



INTERNATIONAL
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EMPOWERING OCEAN LEADERSHIP
1972 - 2022

HEADQUARTERS

We, the International Ocean Institute (IOI), alongside the UN Ocean Decade endorsed Early Career Ocean Professionals Programme (ECOP Programme), strongly believe in the unique role of ECOPs and the need to provide them with greater engagement and capacity building opportunities if we wish to fulfil the vision of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

Since its foundation in 1972, IOI has provided dedicated, regular, focused, training events aimed specifically at enhancing the skills and knowledge of ECOPs, particularly those from developing countries and countries in transition. Thus a critical mass of ECOPs contributes towards a growing global network of trained and empowered Ocean leaders fully conversant with the latest developments in Ocean governance and evidence-based decision-making. ECOPs are talented and motivated thinkers and doers in the many fields of Ocean governance and science. They are also empowered to make the changes needed to achieve equitable and sustainable global development and governance, grounded solidly in the social, economic and environmental spheres.

Gaps in equitable access to capacity development by ECOPs nonetheless remain, and addressing these will require cross-sectoral concerted efforts, meaningful partnerships built on trust, and a willingness to accept and listen to new ways of thinking. The current asymmetric seascape between countries and stakeholders is a challenge to be overcome to ensure equitable learning and engagement opportunities, to leverage the voices of the underrepresented, and to encourage ownership of the Decade within the next generation of Ocean leaders.

In addressing this, the IOI and ECOP Programme have successfully partnered to co-create additional dedicated training workshops for ECOPs in the Global South, where systemic inequalities and lack of resources (in terms of opportunities, available and accessible funding, research facilities and infrastructure, technology, etc.) are not only hampering career development opportunities in the Ocean space but also acting to reinforce current deficits in scientific and policy output.

We jointly recognize the importance of bidirectional mentoring between career-stages and sectors, which has been identified as a key common priority for ECOPs across regions, alongside increased funding and community cohesion. Through regional surveys, the ECOP Programme pinpointed contextual needs and challenges for ECOPs all over the world, helping to tailor the right kind of capacity development initiatives for knowledge production and sharing. The IOI will leverage these insights to provide innovative and equitable learning opportunities to the next generation of Ocean leaders.

Asha de Vos highlighted during the UN Ocean Conference : *“while talent is equally distributed around the world, opportunities are not”*, highlighting the need to mainstream social equity in capacity building during the Ocean Decade and beyond, making every voice count. Knowledge about the Ocean should be accessible to all, as well as opportunities at all levels.

Another challenge relates to tokenism; ECOPs should be naturally integrated within every step, providing them with tangible and impactful opportunities to learn and to contribute as equal partners. A smooth transfer of knowledge and skills should be secured in all institutions and countries so that marine knowledge is preserved and expanded for future generations. We urge all parties to commit to the notion that science and knowledge should be beyond politics and geographies and that any discrimination on any basis is not acceptable.



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Structural barriers to inclusion are still too common, and adversely impact engagement of ECOPs, the development of capacity, and distribution of opportunities across the globe. This hinders creation of a multinational capacity pool, with unique regional perspectives, solutions and ideas, which in turn prevents the global community from solving some of our most pressing challenges.

ECOPs, in facing various challenges across the world, need support from their own governments and local institutions, and international partners. We encourage States and UN bodies to recognize the challenges that the Ocean is facing now, and to support already existing and effective efforts to address this imbalance and to create, where necessary, specific programmes, as well as grant support for ECOPs; to invest in actions to give young people an opportunity to work and contribute to evidence-based decision-making, and the promotion of Ocean solutions based on rigorous science. The IOI, through its programmes and partnerships and its graduate alumni remains ready to assist the global community in achieving these goals.

Sincerely,

Antonella Vassallo
Managing Director