

A SHARED G20 VISION FOR THE OCEAN COMMONS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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March 28, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 01:20 am IST

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HMS Lancaster, a Royal Navy frigate, sails into Kochi port. | Photo Credit: H VIBHU

The oceans hold untrammelled opportunities for the prosperity of our planet. It is therefore not surprising that the most prosperous cities and countries are endowed with a coast. The G20 countries together account for around 45% of the world's coastlines and over 21% of the exclusive economic zones (EEZs). The oceans are reservoirs of global biodiversity, critical regulators of the global weather and climate, and support the economic well-being of billions of people in coastal areas. The term [‘blue economy’](#) includes not only ocean-dependent economic development, but also inclusive social development and environmental and ecological security. Recognising the contribution of the ocean economy for sustainable development, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, “To me, the blue chakra in India’s flag represents the potential of the... ocean economy.”

The Government of India has launched bold initiatives to promote the development of a blue economy. The Sagarmala initiative promotes port-led development. The Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy encourages domestic ship-building. The Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana is actively engendering a ‘blue revolution’ through sustainable and responsible development of the fisheries sector. The Sagar Manthan dashboard tracks vessels in real-time. The Deep Ocean Mission explores deep-sea resources in the EEZ and continental shelf as well as development of technology for harnessing them. India adopted the Coastal Regulation Zone notification to classify and better manage coastal regions and conserve ecologically sensitive coastal and marine areas including ecosystems. As the host of the World Environment Day in 2018, Mr. Modi gave a [clarion call to eliminate single-use plastic](#). In 2022, the global community rallied together for a multilateral treaty on addressing plastic pollution. The same year, India introduced an amendment to the Plastic Waste Management Rules banning select single-use plastic items and introduced policies for extended producer responsibility in waste management in order to combat plastic pollution, including in the marine environment.

From this position of strength, as part of the India’s G20 Presidency, the blue economy is articulated as a key priority area under the Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group. The aim is to promote adoption of high-level principles that guide sustainable and equitable economic development through the ocean and its resources, while simultaneously addressing climate change and other environmental challenges. This approach is consistent with Mr. Modi’s call for the global adoption of ‘Lifestyle for the Environment’ that promotes mindful utilisation over mindless consumption patterns.

Over the last decade, the G20 forum has discussed some specific ocean-related issues. These include the G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter, the Osaka Blue Ocean Vision, and the Coral Research and Development Accelerator Platform. Last year, holistic discussions on blue economy were initiated at the Ocean 20 launch in Bali. India's commitment to prioritising oceans and the blue economy under its presidency would ensure continued discussions on this crucial subject and pave the way for future G20 presidencies.

We must also recognise, however, that the ambitious efforts by countries to expand their blue economies are being threatened by intensifying extreme weather events, ocean acidification, and sea level rise. Growing marine pollution, over-extraction of resources, and unplanned urbanisation also pose significant threats to the ocean, coastal and marine ecosystems, and biodiversity. The inherent inter-connectedness of oceans implies that activities occurring in one part of the world could have ripple effects across the globe. Therefore, the responsibility of their protection, conservation and sustainable utilisation lies with all nations. Since the blue economy involves a range of stakeholders and affects several other sectors of the national economy, effective and efficient ocean and blue economy governance also presents a significant challenge.

In this context, India's G20 presidency would play an important role in promoting individual and collective actions to facilitate the transition towards a sustainable blue economy. The G20 comprises a diverse group of countries with varying national circumstances. Several G20 members have released their strategies for developing and/or expanding their blue economy. This forum presents an excellent opportunity to build an effective communication with all stakeholders to share best practices, foster collaborations for advancements in science and technology, promote public-private partnerships, and create novel blue finance mechanisms. The outcomes of this forum must further inform other international negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, etc., that are closely interlinked. The stewardship of oceans is an investment that will sustain future generations. The spirit of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' must unite the global community for the well-being of our ocean commons.

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