

**Applying a Participative
Multi-Stakeholder Approach
in Transdisciplinary Ocean
Governance Research:
Reflections from the STRONG
High Seas Project**

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List of Abbreviations

ABNJ	Areas beyond national jurisdiction
BBNJ Agreement	Legally binding agreement negotiated under the United Nations on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ
BMUV	German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection
COP	Conference of the Parties
CPPS	Permanent Commission for the South Pacific
IASS	Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies
IDDRI	Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations
IKI	International Climate Initiative
IOI	International Ocean Institute
IUU	Illegal, reported, and unregulated (fishing)
MCS	Monitoring, control, and surveillance
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RFMO	Regional fisheries management organisation
STRONG High Seas	Strengthening Regional Ocean Governance for the High Seas
UCN	Universidad Católica del Norte
UN	United Nations

1. Introduction

Marine areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) represent about half of the planet's surface and are one of the least understood and protected places on Earth. They play a key role in sustaining life on Earth by providing important resources and ecosystem services and regulating the global climate. However, the cumulative impacts of increasing human activities in ABNJ and the changing global climate is a serious threat to marine ecosystems, undermining their health and resilience. The existing ocean governance framework is fragmented with legal and institutional gaps, and there is a lack of full implementation and enforcement of current regulations. Therefore, it is currently ineffective to comprehensively address marine environmental protection, particularly for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ. At the same time, not all institutions (and individuals) across the ocean governance framework may be adequately equipped to address or even be aware of global conservation goals. Not all of them may also coordinate to actively achieve and co-implement measures (e.g., through data and knowledge exchange), or operate by shared sustainability principles (such as the precautionary principle/approach, ecosystem approach, or transparent and inclusive decision-making processes). Such lack of coordination exists between global and regional organisations as well as national government agencies, further exacerbating challenges of ocean management and conservation. Hence, strengthening ocean governance at all levels and across all actors is necessary to achieve global conservation goals.

Thus, stakeholders, including States, will need to collaborate with each other to address shared challenges, particularly in the context of biodiversity conservation in ABNJ, and in the context of shared decision-making. Ocean governance is complex, involving numerous treaties, policies, and regulations at different levels (i.e., global, regional, national), various governing bodies (i.e., institutions, agencies), and the interests of

multiple stakeholders (i.e., States, civil society, private industry, research community, and indigenous groups). Collaborative governance is therefore an essential process to bring together diverse stakeholders in collective forums to engage in consensus-oriented decision-making (Ansell and Gash, 2007). The need for this process and the demand for collaboration increases as knowledge becomes more specialised and distributed, and as institutional infrastructures become more complex and interdependent (Ansell and Gash, 2007).

The STRONG High Seas (*Strengthening Regional Ocean Governance for the High Seas*) project was established as a five-year transdisciplinary research project aimed at strengthening ocean governance at the regional level through a participative multi-stakeholder approach for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ. Beginning in 2017, the project focused on two regions: the Southeast Atlantic and Southeast Pacific regions. The project was initiated by the Secretariat of the Comisión Permanente del Pacífico Sur (CPPS; Permanent Commission for the South Pacific) and the Secretariat of the West and Central Africa Regional Seas Programme (Abidjan Convention) together with researchers within the project prior to identifying funding sources and developing a detailed project proposal. Over five years, this project used a participative multi-stakeholder approach to develop and implement all project activities with a view to ensure stakeholder engagement and buy-in, raise awareness about the need to conserve and sustainably use marine biodiversity in ABNJ, and create a network of and dialogue between relevant stakeholders within the two focal regions, and beyond.

This report aims to showcase and assess the participative multi-stakeholder approach used in the STRONG High Seas project to co-develop and co-design activities and outputs such as scientific assessments and capacity development programs. In particular, the report pro-

vides reflections from the project team on the numerous lessons learned during the project duration on participative multi-stakeholder approaches in transdisciplinary ocean governance research, such as designing and implementing effective engagement strategies, designing targeted capacity development programmes, and fostering co-creative research processes for supporting decision-making and achieving policy impact. The reflections on and recommendations for participative multi-stakeholder approaches within transdisciplinary ocean governance research gained through the course of the STRONG High Seas project can be found in Chapter 3.

1.1 About this report

This report was prepared as part of the STRONG High Seas project and is based on surveys conducted during and after STRONG High Seas workshops, direct feedback from participants after project events, and debriefing and internal discussions amongst project partners. It is targeted towards policy and decision-makers and other relevant stakeholders from the private sector, research, and civil society as well as researchers working on advancing ocean governance, particularly for ABNJ in the Southeast Atlantic and Southeast Pacific regions. This report is part of a series of reports covering issues of ocean governance with a focus on the ABNJ of the Southeast Atlantic and Southeast Pacific and builds on previous studies published by the STRONG High Seas project. These reports are available on the STRONG High Seas website.¹

This introductory chapter provides a short background and overview of the work of the STRONG High Seas project. Chapter 2 assesses and highlights the challenges and opportunities encountered under the STRONG High Seas project, focusing particularly on the conceptual approach applied in the project, stakeholder engagement, capacity development, and co-creation of research to support decision making and achieve policy impact. Chapter 3 provides

an overview of key reflections and lessons learnt from the project, and additional background information and detailed assessments are included in the Annexes.

1.2 About the STRONG High Seas project

The STRONG High Seas (*Strengthening Regional Ocean Governance for the High Seas*) project was a five-year project (June 2017–May 2022) funded through the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV). Its objective was to facilitate the development of comprehensive, cross-sectoral approaches for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ in the Southeast Atlantic and Southeast Pacific regions. The project furthermore fostered interregional exchange and collaboration with other marine regions, particularly with the Western Indian Ocean and Southwest Pacific regions. It also developed options for regional cooperation under the proposed legally binding agreement negotiated under the United Nations (UN) on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ (proposed BBNJ Agreement).

The STRONG High Seas project was coordinated by the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) and implemented together with the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI), BirdLife International, the International Ocean Institute (IOI) – Southern Africa, the Universidad Católica del Norte (UCN), WWF Colombia, and WWF Germany. The consortium worked closely with regional partners, namely the Secretariat of the Comisión Permanente del Pacífico Sur (CPPS; Permanent Commission for the South Pacific) and the Secretariat of the West and Central Africa Regional Seas Programme (Abidjan Convention), and their member States in the project regions. An Advisory Board comprised of senior experts and high-level decision-makers from international

¹ Available at: <https://www.prog-ocean.org/our-work/strong-high-seas/strong-high-seas-resources/>.

and regional organisations, science and civil society also provided strategic and expert advice to the project and ensured links with global and regional ocean governance processes (see Figure 1).²

The focus of the STRONG High Seas project was on ABNJ of the Southeast Atlantic and Southeast Pacific regions. For the purpose of this project, the Southeast Atlantic region was loosely defined as the Eastern side of the South Atlantic Ocean between Mauritania and South Africa,

and the Southeast Pacific region³ as the Eastern side of the South Pacific Ocean between Colombia and Chile (see Figure 1). The project worked specifically with the member States of the Abidjan Convention in the Southeast Atlantic region⁴ and the member States of the CPPS in the Southeast Pacific region. Both focal regions include States with diverse cultures, languages, socio-political situations, socio-economic levels, interests, needs, and available resources and capacities.

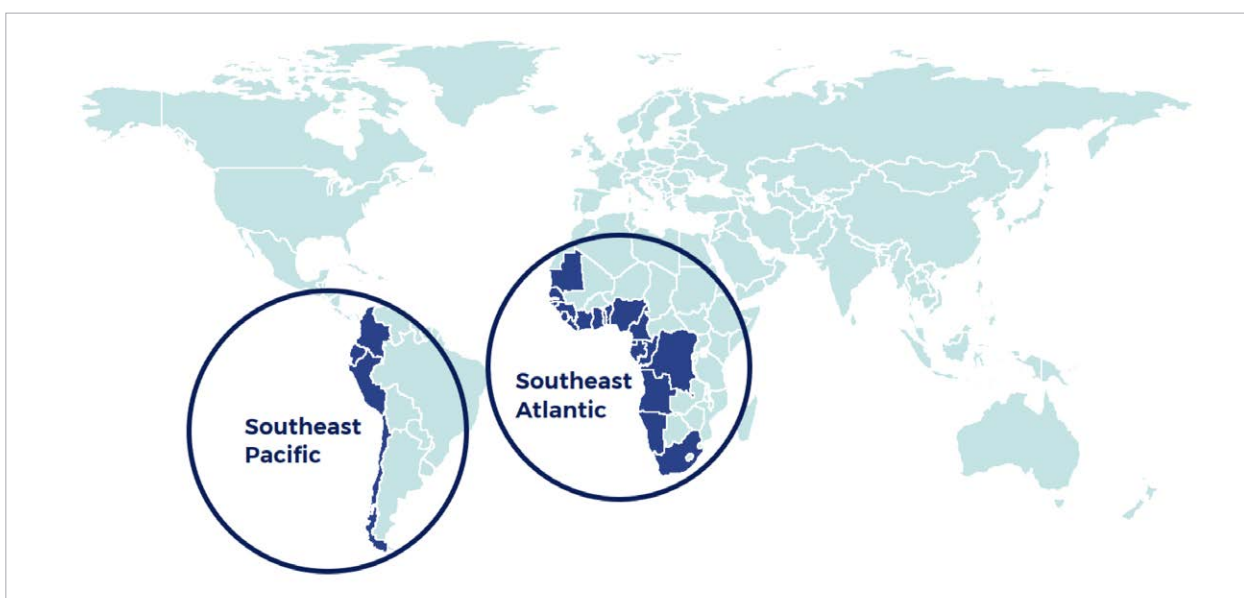


Figure 1: Focal regions of the STRONG High Seas project⁵

The project engaged in numerous ways, including by:

➤ Carrying out transdisciplinary scientific assessments to provide decision-makers, both in the target regions and globally, with improved knowledge and understanding of marine biodiversity in ABNJ, from a legal, ecological, and socio-economic perspective;

➤ Engaging with stakeholders from governments, private sector, academia, scientific institutions and civil society to facilitate and support the design of comprehensive, integrated, cross-sectoral approaches for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ of the Southeast Atlantic and Southeast Pacific regions;

² See members of the STRONG High Seas Advisory Board: <https://www.prog-ocean.org/our-work/strong-high-seas/strong-high-seas-advisory-board/>.

³ Countries that have ratified the Abidjan Convention: Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Togo.

⁴ Countries that are members of the CPPS: Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Chile. Panama is a party to the Lima Convention, for which the CPPS provides the Secretariat.

⁵ Credit: STRONG High Seas Project.

- Identifying best practices and ensuring continued dialogue with relevant stakeholders in other marine regions, such as the Western Indian Ocean and Southwest Pacific regions, to facilitate joint learning and develop a community of practice;
- Developing options for regional governance in the proposed BBNJ Agreement and transfer regional lessons learned to the global level to promote ocean governance at different scales; and
- Building capacities of government representatives and other stakeholders from the project regions and beyond about ABNJ governance and the ongoing UN negotiations for a proposed BBNJ Agreement.

The STRONG High Seas project produced several scientific assessments throughout its duration. The legal and institutional characteristics of the focal regions regarding governance of ABNJ has been reviewed in detail in Durusel et al. (2018). The ecological characteristics of the focal regions, including areas of special ecological importance, areas of geological importance, benthic and pelagic habitats, and marine biodiversity have been extensively described in Boteler et al. (2019). The socioeconomic importance of the focal regions is described in Spiteri et al. (2021) for the Southeast Atlantic region and Olivares Arenas et al. (2021) for the Southeast Pacific region. An overview of existing and recommended conservation and management measures can be found in Castellanos et al. (2022) for the Southeast Pacific region and Hampton et al. (2022 a) for the Southeast Atlantic region. Considerations for integrated ocean management for the conservation and sustainable use of ABNJ in the focal regions are provided in Hazin et al. (2022). An overview of capacity needs assessments in ocean governance can be found in Packeiser et al. (2022) for the Southeast Pacific region, and Hampton et al. (2022 b) for the Southeast Atlantic region. Finally, options to strengthen monitoring, control, and surveillance of human activities in the Southeast Atlantic and Southeast Pacific regions are provided in Cremers et al. (2020 and 2021).⁶

Stakeholders in both focal regions have made considerable efforts to advance conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ. However, to date, no legally binding area-based management measures have been adopted in ABNJ in both regions, besides the management measures adopted by regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) in relation to fisheries. There is also limited cross-sectoral cooperation taking place between organisations with a mandate to work in ABNJ. Indeed, individual organisations adopt their own principles, resolutions, and management measures with varying and non-comprehensive or limited mandates to address issues related to marine biodiversity in ABNJ. There is also varied and uneven participation of States in regional and global agreements across institutions, making it further difficult to coordinate and fully address issues related to marine biodiversity in ABNJ. Enhanced cross-sectoral cooperation within the regions could therefore help to underpin individual efforts and support progress towards shared or similar policy and societal objectives.

1.2.1 The Southeast Atlantic region

The total population of the 22 countries bordering the Southeast Atlantic region currently stands at 557 million (UN DESA, 2019), which represents a near six-fold increase since 1950. This increasing trend is likely to continue in the future, with projections indicating that the population will surpass one billion by 2050. As in other parts of the world, urbanisation and industrialisation are generally centred along coastal areas, resulting in densely populated coastal cities and crowded deltas.

The Convention for Cooperation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region – known as the Abidjan Convention – was adopted in 1981 and came into force in 1984. It is one of the regional seas programmes with its Secretariat hosted by UN Environment. To date, the Abidjan Convention counts 19 member States, with three countries of the Southeast Atlantic region not members of the Convention

⁶ All outputs published under the STRONG High Seas project are available at: <https://www.prog-ocean.org/our-work/strong-high-seas/strong-high-seas-resources/>.

but participating as observers.⁷ The Abidjan Convention focuses on the protection of the marine environment, particularly on the prevention, reduction and combatting of the various forms of marine pollution, in marine and coastal areas within the national jurisdiction of its member States. Though the Abidjan Convention does not have the mandate to work in ABNJ, its 11th Conference of the Parties (COP) recognised the importance of the preservation and sustainable use of ABNJ and established a working group (which formally began its work in 2019) to study all aspects of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ under the Convention's framework (Decision COP 11/10). The 13th COP that took place in December 2021 further reiterated the engagement of the Abidjan Convention member States in the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ and agreed to continue the work of the ABNJ Working Group (Decision COP 13/12).

Each member State to the Abidjan Convention appoints a National Focal Point, who is usually a senior official from their Ministry of Environment, to serve as a channel of communication between the Secretariat of the Abidjan Convention and its member State. The working languages of the Convention are English and French.

1.2.2 The Southeast Pacific region

The total population of the four countries bordering the Southeast Pacific region is about 119.2 million (UN DESA, 2019), nearly four times more than the region's population in 1950. This increasing trend is likely to continue to 2050 be-

fore estimates suggest population projections to taper off. Like the Southeast Atlantic region, urbanisation and industrialisation are significant within coastal areas. However, Ecuador, Colombia, and Chile have major urban areas located inland.

The jurisdictional mandate of the Permanent Commission for the South Pacific (CPPS) includes the national waters of its four member States,⁸ and in some cases, adjacent high seas areas affected by marine and coastal pollution.⁹ According to its 2013 Statute, CPPS also has the competence to:

- Promote the conservation of marine living resources within the national jurisdiction of its member States and beyond, focusing especially on straddling and highly migratory fish stocks;¹⁰
- Foster active participation of its member States in the exploration and exploitation of non-living resources in ABNJ;¹¹ and
- Promote a holistic assessment of the natural resources and fisheries of the Southeast Pacific with a view to its economic development and sustainable use.¹²

CPPS member States also committed to promote coordinated action 'regarding their interests in living and non-living resources in ABNJ'.¹³ The official language of CPPS is Spanish, and each member State is represented by a senior official of their respective Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁷ All coastal States between Mauritania and South Africa, with the exception of Equatorial Guinea, Cape Verde, and Sao Tome e Principe, have ratified the Abidjan Convention. Discussions are ongoing with Morocco for their possible signature/ratification of the treaty.

⁸ Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru.

⁹ CPPS Marine Environmental Protection Convention, Art. 1.

¹⁰ CPPS Estatuto, Art 4a.

¹¹ CPPS Estatuto, Art 4d.

¹² CPPS Estatuto, Art 4i.

¹³ 2012 Galapagos Commitment.

2. The STRONG High Seas approach

2.1 Conceptual approach

The STRONG High Seas project used a participative multi-stakeholder approach to develop and implement its project activities. The overall objectives of this conceptual approach were threefold:

- Engage with and mobilise stakeholders for the implementation of project activities and for the co-design and co-production of project outputs;
- Enhance stakeholder engagement and buy-in in the project results and policy outcomes, and raise awareness, including through capacity development, about the need to conserve and sustainably use marine biodiversity in ABNJ; and

- Create a lasting network of and dialogue between relevant stakeholders within the two focal regions, and beyond.

The conceptual approach applied in the STRONG High Seas project follows Mauser et al. (2013)'s framework for inter- and transdisciplinary co-creation of knowledge (see Figure 2). The approach provides a general overview to the three main process phases with which the STRONG High Seas project engaged within the focal regions, namely: a) the co-design phase, during which project activities were conceptualised; b) the co-production phase, during which project activities were implemented; and c) the uptake of results phase, during which project results were disseminated into different policy processes and within the project regions.

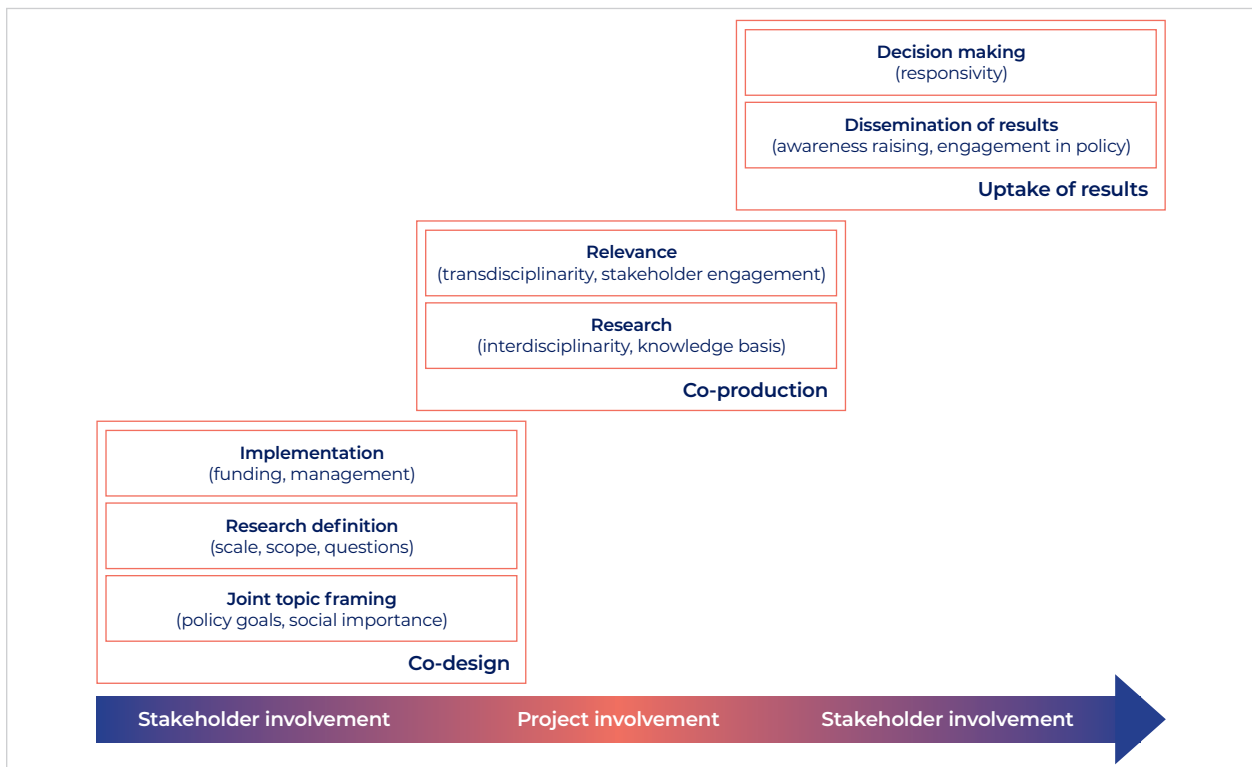


Figure 2: Conceptual approach applied in the STRONG High Seas Project for engagement with the focal regions¹⁴

¹⁴ Adapted from Mauser et al. (2013).

2.1.1 Co-design

Each project activity started with the co-design phase, which is used to define the activity objectives, formulate the research questions, and identified the policy goals to be achieved. During this phase, project partners worked closely together with the Secretariats of the CPPS and Abidjan Convention and State representatives from the two focal regions (primarily through the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in the Southeast Pacific region and the Ministries of the Environment in the Southeast Atlantic region) to co-design project activities. This was important to ensure that events organised and publications developed during the project were of relevance to the project regions and could help to inform decision-makers about the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ.

2.1.2 Co-production

During the co-production phase, project partners prepared, developed, and implemented the activities agreed on under the co-design phase and sought stakeholder involvement to help co-develop events and review project publications. The CPPS and Abidjan Convention Secretariats were actively involved in co-developing workshops and capacity development programmes to ensure that the content was relevant to the project regions. Once final drafts of project reports and policy briefs had been developed by the project team, State representatives of the two focal regions, the CPPS and Abidjan Convention Secretariats, and external experts in ocean governance, including from the STRONG High Seas Advisory Board, were invited to review them and to provide inputs to ensure that they were policy relevant.

2.1.3 Uptake of results

The last phase consisted in feeding key messages and recommendations elaborated in project reports and policy briefs into relevant regional and global policy processes, including the ongoing negotiations for an international legally

binding agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea for conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ (BBNJ Agreement). Dissemination into the different policy processes was done through outreach by project partners, the CPPS and Abidjan Convention Secretariats, and other stakeholders at the national, regional, and global levels, uptake by State representatives from the focal regions, and distribution through social media, and through the STRONG High Seas website¹⁵ and two regional websites¹⁶ designed to facilitate joint learning and develop a community of practice.

2.2 Stakeholder engagement

2.2.1 Approach

A stakeholder mapping exercise to identify key stakeholders relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ in the focal regions was conducted with workshop participants during the STRONG High Seas project's first Dialogue Workshops held in Cali, Colombia, and Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in 2018 (see Annex 1 and Annex 2).¹⁷ Workshop participants identified eight stakeholder groups across four geographic levels (local, national, regional, and international/global), as follows:

- State representatives – from governmental ministries or agencies in the project regions
- Other State representatives – from governmental ministries or agencies in non-target regions
- International organisations
- Regional organisations
- Academia and universities
- Other scientific institutions
- Private sector

¹⁵ See <https://www.prog-ocean.org/our-work/strong-high-seas/>

¹⁶ See <http://www.highseas-abidjanconvention.org/> and <https://abnj-pacifico.org/>

¹⁷ https://www.prog-ocean.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Workshop-Summary-Cali_English.pdf and https://www.prog-ocean.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Workshop-Summary-Abidjan_English.pdf

➤ Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

For all project activities organised during the lifetime of the STRONG High Seas project, stakeholders were carefully selected to represent a range of sectors and stakeholder groups with an interest in the conservation and sustainable

use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ of the focal regions, and beyond. Stakeholders were identified through recommendations and word of mouth, internet searches related to their field of expertise, and attendance at international and regional conferences and workshops.



Participants at the Cali (left) and Abidjan (right) Dialogue Workshops¹⁸

Stakeholders were identified at both the individual level, i.e., individuals whose expertise and knowledge are relevant and important to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ, and the organisational level, i.e., organisations that play a key role in ocean governance at the regional or global level. As the project progressed, a network of stakeholders could be built in the project regions, which allowed to reach out and engage with more stakeholders based in the Southeast Atlantic and Southeast Pacific regions, and beyond.

The project fostered a collaborative process into the implementation of project activities to achieve a participative multi-stakeholder approach (see Figure 3). This approach supported

the project to engage with and mobilise stakeholders for the implementation of project activities and the co-design of project outputs. It also helped to enhance stakeholder engagement and buy-in in the project results, identify lessons learned, raise awareness about the need to conserve and sustainably use marine biodiversity in ABNJ, and create a lasting network of and dialogue between relevant stakeholders within the two focal regions and beyond. Furthermore, the STRONG High Seas project aimed to create a platform for stakeholders outside of the formal negotiation process under the United Nations for the proposed BBNJ Agreement to exchange and discuss on critical issues relevant to the negotiations, but without political outcomes.

¹⁸ Credit: STRONG High Seas project.

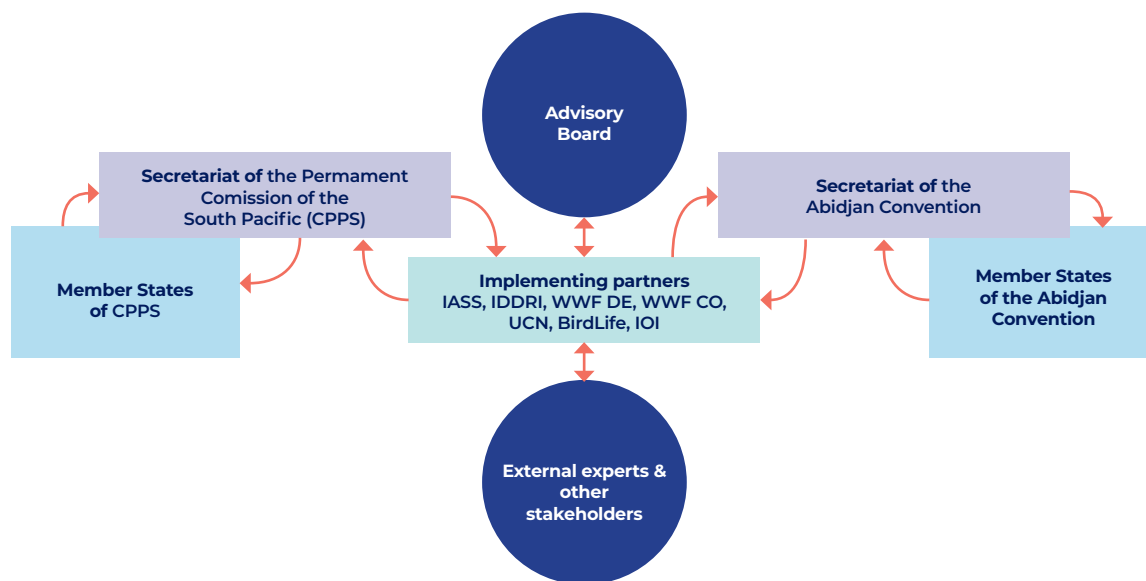


Figure 3: Collaborative process within the STRONG High Seas projects¹⁹

Stakeholder engagement took place throughout the lifetime of the project, with a particular emphasis during the planning ('co-design') and policy dissemination ('uptake of results') phases of project outputs, as well as in the late stage of project output implementation ('co-production' phase). The project sought nine objectives of the participative multi-stakeholder approach of the STRONG High Seas project (see Table 1). These nine objectives, while having some overlap and not being mutually exclusive, were seen as key

to developing a collaborative governance process and establishing a platform for exchange and were actively sought to achieve the project's objectives. In addition, as this report focuses on participative multi-stakeholder approaches implemented in the STRONG High Seas project, the objectives highlighted in Table 1 do not include the objectives of the project prior to its commencement, which covered the co-design of the overall research goals and formulation of overarching research questions.

Table 1: Overview of objectives for stakeholder engagement for the STRONG High Seas project

Objective	Description
Dialogue	Exchange of experiences and information between different stakeholder groups to support the achievement of the STRONG High Seas project's objectives.
Networking	Establishing contact and professional networks between individuals and groups of individuals towards the achievement of the STRONG High Seas project's objectives.
Outreach and dissemination	Distribution and promotion of project results, outputs, and key messages through multiple channels and targeting key actors to raise awareness and support the achievement of the STRONG High Seas project's objectives.
Scientific knowledge gathering	Collecting key data, knowledge, insights, and experiences from relevant stakeholders to support the development of scientific assessments of the STRONG High Seas project.

¹⁹ Credit: STRONG High Seas Project.

Objective	Description
Validation of scientific results	Presenting preliminary or final project outputs to targeted stakeholders for review of scientific findings and validation of results.
Capacity development	Building understanding and knowledge amongst targeted government officials of relevant issues related to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ, including the negotiations under the United Nations for a proposed BBNJ Agreement.
Co-creation of outputs	Incorporating ideas, knowledge, and perspectives from relevant stakeholders for the development of the STRONG High Seas project outputs.
Input to policy	Contributing to ongoing national, regional, and international policy processes to raise awareness and support the achievement of the STRONG High Seas project's objectives.
Stakeholder involvement	Engaging and involving existing stakeholders and identifying and involving new stakeholders to support the achievement of the STRONG High Seas project's objectives.
Project assessment	Reviewing and assessing the progress of the STRONG High Seas project towards its objectives.

The project implemented numerous approaches to engage with stakeholders, both within the project regions and beyond (see Table 2).

Table 2: Overview of engagement approaches used in the STRONG High Seas project

Engagement approaches	Description
Events	Various event formats were used to engage stakeholders, both in the STRONG High Seas project regions, and beyond. See Table 3.
Scientific assessments and reports	STRONG High Seas project outputs aimed at addressing scientific questions relevant to issues and topics around the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ.
Policy briefs	STRONG High Seas project outputs aimed at summarising key points for stakeholders relevant to issues around the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ.
Surveys	Consultations aimed at collecting ideas, knowledge, and perspectives from relevant stakeholders for the development of STRONG High Seas project outputs.
Social media	Project communication across various social media channels (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, etc.) aimed at disseminating project results and communicating STRONG High Seas project activities to stakeholders.
Newsletter	Project communication through online newsletter aimed at disseminating project results and communicating STRONG High Seas project activities to stakeholders.

Engagement approaches	Description
Flyers	Project outputs aimed at highlighting the work and activities of the STRONG High Seas project.
Press and communication	STRONG High Seas project-related publications to highlight project results and key findings to a broad audience through external channels (e.g., newspapers, blogs, etc.).
Letters of intent and/or Memorandum of Understanding	Formal agreements between the STRONG High Seas project (or project implementing partners) and external institutions relevant for the development of STRONG High Seas project outputs and achievement of its objectives.
Stakeholder websites	Websites oriented towards the dissemination and exchange of information to stakeholders on issues and topics related to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ.

Events (see Table 3), particularly Dialogue Workshops and Expert Workshops, constituted an important part of the STRONG High Seas project as they were not only used to engage stakeholders and create an important networking opportunity between different stakeholder groups from within the region and beyond, but also served to gather scientific knowledge for the development of project outputs and validate scientific results. Side events and online seminars allowed to reach out to a broader audience who is in-

terested in learning more about ocean governance and the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ. These types of events were also important for the visibility of the STRONG High Seas project, which resulted in an important networking tool as individual or organisational stakeholders that were not yet involved in the STRONG High Seas project contacted the project team and could be further involved in the project work.

Table 3: Overview of event types applied in the STRONG High Seas project

Event type	Description
Dialogue workshop	Inclusive multi-stakeholder event organised by STRONG High Seas targeting the project's two focal regions with multiple cross-cutting objectives and applying interactive approaches for engagement.
Capacity development	Event or series of events organised by STRONG High Seas targeting the project's two focal regions aimed to develop capacity of government officials on issues related to marine biodiversity in ABNJ.
Expert workshop	Event or series of events organised by STRONG High Seas bringing together experts to discuss specific questions or topics relevant to marine biodiversity in ABNJ.
Side event	Event or series of events held at the sideline of regional or international policy conferences.
Online seminars	Event or series of events held online targeting a wide audience.

Event type	Description
Informal discussions and/or networking	Organised informal exchange between individuals or groups of individuals on topics related to marine biodiversity in ABNJ.
Advisory Board meeting	Meeting between project partners and Advisory Board members.
Participation in external events (including, for instance, the Abidjan Convention Working Group on ABNJ, the Abidjan Convention Conference of the Parties, the CPPS General Assembly, etc.)	Participation in selected policy events relevant to the development and implementation of the STRONG High Seas project and its objectives.

2.2.2 Lessons learnt

Stakeholder engagement has been one of the key objectives of the STRONG High Seas project to build a network of experts within the project regions and ensure continuous engagement and sharing of knowledge during the lifetime of the project, and beyond. Previous work in the project regions and already established networks by project partners meant that the STRONG High Seas project was not starting this engagement strategy from scratch but could benefit from already established contacts to build visibility and a strong network of stakeholders.

During its implementation, the STRONG High Seas project received growing attention from stakeholders through word of mouth and recommendations from stakeholders already aware of and/or engaged in the project, presence at various important international and regional events (e.g., BBNJ negotiations, events organised by the CPPS and the Abidjan Convention, events organised by the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Marine Regions Forum, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, the International Ocean Institute, etc.), and through its outreach programme (social media campaign, project websites, visibility through other partner platforms, etc.) – who were keen to participate and be involved in this initiative. The COVID-19 pandemic meant that a

larger group of stakeholders could be reached through the organisation of online events compared to in-person, which increased the reach and visibility of the project, and interest in the topic of conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ.

Of key importance to the stakeholder engagement strategy of the project was the use of languages to communicate with stakeholders as well as disseminate the project results. To this end, communication in the STRONG High Seas project was done in English, German, Spanish, and French, and sporadically also in Portuguese. Communication with the German Government who was funding the project was done in German, while English, Spanish and French were used to communicate with stakeholders in the project regions, and beyond. All events organised under the STRONG High Seas project in the project regions had simultaneous translation; events organised at the United Nations in New York or in other global fora were organised in English, except for the capacity development programmes organised on the sideline of the BBNJ negotiations in New York, which also had simultaneous translation. Furthermore, all relevant project reports and policy briefs, as well as project websites, are available in English, French, and Spanish. Social media outreach was also done in the three main languages, whenever relevant and possible.



Workshop participants at the 2020 Lima Dialogue Workshop (left) and the 2019 Cape Town Dialogue Workshop (2019)²⁰

2.3 Conceptual approach

2.3.1 Approach

Safeguarding ocean health depends on effective governance and is supported by individuals and institutions with available and relevant capacity to underpin necessary management functions. However, limited human resources are a common problem for many organisations, including their member States, and securing adequate capacities for global or national processes is a key challenge for making ocean governance more effective (Freestone et al., 2014; Shackeroff et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2017; Cicin-Sain et al., 2018). Capacity development is therefore a key enabler to strengthen national, regional, and sectoral institutions as well as individual capacity to ensure that national representatives are able to effectively participate in governance processes and design and implement actions towards global objectives (Gjerde et al., 2018).

Capacity development amongst individuals and organisations was a key component of the STRONG High Seas project's objectives (see Packeiser et al. 2022 and Hampton et al. 2022b). This included developing capacity to implement conservation and management measures in ABNJ and developing capacity of States to ef-

fectively participate in the international negotiations on a BBNJ Agreement. In particular, the targeted capacity development activities aimed to support the:

- Development of targeted measures aimed at strengthening integrated and cross-sectoral governance of ABNJ at multiple scales;
- Promotion of cross-regional cooperation and global-regional interaction;
- Development of targeted measures based on the ecosystem approach to support the above;
- Development of capacity to participate in international negotiations;
- Development of capacity to implement conservation and management measures in ABNJ;
- Identification and development of tools and best practices for: i) monitoring, control and surveillance; and ii) integrated ocean governance in ABNJ;
- Promotion of a stronger role for regional approaches in international ABNJ negotiations.

²⁰ Credit: STRONG High Seas project.



Capacity development programme on the sidelines of the BBNJ negotiations in New York (2019)²¹

Over the course of the project, project partners have frequently surveyed relevant stakeholders in the project regions (e.g., official representatives of the CPPS and Abidjan Convention Secretariats and their member States, and other key stakeholders engaged in project activities, including from international/regional organisations, research institutions and non-governmental organisations) for general as well as specific needs and requests for capacity development on topics related to ocean governance, specifically in ABNJ, and the ongoing process of negotiations towards the adoption of the BBNJ Agreement. Project partners often adapted project activities to the needs and interests of stakeholders in the regions, as they were fundamentally important and of great value for ensuring the project's relevance and to achieve its overall objectives. In this respect, the themes and mechanisms for capacity development were informed by the outcomes of the different surveys conducted during project events.

Several activities were implemented to foster exchange of knowledge, experiences, and lessons learnt, and develop capacity, including a series of annual dialogue workshops, various expert workshops, thematic webinars, training sessions (see Table 4) and the dissemination of policy briefs and reports generated by the STRONG High Seas project through interdisciplinary scientific assessments. The project took a multifaceted approach to developing capacity within the project regions, focusing on creating awareness on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ and the elements addressed by the BBNJ Agreement (i.e., area-based management tools, environmental impact assessments, marine genetic resources, capacity building and the transfer of marine technology), generating reports and policy briefs, and prioritising knowledge exchange, stakeholder engagement and dialogue. A concerted effort was made to connect experts and stakeholders within the project regions and develop wider global networks of experts with an interest in the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ.

²¹ Credit: IISD ENB/Francis Dejon. Available at: <https://enb.iisd.org/events/3rd-session-intergovernmental-conference-igc-conservation-and-sustainable-use-marine-6>.

Table 4: Training sessions organised within the STRONG High Seas project for capacity development

Event	Date and Location
STRONG High Seas Capacity Development Workshop: BBNJ Capacity Development Workshop for UN Negotiations 1	09/2018, New York
STRONG High Seas Capacity Development Workshop: Marine Genetic Resources and Area-based Management Tools	08/2019, New York
STRONG High Seas Capacity Development Workshop: Marine Biological Diversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) in the Southeast Atlantic region	11/2019, Cape Town
STRONG High Seas Capacity Development Series in Diversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) in the Southeast Atlantic region	07/2021–01/2022, online
STRONG High Seas Capacity Development Series in Diversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) in the Southeast Pacific region	12/2021–04/2022, online

The selection of government representatives to participate in the STRONG High Seas project's capacity development activities was a decision taken by the CPPS and Abidjan Convention member States. While some of the officials selected by the States were/are engaged in the actual BBNJ negotiations, several government representatives were rather new to the topic. In general, representatives of academic institutions and non-governmental organisations from within the project regions were identified and invited by project partners and/or the Secretariats of the CPPS and Abidjan Convention to join the STRONG High Seas project's capacity development activities. While most of these stakeholders were keen to get involved and stay engaged in the STRONG High Seas project activities, the interest in the project regions grew constantly and additional stakeholders proactively sought to be included.²²

2.3.2 Lessons learnt

There was a wide and growing interest from stakeholders as well as a willingness of participants taking part in the project's capacity development activities to learn about issues around

the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ. Furthermore, there was an opportunity to build on other project activities (expert workshops, scientific assessments) to create capacity development events and materials based on established project results. In cases when there was no in-house expertise with the project team (for instance for topics such as marine genetic resources), the STRONG High Seas project could rely on a large network of experts to support delivering the project's capacity development events. Overall, feedback by participants on capacity development activities offered by the STRONG High Seas project was very positive. The selection of topics as well as the chosen formats of events were considered by participants to be relevant and appropriate in light of the capacity development needs assessed through the surveys.

However, due to finite financial resources and limited time available, it was not possible for the STRONG High Seas project to comprehensively address all expressed needs and interests of the stakeholders. Though project partners aimed to provide participants with the topics that they requested in the surveys, project partners also

²² Participation at capacity development events that were organised in person were limited to a maximum number of participants due to resources availability. Participation at capacity development events that were organised virtually was not limited to a maximum number of participants.



Workshop participants at the capacity development event in Cape Town (2019)²³

had to balance those with the in-house expertise available and/or availability of external experts and include topics that were required or necessary to achieve the overarching aim of the STRONG High Seas project. Some individual stakeholders in key positions (e.g., State representatives and heads of organisations) changed during the course of the five years of the STRONG High Seas, which made it difficult to build individual and organisational capacity over a longer period of time. Furthermore, the level of knowledge and awareness of ABNJ issues was very different across project regions and across stakeholder groups (e.g., those involved in the BBNJ negotiations had a higher level of awareness and knowledge than those that are not directly involved in the negotiations). This meant that the project activities had to be constantly adapted and, more often than not, provide the basics for all stakeholders to be able to follow.

Though it is expected that awareness of key stakeholders about issues related to ocean governance in ABNJ and the BBNJ Agreement could be enhanced through the STRONG High Seas project activities, it is difficult to assess what participants take back to their institutions and to understand how and if the knowledge gained through the STRONG High Seas project can be applied and contribute to broader institutional gains.

A detailed report, including reflections on and recommendations for developing capacities for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ gained through the course of the STRONG High Seas project has been published within the work programme of the project (Packer et al. 2022 and Hampton et al. 2022b).

2.4 Co-creative research to support decision-making and achieve policy impact

2.4.1 Approach

The STRONG High Seas project put a special emphasis on ensuring a co-creative approach research process for the implementation of the project. Stakeholders, especially State representatives from the project focal regions, were invited to actively contribute to the development of project outputs in the co-design (Phase 1) and co-production (Phase 2) phases. The overarching conceptual approach applied by the STRONG High Seas project is provided in Section 2.1.

Figure 4 provides the general process for involving stakeholders in the design and development of STRONG High Seas assessments and events.

²³ Credit: STRONG High Seas project.

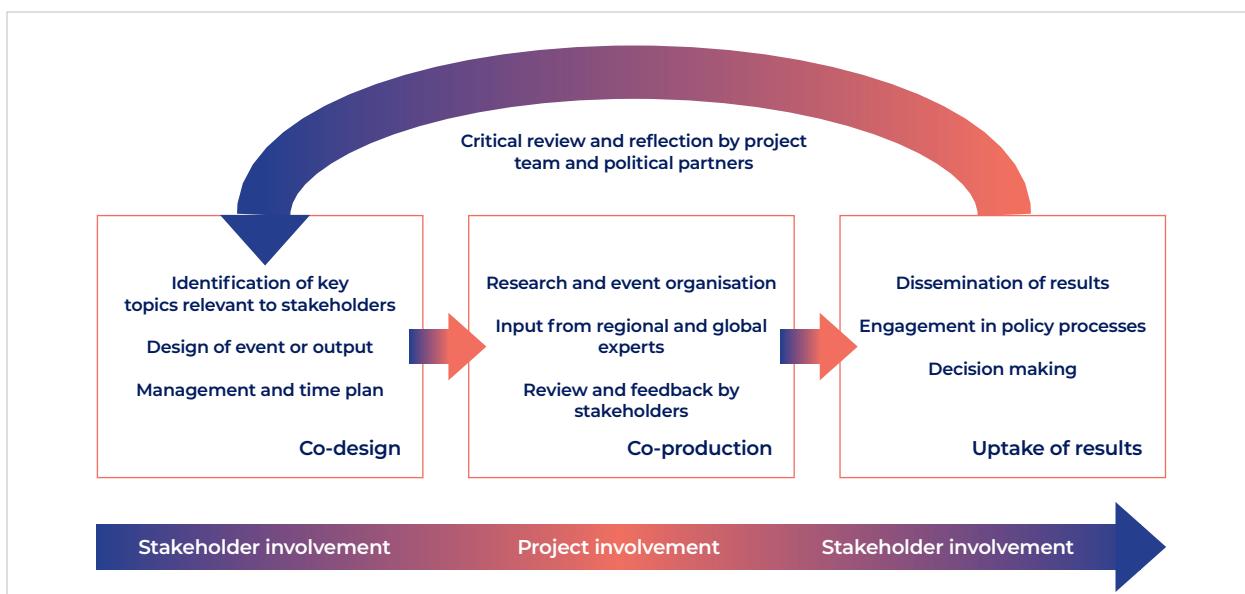
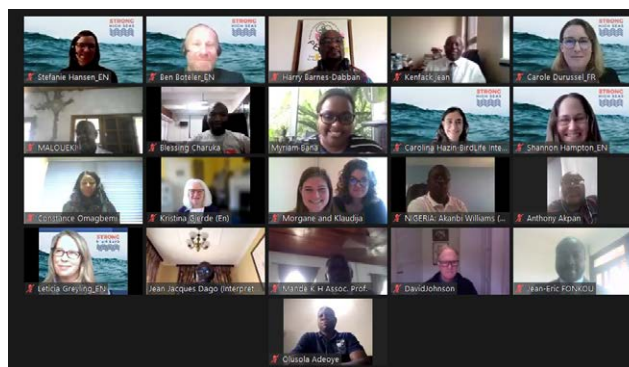


Figure 4: General process used for stakeholder involvement in the different STRONG High Seas project phases

The co-design phase (Phase 1) was important to ensure that events organised, and publications developed during the lifetime of the STRONG High Seas project are of relevance to the stakeholders of the project regions and could help to inform decision-makers about the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ. During Phase 1, stakeholders were essential in identifying topics and providing input and ideas into the design and management of project activities. This phase was done through several varying ways to engage with stakeholders, including via email, short surveys, formal discussions during STRONG High Seas Dialogue Workshops and expert workshops, as well as informal discussions with stakeholders at other events held internationally or in the project regions. Particularly, the CPPS and Abidjan Convention Secretariats and their member States were actively engaged to ensure that the project outputs reflected their needs and those of the region. Events organised by the STRONG High Seas project, particularly the Dialogue Workshops and Expert Workshops, enabled other stakeholders in the project regions, and beyond, to provide suggestions about future project activities and outputs, including the development of project reports and policy briefs.

The co-production phase (Phase 2) focused on co-producing the scientific assessments or events based on the planned design done during Phase 1. This phase was primarily led by the STRONG High Seas project team. State representatives of the two focal regions, the CPPS and Abidjan Convention Secretariats, and external experts in ocean governance, including from the STRONG High Seas Advisory Board, then reviewed draft project reports and policy briefs and provided inputs to ensure that they are policy relevant and contained the information necessary to the project regions to take informed decisions about the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ. This helped to ensure that scientific assessments developed under the STRONG High Seas project benefited from the knowledge and experience of the different stakeholder groups as well as ensured that assessments and discussions were addressing the most critical questions and priorities for stakeholders in the project regions.



Workshop participants at the Guayaquil Dialogue Workshop (2019; left) and online Dialogue Workshop for Africa (2021; right)²⁴

In a final phase (Phase 3), results from project activities were disseminated across stakeholder groups and presented, when possible, in relevant policy fora – such as at meetings organised by the CPPS, the Abidjan Convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity, or during the BBNJ negotiations at the United Nations in New York – to support decision making.

Communication material developed through the STRONG High Seas project, such as leaflets and factsheets, were developed directly by project partners. However, as these outputs were based on scientific assessments or discussions with the various stakeholders from the project regions, and beyond, a level of co-design and co-production can be assumed. It should also be noted that the process described here, while presented as a linear approach, was in practice more fluid and irregular.

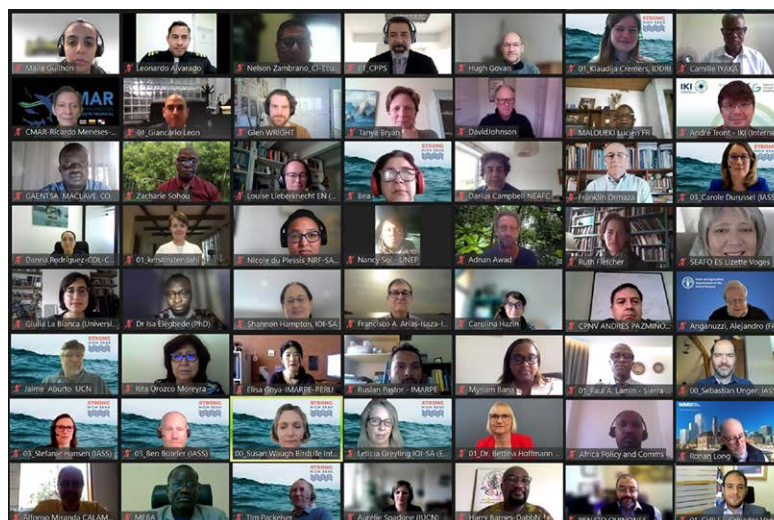
In addition, the STRONG High Seas project team, including partners from the Secretariats of the Abidjan Convention and CPPS, conducted a critical review and reflection after the finalisation of each project activity to ensure that lessons learned and ideas for improvement could be integrated into the next round of project activities. As part of this process, a 'post-workshop survey' (see Annex 3) was distributed to and filled out by attendees of the Dialogue Workshops to receive feedback about the event. This survey was anonymous to allow workshop participants to provide unbiased feedback. The Dialogue Workshops were chosen as the ideal place to conduct

the survey as they were the primary events in which participants from all stakeholder categories were brought together once a year in each of the project's focus regions.

2.4.2 Lessons learnt

There was generally a strong interest from stakeholders to participate in STRONG High Seas events, contribute towards the co-design and co-production of project outputs, and learn more about the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ. Over the lifetime of the STRONG High Seas project, the project team managed to build a strong network of stakeholders in the project regions, and beyond, and many key stakeholders were very supportive and dedicated to the project's success. These stakeholders played an important role and provided an essential contribution to the co-design and co-production of the project outputs as well as to their dissemination into the various policy fora. The dedicated project team also helped to create a trusted environment, which was very important to allow stakeholders to provide feedback, give praise, or voice their concerns directly with the project team and help shape the implementation of the STRONG High Seas project. Furthermore, the project team developed a clear process for the review of draft project reports and policy briefs in collaboration with the Secretariats of the CPPS and Abidjan Convention, which followed States protocols and enabled them to review and participate in the development of these scientific assessments.

²⁴ Credit: STRONG High Seas project.



Dialogue Workshop V participants (March 2022)²⁵

The BBNJ negotiations, a global policy process, provided momentum amongst States and stakeholders to anchor the project (e.g., through timeline and use of terms) and provided a framework for discussions around the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ. However, as the BBNJ negotiations are ongoing and will continue after the STRONG High Seas project comes to an end, the design of the project (e.g., project outputs) were not always relevant as the political reality shifted (i.e., global learning process). Projects require flexibility to identify new opportunities and shift to new activities and engagement strategies to best meet project objective. This is especially true with the COVID-19 pandemic, which has paused and delayed many policy processes, which caused challenges and had direct implications on reaching the project's outcome.

Though it is to be expected that the STRONG High Seas project has been able to provide important scientific and technical knowledge and information to stakeholders from the project regions and help them develop capacities on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ, the complexity and challenge of political realities make it difficult to trace the exact political and policy impacts of the STRONG High Seas project. Political realities at both the global and regional levels meant that a lot was

beyond the control of the project. Furthermore, creating policy impacts often takes time that goes beyond the lifetime of the project, especially in regional and global governance where compromises between many different actors are required. The complexity and size of the 'marine biodiversity in ABNJ challenge' (i.e., cross-sectoral coordination) also means that many stakeholders must be involved and mobilised to achieve policy change, even at the regional level. It is therefore extremely difficult, or impossible, to reach all stakeholders that may be relevant to such regional and global processes. This requires selecting target groups and supporting them to engage with other stakeholders. Last, ABNJ are far away from land and are not identified as a priority by many countries and stakeholders. There is therefore a need for significant awareness raising before policy change can even be considered. Projects working on such global and regional policy impacts therefore would require a longer duration to be effective on the long-term.

Key policy impacts achieved through the STRONG High Seas project, including in the target regions, include:

- Enhanced understanding and knowledge edge-based decision making for actors and institutions in the project regions on issues

²⁵ Credit: STRONG High Seas project.

related to ocean governance and the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ, including for the negotiations of a BBNJ Agreement, through the co-creation of scientific assessments, technical reports and policy briefs;

- Concrete proposals for and recommendations to support the conservation and sustainable management of marine biodiversity in ABNJ to support the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement including:
 - Opportunities and challenges to improve the legal and institutional framework of the Southeast Atlantic and Southeast Pacific;
 - Measures to support conservation efforts;
 - Innovative approaches to integrated ocean management;
 - Targeted recommendations to increase coherence between global and regional approaches for strengthened governance of ABNJ;
 - Options to strengthen monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) activities to, amongst others, combat illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing (IUU);
 - Lessons learned and options for a compliance committee to support the effective implementation of the BBNJ Agreement;
 - Guidance to achieve biodiversity conservation measures in high seas fisheries;
- Regional good practices for integrated ocean governance in ABNJ and exchanges of lessons learnt with other marine regions, including the Western Indian Ocean, the Southwest Pacific, or the Northeast Atlantic regions;
- A network of stakeholders in the project regions from governments, international and regional organisations, private sector, sci-

ence, and civil society that is aware of and engaged in issues related to regional ocean governance and the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ. To date, the project has involved, informed and/or trained over 400 persons through various events in the project regions and at the United Nations during the negotiations of the BBNJ Agreement;

- Support to country representatives taking part in the negotiations for a BBNJ Agreement at the United Nations through specialised capacity development trainings, and scientific and policy advice; and
- Support to the CPPS and Abidjan Convention Secretariats in exploring governance opportunities related to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ through scientific and policy advice.

2.5 The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the STRONG High Seas approach

The COVID-19 pandemic, which started in early 2020 and continued throughout the duration of the STRONG High Seas' project lifetime, affected the implementation of the project in several ways. Prior to the pandemic, all events organised by the project, including workshops, capacity development programmes, and side events, were done in-person in the project regions or at the United Nations in New York, on the sidelines of the BBNJ negotiations. During the pandemic, all project events were organised online, using platforms such as *Zoom*.

The use of online events brought with itself challenges in terms of internet access and bandwidth, time zones, and *Zoom* fatigue, but also advantages that had a positive impact on the participative multi-stakeholder approach of the STRONG High Seas project.²⁶ First, using an online platform allowed the project to invite a larger number of stakeholders to participate in project events than would have been possible through

¹³ Another advantage of organising these events online was the decreased carbon footprint.

in-person meetings, mainly due to budget constraints. In this way, it was possible to disseminate the project outcomes and develop capacities around the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ to a larger audience and thereby build a large network of experts who were aware of these important issues. Second, online platforms allowed stakeholders from different marine regions to more easily meet and exchange. The STRONG High Seas project was able to organise several inter-regional workshops that gathered experts around the South Pacific region and experts from Africa, and thereby to increase the ties between these regions on issues related to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ. Third, short online events could be organised over a longer period of time compared to in-person events. This was particularly important in the case of the capacity development programmes implemented by the STRONG High Seas project, which could be developed as a workshop series rather than a stand-alone in-person workshop, and thus allow a deeper dive and reflection time for participants.

Regarding capacity development activities, the type of exchanges that could be done in-person were very hard to reflect in the online world and the level of engagement in online events was generally more limited due to the shorter length of online activities. However, organising a series of capacity development activities, rather than single events, made it possible to open these events to a larger number of stakeholders and a wider general audience from both project regions. This allowed the project to raise further awareness to the need for conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ and to build a larger network of stakeholders within the project regions.

However, it is to note that the level of engagement in online events was more limited, despite the use of other engagement software (e.g., *AhaSlides*, *Zoom Polls*, *Zoom break-out groups*, etc.). The type of exchanges and networking that

can be done in-person were very hard to reflect in the online world. Furthermore, the demand on stakeholders to attend a growing number of online events during the COVID-19 pandemic also meant that stakeholders had very limited availability and sometimes limited appetite for more online events (*Zoom fatigue*).

The COVID-19 pandemic had limited influence on the co-creative approach since this type of stakeholder involvement could be continued digitally. One of the main challenges, however, was that stand-alone online events organised under the STRONG High Seas project were much shorter than events that could be organised in-person due to the difficulty to get participants' attention over a longer period of time. This resulted in much less time available to discuss the design and production of future project outputs. Furthermore, the type of exchanges that could be done in-person were very hard to reflect in the online world. Project partners tried to use other engagement software (such as *AhaSlides*, *Zoom Polls*, *Zoom break-out groups*, etc.) to ensure that all workshop participants could voice their suggestions and provide feedback, as well as actively encouraged workshop participants and stakeholders to get in touch with the project team. Despite all of this, the level of engagement in online events was more limited, which resulted in slightly less engagement on the co-design and co-production of project outputs.

The impossibility to meet stakeholders in person and the postponement of several important policy processes (e.g., the BBNJ negotiations, the Convention on Biological Diversity's Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework negotiations, the Conference of the Parties of the Abidjan Convention, and other regional seas organisations) made it difficult to fully contribute towards policy impacts. With the whole world on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the second half of the project was more challenging in terms of policy impacts and potentially not as impactful as could have been due to the postponement of these important meetings.

3. Reflections from the STRONG High Seas project

The following are reflections on and recommendations for participative multi-stakeholder approaches within transdisciplinary ocean governance research, particularly focusing on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ gained through the course of the STRONG High Seas project. These lessons learned aim to be a resource for other initiatives seeking to design and implement similar research and development activities, while it does not provide an exhaustive overview of all possible considerations.

- **Participative multi-stakeholder processes are essential to ensure the exchange of experiences and information between different stakeholder groups, thereby fostering mutual learning and collaboration across actors and organisations to underpin decision-making and support progress towards policy targets.** Transdisciplinary research projects can offer a needed platform to bring together diverse stakeholder groups and champion collaborative process for sharing of lessons learnt and best practices, building new networks, and offering a space for States, sectoral organisations, academia, the private sector, and civil society to engage and discuss outside of formal policy processes, such as the global negotiations for the BBNJ Agreement.
- **Transdisciplinary research projects should consider the timing of relevant policy processes and tailor their efforts and interventions towards contributing to policy discussions.** Regarding ocean governance and ABNJ, the negotiations for the envisaged BBNJ Agreement during the STRONG High Seas project meant that the programme focussed primarily on facilitating an understanding of scientific, legal, and governance content. Towards the end of the project, topics more specific to management or implementation of the envisaged BBNJ Agreement

were considered. It is therefore important that topics build on each other. Uncertainty about the outcome of policy processes, such as the BBNJ negotiations, creates challenges in addressing potential future knowledge requirements of individuals and organisations/institutions without knowing future or potential roles in implementing policy or legal frameworks and agreements. This challenge was particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused face-to-face negotiations to be paused, thereby limiting formal progress on the legal text of the treaty.

- **Transdisciplinary research projects provide an important networking and relationship building opportunity for stakeholders from diverse groups as well as different regions and countries. Implementing a participative multi-stakeholder approach will help to build a community of practice that will continue to expand and grow beyond the close of the research project,** continuing long-term support of project goals e.g., strengthening ocean governance and the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ.
- **It was challenging to establish new working relationships with individuals or organisations that fell outside of the established networks of project partners and were not attending the same events. This challenge was compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and was particularly the case for sectoral organisations and the private sector, as many individuals did not respond to efforts to engage, potentially because they did not have a personal link to the project.** While it is difficult to determine the exact reasoning for this group's lower attendance, it may be due to several factors. This includes the complexity and diversity of this group, making it difficult to identify and select representatives with a direct interest in issues concerning

ABNJ, and there also may not necessarily be a general interest or capacity constraints to participate in research projects.

➤ **Awareness raising must be a top priority in transdisciplinary research projects dealing with complex and challenging topics such as governance issues, as well as remain an objective throughout the life of a project as networks grow and learning processes develop.** In the context of the STRONG High Seas project, the complexity of ocean governance and ABNJ and considering the different backgrounds and levels of knowledge of participants, it is important to raise sufficient awareness and foster learning before diving deeply into specific thematic fields and topics. This is especially the case for the topic of ocean governance and ABNJ, which might be viewed as ‘far from people’s minds’ and potentially challenging to make tangible. Project design and implementation should draw on regional experts and examples so that the specifics of a region are included within the design of a programme and participants can connect with its content, and during exchange and discussions.

➤ **High turnover of staff must be accounted for accordingly and planned into project activities.** Especially when working with government institutions and actors, transdisciplinary research projects should be designed for a high rotation of individuals due to changes in posts and staff members. **This will require that transdisciplinary research projects build effective working relationships with new staff and make efforts to (e.g., personal meetings, phone calls) to integrate these individuals into existing project activities.** Moreover, ocean governance and ABNJ is a relatively specialised field, which includes diverse and complex topics, and can therefore be a challenging learning curve for individuals entering the field. **It is important that transdisciplinary research projects provide access to additional or introductory information on important topics and ensure organisations within the project have easy access to resources (in different languages,**

where relevant) from or related to the project activities.

➤ **Co-creative processes to support decision making and achieve policy impact through incorporating ideas, scientific knowledge, and perspectives from stakeholders for the development of project outputs, require flexibility to adapt to shifts in political priorities, changing mindsets, and institutional and individual learning.** It will be necessary to re-evaluate project objectives throughout its implementation and identify new engagement opportunities or shift to new activities to ensure a successful strategy is maintained. It will be important that project funders, especially in longer-term projects, recognise this need for flexibility and not only allow but support shifts in work programmes, which would support the achievement of policy impact. This is especially true with the COVID-19 pandemic, which has paused and delayed many policy processes, and which in turn has caused challenges and had direct implications on reaching the STRONG High Seas project’s outcome.

➤ **Co-creative research projects working to achieve policy impacts will benefit from a shared (e.g., regional) vision, which highlights long-term policy objectives as well as needs (e.g., future roles) of key actors and institutions.** Such a vision can be created within a transdisciplinary research program or by stakeholders prior to project commencement and will support the design and implementation of a systematic plan to support progress towards this vision through a collaborative process. At the same time, projects can benefit from identifying and supporting key changemakers within a programme to help achieve this vision. Such changemakers can be important to help champion this vision from a e.g., regional perspective and foster support for project activities and outputs. Individual changemakers can act as multipliers for institutional or organisational engagement as well as act as knowledge brokers for distributing information and outputs.

- **Capacity development programmes should be based on the needs indicated by and requests of the target audience.** This helps to ensure that the selection of topics and the design of activities (i.e., programme) is targeted towards addressing gaps in knowledge or understanding of those individuals, organisations, or societies the programme is intending to support. However, given the diverse nature and complexity of ocean governance in ABNJ, capacity development programmes most likely cannot be based on requests from participants alone. Further reflection and review from programme organisers and experts will be needed to ensure that the broad range of relevant issues – of environmental/ecological, scientific, technical, legal, socioeconomic, and political nature – are adequately covered.
- **Language and culture are crucial aspects to consider in planning activities in transdisciplinary research projects.** Project activities will potentially involve individuals across many cultures and languages, especially when taking a regional perspective, as is the case in the STRONG High Seas project. It is therefore important to ensure the use of direct interpretation to enable participants to take part in their preferred language, that the language used is not too specialised or that it is well explained, and that interpreters have the knowledge of specialised language used or have been prepared adequately ahead of the programme. This will be important to the success of organised events, whether face-to-face or online, and help to ensure the successful exchange and transfer of information. Furthermore, project outputs, such as reports or policy briefs, also need to be available in the relevant languages to ensure that all stakeholders have access to this important knowledge. It is also important to consider the demands upon a project that these considerations create, and ensure adequate resources are available.
- **Formal and informal communication channels are often needed in combination for successful communication strategies with targeted organisations and individuals when implementing engagement strategies and seeking to achieve policy impacts.** Formal communication with institutions ensures that organisations are directly targeted and acknowledged for their views and ideas regarding research activities, while informal communication with selected individuals within organisations is often essential to ensure timely responses and active engagement by the organisations that they represent. Similarly, the main channel of communication with State representatives in the project regions was done through the Secretariats of the CPPS and the Abidjan Convention, which meant that there was an additional step in communication and dissemination to reach these individuals, creating potentially additional workload for the Secretariats as well as the potential for miscommunication.
- **The benefits of organising research activities through face-to-face settings are well known, including opportunities for networking or one-on-one interventions and in-depth discussion and exchanges among participants on critical and/or complex topics. However, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the benefits of utilising online formats became apparent and include reaching larger audiences in a more cost-effective and more flexible manner as well as enabling activities (e.g., capacity development programmes) to be delivered over longer periods of time (e.g., over several weeks or months), thus allowing participants to engage in topics or issues between work commitments. **Mixing both in-person and online approaches in a relevant and effective design can be a successful way to utilise the benefits from both options and enable an effective participative and collaborative process.****

4. Annexes

Annex 1: Non-Exhaustive Overview of Stakeholders in the Southeast Atlantic region²⁷

Fisheries	Shipping	Conservation	Telecommunications	Research	Seabed Mining	Donor Agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Whaling Commission (IWC) International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) South East Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (SEAFO) Western and central regional fisheries Sub-regional fisheries organisations Interim Guinea Current Commission Benguela Current Commission Port State Control authorities nationally flagged vessels, foreign vessels, national flagged but foreign owned Maritime administrations of each nation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Chamber of Shipping International Transport Federation International Maritime Organization (IMO) World Maritime University United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Hydrographic Organisation World Ocean Council Ports Management Association of West and Central Africa (PMAWACA) International association of ports and harbours International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), London Convention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> World Wildlife Fund (WWF) International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Birdlife International Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) UN Environment Abidjan Convention Greenpeace International Africa Marine and Environmental Sustainability Initiative Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) International Ocean Institute (IOI) Global Ocean Forum Regional NGOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Cable Protection Commission Users of technology Private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP) Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC-UNESCO) World Meteorological Association Scientists from the region – universities and research institutes and international scientists doing work in the region. Interests may overlap. Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Seabed Authority (ISA) Contractors/responsible IPIECA (conglomeration of oil companies looking at environment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> African Development Bank (Ocean program underway) New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Global Environment Facility (GEF) European Commission World Bank National funders MAVA and other philanthropic foundations United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

²⁷ This table is the result of a stakeholder mapping exercise to identify key stakeholders relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ in the Southeast Atlantic region conducted with workshop participants during the STRONG High Seas project's first Dialogue Workshop held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in 2018. See: https://www.prog-ocean.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Workshop-Summary-Abidjan_English.pdf.

Fisheries	Shipping	Conservation	Telecommunications	Research	Seabed Mining	Donor Agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Local communities fishing highly migratory fish stocks Fish processors Community based organisations and NGOs African Union South African Development Community (SADC) Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) World Fisheries University in South Korea Confédération Africaine des Organisations Professionnelles de 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Maritime administrations National Chamber of Shipping Ports Environmental Network-Africa (PENAf) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PEW Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs) 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development Nippon Foundation Japan International Cooperation Agency French Agency for Development German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) MAR Charitable Foundation United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) United Nations Development



Annex 2: Non-Exhaustive Overview of Stakeholders in the Southeast Pacific region²⁸

Geographical scope	Stakeholder group			
	Government	Private sector	Academia	NGOs and foundations
Cross-cutting	Our Ocean Conference; 2030 Agenda SDG 14; Other conferences and workshops			
International/ Global	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Seabed Authority (ISA) International Maritime Organization (IMO) International Whaling Commission (IWC) UN agencies Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Global Environment Facility (GEF) Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC-UNESCO) Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) World Meteorological Organization (WMO) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EUROPECHE Pharmaceutical industry International coalition of fisheries organisations International Cable Protection Committee (ICPC) Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Financiers Telecommunication industry Mining industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foreign universities and research institutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greenpeace International MarViva PEW Charitable Trusts World Wildlife Fund (WWF) International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Philanthropy
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanent Commission for the Southeast Pacific (CPPS) South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) Latin American Organization for Fisheries Development (OLDEPESCA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional shipping organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific research projects Scientific committees International Research Centre on El Niño (CIIFEN) ERFEN committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC)
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agencies of Fisheries Ministry of Environment Ministry of Foreign Affairs Offices for intellectual property rights Ministry of defence Marine research institutes Mining and oil: COCHILCO (Chile) Oil and Mining Society (Peru) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National fisheries organisations National shipping organisations Processing companies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National research institutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oceana Birdlife International
Local		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local fishing organisations 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local communities

²⁸ This table is the result of a stakeholder mapping exercise to identify key stakeholders relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ in the Southeast Pacific region conducted with workshop participants during the STRONG High Seas project's first Dialogue Workshop held in Cali, Colombia, in 2018. See: https://www.prog-ocean.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Workshop-Summary-Cali_English.pdf.

Annex 3: Example of workshop questionnaire

Workshop Questionnaire | Please mark the box that best describes your answer.

Question			
How satisfied are you with the overall organisation (location, invitation, travel arrangements, etc.) of this workshop?			
How satisfied are you with the timing (dates, start/finish times) of this workshop?			
How satisfied are you with the length (2 days) of this workshop?			
Do you think the workshop was able to achieve its goals?			
How would you rate the overall relevance and usefulness of the workshop to your work?			
Do you feel you had the opportunity to provide your opinion and ideas at the workshop?			
How useful did you find the workshop for supporting your objectives as a stakeholder?			
How likely are you to use something you learned at the workshop in your future work?			
How likely are you to attend a follow up workshop?			
Please provide any other comments or suggestions you might have.			

Note: The questionnaire was translated into other languages to accommodate participants from the different project focus regions.

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May 2022



About the STRONG High Seas project

The STRONG High Seas project is a five-year project that aims to strengthen regional ocean governance for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. Working with the Secretariat of the Comisión Permanente del Pacífico Sur (CPPS; Permanent Commission for the South Pacific) and the Secretariat of the West and Central Africa Regional Seas Programme (Abidjan Convention), the project will develop and propose targeted measures to support the coordinated development of integrated and ecosystem-based management approaches for ocean governance in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). In this project, we carry out transdisciplinary scientific assessments to provide decision-makers, both in the target regions and globally, with improved knowledge and

understanding on high seas biodiversity. We engage with stakeholders from governments, private sector, scientists and civil society to support the design of integrated, cross-sectoral approaches for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Southeast Atlantic and Southeast Pacific. We then facilitate the timely delivery of these proposed approaches for potential adoption into the relevant regional policy processes. To enable an interregional exchange, we further ensure dialogue with relevant stakeholders in other marine regions. To this end, we set up a regional stakeholder platform to facilitate joint learning and develop a community of practice. Finally, we explore links and opportunities for regional governance in a new international and legally-binding instrument on marine biodiversity in the high seas.

Project duration: June 2017 – May 2022

Coordinator: Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS)

Implementing partners: BirdLife International, Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI), International Ocean Institute (IOI), Universidad Católica del Norte, WWF Colombia, WWF Germany

Regional partners: Secretariat of the Comisión Permanente del Pacífico Sur (CPPS), Secretariat of the Abidjan Convention

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Partners of the STRONG High Seas project:



International Ocean Institute
African Region

