

Nippon Foundation Ocean Nexus

Towards an Equitable Approach to Marine Plastic Pollution

Dr. Yoshitaka Ota & Dr. Jessica Vandenberg

May 15, 2023

At Ocean Nexus, our mission is to establish social equity at the center of ocean governance.

Our members are over 100 diverse group of international interdisciplinary scholars and practitioners.

Our annual budget is \$3.2 million, a 10-year commitment by The Nippon Foundation.

Our program office is the Nippon Foundation Ocean Nexus Center at the University of Washington.

Our partners over 30 Universities and civil societies groups.

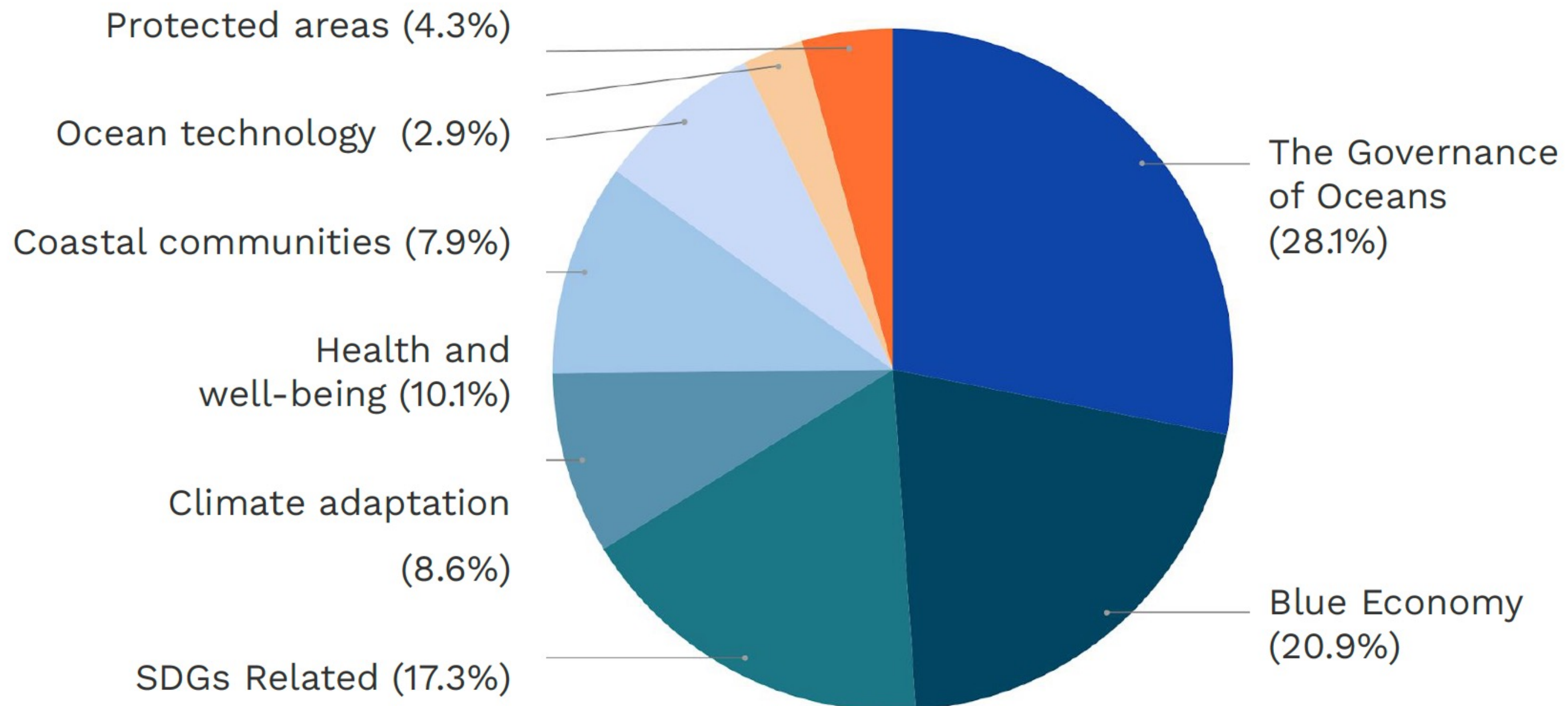
Deputy Directors and Chair professor are with partner institutes, including Simon Fraser University, Dalhousie University, University of Victoria, Edinburgh University and ANCORS (University of Wollongong).

Ocean Nexus Research

Research Topics

- ❖ Impacts and risk of marine Interventions
- ❖ Seafood sovereignty
- ❖ Equity and justice in the Blue Economy
- ❖ Coastal community Wellbeing
- ❖ Transboundary Fisheries management

Project Themes



Ocean Equity Principles:

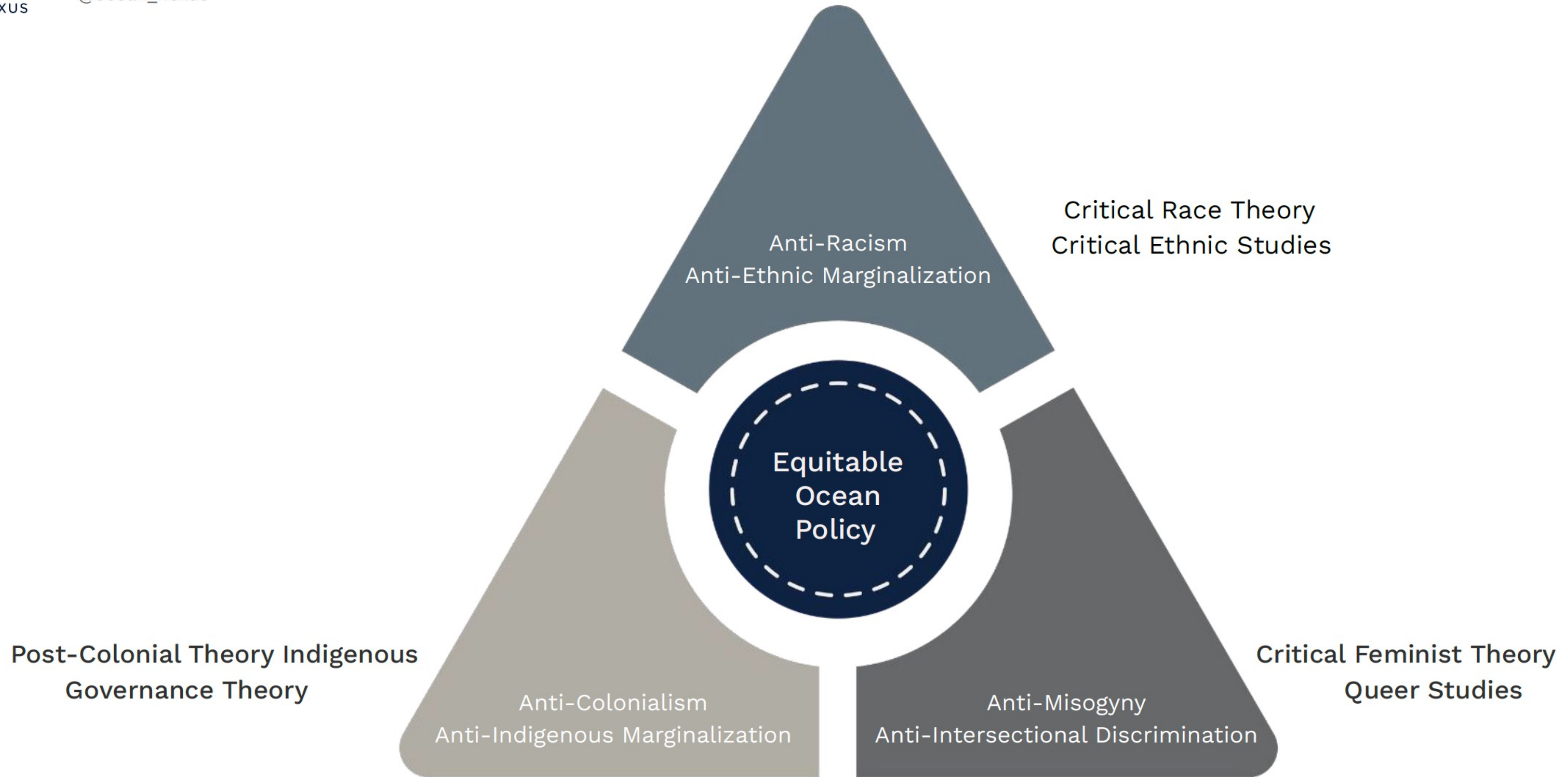
Recognize: We must recognize injustice and inequity that are central to current ocean issues through rigorous analyses and critical inquiries.

Recover: We must recover people who are confronted with harm and failures of ocean governance structures and social systems by providing concrete courses of actions.

Resist: We must resist engagement with narratives that do not explicitly confront inequity.

Reverse: We must reverse the systems that perpetuate inequality and injustice by supporting disruptive actions and promoting shared leadership and network.

The Intellectual Foundation of Ocean Equity



Anti-Inequity Approach

Ocean Nexus Marine Plastic Pollution Project Profile

Marine plastic pollution is an equity issue.

Members

International interdisciplinary scholars and practitioners whose work centers equity and justice.

Budget

\$1.5 million over a 3-year period provided by the Nippon Foundation.

Leading Team

Editors: Jessica Vandenberg, Yoshitaka Ota

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Illustration: Mari Shibuya

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Science Editor: Samantha Larson

Project Management: Wilf Swartz, Karin Otsuka Trudo, Holly Amos

Research Assistance/Coordination: Karin Otsuka Trudo, Marlena Skrobe, Holly Amos



The Problem

- Plastic marine plastic pollution is a global problem impacting both the environment and society.
- The burden of these impacts are often inequitably experienced.
- Mitigative efforts often fail 1) to consider the complexity of human-plastic entanglements and 2) to engage with the problem throughout the full life cycle of plastic.
- These gaps perpetuate and create further social inequities and may lead to ineffective governance



Overall Objective

To further our understanding of the impacts of marine plastic pollution (MPP) on both the environment and society.

Research Questions

- 1 What are the impacts of marine plastic pollution and how are these impacts inequitably experienced?
- 2 What current governance systems perpetuates these inequities?
- 3 What are socially equitable approaches for addressing marine plastic pollution?

Defining Equity

Equity issues are complex, diverse, and can extend beyond these categorical domains



Distributional

Distribution of costs, benefits, rights, responsibilities



Procedural

Involvement & inclusion in decision-making processes



Recognitional

Acknowledgement & respect for knowledge systems, values, social norms, & rights



Cultural/Contextual

Consideration of the social, governance, economic, historical & cultural contexts

Fields of Inquiry



**Ecological
Impacts &
Food Web
Dynamics**



**Human
Health &
Well-Being**



Policy & Law



**Perspectives
on the Ground**

Perspectives on the Ground



United States, Blair Kaufer

Netherlands, Machteld Vergouw

Japan, Karin Otsuka Trudo

Ecuador, Karly McMullen

Ghana, Ivy Akuoko

New Zealand, Matt Peryman & Romilly Cumming

Emergence of Inequities



Responsibility

Where does responsibility lie? vs.
Who is presented as responsible?



Knowledge

Whose knowledge? Whose values?



Well-being

Impacts beyond physical health and
livelihoods



Coordination

Power dynamics between low-income
& high-income countries



Emergence of Inequity: Responsibility



Emergence of Inequity: RESPONSIBILITY

Key Action:

Refocus Responsibility onto the Root Cause
of the Problem— Plastic Production

- Focus on end-of-life approaches that do not limit ongoing economic growth.
- End-of-life approaches distracts from the production of toxic and wasteful plastics.



Emergence of Inequity: RESPONSIBILITY

Key Action:

Recognize that Industry Creates Responsibility
“Scapegoats” to Deflect Blame

- Shifts blame onto less powerful actors outside their supply chains
- Distractions from the continuing efforts of big business to avoid responsibilities



STOP SILENCE

WATER IS LIFE

Emergence of Inequity: Knowledge



Emergence of Inequity: Knowledge

Key Action:

Limit Industry Influence Over Knowledge Production and Plastics Discourse

- Deflects attention away from the role of plastics producers and manufacturers
- Individualized responsibility ignores structural inequalities of plastic waste burdens.



Emergence of Inequity: Knowledge

Key Action:

Recognize and Value Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Governance and Management

- Ongoing exclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems
- Produces socio-environmental injustices that perpetuate harmful colonial and capitalist ideologies and agendas.



Emergence of Inequity: Wellbeing

Emergence of Inequity: Wellbeing

Key Action:

Prioritize Community Voices in Understanding Impacts of Marine Plastic Pollution

- Human health includes environmental, social, biological, psychological, economic, and political attributes.
- Range of direct and indirect impacts that stem from marine plastic pollution.

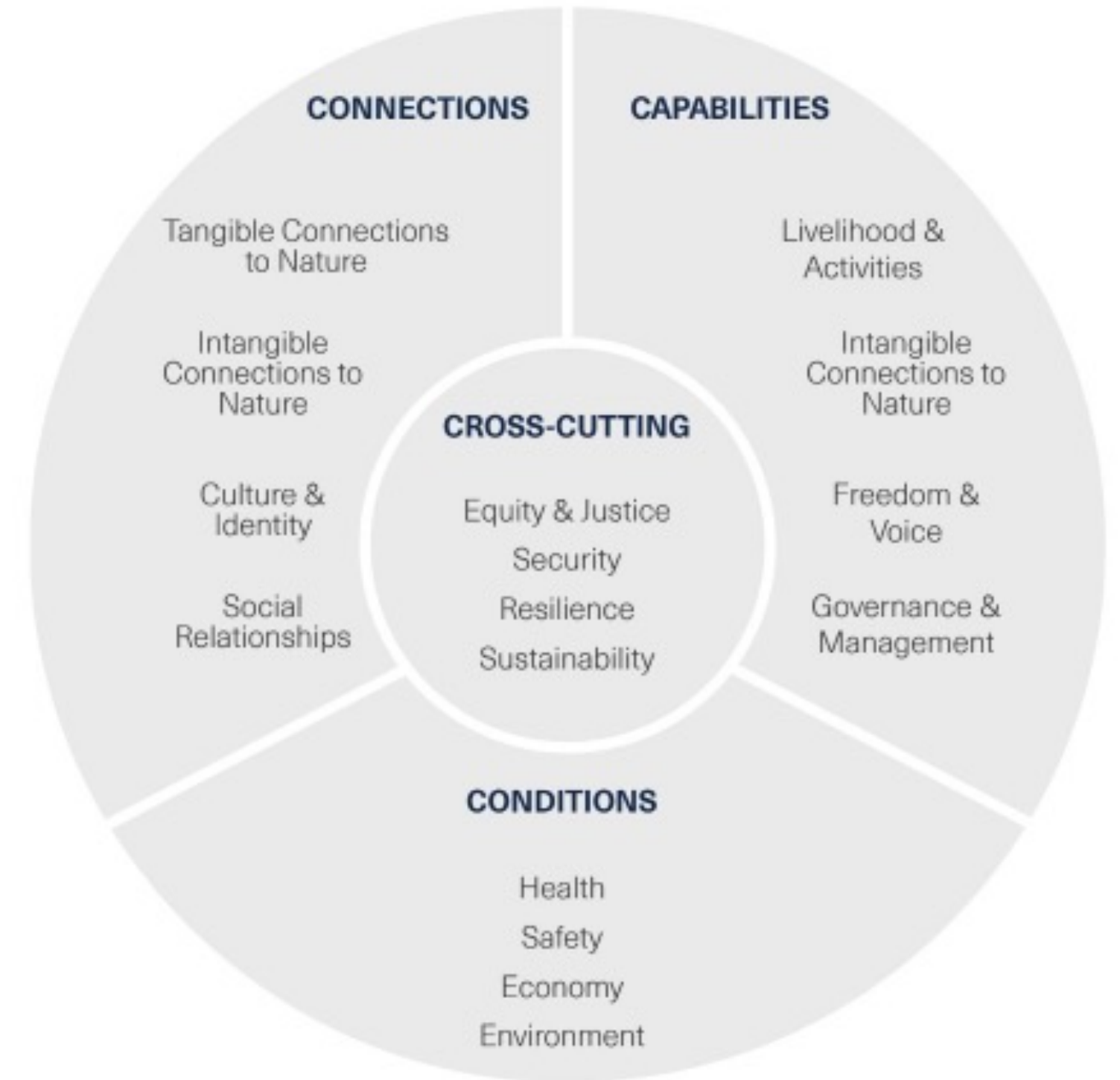


Figure 1. **The 4-C's Conceptual Framework of Human Well-Being**

(Re-printed with permission from "Conceptualizing and Operationalizing Human Wellbeing for Ecosystem Assessment and Management," by S. J. Breslow et al., 2016, Environmental Science and Policy, 66, p. 250-259. Copyright 2022 by Elsevier.)



Emergence of Inequity: Wellbeing

Key Action:

Acknowledge that there is a diversity of voices, values and needs.

- Impacts entangled with other systemic inequities and other historical, political, cultural, and social contexts
- Context matters



Emergence of Inequity: Coordination



Emergence of Inequity: Coordination

Key Action:

Stop the Ongoing Displacement of Plastic Waste through the Global Waste Trade

- Despite the Basel Convention, waste continues to flow from high income to low-income nations.



Emergence of Inequity: Coordination

Key Action:

Address Balloon Effects of Uncoordinated Plastic Production Restrictions

- Fragmented plastic restrictions produce “balloon effects”
- Squeezing out plastics production in one country leads to the inflation of production in others.



Summary of Key Actions

1. Refocus responsibility onto production
2. Limit industry influence & uplift non-Western knowledge systems
3. Prioritize community voices & wellbeing
4. Improve global coordination

Collaborators/Partners

Dr. Jessica Vandenberg, University of Washington
Karin Otsuka Trudo, University of Washington
Dr. Elaine M. Faustman, University of Washington
Jill Falman, University of Washington
Suzy An, University of Washington
Dr. Juan José Alava, University of British Columbia
Karly McMullen, University of British Columbia
Dr. Trisia Farrelly, Massey University
Tina Ngata
Dr. Stephanie Borrelle, BirdLife International
Dr. Sascha Fuller, University of Newcastle
Matt Peryman, Massey University
Romilly Cumming, Massey University
Dr. Elizabeth Mendenhall, University of Rhode Island
Dr. Solène Guggisberg, Utrecht University
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Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn

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Illustrations by Mari Shibuya

Equity and Marine Plastic Report



OCEAN NEXUS

ROADMAP DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- Advance multi-sector engagement to foster immediate action for marine plastic pollution
- Building concrete steps of diverse, equitable solutions.
- Co-develop 3-4 strategies centered on actions to equitably reduce Marine Plastic Pollution



Ocean Equity is..

Ocean Equity is a concept to
dismantle systemic inequity through
the governance of oceans.

Yoshitaka Ota: 2023. Ocean Equity (in preparation with 42 coauthors).



To address inequity:

‘Discredit destructive interpretations’,

Martha Minow: EQUALITY VS. EQUITY.
American Journal of Law and Equality
2021; 1 167–193.

‘Defend equal protection of the laws
and advance systemic changes’

‘Ensure the dignity of each individual
and overcome historic and ongoing
barriers due to stereotypes, “isms,”

A painting of a beach scene. In the foreground, a person wearing a hat and a light-colored shirt is bent over, collecting trash into a bag. The beach is covered with various pieces of colorful trash, including plastic bottles and pieces of paper. In the middle ground, two children are playing in the shallow water, sitting on inflatable rings. The background shows a calm sea and a cloudy sky. The overall style is somewhat somber and realistic, highlighting the impact of pollution on a natural environment.

ABOUT THE ROAD MAP

Online Co-development process
Three 6 hours workshops in 6 months

Multi-sectoral Participation:
22 Participants include SIDS policy advisors,
Scholar of Waste Colonialism and
International Ocean Governance
State-based Grassroot NGO Executive and
International NGOs officers

Value based cross-sector engagement
(Designed by the communication studies
professor - Dr. Kirsten Foot)

URI Department of Marine Affairs

Professor Beth Mendennhall
Ivy Akuoko (Marine Affairs)
Eliya Baron Lopez

Strategic Areas of Action

Community Capacity Strengthening

Community capacity strengthening refers to reinforcing, amplifying, and elevating the existing capacity, representation and agency of communities

International Treaty Principles

Principles reflect the basic values, goals, and purposes of an international agreement, and shape both its design and implementation.

Definitions

Definitions need to capture impacts on public health and social wellbeing through the full life span of plastics

Cooperate Accountability

Cooperate Accountability addresses industry's role in pushing solutions that allow for ongoing production of wasteful and toxic plastics.

Equitable Strategies

Community Capacity Strengthening

- Community have the leading role in any decision-making process
- Prioritize resource distribution to community efforts

International Treaty Principles

- Precautionary principle
- Polluter Pays Principle
- Intergenerational Equity Principle

Definitions

- Consider the bias in definitions that undermine public participation and access to justice
- Address the complexity of product design, such as packaging and material types

Cooperate Accountability

- Reduce plastic production by capping new virgin polymers
- Ensure the introduction of only toxic-free, safe, and a truly regenerative circular economy

Media

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Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn

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