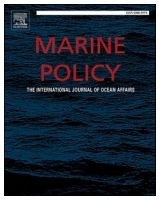
Marine Policy 187 (2026) 107060

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Marine Policy

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/marpol



Full length article

The critical role of allied organizations in supporting ocean defenders

Rocío López de la Lama [a,e,*], Nathan J. Bennett [a,b,c,d], Philippe Le Billon [a,f]

[a] School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada
[b] Global Science, WWF, Washington DC, USA
[c] People and the Ocean Specialist Group, Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy, International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Gland, Switzerland
[d] Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada
[e] Center for Life Ethics, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany
[f] Department of Geography, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Blue justice
Human rights
Coastal communities
Small-scale fisheries
Ocean governance
Ocean defenders
Ocean economy

ABSTRACT

The rapidly expanding ocean economy is a significant driver of global growth but often produces substantial negative impacts on coastal communities, including environmental degradation, displacement, and human rights violations. These harms are exacerbated by the longstanding marginalization and exclusion of these communities from marine and coastal governance. In response, ocean defenders are organizing to resist these injustices, but can experience both non-lethal and lethal attacks for doing so. This study examines the role of allied organizations – including grassroots networks, funders, legal non-profits, NGOs and INGOs, researchers, and journalists – in supporting and safeguarding defenders. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with both ocean defenders and representatives of allied organizations, our findings reveal that allies contribute by strengthening local capacities and skills, advocating and facilitating participation in decision-making, increasing visibility of defenders, conducting research and documentation, creating and supporting solidarity networks, providing financial support, enhancing security and safety protocols, and offering legal support. Yet current efforts remain largely short-term, isolated, and insufficient to meet defenders' diverse and urgent needs. Allied organizations also face several challenges ranging from funding constraints to personal security risks. Addressing these challenges requires more flexibility in financing, stronger protection measures, and deeper collaboration between defenders and their allies. Above all, any strategy to support ocean defenders must center their voices and needs, ensuring they are at the forefront of current and future discussions and decisions related to the development of the ocean economy.

1. Introduction

The ocean is vital to the wellbeing of coastal communities [1,2]. These communities not only rely on marine and coastal ecosystems for their livelihoods and wellbeing, but also contribute significantly to society through providing nutrition, food security, and economic benefits [3,4]. However, they are increasingly facing intensified marine resource exploitation and exclusionary governance regimes associated with the rapidly expanding ocean economy, which are negatively transforming their environment and their lives [5,6]. Achieving 'blue justice' for coastal communities in the ocean economy requires that development initiatives and processes acknowledge and include coastal communities, respect their relationships with the seascape, and prioritize the health of coastal and marine ecosystems [7]. A blue justice approach is essential to uphold these human rights, including procedural and substantive rights, tenure and access rights, and rights to a clean, healthy, and sustainable ocean [1,2,8–11].

Unfortunately, injustices in the ocean space are increasing, with ocean defenders fighting powerful corporations and states to protect their rights, livelihoods and resources [12,13]. Weak ocean governance and inadequate accountability measures enable governments and corporations to operate with minimal regard for human rights and environmental justice, often to the detriment of coastal communities [14–17]. Civil society organizations, academics and UN representatives alike have encouraged governments to improve the quality of governance, and argued that private companies must be held accountable when their activities result in resource depletion, displacement of local populations, and instances of social and environmental injustice

* Corresponding author at: Center for Life Ethics, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany.
E-mail address: rocio.lopezdelalama@uni-bonn.de (R. López de la Lama).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2026.107060
Received 20 January 2025; Received in revised form 2 January 2026; Accepted 21 January 2026
Available online 24 January 2026
0308-597X/© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

[18–20]. However, neither international human rights instruments nor voluntary guidelines for business practices have proven sufficient to ensure the respect, protection, and fulfillment of human rights in the ocean space [8,16,21,22].

Ocean defenders are defined as individuals, groups, or communities that are taking action to protect the marine environment, coastal and ocean territories, and associated human rights from existential threats which often stem from the ocean economy [21]. As economic activities in the ocean are often highly resource intensive and concentrated in the hands of relatively few corporations [23,24], supported by state policies and actors, ocean defenders opposing such powerful interests are often unsuccessful in their resistance efforts [6,25,26]. Although there is increasing documentation of ocean defenders' mobilization efforts, there is limited information on the enabling factors, barriers, and challenges that contribute to or limit the effectiveness of their claims and struggles [21,27,28]. There has also been very little attention to the role and support of external organizations, hereafter referred to as allied organizations, in helping ocean defenders in their fight against power imbalances and for justice in ocean governance [13,21].

Allied organizations include a wide range of organizations - including civil society organizations, philanthropic foundations, or academic and research institutions - working at or across local, national to international levels [18,29–31]. Past literature has suggested that these organizations can provide support in various ways, including building capacities, providing financial and technical resources, advocating for policy change or legal interventions, and increasing visibility of defenders' struggles and claims [19,29,32,33]. Different case studies of resistance efforts have highlighted how support from allied organizations is often a 'game-changer' for ocean defenders [21]. For example, ocean defenders' engagements with grassroots networks have led to positive outcomes for a diverse set of coastal populations in their resistance efforts [34–38].

Given the increasing number of injustices and conflicts in the ocean, it is important to better understand the role of allied organizations in effectively supporting ocean defenders. To delve into this topic, this paper examines the perspectives of both ocean defenders and representatives of allied organizations. It explores the challenges and needs of ocean defenders, as well as their experiences working with allied organizations. It then investigates the support mechanisms provided by, challenges experienced by, and needs of allied organizations. The discussion reflects on these results, with a focus on how to strengthen partnerships between, improve the role of, and increase support from allied organizations for ocean defenders.

2. Methods

This paper represents an initial effort to understand the rights of ocean defenders and the means to safeguard them. Accordingly, a qualitative exploratory approach was adopted to obtain detailed and grounded insights from key informants through semi-structured interviews [39,40]. The main intent of these interviews was to address the research question: *What is the role of allied organizations in supporting and safeguarding ocean defenders?* To this end, we interviewed both ocean defenders and representatives of allied organizations. By bringing together these two perspectives, we sought to capture the everyday struggles and resistance efforts of ocean defenders while illustrating how allied organizations can work with and support them. The following sections detail the interview methods, analysis, sample, and study limitations.

2.1. Semi-structured interviews with ocean defenders and allied organizations

We conducted semi-structured interviews with ocean defenders and allied organizations from different regions of the world. Ocean defenders were identified through newspaper articles, publicly documented cases (such as the Environmental Justice Atlas), and other reputable sources to ensure a diverse representation of coastal communities and groups opposing harmful ocean economy activities. This approach allowed us to include well-known and well-documented cases, but we acknowledge that many other defenders, who would also qualify for this study, could not be included due to the limits of publicly available information and the scope of our sampling. Defenders were contacted directly when possible, or indirectly through trusted intermediary organizations when safety or accessibility required it. Representatives of allied organizations were identified through brainstorming and online searches for relevant groups working with ocean defenders, who were then contacted via email to request an interview.

This project was approved by the behavioral research ethics board (BREB) of the University of British Columbia (UBC) (BREB H21–02290), and followed human research ethics guidelines and protocols to minimize harm and maximize benefits, ensure informed consent, and maintain anonymity and confidentiality [41], including best practices for online interviews. For safety and security reasons, all qualitative data from this research remains anonymous and is not public.

All interviews were conducted virtually between February and April of 2024 by the lead author, in English, in Spanish, or via an interpreter. Participants were initially contacted via email to invite them to part in the study. When requested, follow-up messages were used to secure and to schedule the interviews at a mutually convenient time. Interviews were conducted either via Zoom or WhatsApp calls, depending on the participant's preference and internet connectivity. Three interviews with ocean defenders were carried out with the help of local translators. Prior to each interview, participants were read a consent script and asked for their permission to proceed.

The interview guide for ocean defenders focused on 1) the threats and impacts they face, 2) their experience in working with allied organizations, 3) the type of support mechanism they have access to, 4) the support and strategies they would like to have, and 5) reflections about future collaborations and support mechanisms. Topics explored in interviews with representatives of allied organizations included: 1) the mission and aim of the organization, 2) the main threats and issues that ocean defenders face, 3) types of strategies implemented to support ocean defenders, 4) collaboration and partnerships at the local level, 5) effectiveness and outcomes of their efforts, and 6) reflection on learned lessons and future strategies. Interview guides are available in the supplementary materials.

2.2. Analysis of interviews

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed in both English and Spanish to ensure that minimal information was lost in translation [40]. Analysis was done in NVivo V12. Interview analysis followed a deductive approach, which allowed for the identification of key themes (or codes) related to the central topics of the interview guides [39]. After a couple of iterations of reviewing transcripts, a final set of themes (or codes) was created and representative passages and quotes from the interview text were identified.

2.3. Sample

For this study, we used convenience sampling, also known as availability sampling, an approach commonly employed in exploratory research, defined as "interviewing anyone that one can find that fits the study's inclusion criteria" (40, p.72). Our target population included ocean defenders and representatives of allied organizations. We defined ocean defenders as local communities, groups, or individuals whose livelihoods directly rely on a healthy ocean. Those who provide support to defenders, such as civil society representatives, are considered allied organizations, rather than defenders themselves. Allied organizations include grassroots networks, funders, legal non-profit organizations, human rights institutions, national and international non-governmental

organizations, academic institutions, and the media.

We interviewed eleven ocean defenders across nine countries, including five from South America, three from West Africa, two from Southern and Northern Europe, and one from Oceania. Ocean defenders were classified into three categories based on their primary social profiles: small-scale fishers (n = 6), Indigenous Peoples' (n = 3), and women's organizations (n = 2) (Table 1). Interviews ranged between 45 and 70 min.

Thirty interviews were conducted with representatives of allied organizations worldwide. These included individuals representing the following types of allied organization: grassroots networks (n = 7), funders (n = 2), legal non-profit organizations (n = 6), human rights institutions (regional and international) (n = 3), national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs and INGOs) (n = 7), university researchers and networks of academics (n = 3), and journalists (n = 2) (Table 2). The allied organizations associated with the interviewees worked at either the national (n = 12), regional (n = 4), or international (n = 14) levels, and were located in South America (n = 8), North America (n = 6), Central and Northern Europe (n = 7), South and Southeast Asia (n = 5), and Southern Africa (n = 4). Interviews ranged from 30 to 90 min. Data collection ended once thematic saturation was reached regarding the types of support, challenges, and needs identified by allied organizations [40].

2.4. Limitations

We acknowledge several limitations in this study. First, there are potential biases in our interview sample, including significant geographical gaps. Among ocean defenders, we lack testimonies from North America and Asia. In contrast, most allied organizations interviewed were based in North America, South America, and Europe. Second, the sample of allied organizations was weighted toward national and international NGOs, with limited representation from those working at local or regional levels. As a result, the perspectives captured here may not fully reflect the diverse realities and lived experiences of all ocean defenders and the allied organizations that support them. Finally, despite efforts to secure interviews with more female defenders, only four were included, highlighting persistent gender imbalances among recognized ocean defenders

3. Results

3.1. Ocean defenders' perspectives

3.1.1. Understanding the context: threats, resistance, and repression

Ocean defenders face a wide range of threats linked to ocean economy activities, including industrial fisheries, coastal development, aquaculture, offshore oil and gas, and renewable energy (Fig. 1). These threats arise from both legal and illegal economic operations, with the latter often involving criminal practices, most notably related to the drug trade. Additional risks emerge indirectly from broader anthropogenic pressures, including climate change, invasive species, marine dumping, and pollution. Coastal communities often confront several of these threats simultaneously, enduring their cumulative impacts.

One ocean defender describes the threat of industrial fishing for the fishmeal and fish oil industry in The Gambia, which is done at the expense of the country's food security that is heavily reliant on small pelagic as follows: fish: *"Gambia is a poor country that depends heavily on small pelagic fish as it is very cheap and affordable (…) this fish is very important because it's almost the only source of protein for Gambians (…) What they [the fishmeal factories] do is they finance fishermen (…) giving them the machines, the fishing nets, and some other money to support them. When these people catch fish, the first consideration will not be the poor people but the factory. So, the majority of the fish that is landing goes straight to the factory, not into the community (…) The community is now struggling to have fish (…). Fish have become very expensive, very little fish is now available to us. A lot of people cannot buy it anymore."* - **Ocean defender, The Gambia**

Another ocean defender describes the vulnerability they face as Indigenous Peoples due to the growing power of salmon farming companies in Southern Chile, which is limiting how much they can protest against them: *"Today, there's an urgent need to denounce the persecution that some Indigenous leaders and coastal communities are suffering, especially in the south of Chile, due to salmon farming and how the government is ignoring the issue. (…) We are deeply concerned and horrified because these situations are commonly seen in other countries…persecution of Indigenous leaders, threats, and intimidation. We had never experienced this as people of the sea defending our maritime territory."* - **Ocean defender, Chile**

Ocean defenders discussed how they engage in diverse forms of resistance, and often more than one at the same time, in response to the threats they face. The most common form of resistance is social organization, mentioned by all but one of the eleven interviewed ocean defenders. Other resistance strategies include communication campaigns to raise awareness (n = 6, 55 %), political activism and outreach to authorities (n = 5, 45 %), discussions and exchanges within the community and with other communities who are facing similar issues (n = 4, 36 %), legal interventions (n = 3, 27 %), public protests and demonstrations (n = 3, 27 %), research and documentation (n = 3, 27 %), advocacy for conservation and no-take fishing areas (n = 2, 18 %), monitoring and enforcement (n = 1, 9 %), and physical resistance to displacement (n = 1, 9 %).

The following quote highlights the legal efforts led by one ocean defender to resist the increase of the amount of toxic dredge sludge one company could dump off Great Barrier Island in New Zealand: *"About six years ago, we started a group in response to a serious threat to our island. They [the government and company] were planning to dump 250,000 cubic meters of waste in the EEZ, about 30 miles off another island (…). At first, we felt small and underestimated (…) But we took them to court, jumped through countless hoops, and eventually won the case in the High Court."* - **Ocean defender, New Zealand**

Social organization often takes the form of local associations, though some ocean defenders (n = 5, 45 %) also mentioned sub-national and national level federations, umbrella organizations, or networks. The creation of these types of structures as a resistance strategy was identified by interviewees representing small-scale fishers, Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth. Interviewees highlighted that such collective bodies help to foster unity at the local level, strengthen political power for advocacy, cultivate alliances with other civil society organizations, and support a diverse range of strategies to advance their claims.

As explained by a leader from a small-scale fishing community in

Table 1
Type and geographical location of interviewed ocean defenders.

Ocean Defenders	West Africa	South America	Southern and Northern Europe	Oceania
Small-scale fishers	1	3	2	-
Indigenous Peoples representatives	-	2	-	1
Women representatives	2	-	-	-

Table 2
Type and scope of interviewed allied organizations.

Type of allied organization	National	Regional	International
Grassroots networks	3	2	2
Funders	-	-	2
Legal non-profit organizations	2	1	3
NGOs & INGOs	6	-	1
Researchers and networks of academics	1	-	2
Human rights institutions	-	1	2
Journalists	-	-	2

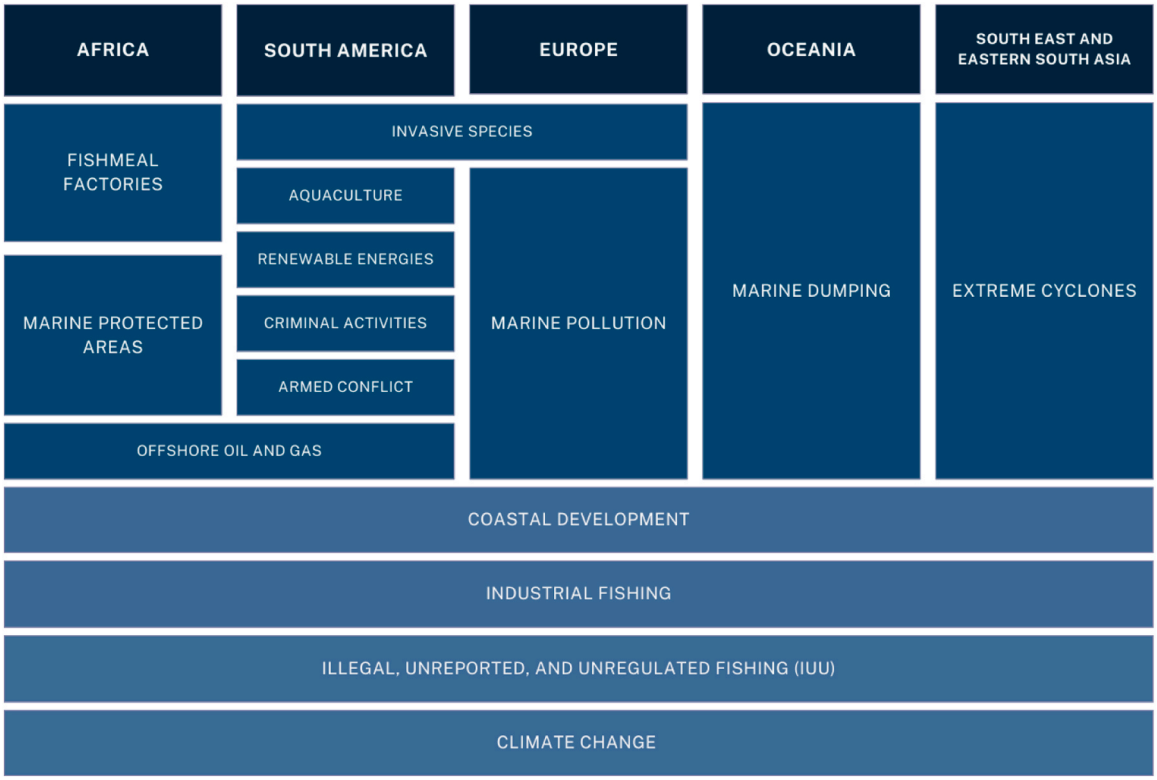


Fig. 1. Threats faced by coastal communities, as identified through interviews with ocean defenders and allied organizations. The figure reflects only the threats reported by participants in this study and does not aim to represent the full range of threats faced by ocean defenders globally. Threats shown in dark blue were reported in a single region, whereas those in light blue were reported across multiple regions. As used here, "coastal development" refers to port construction, tourism infrastructure, and coastal urbanization, as described by participants.

Turkey, the formation of a national association for fishing cooperatives significantly strengthened small-scale fishers' political influence, enabling them to have direct communication with authorities: *"We have about 34–38 cooperatives that form part of our network (…) In Turkey doing manifestations is kind of a luxury right now, but as a cooperative (…) we always either write official complaint letters or participate in meetings with municipal, regional, or national authorities. We are considered an important actor here, and now we have a stronger possibility to achieve change compared to 15 years ago."* - **Ocean defender and grassroot network leader, Turkey**

Most of the threats faced by ocean defenders, as identified here, stem from government support for economic development projects led by national and international businesses. Interviewees reported that corporations often employ divide-and-conquer tactics, sometimes in collaboration with or with the (implicit) support of state authorities. Such tactics include creating and circulating fake news to divide local communities and undermine opposition, promising job opportunities and other social benefits without accountability, and labeling defenders as anti-development or even terrorists. In addition, businesses often justify their promises of economic development by highlighting the employment of some local community members, even though the negative impacts far outweigh the benefits of such jobs. Bribery and paying people to support a project was also mentioned by ocean defenders as a commonly tactic.

The following quote shows how a Chinese fishmeal factory bribed local people in a coastal community in The Gambia to gain their support for their activities without delivering tangible benefits to the local people: *"A lot of bribery and corruption took place when the Chinese factory came here. They went door to door of the influential people in the village… only talking to the old people who haven't gone to school and gave them empty promises… which are not even written. It is all a verbal agreement with the factory. So, when they gave this land to the Chinese, they allowed the factory here all for free… and they allowed the factory to settle in areas where the women used to dry the fish. Those were their areas and they removed them."* **- Ocean defender, The Gambia.**

When divide-and-conquer tactics fail, governments and businesses often escalate to violent strategies. In seven of the nine countries that were the focus of interviews, defenders reported harassment, property damage, unjust imprisonment, physical violence, and death threats. Over half of the allied organizations (n = 17, 57 %) also acknowledged these forms of lethal and non-lethal attacks, emphasizing the risks defenders face for their activism. Two representatives of allied organizations further noted cases of assassinations linked directly to such resistance.

One interviewee described lethal and non-lethal attacks against coastal communities who are opposing offshore oil and gas projects in South Africa: *"We are witnessing increasing pressure on coastal communities to accept or agree to so-called "development projects". These projects often promise potential jobs and some form of community development. However, this model of development contradicts the traditional ways in which these communities have lived (…) Companies and government officials often use aggressive and sometimes violent tactics to push these projects through. This pressure manifests as internal conflicts, intimidation, and even assassination (…) Community members who oppose these projects face increasing threats to their lives and livelihoods from oil and gas companies, their own communities, and government officials. As the push for more oil and gas development continues, it becomes increasingly difficult for environmental defenders, ocean defenders, and communities to oppose these projects due to the escalating threats they face."* **- Legal non-profit organization, South Africa.**

3.1.2. Types of support ocean defenders need

Ocean defenders face numerous threats that endanger their seascapes, livelihoods, and wellbeing. In response, they mobilize and resist in different ways to protect their ways of life and the ecosystems they

rely on. Interviews with ocean defenders revealed that allied organizations can play a crucial role by providing capacity and implementing mechanisms that strengthen these mobilizations. Ocean defenders also highlighted several specific forms of support they would like to receive from such partners to be able to resist more effectively, including:

1) **Developing community-driven visions:** Ocean defenders need time, resources, and safe spaces to develop collective visions that guide resistance efforts, foster unity, and align strategies with community needs.
2) **Understanding challenges and governance context:** Coastal communities need access to clear information on development pressures, stakeholders, impacts, legal frameworks, participation processes, and their rights.
3) **Organizing, planning, and building capacity:** Ocean defenders require guidance on forming alliances, planning resistance, and building skills for organizing and advocacy, including resource mobilization and knowledge-sharing.
4) **Accessing legal support:** Defenders need legal expertise to craft strategies, pursue compensation, and navigate national or international legal systems effectively.
5) **Collaborating on scientific research:** Research provides evidence for campaigns, negotiations, and legal cases, including marine tenure, participation processes, and threats against defenders.
6) **Managing finances:** Financial resources, for some ocean defenders, could be managed by trusted allies to ensure transparency, reduce community tensions, and meet priority needs responsibly.
7) **Improving safety protocols:** Robust measures are needed to protect individuals, families, and communities from attacks, including crisis response and risk mitigation strategies.
8) **Engaging in international advocacy:** Global attention through media, human rights organizations, and mechanisms like UN rapporteurs can pressure governments and corporations to respect human rights and increase accountability.

3.1.3. Ocean defenders' experiences of working with allied organizations

Among the eleven ocean defenders interviewed, nine (82 %) had already established partnerships with various allied organizations. Five (45 %) described these collaborations positively, acknowledging their crucial role in successful resistance efforts. The quote below illustrates the game-changing role that an allied organization played in support of a movement led by local small-scale fishers: *"They [an environmental NGO] are the first supporters we had from the very first moment. They are helping us, not so much with money, but with knowledge, publicity, and all this because we are fishermen and this [a communication campaign] is quite difficult for us to deal with…deal with authorities, deal with the media… They are very important to us; they are important because we don't know anything about these [advocacy] issues."* **- Ocean defender, Greece**

Another quote from The Gambia illustrates how a large international environmental NGO supported local community members by advising them on how to protest safely and avoid further confrontation with national authorities: *"When we started this campaign, we came to realize that we cannot do this alone, more especially when we were arrested. (…) we cannot achieve what we want only by ourselves. So, we have our Facebook page and we started sharing information. So, we came in contact with the environmental NGO [African office of a large environmental organization], it was the first organization to contact us, and we have been working with them for four years now. …they help us build our capacity. How can we protest? How can we peacefully campaign against this matter? That's how they train us".* **- Ocean Defender, The Gambia**

However, ocean defenders agreed that direct assistance from allied organizations remains severely limited. In two cases, this backing was entirely absent. As one participant from Senegal shared, "*We don't have any support from any NGOs, from any university, or any other institution."* Interviewees from Senegal, in particular, expressed feeling isolated and vulnerable to external threats, especially those tied to coastal land dispossession. Overall, defenders stressed the importance of more effective collaboration, long-term commitment, and capacity-building from allied organizations.

3.2. Allied organizations' perspectives

3.2.1. Roles and types of supports

Through this research, we identified seven types of allied organizations that ocean defenders can collaborate with: grassroots networks, legal non-profit organizations, NGOs and INGOs, regional and international human rights institutions, researchers and networks of academics, funders, and journalists**.** It is important to differentiate grassroots networks from local associations or other social groups composed exclusively of local people and ocean defenders. By grassroot networks we refer to broader movements (e.g., international networks of small-scale fishers, Indigenous Peoples organizations, and women's movements) that bring together local member organizations and professionals supporting those networks.

Interviews highlighted how allied organizations offer and provide different support mechanisms, which we have categorized into eight areas: 1) capacity development, 2) advocacy and facilitation, 3) increasing visibility of ocean defenders, 4) research and documentation, 5) creating and supporting solidarity networks, 6) financial support, 7) security and safety protocols, and 8) legal support (Table 3).

Our interviews with representatives of allied organizations explained how each type of organization tends to play a specific role in assisting ocean defenders (Table 4). For example, legal non-profits provide legal advice and representation, either by acting as ocean defenders' lawyers or by serving as observers during judicial processes. Grassroots networks focus on fostering alliances and mobilizing resources on a scale that extends beyond the community level.

Support mechanisms were not monolithic. Representatives of allied organizations explained that the type and nature of support they provide depends on lessons from previous collaborations as well as on direct

Table 3
Support mechanisms offered by allied organizations to strengthen ocean defenders' efforts, listed in order of frequency of mentions by representatives of allied organizations.

Type of support	Description
Capacity development	Refers to providing training to local communities to strengthen their organizational, legal, technical, and advocacy skills.
Advocacy and facilitation	Involves efforts to leverage political influence to raise the visibility of local communities' demands, facilitate their participation in decision-making spaces, and advocate for human rights and sustainable management in the ocean space.
Research and documentation	Focuses on documenting human rights abuses, social and environmental impacts, territorial boundaries and transgressions and violence against defenders to support coastal communities' claims for justice.
Increase visibility	Aims to amplify the experiences, challenges, and struggles of ocean defenders at national and international levels, reaching a wider audience.
Creation & support of solidarity networks	Involves fostering collaboration and exchange among communities of ocean defenders, and with broader networks of allies, to amplify their voices, enhance learning, and build collective advocacy efforts.
Financial support	Offers both direct and indirect economic resources to local coastal communities and their partners to strengthen their resistance efforts and increase impact.
Security and safety protocols	Mechanisms in place that are activated when people are at risk and need to be relocated or removed from their territories urgently.
Legal support	Includes access to legal advice and representation in court or other legal proceedings.

Table 4
Roles of allied organizations that work with ocean defenders.

Type of allied organization	Types of support provided
Grassroots networks	Professionals and community representatives (e.g., small-scale fishers, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth) working together for community well-being. Support includes organizing local initiatives, advocacy and moral support, capacity development, and increasing issue visibility.
Legal non-profit organizations	Organizations advancing human rights and environmental law to promote environmental and social justice. Support includes legal assistance for case litigation and legal protection for defenders.
NGOs and INGOs	Organizations focused on coastal and marine conservation that collaborate with coastal communities and operate at local, national, and international levels. Support includes funding, capacity development, advocacy, and research and documentation of multiple issues.
Regional and international human rights institutions	Institutions that monitor human rights violations beyond State mandates and support National Human Rights Institutions. Support includes capacity development (e.g., extra-national legal courses), documentation of abuses, legal support, and advocacy.
Researchers and networks of academics	Researchers working individually or collectively to advance knowledge on coastal and marine environments, coastal communities, and social justice and equity in the ocean space. Support includes guidance on tactics and networking, access to information, and increasing the visibility of the struggle.
Funders	Philanthropic foundations and intermediary organizations that provide funds to support nature conservation and social justice in the marine and coastal space. Support includes funding for solidarity networks, capacity development, and, in some cases, access to senior political figures and advocacy support.
Journalists	Journalists and news outlets dedicated to investigating stories, gathering information, and engaging the public on issues faced by ocean defenders. Support includes increasing issue visibility and research and documentation.

dialogue with ocean defenders to identify their needs and priorities. This adaptive approach shaped how organizations engaged with coastal communities across different contexts.

Across the cases, NGOs emphasized the importance of tailoring their engagement strategies to better respond to community needs. In Fiji, one representative described how their approach became "*more responsive*," shifting away from time-intensive efforts to convince hesitant communities toward an invitation-based model in which "*it's then up to the communities to reach out to us if they're interested.*" A legal non-profit in Belgium similarly underscored the value of maintaining "ongoing dialogue" through frequent communication as a basis for building "joint advocacy" and mutual capacity. Meanwhile, a grassroots network in Finland highlighted the importance of accessible and reliable information, describing their online portal as a tool to "*bridge the immense diversity among coastal and Indigenous nations*" across the Arctic. Together, these examples show how organizations adapt their support, whether through responsive outreach, sustained communication, or information infrastructure, to strengthen relationships with coastal communities.

3.2.2. Challenges faced by allied organizations

Allied organizations, interviewees explored, also face various challenges that hinder consistent and effective collaboration with ocean defenders. These include limited funding, restrictive institutional structures, weak rule of law, inadequate national governance, and on-the-ground safety concerns for their teams.

Among institutional barriers, financial constraints were the most common, identified by 47 % of representatives of allied organizations (n = 14). This issue was especially acute for national-level groups, particularly legal non-profits. Such organizations often face lengthy and costly judicial processes, making it difficult to meet the increasing demands of defenders across multiple sites. As one lawyer from a South Africa-based legal non-profit explained: *"There's also the challenge of funding. We can't unfortunately help everybody because of our funding constraints and organizational capacity. There are so many communities … but there's only so much we can do in terms of helping them move things forward. And also, we can't take everything to court as well because…I mean, we would like to because of all the applications for oil and gas drilling are getting authorized. But going to court and doing all the required documentation is a very expensive process."* - **Lawyer for allied organization, South Africa**

The allocation and prioritization of funds for ocean defenders was also a concern among interviewed funders. Many described restrictive rules, bureaucratic processes, and top-down budget decisions that overlook the importance of engaging with coastal communities. Safe spaces for learning and relationship building among ocean defenders, as well as capacity development initiatives, were highlighted as areas in urgent need of greater investment by both funders and allied organizations.

A second challenge relates to tensions between the agendas of large international NGOs and the realities faced by their national and local offices. Three of the four representatives from international NGOs noted that time and resources for local priorities, emergencies, and urgent issues are often constrained by headquarters, which may not fully consider local contexts or allow for the needed flexibility in global strategies and programs. Yet such contextual awareness is critical because, as many coastal communities must first meet basic needs and safeguard human rights before they can engage with broader agendas like sustainability or nature conservation.

A third of the allied organizations (n = 10, 33 %) also pointed to inadequate governance, lack of transparency, and corruption at the national level as major barriers. These conditions reduce access to essential data, result in unresponsive or biased government authorities, and create instability due to frequent personnel changes - ultimately undermining the campaigns and interventions of allied organizations.

Finally, safety concerns posed by criminal groups in certain regions were mentioned as a significant obstacle. This challenge is particularly acute in locations where illicit activities, such as drug trafficking, overlap with local industries like fisheries. For instance, a representative of an international NGO in Colombia emphasized ongoing threats to their team's safety from trafficking networks operating in fishing territories: *"One of the main limitations has been drug trafficking. (…) This part of the coastline is a very important area for coca cultivation and its export through maritime transport. So, we have to deal with this issue, and depending on the political processes we are involved in, it either intensifies or slightly reduces the risk, but it remains a constant threat. (…) This has implications for how we will work there and the issues we will address. There are areas where we cannot enter and areas that cannot be monitored."* - **INGO, Colombia office**

3.2.3. Needs of allied organizations

Allied organizations also encounter various challenges, threats, and limitations that hinder their ability to provide effective support to ocean defenders. To address these obstacles, representatives of allied organizations identified key needs during the interviews - which can be summarized as follows:

1) **Sufficient, sustainable, and flexible funding:** Securing long-term funding to support core activities that align with their mandates. Funding needs to be flexible, trust-based, and adaptable to the unique needs and realities of coastal communities.

2) **Safety and security of teams:** Organizations need to develop and implement safety protocols and contingency plans to ensure the security of their teams and the communities they support, particularly in high-risk regions. These measures need to address immediate threats, have a contingency budget for activation if necessary, and provide long-term strategies for crisis response.
3) **Alliances and network building:** Strengthening alliances and fostering networks at local, national, and international levels is critical to tackling the complex challenges faced by coastal communities. Increased collaboration across allied organizations can amplify advocacy efforts and the voices of ocean defenders.
4) **Reconciliation of national and international agendas:** National and international NGOs working in coastal communities need to address institutional tensions by granting local offices more autonomy to respond to urgent and pressing needs. This allows them to balance addressing basic community needs with broader objectives like sustainability and conservation.
5) **Capacity to work in challenging political contexts:** Organizations need strategies to navigate corruption, lack of transparency, and irregular governance. Understanding systemic dynamics and developing tailored approaches for engaging authorities can enhance long-term impact. Establishing alliances with key governmental figures is also crucial to advancing support for ocean defenders.

4. Discussion

Ocean defenders face a range of interconnected threats, stemming from the ocean economy and other human activities, and risks, ranging from political marginalization to direct violence. In the face of these converging pressures and challenges, they actively resist by leveraging their agency and resources to organize collectively. Yet, power imbalances with state governments and corporations highlight the critical role of allied organizations to ensure the success of these efforts. To be effective, support provided needs to align with ocean defenders' specific needs. At the same time, allied organizations face their own challenges, including funding constraints and security risks, which limit their ability to provide meaningful, adequate, and long-term support. This discussion explores the challenges and opportunities in supporting ocean defenders, emphasizing the importance of partnerships, funding, and systemic accountability to advance their cause and ensure the sustainability and wellbeing of coastal communities.

4.1. Context-specific needs and the importance of social capital

First, our results emphasize the importance of understanding the contexts and needs of ocean defenders when designing support mechanisms. Many live in vulnerable and marginalized conditions, often excluded from decision-making processes and facing the cumulative impacts of multiple ocean economy activities [6]. For this reason, strategies need to be context-specific, as a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to resonate equally or effectively. A particularly effective strategy that can enhance the impact of other interventions is strengthening organizational capacity and social capital, which fosters trust and cooperation within communities [42–44]. Building social cohesion around a shared vision is especially useful in countering the divide-and-conquer tactics employed by governments and corporations that exploit mistrust and conflict to weaken resistance [45]. Furthermore, communities with strong social capital are better positioned to identify key problems, anticipate challenges, and plan for necessary changes [46].

4.2. Key role of allied organizations despite limited resources

Second, our results highlight the broad scope, but limited scale of assistance provided by allied organizations to ocean defenders. These organizations engage in diverse types of activities to support defenders, with grassroots networks and non-governmental organizations often showing the greatest flexibility to design, fund, and implement different strategies tailored to local contexts. However, financial constraints severely restrict the ability of many institutions to sustain efforts and build long-term capacities at the local level [47]. This issue is particularly acute for legal non-profits, which struggle to secure resources for their operational needs. Legal support, in particular, requires specialized expertise, adequate funding, and long-term commitment, elements that play a critical role in protecting environmental and ocean defenders [18].

4.3. Partnerships and networks as catalysts for ocean defenders

Third, the research highlights the importance of partnerships and networks in supporting ocean defenders. Building and securing partnerships among allied organizations is crucial, as limited funds and resources, coupled with escalating threats, often exceed the capacity of any single institution [19,29]. Yet our findings suggest that many groups and organizations operate in isolation, with little coordination even when opportunities for synergy exist. This gap is particularly troubling in Africa, where human rights violations and environmental degradation are acute, but local-level engagement by allied organizations remains limited [48,49]. Greater collaboration among NGOs, legal non-profits, researchers, and grassroots networks could amplify collective efforts, enhance resource sharing, and shift power dynamics in favor of defenders [50].

Similarly, grassroots networks of defenders often operate independently, with limited collaboration either internally or across groups. Broader networks play a critical role in coordinating activities, elevating community demands, and drawing attention to the struggles of local people [51–53]. Despite facing limitations in funding and organizational capacity, these networks are often better positioned to advocate for coastal communities' human rights through collective action [18,42,54]. Expanding and reinforcing networks of coastal communities, small-scale fishers, Indigenous Peoples, women and youth could significantly boost ocean defenders' political influence and resource access, enabling far greater impact than isolated efforts [37,46,51,55,56].

4.4. Security risks for ocean defenders and allied organizations

Fourth, while allied organizations have a responsibility to advocate for human rights, they also face serious risks, particularly in safeguarding their own staff while supporting ocean defenders. Although their presence is often linked to improved security for defenders on the ground [19], these organizations themselves frequently become targets of threats and violence. Nearly half of those interviewed reported safety concerns that directly undermine their ability to work effectively at the community level. With both non-lethal and lethal attacks against defenders and their allies on the rise [48], robust security and protection protocols are essential for safeguarding community members as well as employees of allied organizations [18,29]. Even government-funded human rights institutions encounter major constraints, including scarce resources, limited expertise for engaging with coastal communities, and, in some cases, direct threats or arrests of staff [57]. Navigating these "turbulent waters" requires a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics shaping interactions between allied organizations, ocean defenders, states, and corporations.

4.5. Reorienting funding priorities to support ocean defenders

Fifth, greater and more flexible funding needs to be allocated to support ocean defenders and allied organizations, particularly for issues extending beyond marine conservation, fisheries management, and natural resource management. At present, funding priorities are strongly shaped by the 30×30 targets, which emphasize initiatives such as establishing marine protected areas and biodiversity monitoring

schemes [20,58,59]. This narrow focus often overlooks critical needs like the inclusion of coastal communities in ocean governance and sustained capacity development, both of which remain significantly underfunded [20,47]. Philanthropic foundations have a unique opportunity to help close these gaps and influence power dynamics by promoting more participatory and inclusive approaches to ocean governance [50]. In addition, ocean funders should require robust social safeguards for supported projects, especially those tied to the ocean economy, thereby fostering more equitable outcomes [47,60,61].

4.6. From support to accountability: states and corporations as duty-bearers

Finally, governments and the private sector must be held accountable for their obligations to promote, protect, respect, and uphold human rights – including those of ocean defenders. While defenders and their allies play a pivotal role in advancing a sustainable and equitable ocean economy, their efforts will remain insufficient unless governments and corporations fulfill their legal duties and establish grievance mechanisms for rights violations [32,62,63]. As our findings indicate, most threats arise from formal economic activities. Divide-and-conquer tactics and violent attacks, frequently described by interviewees, are often linked to resource-based industries seeking to silence opposition [14,32,48]. This systemic disregard for the wellbeing and rights of coastal communities demands urgent action from all stakeholders [21,64].

If businesses and governments continue to neglect their human rights obligations, the efforts of allied organizations will be like putting band aids on wounds. Ocean defenders and their allies need to scale up their engagement in international human rights space to drive systemic change [20]. Legal instruments like ILO Convention 169 emphasize the obligation to consult Indigenous Peoples on ocean economy projects that directly affect them [65]. Broader frameworks, including international human rights law and regional agreements like the Escazú Agreement in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Aarhus Convention in Europe and Central Asia, provide critical tools for holding corporations and governments accountable [8,66]. In addition, direct engagement with UN Special Rapporteurs on issues such as the right to a healthy ocean or the protection of environmental defenders can amplify local struggles on the global stage, ensuring these concerns receive the attention they deserve [67].

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Achieving a just and equitable ocean economy requires sustained and coordinated support for ocean defenders in their resistance efforts. As pressures from the ocean economy intensify, so too does the need for stronger, more effective engagement from allied organizations, whose presence on the ground remains limited in many regions. When working collectively, these organizations can leverage their complementary expertise, resources, and political influence to expose ongoing injustices, amplify coastal communities' voices, and hold duty-bearers accountable. However, our findings indicate that the main obstacle for both defenders and their allies is the lack of flexible, long-term funding required to enact effective strategies. Expanding financial support would enable broader field-level engagement and more impactful actions that will lead to change. Above all, any strategy must center defenders' voices and perspectives, ensuring they remain at the forefront of debates on the ocean economy, the marine and coastal environment, their territories, their rights, and their safety. Building on these insights, we outline the following recommendations directed at allied organizations and funding institutions engaged in supporting ocean defenders.

5.1. Recommendations for allied organizations:

- Strengthen partnerships and coordination among organizations working on human rights and ocean defender issues and scale up support mechanisms to better match the magnitude of threats and human rights violations faced by ocean defenders.
- Expand and reinforce grassroots networks of coastal communities, small-scale fisheries, Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth to enhance collective advocacy and political in ocean governance processes.
- Ensure institutional commitment to continued support for partner communities and groups when they face external threats from activities and actors that threaten the environment, their territories, and their human rights.
- Tailor support strategies to local contexts, vulnerabilities, and priorities through continuous dialogue and collaboration with ocean defenders.
- Invest in community-level organizational capacity and social capital to counter divide-and-conquer tactics and strengthen collective resilience.
- Establish and maintain robust security and protection protocols to safeguard both ocean defenders and allied organization staff amid escalating risks and violence.
- Support efforts to build the knowledge and capacity of governments and corporations regarding their human rights obligations, including responsibilities to protect civic space and safeguard ocean defenders.
- Work alongside ocean defenders to hold governments and corporations accountable through available national, regional, and international legal and human rights mechanisms.

5.2. Recommendations for funders:

- Provide core and institutional funding to allied organizations that deliver both rapid-response and long-term support to ocean defenders
- Enable flexible, trust-based funding approaches that allow allied organizations to deploy resources in context-appropriate ways and over longer timeframes.
- Allocate funding for conservation and ocean-related initiatives that move beyond externally driven biodiversity and fisheries targets, and instead support local empowerment, territorial integrity, tenure rights, human rights, and inclusive ocean governance as pathways to effective and equitable conservation.
- Provide direct funding to ocean defenders to strengthen their capacity to engage in ocean governance processes, protect the environment and their territories, and hold governments and corporations accountable when human rights obligations are violated.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Nathan J. Bennett: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Resources, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Philippe Le Billon:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Resources, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Rocío López de la Lama:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful to all of the ocean defenders and

representatives of allied organizations who generously shared their time, knowledge, and experiences with us. Their voices and insights are at the heart of this research. We also thank our colleagues and collaborators in the Ocean Defenders Project for their support throughout the development of this study. This research is an output of The Ocean Defenders Project, which is carried out in collaboration with the Peopled Seas Initiative and Coastal Renewal Society and receives financial support from the Oak Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, the David & Lucile Packard Foundation, the Environmental Defenders Collaborative (EDC), and the Commission on Environmental, Economic, and Social Policy of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN CEESP). We gratefully acknowledge their support, without which this research would not have been possible.

Appendix A. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at doi:10.1016/j.marpol.2026.107060.

Data Availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

References

[1] M.R. Stuchtey, A. Vincent, A. Merkl, M. Bucher, P.M. Haugan, J. Lubchenco, et al., Ocean solutions that benefit people, nature and the economy, in: J. Lubchenco, P. M. Haugan (Eds.), The Blue Compendium, Springer International Publishing, Cham, 2023, pp. 783–906. https://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-031-16277-0_20.

[2] H. Österblom, C.C.C. Wabnitz, D. Tladi, E.H. Allison, S. Arnaud-Haond, J. Bebbington, et al., Towards Ocean Equity, in: J. Lubchenco, P.M. Haugan (Eds.), The Blue Compendium, Springer International Publishing, Cham, 2023, pp. 485–521, 978-3-031-16277-0_13&gt, https://link.springer.com/10.1007/.

[3] FAO, The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022: Towards Blue Transformation, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2022.

[4] C.C. Hicks, P.J. Cohen, N.A.J. Graham, K.L. Nash, E.H. Allison, C. D'Lima, et al., Harnessing global fisheries to tackle micronutrient deficiencies, Nature 574 (7776) (2019) 95–98.

[5] A.K. Farmery, E.H. Allison, N.L. Andrew, M. Troell, M. Voyer, B. Campbell, et al., Blind spots in visions of a "blue economy" could undermine the ocean's contribution to eliminating hunger and malnutrition, One Earth 4 (1) (2021) 28–38.

[6] D.A. Gill, J. Blythe, N. Bennett, L. Evans, K. Brown, R.A. Turner, et al., Triple exposure: reducing negative impacts of climate change, blue growth, and conservation on coastal communities, One Earth 6 (2) (2023) 118–130.

[7] J.L. Blythe, D. Armitage, N.J. Bennett, J.J. Silver, A.M. Song, The politics of ocean governance transformations, Front Mar. Sci. 8 (2021) 634718.

[8] N.J. Bennett, E. Morgera, D. Boyd, The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable ocean, NPJ Ocean Sustain. 3 (19) (2024).

[9] Cohen P.J., Tholan B., Dean Fitz K., Pradhan S.K., Solis Rivera V., Govan H.. Marine, Coastal and Shoreline Tenure. 2024 June 7 [cited 2024 Dec 12]; Available from: ⟨https://zenodo.org/doi/10.5281/zenodo.11515140⟩.

[10] B. Tholan, X. Basurto, P.J. Cohen, N. Franz, A. Himes-Cornell, H. Govan, et al., Accounting for existing tenure and rights over marine and freshwater systems, NPJ Ocean Sustain 3 (1) (2024).

[11] UN, Business, planetary boundaries, and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, United Nations Human Rights Council, 2024. Report No.: A/HRC/55/43. Available from: https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/55/43.

[12] N.J. Bennett, J. Blythe, C.S. White, C. Campero, Blue growth and blue justice: ten risks and solutions for the ocean economy, Mar. Policy 125 (2021) 104387.

[13] S. Jentoft, R. Chuenpagdee, A. Bugeja Said, M. Isaacs, Blue justice: small-scale fisheries in a sustainable ocean economy, Springer International Publishing, Cham, 2022 (MARE Publication Series; vol. 26), ⟨https://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-030-89624-9⟩.

[14] N. Butt, F. Lambrick, M. Menton, A. Renwick, The supply chain of violence, Nat. Sustain 2 (8) (2019) 742–747.

[15] N. Middeldorp, P. Le Billon, Deadly environmental governance: authoritarianism, eco-populism, and the repression of environmental and land defenders, Ann. Am. Assoc. Geogr. 109 (2) (2019) 324–337.

[16] IIED, 'Blue economy': why we should talk about investment law, International Institute Environment Development (IIED) (2020). Available from: ⟨https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/the-ocean-economy-in-2030_9789264251724-en⟩.

[17] N.J. Bennett, J.J. Alava, C.E. Ferguson, J. Blythe, E. Morgera, D. Boyd, et al., Environmental (in)justice in the Anthropocene ocean, Mar. Policy 147 (2023) 105383.

[18] S. Khanna, P. Le Billon, Protecting and supporting defenders: a review of policies for environmental and land defenders, Policy Matters 22 (3) (2021) 90–118.

[19] J.H. Knox, Environmental Human Rights Defenders: A Global Crisis, Universal Rights Group, Versoix, Switzerland, 2017.

[20] UNEP, Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders [Internet], United Nations Environment Programme, 2024. Available from: https://wedocs.unep.org/20.500.11822/46756.

[21] N.J. Bennett, R. López De La Lama, P. Le Billon, I. Ertör, E. Morgera, Ocean defenders and human rights, Front Mar. Sci. 9 (2023) 1089049.

[22] J. Nakamura, R. Chuenpagdee, S. Jentoft, Implementation of the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines: A Legal and Policy Scan, Springer Nature Switzerland, Cham, 2024 (MARE Publication Series; vol. 28), https://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-031-56716-2.

[23] D.J. McCauley, C. Jablonicky, E.H. Allison, C.D. Golden, F.H. Joyce, J. Mayorga, et al., Wealthy countries dominate industrial fishing, Sci. Adv. 4 (8) (2018) eaau2161.

[24] J. Virdin, T. Vegh, J.B. Jouffray, R. Blasiak, S. Mason, H. Österblom, et al., The Ocean 100: Transnational corporations in the ocean economy, Sci. Adv. 7 (3) (2021) eabc8041.

[25] I. Ertör, 'We are the oceans, we are the people!': fisher people's struggles for blue justice, J. Peasant Stud. 50 (3) (2021) 1157–1186.

[26] P. Satizábal, W.H. Dressler, M. Fabinyi, M.D. Pido, Blue economy discourses and practices: reconfiguring ocean spaces in the Philippines, Marit. Stud. 19 (2) (2020) 207–221.

[27] A. Scheidel, D. Del Bene, J. Liu, G. Navas, S. Mingorría, F. Demaria, et al., Environmental conflicts and defenders: a global overview, Glob. Environ. Change 63 (2020) 102104.

[28] The Ocean Defenders Project, Ocean Defenders: Protectors of our ocean environment and human rights, The Peopled Seas Initiative, Vancouver, Canada, 2025.

[29] ALLIED, Supporting environmental human rights defenders: developing new guidance for donors and civil society organisations, Alliance Land Indig. Environmetal Def. (2022) 12.

[30] N.J. Bennett, L. Katz, W. Yadao-Evans, G.N. Ahmadia, S. Atkinson, N.C. Ban, et al., Advancing social equity in and through marine conservation, Front Mar. Sci. 8 (2021) 711538.

[31] M. Menton, P. Le Billon, Environmental Defenders: Deadly Struggles for Life and Territory, Routledge, London, UK, 2021, p. 273 p.

[32] P. Le Billon, P. Lujala, Environmental and land defenders: global patterns and determinants of repression, Glob. Environ. Change 65 (2020) 102163.

[33] N.J. Bennett, P. Le Billon, D. Belhabib, P. Satizábal, Local marine stewardship and ocean defenders, NPJ Ocean Sustain 1 (1) (2022).

[34] M. Allen, S. Bird, S. Breslow, N. Dolšak, Stronger together: strategies to protect local sovereignty, ecosystems, and place-based communities from the global fossil fuel trade, Mar. Policy 80 (2017) 168–176.

[35] M.F. Fan, C.M. Chiu, L. Mabon, Environmental justice and the politics of pollution: The case of the Formosa Ha Tinh Steel pollution incident in Vietnam, Environ. Plan. E Nat. Space 5 (1) (2022) 189–206.

[36] I. Figueroa, Lina Saavedra-díaz, Satízaba, Paulal Norlega-Narváez, Gina Velásquez-Mendoza, Yulibeth. Justicia en territorios pesqueros: violaciones a derechos humanos en la pesca artesanal analizadas por la Corte Constitucional de Colombia, Estud. Socio-Jurid 25 (2) (2023).

[37] F. Araos, C. Hidalgo, F. Brañas, J. Anbleyth-Evans, F. Diestre, A.Y. Iwama, Facing the blue Anthropocene in Patagonia by empowering indigenous peoples' action networks, Mar. Policy 147 (2023) 105397.

[38] S. Partelow, K. Nelson, Social networks, collective action and the evolution of governance for sustainable tourism on the Gili Islands, Indonesia, Mar. Policy 112 (2020).

[39] J.W. Creswell, A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research, Sage Publications, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, 2015.

[40] H. Newing. Conducting Research in Conservation. A social science perspective, 1st ed, Routledge, Abingdon, England, 2011, p. 399.

[41] P. Satizábal, P. Le Billon, D. Belhabib, L.M. Saavedra-Díaz, I. Figueroa, G. Noriega, et al., Ethical considerations for research on small-scale fisheries and blue crimes, Fish Fish 22 (6) (2021) 1160–1166.

[42] S.M. Alexander, M. Andrachuk, D. Armitage, Navigating governance networks for community-based conservation, Front. Ecol. Environ. 14 (3) (2016) 155–164.

[43] N.L. Gutiérrez, R. Hilborn, O. Defeo, Leadership, social capital and incentives promote successful fisheries, Nature 470 (7334) (2011) 386–389.

[44] S. Partelow, A. Schlüter, N.C. Ban, S. Batterbury, M. Bavinck, N.J. Bennett, et al., Five social science intervention areas for ocean sustainability initiatives, NPJ Ocean Sustain 2 (1) (2023) 24.

[45] P. Bille Larsen, P. Le Billon, M. Menton, J. Aylwin, J. Balsiger, D. Boyd, et al., Understanding and responding to the environmental human rights defenders crisis: the case for conservation action, Conserv. Lett. 14 (3) (2021) e12777.

[46] R. López De La Lama, A. Valdés-Velasquez, L. Huicho, E. Morales, M. Rivera-Ch, Exploring the building blocks of social capital in the Sechura Bay (Peru): Insights from Peruvian scallop (Argopecten purpuratus) aquaculture, Ocean Coast. Manag. 165 (2018) 235–243.

[47] OAK Foundation. Cover letter: what opportunities exist for philanthropic partnership in the Global South? 2024.

[48] Global Witness. Missing Voices: The violent erasure of land and environmental defenders. 2024 p. 36.

[49] Amnesty International. The Human Cost of Overfishing: How the overuse of fisheries resources in Sanyang threatens human rights. London, UK; 2023 p. 66.

[50] A. Rodericks, C. Cock, G. Gioacchino, Gouthami, M. Lomé, M. Tapia, et al., Understanding the re-granting ecosystem in the global south, OAK Found. Ruta Cívica (2024).

[51] Forst M. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. New York; 2016 p. 27. Report No.: A/71/281.
[52] W. Nicholls, Place, networks, space: theorising the geographies of social movements, Trans. Inst. Br. Geog 34 (1) (2009) 78–93.
[53] J. Das, M. Govender, H.Md Irfanullah, S.A. Selim, M. Glaser, Stakeholder perceptions of blue economy governance networks and their equity implications in Bangladesh, Mar. Policy 170 (2024) 106359.
[54] S. Villamayor-Tomas, G. García-López, Social movements as key actors in governing the commons: Evidence from community-based resource management cases across the world, Glob. Environ. Change 53 (2018) 114–126.
[55] D.J. Abson, J. Fischer, J. Leventon, J. Newig, T. Schomerus, U. Vilsmaier, et al., Leverage points for sustainability transformation, Ambio 46 (1) (2017) 30–39.
[56] P. Ertör-Akyazi, Contesting growth in marine capture fisheries: the case of small-scale fishing cooperatives in Istanbul, Sustain Sci. 15 (1) (2020) 45–62.
[57] FRA, Strong and effective national human rights institutions: Challenges, promising practices and opportunities, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Luxembourg, 2021.
[58] CBD, Kunming-Montreal Global biodiversity framework, Conv. Biol. Divers. (2022). Available from: ⟨https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf⟩.
[59] C. Zhao, Y. Ge, M. Zheng, Reflections on How to Reach the "30 by 30" Target: Identification of and Suggestions on Global Priority Marine Areas for Protection, Water 16 (16) (2024) 2293.
[60] A. Enrici, R. Gruby, M. Betsill, E. Le Cornu, J. Blackwatters, X. Basurto, et al., Who's setting the agenda? Philanthropic donor influence in marine conservation, ES 28 (3) (2023) art2.
[61] N. Ford-Learner, J. Addison, P. Smallhorn-West, Conservation and human rights: The public commitments of international conservation organizations, Conserv. Lett. 17 (4) (2024) e13035.
[62] OHCHR, Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Comissioner, 2011, p. 42.
[63] UN, The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: guidance on ensuring respect for human rights defenders, United Nations General Assembly, 2011.
[64] N.J. Bennett, Navigating a just and inclusive path towards sustainable oceans, Mar. Policy 97 (2018) 139–146.
[65] L.C. Gerhardinger, E. Mills, B. Mesquita, V.S. Rivera, H.C. Kefalás, A.C. Colonese, Challenging the blue economy: voices from artisanal fishing communities in Latin America and the Caribbean, Development 66 (1–2) (2023) 95–104.
[66] U. Etemire, Public voices and environmental decisions: the Escazú agreement in comparative perspective, TEL 12 (1) (2023) 175–199.
[67] Puentes Riaño A. The ocean and human rights - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment [Internet]. United Nations; 2024 [cited 2025 Aug 18]. Report No.: A/HRC/58/59. Available from: https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5859-ocean-and-human-rights-report-special-rapporteur-human-right.