Ocean Diplomacy as a Promising Solution to Climate Change

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Science diplomacy (SD) seeks to strengthen the symbiosis between the interests and capabilities of two different yet working for similar purpose communities: scientists and diplomats/ policymakers. Science diplomacy with its shade of ocean diplomacy is incrementally gaining relevance. In the present scenario, all local, national and regional players need evidence-based scientific knowledge in dealing with the global challenges. Among them, climate change is an imminent threat to humanity, especially in its various and complicated aspects of ocean change such as sea-level rise, growing acidification, loss of marine biodiversity, thereby affecting the food chain and food security.

Till now, ocean science accounts for only 0.04-4% of total research worldwide.[1] Although modest but this group of researchers would have an immense influence while making informed decisions on the future of a better and sustainable maritime system. Consequently, water diplomacy is also in its nascent stage of development.

Ocean governance[2] in the face of ocean change* requires urgent actions which should not be weak political statements of goodwill but legally binding norms within the hard law mechanisms and rightfully enforceable acts on international entities. Lack of ocean governance results in geopolitical disputes especially in Exclusive Economic Zones and maritime territories; displacement and compulsory climate migration of thousands of islanders, inhabitants of coastal countries further hamper the efforts to combat ocean change. The ocean governance should also focus on the states along with influential non-state actors like intergovernmental organizations and other less formalized regional groupings.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is considered to be one of the best-known examples of science diplomacy. It was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Its main aim is to provide the decision-makers,

* The maritime aspects of climate change are called ocean change. Over the last few decades, the rising sea level became one of the most threatening aspects to the inhabitants of the low-lying territories, islands, deltaic areas all over the globe.

politicians, businessmen, lobbyists, etc. with factual scientific assessments on climate change along with risks involved and mitigation options. IPCC deals with the current state of climate change and its potential environmental and socio-economic consequences. It presents highly complicated, detailed and hard to understand data to non-scientists in a simple and lucid manner. This science advice mechanism helps in assessing the science related to climate change. It is essential to make use of this information for the benefit of humankind. Thousands of scientists from all over the world, representing various disciplines, backgrounds and sharing different experiences both in science and very often in politics, contribute to these periodic assessments and review voluntarily, which then add to the global and regional policy discussions.

There is an undeniably increased need for transboundary ocean cooperation at the institutional and governance level. Storms, floods and droughts are becoming frequent, an indication of extreme weather and climate change. Degrading effects of ocean change on life and the very existence of low-lying areas are slowly becoming part of the political agenda. The UN 2020 World Water Development Report has warned that climate change will have a severe impact on the quantity and quality of water resources. The report highlights that unsuitable water management would exacerbate the effects of ocean change.

The 3rd decade of the 21st century has been announced by the United Nations as the 'UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030)'. Its vision is to develop scientific knowledge, build infrastructure and foster relationships for a sustainable and healthy ocean. The Decade will provide a unique, 'once in a lifetime' opportunity for nations to work together to generate the global ocean science needed to support the sustainable development of our shared ocean.[3] Here, the main body responsible for supporting global ocean science is the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Commission enables its 150 member states to work together to protect the health of the ocean by coordinating programs in ocean observations, hazard mitigation, tsunami warnings, marine spatial planning and much more. IOC hopes to enrich research and inspire scientists dealing with ocean science. Scientists will most likely improve knowledge, but also develop new technologies in alignment with ocean sustainable development through multidisciplinary approaches, international demonstration and appreciation of the value of their work to society.[3]

Water diplomacy has recently garnered a lot of attention in both international relations and building foreign policy strategy. The need for transboundary water cooperation and management of shared water resources has significantly increased. Undoubtedly, water is a precious resource related to multifaceted issues. Its significance is anticipated by many, among others by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), that future conflicts may break out due to additional stress put on water resources by climate change. The combination of water scarcity and demographic growth will inevitably lead to exacerbating hydro-political issues.[4] The most vulnerable areas are around the Nile, Ganges-Brahmaputra, Indus, Tigris-Euphrates, and Colorado rivers. On the other hand, water can also be a source of cooperation: jointly managing water can lead to improved relations among countries and communities and enhance security, prosperity and the protection of the environment. Cooperative water management mechanisms can predict conflict and solve long-standing disputes.[5]

Ocean diplomacy is closely related to environmental conservation and human safety. Hence, the author wishes to introduce her proposition while using ocean diplomacy for the benefit of humankind through three key points. These can also be employed as practical tools while doing research, writing political analysis and decision-making. Firstly, we have to start to perceive water as a source of future conflicts and part of securing international law stability and security. Secondly, there is a vast and urgent necessity of considering perspectives from the community level to transnational boundaries. The Western nations acting with goodwill often neglect the local communities' capabilities, cultures and traditions. Last but not least,

regional reforms** for developing international law tend to be more effective, efficient and faster towards this pressing problem of ocean change.[6]

In conclusion, the 'UN Decade of Ocean Science' is the defining point in the history of ocean diplomacy, where political declaration, legally binding acts, new technologies and advanced research in ocean science are being employed to benefit humankind. Thus, global peace and stability can be promoted by bolstering the ocean governance system, mobilising partners (both public and private), and combining science diplomacy methods in policy dialogues and the development of cooperation.

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** The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) is the most influential regional organisation in the region. Thus, it has the actual but also legal capacity to commit its members to a collective effort, including to develop international law in the legal combat against ocean change. The Oceania states started to deposit data on their maritime boundaries by submission to the International Law Commission in order to legally preserve existing territory delimitation, irrespective of the effects of sea-level rise.