



Currents of Contradictions in the Blue Economy

A Framework on the Blue Economy by the Pacific Regional Non-Governmental Organisations Alliance (PRNGO), 2020. (PRNGO Alliance)¹

We, the civil society organisations of the Pacific representing our diverse constituencies and mandated by them to promote and protect the interests of Pacific Island peoples, declare that the agenda of the Blue Economy as currently presented and now espoused by our Pacific leaders, may not be in the interest of Pacific peoples. Rather, the aspired outcomes will endanger: not sustain, the very lives of Pacific people, communities, our environment and our social, cultural wellbeing. Its planned processes will challenge: not uphold, the traditions, cultures and values of Pacific peoples.

Given the way the dominant Blue Economy agenda surfacing throughout the Pacific has co-opted political spaces, policies and development priorities and aspirations, the Pacific Regional Non-Governmental Organisations Alliance is compelled to closely examine the issues. Its position on the subject is thus premised on the rationales outlined below and prefaced by the two following statements.

- **The Pacific Ocean is central to our existence** and that of humanity and its survival.

Our Pacific culture, spirituality and identity ebbs and flows with the ocean's tides, connecting our relationships with our past, present and our future and regulating our very existence through long-term ocean health. The rhetoric of the dominant Blue Economy agenda, distorts this relationship into commodities. It marginalises Pacific peoples' voices; allowing for the exploitation and extraction of marine and human life for the economic wealth of a few at the expense of so many.

- **The Blue Economy is an external industrialisation agenda of ocean economics, which in essence, is masquerading under the cover of sustainability and Pacific identity.**

The planned activities encompass both existing industries such as fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, shipping, and new frontier issues such as deep-sea mining, genetic resources exploitation, renewable energy to name only a few.

Such activities that are focused on exploiting our ocean environment and its resources at industrialized scales, will contribute to the wider context of the climate emergency. Further, they place risks on our sources of life, including ecological systems; Pacific people's identity and culture; livelihoods, security, well-being and the health of the planet.

Hence, with such human-induced impacts, the activities of the Blue Economy cannot possibly be effective responses to Pacific peoples' needs. Neither would they ensure or promote the sustainability of Pacific lives and identity.

On closely examining the Blue Economy agenda, the following are discerned:-

- **That the Blue Economy Agenda reflects the intention of corporate interests.** This intention is to capture and claim our Pacific Ocean as the next frontier for resource experimentation, extraction and exploitation. The concern is that the blue escalation of industrial exploitation of ocean resources will exacerbate cumulative human impacts that diminish our ocean's ability to maintain its life-supporting function for the planet.
- **The impact on the Pacific Ocean's integrity.** Scientific research studies inform us that we have reached the stage where the Pacific Ocean's integrity has been severely compromised. Our ocean needs healing and restoration; not furthering industrial action for resource exploitation and extraction from its waters. Consequently, actions, principles and values that promote and protect the integrity of the oceans, its life-support systems and functions of nature, should now be the main focus.
- **The contests of policy language and the contradictions** of the framing of Blue Economy within a concerted Blue Pacific narrative, while complex, represents a distinct capture of Pacific peoples' ocean identity and assumes acquiescence by Pacific peoples to the neoliberal ideologies underpinning the Blue Economy. The purpose of a Blue Narrative is intended to contradict our own understanding of a Blue Pacific and Blue Economy.

The use of identity and indigenous references in the Blue framing, while applicable in the context, hides the explicit intent to access and exploit Pacific resources.

- **What is touted to be "sustainable" is contested.** If we take into consideration ecosystem functions, the climate crises and ocean health versus the extractive industries like deep-sea mining and large-scale fisheries, sustainability will naturally, be surely compromised. This will challenge or negate the effectiveness of any Blue Economy plans to sustainably manage oceanic resources at the industrialised scale propagated.
- **Free Prior and Informed Consent of indigenous Pacific peoples' of resources not sought.** The indigenous peoples of the Pacific have their own governance, customary tenure systems and collective ownership rights and responsibilities, over land and seas - inclusive of coastlines, reefs, fishing grounds, subsoil and beyond. These have been in place long before the advent of western colonizers into the Pacific. These indigenous people's rights have been universally recognized and duly protected under ILO and UN Conventions –specifically ILO Convention 169 and U.N.Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP 2007). Hence our Pacific governments' support of an externally driven blue framework without clear processes for national and regional level dialogue and without soliciting the free, prior and informed consent of Pacific indigenous peoples and communities who are traditional owners of and custodians of the ocean, is a blatant breach of this fundamental basic human right. Moreover, the current framing of the Blue Economy narrative is limited to only economic and scientific exploitative language. This further limits the engagement by our peoples. Pacific islanders articulate indigenous experiential knowledge and understanding of the ocean differently and recognise the social and environmental concerns connected with this issue. They best articulate these in their own unique indigenous languages and traditional indigenous people's forum.

- **Disregard for the ocean as people's insurance against poverty.** We recognise that the **impacts of COVID 19** may cause our own governments to view their ocean resources as the basis for national economic recovery. However, governments must be reminded of their communities' dependencies on these same resources as their only insurance policy against dire poverty, food insecurity, and to protect local community interests to sustain ocean health for future generations.

INTERROGATING THE BLUE ECONOMY

We urge our leaders to reconsider the current Blue Economy framing with critical lens on the geo-political, ideological and neo-liberal economic agenda that present it. These should be closely examined in order to identify who and what, they truly represent.

CONCLUSIONS

From our consultations, research and analysis, we derive the following conclusions.

- The Blue Economy narrative is a scramble to control the Pacific Ocean and its natural resources through a second wave of economic and political colonisation – **a Blue Colonization.**
- That the current representation of the Blue Economy adopted by our Pacific leaders, is framed under the language of: “creation of jobs and revenue for countries through blue industries” to sell the idea. However, underneath these, flows a deep current of corporate capture that ‘grandstands’, states and manifests corporate interests, industrialisation of ocean resources and exploitation of public policy spaces and regional power.
- That the Blue Economy agenda frames the vast Pacific Ocean as an intensified area for power and economic valuing. The monetary valuing of oceans, including its life- giving values, only serves the interests of monetary entities and neo-liberal ideology that have proven time and time again to benefit a few, while leaving the majority behind with much environmental damage.
- That the imposition of the Blue/Green Economy, and the inadvertent territorialisation of oceans for geo-political and economic gain, have confounded valuable efforts to protect critical life-giving ecosystems. Neither would these rebuild nor promote long-term ocean health and integrity, to sustain life for generations to come.
- The economic development through the industrialisation of natural resources on land has already proven unsustainable. There is an over emphasis in ocean governance on the economic assets of the Blue Economy – e.g. deep-sea mining, large-scale fish industries, etc.
- This extractive development model is contradictory to our Pacific way of life. It challenges our spirituality, indigenous wisdom, and denies the intrinsic value of the ocean and our right to be self-determining.

Hence, the Blue Economy extractive activities are not strategies for Pacific Island development. The Blue Economy as it is currently propagated, will not improve; but endanger, the lives of Pacific peoples.

RISING WITH THE TIDE OF RESISTANCE

It is imperative that as Pacific people, we reclaim the language of relationship with the ocean and relinquish the dominant neoliberal concept of a Blue Economy.

It is clear that global corporations, in conjunction with our national governments, have appropriated our oceans as part of a larger development agenda, which is not equitable for Pacific communities.

Corporations and governments have attempted to disguise their profit-driven motives as development of island economies.

We pledge to: -

1. Interrogate the Blue Economy.
Reconsider the current Blue Economy framing with critical lens of the geo-political agenda that extends from its frames. What ideology guides it? Who dominates the global Blue Economy? Who stands to benefit from it? What systems and structures support it?
2. Recognize the subtleties.
Examine and recognize the geo-political, ideological and neo-liberal economic agenda, which control the Blue Economy framework and who and what they truly represent.
3. Hold our leaders accountable and guide their thoughts on how to develop local economies responsibly and inclusively for the benefit of Pacific people and creation - now and for the future.

At the centre of this Pacific ideology must lie the concept that no further harm be done to people or nature in the name of development.

.....

