

# The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030: Western Tropical Atlantic Regional Workshop

28-29 April 2020

Hosted by and Broadcasted from UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico) Mexico City, Mexico  
Virtual Meeting

## *Safe Ocean Report<sup>1</sup>*

*A safe ocean whereby life and livelihoods are protected from ocean hazards and where the safety of operations at sea and on the coast is ensured<sup>2</sup>*



### A. Introduction

The United Nations has declared 2021-2030 as the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. As part of the Preparatory Process, a virtual meeting for the Western Tropical Atlantic was held on April 28-29, 2020. Over 300 scientists, policymakers, program managers, and government officials, representatives from tourism and maritime sectors, communicators, met to discuss the regional priorities and engage and identify regional priorities and engage and identify new and expanded stakeholders and partnerships. The six outcomes of the UN Decade, as well as the cross cutting issues, were discussed. This report focuses on the Safe Ocean Outcome.

<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries."

<sup>2</sup> The original version of this text used the words human communities. Participants in the workshop recommended that it be amended to "life and livelihoods"

As part of the preparatory phase a questionnaire was made available online for stakeholders to submit their opinions. Thirty four people answered the questionnaire, 28 from the Tropical Western Atlantic. During the 30 minute session some of the results of the questionnaires were presented, polls were taken and participants provided comment and feedback thru the messaging application of the virtual meeting platform. In addition to the main presentation, four panelists representing different stakeholder sectors, were invited to offer their opinion on the interface of science and policy and decision making, COVID-19 and Coastal Resiliency, Capacity Building within the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and Education, Outreach and Communications. From the rich discussion the following emerged as the Grand Challenges and Actions for a Safe Ocean.

### GRAND CHALLENGE

The frequency and intensity of ocean related hazards and its cascading effects are escalating with a devastating and unsustainable impact on life and livelihoods.

### GRAND ACTION

The development of a regional Multi Hazard Ocean Data and Forecast System linked to education, outreach, readiness and communication actions that empowers and recognizes national and local policy and decision making and individual response for the protection of life and livelihoods.

#### **B. Working Group 4 Team:**

**Moderators:** *Jorge Zavala*, Professor, UNAM and Director (Ag.), Mexico National Weather Service

*Carlos Fuller*, Caribbean Community Climate Change Center

**Presenters:** *Christa von Hillebrandt-Andrade*, Manager, NOAA Caribbean Tsunami Warning Program  
*Carolina Hincapie*, PhD Student, University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez and Member of the Decade Early Career Ocean Professional (ECOP) Network

**Rapporteurs:** *Alison Brome*, Program Officer, UNESCO/IOC - Caribbean Tsunami Information Centre  
*Azra Blythe-Mallett*, PhD Candidate, Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture & Fisheries, Jamaica

**Panelists:** *Sharleen DaBreo-Lettsome*, Director of the Department of Disaster Management and Permanent Secretary of BVI

*Dr. Garmalia Mentor*, MD and Manager of Coastal Hazards Project in Northern Haiti

*Capt. (Retired) Frederico Antonio Saraiva Nogueira*, Directorate of Hydrography and Navigation Brazil and UNESCO IOC Vice Chair for Group III

*Ms. Ada Monzón*, Chief Meteorologist Noticentro al Amanecer WAPA TV, WKAQ, Noticel and Founder and President, Board of Directors EcoExploratorio, Inc. and Museo de Ciencias de Puerto Rico

#### **C. Key Themes:**

1. URGENCY – the “ocean is crying and people are dying” (Ms. Sharlene Dabreo, Permanent Secretary of the British – the increasing frequency and cascading events associated with ocean related hazards have escalated and require action.
2. OCEAN SAFETY: A CROSS-CUTTING DIMENSION OF UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS - in addition to SDG-14, life under the Ocean, many other SDG’s are supported and need to be addressed and considered within a safe ocean strategy: Poverty, Zero Hunger, Health and Wellbeing, Education,

Gender Equality, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Reduced Inequalities, Climate Action, Life on Land, Peace and Partnerships.

3. OCEAN SAFETY & PROTECTION - protection must be expanded to embrace an ecosystem approach rather than just human communities
4. ACTION TOWARDS OCEAN SAFETY- UN Decade vision “The Science we Need for the Ocean we Want” paraphrased to “The Science and Actions We Need for the Safe Ocean we Want”
5. THREATS TO OCEAN SAFETY – ocean hazards such as coastal flooding (storm surges, sea level rise, tsunamis, coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion), drought, sargassum spread, coupled with prevailing preparedness inertia and human actions e.g. climate change, oil spills, land to reef pollutions, poor land use management continue to represent significant threats to ocean safety and can best be addressed in a regional multi-hazard framework that serves all communities at risk .
6. DATA & INFORMATION – while it is appreciated that there is a need for additional observational, bathymetric and other data for informed decision-making, the information and products generated must be useful for policy and decision making and accessibility.
7. REGIONAL DIVERSITY & OCEAN SAFETY – the region contains a spectrum of Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries comprising UN Member States and Territories which present specific challenges regarding the use and management of the ocean, and ultimately the attainment of a safe ocean.
8. COVID-19 & OCEAN SAFETY - COVID19 impact and response has the potential to adversely affect ocean safety through the restrictions on servicing and management of ocean and hazard monitoring instrumentation, meetings along with reduced Member State capacity to respond to coastal threats as well as a reduction in availability of funding for non-COVID-19 activities, giving rise to the adoption of deeper harmonization of programmes with multi-hazard potential, including Tsunami Ready.
9. PARTNERSHIPS & RESOURCES – there are many UN, international, regional and national organizations and initiatives that have been advancing resilience in the region. These need to be complemented by new governmental, nongovernmental and private partnerships resources.
10. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT - a priority to stop the cycle of Disasters that needs to be addressed at the regional, national and local level. Ocean Literacy and online and in person training can help bridge the gaps.

**D. Expert Panel Considerations:**

1. Need for increased emphasis on building resilient coastal communities with capacity to respond to the effects of ocean hazards using their own resources. Recognition programmes benchmarking resilience levels continue to prove effective and this level of readiness will reduce the lives lost, secure the economic and food stability of these communities, and support the health of our coastal ecosystems.
2. Gap between science and policy needs to be bridged in order to adopt efficient risk reduction measures and align priorities for the best possible outcome from decisions made.
3. Capacity development, which encompasses knowledge, skills and funding, has been identified as a transformative agent - not to avoid hazard impacts and disasters, but to reduce loss of life and economic impact.
4. Action and solution based oriented education, outreach and communications for the public and targeted audiences (e.g. media, schools, community leaders, policy makers) in coastal communities must be strategically employed to achieve disaster risk reduction particularly in SIDS and low lying coastal zones.

**E. Poll Results and Statements:**

Three polls were conducted throughout the session to get feedback on scientific requirements, data and regional priority for a safe ocean by 2020.

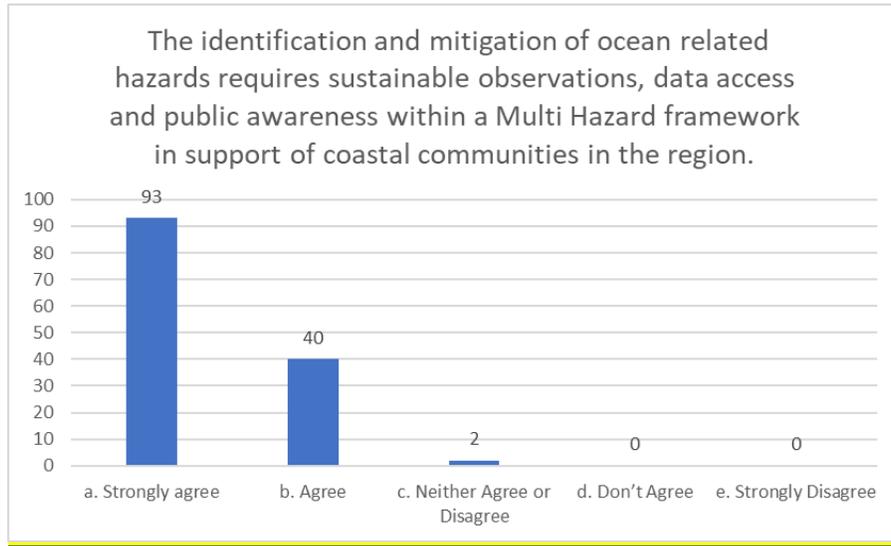


Figure 1 Question 1 focused on reaching a consensus on the overriding scientific approach to a safe ocean. 133 participants answered the poll.

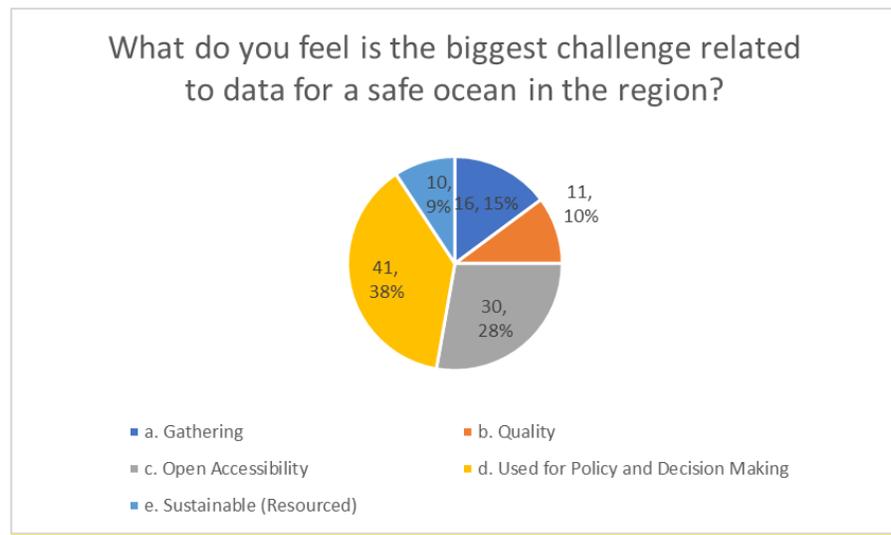


Figure 2 Question 2 focused on the biggest challenge related to data. It was clarified that gathering included existence of data. 108 participants answered the poll.

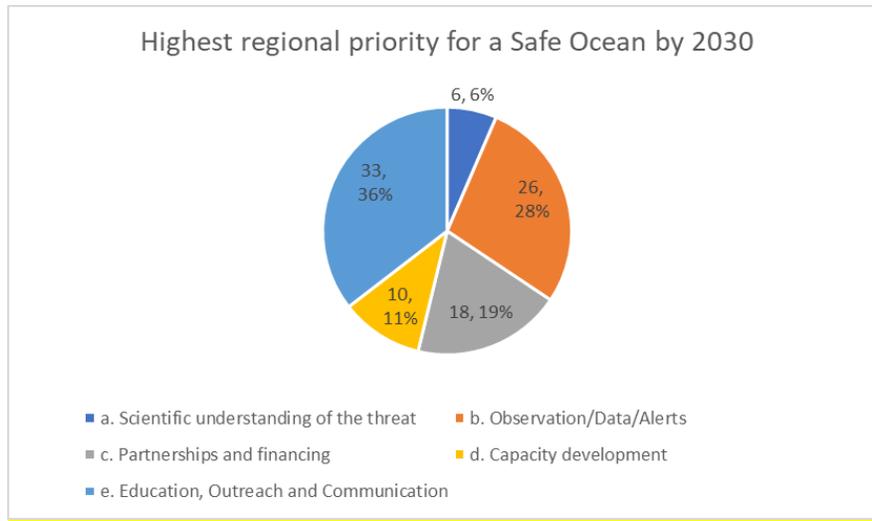


Figure 3 Question 3 of the poll focused on the priority of the decade. 93 participants answered the poll.

#### F. Regional Priorities for A Safe Ocean:

1. A broader and more inclusive spectrum of ocean users and habitats needs to be considered. Language within the Decade Implementation Plan should be amended to be on the line of ***“A safe ocean whereby life and livelihoods are protected from ocean hazards and where the safety of operations at sea and on the coast is ensured”*** emphasizing a whole community approach, not just human communities.
2. An approach which takes cognizance of the varied geo-political and economic situations of the region and the concomitant diversity in priorities at the local, country and sub-regional levels including those peculiar to both developed countries, least developed countries and small island developing states (SIDS).
3. The promotion of public-private cooperation, resource mobilization, recognition programs and research aimed at integrated risk management in consideration of the multi-hazard nature of the region and potential impacts on ocean safety and the fundamental issues and work of The Decade; including COVID-19, hurricanes, drought, Sargassum, tsunamis, pollution, coastal erosion, and sea-level rise all geared towards sustainable use of the resources and protecting life and livelihoods.
4. Foster an integrated approach of science and local and traditional knowledge to encourage policy development and promote technology uses and transfer required for the sustainable management of the resources and ready and resilient coastal communities.
5. Development of a network for the exchange of knowledge/analysed data and action strategies among coastal populations and maritime sector within the region to strengthen policy and decision-making at all levels and build appropriate infrastructure for The Decade implementation focused capacity development, readiness, education, outreach and communication, especially at the local level.

6. Development of standards and best practices for a comprehensive and integrated data collection and information system, which is sustainable and accessible to all and can be used by policy makers and scientists for national and regional ocean observations, forecasting and alerting.
7. Consider the interrelationship between public health and coastal hazards for the development of hazard assessments thru coordination between scientists and local, national and regional agencies. COVID 19 can be a good example for this relationship.
8. Design and propose transformative, empowering and inclusive regional Decade actions that addresses the issues of a safe ocean for the protection of life and livelihoods along the coast and at sea.