captured on visual boards, reflect shared regional barriers as well as country-specific constraints. The challenges were analysed and clustered into six thematic categories. Importantly, these challenges directly informed the solution prototypes discussed in Section 3, ensuring a clear linkage between problem identification and solution design.



### Overview of Challenge Categories

Category	Key Issues Identified
1. Policy & Governance Gaps	Fragmented policies, weak enforcement, lack of regional alignment
2. Data, Information & Knowledge Gaps	Absence of harmonised data, limited information sharing
3. Institutional & Capacity Constraints	Limited technical capacity, weak coordination mechanisms
4. Waste Management & Infrastructure Limitations	Inadequate collection, recycling, and treatment systems
5. Behavioural, Awareness & Responsibility Gaps	Low public awareness, unclear stakeholder responsibilities
6. Financing, Innovation & Market Barriers	Insufficient funding, weak incentives, limited alternatives to plastics

#### 2.1 Policy and Governance Gaps

Participants highlighted the absence of harmonised regional policies on marine litter and plastic waste. While national regulations exist, their scope, ambition, and enforcement levels vary significantly. Challenges included weak implementation of existing laws, lack of enforcement capacity, unclear mandates across institutions, and limited regional policy coordination. Single-use plastics are banned or restricted in some contexts, yet enforcement remains inconsistent, and exemptions or loopholes are frequently exploited by large producers and brands.

These governance gaps underscored the need for regional standards, coordinated policy advocacy, and a shared platform to align national efforts—elements later reflected in the proposed regional cooperation mechanisms.

## 2.2 Data, Information and Knowledge Gaps

A recurring challenge was the lack of reliable, comparable, and up-to-date data on marine litter flows, sources, and impacts. Participants noted the absence of source-to-sea data, limited information on waste leakage hotspots, and insufficient regional knowledge exchange. Data collection methodologies differ across countries, making regional assessments difficult.

This gap directly informed the proposal for a Central Data Collection and Knowledge Hub, with LOWA envisioned as the coordinating entity.

## 2.3 Institutional and Capacity Constraints

Limited technical, institutional, and human capacity was identified at national and local levels. Coordination between ministries, agencies, and local authorities is often weak, and regional coordination mechanisms are largely absent. Negotiation capacity at upstream levels—particularly with producers and multinational brands—was highlighted as insufficient, limiting effective prevention and extended producer responsibility (EPR) implementation.

Participants emphasised the importance of peer learning, technical exchange, and institutional strengthening through structured regional cooperation.

## 2.4 Waste Management and Infrastructure Limitations

Legacy waste management challenges persist across the region, including inadequate waste collection systems, limited recycling facilities, and lack of appropriate technologies for island and coastal contexts. Transporting waste from remote islands remains costly and logically complex. Participants also highlighted limited access to recycling markets and alternatives to single-use plastics.

These constraints reinforced the need for regional collaboration on technology transfer, innovation, and pooled investments.

## 2.5 Behavioural, Awareness and Responsibility Gaps

Low public awareness and limited behavioural change were identified as major barriers. Participants noted weak understanding of individual and institutional responsibility for waste, including “my waste, my responsibility” principles. Awareness gaps exist at grassroots, decision-making, and private sector levels, often resulting in poor compliance and limited demand for sustainable alternatives.

## 2.6 Financing, Innovation and Market Barriers

Insufficient and fragmented funding was highlighted as a critical bottleneck. Existing international funding is often short-term and project-based, with limited focus on implementation and scaling. Participants also noted weak R&D on plastic alternatives, limited incentives for private sector innovation, and risks of greenwashing by corporations.

These challenges collectively informed the proposal for a Regional Marine Litter Prevention Fund.

### 3. Solution Prototyping

Building on the identified challenges, participants co-developed three complementary regional solution prototypes. All three solutions position the Lakshadweep Zero Waste Alliance (LOWA) as a central coordinating, facilitation, and fund management entity.

#### 3.1 Central Data Collection and Knowledge Hub

##### Challenge Description

The roundtable discussions revealed that marine litter data across India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka remains highly fragmented, inconsistent, and often unavailable at the regional scale. Participants highlighted the absence of harmonised methodologies for data collection, limited source-to-sea tracking, lack of information on transboundary waste flows, and poor accessibility of existing studies and monitoring results. These gaps constrain evidence-based policymaking, hinder regional coordination, and limit the ability to prioritise interventions effectively.

Beyond the lack of harmonised data, participants also highlighted challenges related to data accessibility, continuity, and usability. Existing datasets are often project-based, time-bound, or held by individual institutions, limiting their usefulness for long-term planning and regional comparison. In many cases, data generated at the local level does not feed into national or regional decision-making processes, resulting in weak feedback loops between implementation and policy formulation. Furthermore, limited technical capacity for data analysis and interpretation reduces the ability of institutions to translate raw data into actionable insights. These challenges collectively undermine strategic prioritisation, impact measurement, and the ability to demonstrate progress to policymakers, donors, and the public.



##### Solution Description

The Central Data Collection and Knowledge Hub is envisioned as a regional digital platform that consolidates data, knowledge products, and analytical tools related to marine litter prevention in the Lakshadweep Sea. Hosted and coordinated by the Lakshadweep Zero Waste Alliance (LOWA), the hub will act as a one-stop repository for policy-relevant data, best practices, technologies, and lessons learned. It will support harmonised data standards while respecting national data ownership.

In response, the Central Data Collection and Knowledge Hub is designed not only as a data repository, but as an enabling decision-support system for the region. In addition to consolidating datasets, the hub

will synthesise information into policy-relevant formats such as dashboards, briefs, and regional indicators that can inform planning, investment, and regulatory action. By integrating scientific data, policy information, and implementation experiences, the hub will bridge the gap between knowledge generation and decision-making. Coordinated by LOWA, the hub will also facilitate continuous updating of data, encourage cross-country comparability, and support transparency by making non-sensitive information accessible to a broad range of stakeholders, including governments, practitioners, and development partners.

### Objectives

- Establish harmonised regional data standards and indicators for marine litter
- Enable evidence-based decision-making and regional policy alignment
- Improve transparency, reporting, and accountability
- Support monitoring of regional commitments and interventions

### Key Stakeholders & Roles

Stakeholder	Role
LOWA	Platform host, regional coordinator, data governance
National Governments	Data provision, validation, policy use
Local Authorities	Primary data collection
Research Institutions & Academia	Methodology design, analysis, interpretation
Development Partners	Technical assistance and financing
Private Sector	Data sharing on materials, waste streams

### Key Functions

- Centralised regional data repository
- Harmonised indicators and dashboards
- Knowledge library of policies, technologies, and tools
- Monitoring and reporting support for regional initiatives

### Activities

- Development of regional data protocols
- Establishment of an interactive digital platform
- Capacity building for data collection and reporting
- Annual regional marine litter status reports

## 3.2 Regional Cooperation for Knowledge Transfer

### Challenge Description

The Regional Policy Roundtable highlighted that while India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka face similar marine litter challenges, institutional learning and solution uptake remain largely fragmented and country-specific. Participants noted that valuable experiences, technologies, and policy innovations developed in one country are often not systematically shared or adapted by others. This results in duplication of efforts, slow adoption of proven solutions, and missed opportunities for cost-effective implementation.

Limited technical capacity within government institutions, particularly at sub-national and local levels, further constrains effective marine litter prevention. Participants also identified weak negotiation capacity with upstream actors such as plastic producers and multinational brands, insufficient exposure to alternative materials and waste technologies, and lack of regional platforms for sustained peer learning. While regional meetings and conferences occasionally occur, they are often ad hoc, project-driven, and not embedded within a long-term cooperation framework.

Additionally, the absence of harmonised marine litter standards and coordinated policy advocacy across the Lakshadweep Sea region reduces the collective influence of the three countries in international negotiations, funding dialogues, and engagement with the private sector. These challenges underscore the need for a structured and institutionalised regional cooperation mechanism focused on knowledge transfer and capacity development.



### Solution Description

The **Regional Cooperation for Knowledge Transfer** solution proposes the establishment of a structured, long-term regional mechanism to facilitate peer learning, technology transfer, policy alignment, and joint advocacy on marine litter prevention. This mechanism will be coordinated by the **Lakshadweep Zero Waste Alliance (LOWA)**, leveraging its regional mandate and networks established under the PROMISE project.

The cooperation mechanism will enable systematic exchange of best practices, policy instruments, technologies, and implementation experiences through a mix of in-person and virtual platforms. Key modalities include regional conferences, thematic workshops, study tours, technical trainings, and joint pilot demonstrations. The mechanism will also support coordinated regional policy advocacy and the gradual development of harmonised marine litter prevention standards suited to island and coastal contexts.

By institutionalising regional learning and cooperation, this solution aims to move beyond isolated national efforts and foster a shared regional approach to marine litter prevention in the Lakshadweep Sea.

### Objectives

- Strengthen institutional and technical capacity across India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka
- Facilitate peer learning and transfer of proven technologies and solutions
- Promote harmonisation of marine litter policies, standards, and guidelines
- Enhance regional advocacy and collective engagement with international partners
- Support innovation and adaptive solutions tailored to coastal and island contexts

### Key Stakeholders & Roles

Stakeholder	Role
LOWA	Regional coordinator, convenor, knowledge broker
National Governments	Policy participation, adoption of learnings
Local Authorities	Implementation and pilot testing
Research Institutions & Academia	Knowledge generation, technical inputs
Civil Society & NGOs	Community-level innovation and outreach
Private Sector	Technology provision, innovation, scaling
Regional & International Bodies	Policy alignment, advocacy support

### Key Functions

- Coordination of regional knowledge exchange activities
- Design and delivery of capacity-building programmes
- Facilitation of technology transfer and innovation uptake
- Support for regional policy dialogue and advocacy
- Development of regionally relevant marine litter standards

### Activities

- Organisation of annual regional marine litter prevention forums
- Thematic workshops on waste prevention, recycling, and alternatives
- Study tours and exposure visits to successful initiatives within and outside the region
- Virtual trainings and peer-learning sessions for government and practitioners
- Joint development of regional marine litter guidelines and standards
- Coordinated policy advocacy at regional and international platforms

### 3.3 Regional Cooperation for Knowledge Transfer

#### Challenge Description

One of the most critical barriers identified during the roundtable was the lack of predictable, long-term, and coordinated financing for marine litter prevention. Participants noted that existing funding for marine litter initiatives in the region is often fragmented, short-term, and heavily reliant on external donors. Funding tends to prioritise pilot projects and awareness activities, while limited resources are available for implementation, scaling, and sustained operation of proven solutions.

National and local governments face budgetary constraints, particularly in island and coastal regions where waste management costs are high due to transport, limited land availability, and infrastructure challenges. At the same time, private sector engagement remains limited due to weak incentives, perceived risks, and lack of blended finance instruments. Participants also highlighted insufficient funding for research and development of alternatives to single-use plastics and context-appropriate waste technologies.

These challenges point to the need for a dedicated regional financing mechanism that can mobilise, pool, and strategically deploy resources for marine litter prevention across the Lakshadweep Sea.



#### Solution Description

The Regional Marine Litter Prevention Fund is proposed as a pooled, multi-donor financing mechanism that brings together contributions from national governments, international donors, development banks, and philanthropic organisations. The fund will prioritise prevention-focused, scalable, and regionally relevant interventions, while also supporting innovation, capacity building, and policy implementation.

The Lakshadweep Zero Waste Alliance (LOWA) will act as the Fund Management Agency, responsible for overall governance, financial management, project selection, monitoring, and reporting. LOWA's regional positioning enables transparent, accountable, and context-sensitive fund administration while ensuring alignment with regional priorities identified through policy dialogues.

The fund will operate through thematic funding windows, allowing targeted support for areas such as waste prevention, alternatives to plastics, regional data systems, capacity building, and pilot-to-scale initiatives.

#### Objectives

- Mobilise sustainable and predictable financing for marine litter prevention
- Support implementation and scaling of regionally agreed solutions
- Incentivise innovation and private sector participation

- Strengthen regional ownership, accountability, and impact
- Reduce dependence on fragmented, short-term project funding

### Key Stakeholders & Roles

Stakeholder	Role
LOWA	Fund management, governance, reporting
National Governments	Financial contributions, strategic oversight
International Donors & IFIs	Capitalisation, technical assistance
Implementing Partners	Execution of funded activities
Private Sector	Co-financing, innovation, scale-up
Civil Society	Community-level implementation and monitoring

### Key Functions

- Mobilisation and pooling of financial resources
- Management of grants and blended finance instruments
- Transparent project selection and disbursement
- Monitoring, evaluation, and impact reporting
- Alignment of funding with regional policy priorities

### Activities

- Establishment of fund governance structures and operating procedures
- Launch of thematic funding windows aligned with regional needs
- Financing of pilot, implementation, and scale-up projects
- Provision of catalytic funding to leverage private investment
- Annual financial audits and impact assessments
- Reporting to contributing governments and donors

## 4. Conclusion

The Regional Policy Roundtable on Marine Litter Prevention in the Lakshadweep Sea marked a critical milestone in advancing a shared regional approach to addressing marine litter in one of South Asia's most ecologically sensitive marine ecosystems. By bringing together government representatives, development organisations, research institutions, civil society, and private sector actors from India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka, the roundtable created a rare and valuable platform for regional dialogue. The participatory structure enabled stakeholders to move beyond problem identification toward co-creation of practical, implementable solutions, grounded in national realities but oriented toward regional impact. The discussions reaffirmed that marine litter in the Lakshadweep Sea is a transboundary challenge requiring coordinated, long-term, and prevention-focused responses.

The challenges identified during the roundtable—ranging from policy and governance gaps to data limitations, capacity constraints, behavioural barriers, and financing shortfalls—demonstrated strong convergence across the three countries. Importantly, these challenges were not treated in isolation but were directly linked to the development of three complementary regional solution prototypes. The Central Data Collection and Knowledge Hub, the Regional Cooperation for Knowledge Transfer mechanism, and the Regional Marine Litter Prevention Fund together form an integrated framework that addresses evidence generation, capacity development, and sustainable financing. The consistent emphasis across all group discussions on coordination, harmonisation, and shared ownership underscores the maturity of regional thinking achieved through the roundtable process.

A defining outcome of the roundtable was the collective recognition of the Lakshadweep Zero Waste Alliance (LOWA) as a central institutional anchor for regional marine litter prevention efforts. Participants strongly endorsed LOWA's role as a coordinating platform, knowledge broker, and fund management agency capable of translating regional dialogue into sustained action. Moving forward, priority next steps include formalising regional commitments, strengthening LOWA's governance and operational capacity, mobilising seed financing for the proposed fund, and initiating pilot activities under each solution stream. With continued political commitment, strategic partnerships, and sustained regional cooperation, the outcomes of this roundtable can serve as a foundation for long-term, scalable marine litter prevention across the Lakshadweep Sea region.

