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# Mid-term Evaluation of the UN Ocean Decade

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# Abstract and acknowledgements

## Abstract

The United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030), coordinated by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), was launched to catalyse global cooperation in ocean science to support the 2030 Agenda, particularly SDG 14. Rooted in equity, inclusivity, and diverse knowledge systems, the Decade fosters co-designed, science-based actions through a broad collaborative framework without imposing new financial obligations on Member States. Its implementation relies on a multi-tiered governance structure and seeks to integrate ocean knowledge into policy to enable sustainable ocean management. At the initiative's halfway point, the UNESCO-IOC Executive Council requested a Mid-Term Evaluation, managed by UNESCO's Internal Oversight Service (IOS), to assess the Decade's effectiveness, relevance, and coherence, and provide strategic recommendations for its future direction. The evaluation uses a utilization-focused, mixed-methods approach—including over 1,000 stakeholder consultations across 118 countries—supported by tools such as social network analysis and policy influence assessments. It is guided by a Theory of Change and aims to inform decision-makers and stakeholders at all levels, from global governance bodies to national committees and implementing partners.

The UN Ocean Decade has achieved substantial progress as the largest coordinated global ocean science initiative, mobilizing over 4,500 institutions and nearly USD 1 billion in support for Decade Actions, with a strong foundation in inclusive and collaborative science. Key achievements include cross-sector partnerships, integration of diverse knowledge systems, youth engagement through ECOPs, global visibility via high-profile events, and early outcomes such as tsunami preparedness and marine science education. However, the Mid-Term Evaluation identified challenges across governance, resource mobilization, science delivery, UN engagement, inclusivity, communication, and monitoring. Limited coordination capacity, regional imbalances, underrepresentation of LDCs and SIDS, and uneven policy integration hinder the Decade's full potential. Strengthening decentralized coordination, strategic partnerships, and resource mobilization—particularly from private and philanthropic sectors—alongside improved monitoring, outreach, and inclusivity are essential to maximizing impact. Moving forward, enhancing UN-wide collaboration, fostering local ownership, and positioning UNESCO-IOC for strategic leadership beyond 2030 are critical to advancing ocean science and achieving the Decade's vision.

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On behalf of IOS, the evaluation was managed by Ms. Ekaterina Sediakina Riviere, Principal Evaluation Specialist, with the support of Ms. Savannah Saunders, Associate Evaluation Specialist who also provided quality assurance for the final report. An Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) composed of representatives from the Decade Coordination Unit, Decade Collaborative Centres and the Decade Advisory Board provided guidance and feedback throughout the evaluation process, further strengthening the quality assurance of the evaluation.

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### ► Bernardin Assiene

Director of the Division  
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# Acronyms

<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank	<b>IAEA</b>	International Atomic Energy Agency
<b>ADGs</b>	Assistant Director-Generals	<b>IaDB</b>	Inter-American Development Bank
<b>AfDB</b>	African Development Bank	<b>IFIs</b>	International Financial Institutions
<b>BA</b>	Bibliometric Analysis	<b>IMO</b>	International Maritime Organization
<b>BBNJ</b>	Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction	<b>IMOS</b>	Integrated Marine Observing System
<b>BSP</b>	Bureau of Strategic Planning (of UNESCO)	<b>IOC</b>	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (of UNESCO)
<b>CARICOM</b>	Caribbean Community	<b>IODE</b>	International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (of UNESCO-IOC)
<b>CARIBE WAVE</b>	Caribbean and Adjacent Regions Tsunami E	<b>IOS</b>	Internal Oversight Service (of UNESCO)
<b>CBD</b>	Convention on Biological Diversity	<b>IPOS</b>	International Platform on Ocean Sustainability
<b>COPs</b>	Conference of the Parties	<b>ISA</b>	International Seabed Authority
<b>DAB</b>	Decade Advisory Board	<b>IsDB</b>	Islamic Development Bank
<b>DCC</b>	Decade Collaborative Centres	<b>LDCs</b>	Least Developed Countries
<b>DCO</b>	Decade Coordination Offices	<b>MAB</b>	Man and the Biosphere Programme
<b>DCU</b>	Decade Coordination Unit	<b>MDBs</b>	Multilateral Development Banks
<b>DITTO</b>	Digital Twin of the Ocean	<b>MEL</b>	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
<b>DOALOS</b>	Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea	<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>EC</b>	European Commission	<b>NDCs</b>	National Decade Committees
<b>ECOP</b>	Early Career Ocean Professionals	<b>NEAMWave</b>	North-Eastern Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and connected seas Tsunami Exercise
<b>EESM</b>	Embedded Expert Support Mechanism	<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>ESG</b>	Environmental, Social and Governance	<b>OARS</b>	Ocean Acidification Research for Sustainability
<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>OBON</b>	Ocean Biomolecular Observation Network
<b>FAIR</b>	Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable	<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization	<b>PIA</b>	Policy Influence Analysis
<b>FGDs</b>	Focus Group Discussions	<b>PPP</b>	Public-Private Partnership
<b>GOOS</b>	Global Ocean Observing System	<b>RACER</b>	Relevant, Accepted, Credible, Easy to monitor, Robust (indicators)
<b>GMS</b>	Global Media Scan	<b>RCPs</b>	Regional Collaborative Platforms



<b>RCOs</b>	Resident Coordinator Offices
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SIDS</b>	Small Island Developing States
<b>SMART</b>	Specific, Measurable, Ambitious but Achievable, Realistic and Time- bound (targets)
<b>SNA</b>	Social Network Analysis
<b>SPREP</b>	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
<b>TAC</b>	Tropical Americas and Caribbean
<b>ToC</b>	Theory of Change
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>UCCN</b>	UNESCO Creative Cities Network
<b>UNCBD</b>	United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity
<b>UNCLOS</b>	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
<b>UNCTAD</b>	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNESCO/SC/LINKS</b>	UNESCO's Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems Programme
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>UNGA</b>	United Nations General Assembly
<b>UNIDO</b>	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UN-Oceans</b>	United Nations Inter-Agency Mechanism on Oceans
<b>UNU</b>	United Nations University
<b>WESTPAC</b>	IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific
<b>WMO</b>	World Meteorological Organization

# Executive summary

## 1. Overview of the UN Ocean Decade

The United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) was formally proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly through its **Resolution A/RES/72/73** on 5 December 2017. The resolution invited UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) to prepare and coordinate the Decade's implementation plan, in consultation with Member States, UN system actors, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders. It emphasized that implementation should take place “within existing structures and available resources”, indicating that the Decade was not intended to create new funding obligations for Member States, but rather to catalyse coordination, partnerships and action.

Originally proposed by UNESCO-IOC in 2016, the Decade emerged in response to limited global recognition of the role of ocean science in achieving the 2030 Agenda, despite the inclusion of SDG 14 (Life Below Water). Since its launch in January 2021, during a time marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and growing global environmental challenges, the Decade has evolved into a global initiative guided by the vision of “the science we need for the ocean we want”. It adopts a broad, inclusive definition of ocean science that values diverse knowledge systems and is rooted in principles of equity, inclusivity, and diversity.

Building on this foundation, the Decade provides a collaborative framework designed to advance transformative ocean science by facilitating the co-design and delivery of science-based actions, strengthening capacity development, mobilising partnerships and resources and promoting the integration of ocean knowledge into policy and decision-making processes to advance sustainable ocean management. While the Decade is not a financing framework, its success depends on the mobilisation of financial and in-kind resources to support coordination and foster an enabling environment for access to funding and support for its Actions. This also requires the alignment of

existing programmes and strengthened partnerships across the UN system, as well as among public, private, and multilateral actors.

The Decade operates through a multi-tiered governance and coordination structure led by the Decade Coordination Unit (DCU) within UNESCO-IOC, with the support of global and decentralized structures including the Decade Advisory Board (DAB), UN-Oceans, Decade Coordination Offices (DCOs), Decade Collaborative Centres (DCCs), and National Decade Committees (NDCs). Its objectives are pursued through Decade Actions, which include programmes, projects, activities, and contributions across science, policy, capacity development and outreach.

## 2. Evaluation objectives and use

The Mid-Term Evaluation of the UN Ocean Decade was requested by the UNESCO-IOC Executive Council at its 57th session in June 2024, marking a critical reflection point at the halfway stage of the initiative. Managed by UNESCO's Division for Internal Oversight Services (IOS), the evaluation aims to assess the effectiveness, relevance, and coherence of the Decade's implementation to date, and to inform strategic adjustments needed to achieve its intended outcomes over the remaining five years. As such, it serves dual purposes: first, to assess progress and emerging achievements; and second, to provide evidence-based recommendations for enhancing the Decade's delivery, impact and sustainability. It covers key dimensions of the Decade, including governance and coordination, resource mobilisation, science and knowledge delivery, monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder engagement, inclusivity, communication and outreach, and the Decade's contribution to advancing IOC's long-term vision and institutional evolution. It also identifies lessons learned and areas requiring strategic attention to ensure that the Decade remains responsive to emerging global challenges. The primary intended users of the evaluation are the DCU, IOC Governing Bodies, the DAB, UN-Oceans members and decentralized coordination structures. Secondary users include NDCs, Member States, and the broader community of Decade Action implementers.



### 3. Key elements of the evaluation methodology

The evaluation follows a utilization-focused, mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative data for a comprehensive assessment. Key methods included a desk review, semi-structured interviews with 109 stakeholders, focus group discussions, case studies and an online survey with 1,205 responses, 72% of whom self-identified as active Decade participants. In total, 1,006 stakeholder consultations were conducted across 118 countries using a range of methods. Data collection was carried out in English, French, and Spanish, ensuring broad geographical, sectoral, and demographic representation, with particular attention to under-represented groups such as Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Indigenous voices, and Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs). The methodology also incorporated Social Network Analysis (SNA), bibliometric and policy influence analyses and a global media scan. The evaluation is structured around a Theory of Change (ToC) to map pathways from inputs to impact and to test key assumptions.

### 4. Main findings and conclusions

Drawing on a wide range of triangulated evidence sources, the following findings and conclusions highlight both the UN Ocean Decade's progress and achievements to date and key areas for improvement as it enters its second half.

#### *Key achievements*

The Ocean Decade **Vision 2030** report, published in October 2024, describes the Decade as the “largest coordinated global ocean science initiative ever undertaken”, having mobilized over 4,500 institutions and 20,000 individuals “to co-create and co-deliver the science and knowledge that is needed for decision making” for addressing the Ocean Decade Challenges. According to the report, the Decade Actions mobilized nearly USD 1 billion, though resource gaps remain a significant constraint.

The evaluation found that the UN Ocean Decade has demonstrated significant progress in its first half, building a solid foundation to deliver the outcomes envisioned through more inclusive, impactful and collaborative ocean science. The DCU was unanimously

recognized by stakeholders for its leadership and efficiency, despite operating under severe resource constraints. Decentralized coordination structures have demonstrated promising approaches to regional and national engagement. At the same time, the DAB has been evolving to enhance its support and provide strategic guidance to the DCU.

The Decade has fostered strong cross-sector partnerships. Collaboration between the DCU and UNESCO Programme Sectors and Central Services, such as the Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) Programme and the Gender Equality Division, has supported the incorporation of diverse knowledge systems, as well as the mainstreaming of gender. The Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOP) programme has been particularly effective in engaging young professionals in leadership, capacity development and global forums. Stakeholder engagement has remained strong, with contributors motivated by the opportunity to advance the Decade's objectives.

Resource mobilisation has shown steady progress, particularly through the Foundations Dialogue and the Ocean Decade Alliance, which have contributed to attracting support for Decade Actions and coordination efforts from philanthropic partners and Member States. The Ocean Matcher has emerged as a promising tool to connect Actions with potential funders. Private sector contributions have demonstrated good practice, with both in-kind and financial support from partners such as Fugro, Uniqlo, and Prada. Further opportunities for resource mobilisation have also materialized, notably through the European Commission–IOC Decade Cooperation Roadmap, which offers important avenues for both financial and in-kind support, including via Horizon Europe and the EU Mission “Restore Our Ocean and Waters”.

Across 93 countries, 641 Actions<sup>1</sup> have been endorsed, with the majority focused on ecosystem protection and capacity development. The strategic pathway, defined for the second half of the Decade through the Vision 2030 process and its white papers, has supported participatory design efforts and provided tools to guide future Calls for Action. NDCs in several countries, such as Portugal, India, Benin, Belgium, and New Zealand, have successfully aligned Decade initiatives with national priorities. Contributions from ECOPs and NGOs have begun to pave the way for grassroots engagement and real-world impact.

The Decade has gained significant visibility through high-profile events such as the Lisbon and Barcelona Conferences, which stakeholders consistently highlighted as key moments for engagement. Beyond raising awareness, these events served as platforms

<sup>1</sup> In this report, “Actions” refers to projects and programmes. The typology of Ocean Decade Actions can be found in Annex 1.

for interaction between scientists, policymakers, and other stakeholders, creating opportunities for shaping policies and aligning scientific outputs with national and global priorities. In parallel, continuous communication efforts, through digital outreach, webinars, ECOP-led campaigns, have broadened awareness, enhanced relatability and fostered dialogue across diverse audiences, including youth and marginalized communities.

Towards the end of its first half, the Decade started to show early outcomes through its various initiatives and Actions. For example, the Ocean Decade Tsunami Programme has raised over USD 450 million and reached millions of people through preparedness efforts. In education, initiatives such as the integration of marine science into school curricula in Chile have strengthened ocean literacy. Progress has also been made in advancing open data, interoperability, and ocean monitoring systems.

The Decade has played a key role in enhancing the strategic visibility and relevance of UNESCO-IOC on the global stage, by advancing interdisciplinary research and strengthening connections between ocean science and policy. It has helped position the organization not only as a convener of ocean science but also as a key driver of ocean knowledge systems, laying the groundwork for an expanded leadership role beyond 2030.

## ***Key areas for improvement informing the recommendations***

The Mid-Term Evaluation identified several interrelated areas for improvement that, if addressed, would enhance the Decade's ability to deliver on its vision. These areas, as highlighted by findings and conclusions drawn from a diverse and comprehensive body of evidence, reflect systemic and structural considerations requiring targeted attention to sustain the Decade's relevance and effectiveness despite resource scarcity and a challenging global context shaped by shifting national and regional priorities and mounting pressures on the multilateral system.

### **Governance and Coordination**

- i. While the DCU has shown strong leadership under considerable constraints, its capacity remains stretched, in part due to a complex and fragmented coordination

framework. The intended decentralized UN support has not yet been fully implemented. There is an opportunity to strengthen coordination across levels and partners, while clarifying roles, simplifying processes, and improving alignment with regional and national structures.

- ii. Despite examples of good practice, partnerships between the DCU, IOC, and broader UNESCO structures require strengthening. Cooperation with UNESCO field offices and other UN entities remains limited, restricting the ability to provide targeted support to regions and Member States, particularly those with fewer resources. Moreover, 61% of the members of governance and coordination bodies are based in Europe and North America, with minimal representation from LDCs and SIDS, highlighting a geographic imbalance that may affect the inclusivity and responsiveness of governance structures.
- iii. Stakeholders called for more strategic engagement from the DAB, whose current structure and participation patterns are perceived to limit its overall effectiveness. There is strong consensus that the DAB could enhance its contribution by focusing more explicitly on strategic guidance, governance and coordination improvements, resource mobilisation, stronger science-policy interaction, and long-term legacy planning. Strengthened engagement between the DAB and decentralized mechanisms, along with enhanced UN presence and representation within the DAB, were identified as priorities to further improve the Decade's governance model and reinforce its identity as a UN initiative.

### **Resource Mobilisation**

- iv. While the Decade has laid important groundwork in building partnerships and establishing mechanisms for funding, resource mobilisation remains a widely shared concern. Only 17% of surveyed stakeholders rated current efforts as effective. The evaluation identified the need for more coordinated fundraising strategies, expanded outreach to philanthropic and private sector actors, increased engagement with multilateral development banks (MDBs) and other international financial institutions (IFIs), as well as national science and innovation funding agencies and government departments, alongside greater attention to regional prioritization, particularly for LDCs and SIDS that require higher levels of support for engagement and implementation of Actions.
- v. A range of interlinked barriers continues to limit the effectiveness of resource mobilisation. These include limited visibility of the Decade among potential funders,



competing donor priorities that may not align with ocean science, and a need for stronger coordination of resource mobilisation efforts to support Decade implementation and its Actions.

- vi. More importantly, the evaluation identified that resource mobilisation efforts should be more clearly aligned with Member States' needs, challenges and priorities and better communicate the real-world value of ocean science, particularly its role in addressing pressing issues such as food security, coastal resilience, and community well-being. The evidence indicates that greater emphasis on the tangible impact of ocean science and knowledge, when underpinned by data and results from the Decade's achievements and Actions, has the potential to strengthen both the case for funding and buy-in from a wide range of financial and in-kind support providers.

## Science and Knowledge Delivery

- vii. The evaluation highlighted a need for more balanced science and knowledge delivery across regions, institutions, and Ocean Decade Challenge areas. Of the 641 endorsed Actions, the majority (68%) originate from Europe and North America, with relatively limited representation from LDCs (1%), SIDS (3%), and other underrepresented regions. Participation from the private sector and UN agencies beyond UNESCO-IOC also remains modest. Furthermore, the distribution of Actions across the 10 Challenges is uneven, ranging from 318 Actions under "Challenge 2: Protect and restore ecosystems and biodiversity" to just 98 under "Challenge 6: Increase community resilience to ocean and coastal risks".
- viii. While there is widespread recognition of the Decade's strongest contributions in raising global awareness of ocean issues, fostering collaboration in ocean science and expanding communication networks, areas such as the incorporation of diverse knowledge systems, mobilisation of resources for research and influence on national policy were seen as needing further progress. Stakeholder perceptions of overall progress remain mixed, particularly among those involved in coordination structures, long-term contributors engaged since the Decade's design or launch and the scientific community, many of whom rated progress as moderate, limited, or minimal. Several recurring challenges were identified as constraining progress, including resource mobilisation, stakeholder engagement, public visibility and alignment with national priorities.

- ix. Several challenges were identified in the submission and management of Decade Actions. Lengthy endorsement timelines and criteria perceived as unclear by some stakeholders, alongside a common misconception that endorsement guarantees funding, emerged as key concerns. Limited capacity to navigate the application process in LDCs, SIDS, and regions such as Africa and the Arab States contributes to regional imbalances and limits the ability to address ocean-related challenges through science and knowledge. On the management side, the absence of a mechanism linked with an effective database to identify overlaps, coupled with limited search and filtering functionality on the Decade website, hampers coordination and the development of synergies. While decentralized review and endorsement of Actions by pilot NDCs show promise, scaling remains constrained by capacity limitations in resource-scarce countries. Although some stakeholders attribute these and similar challenges to broader systemic issues in these contexts, evidence suggest that targeted interventions can initiate positive transformation and help address structural and systemic barriers, as illustrated by case studies included in the report. In addition, the underrepresentation of the social sciences, often limited to ocean literacy, reduces the potential for Actions to inform policy and generate wider societal impact.
- x. As the Decade reaches its mid-point, expectations have grown for greater engagement of policymakers in using the science and knowledge generated by Decade Actions to inform national and international policies, policy debates and decision-making processes. Evidence gathered through multiple evaluation methods indicates that Decade-policy interactions remain uneven across regions, with a decline in policy-related outputs over time, reflecting a broader loss of momentum in this area. Contributing factors include limited co-design efforts for Actions, including underutilisation of DCU-provided resources for co-design, and a lack of accessible policy communication tools such as dashboards and policy briefs. While high-profile events, such as the Barcelona Conference, have successfully drawn the attention of policymakers, sustained engagement remains limited, particularly from underrepresented regions, again linked with capacity and resource challenges.
- xi. The evaluation highlighted the importance of ensuring that the science and knowledge generated through Decade Actions are not only produced but also effectively applied across innovation ecosystems and community-level solutions. To support this, evidence points to the need for a more structured approach to facilitate the transfer, scaling and contextualisation of these outputs. This need is especially relevant in LDCs, SIDS, and other underrepresented regions, where

stakeholders face challenges in accessing and adapting relevant knowledge, innovations, tools, and technologies. Furthermore, ECOPs, though actively engaged, have limited avenues to apply the skills developed through the Decade in practical, solution-oriented settings. As the Decade moves into its second half, the evaluation identified a timely opportunity to enhance the accessibility and practical use of outputs supporting innovation, applied impact, and long-term value across regions and sectors through more structured approaches to knowledge and technology transfer.

## UN-Oceans and Broader UN Engagement

- xii. Engagement from UN entities beyond UNESCO and IOC during the first half of the Decade has been limited, presenting an important opportunity to broaden involvement across the UN system in the second half. The evidence points to communication constraints that have created uncertainty around how to engage with the Decade and its Actions. Strengthening regular communication through UN-Oceans and other relevant UN platforms was identified as a promising opportunity to clarify expectations, facilitate coordination and encourage more contributions by aligning ongoing and planned ocean-related efforts with the Decade framework. The findings indicate that improving visibility and expanding participation of UN agencies would reinforce the Decade's identity as a collective UN initiative and help maximise its reach and overall impact.
- xiii. Looking to the second half of the Decade, climate change, marine pollution, and deep-sea mining have emerged in the evaluation as priority areas requiring heightened attention. Effectively addressing these and other pressing challenges will demand stronger UN-wide collaboration, especially in a context of increasing conflicts, shrinking resources and declining attention to sustainability issues. Strengthening coordination with relevant UN agencies, as well as mechanisms such as the UN Resident Coordinator Offices (UNRCOs), the UN Global Compact, Issue-Based Coalitions, and the Interagency Task Team on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) for the SDGs, alongside closer alignment with other UN Decades, emerged as critical to expanding the Decade's reach and reinforcing its implementation. These partnerships also offer strategic entry points at the national level, including ministries of finance, education, science, agriculture, and energy, helping to align efforts with broader development agendas and resource allocations, while embedding ocean priorities more deeply into cross-sectoral initiatives, policies and policy measures.

- xiv. The evaluation found that efforts to promote inclusivity, diversity, and equity are gaining traction, with youth engagement, particularly through ECOP-led initiatives, seen as a positive example. However, stakeholder feedback and survey results point to disparities across different groups, including SIDS, LDCs, women, Indigenous peoples, and developing countries. Moving forward, there is an opportunity to broaden and deepen inclusion across all dimensions of Decade engagement.
- xv. Despite positive momentum, several factors continue to limit the full participation of underrepresented groups. These include constrained resources, limited outreach to non-English-speaking communities and a concentration of leadership of various activities and Decade structures within institutions in higher-income countries. Stakeholders also noted the need for targeted training, mentorship, and empowerment initiatives to support more equitable engagement.

## Communication and Outreach

- xvi. The evidence highlighted that stakeholders most commonly learned about the Decade through informal channels such as professional networks and personal contacts, underscoring the strength of peer-to-peer communication. In contrast, formal channels, such as the Decade website, newsletters and social media, had comparatively lower visibility among those not yet engaged with the Decade. Industry associations and professional bodies were among the least-cited sources by evaluation participants, suggesting a valuable opportunity to expand the Decade's reach to more diverse and currently underrepresented stakeholder groups.
- xvii. Underrepresented groups, such as LDCs, SIDS, youth, developing countries, Indigenous peoples, and women, stand to benefit most from enhanced communication and outreach under the Decade. While digital platforms and social media have helped expand reach, language barriers, uneven digital access and financial or skills-related constraints continue to limit engagement from these groups. In response, stakeholders emphasized the value of locally accessible channels, including community radio, influencers, artists, and philanthropic organizations, particularly in non-English-speaking and underserved regions. Evaluation findings indicate that diversifying formats and platforms can help foster local ownership and broaden the Decade's impact at the grassroots level.



## Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

- xviii. As the Decade enters its second half, there is a clear opportunity to evolve the current Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework into a more strategic, results-based MEL system not only to track progress and demonstrate outcomes and impact but also to support critical initiatives such as resource mobilization and policy engagement by providing credible, data-driven insights. A strengthened MEL system could facilitate adaptive learning, guide strategic decisions, and reinforce stakeholder accountability. While the existing framework has been effective in tracking operational outputs, evidence suggests it offers limited insight into progress toward the Decade's broader goals and would benefit from mechanisms that better capture results at scale.
- xix. The evidence demonstrates the value of enhancing transparency in the M&E process and establishing stronger feedback loops to sustain stakeholder engagement and support shared learning. Clarifying the Decade's main activities and intended results through a Theory of Change and refining indicators to better capture outcomes emerged as a need to further strengthen its strategic value.

## Positioning IOC Beyond 2030

- xx. Building on the momentum generated by the Decade, UNESCO-IOC is well positioned to assume a broader strategic role aligned with global development agendas, creating an opportunity to transform its core programmes and reinforce its leadership in ocean science beyond 2030. Evidence indicates that realising this potential will depend on addressing key challenges, including resource constraints, uneven regional participation, and the need for strengthened governance and coordination. Findings also highlighted the importance of expanding engagement with other UN agencies, advancing platforms such as the International Platform on Ocean Sustainability (IPOS) and integrating diverse knowledge systems to inform more inclusive and impactful ocean strategies.

# 5. Main recommendations

## Basis and context for the recommendations

The evaluation confirms that the vision and outcomes of the UN Ocean Decade have resonated deeply across sectors, mobilising thousands of stakeholders and generating

momentum that has far exceeded initial expectations. This widespread engagement has elevated the Decade's visibility and ambition on the global stage. At the same time, it has revealed a challenge in aligning the scale of this ambition with the current capacity, resources, governance arrangements and coordination mechanisms in place to deliver on it.

The findings point to a critical moment in the Decade's trajectory: an inflexion point where renewed focus, adapted strategies and strengthened institutional frameworks are required to meet the scale and urgency of emerging ocean challenges. This need is further underscored by a shifting global context marked by diminishing attention to sustainable development, constrained resources, exacerbated by funding cuts from major donors, such as the United States, which has historically provided significant support to ocean-related initiatives, and mounting geopolitical tensions. These external pressures, while complicating the path forward, reinforce the relevance and necessity of the Decade as a unifying framework to safeguard the ocean and the communities and ecosystems it supports.

Despite these constraints, the Decade has already achieved significant progress in advancing a more inclusive and impactful ocean science agenda. The collaborative spirit, commitment and aspiration demonstrated across stakeholder groups provide a strong foundation for deeper transformation in the second half. The recommendations that follow are grounded in the evidence gathered during the evaluation and reflect both the key lessons of the first five years and the ambitions for the Decade's legacy beyond 2030.

With 2025 marking a strategic midpoint, this is a timely opportunity to strengthen delivery mechanisms, deepen engagement, and position the Decade to deliver lasting impact.

The recommendations do not call for specific financial contributions from Member States. Instead, they are grounded in the recognition that, through the prioritisation of ongoing activities, the streamlining of operational workload and the leveraging of partnerships, collaboration and support within IOC, UNESCO, UN-Oceans members, other UN entities, NGOs, and public and private actors, as well as using affordable digital tools and platforms, implementation is both realistic and achievable within existing resource environments.

## Main recommendations

The following list provides the main recommendations, with detailed suggested options for their implementation offered for consideration in the final section of this report.

1. **Streamline and strengthen the governance and coordination framework for the Ocean Decade to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation and support progress toward its intended outcomes in the second half.**
2. **Strengthen UN system-wide collaboration and alignment to support the achievement of the Decade's outcomes and reinforce its identity as a collective UN initiative, enhancing its global reach and impact.**
3. **Put in place a comprehensive resource mobilization framework to ensure sustainable funding for the coordination of the Decade and to strengthen the enabling environment for funding and supporting Decade Actions**
4. **Strengthen national and regional engagement, with a focus on LDCs, SIDS, and other under-represented regions, to facilitate more equitable participation and alignment with local and regional priorities.**
5. **Enhance the mainstreaming of inclusivity, diversity, and equity to ensure that all voices, particularly those of marginalised and under-represented groups, are meaningfully included and benefit from the Decade.**
6. **Strengthen the strategic focus and impact of the UN Ocean Decade Actions to enhance alignment with global and national priorities, promote innovation, support knowledge use and ensure practical application for tangible benefits to Member States and the ecosystem.**
7. **Enhance the existing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to transform it into a monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) system.**
8. **Systematically leverage the Decade to shape UNESCO-IOC's post-2030 agenda and amplify the impact of its programmes.**





# Management response

## Overall Management Response

- ▶ **The IOC thanks the UNESCO Internal Oversight Service (IOS) for leading the evaluation process.** IOC notes the extensive consultation that was undertaken to inform the evaluation process and thanks the evaluation team and all individuals and organizations who participated in this process. The mid-term evaluation falls at a critical time in the Ocean Decade. After five years of implementation, the Ocean Decade has achieved significant success across a range of areas. It has enhanced global awareness of the role of ocean science and knowledge in sustainable development, catalyzed the emergence of close to 60 major global programmes, successfully trialed innovative new approaches to resource mobilisation, and supported the establishment of thematic and regional coordination hubs to support the generation and use of science and knowledge to inform decision making. Member States have actively adopted and supported the vision of the Ocean Decade, aligned their national science priorities around the Decade objectives and engaged in national initiatives including through the establishment of National Decade Committees, development and funding of Decade Actions and hosting of events, conferences and meetings to advance the Decade mission.
- ▶ **The IOC highlights that it is imperative to make use of the second half of the Ocean Decade to consolidate the significant achievements to date and seek synergies between current Decade activities in order to achieve higher impact and fulfil the Decade vision and mission by 2030.** It agrees with the conclusion of the evaluation that the mid-point of implementation is a critical moment to take stock and set future priorities for the delivery of the Decade for its second half that are tailored to address these challenges. Inevitably challenges remain in the implementation of the Decade, many of which are identified in the evaluation. The potential for recommendations and associated responses to contribute to the post-2030 impact of the Decade has been a key filter through which the management response has been developed.
- ▶ **The IOC recognizes that the Decade operates within a dynamic and complex global landscape and simultaneously is influenced by and needs to address systemic and persistent challenges** related to issues such as availability of resources for ocean science and ocean science infrastructure, geographical inequities in resources and capacity, the time taken for science to inform decision making and policy, and above all, rapidly changing ocean ecosystems and geopolitical environments. While the Ocean Decade is contributing to larger efforts to redress such challenges and can indeed use its unique characteristics to increase this contribution through fostering of broader networks within and outside of Member States, none of these issues can be addressed by the Decade alone. IOC believes that the mid-point of the Decade is also a moment to redefine and communicate the unique niche and added value of the Decade both to contribute to engagement and resource mobilisation efforts, but also to clarify, and in some cases reset, expectations of stakeholders on the benefits of engaging in the Decade.
- ▶ **The IOC highlights that strengthened coordination is needed to enhance consolidated delivery in the last half of the Decade, and that this requires increased resources at a particularly complex period for resource mobilisation.** The IOC agrees with the overall finding from the evaluation that strengthened coordination will result in increased impact, but in considering the feasibility of the suggested actions identified by the evaluation team, the IOC has sought to achieve a balance between the expected impact of actions and the existing, or likely future, availability of resources. The areas of action identified below will form the foundation for an ambitious, coherent and impactful package of work for the next half of the Decade. They will require additional resources but have been developed to take account of the prevailing financing and investment landscape and aim to represent a targeted and ambitious, yet realistic ask, to Member States and partners to support implementation of the priority needs of the Decade globally and in regions.



## Recommendations

## Management response

# 01

### Recommendation

**Streamline and strengthen the governance and coordination framework for the Ocean Decade to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation and support progress toward its intended outcomes in the second half.**

### *Accepted*

As a UN-wide initiative, governance of the Decade at the highest level sits with the UNGA and reporting is carried out through the UN SG's annual reporting to the UNGA. Via its UNGA-mandated role as the coordinating agency for the Decade, IOC reports to its Member States through the Executive Council and the Assembly. The Decade Advisory Board is a technical advisory body to the IOC Secretariat and Governing Bodies. The Decade Coordination Unit (DCU) within the IOC Secretariat has been administratively established but is not independently staffed. The Director position was formally established in 42C/5 (2024) and is currently under recruitment. The function of Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator are currently filled by IOC's Marine Policy and Regional Coordination staff. The DCU is the central coordination hub for the Decade and is supported by a network of IOC and non-IOC led thematic and regional coordination hubs.

The scale, complexity, rapid growth and organic nature of the Decade means that strong governance and coordination are essential and the existing structures require continued strengthening and increased resourcing across all levels to achieve the ambitions of the next half of implementation.

The Terms of Reference (TORs) for the Decade Advisory Board require revision to increase the focus on the strategic role of this group which comprises expert individual members and UN agency representatives. A proposal for these revised TORs has been developed with the current Board and is being presented to the 33<sup>rd</sup> session of the IOC Assembly. Formal establishment of the DCU within IOC, completion of the recruitment process for a coordinator the Decade and formal recognition of the role of other senior staff in the Unit will assist in strengthened external and internal legitimacy and visibility for coordination at the central level.

The DCU and IOC-led regional/thematic coordination structures have been operating with a skeleton staff and without significant new resources; this situation is unlikely to change. While an increase in human resource capacity within the DCU and within regional coordination structures would be ideal, and indeed necessary to achieve many of the following recommendations, it is not considered feasible to achieve this solely through secondments and loans of experts from within the UN system. As indicated in more detail below, without significant new contributions of financial and in-kind resources for human resources from 2026 onwards, activities of the DCU and the IOC-led decentralised coordination structures will need to be scaled back; a situation which would be entirely at odds with the ambition of consolidated impact during the remaining five years of the Decade and which would compromise the achievements of the past five years.

Discussions with Member States and UN and non-UN partners on resource mobilisation priorities will intensify, including exploration of novel resourcing options, to increase capacity within the DCU and regional structures.

## 02

### Recommendation

**Strengthen UN system-wide collaboration and alignment to support the achievement of the Decade's outcomes and reinforce its identity as a collective UN initiative, enhancing its global reach and impact.**

#### *Accepted*

Full and active engagement of UN agencies in the Decade is essential to its success as a UN-wide initiative. To date a small group of UN agencies has demonstrated a strong commitment to the Decade through submission of Decade Actions, participation in the Decade Advisory Board, hosting of and participation in meetings and conferences, and engagement in expert working groups. However, the Decade has struggled to gain strong traction outside of this core group. Increased communication with UN agencies, including through engagement at leadership level, is necessary to more clearly articulate the benefits of engaging in the Decade including for contributing to the science-policy mandates of UN agencies. The proposed revision of the TORs of the Decade Advisory Board includes proposals to strengthen the role of UN agency members in the Board and will also contribute to achieving this recommendation.

## 03

### Recommendation

**Put in place a comprehensive resource mobilization framework to ensure sustainable funding for the coordination of the Decade and to strengthen the enabling environment for funding and supporting Decade Actions.**

#### *Accepted in part*

The UNGA mandate for the Decade identified the need to implement the Decade within existing resources. Resourcing remains the single most important issue hindering full and effective implementation of the Ocean Decade. This is true both for Decade coordination within the DCU and IOC-led regional and thematic coordination structures, and for the effective implementation of Decade Actions.

Coordination activities are fully dependent on voluntary contributions from Member States and other partners. As implementation of the Decade reaches its mid-point, an increasingly complex funding landscape, combined with a degree of anticipated and natural donor fatigue, has resulted in a downward trend in resources for central and regional coordination. Projections for 2026 onwards reveal that a downscaling of the DCU and its coordination activities will be necessary without significant new contributions of financial and in-kind resources. Critical IOC-led regional and thematic coordination structures in Africa, the Tropical Americas and Caribbean and focusing on ocean observations are in a similar situation. The regional structures have never been fully operationalised and downscaling of the Observations DCO is foreseen despite the critical priority afforded to ocean observations in the Decade and in IOC programmatic work. Resource mobilisation efforts, while still addressing core operational work of the DCU, will be increasingly focused around a limited set of high-priority themes or regions that support other recommendations of the evaluation related to enhanced coordination of Decade actions for consolidated impact (Recommendation 6) and the opportunity to leverage the Decade to strengthen IOC programmatic work post-2030 (Recommendation 8). This targeted approach structured around thematic or regional packages of actions will be more effective than the wide-ranging “comprehensive resource mobilisation framework” suggested in the evaluation report.

Despite successes in innovative approaches including with the Ocean Decade Alliance, Foundations Dialogue and other partners for example, in the development of co-branded Calls for Decade Actions, there persists a strong degree of disappointment on the perceived ‘failure’ of the Decade to finance endorsed initiatives. There is a need to realign expectations and understanding of the role of the Decade in relation to resource mobilisation for Decade Actions i.e. that Decade aims to influence the financing and investment landscape and is not a financing mechanism per se. In parallel efforts will continue in the development and deployment of innovative partnerships to influence the global financing and investment landscape for ocean science.

# 04

## *Recommendation*

**Strengthen national and regional engagement, with a focus on LDCs, SIDS and other under-represented regions, to facilitate more equitable participation and alignment with local and regional priorities.**

### *Accepted*

Strengthened regional and national engagement in the Decade was recognised as a priority in The Barcelona Statement emerging from the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference. Support to regional taskforces and National Decade Committees is being furnished within the possibilities of available human resources and will continue. In addition, measures will be implemented to enhance interaction between the Decade Advisory Board, Decade Actions and national and regional Decade structures, and partners. Support to National Decade Committees will continue, within the constraints of available human resources, to strengthen links to Decade Actions as a means of linking the work of the Decade to support fulfilment of national commitments under global and regional UN conventions and frameworks (e.g. UNFCCC, CBD, and BBNJ). The Decade Capacity Development Facility and underlying IOC capacity development delivery mechanisms will be further leveraged to provide support to SIDS/LDCs stakeholders in co-design approaches, resource mobilisation, and engagement with private sector/philanthropy to generate self driven Decade actions.

# 05

## *Recommendation*

**Enhance the mainstreaming of inclusivity, diversity, and equity to ensure that all voices, particularly those of marginalized and under-represented groups, are meaningfully included and benefit from the Decade.**

### *Accepted*

Inclusivity across genders, geographies and generations is a fundamental tenet of the Decade. Significant work has been undertaken to date and new initiative have been launched to enhance gender equity and youth inclusion as well as to facilitate leadership by and engagement of Indigenous and local knowledge holders in the Decade. These initiatives will be continued in coming years.



# 06

## Recommendation

**Strengthen the strategic focus and impact of the UN Ocean Decade Actions to enhance alignment with global and national priorities, promote innovation, support knowledge use and ensure practical application for tangible benefits to Member States and the ecosystem.**

### *Accepted in part*

Consolidation of the diverse and ever-growing portfolio of Decade Actions is the single most pressing challenge for the second half of the Decade and one that requires a systematic, structured approach supported by adequate resources. Overall, there is a need to raise the ambition and demonstrated impact of the Decade in terms of influence on decision making at national, regional and global levels.

To achieve this, improved and new processes will be developed to increase understanding by, accountability of, and reporting from Decade Actions on how they are collaborating and influencing decision making.

A strengthened Call for Decade Actions process will be designed and implemented to ensure that new Decade Actions align with identified priority knowledge and policy gaps, that they have identified tangible pathways of impact to inform decision making, and they are actively collaborating with partners across the Decade ecosystem including other Decade Actions, decentralised coordination structures, and National Decade Committees.

As indicated in the response to Recommendation 7, enhancement of the monitoring and evaluation framework will be achieved to allow better tracking of the impact of Decade Actions, including increased accountability for self-reporting on impact on decision making for sustainable development, albeit in recognition of a lag time between availability of science and knowledge and decision making.

The 2027 Ocean Decade Conference and pre-Conference preparatory process will leverage the Vision 2030 process outcomes to define a framework to assess remaining implementation gaps through enhanced collaboration across the portfolio of Decade Programmes, and Decade ecosystem (regional, thematic, national). This work will be used to tailor future resource mobilisation efforts around a package of high priority themes and regions and identify the foundations of the consolidated post-2030 Decade legacy.

# 07

## Recommendation

**Enhance the existing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to transform it into a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system.**



### Accepted

A monitoring and evaluation framework exists for the Decade and has been implemented and continuously refined since the first data collection exercise in 2022. Future efforts will focus on: (i) tracking impact and progress at the level of the Ocean Decade Challenges based on the results of the Vision 2030 process, and (ii) evaluating the science-policy-society impact of the Decade including how scientific knowledge generated through the Decade is informing decision making across society.

# 08

## Recommendation

**Systematically leverage the Decade to shape UNESCO-IOC's post-2030 agenda and amplify the impact of its programmes.**



### Accepted

A failure to leverage the Decade to shape the future IOC would represent a wasted opportunity. Since its proclamation, the Decade has successfully raised visibility and awareness of the role of IOC within the UN system, opened opportunities for new partnerships and resources, and led to the development of innovative and new areas of work for the IOC. Not all IOC-led work under the Decade will continue past 2030 but core initiatives in ocean observations, ocean data, sustainable ocean planning, capacity development, tsunami preparedness and ocean acidification have the potential to influence the future direction and resourcing of IOC programmatic work. Regional IOC-led coordination structures, if adequately resourced, have the potential to cement the role of IOC with regional partners. The identification of the IOC-led post-Decade legacy initiatives will also inform the development of a targeted and tailored approach to resource mobilisation around high priority themes or regions. Groups such as the Foundations Dialogue and Ocean Decade Alliance, will be future, long-term allies and supporters of IOC's work thanks to their exposure via the Decade. In the lead-up to the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference and in parallel to other initiatives in the IOC that are shaping strategic discussions with Member States on future IOC priorities, including the 'IOC and Future of the Ocean' process, tangible actions will be defined to ensure that existing or emerging core Decade initiatives and structures flourish past 2030 and lead to a strengthened IOC.

# 1. Introduction

1. This mid-term evaluation of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) assesses the structures, processes, partnerships, and resources essential to achieving the Decade's objectives by 2030, as outlined in its Terms of Reference (ToR) (Annex 1). Mandated by the Executive Council of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (UNESCO-IOC) at its 57th session in June 2024, this evaluation is managed by UNESCO's Division for Internal Oversight Services (IOS). It focuses on key aspects such as governance and coordination, resource mobilization, science and knowledge delivery, UN-Oceans engagement, progress tracking, inclusivity, outreach and the Decade's contribution to advancing IOC's vision and evolution.

## 1.1. An overview of the UN Ocean Decade

2. The United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) was formally proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly through its Resolution A/RES/72/73 on 5 December 2017. The resolution invited UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) to prepare and coordinate the Decade's implementation plan, in consultation with Member States, specialized agencies, the wider UN system, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and relevant stakeholders. The resolution explicitly called for implementation to take place "within existing structures and available resources," underscoring that the Decade was not intended to establish new funding obligations for Member States.
3. The resolution also called for enhanced collaboration across the UN system, inviting UN-Oceans and its participants to support the implementation of the Decade. While the Decade is not a financing mechanism and does not carry a dedicated funding envelope, its success depends on the strategic mobilization of voluntary contributions, the alignment of existing programmes, and strengthened partnerships among public, private, and multilateral actors. This reliance on non-earmarked and in-kind support is particularly relevant given today's constrained global funding environment, including reduced financial commitments by some major contributors, such as the United States, which has historically provided significant support to ocean-related initiatives.
4. Coordinated by UNESCO-IOC, the UN Ocean Decade aims to move from the "ocean we have" to the "ocean we want". The initiative, coordinated by the UNESCO-IOC, aims to deliver "the science we need for the ocean we want". It seeks to encourage transformative ocean science that connects people to the ocean, catalysing sustainable practices and contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 "Life Below Water" (SDG 14), focused on conserving and sustainably using oceans, seas and marine resources.
5. The Decade was launched in January 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic and against the backdrop of escalating global challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss and the growing need for sustainable management of ocean resources. These challenges are compounded by social, political, economic and demographic disparities, such as the disproportionate impact of ocean degradation on developing regions, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and coastal communities. The Decade aims to facilitate transformative ocean science solutions for sustainable development by engaging diverse stakeholders, including governments, UN agencies, intergovernmental organizations, scientists, Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs), private sector actors, NGOs, and Indigenous communities, while bridging gaps in knowledge, policy and the real-world application of ocean science and solutions and addressing the unique needs of underrepresented regions and vulnerable populations.
6. The governance and coordination of the Decade follow a multi-tiered **framework** (Annex 7):
  - **Overall Oversight:** Mandated by the UN General Assembly, the IOC Secretariat of UNESCO oversees the Decade's implementation. The IOC Governing Bodies provide general oversight.
  - **Global Coordination:** The Decade Coordination Unit (DCU), housed within the IOC Secretariat, manages global operations. Decade Advisory Board (DAB) and **UN-Oceans** (a 31-member inter-agency mechanism) serve as consultative bodies to the DCU.
  - **Decentralized Coordination Mechanisms:** Decade Collaborative Centres (DCCs) and Decade Coordination Offices (DCOs) coordinate and catalyse Decade Actions at regional and thematic levels. Decade Implementing Partners



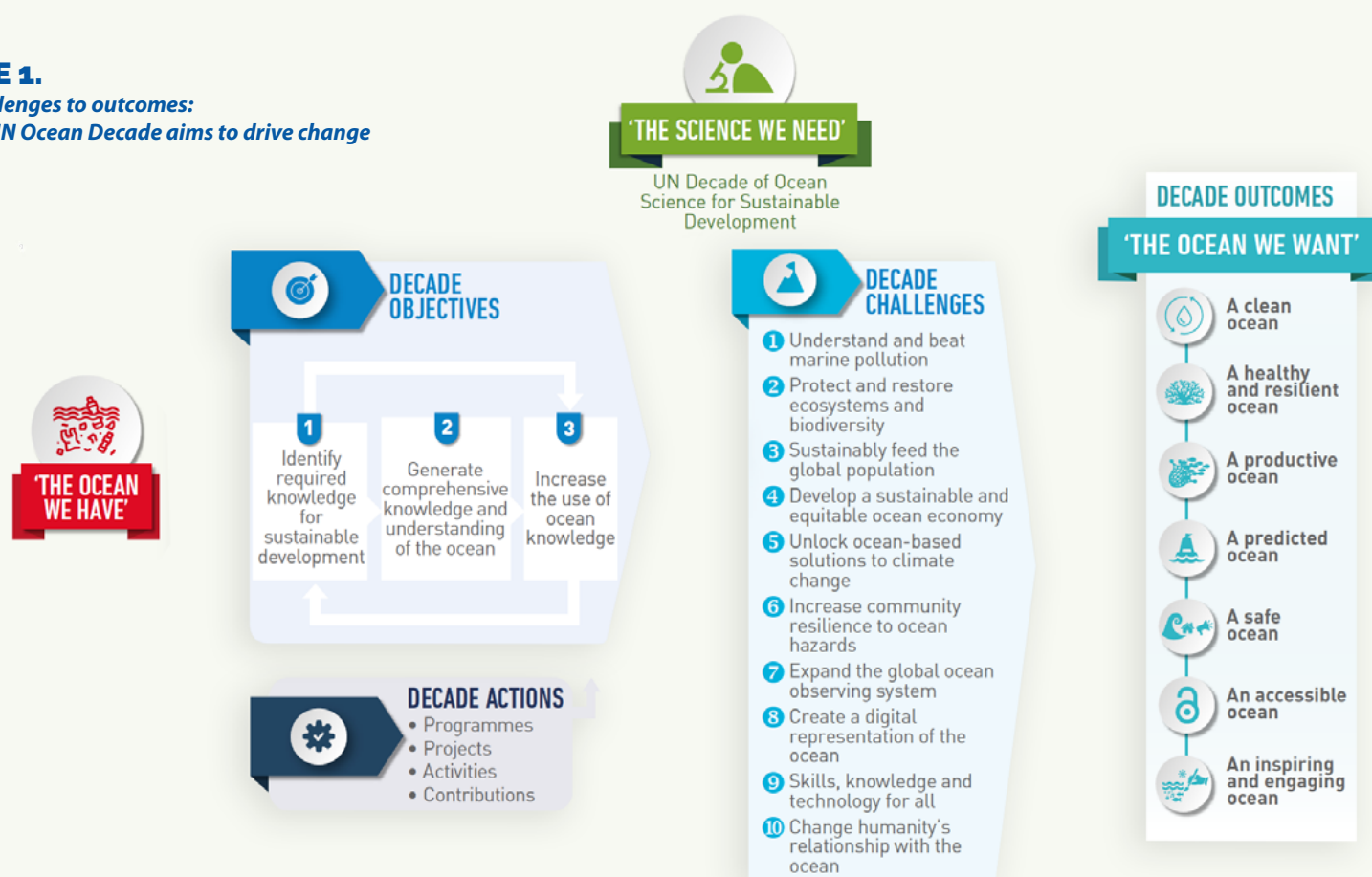
(DIPs) support technical coordination, resource mobilization, and stakeholder engagement.

- ▶ **National Coordination:** 39 active National Decade Committees (NDCs) facilitate links between global priorities and national initiatives.
- ▶ **Additional Support Mechanisms:** Other mechanisms, such as regional structures and global mechanisms like Decade Alliance support various aspects of the Decade's implementation.

7. The **Implementation Plan** identifies three overarching objectives, seven outcomes and ten challenges that guide global ocean sustainability efforts. The objectives aim to enhance ocean knowledge, build capacity for sustainable development and ensure the effective use of ocean science in decision-making. The seven outcomes envision an ocean that is clean, healthy, productive, predictable, safe, accessible and engaging, while the ten challenges tackle key issues such as marine pollution, biodiversity restoration, sustainable ocean economies and climate resilience, driving a coordinated approach to achieving the UN Ocean Decade's vision (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1.**

*From challenges to outcomes:  
How the UN Ocean Decade aims to drive change*



Source: The United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030): Implementation Plan

8. To guide progress toward 2030, the **Vision 2030** framework has been established to define priority datasets, identify knowledge gaps and assess resource needs for each challenge. This process led to the development of ten **White Papers**, the Barcelona **Statement** announced after the Barcelona Conference in April 2024 and the publication of the Consolidated Outcomes **Report** in October 2024. These efforts set key priorities, including enhancing marine ecosystem management, scaling up sustainable ocean economies, improving ocean observation systems and strengthening the role of ocean science in policymaking.
9. The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework for the Decade defines the approach to assessing progress and outcomes associated with the initiative. It incorporates a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators to track progress across three levels: impact, operational and enabling environment. It is designed to evaluate both the performance of Actions, including programmes and projects and the broader progress of the Decade as a whole. While the framework outlines goals, objectives and indicators, it does not include a fully articulated results framework, a Theory of Change (ToC), or a logic model. The DCU implements the framework by distributing online survey forms, collecting

data voluntarily provided by NDCs, DCCs, DCOs, DIPs and Actions and publishing annual progress **reports**.

## 1.2. Report structure

10. The remainder of this report is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the purpose and methodology of this evaluation. Section 3 presents the evaluation findings, structured around key thematic areas, answering the evaluation questions, including governance and coordination, resource mobilization, science and knowledge delivery, UN-Oceans engagement, tracking progress, engagement, inclusivity and outreach, assessing achievements, challenges and opportunities for improvement. Section 4 synthesizes the conclusions, summarizing overarching insights drawn from the findings, while Section 5 provides actionable recommendations, outlining strategic steps to enhance the impact and sustainability of the Ocean Decade in its second half. This approach ensures that the evaluation is systematic, evidence-based and aligned with the Decade's strategic objectives while providing clear pathways for future improvements.





## 2. Purpose and methodology of the evaluation

### 2.1. Purpose, coverage and use

11. By mid-2025, the UN Ocean Decade will reach its halfway mark, making this mid-term evaluation a significant opportunity to assess key elements driving its implementation, including governance structures, processes, partnerships and resource mobilization. Conducting the evaluation at this stage is essential for measuring progress and refining strategies for the second half of the Decade. It serves both summative and formative purposes, reviewing achievements and challenges while identifying lessons learned and strategic recommendations for the next five years. The overarching goal is to keep the Decade on track to achieve its vision of a healthy, resilient, sustainable and equitable ocean by 2030.
12. The evaluation covers the period from the launch of the Decade in 2021 to the end of 2024, with a global scope that includes all regions and stakeholder groups involved in its implementation. In line with the ToR of the evaluation, primary users consist of the Decade's global and decentralized governance structures, including the UNESCO-IOC Governing Bodies, DCU, UN-Oceans members, DAB, DCOs and DCCs. Secondary users include NDCs, focal points of endorsed Decade Actions and other entities participating in Decade initiatives. The utilization-focused approach adopted ensures the evaluation findings are actionable and directly support adaptive management and cross-stakeholder collaboration for the implementation of the Decade's second half.

### 2.2. Evaluation management and stakeholder engagement

13. The evaluation team worked closely with the UNESCO Evaluation Office within IOS, which oversaw the quality assurance of the evaluation process and deliverables while also facilitating engagement with the DCU and Evaluation Reference Group (ERG). The ERG, composed of the IOS Evaluation Office, the DCU, the UNESCO-IOC Executive Office, representatives of select DCOs, DCCs, the DAB and the UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS) in its role as Secretariat to UN-

Oceans, played a key role in reviewing deliverables, providing contextual insights, suggesting stakeholders for consultation and participating in the inception and debriefing workshops. Throughout the evaluation, structured engagements with the ERG ensured a collaborative and transparent process, integrating stakeholder insights and feedback into the Final Report.

### 2.3. Methodology

14. The evaluation design was guided by the ToR, which also informed the structure of this report. The evaluation questions under each aspect were identified by the IOS through a document review, consultations with the DCU and scoping interviews with 25 individuals. They aim to deepen the inquiry into each issue while covering all standard evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and pathways towards impact). The evaluation also adopted a theory-driven perspective, ensuring that findings were assessed within a structured framework of expected change. To support this, a ToC was developed by the Evaluation Team with input from the DCU and the ERG, along with insights from interviews conducted during the Inception Phase (Annex 8). The Team revisited and refined the ToC at the end of the data collection process, incorporating input from a diverse range of stakeholders.
15. The ToC serves as a foundational model, mapping the connections between inputs, activities and outcomes essential for achieving the Decade's overarching mission: "the science we need for the ocean we want". Developing a ToC at this stage is particularly valuable as it provides a structured framework to assess how effectively these elements contribute to the desired outcomes. It also informs efforts to establish a results framework and a functional monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system for the Decade's second half. In addition, the ToC enables the evaluation to systematically test key assumptions and identify risks, ensuring that the model accurately reflects the pathways and conditions necessary for success. Complementary conceptual frameworks, including the Decade's current M&E Framework and Vision 2030, further support the alignment of this evaluation with expected outcomes, priorities and milestone indicators.

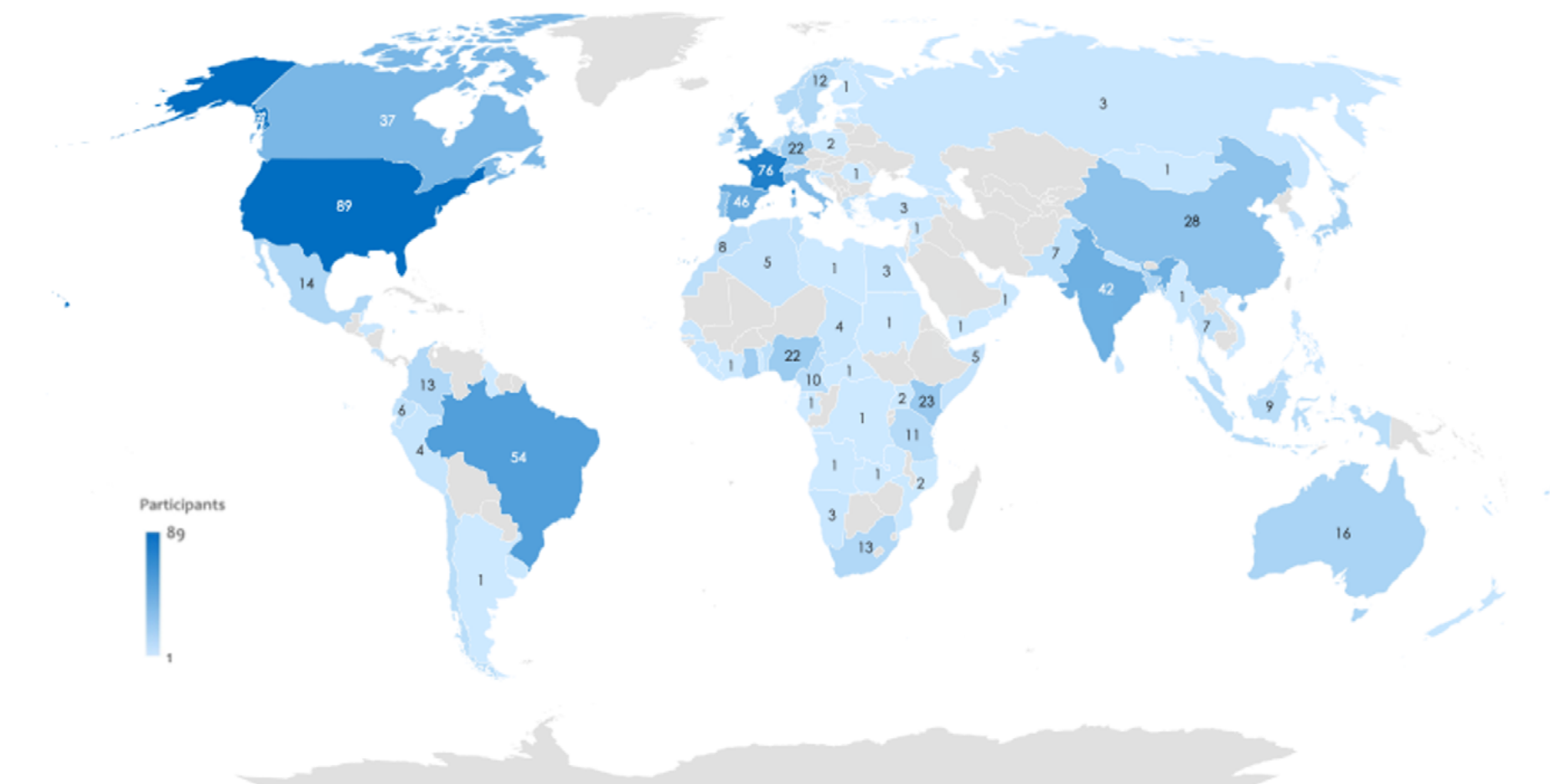
## 2.4. Data collection and analysis methods

16. The evaluation began with an inception phase, which included a preliminary desk review of key documents and inception interviews with selected stakeholders, including representatives from the DCU, ERG and the DOALOS. The step established a strong foundation for a rigorous evaluation, ensuring alignment with the principles of independence, impartiality and ethical standards set forth in UNESCO's Evaluation Policy and UNEG standards.

17. The methodology employs a comprehensive mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to facilitate triangulation, as summarized below. (details are provided in Annex 9). Altogether, the process involved 1,006 consultations with stakeholders in the form of semi-structured interviews, stakeholder surveys, case study interviews and focus group discussions. Geographically, it covered 118 countries (Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2.**

*Geographic coverage of stakeholder consultations across 118 countries in this evaluation*



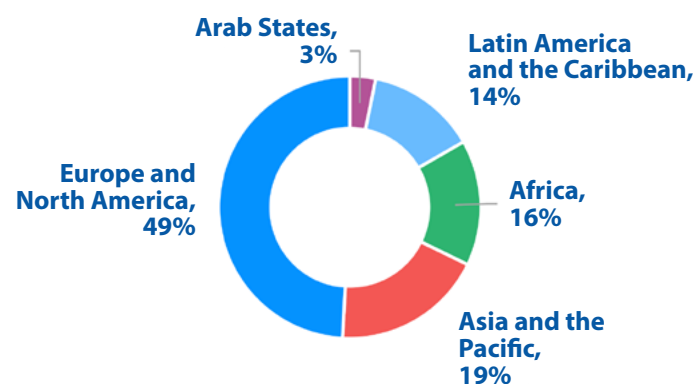
Source: INOMER, based on evaluation data



18. In parallel with the regional concentration of the Decade's structures, Actions and Activities, nearly half of the consultations involved stakeholders from Europe and North America (49%), followed by Asia and the Pacific (19%), Africa (16%), LAC (14%) and Arab States (3%) (Figure 3). This included 79 consultations with stakeholders from LDCs and 38 from SIDS, as well as two countries (Comoros and Kiribati) with both LDC and SIDS status. The gender breakdown of participants was nearly balanced, with 48% female and 50% male (Figure 4).

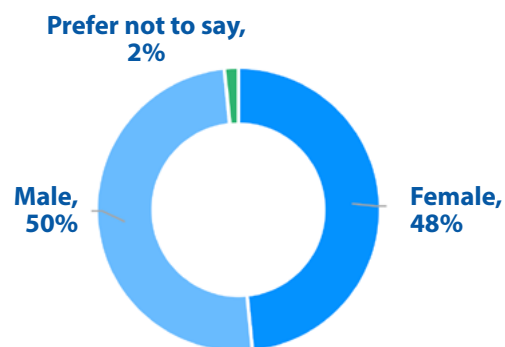
**FIGURE 3.**

*Consulted stakeholders represent all regions, including LDCs and SIDS*



**FIGURE 4.**

*Nearly equal gender representation among consulted stakeholders*



Source: INOMER, based on evaluation data

19. Specific data collection and analysis methods included the following:

► **Document Review:**

- Over 100 documented sources were reviewed (details in Annex 3), along with a detailed assessment of the Decade's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework, including its data collection and reporting tools.

► **Semi-Structured Interviews:**

- A total of 109 priority stakeholders were interviewed, exceeding the initial plan of 65 to 75, in three languages (English, French, and Spanish), with efforts to engage stakeholders from SIDS, LDCs, and other underrepresented groups.
- A representative sample of stakeholder groups from all regions were covered (Europe and North America (27%), Africa (16%), Asia and the Pacific (16%), LAC (7%) and Arab States (3%)) in addition to representatives from UN-Oceans and international organizations (32%).
- Gender balance was achieved with 48% female and 52% male (50/50 split excluding UN entities) (details in Annexes 4 and 10).

► **Stakeholder Surveys:**

- An online survey (Annex 11) was distributed to 16,300 contacts, receiving 1,205 responses.
- Representation across geography, gender, and age was achieved (Annexes 5 and 12).

► **Social Network Analysis (SNA):**

- A separate online survey was conducted targeting 422 key stakeholders, with 62 responses received to analyse the structure, dynamics, and effectiveness of partnership networks within the Decade (Annex 13).

► **Platform-based Analyses:**

- Bibliometric Analysis, Policy Influence Analysis, and Global Media Scan were conducted using online platforms, with results presented in Annexes 14, 15, and 16, respectively.

### ► Case Studies:

- Five detailed and four brief case studies were prepared on various themes and partnerships, covering Indigenous knowledge, regional coordination, resource mobilization, policy integration, and capacity development.
- Geographical representation was achieved across Africa, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific and Europe, in addition to a global initiative (details in Annex 17).

### ► Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Observations:

- FGDs involving 23 stakeholders were held to obtain deeper insights on stakeholder engagement, decision-making practices, and key evaluation topics.
- Observations involved participation in a DAB meeting and a TAC Task Force workshop.

## 2.5. Human Rights and Gender Equality

- The evaluation was designed in alignment with the principles of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) **Norms and Standards, Ethical Guidelines** and **Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations**, ensuring an inclusive and equity-focused approach. Human rights and gender equality considerations were embedded in the evaluation framework through dedicated questions assessing inclusivity, engagement and participation, particularly in relation to gender, geographic representation and underrepresented groups such as SIDS, LDCs, Indigenous communities and ECOPs. Additional interviews were conducted to enhance the representation of underrepresented groups and regions beyond the initially planned number of participants. The Evaluation Team systematically tracked the gender composition of interviewees and survey respondents to assess representation across stakeholder groups. In addition, the evaluation examined the integration of Indigenous knowledge within the Decade, assessing efforts to recognize and apply diverse knowledge systems in ocean science and governance. The Team made efforts to ensure diverse

participation in other data collection methods, including purposive sampling for FGD invitees. The evaluation was conducted in English, French and Spanish to facilitate accessibility and overcome language barriers, particularly for stakeholders from non-English-speaking regions. These efforts ensured that human rights and gender equality considerations were fully integrated into the evaluation process and meaningfully informed its findings and recommendations, leading to a more inclusive and equitable assessment of the Decade's implementation.

## 2.6. Quality assurance

- The evaluation adhered to diligent quality assurance measures to ensure the reliability, validity and credibility of the process, deliverables, findings and recommendations. It followed the UNESCO **Evaluation Manual** and was assessed against the UNESCO Evaluation Report Quality Checklist to maintain the required standards. During the design phase, data collection tools were tested to refine clarity and consistency, and translations were verified by native-speaking evaluators to ensure accuracy.
- The ERG provided oversight to ensure methodological soundness and impartiality, while IOS conducted reviews and provided guidance throughout the inception phase and data collection process. The Evaluation Team Leader reviewed the first interview transcripts from other interviewers to ensure consistency, with additional oversight by IOS. Weekly meetings were held with the IOS evaluation manager to monitor progress, address emerging challenges and mitigate potential risks.
- A systematic triangulation approach was applied, cross-verifying data from multiple sources, including interviews, surveys, case studies and document reviews, to strengthen the robustness of conclusions. The final report underwent quality review by subject matter experts and the strategic advisors of INOMER (Annex 6), ensuring that findings and recommendations were well-grounded and actionable. In addition, peer review mechanisms were used to validate key insights and all evaluation steps, from sampling to reporting, were guided by principles of independence, impartiality and ethical integrity, ensuring a fair and balanced assessment of the Ocean Decade's implementation.



## 2.7. Limitations

24. While the evaluation employed a rigorous mixed-methods approach, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, despite efforts to ensure broad representation, participation from some underrepresented groups, particularly stakeholders from SIDS and LDCs, remained limited due to their weak representation and engagement with the Decade. The SNA survey received a lower-than-expected response despite multiple reminders, likely due to its timing just before the end-of-year holiday season. Similarly, although scheduled in mid-January, participation in focus groups remained lower than anticipated, possibly due to extended holidays and the summer break in the Southern Hemisphere. To mitigate this risk, a total of 64 individuals were invited to participate in FGDs, exceeding the originally planned minimum of 24. This measure helped secure enough participants and ensure diverse perspectives were captured.
25. Finally, while triangulation across multiple data sources strengthened the validity of findings, some datasets, such as policy influence and media scans, relied on data platforms that may have inherent coverage gaps. These analyses, covering bibliometric trends, policy influence, and global media scan, were constrained by the limitations of the indexing platforms, which are not fully comprehensive. However, efforts were made to prioritize databases with the best available coverage to mitigate these gaps.
26. Nevertheless, by employing a broad range of qualitative and quantitative methods, engaging a diverse group of stakeholders and triangulating multiple streams of evidence for each evaluation question, the evaluation delivered a comprehensive, credible, balanced and well-substantiated assessment of the Ocean Decade's implementation.



## 3. Evaluation findings

### 3.1. Governance and coordination

This section addresses the following evaluation questions outlined in the Terms of Reference for the Mid-Term Evaluation, formulated by the UNESCO Division of IOS in consultation with UNESCO-IOC.

Role, resourcing, and effectiveness of global governance and coordination structures including the Decade Coordination Unit and the Decade Advisory Board.

- **How sustainable is the organizational structure, staffing (including contract), and resourcing of the Decade Coordination Unit for the successful coordination of the second half of the Ocean Decade?**
- **How does the DCU work with other sections of IOC on the Decade? How does it collaborate with other UNESCO Programme Sectors on the Decade? To what extent do UNESCO Central Services such as communications, media relations, resource mobilization, partnership building, gender equality, priority Africa, etc. support the IOC in its coordination and implementation of the Ocean Decade?**
- **What should be the role of the Decade Advisory Board during the second half of the Ocean Decade?**

Role, resourcing, and effectiveness of decentralized governance and coordination structures including Decade Coordination Offices, Decade Collaborative Centers, Decade Implementing Partners, Decade programmes, regional taskforces, and National Decade Committees.

- **How do global governance and coordination mechanisms engage with the decentralized mechanisms, including at the national level?**  
**How effectively do the various decentralized structures interact with Decade Actions, National Decade Committees and amongst themselves?**
- **How is the Ocean Decade engaging institutions (scientific as well as those with a policy/management focus) at the national level and what impacts have National Decade Committees in furthering the Ocean Decade's vision within countries?**

#### 3.1.1. DCU structure and sustainability

**Key Finding: Interviewed stakeholders consistently commend the DCU's leadership team for their efficiency and dedication. However, the unit's organizational structure, staffing levels and resources are currently limited to effectively coordinate the second half of the UN Ocean Decade.**

27. The DCU operates with highly limited resources, relying on a \$2 million biennial budget (of which 80% is received from external donors), two permanent staff and short-term consultants. While stakeholders praise the DCU's efficient leadership, these constraints limit its capacity to effectively coordinate the Decade and raise concerns about sustainability during the second half, as emphasized through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs).
28. Frequent staff turnover affects the continuity of work, poses challenges to maintaining institutional knowledge and can affect relationships with stakeholders. The reliance of the DCU on short-term contracts with junior personnel due to limited funding for permanent positions has contributed to a turnover rate of 40% since the Decade's inception. Lengthy recruitment cycles of two to six months further complicate these challenges and contribute to delays in implementation. The lack of mid-level personnel forces senior leadership to handle operational tasks, reducing bandwidth for strategic focus and limiting the DCU's ability to manage decentralized structures effectively. These challenges have had notable impacts, including a one-year delay in critical initiatives such as the donor-funded Ocean Decade Capacity Development Facility.
29. The Ocean Decade **Implementation Plan** envisioned the UN supporting the Decade through seconded staff, decentralized contributions and collaborative coordination with other actors. However, limitations in formal collaboration mechanisms and communication between the IOC and UN-Oceans have constrained progress toward fully realizing this ambition. This arrangement would



have enabled the DCU to enhance its capacity with the help of experienced staff from other agencies. Greater engagement from the UN could leverage the networks of UN agencies, spanning policymakers, grassroots stakeholders and ministries such as finance, agriculture and industry, to support the Decade to better align Actions with national priorities and influence policies. This situation has also limited the Decade's positioning and alignment as a truly collective "UN" initiative in line with the **UN General Assembly Resolution 72/73** (§292-295) and has resulted in reduced opportunities to advance its overarching objectives.

### 3.1.2. Cooperation between DCU and UNESCO-IOC sections

**Key Finding: The DCU's collaboration with UNESCO-IOC sections advances UN Ocean Decade priorities but is shaped by intermittent communication, unclear roles and resource limitations.**

30. Engagement of the DCU with the IOC Assembly and Executive Council has secured high-level support and aligned Decade priorities with global ocean governance frameworks. However, interviews found that decision-making authority is largely centralized within the IOC, which has contributed to a lengthier endorsement process, slower communication flows and less consistent regional-level support, with noted effects in LDCs and SIDS. While collaboration with IOC regional offices has promoted inclusivity, insufficient integration and limited DCU support in regions like Tropical Americas and the Caribbean (TAC) point to ongoing challenges in regional engagement and may limit the pace of progress.
31. The DCU's partnerships with programmes such as the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) and the International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE) have advanced key scientific priorities, particularly in data sharing and capacity building. However, ongoing coordination challenges, evolving role clarity, and limited resources have affected the ability to further expand support and impact for these and other related IOC programmes.

### 3.1.3. Collaboration between DCU and UNESCO Programme Sectors

**Key Finding: The DCU and UNESCO Programme Sectors would benefit from established mechanisms to cultivate synergies and optimize the use of expertise and resources to achieve Decade outcomes**

32. The DCU has collaborated with UNESCO sectors on initiatives such as **Ocean Literacy**, marine site conservation and mangrove restoration, with initiatives such as blue education and the **Ocean Decade Heritage Network** underscoring the value of these partnerships. Interviews highlighted good practices in intersectoral collaborations (Box 1). However, intermittent communication within the partnerships has posed challenges to their effectiveness, while gaps in feedback loops have left UNESCO sector partners uncertain about how their contributions align with Decade goals, affecting continued engagement.

#### BOX 1.

**UNESCO/SC/LINKS and DCU collaboration to strengthen Indigenous perspectives in the Ocean Decade**

**UNESCO/SC/LINKS** partnered with the DCU to strengthen inclusivity and integrate indigenous knowledge into the Decade framework. This collaboration focused on governance of marine resources and decision-making processes, producing tools and policies to include indigenous perspectives in marine spatial planning. LINKS supported regional initiatives, including contributions to the 2022 Decade Coordination Conference in Fiji and advocating for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in the SIDS framework. By documenting New Zealand's approach to engaging indigenous communities, LINKS provided a model for other nations. Their efforts also facilitated capacity-building, securing resources for an indigenous knowledge coordinator in Fiji and enhancing the Ocean Decade's inclusivity and impact. LINKS-DCU partnership has advanced the recognition and incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems in ocean governance, demonstrating the value of cross-sectoral collaboration.

Source: INOMER, UN Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation Interviews, 2024



33. Despite some examples of effective partnerships, interviews and FGDs highlighted the importance of institutionalized mechanisms to support strategic and systematic collaboration between the DCU and UNESCO Programme Sectors. The evaluation found that limited cross-sector collaboration within UNESCO, resource constraints in both the Organization and the DCU and competition with initiatives such as UNESCO's **Science Decade** have added to coordination difficulties. As a result, key UNESCO divisions and programmes are not always fully aware of the Decade's efforts, including the process for registering Actions, resulting in partnerships often built on individual relationships rather than institutional frameworks. Structured collaboration with the Natural Sciences, Social and Human Sciences, Education and Culture Sectors is essential, while systematic partnerships with UNESCO/ LINKS, SIDS and **Man and the Biosphere Programme** (MAB) represent a valuable opportunity for the Decade's success.
34. Evidence from multiple sources showed that strengthening engagement with UNESCO field offices is essential to extend the Decade's reach and better leverage local knowledge and networks. Stronger structural mechanisms could help formalize regional partnerships, which often rely on individual initiatives. The collaboration between **IOC WESTPAC** and the **UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok** illustrates the importance of enhanced field-level engagement for the effective functioning of the Decade's decentralized structures (see Box 2).

### 3.1.4. Collaboration between DCU and UNESCO Central Services

**Key Finding: Addressing capacity constraints and clarifying collaboration processes would strengthen the DCU's partnership with UNESCO Central Services in raising awareness, resource mobilization and regional engagement**

35. Despite intermittent joint efforts on milestone events like the 2024 UN Ocean Decade Conference, coordination challenges limit the effectiveness of collaboration between the DCU and UNESCO central services. While central services have primarily supported high-visibility events, interviews highlight

coordination difficulties. The limited mechanisms for structured collaboration contribute to irregular engagement, due in part to resource constraints and competing priorities on both sides. A review of UNESCO's recent ocean-related social media communications highlights gaps in visibility, including limited or absent references, tags or hashtags to the Ocean Decade. Similar issues are seen in the UN's ocean-related posts, which may benefit from enhanced cooperation between the DCU, UNESCO and UN-Oceans members.

36. The collaboration between the DCU and UNESCO's Bureau of Strategic Planning (BSP) has yielded positive engagement initiatives, such as the Foundation Dialogue, which has successfully brought together philanthropic organizations to exchange knowledge and explore joint funding opportunities, including co-funding a UN General Assembly event. Similarly, the Ocean Decade Alliance has served as a high-level platform to engage influential partners in ocean advocacy and resource mobilization. However, several factors have posed challenges to these collaboration efforts. While there is a strong willingness to collaborate, capacity constraints on both sides have led to inconsistencies in communication and follow-up. BSP was sometimes informed too late to provide timely support for partner engagement and fundraising, while mutually agreed-upon approaches to resource mobilization did not always advance as planned due to competing priorities and limited resources.
37. Similarly, collaboration under Global Priority Africa has aligned with **Flagship Programme 5** and UNESCO's **Operational Strategy for Priority Africa 2022-2029** to promote ocean science for sustainable development. However, insufficient financial and personnel resources continue to present challenges for collaboration and reduce visibility of ocean-related initiatives in Africa.
38. The document **Uncharted Waters: An Exploration for Gender Equality and the Ocean** confirms collaboration between UNESCO's Division for Gender Equality and the IOC, highlighting joint efforts to integrate gender equality into the Decade's governance, monitoring and action planning frameworks, including the establishment of a gender working group, as also confirmed by interviews with the DCU and the development of a gender strategy before the 2025 UN Ocean Conference. The IOC's action plan indicates that this activity was expected to be completed by Q4 2024 in collaboration with the UNESCO Division for Gender Equality; however, its initiation was still pending as of late 2024<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> **Action Plan** in response to the IOS evaluation of the IOC strategic positioning update on implementation, 25 April 2024.

### 3.1.5. Decade Advisory Board's role

**Key Finding: The role of the DAB in governance is limited largely to advising on programme endorsements, highlighting the potential for an expanded strategic role to guide the Decade's second half.**

39. DAB members, serving on a voluntary basis, primarily meet virtually to advise on programme endorsements, with limited opportunities for interaction between meetings due to time constraints. In-person meetings provide a rare opportunity for members to dedicate more time to strategic discussions, but resource limitations restrict these to once a year, reducing opportunities for the Board to offer actionable strategic guidance as outlined in its ToR.
40. Table 1 summarizes the key focus areas of the DAB's advice, showing consistent contributions to programme calls and endorsements and noting episodic roles in strategic issues. Stakeholders agree that in the second half of the Decade, the DAB could shift its focus toward strategic oversight, governance and coordination improvements, resource mobilization, stronger science-policy interaction and long-term legacy planning.

**TABLE 1.**

**DAB's role over time: Strong focus on programme endorsement, but strategic oversight remains limited**

Focus area	Consistency	Examples
Programme endorsement	Consistent and central role	Regular reviews and recommendations on programme submissions
Calls for Actions	Frequent and integrated role	Regular input on scoping and gap analysis for Calls
Strategic governance	Episodic and event-driven	Vision 2030 recommendations; NDC strengthening
Resource mobilization	Less consistent, could be further developed	Ocean Matcher tool, mapping funding sources
Cross-cutting themes	Reactive and event-driven	Gender equity, youth engagement and inclusivity efforts

Source: INOMER, based on DAB meeting reports (April 2021-December 2024)

41. While the current nomination-based model for DAB membership ensures geographical diversity, it results in inconsistent participation, with some board members attending only one or two meetings during their tenure. This variable engagement affects the board's ability to fully carry out its advisory role.
42. Interviews and FGDs reveal that UN agency representatives serving on the DAB are regarded and self-identify as "observers", although there is no explicit reference to this status in the DAB TOR. These representatives actively contribute technical expertise and strategic guidance, as observed by the Evaluation Team during the Eleventh DAB meeting. However, the uncertainty around their formal status and their lower visibility, for example, the absence of their names on the Decade's website, may not fully reflect the role typically expected of UN agencies in a UN initiative.

### 3.1.6. Engagement between global and decentralized structures

**Key Finding: The decentralized governance framework is complex, with limited communication between global and decentralized structures, suggesting opportunities to enhance strategic design and stronger communication channels.**

43. Although the Implementation Plan defined DCCs, DCOs and NDCs as key decentralized structures of the Decade, the absence of an overarching strategic framework informed by a ToC has led to the creation of new bodies without cohesive strategic guidance. This has resulted in a complex system, as evidenced by multiple sources in interviews, FGDs, and surveys. For instance, the NGO Task Group was established by a former DCU staff member and lacked institutional support. Similarly, unclear roles and limited oversight for structures like DIPs have diminished their contributions. The overall structure confuses stakeholders and creates accessibility barriers, particularly for developing countries, LDCs and SIDS.
44. The unplanned proliferation of new Ocean Decade structures is a concern for stakeholders, as reflected in interviews, FGDs, surveys, and SNA research. This expansion further places additional demands on the DCU's limited resources to coordinate across global and decentralized mechanisms, including at the national level. Recently formed or envisaged structures, such as the Youth Working Group, Gender Task Force and Indigenous and Local Knowledge Reference

Group, while thematically important, could face risks to their effectiveness due to resource scarcity within global structures. This could lead to variation in engagement levels with existing mechanisms and other stakeholders.

45. Interviews and surveys highlight the domination of the Decade's coordination by the Europe and North America region, leading to imbalanced representation. DCU data confirm this imbalance, with 61%<sup>3</sup> of governance and coordination structures members coming from Europe and North America, while representation from SIDS and LDCs is minimal<sup>4</sup>.
46. Communication between global and decentralized structures has shown mixed effectiveness. While the DCU leadership team's active engagement is appreciated, interviewees, particularly those from underrepresented regions, express dissatisfaction with limited personalized interaction. Constraints such as unreliable internet connectivity in LDCs and SIDS, language barriers across regions and time differences for Asia-Pacific countries have further created challenges in communication, which occurs primarily through virtual meetings. The DAB's lack of direct engagement with decentralized mechanisms limits its ability to provide context-specific advice and align efforts with regional priorities, affecting its ability to fulfil its strategic mandate.
47. The SNA survey analysis reveals a noticeable gap between Decade structures and the organizations represented within them, highlighting the need for improvement in the Decade's second half (Annex 13). It also indicates variability in stakeholders' access to Decade governance and coordination structures. The SNA survey results indicated that the DCU is the most accessible structure (81%), followed by the DCOs (76%), DCCs (66%) and NDCs (67%). Conversely, the Corporate Data Group (35%), Foundations Dialogue (32%) and Technology and Innovation Group (6%) are the least accessible by the other Decade structures. Both interviews and surveys note that centralized decision-making often bypasses consultation processes, with limited transparency on progress and funding as well as difficulties in accessing key information.

<sup>3</sup> Based on DCU lists from November 2024, excluding representatives from IOC, UNESCO and other UN entities (n=227). Including them (n=28), Europe and North America's share rises to 63%.

<sup>4</sup> Africa accounts for 9%, Asia-Pacific 16%, LAC 10% and the Arab States 4%, while SIDS represent 4% and LDCs 7%.

### 3.1.7. Interactions among decentralized structures

**Key Finding: Decentralized structures show variation in effectiveness when interacting with Decade Actions, NDCs, and each other, influenced by resource disparities and coordination challenges.**

48. Decentralized structures vary in effectiveness at bridging global priorities with regional and local contexts. While the roles of DCCs, DCOs and NDCs are critical for Decade Actions, resource disparities, ownership issues and coordination challenges affect their performance. For example, while the DCC Coastal Resilience in Bologna mobilizes resources for coordination and offers strong support to Actions, some others are less able to do so. The unexpected closure of the DCC Northeast Pacific left several Actions unsupported and as of December 2024, the **Ocean Visions-UN DCC** ceased operations due to funding shortfalls, indicating the need for sustained resources and transition plans. FGDs emphasized the need for sustained resource mobilization and a strategic off-boarding solution to ensure continuity and stability for Actions reliant on decentralized structures.
49. NDCs' engagement with other decentralized structures varies in effectiveness, especially in regions with scarce resources or weaker organizational frameworks, such as the absence of dedicated secretariats. While the Foundations Dialogue and Ocean Decade Alliance are key mechanisms for resource mobilization for coordination and Actions, with notable success, as also highlighted in this report, their overall impact on building strategic partnerships and securing broad-based resources could be further strengthened.
50. Some decentralized structures demonstrate strong partnerships, particularly in Europe, where NDCs and DIPs share knowledge and resources. However, regions such as TAC, the Arctic and the South Pacific lack formal mechanisms for coordination and knowledge exchange. Nevertheless, the evaluation identified successful practices in the DCO Western Pacific, highlighting an example of structured coordination that could inform efforts to strengthen similar mechanisms in other regions (Box 2). To support these efforts, strengthening financial data collection and reporting is important for enabling effective monitoring during the second half of the Decade while also providing clear directions for resource mobilization to enhance decentralized structures (a brief analysis of DCO and DCC financial data is given in Annex 18).

**BOX 2.*****Regional and national coordination: The DCO Western Pacific case***

The DCO Western Pacific, hosted by the IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (**WESTPAC**), has effectively coordinated National Decade Committees and four Decade **Actions** by leveraging partnerships with Member States and stakeholders from the public and private sectors, academia and non-governmental organizations, including mobilizing resources from the private sector. In close collaboration with the UNESCO Regional Office, it played a key role in co-designing and implementing Actions that advance marine spatial planning, reduce plastic pollution, expand capacity-building through six Regional Training and Research Centres and launch 11 projects under the Kuroshio Current study. Notable milestones, including engaging over 4,200 participants in two regional Decade conferences, have further strengthened regional partnerships. Important challenges included limited human resources, communication gaps with Decade governance structures and delays in the endorsement of submitted Actions. Major lessons for other regions are to collaborate closely with the UNESCO Regional Offices, establish cross-sector partnerships at the Member State and regional levels and align programmes with Member States' needs and priorities by involving stakeholders in the design process.

*Source: INOMER, UN Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation Interviews and document review (Full case study is available in Annex 17)*

**3.1.8. Engagement of institutions at national level**

***Key Finding: NDCs amplify impact through multi-level, cross-sectoral collaboration, yet in underrepresented regions, persistent systemic barriers, resource-constrained governance models and fragmented policy integration present challenges to their effectiveness.***

51. The Decade primarily engages with national institutions by establishing and supporting NDCs. Successful examples include Portugal's NDC which unites over 60 entities, including key government agencies, academia, NGOs, and the private sector, under ministerial leadership; Belgium's NDC, aligning regional and federal efforts with strong support for Actions; India's NDC, forming and empowering decentralized subcommittees focused on, for example, ocean observation, outreach and capacity development; Benin's NDC, engaging with key ministries and collaborating with journalists, schools and local communities; and New Zealand's NDC, integrating Indigenous perspectives into ocean science and the Decade framework.
52. In Kenya, in the absence of a formal NDC, the Decade's framework has catalysed progress in marine spatial planning, illustrating the flexibility of the Decade's structures to influence national policy agendas. Similarly, in Australia, national focal points and collaborations, such as with the Integrated Marine Observing System (IMOS), have effectively maintained coordination without a formal NDC.
53. Regional variations in NDC effectiveness highlight broader disparities in resources and capacity. Key challenges include scarce funding, particularly in developing countries, LDCs and SIDS, leading to inactivity in some committees, as well as challenges in communication, difficulties in maintaining regular stakeholder engagement and limited alignment between national, regional and global efforts.

## 3.2. Resource mobilization

This section addresses the following evaluation questions outlined in the Terms of Reference for the Mid-Term Evaluation, formulated by the UNESCO Division of Internal Oversight Services in consultation with UNESCO-IOC.

Identification of priority existing and potential resourcing and financing partners, analysis of engagement and approaches to increase engagement including the roles and responsibilities of different Decade groups and structures in achieving this (e.g. DCU, decentralized coordination structures, Ocean Decade Alliance, Foundations Dialogue, Member States, UN-Oceans members). This should include consideration of the resourcing needs for both coordination and Decade Actions.

- **How effective have resource mobilization mechanisms been so far in raising funds for the Decade (Actions and coordination)?**
- **What are the gaps, priority targets, and priority areas of focus for the mobilization of resources?**
- **What are new opportunities for the mobilization of resources for the Decade, including with new actors (e.g. private sector, institutions from the finance sector, international financing institutions) and potential modalities required?**

### 3.2.1. Effectiveness of resource mobilization mechanisms

**Key Finding: Resource mobilization has progressed through the active engagement of the Foundations Dialogue and Ocean Decade Alliance but would benefit from enhanced strategic focus and capacity.**

54. Stakeholders identify the lack of consistent and sustainable financial resources as the greatest challenge to the Decade's progress and success. Many Actions rely on

short-term funding from sources such as philanthropy or government support, making sustainability challenging, especially in developing countries, LDCs and SIDS. Limited resources also hamper coordination effectiveness between and within Decade structures.

55. The comprehensive Resource Mobilization Strategy, established at the outset of the Decade, provided a roadmap for securing finance and in-kind contributions but its implementation has been uneven. Reflecting this, survey participants find resource mobilization efforts limited in effectiveness, with only 17% rating them as effective in response to the evaluation question in the TOR regarding the effectiveness of "raising funds for the Decade (Actions and coordination)".
56. Direct financial support for coordination from bilateral donors and in-kind contributions through secondments have not fully met needs, considering the Decade's ambitious objectives. This, in turn, limited the DCU's capacity not only to raise resources but also to use secured funds effectively. For instance, delays in staffing affected the €1.1 million Ocean Decade Capacity Development Facility, funded by the Flanders Government. Similarly, conditions tied to the International Seabed Authority's \$5 million partnership fund, such as ensuring strategic visibility and contributing to decision-making, remain unmet, delaying its utilization.
57. Interviews and FGDs indicate that recent efforts to connect Actions with donors through the **Ocean Matcher** tool are a promising step and could play a key role in funding programmes and projects. Stakeholders see opportunities to enhance the tool's impact by involving diverse funding sources as well as clearer and transparent funding priorities.
58. Private-sector contributions to Decade coordination and Actions remain underdeveloped. A notable exception is Fugro's sustained in-kind support through senior staff secondments to the DCU, advancing data governance and sharing initiatives.
59. Survey participants identify limited awareness of the Decade among potential funders as the main challenge (40%) on resource mobilization, followed by competing donor priorities (39%) and insufficient coordination and private-sector engagement (both 35%) (Annex 5 and 12). Interviews and FGDs echo these observations, emphasizing the importance of leveraging support from multilateral development banks (MDBs) and in-kind contributions from UN agencies.



### 3.2.2. Gaps, priority targets and areas of focus in resource mobilization

**Key Finding: Resource mobilization priorities reflect a broad range of needs, from infrastructure development to blue economy research and innovation, with a focus on food security and community resilience, particularly in under-resourced regions. While this diversity ensures that multiple priorities are addressed, diverse stakeholder groups that were interviewed highlight the potential challenge of dispersing resources too broadly, underscoring the need for strategic prioritization.**

60. Resource gaps are severe in underrepresented regions, including Africa, the TAC and the Southern Ocean. Interviewees note that these gaps are particularly evident in areas such as ocean observation infrastructure, where insufficient investment exacerbates challenges such as sea-level rise and disaster preparedness. For example, the Southern Ocean remains critically under-observed, hindering progress in climate modelling and marine ecosystem management. Other priority areas for investment include nature-based solutions like mangrove restoration, coastal resilience and climate-smart marine spatial planning. Interviews also identified the need for improved governance frameworks for marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdictions and enhanced data sharing and interoperability as critical priorities.
61. Regional prioritization is essential for resource mobilization, as LDCs and SIDS often lack the capacity and infrastructure to fully engage in Decade initiatives. This challenge is frequently cited in interviews and FGDs, with several respondents highlighting limited research capacity, lack of incentives, and the need for SIDS and LDCs to develop and fund their own nationally driven ocean science agendas. Addressing these gaps requires increased targeted investments in ocean literacy, research capabilities and data-sharing systems.
62. Interviewees from various stakeholder groups emphasized that to attract attention and investment, priorities should align with the pressing needs of Member States, with the Decade demonstrating its broader impact beyond science and research. Proposed key focus areas include the blue economy, which enhances food security, strengthens value chains and demonstrates the tangible benefits of natural

resources. They also believe that focusing on results like job creation, revenue generation and community well-being can drive greater investment in ocean science and innovation.

### 3.2.3. New opportunities for resource mobilization

**Key Finding: The Decade has significant opportunities to expand its resource base through innovative financing, private sector engagement and multilateral development partnerships.**

63. The evaluation found several opportunities for resource mobilization to support the Decade. The private sector emerged as a key player, with an emphasis on attracting industries such as shipping, fisheries, offshore energy, insurance and tourism to contribute financial or in-kind resources. Company-driven initiatives, such as **Uniqlo** and **Prada's** allocation of sales to Decade projects, provide scalable models for mobilizing resources and raising awareness. Aligning Actions with corporate ESG strategies offers additional untapped potential. Regulatory changes in Europe requiring non-financial disclosures position Decade projects as valuable sources of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) data for compliance.
64. Interviews and surveys identified solutions such as biodiversity credits and environmental restoration projects as avenues for corporate funding mechanisms. They also highlighted innovative approaches such as **Debt-for-Nature Swaps** and **Blue Bonds**, exemplified by Seychelles' partnership with the World Bank, as tools for sustainable financing, showcasing successful pathways for scaling such initiatives globally.
65. Stakeholders identified international financial institutions (IFIs), notably the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), African Development Bank (AfDB), Inter-American Development Bank (IaDB), and Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), as critical actors in diversifying funding streams. Survey findings suggest that, after IFIs (53%), government science and innovation agencies (46%) and national development funds (41%) are key targets for resource mobilization (Annex 5 and 12).
66. Interviews and FGDs suggested expanding the **Foundations Dialogue** and **Decade Alliance** to include MDBs and private-sector actors to strengthen funding coordination. Partnerships with MDBs and adaptation funds could co-finance initiatives in fisheries management, marine pollution and coastal infrastructure,

particularly in underrepresented regions like West Africa and the TAC. The Coastal Resilience DCC's success in securing climate resilience funding for the Caribbean illustrates this potential. Interviews also identified Saudi Arabia's \$60 million **pledge** for climate and environmental efforts as an additional funding opportunity.

67. The Decade Cooperation **Roadmap** (2024) between the European Commission (EC) and IOC provides a significant avenue for resource mobilization. Programmes like Horizon Europe, the **EU Mission "Restore Our Ocean and Waters"** and the **European Digital Twin of the Ocean** offer financial and in-kind support. However, stakeholders with limited experience in EC funding recount challenges in accessing these resources, highlighting the need for targeted capacity building.
68. The survey found that some Actions have used funding mechanisms such as venture capital for marine technologies, contributions associated with corporate social responsibility schemes (e.g. Google's Global Fishing Watch) and blended financing models (e.g. PROBLUE, Blue Action Fund), all of which could be further expanded. Other promising approaches such as Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), and debt swaps (e.g. Ecuador's Galapagos initiative) show significant potential for diversifying resource mobilization (Box 3).

### BOX 3.

#### *Examples demonstrating scalable resource mobilization strategies*

**The Blue Action Fund** provides a scalable and replicable model of resource mobilization through partnerships among governments, international organizations, NGOs and private donors. It funds marine protected areas and supports sustainable livelihoods for coastal communities in biodiversity-rich areas such as Tanzania, Indonesia and Madagascar.

**ORRAA's** climate-resilient coastal communities projects mobilize a mix of public and private funding to support small-scale fisheries and coastal ecosystem restoration. By leveraging innovative financial mechanisms, such as microinsurance and resilience bonds, the initiative enhances the adaptive capacity of vulnerable coastal communities to climate change.

**The Global Fishing Watch**, a collaboration between Google, Oceana and SkyTruth, uses satellite data and AI to track illegal fishing activities. This initiative combines in-kind support (technology and expertise) with funding to improve fisheries management and marine protection globally.

*Source: INOMER, UN Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation Stakeholder Survey, 2024*

## 3.3. Science and knowledge delivery

This section addresses the following evaluation questions outlined in the Terms of Reference for the Mid-Term Evaluation, formulated by the UNESCO Division of Internal Oversight Services in consultation with UNESCO-IOC.

Processes and effectiveness of soliciting Decade Actions to fulfil priority gaps and needs identified through Decade and partner-led priority setting processes.

- **What mechanisms have been put in place to identify gaps and priorities in ocean science and knowledge including Member States' needs and to scope the corresponding calls for Actions?**
- **How can the Decade encourage more partners to see the benefits in registering their ongoing Actions?**

Progress and achievements of endorsed Ocean Decade Actions in generating and delivering relevant and transformative ocean science and knowledge to inform global, regional, and national policy and decision making in the public and private sector.

- **How are Member States taking into consideration Decade challenges into their national development plans, national commitments under global policy instruments (e.g. national climate strategies, Nationally**
- **To what extent have Decade Actions succeeded in mobilizing policy makers and other users of ocean science, including industry, and making them pay attention to ocean science?**

### 3.3.1. An overview of the UN Ocean Decade Actions

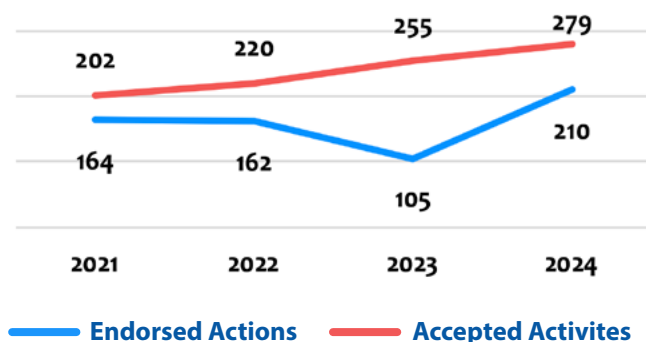
**Key Finding: From 2021 to 2024, 641 Actions were endorsed, with a majority from Europe and North America, focusing on ecosystem protection and capacity-building, but with limited participation from SIDS and LDCs.**

69. The Decade's objectives and outcomes are implemented through Decade **Actions**<sup>5</sup>, which include programmes, projects, activities and contributions

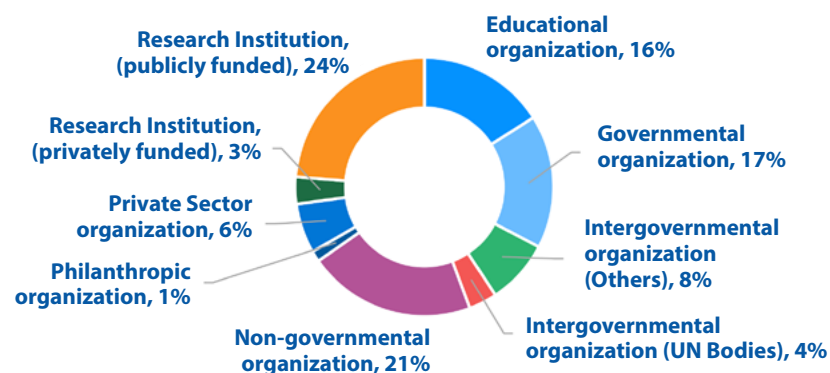
<sup>5</sup>In this report, "Actions" refers to projects and programmes. The typology of Ocean Decade Actions can be found in Annex 1.

spanning science, policy and outreach. According to DCU data, between 2021 and 2024, a total of 1,043 Actions were submitted, with 641 endorsed, while 26% were not endorsed and 5 were withdrawn<sup>6</sup> (Figure 5). The majority of endorsed Actions were submitted by public research institutions (24%), NGOs (21%) and governmental organizations (17%) (Figure 6). Gender data are missing for the majority of endorsed Actions, with 466 (73%) categorized as “Not available”. Among Actions with available gender data on leadership, 90 (52%) are led by females and 84 (48%) by males.

**FIGURE 5.**  
*The number of Decade Actions increased each year*



**FIGURE 6.**  
*Public research institutions, NGOs, and governments led endorsed Actions*

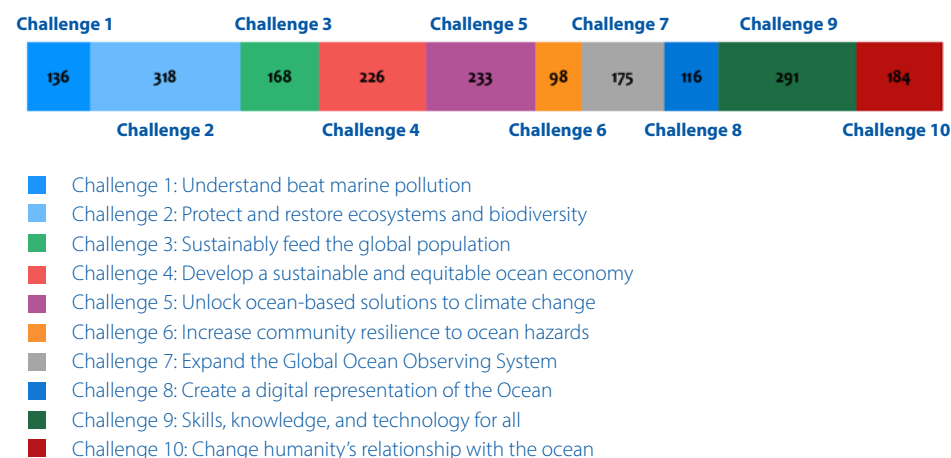


Source: INOMER, based on DCU data

<sup>6</sup> As of January 2025, 12% of Actions were under review by the DCU.

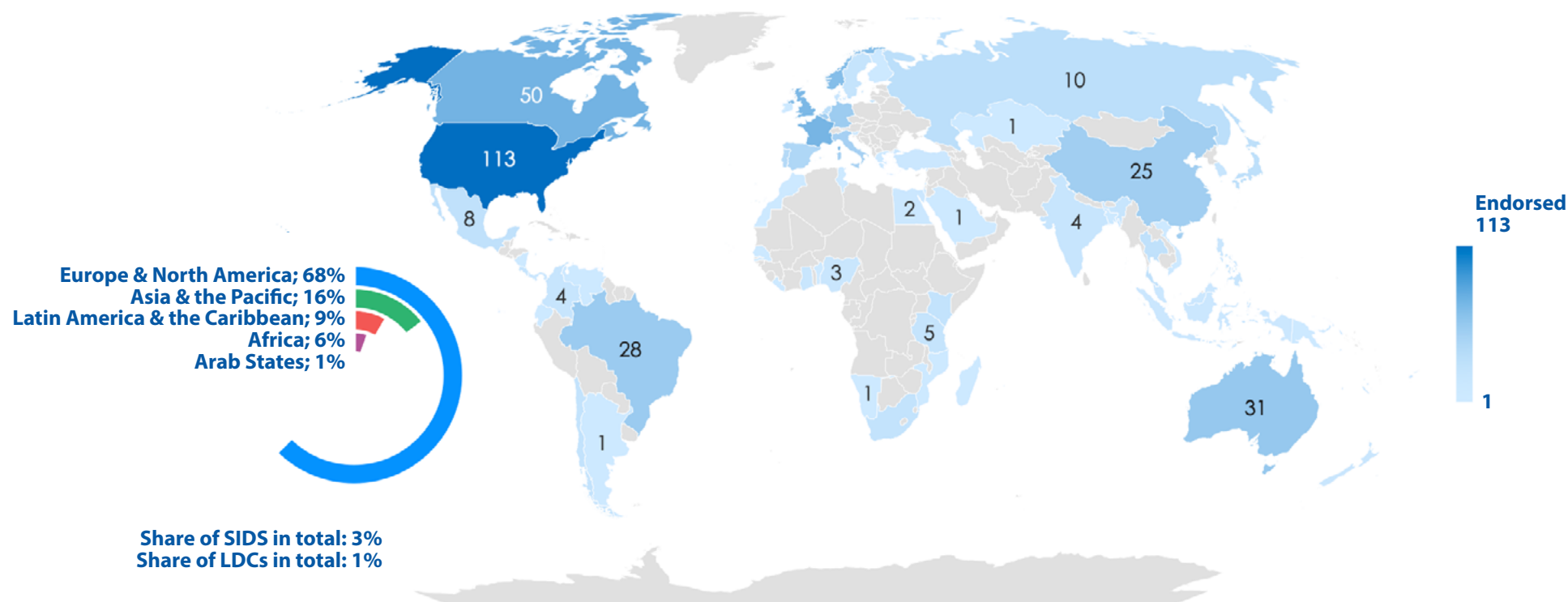
70. Endorsed Actions address multiple Ocean Decade Challenges, with the highest shares focusing on Protecting and Restoring Ecosystems and Biodiversity (16%) and Skills, Knowledge and Technology for All (15%), emphasizing conservation and capacity-building. In contrast, challenges such as Increasing Community Resilience to Ocean Hazards (5%) and Creating a Digital Representation of the Ocean (6%) have a lower number of Actions (Figure 7).

**FIGURE 7.**  
*Most endorsed Actions target ecosystem protection and skills development*



Source: INOMER, based on DCU data

71. Endorsed Actions were submitted by 93 countries, but their distribution across regions varies significantly, with Europe and North America accounting for the largest share (64%) (Figure 8). The proportion of SIDS and LDCs that have at least one endorsed Action is 28% of the total number of countries in each category. However, these Actions represent only 3% and 1% of the total globally endorsed Actions, respectively.

**FIGURE 8.***Endorsed Actions are concentrated in Europe and North America**Source: INOMER, based on DCU data*

72. Between 2021 and 2024, the DCU received 1,227 Activity submissions and accepted 958. The majority (68%) came from Europe and North America, followed by Asia and the Pacific (13%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) (13%). In comparison, Africa had 37 accepted Activities, the Arab States 24 and SIDS and LDCs a total of 20. More than half of the Activities were submitted by NGOs (38%) and public research institutes (18%). The most common types of accepted Activities were congresses, symposia and conferences (26%), followed by workshops, courses, training sessions and summer schools (15%) and publications such as academic articles, policy reports and books (12%).

73. While detailed financial information on the Decade implementation is not available, the IOC reports<sup>7</sup> that the DCU operates with an annual cost of \$1.3 million, excluding regular programme staff costs and additional resources required for its complete functioning. The DCU's team of 13-15 staff involves "two part-time regular programme staff, two full-time secondees from France and Japan, one full loan from Fugro, three project appointment staff, and eight consultants supported by extra-budgetary resources". IOC-led Decade programmes and projects have an estimated secured annual budget of \$7.6 million, leaving a funding gap of around \$13.3 million for full implementation.

<sup>7</sup>IOC/INF-1425: Update of IOC Contributions to the Ocean Decade and Resource Needs, 29 May 2023



### 3.3.2. Overall progress of the UN Ocean Decade

**Key Finding: While the Decade has elevated ocean awareness, particularly through international governance discussions, the ECOP network, media outreach and scientific community engagement, progress faces challenges related to funding, stakeholder engagement and public outreach, indicating the need for more effective participatory governance models.**

74. The evaluation found that the Decade successfully raised global awareness of ocean issues and advanced ocean science. This is supported by multiple interviews, highlighting an unprecedented global profile for ocean science and its integration into climate discourse, including through COP processes. The Decade also enabled innovative projects, such as large-scale data collection via the Moana Project in New Zealand, and promoted applied research, data-sharing platforms, and cross-sectoral collaborations, reinforcing its role in connecting science to societal needs. However, stakeholders identified resource mobilization and engagement as areas of limited progress. While 44% of survey respondents rated the overall progress positively, some expressed more cautious or reserved perspectives (Figure 9).

#### FIGURE 9.

**Stakeholder assessment: Mixed perceptions of the Ocean Decade's overall progress (n=866)**



Source: INOMER, UN Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation Stakeholder Survey, 2024

75. The survey reveals mixed feedback, with key groups such as global and decentralized structures (57%), long-term stakeholders (58%) and the scientific community (54%) expressing reservations and the majority rating progress as

moderate, limited or minimal. Regionally, LAC (77%), SIDS (62%) and Europe and North America (54%) express similar concerns, pointing to differences between expectations and outcomes (Annex 5 and 12).

76. Survey respondents identified limited funding and in-kind resource mobilization (63%) as key challenges impacting the Decade's progress toward its objectives. Other prominent challenges included insufficient engagement from key stakeholders (45%) and limited awareness and public understanding of the Decade's objectives (37%), followed by other constraints (Annex 5 and 12). These findings align with interview and FGD results and point to the need for reinforced implementation strategies. Notably, this suggests a broader divergence between stakeholder expectations and the Decade's intended role, as some respondents appear to have anticipated that endorsement or participation would be accompanied by financial support from UNESCO-IOC.

### 3.3.3. Mechanisms to identify gaps and priorities in ocean science

**Key Finding: The Decade employs various participatory tools to identify priorities and scope Calls for Action. However, gaps in mechanisms, action plans and collaboration present challenges to effectiveness. Strengthening decentralized engagement, ensuring systematic approaches for underrepresented regions and developing monitoring frameworks will be critical to achieving greater impact.**

77. The Decade's governance and coordination system employs consultations, workshops and reviews to identify gaps and priorities in ocean science, aligning with Member States' needs. However, underrepresented regions like the Pacific and TAC lack mechanisms to systematically capture and tackle their specific challenges, leaving some critical issues insufficiently addressed. Limited collaboration with UNESCO programme sectors, including field offices, further challenges efforts to identify gaps and priorities effectively.

78. The **Vision 2030** document is a valuable strategic tool for setting priorities, but stakeholders note that it is not yet fully operationalized. While the document was prepared through a participatory approach and supplemented by White Papers outlining milestones and indicators, it lacks a detailed action plan and specific

mechanisms for implementation, making it more difficult to translate its strategic ambitions into tangible outcomes.

79. While the DAB provides regular input on scoping and gap analysis for Calls (Table 1), limited interaction with decentralized mechanisms affects its capacity to better inform Decade priorities.
80. Initiatives such as the **Africa Roadmap** exemplify good practices and highlight the importance of region-specific approaches. Developed through a participatory process, it serves as a strategic framework for regional priorities. However, a review of the plan and interviews revealed areas for improvement, including the absence of a detailed action plan, a monitoring and evaluation framework and stakeholder engagement strategies to provide an operational pathway and ensure broad-based participation across the continent. Furthermore, the roadmap would benefit from regular updates to address evolving challenges and priorities since its creation in 2019–2020. Regions such as the Pacific still lack similar roadmaps, while the **TAC Roadmap**, published in December 2024, was delayed, considering the Decade began in 2021.

### 3.3.4. Encouraging more partners to register existing programmes as Actions

**Key Finding: Encouraging more partners to register existing programmes as Decade Actions requires clearer communication, simplified processes and demonstrable benefits, particularly for developing countries, LDCs and SIDS.**

81. According to survey participants, contributing to global ocean science and conservation goals (77%) is the primary motivation for submitting Ocean Decade Actions. Networking and new collaboration opportunities (47%) and increased visibility and credibility through association with a UN-led initiative (46%) are also key incentives. For Africa and LDCs, access to funding is a significant driver for nearly half of survey respondents (Annex 5 and 12). Interview findings support these results, confirming similar motivations.
82. Survey findings indicate that the primary reasons for not submitting Actions are a lack of awareness about the Decade and its registration process (42%) and limited funding (34%), which were also confirmed in interviews. Multiple interviews also

cited unclear endorsement criteria and processes, as well as lengthy evaluation timelines (6–12 months for Actions and at least 6 weeks for Activities) as important disincentives.

83. The evaluation found that the misconception that endorsement guarantees funding has stopped some projects from progressing due to insufficient resources. Limited capacity is a barrier to submission for LDCs, SIDS, Africa and the Arab States (Annex 5 and 12). Many institutions in these regions also lack administrative support to navigate submission forms, unlike those in Europe and North America. Unreliable internet connectivity further hampers submissions in LDCs and SIDS.
84. Interviews highlight the challenges of identifying overlaps and creating synergies across programmes and projects as the number of Actions increases. Without formal coordination mechanisms, the process relies heavily on institutional knowledge within the DCU. However, capacity constraints in the unit have prevented the effective maintenance of databases, further complicating coordination efforts. In addition, the Decade website's limited search and filtering functionality makes it impossible for users to efficiently access, analyse and compare Actions, an area where several stakeholders, including representatives from decentralized structures, scientists, Action implementers and government bodies, expect to see improvement.
85. The DCU is piloting decentralized review and endorsement by NDCs to streamline this process. Interviews noted successful implementation in Portugal and India, which are involved in the pilot. However, stakeholders stress the importance of balancing decentralization with centralized oversight to ensure alignment and prevent redundancies in Actions. Concerns were also raised about disparities in NDC capacity, as some lack dedicated internal secretariat support to implement the process effectively. It is worth noting that some DAB members are not aware of this pilot, indicating a need to involve the DAB in strategic decision-making.
86. According to interviews, consolidating existing Actions, rather than accepting new submissions after endorsing a total of 60–70 programmes, will be a strategic priority of the DCU for the second half of the Decade, to achieve greater effectiveness. FGDs revealed mixed views, with some participants supporting this approach to enhance impact and optimize resource use, while others emphasized the importance of addressing gaps through new submissions.
87. Some DCCs, such as those focused on coastal resilience and ocean prediction, have made progress in consolidation efforts, although significant gaps remain both

geographically and thematically. As a solution, the DCU introduced communities of practice (CoPs) as flexible, digital collaboration spaces. The DCU identified an opportunity to enhance understanding of CoPs, as some DCCs have yet to fully recognize them as coordination mechanisms, while others employ similar approaches without labelling them as such.

88. As revealed by interviews and surveys, a critical gap in the Decade's approach is the under-representation of social sciences. The Decade often narrowly equates social sciences with ocean literacy, overlooking broader societal dimensions. This may limit the potential of programmes to achieve their full objectives to influence policy and management practices.

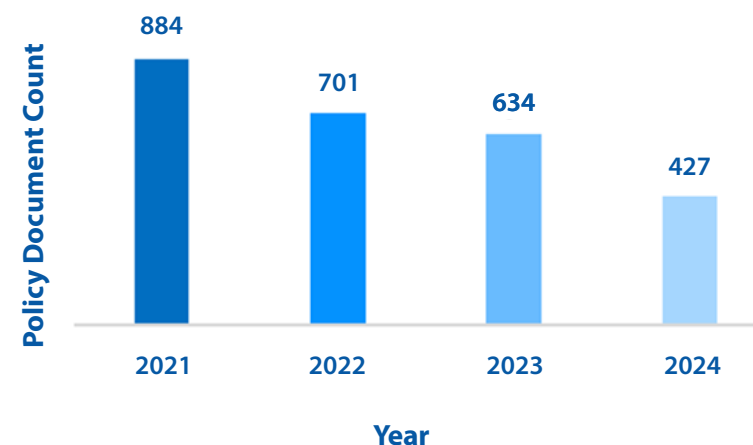
### 3.3.5. Influence of Decade Challenges on national policy frameworks

**Key Finding: While some countries have made progress in integrating Decade goals into national frameworks, opportunities remain to strengthen policy alignment through improved co-design and enhanced stakeholder engagement.**

89. The evaluation question on the “progress and achievements of endorsed Ocean Decade Actions in generating and delivering relevant and transformative ocean science and knowledge to inform global, regional, and national policy and decision making” was explored using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. When asked about the Decade's policy influence, 29% of respondents considered Actions effective or highly effective in encouraging national policymakers to prioritize ocean science, while 37% rated them as somewhat effective. Insufficient engagement of national policymakers in Decade activities is identified as the primary barrier to influencing national policy, as confirmed by interviews and 54% of survey respondents. Other notable challenges include insufficient visibility or awareness of Actions (38%) and limited alignment with national policy priorities (36%), reflecting interview findings about gaps in co-design and need identification at the national level.

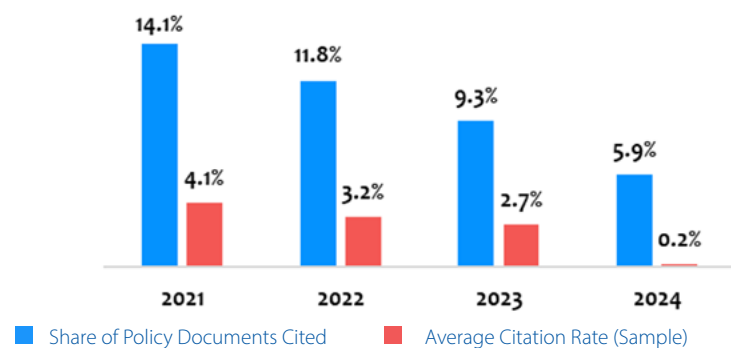
90. The Evaluation Team's analysis of 2,242 policy documents from 2021 to 2024, drawn from a global database of over 18 million policy documents, including grey literature across 188 countries with a view to “**decolonise research**”<sup>8</sup>, supports these findings (Annex 15) and confirms interviewees' and survey participants' remarks about decreasing interest and lost momentum in the Ocean Decade. As seen in Figure 10, the production of Decade-related policy documents declined by 52% between 2021 and 2024. UNESCO produced nearly half of the intergovernmental policy documents, with the IOC accounting for 20% of this share. The citation impact of Decade-related policy documents has declined as well, though it remains above average, indicating ongoing influence (Figure 11). UNESCO accounts for 20% of citations received, with the IOC contributing 20% of UNESCO's share.

**FIGURE 10.**  
*Decline in Decade-related policy document production*

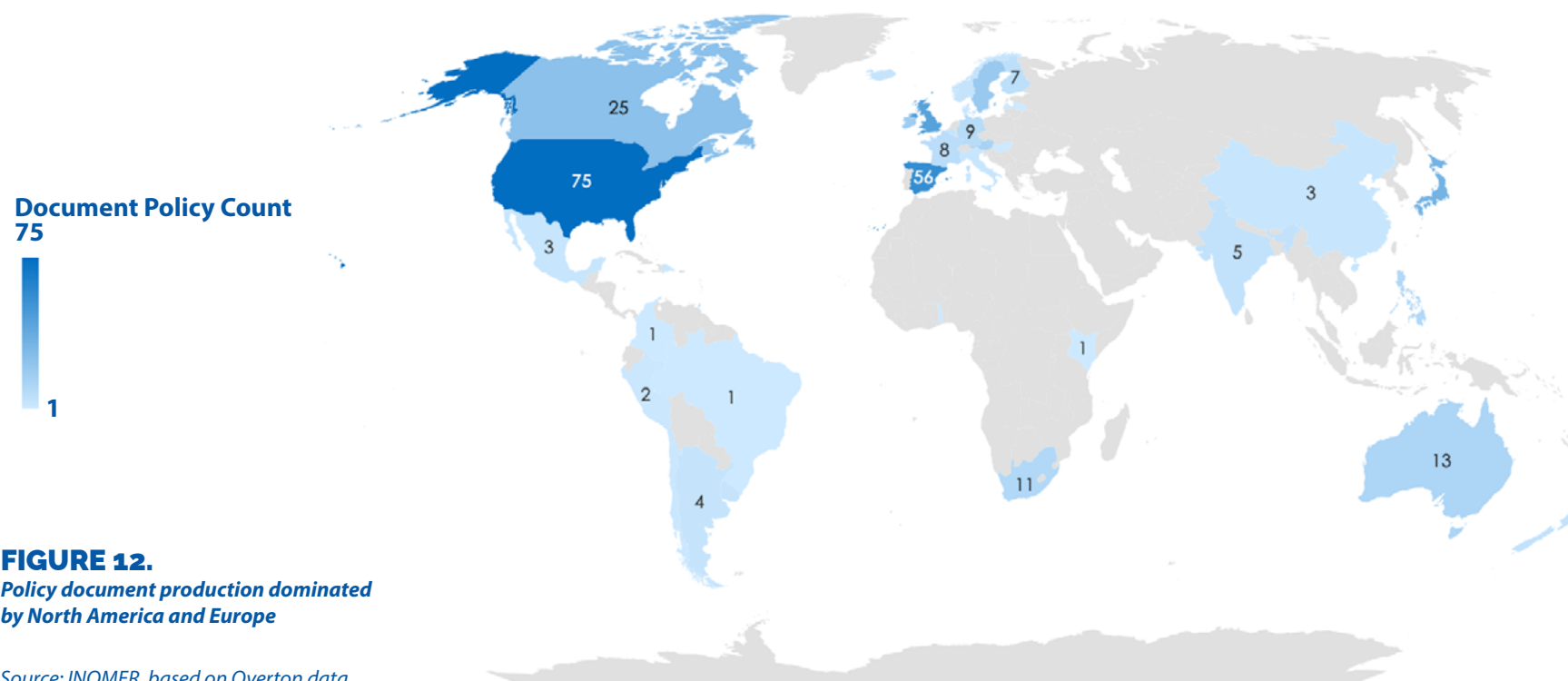


Source: INOMER, based on Overton data

<sup>8</sup> **Overton** is the world's largest database of policy and grey literature, containing over 18 million documents from 188 countries. It is used by policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. By incorporating grey literature, it helps reduce bias and uncover diverse perspectives, supporting efforts to “**decolonise research and teaching**”. Overton has a broad conception of policy documents, considering them as documents written by or primarily intended for policymakers, serving as sources of evidence or guidance in the policymaking process.

**FIGURE 11.***Ongoing policy influence despite reduced citation of Decade-related policy documents**Source: INOMER, based on Overton data*

91. The US, Spain and the UK are leading contributors to Decade-related policy documents (Figure 12). The documents analysed focused primarily on climate change and biodiversity and demonstrated strong connections to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This highlights progress in linking Decade priorities to global sustainability goals. While topics related to practical tools and processes for implementation have received comparatively less attention, this presents an opportunity to strengthen alignment between Actions and policy priorities.
92. Limited stakeholder engagement and underutilization of the NDC mechanism present challenges to aligning national and regional priorities with Decade objectives. Resources from the DCU, such as the **Best Practice Manual** for NDCs and **co-designing guidance** and recommendations, remain underused,

**FIGURE 12.***Policy document production dominated by North America and Europe**Source: INOMER, based on Overton data*



primarily due to resource scarcity in under-represented regions. Stakeholders also emphasize that without tools to map Actions or effective M&E frameworks, endorsed programmes often operate in silos, reducing their impact on policies or global objectives.

93. The evaluation identified successful practices of policy influence, including Canada's inclusion of Indigenous communities, South Korea's NDC-driven R&D initiative, Portugal's plans for a marine science funding programme and Benin's alignment of ocean research with government programmes. In the Caribbean, efforts to develop a CARICOM **Blue Economy Policy** offer an opportunity for alignment with the Decade's objectives. Initiatives such as **OBON**, **Seabed 2030** and **GOOS** show how collaboration among scientists, users and governments can align science with policy needs (Box 4).
94. The International Platform on Ocean Sustainability (**IPOS**) initiative aims to fill a gap by translating global assessments into national policies and policy actions. However, stakeholders have raised concerns about whether new initiatives like IPOS will strengthen existing systems or divert resources and attention.

#### **BOX 4.**

##### **Examples of Decade Actions with impacts on policy and ocean management frameworks**

**Seabed 2030**, an initiative focusing on creating a comprehensive map of the global ocean floor by 2030, has catalysed significant advancements in ocean science and policy, including international collaboration, public-private partnerships and awareness of the importance of seabed mapping. For instance, the initiative has directly influenced national legislation and funding allocations, such as a proposed funding bill in the U.S. Congress to map the Great Lakes fully.

**GOOS** is a collaborative initiative that has strengthened global ocean observation systems, integrating data on ocean health, ecosystems and climate change. It has informed policies under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), particularly in recognizing the link between ocean health and climate action. The initiative has directly contributed to integrating ocean considerations into global climate negotiations and promoting blue carbon strategies.

*Source: INOMER, UN Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation Stakeholder Survey, 2024*

### **3.3.6. Mobilizing policymakers and industry through Decade Actions**

#### **Key Finding: Efforts to engage policymakers and industry in Decade Actions show variation, with challenges in awareness, outreach and the translation of scientific outputs into results.**

95. Interviewees praised the success of high-profile events, such as the Ocean Decade **Conference** in Barcelona, in attracting and involving policymakers. Regular engagement, especially in developing regions, LDCs and SIDS, through Decade structures and Actions has been difficult, primarily due to low level of awareness, coordination challenges and the lack of a policy communication toolkit – such as tailored communication and knowledge products like dashboards and policy briefs showcasing benefits and impact. Successful examples, such as the Ocean Decade Tsunami Programme (ODTP), demonstrate how targeted outreach strategies, preparedness tools and awareness campaigns can enhance engagement and mobilization efforts (Box 5).
96. Stakeholders noted that while the Decade promotes open data and open science, transparency remains an area for improvement in both data accessibility and operational structures. Open data is encouraged, but delays in data sharing continue to present challenges, often due to systemic issues within the scientific and academic community, such as publication-related incentives, which the Decade alone cannot resolve, according to the stakeholders. Efforts exist to make science widely available, but gaps remain in coordination, clarity of responsibilities and ensuring governments can effectively use the data.
97. Private sector involvement varies, concentrated among early adopters of the Decade and limited in scope despite its critical potential role. Examples of successful practices include **Fugro's** data-sharing initiatives, **Ørsted's** biodiversity measures and exploration of ocean carbon credits, **Prada's** collaboration on Ocean Literacy programmes and **Uniqlo's** support for ocean science education.
98. Potential pathways suggested by stakeholders to increase private sector participation also include stimulating ocean-focused entrepreneurship and collaborating with platforms like **1000 Ocean Startups** to help transform scientific outputs into market-ready solutions and build science-industry partnerships. In addition, various stakeholder groups highlighted the importance of engaging with CSOs and NGOs to enhance accessibility and grassroots impact while enabling two-way knowledge exchange with local communities.



**BOX 5.*****Ocean Decade Tsunami Programme:  
A case study on global cooperation and community engagement***

The Decade Actions, through initiatives such as the **ODTP** of the IOC-UNESCO, have effectively mobilized policy-makers, scientists and other ocean science users to address tsunami risks. The programme has facilitated the establishment of advanced tsunami warning systems, such as 24/7 monitoring services in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean, supported by Member States like China, Germany and the United States, with investments exceeding \$450 million.

Efforts like the Tsunami Ready Recognition Programme have equipped communities in India and Cyprus with actionable preparedness strategies, while educational campaigns like #GetToHighGround and tools such as 'The Tsunami and Earthquake Fighter' game have raised awareness among younger generations. Simulation exercises, including NEAMWave and CARIBE WAVE, have engaged over 3.5 million participants globally, strengthening response mechanisms. Despite these achievements, the programme's integration with broader Decade goals remains limited, underscoring the need for sustained funding, expanded research capacity and a multi-hazard approach to align disaster resilience with global ocean governance objectives.

*Source: INOMER, UN Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation Interviews and document review (Full case study is available in Annex 17.)*



### 3.4. Engagement of UN-Oceans

This section addresses the following evaluation questions outlined in the Terms of Reference for the Mid-Term Evaluation, formulated by the UNESCO Division of Internal Oversight Services in consultation with UNESCO-IOC.

Progress of Ocean Decade Actions in supporting relevant United Nations global policy frameworks and targets and contributing to the mandates of members of UN-Oceans. This should include consideration of the engagement of UN-Oceans members in the Ocean Decade.

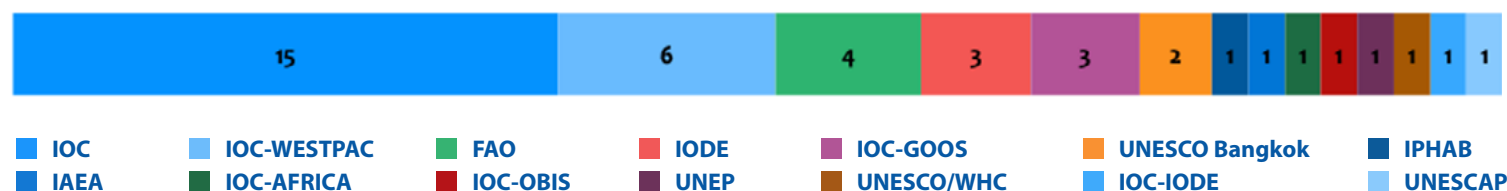
- **How effectively has the Decade's global governance engaged with UN-Oceans and its members? What are opportunities for strengthening UN-Oceans' members' contribution to the Decade?**
- **How do Decade Actions support UN global policy frameworks and normative instruments (UNCLOS, UNFCCC, UNCBD, BBNJ, etc.)?**
- **What are incentives to connect other UN-Oceans members' initiatives to Decade Actions?**

#### 3.4.1. Effectiveness of engagement with UN-Oceans and its member agencies

**Key Finding: The Decade's engagement with UN-Oceans, both as a group and with individual UN-Oceans members, has been insufficient due to limited efforts to address persistent issues and resource constraints, reducing its potential for transformative collaboration as a UN-wide initiative.**

99. Interviews and FGDs highlighted opportunities to better leverage UN-Oceans as a collaborative platform to align efforts across UN agencies. The Decade is often perceived as an IOC-led initiative due to a lack of systematic inter-agency collaboration and centralized coordination under the DCU, which limits opportunities for UN agencies to adopt visible and active roles. Many agencies reported feeling less recognized and more peripheral in participation rather than integral contributors, which has weakened engagement and strategic alignment.
100. In 2023, the DCU engaged a consultant to identify gaps, challenges and opportunities for enhancing UN-Oceans engagement and inter-agency cooperation. The findings from this report were expected to be presented during the IOC Executive Council in June 2024. However, delays in finalizing the report have raised concerns among stakeholders and emphasized the importance of timely remedial actions to maintain trust and momentum.
101. Interviews for this evaluation and the previous assessment attribute challenges in collaboration to several factors, including the complexity of the Decade's governance structure, limited awareness of engagement opportunities, resource and capacity constraints and a perceived mismatch between the Decade's programme-focused Actions and the broader, cross-cutting mandates of many UN agencies.
102. Some UN-Oceans members noted that the requirement for entities to submit Actions for endorsement, perceived as contrary to initial design-phase agreements, has created confusion and limited broader participation of UN agencies. According to interviews, this shift altered initial expectations and added an additional bureaucratic layer that some UN agencies view as unnecessary. Many agencies already have their own governing bodies for approval, and the requirement for external endorsement is seen as duplicative and potentially conflicting with their internal decision-making structures. Based on DCU data, only five UN entities outside UNESCO and IOC have registered a total of eight Actions (Figure 13)<sup>9</sup>. Interviews found that agencies such as UNEP, UNDP and FAO have aligned some ongoing programmes with Decade goals; however, there is an overall perception that these efforts are not fully coordinated or acknowledged.

<sup>9</sup>Indicates the number of Actions registered under the 'Intergovernmental Organizations (UN Bodies)' category in DCU data.

**FIGURE 13.***Low engagement of UN entities in Decade Action registration*

Source: INOMER, based on DCU data

103. Stakeholders recommended integrating the Decade with complementary initiatives, such as the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and Early Warnings for All, to enhance synergies. Specific suggestions included advancing marine spatial planning under the CBD framework, partnering with UNCTAD to improve port resilience in SIDS and collaborating with MDBs on projects related to coastal resilience, marine ecosystem management and the blue economy. Leveraging ongoing work by FAO on small-scale fisheries and climate adaptation and by IMO on reducing marine pollution, was also highlighted as critical to advancing shared objectives.
104. On a systemic level, stakeholders suggested decentralizing Decade activities to empower regional structures and UN agencies, potentially through strategic collaboration with UN Resident Coordinator Offices (UNRCOs). Proposals included creating a UN-Oceans subgroup focused on the Decade, making the Decade a standing agenda item at UN-Oceans meetings, collaborating with the UN Global Compact to attract private-sector partnerships and philanthropic funding and strengthening DAB members' engagement with the UN system. The evaluation also identified limited connections with other UN collaborative platforms, such as Issue-Based Coalitions and the Interagency Task Team on STI for the SDGs, as opportunities not yet fully realized to advance the Decade's objectives through enhanced partnerships.

### 3.4.2. Alignment of Actions with global policy frameworks and UN normative instruments

**Key Finding: Decade Actions align with UN global policy frameworks and normative instruments, but they would benefit from stronger policy influence mechanisms and more explicit alignment with the SDGs to enhance their relevance and impact.**

105. Decade Actions aim to support UN global policy frameworks such as **UNCLOS**, **UNFCCC**, **UNCBD** and **BBNJ** by building science-policy interfaces and promoting integrated approaches. They contribute to sustainable ocean management and evidence-based governance, advancing marine scientific research under UNCLOS and addressing ocean-climate linkages under UNFCCC through initiatives like blue carbon preservation and climate resilience. However, interviews revealed that while Actions amplify ocean-related issues in international policy forums such as the UN Ocean Conference and UNFCCC COPs, these contributions remain largely aspirational, with challenges in translating outputs into actionable policy integration.



106. In alignment with UNCBD, Decade Actions promote biodiversity conservation through marine protected areas, habitat restoration and integrating ecosystem services into decision-making, supporting global biodiversity goals such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. For BBNJ, stakeholders noted that Decade initiatives provide critical data, capacity building and methodologies to implement the BBNJ Agreement, promoting sustainable use and conservation of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction. However, stronger mechanisms are needed to ensure that Decade outputs align directly with implementation priorities.
107. Limited engagement with constituted bodies and reduced visibility in processes such as UNFCCC capacity building and adaptation measures pose challenges to full integration. Interviewees from diverse stakeholder groups emphasized the need to amplify ocean-related issues in global discussions and enhance collaboration across UN agencies on cross-cutting themes such as local and Indigenous knowledge inclusion.
108. Both interview and FGD participants underlined the importance of clearer links between the Decade and the 2030 Agenda, noting that many approved programmes do not have explicit connections to the SDGs. They recommended enhancing UNESCO-IOC messaging to consistently highlight how Decade Actions align with the SDGs and acknowledged the gradual progress being made to address this gap.

### 3.4.3. Incentives to connect other UN-Oceans members' initiatives to Actions

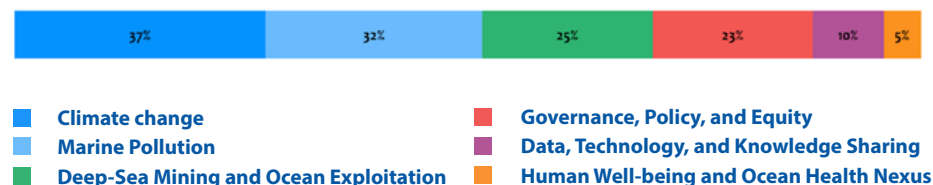
**Key finding: Strengthening the connection between UN-Oceans members' initiatives and Decade Actions enhances visibility, impact and alignment with global goals, but clearer dialogue would help further maximize the benefits of this collaboration.**

109. UN agencies often hesitate to register their programmes due to the complexity of the process, perceived challenges in alignment with mandates and questions around added value, particularly when they manage Member State-endorsed programmes with established visibility. Interviews highlighted the need for

streamlined processes and clear communication of tangible benefits to address these barriers.

110. The stakeholder survey identified key emerging issues for the Ocean Decade's second half, with 240 entries to an open-ended question. A thematic analysis highlighted climate change and marine pollution as top concerns, followed by risks from deep-sea mining and its potential harm to ecosystems, limited collaboration among countries, insufficient inclusion of Indigenous and marginalized groups and challenges in enforcing international agreements. The other issues noted include gaps in ocean monitoring, inequitable access to data in LDCs, limited availability of open data-sharing frameworks, limited investment in AI and big data, as well as the need to link ocean health with human well-being, including food insecurity, disaster resilience and the effects of pollution on community health (Figure 14). This picture reinforces the critical importance of effective and well-coordinated collaboration with UN agencies during the second half of the Decade.

**FIGURE 14.**  
*Climate change, marine pollution, and deep-sea mining among key concerns for the Decade's second half (n= 240)*



Source: INOMER, UN Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation Stakeholder Survey, 2024

111. The evaluation evidence indicates that the Decade framework serves as a unifying platform for science- and innovation-driven solutions to current and emerging challenges, aligning with the mandates of UN agencies. Structured and purposeful collaboration would enable UN agencies to enhance their impact through coordinated action, while the Decade would benefit from expanded expertise and reach.

## 3.5. Decade's M&E framework

This section addresses the following evaluation questions outlined in the Terms of Reference for the Mid-Term Evaluation, formulated by the UNESCO Division of Internal Oversight Services in consultation with UNESCO-IOC.

Effectiveness of the Ocean Decade Monitoring and Evaluation Framework in tracking progress and impact.

- **To what extent does the M&E Framework provide relevant and timely data on the implementation of the Ocean Decade?**
- **How does the M&E Framework work in practice both for implementers of Decade Actions and for the end users?**
- **How is the Ocean Decade M&E Framework connected with other M&E frameworks, such as of those of the IOC and UNESCO programmes, as well as initiatives of other UN-Oceans members?**

### 3.5.1. M&E framework's effectiveness in providing relevant and timely data

**Key Finding: The Decade's M&E framework tracks operational outputs but would benefit from enhanced tracking of results to generate meaningful insights and support strategic decision-making.**

112. Overall, the system in the M&E Framework Implementation **Manual** is well-conceived, aiming to provide relevant and timely data on the implementation of the Decade. Its structured approach, disaggregated data and alignment with global standards ensure relevance, while its regular reporting cycles support timeliness. However, it would benefit from a more rigorous results framework, a requirement that was also highlighted in a previous **IOS evaluation of the IOC**.

In addition, limitations related to the simplicity of some indicators, the reliance on existing data and the evolving nature of certain measures, such as proxy indicators and adaptation and iteration, highlight areas for refinement. Effective implementation requires comprehensive data collection across all framework indicators, alongside consistent disaggregation by geography, gender and career stage. Adhering to FAIR<sup>10</sup> data principles and aligning with SDG indicators are essential for enhancing transparency and usability.

113. The absence of a ToC, along with associated indicators<sup>11</sup> and SMART<sup>12</sup> targets, presents challenges for the Decade's ability to develop and implement an effective framework. Existing M&E tools, including recent updates, focus on tracking operational milestones and short-term outputs, such as activities and knowledge products within Actions. However, as interviewees have noted, they have not yet fully captured Decade-level progress or results in addressing the ten Challenges or advancing global policy goals.
114. The M&E framework's limited participation and uneven coverage leads to challenges in its ability to provide reliable and useful data. With a 40% response rate, 80% of which comes from developed countries, the evaluation findings attribute this lack to voluntary reporting processes as well as burdens on participants with detailed requirements. Responses were described as rushed and superficial, with self-reported metrics and limited verification mechanisms which may affect trust in the findings. These challenges are particularly pronounced for SIDS and LDCs, where limited capacities make meeting reporting requirements especially difficult.
115. The DCU's progress reporting is in line with the Manual in its focus on quantitative and qualitative reporting, alignment with Decade Challenges and data disaggregation. However, it does not address all framework indicators, such as funding gaps, infrastructure metrics and outcome-level indicators, nor does it ensure fully representative, unbiased and strategic data collection. While the report includes elements of progress reporting, such as trend identification and qualitative conclusions, it lacks systematic comparisons with previous periods, baselines and targets. These gaps may limit its overall effectiveness in supporting accountability, adaptive management and a clear assessment of the Decade's progress towards long-term objectives.

<sup>10</sup> Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable

<sup>11</sup> Indicators should adhere to the RACER criteria: Relevant (measuring the right thing in relation to the targeted objective), Accepted (recognized by staff and stakeholders), Credible (unambiguous and easy to interpret for non-experts), Easy to monitor (facilitating low-cost data collection) and Robust (resistant to manipulation).

<sup>12</sup> Specific, Measurable, Ambitious but Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.

116. Interviewees representing diverse stakeholder groups expressed concerns about the level of transparency and feedback mechanisms, reporting unawareness of how their data informs strategic decisions. This diminishes motivation to participate and reduces the framework's perceived value. While the DCU is committed to streamlining and simplifying reporting, further efforts are needed to balance data granularity with usability and to establish learning elements. Although Vision 2030's white papers outline clear milestones and indicators for addressing science needs under the ten challenges, these have not yet been fully integrated into the framework.

### 3.5.2. M&E framework for Action implementers and end users

**Key Finding: The M&E framework could be strengthened by incorporating result-based metrics informed by the ToC and providing accessible analysis to better support end users, including policymakers.**

117. Stakeholders interviewed from diverse groups view the framework as having limited effectiveness, citing the need for stronger indicators and improved feedback loops, reducing its utility for implementers. Many feel it does not fully capture the real-world impact of Actions, limiting its value as a monitoring and decision-making tool.
118. For end users like policymakers, the framework offers limited benefits due to challenges in content, data sharing and analysis. This lack of transparency reduces its relevance for decision-making and weakens alignment with Decade priorities. Furthermore, the framework lacks tailored tools to meet the needs of diverse stakeholders, such as grassroots organizations and local governments, making it less flexible and accessible. Without improvements in data sharing, inclusivity and adaptability, the framework may limit engagement with key groups, failing to advance the Decade's goals effectively.
119. Implementers and end users of Decade Actions need robust mechanisms for qualitative and quantitative reporting, supported by sufficient resources for decentralized coordination structures such as DCOs and DCCs. Iterative review processes to refine methodologies, address gaps and foster stakeholder

collaboration are essential. Furthermore, improving the accessibility and usability of M&E data through targeted capacity-building efforts and ensuring alignment with user needs will enable the framework to better meet the strategic and operational objectives of all participants.

### 3.5.3. Alignment of M&E Framework with other UN monitoring systems

**Key Finding: The M&E framework can achieve greater coherence and impact through better alignment with other UN systems**

120. The M&E Framework Implementation Manual establishes strong connections with other M&E systems within the IOC, UNESCO programmes and initiatives of UN-Oceans members, by aligning with global standards and leveraging existing structures. It integrates SDG indicators, such as SDG 14.1.1 for marine pollution, SDG 14.5.1 for protected marine areas and SDG 14.a.1 for the proportion of the total research budget allocated to marine technology, ensuring consistency with global objectives. The framework also builds on the methodologies and goals of the IOC, including GOOS and the Ocean Literacy Framework, to monitor ocean science capacities and societal engagement. These connections strengthen the framework's ability to deliver actionable insights and support global, regional and local ocean management objectives.
121. Challenges remain in fully integrating the Decade's M&E Framework with the diverse practices and methodologies of UN entities, particularly in aligning approaches and avoiding duplication. The absence of indicators recognizing contributions from specialized UN agencies limits the opportunity to fully reflect the breadth of efforts across the system. Stakeholder representatives from diverse groups emphasized the need for improved cross-agency collaboration to avoid overlapping initiatives, such as in coastal inundation and marine climate services and to enhance the efficiency and coherence of the Decade's M&E Framework. Addressing these areas by leveraging existing expertise, fostering alignment with established frameworks such as WMO's ToC-based approach and ensuring broader representation of contributions, could significantly improve the framework's inclusivity and impact.

### 3.6. Inclusivity, diversity and equity

This section addresses the following evaluation questions outlined in the Terms of Reference for the Mid-Term Evaluation, formulated by the UNESCO Division of Internal Oversight Services in consultation with UNESCO-IOC.

Progress in achieving inclusivity, diversity and equity in the Ocean Decade including across gender, geography, and generations and in embracing all forms of ocean knowledge.

- **What mechanisms have been put in place by the Ocean Decade for mainstreaming gender in Decade Actions and governance and coordination structures?**
- **What can be done to further engage stakeholders from countries that have been less engaged in the Ocean Decade to date?**
- **To what extent have Early Career Ocean Professionals been given opportunities to meaningfully participate in the Ocean Decade?**
- **To what extent has the Ocean Decade focused on UNESCO's Global Priority Africa, as well as other priority groups such as Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS), youth, indigenous peoples, etc.?**
- **To what extent has the Ocean Decade developed and operationalized processes to include alternative knowledge systems and holders (Indigenous and local knowledge, traditional knowledge) in governance and coordination structures and Decade Actions?**

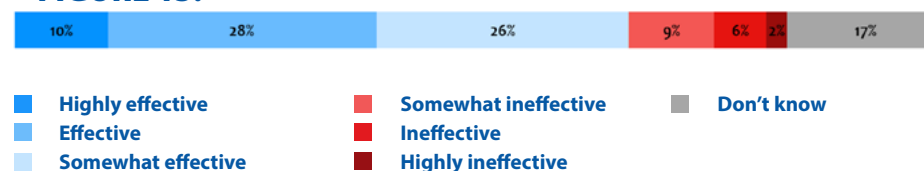
#### 3.6.1. Gender mainstreaming in the Decade's governance and Actions data

**Key Finding: The Decade demonstrates a strong commitment to gender equity, particularly for women in under-represented regions and young women in ocean science and governance. Strengthening collaboration with UNESCO's Gender Equality Division offers an**

#### *opportunity to amplify these efforts.*

122. The Decade deliberately incorporates gender considerations into its governance and coordination mechanisms, as well as Actions, by ensuring diverse representation in decision-making processes and implementation strategies. Survey findings show that while respondents acknowledge these efforts, they also identify areas for further progress (Figure 15). Efforts to enhance women's involvement are often not paired with meaningful opportunities for leadership or decision-making roles, though these are not under the control of the Decade. Stakeholders interviewed from various groups note that the Decade places particular emphasis on empowering women in developing countries, LDCs and SIDS, to address regional disparities through targeted actions and activities. While the primary focus has been on binary gender representation, future efforts could benefit from more explicitly engaging gender-diverse individuals to ensure full inclusivity in the Decade. In addition, while disability inclusion has not been a central focus, some targeted communication activities, such as during the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, have aimed to highlight the experiences of persons with disabilities, suggesting an opportunity for more systematic engagement in the future.

**FIGURE 15.**



Source: INOMER, UN Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation Stakeholder Survey, 2024

123. The recently established Gender Task Force, which has yet to begin drafting an action plan, demonstrates the Decade's commitment to embedding gender-sensitive practices into its governance and Actions. Collaboration with UNESCO's Gender Equality Division and gender experts from UN-Oceans members, who specialize in this domain, is critical for resource efficiency and ensuring the integration of best practices, especially given the delay in the action plan.



### 3.6.2. Engagement of stakeholders from underrepresented countries

**Key Finding: Stakeholders from less-engaged countries face systemic barriers such as low awareness, resource constraints and language disparities, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to promote inclusivity.**

124. Countries outside Europe and North America encounter significant barriers to participation in the Decade, including low awareness, capacity and resource limitations, weak coordination and a lack of localized initiatives. Underrepresentation is particularly acute in LDCs, SIDS, Asia and LAC, where tailored programmes and support are needed. Overstretched ministries with limited personnel and funding face challenges in participating in global initiatives. Interviewees suggest strengthening NDCs and creating region-specific outreach and action plans to help bridge the gap in engagement and to ensure these regions are better included.
125. Interviews and surveys indicate that language barriers limit participation in ocean governance, particularly in non-English-speaking regions of Africa and the LAC regions. Results from bibliometric and policy influence analyses reveal limited production of non-English documents (Annexes 14 and 15). The lack of multilingual resources, training materials and regional coordination makes it more difficult for stakeholders in these countries to fully engage in international ocean governance forums, contributing to the continuation of existing disparities. To address these challenges, interviewees and FGD participants recommend providing targeted support through event participation sponsorship, creating more accessible platforms for Decade-related outputs and establishing NDCs across a broader range of Member States.

### 3.6.3. Participation of Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs)

**Key Finding: The ECOP Programme effectively engages with young ocean professionals, including those from LDCs and SIDS; however, expanding financial support, addressing regional inequities and bridging the gap between capacity building and practical implementation could further enhance its long-term impact.**

126. The Decade has effectively engaged ECOPs through dedicated programmes and governance structures, ensuring their participation in panels, working groups and high-profile events. Training and capacity-building programmes focused on ocean governance, climate solutions and technical skills have supported ECOP professional development. Although financial assistance has been limited, it has enabled some ECOPs to participate in international conferences and connect with senior professionals.
127. Despite recent progress, challenges remain in providing meaningful long-term benefits for ECOPs. Inclusion, in many cases, is perceived as symbolic, with limited follow-up opportunities for collaboration or access to research literature. Regional inequities persist, with Pacific ECOPs and those from resource-limited countries facing prohibitive travel costs and funding gaps as well as visa issues, though these are not under the control of the Decade. Language barriers restrict access to resources in non-English-speaking regions, while ECOPs in academia generally have greater access to opportunities compared to independent or non-scientific professionals.
128. While some countries support ECOPs through incubation services for the creation of NGOs and start-ups, these initiatives remain sporadic. Most developing countries, SIDS and LDCs lack sufficient opportunities for ECOPs to apply their newly developed skills in practice, creating a persistent gap between capacity building and real-world implementation. Regional networks, such as the Western Indian Ocean Early Career Scientists Network (WIO-ECSN), provide a promising model for addressing these challenges, particularly in the LDC context, by encouraging collaboration, entrepreneurship and hands-on training (Box 6).

**BOX 6.****WIO-ECSN: A Model for Regional ECOP Development**

The Western Indian Ocean Early Career Scientists Network (**WIO-ECSN**), established in 2017 by the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (**WIOMSA**), a member of the Decade's Africa Task Force, demonstrates how regional networks can effectively support ECOPs' professional growth. With 427 members across 11 Western Indian Ocean states, the network has awarded 104 Marine Research Grants (2021-2024) with 53% female recipients, launched the Fenoy-X Platform to identify regional knowledge gaps and partnered with global initiatives like the Black in Marine Science Tidal Wave programme. The network empowers African youth through practical training in dive certification and coral restoration while integrating local communities into research projects. Notable entrepreneurship successes include the **Seaweed Café** in Tanzania, which helps women develop value-added seaweed products, showing the importance of targeted support in creating new businesses. Despite funding constraints and limited participation from SIDS, WIO-ECSN's success in fostering collaboration, entrepreneurship and capacity building offers a replicable model for other regions seeking to bridge the gap between ECOP capacity building, practical implementation and entrepreneurship.

Source: INOMER, UN Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation Interviews and document review (Full case study is available in Annex 17)

### 3.6.4. Focus on Global Priority Africa and other priority groups

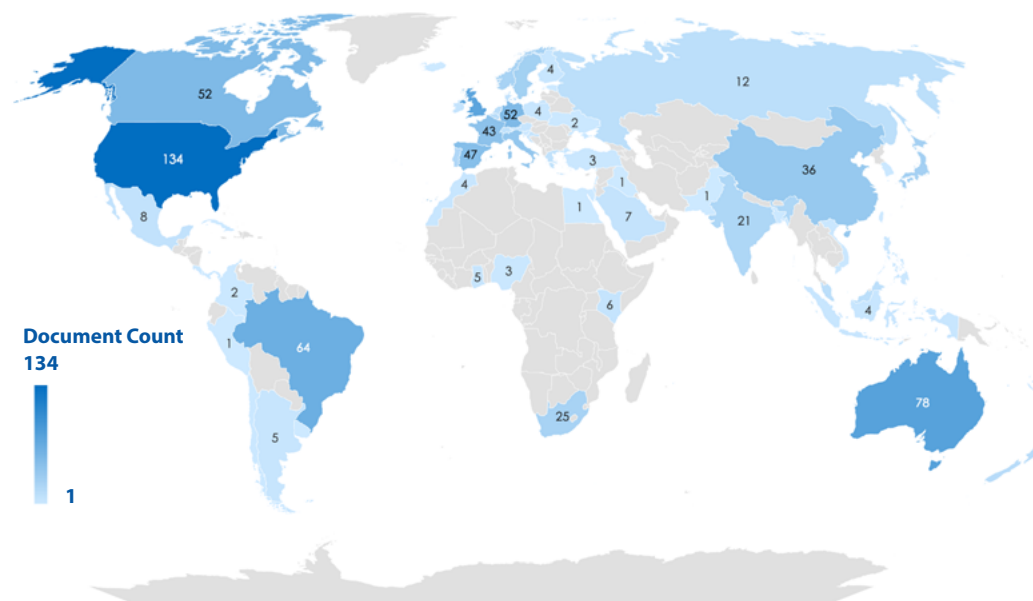
**Key Finding: The Decade prioritizes Africa, SIDS, LDCs, youth and Indigenous peoples but continues to experience systemic disparities, under-representation and funding gaps.**

129. Persistent structural disparities exist between developed and developing and least developed countries. Most Decade submissions originate from wealthier regions, including Europe, North America, China and Japan, reflecting inequalities in funding, institutional support and access to scientific and technological infrastructure. While these imbalances are common across global initiatives, the Ocean Decade was envisioned as a catalyst for transformation, aiming to address such disparities through systemic, inclusive approaches.

130. Efforts to bridge these gaps have seen some success in North-South and South-South collaborations, such as Portugal's support for Portuguese-speaking countries and Ireland's capacity-development programme in SIDS. Regional hubs like the **SPREP** show the potential for cross-regional learning. However, the bibliometric analysis highlights enduring North-South disparities, with minimal contributions from African countries and other developing regions and their exclusion from global research networks (Figure 16) (Annex 14).

**FIGURE 16.**

**Regional disparities in scholarly work production: Limited contributions from Africa and developing regions**



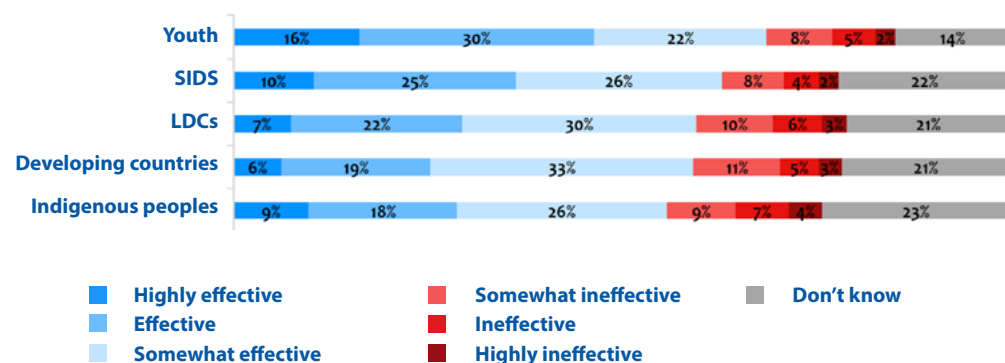
Source: INOMER, based on Lens data

131. Africa remains central to the Ocean Decade, aligning with UNESCO's Priority Africa and its **Flagship Programme 5** (2022–2029). Regional initiatives like the Africa Marine and Coastal Atlas and coordination centres strengthen ocean science capacity and address marine pollution and climate adaptation challenges. However, Africa's vast geographic and linguistic diversity adds complexity to coordination efforts. Interview and FGD participants emphasized that additional targeted funding and capacity development are needed to overcome these barriers.

132. Engagement from SIDS and LDCs is limited by coordination, resource and capacity constraints. Youth participation, supported by programmes like ECOPs, shows promise but is hindered by financial and logistical barriers, particularly in Africa, SIDS and LDCs. Indigenous communities face the challenges of tokenistic inclusion and sporadic engagement. Survey findings reflect these disparities, as underscored in interviews and FGDs, with youth engagement receiving the highest positive assessment (46% rating it highly effective or effective), followed by SIDS (35%), while other priority groups indicate a need for greater focus (Figure 17).

**FIGURE 17.**

**Stakeholder views on Ocean Decade engagement: ECOP-driven youth participation rated highest, but disparities persist (n= 725)**



Source: INOMER, UN Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation Stakeholder Survey, 2024

133. A thematic analysis of qualitative survey responses identified key barriers to inclusivity in the Decade, including a lack of resources and structural issues such as the dominance of wealthier countries (26% each), followed by gaps in local engagement and equitable research practices, as well as barriers to inclusive and multilingual communication (25% each) (Table 2). The most frequent suggestions from stakeholders consisted of increasing

local representation and leadership from SIDS, LDCs and developing regions, providing targeted funding for marginalized groups and integrating Indigenous knowledge into Decade efforts. Initiatives such as Ireland's **Our Shared Ocean** (OSO) programme demonstrate how tailored capacity-building efforts and strategic partnerships can address some of these challenges and support SIDS participation (Box 7).

**TABLE 2.**

**Stakeholder-identified barriers to inclusivity: Funding, structural issues, and local engagement gaps (n=142)**

Theme	Description	Frequency
Lack of funding and resources	Inadequate financial resources for marginalized groups (LDCs, Indigenous peoples, etc.) to fully participate in Decade initiatives.	26%
Structural issues	Initiatives are predominantly led by institutions from wealthier countries, with limited opportunities to incorporate perspectives from developing and under-represented regions. Bureaucratic and exclusive systems further restrict the participation of marginalized groups.	26%
Gaps in local engagement and equitable research practices	Insufficient involvement of local coastal communities, small-scale fishers and grassroots organizations in Ocean Decade initiatives, alongside research practices that often exclude or fail to benefit local researchers and communities.	25%
Barriers to inclusive and multilingual communication	Limited dissemination of Decade information to marginalized communities and developing regions, with a need for expanded multilingual outreach and communication tailored to diverse audiences.	25%
Representation and decision-making gaps	Limited representation of women, youth, Indigenous peoples and local communities in leadership and decision-making processes, including insufficient support for their active engagement.	21%
Capacity-building gaps	Limited training, mentorship and capacity-building initiatives to empower marginalized groups to lead or participate effectively in Decade activities.	9%

Source: INOMER, UN Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation Stakeholder Survey, 2024

**BOX 7.****OSO: A case study on capacity building and partnerships with Caribbean SIDS**

The **Our Shared Ocean** (OSO) programme is a funding initiative by the Government of Ireland focused on building capacity and partnerships for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) through competitive grants. As an endorsed Decade Contribution, OSO has undertaken capacity-building initiatives targeting SIDS through the development of a free online training course on the principles of Co-Design in the ocean space hosted by the **OceanTeacher Global Academy** (OTGA). To date, 103 learners have benefited from this online course. OSO also part-funded and developed a support and mentoring programme for 12 Caribbean SIDS project teams on the principles and applications of co-design. The aim is to strengthen these project ideas into fundable, actionable proposals. This initiative facilitated knowledge transfer and was adapted from a prior Decade course for African developing nations and tailored specifically for SIDS. Key achievements include facilitating knowledge exchange, fostering youth engagement in ocean research and nurturing innovative projects like bioplastics made from sargassum. OSO represents a model initiative for addressing the challenges faced by SIDS through the emphasis on co-design, capacity building and strategic partnerships. It serves as a bridge between global goals under the Decade and local needs in vulnerable regions, such as Caribbean SIDS.

*Source: INOMER, UN Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation Interviews and document review (Full case study is available in Annex 17)*

### 3.6.5. Inclusion of Indigenous, Local, and Traditional Knowledge

**Key Finding: The Decade has made progress in including Indigenous knowledge in its Actions, but strengthening participation and co-developing frameworks can further promote inclusive and resilient ocean management.**

134. The Decade has demonstrated efforts to include Indigenous knowledge in its Actions. Examples include incorporating traditional knowledge into marine spatial planning and nature-based solutions, as seen in initiatives like Ocean Voices and

Australia's Reef Recovery 2030. The Pacific DCC emphasizes traditional practices, such as Tabu Areas, in its Integrated Ocean Management programme, blending ancestral methods with modern science to develop innovative biodiversity strategies. In New Zealand, Māori knowledge is increasingly central to marine governance, offering a replicable model. The eDNA initiative engages with Indigenous communities in sampling, enriching scientific outcomes with local insights. Australia's "two-eyed seeing" framework combines Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge in addressing environmental challenges (Box 8).

135. The collaboration between DCU and UNESCO/SC/LINKS has achieved notable successes, such as including Indigenous knowledge in governance frameworks and marine spatial planning but faced challenges like staffing gaps and insufficient coordination between Headquarters and regional offices. The DCU is considering the creation of a small 'reference group' as an informal mechanism that can function as a sounding board on the inclusion of Indigenous and local knowledge in the Decade. However, as also explained in interviews, UNESCO's Interagency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples already has extensive experience working across the UN system and within UNESCO, offering expertise on governance issues and inclusivity. This group has previously supported the IOC in the design and implementation of the Ocean Decade, particularly in areas related to Indigenous Peoples and local communities and has contributed to the programmatic aspects of the Decade by helping deliver relevant elements. Rather than establishing a separate reference group, integrating the Decade as a standing agenda item within this existing group could enhance Indigenous engagement and ensure their perspectives are systematically embedded in Decade governance
136. Nevertheless, the limited structured mechanisms for equitable participation and an overreliance on formal scientific protocols continue to marginalize grassroots input. Language barriers and limited resources further hinder the inclusion of diverse knowledge systems and holders. Diverse stakeholders call for decentralized bodies to facilitate dialogue, allocate resources and ensure fair representation of Indigenous communities. Furthermore, documenting best practices, creating accessible outreach tools, building capacity and co-developing governance frameworks that recognize and incorporate diverse knowledge systems and holders could enhance collaboration and promote inclusive solutions.



**BOX 8.*****Bridging knowledge systems for ocean management:  
A case from Australia***

A demonstration of 'Two-Eyed Seeing' comes from an Australian island, where Indigenous knowledge connects tree flowering patterns with shark breeding behaviours. Traditionally, when specific trees flowered, communities knew to prevent children from swimming as sharks entered shallows to give birth. However, climate change and altered water temperatures have disrupted this long-standing correlation. The critical insight is rooted in the desire of Indigenous peoples to understand why their traditional indicators no longer align with shark behaviour, recognizing that Western scientific data on currents and water temperatures can help explain these changes. This case illustrates the essential complementarity between Indigenous knowledge, which identified the environmental change and Western science's ability to explain the underlying mechanisms - demonstrating how both knowledge systems together can provide a fuller understanding of oceanic changes past, present and future. This case highlights the importance of incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the Ocean Decade to develop effective, culturally informed ocean management strategies while strengthening community resilience.

*Source: INOMER, UN Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation  
Stakeholder Survey, 2024*

## 3.7. Communication and outreach

This section addresses the following evaluation questions outlined in the Terms of Reference for the Mid-Term Evaluation, formulated by the UNESCO Division of Internal Oversight Services in consultation with UNESCO-IOC.

Process and results of communicating the goals and actions of the Decade and measuring the results of communication and outreach with key targeted stakeholders.

- **What communication and outreach channels have been the most relevant and successful in promoting the Decade goals? What other channels need to be explored?**
- **What other groups of partners could support the amplification of Ocean Decade communications and outreach? To what extent have communication and outreach efforts reached diverse audiences (age, gender, geography, etc.)?**
- **What improvements can be made to communication and outreach efforts for the increased visibility of the Decade including via the Ocean Decade Strategic Communications Group and infrastructures such as the Ocean Decade Network?**

### 3.7.1. Effectiveness of communication and outreach channels

**Key Finding: The Decade's communication efforts have effectively promoted its goals within the ocean science community, but addressing inclusivity, accessibility and industry engagement can broaden its impact across diverse audiences.**

137. The Decade has utilized diverse communication channels, including social media, to disseminate information about ocean science and foster dialogue among policymakers, researchers and communities. Collaborations with influencers and community leaders have expanded its reach, while events such as the Barcelona Ocean Decade Conference have secured broad stakeholder commitments. Education initiatives, such as integrating marine science into school curricula in Chile and creative efforts like storytelling and art, have effectively built ocean

literacy and inspired action. The recently established Gender Task Force, which has yet to begin drafting an action plan, demonstrates the Decade's commitment to embedding gender-sensitive practices into its governance and Actions. Collaboration with UNESCO's Gender Equality Division and gender experts from UN-Oceans members, who specialize in this domain, is critical for resource efficiency and ensuring the integration of best practices, especially given the delay in the action plan.

138. Survey data show that stakeholders primarily learned about the Decade through professional networks or colleagues (28%), with some differences according to region and age. Formal communication channels, including the Decade's website (10%), social media (8%) and newsletters (3%), have relatively lower visibility and appeal. In addition, the minimal role of industry partners (1%) highlights weak connections with the private sector and opportunities for further engagement with industry associations for collaboration and outreach (Annex 5 and 12). Interviews and FGDs confirm these findings.
139. Interviewees identify underutilized platforms such as YouTube, supported by findings from the Global Media Scan (Annex 16) and podcasts as opportunities remain to better simplify scientific concepts for younger audiences and non-experts. Interviews and surveys emphasize the need for multilingual content and localized storytelling to enhance inclusivity in non-English-speaking regions. Suggestions include using gamified content, mobile apps and regional platforms like SPREP to expand outreach, while including Indigenous knowledge in communication strategies to promote inclusivity.
140. Under-represented groups would benefit greatly from enhanced communication and outreach efforts by the Decade. Leveraging local channels, such as community radio and more intensive and systematic collaboration with influencers, artists and philanthropic organizations can produce emotionally engaging content that resonates with diverse audiences. Interviewees also emphasized the need for tailored outreach strategies for under-represented regions, including LDCs and SIDS, to further diversify communication approaches. For example, face-to-face interactions are important in many Pacific cultures, where virtual communication can be challenging without prior in-person engagement.
141. A global media scan conducted by the Evaluation Team (Annex 16), as well as the social media statistics provided by the DCU, indicate digital communication as a strength of the Ocean Decade, with 58% of users aged 18–35 expressing strong interest in political engagement (24%), environmental concerns (15%) and scientific topics



(12%). Among digital platforms, LinkedIn stands out as the most impactful, with an average engagement rate of 14% per post, exceeding the platform's average<sup>13</sup>.

### 3.7.2. Strengthening communication and outreach

**Key Finding: Enhancing coordination and prioritizing localized, inclusive outreach can strengthen the Decade's communication.**

142. The draft Communications Strategy offers a comprehensive framework with diverse outreach methods and stakeholder engagement mechanisms. However, it could be strengthened by revisiting audience groupings, such as moving UN agencies to a primary group for all communication objectives and by adding 'UN' to its name and messaging. It should also reassess assets, actions and channels to better reach under-represented regions and groups. To enhance its impact, the strategy would benefit from clear KPIs, SMART targets, a detailed action plan with timelines and responsibilities, risk management strategies and an M&E framework.
143. The Decade's communication efforts need better coordination among governance structures like the Strategic Communications Group, NDCs, and regional and national entities to ensure consistent messaging. Limited and irregular interactions within and between these groups have reduced the effectiveness of outreach, reducing the Decade's visibility. Regular coordination mechanisms and clear roles and action plans for the SCG can help address these gaps.
144. Streamlining communication platforms like the **Ocean Decade Network** is essential. The DCU is considering integrating the network into the main website to reduce duplication, cut costs and enhance usability. A survey participant suggested transforming it into a 'LinkedIn for the Ocean community' with interactive features like surveys and notifications to increase engagement and amplify regional visibility.

### 3.7.3. Enhancing inclusivity in communications

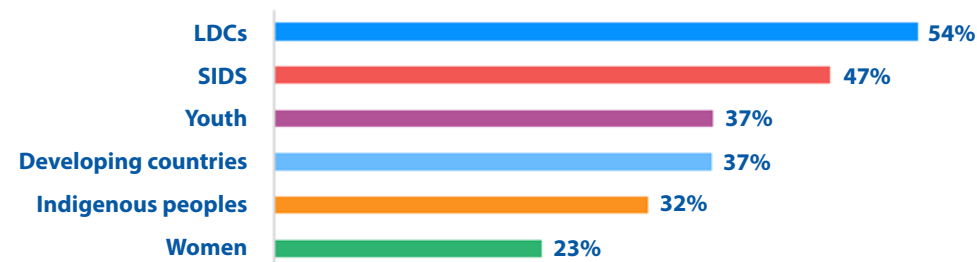
**Key Finding: The Decade effectively engages ECOPs and women in its communications; however, strengthening outreach to marginalized groups, non-English speakers and under-represented regions is necessary to ensure broader inclusivity.**

<sup>13</sup>According to **Social Insider**, the average engagement rate on LinkedIn is 3.85%.

145. Interviews and surveys indicate that the Decade has successfully engaged with diverse audiences through initiatives like the ECOP programme, which integrates young professionals into leadership and decision-making processes. Gender inclusivity has improved, with more women participating in conferences and leadership roles. Digital platforms and social media have facilitated broad message dissemination, particularly in well-connected regions. However, outreach efforts have faced challenges in engaging remote and marginalized communities, such as artisanal fishers and coastal populations, who often lack access to digital platforms and awareness of the Decade's initiatives. Language barriers persist, as most communication materials are in English and have been consistently highlighted as a barrier. Geographically, outreach has been concentrated in Europe and North America, with less representation in developing regions, LDCs and SIDS (Figure 18).

**FIGURE 18.**

**Gaps in Ocean Decade outreach: Increased efforts needed for underserved groups, LDCs, and developing regions (n= 725)**



Source: INOMER, UN Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation Stakeholder Survey, 2024

146. Interview and FGD participants suggest engaging with regional organizations such as the African Union, subregional bodies and civil society groups to amplify messaging across diverse contexts. Incorporating Decade-related topics in schools and educational institutions can inspire future ocean advocates, while civil society liaisons can connect with marginalized communities lacking digital access. Engaging with UNRCOs and UN agencies in the Decade is also essential for strengthening regional and local communication efforts.

### 3.8. Leveraging the Decade to contribute to UNESCO-IOC's vision and evolution

This section addresses the following evaluation questions outlined in the Terms of Reference for the Mid-Term Evaluation, formulated by the UNESCO Division of Internal Oversight Services in consultation with UNESCO-IOC.

Sustainability and impact of IOC-led Ocean Decade initiatives as a means of contributing to achievement of IOC High Level Objectives and in catalyzing new partnerships, activities or resource mobilization to support future evolution of IOC, including post-2030.

- **How can the Ocean Decade contribute to defining the future role for the IOC in the post-2030 Agenda, including in UNESCO's next Medium-Term Strategy (2029-2037)?**
- **What untapped opportunities exist to increase the impact of IOC programmes through the Decade to achieve their transformation (more sustainable, with a focus on informing policy and ocean management)?**

#### 3.8.1. Contribution to defining the future role of the UNESCO-IOC

**Key Finding: The Decade can shape the IOC's post-2030 role by embedding outcomes into long-term strategies and broadening thematic priorities in alignment with UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy.**

147. Interviews suggest that the Decade enhances the IOC's strategic relevance and increases its visibility at the global level by advancing interdisciplinary research and linking science to policy to address global challenges such as coastal resilience and climate adaptation. Programmes like GOOS' **CoastPredict** and capacity-building initiatives in under-represented countries bridge capacity gaps and promote inclusivity. Stakeholders suggest strengthening NDCs and sustaining regional collaborations to institutionalize the Decade's achievements in the IOC's future agenda.

148. Interviewees suggest that to sustain its legacy and ensure alignment with UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy, the IOC should expand its priorities to include biodiversity conservation and sustainable blue economies while leveraging existing programmes like GOOS. Addressing resource limitations, governance challenges and operational barriers is essential for long-term success. Increased funding, private sector partnerships and embedding Indigenous knowledge into ocean science are also key to solidifying the IOC's role in ocean governance.

#### 3.8.2. Untapped opportunities for transforming IOC programmes

**Key Finding: The Decade can transform IOC programmes by tackling inequities, strengthening science-policy links, diversifying funding and leveraging initiatives like IPOS to deliver inclusive, actionable solutions for ocean management.**

149. The evaluation evidence indicates that the Decade offers opportunities to enhance the sustainability and impact of IOC programmes by addressing structural inequities and fostering inclusivity in ocean science. For regions such as SIDS and LDCs, developing research capacity is critical, as persistent resource and infrastructure challenges affect their participation. This requires focusing more on building self-sufficient institutional capacities. Programmes such as the Digital Twin of the Ocean (**DITTO**) and Ocean Acidification Research for Sustainability (**OARS**) demonstrate the potential for transformative science, yet their success depends on continuous financial and institutional support. In addition, expanding localized efforts, including climate resilience projects and nature-based solutions, can bridge the gap between global ambitions and the practical needs of coastal communities, ensuring both ecological and economic benefits.
150. Achieving transformation requires the Decade to strengthen science-policy interfaces by establishing mechanisms to evaluate the practical use of research outputs. Survey participants recommend integrating Decade goals into national and international policies and embedding ocean science in development plans, climate strategies and international agreements to ensure sustained momentum. While the Decade does not hold direct responsibility for policy implementation, it can play a catalytic role by building the capacity of national governments and relevant policy bodies, supporting decentralized coordination structures and promoting sustained engagement between science and policy communities.



151. Interviewees and FGDs emphasized the potential of creating platforms like the European Marine Board in other regions to bridge science and policy gaps in support of the IOC's mission. If facilitated by the Decade, these structures could become a legacy beyond 2030, with IOC regional hubs playing a key role in ensuring they address regional needs and priorities effectively.
152. Insights from interviews indicate that in the second half of the Decade and beyond, the IOC's role could evolve from a facilitator of ocean science to an active architect of a long-term global framework for integrating ocean science into sustainable development, policy and decision-making. This evolution requires strengthening governance, ensuring financial sustainability and enhancing stakeholder engagement to integrate ocean knowledge into policy, economic planning and community resilience, establishing ocean science as essential societal infrastructure beyond 2030. These expectations align with the DCU's aspirations, as the unit is currently exploring the integration of IPOS into the Decade as a science-policy service. While discussions remain preliminary, the initiative aims to expand the IOC's mandate by leveraging the platform to provide on-demand support for countries and regions facing complex scientific challenges. (Box 9).

### **BOX 9.** ***IPOS' Strategic Overview***

According to the draft IPOS strategic overview, the platform will be the first global, demand-driven mechanism linking ocean knowledge, policy and society. It aims to accelerate the fulfilment of international ocean commitments by integrating diverse knowledge sources, including global environmental assessments, Indigenous knowledge and peer-reviewed research. IPOS will offer services such as Action Requests and Rapid Responses to deliver tailored, actionable solutions within decision-makers' timelines, addressing local and regional challenges. Its decentralized governance model will ensure inclusivity, engaging with stakeholders like UN agencies, governments, Indigenous communities and the private sector. The platform is envisioned to be embedded within the UN Ocean Decade, with UNESCO-IOC as a potential host, ensuring alignment with global frameworks such as SDG 14 and the Global Biodiversity Framework.

*Source: Towards IPOS: Strategic Overview, Draft – January 2025*



## 4. Conclusions <sup>14</sup>

Since its launch, the UN Ocean Decade has made significant progress in advancing ocean science, fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration and incorporating diverse knowledge systems into marine governance. It has successfully mobilized a global network of partners, securing commitments from governments, scientific institutions, civil society, and the private sector. Notable achievements include strengthening regional coordination, expanding science-policy linkages, and increasing engagement in capacity development and Indigenous knowledge inclusion.

However, achieving its envisioned outcomes and maximizing long-term impact depends on addressing six interconnected challenges that have affected the Decade's progress and effectiveness midway through its implementation: structural design challenges in governance and coordination, resource constraints as systemic barriers, regional disparities in representation and engagement, coordination and integration challenges across different levels, gaps in the strategic direction of Actions and the need to strengthen implementation through UN system collaboration. Addressing these systemic issues while leveraging emerging opportunities will be critical in the second half to achieve the Decade's transformative vision.

1. **Structural design challenges:** The Decade's governance and coordination framework has resulted in important achievements under the DCU's effective leadership of this complex global initiative. However, the unit's operational effectiveness is impeded by implementation challenges which limit the systematic coordination of decentralized structures and the timely review and endorsement of Actions, among others. The absence of a comprehensive strategic plan, including a well-defined ToC, has led to the expansion of coordination structures without cohesive strategic guidance. The outcome is a complex system that strains DCU's limited resources. This structural issue is observable across multiple areas ranging from the DAB's limited strategic role to the M&E framework's focus on outputs

rather than results. In addition, the disconnect between the Implementation Plan's vision for enhanced UN-wide engagement and current implementation patterns has weakened the Decade's potential to fully leverage the collective strengths of the UN system for maximum impact and reach.

2. **Resource constraints as a systemic barrier:** The Decade has secured important financial commitments and in-kind contributions, notably through Foundations Dialogue and Ocean Decade Alliance. These include valuable private sector engagement, such as staff secondments from Fugro. However, resource limitations emerge as a critical systemic factor affecting both coordination and Actions. Recent efforts to connect Actions with donors through the Ocean Matcher tool show promise but require greater involvement from diverse funding sources and clearer funding priorities to address widespread sustainability challenges, particularly in developing regions and LDCs. The DCU's limited capacity impacts its ability to fully implement strategic priorities. Meanwhile, funding constraints have affected the development of sustainable decentralized coordination mechanisms. The resource issue results in a challenging cycle: staffing and funding limitations affect the ability to mobilize additional resources, while the current M&E system makes it difficult to fully demonstrate impact to potential funders.
3. **Regional disparities:** The evaluation highlights ongoing efforts to achieve balanced regional representation in the Decade's implementation. While Europe and North America currently dominate in governance and coordination structures (61% of membership), successful initiatives in other regions are indicative of progress toward greater inclusivity. Notable examples include Portugal's support for Portuguese-speaking countries, Ireland's capacity development programme in SIDS and regional hubs like SPREP that facilitate cross-regional learning. Nevertheless, considerable systematic efforts are needed to achieve equitable participation in the Decade and its Actions across all regions, notably TAC, LDCs and SIDS.

<sup>14</sup>The conclusions presented here synthesize evidence from throughout the evaluation findings. The analysis of structural design challenges draws from findings on DCU operations, governance structures and institutional collaboration (1–15); resource constraints stem from findings on mobilization strategies, funding mechanisms and operational sustainability (27–41); regional disparities are based on findings regarding representation, engagement patterns and participation barriers (16–26, 91–102); coordination and integration reflect findings on decentralized structures, UN system collaboration and implementation mechanisms (63–78); strategic direction draws from findings on Decade Actions, science-policy interface and knowledge integration (42–62); and opportunities for strengthening implementation are informed by findings on resource diversification (36–41), UN system collaboration (66–71) and UNESCO-IOC's evolving role (115–120).

4. **Coordination and integration constraints:** The Decade showcases evolving approaches to connecting actions at different levels, from global to local, from science to policy and across UN agencies. Mechanisms such as DCCs have demonstrated their effectiveness in facilitating regional coordination, as evidenced by initiatives supporting coastal resilience. However, the recent closures of DCCs for Northeast Pacific and Ocean Visions due to funding shortfalls highlight the pressing need for sustainable operational models and transition plans to ensure stability during the Decade's second half. While certain UNESCO programmes and UN agencies like UNEP, UNDP and FAO have aligned some of their actions with Decade goals, opportunities remain to enhance integration across different components, such as governance structures, endorsed Actions, and regional coordination mechanisms, and to ensure broader participation from UN-Oceans members, other UN agencies and UN collaborative platforms. The experience of the DCO Western Pacific demonstrates how effective partnerships with UNESCO field structures and cross-sector engagement can advance regional priorities, suggesting the need to transfer such good practices across regions. NDCs demonstrate a clear divide in effectiveness between wealthier countries and under-resourced regions, reflecting broader systemic integration challenges in the Decade's implementation. The limited connections between Decade structures and their constituent organizations represent a critical gap in building the collaborative ecosystem needed for transformative impact. The science-policy integration shows promising developments, with certain Actions beginning to influence national policies and marine management frameworks; however, stronger mechanisms and systematic efforts are needed to sustain these contributions at scale.
5. **Gaps in the strategic direction of Ocean Decade Actions:** The portfolio of endorsed Actions represents a critical foundation for achieving the Decade's objectives, with notable successes in areas like tsunami preparedness, marine observation systems and coastal resilience. As the Decade moves into its second half, a strategic focus on strengthening the collective contribution of these Actions to ocean knowledge and solutions will be vital. The DCU's emerging approach of stimulating deeper connections between existing Actions offers an opportunity to enhance their combined impact on ocean challenges. Beyond creating science-policy linkages, successful implementation depends on sustained capacity development, particularly in underserved regions and ECOPs, systematic efforts to include Indigenous knowledge, equitable participation and knowledge co-production, robust data-sharing mechanisms and practical pathways for applying scientific outputs to ocean management and conservation. The effectiveness of Actions in addressing the Decade's challenges will increasingly rely on strengthening implementation partnerships, ensuring knowledge transfer to practitioners and creating conditions for scaling successful approaches across different contexts.
6. **UN system collaboration issues:** Enhanced collaboration between the Decade and the broader UN system, particularly UN-Oceans, is critical to advancing the Decade's outcomes, as envisioned in both the UN General Assembly resolution adopted on 5 December 2017 and the Decade Implementation Plan (2021). Strengthening systematic and strategic collaboration presents an opportunity not only to enhance engagement through UN-Oceans, but also to establish deeper partnerships with UNESCO Programme Sectors, leveraging the technical expertise and resources of UN agencies, strengthening linkages with other Decades and similar efforts and engaging with UN field structures, RCOs and Regional Collaborative Platforms (RCPs). Initiatives such as FAO's work on small-scale fisheries, IMO's efforts to reduce marine pollution and potential collaboration with UNCTAD on port resilience in SIDS illustrate the value of harnessing UN agencies' specialized expertise. Enhancing coordination and visibility across the UN system may also help unlock additional funding opportunities that have not yet been fully utilized. For example, the \$5 million partnership fund established by the International Seabed Authority, which could support the Decade's efforts to implement recommendations presented in the following section, has not yet been accessed due to unmet conditions related to strategic visibility and decision-making engagement. Expanding these collaborations can significantly enhance the Decade's impact, ensuring greater effectiveness and reach, particularly in engaging with ministries responsible for finance, education, research, science and agriculture -key stakeholders that lie beyond UNESCO-IOC's traditional sphere of influence.



Addressing these issues while leveraging emerging opportunities will be critical in the second half to achieve the Decade's transformative vision. At the same time, several promising elements can strengthen implementation moving forward. Opportunities include expanding engagement with MDBs, leveraging private sector partnerships through ESG alignment and innovative corporate funding mechanisms and operationalizing tools like the Ocean Matcher to connect Actions with an expanded platform of potential funders. The EC-IOC cooperation roadmap represents a significant avenue for advancing the Decade's objectives, though its success depends on building stakeholder capacity to access available resources. Successful examples like the Blue Action Fund and Global Fishing Watch demonstrate viable approaches for combining different funding streams. Furthermore, the achievements of some regional and national coordination structures, particularly in integrating diverse stakeholders and addressing local needs, provide valuable insights for enhancing implementation while ensuring context-specific approaches.

The Decade's ability to influence UNESCO-IOC's future role and catalyze transformation in ocean science and governance will largely depend on how these factors are addressed in its second half. Building on past achievements while addressing structural limitations and systemic inequalities will be essential for realizing the Decade's transformative ambitions. Strengthening partnerships with the UN system and other stakeholders will be key to ensuring that UNESCO-IOC evolves into a strategic leader that integrates ocean science into governance, policy, and societal resilience beyond 2030.





## 5. Recommendations

The evaluation highlights that the UN Ocean Decade has inspired widespread engagement across regions and sectors, galvanising a diverse community of actors around a shared vision. This collective momentum has positioned the Decade as a visible and ambitious global initiative. However, the pace and scale of this growth have, at times, exceeded the capacity, resources, and institutional systems currently available to fully support its delivery.

The evidence indicates that the Decade is at a critical juncture, where maintaining relevance, coherence, and responsiveness will be essential to delivering its intended outcomes. This need is particularly urgent in a shifting international landscape, where declining attention to sustainability and constrained funding persist, reflected in recent reductions by major donors, compounded by increasing geopolitical complexity and global tensions, even as the climate crisis escalates and pressures on ocean ecosystems intensify. While such dynamics create a more difficult environment, they also reaffirm the Decade's relevance and importance as a unifying platform for coordinated, science-based responses to global ocean challenges.

Despite resource constraints, the Decade's first half has laid a solid foundation for advancing a more inclusive, impactful, and solutions-oriented ocean science agenda.

Stakeholders' commitment, shared ambition and willingness to voluntarily collaborate across institutional and geographic boundaries have shown what is possible. The recommendations that follow are grounded in this evidence and reflect both the lessons learned so far and the aspirations for the Decade's legacy beyond 2030. With 2025 marking a strategic midpoint, this is a timely opportunity to strengthen delivery mechanisms, institutional arrangements and engagement pathways.

The recommendations do not propose increased contributions from Member States. Rather, they are based on a more strategic use of existing resources through the prioritisation of activities, streamlining of operational workload and enhanced collaboration. Implementation is considered realistic by leveraging strong partnerships and support within IOC, UNESCO, UN-Oceans members and other UN entities, NGOs, and public and private actors, alongside the engagement of PhD students for certain tasks and the use of affordable digital platforms and tools to increase efficiency.

The prioritization of the recommendations and possible ways forward presented below are guided by their significance in addressing key areas for improvement and their potential to deliver the greatest impact in strengthening the implementation of the Decade.

**Recommendation 1: Streamline and strengthen the governance and coordination framework for the Ocean Decade to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation and support progress toward its intended outcomes in the second half.**

**Basis:** All conclusions, particularly those relating to structural design challenges, resource constraints, and coordination gaps, and the need for enhancing UNESCO's and UN-Oceans' engagement towards an efficient and effective governance and coordination framework.

**Lead and contributors:** Under the leadership of the UNESCO-IOC Executive Secretary and the DCU Coordinator, in collaboration with the UNESCO-IOC Governing Bodies (the Assembly and the Executive Council), UNESCO Programme Sectors and Central Services, UN-Oceans partners and Member States.

**Suggested timeframe:** To be completed by September 2025.

**Possible ways forward:**

- i. Strengthen the DAB's role in providing strategic guidance and high-level advisory support to the Ocean Decade by revising its TOR to enhance its engagement in key decision-making processes, reinforce UN system collaboration, and maximize its impact. To this end, among other actions, consider:

- Reinforcing its scientific and strategic advisory functions and ensure formal membership status for key UN representatives. In this capacity, the DAB should provide guidance on identifying gaps and priority areas in ocean science, knowledge, innovation and resource mobilization in alignment with global and Member States' needs, challenges and emerging opportunities<sup>15</sup>. It should also advise on fostering global partnerships, enhancing knowledge exchange, and facilitating the transfer of scientific results, knowledge, and technology to end users.
- Refining the DAB membership selection process by adopting a hybrid model that combines nomination-based and invitation-based approaches. Institutional representatives from UN agencies and key organizations would be invited based on their ability to contribute to the Decade's strategic direction and implementation. Their participation would help ensure continuity, strengthen coordination across UN and intergovernmental initiatives, and provide a direct link to high-level policy and decision-making spaces. Thematic and regional experts will be selected through a nomination process to ensure diversity, inclusivity, and broad engagement.
- Making it clear in the ToR that the DAB and its members should establish regular, structured and results-driven collaboration and communication with the DCU and other Decade structures. This could be achieved through regular participation and active contribution of the DAB members in the meetings as well as dedicated working groups, scheduled brief advisory contributions beyond regular DAB meetings, either in small groups or individually, based on needs, structured written inputs and active participation in Decade-led policy dialogues, capacity-building efforts and coordination meetings at the global, regional and country levels.
- Encouraging that UN members serve as bridges between the Ocean Decade, other relevant UN Decades, and the UN Secretary-General's initiatives, such as Early Warning for All, as well as global frameworks. Other effective options in this respect could include engaging a representative from the UN Secretary-General's Scientific Advisory Board to strengthen science-policy linkages, ensuring that Decade knowledge contributes to global sustainability and development frameworks, and enhancing the role of UN agencies' representatives in

connecting the Decade with national policymaking and implementation bodies by leveraging their direct linkages with ministries and government agencies beyond IOC's traditional counterparts, such as ministries of finance, education, science and innovation, energy and agriculture.

- Establishing regular engagement between DAB, decentralized coordination structures (DCOs, NDCs) and organizations leading Decade Actions to enhance coordination, improve alignment with regional and national priorities and maximize impact. This could involve actions such as small groups of DAB members participating as observers in meetings of other structures, periodic meetings between DAB members and implementation teams of major Actions and the formation of DAB Action Groups to engage with the Decade structures in LDCs and SIDS
- To support DCU's activities amid resource constraints, initiate discussions with UN agencies on the interest and feasibility of establishing an Embedded Expert Support Mechanism (EESM) as an alternative or complement to secondments. If feasible, develop the procedural modalities for this mechanism, in line with the 'One UN' spirit endorsed by the UN General Assembly resolution of 5 December 2017, which invites UN entities to collaborate with IOC on the implementation of the UN Ocean Decade. Under this mechanism, expert staff from UN agencies remain within their institutions but are formally designated to contribute actively to specific Decade priorities, such as resource mobilization, policy engagement with respective constituency, or technical support on key tasks, on a flexible, task-oriented basis.
  - Formally establish the DCU within IOC. Complete the recruitment of the DCU Coordinator, formalise the role of the Deputy Coordinator and reinforce the identity and role of DCU specialized teams (e.g. 'Resource Mobilization and Partnerships', 'Engagement and Inclusivity', 'Action Management') and enhance capacity with mid-level and senior staff, including secondments from UN agencies and support through EESM.
  - Review and finalize the Decade's ToC (Annex 8). Consider increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Decade's overall coordination system by reviewing it in line with the ToC and the evaluation findings given in Section 3.1.6. In addition, put in

<sup>15</sup> This process could begin with a review and discussion of the gaps, priority targets, areas of focus and opportunities identified in Section 3 of this report, such as Sections 3.2.2, 3.2.3 and 3.4.3, as well as its respective annexes.

place missing elements outlined in the ToC, that are essential for similar initiatives, such as Operational Guidelines and risk management framework.

- v. Work directly with relevant UNESCO divisions and programmes (e.g. Gender Equality, SIDS, LINKS) to develop roadmaps and guidelines to increase efficiency and effectiveness.
- vi. Engage a senior monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) specialist or a small team of MEL experts convened as a panel from UNESCO and relevant UN agencies to establish and implement a revised MEL Framework aligned with the ToC. Given resource limitations, apply the EESM to leverage MEL expertise from UN agencies, ensuring ongoing technical support without requiring permanent staff placements.

**Recommendation 2: Strengthen UN system-wide collaboration and alignment to support the achievement of the Decade's outcomes and reinforce its identity as a collective UN initiative, enhancing its global reach and impact.**

**Basis:** Conclusions related to challenges in UN-Oceans engagement, opportunities for enhanced UN system collaboration and the need for integrated policy frameworks.

**Lead and contributors:** Under the leadership of the UNESCO-IOC Executive Secretary and the DCU Coordinator, in collaboration with the UNESCO-IOC Governing Bodies (the Assembly and the Executive Council), UN-Oceans partners, UNESCO Programme Sectors, including the UNESCO World Heritage Marine Programme and the 2001 Convention Secretariat and DAB.

**Suggested timeframe:** To be completed by November 2025 with the first two actions initiated and completed as soon as possible.

**Possible ways forward:**

- i. Conduct a stakeholder mapping exercise<sup>16</sup> to identify and analyse the roles, expertise and potential contributions of UNESCO, other UN agencies (including

non-members of UN-Oceans such as UNICEF and UN Women), UN structures (e.g. UN Global Compact, Resident Coordinator Offices, Regional Collaborative Platforms) and other UN-related mechanisms (such as Issue-Based Coalitions and the Interagency Task Team on STI for the SDGs) to the Ocean Decade. The mapping should also include a prioritization of stakeholders based on key criteria linked to the need for strategic collaboration to achieve the Decade outcomes, such as their mandate's relevance to the Decade, capacity to mobilize resources and networks and ability to drive implementation through existing and potential programmes and projects.

- ii. Based on the mapping results, develop an implementation plan that outlines partnership strategies to enhance collaboration and leverage synergies and resources for maximum impact. To kick-start implementation:
  - At the UNESCO level, convene a high-level meeting led by the IOC Executive Secretary with the leadership of key sectors and services, notably Natural Sciences, Social and Human Sciences, Education, Culture, Priority Africa, External Relations, Communication and Information, Gender Equality, and the Bureau of Strategic Planning. This meeting should establish a structured five-year collaboration framework with clear commitments and concrete joint actions including at the field level. Progress should be reviewed annually, with the framework revised and renewed as needed. Following the first meeting, the DCU should organize a dedicated meeting with relevant UNESCO departments to operationalize collaboration by jointly identifying priority actions, defining roles and setting timelines. Biannual follow-up meetings should assess implementation, reinforce engagement and report findings and agreed actions to the IOC Executive Secretary ahead of the annual high-level meeting.
  - At the UN level, organize a high-level meeting led by the IOC Executive Secretary with senior representatives from key UN agencies, including but not limited to FAO, UNEP, IMO, UNFCCC, ISA, WMO, UNDP, the World Bank, CBD, UNIDO and UNU, selected from among UN-Oceans members as well as other prioritized UN agencies and structures. This meeting should establish a structured five-year engagement framework with concrete commitments, defined joint actions, including at regional and country levels, and clear mechanisms for coordination. Annual meetings should assess progress, allowing for adjustments and renewal

<sup>16</sup>This and similar tasks under other possible ways forward could be implemented by engaging one or a small group of PhD students or interns with relevant backgrounds. In this case, for example, they could use digital platforms or tools that support internet-based searches, including but not limited to the UN Info Platform as an entry point, followed by a deeper review of publicly available information sources and partnership portals of UN entities.

as needed. After the first meeting, the DCU should facilitate a focused meeting with designated UN agency focal points to translate commitments into concrete actions by determining priorities, clarifying roles and setting implementation timelines. Biannual follow-up meetings should monitor progress, strengthen collaboration and report key outcomes and next steps to the IOC Executive Secretary in preparation for the annual high-level review.

- iii. Communicate with UN agencies to clarify that special processes already exist for their contribution to Decade Actions without requiring formal endorsement, addressing doubts raised by some of them as explained in the evaluation findings.
- iv. Strengthen operational linkages with UN RCOs and UN RCPs to enhance country- and regional-level implementation of the Decade and its Actions, involving DCOs and DCCs.
- v. Launch capacity development initiatives, utilising the Decade Capacity Development Facility by leveraging expertise, and existing capacity development investments from UN agencies and entities based on the mapping exercise to address priority technical, institutional and community needs.
- vi. Develop and implement a UN system-wide communication action plan to sustain collaborative efforts over the next five years, ensuring continuity beyond individual roles or organizational changes, to enhance the visibility of the Ocean Decade and increase engagement with stakeholders.

**Recommendation 3: Put in place a comprehensive resource mobilization framework to ensure sustainable funding for the coordination of the Decade and to strengthen the enabling environment for funding and supporting Decade Actions.**

**Basis:** All conclusions related to resource constraints and mobilization challenges, funding gaps and the need to strengthen existing mechanisms, including the Foundations Dialogue and Ocean Decade Alliance.

**Lead and contributors:** DCU Resource Mobilization and Partnership Team under the leadership of the DCU Coordinator, with the advisory guidance of DAB, in partnership with the UNESCO Bureau of Strategic Planning and in consultation with the

Foundations Dialogue, Ocean Decade Alliance and engagement of MDBs, the private sector, philanthropic partners and Member States.

**Suggested timeframe:** To be completed by December 2025

**Possible ways forward:**

- i. Develop and implement a comprehensive Resource Mobilization Strategy and Action Plan, leveraging existing expertise within UNESCO and other UN agencies on the subject. Ensure results-oriented mechanisms, defined KPIs and targets, assigned responsibilities, and a timeline to enhance effectiveness.
- ii. Map funding sources, including private sector entities and MDBs, to identify opportunities for Ocean Decade initiatives collaborating with specialists in UNESCO and UN agencies. Develop tailored value propositions that align with funders' priorities, such as climate resilience, biodiversity and sustainable blue economies. Prepare and use case studies of Actions that achieved tangible impact through secured funding, supported by impact measurement frameworks to demonstrate value for money and long-term benefits.
- iii. Support the UNESCO-IOC Leadership and DAB in leading engagement with major funding sources, including MDBs and other IFIs, expanding initiatives like the Foundations Dialogue and Ocean Decade Alliance and coordinating resource mobilization efforts across UN agencies.
- iv. Advocate for the creation of pooled funding or a similar mechanism dedicated to supporting LDCs and SIDS, enabling streamlined financial support for their strategic priorities and enhancing equitable access to resources.
- v. Work with NDCs to develop and execute a targeted advocacy campaign urging national research and innovation agencies and relevant ministries to establish dedicated support programmes for collaborative ocean science and innovation projects. Facilitate policy dialogues and provide tailored guidance to align national funding priorities with Decade goals. For the implementation of this action, leverage existing structures of UNESCO and other UN agencies, including field offices as well as UNRCs.
- vi. Support the enhancement of the Ocean Matcher tool by expanding partner networks, encouraging voluntary sharing of allocation information and developing approaches for impact tracking, while respecting the autonomy and priorities of philanthropic actors.



**Recommendation 4: Strengthen national and regional engagement, with a focus on LDCs, SIDS and other under-represented regions, to facilitate more equitable participation and alignment with local and regional priorities.**

**Basis:** Conclusions related to regional disparities and coordination challenges, particularly regarding under-represented regions, LDCs and SIDS.

**Lead and contributors:** DCU Engagement and Inclusivity Team under the leadership of the DCU Coordinator, with the advisory guidance of DAB and in collaboration with UN-Oceans, UNESCO/LINKS, SIDS, MAB, PAX, Central Services, UNESCO's and IOC's field structures, UN RCOs and UN RCPs, DCCs, DCOs, NDCs and other regional and national structures.

**Suggested timeframe:** To be completed by February 2026

**Possible ways forward:**

- i. Strengthen DCOs as regional coordination hubs in under-represented regions by substantially enhancing their resources and capacities through EESM, while at the same time reinforcing their links with UNESCO and other UN field structures.
- ii. Establish a DCC Sustainability Framework that includes:
  - updated and clarified operational and financial sustainability criteria
  - regular reviews of DCC health and sustainability, including self-assessment checks
  - support mechanisms, such as systematic coaching and dialogue with decision-makers, to prevent abrupt closures
  - structured transition protocols for at-risk DCCs
  - guidelines for maintaining continuity of Actions during transitions.
- iii. Understand the strengths and challenges in each NDC and take steps to strengthen or revive those in under-resourced countries through targeted actions, including capacity development measures, a mentoring mechanism connecting low-performing NDCs with stronger counterparts and increasing the participation of experienced ECOPs in committees.

- iv. Develop and implement action plans for the existing Africa Roadmap and the recently developed TAC Roadmap, ensuring that each plan includes clear steps, assigned responsibilities, measurable indicators, targets, timelines, and potential resources. For the Africa Roadmap, first conduct a review to assess progress since 2021 before formulating the action plan. Establish task forces and create roadmaps supported with action plans for other underrepresented regions.
- v. Establish formal interaction protocols and regular consultation mechanisms between DAB, decentralized coordination structures and organizations leading Decade Actions to ensure strategic alignment and effective knowledge sharing.
- vi. Implement a dedicated technical assistance mechanism, as part of the Capacity Development Facility, for LDCs and SIDS, in collaboration with UNESCO and relevant UN agencies and field structures, including targeted capacity development programmes, facilitated procedures for action submission and access to a pooled or similar funding mechanism proposed in Recommendation 3, ensuring that these under-resourced and vulnerable countries receive tailored support, as is common in similar interventions.

**Recommendation 5: Enhance the mainstreaming of inclusivity, diversity, and equity to ensure that all voices, particularly those of marginalized and under-represented groups, are meaningfully included and benefit from the Decade.**

**Basis:** Conclusions related to the need for enhanced inclusivity, diversity and equity considerations.

**Lead and contributors:** DCU Engagement and Inclusivity Team under the leadership of the DCU Coordinator, with the advisory guidance of DAB and in collaboration with UN-Oceans, UNESCO/LINKS, SIDS, MAB, PAX, Central Services, UNESCO's and IOC's field structures, UN RCOs and UN RCPs, DCCs, DCOs, NDCs and other regional and national structures.

**Suggested timeframe:** To be completed by February 2026

**Possible ways forward:**

- i. Implement a multilingual communication strategy complemented by region-specific outreach plans and tailored tools.
- ii. Put in place structured mechanisms to effectively engage with alternative knowledge systems and their holders (including Indigenous, local, and traditional knowledge) in systematic collaboration with UNESCO/LINKS.
- iii. Develop targeted programmes to support ECOPs from under-represented regions, with a focus on mentorship, career and funding opportunities, leveraging partnerships within UNESCO, the broader UN system, universities, research institutes, NGOs, and the private sector in developed countries to maximize impact.

**Recommendation 6: Strengthen the strategic focus and impact of the UN Ocean Decade Actions to enhance alignment with global and national priorities, promote innovation, support knowledge use and ensure practical application for tangible benefits to Member States and the ecosystem.**

**Basis:** Conclusions regarding the strategic direction of Ocean Decade Actions and the need for stronger implementation mechanisms.

**Lead and contributors:** DCU Action Management Team under the oversight of the DCU Coordinator, with the advisory guidance of DAB and in consultation with decentralized coordination structures.

**Suggested timeframe:** To be completed by March 2026

**Possible ways forward:**

- i. Reinforce the existing Actions Management System with the following features to enable regular portfolio reviews, cross-programme coordination, and risk mitigation for both existing and new Actions. Given the importance of this initiative, consider allocating coordination funding for its development or establish an in-kind partnership with a company, university/research centre, or partner agency to provide IT and analytical support for its development and maintenance.

- A systematic overlap detection and management mechanism incorporating regular portfolio reviews, risk mitigation protocols, and automated alerts.
  - A centralized database with ongoing status monitoring or up-to-date tracking of Action progress.
  - Interactive dashboards for monitoring impact and facilitating cross-programme coordination.
  - Advanced search and filtering functionality, integrated with the Decade website, tailored to the needs of various stakeholders, including scientists, policymakers, and potential users and collaborators.
  - Customizable reporting tools to generate tailored reports for UNESCO-IOC management, DAB, and other stakeholders such as policymakers, scientists, NDCs, and donors.
- ii. Regularly review and identify Actions that can establish synergies based on findings from the overlap analysis and management system and facilitate collaboration among them where relevant.
  - iii. Strengthen and diversify mechanisms for knowledge exchange and collaboration around key thematic areas, including social science integration, to enhance the understanding of societal drivers, equity and policy impacts in Decade Actions. Reinforce CoPs through coaching and mentoring while also exploring complementary mechanisms such as structured peer-learning initiatives and targeted expert networks to improve engagement and impact.
  - iv. Create standardized protocols for Action submission and review, incorporating systematic checks for potential overlaps and synergies, preferably integrating automated processes, subject to available funding and technical capacity. Facilitate the Action submission process for LDCs and SIDS with support from NDCs, UNESCO field offices, other UN structures and regional organizations, and science networks, as well as mentoring initiatives and other capacity development measures.
  - v. Implement a structured framework with measurable indicators to understand and strengthen science-policy interfaces. Incorporate data-driven methodologies, such as policy uptake tracking and stakeholder perception analysis, and integrate social science approaches to ensure that policy decisions reflect diverse perspectives and real-world needs.
  - vi. Establish a structured collaboration framework with MDBs to not only identify financing opportunities but also integrate ocean science into national and regional

development planning. Facilitate targeted dialogues between the IOC, Member States, and MDBs (e.g., World Bank, ADB, AfDB, IDB, IsDB, EBRD) to align priorities on ocean science, blue economies and climate resilience. In collaboration with UNESCO, the UN system and DCU structures, support Member States in accessing demand-driven funding by aligning ocean-related proposals with MDB financing frameworks. Ensure that Decade-backed research and innovations inform MDB-funded project design and implementation, embedding ocean science into broader sustainable development strategies.

- vii. Amplify targeted calls with dedicated funding opportunities, aligned with the Vision 2030 targets and supporting the participation of SIDS, LDCs and developing regions.
- viii. Make open science principles more explicit and visible within the Decade in alignment with the 2021 UNESCO Open Science Recommendation. Ensure that existing principles in the Ocean Decade criteria and Data and Information Strategy are actively promoted, accessible and integrated into Action design and reporting. Strengthen awareness through targeted communication, incentives and capacity-building efforts, benefiting in particular LDCs and SIDS.
- ix. In collaboration with stakeholders experienced in Knowledge and Technology Transfer (KTT) (e.g. competent technology transfer offices of universities and research centres, innovation hubs, industry associations, and science parks), put in place a KTT mechanism that systematically identifies, adapts, and deploys relevant Decade outputs to end-users. This mechanism could prioritize:
  - Promoting frugal innovation principles in Decade Actions by prioritizing low-cost, scalable and context-appropriate solutions to make ocean science and technology more accessible to vulnerable and resource-constrained regions and users.
  - Leveraging existing Decade structures, networks and partnerships to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and scientific outputs from Actions to regions, countries and communities in need, including UN-level collaboration, in particular with the agencies (such as UNEP, UNDP, UNFCCC) having Technology Needs Assessment efforts as well as other international organizations such as the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission that prepares Science, Technology and Innovation for SDGs Roadmaps.
  - Establishing processes to match Decade outputs with identified and unsolicited demands from LDCs, SIDS and disadvantaged communities, ensuring equitable access.

- Incorporating social science insights to ensure that transferred knowledge and technologies are culturally relevant, socially equitable and designed to address community needs.
  - Streamlining pathways to make Decade-generated knowledge and technologies accessible, actionable and impactful for all stakeholders.
  - Designing scaling mechanisms for successful Actions based on documented impact metrics, enabling the broader dissemination and replication of proven solutions.
- x. Develop and implement an outcomes-driven framework to align Decade Actions with Member States' priorities, building on existing consultations (e.g., IOC and Future of the Ocean consultation) but ensuring that concrete steps are taken to address unmet needs. This could include:
    - conducting consultations with Member States to identify their most pressing needs and priority areas for sustainable development
    - defining measurable indicators that illustrate how Decade Actions contribute to economic, societal, and environmental priorities, such as blue economy development, food security, and sustainable livelihoods, to provide a basis for effective communication, attract investment, and strengthen engagement from policymakers and funding institutions
    - developing an 'Impact Visibility Report' (or structured impact reporting process) that systematically tracks and synthesizes measurable indicators of Decade Actions' contributions to economic, societal and environmental priorities. This report will provide evidence-based insights to inform decision-making, attract investment and enhance stakeholder alignment with Member States' priorities.

**Recommendation 7: Enhance the existing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to transform it into a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system.**

**Basis:** Conclusions regarding MEL framework limitations and the need for enhanced tracking of results and impact during the second half of the Decade.

**Lead and contributors:** A dedicated MEL specialist (engaged through secondment or the EESM) or a small team of MEL experts convened as a panel from UNESCO and relevant UN agencies, under the guidance of the DCU Coordinator in collaboration with the UNESCO Internal Oversight Service and UN evaluation offices.

**Suggested timeframe:** To be completed by December 2025

**Possible ways forward:**

- i. Implement an enhanced MEL framework by addressing gaps in indicators, processes, resources, and responsibilities at the Challenge level, building on existing structures such as Decade Action indicators and State of the Ocean Report. Ensure alignment with the Decade's strategic documents (e.g., Vision 2030, White Papers) and M&E frameworks of UNESCO, IOC, and relevant UN agencies. Create robust indicators and SMART targets to track progress at both the Decade and Action levels by leveraging existing UN frameworks such as FAO, WMO and SDG indicators. Ensure that indicators are technically measurable and relevant and require minimal primary data collection. Include specific objectives and indicators to evaluate the performance of the Decade coordination structures, establishing a foundation for effective MEL tools, such as periodic self-assessments, structured feedback mechanisms, and reporting templates to track coordination efficiency and impact.
- ii. Create user-friendly reporting templates and tools that balance data needs with accessibility and ease of use.
- iii. Implement a digital MEL platform integrated with UNESCO/IOC systems to enable real-time data collection, analysis and visualization. Ensure alignment and interoperability with the Actions Management System proposed under Recommendation 5 to centralize data tracking, avoid redundancy and enhance overall efficiency.
- iv. Establish regular review cycles with feedback mechanisms to inform stakeholders and support the adaptive management of the Decade at large, ensuring continuous learning and improvement across Actions.
- v. Ensure that stakeholders providing monitoring data and information are explicitly informed that their inputs will be systematically integrated into progress reports and other relevant documents and materials. Disseminate progress reports widely, prioritizing those who provide input, to enhance transparency, accountability and stakeholder engagement.

- vi. Develop targeted capacity-building programmes to support MEL implementation, ensuring that all users have the necessary expertise to apply MEL frameworks consistently and effectively. This way, aim to help bridge capacity gaps, particularly between developed and developing countries, to promote equitable participation in MEL processes.
- vii. Maintain a "Knowledge Management System" (KMS) to systematically capture, analyze, and share lessons learned from Decade Actions, MEL reports, and stakeholder feedback. This KMS will facilitate the exchange of best practices, challenges and policy insights to support evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement across the Decade. It will also serve as a knowledge repository for informing strategies, policies, and actions beyond 2030, ensuring that the Decade's legacy contributes to long-term ocean sustainability.

**Recommendation 8: Systematically leverage the Decade to shape UNESCO-IOC's post-2030 agenda and amplify the impact of its programmes.**

**Basis:** Conclusions regarding the strategic positioning of IOC beyond 2030, the untapped potential of IOC programmes, and the need for a structured approach to align the Ocean Decade's achievements with UNESCO's next Medium-Term Strategy (2029-2037).

**Lead and contributors:** Under the leadership of the UNESCO-IOC Executive Secretary and the DCU Coordinator, in consultation with UNESCO-IOC Governing Bodies, in collaboration with DAB, IOC Sections, UNESCO Programme Sectors, UN-Oceans, teams at IOC and BSP responsible for the development of UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy, key Decade stakeholders and Member States.

**Suggested timeframe:** To be completed by December 2028

**Possible ways forward:**

- i. Formulate a high-level blueprint guided by scenario planning and foresight to ensure the Ocean Decade's achievements inform the IOC's post-2030 role. Align it with global ocean governance needs and UNESCO's next Medium-Term Strategy (2029–2037). Implement a participatory process to capture diverse perspectives and foster broad stakeholder ownership.



- ii. Support this process with the following mechanisms, considering that the blueprint should be a living document, regularly updated to reflect new developments, emerging challenges, and evolving priorities:
  - Establish a structured coordination mechanism to ensure that Decade insights continuously inform IOC's evolving strategic priorities and are systematically incorporated into the blueprint by
    - Holding targeted consultations among IOC leadership, the DCU, the DAB, and other Decade structures.
    - Conducting regular regional or thematic policy dialogues involving science, industry, civil society, and Indigenous/local knowledge leaders to reinforce the alignment between Decade achievements and IOC's long-term role.
    - Systematically integrating resulting insights into IOC Governing Body deliberations to maintain an evidence-based, inclusive evolution.
  - Enhance the Strategic Foresight and Transformation Function, led by IOC's Ocean Science Section as part of the Medium-Term Strategy, to ensure that emerging ocean science and governance trends inform the Decade Call for Actions and other key Decade processes, while also integrating insights from Decade Actions into IOC's strategic planning, policy frameworks, programmatic priorities, and the blueprint for IOC's post-2030 role. This could include:
    - Establishing a dedicated staff or specialized working group to track emerging challenges (e.g., ocean acidification, deep-sea mining) and cutting-edge solutions (e.g., AI-driven analytics) to inform both Decade priorities and IOC strategy.
    - Strengthening coordination with UNESCO and UN-Oceans foresight teams to ensure ocean-specific innovations influence broader IOC, UNESCO, and UN planning processes while also channelling Decade-generated insights into global policy frameworks.
- iii. Leverage existing IOC-led initiatives using flagship programmes (e.g., GOOS, CoastPredict, Ocean Literacy) to enhance interdisciplinary research, capacity development, and science-informed policy. Wherever possible, encourage interactions between these programmes and Decade Actions, ensuring that insights and innovations from Actions, particularly in areas like ocean observations, tsunami warning, and literacy, contribute to the transformation and long-term evolution of IOC programmes. This approach aims to reinforce IOC's leadership in ocean science while ensuring its programmes remain responsive to emerging global priorities. Putting in place an annual "reflection" exercise on selected insights and innovations from Actions that were documented (exercise could be facilitated by a MEL officer and involve IOC leadership). This could inform programming adjustments during IOC planning phases/processes.
- iv. Enhance the IOC's role in science-policy engagement by establishing or strengthening a structured knowledge transfer and policy integration mechanism within the IOC. This mechanism should be designed to complement existing efforts and avoid duplication if the integration of IPOS is found feasible (see iv. below). This could:
  - Ensure Decade-generated knowledge informs decisions at national, regional and international levels.
  - Facilitate engagement between policymakers, IOC regional bodies, and Decade-endorsed initiatives.
  - Integrate ocean science into key processes such as global development planning, climate adaptation, and ocean governance frameworks.
- v. Examine the technical and financial feasibility of integrating IPOS within the Ocean Decade and, eventually, IOC as a science-policy service, ensuring it provides demand-driven, scientific support to governments, UN agencies, and regional institutions.
- vi. Expand IOC's role in UN-wide ocean initiatives by leveraging Decade partnerships to deepen IOC's engagement in high-impact areas, such as climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation, blue economy policies, and digital ocean solutions, reinforcing the IOC's leadership in evidence-based ocean governance.
- vii. Develop a strategic communication action plan to showcase how the Ocean Decade's successes support IOC's long-term impact and global priorities (e.g., the UN Ocean Conference, the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, and SDG 14). Emphasize case studies, data, and outcomes that illustrate the Decade's added value and future relevance.
- viii. Deepen IOC's engagement with key UN partners (e.g., FAO, ISA, UNEP, UNDP) so that Decade and IOC science outputs can inform broader development agendas, including SDGs and BBNJ, by establishing dedicated planning sessions, preparing joint policy briefs and project proposals, organizing co-branded events, expanding mutual data-sharing platforms and establishing staff exchange schemes as well as through EESM.

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# Annex 6.

## Brief Biographies of the INOMER Evaluation Team Members

### Team member and role

### Qualifications



**Ms. Sirin Elci,  
Team Leader**

*Design & management of all evaluation phases, team supervision & guidance, analysis, triangulation.*

34 years of professional experience, including 29 years in project/programme evaluation, with extensive experience and knowledge in designing, conducting, and leading evaluations of complex multistakeholder programmes and initiatives. Proven experience in working with UNESCO and in the UN system with good knowledge of institutions and partners engaged in ocean science and research and a strong understanding of the UN system (e.g. Team Leader of the Evaluation of the UNESCO/Government of Flanders Innovation Fund (FUST) for the support of UNESCO activities in the field of science for the period 2019-2023 (2023)).



**Ms. Alix Willemez,  
Senior Evaluator**

*Data collection & analysis, including document review, interviews, surveys & case studies.*

19 years of experience with multilaterals, national organizations (e.g., African Development Bank, Crédit Agricole), governments (e.g., France, New Zealand, Germany, New Caledonia), NGOs (e.g., WWF, ICUN), international organizations (e.g., GEF, UNIDO, EU, IRENA), and academic institutions (e.g., Institute for Regional Maritime Security of West Africa). Expertise in sustainable fisheries, marine pollution reduction, climate change, land degradation, and biodiversity. Evaluator for INOMER's FUST and IAF evaluations. Member of World Commission on Environmental Law and other key advisory roles. PhD in Law on sustainable exploitation of marine resources.



**Mr. Jerome Helfft,  
Project Coordinator  
and Senior Evaluator**

*Managing team communications, data collection and contributing to qualitative analysis.*

Over 22 years of experience, including 17 years in monitoring and evaluation expertise in poverty reduction, peacebuilding, science, technology, innovation, environmental sustainability. Experienced in designing evaluation processes and monitoring systems, particularly using results-based approaches. Conducted or managed over 45 evaluations and research studies. Recent roles include evaluations of FUST, IAF, and other projects for UNDP, UNOPS, and the World Bank.



**Mr. Manuel Ricardo  
Galindo Moreno,  
Evaluator and Data Analyst**

*Data collection, desk review and  
quantitative analysis.*

17 years of experience, including over 9 years in policy research, programme evaluation, data extraction, analysis, and visualization. Coordinated complex INOMER projects such as the evaluation of FUST, MOPAN assessments of ILO and EBRD, and capacity development for the Peruvian Government. Previously worked with UNESCO's Natural Sciences Sector, conducting assessments and contributing to Science and Technology Policy databases.



**Ms. Gulenay Dogan,  
Statistician  
and Data Analyst**

*Designing and managing online  
surveys, conducting statistical analysis  
of datasets*

More than 10 years of experience in implementing primary and secondary data collection and conducting statistical analyses for complex evaluation projects. Skilled in utilizing statistical tools and data analysis platforms to generate evidence-based insights that inform evaluation conclusions and recommendations. Extensive experience in regional and global evaluations for UN agencies and international organizations, including UNESCO, the World Bank, the European Commission, and the OECD.



**Ms. Catherine Ward,  
Subject Matter Expert**

*Specific insights in sectoral & thematic  
areas, supporting the core group  
in tools, interviews, preparation of  
detailed case studies, contribution  
to analysis and recommendation  
formulation.*

10 years of professional experience in fisheries, agriculture, natural resource management, and climate change. PhD in Environmental and Geographical Sciences. Expertise in environmental monitoring frameworks, fieldwork surveys, and data quality assessments. Currently supports MEL activities under the UK's Ocean Country Partnership Programme. Extensive research experience in social-ecological issues and small-scale fisheries in Africa and Southeast Asia.





**Ms. Celia Murcia,  
Subject Matter Expert**

*Specific insights in sectoral & thematic areas, supporting the core group in tools, interviews, preparation of detailed case studies, contribution to analysis and recommendation formulation.*

Blue Economy specialist with over 11 years of experience across private, public, and intergovernmental sectors. Expertise in European maritime strategies, stakeholder engagement, and programme evaluation. Coordinated the Assistance Mechanism for the WestMED Initiative and contributed to evaluations for CINEA Blue Skills call, Interreg NEXT MED, and other blue economy initiatives.



**Mr. David Michael Adams,  
Strategic/Quality Advisor**

*Providing strategic guidance to the team and reviewing the tools and deliverables.*

43 years of experience in Blue Economy finance and investment advisory. Founder of Ocean Assets Group, specializing in responsible investment in blue economy sectors. Led high-profile projects with UNEP-FI, European Commission, and international finance organizations. Recognised for contributions to sustainable finance in maritime sectors.



**Ms. Yesim Baykal,  
Strategic/Quality Advisor**

*Providing strategic guidance to the team and reviewing the tools and deliverables.*

Over 30 years professional experience in international law, sustainable development, technology transfer and innovation with 15 years in the UN system, including roles with the UN Technology Bank and WIPO. Expertise in outreach, funding, and STI needs of LDCs, linking UNTB with International Seabed Authority for ocean-related challenges. Previous work includes legal counsel on Law of the Sea issues at the Turkish Mission to the UN in New York.



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