

The ocean is a major contributor to food security and nutrition, livelihoods, critical planetary processes and economies and a healthy ocean is crucial for human survival. The ocean makes up 70% of the Earth's surface, producing over 50% of the world's oxygen needed to support animal and human life¹. There is an increased reliance on the ocean for food, materials and energy to meet current and future needs of human development, at the same time, the ocean is under increasing threat². Effects from climate change such as rising sea temperatures and sea levels, shifts in ocean currents and acidification³, and other effects such as pollution, over-exploitation of natural resources and habitat degradation are decreasing the overall resource availability. Working towards a sustainable ocean economy contributes to the 2030 Agenda, and the achievement of all its goals, not only SDG 14 (Figure 1)⁴. A sustainable ocean economy needs to integrate all dimensions of sustainability; economic, social and environmental^{5,6}. If managed sustainably, the ocean has the capacity to regenerate, be sustainably productive, resilient, and support equal societies⁷.

WHAT DEFINES A SUSTAINABLE OCEAN ECONOMY⁸ IN A DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT?

Currently, there is a lack of common criteria to ensure that the development community is moving effectively towards the same targets to ensure a sustainable ocean economy. Partial progress has been made though the OECD DAC definition that addresses some of the complexities (Box 1)⁹. Within the sectors that forms an ocean-based economy¹⁰, development

initiatives can be classified into three OECD DAC sub-groups of ocean economy. The OECD DAC definition on ocean economies is important as it clarifies the need to transition support to activities regarded as sustainable. It puts the focus on the ocean and coastal seas and the important connections between the inland water resources and ecosystems and those in the ocean. A sustainable use and conservation of ecosystems and natural resources in the world's ocean, seas and coastal areas will also be at the core of the sustainability aspect¹¹ and include a clean energy transition¹². The volume of ODA for the ocean measured with this methodology is small in relation to the total ODA as are activities focused on sustainability. Of the total ODA for the ocean economy, only half contributes to sustainable ocean economies, as per the OECD DAC methodology¹³. Moreover, ODA for the ocean economy is concentrated in a few countries, normally driven by large infrastructure projects in maritime transport projects that do not integrate sustainability. Critically, despite their reliance on ocean resources, small island developing states and least developed countries receive only a small share of the ODA towards the sustainable ocean economy¹⁴.



Box 1: OECD DAC defines a sustainable ocean economy as “the sum of the economic activities of ocean-based industries, and the assets, goods and services of marine ecosystems” and distinguishes ocean related official development assistance (ODA) in three ways:

1. ODA for the ocean/blue economy: support of ocean-based industries and marine ecosystems, irrespective of whether the support explicitly takes sustainability considerations into account.
2. ODA to curb ocean pollution from land: land-based activities that reduce negative impacts and/or have a positive impact on ocean, such as water treatment and waste management projects.
3. ODA for the sustainable ocean economy: This is a subset of ODA for the ocean economy. It identifies ocean conservation activities as well as support for ocean-based industries that integrates sustainability concerns.

1 Stuchtey, et al. 2020

2 Jouffray et al. 2020

3 WMO 2022

4 Adapted from Stuchtey, et al. 2020

5 Cisneros-Montemayor et al. 2021

6 Okafor-Yarwood et al. 2020

7 OECD 2020

8 A Blue Economy, in contrast to the Ocean economy, refers specifically to how an ocean economy is managed (World Bank 2021) and could also include economic activities in inland seas and rivers.

9 OECD 2020

10 Examples of ocean based activities; Seafood production, including fishing, aquaculture and fish processing; Coastal and marine tourism, Extractive industries, including oil and gas and seabed mining; Renewable energy; Marine biotechnologies and Shipping & ports

11 This would include a marking of at least one of the Rio Markers for climate adaptation, climate mitigation and/or biodiversity, and those that are marked through the Environment Marker as either 1 or 2.

12 [Statement on International Public Support for the Clean Energy Transition - UN Climate Change Conference \(COP26\) at the SEC - Glasgow 2021](#) ([lukcop26.org](#))

13 OECD 2020 For the combined years 2013-2018,

14 OECD 2020, For the combined years 2013-2018, only 5.5% of ODA to SIDS targets the ocean economy.

However, the OECD definition of sustainability of ocean activities does not fully take into account broader sustainability criteria nor all the central perspectives for development cooperation. Notably it does not fully take into account gender equality, the human rights based approach nor potential conflict dimensions when defining sustainable ocean economy interventions. Yet, globally a joint acceptance is emerging towards the promotion of a sustainable ocean economy concept that is multidimensional, compared to a narrower ocean economy definition¹⁵. Actors increasingly define and entail clear social, environmental and economic sustainability principles as part of their values.

To advance the definition and increased development efforts towards a sustainable ocean economy incorporating a mandatory assessment, and consequent monitoring, of the perspectives of people living in poverty, human rights based approach and the climate and environment- and conflict perspectives, will assist in identifying and managing conflicting objectives and promoting synergies between different thematic areas of development cooperation within a sustainable ocean economy. Per the OECD definition, the **climate and environment** (including biodiversity) perspective is at the core of a sustainable ocean economy development intervention, i.e., in order to qualify as a sustainable ocean economy, an intervention needs to have environmental, climate change or biodiversity results as part of its main objectives. **The perspectives of people living in poverty**, and a more equitable distribution of resources, is also at the core of the sustainable ocean economy concept through its focus on sustainable development, but being multidimensional (poverty), is also dependent on the integration of the other perspective. In the current discourse, it is also widely recognised that **gender** aspects increasingly have to be mainstreamed in development projects related to oceans.¹⁶ Less discussed are the links between ocean economy and **human rights based approach** even though the inclusion of transparency, accountability, participation and clear governance mechanisms are critical in achieving a sustainable ocean economy¹⁷. The connections between **conflict** and ocean economy is less apparent in the global ocean economy discourse even though, depending on the context, there are strong arguments for including this perspective in the debate¹⁸ as the ocean is increasingly under threat and as competition of resources increase¹⁹, consequently so does the risks for conflicts. General guidance on how to integrate these perspectives can be found in the

Sida's relevant toolboxes^{20,21,22}. Box 2 presents a way of reasoning, building on the OECD definition and complementary policy markers²³, based on the arguments above, that will ensure that all dimensions of sustainability are being addressed in a sustainable ocean economy. Importantly, also land-based interventions can qualify for contributing to sustainable ocean economies but would need to entail objectives for how the interventions will address ocean related issues²⁴.

Box 2: Required policy and Rio markers for contributions towards a sustainable ocean economy;

- Environment, AND/OR biodiversity, AND/OR climate adaptation – 2, principle objective. (OECD DAC definition)
AND strive to increase number of contributions, with a significant (1) or principle objective (2), for:
- Democracy and human rights
 - Sustainable ocean economy need to build on equality and by supporting processes that are:
 - Inclusive and well-informed
 - Accountable and transparent
- Gender equality
 - Strengthen women's role in the fisheries and tourism sectors
 - Engage women and men to transform gender norms
 - Mainstream gender equality issues in ocean in policies and regulations
- Conflict
 - Address resource competition and economic development versus nature function
 - Advance regional resource arrangements and management bodies
 - Including using tools such as marine spatial planning

DEVELOPMENT INSTRUMENTS TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE OCEAN ECONOMY²⁵

The ocean economy covers many different sectors and often each has its own governing institutions and policy objectives. Policy-making, and equally so development interventions, for the ocean economy is therefore often fragmented. Development actors can have a role in promoting more holistic approaches to ensure policy coherence, manage trade-offs between the sectors, and take advantage of synergies where policies can deliver benefits to multiple sectors. In practice, this could include support to the development and implementation of crosscutting policies, co-ordinating institutions or mechanisms needed for the sustainable ocean economy. Furthermore, development cooperation has a unique role to play to ensure that developing

15 World Bank and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2017. Another widely used definition by the World Bank also stress not only economic aspects but also livelihoods as well as the preservation efforts. The World Bank defines sustainable ocean economy as: "the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs while preserving the health of ocean ecosystems"

16 For instance in OECD 2020, and Wabnitz et al. 2021

17 Wabnitz et al. 2021

18 Tafon et al. 2021

19 Spijkers et al. 2018

20 [Gender Toolbox | Sida](#)

21 [Peace and conflict toolbox | Sida](#)

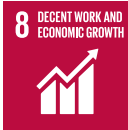
22 [Human Rights Based Approach | Sida](#)

23 Policy markers as per their respective criteria, e.g. Democracy and human rights-, Gender equality-, and Conflict prevention, peace and security policy markers

24 For additional guidance on land-based activities and the ocean, see [Sida's brief on Source to Sea](#).

25 This section builds on OECD 2020 and Wabnitz et al. 2021

Figure 1. Examples of actions within a sustainable ocean economy that contributes to the achievement of the respective SDG in Agenda 2030.

 1 NO POVERTY	Sustainable ocean economy contributes to sustained growth which can lift and keep people out of poverty	 2 ZERO HUNGER	Sustainable fishing, including small scale fishing, can contribute to nutrition targets and produce more protein than a 2050 population requires	 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	A healthy ocean can provide more nutritious food, is the recharging point for billions of people, and is a resource for future medicines
 4 QUALITY EDUCATION	Lifting marginalised coastal communities out of poverty increases their children's chances for a good education	 5 GENDER EQUALITY	Increasing gender equality in ocean economy can empower millions of women by improved livelihoods, participation and decision-making	 6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION	Using a source-to-sea approach and improving sanitation can increase coastal water quality for the benefit of millions of people and nature
 7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY	Expanding the ocean's renewable energy potential is predicted to contribute to 10% of the global electricity production increase by 2025	 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	Growing the ocean economy sustainably can create better working conditions and double the current ocean economy	 9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE	Low carbon infrastructure and renewable ocean energy can stimulate innovation while conserving ocean health and ecosystems
 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES	Well-defined ocean access, rights and sustainable resource use ensures long term prosperity of marginalised groups	 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES	Using nature-based solutions, such as storm protection, infrastructure and mangroves, can make cities more sustainable and resilient	 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION	A more circular economy on land, minimising pollution to the ocean, will help build a healthy ocean
 13 CLIMATE ACTION	A sustainable ocean economy can contribute to greenhouse gas savings and enhanced adaptive solutions for coastal communities	 15 LIFE ON LAND	Protection of coastal ecosystems and its biodiversity positively impact terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity	 16 PEACE AND JUSTICE STRONG INSTITUTIONS	In a sustainable ocean economy, nation's sovereignty over its resources can be achieved, as well as an equitable use of resources in the high seas
 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS	The ocean is a platform for collaboration and strengthens the global partnership for sustainable development				

countries have access to the knowledge, science, innovations and finance, guided by institutional arrangements and policies aligned to sustainability and benefitting the world's poor and most vulnerable²⁶.

Development co-operation can be used to directly fund sustainable investments or to help re-direct private finance towards sustainable ocean businesses and activities²⁷. Opportunities include blue bonds, blue carbon schemes and ocean-relevant risk management tools. Development partners can also support the scaling up of already existing ocean investments, provide technical assistance and strengthen ocean economy knowledge and innovation networks. Development partners also have a crucial role in supporting policies, regulations and financial tools to divert finance from unsustainable practices and to ensure that sustainability is integrated in traditional financial services and

investments. Development actors thus have a dual role; being "enablers" for financing, and as "gatekeepers" in order to ensure that investments are directed towards sustainable ocean economy.

KEY MESSAGES TO ENSURE A SUSTAINABLE OCEAN ECONOMY

- Increased support to ocean economy is critical but needs to be built on the integration of all dimensions of sustainability; economic, social and environmental. Hence, in addition to OECD DACs sustainability criteria, the human rights based approach and the gender equality- and conflict perspectives should be assessed and integrated and progress tracked through relevant policy markers.
- Working towards a sustainable ocean economy is a main contributor to all SDGs in the Agenda 2030, in addition to SDG 14, Life Below Water.
- Development actors have a dual role in promoting standards as to avoid negative consequences of ocean investments, while also exploring and advancing policy instruments in support of a sustainable ocean economy.
- Promoting a sustainable ocean economy can be achieved by working with different ocean sectors. Land-based interventions can also form an important and integrated part of the approach.

²⁶ Adapted from OECD 2020. The foster a sustainable ocean economy include regulatory (command-and-control) and economic instruments, as well as information and voluntary approaches. Both policy and finance are needed to ensure that ocean sustainability objectives are effectively achieved. Economic instruments, which provide incentives for sustainable production and consumption, are also able to generate government revenue to support the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean. Other available approaches to help mobilise finance for the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean include conservation trust funds, public-private partnerships and co-management. The "multi-aspect" nature of the environmental challenges facing the ocean implies that a mix of different policy instruments will be required.

²⁷ UN Environment Programme (2018).

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