

Tangled up in blue

Healthy oceans and coastal communities cannot exist without investments in the long-term sustainability, social development and values of small-scale fisheries

The importance of oceans to sustainable development has always been recognized in international processes. It is articulated in Agenda 21 (1992), the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002) and the 2012 Rio+20 outcome document titled *The Future We Want*. Concern for the deteriorating health of the oceans culminated in a dedicated goal to conserve and sustainably use marine resources in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Simultaneously, technological innovation, merged with global capital's perennial pursuit of new avenues for investment, has led many to see the oceans as Earth's last economic frontier. In 2016, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) projected that by 2030, the 'Blue Economy'—a collective term for all economic sectors with a direct or indirect link to the ocean—could outperform the growth of the global economy as a whole.

In various formulations by multilateral agencies, national governments and the private sector, this ocean economy includes both old uses of coastal and marine resources (food provisioning, marine transport and infrastructure, energy production, extraction and tourism) and emerging industries (for example, marine biotechnology, seabed mining, carbon sequestration). Thus, what emerged as a vague reformulation of the 'green economy' to benefit small island developing states (SIDS) and the coastal least developed countries (LDCs) has become a global buzzword, noticeable in many conferences and events and in the growing body of literature on the subject.

Social movements and civil society advocates for fishers and fishworkers have tracked this blue economy and blue growth discourse with some unease. These 'blue' agendas have been criticized for not recognizing the contributions of capture fisheries, particularly small-scale fisheries, to global nutrition and food security and livelihoods; for the promotion of inequitable rights-based management and spatial-planning approaches for coastal and marine natural resources; and, in some instances, for encouraging investments in large-scale infrastructure and extractive industries that can threaten coastal communities and the ecosystems they depend on.

In this edition of the SAMUDRA Report, an article on the Seychelles' Blue Bond scheme addresses some

of the contradictions inherent in these 'blue' agendas. Tourism and fish exports drive the Seychelles economy, while crucial commodities such as oil and gas have to be imported. The country has introduced stricter fishing regulations while expanding oil-and-gas exploration in its exclusive economic zone. It is important that we recognize both, the compulsions of developing countries seeking economic self-sufficiency and the vulnerabilities of traditional coastal communities, who are often sidelined as a result.

The 'RISE UP Blue Call to Action', also in this edition, is itself a document that embodies these contradictions. The petition, signed by a group of non-governmental organizations and philanthropic foundations, retains hope in the transition to a sustainable economy through improved governance, innovation and more protection, including the use of area-based conservation measures in

some contexts. Crucially, it calls on governments to recognize and protect fishing communities' rights to resources and the immediate implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines).

The SSF Guidelines recognize the multiple and often conflicting uses of marine and coastal resources. They call for the active participation of fishing communities in decision making. Environmental accounting must incorporate more than economic value to consider the holistic contributions of fisheries to the lives and livelihoods of coastal communities. Marine spatial planning should be inclusive and take due account of small-scale fisheries interests and role in management, and also effectively address their concerns.

In order for the ocean to remain healthy and for coastal populations to thrive, countries should invest in the long-term sustainability of their fisheries and the social development of the communities they support. In this context, small-scale fisheries offer justice for the lives of the vulnerable and marginalized above and on the shores of our seas and oceans. The values of small-scale fisheries are just as important as their contributions to nutrition, employment and local economies. They sustain communities and their cultures and symbolize the judicious use of resources to benefit present and future generations, a core principle of sustainable development. Conditions favourable to preserving these values should be maintained.

