

The One Ocean Hub: Transforming Ocean Governance

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The ocean covers over 70% of our planet. It connects communities, countries and cultures in space and time. The ocean itself is a web of connected, inter-dependent systems and lifeforms on which we are entirely reliant: it produces over half the oxygen we breath, absorbs over a quarter of global CO₂, and contributes to freshwater renewal.

From plastic pollution, to over exploitation of ocean resources, ocean acidification and rising sea temperatures, awareness of the crisis facing our ocean is increasing. So too is the pressure on governments and the international community to respond. The response needed, however, must mirror the inter-connected nature of the ocean system. Responses must be coherent, connected across sectors (of ocean use and terrestrial activity), across scales (from local to international level) and informed by multiple knowledge systems, world views and values held by those closest to it: the communities, women and youth whom are most reliant upon the ocean, and most disproportionately affected by our failure to protect it.

Transforming ocean governance, through connecting the current disconnects, is the focus of the One Ocean Hub (the Hub), an ambitious £20m global research programme led by the Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance. Bringing together law, marine and social sciences, arts and policy, its research seeks to integrate governance frameworks to balance multiple ocean uses with conservation and bio-cultural heritage, and investigate how to share fairly and equitably the environmental, socio-cultural and economic benefits arising from the ocean.

As a research-for-development programme, the Hub will serve vulnerable coastal communities in South Africa, Ghana, Namibia, Fiji and the Solomon Islands. It aims to strengthen capacity within; and learn from, and empower, communities, women and youth to support the integration of community views, values and knowledge in scientific assessments, management practices, and ocean decision-making processes. These communities' ways of life are intimately connected with the ocean, yet their voice is largely unheard in decision-making at different levels and this has a direct impact on their lives.

Two pilot research projects have begun in South Africa and Ghana, where various methodologies facilitating the co-defining of concerns of vulnerable groups along the coast are underway. This forms part of the contextual profiling process that has recently informed a hub-wide research co-design process (which offers communities greater control of the research process and outputs). In both countries we find that small-scale fishing communities require access to natural resources and markets; however access to fishing grounds are affected (in various ways) by regional and bilateral fishing agreements, and imbalances of power and access that either favour international commercial fishing, or other privileged groups, who have political or financial power to navigate these policies. It is yet to be confirmed, but in both cases there is the potential that access to markets may be challenged by international trade liberalization. Furthermore, the rights and knowledge of small-scale fishing communities may not be recognized at national level, and, in the case of South Africa where they have been recently recognized, they fail to incorporate cultural and spiritual nuances that differ along the coastline. In both Ghana and South Africa early evidence reveals that these small-scale fishing communities are challenged by competing sectors, and multiple user groups, with different levels of access, power and privilege. For example, offshore mining and unsustainable tourism may negatively impact small-scale fisheries (concerns which the Hub is still investigating), yet current decision-making processes are not based on integrated cumulative impact assessments. As a result, the community's income and food security, as well as their cultural heritage which is intimately linked to over a century of fishing cultural identity and folklore in both cases, may be negatively impacted; and yet are not considered in the decision-making process. Integrated cumulative impact assessments could also benefit from the knowledge of small-scale fishing communities so that intangible values of ocean resources are considered, such as their potential for medical innovation or cultural purposes, as well as deep spiritual and mental health contributions fishing activities provide. Decision-making across sectors and scales should thus be based on evidence that also unveils 'hidden' trade-offs between more easily monetized fishing or mining activities and less-understood values of the ocean such as its cultural role, its function in the carbon cycle, or its potential in medical innovation.

Led by the University of Strathclyde, the Hub represents a global collaboration of over 50 partners including world-leading research centres, non-governmental and development organisations, community representatives, national and regional governments and multiple United Nations agencies. The Hub is providing a participatory, co-designed and collaborative research-oriented forum for all these diverse organizations to work towards a single vision while maintaining their sovereignty: integrated ocean governance for equitable and inclusive sustainability.

The Hub's research seeks to be in service of various vulnerable communities, and aims to share fairly and equitably the environmental, socio-cultural and economic benefits of ocean conservation and sustainable use.

In particular, at the local level the Hub is expected to support the initiatives of communities, women and youth in ocean-related research, advocacy or innovation, as well as create an enabling environment for a variety of other actors (civil society, trade unions, co-operatives, tribal leadership, local and national government, and others) to contribute to enhancing the livelihoods of vulnerable groups through a circular Blue Economy.

Globally, the Hub aims to support, through co-developed research, empowerment and capacity building, low and middle-income countries in having a more persuasive voice in international negotiations and leading in the coherent and inclusive implementation of international law that relates to the ocean. Through a comprehensive arts programme (the Deep Emotional Engagement Programme (DEEP) – a responsive fund for art-based practiced-led, embodied research; and the One Ocean Shoal – a creative interactive multi-genre archive), we aim to (re)engage a diverse range of stakeholders in ocean-related challenges and opportunities.

Although Seychelles was unable to be a direct beneficiary of the Hub, as a result of their removal from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's list for Official Development Assistance (ODA), the University of Seychelles *James Michel* Blue Economy Research Institute (BERI) remains a project partner, and is providing leadership, research and coordination support to the One Ocean Hub (OOH). BERI is co-directing a research package that is focusing on enabling '*transformative governance for an inclusive, innovative and responsible blue society that aims to develop an integrated and intersectional approach to the Blue Economy*'. The Hub will bring additional benefits to Seychelles as resources and partnerships are developed throughout the lifespan of the project, as the OOH has built in mechanisms to support capacity development, fundraising and networking aspirations of project partners.

Overall, the Hub aims to shift fundamentally collaborative research across scales and sectors, to ensure that ocean management, decision-making and innovation are shaped by communities, women and youth.

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