



2021 United Nations Decade
2030 of Ocean Science
for Sustainable Development

Dialogue for building bridges between intersectional gender equality and ocean science: a multidisciplinary and multisectoral approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Authors:

Silvia Donoso López, Institut de Ciències del Mar (ICM/CSIC)
Nekane Viota, UN ETXEA (Basque Country Association for UNESCO)

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1. Background/Preamble

The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) ('the Ocean Decade') seeks to stimulate ocean science and knowledge generation to reverse the decline of the state of the ocean system and catalyse new opportunities for the sustainable development of this massive marine ecosystem.

The vision of the Ocean Decade is '**the science we need for the ocean we want**'.

The Ocean Decade provides a convening framework for scientists and stakeholders from diverse sectors to develop the scientific knowledge and the partnerships needed to accelerate and harness advances in ocean science to achieve a better understanding of the ocean system and deliver science-based solutions to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

The Ocean Decade *Implementation Plan*, a global framework for action, points out that the most pressing need is to collectively find transformative solutions to the existing and future challenges that face the ocean and thus humankind. The solutions will be many and varied and will differ in their form and scale to best respond to regional, national and local contexts. These will need to evolve and adapt to respond to a changing climate and will include, *inter alia*, knowledge to inform policy and decision-making, management and governance frameworks, and technological innovation. The only possibility to move from the 'ocean we have' to the 'ocean we want' is to convince governments, decision-makers, funders, scientists from natural and social science disciplines including humanities, and society at large, that the world requires a transformational, large-scale, adequately resourced, innovative campaign to mainstream ocean science. It also underlines that this campaign needs to cut across geographies, but also be inter-generational, **recognise and redress gender disparities in ocean science** and be of sufficiently long duration to deliver lasting change.

Women and Oceans Decade

The Ocean Decade *Implementation Plan* identifies interactions with the 2030 Agenda, and concerning SDG5 appoints to the need to increase gender equity in ocean science.

The **Empowering Women** Programme is the only programme endorsed by IOC-UNESCO under the *Ocean Decade* addressed to enhance capacity to explore and promote women's empowerment and gender equality in the conduct of ocean science and science-dependent governance systems. The Programme hosts three Projects: [Women from the Sea](#), [Women in Blue: Gender Equity for the Ocean](#) and [Empowering Women in Hydrography](#).

The Programme aims to help deliver equal opportunities for full participation and leadership by women at all levels of ocean science under the Ocean Decade and do this by enhancing ongoing collaborations with partners including government agencies, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, research institutes, universities, and individuals to deliver substantive research outputs contributing to transformative actions.

Beyond this effort, little seems to have been done concerning gender mainstreaming (and even less from an intersectional approach) in the Ocean Decade's actions overall. This reality became evident during the Ocean Decade

Conference in Barcelona, where addressing gender equality issues related to the oceans was limited to specific 'women's' sessions/events and was absent from the rest of the sessions.

2. The Dialogue

The UN Ocean Decade 2021-2030 fosters synergies through the research community, decision-makers, private sector and civil society towards effective solutions facing the urgent crisis enhancing innovation, dialogue and public awareness on marine ecosystems focusing on the environment and human health.

With this in mind, the Institut de Ciències del Mar and UN ETXEA, with the collaboration of UNESCO, Department of Economic Development, Sustainability and Environment of the Basque Government, Oceánicas – Institute of Oceanography-Spanish Research Council (IEO-CSIC), AZTI (Ocean and Food Research Institution) and Associació Catalana de Dones de la Mar organized the event “**Dialogue for building bridges between intersectional gender equality and ocean science: a multidisciplinary and multisectoral approach**”, an open space for dialogue oriented to contribute to the definition of a joint vision of “*the science we need for the ocean we want*” from a gender perspective.

We understand that the need for gender equality goes beyond the ocean science community. It should transcend stakeholders from diverse sectors, as women outside the scientific fields also contribute to the knowledge and sustainability of the oceans. The production of scientific knowledge related to the oceans must take their voices and needs into account. At the same time, it should also be considered the inclusion of gender dimension in the production of knowledge in ocean research to guarantee that women also benefit from ocean science knowledge and results.

The possible ways to achieve these objectives were discussed with three panelists who provided some remarkable insights:

Begoña Lasagabaster (Director of the Gender Equality Division of the General Director, UNESCO), pointed out three key areas for improvement to advance gender equality: the need to increase women's participation and visibility in different fields, especially in decision-making and policy discussions; investment and funding in women-led projects, and the collection of sex-disaggregated data and statistics. Articulated work between different actors and stakeholders must be supported, and women must have a voice at all levels. In this sense, she underlined the need to galvanize and accelerate commitment from UNESCO and the international community to address these challenges, recognizing that everyone has a role to play.

Esther Garcés (Marine Research Institute ICM-CSIC) emphasized the enduring obstacles to gender equality within the research system, which frequently manifest in institutional structures affecting aspects such as personnel management, funding allocation, decision-making processes, and research agendas. Despite the presence of normative frameworks and policies designed to promote gender equality, there remains a clear imperative for research institutions to adopt tailor-made, targeted strategies. These strategies should feature achievable objectives, measurable outcomes, suitable actions, and

progress indicators. Addressing this challenge requires meaningful institutional transformations that bridge the gap between rhetoric and implementation.

For her part, *Farah Obaidullah* (Women4Oceans) focused her reflection on highlighting the invisibility and lack of voice and recognition of women in many areas related to the oceans, their absence in decision-making spheres, their difficulty in accessing resources, their fewer opportunities, undervalued work positions and lower wages. This reality is especially evident in developing countries and among the most vulnerable groups of women. She also pointed out the lack of a gender perspective in many research or ocean-related policies and programs. Consequently, she urged the need to generate effective conditions to overcome gender inequality in this field and to do so from an intersectional perspective.

3. Recommendations

The **Barcelona Statement** identifies the future priorities for ocean knowledge and science generation within the framework of the Ocean Decade, including the co-design and co-delivery of science and knowledge to understand the global distribution, human health, ecosystem impacts of marine pollution, and to strengthen sustainable aquatic food production and encourage sustainable and climate resilient ocean economy projects.

The Statement also emphasizes **cross-cutting** issues that must be addressed to ensure the success of Ocean Decade is on track for success by 2030 including measures to continue to enhance **diversity, inclusivity and equity** in the Ocean Decade and systematically identify and remove barriers to generational, geographic, and **gender diversity** – whether this be giving a more central place to Indigenous and local knowledge systems, or better considering the **voices of women** and youth.

These are specific recommendations for advancing gender equality in ocean science at the Ocean Decade Conference 2024 (Barcelona). These recommendations take into account the results of the event “**Multidisciplinary and multisectoral dialogues for Building Bridges between intersectional gender equality and Ocean Science**”, held in the context of the Conference.

1. **Ensuring gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in the challenges, strategies, and actions of the Ocean Decade.** UNESCO, through its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), in its role as coordinator of the Ocean Decade, should ensure that all actions, policies, programs and projects promoted within the framework of the Oceans Decade, apply gender mainstreaming and advance gender equality to secure a sustainable future for the Ocean and Humanity.

In this effort, the Division for Gender Equality in the Office of the Director-General of UNESCO can play a key role.

- 2. Call for joint action.** Encourage the active participation of the international community, academic institutions, the private sector, civil society organisations and governmental and non-governmental organizations in promoting gender equality in all areas related to the oceans. Cooperation is needed to work towards a future where women can reach their full potential and contribute fully to the study and protection of our oceans.
- 3. Promote women's participation and leadership.** Identify barriers and solution paths for women's participation and leadership at all levels of ocean affairs, especially in decision-making spaces and policy discussions. Recognize and make visible the scientific work and results produced by women to preserve oceans and in the conservation of marine sites. This includes initiatives to strengthen women's voices and professional development opportunities, such as implementing gender quotas, mentoring and leadership programs, as well as promoting inclusive institutional cultures.
- 4. Women's capacity development.** Capacity development is an essential tenet of the Ocean Decade. The Decade assume that capacity development efforts must focus on the capacity to do, influence the design and use science to develop solutions for sustainable development. However, efforts must be intensified to ensure that scientist women as women across different stakeholder groups effectively benefit from capacity development initiatives. Specific actions targeted towards women to address existing gender gaps need to be expanded.
- 5. Transdisciplinary approach.** Collaboration between research institutions, private sectors, public administrations, and civil society can significantly improve ocean management outcomes. Different stakeholders can bring innovative ideas and creative solutions to marine problems and ocean hazards. It is crucial to give women a voice and recognition in these processes, as they often have unique and valuable perspectives on the conservation and sustainable use of ocean resources.
- 6. Increase investment and funding.** Allocate additional financial resources to women-led research projects and initiatives that promote equitable participation and gender equality in the marine sector. This could involve establishing dedicated funds and programs for women marine scientists, as well as supporting projects that focus on addressing issues of specific importance to women as stakeholders in the ocean.
- 7. Impulse the creation of specific spaces and support networks for women.** Establish and promote supportive spaces where women can build and develop their ideas, share experiences and collaborate on initiatives for change in the field of oceans. This may include the creation of working groups, discussion forums, and mentoring programs specifically designed for women marine scientists.

8. Improve the knowledge about gender gaps. It is needed to improve the data collection disaggregated by sex and introduce gender-sensitive indicators in statistics. Collecting data and statistics plays a key role in understanding women's specific needs and challenges and assessing gender differences and gaps in the oceans, effectively addressing the particular challenges women face concerning marine resources and ocean activities.

9. Address gender discrimination and harmful gender norms from an intersectional perspective. Implement policies and programs that eliminate discriminatory practices, promoting an equitable distribution of roles and responsibilities, as well as leadership opportunities in the oceanographic field.

To this end, data and statistics collection plays a key role in understanding and assessing gender differences and gaps in the oceans. Without this detailed and disaggregated information, it is difficult to identify and effectively address the specific challenges faced by women in relation to marine resources and ocean activities.

10. Provide girls and young female ocean scientists with quality educational opportunities, scholarships, mentorship programs, networking and funding opportunities for their research and action projects. This will help equip the next generation of women to be environmental and social justice leaders able to make decisions to protect the health of the oceans while ensuring equitable and sustainable access to their resources.

11. Promote more inclusive, equitable, safe, and respectful environments for all women, encouraging diversity in all its forms in networks and work teams. Supporting inclusive and diverse workspaces and teams can significantly improve outcomes in ocean management. Different cultural, socio-economic and gender experiences can bring innovative ideas and creative solutions to marine problems.

Organizations should develop and implement clear inclusion and diversity policies, offer continuous training on gender equality, eliminate gender-based violence and adopt targeted measures to promote the safety of women. They should also implement inclusive recruitment and promotion practices, fostering an inclusive and caring organizational culture.

4. Partners

- UNESCO
- Department of Economic Development, Sustainability and Environment of the Basque Government
- Oceánicas – Institute of Oceanography-Spanish Research Council (IEO-CSIC)
- AZTI (Ocean and Food Research Institution)
- Associació Catalana de Dones de la Mar

5. Main speakers & Contributors

Main speakers

- Begoña Lasagabaster, Director of Gender Equality of the Office of the General Director, UNESCO
- Esther Garcés, a marine researcher at ICM
- Farah Obaidullah, Women4Oceans

Contributors

- Arantza Acha (UN Etxea)
- Donia Allani (UNESCO)
- Valentí Sallarés (ICM/CSIC)
- Marina Santurtun (AZTI)
- Lexuri Vázquez (University of Deusto)



6. References

- [Gender Equality for Ocean Sustainability](#), UNESCO
- [Call for Action. Gender Equality to solve the Climate Emergency](#), UNESCO