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When Impact Diplomacy redraws the horizons of the Environment

- News - General news -



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International Geneva has long been a global stage for major negotiations on the environment, human rights, and development. Yet, over the years, one fact has become clear: the classic tools – conventions, treaties, resolutions – struggle to keep up with the speed and scale of ecological and social crises. Moreover, funding is collapsing on a massive scale. Faced with this inertia and the urgency of a new financial model, a new approach is emerging: impact diplomacy and the assets of participatory science, which prioritize concrete effects in the field and collective action beyond silos.

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By Mr. Thomas EGLI, Founder of the NGO Objectif Sciences International.)

Among the most emblematic themes of this transition in the year 2025 (the year of writing this article), and following the major UN conference held in Nice on the Ocean, which was preceded by a week-long world scientific congress bringing together 2,000 scientists, a pressing question now arises: What rights for the Ocean?

While in New York the treaty was voted on by member countries following the Nice Conference, International Geneva is today taking up the baton at the level of implementing the resolutions in concrete terms and achieving real change.

At the [17th Geneva Forum \(www.Geneva-Forum.com](#) [http://www.Geneva-Forum.com]) held from December 8 to 12, 2025, the NGO Objectif Sciences International will present its proposals for participatory formats enabling citizens from all over the planet to engage in their own survival, through the safeguarding and regeneration of the global Ocean.

The Ocean as a starting point: towards recognition of the Rights of Nature

The ocean covers more than 70% of the Earth's surface. It regulates the climate, feeds billions of human beings, shelters abundant biodiversity, and generates two-thirds of the oxygen we breathe in the Swiss mountains. Yet it remains one of the most overexploited and least protected spaces. The recognition of rights for the ocean is not merely a legal or philosophical exercise: it paves the way for a profound transformation of our relationship with nature. A relationship with nature that Swiss ancestral culture carries in its deepest core, just like all Indigenous peoples for whom nothing is possible without respect for their natural environment.

This movement is part of the broader dynamic of the Rights of Nature, already recognized in certain countries of Latin America, in New Zealand, or in India. Recognizing that ecosystems – rivers, forests, oceans – have fundamental rights means ceasing to consider them solely as exploitable resources. **It also means acknowledging that the health of human societies depends on that of the ecosystems that sustain them.**

Thus, **protecting the ocean is not just about saving fish: it is about protecting the fundamental human rights to food, water, health, and security.** It is also about ensuring the sustainability of entire sectors of the global economy, from artisanal fishing to maritime transport, including coastal tourism. The Rights of Nature therefore become a framework for understanding and action that links ecology, social justice, and economic development.

See here [the Call for Contributions “What rights for the Ocean?” issued by the Annual Conference on the Rights of Nature for Peace and Development](https://www.geneva-forum.com/What-rights-for-ocean.html?lang=en) [https://www.geneva-forum.com/What-rights-for-ocean.html?lang=en] organized by the Geneva Forum.

International Geneva: a crossroads where struggles converge

International Geneva plays a unique role in this debate. It is here that diplomats, scientists, human rights defenders, representatives of civil society, and economic actors often meet for the first time.

The Geneva Forum, launched in 2001 and dedicating its 2025 edition to the rights of the ocean, illustrates well this capacity of the city to become a laboratory of ideas and unprecedented alliances. **The environmental diplomacy taking place here is not only that of States: it is also carried by Indigenous peoples, NGOs, youth, entrepreneurs, researchers.**

This effervescence reflects a major evolution: to face the climate and ecological crisis, it is no longer enough to bring the same actors around the same tables. New forms of dialogue must be invented, capable of breaking institutional and sectoral silos. This is where impact diplomacy comes in.

From environmental diplomacy to impact diplomacy

Classical environmental diplomacy has often been hindered by procedural delays. Successive UN conferences have enabled progress, but they clash with the weight of divergent interests and geopolitical logics.

[Impact diplomacy](https://thomas-egli.org/Impact-Diplomacy-in-the-continuation-of-Scientific-Diplomacy-and-Cultural.html?lang=en)

[https://thomas-egli.org/Impact-Diplomacy-in-the-continuation-of-Scientific-Diplomacy-and-Cultural.html?lang=en], on the other hand, proposes a cross-cutting approach. It does not stop at negotiating agreements but values the implementation of concrete, transversal initiatives that produce tangible effects. It directly connects local communities to international bodies, recognizing the value of their experiences and data.

In the case of the oceans, this means, for example, that testimonies and measurements collected by fishers, divers, citizens, or amateur scientists can feed diplomatic debates and direct funding towards effective, field-validated projects.

See here [a formal presentation of Impact Diplomacy at the service of the Environment](#)

[<https://thomas-egli.org/Impact-Diplomacy-in-the-continuation-of-Scientific-Diplomacy-and-Cultural.html?lang=en>].

Participatory science: a concrete lever for assertive diplomacy

This is where participatory science plays a central role. It enables citizens, associations, schools, businesses, researchers, and institutions to collaborate on applied scientific projects.

Its strength, from the perspective of the challenges faced by International Geneva, is twofold:

- **Transversality:** it builds bridges between worlds that rarely communicate: local communities, diplomats, scientists, philanthropists, businesses.
- **Creation of evidence and narratives:** it produces robust data but also human stories, images, experiences that embody the reality of environmental issues.

Thanks to this, Participatory Science becomes a powerful tool to attract new forms of funding, notably philanthropic, citizen-based, or corporate, at a time when classical institutional funding is dwindling.

It is within this approach that the NGO Objectif Sciences International initiated the creation and implementation of [the Global Alliance of Citizen Science for the Ocean](#)

[osi-ngo.org/Jobs/partenariats-avec-les-autres-ong/article/alliance-globale-de-sciences-citoyennes-pour-l-ocean?lang=en], in response to the call for commitment issued by the UN in preparation for the Ocean Conference.

Participatory Science offers International Geneva a new capacity: that of presenting not only findings or appeals, but solutions already under experimentation, grounded in reality, carried by collectives, and ready to be scaled up.

See here [an article in the magazine UN Today describing the advantage of Participatory Science in support of Governmental Environmental Policies](#)

[<https://untoday.org/les-sciences-participatives-une-opportunité-majeure-pour-lonu>].

Towards a reinvented International Geneva

Beyond the case of the ocean, this dynamic questions the very role of International Geneva. To remain relevant in a rapidly changing world, it must adapt. It is no longer enough to reproduce the classic formats of multilateral negotiations: new logics must be invented, capable of tackling problems at their root.

One of the great mistakes of the past has been trying to solve environmental crises with the same economic, legal, and diplomatic logics that had generated them. **The current situation demands a radically different approach, one that places real impact at the center of decisions.**

Participatory science embodies this new logic: it does not stop at observations, it opens up paths of immediate and inclusive action. It makes it possible to implement an assertive diplomacy, capable of saying: here is what we have already started, here are the results, here is how to amplify the impact.

For an impact diplomacy in the service of the planet and humanity

The time is no longer for deferred promises, but for visible and shared actions.

The recognition of the rights of the ocean, and more broadly of the rights of nature, offers us a powerful framework for linking ecology, human rights, and the economy. International Geneva can become the driving force, provided it opens up to these new practices that break down silos and federate. **This would also be a tremendous opportunity to support cross-cutting projects capable both of breaking down silos and of attracting new and significant funding sources from major philanthropists. They expect concrete proposals with detailed implementation, as they will not be satisfied, and rightly so, with a list of objectives.**

With participatory science, we have a concrete tool to move from words to impact, from observation to action, and to invent together a planetary governance that is fairer, more effective, and more humane.

By choosing this path, Geneva can once again become not only the place where the future is discussed but also the place where it is built.

Thomas EGLI, Geneva, August 22, 2025