Session 2: Equity and Just Transition

Report by Prof Agamutu Pariatamby

Speakers:

1. Ms Jessica Cheam, Founder and CEO of Eco-Business
2. Mr Minh Nguyen, Senior Project Specialist, VietCycle Corporation.

Moderator:

Prof Agamutu Pariatamby, Senior Professor, Jeffrey Sachs Center on Sustainable Development, Sunway University

There were two presentations given by Ms Jessica Cheam, Founder and CEO of Eco-Business and Mr Minh Nguyen, Senior Project Specialist of VietCycle Corporation.

Ms Jessica Cheam screened a clip from the film, "WASTED 2.0" by Jessica Cheam & Fraser Morton, while Mr Minh Nguyen presented on ensuring an inclusive global response to plastic pollution, with special attention to vulnerable groups and the informal waste sector.

During the workshop, participants watched the segment focusing on Vietnam. The full film, WASTED 2.0 by Jessica Cheam, investigates the hidden realities of waste management in five Asian countries: Singapore, South Korea, Vietnam, India, and Thailand. It examines Asia's waste crisis and the urgent need for sustainable waste management solutions in the region.

The film segment highlighted the importance of equity and just transition within the waste management industry. Equity, in this context, refers to the fair treatment and involvement of all people in waste management policies, regardless of race, income, or ethnicity. This is crucial because plastic pollution impacts communities unequally across all stages, and marginalised and vulnerable communities often bear the brunt of poorly managed waste, facing increased exposure to health hazards and environmental pollution. Policies sometimes worsen these inequities by ignoring local knowledge and focusing narrowly on end-of-life solutions.

Ms Jessica Cheam stressed that equitable waste management can lead to reduced emissions and pollutants, mitigating climate change and improving public health. Including all stakeholders, such as informal waste workers, indigenous populations and low-income communities in decision-making processes, results in more effective and just waste management solutions. The plastics sector provides millions of jobs globally and integrating just transition principles can safeguard these livelihoods while promoting environmental sustainability and social equity.

Mr Minh emphasised the consequences of illegal dumping and the role of informal sector in enhancing recycling in Vietnam. The question of formalising the informal waste collectors were also discussed briefly.

Mr Minh presented the current figures showing the current status of plastic waste in Vietnam, as well as the current status of plastic recycling in Vietnam. At the same time, he also introduced the positive support solutions from the Vietnamese Government in supporting the private economy, domestic business organisations in Green Transformation, professionalising and formalising the process of collecting and recycling plastic waste in Vietnam.

Through his presentation, Mr Minh spoke about the importance of the informal, freelance plastic waste collection workforce in Vietnam. However, this labor system still has many shortcomings and many of these plastic waste collectors are still very apprehensive about the work they are doing due to lack of proper attention and recognition.

Therefore, in the final part of the presentation, Mr Minh emphasised the importance of the informal, freelance plastic waste collection workforce in Vietnam. However, this labor system still has many shortcomings and many of these plastic waste collectors are still very apprehensive about the work they are doing due to lack of proper attention and recognition.

Therefore, in the final part of the presentation, Mr Minh emphasised the importance of the informal, freelance plastic waste collection workforce in Vietnam. Minh presented the solutions implemented by VietCycle Corporation when building XanhNét Circular Ecosystem as a cooperative network of more than 170 partner members, aiming to manage and support more than 50,000 informal waste collectors in Vietnam. At the same time, XanhNét Circular Ecosystem will also gather many projects to build recycling plants and plastic waste collection and sorting stations in Vietnam.

Several questions were raised to both speakers such as:

1. *How can plastic credit trading be made accessible and beneficial for informal waste collectors in the Global South?*

2. *Could plastic offset schemes incentivize more responsible consumer behavior, or would they primarily serve corporate interests?*

3. *How can policies ensure fair integration and protection of informal waste workers especially women and marginalized groups with formal plastic waste management systems?*

Both speakers (Ms Jessica Cheam and Mr Minh) agreed on the importance of plastic credit trading for the beneficial informal waste collectors but its implementation will be slow. Several incentives are available for responsible consumer behavior, however, there is always a suspicion that it will only serve the corporate interest. Policies can help promote fair integration and protection of informal waste workers, especially women and marginalised groups, and there are already several positive policies found in many developing countries such as Thailand and the Philippines.