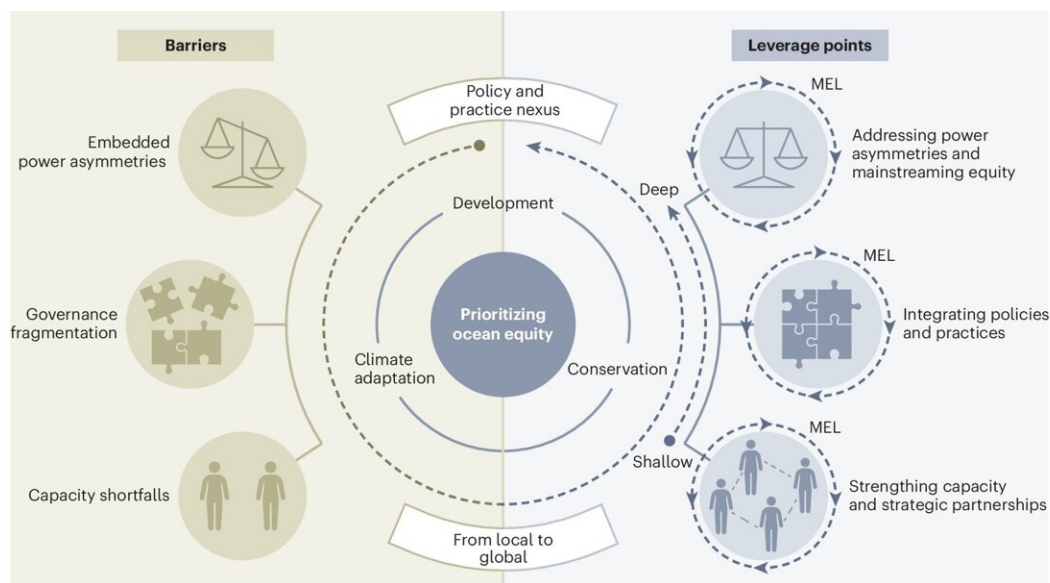


Equity must be considered in ocean governance to achieve global targets by 2030, researchers say

May 15 2024



Policy and practice from local to global scales around development, climate adaptation and conservation all intersect to affect ocean equity. Proposed actions consist of deep to shallow leverage points that need to be implemented across scales (central dotted arrow) and strategically tailored to each social–ecological context through monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) frameworks (dotted arrows around each action). Shallow leverage points occur where interventions are relatively easy to implement but are likely to bring about smaller changes to the overall functioning of the system, compared to deep leverage points that might be more difficult to alter but have a potentially larger potential for transformational change. Credit: *Nature Ecology & Evolution* (2024). DOI: 10.1038/s41559-024-02417-5

As the world presses forward with urgency towards reaching global biodiversity and climate targets by 2030, there must be increased attention to center equity in dialogue and practice when designing ocean conservation, adaptation and development interventions.

The world is facing a dual biodiversity and climate crisis. Yet, without focused attention to equity, say a group of researchers and practitioners in a new [article](#) published today in *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, there are risks for harmful or maladaptive actions that will impact human health and well-being and exacerbate the vulnerability of marginalized populations.

This, in turn, will undermine joint policy goals for climate, conservation and [sustainable development](#).

Two major global agreements are redefining how governments, civil society and the private sector are moving forward together to reduce global emissions to stabilize the Earth's climate system, stem the biodiversity loss crisis, and concurrently protect the health of our planet and its inhabitants.

Under the legally binding Paris Agreement, countries agreed to take actions that will hold "the increase in global average temperatures to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels" by 2030, while supporting efforts to adapt to the significant climate impacts already experienced across the planet.

Under the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework, countries also agreed "to take urgent action and reverse biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and planet," including through protection of 30% of the global oceans by 2030.

The world is at a crossroads and races to design and implement ocean actions to reach these ambitious yet necessary targets, yet a failure to fully consider who bears the costs of these actions and who receives the benefits could result in the further displacement and marginalization of the most vulnerable.

While local grassroots movements are growing in response to long histories of social injustice, the voices of marginalized actors bearing the cost inequitable ocean governance are still being drowned out by powerful economic and political interests that dominate decision-making processes about how ocean space and resources are used.

Dr. Joachim Claudet, Senior Research and Ocean Advisor for the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) and lead author, stresses that, "We urgently need a transformative change towards ocean sustainability. Such a change can only occur if we rally ocean actors towards more inclusive and equitable forms of sustainable development, climate change adaptation and conservation.

"In our paper, we propose key leverage points with actionable options for decision-makers to advance ocean equity."

These actions include things like recognizing and ensuring meaningful participation of the full range of affected groups in ocean governance, including within marine spatial planning processes. For example, this could involve inviting representatives of Indigenous Peoples and small-scale fishers organizations to planning and policy meetings and ensuring not just that their voices are heard, but also that their concerns are addressed.

Influential ocean actors such as governments, donors, big non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and corporations should work toward mainstreaming equity within their own internal governance

processes, while asking themselves tough questions about how design and implementation of their actions could be more inclusive and result in more equitable outcomes.

Action may be needed to shift deeply rooted norms and structures that underpin historical and ongoing injustices in the ocean and along the coast, but this may not be enough. Where necessary and appropriate, reparations may be needed to address past harms where poorly planned actions in oceans spaces, often combined with severe impacts of climate change, have significantly compromised the health and well-being of coastal communities.

"Hundreds of millions of people worldwide live near and depend on the ocean. So, it only makes sense that their voices and needs are considered in decisions related to the ocean that will affect their lives.

"This includes in the development of the blue economy, creation of marine protected areas, and implementation of climate actions. In short, equity must be at the center of ocean governance," says Dr. Nathan Bennett, Global Oceans Lead Scientist for WWF, Chair of the People and the Ocean Specialist Group for IUCN, and co-author.

"Continuing under the status quo is not an option," says Dr. Stacy Jupiter, Executive Director of Marine Conservation for the Wildlife Conservation Society and another co-author to the paper. "To effectively achieve the world's ambitions for sustainable development, climate change and biodiversity in ocean spaces, no one should get left behind.

"There is a moral and ethical imperative for everyone to think carefully about possible unintended consequences of development and conservation actions. Putting equity up front as a key principle in policy and practice is a necessary first step in ensuring the well-being of all people who use and access the oceans and safeguarding our planet."

More information: Joachim Claudet et al, Advancing ocean equity at the nexus of development, climate and conservation policy, *Nature Ecology & Evolution* (2024). [DOI: 10.1038/s41559-024-02417-5](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-024-02417-5)

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

Citation: Equity must be considered in ocean governance to achieve global targets by 2030, researchers say (2024, May 15) retrieved 19 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-05-equity-ocean-global.html>

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