

Integrated and Inclusive Ocean Governance is Essential to Tackling **Climate Change**

By Mitchell Lennan

We are entirely reliant upon a healthy ocean for our human rights to life, health, food, water and culture. The ocean contributes to the renewal of freshwater; it absorbs over a quarter of global carbon dioxide, and it produces half the oxygen we breathe. Climate change is driving rapid and vast changes to the ocean and consequently the ways that people relate to it. Other negative impacts on the ocean, such as overfishing and plastic pollution, are being compounded by climate change, while they also contribute to exacerbating climate change impacts.

However, for many years, the connection between marine biodiversity loss, climate change, and human rights has been overlooked. With the eyes of the world on Glasgow, Scotland in the coming weeks, the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 26) presents an opportunity for governments to:

- direct climate funding to transdisciplinary ocean research for transformative change,
- require a human rights-based and ecosystem-based approach to address marine biodiversity in climate change adaptation and mitigation in order to support multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This policy brief summarizes the key research findings from the One Ocean Hub – in South Africa, Namibia, Ghana, Fiji and the Solomon Islands – that support these key messages and require urgent consideration at COP26.

Key messages

- COP26 should recognize the need to **systematically integrate the ocean in future climate mitigation and adaptation action (notably nature-based solutions)**, because integrated and inclusive ocean governance is essential to tackling climate change across scales.
- COP26 is an opportunity for governments to **prioritize policy coherence at the nexus between the ocean, climate change, biodiversity and human rights**, so that the nexus can then be addressed across all **relevant international processes**.
- **Climate finance** should target **transdisciplinary research** on the nexus of climate change, ocean, biodiversity and human rights **as a pre-condition for transformativescience/policy engagements**, to develop inclusive and resilient climate responses to the benefit of the most vulnerable.
- COP26 should underscore the role of the **human rights-based and ecosystem-based approach** to ensure **co-benefits** for the protection of marine biodiversity, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and multiple Sustainable Development Goals.

The nexus between the ocean, climate change, biodiversity and human rights



Photo: Eric Nathan

A **valuable research** contribution of the One Ocean Hub is clarifying why and how we need to strengthen the nexus between the ocean, climate change, biodiversity and human rights.

Despite the connection between terrestrial ecosystems, biodiversity loss and climate change featuring in academic works and global media headlines for several years, the nexus between the ocean, climate change and biodiversity has only recently been placed on the agenda of the international climate change process. On the other hand, under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) a series of guidance documents, negotiated and agreed upon by 196 Parties have already addressed an array of issues at the intersection of climate change, biodiversity and human rights, which relate directly or implicitly to ocean management. CBD Parties have already systematically identified potential and actual threats that climate change and climate change response measures pose to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. They have also identified to assess and prevent negative impacts on biodiversity through mutually supportive interpretation and application of international climate and biodiversity law.

The Hub's legal and inter-disciplinary research has underscored that the CBD ecosystem approach and other CBD guidelines are essential to ensure integrated ocean governance across scales (notably through marine spatial planning), and through that can also contribute to **inclusive and integrated climate change adaptation and mitigation through nature-based solutions that value and contribute to protect marine biodiversity**. The Hub is already developing models and other tools to put these findings into practice.

In addition, the Hub's legal and inter-disciplinary research has underscored that CBD guidance on the ecosystem approach and other CBD guidelines have (often implicitly) contributed to clarifying **a human rights-based approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation**, mainly with regard to the human rights of indigenous peoples and local communities (including small-scale fishers). This approach responds to the needs and concerns identified in our in-country social science research with communities affected by climate change. Ongoing Hub research is further making clear that the nexus of marine biodiversity and climate change is a broader matter of international human rights law, that concerns everybody's full enjoyment of basic rights (life, health, food, water), but also the rights of women and children who depend on marine biodiversity and marine ecosystem services.

"There is a window of opportunity for COP26 delegations to contribute to policy coherence."

There is a window of opportunity for COP26 delegations to contribute to **policy coherence and ensure co-benefits across multiple SDGs** by supporting the application of the CBD guidance and of a human rights-based and ecosystem-based approach in future international climate change negotiations, as well as other relevant international processes (such as the UN negotiations on a new international instrument on marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction).

Transdisciplinary ocean research for transformative **climate** adaptation and mitigation

The **One Ocean Hub** has developed and tested innovative inter- and transdisciplinary research approaches with rightsholders, stakeholders and experts from varied disciplines including marine sciences, law, anthropology, sociology, history and the arts. This approach is essential to integrate diverse forms of knowledge and technologies (including indigenous knowledge) through participatory, community-based, and arts-based research methods. This helps the process of knowledge co-creation, identification of blind spots in ocean and climate governance and allows a broader range of voices and concerns to be heard. The approach further allows for networks of ocean defenders and citizen scientists to participate in the protection of ecosystems and services and finding climate smart solutions for sustainable blue economies.



Photo: Georgina Yaa Oduro

In particular, Hub research has underscored that cultural and spiritual services provide by the ocean are largely overlooked in discussion about climate change and ocean governance. Inter- and transdisciplinary approaches, including extra-legal processes and creative methodologies can work to **respectfully include tangible and intangible heritage into policy- and decision-making spaces nationally and internationally**. Filling this gap is a key step in ensuring that the science/policy interface is able to fully consider the nexus of climate change, oceans, biodiversity and human rights (including children's rights).

"Hub research has underscored that cultural and spiritual services provide by the ocean are largely overlooked in discussion about climate change and ocean governance."

In addition, **the scaling up of research, and mitigation and adaptation responses, to ocean-basin and regional scale is vital**. This is due to the hyper-connectivity of ocean ecosystems. Research at ocean-basin scale is needed to understand different areas of the oceans that are under greater risks, develop monitoring tools, and design appropriate mitigation and adaptation strategies. This needs to be coupled with advancing urgently research on deep-sea ecosystem services: it is estimated that there are 2.50 million undiscovered marine species, so we have very little knowledge about how these species function, what services they provide, and how they may be affected by climate change.

Given the high expense of deep-sea research and the risks of marginalizing researchers in the Global South, as well as the risk to side-line the needs of the most vulnerable human rights holders, **climate finance should be directed to inter- and transdisciplinary ocean research and development through fair partnerships**. Based on the experience of the One Ocean Hub, funders should require specifically that **international research collaborations** be co-developed through fair partnerships, as a key element in advancing efforts both in the Global North and in the Global South at the nexus of climate change, biodiversity, ocean and human rights.

A human rights-based approach for nature-based solutions to climate change adaptation and mitigation



Photo: Jackie Sunde

The Hub's research at the country level has demonstrated time and again the importance of adopting a human rights-based approach in tackling the connections with marine biodiversity in climate change adaptation and mitigation. This involves responding to climate change by assessing impacts, vulnerability and risks (as well as relevant knowledge and resources) at community level, and designing planning and implementing adaptation measures in an iterative and inclusive manner, including by monitoring and evaluating these measures to improve adaptive capacity.

"Climate action must be contextualised and co-developed with local communities."

Ahead of COP 26, some governments have demonstrated they are acutely aware of the importance of the ocean and marine ecosystems in adapting to the impacts of climate change. 196 CBD Parties have already adopted voluntary guidelines for the design and effective implementation of ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation and disaster risk reduction, as well as specifically on coral reefs and closely associated ecosystems (i.e., mangroves and seagrasses), that can support socio-ecological resilience to the impacts of climate change, as well as respect for human rights to subsistence and culture.

For instance, as fish stocks shift their distribution to find colder waters due to the impacts of climate change, many local fishers are at increased risk of poverty and food insecurity.

The One Ocean Hub research examines the combined impacts of climate change, over-exploitation, pollution, and other global change factors on fish that is essential to support the nutritional needs, livelihoods and cultures of coastal communities.

Climate action must be contextualised and co-developed with local communities. For example, while the value of marine protected areas (MPAs) for climate change mitigation and adaptation is clear, but the creation and management of new MPAs must be inclusive of human rights, particularly indigenous peoples and local communities. **The Hub's research has seen that bottom-up and co-management approaches are more effective approaches.** These limit potential for conflict with management authorities, the private sector and within communities themselves.

More broadly, **nature-based solutions to climate change adaptation and mitigation need to respect international human rights and contribute to their full realisation.** The One Ocean Hub has already developed innovative methodologies (such as empathatre) to support genuine and constructive engagement with local communities and peoples towards better understanding their needs and views and co-developing research and actions that can support a human rights-based approach to ocean-based solutions to climate change adaptation and mitigation. These approaches have also been discussed regionally and internationally to support the protection of environmental human rights defenders and environmental/climate justice.

The One Ocean Hub is an international programme of research for sustainable development, working to promote fair and inclusive decision-making for a healthy ocean whereby people and planet flourish.

Funded by:

