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Marine plastic pollution in West Africa – the case of Ivory Coast

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Africa remains the continent with the least information on marine plastic pollution. Since 2022, we have undertaken a series of studies to fill this gap in Ivory Coast (West Africa, north of the Gulf of Guinea). The importation of raw primary materials for the plastics industry is expected to reach 1 million tons annually within the next five years. The annual per capita consumption of plastic is approximately 19–20 kg, with more than 200,000 tons of plastic being exported to the ocean annually. Local oceanic circulation allows a significant portion of this plastic to reach the coast. During the rainy season, the western and eastern coastal regions around Abidjan (a city with 6 million inhabitants and the economic hub of the country), particularly sun and beach tourism, are severely affected by plastic waste washing ashore. Littoral fisheries are also impacted, with species (e.g., *Sardinella* sp.) ingesting microplastics. This poses a significant threat to both public health and food safety in the region. In the ocean, the Ébrié Lagoon is the primary recipient of domestic plastic pollution. Microplastic accumulation within the lagoon leads to high concentrations. Plastic recycling, which mainly involves industrial waste, remains a marginal activity. Although a law officially banning single-use plastic packaging bags was introduced in 2013, it has never been implemented due to a lack of explicit political will. The trend, therefore, continues to worsen in both the import of raw materials and the use of plastic products, leading to a worsening pollution crisis. These various challenges require that authorities struggle to address, largely due to the economic importance of the plastics industry (2% of GDP and over 200,000 jobs). We will engage all stakeholders in civil society, starting with the youngest members—schoolchildren and students. Policymakers must be involved and actions are planned at both local (municipal councils) and national (senate) levels. Donors have also to be approached for funding remediation operations. This presentation will highlight the key findings from our research and outline the upcoming action plan.

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