



A unique group of leaders who are fast-tracking solutions to the most pressing challenges facing the ocean



## Gender parity in the ocean

### Context

This Action Track aims to unlock progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 (Life Below Water, or the 'Ocean Goal') by prioritising ocean solutions that ensure women and men have equal access to the businesses, governance, productive resources, institutions and organisations, knowledge and technologies, markets, decent employment and social protection that are related to a healthy ocean.

Friends of Ocean Action (FOA) aims to do this by:

- Identifying knowledge gaps and existing networks focussed on gender-related ocean solutions;
- Using this knowledge to identify actions that Friends can take in line with the most urgent targets of the Ocean Goal (SDG 14.1, 14.2, 14.4, 14.5, 14.6);
- Integrating this knowledge into existing Action Tracks, with a particular focus on ocean and gender data, as well as food from the ocean, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, MPAs, and science-based targets; and
- Developing a portfolio of tangible, investable solutions.

## Gender and SDG progress

There is considerable evidence to support the idea that progress on many of the SDGs accelerates when women are empowered to bring about change. This could offer useful lessons for advancing SDG 14 since many of the challenges that it seeks to address have strong gender dimensions, including targets 14.2 (sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems), 14.4 (end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing) and 14.B (provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets).

The conditions women face in the fisheries sector bear the same hallmarks as those in agriculture. More data is needed but evidence shows that much of their work is in the informal sector and occupational segregation is widespread. Women make up about half the workforce in processing, cleaning and trading fish, and are largely concentrated in low-skilled, low-paid, seasonal jobs without health, safety and labour rights protections. Men are more frequently involved in offshore and high-value fisheries and make up 81% of those involved in fish and aquaculture harvesting. Women are overwhelmingly (90%) involved in secondary fields such as fish processing, intertidal invertebrate harvesting, marketing, and fishing machinery maintenance. These jobs are often low paid or unpaid, and women face significant barriers



Fish processing in the Dutch fish auction in Den Helder © Ton Koene/Alamy

to accessing bank credit, financial resources, technology, market information and entrepreneurial support. Women earn approximately 64% of men's wages when carrying out the same work in aquaculture, and face the risks of ocean degradation with fewer resources on hand to build resilience.

Whilst women often depend on the sustainability of local resources, as men do, they frequently have minimal voice in the governance of those resources. Moreover, IUU fishing often coexists with violence against women – a widespread problem documented by the US Department of State. Perhaps such challenges could be tackled using similar solutions to other industries developing gender equality?

## Gender, coastal resilience and adaptation to climate change

There is a strong gender dimension when it comes to coastal resilience (SDG 14.2) and adaptation to natural disasters (SDG 13.1). Oxfam reported the disproportionate level of tragedy for women in the 2004 Asian tsunami: four women died for every man in India and Sri Lanka. This became a focus for rallying resources into the relief and recovery effort, highlighted ways to ensure that humanitarian responses are sensitive to gender, and prompted increased efforts towards equitable humanitarian responses.

It has been argued that the way to make progress on the ambitious and complex 2030 Agenda is to prioritise policies and investments that advance gender equality. Indeed, the Agenda's strength is that it enables linkages to be made across different issues via an integrated approach to the 17 SDGs. Identifying policy solutions that can leverage change across a number of different goals is vital to accelerating progress, while addressing gender equality within those policy solutions is key.

## How should this be approached and where does data come in?

It is crucial to address the level of baseline analysis and data that we have available. Invisible population groups in data are commonly the most vulnerable: women and girls, people with disability, refugees and migrants, and the elderly.

The SDG Gender Index, an index developed in 2018 to measure gender equality in the SDGs, created a set of data to monitor progress in six pilot countries on more than 250 data points related to 12 of the 17 SDGs that have



Workers at a fish processing factory, Walvis Bay, Namibia. © Oleksandr Rupeta/Alamy

clear connections to gender equality. Important gender dimensions within SDG 14 include livelihoods and sustainable development issues that rely on a healthy ocean. However, the lack of data on this goal was clear, with the authors calling for "suggestions for gender-related indicators on SDG 14 for consideration in future iterations of the Index".

In a similar vein, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) report *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture* explicitly states that "enhanced statistics on both industrial and small-scale operators, together with data on the secondary post-harvest and service sectors, would greatly improve the understanding of the importance of women's contribution to fisheries and aquaculture, food security and livelihoods". Those ocean leaders who took part in sessions on catalysing ocean action at the World Economic Forum Sustainable Development Impact Summit 2018 echoed this message.

## Integrating gender into other Action Tracks

This is something that the Friend of Ocean Action's Ocean Data Action Track is well positioned to support. An ocean data platform aimed at making data on the ocean available on a comprehensive, open-source, digital platform for the public good with a view to better informing decision-making could well support greater understanding of the importance of women's contribution to the ocean economy. Uniquely, this platform will enable the 'plug-in' of various datasets to show connections and examine relationships of correlation and causality. Could a focus on gender equality provide new insights and improved datasets on ocean health and sustainability?

More broadly, SDG 14 has clear connections to other SDGs where gender is a focus of potential change. The FAO Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries position women as central to the global fishing industry. A UN high-level event in Rome in December 2016 highlighted on-the-ground examples of where small changes in gender recognition can make big differences. Norway is also involved, particularly through the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, where it has supported an international network of researchers working with women and gender policy within fishing and aquaculture.

## Country focus

Much progress on addressing skills and gender gaps (across all SDGs) is focussed on specific countries. The World Economic Forum highlighted that it may take 217 years to close the economic gender gap globally and has established national task forces in Chile, Argentina, Panama, Peru and France, with those in Latin America implemented in partnership with the Inter-American Development Bank. The World Economic Forum is discussing the expansion of these efforts with various countries and institutions, and is seeking partners interested in collaborating to establish national task forces. Perhaps the trend for framing the ocean as a nation, constituting the world's seventh largest economy, worth USD24 trillion, is an opportunity?

**Women and feminist organisations were pivotal in demanding Agenda 2030, and it is likely to be their organising and action that will determine whether its promise is realised.**

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