2025 HLPF Thematic Review
Expert Group Meeting
Virtual, 12-13 May 2025

Meeting Summary for SDG 14[1]

1. Introduction

The 2025 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), scheduled to convene in New York from 14 to 23 July 2025, will take stock of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the theme: "Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no one behind". The Forum will include in-depth reviews of SDG 3 (Health), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Economic Growth and Decent Work), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 17 (Partnerships).

As part of the preparations, the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), in collaboration with Food and Agriculture Organization, International Maritime Organization, United Nations Environment Programme, International Atomic Energy Agency, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Meteorological Organization, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs organized a virtual Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on 12–13 May 2025. The EGM focused on SDG 14: "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development".

The objectives of the 2025 SDG 14 EGM were threefold: (i) to take stock of progress toward SDG 14 and its targets, including those that have expired or are due to expire by 2025; (ii) to review implementation opportunities and threats, lessons learned, and best practices, including interlinkages with other SDGs; and (iii) to formulate concrete policy recommendations and solutions for the HLPF, informed by evidence and practical experience.

The EGM was structured around eight parallel working group sessions, each focusing on a specific SDG 14 target or cluster of related targets. Discussions were anchored in keynote presentations delivered by lead UN custodian agencies, followed by technical contributions from a diverse group of experts, including government

[1] The recommendations expressed in this report are a summary of the contributions made by experts in the meeting and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

representatives, small-scale fisheries organizations, NGOs, research institutions, and intergovernmental bodies. The meeting also reflected on interlinkages between SDG 14 and other relevant processes in 2025, including the 2025 UN Ocean Conference, which will be held one month prior to the HLPF.

The EGM outcomes aim to inform the 2025 HLPF, including its thematic sessions, and to support the implementation of the 2023 Political Declaration adopted at the SDG Summit, the Pact for the Future emerging from the Summit of the Future, and global instruments such as the BBNJ Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The meeting also served to strengthen the evidence base for ocean-related policies and actions in the years remaining to 2030 and beyond.

2. Stocktaking and challenges

a. *Aquatic Food Systems (targets 14.4. and 14.6.)*

Progress on SDG Target 14.4, measured through indicators 14.4.1. (sustainable fish stocks) remains in a negative trajectory. In 2021 the fraction of fishery stocks caught within biologically sustainable levels decreased to 62.3 percent. However, when weighted by production levels, biologically sustainable stocks accounted for 76.9 percent of 2021 landings assessed by FAO. This means that when management is applied – usually to larger more important stocks – it works, and those stocks are improving. FAO is currently updating its methodology to evaluate the health of stocks. The new methodology will be published during the 3rd UN Oceans Conference and increases the number of reference stocks from the 531 used until 2021 to 2570, providing a richer and more granular view on the state of the world's stocks.

Progress on SDG 14.6 is measured via indicator 14.6.1 and has seen measurable improvements. The indicator measures the self-reported progress by countries in the degree of implementation of international instruments aiming to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The global average score as measured by this indicator increased from a "3" in 2018, to 4 in 2020 (on a 1-5 scale), and has remained the same through to 2024, but regional variations remain. Furthermore, the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies is a significant milestone for SDG Target 14.6, given the target call for eliminating harmful subsidies.

Since the last review, the enabling environment has evolved with stronger global instruments (e.g., the Port State Measures Agreement, WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement, IMO Cape Town agreement, CITES listing of marine species, BBNJ Agreement and Kunming Montreal Biodiversity Framework, and where applicable, the OECD Recommendation on eliminating government support for IUU Fishing), improved technological tools, and growing recognition of aquatic food systems in broader food security agendas. However, global funding constraints, geopolitical fragmentation, and uneven political will have weakened multilateral progress.

b. *Marine Pollution (target 14.1)*

The implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 target 14.1 on reducing marine pollution remains uneven and faces persistent challenges across technical, institutional, and financial dimensions. The indicator 14.1.1, which includes sub-indicators on coastal eutrophication (14.1.1a) and plastic debris density (14.1.1b), suffers from significant data gaps. While progress has been made in developing harmonised methodologies and producing modelled data through collaborative efforts led by UNEP and partner agencies, comprehensive global coverage remains elusive. Although some international agencies, a.o., IAEA, are intensively working to build national-level

reporting capacities, reporting remains inconsistent. Many countries still lack the necessary technical expertise, infrastructure, and institutional coordination to produce, validate, and report reliable data.

Ocean data monitoring is technically demanding and resource-intensive, especially in high seas and remote areas. Limited access to technology, particularly in developing countries, impedes both data collection and validation. The reliance on modelled or satellite-derived data further complicates national ownership and acceptance, as many countries are unable to verify the findings using their own capabilities.

Fragmentation in governance structures, disparities in the engagement of regional seas programmes, and limited institutional coordination exacerbate these challenges. While some regional bodies are actively contributing to marine pollution assessments, others remain underutilized or insufficiently resourced. Additionally, the current science-policy interface is insufficiently integrated, hindering the translation of scientific findings into national action.

A critical challenge lies in silos within ocean science and policy communities. Interdisciplinary collaboration is limited, and engagement with broader sectors—including public health, education, social sciences, and the private sector—is minimal. The lack of systematic outreach beyond the environmental community limits the political traction and societal support necessary for ambitious policy implementation.

c. *Biodiversity and Conservation (targets 14.2. and 14.5.)*

The 2025 review of SDG 14 progress reveals both encouraging developments and persistent challenges in achieving ocean biodiversity and conservation goals, particularly SDG Targets 14.2 on sustainable management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems, and 14.5 on conservation of coastal and marine areas. While more than a hundred countries are engaged in Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) processes, few have formally approved marine spatial plans. This reflects a significant gap between policy development and its operationalization. Current indicators primarily capture the existence of frameworks rather than their effectiveness, leaving a blind spot in assessing real-world impacts and outcomes.

Global coverage of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) has risen steadily to approximately 8% of marine areas—below the 10% target for 2020 and far from the 30% aspiration for 2030. The Southeast Asia region, as reported by the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, lags even further behind, with under 4% effective coverage. Furthermore, less than 20% of areas vital for ecosystem functions and services are under protection, indicating substantial risks to marine biodiversity and the sustainability of ecosystem services.

Panelists underscored the fragmentation of marine governance frameworks across scales and sectors, which impedes the adoption of holistic, adaptive, and integrated management approaches. Critical gaps remain in integrating traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge systems into mainstream marine policy and planning. Effective MPA management remains elusive, with limited data on ecological representativeness, connectivity, and management effectiveness. Existing networks are insufficiently designed to support resilience against climate change and human pressures. While the private sector is showing growing interest in blue economy and restoration efforts, its participation remains marginal in practice. Public-private partnerships are not yet fully leveraged to drive scalable marine conservation and sustainable use projects.

d. *Climate change impacts (target 14.3)*

In relation to Target 14.3, there has been an increase in the number of reporting countries and monitoring stations under the relevant indicator, yet regional coverage remains uneven. The indicator itself focuses on pH trends, which do not capture the broader consequences of chemical changes or the full range of impacts on ocean ecosystems.

Significant data gaps persist, and the current data pipeline—from researchers to national agencies—is often non-functional or insufficient. Key issues include the absence of robust metadata standards and limited data interoperability.

Many countries face capacity constraints, lacking the infrastructure, equipment, and trained personnel necessary to monitor ocean conditions effectively. Moreover, there is a disconnect between national reporting and local action: while ocean acidification responses are often documented at the national level, local governments are typically responsible for implementation but lack adequate funding, capacity, and institutional recognition.

Finally, a persistent lack of sustained funding for ocean acidification research communities continues to limit data collection, capacity-building, and the ability to translate knowledge into action.

e. *Sustainable Blue Economy and SIDS (target 14.7)*

The discussions on Target 14.7 were focused on "by 2030, increase the economic benefits to Small Island Developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism".

Ocean economic growth has outpaced global growth, expanding 2.5 times between 1995-2020, compared to 1.9 times for the rest of the economy. Ocean trade in goods and services reached $2.2 trillion in 2023, with coastal tourism and maritime transport being the largest sectors. SIDS and LDCs rely significantly on ocean exports, with SIDS' ocean goods and services exports representing 15% of their GDP.

Among ocean goods production and trade, sustainable fisheries only contribute a small portion to GDP, ranging from 0.1% to 0.8% globally, but are more significant for Oceania, LDCs, and SIDS, where they account for 0.5% to 2% of GDP. Informality, lack of equality and difficulties accessing markets in a common reality on the Small-Scale Fisheries and Aquaculture sector, with overfishing and pollution, including in ABNJ which are beyond SIDS' control.

SIDS still are facing multiple challenges and constraints. Narrow SIDS resource base, low finance and investment flows, and regulatory weaknesses combined with high environmental vulnerability such as exposure to sea level rise and extreme weather events, ocean acidification, coral bleaching, pollution, and overfishing in international waters.

The fact that SIDS are "sea-locked" means SIDS are particularly reliant on oceans and on maritime transport linkages, but at the same time face low connectivity and high transport costs. Liner shipping connectivity for both SIDS and LDCs remains low, about three times less than for non-SIDS/LDCs.

While ports are critical for access to global markets and ocean economy activities, as well as food and energy security, tourism and in the context of disaster response and recovery, ports in SIDS are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, making effective adaptation action imperative.

The discussion addressed the adaptation finance gaps: SIDS and LDCs adaptation and resilience projects struggle for capital. There is an urgent need for more accessible and affordable adaptation finance, including in the form of grants, as well as for capacity-building.

Climate-driven coastal erosion poses a significant threat to sandy beaches and 3-S tourism. Most sandy beaches will be significantly affected with many at risk of disappearing. Frequent flooding will affect not only the blue economy but also other sectors and key infrastructure. Key research findings shared by experts include the following: Coastal flood impact projections: https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-023-01230-5; Global coastal erosion projections: https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-020-0697-0; Beach Carrying Capacity at Touristic 3S Destinations: https://www.longdom.org/open-access/beach-carrying-capacity-at-touristic-3s-destinations-its-significance-projected-decreases-and-adaptation-options-under-climate-cha-93317.html

An open access geospatial database of coastal infrastructure land use (ports, airports, wastewater treatment facilities, etc.) is available to provide critical information for climate risk assessment in Caribbean SIDS: https://uri.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/10fb2265d767421a9b4247817fa667bc

f. *Supporting Small Scale Fisheries communities' access to resources, capacity, and knowledge (target 14.b.)*

The indicator SDG 14.b.1 measures the degree of FAO members implementing legal, regulatory or policy frameworks that recognize and protect access rights for small-scale fisheries, in support of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). The global average score for SDG 14.b.1 dropped from 5 (very high implementation) in 2022 to 4 (high implementation) in 2024, based on reports from 112 countries. However, the overall trend since 2018 has been positive, and more countries have been reporting since 2020. Around half (54 percent) of reporting states scored 5 in 2024.

In 2024, the SSF Guidelines marked their 10th anniversary, with growing adoption worldwide. Awareness-raising and implementation efforts around the SSF Guidelines have supported important progress towards SDG 14.b over the last decade. However, implementation on the ground of the SSF Guidelines and relevant legal, regulatory or policy frameworks in support of SDG 14.b remains a critical need moving forward into the next decade.

Since the goal was last reviewed in 2022, 5 more countries have developed and implemented National Plan of Action of Small-Scale Fisheries (NPOA-SSF), which provide a systematic approach towards implementing the SSF Guidelines at the national level, and more concretely include priority actions to promote an enabling environment and improve access of small-scale fisheries communities to resources and markets, essentially towards achieving SDG 14.b. The list of countries interested in developing and implementing NPOAs-SSF are growing, such as in the Southeast Asia region.

g. *Science, technology, and education (Target 14.a.)*

SDG 14.a. noted progress through international agreements and growing engagement: Key global frameworks as the BBNJ Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework, the ongoing Plastic Pollution Treaty negotiations, and the Ocean-Climate Dialogue, have advanced ocean sustainability considerations with the international policy agenda. These frameworks reflect stronger political will and acknowledgment of the ocean's role in climate stability, biodiversity, and livelihoods.

However, as per the latest data, the Global Ocean Science Report (GOSR) highlights that ocean science receives nearly ~1.7% of national research budgets, and only 15% of the required funding for SDG 14 is mobilized. These insufficient levels lay on the line the agenda 2030 timeline. In addition, the State of the Ocean Report that is structured around the seven outcomes of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, provides important information about ocean well-being, and reveals persistent gaps in knowledge distribution, it highlights

the need for collaboration between knowledge holders, governments and private sector, the importance to consider local context to detect, adapt and mitigate global trends and the uneven distribution of data access, and human capacity especially in SIDS and LDCs.

Although ocean science is generated through global programs like the UN Decade of Ocean Science, and in reports as the GOSR, SOFIA, and many IPCC /IPBES assessments, implementation at the national level remains challenging. The Global Ocean Observing system, faces persistent barriers due to inadequate investment, limited interoperability, and data sharing difficulties especially for SIDS and LDCs.

Additionally, a strong science-policy interface is required to optimise ocean science use. A Theory of Change approach is proposed to map pathways from knowledge to impact. In addition, Co-design and co-delivery are vital for effective policy-science integration. Through more donor engagement and clearer messaging. Emphasis on connecting non-scientific practitioners to decision-making. However, it is challenging for many member States to access and apply scientific knowledge due to barriers in communication, institutional capacity, and governance alignment. The OARS Programme reinforces this, noting the ongoing need to better equip decision-makers with timely, relevant, and accessible data on issues like ocean acidification

h. Supporting the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

The session focused on SDG Target 14.c, which calls for the implementation of international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to conserve and sustainably use oceans and their resources. Several legal developments since the 2022 UN Ocean Conference were acknowledged, such as:

- The adoption, by consensus, of the Agreement under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), in June 2023, was a historic achievement for the ocean and a great victory of multilateralism. The BBNJ Agreement has become the third implementing agreement to UNCLOS. Once in force, and if effectively implemented, it can make significant contributions to achieving SDG14 and its targets, including particularly target 14.c.
- The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework also supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In particular, its target 3, which aims to ensure that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of marine and coastal areas are effectively conserved and managed, is directly relevant to SDG14.
- In addition, ongoing negotiations toward an internationally legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, offer renewed hope for the protection and preservation of the marine environment.
- In terms of vessel-source pollution, the revised IMO Strategy on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from ships includes targets to reach net-zero HGH emissions by 2050.
- In respect of non-living marine resources, the International Seabed Authority (ISA) is currently working to develop regulations for the exploitation of mineral resources in the Area, which aim to balance economic needs with the effective protection of the marine environment. Once adopted, these regulations will complement the three sets of regulations already in place concerning the exploration of mineral resources in the Area.
- The role of international courts and tribunals in clarifying the obligations under UNCLOS was also underscored, with a focus on the 2024 advisory opinion of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea on climate change and international law.

Despite this progress, substantial challenges persist, especially for developing countries, including the Least Developed Countries, landlocked developing countries and Small Island Developing States. These include:

- Low ratification and implementation rates of relevant legal instruments, which impact the effectiveness of these instruments.
- Capacity and resource constraints, which continue to be the primary limiting factors for becoming a party thereto.
- Lack of financial and human resources, scientific knowledge and technical expertise required to implement, monitor and enforce relevant measures, which prevents States from effectively participating in, and benefiting from, activities in the ocean.
- Inadequate data collection and insufficiently detailed monitoring frameworks, which influence the effectiveness of reporting on progress made in the implementation of relevant legal instruments.
- Fragmentation in reporting methodologies and challenges in coordination, which may also impede the effective monitoring of progress.

3. Key considerations for the future

a. *Aquatic Food Systems (targets 14.4. and 14.6.)*

Over the next five years and beyond, several evolving institutions and trend swill shape SDG 14.4 and 14.6 outcomes. Short-term (to 2030) risks include failure to curtail harmful subsidies, inadequate attention to fisheries management, particularly support for data-poor fisheries and poor monitoring control and surveillance, threaten ability to achieve SDGs 14.4 and 146. Long-term, without action, overfishing and harmful subsidies compounded by climate impacts could undermine marine biodiversity and food security for millions.

In particular, climate impacts such as ocean warming, acidification, and extreme weather will stress marine ecosystems and disrupt fisheries, especially in the Global South.

Geopolitical tensions and conflicts, coupled with fragmented global governance, threaten multilateral agreements, including those related to SDG Targets 14.4 and 14.6. Countries are urged to continue negotiations at the WTO, to ensure that harmful subsidies that impact the health of the world's stocks are curtailed.

Also, debt and fiscal constraints limit the capacity of developing countries to invest in sustainable fisheries management.

The understanding of the role of aquatic foods in food and nutrition security is increasing, which drives attention of the role of aquatic food systems in achieving other SDGS, particularly SDGs 1 and 2. While this might drive up demand for aquatic foods, it also drives key stakeholders to better manage fisheries and ensure that they can continue providing benefits in the long term.

Technological advances in areas such as monitoring, control and surveillance, DNA species identification, real-time stock assessments, and improving data collection and analysis offer potential to support countries in managing their fisheries.

Finally, inequalities in the access and use of aquatic foods risk deepening unless addressed through appropriate policies and capacity development for institutions and stakeholders.

b. *Marine Pollution (target 14.1)*

The future of SDG 14.1. implementation hinges on strengthening the science-policy-politics interface. While considerable emphasis has been placed on enhancing the role of science in policy development, equally important is the engagement of political actors who can drive the institutional changes required. It is vital to elevate marine

pollution as a cross-cutting societal issue with implications for public health, economic resilience, and climate stability.

Monitoring frameworks must be reimagined to reflect both strategic focus and local realities. The concept of "Sentinel Stations"—strategically positioned monitoring hubs that reflect regional dynamics and provide high-quality data—offers a promising model for scalable, cost-effective observation. Similarly, integrated monitoring systems, such as the proposed Integrated Marine Debris Observing System (IMDOS), would facilitate consistent, long-term data flows between local, national, and global levels.

Although success stories exist and new initiatives focusing on specific pollutants have shown promising results (e.g., IAEA's NUTEC initiative on marine microplastics monitoring), capacity building remains a foundational requirement for progress. Many developing countries face persistent gaps in laboratory infrastructure, trained personnel, and financial resources. Strengthening regional networks and investing in capacity-building mechanisms, including South-South cooperation, will be essential to address these disparities.

Citizen science and public engagement offer untapped potential to complement scientific monitoring efforts. Increased ocean literacy and public awareness can foster a stronger social contract for marine protection, while large-scale citizen science initiatives can help fill critical data gaps. However, these efforts must be supported by clear frameworks for data quality assurance and integration into official reporting mechanisms.

c. *Biodiversity and Conservation (targets 14.2. and 14.5.)*

A primary consideration is to move from the design of plans and targets to their concrete, measurable implementation. Governments must prioritize institutional support, capacity development, and resource allocation for effective MSP and Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) execution. Conservation frameworks must become more adaptive and recognize dynamic socio-ecological systems. The importance of including indigenous and local knowledge holders in policy and planning is paramount—not only to ensure social equity but also to enhance ecological effectiveness.

Marine protection efforts must deliver not only environmental but also social outcomes, such as safeguarding the livelihoods of coastal communities, ensuring food security, and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples. Scaling up MPAs must prioritize ecological representativeness and functional connectivity to ensure resilience. Protecting biodiversity hotspots alone is insufficient without broader ecosystem-based approaches that maintain essential services. The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development offers a critical window to transform ocean governance practices by fostering systemic innovation, transdisciplinary research, and inclusive partnerships.

d. *Climate change impacts (target 14.3)*

Capacity-building must be strengthened with a clear knowledge-to-policy focus. Support is needed for "train-the-trainers" models and for broad education efforts on scientific tools, policy instruments, and co-design approaches. Local relevance is essential, as environmental and socioeconomic conditions vary widely by region. To be actionable, knowledge must be adapted to local contexts, and subnational actors must be meaningfully engaged in implementation and response.

It is also critical to reinforce the science-policy interface by creating clearer pathways to move from data collection to practical decision-making. Finally, the complexity of multi-stressor challenges must be recognised. Scientific data should be used to inform decisions not only in a single sector but across intersecting areas such as fisheries management, coastal resilience, and biodiversity protection.

e. Sustainable Blue Economy and SIDS (target 14.7)

Promoting sustainable fisheries practices is essential for the long-term health of marine ecosystems and the livelihoods that depend on them. Ensuring that fisheries stakeholders commit to responsible and sustainable methods remains a critical foundation for progress under SDG 14.7.

Experts also emphasised the importance of formalising the fisheries sector. Transitioning from informal to formal economic activity—with a clear business vision and transparent relationships between producers and traders—can strengthen economic stability and improve accountability across value chains. These value chains, in turn, extend benefits beyond producers to multiple actors in the economy, with the potential to foster more inclusive and sustained growth.

Addressing water and sanitation infrastructure was identified as a key enabler for sustainable development in coastal regions. Persistent infrastructure degradation and ongoing data gaps undermine progress, highlighting the need for investment in both physical systems and improved data collection mechanisms.

Given the heavy reliance of SIDS on port infrastructure, experts underscored the urgent need for better access to adequate and affordable adaptation finance, particularly in the form of grants. Strengthening capacity-building alongside infrastructure investments will be vital to support climate resilience in seaport operations and coastal development. Participants also called for the development of additional indicators to track overall progress on SDG 14.7. These may include metrics related to ocean trade in goods and services—such as fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, and shipping—as well as policies, NAPs, and NDCs that support climate-resilient development and disaster risk reduction for ports.

Further, the importance of beach replenishment and the protection and monitoring of suitable marine aggregates was raised, particularly as beaches play a crucial role in tourism and in safeguarding coastal infrastructure. Severe erosion threatens these ecosystems and their economic value. Finally, regional and national ocean policies were recognised as vital tools to operationalise international commitments. One example cited was the Eastern Caribbean Regional Ocean Policy, which provides a comprehensive framework for ocean governance and sustainable development in the region: https://oecs.int/en/our-work/knowledge/library/eastern-caribbean-regional-ocean-policy/download.

f. ***Supporting Small Scale Fisheries communities' access to resources, capacity, and knowledge (target 14.b.)***

There is a clear need to ensure the full and meaningful participation of legitimate small-scale fisheries (SSF) communities and organisations in all ocean Economy initiatives and related policy and decision-making processes, including those connected to the "30x30" biodiversity conservation agenda.

Several key challenges to the implementation of SDG 14.b were highlighted. Women engaged in small-scale fisheries remain particularly marginalised and must be better included to ensure that their access rights and tenure are secured. Access challenges for SSF are complex and multi-dimensional, often varying between inland and marine fisheries and depending on the nature of competing sectors.

Climate change and fragmented governance—especially the division of responsibilities between environmental and fisheries authorities—further complicate the realisation of access rights for SSF. These institutional barriers must be addressed to ensure inclusive and coherent policy responses.

Participants stressed the need to shift prevailing narratives: from viewing SSF as a problem to recognising them as a solution for environmental health, food security, and social wellbeing.

Improving the target's reporting and monitoring process will require a more participatory approach in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and SDG 14.b reporting. Currently, reporting under indicator 14.b.1 is led by governments, but direct engagement with SSF communities and organisations is often lacking. In such cases, support for multi-stakeholder national consultations may be necessary, including facilitation by agencies such as FAO.

Finally, the indicator itself may require revision to better reflect on-the-ground realities and ensure that SSF communities—including women—are meaningfully represented in both implementation and accountability frameworks.

g. Science, technology, and education (Target 14.a.)

Looking ahead, numerous intersecting factors will shape the implementation patterns of SDG 14. In particular, the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification are increasing at a pace, driving more frequent marine heatwaves, ecosystem disruptions, and marine biodiversity disturbance. These crises require faster adaptive responses to inform decision making. On the other hand, technological advancement continues at pace. Tools like Artificial intelligence, digital twins, automated drones, and satellite observations offer potential to improve data collection and accessibility, modelling and forecasting. Yet, targeted support and capacity development for SIDS and LDCs is mandatory to consider to not widen the gap between developed and developing states.

The Ocean Decade Science-to-Action Framework and the Barcelona 2024 Conference outcomes present an opportunity to rethink how and where ocean science is generated, used and communicated. These global initiatives call for stronger collaboration across stakeholders, policy makers and society through a solid and well-established science- policy interface, with the inclusion of diverse knowledge systems, equitable participation, and localized research priorities of SDG 14 implementation.

h. Supporting the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

Speakers underscored several key priorities for advancing the implementation of Target 14.c., including the need for:

- Enhanced monitoring methodologies for better visibility of progress on target 14.c
- Increased coordination among UN agencies and regional bodies.
- Leveraging the opportunities arising from the BBNJ Agreement for promoting cooperation and cooperation with and among relevant instruments, frameworks and bodies.
- Proactive capacity-building, particularly in line with the provisions of the BBNJ Agreement on capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology.
- Recognition of the voluntary commitments' registry as a valuable tool to encourage informal, cross-sectoral innovation and to help track the implementation of treaty-related efforts.
- Swift conclusion of ongoing international processes (such as the negotiations on an internationally legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, and the development of regulations for exploitation of mineral resources in the Area) and effective implementation of UNCLOS and related instruments, as critical factors for advancing progress on SDG14

- Development of binding environmental thresholds under the International Seabed Authority (ISA).

4. Policies and actions to maximize synergies, mitigate trade-offs and drive transformation

a. *Aquatic Food Systems (targets 14.4. and 14.6.)*

Innovative and proven solutions for advancing SDG Targets 14.4 and 14.6 center on inclusive governance, adaptive management, and system-wide reform. Co-management and participatory governance approaches are critical to empowering small-scale fishers, enhancing equity, and improving resource stewardship. Implementing global normative instruments, both binding and non-binding, frameworks that support these approaches—such as the SSF Guidelines, and the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and its associated instruments—demonstrate how inclusive governance and policy coherence can reverse declining trends in fisheries sustainability.

Science-based adaptive management is also essential. This includes the use of inclusive data systems and locally tailored tools to assess stock health and ensure compliance. Co-developing appropriate monitoring and management tools in partnership with governments and local actors strengthens sustainable capture fisheries and supports long-term resilience.

Participants emphasised the importance of reallocating harmful subsidies towards more constructive investments in stock management, monitoring, and capacity-building for fishers. SDG Targets 14.4 and 14.6 cannot be achieved through a narrow focus on stock health or IUU fishing alone. A systems approach is needed—one that integrates post-harvest considerations, decent employment, and community well-being. This is especially relevant for small-scale fisheries, which account for at least 40 percent (37.3 million tonnes) of global fisheries catches and provide 2.3 billion people with, on average, 20 percent of their dietary intake across six key micronutrients essential to human health.

The interlinkages between SDG 14 and other goals were also highlighted. Aquatic foods contribute to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) by serving as key sources of micronutrients; SDG 3 (Health) by reducing contamination in food chains; SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by addressing gender roles in fishing communities; SDG 8 (Decent Work) by improving employment conditions; and SDG 17 (Partnerships) by fostering cooperation in finance, technology, and capacity development.

Finally, integrating aquatic foods into the broader food systems discourse—by including them in national food security plans and sustainable development strategies—was identified as essential to advancing the role of aquatic resources in achieving multiple development outcomes, particularly for coastal communities.

b. *Marine Pollution (target 14.1)*

Treating ocean data as a global public good could help effectively reduce marine pollution and accelerate the achievement of SDG 14.1. This calls for the institutionalization of ocean observation systems analogous to global meteorological frameworks. Establishing intergovernmental agreements or conventions dedicated to ocean data collection and sharing would help ensure long-term sustainability, comparability, and accessibility of marine data.

Greater policy coherence is urgently needed across sectors and governance levels. Existing global initiatives—including the UN Decade of Ocean Science, the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML), and regional seas conventions—should be coordinated under a common strategic framework to avoid duplication and maximize

efficiency. The role of national focal points must be clarified, and responsibilities for data collection, validation, and reporting should be streamlined and appropriately resourced.

The prevailing regulatory paradigm should shift to reverse the burden of proof. In practice, this means that industries and other actors should be required to demonstrate the safety of their actions, rather than requiring governments and civil society to prove environmental harm. This approach would help mainstream the precautionary principle and accelerate the implementation of polluter-pays mechanisms.

Pledges and commitments made at major ocean-related summits and conferences must be followed by concrete implementation and accountability mechanisms. Tracking the delivery of these commitments would help sustain political momentum and ensure alignment with SDG targets.

Local knowledge systems, including indigenous and community-based monitoring, should be integrated into national and global efforts. These knowledge systems offer valuable contextual insight and foster community ownership of marine conservation initiatives. Supporting inclusive governance frameworks will also help reconcile scientific knowledge with social and cultural priorities.

c. *Biodiversity and Conservation (targets 14.2. and 14.5.)*

Member States must integrate ICZM and MSP as fundamental tools across national ocean policies, ensuring that these frameworks guide sustainable use, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation efforts. Cross-sectoral collaboration among governments, civil society, private actors, and indigenous communities is essential. Mechanisms for shared decision-making and co-management can drive more legitimate, durable, and effective outcomes. Monitoring frameworks must incorporate both scientific and community-based knowledge to track progress towards ecological, social, and governance objectives. Transparent, participatory data platforms can foster accountability and learning.

Blue economy models and nature-based solutions present significant opportunities for private investment. Clear regulatory frameworks, public-private partnerships, and market incentives are needed to attract and align private sector action with SDG 14 targets. All conservation and restoration efforts should be designed within human rights frameworks to ensure that the voices, rights, and livelihoods of local and indigenous populations are upheld.

d. *Climate change impacts (target 14.3)*

To address climate change impacts under Target 14.3, participants emphasized the need to integrate ocean-related data and insights into broader climate policy tools. In particular, the incorporation of ocean acidification (OA) impacts into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) remains critical. Greater harmonization is also needed between OA monitoring efforts and climate resilience strategies, particularly in relation to blue food systems, as supported by organizations such as FAO and WorldFish.

Strengthening policy coherence across governance levels was highlighted as essential. OA monitoring and data should inform subnational and sectoral policies, and efforts should be made to promote the use of nature-based solutions (NbS) and regional adaptation strategies grounded in ocean science.

Participants also called for more effective application of existing frameworks. Outputs from the UN Decade of Ocean Science—such as white papers and the OARS programme—should be actively used to inform both national and international decision-making processes. Finally, strengthening feedback loops was viewed as a priority to ensure that local data and knowledge flow upward and are integrated into national and global climate action.

e. *Sustainable Blue Economy and SIDS (target 14.7)*

To advance progress on SDG 14.7, participants called for a set of targeted policies and actions focused on climate resilience, sustainable production, and infrastructure development. As climate-related events grow in frequency and intensity, it is critical to enhance global and regional climate data systems, including forecasting and early warning capabilities.

Integrated coastal management was also highlighted as a key pillar for resilience. Coordinated efforts are essential to align the growth of ocean-based economic sectors—such as aquaculture and green ports—with the sustainability of coastal ecosystems. Ensuring that production relies on sustainable stocks is vital for preserving marine biodiversity while supporting long-term economic growth.

Improved marketing and infrastructure are needed to facilitate efficient and sustainable operations. This includes the development of cold storage facilities, enhanced trade flows, and resilient port infrastructure. Strengthening risk analysis and management—particularly through increased collaboration with sectors such as cruise tourism—was also seen as critical. A better understanding of the full economic, social, and environmental costs associated with these activities will support more informed and effective decision-making.

Finally, effective climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies for ports and coastal transport systems are urgently required. These policies must support risk assessment and enable on-the-ground adaptation. Relevant considerations should also be integrated into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and cross-sectoral policy and legal frameworks related to the ocean economy.

f. *Supporting Small Scale Fisheries communities' access to resources, capacity, and knowledge (target 14.b.)*

Advancing Target 14.b requires the broad implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines), including through the development of National Plans of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries (NPOA-SSF) and their integration into national regulatory frameworks. These efforts should be pursued in tandem with progress under other SDG 14 targets and related goals such as SDG 1 (No Poverty), 2 (Zero Hunger), 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work), and 10 (Reduced Inequalities), among others.

Participants highlighted the importance of recognising and learning from successful experiences, particularly those involving women working in SSF groups or organisations. Empowering women and securing their access and tenure is vital for equitable implementation. Good practices for improving access to resources include the establishment and enforcement of co-management systems and preferential access arrangements. Some countries have successfully implemented such measures through policies and regulations that offer lessons for broader replication. Examples cited for potential scaling up include Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMA), the effective role of SSF in Environmental stewardship and the Catalan fisheries co-management model.

On improving access to markets, experts pointed to effective strategies such as product promotion and labelling—often with government support—that connect fishers directly to consumers. Examples include the Abalobi initiative, school meal programmes sourcing from SSF, and enhanced recognition of local markets' role in food security. Training and capacity-building efforts for SSF communities and organisations are necessary to improve product quality and market competitiveness.

Improving data capacity is also essential. Countries need to collect and analyse better data to inform policy decisions related to access to resources and markets. In addition, participants called for engaging youth in SSF and

promoting innovative, participatory approaches—such as popular theatre—to raise awareness and address persistent barriers related to access, knowledge, and capacity.

g. *Science, technology, and education (Target 14.a.)*

To maximize synergies, mitigate trade-offs, and drive transformation in ocean sustainability, integrated and cross-cutting actions must align with the broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 14 Life below water has connecting pieces to all SDGs; directly to SDG 13 (Climate action), SDGs 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Innovative solutions in this context include the co-design of science-based policies involving indigenous knowledge holders, the application of AI and digital twins for ocean monitoring, and targeted capacity development in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Global agreements such as the BBNJ Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Plastic Pollution Treaty exemplify international commitment to science-informed governance.

At the national level, best practices involve mainstreaming ocean literacy, investing in early warning systems, and building inclusive ocean science infrastructure.

In addition, platforms like the Ocean Acidification Research for Sustainability (OARS) foster data-driven decision-making and equitable knowledge sharing through extensive and equitable data collection and connecting different knowledge pillars.

The State of the Ocean Report highlights that sustainability is achieved not only by science alone, but through its efficient utilization that requiring strategic communication, strong stakeholder engagement, and aligned governance frameworks that ensures science is translated into action and accessible to all.

To leave no one behind, it is necessary to combine efforts to enhance the better representation and integration of underrepresented groups and knowledge holders especially at the national level, and foster partnerships that link public, private, and local actors are essential.

Pathways toward achieving the 2030 Agenda were addressed at the Barcelona 2024 Ocean Decade Conference, which outlined ten thematic action priorities to drive transformation. These included the need for increased understanding of marine pollution, including emerging pollutants, across the land sea interface, Deep Sea ecosystems and the threats that they are facing including new economic activities and climate change, Science and knowledge to underpin the development of resilient and equitable sustainable ocean economies, The impacts of marine carbon dioxide removal interventions. social sciences and the ways in which behavior change can be triggered in relation to our relationship with the ocean and the links between ocean health and human health.

h. *Supporting* the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

To strengthen progress on Target 14.c, which calls for the implementation of international law as reflected in UNCLOS, to conserve and sustainably use the oceans and their resources, panellists proposed a number of concrete actions:

First, they recommended applying lessons learned from the monitoring framework for SDG Target 14.6.1 to improve the measurement and tracking of 14.c. A more robust monitoring approach could offer better visibility into legal and institutional implementation across Member States.

Adopting a “One UN” approach was also encouraged to leverage the comparative strengths and institutional expertise of different UN entities in a coordinated and efficient manner.

Experts called for the integration of voluntary commitments into both national and global implementation strategies to enhance accountability and innovation.

Promoting marine scientific research and developing or strengthening related capacity-building initiatives was seen as central to supporting sustainable ocean governance, particularly for developing countries.

Building strategic partnerships and mobilizing all relevant stakeholders to accelerate ocean action was also emphasized.

Panellists further emphasised the importance of promoting innovative science-based solutions and a strong science-policy interface to ensure timely, credible and salient scientific information to inform policies and actions. Finally, encouraging transparent national reporting systems and better utilisation of tools such as questionnaire methodologies were identified as critical to improving data consistency, comparability, and policy alignment across countries.

5. Means of implementation: Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress

a. *Aquatic Food Systems (targets 14.4. and 14.6.)*

Accelerating progress on SDG Targets 14.4 and 14.6 will require inclusive, cross-sectoral action across all stakeholder groups. Governments are encouraged to institutionalise co-management frameworks, strengthen enforcement of regulations against illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and align national development plans with priorities related to aquatic food systems. Ratifying key global agreements that support the achievement of SDG 14.4, 14.6, and SDG 14 more broadly remains essential. Continued negotiations under the WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement were also highlighted, with calls for broader participation and more effective, inclusive outcomes.

Civil society and local communities play a crucial role in environmental stewardship and implementation of global commitments at the grassroots level. Bottom-up coalitions and participatory co-management approaches can help ensure more equitable and sustainable fisheries governance.

The scientific and technology communities are also central to this effort. Advances in tools such as satellite monitoring and the reduction of technological costs should be leveraged to co-develop appropriate management and monitoring systems. Collaboration between researchers, governments, and stakeholders is key to tailoring solutions that meet local needs while supporting sustainable capture fisheries.

International organisations were urged to continue promoting South-South cooperation, transparency standards, and innovative financing mechanisms. Engagement in platforms such as the FAO Committee on Fisheries and its sub-committees on fisheries management and fish trade was encouraged as a means of setting shared priorities and exchanging lessons learned across regions. Also, integrate ocean sustainability with climate resilience, food systems, and equity, the global community can drive forward the transformative change needed to meet SDG 14.4 and 14.6 targets.

b. *Marine Pollution (target 14.1)*

The realization of SDG 14.1 depends on a coordinated global effort that leverages partnerships, technology, and capacity-building mechanisms. Existing interagency platforms, such as the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP), should be strengthened to foster coherence across UN entities and ensure alignment with emerging international instruments. Another example being the global network of laboratories for monitoring of marine plastics currently in development by IAEA as UN Decade action, empowering member states on the reporting.

Technological innovation should be harnessed to reduce monitoring costs and expand coverage. Passive sampling devices, satellite observation, artificial intelligence, and remote sensing technologies, and tools such as digital twin of the ocean can play a significant role in scaling up data collection and scenario modelling to develop actionable science-based knowledge for policymaking. Partnerships with research institutions, NGOs, and the private sector will be essential to mainstream these technologies and ensure they are accessible to all countries.

Regional cooperation should be prioritized to build shared capacity, harmonize methodologies, and enhance data comparability. Regional seas programmes should be empowered to act as convening platforms for data harmonization, capacity building, and knowledge exchange. Particular attention should be given to regions currently lacking structured monitoring or institutional support.

Fit-for-purpose financial mechanisms must be developed and mobilized to support long-term monitoring and implementation efforts. National budget allocations, multilateral environmental funds, and blended finance arrangements should be explored to meet the scale of investment required. Emphasis should be placed on integrating marine pollution objectives into national development and climate finance strategies.

The UN Ocean Coordination Mechanism must play a central role in connecting diverse actors, facilitating policy integration, and avoiding fragmentation. An enhanced and adequately resourced coordination mechanism can provide the structure and leadership needed to drive SDG 14.1 implementation across the UN system and with Member States.

c. *Biodiversity and Conservation (targets 14.2. and 14.5.)*

Regional bodies such as the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity and the Coral Triangle Initiative offer vital coordination platforms. Enhanced information exchange, capacity building, and harmonized reporting can amplify impact. Developing countries require targeted support to design, approve, and implement effective marine spatial plans and MPAs. International development partners, climate finance mechanisms, and philanthropic funding should prioritize these needs. Inclusive partnerships involving governments, research institutions, the private sector, and civil society are key to advancing shared goals. These partnerships can co-create solutions, share costs and benefits, and promote innovative governance models.

Alignment with the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, the BBNJ Agreement, and SDG 14.5 targets is essential to ensure policy coherence and synergy across scales. Investments in collaborative research that bridge ecological science, social equity, and local knowledge will underpin transformative shifts towards sustainable ocean governance.

Despite notable progress in setting global targets and developing frameworks, the current pace of implementation is insufficient to meet the 2030 SDG 14 goals. Urgent action is required to scale up marine spatial planning, improve the quality and effectiveness of marine protected areas, and foster inclusive, adaptive governance systems. The private sector, local communities, and indigenous peoples must be fully engaged as partners in conservation and

sustainable use efforts. Increased investment, capacity building, and transdisciplinary collaboration—underpinned by rights-based and ecosystem-based approaches—are essential to unlock transformative change and ensure resilient, healthy, and productive oceans for future generations.

d. *Climate change impacts (target 14.3)*

To support the implementation of SDG Target 14.3, international cooperation has been a key enabler. Agencies such as the IAEA and IOC-UNESCO have fostered coordinated capacity-sharing through joint training initiatives, the establishment of shared goals, and the use of common metrics to guide and assess capacity-building efforts. Particular attention has been given to the development of data infrastructure, with IOC working to establish a federated system and aligned metadata standards to improve interoperability and enhance reporting capabilities.

Empowering local and regional actors was also emphasized. Applying local knowledge is vital to translating scientific data into actionable policies and decisions, especially at the subnational level. In support of this, the IAEA has provided "train-the-trainer" models and equipment to assist national governments in building long-term technical capacity.

Efforts to strengthen the science-policy interface are being led by programs such as OARS and GOA-ON, which aim to embed ocean-related knowledge into broader policy frameworks, including those on climate adaptation and fisheries management. Despite this progress, a persistent lack of sustained funding—particularly in the Global South—continues to hinder research, capacity development, and infrastructure investments.

Finally, partnerships and policy integration were identified as crucial. Ocean concerns are increasingly reflected in national climate strategies, including NDCs and NAPs, and coordination with institutions such as UNFCCC, FAO, and WMO is helping to ensure coherence across climate and ocean agendas.

e. Sustainable Blue Economy and SIDS (target 14.7)

Advancing implementation of SDG Target 14.7 will require stronger data systems, integrated policy approaches, and enhanced financial mechanisms to support the sustainable development of ocean economies, particularly in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs). While the indicator for 14.7 is well-defined, the current data landscape is limited. Experts stressed the need for more comprehensive datasets covering ocean trade, aquaculture, tourism, shipping, and ports. This should include metrics such as the contribution of ocean trade to GDP and the number of countries making mitigation, adaptation, and resilience commitments in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs).

Holistic fisheries management was highlighted as a key priority. This includes the promotion of science-based practices in tandem with cold-chain development, improved data platforms, cross-sector partnerships, and coordination across logistics, water infrastructure, and coastal protection sectors.

Climate-related risks to port infrastructure emerged as a critical concern. Collecting detailed data on port types—including fishing, cargo, and tourism ports—will enable better understanding and management of their specific vulnerabilities. Enhancing the resilience of port operations and aquaculture infrastructure is vital to ensuring continuity in ocean-based economic activity amid increasing climate threats.

Participants also emphasised the importance of closing the financial gap for infrastructure adaptation. This entails scaling up affordable finance mechanisms and leveraging innovative tools such as blue bonds and insurance to fund upgrades that enhance the climate resilience of critical infrastructure, such as ports.

f. *Supporting Small Scale Fisheries communities' access to resources, capacity, and knowledge (target 14.b.)*

To accelerate implementation of SDG Target 14.b, participants underscored the importance of strengthening the capacity of small-scale fisheries (SSF) communities and organisations at all levels—local, national, regional, and global. Such support is essential to enable SSF actors to advocate effectively for secure access to resources and markets, with a particular emphasis on ensuring women's full and meaningful participation. Notable examples of organisations contributing to this effort include the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations (CNFO), AFRIFISH-Net, AWFISHNET, and the Ibero-American Network of Small-Scale Fisheries. Participants also noted that internal accountability is crucial to ensure these organisations are truly representative of their communities.

Support holding global Small-Scale Fisheries Summits (SSF Summits) every two years as platforms to assess progress, agree on collective strategies, and advocate for the needs and priorities of SSF stakeholders. These summits bring together a wide range of actors—including SSF representatives, governments, civil society, support organisations, and academia—thereby fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration at all scales.

National Plans of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries (NPOA-SSF) were identified as key tools to operationalise SSF Guidelines and facilitate multi-sectoral coordination. Such plans help institutionalise collaboration with SSF communities and can align national policies with local realities.

Finally, participants highlighted the ongoing need for increased research, capacity-building, and communication, particularly at the community level and within national governments, to ensure that SSF voices are integrated into policy and practice.

g. *Science, technology, and education (Target 14.a.)*

The efficient implementation of SDG 14 is based on developing efficient mechanisms to translate knowledge into actionable decision. Among these, are the UN Ocean Decade which is a global framework for co-designing and delivering ocean knowledge, emphasizing capacity development and co-design the science we need for long-term impact and the ocean we want. It supports national level action and aims to proactively support SIDS and LDCs, and the strengthening of national science-policy-society interfaces. In this context, flagship initiatives have raised from recommendations of 'Ambition, Action, Impact' Report; two position papers are being developed under the Return on Investment in Ocean Science, the Seabed Mapping initiative is strengthening through the Ocean Decade Alliance, with pledges being collected for public release and a call for new partners. In addition, action plans are under preparation for youth and gender working. Capacity Development efforts have resumed, with a renewed focus on supporting Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs).

Additionally, Global knowledge sources for ocean science as the Global Ocean Science Report (GOSR), which is contributing contributing to the 2030 Agenda, the Climate Change and Biodiversity conventions, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) and the OARS provide accurate information and practical tools for monitoring but most importantly for identifying gaps and informing evidence-based national policies.

To accelerate progress, moving forward with private sector engagement is needed, to produce and share valuable ocean data for knowledge application and innovation. Capacity development, fair and inclusive investments in education, advanced technologies, and targeted training programs are required, including not only technical skills but also the development of leadership and governance capacity across all regions.

Lastly, implementation efforts should be grounded in equity as ocean preservation and sustainability through SDG 14 achievement, is strongly depending on collaboration that empowers the full spectrum of ocean stakeholders.

h. Supporting the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

To support the implementation of SDG Target 14.c, experts discussed a range of mechanisms and partnerships, as outlined below:

- Addressing States' capacity and resource needs to overcome barriers to ratification and implementation of international legal instruments, through robust capacity-building and targeted technical assistance activities. The BBNJ Agreement, through its provisions, on capacity-building and the transfer on marine technology which shall be based on and be responsive to the needs and priorities of developing States, taking into account the special circumstances of small island developing States and of least developed countries, can significantly contribute to improving the implementation of UNCLOS and related instruments.
- The ISA also facilitates a range of training programs, with over 1,000 having benefited from capacity development initiatives implemented by the Authority.
- The establishment of communities of practice around voluntary commitments in support of treaty implementation through the promotion of sharing of experiences and knowledge and ensuring thar relevant information is brought to the attention of policy makers.
- Leveraging the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference as a unique opportunity to mobilize all relevant stakeholders and to provide a more informal space for holistic and cross-cutting discussions in support of treaty implementation.
- Aligning financial mobilization and resources with documented progress. A case in point was the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), where improved tracking systems helped mobilize $37 million in support of its implementation—demonstrating the tangible benefits of linking monitoring frameworks to funding flows.