

*Research Article*

# **Oceanian Sovereignty in Blue Economy: Ending Unfair Dependency Constraining Small Island Developing States**

**Farrel Rakha Aryasatya<sup>1</sup>, Falah Mar'ie Amanullah<sup>2</sup>, Mas Intan Putri Apriani<sup>3</sup>,  
Rahayu Hemalina Prasetyo<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> *Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia (corresponding author)*  
*farrel.rakha.aryasatya@mail.ugm.ac.id.*

<sup>2</sup> *Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia*  
*falahmarieamanullah@mail.ugm.ac.id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia*  
*mas.intan1702@mail.ugm.ac.id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia*  
*rahayu.hemalina2903@mail.ugm.ac.id.*

*Received 25 November 2023; Revised 1 March 2025; Accepted 8 May 2025; Published Online 26 June 2025*

## **Abstract**

The implementation of the blue economy in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) can provide a promising economic opportunity to further utilize the riches of marine resources sustainably. Unfortunately, due to the internalized cultural hegemony supporting the economical North-SIDS relations, SIDS still rely upon the investment of the Global North to provide resources to implement this concept. In Neo-Gramscian theory, the Global North is forming a 'historical bloc' that uses their resources to maintain an upper hand in their relationship with SIDS. The concept of 'Oceanian Sovereignty' in the blue economy acts as a 'counter-hegemony' for these countries to unify support for their sovereignty and rights over their own development course through South-South Cooperation. This paper analyzes cases of North-South power imbalance. Using the Neo-Gramscian Theory, this paper uses qualitative methods in analysing the 'Oceanian Sovereignty' concept as a gradual effort to counter the Global North domination in the blue economy and look into challenges of the South-South Cooperation to manifest a just transition. This paper finds that under the current state of South-South Cooperation, it is challenging to contest Global North's domination that persists through neoliberal co-optation and economic pressure without sufficient strive for international solidarity and collaboration.

**Keywords:** Blue Economy; Small Island Developing States; Trasformismo; Oceanian Sovereignty; South-South Cooperation

## Introduction

The concept of 'blue economy' gained traction since 2012 at the United Nations Convention on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) or the Rio+20 Conference. The idea, brought primarily by Small Island Developing States (SIDS), emphasized the importance of marine-based economic activity that benefits developing nations with access to the ocean. The United Nations defines the blue economy as a range of sustainable and socially equitable economic activities related to oceans, seas, and coastal areas. SIDS tend to have little land areas, demographics, and access to the global market, but own significant maritime territories. According to the UN, there are three categories of SIDS grouped by their relative locations. SIDS in the Indian Ocean comprises nine countries, the Atlantic and Caribbean SIDS comprises 16 countries, the Pacific SIDS comprises 13 countries, plus the additional 20 non-independent overseas dependencies. SIDS are grappling with unique challenges that no other countries face, especially climate change despite their minimal contributions to the issue. Recent economic challenges from COVID-19 pandemic also constrained their budgets. Consequently, SIDS is in critical need of support from foreign partners (Louey, 2022). It is not rare to find SIDS that sit on top of precious natural resource stock or tourism and maritime potentials, and so the implementation of the blue economy as a strategy for SIDS can be considered as a way for these countries to escape their problems. Unfortunately, the process of implementing a sustainable blue economy in SIDS would face cost challenges that can only be solved through further dependency on the Global North.

SIDS, especially those that are located in the Pacific Ocean, have been reliant on advanced industrialized economies in the Global North to secure financial aid, investment, and skilled workforce (ITC ILO, 2022), and thus are put in an unfair position. Control over resources is unevenly distributed, with high income countries dominating global fishing in both the high seas (98%) and exclusive economic zones of low income countries (78%). In addition, 98% of patents for marine genetic resources are owned by actors from 10 countries, with 47% of the patents owned by an individual corporation (Bennett et al., 2021). Furthermore, SIDS is excluded from decision-making and governance. Previously, in the Rio+20 Conference, the blue economy was defined as "developmental space", highlighting equity distribution and sustainable practice. The World Bank Group (2017) stated that the blue economy seeks to '... promote economic growth, social inclusion, and preservation or improvement of livelihoods while at the same time ensuring environmental sustainability...'. Such narrative shifts have enabled versatile interpretations of the blue economy and an illusion of combining economic growth and sustainable practice when two variables can be contradictory. This paper views that the concept of Oceanian Sovereignty presented by SIDS academics has the potential to address this power imbalance. However, this idea that tries to increase the security and sovereignty of maritime territorial integrity has not received mainstream traction and would need the international community's support, especially from Global South countries.

This paper tries to answer the question of how the Oceanian Sovereignty implementation, applied through a South-South Cooperation, could bridge the gap of power imbalance between SIDS and the Global North. This paper tries to analyze the possibility of a counter-narrative of the mainstream neoliberal blue economy through a South-South mechanism that could bridge this gap. This paper adds to the ongoing discussion of blue economy implementation and its challenges along with utilizing the ideational concept of Oceanian Sovereignty as the basis for an alternative implementation through South-South Cooperation frameworks. By meeting the concept of Oceanian Sovereignty with blue economy, this paper proposed that the implementation of Oceanian Sovereignty within the blue Economy scheme could benefit SIDS as a whole, creating a new power relation that would put less stress on them to obey the rulebook of the Global North. This paper is organized into several sections, beginning with a literature review regarding the blue Economy and Oceanian Sovereignty, as well as the dependency phenomenon prevalent amongst SIDS. Through this paper, we will fill in the lack of literature combining blue economy and Oceanian Sovereignty and further emphasize the dire need to address the unfairness of current power relations that exist between SIDS and the Global North.

## Literature Review

Voyer et al. (2018) proposed four ways of understanding the meanings of blue economy. The first sees oceans as a 'natural source of capital' where actors sought to utilize the ocean to promote sustainable development and citizens' well-being. The second sees oceans as 'a source of livelihood' which argues the importance of the ocean for local sustenance and traditional practices of exploiting it. The third sees the ocean as 'good business', being relegated to economic growth discourse, focusing on issues of maritime economic activity, and how its dynamic affects economic growth. The fourth regard the oceans as 'drivers of innovation' where they advocate for new practices for efficiency and environmentalism.

Hassanali (2020) pressed the importance of blue economy's multiplicity of meanings, and the consequences of not dealing with it internationally especially in the context of South-South cooperation. Hassanali engaged with the writing of Voyer et al. (2018) about competing interpretations while discussing the blue economy implementation in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) SIDS. Hassanali shows that the multiplicity of meanings can hurt SIDS' attempt to implement a blue economy together and bring discord rather than opportunities for collaborative work. Voyer et al., (2017) connected the idea of blue economy and maritime resource extraction with the issue of security in the article 'Maritime Security and the blue economy: Intersections and Interdependencies in the Indian Ocean'. The importance of maritime security is emphasized as the enabler of a functional implementation of the blue economy in SIDS, and a better and more comprehensive maritime security capacity on behalf of SIDS is necessary. The paper discussed how the implementation of a sustainable maritime economy came under threats intertwining with maritime security issues and how international cooperation could help and bolster the development of the blue economy.

According to Schutter et al. (2021), there are also disputes on the interpretation of the blue economy domestically, by showing differing perspectives of domestic stakeholders in Seychelles. Despite this, there seems to be a consensus, largely because of how the blue economy acts as a 'boundary object,' in which a concept is versatile enough to be applied in various contexts. The plasticity it possesses becomes a power in negotiations since it can create a 'common sense' that stifles debate—especially from the oppositions of the blue economy concept. Moreover, this is also supported by a political landscape that hinders stakeholders to voice out their concerns; hence, discontent is only expressed privately. However, this literature does not discuss the possible counter-hegemonic movements among small fractions of people in Seychelles that are discontented with blue economy hegemony.

Bennett et al. (2021) shows an alternative to the blue economy discourse in the form of 'blue justice'. This research deconstructs the dominant discourse that frames blue growth as beneficial for the economy, but in reality, risks downplaying the uneven distribution of benefits and the potential social harms for developing nations. To address the issues, blue justice advocates ten key practices in the pursuit of blue growth: tenure and access, environmental justice, ecosystem services, small-scale fisheries, food security, economic benefits, socio-cultural impacts, gender equity, human rights, and inclusive governance. Nevertheless, this study does not take into account the power relations inherent between the blue economy concept and the subjects subservient to it.

Louey (2022) traces the evolution of blue economy promises within global discourses, looking at how sustainable development and equitable sharing principles of the blue economy shifted into the neoliberalism of economic growth and profit-oriented practices. Initially, the terminology "blue economy" was coined by Gunter Pauli, but Louey (2022) noted that from 2011 to 2012, it was SIDS that crafted a foundational promise of a blue economy to align with the aspirations of the Pacific Island States and SIDS in general, which comprise, a blue economy that brings development for SIDS and least developed countries (LDCs), and secondly, a commitment to equitable benefit sharing. Nonetheless, these visions are compromised by UNDESA's Concept Paper in 2014, which despite reiterating two promises, stated that economic development can be pursued without compromising ecological systems. This problematic "decoupling" promise is released by a body that

does not explicitly represent the Global South, and tries to reconcile two disparate goals. This overlooks problems of inequality and the environment that a developmentalist goal has caused.

Louey mentioned that the decoupling promises that have affected the blue economy practice require scrutiny by SIDS. Bambridge et al. (2021) discussed the idea of Oceanian sovereignty and its correlation with environmental conservation, where they refer to Epeli Hau'ofa (1994) who discussed the need for conserving natural resources in Oceania while addressing climate change, ecological damage, and environmental degradation. Hau'ofa advocates for Oceanian sovereignty, wherein indigenous peoples take control of the development in the Oceania region. It should be noted that the concept of sovereignty in this context cannot be fully captured by the Western legal-formal definition regulated in international law. Instead, it highlights the justification of fundamental rights for indigenous peoples to manage natural resources within their territory.

Multiple definitions and interpretations of the blue economy concept have created unsustained practices for a sustainable environment (Voyer et al., 2018; Hassanali, 2020; Schutter et al., 2021; and Louey, 2022). Hassanali (2020) proposed that this multiplicity of meaning can potentially hinder collaborations to conservation and sustainability. Voyer et al. (2018) addresses the importance of unionizing the concept of the blue economy through "maritime security", highlighting the need for collaboration in ensuring inclusivity, transparency, and accountability of practices and decision-making, while Bennett et al. (2021) proposes "blue justice" consisting of 10 key practices to pursue blue growth. However, these solutions have yet to address the issue of power imbalance between SIDS and the Global North in implementing the blue economy. With little resources, high climate change vulnerability, and recent economic struggles due to COVID-19, SIDS are heavily dependent to foreign powers, which has vested interest to keep them from their original goals of sustainability and equitable income sharing. This paper tries to look towards possible counter-narrative through "Oceanian Sovereignty" by Hau'ofa (1994) to dismantle the dominant narrative of the blue economy for an inclusive practice and benefits of all parties. Our focus in this study will further explain in detail how SIDS can reiterate the original aspirations of 2011-12, through the concept of "Ocean Sovereignty," which we believe will counter the hegemonic discourse of "decoupling" created by the Global North.

## Methods

This study employs a comprehensive literature review from diverse sources such as journal articles, books, reports, and reputable websites, serving as both primary and secondary data. This paper employs a qualitative research method, as its primary objective is to answer "how" questions rather than quantitative questions such as "what" or "how many" (Yin, 2003). The research analyzes theoretical frameworks by applying Gramsci's concept of *trasformismo* to reveal the process of the Global North's dominance in defining and determining the rule of the game, and how the status quo perpetuates. By learning the power imbalance situation in the context of the blue economy in SIDS, the research concludes by assessing "Oceanian Sovereignty" as the basis of resisting dominant narratives, while gradually establishing alternative alliances, such as South-South Cooperation. First, this study analyzes the shifting definition of the blue economy promoted by SIDS to those by the UNDESA and the World Bank. Second, this study explores historical contexts and power dynamics using Gramsci's hegemony theory, examining neoliberal practices in blue economy, and power imbalance is perpetuated through the concept of *trasformismo*, in which subaltern groups and is neutralized by integrating their voice under neoliberalism. Third, this study reveals the challenges of implementing a blue economy caused by Global North's pressure, before proposing "Oceanian Sovereignty" as a new 'Historic Block' in addressing power imbalance.

The paper is then structured into multiple subsections. First, the writers elaborate on the concept of Neo-Gramscian which will be utilized in this paper to explain the distortion of the idea of the blue economy by the Global North from the sustainability and equity promises popularized by Pacific Islands and Small Island

Developing States to the neoliberal practices. This paper also explores the barriers SIDS face as subalterns in challenging neoliberal hegemony inherent in blue economy implementation. For the next part, writers will discuss instances of problematic implementation of the current blue economy practices. The final part of this paper will elaborate on the concept of Oceanian Sovereignty as an identity power that can be achieved through south-south cooperation to restore the distorted discourse on the blue Economy in SIDS.

## Result and Analysis

### ***Idea Distortion in the Discourse of the Blue Economy Concept***

Based on UNDESA (2014)'s definition, the blue economy "... seeks to promote economic growth, social inclusion and preservation or improvement of livelihoods while at the same time ensuring environmental sustainability." However, practices of this definition face criticisms. First of all, concerns are pointed towards the versatility of interpretation of this definition. Combining economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection could simultaneously lead to misinterpretation, with some actors emphasizing oceans as "economic frontiers", while others advocated for protection of ocean biodiversity (Schutters et al., 2021). Louey (2022) argues that UNDESA's definition has distorted the sustainability goal of this concept, and reveals that this is a "decoupling" strategy pursued by neoliberalism to separate the correlation between economic growth and environmentalism. The initial discourse in the Rio+20 Conference emphasizes on the commitment to sustainable conduct and equitable benefit sharing, but through UNDESA and the World Bank publications, the blue economy is disguised using the narration of "sustainable" development to cover the true purpose of "sustained" development (Louey, 2022), perpetuating the asymmetric relationship between SIDS and the Global North.

Dominant powers in the international system shape the order of the system to which their interests are best served. In attempting this, the powerful excels in their financial and technological capabilities, thus shaping a coercive relationship. They are also capable of generating consent from disadvantaged groups through a 'historical bloc' (Cox, 1981) which refers to the idea of how hegemony uses institutions to maintain power. When the cultural, political, and moral values of the dominant group are adopted and embedded throughout society as if those values will benefit all, it will transform into a 'common sense' despite lingering inequality (Patnaik, 1988). The three points of UNDESA, and the World Bank (2017) goals of "economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, and ecosystem health", all seemingly addresses the needs of less developed states (Schutter et al., 2021). These institutions, dominated by the Global North, create a perception that all the three aspects can be achieved without sacrificing any.

Another root structural disparity of the implementation of the blue economy is the absence of emphasis on how the dominant powers benefitted from environmental degradations and inequalities born from neoliberal practices. In Louey's (2022) work, attention is drawn to the exploitation of ocean resources in SIDS by external entities. This attention includes instances such as nuclear testing conducted by the United States and France, inadequate compensation for fishing licenses from deep-water fishing nations, the negative environmental and social consequences stemming from the establishment of foreign-owned tourism resorts, and the utilization of Pacific waters for military war games by both former and neo-colonial powers (Loeuy, 2022). In addition, the narrative approach encompasses concerns related to the ocean economy, including pollution, coral bleaching, and industrial overfishing, while sidestepping the elements of the neoliberal system that contribute to these environmental problems (Ewing, 2017). The blue economy concept configures oceans as unbounded frontiers where both economic activities and environmental protection can harmoniously coexist. It decouples the causes of inequality and environmental degradation from neoliberal practices, which focus on the "business as usual" approach. In Seychelles, for example, there is an incongruence in policy where a national company actively encourages the exploration of oil and gas, while another body is established for conservation and adapting to climate change (Schutter et al., 2021).

### ***SIDS Inertia in Transforming North-led Blue Economy Hegemony: *Trasformismo* and Passive Revolution as the Root Causes***

With the hegemony of neoliberal practices subsumed in the blue economy, the current context in SIDS mirrors what Cox (1983) stated: the influence and uniformity of hegemony are more stable in the core, while it is more conflicted and inconsistent in the periphery. The contradictions occurring in periphery states like SIDS happen because, as Gramsci (1971) argued, periphery states adopt an international hegemony development model—or neoliberalism that is inherent in the blue economy—without basing the transformation on local economic development. In the beginning, endorsement of the blue economy was brought by SIDS and the Pacific Island States (Louey, 2022). However, the global structure of neoliberalism permeated the blue economy concept, deviating from their initial aspirations. The adoption of neoliberal hegemony by SIDS, therefore, lacks context-specific historical understanding from SIDS and a tendency to work with powerful actors that support global neoliberal hegemony, thus preserving existing power imbalance (Dempsey, 2016).

Consequently, the integration of neoliberal value in the blue economy entails the marginalization of subalterns' interests. With the domination of actors from supporters of blue economy hegemony, Barbesgaard (2018) suggests those affected directly by blue economy implementation are not sufficiently represented in governance forums, or if they are included, it merely legitimizes a neoliberal agenda. Moreover, coastal communities who feel unheard and not involved in the operationalization of the concept of the blue economy (Hadjimichael et al., 2014) will be the first casualty of the harmful impact of blue economy implementation. For example, the Dominican Republic adopted neoliberal policies for blue growth by developing mass tourism, which caused adverse social impacts such as lost access to resources, resident displacement, loss of agency, and declining social cohesion (Duffy et al., 2015). It is not just the coastal communities, small-scale sectors, or minority groups that show dissatisfaction toward the blue economy; NGOs and governments also express their concerns. In Seychelles, which used blue economy investment through a debt-for-nature swap mechanism to pay for debts, domestic actors and the government proclaimed that financing marine conservation with money from abroad means a loss of sovereignty (Schutter & Hicks, 2019).

Dissent coming from various actors in SIDS does not mean that a neoliberal blue economy can easily be replaced through counter-narratives. Instead, a form of resistance towards blue economy implementation in SIDS is unlikely to appear because of Gramsci's concept of *trasformismo*. It implies that *trasformismo* worked to co-opt potential leaders of subaltern social groups (Gramsci, 1971). When counter-narratives emerge in Seychelles, *trasformismo* serves as a strategy of assimilating and domesticating the narratives by adjusting them to the policies of neoliberal hegemony and can thereby obstruct the opposition to established social and political power (Cox, 1983). The neoliberal hegemony then stifles the opposition in Seychelles by accommodating the countering ideas and making the ideas consistent with the hegemonic order. Neoliberal logic is applied in the blue economy implementation in Seychelles, which has led to the establishment of the Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT) in debt-for-nature swap whose goal is to "...competitively grant at least US\$ 750,000 per annum or 0.044% of 2018 GDP (World Bank, 2018) to support the stewardship of Seychelles' ocean resources, island life and blue economy..." (SeyCCAT, 2017). Other than that, the blue economy lures Seychelles—a potential subaltern leader—to remain with the hegemonic order through the appeal of successful foreign policy instruments (Bueger & Wivel, 2018). As a result, Seychelles has the urge to maintain the status of pioneer and champion of the blue economy.

As *trasformismo* hinders the consolidation of SIDS to counter neoliberal hegemony inherent in the blue economy, SIDS adoption of the blue economy itself still faces constraints in deconstructing hegemony because of the state of passive revolution. Passive revolution describes the situation in which stalemate happens between the old dominant force (neoliberalism) and the new force (blue economy concept by SIDS), creating sluggish progress towards change in global hegemony. Passive revolution can be reflected in how SIDS has

not experienced an extensive social revolution, nor have their economies evolved in the same manner. However, they attempt to adopt aspects of the dominant neoliberal hegemonic model in the blue economy without disrupting existing power hierarchies. The integration of neoliberalism into the blue economy concept is reflected in the portrayal of the sea as uninhabitable compared to land, thereby justifying the pursuit of neoliberal agendas through the exploitation of marine resources (Germond-Duret, 2022). In other words, as stated by Steinberg & Kristoffersen (2018), the blue economy is often subsumed in the quest for growth and accumulation. This further entrenches the neoliberal hegemony and makes it hard to transform into a new structure—which is the essence of a non-hegemonic society in passive revolution.

### ***SIDS Challenges in Implementing Blue Economy***

In April 2022, the United Nations' International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) announced a US\$26.6 million program called 'Inclusive Blue Economy' in Haiti, aiming to generate economic opportunities for citizens of Haiti (IFAD, 2021). This program is one of several programs that international entities launched to expedite economic recovery and sustainable growth in the poorest country of the American Continent. The United States has been a crucial actor in supporting Haitians, and has provided around US\$6 billion through aid since 2010 (United States State Department, 2025). Despite this, the US support for the late President Jovenel Moïse has been proven to be harmful to Haitians, mainly due to his regime being corrupt and often colluded with the country's murderous gangs to secure elections (Abi-Habib, 2021). The recent death of the President, coupled with an upsurge in gang violence, threatens IFAD's ambitious program. CARICOM recently announced an intervention to end the crisis in Haiti, but this plan risks reintroducing foreign pressure to Haiti, especially from the United States.

CARICOM, in its 2015-2019 Strategic Plan, has committed to deepening foreign policy coordination to project a unifying voice as a singular community of SIDS (Hassanali, 2020), entailing stronger solidarity amongst the Caribbean states. However, different interpretations and political leanings within CARICOM hinders its ability to project this unifying voice, and thus also hinders its ability to prevent foreign pressure. The case of Bahamas's failed negotiation with China on opening their seas for greater commercial fishing proves this point (Elliot, 2018). The negotiation eventually fell short due to internal pressure from Bahamian society and the United States. Hassanali noted that there was no response from CARICOM on this subject, despite the fact that the Bahamas is a haven for artisanal, subsistence, and sporting fishing in the Caribbean, and a critical link for the maritime ecosystem of the Caribbean as a whole. CARICOM's shortcomings in creating a single unifying front on how to implement each of their member states' blue economy can have harmful effects, especially in Haiti where US interference has had a strong history.

On the other end of the globe, the country of Tuvalu faces a different problem. The country is one of the smallest SIDS in the world, with only around 10 thousand citizens (Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 2024) and a GDP of US\$62 million (World Bank, 2023). The maritime resources potential of Tuvalu is huge, as its Exclusive Economic Zone's total area amounted to more than 900,000 km<sup>2</sup> (FAO, 2010). However, due to its miniscule population and infrastructure, Tuvalu is reliant on foreigners to exploit its resources and profited through access licenses, which in 2023 comprise US\$33 million or around 45% of total government revenue (Paeniu, 2023). Tuvalu is part of the skipjack and yellowfin tuna habitat (Pala, 2021) which have high demand primarily in China and Japan. Tuvalu is now a subject of investment aid from the ADB (Asian Development Bank), an institution that includes consumers of Tuvalu's tuna, including Japan. The ADB has poured in US\$133.6 million worth of investments, grants, and loans to Tuvalu for economic development and disaster relief but hasn't committed towards a more sustainable marine economy.

Through the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) signed in 1982, Tuvalu and other Pacific SIDS gained leverage over foreign fishing through prohibitions in purse-seining fishing and fee imposition that granted new income. The clauses covered two mechanisms to control foreign fishing activities; the Vessel Day Scheme

(VDS), and utilizing Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification (Yeeting, et al., 2016). The VDS limits days that purse-seining vessels can fish by charging companies/vessels for each day. This brought a huge increase in income, and gave them authority to control how much foreign companies/vessels fish. Through the MSC certification mechanism, the PNA incentivises sustainable fishing schemes, pressuring companies/vessels to abide by MSC principles. Unfortunately, industrial scale fishing to fulfill demands in advanced economies, causes Tuvalu and other Pacific SIDS to face sustainability issues. The Tuvalu Fisheries Department (2019) warned of overfishing, with 50% of inshore species suffering reduction in sizes, indicating disturbances in the surrounding marine ecosystem. Yeeting, et al. (2016) noticed that it was unclear whether the PNA's mechanisms have helped much with overfishing, mainly in combating high catch volumes due to new fishing technologies.

Haiti and Tuvalu faced different challenges towards their implementation of blue economy, but the underlying problems are similar: the power imbalance between SIDS and bigger advanced economies. These two countries are classified as Less Developed States with very limited economic and financial capacity and are constrained by geographical and historical factors. Both Haiti and Tuvalu are members of several South-South Cooperation frameworks, the CARICOM and the PNA, and both frameworks have already tried to establish a solution that could potentially help these countries face these kinds of external challenges. However, in both cases, the enforcements are either too weak (in the case of PNA) or the implementation lacks unity and self-dependency (in the case of CARICOM), which hampers coordination for a unified strategy to overcome external pressure.

### ***Oceanian Sovereignty Through South-South Cooperation: A New Historic Bloc?***

Despite being relatively inert in taking the maneuver of the neoliberal blue economy regime, the prospects of SIDS countering its hegemony remain open. This aligns with how Cox (1983) emphasizes the need for a new historic bloc to counter passive revolution—wherein the SIDS blue economy emerged as a new force in the middle of neoliberal hegemony. To break free from the status quo of passive revolution in the blue economy regime, a war of position—achieved through the formation of new historic blocs via socio-political reform—is essential for driving structural change (Gramsci, 1971). This concept of historic bloc is derived from Sorel's (2009) social myth, both highlight the element of mobilizing collective subjectivity and ideological coherence to prevent the revolutionary movement from being diluted into mere reformism or incrementalism, which would preserve the existing hegemonic order rather than transforming it. This paper, therefore, views that the prospect of creating collective subjectivity and ideological coherence can be built among SIDS as a counterhegemonic force through Oceanian Sovereignty.

The concept of Oceanian Sovereignty articulated by Hau'ofa (1994) is a concept that connects the right to make decisions on land or sea with the cultural heritage that is deeply rooted, developed, and unique in the Pacific Islands. In this conception, Hau'ofa does not see the concept of sovereignty in a legal-formal context that talks about the authority that a state can exercise in a certain area where no other authority can do it besides the state (Bambridge et al., 2021). This concept emphasizes the more fundamental and grassroots aspects of the meaning of sovereignty itself, which is not only arbitrarily owned by state institutions but also the grassroots community itself through the distinctive feature of Oceanian Identity. Through this concept, Hau'ofa (1994) envisions a region in which local communities, governments, and other stakeholders share the obligation and duty to sustain marine resources. In this case, the context of connected environmental history and social trauma is an important factor to use as justification in making this concept a form of power. As a result, counter-hegemony, which is in line with Cox's (1983) idea, operates by creating a new common sense that challenges the dominant ideological framework. Oceanian Sovereignty reframes the narrative from dependence, a byproduct of neoliberalism, to self-determination and cultural resilience.

The concept of "Oceanian Sovereignty" suggests that management or governance decisions should be made collaboratively by partners; these decisions may or may not be governed by national or international

governance frameworks who act as the hegemonic class. This also aligns with Cox's historic bloc concept wherein organic intellectuals of the working class, in this case SIDS intellectuals, are needed to create a new historic bloc under working-class hegemony to reframing common sense and developing a counter-narrative that challenges the legitimacy of the existing hegemonic class. However, one of the common challenges in any management or governance situation is handling sensitive matters (Tilot et al., 2021). Mawyer and Jacka (2018) identify who gets to determine who has the power to make decisions and influence the future of the environment and ecology. In light of this reciprocal relationship, "Oceanian Sovereignty" requires all negotiator actors to recognize it and incorporate it into their policies, governance, and management practices as a fundamental part of their commitment to social justice and environmental protection for the marine spaces, resources, and ecological futures of the region. In other words, the shaping of a new historical bloc by subordinate class over other subordinate groups through Oceanian Sovereignty goes in line with Gramsci (1971) conceptualization of the historic bloc which requires an intensive engagement between leaders and followers within the emerging hegemonic class.

The incorporation of Oceanian Sovereignty into blue economy practices in SIDS might shed light on how to counter the Global North's prowess. One concept that links to this idea is identity power. Using terms like "great power," "regional power," "small power," "rising power," "sea power," and "resource-rich country," this idea was used to categorize nations according to their advantages (Baldwin, 2016). SIDS is endowed with a wealth of natural resources, including minerals and gas, due to its equator location and vast water surrounding it, and it has deep-sea resources that are valuable to mining exploration. Identity in this context will play a huge role because it shapes individuals' ideas, beliefs, and assumptions about diverse issues on both local and global levels. This way, one of the two elements of the historic bloc, which is superstructure, is manifested in the common identity emerged from Oceanian Sovereignty, which creates social cohesion and ideological unity. It can offer a framework for international relations that political leaders can use to establish, uphold, and organize their policies.

Within this frame of reference, Oceanian Identity, which stems from the idea of Oceanian Sovereignty, can be utilized as a form of power that can only be manifested enough through South-South cooperation. There are several key principles of south-south cooperation that must be met to solidify the unification of Oceanian identity (UN, 2009):

1. Working together is a way for countries in the South to be independent and self-reliant, showing solidarity and achieving common goals.
2. The South should lead and guide the agenda for cooperation among themselves.
3. Cooperation among Southern countries is not a replacement for assistance from developed nations. It is about strengthening bonds, not compensating for reduced support.
4. Evaluating cooperation among Southern countries should be different from evaluating North-South relations.
5. Financial help between Southern countries is not the same as official aid—it is about solidarity and shared experiences.
6. Cooperation in the South has its own unique goals, separate from other international relations.
7. Cooperation in the South is built on a strong, broad partnership and solidarity.
8. Cooperation in the South is based on equality, mutual respect, and mutual benefit.
9. Cooperation in the South respects each country's sovereignty while sharing responsibility.

10. Cooperation in the South supports a hands-on approach to solving development challenges.
11. Cooperation in the South encourages sharing best practices and supporting each other in various aspects of development.
12. Cooperation in the South relies on the collective self-reliance of developing countries.
13. Cooperation in the South aims to empower developing countries in global decision-making for sustainable development.
14. South-South cooperation happens through bilateral, sub-regional, regional, and interregional collaborations, as well as multilateral cooperation.

The fourteen points of South-South Cooperation are crucial for supporting the emergence of a historic bloc, particularly in fostering a unified movement to challenge the neoliberal structure. However, considering the current state of their implementation, it is evident that South-South Cooperation within the blue economy regime is still in a prolonged journey towards bridging the gap between the Global North and South. This paper argues that SSC implementation is hindered because an alternative economic structure that could act as a counter-hegemony of the current neoliberal practice is still to no avail, despite Oceanian Sovereignty being a common identity that may act as a superstructure to create a historic bloc in undermining the neoliberal blue economy. To contextualize, an example of SSC in the blue economy regime can be seen in the previously mentioned alliance of eight Pacific island countries under the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA)'s VDS policy. Superficially, this demonstrates an advantageous position for SIDS, wherein PNA countries' collective income from tuna licensing jumped more than tenfold within a decade, currently delivering approximately US\$500 million each year (Kesby, 2022). However, the cap and trade mechanism means that SIDS subsumed itself into the neoliberal hegemony, one of which is to liberalize its trade. This then results in a predatory relationship between local fishing companies with larger foreign companies that have more capital in buying the fishing license. Although this mechanism boosts national economies, local fishers and entrepreneurs find it difficult to afford licenses or expand their fishing activities, with the same cost as the distant water fishing nations, amounting to US\$10,500 per day (PNG Post-Courier, 2021).

As a mechanism itself, SSC is still held captive in the mold of neoliberal economic structure, failing to provide a medium for the "South to be independent and self-reliant"—the first point of SSC. Even though they could "lead and guide the agenda for cooperation among themselves," the implementation itself still relies on the framework of the current hegemon, thus failing to support a historic bloc. Just as Gramsci (1971) stated that the movement towards hegemony is a "passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures," Oceanian Sovereignty as an alternative superstructure needs to be built upon an alternative economic structure that could negate the neoliberal foundation in blue economy. One sticking point with regards to the implementation of the blue economy concept is that it is done with little international South-South coordination. Each state has its own perceptions of what comprises the blue economy (at least one out of four of the blue economy understandings listed by Voyer et al. (2018)), which means there is currently no established South-South mechanism to create a unifying understanding of the blue economy concept. As mentioned, CARICOM and the PNA has different ways of dealing with the blue economy through each South-South mechanisms, with the PNA opting for a united front in opposition to fishing exploitation by major economies, while on the other hand, CARICOM has no singular front of implementing and protecting their own blue economy. This means that out of all of these 14 points, the current status quo failed to fulfill points 1, 7, 11, 12, and 14, all of which emphasize global solidarity, self-reliance, and collaboration. As Hassanali (2020) suggested, the lack of coordination can be harmful to the success potential of implementing a blue economy within SIDS and can help the Global North to co-opt any attempt at dislodging their influence to create self-sufficiency.

Oceanian sovereignty will be the core idea to foster counter-hegemony to the neoliberal-like structure. Rather than relying solely on legal and political justifications derived from state constitutions, Oceanian Sovereignty emphasizes past, present, and future commitments executed via sustainable use in cooperation with an ancestral ocean firmly rooted in cultural identity as a basis of governance. In the previous part, this research showed how CARICOM or the PNA has had an existing framework of international cooperation based on the similar necessities and identity of being SIDS, either in the Caribbean Region or in the Pacific. In both cases, CARICOM and the PNA have tried to enforce their own regulations in opposition to the exploitative dependency that they have towards the major economies of the world. This, however, has limited success, and in both cases, CARICOM and the PNA come short of strengthening their own internal cooperation and self-sufficiency in the face of the overwhelming presence of major economies, or their over-reliance on Northern aid. Thus, stronger and wider cooperation, especially with developing countries of the Global South, is necessary to disentangle SIDS from major economies' pressures. Looking at the current development of the South-South Cooperation, it is still insufficient to create an effective historic bloc despite an alternative superstructure, which is the Oceanian Sovereignty concept, is available. The inability of SSC itself stems from how the framework is still working in the body of a neoliberal economic structure.

## Conclusion

This paper proposed a solution to the current imbalance of power relations inherent within the understanding and implementation of the blue economy concept. Through the distortion in the discourse of the Blue Economy concept internalized within the production and dissemination of knowledge of Blue Economy, the embeddedness of neoliberal ideas and the ability of hegemonic order to co-opt Global South's interests is causing the inability of coordinated comprehension within the Global South to mend the multiplicity of meanings that has been produced by this structure. From a Neo-Gramscian perspective, it is understood that SIDS is likely to face challenges in countering the global hegemonic order due to the deeply entrenched neoliberal structures, which tend to lure SIDS into aligning with neoliberal hegemony. SIDS in particular has been the one who experienced most of the negative burdens of this problem in their attempts to implement a blue economy. Propagating the concept of Oceanian Sovereignty which was coined by SIDS intellectuals could potentially open a room for a new historic bloc to counter neoliberal blue economy hegemony. However, the realization of this counterhegemonic vision is hindered by the current limitations of South-South Cooperation, which remains entangled in neoliberal economic structures and lacks a unified strategy to challenge the dominant blue economy paradigm. While the current state of South-South Cooperation and SIDS' structural dependencies pose challenges, this paper underscores the potential of Oceanian Sovereignty as a transformative superstructural force. without substantial reforms in economic self-sufficiency and ideological solidarity, the struggle against neoliberal hegemony risks stagnation. Future efforts should focus on solidifying Oceanian Sovereignty as both an intellectual and economic movement, ensuring that SIDS are not merely resisting power but actively reshaping global governance to reflect their own interests, cultures, and sovereignty.

## Acknowledgments

The authors of this paper did not receive any forms of financial support from other institutions or entities in conducting and writing this research.

## References

- Abi-Habib, M. (2021, July 8). Why Haiti Still Despairs After \$13 Billion in Foreign Aid. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/08/world/haiti-foreign-aid.html>
- ADB. (2022). ADB Member Fact Sheet. In <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/27808/tuv-2022.pdf>. Asian Development Bank.
- Bambridge, T., D'Arcy, P., & Mawyer, A. (2021). Oceanian Sovereignty: Rethinking Conservation in a Sea of Islands. *Pacific Conservation Biology*. <https://doi.org/10.1071/pc20026>
- Barbesgaard, M. (2017). Blue Growth: Savior or Ocean Grabbing? *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 45(1), 130–149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1377186>
- Bennett, N. J., Blythe, J., White, C. S., & Campero, C. (2021). Blue Growth and Blue Justice: Ten Risks and Solutions for the Ocean Economy. *Marine Policy*, 125, 104387. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2020.104387>
- Bueger, C., & Wivel, A. (2018). How Do Small Island States Maximize Influence? Creole Diplomacy and the Smart State Foreign Policy of the Seychelles. *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 14(2), 170–188. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19480881.2018.1471122>
- Cox, R. W. (1983). Gramsci, Hegemony, and International Relations : An Essay in Method. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 12(2), 162–175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298830120020701>
- Dempsey, J. (2016). *Enterprising Nature: Economics, Markets, and Finance in Global Biodiversity Politics*. Chichester, West Sussex, Uk Wiley Blackwell.
- Duffy, L. N., Stone, G., Charles Chancellor, H., & Kline, C. S. (2015). Tourism Development in the Dominican Republic: An Examination of the Economic Impact to Coastal Households. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 16(1), 35–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1467358415613118>
- Economy Concept Paper. (n.d.). UN Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2978BEconcept.pdf>
- Elliot, K. (2018). Trouble in the Caribbean: Responses to a Potential Chinese-Bahamian Bilateral Fishing Agreement. *Duke Environmental Law & Policy Forum*, 28(2), 305–332. <https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/delpf/vol28/iss2/5>
- Ewing, J. A. (2017). Hollow Ecology: Ecological Modernization Theory and the Death of Nature. *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 23(1), 126–155. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jwsr.2017.611>
- FAO. (2010). *National Fishery Sector Overview Tuvalu*. FAO. [https://www.fao.org/fishery/docs/DOCUMENT/fcp/en/FI\\_CP\\_TV.pdf](https://www.fao.org/fishery/docs/DOCUMENT/fcp/en/FI_CP_TV.pdf)
- FAO. (2017). *FAO Fisheries & Aquaculture*. FAO. <https://www.fao.org/fishery/en/facp/tuv?lang=en>
- Germond-Duret, C. (2022). Framing the Blue Economy: Placelessness, Development, and Sustainability. *Development and Change*, 53(2), 308–334. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12703>
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. International Publishers.
- Hadjimichael, M., Bruggeman, A., & Lange, M. A. (2014). Tragedy of the Few? A Political Ecology Perspective of the Right to the Sea: The Cyprus Marine Aquaculture Sector. *Marine Policy*, 49, 12–19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2014.04.003>
- Hassanali, K. (2020). CARICOM and the Blue Economy – Multiple Understandings and Their Implications for Global Engagement. *Marine Policy*, 120, 104137. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2020.104137>
- Hau'ofa, E. (1994). Our Sea of Islands. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 6(1), 148–161. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23701593>
- IFAD. (2022, April 13). *IFAD-funded Project to Protect the Environment in Haiti by Improving Smallholder Farmers' and Artisanal Fishermen's Livelihoods - Haiti* | ReliefWeb. Reliefweb.int. <https://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/ifad-funded-project-protect-environment-haiti-improving-smallholder-farmers-and>
- Kesby, C. (2022, March 16). The Vessel Day Scheme: A Sinking Ship? Young Australians in International Affairs. <https://www.youngausint.org.au/post/the-vessel-day-scheme-a-sinking-ship>
- Louey, P. (2022). The Blue Economy's Retreat From Equity: A Decade Under Global Negotiation. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2022.999571>

- Mancham, J. R. (n.d.). Maritime Security and the Blue Economy: The Importance of Understanding the Link. *Peace and Diplomacy Research Institute of University of Seychelles. The Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Dialogues for Sustainable Development | ITCILO*. (2022).
- Mawyer, A., & Jacka, J. K. (2018). Sovereignty, Conservation, and Island Ecological Futures. *Environmental Conservation*, 45(3), 238–251. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s037689291800019x>
- United Nations (n.d.). *Diving into the Blue Economy*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/desa/diving-blue-economy#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20blue%20economy%20concept%20seeks>
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2014). Blue Economy Concept Paper. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2978BEconcept.pdf>
- Paeniu, S. (2023). 2023 National Budget. *Government of Tuvalu - Ministry of Finance*. <https://finance.gov.tv/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2023-National-Budget.pdf>
- Pala, C. (2021, June 15). *The Mice That Roared: How Eight Tiny Countries Took on Foreign Fishing Fleets*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/16/the-mice-that-roared-how-eight-tiny-countries-took-on-foreign-fishing-fleets>
- Patnaik, A. K. (1988). Gramsci's Concept of Common Sense: Towards a Theory of Subaltern Consciousness in Hegemony Processes. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23(5), PE2–PE10. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4378042>
- Schutter, M. S., & Hicks, C. C. (2019). Networking the Blue Economy in Seychelles: Pioneers, Resistance, and the Power of Influence. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 26(1), 425–447. <https://doi.org/10.2458/v26i1.23102>
- Schutter, M. S., Hicks, C. C., Phelps, J., & Waterton, C. (2021). The Blue Economy as a Boundary Object for Hegemony Across Scales. *Marine Policy*, 132, 104673. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104673>
- SeyCCAT. (2019). *SeyCCAT - The Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust - We Strategically Invest in Ocean Stakeholders to Generate New Learning, Bold Action, and Sustainable Blue Prosperity in Seychelles*. SeyCCAT. <https://seyccat.org/>
- Sorel, G. (2009). *Reflections on Violence* (J. Jennings, Ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Steinberg, P. E., & Kristoffersen, B. (2018). Building a Blue Economy in the Arctic Ocean. *Routledge EBooks*, 136–148. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351031981-9>
- Tilot, V. C., Guilloux, B., Willaert, K., Mulalap, C. Y., Bambridge, T., D'Arcy, P., Mawyer, A., Gaulme, F., Kacenelenbogen, E., Jeudy de Grissac, A., Moreno Navas, J., & Dahl, A. (2021). The Concept of Oceanian Sovereignty in the Context of Deep Sea Mining in the Pacific Region. *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2021.756072>
- Tuvalu Central Statistics Division. (2024). Social Statistics Release: Vital, Migration, and Population Estimates. *Tuvalu Central Statistics Division*. [https://stats.gov.tv/download/77/statistical-reports/1400/social-report-release-2\\_24.pdf](https://stats.gov.tv/download/77/statistical-reports/1400/social-report-release-2_24.pdf)
- Tuvalu Fisheries Department. (2019, November 1). *Creel Survey Report Shows Overfishing for Inshore Species | Tuvalu Fisheries*. Tuvalu Fisheries Department. <https://tuvalufisheries.tv/2019/11/01/creel-survey-report-shows-overfishing-for-inshore-species/>
- UN. (2009). *Sixty-fourth Session Agenda Item 58 (b) Operational activities for Development: South-South Cooperation for Development Promotion of South-South Cooperation for Development: A Thirty-Year Perspective*. [https://reliefweb.int/attachments/fd264d4f-c842-3f23-b997-a82b4af9f76f/FAB69C091054963D49257680000B97C3-Full\\_Report.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/attachments/fd264d4f-c842-3f23-b997-a82b4af9f76f/FAB69C091054963D49257680000B97C3-Full_Report.pdf)
- United States State Department. (2025). *US Relations with Haiti*. US State Department. <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-haiti/%23~:text=%3DSince%2520the%25202010%2520earthquake%252C%2520the,%252C%2520reconstruction%252C%2520and%2520development%2520programs&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1740610817474634&usg=AOvVaw3BOOtpRsHcDeS2knGRGepQ>
- Voyer, M., Quirk, G., McIlgorm, A., & Azmi, K. (2018). Shades of Blue: What Do Competing Interpretations of the Blue Economy Mean for Oceans Governance? *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 20(5), 595–616. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908x.2018.1473153>

- Voyer, M., Schofield, C., Azmi, K., Warner, R., McIlgorm, A., & Quirk, G. (2018). Maritime Security and the Blue Economy: Intersections and Interdependencies in the Indian Ocean. *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 14(1), 28–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19480881.2018.1418155>
- World Bank. (2017, June 6). *What is the Blue Economy?* World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2017/06/06/blue-economy>
- World Bank. (2018). *Seychelles: Country Profile, World Development Indicators*. World Bank. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/SC>
- World Bank. (2023). *World Development Indicators: Tuvalu* | DataBank. <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=TUV>
- Yeeting, A. D., Bush, S. R., Ram-Bidesi, V., Bailey, M., (2016). Implications of New Economic Policy Instruments for Tuna Management in the Western and Central Pacific. *Marine Policy*, 63, 45–52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2015.10.003>

## Authors Biography

**Farrel Rakha Aryasatya** is an undergraduate International Relations student at Universitas Gadjah Mada. His research centers on global politics and security, focusing on security theory and policy making. Farrel can be contacted via [farrel.rakha.aryasatya@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:farrel.rakha.aryasatya@mail.ugm.ac.id)

**Falah Mar'ie Amanullah** is an undergraduate International Relations student at Universitas Gadjah Mada. Falah can be contacted via [falahmarieamanullah@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:falahmarieamanullah@mail.ugm.ac.id)

**Rahayu Hemalina Prasetyo** is an undergraduate International Relations student at Universitas Gadjah Mada. Her research interests center on postcolonialism, blue economy, circular economy, and environmental governance. She can be contacted via [rahayu.hemalina2903@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:rahayu.hemalina2903@mail.ugm.ac.id)

**Mas Intan Putri Apriani** is an undergraduate student at the Department of International Relations, Universitas Gadjah Mada, and the Summer 2025 Intern at the Department of International Relations, Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Indonesia. Her research interests lie in international political economy matters, with a focus on global inequality and poverty, labour rights, and international development—particularly in education and climate change mitigation and adaptation, approached from a justice perspective. She can be contacted via [mas.intan1702@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:mas.intan1702@mail.ugm.ac.id)