

Supporting lagoon communities

The environmental, social, governance and economic case for urgent action

Ensuring the sustainability of the world's lagoons is vital to communities, ecosystems and economies. Our international, multi-stakeholder platform aims to bring a new dynamic to understanding and addressing this crucial challenge.



In brief

An unfolding crisis

- Lagoons provide an array of fundamental, valuable resources that are essential to the wellbeing of coastal communities in many parts of the world.
- Particularly in West Africa and elsewhere in the global South, the settlements built around them are among the fastest-growing and most developed areas.
- Yet the sustainability of lagoons and the survival of the people who rely on them are under increasing pressure from a complex set of interconnected problems.
- These include population growth, pollution, poor sanitation and climate-change-related threats such as sea-level rise, erosion and shifts in natural cycles.
- Understanding of these challenges remains limited, as a result of which there is little effective policy and governance to support prospective solutions.



An innovative platform for action

- The Resilient Lagoon Network (RLN) seeks to provide an international, multi-stakeholder platform for tackling this issue.
- At the RLN's core is an interdisciplinary team of academics with decades of combined experience in a wide range of relevant fields.
- One of our key goals is to facilitate dialogue and knowledge transfer between experts from the natural and social sciences, engineering and education.
- Crucially, we also believe the sustainability of the world's lagoons requires people - that is, local communities - to work with policymakers and practitioners.
- By promoting an approach that is both "bottom-up" and "top-down", we aim to forge the links needed to build long-term resilience in lagoon communities.

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A strategy for positive, lasting change

Troubled waters

Especially in West Africa and elsewhere in the global South, lagoon communities increasingly face an interconnected array of challenges that have environmental, social and governance (ESG) aspects. They also have potentially enormous economic implications.

Climate change is at the heart of many of these issues. There are also mounting difficulties around development, resource management and livelihoods. Since these problems have numerous dimensions, the solutions are themselves likely to be multifaceted.

From an academic point of view, this situation demands a uniquely interdisciplinary approach. From a broader perspective, a truly effective response is likely to require the involvement of a variety of stakeholders and a strategy that is both “bottom-up” and “top-down”.

The three Ps in microcosm

Sustainability issues are nowadays commonly framed in the context of the “three Ps” - *people*, the *planet* and *profit*. This view holds that economic health is derived from environmental and societal wellbeing. Lagoon communities offer a microcosm of this global nexus.

As long ago as the 1990s, Africa’s coastal lagoon systems were estimated to deliver goods and services worth over US\$500 billion a year*.

Providing both sustenance and livelihoods, fishing communities in particular still contribute to local and regional economies today.

Yet these communities are now being wracked by resource depletion, population growth, immigration, lack of sanitation, concerns over food security and other issues. This perfect storm threatens to significantly - and perhaps irrevocably - undermine each of the three Ps.

Uniting policymakers, practitioners and people

As a multi-stakeholder platform, the RLN seeks to identify sustainable solutions by bringing together a different three Ps. Our goal is to unite *policymakers* and *practitioners* with *people* - that is, the individuals who live and work in the areas that are under threat.

By developing a shared understanding of their lived experience, we hope to give lagoon communities in West Africa and elsewhere a voice and encourage them to participate in the co-creation of adaptations to halt their environmental, societal and economic decline.

We believe this collaborative approach can provide a framework for dialogue and knowledge transfer and inform decision-making at community, regional and national levels. This, in turn, should help build long-term resilience and deliver positive, lasting change.

Our global ambition and alignment

Although West Africa is our principal focus at present, the RLN has far-reaching ambition. We are already aware of our work’s relevance throughout the global South, and our long-term objective is to help address the issues confronting lagoon communities worldwide.

The RLN’s efforts are clearly aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), which the UN describes as “a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet”. Our work is especially geared towards realising the following SDGs:



* See, for example, Boateng, I, Mitchell, S, Couciero, F, and Failler, P: *An Investigation into the Impacts of Climate Change on Anthropogenic Polluted Coastal Lagoons in Ghana*, 2020; and Glavovic, B: *Our Coast, Our Future: A New Approach to Coastal Management in South Africa*, 2000.

Working with the RLN

Our academic core

The team at the heart of the RLN draws from academia in the UK and Africa. Our researchers and experts specialise in fields such as geology, ecology, coastal engineering and management, development studies, public health and social and economic geography.

We represent institutions including the Universities of Derby, Portsmouth, Oxford and Ghana-Legon; the University of Education, Winneba; the Ghana Forestry Commission; the Institut de Recherches Halieutiques et Océanologiques, Bénin; and Yaba College of Technology, Lagos.

With further partnerships in India and the South Pacific, the RLN is already building its global reach. We see collaboration with stakeholders in countries on the OECD's DAC List of ODA Recipients as key to enhancing the resilience of lagoon communities worldwide.

Our groundbreaking multi-stakeholder workshops

The RLN's primary networking activity takes the form of workshops. Depending on global circumstances and participants' resources, these can be either in-person or virtual. They embody our innovative, multi-stakeholder approach to improving the resilience of lagoon communities and are designed to facilitate introductions, encourage engagement and maximise collaboration.

These events constitute the platform on which we aim to build an effective strategy for fostering ownership, empowerment and behaviour change around key issues. We welcome contributions from anyone with knowledge of the problems at hand - whether environmental, social, governance-related or economic. Expertise and experience in all relevant concerns will be essential to identifying the multifaceted solutions required.

In addition to our workshops, the RLN offers consultation, discussion and expert advice.

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Our contact details

You can learn more about our work and how to participate by contacting our project leaders or visiting our website. We look forward to collaborating with you in building resilient futures for these communities, the people who live in them and the regions and nations in which they lie.

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