



The Global Oceans Forum At Rio+20



RIO+20
United Nations Conference
on Sustainable Development

May 2011

Advancing the Agenda of Oceans, Coasts, and Small Island States in the Rio+20 Process

THE IMPORTANCE OF RIO+20

The UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), also known as Rio+20, will take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on 4-6 June, 2012, marking the 20th anniversary of the 1992 Earth Summit (UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)) and the 10th anniversary of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). The UNCSD aims to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assess progress made and remaining gaps in the implementation of major agreements on sustainable development, and address new and emerging challenges,¹ especially those relating to the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Both UNCED and the WSSD were instrumental in developing the global environmental governance framework and outlining steps to address the most pressing issues related to environment and development. However, oceans and coasts are still facing growing threats from overfishing, pollution, and climate change, among other pressures. While great strides have been made since UNCED, unsustainable utilization of ocean and coastal resources and gaps in the international environmental governance (IEG) framework still threaten the long-term health and well-being of marine ecosystems and coastal communities. Rio+20 thus represents an important opportunity to take stock in progress made in the achievement of major goals and targets for oceans and coasts and to outline a new, operational vision towards strengthening the three pillars of sustainable development for the world's oceans and coasts.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED AT RIO+20

Objectives:

- Securing Political Commitment for Sustainable Development
- Assessing Progress Towards Global Commitments
- Addressing New and Emerging Challenges

Themes:

A. Green Economy in the Context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication

- Reconfiguring business and infrastructure to deliver better returns on natural, human and economic capital investments, while mitigating adverse environmental impacts, reducing social inequity, and alleviating poverty.

- Main tenets:

- Investing in natural capital
- De-carbonizing the economy
- Creating green jobs

B. Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development

- Failure to halt environmental degradation is indicative of institutional weaknesses in developing and implementing policies on sustainable development.
- International environmental governance (IEG)² must be strengthened through:
 - Creating a strong and accessible science base and policy interface;
 - Developing a global authoritative voice for environmental sustainability;
 - Achieving effectiveness, efficiency and coherence within the UN system;
 - Securing sufficient and predictable funding;
 - Ensuring a responsive and cohesive approach to meeting the needs of countries.

HIGHLIGHTING OCEAN ISSUES AT RIO+20

Chapter 17 of Agenda 21, which was formulated and adopted at UNCED, provided for the protection and sustainable development of the marine and coastal environment and its resources with the application of new approaches to marine and coastal area management at global, regional, national, and local levels, calling specifically for an integrated and precautionary approach. At the WSSD, the world's political leaders committed to specific targets and timetables on the ecosystem-based approach and integrated management, protection of the marine environment from land-based activities, reduction of biodiversity loss and establishment of marine protected areas, sustainable development of small island developing States (SIDS), fisheries management, integrated water resources management, global marine assessment, and coordination of UN ocean-related activities.

The Global Forum on Oceans, Coasts, and Islands, first mobilized in 2001 to help governments place issues related to oceans, coasts, and SIDS on the WSSD agenda, brings together ocean leaders from all sectors from over 100 countries to advance the global oceans agenda. The Global Forum promotes the implementation of international agreements related to oceans, coasts, and SIDS by assessing progress made, and identifying obstacles and opportunities for achieving sustainable development. Through expert working groups and multi-stakeholder dialogues, the Global Forum has been reporting on progress achieved on each of the WSSD ocean-related goals (see Publications list in companion leaflet *The Global Forum At-A-Glance*, http://www.globaloceans.org/sites/udel.edu.globaloceans/files/GOC_At_A_Glance_112310.pdf). For Rio+20, the Global Forum will carry out assessments on the implementation of the

¹UNGA resolution 64/236, para. 20(a).

²UNEP. Eleventh special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, Bali, Indonesia, 24–26 February 2010. UNEP/GCSS.XI/4, Annex.

1992 UNCED and 2002 WSSD targets on oceans and coasts up to 2011 to provide input towards the development of a vision for the next phase.

GLOBAL OCEANS FORUM ASSESSMENTS: HOW WELL ARE WE DOING?

The Global Forum will mobilize its volunteer network of experts from all regions of the world (250 experts from 70 countries), together with collaborating organizations, to focus on the major themes contained in Chapter 17 of UNCED and the associated WSSD Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, as well as examine the cross-cutting issues of achieving a green economy and improving international environmental governance.

The assessments will be concise and aimed at high-level policy leaders. They will assess:

- The current status of the issue
- Evolution over time
- Extent of progress achieved
- Challenges that must be addressed in the next phase
- Toward a new vision

Critical analytical assessments will be organized around the following themes, subject to change by the teams preparing the assessments and the regional consultations:

Specific UNCED/WSSD targets

- The status of ocean ecosystems and coastal communities, in the context of climate change and continuing biodiversity loss
- Addressing critical uncertainties for the management of the marine environment and climate change
- The extent of achievement of ecosystem-based, integrated ocean and coastal management in areas of national jurisdiction (coastal zones, exclusive economic zones), in areas beyond national jurisdiction, and through regional efforts, such as the Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) approach and Regional Seas Programmes
- The status and prospects for fisheries and aquaculture within and outside of national jurisdiction
- The special issues associated with small-island developing States and oceans, especially in the context of climate change
- Biodiversity loss, climate change, and networks of marine protected areas
- Financing, capacity development, and public outreach: The needs and the challenges

The role of the oceans in the new low-carbon green economy

Oceans play a key role in moving towards a low-carbon green economy in a number of ways. Oceans are an integral part of the global carbon cycle, storing large quantities of carbon in marine and coastal ecosystems, and provide viable sources of clean, renewable energy, such as offshore wind, wave, and tidal power. Environmentally friendly methods to sequester carbon in ocean areas are also being examined. However, the importance of oceans in the green economy has attracted inadequate attention in many global discussions. Rio+20, therefore, presents a critical opportunity

to emphasize the importance of oceans in the green economy, by encouraging sustainable exploitation of ocean-based renewable sources of energy and highlighting the need to protect and preserve marine and coastal ecosystems in order to maintain their role in the global carbon cycle.

Improved international environmental governance

Oceans represent the quintessential case for the need for improvement in global environmental governance, covering $\frac{3}{4}$ of the globe and playing a central role in the regulation of climate. Among the issues that may be addressed: Ocean functions are spread throughout the UN system and seldom receive sufficient attention; while oceans are essential in climate, ocean issues and impacts on coastal communities are neglected in the global climate regime; essential connections between the management of ocean ecosystems and freshwater ecosystems are often lacking; while the Law of the Sea Convention serves as the constitution for the oceans, there are gaps in its coverage and application.

GLOBAL FORUM CONSULTATIONS ON THE RIO+20 PROCESS

The Global Forum will undertake a consultative preparatory process in the lead up to Rio+20. The consultations will provide a venue for stakeholders to provide quantitative and qualitative input on the effectiveness of Agenda 21 and the WSSD in improving ocean and coastal management in different parts of the world, as well as offer regional perspectives on improvements in governance (or lack thereof) and corresponding causal factors. These consultations will also outline possible next steps for moving forward, in the context of a Green Economy and proposed improvements of the institutional framework for sustainable development. These consultations will be conducted in a timely manner in order to provide input to the Rio+20 intersessional and PrepCom meetings.



CONTACT INFORMATION

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³Rio+20 preparatory meetings:

Second Meeting of the Preparatory Committee, UN Headquarters, New York, March 7-8, 2011
Second Intersessional Meeting, UN Headquarters, New York, December 15-16, 2011
Third Intersessional Meeting, UN Headquarters, New York, March 5-7, 2012
Third Meeting of the Preparatory Committee, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, May 28-30, 2012