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# Fostering Regional Engagement through Transdisciplinary Research

## A CASE STUDY: Lessons Learned

Special Session: WIOMSA 11th Scientific Symposium

University of Mauritius

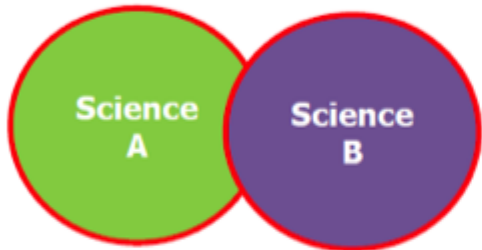
5 July 2019

Professor Narnia Bohler-Muller

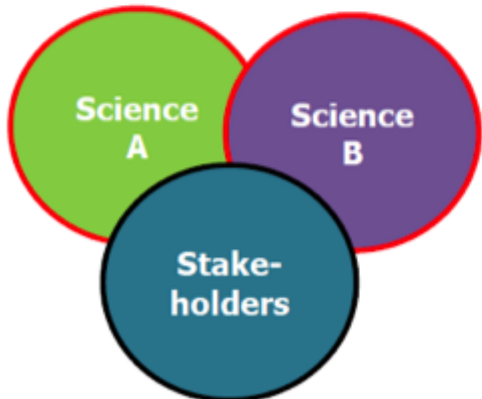
# Transdisciplinary research



**Disciplinary** research within academia



**Interdisciplinary** (multidisciplinary) research within academia



**Transdisciplinary** research goes beyond academia and involves stakeholders from policy, civil society etc.

# Human Sciences Research Council

*As South Africans we can achieve anything we wish, including putting human and social science research into action, as we put our minds to it and work together with a common purpose to uplift our people beyond inequality and gender differences.*

Our mandate is to inform the effective formulation and monitoring of government policy; to evaluate policy implementation; to stimulate public debate through the effective dissemination of research-based data and fact-based research results; to foster research collaboration; and to help build research capacity and infrastructure for the human sciences. The Council conducts large-scale, policy-relevant, social-scientific research for public sector users, non-governmental organisations and international development agencies. Research activities and structures are closely aligned with South Africa's national development priorities.

The HSRC's integrated research programmes provide single points of entry – complete with a critical mass of researchers – for interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and problem-orientated research in the following areas:

## **Research Programmes**

Africa Institute of South Africa  
Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation Indicators  
Democracy, Governance and Service Delivery  
Economic Performance and Development  
Education and Skills Development  
HIV/AIDS, STIs and TB  
Human and Social Development  
Population Health, Health Systems and Innovation



**HSRC**  
Human Sciences  
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# A Blue Economy for Women's Economic Empowerment

PIs: Joleen Steyn Kotze & Narnia Bohler-Muller

Researchers: Dr. Steven Gordon, Dr. Emmanuel Sekyere,  
Dr. Gavaza Malukele, and Ms. Thobekile Zikhali



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# Core research team

## **Principal Investigators**

Joleen Steyn Kotze : Professor of Political Science

Narnia Bohler-Muller : Law Professor

## **Researchers**

Dr. Steven Gordon : Social Science (quantitative)

Dr. Emmanuel Sekyere : Economics

Dr. Gavaza Malukele : Philosophy/ Gender Studies

Ms. Thobekile Zikhali : Political Studies

# Outline



Introduction and  
Background

Overview of project assignment  
Methodology



Unpacking the Blue Economy for Women's Economic  
Empowerment



State of women in the Blue Economy



Women's Economic Empowerment in the Blue  
Economy: A Secondary Data Analysis



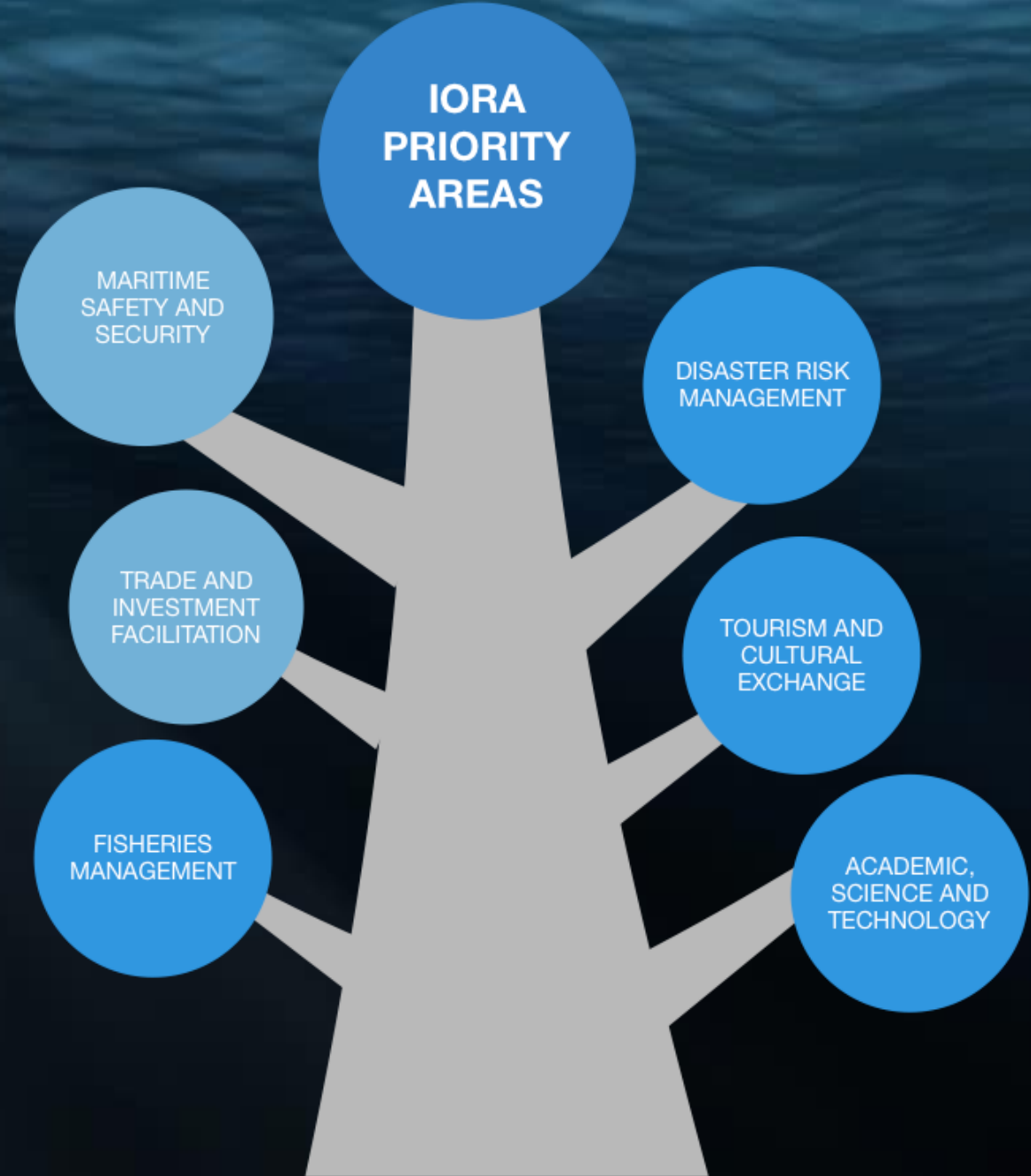
Advancing women's economic empowerment through  
the Blue Economy: Elite Stakeholder Interviews



Mapping the way forward: Conclusion and  
Recommendations

# Priority areas of IORA

- Six priority areas
- Blue Economy and Women's Economic Empowerment are cross-cutting issues in the six priority issues
- The Blue Economy is the vehicle through which member states look to address mutual development aspirations
  - Includes inclusive growth and sustainable development.





# Sectors of the Blue Economy

FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE

SEAPORTS AND SHIPPING

RENEWABLE OCEANS ENERGY

OFFSHORE HYDROCARBONS  
AND SEABED MINING

MARINE BIOTECHNOLOGY RESEARCH  
AND DEVELOPMENT

TOURISM

# Introduction and Background

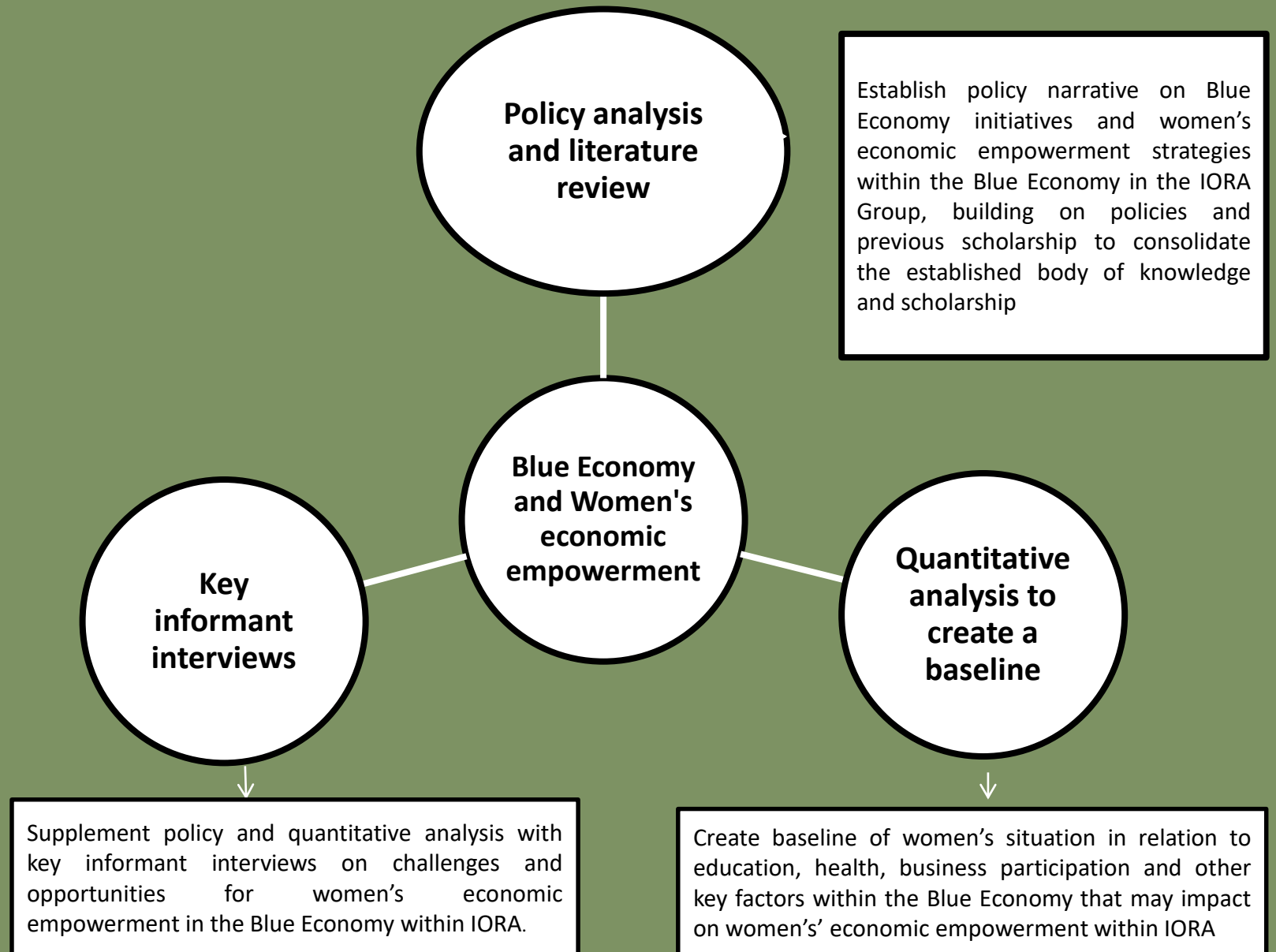
Priority Area	Flagship Initiatives		
	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term
Blue Economy	<p>Establish an IORA Working Group on Blue Economy.</p> <p>Implement the outcomes of the Blue Economy Core Working Group Workshops as well as Ministerial and High-Level Expert Meetings.</p>	<p>Develop appropriate mechanisms of cooperation for sustainable development of Blue Economy sectors, including training and capacity-building programmes.</p>	<p>Improve livelihoods of coastal communities through capacity-building programmes.</p>
Women's Economic Empowerment	<p>Establish an IORA Working Group on Women's Economic Empowerment.</p> <p>Establish a women's business forum in the Indian Ocean Rim Business Forum.</p>	<p>Establish cooperation with UN Women and relevant organisations for capacity-building and information exchange.</p> <p>Champion initiatives to increase women's economic empowerment such as the Women's Empowerment Principles.</p> <p>Implement training and capacity-building programmes.</p>	<p>Organise activities to strengthen women's economic capacity and participation in businesses.</p>

# Project Assignment



- HSRC of South Africa, a statutory science council, responded to a call for proposals by the the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for technical assistance on the topic “Strengthening women’s economic empowerment in the Blue Economy, specifically in the Indian Ocean”. Specific objectives of the project were:
  - Delivering an outcome report that contributes to the crosscutting themes of Blue Economy and women’s economic empowerment, based on the IORA Action Plan 2017 - 2021.
  - Provide technical advice and support on women’s economic empowerment issues in the Indian Ocean’s Blue Economy to the IORA Secretariat and Academic Group, acting as subject matter expert.
  - Attend selected meetings and visits to the IORA Secretariat to provide technical input on women’s economic empowerment issues in the Indian Ocean’s Blue Economy.

# Methodology



# Conceptualising the Blue Economy and Women's Economic Empowerment



## The Blue Economy

- Concept that looks to advance economic development and social inclusion, and to enhance livelihoods while working to ensure the environmental sustainability of the oceans and coastal territories
- Key component is its emphasis on recognising that the ecosystem services provided by the ocean are essential global priorities, and have both intrinsic and fiscal qualities that support well-being and development
- As an alternative model of development , a “paradigm shift, the idea that the Blue Economy may generate employment and facilitate inclusive and sustainable growth dominates international policy discourse

# Conceptualising the Blue Economy and Women's Economic Empowerment



Responsible economic  
activity and inclusive  
development for job creation



Environmental protection  
and sustainability



Social justice



Human well-  
being

## The Blue Economy

Sustainability

Equitable Development

Alternative Paradigm for development

Space for inclusive growth and economic empowerment

## Challenges

Lack of Understanding at Grassroots level on what Blue Economy is

High level panel discussions

Need to engage communities and educate them on the potential for empowerment through the Blue Economy

## BE and WEE

Male dominated industries

Gender Stereotypes

Socio-cultural aspects with regard to education and access to finance

Need space for self-empowerment

## Interventions

Capacity building programmes

Educational Campaigns

Increased education opportunities

Women's Leadership and Networks

Bringing men into the conversation

## Gender mainstreaming and policy

Policy development through a gendered lens

Women representation essential

Women's voices necessary

## Quality Research and Data

Lack of focus on women in Science and Technology Education



# Lessons Learned (1)

***Professor Joleen Steyn-Kotze. Senior Research Specialist, HSRC***

Questions of gender inequality require a transdisciplinary approach, especially when one engages in research that seeks to advance women's empowerment within the policy realm. The IORA "A Blue Economy for Women's Economic Empowerment" employed a three-pronged approach to facilitate a holistic understanding of issues facing women in the Indian Ocean's Blue Economy and to facilitate recommendations that could speak to relevant policy interventions for women's empowerment in this region. A key first step was to draw on policy study approaches which sought to determine the policy narrative on women's economic empowerment and identify potential gaps that may undermine achieving the goal of a gender equal IORA. To this effect, we also drew on feminist approaches that focus on gender mainstreaming when engaging in policy analysis, most notably the four Rs of Rights, Representation, Resources, and Reality. Employing this technique allowed one to determine which methodologies to use in providing a holistic overview of the state of women in IORA.

This project also engaged in quantitative analysis to assess access to resources, participation in employment and leadership, decision-making ability, education, domestic and unpaid care work, and health. These factors are important as they impact on the ability of women to pursue their life dreams and affect the choices and opportunities available to them. The transdisciplinary methodology we employed provided a solid understanding of the opportunities and challenges women face in accessing opportunities in the Blue Economy for their economic empowerment. Further to this, it allowed us to make relevant recommendations in line with the four Rs of gender mainstreaming to strengthening future policy interventions for women's economic empowerment in the Indian Ocean's Blue Economy.



## Lessons learned (2)

*Dr Emmanuel Sekyere, Chief Research Specialist, HSRC*

The main challenge Blue Economy Research in general faces, beside its multi-dimensional and transdisciplinary outlook is the fact that it is a new area of research. As a result research on other related critical dimensions to the Blue Economy such as issues of gender and women economic empowerment in the context of the blue economy are virtually non-existent. Although significant volumes of literature exists on gender and women empowerment in general, direct applicability to the Blue economy is still absent. This calls for intensified effort to produce knowledge that is blue economy specific to serve as existing precedence on which further research work can be built and developed.

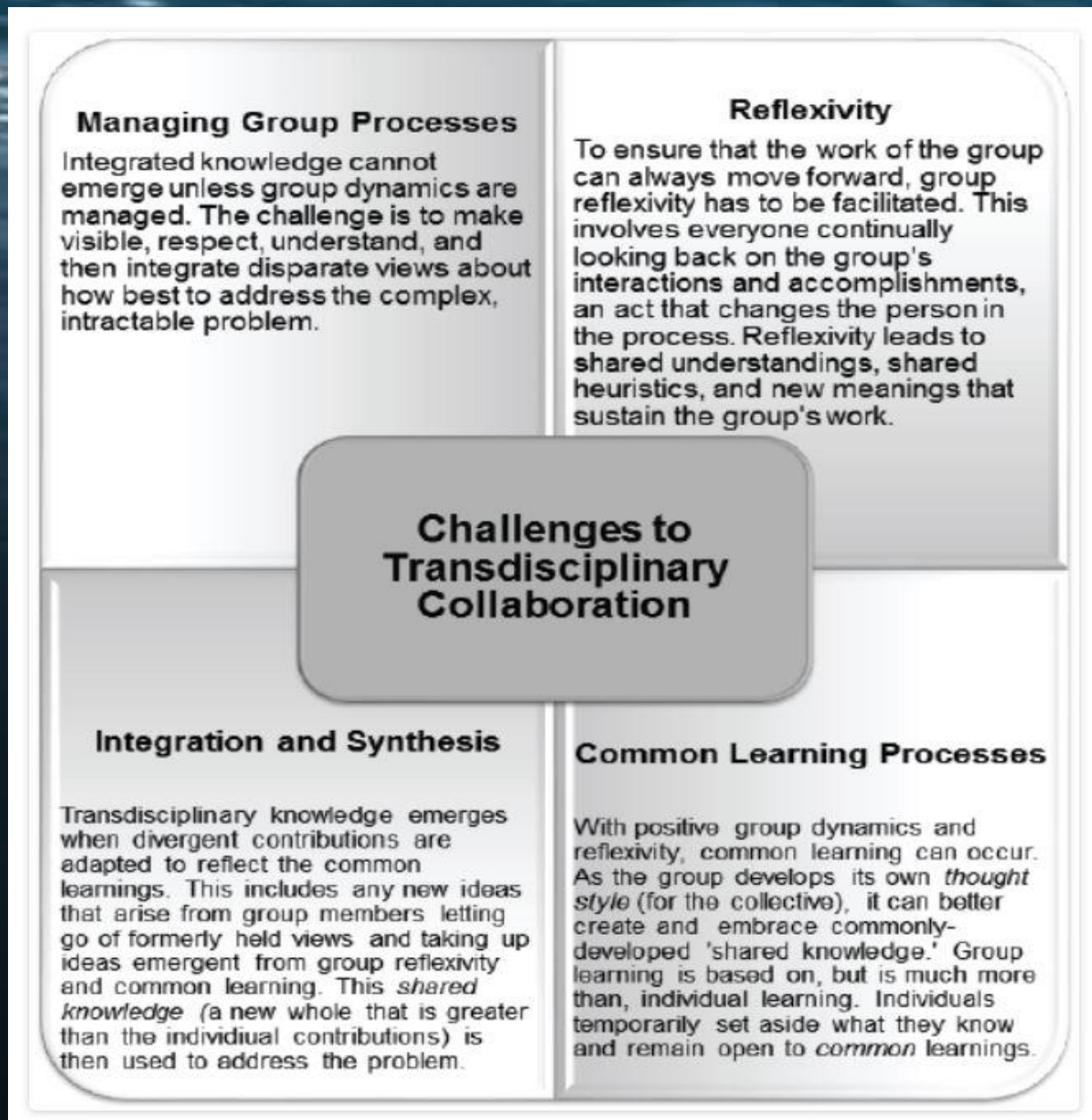
In this regard the absence of relevant data emerges as the most woefully lacking research tool. IORA member countries do not keep “up to date” data on several general women empowerment variables and indicators, let alone data specific to the Blue economy and its related industries and sectors. This is a major setback for blue economy related research that has to be tackled urgently and comprehensively.

# Lessons Learned (3)

***Thobekile Zikhali, Research Specialist. HSRC***

Transdisciplinary research goes beyond interactions between academic disciplines, i.e. natural and social sciences (interdisciplinary) and includes the impeccable interactions between science and diverse societal actors such as citizens, policy players, and industries. This creates room for shared understanding of the problems faced. Mono disciplinary approaches rob the Blue Economy of its *essence* which often leads to biased or distorted realities. As envisioned in the upcoming ten year United Nations 2021-2030 framework (the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development) “science should go beyond the laboratory to meet the needs and concerns of the diverse actors that make up the ocean community”.

Addressing issues such as the marginalisation of women and other vulnerable groups should be nuanced in qualitative research. Conversations with these groups, in their social setting brings flesh to the ‘bones’ that most quantitative researchers are often accused of creating. For example, understanding the number of women who are unfairly paid or discriminated within the Blue Economy does not dig deeper to the real life challenges faced as well as opportunities available in the industry. In this case, effective participation of all relevant stakeholders and indigenous knowledge would be important in developing and encouraging courageous approaches such as transdisciplinarity.



Thank  
you

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