Is **Blue Growth** compatible with securing **Small-Scale Fisheries**?

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Summary

In 2012, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure for Land, Fisheries and Forests were finalised, after a momentous process of consultations involving hundreds of civil society organisations. Two years later these were joined by the Voluntary Guidelines on Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries, also achieved through enormous collaboration. Many organisations, including those working to further the rights and livelihoods of small-scale fisheries see the Guidelines as a primary policy for addressing food security and poverty reduction, while protecting millions of people from industrialisation, privatisation and economic concentration in food production systems.

Simultaneously, organisations that endorse the Guidelines are promoting 'blue growth'. This was an attempt to make the green economy concept relevant for coastal and marine habitats and industries. Superficially blue growth seems compatible with the Guidelines; they share common ground in trying to conserve fish populations, address the climate crisis and pollution, and help achieve poverty reduction. Yet the contradictions between blue growth and the aspirations and principles of the Guidelines are becoming more and more obvious. Our analysis highlights six areas of concern, which when combined, demonstrate how the blue growth concept is likely incompatible with the Guidelines.

1. **The marginal position of fisheries in blue growth:** The origin of the blue economy/growth concepts lies with the work of UNEP. Small-scale fisheries were originally seen as strategic because of their importance in providing food security and livelihoods, as well as being a relatively low carbon emitting sector. But as international interest has been generated, small-scale fisheries have become less of a priority. The focus is now on business opportunities that provide short term economic potential gains. Explaining what is useful about the blue growth concept for small-scale fisheries has become harder to do. Numerous high-level conferences on blue growth have therefore not included representation from small-scale fisheries organisations.

2. **The misleading presentation of value in the blue economy:** The Guidelines highlight the dangers for small-scale fisheries and food security when public policy is fixated on economic growth. Yet this is the dominant framing of the benefits for society; blue growth advocates are promoting highly dubious estimates on the value of blue natural capital, suggesting the ocean economy has enormous potential for further growth and private sector investments. Blue growth has therefore become a barrier to recognising the unique value of small-scale fisheries and the public wealth of commons, while it stimulates a reckless narrative of coastal and marine ecosystems being largely untapped.

3. **Blue growth has side-lined a human rights perspective:** The corporate orientated nature of blue growth means that a human rights-based approach is largely absent. Governance reforms for stimulating blue growth are based on the need to attract private investors. The overriding message of 'partnerships' with multinational corporations is central to the work of most leading organisations. This has been called 'blue washing'; a term that originates from the UN's decision to allow companies involved in the Global Compact to use its blue logo. However, many countries adopting blue growth do not have the institutions in place to avoid its most obvious threats to vulnerable and marginalised people.

4. **Blue growth is promoting competing industries to small-scale fisheries:** Blue growth is presented as a win-win-win scenario; good for the environment, good for poorer people and good

for investors. This obscures the inevitable competition for resources and tenure rights among ocean and coastal based businesses. Following the example set by the European Commission, several developing countries are using the blue growth concept to justify investments in businesses that will have a damaging impact on coastal fisheries. This includes oil and gas, seabed mining, coastal tourism and commercial aquaculture. While advocates of blue growth may not want it to undermine the tenure rights of small-scale fisheries, this is encouraged by the flexible interpretation of the concept and the importance given to economic growth. Small-scale fisheries struggle to resist these developments due to their weak bargaining position, state-corporate corruption, and the absence of independent social and environmental impact assessments.

5. **Blue growth is a failed response to the climate crisis:** Advocates claim that a most important aspect of blue growth is about 'decoupling' economic growth from resource depletion and greenhouse emissions. Considering the most polluting ocean industries; oil and gas, shipping and tourism, there is no evidence that further growth in these sectors can be achieved while dramatically reducing their contribution to the climate crisis and biodiversity loss. The implications for small-scale fisheries and poverty reduction for the most vulnerable and marginalised is worrying. Blue growth allows for business as usual and removes the urgency for reforms. The idea that 'blue carbon' trading can help mitigate the climate crisis is also unconvincing—there is almost no possibility that a market or fund will materialise to pay for blue carbon at any scale and any time soon.

6. **Blue growth and the promise of 'inclusive growth':** Advocates say that blue growth is designed to ensure 'inclusive development'. However, there is a lack of critical reflection on what it means and how it could be achieved. Generally blue growth assumes that poverty reduction and inequality will be addressed through stimulating new jobs and increasing private investment. But most studies on inclusive growth recognise that these are not reliable pathways for improving the lives of many poor people or those reliant on small-scale and subsistence farming and fishing. Blue growth is focussed on highly capital-intensive projects, which offer limited benefits for most coastal communities in developing countries. Organisations promoting this financialization of coastal and marine development typically have vested themselves as brokers and service providers. This elevates their influence of domestic policymaking but can be at odds to the interests of small-scale fisheries.

In conclusion, we argue that blue growth lacks critical reflection on the root causes of problems facing small-scale fisheries. Therefore, it is most unlikely to help secure sustainable small-scale fisheries and advance the responsible governance of tenure to achieve food security. Among some critics of blue growth, there is hope that the slogan could be redefined to better accommodate small-scale fisheries. From the perspective of small-scale fisheries, however, the challenge is not to insert the Guidelines into blue growth, but to restrain blue growth in order to see the Guidelines implemented.

1. Introduction

1.1 The importance of securing Small-Scale Fisheries and the responsible governance of tenure

There is growing awareness that people relying on coastal fisheries for their food and livelihoods are facing a challenging future. Populations of fish are disappearing caused by a combination of overexploitation, the impacts of the climate crisis, pollution and habitat destruction. Coastal fishing communities are increasingly vulnerable to storms and rising sea levels. In many parts of the world, significant population increases, and urbanisation are happening in coastal areas where local fisheries has been a vital source of local income and food security, predominantly for people with limited alternatives. Meanwhile, competition for fish and other marine resources, including coastal lands, is increasing, as is the value of these resources. In many places, small-scale fisheries and co-dependent industries, such as processing, and fish selling are being pushed to the periphery by more powerful businesses and investments.

Reversing these trends and averting the social and ecological crisis facing coastal communities has become a major theme of international attention. For small-scale fisheries organisations arguably one of the most progressive achievements has been the production of the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security, endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security in 2012, as well as the Guidelines on Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, endorsed by the UN's Committee on Fisheries in 2014 (henceforth, the Guidelines on Tenure, and the Guidelines on Small-Scale Fisheries).

One of the reasons these Guidelines are so significant is that they were developed through an ambitious process of participation, facilitated by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and involving governments, companies, multilateral organisations and, most significantly, enormous numbers of civil society organisations and social movements that work to protect indigenous groups and rural communities. This mobilisation of different groups, and the efforts to involve grass-roots organisations in an empowering way to define and write an international agreement that affects their lives, is described by many as unprecedented; certainly, in the fisheries sector.

The text of the guidelines is certainly a compromise. The wording is vague in places, which gives room for interpretation. Nevertheless, the contents of the Guidelines are regularly referred to as an 'historic victory'. The Guidelines promote several core ideals. Four broad themes are important to highlight:

- The imperative for small-scale production: First, advancing small-scale food production systems via tenure reform is critical to address rural poverty and food security. States should therefore pursue policies that either protect tenure rights of small-scale producers or achieve a redistribution of resources that reverse or avoid concentration of ownership and wealth. Such tenure reforms need to be supported with increased levels of public funding; free markets are not favourable to push investments at this level. Additionally, it is claimed, that these tenure reforms provide efficiency gains as well; smaller-scale production systems are generally more productive and beneficial for local food security than larger commercial production systems geared for export markets.[1]

- Recalibrating value:

Second, the value of natural resources to society cannot be reduced simply to private profits and resource rents for governments. Under the Washington Consensus, resources (as well as the labour forces that exploit them) are treated as inputs to achieve economic growth, with development achieved via the 'trickle down' theory. In the fisheries sector this view has been promoted in the 'wealth based approach to fisheries', something that has been the preferred advice of the World Bank and some European bi-lateral donors, particularly the UK.[2] Yet the guidelines, and the historical documents it draws on, point to the importance of food security and poverty reduction as guiding principles for informing decisions on tenure and access to land, forests and fisheries.

- Community stewardship and nature conservation:

Third, strengthening the governance of tenure is necessary to reverse trends in habitat destruction and unsustainable resource use. A growing body of research shows that where local communities have direct control over the management of the resources that their lives depend on, then there is a higher probability that biodiversity and resource sustainability is achieved. Securing tenure for small-scale fisheries, farmers and indigenous forest people is therefore a critical way in which the governance of tenure links to conserving the environment.

- Reviving the commons:

And finally, the Guidelines recognise and support the value of collective and localised systems of resource stewardship. This is because fisheries, land and forests in many parts of the world have existed as commons and these play a unique role in providing social income and supporting community well-being. This contrasts to much mainstream policy advice on resource governance that considers commons to be unproductive and unsustainable, and therefore these need to be made more efficient through privatisation.

Taking these proposed reforms into consideration, many people and organisations therefore regard the Guidelines as a significant step forward in challenging the dominant economic model that has caused—and continues to do so—the transfer of natural resources and commons to rapacious industrial-corporate interests, leaving a diminished and degraded space for the majority of local people. Viewed in this way, the Guidelines are important tools in a political struggle. This is demonstrated in the People's Manual on the Guidelines on Tenure, written by the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), who represent hundreds of civil society organisations involved in producing the Guidelines, including several that were involved in producing the Peasants Charter decades ago. According to the IPC report, the context in which these guidelines have been developed, and what the guidelines can help dismantle, is defined as an 'extractive model of development':

"In order to implement this economic model, the commons such as land, forests, fisheries, water and seeds have been subjected to privatisation and concentration… Investment in the extractive economic model favour patriarchal structures that systematically discriminate against women and privilege the accumulation of wealth and power, in particular by the transnational corporate sector. These models are highly dependent on public funding, thus increasing the external debt burden of countries where such investments are made.

[1] Palmer, D., S. Fricska and B. Wehrmann. 2009. Towards improved land governance. FAO Land Tenure Working Paper 11., available at: http://www.fao.org/3/a-ak999e.pdf

[2] Cunningham, S., Neiland, A. E., Arbuckle, M., and Bostock, T. (2009). Wealth-based fisheries management: using fisheries wealth to orchestrate sound fisheries policy in practice. *Mar. Resour. Econ.* 24, 271–287.

These dynamics have had negative impacts on the economic, social and political lives of peoples across the world, and have particularly affected the territories, the living conditions and well-being of indigenous peoples and communities living in rural and coastal regions. In those regions, tensions and conflicts have arisen between local communities and transnational corporations, elites and governments because of differing visions of the ecological, social, cultural, and economic values and uses of land and the commons. Land and water play vital social, cultural and spiritual functions for peasant, pastoralist and fishing communities."[3]

Implementing the guidelines remains a huge challenge, given that it requires genuine political will among governments that benefit through the status quo. Indeed, there are numerous indicators that show a huge implementation gap. Thus, the Rights and Resources Initiative estimated in 2015 that 65% of the world's land is owned through customary tenure arrangements, but only 18% is formally recognised as such.[4] Even within this 18%, institutions protecting customary land rights are often weak. Large-scale transfers of resources, including coastal lands and access to coastal marine areas, continues to happen without prior, informed consent of local communities, and it is increasingly clear that corporations behind these grabs target countries with weak governance, and often where food security and poverty is high. What is more, efforts to defend people's rights to their resources are continuously undermined by oppression and violence in many parts of the world; the 2018 CIVICUS Monitor report, which tracks the ability of civil society to speak out over the activities of their governments, including in natural resource decisions, classified 60% of countries to have oppressive or closed approaches to civil society voice.[5] The number of peaceful protests confronted by violence has increased, while more and more governments are passing draconian laws to limit media freedoms and civil society activism. Validating these findings is the work of The Committee to Protect Journalist, who estimates that reporters exposing land grabs and the environmental impacts of transitional corporations are—behind those covering war—the most at risk of intimidation and physical harm.[6]

The scale of these ongoing problems affecting rural peasants and small-scale fisheries has prompted the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2018 to draft a new United Nations 'declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas',[7] which reinstates many of the core messages of the Guidelines.

1.2 Blue Growth

Although the Guidelines have become strategic for positive legislative reforms in some countries, efforts to implement them are frustrated by indifference by some governments. However, it is important to consider how the Guidelines are affected by other international reform efforts. Specifically, at the same time the guidelines were being discussed and finalised, many international organisations, governments and corporations—most of whom endorse the Guidelines—have

[3] IPC, People's Manual on the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of National Food Security, available at: http://www.foodsovereignty.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/peoplesmanual.pdf

[4] RRI 2015. Who Owns the World's Land? A global baseline of formally recognized indigenous and community land rights. Washington, DC: Rights and Resources Initiative, available at: https://rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/GlobalBaseline_web.pdf

[5] See, CIVICUS Monitor, 2018, "People power under attack: A global analysis of threats to fundamental freedoms", available at: https://www.civicus.org/documents/PeoplePowerUnderAttack.Report.27November.pdf

[6] J. Garside & N. Watts, 17th June 2019, Environment reporters facing harassment and murder, study finds', The Guardian Newspaper, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jun/17/environment-reporters-facing-harassment-murder-study

[7] The UN declaration is available at: https://undocs.org/A/C.3/73/L.30

framed the crisis affecting coastal and marine habitats as a new business opportunity. This also is presented as a departure from 'business as usual'.

Taking inspiration from the green economy concept, this policy is referred to as the 'blue economy', or 'blue growth'. International conferences and programmes offering to promote blue growth have proliferated and it is now the dominant motif for international ocean conservation and development. Blue growth or blue economy projects are being launched by UN Agencies, the World Bank, the European Commission (EC) among many others. Indeed, the World Bank changed its 'pro fish' fund to 'pro blue'.

The extent to which the blue economy and blue growth concepts have become influential was demonstrated in November 2018, when Kenya, Canada and Japan co-hosted the international 'sustainable blue economy conference' in Nairobi, sponsored by the UN, the World Bank, the African Union, the European Union and 11 other countries. Over 18,000 delegates came to the event from all over the world.

1.3 Defining blue growth

The blue growth concept is somewhat vague—many organisations use their own wording to define it. It is a slogan that is adaptable to different contexts and interpretations. Research in the Seychelles, considered one of the world's pioneers of the blue economy concept, found that many government officials, civil society organisations and businesses have their own view of what it means and there is quite widespread appreciation that it may require further debate and revision.[8]

However, there are core aspects that are common to many blue economy/growth documents and conference agendas. The blue growth idea combines a concern to conserve marine and coastal ecosystems and biodiversity with the notion that various 'blue' business sectors have the potential to be expanded. The potential of blue growth is regularly described as far greater than is normally realised; providing billions of dollars in revenues and substantial employment. Thus, four broad themes are usually associated with the blue growth/blue economy concept:

- Decoupling growth from ecological degradation:

As an environmental initiative, blue growth continues with a longstanding commitment to expand protected areas, but it also gives emphasis to lowering carbon emissions via efficiency gains and promoting the expansion of cleaner energy use, such as offshore wind. As there are 'green jobs', there are blue ones. A central claim made by proponents of blue growth—which is also at the heart of the green growth concept—is that it is possible and imperative to decouple economic growth from resource depletion and greenhouse gas emissions. In other words, the world can accelerate growth while drastically reducing greenhouse emissions and natural resource depletion.

- Financialization:

Advocates of blue growth argue that this transition requires enormous financing, for which public funds, including development aid, are woefully inadequate. Therefore, the imperative is to attract private capital, which requires innovation through public-private partnerships. There is confidence that investors will come on board given the substantial opportunities for profits. Investment banks have therefore become prominent voices in blue growth advocacy, such as Credit Suisse, Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan. One example of how this search for new financing is being implemented is the launch of 'blue bonds.' With

[8] Schutter, M & Hicks, M, (2019) 'Networking the Blue Economy in Seychelles: pioneers, resistance, and the power of influence', Journal of Political Ecology, vol 26.

financial and technical assistance from e.g. the World Bank and the UN—developing countries and small-island states are being encouraged to raise capital through private financial markets to invest in their blue economy. It is a policy that is inspired by the phenomenal growth of the green bond market.

- Payment for ecosystem services:

Another common theme is the idea that oceans and coastal habitats need to be recognised as valuable forms of natural capital, providing ecosystem services for the economy. The ecological crisis is being caused by a collective failure to value this blue natural capital. Blue growth therefore supports natural capital accounting—measuring the economic value of ecosystems services—to help inform decisions on investments and government policies. This is also closely linked with developing new systems for paying for ecosystem services. Given that coastal and marine habitats store enormous amounts of carbon, many organisations are advocating for paying countries and communities for restoring and protecting blue carbon sinks, which includes creating international trade for blue carbon credits. Additionally, there are efforts to establish and grow biodiversity offset markets; companies that degrade ocean and coastal habitats can pay for a commensurate conservation of similar biodiversity elsewhere.

- Inclusive growth:

Most presentations of this vision say that the intention is to ensure blue growth is beneficial for poorer communities, or that it is orientated towards 'inclusive growth'; a concept that originates from the World Bank and is sometimes seen as revision of the Bank's commitment to the Washington Consensus policies. A frequently used catch phrase in blue growth is therefore the notion of looking for 'triple wins'; policies and projects that are beneficial for the environment, beneficial for poorer people and their human development, and beneficial for investors.

1.4 Blue growth for small-scale fisheries?

The international interest in blue growth is therefore quite different to the reform agenda presented by the Guidelines. They share commonalities, including concern with climate crisis and loss of biodiversity, as well as poverty reduction. But blue growth is not an international movement that emphasises redistribution of rights or democratic reforms; it is orientated towards innovative investments in business sectors that combine profits with a contribution towards reducing environmental damages. Whereas the Guidelines seek to address rural poverty through tenure reforms and government accountability, blue growth is ambiguous and most commonly identifies increased jobs and profits as a route to poverty reduction.

It remains possible that blue growth is approached in some places that has benefits for small-scale fisheries. The broad and somewhat vague definition means that national interpretations are likely to be quite different. Moreover, in one of the most substantial documents describing the blue economy, produced by UNEP for Rio+20, small-scale fisheries were identified as prominent beneficiaries.[9] This is also the message presented by the FAO. As the organisation that has been a driving force of the international conferences on agrarian reform and rural development and has produced the Peasants Charter and then facilitated the development of the Guidelines, they also have their own blue growth initiative.

However, the compatibility of the Guidelines with blue growth is becoming harder to sustain. Many organisations working

[9] See, UNEP. (2012) The Green Economy in a Blue World, available at: https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Environment%20and%20Energy/Water%20and%20Ocean%20Governance/Green_Economy_Blue_Full.pdf

to advance small-scale fisheries are deeply sceptical with the blue growth concept, recognising that it is merely a continuation of the economic model that the Guidelines question.[10] Based on these concerns, the following sets out six main ways that the two are incompatible.

2. Why is blue growth incompatible with the Guidelines

2.2 Small-Scale Fisheries and its diminishing importance in blue growth

As blue growth has evolved through increasing international attention, small-scale fisheries have been gradually marginalised. Originally, when it was conceptualised at Rio+20 this was not the case; UNEP highlighted the importance of small-scale food production systems for employment and lower carbon emissions. However, as blue growth has focused on economic growth and expanding business opportunities, it has become clearer that small-scale fisheries are less central. An example is with the European Commission's blue growth strategy, which focusses attention on tourism, biotechnology, mining, shipping and aquaculture, but has no fisheries component. proposals for the future priorities of the European Commission, written in 2019, confirms that this approach will be continued.[11]

Most worryingly, developing countries are following suit. In Africa the AU has referred to the blue economy in its 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy as a 'new frontier for African renaissance'. Although this may be dismissed as hyperbole, it confirms an image of the blue economy being an adventurous and relatively uncharted territory for new business ventures.

Various blue growth conferences and forums therefore have no obvious link to small-scale fisheries, apart from the ubiquitous images of artisanal fishers and women fish workers on posters and promotional flyers. This was most clearly shown at the Nairobi conference on sustainable blue economy. Small-scale fisheries were barely mentioned in the final report[12] and there were no presentations made by small-scale fisheries in the main event. There have been no small-scale fisheries representatives at the Africa Blue Growth Forum, as well as the annual meetings of the World Ocean Summit, organised by the Economist Intelligence Unit, or the annual meetings on Conservation Financing, hosted by Credit Suisse in New York. These are meetings—hosted in the most prestigious waterfront hotels of the world, with tickets to attend costing thousands of dollars—that are aimed at the super wealthy in order to use their power, contacts and resources for conservation, carbon saving technologies and investments in innovative start-ups.

Some organisations are trying to rectify this. Both the Commonwealth Secretariat and the FAO, for example, have written that the blue economy concept offers a new way of approaching fisheries reforms.[13] This suggests that small-scale fisheries could, and should, take a more prominent position in blue growth

[10] See for example, Pamalakaya-Pilipinas (2015). Bluer Than Blue Economy: Fisherfolk Group Say no to Apec's Blue Economy Strategy. Manila: Pamalakaya-Pilipinas National Federation of Small Fisherfolk Organizations in the Philippines, available at: https://pamalakayaweb.wordpress.com/2015/10/07/bluer-than-blue-economy-fisherfolk-group-say-no-to-apecs-blue-economy-strategy/

[11] A copy of the EC's priorities has been posted online, although this has yet to be formally published by the Commission. the copy can be read at: https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/clean_definite2.pdf

[12] Report on the sustainable blue economy conference 26th—28th Nov. 2018 Nairobi, available at: http://www.blueeconomyconference.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/SBEC-FINAL-REPORT-8-DECEMBER-2018-rev-2-1-2-PDF2-3-compressed.pdf

[13] Fox, C, G Macfadyen and R Cappell (2016), 'Capture Fisheries'. Commonwealth Blue Economy Series, No. 3. Commonwealth Secretariat, London.

frameworks. But the result is ambiguous. Both organisations promote technocratic reforms for lowering carbon emissions and waste in the fishing sector, as well as rehearsing the usual fisheries policies, such as fighting illegal fishing. Neither countenance the threats and contradictions facing small-scale fisheries from blue growth. This inability to explain what is useful for small-scale fisheries about blue growth highlights that fisheries, particularly small-scale fishing, is an awkward fit.

2.2 The value of blue growth

The Guidelines highlight the risks where governments prioritise economic growth for agrarian and fisheries reforms and development. This has long been a problem facing small-scale fisheries, small farmers and indigenous forest people. Their value does not lie with accelerating economic growth, and policies that try to achieve this therefore work against their interests.

The Guidelines of Tenure state: "Policies and laws related to valuation should strive to ensure that valuation systems take into account non-market values, such as social, cultural, religious, spiritual and environmental values where applicable". However, international presentations on blue growth almost always fail to do this. The result is that small-scale fisheries appear as a relatively small, even trivial, part of the blue economy.

A few statistics are used regularly in blue growth presentations. One is the OECD's research on the global value added of the ocean economy.[14] Small-scale fisheries are not even included in this because of a lack of data, which the OECD regrets. Even industrial fisheries only make up 1% of the GVA, dwarfed by oil and gas (32%), coastal and marine tourism (26%) and ports and shipping (13%). In total the OECD found that the GVA of the ocean economy was 1.5 trillion dollars in 2010 but would most likely double in size by 2030. But the idea that fisheries produce almost no value is ridiculous.

Perhaps the most troubling and influential statistic has been produced by WWF.[15] They claimed the blue economy generated 2.5 trillion dollars in 2016, making it the equivalent of the 7th largest national economy in the world. Whether this was a good thing or not was never explained. WWF also put forward the concept of Gross Marine Product (GMP), as a new indicator for growing the blue economy. Conservationists have been among the many critics of GDP, so it is surprising that one of the world's largest environmental NGOs is advocating for a GDP for the oceans. But WWF went a step further and also produced a contentious calculation of the economic value of the ecosystem services provided by marine habitats and 'productive coastlines', which included 'shipping lanes' as part of the natural capital of the oceans. They ended up by saying the 'ocean asset base' was worth 24 trillion dollars.[16] The figure is highly questionable. For instance, WWF used estimates of the social cost of carbon emissions to infer the economic value of stored carbon in oceans and coastal habitats. Not only is the social costs of carbon emissions virtually impossible to know,[17] this cannot be used to put a dollar sign on stored carbon in natural habitats.

The advocacy purpose of these valuations is understandable; telling governments that they have massively underestimated the true value of healthy marine ecosystems, and therefore they must give conservation efforts more resources. Yet these flawed statistics produce moral hazards. They are the precursor

[14] OECD (2016), 'The Ocean Economy in 2030', OECD Publishing, Paris, available at: https://geoblueplanet.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/OECD-ocean-economy.pdf

[15] WWF (2015) "Reviving the Ocean Economy - The Case for Action", available at: https://www.worldwildlife.org/publications/reviving-the-oceans-economy-the-case-for-action-2015

[16] See, Rotenour, S, 2018, 'What's the "Social Cost of Carbon?', available at: https://mises.org/wire/what's-social-cost-carbon

[17] Pezzey, JCV. Why the social cost of carbon will always be disputed. WIREs Clim Change. 2019; 10:e558. https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.558

to market-based payments for ecosystem services. Additionally, they ignore non-market values as well as the public wealth of commons; these do not contribute to GDP or GMP, unless they are sold off or privatised. They also project a false idea that nature has vast potential to grow the economy—by confusing estimates of the social cost of carbon emissions with the value stored carbon, ocean and coastal habitats are reimagined as sources of fantastic economic growth.

In conferences such as the one in Nairobi, governments forget the flaws and caveats about the use of these statistics and are encouraged to think that they can extract ever more economic value from ocean industries. In the final Nairobi meeting report, for instance, one of the opportunities presented by the blue economy was described as: "The total annual economic value for maritime related activities stands at $1.5 trillion and is forecasted to reach $3.5 trillion in 2020 *and offers an opportunity to investments*." In fact, a rephrasing of this statement would be, "the total annual production from ocean based industries stands at $1.5 trillion dollars and is forecasted to reach $3.5 trillion, w*hich will cause an existential crisis to marine wildlife and millions of people who depend on the ocean for their livelihoods, food security and culture*".

2.3 The exclusion of a human rights framework

Human rights are generally absent from presentations and key documents on Blue Growth. Blue growth is largely oriented for corporate profit making and private financial investment opportunities.

The EC's blue growth strategy is exemplary. It has been based on a combination of public-private partnerships and efforts to de-regulate sectors—removing 'red tape'—to encourage more investments.[18]

A similar framing is found among other international organisations and development agencies, who are all supportive of human rights and the Guidelines, but do not prioritise either when it comes to policy advice on blue growth. The Commonwealth Secretariat's blue economy report therefore defines governance challenges for blue growth as largely about providing foreign investors with assurances and support.[19]

In 2017 the World Bank Group and the United Nations produced a joint publication called "The Potential of the Blue Economy: Increasing Long-term Benefits of the Sustainable Use of Marine Resources for Small Island Developing States and Coastal Least Developed Countries".[20] This publication was an output of an Informal Working Group tasked with making recommendations on the blue economy to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development Goal 14 (on the sustainable use of the oceans), and included various UN agencies as well as NGOs including the IUCN and WWF (there were no representatives from small-scale fisheries in this group). In its assessment of what are the critical factors for transitioning to a blue economy, human rights were not mentioned at all, and the emphasis again was on investment in research and technical capacity building, as well as attracting new investors. The participation of people, including women, in blue growth planning was mentioned to be important. However, the full range of human rights obligations for the responsible

[18] European Commission, 2017. "Report on the Blue Growth Strategy: Towards More Sustainable Growth and Jobs in the Blue Economy", Commission staff working document, available at https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/sites/maritimeaffairs/files/swd-2017-128_en.pdf

[19] Roberts, JP and A Ali, (2016), The Blue Economy and Small States. Commonwealth Blue Economy Series, No. 1. Commonwealth Secretariat, London.

[20] World Bank and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, (2017), 'The Potential of the Blue Economy: Increasing Long-term Benefits of the Sustainable Use of Marine Resources for Small Island Developing States and Coastal Least Developed Countries', World Bank, Washington DC.

governance of tenure were not included, including issues on access to justice, accountability and anti-corruption, and there was an omission of any obligation to ensure blue growth prioritised the most marginalised and vulnerable. The Guidelines were not mentioned in this report either.

The transition away from *business as usual* and towards the blue economy is therefore based on standard neoliberal policy advice, as opposed to the progressive reforms for rural development recommended in the Guidelines that attempt to put the interests of the most marginalised and vulnerable at the forefront, and to protect them from further industrialisation and economic concentration.

If development agencies and international organisations put the implementation of the guidelines at the forefront of blue growth strategies, then it would be more apparent that pursuing blue growth in many countries could be reckless as the conditions to avoid some of its most obvious threats to food security and the lives of the most vulnerable and marginalised are not in place. Indeed, at Rio+20, the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, was critical about the how quickly human rights have disappeared from discussions on green growth. Her statement was equally relevant to blue growth: "So let us be clear today: Human rights matter to this debate. The only way to ensure that the green economy is not a green-washed economy is to insist on a human rights-based approach, putting people and their rights, rather than government power or corporate profit at the centre."[21]

In 2018, WWF, the Prince of Wales Charitable Trust, the European Commission and the European Investment Bank launched the Sustainable Blue Economy Investment Principles—including 14 pledges that included respecting poor people and their environment and promises of doing no harm. These Principles therefore recognise that large-scale foreign investments in blue industries can often be harmful for local communities and nature. How these principles will be monitored and enforced is not clear.

Also, the principles do not present any views on how or why international investments contribute to negative outcomes in coastal and marine ecosystems, and therefore they lack any critical reflection for large-scale investors, such as the EC and EIB. This argument has been made against the Principles for Responsible Investments in Agriculture, produced by the World Bank, the FAO and other UN agencies in 2010.[22] Beyond the fact that these principles have not been rigorously adhered to either, was the view that large-scale investments in agriculture and land acquisitions, which the principles were aimed at better regulating, is precisely not what is needed to protect and restore the tenure rights of small farmers and the existence of the commons. The principles were therefore widely condemned, including by the former UN Rapporteur on the Right to Food, who dismissed them as "a checklist of how to destroy the global peasantry responsibly."[23]

2.4 Blue growth as a direct threat to tenure rights of Small-Scale Fisheries

There are inevitable tensions facing governments in balancing multiple uses of marine and coastal ecosystems. However, the Guidelines urge governments to recognise the importance of protecting small-scale fisheries from further expansion of commercial and industrial investments, where this undermines the goals of achieving food security and poverty

[21] Statement of High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay at the OHCHR-UNEP Joint Side Event on Human Rights in Sustainable Development - Human Rights at the Heart of Sustainable Development: Honouring Principle 1, available at: https://newsarchive.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=12255&LangID=e

[22] See for example, Grain, (2012), "Responsible farmland investing? Current efforts to regulate land grabs will make things worse," https://www.grain.org/e/4564.

[23] Olivier De Schutter (2011) 'How not to think of land-grabbing: three critiques of large-scale investments in farmland', The Journal of Peasant Studies, 38:2, 249-279.

reduction. In the Guidelines on Tenure it is written: "Considering that smallholder producers and their organizations in developing countries provide a major share of agricultural investments that contribute significantly to food security, nutrition, poverty eradication and environmental resilience, States should support investments by smallholders as well as public and private smallholder-sensitive investments." Both Guidelines also stress the importance of governments undertaking credible independent environmental and social impact assessments.

The sensitivity towards small-scale fisheries is inadequately communicated in blue growth. The preamble of the Guidelines on Small-Scale Fisheries includes an important paragraph highlighting that this has long been the case: "Small-scale fishing communities also commonly suffer from unequal power relations. In many places, conflicts with large-scale fishing operations are an issue, and there is increasingly high interdependence or competition between small-scale fisheries and other sectors. These other sectors can often have stronger political or economic influence, and they include: tourism, aquaculture, agriculture, energy, mining and infrastructure developments."

These are *precisely* the sectors which blue growth is prioritising. Yet, it is rare to see the resulting threats posed to local tenure rights, food security and livelihoods recognised in blue growth presentations. Blue growth is depicted as easily benefitting all sections of society, without any costs or losers.

The potential for blue growth to undermine fisheries and food security was recognised by the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament, who commissioned a study into the implications the EC's blue growth strategy for small-scale fisheries in Europe.[24] This study found that—if approached carefully—elements of the EC's blue growth strategy could help small-scale fisheries; there are potential synergies, with adapting coastal tourism so that there are closer and beneficial working relationships between the tourism sector and local fisheries and fish trade. But overall, the report made clear that expanding the five priority sectors would most likely threaten access to fishing grounds for fishers and will contribute to deteriorating marine ecosystems and therefore diminishing fish populations.

Worryingly, there are many examples where governments are using blue growth as a positive spin on expanding sectors that directly threaten coastal communities and small-scale fisheries. In South Africa, for example, Operation 'Phakisa' (Hurry Up!) has been highlighted by the government and other international organisations (including by the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa during the first Africa Blue Economy Forum) as representing the South Africa's commitment to blue growth. It is focussed on increasing economic returns and employment from oil and gas, tourism, commercial aquaculture and marine protected areas, with a vague commitment for sustainability. But as researchers at the Transnational Institute describe,[25] Operation Phakisa is worrying for the local small-scale fishing sector, who have no prominent role. Indeed, the loss of communal rights to the coast and fisheries caused by expanding marine parks in South Africa was highlighted in an FAO technical guide on how the implementation of the Guidelines on Tenure can revive and protect the commons against government abuses.[26]

[24] Kim Stobberup, María Dolores Garza Gil, Aude Stirnemann-Relot, Arthur Rigaud, Nicolò Franceschelli, Roland Blomeyer, 2017. "Research for PECH Committee - Small scale fisheries and "Blue Growth" in the EU", available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU(2017)573450

[25] Z. Brent, M. Barbesgaard, and C. Pedersen, (2018), 'The Blue Fix: Unmasking the politics behind blue growth', Transnational Institute, available at: https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/the_blue_fix_english.pdf

[26] Governing Tenure Rights to Commons A guide to support the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security, GOVERNANCE OF TENURE TECHNICAL GUIDE No. 8 , available at: http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6381e.pdf

In the Maldives, reports suggests the government's blue growth strategy has emphasised 'blue tourism' but this has involved the conversion of coastal ecosystems for new high end hotels, which has damaged in-shore coral reefs and led to the removal of seagrass beds; important habitats for sustaining fish populations, as well as being important carbon sinks.[27]

In several Pacific Small-Islands states, blue growth is being linked with government efforts to expand seabed mining, supported by foreign governments including the UK and Australia; sponsors of many blue economy conferences. The same is true for the EC, who classify sea-bed mining as one of the 'emerging, innovative and additional sectors of the blue economy.' Yet this inclusion of sea-bed mining in blue growth is gaining widespread criticism, with the EU's multi-stakeholder advisory body on fisheries issuing a joint statement recommending that the EC end their financial support because of the potential impacts on marine ecosystems and fish populations. Industrial seabed mining has regularly caused conflict with coastal fisheries. This includes, for example, years of protests and local mobilisation against a proposed offshore phosphorus mine off the Baja California peninsula in Mexico, and the offshore sulphur mine in Papua New Guinea operated by the Australian Nautilus mining company. In both cases, coastal communities have lost the fight, with claims made by civil society organisations that the companies and investors involved have adopted intense political lobbying and they have downplayed the likely social and and environmental impacts through dubious environmental and social impact assessments.[28]

In the Philippines, fishing communities have protested at the government's blue growth strategy, which includes selling off a large area of coastal commons used by fishers to the US Nickelodeon Corporation, in order for this area to be turned into a giant marine theme park.[29] Additionally the Duterte Government is proposing the Manila Bay Reclamation Project that will displace approximately 200,000 small-scale fishers. This was ostensibly sold as an effort to clean the bay from pollution, but fisher folk organisations are convinced this is land grabbing to pave the way for private sector investments in real estate.[30]

Remarkably the blue economy concept has also been used to justify new agreements for industrial fisheries in Africa. Just prior to the Nairobi Sustainable Blue Economy conference, the government of Madagascar announced a bi-lateral agreement with a Chinese state-owned company to allow over 300 fishing vessels into coastal fisheries in return for a pledge of investments totalling 2.7 billion USD. This again was presented as something that will benefit coastal communities and was labelled as part of the country's blue growth strategy. However, there is no doubt that if this agreement goes ahead—and protests by small-scale fishing organisations are unsuccessful—then it will have enormously detrimental impacts for the tenure rights of people relying on fisheries for their livelihoods and food security.

The complex relationship between blue growth and the sustainability of coastal fisheries must be viewed at the regional and international level as well. While the EC highlights the economic benefits of expanding commercial aquaculture in Europe, this continues to drive industrial fishing in developing countries that provides fishmeal. Indeed, in many West African countries, governments are supporting the rapid growth in fishmeal factories for export markets, which are directly impacting on the availability of fish

[27] Howard, B (2018) Blue growth: stakeholder perspectives', Journal of Marine Policy, 87.
[28] Rosenbaum, H & Grey, F. (2015) "Accountability zero', Deepsea mining watch, available at: http://www.deepseaminingoutofourdepth.org/wp-content/uploads/accountabilityZERO_web.pdf
29 Pamalakaweb, Jan 13th, 2017, 'APEC's Blue Economy shapes up Palawan underwater project' available at: https://pamalakayaweb.wordpress.com/2017/01/13/apecs-blue-economy-shapes-up-palawan-underwater-project-fisherfolk/#more-1749
[30] Focus on Global South, Jan 2014, Small-fisheries call or pro-people rehabilitation of manila bay', available at: https://focusweb.org/small-fishers-call-for-pro-people-rehabilitation-of-manila-bay/

for small-scale fisheries and are therefore having a negative impact on regional food security.

Across so many examples, a consistent theme is that Governments are not ensuring independent assessments of the possible harms to local communities. Community protests against seabed mining have therefore involved commissioning their own scientific studies, on the grounds that the ones paid for by the mining companies were a sham.

It is possible that people advocating for blue growth did not intend it to promote industrial business sectors that directly threaten coastal communities and small-scale fisheries. Yet this is what blue growth has become. It is now dangerously vague; malleable to whatever suits government and corporate interests. But this is what is being encouraged. The recommendation of the Informal Panel to the United Nations Conference on SDG14 therefore simply states that "each country should weigh the relative importance of each sector of the blue economy and decide, based on its own priorities and circumstances, which ones to prioritize.'

Looking at the pledges made by governments at the Nairobi Conference, while many were quite positive in terms of trying to lower carbon emissions or address plastic waste in the oceans, nothing was relevant to supporting tenure reforms or rural development in small-scale fisheries. Instead, coastal and offshore mining was identified for achieving blue growth by some African nations. Japan, as co-host, pledged investments for the development of 'economic corridors' in Africa. Italy pledged money to invest in building and renovating regional shipping ports, and China announced its commitment to expand 'eco-tourism' in Africa. This event was simply a massive trade fair. The 'business and private sector forum' in Nairobi, attended by over 3000 participants (far larger than any other), reported that "35 Bankable Projects worth US$14.3 billion were packaged as well as 40 pipeline projects from 14 counties". Details of exactly what these projects are were not reported, and the extent to which these projects undermine coastal fisheries, food security and livelihoods of the most marginalised and vulnerable remains a huge concern.

"Blue Washing"

The inclusion of activities by companies and governments in blue growth that have dubious or harmful social and environmental outcomes can be referred to as 'blue washing'. The Nairobi conference was perhaps an enormous display of this.

However, the term has had another application. It was coined in the mid-2000s when the UN launched the Global Compact for ethical business practices, in partnership with many of the world's largest multinational companies. In return the UN allowed these businesses to use the UN blue logo to illustrate their commitment for development. At Rio+ 20 a coalition of NGOs referred the concept of the green economy as a further extension of blue washing, given the disproportionate influence the corporate sector was allowed to have in defining and agreeing to the agenda. Their statement on ending the 'corporate capture of the UN' highlighted the damage caused by several partnerships between UN agencies and large multinational companies, and the fact that market-based proposals being put forward were problematic for small-scale fishers and farmers:

"Lobbying for market-based systems - for air, biodiversity, water, land or other common goods - as solutions to the current environmental crisis, illustrates the promotion of false solutions. Such solutions serve business interests - to profit from crises that affect millions of people - without tackling the core of the problem, while further concentrating the control of corporations over land, resources, and peoples' lives... the Zero Draft declaration for Rio+20 reinforces the role of business as a promoter of the so-called green economy, but completely fails to address the role of business in creating the financial, climate, food and other crises”.[31]

2.5 The response to the climate emergency

While the Guidelines are not detailed on the issue of climate and greenhouse emissions, both say that States should prevent climate change and they recognise the gravity of failing to do so. For example, in the section dealing with climate change and emergencies in the Guidelines on Tenure, it begins by saying: “States should ensure that the legitimate tenure rights to land, fisheries and forests of all individuals, communities or people likely to be affected, with an emphasis on farmers, small-scale food producers, and vulnerable and marginalized people, are respected and protected by laws, policies, strategies and actions with the aim to prevent and respond to the effects of climate change consistent with their respective obligations, as applicable, in terms of relevant climate change framework agreements.”

Since the guidelines have been finalised there has been an increasing amount of evidence that shows the full range of impacts on the future of small-scale fisheries by the climate emergency, including the complete loss of critical habitats for fish such as coral reefs as well as the increasing occurrence of highly destructive storms that small-scale fisheries are ill-equipped to survive.

On this, blue growth—as with the green economy concept—relies on the belief that the ocean economy can continue to grow while dramatically lowering total greenhouse emissions, as well as averting further degradation of habitats and bio-diversity. The proposals to do this involve shifting employment and investments from ‘brown’ sectors to greener (or bluer) industries, while also lowering the environmental impact of ocean industries through efficiencies and technological innovations. The most important claim presented by blue growth—which is its central premise—is that these efforts can result in an absolute decoupling of environmental decline from economic growth.

The claim that accelerated economic growth is compatible with environmental goals is becoming harder to sustain, although without it, faith in the blue economy concept would evaporate. The evidence that advocates of blue growth use is selective and has been thoroughly debunked, including by the International Resource Panel established by UNEP to research economic and environmental decoupling.

The truth of the matter is that reversing existing trends of growing greenhouse emissions, natural resource depletion and habitat loss, while increasing economic returns, seems impossible.[32] In 2016 the IRP, in its highly detailed study on resource use and development argued the opposite to what blue growth advocates hope to happen—the world is in fact using more resources and producing more pollution to sustain economic growth: ‘The speed at which we are exploiting natural resources, and generating emissions and waste, is increasing faster than the economic benefits gained. This disproportionately accelerates environmental impacts such as climate change, resource depletion and reduced ecosystem health’.[33] The report went on to argue, ‘given the fact that the global economy, at today’s level of resource use, is already surpassing some environmental thresholds or planetary boundaries, this shows that the level of well-being achieved in wealthy industrial countries

[31] The Joint civil society statement on ‘Ending corporate capture of the United Nations’, can be accessed at, https://www.foei.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Statement-on-UN-Corporate-Capture-EN.pdf

[32] Ward JD, Sutton PC, Werner AD, Costanza R, Mohr SH, Simmons CT (2016) Is Decoupling GDP Growth from Environmental Impact Possible? PLoS ONE 11(10): e0164733. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0164733

[33] IRP, 2016, Global Material Flows and Resource productivity: assessment report for the UNEP International Resource Panel, UNEP, New York, available at: https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/21557

cannot be generalized globally based on the same system of production and consumption."

In theory it may be possible that blue growth could help lower emissions from certain ocean industries, thereby contributing to global efforts, such as the Paris Agreement. But this is not happening at a meaningful level and blue growth will make matters worse.

The most serious problem is that the most profitable and damaging ocean industry—oil and gas production—is booming. The World Bank must be congratulated, belatedly, for its commitment to stop all investments in fossil fuels. For decades the Bank has helped push fossil fuel expansion in developing countries and was the largest source of public finance for the sector. Its ending of financial support is therefore significant, although doubts remain on whether the bank has really disinvested or not.[34] But hardly any of the other development banks or national governments are following their lead. Recent studies show that the sector continues to gain huge subsidies, including billions of overseas aid for new projects in developing countries. This is happening while public support for renewables is stagnating. In many developing coastal countries vast areas of their Exclusive Economic Zones is gazetted for further oil and gas exploration, including in marine protected areas. Existing and new installations will be around for decades, protected from government interference or excessive environmental regulation by secretive bilateral investment treaties. Somehow the oil and gas industry is listed by numerous organisations, including UN agencies, as a component of blue growth.

A similar problem is evident with international shipping; According to blue growth this enormous expansion of shipping can be achieved while dramatically lowering emissions; vital given that tankers use extraordinarily dirty and polluting fuels (bunkering fuels). The shipping industry produces as much greenhouse emissions as Germany, with economic forecasts predicting that the global shipping industry will most likely double in size over the next 20 years.[35] The international Maritime Organisation (IMO)further forecast that greenhouse emissions from the shipping industry are likely to rise by 250% by 2050.[36]

While the sector, led by the IMO, is discussing proposals for zero-net emissions over the next few decades, this is most unlikely. The only recent time that shipping emissions have shown a decrease was following the global recession, when global trade contracted and shipping companies looked to save costs by slowing their ships down. This improved shipping fuel efficiency. Yet with a recovering global economy, shipping has speeded up again, increasing greenhouse emissions accordingly.[37] Greening the shipping industry is remarkably difficult; alternative fuels are yet to be viable, and most large vessels built today (relying on dirty fuel) will be in operation for at least 20-30 years. What is more, the technological advances needed to build imagined 'green ships' (unless they were to return to sailing boats) have yet to be developed and could be extremely costly.[38] There is also a strong likelihood that the

[34] Mainhardt, H, (2019), 'World Bank Group Financial Flows undermine the Paris Climate Agreement: The WBG contributes to higher profit margins for oil, gas, and coal', Urgewald, avalable at: https://urgewald.org/sites/default/files/World_Bank_Fossil_Projects_WEB.pdf

[35] See for example, DNV, (2017) 'Maritime forecast to 2050', available at: https://issuu.com/maritimeprofessionals.net/docs/dnv_gl_eto-2017_maritime_forecast_t

[36] International Maritime Organisation, (2015), 'Third IMO greenhouse gas study, 2014', IMO, available at: http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Environment/PollutionPrevention/AirPollution/Documents/Third%20Greenhouse%20Gas%20Study/GHG3%20Executive%20Summary%20and%20Report.pdf

[37] Olmar, N, et al (2017), 'Greenhouse emissions from global shipping, from 2013-2015', International Council on Clean Transportation, available at: https://theicct.org/publications/GHG-emissions-global-shipping-2013-2015

[38] National Public Radio, July 15, 2019, "Giant Shipper Bets Big On Ending Its Carbon Emissions. Will It Pay Off?", available at: https://www.npr.org/2019/07/15/736565697/giant-shipper-bets-big-on-ending-its-carbon-emissions-will-it-pay-off?t=1563445364018

measures needed to lower emissions will increase costs of shipping, and therefore will either lower corporate profits or raise prices for trade, or require large public subsidies. Decoupling economic growth from emissions is impossible.

The third most polluting ocean industry is coastal and marine tourism, one of the main pillars of blue growth. Global tourism is now responsible for about 8% of total greenhouse gas emissions, and holidays to small-island states are responsible for a disproportionate amount of this total.[39] Again, the only recent time when emissions were reduced from global tourism came after the global recession, but it has picked up again and is predicted to grow between 3-5% over the next decade or so. Many organizations are vigorously promoting ecotourism for national blue growth strategies, and a popular idea is that levies on tourism can be redirected to marine conservation projects, such as protecting coral reefs—the habitats that are on the brink of extinction from greenhouse emissions. But there is no proposal to reduce global marine tourism, rather to redirect a part of the profits to conservation projects.

Therefore, the prospect of absolute, or even relative, decoupling in the ocean industry seems extremely unlikely under a growth scenario. The thesis that blue growth can generate increasing and never-ending profits, while simultaneously reducing environmental impacts to the extent that these industries achieve a commensurate contribution to averting the climate emergency is delusional. The most significant reductions in pollution and emissions from ocean industries have been caused by decreasing economic growth and investments, sparked by a global recession. While climate deniers are often seen as the biggest threat to the climate emergency, those that remain convinced economic growth can be achieved while saving the planet are equally, if not more so, threatening.

"Blue carbon"

A fundamental criticism of the blue carbon concept is that it is a convenient strategy by industrialised polluting countries and industries. In essence, they are trying to pay developing countries to address climate change so as to avoid or delay necessary reductions themselves. Additionally, terrestrial carbon projects have been accused of encouraging land grabbing by companies and public authorities as it has raised the perceived value of the commons. Many organisations, including indigenous forest people and small-scale fishing organisations have therefore renounced carbon trading completely. None of these criticisms have surfaced in blue growth presentations, including for the FAO that includes blue carbon within is blue growth initiative.[40]

Advocates of blue carbon may argue the reasons for doing this are not so cynical, and that measures for protecting tenure rights of rural people can and have been strengthened. However, more practically the prospect of a market to pay for carbon stored in the oceans, happening at scale and any time soon, is almost nil. It is therefore not a viable way for the blue economy to contribute positively to the climate crisis.

This would have to work either on a results-based payment system—whereby countries are rewarded for conservation of blue carbon by being paid by other countries or through a global fund—or through a carbon trading scheme.

The first option—a results-based system—has never been proposed by the international community, although mangrove forests are being slowly included in international schemes

[39] Lenzen, Manfred & Sun, Ya-Yen & Faturay, Futu & Ting, Yuan-Peng & Geschke, Arne & Malik, Arunima. (2018). The carbon footprint of global tourism. Nature Climate Change.
[40] For a discussion on the risks of carbon trading projects in mangrove forests see, MC Cormier-Salem & J Panfili (2016) Mangrove reforestation: greening or grabbing coastal zones and deltas? Case studies in Senegal, African Journal of Aquatic Science, 41:1, 89-98.

for forest carbon financing. A reluctance to launch a global blue carbon fund or enter into bilateral payments is understandable; results based payments for carbon storage in forests have taken well over a decade to plan for, and very little money is being delivered, apart for millions in donor aid for countries to get ready for this possibility. The entire initiative is also coming unstuck as pilot countries receiving payments demonstrate how temporary these achievements can be; Brazil, Venezuela and Indonesia received millions from Norway for reducing rates of deforestation, but then fairly quickly they reversed progress. Simply paying governments in developing countries not to cut down forests is proving unreliable; the money being offered—which is increasingly made contingent on transparency and anti-corruption—cannot easily out compete investments in extractive industries, such as logging and agriculture. The madness of this situation is that the countries providing financial incentives for developing countries to conserving carbon stocks and protect forests are the same ones investing in competing industries, such as industrial agriculture.

Growth in trading blue carbon credits—the second option—is also highly unlikely, given that the voluntary market for these credits is very limited and therefore the prices for carbon credits is hardly worth the effort. A tonne of carbon is worth about 3-5 dollars. The costs involved of getting carbon trading projects up and running, and then verified by third party assessors, is substantial. About 90,000USD on average.[41] It therefore takes several years—if ever—for a carbon project to break even.

What makes blue carbon particularly unlikely for either payment system, is that carbon stored in ocean habitats is extremely hard to measure and the way in which these habitats store carbon is highly volatile, influenced by tides and weather. Given climate change, this means that any carbon storage gains caused by conservation efforts may be destroyed quickly and unpredictably, such as by a hurricane. Blue carbon credits are therefore not strong tradable assets. The same is true of forest carbon—vulnerable to fires or pests, for example.

Reflecting on the various failures of carbon trading projects based on conserving or restoring forests, several leading scholars in this field urged the conservation community to reconsider the underlying faith in market-based mechanisms, and instead to move "towards a more fundamental redistribution of resource control, reigning in extractive expansion and putting land back under local control to manage as a commons."[42] Reinforcing this advice, one of the largest organisations working on climate justice and land rights, the Climate, Land Ambition and Rights Alliance (CLARA) therefore prioritise indigenous and community rights to natural resources as a strategy to avert the climate crisis, as opposed to costly and uncertain carbon storage technologies.[43]

2.6 Poverty reduction and inclusive growth

The final aspect of blue growth comes with the claim it will achieve poverty reduction, including for the most marginalised and vulnerable. Blue growth is frequently married to the ideal of 'inclusive growth'. This is also a fuzzy concept and has generated enormous critical debate. According to UNDP's chief economist, Thangavel Palanivel: "Growth is inclusive when it takes place in the sectors in which the poor work (e.g. agriculture); occurs in places where the poor live (e.g. undeveloped areas with few resources); uses the factors of

[41] Xie,E (2016) How Carbon Trading Can Help Preserve Coastal Ecosystems, The Climate Institute, available at: http://climate.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Carbon-Trading-Coastal-Ecosystems.pdf

[42] Fletcher, R. , Dressler, W. , Büscher, B. and Anderson, Z. R. (2016), Questioning REDD+ and the future of market-based conservation. Conservation Biology, 30: 673-675.

[43] Dooley, K et al. (2018) "Missing Pathways to 1.5°C: The role of the land sector in ambitious climate action", Climate Land Ambition and Rights Alliance. Available from: www.climatelandambitionrightsalliance.org/report

production that the poor possess (e.g. unskilled labour); and reduces the prices of consumption items that the poor consume (e.g. food, fuel and clothing)."[44]

This is not reflected in mainstream visions of blue growth. Instead, blue growth represents a vague proposition that growth itself will generate poverty reduction and equality through a combination of more jobs and increased business profits, and hence the increase in government taxes and levies. Much research has shown these are not reliable pathways to lifting millions of people out of poverty or strengthening their sources of social income, which for millions of people relies on their accessibility to commons.

The jobs from many blue growth sectors—such as mining, commercial aquaculture, offshore energy production and bio-technology—are not those that will give income to many poor people, or easily absorb those that currently rely on the informal sector. Growth driven by capital intensive sectors generally fails to have a strong impact on either poverty reduction or levels of inequality.[45] An inverse relationship has also been observed; growth driven by a reliance on industrial extractive industries means rising inequality, poverty, as well as corruption and a disregard for human rights.

Because growth in some of these blue sectors will likely cause environmental and social costs—including further enclosures and privatisation of commons—countries pursuing vigorous blue growth could experience negative net impacts for the most vulnerable and marginalised, although their scores on Gross Marine Product would rise.

If not jobs, then blue growth may help the poor if national governments use increased income from expanding ocean industries to fund vital social services and other investments in poorer people, including those directed specifically at small-scale fisheries. This may happen, but there are many examples of how governments have wasted resource wealth and used it for unproductive spending, or simply allowed it to be captured by elites. Relying on governments to adopt redistributive spending policies through blue growth, specifically aimed at small-scale fisheries, would seem naive in many countries.

Although a range of policies have been promoted to help governments better manage their resource wealth—including sovereign wealth funds—so far presentations and documents on blue growth do not dwell on these debates. It is difficult to understand why, but it points to the possibility that the inclusive aspect of blue growth has not been given as much priority or thought as the issue of attracting investors and funding conservation projects.

"The reliance on private finance"

It is unclear whether, and to what extent, developing countries will experience a substantial increase in private financing for innovative blue growth projects. Evidently there is huge interest by foreign investors in offshore oil and gas, as well as coastal real estate and tourism, and potentially more to come for coastal and marine mining and commercial aquaculture. However, private financial investments in other ocean industries are more uncertain, such as offshore energy and biotechnology.

Given this market uncertainty, one strategy for increasing private sector investments lies with sovereign bonds. These do not rely on investors coming on board for a specific ethical or environmental project or idea, but rather they are debt instruments issued by governments, with the proceeds being reserved for 'blue' spending. Those buying blue

[44] Cited in, UNDP, (2011), 'Consultation on conceptualising inclusive growth', UNDP, India., available at: https://www.undp.org/content/dam/india/docs/consultation_on_conceptualizing_inclusive_growth.pdf

[45] UNDP, (2016), 'Income Inequality Trends in sub-Saharan Africa: Divergence, determinants and consequences', UNDP, New York.

bonds may not care too much on the use of the proceeds and will trust the issuer to ensure that their investment is used for the purpose advertised. There is a strong demand for bonds issued by developing countries (no matter the colour), as they provide higher returns for investors than bonds issued elsewhere. Many developing countries have therefore managed to expand their borrowing through international bond markets over the past decade, with revenues derived from foreign private debt now reaching parity with overseas aid in Africa.

The launch of the first Blue Bond by the Seychelles, which generated about 25 million USD, needs to be put in this wider context. The ambition of the World Bank and the UN, who helped finance the deal, is to see other developing countries sell similar bonds. Numerous spin off organisations specialising in financial markets for conservation, such as NatureVest, are also promoting these bonds with the assistance of private investment funds and banks. NatureVest was reported in the Economist in 2017 as saying they will be selling blue bonds worth a billion USD in the next 10 years. This is possible, given the success of green bonds. These were first introduced by the European Investment Bank in 2007 and then by the World Bank in 2008. In 2018 the total value of green labelled bonds was approximately 130 billion USD.

There are a range of risks involved in the growth of these debt instruments. Although their growth has been encouraged by international policy advisers, including the World Bank, several people, including World Bank analysts, have warned about a new debt crisis in developing countries, particularly as most sovereign bonds are issued in foreign currencies. Numerous African countries have defaulted on their repayment. The results have been catastrophic, causing governments to reduce budgets for vital social services. Mozambique's infamous 'tuna bonds', sold with the assistance of Credit Suisse—the bank championing 'conservation finance'—are an extreme example. In this case, almost 2 billion USD was raised by the Government through opaque deals, with much of the funds being lost through corruption and extortionate fees for bankers. This caused a lowering of their credit rating and depreciation of their currency, leading to further rises in poverty, massive rise in food prices and therefore national food insecurity. Seychelles, in comparison, is being quite cautious about ensuring transparency and accountability, and the relatively small rate of borrowing would suggest the risks are low. However sovereign bonds are vulnerable to corruption as they can provide relatively easy 'off-budget' income for governments and they lack adequate oversight.

What is more, there is no robust mechanism to ensure that the proceeds are used for projects that further the aspirations of the blue economy or blue growth concepts. Green bonds are now certified by third party assessors, but even then, there is enormous doubt over whether many green bonds are particularly green and how certifiers interpret concepts such as sustainability. Much of the time issuer's promises are taken at face value.

Most critically it is also doubtful that the proceeds of these bonds will be made available for investments in small-scale fisheries and services for the most marginalised and vulnerable. As these funds require repayment—and at high interests for developing states with low credit ratings—they are more likely to be used for investments in sectors and projects that provide a strong economic return for governments. Financialisation therefore is unlikely to promote poverty reduction and investments in rural, subsistence or small-scale food production systems, or commons. This is a similar problem with public-private partnerships in general, which are increasingly used to finance infrastructure, education, health and agricultural. But there are well documented problems of increased prices and lower service availability for poorer sections of society. Several high-profile campaigns aimed at development banks and donors seek to end this policy, but it remains recurrent to blue growth strategies without much critical reflection.

Additionally, financialization enables a disproportionate influence on domestic policy making to unelected and foreign stakeholders. The expansion of international financialization for blue growth and related marine conservation projects could therefore further push democratic decision making on natural resources and the commons away from the local level, which is the opposite of what was asked for rural development in the Guidelines. This is raised as particular compliant by the Low Impact Fishers of Europe platform, noting that amid the 'razzmatazz' of blue growth presentations, 'some large western NGOs, backed by multinational corporate investors, are steadily taking over the role of states in marine and coastal management, but without transparency and public consent'.[46]

3. Conclusion

The blue growth concept has had a remarkable impact on international debates on marine and coastal development. Yet a feature of blue growth is that it has resisted being tied to any specific, measurable outcomes and there are no proposals yet for indicators of success. The impact may therefore be more symbolic. It has put forward a glossy advertisement for the ideal of accelerating economic growth, while saving marine ecosystems and simultaneously helping the wellbeing of poorer communities. The argument here, which is not original and has been made by others—and likewise for the 'green growth' concept—is that blue growth is a dangerous smokescreen. It combines impossible claims with a lack of critical reflection on why it will fail.

Putting blue growth up against the ideals and principles of the Guidelines on Tenure and the Guidelines on Small-Scale Fisheries is important. Both are being implemented simultaneously and frequently by the same organisations. However, the ideological contradictions are plain to see.

The history behind the Guidelines is a struggle against the displacement and neglect of small-scale farmers, fishers and forest people caused by economic liberalisation, privatisation and enclosures of commons; processes that have been cause and effect of the rising power of multinational companies. These developments have left large numbers of people in a situation of food insecurity and worsening poverty, while rapidly destroying natural resources. They have eroded democratic accountability, which is becoming more pronounced through opaque investments, enormous political lobbying and conflicts of interests between government elites and multinational companies. In contrast, the blue economy concept has no interest in recognising or challenging this economic and political reality, but rather it attempts to reduce its negative impacts through technological advances and efficiency gains, which are contingent on ensuring further or accelerated economic growth. The fact that private investors are considered vital for blue growth has meant human rights are peripheral and political reforms are largely technocratic, without opposing considerable imbalances of power and political resources. This is why many organisations have dismissed green/blue growth as superficial, distracting from more profound policies of redistribution and conservation.

Yet there is unease among organisations working on conservation and small-scale fisheries to denounce the blue economy or blue growth concepts, even if they recognise many of these flaws. This is due to a fear of alienating donors or losing voice in international meetings. There is hope that blue growth could be redefined to better accommodate small-scale

[46] Oriodan, B, 2016, 'Blue Growth Razzmatazz: time for a reality check.' LIFE Platform, blog article, available at: https://lifeplatform.eu/5059/

fisheries. If this could be done, then a progressive agenda could ride the wave of interest in conserving marine ecosystems that blue growth has generated.

But to do this would require stripping the blue economy concept and the idea of blue growth from its basic tenets. If blue growth was made compatible with the Guidelines, it would cease to be anything like what its proponents advocate. A blue economy for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries could not depend on foreign financial investors and partnerships with multi-nationals, it would require rejecting indicators such as 'Gross Marine Product,' and the dangers of natural capital accounting and blue carbon trading. It would distance itself from the idea that boundless economic growth is desirable and stress instead the importance of 'sufficiency' as an alternative to excessive consumption. It would also put climate justice at the forefront, and assert human rights and democratic reforms to protect people from the corruption caused by corporate led globalisation.

The challenge is therefore not to insert the Guidelines into blue growth, but to resist blue growth in order to see the Guidelines implemented.