

AN OCEAN LIKE NO OTHER

5.3 WHO GOVERNS THE OCEAN?

VIDEO DURATION– 06:04

The Sustainable Development Goals and other global governance processes reach from the global down to the national level, from one planet to over 190 countries! So what is the ocean governance? Why do we need it and who governs the ocean?

This lecture was written by **David Obura**, a Founding Director of Coastal Oceans Research and Development – Indian Ocean, East Africa.

Here is David, explaining **what we mean by the Ocean Governance, why it is important and what would happen if the ocean was not governed.**

“By Ocean Governance we mean the system of agreements and conventions that are set up by countries and by different actors to govern or to manage the oceans. The ocean has been commonly been viewed as open access for anyone to get to. We live on the land, very few cultures really live on the ocean – so people see the sea as anyone’s property where you can dump things, you can go and fish wherever you want to, you can transport or mine anywhere – if the ocean is not governed, that is the situation we have been in for many centuries now already, and so have had massive decline of marine mammals and whales, and of fish stocks because nobody was governing those stocks outside of national boundaries or territorial seas.

So we need to have ocean governance now in order to rationalise and control uses, so that we maintain ocean health – we say that the oceans are the lungs of the planet, and many different metaphors like that, well it’s true, we need ocean governance to really make sure we don’t destroy those services we get.”

The Regional Seas Convention, hosted by United Nations Environment was a first step to address ocean governance on a global scale, set up in the 1970s and 80s. It identifies 18 regions around the world based on currents, biogeography, productivity and other ocean processes, only leaving out parts of the high seas not closely linked to national waters by ocean processes.

Other regional governance mechanisms have emerged to meet specific needs, such as in relation to fisheries stocks that cross national boundaries and the high seas, which we generally call Regional Fishery Management Organizations. These often have overlapping spatial extents but clear mandates focused on specific fish species and stocks, such as the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement, on demersal, or bottom-dwelling fish; and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, on surface and pelagic tuna, in the Indian Ocean.

What other mechanisms have been put in place to address ocean governance at a regional level?

Another mechanism has been the identification of ocean regions of high productivity in the Large Marine Ecosystems programme or LMEs.

Large marine ecosystems are regions of the world's oceans, encompassing areas from the coast to the outer margins of the major ocean currents. The system of LMEs has been developed for the oceans conservation purposes to provide a collaborative approach to manage resources within ecologically-bounded transnational areas. Although the LMEs cover mostly the continental margins, the 66 LMEs produce about 80% of global annual marine fishery biomass.

Are nations and regions able to work together to find solutions?

With emerging focus on sustainable blue economy principles, many economic development blocs are beginning to look at the shared ocean resources and opportunities among their member states.

However, there are major challenges here – and the first one is the mismatch between political, terrestrial and ocean boundaries.

Here is **David Obura** to tell us more about this challenge:

“Currents and ocean processes of course don't know national boundaries, and they move fish and larvae, all sorts of things from one place to another, and this mismatch with national boundaries is a challenge because one country may manage their resources well, another one may manage resources less well, or not at all. And there is also the issue of shared stock, so if the fish are in one country one week and in another country the next week, or the next month, who do they belong to, and who has access rights to those fish?”

The second major challenge is the management of the High Seas – areas beyond national jurisdiction of any of the countries. The high Seas comprise more than half of the global ocean's surface and they belong to all of us, comprising the “Common Heritage of Mankind”.

Here is **David Obura** to explain this challenge.

“The second big challenge is the ‘High Seas’- and of course the high seas belong to no country. Up until 1972 when the UN Law of the Sea was passed, there was no real global framework for managing the high seas. That agreement is being renegotiated now and updated because things are very different now, 50 years on from 1972. Managing and governing the high seas is a critical issue that the global community needs to deal with and is addressing right now.”

In the Western Indian Ocean, dialogue between the multiple regional blocs and entities has started, and convergence among them in the future will be necessary to deliver regional ocean governance processes that truly support meeting the SDGs within each country.

Supporting the integration of these multiple regional approaches, is a key goal of emerging ocean science and information services.

Rapid advances in data and technology can support understanding of regional ocean processes, human and economic pressures and opportunities, and decision-making that supports future sustainability and prosperity.

Resolving the complex interactions between ocean and human issues can be assisted using the multi-dimensional vision of the SDGs, which frames the interactions between natural, economic and social needs, to deliver balanced benefits across all 17 goals.