



2022 United Nations Ocean Conference Side Event

Rights Based Approaches to Marine Conservation, Shedding Light on Oceans Declaration and the Youth Call to Action for G7

01.07.2022, 1:00–2:30 pm Lisbon Time, Online via Zoom

Organized by: Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Youth for Oceans

Background on the event

The focus of the virtual side event organized by Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Youth for Oceans, was on the need to have a rights based approach in the marine conservation space. Given that marine ecosystems are claimed by a number of stakeholders, it is important to ensure that all of them are given a space to express their concerns and voice their opinion. This is especially true for the vulnerable and marginalised communities like small-scale fisherfolk who are often not included in the discussions surrounding conservation and decision making. The side event therefore provided a platform for these open discussions, where experts from diverse sectors pointed out the importance of having a rights based approach (both nature and human rights) in marine conservation and the ways in which it can be effectively integrated. The event had 6 speakers (from diverse sectors) who provided their views on a rights based approach in the context of South Asia, Europe, Southeast Asia and the High Seas. This was followed by a panel discussion and Q&A on potential solutions for integrating a rights based approach in the marine realm going forward. Overall, the event was a success in creating awareness, finding solutions and sparking discussions on a less talked about subject in the marine conservation field.

Key Issues discussed

The speakers spoke on various interlinked aspects of ocean conservation taking into account the rights of humans and nature. The main issues discussed (in a panel discussion format) were -

- The importance and the role of the fishing communities in ocean conservation and how they should occupy centre stage along with other stakeholders especially in Asia.
- The differing roles of men and women within the Indigenous and Local Communities (IPLCs) were also discussed along with the naturally sustainable methods employed by fishing communities the world over

- The need for ocean rights and how human rights-based environmental litigation and other legal methods can ensure robust conservation measures in the European context
- The use of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a key instrument to advance the protection of everybody's human rights for ocean conservation. The issue discussed how healthy oceans are a part of it by discussing it in the context of nature and human rights,
- How the High Seas Treaty ties into the rights-based approach to marine conservation. The importance and need for having the High Seas Treaty and different monitoring mechanisms for areas beyond 200 nautical miles (accounting for a major part of our oceans) were discussed.

Key recommendations for action

The key recommendations put forth by speakers for ensuring that a rights based approach to marine conservation are the following:

- Local fishing communities are generational store houses of information about the oceans and we need to tap into them and make use of it by including them at all stages of decision making.
- Start looking at commons along the seafood supply chain where harvesters, traders and consumers come together to form a community and work together to tackle issues concerning our oceans.
- Oceans to be considered as living entities with legal rights and recognising people's right to a healthy marine/ocean ecosystem.
- Recognising and valuing traditional (non-formal) protection systems for marine areas, establishing social safeguards to protect the livelihoods of people and protecting users from displacement.
- Children and youth to be included in decision making processes related to establishment and management of conservation areas. Assessing the impact (positive and negative) of various conservation measures on the marine ecosystem, youth, children and other human rights holders to prevent unjustified infringement of human rights violations.
- The access to areas beyond national jurisdiction and the benefits arising from the utilisation of those resources is restricted to those countries who have the capability technology. This needs to change and the profits arising out of the use of the common resources should be distributed equally among everyone.

Voluntary Commitments

GYBN is committed to enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of our oceans by ensuring intergenerational equity and a rights based approach. Capacity building and integrated coastal management is central to protection of nature and ensure equitable and fair sharing of benefits across generations, society and time. All of this would be better possible with increased recognition of youth in the conservation of marine ecosystems. This further requires increased financial support for youth along with opportunities for increased scientific knowledge, research capacity and technology transfer.