MPA Champions and Ambassadors: Bridging the Blue Economy Funding Disconnect

MPAConnect Network | Grenada

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What this means, in simple terms

1. Governments and investors are excited about making money from the ocean: fishing, mass tourism, shipping and more.

2. But the protected areas that keep those industries alive are under-funded, lack legal mandate or may have legislation that needs updating and approval.

3. Champions and Ambassadors can help decision makers see this gap and push them to pay for the solution.

Two roles, one connective tissue

Champions

Insiders with authority

- Ministers and parliamentarians
- Permanent secretaries
- Private sector leaders
- Board of Directors
- Directors/administrators

Ambassadors

Credible communicators

- Fishers and dive operators
- Scientists and youth
- Cultural figures and celebrities
- Staff
- Community leaders

Together they translate between ecology, finance and policy, and keep the story grounded in local reality.

In assigned groups, respond to these questions (10 mins.) Appoint a reporter

1. In your organizations, who are your Champions? Ambassadors? If you don't have, how would you select them?
2. How do they close the disconnect between decision makers and MPAs?
3. What could be some reasons MPAs stay underfunded? How can they generate funding?
4. What strategies do they need to use to get support from investors and policy makers? Local communities?

MPA connect

a partnership between:

GCFI
Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute, Inc.

NOAA
CORAL REEF
CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Information that follows can be shared after presentations, if not covered.

How they close the gap

Explain the value

Protecting the ocean protects jobs, income and coasts

Show the frontline

What life is really like for rangers and fishers

Push for real funding

Money spent on running MPAs, not just promises

Include communities

So local people benefit too

Four reasons MPAs stay underfunded

Paper parks

Targets like 30x30 reward area designated, not how well it is managed.

Invisible value

Coastal protection, fish nurseries and tourism appeal rarely appear in budgets, so MPAs look like costs.

Mismatched capital

Investors want bankable returns; MPAs offer shared public benefits and recurring running costs.

Distance from the frontline

Decision makers rarely see the work, the people doing it, or the cost of its absence.

Seven things they do

1. **Translate**
   Turn ecological data into jobs, revenue at risk and storm damage avoided.

2. **Make the frontline visible**
   Site visits and testimony show what underfunding means.

3. **Push for budget lines**
   Funded management plans and a share of fees, levies and licences.

4. **De-risk and attract finance**
   Trust funds, blue bonds and debt swaps need political leadership.

5. **Embed MPAs in planning**
   Treat them as natural infrastructure in spatial and adaptation plans.

6. **Create accountability**
   Ask what share of the budget is funded and who benefits.

7. **Legitimize local voices**
   Community ambassadors keep the story from becoming top-down and make sure benefits reach coastal livelihoods.

What makes them effective

Effective when they have

- **A clear ask.** A specific figure beats "more support."
- **Evidence.** Effectiveness assessments and valuations.
- **A frontline link.** Regular feedback from rangers and staff.
- **Cross-sector pairs.** Finance minister plus tourism operator.
- **Sustained roles.** Caucuses, boards and annual funding reports.

Risks to manage

- **Symbolic advocacy.** Pledges with no money disbursed.
- **Celebrity fatigue.** Ambassadors detached from local reality.
- **Blue washing.** MPA ties used to legitimize extraction.
- **Equity gaps.** Finance reaches institutions, not communities and frontline staff.

The chain they hold together



Their role is not only to speak for MPAs, but to shorten the distance between the people who protect the ocean and the people who control the money.