

Transformative partnerships for co-developing sustainable blue economies

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Challenges in current blue economy policies and practices

Our analysis (Niner et al, 2022) indicates that *national blue economy policies* focus on technical solutions that do not address systemic issues, such as discrimination, gender inequality, and challenges posed by climate change (SDGs 16C, 5 and 13). These limited blue economy policies have legal implications: they give rise to expectations in foreign investors (SDG 17.5), which are protected under international investment law, with the result that national authorities are limited in responding to local communities' interests that are better aligned with the SDGs (SDG 14.7) and to protect their human rights (SDG 16) from unsustainable blue economy initiatives if there is a conflict with foreign investors' expectations (Cotula and Berger, 2020).

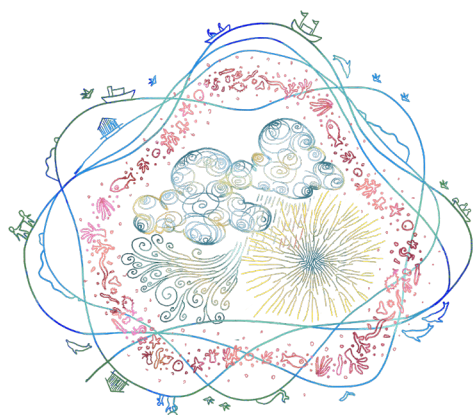
The One Ocean Hub identified **four challenges** to ensuring sustainable ocean-based economies:

1. avoid reproducing **historical and current injustices**, by identifying and addressing contextual inequalities;
2. avoid **exclusionary and non-responsive processes** (SDG 16.7), by paying attention to local, national and global power imbalances that limit people's abilities to engage in policy development;

3. avoid prejudice against **local knowledge systems**, by integrating **intangible cultural heritage** (SDG 11.4) and respecting cultural rights;
4. **accurately valuing blue natural capital**, by integrating crucial marine ecosystem services (including **deep-sea ecosystem services**) on which humanity depends (notably, climate regulation and climate change mitigation, and contributions to human health).

Transformative partnerships

New partnerships between ocean-dependent communities (including women and children), researchers and civil society can address these challenges at the outset and contribute to build more integrated and inclusive evidence base, as well as more inclusive methods, to support governments in co-developing sustainable ocean-based economies.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

- Sustainable blue economies need to be co-developed through inclusive and integrated processes to address systemic issues.
- Transformative partnerships between ocean-dependent communities, researchers and civil society can integrate the evidence base and provide new approaches for co-developing blue economies.
- Innovative finance (including climate finance) is needed for replicating and scaling up transformative partnerships for ocean knowledge co-production.
- Ocean, climate and research funders need to include specific conditions to ensure fair partnerships and iterative learning from ocean research co-development.
- The UN Decade for Ocean Science needs to document and share good practices on transformative ocean knowledge co-production, in collaboration with IPBES and the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration.



Photo: Nessim Stevenson

These co-development partnerships can: address multiple dimensions of poverty, connecting small-scale fishers to markets, contribute to ecosystem management, identify and address data gaps, contribute to de-risking ocean investment, connect capacity for valuing ocean resources, and contribute to strengthen national legal frameworks.¹

The One Ocean Hub is innovating on the data and methods to create and support partnerships to co-develop sustainable ocean-based economies, exploring four inter-linked approaches:

1. human-rights based approach to empower Indigenous peoples, small-scale fishers, women and children to inform decisions on sustainable ocean-based economies based on their values and knowledge systems. Human rights are relied upon to:

- empower ocean-dependent communities to inform decisions on sustainable ocean-based economies;
- integrate evidence from the marine and social sciences, and different knowledge systems, to understand equity and sustainability issues at stake;

¹ These needs are underscored by the concept note of the UN Ocean Conference: https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/ID_4_Fisheries.pdf

2. integration of ocean science (including a standard framework on deep-sea ecosystem services) with historical analysis and environmental justice research

- a standard framework on deep-sea ecosystem services² is needed to include within decision making the **benefits that these remote marine environments provide to society**. Equally, this serves to better understand knowledge gaps in the management of supporting ecosystem services such as climate regulation, in order to prioritise new scientific efforts and the application of the precautionary approach in decision-making.
- Historic analysis serves to understand **marine dispossession and injustices**, which is vital for identifying human right holders who have been displaced from coastal environments and are left out from ocean decision-making processes; as well as supporting the recognition of local

² G La Bianca et al, "From theory to practice: development of an ecosystem services framework for the deep sea" (forth).

Photo: Nessim Stevenson



knowledge, customary laws, and intangible cultural heritage, and barriers to gender equality.

- Environmental justice research helps identify more clearly **equity issues** (Global North/ South, most affected groups), critical knowledge gaps, and areas for governance reform to prioritize the most vulnerable in the application of human rights in environmental and ocean governance. This serves to develop contextual responses and avoid transposing Global North understandings and approaches due to documented risks of being ineffective in the Global South and producing further injustices.

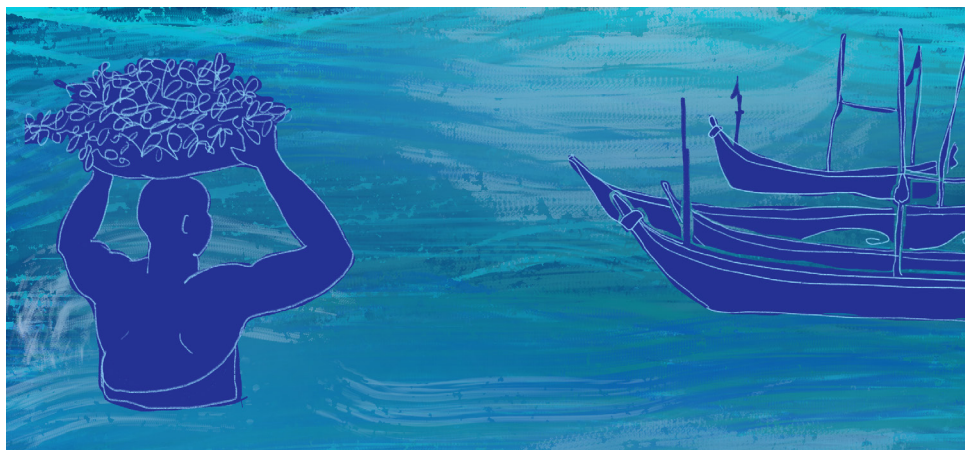


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3. **arts-based research approaches to create more equitable public dialogue platforms to thinking through contentious issues without retreating into polarised positions (Erwin, 2021):**

- fostering understanding, and urging recognition and protection of, different knowledge systems, ocean cultural heritage and creative economies;
- protect cultural rights & environmental human rights defenders (ocean defenders);
- Providing evidence of ocean-related cultural heritage & discrimination in courts of law;
- supporting alternative and solidarity-

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based economic activities (locally grounded, culturally significant and supportive of gender equality);

- Identification of shortcomings in current approaches to law implementation; and
- piloting new methods for transdisciplinary ocean research and inclusive ocean governance (environmental impact assessment, consultations, mediation).

For example,

- The Empatheatre play titled Lalela Ulwandle (Listen to the Sea) in South Africa pieces together and shares the hopes and concerns of ocean-dependent people and supports conversation with diverse audiences (policy makers, educators, ocean practitioners);
- photography and digital storytelling in Algoa Bay, South Africa, engage

Indigenous and local knowledge holders as co-researchers to integrate cultural connections to the ocean in marine spatial planning ([Strand, Rivers and Snow, 2022](#)).

- an ‘embodied mapping’ process in which small-scale fishers’ leaders made more understandable draft maps and consultation documentation, using their bodies as reference points for land-marks and noticeable boundaries; and then relied on these alternative, community-led maps to engage public authorities in discussing past inequalities and exclusions from ocean-related decision making ([Pereira, Francis and McGarry, 2021](#)).

4. **fair (research & governance) partnerships: acknowledging what went wrong in past collaborations and setting out commitments to avoid repeating these mistakes in future partnerships is essential to co-develop fair partnership. In and of itself, this can support transformation.**

- The One Ocean Hub’s [Code of Practice](#) that took inspiration and foundational principles from the [San Code of Ethics and Global Code of Conduct](#), as well as the previous experiences of researchers in different regions.



Photo: Nessim Stevenson

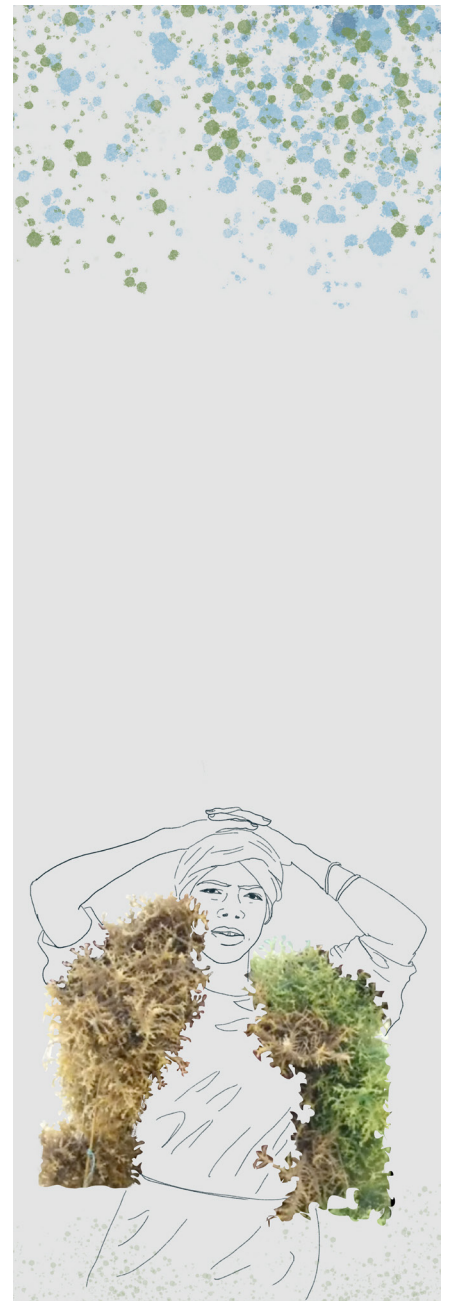
The Code of Practice highlights multiple dimensions of fairness in the process of co-designing and co-delivering research programme and outputs, with a view to identifying collective approaches to fairness, including towards: 1) vulnerable groups; 2) each region and across regions; 3) each researcher (taking into account also gender, age, race, career stage); 4) partners; and 5) the funders and tax-payers vis-à-vis the Hub budget and in-kind contributions.

- The development of the Code of Practice was an explicit requirement from the Hub's funder (UKRI GCRF), which

together with other requirements, allowed to tackle pre-existing inequities in international research cooperation. The funder also included conditions for ensuring, monitoring and learning from research co-development.

The integration of these strands of research and methods helps create **platforms for knowledge sharing and co-development of solutions**, based on better understanding of: direct impacts on beneficiaries (e.g. increased resilience of communities); direct impacts on the environment (e.g. protection of marine and terrestrial environments); improved capacity (involvement of ocean educators). These platforms at the same time build capacities, and contribute to marine spatial planning, marine conservation, ecosystem restoration and climate change adaptation, leading to locally grounded and integrated policy and legal reform.

For instance, the Coastal Justice Network brings together small-scale fisher leaders, environmental justice organisations and researchers responding collaboratively to unsustainable blue economy initiatives along the South African coastline.




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