

Views from the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO on lessons learned from the first cycle of the Regular Process (WOA-I)

Background

IOC has been involved in the establishment and conduct of the Regular Process from the beginning. In 2005 the UN General Assembly, by resolution 60/30, requested IOC and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to serve as the lead agencies to carry out a two-year start-up phase of an “Assessment of Assessments”, to be conducted in cooperation with all relevant UN agencies and Programs of the UN. This was done through the work of an independent Group of Experts set up in 2006 that delivered its report to the UNGA in 2009. The report identified factors central to the quality of assessments, such as scientific credibility, policy relevance and legitimacy. The report also identified best practices, thematic, geographic or data gaps, scientific uncertainties, as well as research and capacity-building needs, particularly in the developing world. In 2010, the Ad Hoc Working Group, after having considered the Assessment of Assessments report, recommended the launch of the 1st cycle of the Regular Process. Through UN Resolution 65/37 (adopted by the UNGA in December 2010), IOC together with UNEP, IMO, FAO were invited to provide scientific and technical support to the Regular Process.

From 2011 to 2015, the IOC Secretariat has provided support to the Regular Process in the following manner:

- (i) Engaging MS and their experts into the Process;
- (ii) assistance with the information (incl. communication) and data management aspects;
- (iii) the co-organization of regional workshops on the Regular Process under the auspices of UN;
- (iv) the conduct of capacity-building activities related to marine assessment in view of regional requirements;
- (v) the provision of assessment products, results and data upon request from the lead authors and experts in charge of the WOA report preparation;
- (vi) Support to the WOA report editorial process;
- (vii) Communication to scientific community and IOC Member States on the objectives of the Regular Process.

IOC Representatives have taken part in all Ad Hoc Working Group Meetings as well as several meetings of the Group of Experts as observers.

Main considerations

Scoping issues

The landscape of existing assessment has changed in the last years; there are now several global initiatives related to the assessment of the marine environment. These

include the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, the IPCC including the proposal of launching an IPCC special report on the ocean, the Global Environment Outlook process led by UNEP, and the Transboundary Water Assessment programme led by IOC and UNEP. Regionally, through Regional Seas conventions, we are also witnessing the implementation of Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, such as the recent one produced by the Nairobi Convention. This is encouraging.

More than ever, there is now a need to articulate and coordinate the Regular Process with these initiatives in order to avoid duplication and to ensure that they build on each other. Because of that the AHWG would need to consider these recent developments in defining the scoping process for a second cycle of the Regular Process.

Whilst the added value of a WOA report in terms of depicting global ocean processes is high, the level of information at regional level may not be robust enough to support decision making at that level. This was highlighted by several Member States during the 2015 AHWG. This may be due to the inherent characteristics of the original scope of the 1st cycle of the Regular Process, which was defined through consultations undertaken by the Ad Hoc Working Group, and was targeting a global overview of the marine environment. The question that arises now is whether the Regular Process in its current structure can respond to regional needs, and those are multiple, and ultimately inform regional/national ocean governance processes.

A possible option could be to develop a dual approach, have the RP focusing on marine environmental processes of global nature whilst providing regions with the capacity to define the scope of the regional inputs based on their priority considerations. The implementation of regional workshops in the second cycle could be a mechanism for scoping regional priorities.

Another issue concerns the principle that the 1st cycle of the RP should define a baseline for future assessment whilst future RP cycles would address trends. The consistent assessment of trends in various regions of the world and over various time scales may require the definition of baseline indicators that are harmonised and inter-comparable across regions, and would allow for integration. A basis for this could be the Transboundary Water Assessment Programme led by IOC and UNEP which provides baseline indicators for all Large Marine Ecosystems and open ocean areas. The scale of the investment needed for developing a robust and globally applicable methodology, including the definition of common standards to measure these processes, should not be underestimated.

In this regard, the link to the SDG process could be an important anchor for the RP. Global targets and related indicators have been identified and the next cycle of the RP could provide a mechanism for integrating the measurement of these SDG targets. SDG indicators will need to be further refined and tailored to each region. It is important to note that target 14.c has a strong policy dimension since it relates to the implementation

of UNCLOS and other related instruments, whilst the policy dimension in the 1st cycle of the RP has been quite limited.

Finally, it is recommended that each subsequent WOA report should identify areas where the science has improved since the previous report and also note areas where further research is required.

Communication

Turning to the issue of communication, it is a reality that there have been challenges in communicating the objectives of the Regular Process to both the scientific community and the marine policy community. The relatively low participation of Member States in the session of the AHWG is a reflection of these challenges.

It is therefore critical that the development and implementation of an effective communication strategy be an integral part of a possible second cycle, and this of course requires adequate resources and capacity to establish partnerships with different types of stakeholders. Communication needs to happen throughout the process, with special efforts in the roll out of the Assessment products. A number of launching events in various parts of the world and/or at global ocean events should be envisaged. The fact that the release of the WOA-I report received very little attention is alarming. The media department of the UN Secretariat and of other UN agencies involved in the implementation of the Regular Process would need to work together to achieve greater visibility for the process.

Capacity development

On the issue of capacity development, the Group of Experts has called on efforts to harmonise assessment methodologies and to build capacity in the regions. They also called for the assessment of capacity gaps in order to guide where investment would be needed.

The IOC has embarked on the development of a Global Ocean Science Report under the umbrella of the IOC Assembly. Through this initiative, national information is being collected with a view to assess the state and progress of ocean science as well as the underlying human and institutional capacity needs of nations in the field of marine research, monitoring, ocean data and assessment. A report will be published in 2017 and this could inform the capacity development strategy of the Regular Process in its second cycle.

A specific training programme could be developed to support the implementation of the second cycle. IOC and UNEP have strong expertise in the conduct of assessments. The IOC, through its Regional Subsidiary Bodies and the IODE's Ocean Teacher Global Academy, could provide a mechanism for delivering these trainings in various regions via its networks of inter-connected Regional Training and/or research Centres and national institutions.

Nomination process to the Pool of Experts/ Group of Experts and working procedure of the Group of Experts

On the issue of expert nomination, as expressed during the last AHWG, there is consensus about the need to improve the participation of the scientific community through the pool of experts; this is essential to ensure the scientific credibility of the assessment.

The proposal to consider establishing national focal points to act as a liaison between the global process and the national scientific community of a given country is a good one. This would provide an entry point at national level for scientists to engage in the process.

The IOC has such mechanism in place through its network of 148 national focal points. These are generally national institutions placed under the Ministry of Science or national committees that gather a number of national scientific institutions. These national bodies could also be activated to mobilise the scientific community at national level. As a matter of fact, IOC sent several circular letters to these national mechanisms to inform them about the nomination process.

All expert group meetings have taken place in New York which has limited the participation of agencies based outside of New York. The model adopted during the conduct of the 'Assessment of Assessment' whereby each agency agreed to host one meeting of the Group of Expert (meetings where hosted in Paris (IOC), London (IMO), Geneva (WMO) and Rome (FAO)) was instrumental in ensuring stronger engagement of those technical agencies. In some instances, these were able to co-finance the organisation of these meetings, hence increasing the resource base of the process.

The lack of resources for face-to-face meetings of chapter leads and co-authors was a problem that made co-ordination very hard and time consuming. Scientists who participate in the WOA assessment process do so without any compensation other than the normal salaries they receive from their home institutions. The process is labor-intensive, diverting time and resources from participating scientists' research programs. Concerns have been raised that the large uncompensated time commitment and disruption to their own research may discourage qualified scientists from participating. The lack of visibility of the process is also an issue that limits the engagement of scientists.

In this regard, it would be beneficial to collect views from the experts/scientists who actually participated in the WOA process on how the drafting and review process of the report could be improved. Without a strong participation from the scientific community, the WOA report will not be considered as authoritative.

Involvement of the UN technical agencies, bodies and programmes

Whilst the GA resolution has invited on a number of occasions relevant UN bodies to provide technical and scientific support to the process, this support has been rather limited over the last years. These bodies have a wealth of information and expertise in various aspects of ocean assessment which have not been used to their maximum. The 'Assessment of Assessments' Group of Experts preferred institutional option for supporting the Regular Process was the establishment of an inter-agency secretariat shared amongst various agencies which would capture the contribution and expertise of these bodies. Whilst a different set up was chosen by the General Assembly, there may still be room for discussing a more formal collaborative arrangement for managing the ever increasing demand that is put on DOALOS as the Secretariat. A technical support group with specific tasks assigned to agencies, working under the coordination of DOALOS could for example be a model. This would also be one way to strengthen the resource base of the Regular Process.

A mechanism should also be defined to engage non-UN scientific and technical organisations that have a mandate in marine science, assessment, and capacity building, and that could ultimately provide support to the process. These may include e.g., ICES, PICES, POGO, amongst others.

Financing

The IOC would recommend that an assessment of the minimal amount of financial resources that is needed to run a second cycle be done prior entering into a second cycle. Financing models of other global assessment such as IPBES could be assessed. IPBES is supported by a fully staffed secretariat and strong financial backing from Member States. One option could be to identify different scenarios of what WOA-II can achieve according to different levels of funding.

Contact point:

J. Barbrière, Head, Marine Policy & Regional Coordination Section

IOC/UNESCO

Email: j.barbriere@unesco.org