

High-Level Report

SAMSS Special Session: Building Bridges Through Generational Dialogue

Ocean20 (O20) and NRF-SAEON, in collaboration with Women20 (W20), hosted a special session entitled **“Building Bridges Through Generational Dialogue”** on the margins of the Southern African Marine Science Symposium (SAMSS) 2025, held in Cape Town from 08–12 September 2025. The session created a dynamic platform for intergenerational exchange in marine science, combining a World Café conversation with a fireside chat to foster mentorship, knowledge sharing, and open dialogue.

- Session 1: “Real Talk” for Early Career Researchers (World Café style), senior and early-career researchers facilitated rotating table discussions where early-career researchers shared personal career journeys, including challenges, turning points, and lessons learned. Facilitators documented key insights to support ongoing mentorship.



- Session 2: “Women in Marine Science – An Intergenerational Conversation on Journeys, Challenges, and Collective Wisdom” (Fireside Chat). An intergenerational panel reflected on women lived experiences in marine science, highlighting challenges in fieldwork, stereotypes, and the importance of safe, inclusive environments. The discussion emphasized the critical role of mentorship, peer networks, and advocacy in shaping resilient career pathways.



The session reinforced the importance of intergenerational dialogue, inclusive practices, and collective wisdom in building a more equitable and transformative marine science community. Discussions highlighted several key areas of emphasis:

- **Innovation & Integrity:** The need to stay true to research values while fostering innovation and finding creative ways to utilise resources. Innovation must also address equity, access, and sustainability. Beyond staying true to research values and fostering creativity, the session highlighted the importance of changing perceptions around failure. Setbacks and challenges should be viewed as opportunities for growth, refinement, and professional “rebirth,” enabling researchers to build resilience and adapt in their careers.
- **Safety & Gender Sensitivity:** Concerns around women’s safety during fieldwork, particularly in remote or demanding marine environments. The need for Institutions to adopt gender-sensitive planning, ensure safe accommodations and transport, and put mechanisms in place to protect women’s health, reproductive needs, and well-being.
- **Support for Women from Disadvantaged Backgrounds:** Institutions should strengthen efforts to support, mentor, and include women from previously disadvantaged backgrounds in marine science. This includes providing targeted guidance, fostering mentorship opportunities, and creating inclusive platforms that enable women to grow, lead, and influence the research community.
- **Mentorship & Coaching:** Highlighted as essential to nurturing the next generation of marine researchers. Mentorship provides guidance, builds confidence, transfers skills, and creates networks for collaboration and innovation.

- **Advocacy & Transformation:** Strong advocacy is required to push for inclusivity and cultural change within institutions. Advocacy must ensure that diversity and transformation in marine science are lived realities, not only policy commitments.

Session Reflection

The session successfully created a safe and dynamic environment for intergenerational dialogue. Early-career researchers were inspired by honest stories and practical insights from senior researchers and peers, while women across career stages reflected on lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities in marine science. Participants highlighted the value of mentorship (informal and formal), peer networks, and advocacy in building resilient career pathways.

It is recommended that the Intergenerational Dialogue becomes a standing event within the SAMSS programme, either as a collaborative legacy activity for South Africa's Presidency of the G20 facilitated by Ocean20 and Women20, or as part of the NRF-SAEON science engagement activities.

Overall, the session reinforced the importance of:

- Intergenerational dialogue as a tool for knowledge transfer and career guidance.
- Inclusive practices that support women and marginalized groups in marine science.
- Collective wisdom and shared learning in shaping a more equitable and transformative marine research community.