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Greetings!

Beating Marine Pollution: Greening the Blue

This being the environment week the buzz is all about #BeatingPlasticPollution and as such, we continue our Eco-byte series by focusing on marine pollution.

Marine pollution is one of the greatest pollution challenges in these modern times, with an estimated 8 million tons of plastic waste finding its way into the world's oceans each year. The constant increase in the mass of solid waste produced by humans, coupled by the very slow rate at which waste degrades lead to a steady increase in the amount of waste accumulating at the sea, sea floors and along coastlines around the world.

Most of the marine pollution is caused by human activities such as littering along beaches, dumping of waste along the coastline, releasing of toxic chemicals and sewage waste into the oceans, oil & chemical leakages by water transport systems (ships, motor boats, ferries, etc.) legal & illegal dumping of waste. Some of the waste is also flushed downstream by river currents as they drain into the sea. This means that whatever activities you could be carrying out upstream will somehow find their way into the ocean.

Effects of marine pollution

The biggest casualty for marine pollution is the ecosystem whose functions and services are affected a great deal, not forgetting the occurrence of biodiversity loss. Fishing gear abandoned by fishermen at sea is known to ensnare and kill marine life. Toxic chemicals from pesticides and other chemical sources destroy some sensitive marine habitats.

Some of the micro plastics are also ingested by aquatic life causing their deaths. An indirect effect is that once these toxins are ingested by the fish, they find their way up the food chain when they are fed on by birds, other bigger fish and even human beings.

When toxins get into the human system they have a high likelihood of increasing diseases such as cancer, reproductive conditions, skin infections, respiratory problems among others. Oceans form a major source of livelihood for many fishermen therefore pollution affects them too.

Besides causing damage to coral reefs, affecting marine habitats and species, marine pollution also causes critical economic losses.

How so? In Kenya for instance, most tourism businesses (e.g. hotels) at the Coast are continually covering high costs on beach clean-up activities, and waste disposal issues. This is money that could have been invested elsewhere to advance the business, but now has to be used to keep the coastline clean both for public health and aesthetic reasons.



What can we do?

Preventing and minimizing pollution is a collective responsibility. We all have to make conscious decision to make a change. In other words, it starts with YOU and ME. Addressing marine pollution is vital because it not only supports marine life but our well-being as well! Cleaner oceans mean we can continue to have safe spaces to enjoy our beaches, and fishermen can have a reliable source of livelihood.

This is what you can do:

1. Be involved in regular beach clean-up activities – if there are none in your locality, be challenged to organize one and involve as many teams as possible, regularly.
2. Reduce your waste – this is also for those who live upstream far from the oceans, because your waste will still somehow find its way into the oceans if not well managed. If we reduce the amount of waste on land, we will ultimately reduce rubbish at the sea.
3. All waste water should be properly treated and not directly discharged into the water sources both upstream and downstream.
4. Recycle all the plastics you use, but if possible, find a way of eliminating plastic use. As they say, if you can't reuse it, refuse it!
5. Above all, act responsibly, adhere to the laws and where you can, create awareness to people around you. Remembers, every effort counts!