

Ocean, Coasts and Society: Reimagining blue transformations and governance at the intersections

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Abstract

World's oceans are the lifeline of the whole of humanity. Yet they are under increasing stress and remain vulnerable to mega drivers (e.g., climate change, blue economy, plastic pollution), and are influenced by broader ecological, socio-economic, and governance dimensions (e.g., biodiversity decline, livelihood loss, health and wellbeing harm, inadequate policies, principles and institutions). Pathways to reduce ocean-related social-ecological vulnerabilities and operationalise ocean sustainability and blue transformation are context-, scale-, knowledge-, practice-, and resource-dependant. Identifying and understanding opportunities, as well as challenges or trade-offs, to achieve these ambitious goals is critical. In this regard, the paper makes a number of observations and examines key elements that require further considerations from the science-policy-practice community.

First, putting the ocean into appropriate context is important, and understanding the ocean, coasts and society connections as a complex adaptive system is a precursor. Second, oceans are global commons, and the challenges that abound them can be better realised as a commons problem requiring collective actions, responses and 'solutions'. Third, the pursuit of ocean (blue) transformation can succeed if prefixed by a meticulous focus on transitions (process orientation). Fourth, the work on blue transformations needs to be rooted in examining vulnerabilities but simultaneously striving toward viability that is sensitive to human rights and justice. Fifth, transformations within the ocean-coast-society context requires governance approaches to directly address finer nuances and nitty-gritties in addition to overarching principles, norms, institutions, relationships and interactions. Sixth, methodological innovations are still necessary that require thinking beyond inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches and participatory and collaborative methods.

The paper articulates some of these new directions to better comprehend pathways toward blue transformation, unravel the nexus between ocean-climate-biodiversity, and streamline the ocean's contributions to human wellbeing as a social-ecological outcome.