



More Than Plastics: How Rapa Nui is Receiving the World's Trash

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Daring to Dream: What are the Solutions to Plastic Pollution?

During one of my interviews, a local said to me “we are tired of talking about this problem. We live here, we know what is happening. We want to talk about the solutions”. So, I kept asking myself, what are the solutions to this daunting global problem?

There are hundreds of opinions from scientists and experts all over the world, though one census everyone agrees on is that the tap needs to be shut off – meaning that with plastic production is expected to at least double in the next few decades, this growth is not sustainable [1]. Plastic production needs to be reduced otherwise cleanup and management efforts will have limited impact.

Another call to action, is to regulate industrial fisheries extractive activities and their solid waste disposal that are operating in the High Seas (an area which is currently not regulated and hopefully the current undergoing UN negotiations with the High Seas Treaty and International Plastics Treaty has the unique chance to address these in the future).

Waste management and regulation is also needed on land to reduce plastic land emissions from rivers and active coastal regions, which is crucial to the problem as it is easier to remove and reduce the plastic from the source before it enters the ocean.

What to do with the non-recyclable waste (which includes most mixed plastic waste in the environment) is another difficult question. The majority of plastic waste is not recyclable, and it was never designed to be by oil manufacturers in the first place. Instead of trying to force a solution which was destined to fail, it is crucial to reduce the use of non-recyclable plastics, research and fund better alternatives, and to look at waste management from a local perspective as there are many regions where recycling and waste management are effective as there are strong social systems and policy enforcement in place which work for that specific region.

In terms of small island developing nations, such as Rapa Nui, when discussing solutions, it is important to address local environmental problems on a local level (although there is complexity here as it is influenced by a global scale problem as our oceans are all connected). Outsiders should be mindful of cultural and traditional knowledge before pushing western solutions as the standard.

During my brief time in Rapa Nui, through the organization, Te Mau o te Vaikava’s Hohonu program: a program dedicated to educating about the biological and environmental significance of life impacted by plastic pollution – I learnt that even cleaning a beach from plastics without recognizing the site heritage and thanking/asking permissions from ancestral gods can be harmful. Which is why empowering those who live on their land to have their own self-governance and solutions is critical to solving this problem.

One large issue Rapa Nui locals are experiencing, is limited financial backup/resources to continue their cleanup efforts. Many people are often spending their own time, boat fuel, and money to pick this plastic up which isn’t theirs to begin with and along with many other island nations, need more financial say and of a voice in policy decision making since they are the ones who are impacted most by plastic pollution and climate change.

During the filming of my documentary, I asked experts what they thought the solution should be and their hopes for the future, I have shared some of them below:

“My grandchildren tell me our island is already lost because of microplastics, it’s full of plastics, they also pick it up. They bring it to me, they leave it at home, and I am happy for my grandchildren, because they also care about our sea” – Claudio Tuki (local fisherman and artist)

“I think there can be a solution if there is a will. The will has to come from the United Nations. Because the United Nations are what has to intervene in this. It is the only solution and to look for a solution in this.” – Felipe Nahoe

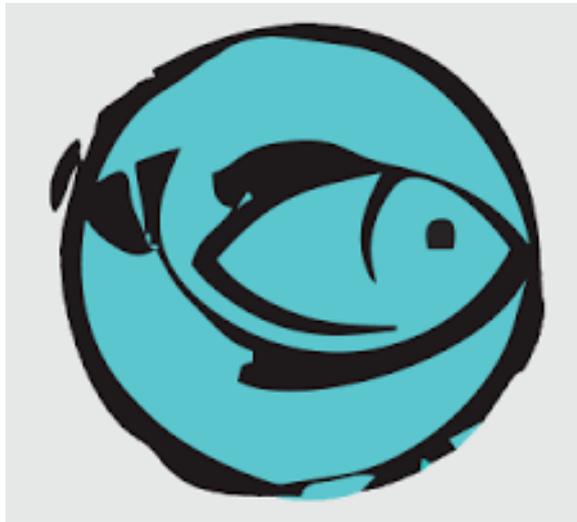
“To re-unite what is the Polynesian Triangle. Between us, United Polynesia, we can protect our sea. Maybe between all of us we can fight this problem that comes from other countries. Look what it is to clean our sea. That is the solution for me. We need to be united, to be able to have strength to work on this [since].... we are the smallest in the world, so they are not going to take us into account” – Felipe Nahoe, director of Koro

“We are the ones who live here, the ones who want to protect, the ones who want to conserve. So we have the heart and the feeling of wanting to have our area and our species, marine resources, ecosystems protected. We want to see it, to know that it exists”. -Emilia Palmatuqui, marine biologist

“Marine protected areas are great in many ways, but water will go where it goes. So if you don’t stop the pollution, marine protected area or not, the pollution will still reach unfortunately, and that is the problem....I would like to go back to being truly sustainable, because for me, truly sustainable is when the materials that you use can go back to the earth without damage” – Jennifer Verduin, Professor of Oceanograph at Murdoch University



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