



GULF OF GUINEA MARITIME INSTITUTE

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A COLLECTIVE ACTION STARTS WITH YOU

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Collective Action Starts with You

A World Oceans Day Blog Post

This year's World Oceans Day was a great chance to reflect on the centrality of the ocean to supporting livelihoods. However, the theme for the celebration, *Revitalization: Collective Action for the Ocean*, connotes a longer-lasting contemplation of the ocean space beyond the single opportunity World Oceans Day presents. It calls for a progressive understanding of the importance of the deep blue and the harmonisation of efforts across the globe towards ensuring its sustainability. Perhaps a crucial first step towards this desired state is to ask this one question: what comes to mind when you think about the ocean?

The answer comes much more quickly to some people than it does to others. Individuals living in coastal communities for instance, have a much broader range of interactions with the ocean; thus, the answers might come more easily to them. If you do not live along the coast, or if you have had very limited opportunities to interact directly with the ocean, it may take a while. However, it is important that as individuals who are highly dependent on the planet, we each attempt to figure out what answers hold true for us.

Chances are that we may have varying responses. According to [The Human Relationship with our Ocean Planet](#), a Blue Paper by the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, we often view our relationship with the ocean at material, relational or subjective levels. This blog post will focus on two broad categories instead: material and intrinsic levels.



Let's start with the material level. For most people, when they think about the ocean, they think about fish. They are right. The fish that the ocean produces is highly essential to supporting the well-being and livelihoods of billions of people across the globe. As a matter of fact, fisheries resources are often the most critical source of high-quality protein for developing countries and the world's poorest nations. Without fish, a state of food security would be incredibly hard to attain. It doesn't just end at fish, though. Seafood generally is a major component of diets across the globe and one of the primary keys to building sustainable food systems.

Of course, the ocean's material benefits extend far beyond seafood. Although the ocean is a large body of water, we seldom think of its importance to freshwater supplies. *It's too salty to do us any good*, we often assume. Get this: the ocean's major role in regulating our planet's climate is the reason behind rain and storm systems that provide the fresh water that is so fundamental to life on Earth. Again, with fresh water becoming such a limited resource in several regions across the globe, large-scale desalination of ocean water is becoming a very real consideration.

The ocean also serves as a great source of renewable energy and minerals. Before you even remotely think, "*Who cares?*", consider the fact that our planet is battling with some major effects of climate change, largely as a result of our use of unsustainable energy sources...effects that are bound to affect your own future generations if nothing is done about them. The ocean provides a pathway out of this fate.

Furthermore, the most under-explored parts of the ocean hold some of the greatest secrets for medical breakthroughs. Unique organisms and ecosystems found in the ocean depths are beginning to point scientists to solutions for addressing some major terminal diseases and the pharmaceutical industry is fast becoming one of the major beneficiaries of ocean exploration.

We also think of the shipping industry when we consider the ocean. We think of its implications for economic growth, for development...for the advancement of societies. We think of the wealth it brings to individuals and businesses.

It is harder to quantify the intrinsic value of the ocean; these are often felt rather than experienced in a tangible sense. Even if you are not a coastal dweller, chances are that the ocean often leaves you in a sense of awe and wonder. It gives you an



opportunity to reflect, meditate and connect with your deeper senses of freedom and adventure, each of which is important to your general well-being as an individual. We tend to underestimate this value when it is, in fact, one of the greatest reasons to protect the ocean. It has served as a source of inspiration to many, inciting creativity, rejuvenating mental health and giving millions of individuals a sense of inner-peace. There's no way we can put a price on these.

It is clear then that we depend on the ocean for our very survival. However, the ocean is facing a host of threats that have dire implications for the services it provides us as humans. It is easy for us to ignore all the raving and ranting about the need to safeguard the oceans...easy for us to look the other way, simply because it feels much better to us to pretend there is no problem.

There is; and it is not going away until we take some giant steps. Focus on the broad range of interactions you have with the ocean...on the broad range of interactions all humans have with the ocean. Let that give you the momentum you need to face the problem and take some decisive action.