ISSUE BRIEF

Ocean

A Call to Action for Health and Equity of The Ocean

WOMEN & GENDER CONSTITUENCY

Given the critical ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus under the UNFCCC and delays in implementing substantial ocean-related obligations under the Convention, COP26 must be the COP where the ocean is a priority, and a crucial example of a gender-just, human rights approach in climate negotiations toward 2030.

Background

The ocean is a vital part of the global life support system. It produces half of the annual oxygen, has absorbed more than 90% of the energy produced from global warming, and every year absorbs around 30% of carbon dioxide (IPCC-SROCC). It regulates the global climate, and provides food and many other goods and services that are vital to all life on Earth. We cannot achieve local and global climate, environmental, biodiversity and development justice goals without a healthy ocean.

Although precious, the ocean is not protected and continues to be degraded as a result of numerous anthropogenic, dangerous and inequitable practices. Climate change has become an increasing threat to the ocean while multiple impacts (warming and marine heat waves, acidification, stratification, oxygen loss, changes in ultra-violet radiation, sea level rise, altered currents, extreme storms and cyclones, regular flooding and inundation of water tables) often occur at the same time and place. The ocean is getting hotter, higher, more acidic and lower in oxygen. Biodiversity is less, and Indigenous Peoples and

The Women and Gender Constituency is one of the nine stakeholder groups of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), consisting currently of 33 women's and environmental civil society organizations and a network of more than 600 individuals and feminist organizations or movements focusing on gender equality and women's human rights to achieve climate justice.

local communities who depend on its sustainable use experience severe loss and damage and are struggling to sustain resilience practices.

The IPBES Global Assessment and IPCC's special reports on global warming on 1.5°C and the ocean and cryosphere (SROCC) show that predicted impacts are coming much earlier than expected and at rates unprecedented in human history—while warming from anthropogenic emissions is causing further long-term changes in the climate system, irreversible sea level rise and biodiversity loss.

The current emission pathway and consequential climate change and biodiversity loss on the marine environment globally threatens the living planet. It interferes with the right to development, to a peaceful life, and for many, takes away the right to life and a thriving culture and society. While felt everywhere now, the impacts are distributed unevenly, most affecting high and low latitude regions. They entail specific threats to coastal areas and populations, especially in low-lying small island developing states (SIDS) and archipelagic countries. Over decades, global warming has led to widespread, severe shrinking of the cryosphere (the part of the planetary system that is frozen water), with mass loss from ice sheets and glaciers, reduction in snow cover, Arctic sea ice extent and thickness and increased permafrost temperatures and loss of river, lake and oceanic ice. These changes are not only affecting many species, local mountainous communities and entire regions that rely on glaciers and snow for clean water supply, but planetary oceanic water systems and cooling cycles.

Although the 1.5°C scenario suggests less loss and damage in comparison to 2°C, the loss of marine biodiversity is particularly high in lower latitudes where communities and economies depend on their marine and coastal ecosystems. Most of all, warm water corals cannot survive. They are already at high risk under current 1.0 warming. The majority (70–90%) of tropical coral reefs that exist today are expected to disappear even if global warming is constrained to 1.5°C, with losses being even greater (99%) at 2°C. Whether at 30 or 10 percent strength, coral reefs will no longer provide vital functions and services to more than 500 million people who depend on coral reefs for food, medicine, income, revenue, coastal protection, risk reduction and cultural value. We do not yet know exactly when and what tipping points will occur as the planet loses its coral reefs, but the effects on oceans and planetary systems will be severe.

Moreover, the carbon capture potential of marine biodiversity, including fisheries, is expected to decrease considerably at both 1.5°C and the limits of a 2°C world. Every amount of warming and increased loss of marine biodiversity means humans lose their greatest allies to combat climate change.

Feminist Perspectives

The ocean crisis demonstrates a deeper crisis of the human-nature relationship, which is the result of societal divisions of labour and relationships of power and domination in the private and public spheres. The dominant patriarchal neoliberal-capitalist economic system and its paradigm of endless economic growth are based on inequality, injustice, violence, financialisation, commodification and privatization of the commons and a rampant extraction of resources. It encourages overexploitation, destruction and pollution of the ocean, as it does of land. We affirm the right to a living, peaceful planet.

Ocean-based Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR), other so-called 'mitigation interventions' and an ideology oriented towards an economic emphasis on ocean value—such as Blue and Blue-green economies—are of increasing concern. Encompassed in any global call to end the climate and ecological emergency, ocean-climate-biodiversity-responsive proposals must include: an end to fossil fuel subsidies for maritime transport and unsustainable fisheries that contribute to overfishing; an end to destructive, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) and distance-water focused fisheries including bottom trawling; and an end to other activities disturbing carbon and methane stored in the seafloor.

There must also be a transformation of urban areas and cities, for a healthier ocean. Two-thirds of the global population is expected to live in cities by 2050, including many mega-cities in coastal areas. Therefore, all urban and rural development agendas must be coherent and responsive to ocean, climate, biodiversity and gender. This includes the UNFCCC, the Sustainable Ocean Initiative as part of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat IV), the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, and other multilateral processes. All must incorporate a framework that respects Indigenous Peoples and local communities and prioritizes small-scale fishing for its importance to food security, sovereignty and poverty eradication in the coming decades for all—and especially those facing irreversible loss and damage from climate injustice.

Thus, we need to set an agenda with a human rights-based approach to small scale fishing (SSF), coastal communities and Indigenous Peoples' livelihoods, especially recognising that the majority of people that this impacts are women and girls. All ocean-climate-biodiversity actions must balance conservation and use in all areas of the ocean, and recognise the value and inclusion of local community inputs towards ocean conservation based on experience and traditional knowledge, including ensuring the full and meaningful participation of women, girls and gender non-binary people in all their diversities. It is estimated that 98% of all fishers and fish farmers live in developing countries, in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Together, they produce more than half of the world's annual marine fish and supply most of the fish consumed in the developing world (Berkes et al, 2001 in FAO, 2017). Out of this, women make up an estimated 47 percent of workers, accounting for around 56 million jobs along the fisheries supply chain, primarily

in post-harvest activities like processing and trading (World Bank, 2012 in FAO,2017). Women in the fishing sector are not homogenous, having diverse capacities and inputs towards various fishing value chains. Some can own a boat and gather mollusks, but the majority of women experience inequities in terms of access and control of their productive resources. They are involved in unpaid care, domestic and communal work, pre-harvest work (including tasks such as collecting and preparing bait and boats, mending nets, preparing food for fishing trips, arranging lines, and maintaining accounts of fisher organizations), and post-harvest work (such as cleaning the fish and other fishing products, sorting, weighing and in some cases processing and selling the fish).

Fishing women are underrepresented in the implementation of ocean conservation actions; women's fishing work is underpaid and undervalued; they are underrepresented in the official data with no sex differentiated statistics; and they are underrepresented in policy making, especially evident in those policies related to ocean conservation and sustainable use of the sea resources.

We must recognise and value the work of fisherwomen and fishing communities in a strong and new chapter for rural food sovereignty, ecologically-sound and just development, and marine conservation. We must recognise the roles of small-scale fisheries and coastal communities in integrated governance and ecological sustainability, ensure the access rights of women-led, small-scale and artisanal fisheries, and recognise IPLC tenure and governance models. Women, especially Indigenous and local fisherwomen, must be guaranteed human rights and justice in all decisions for the future of this planet, ocean, other species and all humans.

Demands

Therefore, the WGC highlights the following key asks at COP26:

- Create and strengthen processes to systematically, accountably and meaningfully include women, gender justice and human rights considerations in all ocean-climate-biodiversity processes;
- Reduce climate change related impacts on oceans and implement the substantial obligations under Art. 4.1 (d) and (e) of UNFCCC that directly refer to the conservation and enhancement of GHG sinks and reservoirs in marine and coastal ecosystems;
- Raise ambition to keep the global temperature rise this century well BELOW 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels in order to save coral reefs, stop biodiversity loss, and protect and enhance marine sinks and reservoirs;

- Acknowledge the massive role of coastal and oceanic blue carbon in global climate regulation, and protect and enhance marine ecosystems' and species' massive contribution to carbon sequestration, which also brings benefits for food security and all other SDGs;
- Support the climate justice demands of people of small island states and Arctic regions, and recognize the specific risks, knowledge, commitment and rights of women, Indigenous Peoples, small-scale fishers and associated poor communities from coastal areas, especially in tropical and Arctic regions at the frontline of the ocean-climate-biodiversity emergency, and call to institutionalize the representation and meaningful participation of coastal communities, fisherwomen and fishermen side by side with farmers and agriculture under the UNFCCC framework and in any processes related to the ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus at all levels;
- Exhaust all means available to assist fragile marine systems and vulnerable coastal communities to adapt to irreversible climate change, biodiversity loss, and other loss and damage including non-economic loss and damage (NELD);
- Address the severe and rapidly rising issue of climate-related people movement, migration and refugees due to climate change, and often over oceans. (This requires urgent, coherent, human rights-based international governance and multilateral efforts led by those most affected, preventative loss and damage work on food sovereignty, water security, housing, land, coastal and marine water tenure and access rights, fostering regional water cooperation, supporting livelihood security, migration monitors led by the UN with leadership by those communities most affected, providing safer modes of transport, and consolidating and expanding destination country integration resources, among other actions);
- Recognize and compensate for loss and damage of coral reefs, marine biodiversity and the foregone goods and services to associated Indigenous Peoples and local coastal communities;
- All climate finance must be ambitious, reliable and predictable, accountable and transparent and be focused on solidarity, engagement and participation of those most affected by the climate crisis, and respond to the intersectionality of all people, communities and societies, and effectively responding to the needs of communities disproportionately affected by climate change which requires releasing a sense of ownership and stopping all harmful norms and practices;
- Promote integration and coherence among all multilateral processes for global reporting and assessment of the state of climate change, ocean and marine and coastal biodiversity while balancing environmental, socio-economic, cultural and human rights aspects;

- Take all necessary measures to address and reduce all maritime sources of GHG (end fossil fuel subsidies in maritime transport and fisheries that contribute to overfishing, destructive fishing and IUU fishing, bottom trawling, deep sea mining and other activities disturbing carbon and methane stored in the seafloor.) There can be no policy shifts in industrialised North countries at the expense of marine biodiversity and food security in the majority South;
- Account for domestic shipping emissions in updated NDCs and domestic development and climate change plans, and develop decarbonisation plans for the sector that reduce domestic emissions by at least 50% below 2010 levels by 2030, and full decarbonisation of the sector by 2050;
- Activate the integration of climate change issues in all relevant ocean regimes, especially the currently negotiated Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) instrument under UNCLOS and the Post 2020 Framework of CBD, and in any ocean policy from the local to the global level in a coherent manner;
- Develop effective strategies on adaptation, mitigation and loss and damage to address sea level rise, ocean warming, ocean acidification, deoxygenation and harmful impacts of climate change and environmental pollution on oceans and coastal ecosystems such as river deltas, estuaries, sand dunes, mangroves and coral reefs, which are in grave danger. This includes action to prevent and urgently reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris, nutrient pollution, wastewater, solid waste discharges, plastics and microplastics into waterways and the oceans;
- End illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices, addressing their root causes and holding actors accountable to remove the benefits of such activities, and effectively implementing flag State and port State obligations as part of global measures to address loss and damage impacts to climate frontline communities, and for effective climate adaptation. This shift must reckon with the over-consumption of fish in developed countries;
- All ocean-responsive policies must take into account the problems of scale-ocean farming, which must be regulated and limited to what will conserve and protect local ecosystems and marine biodiversity from loss and damage;
- Protect and restore marine biodiversity and strengthen ocean resilience through ecosystem-based management and area-based management, including 100 percent protection of the commons, marine protected areas and reserves, and ocean-climate-biodiversity-responsive environmental impact assessments and integrative governance across sectors, areas and jurisdictions, with respect for Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of Indigenous Peoples and local communities;

- An **integrated ocean-climate-biodiversity framework and policy** must include a rights-based ecosystem approach to mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage, and include all pillars of the UN system, leading to a new peaceful, stable relationship between people and ocean;
- An integrated ocean-climate-biodiversity framework and policy must include, as an important minimum precautionary standard, the duty to obtain Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including small-scale fisherwomen, to decisions that affect them;
- An integrated ocean-climate-biodiversity framework and policy must pay attention to the huge mitigation potential of sustainable fisheries, marine biodiversity and oceanic blue carbon as well as vegetal blue carbon in coastal wetlands to protect the commons, ecosystems and ecosphere and to achieve all of the sustainable development goals;
- All plans to conserve and restore Earth's land and sea areas by 2030 through "area-based conservation measures," like any climate mitigation policy, must respect the rights and sovereignty of Indigneous Peoples and local communities to their territories and waters as well as IPLC governance systems so that new protected areas do not lead to further human rights abuses across the globe. We note the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines);
- Stop seabed mining! Seabed mining is inconsistent with UNFCCC Article 4.1 (d) and (e) and Paris Agreement Article 5.1, and other international obligations such as UNCLOS Article 145 as it results in incalculable and irreversible damage of fragile, poorly understood, slow growing deep sea species and ecosystems, accelerates marine biodiversity loss and threatens ocean's climate functions and services;
- Finally and unequivocally, we reject all experimental geoengineering (intentional, large-scale technological manipulation of the Earth's systems), including marine focused large-scale Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) and Carbon, Capture and Storage (CCS) technologies. They entail dangerous risks and potentially irreversible disasters to oceans, marine life and biodiversity, especially to fragile, slow growing deep sea species and ecosystems, and incalculable manipulations of the ocean's highly complex and poorly understood climate and life-sustaining functions.

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