

## **Blue Economy: Harmonizing IORA Declaration and UN Sustainable Development Goals**

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In September 2015, two significant announcements relating to ocean economy were made. The Indian Ocean Rim Associations (IORA) hosted the first IORA Ministerial Blue Economy Conference titled “Enhancing Blue Economy Cooperation for Sustainable Development in the IORA Region” in Mauritius and identified four priority areas (a) Fisheries & Aquaculture; (b) Renewable Ocean Energy; (c) Seaports & Shipping; and (d) Seabed Exploration & Minerals for development. The post conference declaration urged the member States to engage in the development of the above sectors and strengthen networking, exchange of experiences and best practices for the development of the Blue Economy in the region. The Declaration also made reference to the importance of the proposed UN led Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the Blue Economy, especially for the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for development.

Later that month, the UN announced the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed to ‘end **poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all and address Climate Change**’ through integrated and indivisible 17 Goals with 169 associated targets. **Goal 14, titled** “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development” lists 14 targets to be achieved over the next 5, 10 and 15 years up to 2030. These can be placed into two distinct baskets i.e. health of the oceans and fisheries. Goal 14 calls on States to reduce marine pollution, address the impacts of ocean acidification, conserve coastal and marine areas, and facilitate transfer of technology to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity. As regards fisheries, it calls for regulated harvesting and to curb overfishing and illegal unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Further, efforts must be made to provide access to small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets.

A close reading of the two declarations and the related documents suggests that there are a number of convergences in the agendas of the IORA and the SDGs which promote collaboration and cooperation for a balanced and sustainable development of ocean resources while keeping a close watch on the protection of coastal areas and the marine environment. The IORA has an expanded view on the development of ocean resources including non-living resources and services such as exploitation of offshore energy and seabed resources, development of marine related industries such as shipping, shipbuilding, marine tourism and other environmentally sound activities for the socio-economic development of the people. Another important feature of the IORA announcement is the prominence given to women in the agenda by empowering them through participation in micro, small and medium enterprises for ‘equitable and sustainable economic growth’.

The IORA and SDG also have a common view on the IUU fishing and call on States to address the issue through a stricter port control regime for inspections of vessels and to stop IUU catches landed at ports regardless of the flag they fly. It is useful to mention that IUU fishing is a major issue of concern and costs the global economy up to US \$ 23 billion annually. As far as the Indian Ocean is concerned, nearly 18 per cent of the catch in the Western Indian Ocean and 32 per cent in the Eastern Indian Ocean falls under the IUU category.

Notwithstanding the convergences and the forward looking approach to sustainable development of oceanic resources, the IORA needs to harmonize its agenda with that of the SDG. This could be achieved by taking at least three initiatives. First, all action oriented agendas require to be assigned timelines by which, the member States should achieve the IORA’s vision. This is important because States have endorsed the UN SDG Goals and targets and committed to achieve these over the next 15 years and work “tirelessly for the full implementation of this Agenda by 2030”. Further, the States have agreed to the “central role in overseeing follow-up and review at the global level” by a “high-level political forum under the auspices of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council”.

Second, Blue Economy is science, technology and finance intensive and majority of IORA member States are developing countries and may be constrained to achieve the desired

end-state. IORA could explore a fund for Blue Economy through international and regional financial institutions such as the IMF, ADB, and the more recent AIIB.

Finally, the SDGs “acknowledge the essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of our commitments”. It is hoped that the Indian Ocean countries would be able to seek endorsement of the IORA’s Blue Economy agendas from the respective State legislative, executive and judicial organs...