



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Session on SDG 14 and interlinkages with other SDGs: Life below water

Thursday, 7 July 2022, 3 to 6 pm

Secretariat Background Note

Introduction

The 2017 HLPF – when SDG 14 was last reviewed – highlighted the multiple impacts of human pressures, including climate change, ocean acidification, overfishing and marine pollution, on coastal and marine ecosystems. These pressures were seen as compromising the gains made in the sustainable management of ecosystems and in conservation efforts, including the effectiveness of marine protected areas. While positive gains for oceans and communities had been achieved locally, global trends in rising pressures largely overshadowed those gains. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has added to the pressures in multiple ways, including through the surge of biomedical plastic waste [e.g., masks] and disposable single-use plastics utilized to minimize exposure to the virus.

Four SDG 14 targets (14.2, 14.4, 14.5 and 14.6) matured in 2020. None of these targets have been reached globally, although local progress towards them has been made. Target 14.5 on marine protection is within reach and has been exceeded by some countries. However, the global geographic distribution of marine protected areas, their management effectiveness, and broader integrated planning and management measures are lacking.



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Against this background and building on the outcomes of the Ocean Conference in Lisbon, around the theme, Scaling up Ocean Action Based on Science and Innovation for the Implementation of Goal 14: Stocktaking, Partnerships and Solutions, the discussions at the HLPF SDG 14 session [July 7, 2022] will aim to reinvigorate commitment and action towards achieving SDG 14, and to set the foundation for collaborative framework that is innovative and well supported [financially and otherwise].

Challenges and gaps

At the present time, the multiple pressures driving the decline in ocean health are intensifying, and as a result compromising the ability of the ocean ecosystem to support the benefits derived from it. Our scientific understanding of the ocean has increased since the last HPLF, but gaps in data and knowledge still exist, compounded by gaps in science capacity and technology. These gaps prevent many countries from undertaking the research required for sustainable management of their ocean resources and to effectively benefit from national blue economies.

The implementation of SDG 14 relies on understanding and acting upon SDG interlinkages through mainstreaming ocean issues into the work of other sectors, particularly those sectors that may have the greatest impact on ocean sustainability or that may provide the best opportunities for mutual benefits. For example, with the ocean downstream from land-based activities and their impacts, integrated ecosystem-based “ridge to reef” management is required to jointly address both SDGs 14 and 15. And while the ocean supports human health, well-being, decent employment and economic growth, the



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ocean can also suffer from negative impacts of economic development where the maintenance and restoration of ocean health is not central to reaching economic aspirations. Consequently, ocean health is also an important consideration for COVID-19 recovery strategies, as only a healthy ocean can support the recovery of ocean industries and the well-being of those dependent on ocean resources.

Opportunities for action

The ocean can also suffer, in some countries, from an “out of sight, out of mind” problem, making it seem distant from urgent daily priorities. Recent research has found that SDG 14 is considered the least important SDG by many global leaders and receives less funding than any other SDG. The implementation of SDG 14 depends on re-imagining the human relationship with the ocean, and this, in turn, depends on building ocean awareness through mobilizing public concern, including by fostering ocean literacy and local action through the implementation of SDG 4. A more universal concern for ocean health, and the services provided by a healthy ocean, may also help address the existing funding gap for ocean action.

When implemented together, SDGs 14 and 5 offer opportunities to jointly advance gender equity and ocean health in mutually beneficial ways. Training the next generation of female leaders in marine science, policy and sectors of a sustainable ocean economy will not only provide employment opportunities for women, but will also create space for new and innovative solutions towards a sustainable ocean in the long term.



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Finally, SDG 17 is central for restoring the health of a global ocean, where international partnerships can accomplish what no country can do on its own. For an ecologically, economically and culturally interconnected ocean, equitable partnerships are vital for raising capacity and providing opportunities for mutual learning and joint action. All of these are required if SDG 14 is to become reality by 2030.

The 2022 United Nations Ocean Conference taking place in Lisbon, Portugal, from June 27 to July 1, co-hosted by the Governments of Kenya and Portugal will provide an important basis for the work of the HLPF in reviewing Goal 14. The Conference, which focus is on science and innovation, will feature eight (8) thematic interactive dialogues to provide information on lessons learned, reflections on actions taken, and propose new directions and innovations for scaling up implementation. The Conference' *Political Declaration* will serve to re-energize commitment and aim to propel action towards accelerated implementation of SDG 14 through partnerships and collaboration. Likewise, the HLPF review of SDG 14 and its targets will serve to guide the efforts of the action oriented Voluntary Commitments stemming from the UN Ocean Conference as these moves towards implementation. Furthermore, the HLPF discussions are informed by an Expert Group Meeting [EGM] held on May 10th and 11th, 2022.

Proposed guiding questions

- What has changed since the SDG was last reviewed in 2017 including in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are the next steps regarding SDG 14 targets that have now expired?



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- How can we best utilize the momentum from the Ocean Conference to strengthen the science - policy interface to support sustainable ocean management?
- Building on the UN Ocean Conference, what are the interlinkages with other SDGs and opportunities to leverage synergies and minimize trade-offs?
- What are the key actions, partnerships, and financing frameworks for enhancing COVID-19 recovery, sustainable economic development and ocean health?
- How can ocean action better support gender equality?