South-South Collaboration to Strengthen Statistics for Ocean-related SDGs

14 LIFE BELOW WATER

Developing statistical guidance for ocean accounting through South-South collaboration

CHALLENGE

Countries in the Asia-Pacific region benefit tremendously from the oceans. In 2018, Asia was home to 85 percent of the global population engaged in fisheries and aquaculture.[1] Among the Sustainable Development Goals, data availability on Goal 14 remains limited. With the three measurable targets, the Asia-Pacific region has made little progress in tackling marine pollution (Target 14.1) and in conservation of coastal areas (Target 14.5) and it is regressing on marine resources for small island developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDC) (Target 14.7).[2]

Ocean data and statistics are fragmented and fit-for-purpose statistical standards are insufficient, hampering the development of cohesive sustainable ocean development policies. Of the international frameworks that exist, none of them have been applied at the level of detail that would support monitoring and measurement of ocean-related targets in Goal 14 and interrelated goals.

TOWARDS A SOLUTION

ESCAP seeks to bridge the gaps in producing and disseminating harmonized data and statistics for monitoring and reporting progress related to sustainable ocean development. The strategy for doing so was to develop common statistical guidance through South-South collaboration, with the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP) established as the platform for experience-sharing and the generation of common knowledge products.

The statistical guidance developed, the *Technical Guidance on Ocean Accounting*,[3] supports countries in selecting, prioritizing, and standardizing

PROJECT NAME

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NOMINATED BY

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

COUNTRIES/REGIONS/TERRITORIES

All countries in Asia and the Pacific

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS TARGET(S)

2.3, 9.4, 13.2, 14.1, 14.2, 14.3, 14.4, 14.5, 14.6, 14.7, 14.a, 14.c, 14.c 15.5, 15.9, 17.8, 17.9

SUPPORTED BY

ESCAP, University of New South Wales (Australia), Australian Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, UN Joint SDG Fund, UN Development Account

IMPLEMENTING ENTITIES

ESCAP and the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP)

PROJECT STATUS

Ongoing

PROJECT PERIOD

2018 – 2024

LINK

https://stat-confluence.escap.un.org/x/woDL
https://www.oceanaccounts.org/

1 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2020). *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture* 2020. Sustainability in action. Rome. https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9229en

2 ESCAP (2022). Asia and the Pacific. SDG Progress Report. ST/ESCAP/2996

3 https://www.oceanaccounts.org/technical-guidance-on-ocean-accounting-2/

data of national, regional and global importance, so the data can be integrated to provide comprehensive information for decision-making. The technical guidance builds on existing statistical frameworks, including the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA) and the System of National Accounts (SNA), and adds elements of ocean governance and of sustainable use of the ocean.

The guidance was developed from experiences and expertise gained through initial experimentation and national pilots in the Global South, with five pilots conducted by China, Malaysia, Samoa, Thailand and Viet Nam in 2019. Lessons and results of the five pilots formed the basis for the technical guidance, built in-country capacity on ocean accounting and generated policy-relevant data: China developed harmonized ecosystem maps and carbon stock assessments of Beihai Bay, one of China's important marine ecological sites; Malaysia examined food security risk along the Straits of Malacca under climate variability and changes in ecosystems; and the sustainable tourism focus of Samoa, Thailand and Viet Nam enhanced the understanding of linkages between tourism income, natural resource use, land-based pollution and ecosystem impacts. Since then, the technical guidance has been further improved through enhanced South-South collaboration and additional pilots both in Asia and the Pacific and Africa.

Pilot projects adopted the following methodology for implementation: 1) a national pilot team conducted a rapid assessment to outline a pilot structure using ESCAP's diagnostic tool; 2) a national pilot team carried out a scoping assessment, with guidance from ESCAP, to review existing ocean-related policy priority, stakeholders, institutional mechanisms, existing data and gaps and opportunities, and to suggest options for the pilot; 3) a first national workshop was held by countries, where ESCAP provided ocean accounts training and key national stakeholders agreed on the topic; 4) a national pilot team implemented ocean accounting; and 5) a second national workshop was held by countries to review initial pilot results. The diagnostic tool utilized in the first step was designed to engage and guide structured dialogue among stakeholders, whereas the two workshops embedded in the pilot process ensured stakeholders were involved and consulted throughout the project.

The first version of the ESCAP diagnostic tool was tested through the initial pilot studies, and was further transformed into the Ocean Accounts Diagnostic Tool[4] for use in future pilots. The methodology for implementation has since been replicated by other GOAP members initiating ocean accounting projects. The 2019 pilot findings were presented at the First Global Dialogue on Ocean Accounting[5] where more than 100 technical experts and decision-makers from around the world shared ocean accounting experiences and reviewed the emerging technical guidance. The meeting was the first time GOAP convened, and since then, GOAP membership has expanded considerably.

The partnership serves as a coordination and communication platform for a global ocean accounting community of practice, where members exchange knowledge and share lessons learned from applying the ocean accounting framework.

The shared practices, in turn, are used to improve the technical guidance. GOAP provides technical and policy support for pilot implementation and organizes annual Global Dialogues on Ocean Accounting to exchange knowledge and discuss progress made. GOAP members continuously share experiences in the GOAP regional communities of practice for Africa and the Asia-Pacific region, and contribute to several regional and global events such as the Asia-Pacific Days for the Ocean.[6]

The Technical Guidance developed through South-South collaboration was recognized by the UN Statistical Commission, and now forms the substantive basis for ocean accounting standards development within the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting.[7]

The countries involved continue to extend their pilots. For example, Samoa focuses on links between land-based pollution and waste and the ocean. Currently, the country is preparing a study on plastic pollution and mangrove ecosystems. In Thailand, ocean accounts, Ocean Health Index and marine spatial planning have been integrated in a new pilot study in Phang Nga Bay. SEEA and ocean accounting were also incorporated in Thailand's Tourism Satellite Account–SEEA study, and methodologies from the initial pilot are being replicated in other tourism clusters. Viet Nam's original pilot on the ecosystem, pollution and tourism is being extended to an economic valuation of coastal and marine ecosystem services in Quang Ninh to support ocean economy planning.

Countries that want to develop ocean accounts are encouraged to adhere to the Technical Guidance, while following the methodology for implementation. The methodology for implementation provides a road map and leads to the creation of a network and coordination among national, regional and international partners. In addition to the technical challenges encountered, there were logistical and coordination challenges which the pilots sought to overcome. These lessons and experiences are included in the guidance shared through the GOAP community of practice.

Most recently and inspired by the other pilot experiences, Palau initiated an ocean accounting pilot in 2021 with the initial scope of accounting for the extension and condition of coral and mangrove ecosystems. Ocean accounts, developed through this initiative, are meant to primarily inform policies for sustainable ocean development, and related sustainable development targets. Emphasis on capacity-building activities is paramount to build technical expertise and to support countries' long-term ability to produce ocean accounts. Most recently, GOAP has received funding to continue and to scale up its technical assistance to countries wishing to initiate or continue their ocean accounting activities.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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4 https://www.oceanaccounts.org/ocean-accounts-diagnostic-tool/

5 https://bit.ly/3JUhsBH

6 https://www.unescap.org/events/2021/fourth-asia-pacific-day-ocean-4

7 https://seea.un.org/events/experimental-ocean-accounts-seea-ocean