

Theme Editorial

The Blue Economy, the Ocean Economy, Blue Growth, Sustainable Development Goals and Transdisciplinary Research: these are challenging global terms that many are now grappling with. But what does it all mean?

As the population increases, so too does our demand on the ecosystems on which we depend. The ocean is considered as the new frontier to meet these needs. It has the potential to increase economic wealth for many countries; the opportunities are great, but so too are the risks. A healthy ocean is essential for our survival. It sustains biodiversity, produces oxygen, absorbs carbon dioxide and many communities have a cultural and economic connection to it. Various economic sectors depend on ocean resources and services (either directly, or indirectly). Unchecked use of this global resource will have a direct impact on economies and vulnerable communities. Ecosystems are interlinked and complex and the health of the ocean cannot be addressed in isolation. How do we explore the potential that it holds, support its recovery from current impacts, and help to protect it from future exploitation?

Through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the global community is tackling ‘peace and prosperity for people and the planet’. One of the SDGs relates directly to the ocean (SDG14) but others, if not all, can be positively influenced by the ocean and the potential it holds, so long as its use is governed effectively. The Blue Economy emerged out of global discourse in 2012 to bring together various economic sectors and policies that impact on the sustainable use of the ocean. At the heart of the Blue Economy is sustainability and shared prosperity ... the environment and people. But do these two pillars have a strong enough ‘voice’ in the development of the Blue Economy as things stand? What efforts and instruments are in place to ensure that these are engaged as local and global agendas advance? Is financial innovation empowering developing nations and Small Island Developing States? Do they have the knowledge and capacity to make the most of the support on offer? Is research accessible and supporting communities, decision-makers, and adaptive management? There are more questions than answers in the debates around the Blue Economy, but the global community is taking action. Various efforts are underway in many countries to tackle these questions, some more sustainably-minded than others.

This edition of the *Seychelles Research Journal* starts pooling together themes that relate to the Blue Economy and is designed to stimulate debate, discussion and action. The University of Seychelles James Michel Blue Economy Research Institute (BERI) has developed an extensive network of national and international colleagues and organisations. BERI aims to build resources, synergies, and research to empower a society of ‘Blue Guardians’. BERI,

for instance, is a project partner in the UKRI Global Challenge Research Fund's *One Ocean Hub*. This project aims to empower collaborative research across scales and sectors, to ensure that ocean management, decision-making and innovation are shaped by communities, women and youth. This project is discussed in more detail in this edition, which also covers Blue Economy literature, ocean governance and ocean organizations, climate change, aquaculture, marine biodiversity and transdisciplinary research, waste management, maritime security, the high seas, disaster risk reduction and marine spatial planning.

Global and local actions will influence the debates around ocean-based sustainable development, regardless of the terms used to refer to this. These actions will also provide examples of how communities can access (or not) the tangible and intangible benefits of the ocean. A key driver to the success of our actions will be dependent on innovative thinking and actions that empower all, and not just some.

As the theme editor of this issue, I am grateful to the various contributors. Everyone in this field is very busy but, in taking time to write something on the subject, we are together helping to push back the frontier of our knowledge and experience. Our understanding of the Blue Economy has advanced in just a few short years and there is no doubt that we will see further advances in the years ahead.

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