

Our Oceans, Our Seas, Our Future

The challenge now is to make the global targets and objectives of the SDGs respond to the reality of thousands of people who live from the sea and its resources

The United Nations and the governments that are part of it surprised us positively with a new initiative named the Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These Goals, observed in a comprehensive way, responds to what civil society also believes integrates the environmental, social and economic elements that allow us, as a planet, to move towards sustainability.

However, when we analyze these goals and how countries should develop an implementation strategy to comply with them, all the historical doubts from the civil society re-emerge. That is to say, we feel that unless these SDGs are implemented

The Objective 14—hereinafter referred to as Life Below Water—concerns the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. The Life Below Water objective presents 10 targets that, if well implemented, should demonstrate significant progress in achieving the sustainability of these valuable marine ecosystems.

A quick view of the targets and indicators of this objective, however, reveals that some critical issues are only referred to on the surface or are absent from this goal—for example, small-scale fisheries (with the exception of its mention once in terms of market and resources access for the subsector), marine governance, land tenure, the integration of traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge, among others.

The targets of this objective (see Box 1) seem to focus on issues of global importance, such as pollution, the effects of acidification of the oceans, fisheries exploitation, and illegal fishing, among others.

All of the above, no doubt, represent topics for urgent attention but they are far from being fully representative of the issues needed to be discussed at the local level and that affect more than 300 mn people in the world who live from the resources of the sea and are mainly small-scale fishers who ensure food security along the whole fish value chains at the country level.

Work by CSOs

It is the Goal 14b—the one that responds to the work done by civil society organizations of small-scale fisheries and governments oriented to serve a population highly

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in an integrated way, very little will be achieved towards the necessary change that must emerge from a planet in crisis, and of a development model that is clearly inequitable.

Perhaps the point of this observation is that so far, and in spite of the integrality that is being sought by the SDGs, it is not clear what are the concrete actions that will guarantee the implementation of this necessary holistic view.

The SDG objectives have left out neither our oceans nor our seas, which is clearly a positive sign. As a result, the initiative now has developed a global effort to raise attention towards the conservation of these ecosystems.

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marginalized and little attended—that is dedicated to small-scale fisheries. Small-scale fisheries is mentioned as follows in one of the targets: “to facilitate the access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets”.

This target is the only one that opens up a space to incorporate social issues in the implementation of Objective 14; it leaves at least a space to reflect on the need to learn more on this topic, and especially pick on years of experience in working with the coastal marine populations and their needs.

We might think that Goal 14b allows us to incorporate the need to implement, at all levels, the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, endorsed by the meeting of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in Rome in June 2014. These Guidelines speak clearly and firmly about the need for a marine conservation based on the human rights of the poorest sections of our coasts: indigenous peoples, women not involved in the value chain of small-scale fisheries, fishermen and non-formal youth and migrants, and Afro-descendants, among others.

It is evident that Goal 14 cannot be achieved without being integrated into other goals, namely, 5, 8, 12 and 17, among others. In order to move towards the integrated approach proposed necessarily means the integration of the efforts of civil society and governments.

The oceans cover three-quarters of the surface of our planet, contain 97 per cent of the earth’s water and represent 99 per cent of the space of life on the planet in volume. The oceans are also the largest source of protein in the world, with more than 3 bn people depending on them as their primary source of life (UNDP, Costa Rica, 2017).

During this year, and as a result of the priority that the UN has given to the implementation of the SDGs, the whole world will be participating

BOX 1:

SDG 14: Life Below Water

14.1 By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution

14.2 By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans

14.3 Minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific co-operation at all levels

14.4 By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices, and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

14.5 By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information

14.6 By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation

14.7 By 2030, increase the economic benefits to small island developing states and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism

14.A Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing states and least developed countries

14.B Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets

14.C Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in UNCLOS, which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of The Future We Want

at the high-level conference for the implementation of Objective 14 in New York (5 to 9 June 2017). Certainly, this gathering will be a tremendous opportunity to promote and strengthen the initiatives that countries are developing to comply with this objective and the ones related to it. It will also be a good opportunity to reflect on the issues of high importance that have not yet been included in the most recent version of the final agreement of the conference (see Box 2).

BOX 2:

OUR OCEAN, OUR FUTURE: CALL FOR ACTION (Revised Draft 7th of April, 2017)

1. We, the Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives, meeting at the first United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 of the 2030 Agenda, with the full participation of civil society and other relevant stakeholders, affirm our strong commitment to conserve and sustainably use our oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
2. We are mobilised by a strong conviction that our ocean is critical to our shared future and common humanity in all its diversity. As responsible stakeholders, we are determined to act decisively and urgently, convinced that our collective action will make a meaningful difference to our people, to our planet, and to our prosperity.
3. We recognise that our ocean covers three-quarters of our planet, connects our populations and markets, and forms an important part of our heritage and culture. It supplies half the oxygen we breathe, absorbs a third of the carbon dioxide we produce, and plays a vital role in the water cycle. It contributes to sustainable development and sustainable ocean-based economies, as well as to poverty eradication, food security and nutrition, and livelihoods.
4. We are particularly alarmed by the adverse impacts of climate change on the ocean, including the rise in ocean temperatures, ocean acidification, deoxygenation, and sea-level rise. We acknowledge the need to address the adverse impacts that impair the crucial role of the ocean as climate regulator, carbon sink, source of marine biodiversity, and as key provider of food and nutrition, ecosystem services, maritime trade and transportation, and as an engine for sustainable economic development and growth.
5. We are committed to halting and reversing the decline in the health and productivity of our ocean and to protecting and restoring its resilience. We recognise that the well-being of present and future generations is inextricably linked to the health and productivity of our ocean.
6. We reaffirm our commitment to achieve the targets of Goal 14 within the timelines. We also affirm our commitment to continue to take action beyond those dates, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.
7. We underline the integrated and indivisible character of all Sustainable Development Goals under the 2030 Agenda, as well as the interlinkages and synergies between them.
8. We stress the need for an integrated, interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach as well as enhanced cooperation, coordination, and policy coherence, at all levels. We emphasise the critical importance of effective partnerships enabling collective action, to reverse the decline in the health of our ocean and its ecosystems, and to protect and restore their resilience and productivity. We reaffirm our commitment to the implementation of Goal 14 with the full participation of all relevant stakeholders.
9. We underline the need to integrate Goal 14 into national development plans and strategies, and to promote national ownership and leadership and success in the implementation of Goal 14 by involving all stakeholders, including local authorities and communities, indigenous peoples, women and youth, as well as business and industry.
10. We recognise the crucial role of women in the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
11. We stress the importance of enhancing understanding of the health and role of our ocean, including through assessments on the state of the ocean, science and traditional knowledge, as well as the need to further increase marine scientific research to inform and support decision-making, and to promote knowledge hubs and networks to enhance the sharing of scientific data, and best practices.
12. We emphasise that our actions to implement Goal 14 should be in accordance with, reinforce and not duplicate or undermine, existing legal instruments, arrangements, processes, mechanisms, or entities. We affirm the need to be consistent with international law, as reflected in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea which provides the legal framework for all the activities in the oceans and seas.
13. We recognise that the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean and its resources require the necessary means of implementation in line with the 2030 Agenda, Addis Ababa Action Agenda and other relevant outcomes, including the enhanced capacitybuilding and the transfer of knowledge and environmentally-sound marine technology to developing countries on mutually agreed terms.
14. We call on all stakeholders to work in concert to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development by taking, *inter alia*, the following actions on an urgent basis, including by building on existing institutions and partnerships:
 - (a) Approach the implementation of Goal 14 in an integrated and coordinated way and promote policies and actions that take into account the critical interlinkages among the targets of Goal 14, the potential synergies between Goal 14 and the other goals, particularly those with ocean-related targets, as well as other processes that support the implementation of Goal 14.
 - (b) Strengthen cooperation, policy coherence and coordination amongst institutions at all levels, including between and amongst international organisations, regional organisations, arrangements and programmes, as well as national and local authorities.
 - (c) Promote effective multi-stakeholder partnerships, including public-private partnerships, by enhancing engagement of governments with global and regional bodies and programmes, the scientific community, the private sector, donor community, non-governmental organisations, community groups, academic institutions, and other relevant actors.

- (d) Develop comprehensive strategies to raise awareness of the natural and cultural significance of the ocean, as well as of its state and role, and of the need to further improve the knowledge of the ocean, including its importance for sustainable development and how it is impacted by anthropogenic activities.
- (e) Support plans to foster ocean-related education, for example as part of education curricula, to promote ocean literacy and a culture of conservation, restoration and sustainable use of our ocean.
- (f) Dedicate greater resources to marine scientific research, as well as the collection and sharing of data and knowledge, including traditional knowledge, in order to increase knowledge of the ocean, including to better understand the relationship between climate and the health and productivity of the ocean, and to promote decision-making based on the best available science, to encourage scientific and technological innovation, as well as to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries in particular small island developing States and least developed countries.
- (g) Accelerate actions to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, including marine debris, nutrient pollution, untreated wastewater, solid waste discharges, hazardous substances, pollution from ships, abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear, and plastics and microplastics.
- (h) Develop sustainable consumption and production patterns, adopt the 3Rs—reduce, reuse and recycle—including through incentivising market-based solutions to reduce waste and its generation, improving mechanisms for environmentally-sound waste management, disposal and recycling, and developing alternatives such as reusable or recyclable products, or products biodegradable under natural conditions.
- (i) Implement long-term strategies to reduce the use of plastics, particularly plastic bags, single-use plastics and the use of primary microplastic particles in products, including by partnering with stakeholders at relevant levels to address their production and use.
- (j) Strengthen the use of effective area-based management tools, including marine protected areas and other integrated, cross-sectoral approaches, consistent with international law and in accordance with national legislation, including marine spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management, based on best available science and the precautionary and ecosystem approaches, to enhance ocean resilience and better conserve and sustainably use marine biodiversity.


The implementation of Objective 14, at least from the point of view of the central American region, could be better achieved through the application of the SSF Guidelines, and ensuring that UN Members mention the importance of transforming the SSF Guidelines into binding instruments to address the priority issues that we know beset the people of the sea and its coasts.

There is an urgent need to ensure that the zero draft, later to become the end agreement, will be clear and strong in mentioning the need to support communities of small-scale fisheries to participate in, and take responsibility towards, the integrated management of fisheries and coastal areas, and that all these efforts will be recognized and that the access rights of these communities will be protected, alongside other human rights.

It is necessary to strengthen the language and the proposals for the implementation of Objective 14 towards a human-rights-based approach to the conservation of the seas and oceans. Issues such as land tenure in the coastal areas, gender

considerations and indigenous cosmo-vision, the generation of knowledge that integrates the scientific with the traditional, and also the need to strengthen the institutional framework to generate capabilities that allow an integrated and transdisciplinary vision of how to address the issues of the oceans, will have to be necessarily addressed.

It is clear that the preservation of the sea and the sustainable use of its resources will not be possible without a strengthening the community governance models of marine conservation, based on the respect and recognition of the rights of fishing communities, and their knowledge and cultural identity.

The challenge now is, firstly, to include the appropriate language, to listen to the lessons learned so far from the work that manages to “leave no one behind”, also in the conservation of the sea, and, secondly, implement a vision that considers not only the marine environment but also respect for the human rights and well-being of the people of the sea. 

For more

oceanconference.un.org/about

Our oceans, our future: partnering for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14

sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/14666sideeventsOceans.pdf

Joining forces for sustainable small-scale fisheries through a human rights-based approach to ocean conservation

sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg14

Triptico informativo sobre los Objetivos del Desarrollo Sostenible. Costa Rica