



Ocean Governance and Blue Economy: An Emerging Agenda for The Africa-Europe Partnership

“Strengthening the cooperation of Africa and Europe on ocean governance and blue economy and forging a mutually beneficial vision for the two continents by 2030”.





EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Ocean Governance and Blue Economy: An Emerging Agenda for The Africa-Europe Partnership

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“The ocean does not divide us, it connects us” —
Pacific-island maxim.

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021

PDF ISBN 978-92-9405-027-4

doi: 10.2926/125437

HZ-02-23-228-EN-N

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Executive Overview

This Scoping Report outlines ways to strengthen cooperation between Africa and Europe on ocean governance and blue economy, from which to forge a mutually beneficial roadmap for the two continents in line with the 2030 UN Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals and the AU's Agenda 2063. The Report shows how the ocean has facilitated connections between Africa and Europe in multiple ways, including trade, investment, and cultural exchanges, contributing to economic development for both continents, underpinned by vast shared maritime areas and ocean traditions.

The Scoping Report underscores the fragmentation of Africa-Europe ocean cooperation, and highlights the need for a more coordinated strategy. The Report calls for greater joint global responsibility and coordinated action to strengthen international ocean governance. This call for joint action on ocean-related matters was already stated in the Abidjan Declaration issued after the 5th AU-EU Summit in 2017 and repeated in the Communiqué adopted by AU and EU Foreign Affairs Ministers when they met in January 2019. The final declaration of the 6th AU-EU Summit notes that African and European leaders “pledge to work towards more converging positions in multilateral fora to reduce global inequalities, strengthen solidarity, promote international cooperation, fight and mitigate climate change and improve delivery on ‘global public goods’, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and AU Agenda 2063.”

The Scoping Report identifies a set of key findings to help shape the future of the Partnership:

- The hydrosphere, including ocean ecosystems and resources, is one of the most interconnected and complex systems on our planet. Transcending national borders, 60% of the ocean lies outside the jurisdiction of individual states.
- Ocean governance and the blue economy represent strategic domains for cooperation, but they have not yet become central to the Africa-Europe partnership, with SDG 14 (“life below water”) being the most under-resourced Sustainable Development Goal.
- In 2021, [ODA for SDG14](#) totalled USD 2.08 billion, equivalent to less than 1% of global ODA (= 0.68%). For Africa, in 2021 ODA for SDG14 totalled USD 469.02 million, equivalent to 3% of total ODA received by Africa.
- The ocean is becoming increasingly important geopolitically. The current shifts in geopolitics, economics, and the interconnected climate and biodiversity crises have thrown light on how important our oceans are. They provide an opportunity for Africa and Europe to work as partners on ocean issues. Together, the two continents could strive for a just and equitable sustainable blue economy for the benefit of the people and our planet.
- Ocean governance, the development of blue economy strategies, and joint delivery mechanisms can reinforce the Africa-Europe partnership, underpinning collective human prosperity and sustainable development, and drawing on both continents’ combined wealth of knowledge and experience.

While there is immense potential for enhanced cooperation between Africa and Europe regarding ocean governance and blue economy, there are also significant challenges to overcome. First, for this partnership to thrive, it must demonstrate mutual and equitable benefits. African and European stakeholders should play equal roles and share the burdens and benefits of any initiatives and actions.

A co-designed Africa-Europe Partnership on the ocean will be crucial to strengthen ocean governance and reverse the climate and biodiversity crisis, including on issues such as overfishing and marine pollution. This will entail establishing genuine cooperation between Europe and Africa, while considering each other's priorities, acknowledging the asymmetries between the two continents, and enhancing trust to foster a win-win partnership.

The Report offers two sets of areas of action, with the first one relevant to the upcoming work of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance, a newly established multistakeholder dialogue platform hosted by the AEF with the financial support of the European Commission, and the second, targeted at the ocean community at large, to be catalysed through a strengthened Africa-Europe Partnership. These recommendations focus on five overarching areas: (1) public policy and regulation, (2) capacity building and co-innovation; (3) building shared prosperity from the blue economy, (4) Marine Domain Awareness, and (5) finding ocean-based actions to address the climate and biodiversity crises. In each area, action should be underpinned by the inclusion of women and youth as fundamental pillars of the partnership.

Among the Report's recommendations, four are of utmost importance to reinforce the Africa-Europe partnership on ocean governance and blue economy.

Monitoring Progress to Evaluate Effectiveness: There is an evident need to monitor progress and evaluate the effectiveness of existing initiatives and actions. This will help the partnership achieve its desired outcomes, ensure necessary adjustments are made promptly. Moving forward, it would be valuable to conduct an analysis of existing/previous initiatives on ocean governance and blue economy which could be replicated at the Africa-Europe level.

Building Capacity and Providing Technical Assistance: Building on Europe's expertise and lessons learned, the partnership should offer technical assistance and capacity building to African countries to help develop ocean governance frameworks tailored to their situation. This includes providing training, sharing best practices, and facilitating knowledge exchange between the two continents. As such, the Scoping Report recommends an analysis of partnership opportunities with the most potential for mutual learning and co-benefits, where Europe can learn from Africa as well as Africa learn from Europe.

Contributing to the establishment of Africa's Regional Centres of Excellence: The Scoping Report highlights ways to build on political commitments from the African Union, including its ambition to set up Regional Centres of Excellence. Such centres could serve as focal points for research, training, and capacity building on sustainable ocean governance and blue economy practices. They could also facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration among stakeholders in the region, and across Africa and Europe, thus promoting the development of a skilled workforce and fostering blue economy innovation. These centres could provide a platform for exchanging best practices and lessons learned, to inform policy decisions and improve the effectiveness of ocean governance initiatives.

Convene an AU-EU Ocean Governance and Blue Economy Ministerial Conference: Africa and Europe could convene leaders from the two continents to elevate the bar politically and financially for the ocean. The Ministerial Conference could be supported by the work of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance, to advance continental priorities, seek common ground and mobilise a Team Europe approach for the benefit of the cross-continental partnership.

Comparative Analysis of Priorities and Potential Common Agenda

As two continents surrounded by some of the world's most important marine biodiversity, strategic maritime trade routes, abundant aquatic resources and blue carbon assets, Africa and Europe must guide ocean governance and blue economy development through impactful policies which meet global and continental targets.

Building on pre-identified priorities for Africa and Europe, the Scoping Report highlights issues of common interest to be explored to enhance Africa-Europe cooperation. The table below is an illustration of this.

Pre-identified EU-Africa priorities for joint work	AU priorities as enshrined in Blue Economy Strategy and Agenda 2063	EU priorities as enshrined in Blue Economy Report 2022 and EU's Agenda for international ocean governance	Shared interest to work jointly on the following issues
Low-carbon, climate resilient and circular blue economy	Environmental sustainability, climate change and coastal infrastructure	Implementing the Paris Agreement and ocean mitigation, conserving 10% of marine and coastal areas, circular blue economy, ecosystem accounting and nature-based solutions, waste-water treatment	Shared interest in working towards a just and sustainable blue economy, with a particular focus on safeguarding the natural environment, conserving biodiversity and enhancing climate resilience through Nature-based Solutions
Aquaculture	Fisheries, aquaculture and ecosystems conservation	Fighting illegal fishing and promoting sustainable management of ocean food resources globally, banning harmful fisheries subsidies, improving and strengthening regional fisheries management	Shared interest in working towards the development of sustainable aquaculture and fisheries with clear nature and people positive benefits.
Ocean research, innovation and data & Digitalisation and technology transfer	Knowledge-based policies, integrating planning, greater cooperation on data	Improving coordination and cooperation between international organisations and launching Ocean Partnerships for ocean management, capacity building, investment in 'blue' science and innovation, international	Shared interest on innovation and in modernising traditional ocean sectors with the best available research and data and local knowledge

		ocean research, innovation and science partnerships, ocean observation, data and marine accounting	
Maritime spatial planning and ecosystem-based management	Improved governance Promotion of continental peace and security	Filling the gaps in the international ocean governance framework, promoting the effective management of MPAs, ensuring the safety and security of seas and oceans	Shared interest in working towards better and enhanced ocean governance and improved management effectiveness, including the 30x30 Agenda, underpinned by development and security principles
Fair competition between the EU and third countries' seafood producers	Governance, Institutions, and social actions	Improving coordination and cooperation between international organisations and launching Ocean Partnerships for ocean management	Shared interest in working towards a just and equitable future, underpinned by improved ocean governance.
Inclusivity and skills	Women and youth agency and leadership	Developing new forms of governance and collaboration to engage with citizens, especially youth (EU4Ocean Coalition).	Shared interest in working towards social actions, underpinned by inclusivity with a particular focus on youth and women.
Ocean-related investment: public-private partnership and entrepreneurship	Shipping, transportation and trade Sustainable energy, extractive minerals, gas, innovative industries	Marine renewable energy, emerging ocean energy sources, port activities and infrastructure, shipbuilding and repair, maritime transport.	Shared interest in working towards an ocean-related conducive environment and enabling conditions for business and public-private partnerships.

Introduction and Contextual Background

Ocean governance and the blue economy represent a strategic domain of cooperation not yet central to the Africa-Europe partnership. SDG 14 ("life below water") is the most under-resourced Sustainable Development Goal, with only 0.68% of development finance directed

to it in 2021, according to the [OECD Data Platform on Ocean Finance \(shinyapps.io\)](https://shinyapps.io). The ocean needs to be managed for the good of all, including future generations because its use brings mutual benefits and challenges.

The ocean has facilitated the connection between Africa and Europe in several ways, including trade, investment, and cultural exchanges, contributing to the development and progress of these two continents and giving them a natural connection underpinned by vast shared maritime areas and ocean traditions.

Institutionally, the Africa-Europe partnership has not only been strengthened and defined through political and policy engagements at the European Union (EU) and African Union (AU) levels but also advanced at bilateral and multilateral levels, where broader policy agendas have served as platforms for cooperation in trade, development, security, and issues related to the management of natural resources and climate change.

Dedicated to developing a shared vision for Africa-Europe relations in an increasingly interconnected and multipolar world, the cross-continental partnership aims to strengthen economic cooperation and support sustainable development while promoting peace, security, democratic values, prosperity, and human dignity.

The hydrosphere, including ocean ecosystems and resources, is one of the most interconnected and complex systems on our planet, they transcend national borders, and 60% of the ocean lies outside the jurisdiction of individual states. Therefore, global responsibility and coordinated international action are essential to the management of the oceans and to fostering sound and coherent international ocean governance (IOG).

In 2000, the 1st African Union – European Union (AU-EU) Summit was held in Cairo, Egypt, formally establishing the Partnership between the two continents. Since then, cooperation has been guided by the [Joint Africa-EU Strategy](#), initially adopted in 2007. For more than twenty years, African and European leaders have met in different formats to meet the challenges of the times, repurpose the partnership and revisit common political priorities.

Against this background, at the 5th EU-AU Summit in 2017, Leaders adopted the “Abidjan Declaration” in which they committed to “strengthen [their] cooperation and partnership (...) to address illegal exploitation and unsustainable management of natural resources, impact of climate change, maritime security”. They also committed to “promoting responsible and sustainable public and private capital (...) This will focus on value-adding, human investment and skills sectors with the highest potential for sustainable job creation and low-emissions climate resilient and sustainable development, such as (...) the ocean economy”.

In January 2019, following up on the commitment made in Abidjan, the first annual EU-African Union Ministerial meeting was held in Brussels. The joint Communiqué states that: “Ministers undertook to strengthen joint high-level policy dialogue to adopt a more coordinated approach and converging positions in international negotiations. They agreed to continue to implement and cooperate on priorities including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, and the AU Agenda 2063. A post-2020

Global Biodiversity Framework, ocean governance, (...) are, among others, examples of areas where cooperation can make a difference.”

The 6th AU-EU Summit, held in February 2022, was guided by a need to deepen further cooperation between the two continents. It committed leaders from the AU and the EU to a Joint Vision for a renewed Partnership to build a common future underpinned by key areas of cooperation, including green transition, digital transformation, peace and governance, migration and mobility, and a renewed commitment to multilateralism.

The final declaration of the 6th AU-EU Summit further notes that African and European leaders “pledge to work towards more converging positions in multilateral fora to reduce global inequalities, strengthen solidarity, promote international cooperation, fight and mitigate climate change and improve delivery on ‘global public goods’, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and AU Agenda 2063.”

It is essential to recognise the shared ocean seascapes between and around the two continents as being central to strategic areas of cooperation and its role in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. As such, ocean governance and the development of blue economy strategies and joint delivery mechanisms can potentially reinforce the partnership and underpin collective human prosperity and sustainable development. Nonetheless, while reference is made to the need for cooperation between the AU-EU on ocean governance, it needs to become a central feature of the AU-EU partnership and translate into action to move beyond summit diplomacy.

Today, the current shifts in geopolitics, economics, and the interconnected climate and biodiversity crises brought to light how important the oceans are and provide an opportunity for Africa and Europe to work as partners on ocean governance issues and strive towards a just and equitable sustainable blue economy for the benefit of the people and our planet.

The waters surrounding Europe and Africa are some of the world's most diverse and productive oceanic areas. These two continents share an extensive coastline of over 100,000 kilometres (EU= 68,000 km, Africa=41,000km) and a common interest in ensuring the sustainability of the ocean surrounding them. To achieve this, Europe and Africa need to cooperate on ocean governance.

The ocean plays a critical role in supporting Africa and Europe's social and economic development. It provides food, energy, transportation, and numerous other resources essential to the livelihoods of millions of people on both continents. However, the ocean is also at risk due to overfishing, climate change, pollution, and other activities that harm marine biodiversity and ecosystems.

Cooperative ocean governance between Europe and Africa can help address these issues and promote sustainable development. With their combined wealth of knowledge and experience, Europe and Africa can engage in strategic partnerships on matters relating to ocean governance, including the development of sustainable fisheries management policies, and the implementation of marine biodiversity agreements.

There is a constellation of opportunities in 2023 and 2024 to reinforce cooperation on ocean governance from the follow-up of the 6th AU-EU summit to the mid-term review of SDGs and

preparation of the Africa Climate Action Summit and COP28, as well as the ratification and implementation processes of international agreements such as the Agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction and the negotiations of a Global plastics treaty. As such, 2023 presents a valuable opportunity for African and European decision-makers and other key stakeholders to take stock of progress and orient the revised partnership towards meaningful priority sectors of cooperation that are not yet central, including ocean governance and the blue economy.

Methodology

This Scoping Report aims to provide a convening point for African and European stakeholders and partners to understand the state of play on ocean governance and the blue economy at the level of the two continents. It aims to demonstrate that ocean governance, including the blue economy must be seen as an ocean of opportunities with the unique potential to reinforce the Africa-Europe partnership. The insights gleaned from this report aim to enable the two continents to identify priority intervention areas, resource needs and opportunities for accelerated action.

This report was commissioned by the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) to primarily inform the work of the Africa-Europe Ocean Strategic Group that is being set up with the support of the European Commission and in partnership with the African Union Commission. More precisely it will serve the Group to identify priority areas of focus for joint cooperation and co-design a roadmap for action that can enhance the ocean governance partnership.

This report also provides a unique analysis of the state-of-play of the cooperation between the EU and Africa on ocean-related matters.

The first chapter outlines continental positions, strategies and priorities in relation to ocean governance and the blue economy while providing a first overview of potential areas for joint action. The second chapter provides an assessment of key challenges and opportunities for strengthening cross-continental cooperation, exploring several issues which could underpin the development of an ocean partnership. The third chapter will focus on key recommendations targeted at both members of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance, and relevant stakeholders interested in the Africa-Europe ocean relationship. The latter focuses on five priority areas: public policy and regulation, capacity building and co-innovation, the blue economy, marine domain awareness, and climate and biodiversity. Finally, the report advances a list of priority areas for collective action.

SECTION 1: Overview of The State-of-Play of Ocean Governance and Blue Economy In Africa and Europe.

1.1 Ocean Governance and Blue Economy

Scholars and policymakers have championed the concept of a “Blue” Economy as a tool for sustainable economic development that balances economic growth and environmental conservation.

Initially conceived at the [United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development](#) held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, many countries have widely adopted the blue economy (BE) concept, demonstrating its prominent positioning on national and international [developmental agendas](#). The adoption of the BE concept has resulted in the pursuit of efficient and effective [governance strategies](#) in the following sectors that hold the potential for sustainable growth: fisheries, maritime transport and coastal tourism, as well as innovative sectors, such as renewable ocean energy and biotechnology. A fundamental aspiration of the BE is to improve human well-being and social equity while reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. Therefore, it lies at the nexus of economic growth, environmental conservation and social equity.

The blue economy has emerged as a sustainable way of exploiting ocean resources for social development and economic growth. Globally, the blue economy is [projected](#) to grow from \$1.5 billion to \$3 trillion by 2030, and the African Union’s 2050 Africa’s Integrated Maritime (AIM) Strategy declared it the “new frontier of African Renaissance”. Equally, the EU sees the blue economy as a “key driver” of economic growth and job creation, and crucial to the attainment of sustainable development and the creation of a resilient future. According to the 2022 EU Blue Economy [report](#), the sector is directly employs close to 4.45 million people and generated around €667.2 billion in turnover and €183.9 billion in gross value added in the European Union.

It is often the case that ocean-related issues are fragmented across different sectors, leading to the duplication of responsibilities and the [fragmentation of governance and policies](#). Cooperative ocean governance is at the heart of blue economy strategies, given the ocean’s cross-sectoral, transboundary and cross-jurisdictional nature and the activities therein. Ocean governance is about managing the ocean and its resources sustainably and holistically in order to secure ocean productivity for the benefit of current and future generations.

1.2 Multilateral Context

The ocean is emerging as one of the world’s major geopolitical arenas.

At the global level, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) outlines the need to improve how oceans are exploited and protected. In 2017, United Nations member states renewed their commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 14, which amounts to conserving and sustainably using the ocean, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. In 2022, at the 2nd UN Ocean, they committed to scale-up their efforts to implement it. 2023 marks an important milestone for revising the progress of the goal given the mid-term assessment of the SDGs (2015-2030).

The UNCLOS sets out provisions for the definition of maritime zones and boundaries and defines the rights and obligations of States with regard to the high seas and the seabed, including freedom of navigation, the peaceful use of the oceans and the protection of the marine environment. Its significance as a global instrument is made evident when it states that it will "promote peaceful uses of the seas and oceans," maintain peace, justice, and progress for all peoples of the world, and "contribute to the goals of realising a just and equitable international economic order."

The year 2023 should encourage leaders to give the ocean a higher priority on the national, regional, and cross-continental agendas:

- In February 2022, at the resumed fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2), a historic resolution (5/14) was adopted to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment with the ambition to complete the negotiations by end of 2024.
- On 17 June 2022, after 21 years of negotiation and in line with SDG 14.6, the 12th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization reached an agreement on the prohibition of certain fisheries subsidies. These relate to specific fishing activities / fishing areas as well as new obligations related to such disciplines.
- On 22 December 2022, the Conference of Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework that includes important ocean-related targets, namely to ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas are effectively conserved and managed (target 3) and minimize the impact of climate change and ocean acidification on biodiversity and increase its resilience (target 8).
- On March 4th 2023, Parties of the UNCLOS agreed on the conservation and sustainable use of marine Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ). On 9 June 2023, the BBNJ Treaty was adopted by consensus. At present, only around 1.2 % of the high seas are under legal protection, and only 13 % of the ocean remains classified as marine wilderness, i.e. completely free from human disturbance, with most of this area being located in the high seas, where 34 % of all fished species are now overexploited.

These achievements and milestones at multilateral level can serve as an emerging agenda for strengthened cooperation between Africa and Europe on ocean governance against the backdrop of demonstrated decades-long cooperation on fisheries governance.

Further, the fact that the 2022 UN Ocean Conference was co-organised by Kenya and Portugal has, among others, brought focus on how Africa and Europe face similar challenges and opportunities associated with ocean governance and blue economy.

Additional ocean cooperation has included the latest Conference of the Parties on Climate Change, COP27, hosted by the Arab Republic of Egypt in Sharm el-Sheikh in November 2022. In the Sharm el-Sheikh implementation plan, all parties recognise the importance of ocean-based climate solutions in the fight against climate change.

Furthermore, the forthcoming United Nations Ocean Conference to be co-hosted by France and Costa Rica in June 2025, the 6th International Marine Protected Areas Congress to be hosted by Senegal in 2026 (IMPAC6), the 2024 UN Ocean Decade Conference in Barcelona, and 2024 'Our Ocean Conference' in Greece are all key international events that offer an opportunity for Africa and Europe to work together, towards common goals. Improved coordination can also leave a legacy of cooperative ocean action for the future of AU-EU cooperation on ocean governance.

The President of Comoros's 2023 chairmanship of the African Union is also perceived as an opportunity to drive the agenda of Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) and emphasise the importance of the ocean and blue economy for the African continent.

1.3 Ocean Governance-Blue Economy: Policy Framework and Priorities for Africa

Africa is a massive island, with the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the Indian Ocean to the east, the Antarctic Ocean to the South, the Mediterranean Sea to the north, and the Red Sea to the northeast. The continent boasts proximity to some of the world's most strategic waterways or "choke points", namely the Strait of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal, the Bab El-Mandeb Strait, the Gulf of Aden and the Mozambique Channel.

Africa lies at the crossroads of several major sea lanes. The continent is viewed as a significant trade gateway between Asia and the Middle East to Europe via the Suez Canal. Further west into the Atlantic Ocean region and the Gulf of Guinea, which spans from Angola to Senegal, is a vital global shipping route with tremendous development potential of blue economy activities.

The AU describes the blue economy as the 'new frontier of the African renaissance' based on its potential to contribute towards sustainable development. True to this, the blue economy features prominently as goal 6 of aspiration 1 of the AU's Agenda 2063: The Africa we want - the AU's blueprint to achieve inclusive and sustainable development over 50 years.

Agenda 2063 aims to achieve a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development, including the continent's blue economy; it notes that 'Africa's Ocean which is three times the size of its landmass, shall be a major contributor to continental transformation and growth.'

The AU's Agenda 2063, the following are priorities areas for the continent to develop its blue economy:

Table 1: Agenda 2063 Priority Areas

1. Sustainable use of marine resources: The AU aims to promote sustainable use of marine resources, including fisheries, aquaculture, and tourism, while protecting marine ecosystems and biodiversity.
2. Maritime security: The AU is committed to enhancing maritime security and safety in African waters, including combating piracy, illegal fishing, and other maritime crimes.
3. Blue economy: The AU recognises the potential of the blue economy to drive economic growth and job creation in Africa and is working to promote sustainable development of maritime sectors such as shipping, ports, and offshore energy.
4. Climate change and ocean acidification: The AU is concerned about the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification on marine ecosystems and coastal communities and is working to promote adaptation and mitigation measures.
5. Marine scientific research: The AU recognises the importance of marine scientific research for understanding and managing marine ecosystems and is working to promote cooperation and capacity-building in this area.
6. Ocean governance: The AU is committed to promoting effective ocean governance, including through the development of regional and international agreements and frameworks.

The Blue Economy, as defined by the AU's 2019 Blue Economy Strategy and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) Blue Economy Policy Handbook for Africa (2016), entails the sustainable exploitation of marine resources in the continent's oceans, seas, lakes, and rivers. The EU and AU definitions of the blue economy are similar in that they both refer to the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth and development. However, there are some differences in their approach and focus.

The EU definition of the blue economy emphasises the importance of innovation, technology, and research in developing sustainable ocean-based industries. It also includes activities such as tourism, renewable energy, and biotechnology.

On the other hand, the AU definition of the blue economy emphasises the ocean's role in supporting the livelihoods and well-being of coastal communities. It also highlights the need to address issues such as illegal fishing, marine pollution, and climate change to ensure ocean resources' sustainability.

Overall, while both definitions share a common goal of promoting sustainable economic growth through the use of ocean resources, the EU definition focuses more on technological innovation and industry development hinged on the European Green Deal and recovery plan for Europe, while the AU definition places greater emphasis on community well-being and environmental sustainability.

Despite their varying approaches, the EU and AU can strengthen their blue economy partnership by identifying areas of common interest and working together to achieve shared

goals. For example, both the EU and AU recognise the importance of sustainable fisheries management, marine conservation, and the development of renewable energy sources. They can collaborate on research and development projects, share best practices, and work together to address common challenges such as marine pollution and climate change.

In addition, the EU and AU can learn from each other's experiences and approaches. The EU can share its expertise in technological innovation and industry development, while the AU can provide insights into community-based approaches to ocean resource management and conservation.

Ultimately, building an ocean governance partnership between the EU and AU that advances the blue economy will require a willingness to listen, learn, and collaborate. By working together, they can create a more sustainable and prosperous future for both their economies and the ocean.

In 2015, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), the AU Commission and UN Environment (UNEP) began partnering to develop an African ocean governance [strategy](#) aligning the AU vision with global international law on ocean governance across several ocean themes. The 'African Ocean Governance Strategy' final version is eagerly anticipated and may serve as a catalyst for Africa-Europe cooperation on ocean governance.

There is a commitment to realising Africa's blue economy potential in several national blue economy strategies and other continental documents, such as the [2019 African Blue Economy Strategy](#) (ABES) and its [Implementation Plan](#) (2021-2025).

African and other developing states have led efforts to implement a plan to reform the post-colonial legal order to access and manage ocean resources. This ocean governance reform agenda was first undertaken under the auspices of the Organisation of African Unity (now the African Union) and later as part of the Group of 77 of the United Nations.

For example, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was adopted on December 10, 1982, and entered into force on November 16, 1994. African countries have actively participated in the UNCLOS negotiations since the beginning and have sponsored several resolutions to adopt UNCLOS. For example, the African Group at the United Nations sponsored a resolution in 1970 calling for convening a conference to consider the law of the sea, according to the UN (2019). This resolution led to the establishment of the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, which ultimately resulted in the adoption of UNCLOS in 1982.

UNCLOS entered into force on November 16, 1994, after it was ratified by 60 countries, including several African countries. African countries have been active participants in the implementation of UNCLOS, including through the establishment of exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and the protection of marine biodiversity.

Several other governance frameworks complement and contribute to achieving the goals of Agenda 2063. These include the AU's Integrated Maritime Strategy for 2050, which facilitates greater cooperation among AU Member States in ocean governance for the potential of the blue economy to be realised; the 2014 Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa (PFRS); the Lomé Charter (2016 African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa); and the Ocean Decade Africa Roadmap which provides a coordinated framework for ocean science planning and uptake, and a foundation to monitor the achievement of the UN Ocean Decade priorities and outcomes in the region.

List of the priorities as part of the ‘Ocean Decade Africa Roadmap’:

1. Sustainable Ocean Management in Africa
2. Ocean and Human Health in Africa
3. Unlocking the Blue Carbon Potential of Africa
4. Fisheries and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fisheries in Africa
5. Strengthening Multi-hazard Early Warning Systems and Community Resilience
6. Ocean Observations and Forecasting Systems for Africa
7. Digital Twin for Africa – Establishing an African Ocean Knowledge Hub
8. Strengthening capacities and skills of African Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs)
9. Regional Ocean Literacy Programme for Africa

IOC-UNESCO, 2022

The combination of these strategies and initiatives paves the way for strengthening multilateral partnerships centred on ocean governance, including between Africa and Europe.

While the sustainable use of marine resources is generally accepted as the guiding principle for the BE, the development of BE strategies is often context-specific due to its diverse components. The AU's BE strategy has identified five thematic focus areas:

1. Fisheries, aquaculture, conservation, and sustainable aquatic ecosystems
2. Shipping/transportation, trade, ports, maritime security, safety and enforcement
3. Coastal and maritime tourism, climate change, resilience, environment, infrastructure
4. Sustainable energy and mineral resources and innovative industries
5. Policies, institutions and governance, employment, job creation and poverty eradication, and innovative financing

The development of these five priority areas of the African BE strategy could serve as points of collaboration with Europe using a rules-based framework anchored in the provisions of UNCLOS to which both African and European actors are signatories in a mutually beneficial manner.

The ABES seeks to build on policy objectives of Agenda 2063, 2050 AIMS, UN Agenda 2030, the PFRS, and the Lomé Charter.

Table 2: List of Blue Economy Strategies and Frameworks of the AU-Member States and Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

Countries	Documents
Madagascar	National Blue Economy Strategy 25 June 2022 building on a National Blue Economy strategy from the Madagascar National Development Plan 2015-2019
Angola	Angola National Development Plan 2018-2022
Cameroon	National Blue Economy Strategy 2019
Cape Verde	National Blue Economy Roadmap (2018-2022)
Burkina Faso	National Blue Economy Strategy April 2022
Somalia	National Blue Economy Strategy March 2022
Congo Republic	National Blue Economy Strategy 28 June 2022
Seychelles	<u>National Blue Economy Strategy: Republic of Seychelles. (2018). Seychelles Blue Economy: Strategic Policy Framework and Roadmap Charting the Future (2018- 2030)</u>
Namibia	Namibia Blue Economy Policy Framework (2022-2031)
Mozambique	Mozambique Policy and Strategy of the Sea (POLMAR) was developed in 2017 to serve many initiatives related to the Blue Economy
Mauritius	<u>3-Year Strategic Plan 2017/18-2019/20</u> lists Ocean-based activities as having the potential to boost growth and create wealth. The Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping has a Five-year Fishery Development Plan and a National Action Plan to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing and an aquaculture masterplan
South Africa	<u>Ocean Economy operation Phakisa</u> -South Africa's Blue Economy Strategy launched in 2014
Gabon	National Strategy for the Blue Economy 2014
Kenya	Kenya Blue Economy Strategic Plan 2019: https://www.kilimo.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Kenya-Blue-Economy-Strategic-Plan.pdf

Ghana	Ghana National Integrated Maritime Strategy 2019: https://www.mtit.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Ghana-National-Integrated-Maritime-Strategy.pdf
Tanzania	Tanzania Blue Economy Strategic Plan: : https://www.tzdp.org.tz/fileadmin/documents/dpg_internal/dpg_working_groups_clusters/cluster_2/energy_environment/WG2_Environment/Blue_Economy_Strategic_Plan.pdf
Comoros	Strategic Framework for a <u>Blue Economy National Policy</u> with a focus on (1) Strengthening national safety and security, (2) Enhancing key sectors of the Blue Economy with training and creating jobs for the youth, and (3) Protecting the coast. Aquatic and marine ecosystems with managing the waste; (4) enhancing adaptation of institutional frameworks; and (5) Reorienting pillars of regional integration NB: This is a country cooperation framework with the Work Bank
Egypt	Egypt Blue Economy Strategy : https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/3/100758/Egypt-launches-Blue-Economy-strategy-to-boost-maritime-sector
Regional economic communities (RECs)	Documents
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)	Blue Economy Strategy adopted in 2019 - https://www.ecowas.int/blue-economy-strategy/
Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)	Blue Economy Strategy adopted in 2017 - https://www.amu-maghreb.org/en/blue-economy/
Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)	Blue Economy Strategy adopted in 2016 - https://www.censad.int/en/blue-economy
Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)	Blue Economy Strategy adopted in 2014 - https://www.commissionoceanindien.org/en/blue-econom
East African Community (EAC)	<u>EAC Regional Blue Economy Strategy May 2022</u>
Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa	<u>Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Blue Economy Strategy May 2022 (COMESA)</u>

Regional Blue Economy Strategy (COMESA)	
Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)	<u>Regional Blue Economy Strategy (2021-2025) Five-Year Plan (IGAD)</u>
Regional Blue Economy Strategy (SADC)	<u>Regional Blue Economy Strategy (SADC) 2018</u> A SADC BE Strategy validation meeting is set for 14 March 2022 in Johannesburg, South Africa
Economic Community for Central African States (ECCAS)	<u>Economic Community for Central African States Regional Blue Economy Strategy 28 June 2022</u>

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list as other countries have developed blue economy strategies at the time of writing the report.

1.4 Enhancing Joint Efforts and Cooperation within Africa.

The Inter-African bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), a specialised technical office of the African Union Commission (AUC), with a mandate which covers fisheries, has facilitated, in partnership with the Norwegian government, the development of four national blue economy strategies (Madagascar, Burkina Faso, Congo Republic, and Somalia), as well as that of three regional economic community blue economy strategies (EACCAS, EAC and COMESA). Despite being outside the European Union, such partnerships could serve as a model for future EU engagements on the African continent.

The AU-IBAR plans to assist a number of African states in developing several economy strategies. Countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Togo, Egypt, Nigeria and Tanzania are drafting national blue economy strategies and have integrated these into national and regional budget plans.

Africa's Ocean and BE governance process demonstrates that the BE lies at the intersection of several industries and sectors, demonstrating the complexity of articulating a common governance trajectory. Further, in Africa, reliance on ocean resources is more than a source of income, as several communities have intrinsic cultural and religious linkages with marine resources. These conflicting issues necessitate strategic planning that can facilitate integrating the blue economy into sustainable development and shifting away from the current sectoral approach that has shaped African blue economy governance.

1.5 Ocean Governance and Blue Economy: Policy Framework and Priorities for Europe

Europe's maritime space comprises the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the Mediterranean Sea to the south, the Baltic Sea and the North Sea to the north, and the Black Sea to the east, as well as multiple outermost regions in all oceans of the world.

Europe's blue economy is a significant sector as it employs 4.45 million people and generates around €667.2 billion in turnover and €183.9 billion in gross value added, according to the [EU Blue Economy Observatory](#). The strength of this sector, according to the [European Community Shipowners' Associations](#), is rooted in Europe's extensive maritime history and traditions that have enabled the EU to control around 40% of global shipping tonnage. Its critical sectors include marine living resources (fisheries), marine non-living resources, marine renewable energy, shipbuilding and repair, port activities, maritime transport, and coastal tourism.

The EU's detailed agenda for the blue economy is described in a Communication adopted in 2021 and entitled a "[new approach for a sustainable blue economy](#)". It represents a major shift from the blue growth approach to the development of a sustainable blue economy.

Three key thematic priorities have been identified to underpin this transition from blue growth to a sustainable blue economy. These include:

- **Transforming the blue economy value chains** by working towards achieving the objectives of climate neutrality and zero pollution, advancing the circular economy and preventing waste; preserving biodiversity and investing in nature; supporting coastal resilience; and as responsible food systems.
- **Ocean Knowledge**, by investing in research and innovation and strengthening existing capacities, facilitating investments at the scale and speed needed, creating blue skills and jobs.
- **Creating the conditions for sustainable governance** by improving maritime spatial planning and access to data; encouraging citizen engagement and improving ocean literacy; working at the sea-basin level, enhancing regional cooperation and providing support for coastal regions and strengthening maritime security.

Even though the approach has a European focus, it has also the ambition to promote the development of a sustainable blue economy abroad. Indeed many blue economy value chains are global and exposed to global competition. The EU also aims at promoting its expertise, environmental action and rule of law at international level.

Furthermore, the European Commission has launched a range of initiatives to support research and innovation activities for the Blue Economy such as:

- In Horizon Europe, with the [Mission Ocean](#) that aims to Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030.
- The '[BlueInvest](#)' investment platform that aims to foster investment, innovation and sustainable growth in the Blue Economy, namely for SMEs.
- The smart specialisation [Blue Growth](#) strategy to support the sustainable growth of the marine and maritime sectors.
- The [European Partnership for a climate-neutral, sustainable and Productive Blue Economy](#).
- Dedicated initiatives include the blue economy, blue biotechnology, the EU algae initiative, and [marine renewable energy](#).

Regarding fisheries, the European Union has recognised, promoted the importance of their effective management and sustainable use, and provided leadership at international level..

The updated EU International Ocean Governance Agenda notes that "marine species are disappearing at twice the rate of those on land due to warming". It indicates that "34.2% of the world's marine fisheries are overfished". To ensure sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, the European Union has identified the following strategies:

- Pursue a zero-tolerance approach against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.
- Build on the global WTO agreement on harmful fisheries subsidies concluded in June 2022 and push for its reinforcement with the elements not yet agreed upon.
- Revise EU marketing standards for fisheries and aquaculture products.

The European Commission has also acknowledged the necessity to document financial flows in the maritime sector. To this end, in 2020, it commissioned a study entitled "Unsustainable Finance in the Blue Economy: Where Does the money come from?" that highlights the need for sustainable financing in fisheries and identifies sources of financing for the blue economy. The study emphasises the importance of collaboration between stakeholders and provides recommendations for promoting transparency and sustainability in fisheries trade, which, if implemented, could strengthen equitable and transparent fisheries trade between the EU and Africa, as well as other ocean governance partnerships.

Overall, at international level, the EU's interest lies in increasing competitiveness and sustainable practices and in ensuring that EU standards are understood and implemented efficiently without hindering the sector's development with unnecessary complexities. The EU also seeks to promote the sector's modernisation, including equipment and skills for higher efficiency and improved environmental footprints.

In general, the EU aims to strengthen mutually beneficial relations with its neighbours and more distant partners. It identified ten strategic areas.

Table 4: EU Global leadership priorities.

10 strategic areas to strengthen the EU's global leadership
1. Ensuring sustainable and resilient health and food systems
2. Securing decarbonized and affordable energy
3. Strengthening capacity in data management, artificial intelligence and cutting edge technologies
4. Securing and diversifying supply of critical raw materials
5. Ensuring first-mover global position in standard-setting
6. Building resilient and future-proof economic and financial systems
7. Developing and retaining skills and talent matching EU ambitions
8. Strengthening security and defence capacities and access to space
9. Working with global partners to promote peace, security and prosperity for all
10. Strengthening resilience of institutions

Source: EU Strategic Foresight Report 2021: The EU's capacity and freedom to act.

1.6 Designing an Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership

Africa and Europe are linked by geography. They share three sea basins, creating a natural connection between the two continents: seven EU countries border the Mediterranean Sea and five border the Atlantic Ocean. Several EU territories are located in the Western Indian Ocean, such as Mayotte and Reunion islands. Several African countries are part of the [EU Mediterranean Sea Basin strategy](#) that promotes joint management of maritime activities and scientific cooperation, demonstrating existing collaboration between Africa and Europe both on projects and strategies.

Africa and Europe are also confronted by shared global issues, ranging from the climate crisis, rising sea levels, overexploitation of natural resources or Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing. The two continents share a commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 14, which concerns the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources in a manner that is consistent with international law and necessitates governance cooperation.

The Joint Vision of the 2022 AU-EU Summit calls for a prosperous and sustainable Africa and Europe. The [Africa-Europe Investment Package](#) (a share of the Global Gateway) will aim at boosting large-scale sustainable investments, supported by Team Europe Initiatives, with due consideration to the priorities and needs of the African countries. This includes green transition supporting the implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) of African Countries under the Paris Agreement. It also includes supporting the implementation of National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plans (NBSAPs) under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the recently adopted Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Back in 2017, Africa and Europe have agreed to foster their cooperation on ocean governance and blue economy (see introduction and contextual background). The two continents have

also emphasised the need to empower women and youth in fisheries and aquaculture to take full advantage of blue growth. The two regional blocs support investing in youth for accelerated inclusive growth and sustainable development. The 6th AU-EU Summit identified a broader common interest (indirectly related to ocean governance) in providing young people with the skills and opportunities they need through the mobilisation of innovative and targeted investments, empowering young people, both girls and boys, on equal terms to participate in political, economic and social life.

Africa and Europe's geographical positioning and mutual interests and challenges in ocean governance signal the need for joint responsibility over this space, as highlighted by the following key facts:

- 60% of the world's ocean lies in areas beyond national jurisdiction, necessitating multilateral cooperation.
- Most AU and EU member states are coastal countries (39 of the AU's 55 and 22 of 27 EU member states).
- The two continents possess some of the largest exclusive economic zones (EEZ); ([25 million square kilometres](#) for the EU and [13 million square kilometres](#) for the AU).
- Only 10.8 % of European seas and coasts are designated Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and less than 1% are fully protected, according to the [European Environment Agency](#).
- Excluding St Helena's MPAs, Africa's MPAs cover around 16.67% of the continent's combined EEZ, according to a 2020 report by [Protected Planet](#).
- [Africa and Europe are in the vicinity of a quarter of the world's Large Marine Ecosystems \(LMEs\)](#).
- 90% of Africa's imports and exports are transported by sea, while the EU is Africa's largest partner for exports (36%) and imports (33%). Coastal livelihoods are dependent on the equitable and sustainable management of marine resources. About half of Africa's and Europe's population lives within 100km of the seaside – most of which are concentrated in urban areas along the coast.

For decades now, the EU's activities in Africa have supported the sustainable exploitation, management and conservation of marine biological resources and the marine environment, the development of scientific knowledge and advice, improving policy coherence, supporting action necessary to eradicate illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and reinforcing the regional bodies in charge of the management of fish stocks.

They have been broadly structured around two pillars:

A) Fisheries management:

- The EU has bilateral [sustainable fisheries partnership agreements \(SFPAs\)](#) with 12 African countries providing funds for sectoral support
- It is also a member of [Regional Fisheries Management Organisations \(RFMOs\)](#) and Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs) covering African waters like ICCAT, GFMC, IOTC, CECA and the SWIOFC. The RFMOs meetings provide an opportunity for the EU and African countries to work together to promote the sustainability of certain fish stocks.

- Projects like PESCAO have also fostered the cooperation between some African countries/regions and the EU.
- Regarding aquaculture, DG MARE has worked with FAO to define global guidelines that will help African countries develop this economic activity in a sustainable way.
- Overall, Africa is the main recipient of EU funds for fisheries and aquaculture, receiving nearly EUR 200 million (out of a total envelop of EUR 450 million).

B) The International Ocean Governance Agenda

- Since the entry into force of the European IUU Regulation in 2010, the European Commission has been active in Africa, first in West Africa and more recently in East Africa. Work has focused on coastal States that have been seen to have shortcomings in the management of their fisheries resources and the monitoring and control of fishing activities in their waters as well as with the flag States of the many vessels operating in these regions.
- Maritime security is a significant issue on both sides of Africa, previously Somalia and the north western waters of the Indian Ocean were a hot spot for piracy. Over recent years, piracy has become increasingly frequent in the Gulf of Guinea and the Horn of Africa.
- Sea-basin cooperation within the EU Mediterranean Sea Basin Strategy and, to a certain extent, with some outermost regions that are located in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

Apart from those pillars, blue economy has recently been referenced or touched upon in the use of sectoral support in a few SFPAs, notably on aquaculture developments. The European Commission works also closely with North African countries through the 5+5 process that led to the adoption of the WestMed Initiative¹.

With IOC UNESCO, the European Commission has developed internationally accepted Guidelines on transboundary Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP). [MSP projects in some African countries are being supported.](#)

More information about the EU actions in Africa is included in the Annex to this report.

Against this background, and noting common challenges and interests in several areas related to ocean governance, and with the objective to develop a more structured dialogue with Africa, the European Commission Directorate-General in charge of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) commissioned a feasibility study on an 'EU-Africa Task Force for policy cooperation and Dialogue on international ocean governance' in [2020](#).

This work benefitted from comments and suggestions from stakeholders based in Europe and Africa, including the African Union. Observing the critical need for Africa and Europe to work jointly on identifying common areas of focus and interest, building on each other's continental aspirations and strategies as well as context-specific situations due to its diverse components,

¹ Initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean, COM(2017) 183 final of 19.4.2017.

the [feasibility study](#) identified the following possible thematic focus areas for EU-Africa cooperation:

- i. Low-carbon, climate resilient and circular blue economy
- ii. Aquaculture
- iii. Ocean research, innovation and data & Digitalisation and technology transfer
- iv. Maritime spatial planning and ecosystem-based ecosystem management
- v. Fair competition between the EU and third countries' seafood producers
- vi. Inclusivity and skills
- vii. Ocean-related investment: public-private partnership and entrepreneurship

The key recommendation of the study is that an Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance (referenced as an EU-Africa Task Force in the study) would be timely and highly relevant for the two continents and expand the sharing of knowledge and capacity building. It would increase the level of cooperation and understanding between the two continents and expand the sharing of knowledge and capacity building.

Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements:

Maritime threats affect the development of sustainable blue economies and impact coastal communities' well-being. The ocean is also pivotal to intercontinental connectivity between Europe and Africa for trade and economic-related activities. Consequently, it must be managed sustainably for the benefit of all. In this context, the EU and African countries have elaborated a number of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs).

SFPAs aim to address issues related to sustainable fisheries management, including overfishing, illegal fishing, environmental impact, and economic development. The agreements promote sustainable fishing practices, reduce bycatch and discards, and ensure compliance with regulations. The goal is to ensure that fishing activities are environmentally and economically sustainable and contribute to the long-term conservation of fish stocks and marine ecosystems. Consequently, the European Union has signed several SFPAs with African countries, including [Senegal](#), [Mauritania](#), and [Cape Verde](#) among many others. These agreements aim to promote sustainable fishing practices and ensure that EU vessels comply with international rules and regulations related to fishing, control, and transparency. The agreements also include clauses related to human rights and working conditions for fishermen.

While SFPAs allow EU vessels to fish for surplus stocks in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of third countries, they also ensure equal rules, scientific management and social empowerment, with a focus on environmental sustainability, local growth, human rights and shared accountability.

SFPAs aim to avert risks related to IUU fishing, which remains an important issue globally. IUU fishing has far-reaching adverse consequences on three levels. The depletion of local marine resources negatively affects food security and community livelihoods in coastal areas. It jeopardises fish stock management projects critical to blue economy initiatives. Furthermore, as a result of IUU fishing, public trust in law enforcement and the government is eroded, which may lead to violence and make organised crime more profitable. This leads to a vicious cycle of violence and instability, undermining the long-term potential of maritime investments.

It is estimated that countries such as Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea and Sierra Leone lose up to US\$2.3 billion annually as a result of IUU fishing. However, IUU fishing is not exclusive to West Africa and also affects East Africa and the Horn of Africa. Cooperation at a broader governance level can effectively address this challenge.

SFPAs exist within the framework of the external dimension of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and enable EU vessels to fish surplus stocks in the partner country's EEZ within an agreed framework of bilateral agreements with several African countries.

However, within the context of increasing concerns about the overexploitation of fish stocks and the ever-evolving nature of the fisheries environment, commitment to sustainability is crucial to ensure that SFPAs can effectively benefit the EU and African states in a complex and evolving fisheries supply chain environment, faced with several significant challenges that must be addressed.

These include the pressing need for enhanced information transparency, more accurate

1.7 Comparative Analysis of Priorities and Potential Common Agenda

As two continents surrounded by some of the world's most important marine biodiversity, strategic maritime trade routes, abundant aquatic resources and blue carbon assets, Africa and Europe must guide ocean governance and blue economy development through impactful policies which meet global and continental targets.

Building on pre-identified priorities for Africa and Europe, issues of common interest can be explored to enhance Africa-Europe cooperation. Table 5 below is an illustration of these:

Table 5: Comparative Analysis of Priorities

Pre-identified EU-Africa priorities for joint work	AU priorities as enshrined in Blue Economy Strategy and Agenda 2063	EU priorities as enshrined in Blue Economy Report 2022 and EU's Agenda for international ocean governance	Shared interest to work jointly on the following issues
Low-carbon, climate resilient and circular blue economy	Environmental sustainability, climate change and coastal infrastructure	Implementing the Paris Agreement and ocean mitigation, conserving 10% of marine and coastal areas, circular blue economy, ecosystem accounting and nature-based solutions, wastewater treatment	Shared interest in working towards a just and sustainable blue economy, with a particular focus on safeguarding the natural environment, conserving biodiversity and enhancing climate resilience through Nature-based Solutions
Aquaculture	Fisheries, aquaculture and ecosystems conservation	Fighting illegal fishing and promoting sustainable management of ocean food resources globally, banning harmful fisheries subsidies, improving and strengthening regional fisheries management	Shared interest in working towards the development of sustainable aquaculture and fisheries with clear nature and people positive benefits.
Ocean research, innovation and data & Digitalisation and technology transfer	Knowledge-based policies, integrating planning, greater cooperation on data	Improving coordination and cooperation between international organisations and launching Ocean Partnerships for ocean management, capacity building, investment in 'blue' science and innovation, international	Shared interest on innovation and in modernising traditional ocean sectors with the best available research and data and local knowledge

		ocean research, innovation and science partnerships, ocean observation, data and marine accounting	
Maritime spatial planning and ecosystem-based management	Improved governance Promotion of continental peace and security	Filling the gaps in the international ocean governance framework, promoting the effective management of MPAs, ensuring the safety and security of seas and oceans	Shared interest in working towards better and enhanced ocean governance and improved management effectiveness, including the 30x30 Agenda, underpinned by development and security principles
Fair competition between the EU and third countries' seafood producers	Governance, Institutions, and social actions	Improving coordination and cooperation between international organisations and launching Ocean Partnerships for ocean management	Shared interest in working towards a just and equitable future, underpinned by improved ocean governance.
Inclusivity and skills	Women and youth agency and leadership	Developing new forms of governance and collaboration to engage with citizens, especially youth (EU4Ocean Coalition).	Shared interest in working towards social actions, underpinned by inclusivity with a particular focus on youth and women.
Ocean-related investment: public-private partnership and entrepreneurship	Shipping, transportation and trade Sustainable energy, extractive minerals, gas, innovative industries	Marine renewable energy, emerging ocean energy sources, port activities and infrastructure, shipbuilding and repair, maritime transport.	Shared interest in working towards an ocean-related conducive environment and enabling conditions for business and public-private partnerships.

Several areas within Africa's combined maritime zone present opportunities for enhancing Africa-Europe cooperation. The AU's Blue Economy Strategy has outlined several priorities towards realising its collective goals. To this end, the European Union may have a key role in contributing to the projects and initiatives already outlined by its African counterparts. However, for this to happen, it will be imperative for the AU and the EU to agree on a common definition and scope of the blue economy to avoid confusion and inconsistencies in implementation.

The table below provides a non-exhaustive list of linkages between the blue economy development goals, the SDGs and Agenda 2063 aspirations that mention the blue economy. These also align with the objectives of the renewed AU-EU partnership:

Table 6: Blue Economy and SDGs

Potential POSITIVES of the Development of a Sustainable Blue Economy	UN SDGs	AU Agenda 2063: Aspirations	Potential NEGATIVES of the Development of an Unsustainable Blue Economy
Transition to low-carbon economies; Resilience to uncertain climate future	Goal 13 Climate change	Goal 7 Environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient economies and communities	Increased carbon intensity Coastal degradation leading to climate vulnerability
Enhanced health of aquatic and marine ecosystems; Increased stock abundance supporting sustainable fisheries	Goal 14 Life below water	Goal 6 Blue/ocean economy for accelerated growth	Overexploitation of aquatic and marine resources; Environmental degradation
Increased water security; Enhanced sustainable transboundary water sharing	Goal 15 Life on land	Goal 7 Environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient economies and communities	Nutrient pollution and biodiversity loss
Improved governance; Promotion of continental peace and security	Goal 16 Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies	Goal 12 Capable institutions and transformative leadership in place	Resource conflict; Failure to implement and enforce laws and regulations ; Dutch disease and the resource curse

Adapted from UNECA, 2016 and AU Agenda 2063.

While the table above provides a non-exhaustive list of the blue economy's links to SDGs and Agenda:2063 aspirations, [a World Ocean Initiative report](#) shows that, the blue economy shares strong links to all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other international agreements such as the Paris (2015) and the Kunming-Montreal (2022) agreements.

- **Goal 1: No Poverty** | The ocean provides millions of people's livelihood through blue economy sectors like fishing and tourism.
- **Goal 2: Zero Hunger** | The ocean is a source of food for millions of people, and sustainable fishing practices can help ensure food security and improve people's diet as blue foods from the ocean are a primary source of protein.
- **Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being** | The ocean provides opportunities for recreation and relaxation, which can improve mental and physical health. It also offers many organisms for scientists to discover and develop new medicines.
- **Goal 4: Quality Education** | The ocean is a valuable educational resource, providing opportunities for marine science research and environmental education.
- **Goal 5: Gender Equality** | Women are often involved in small-scale artisanal fisheries and aquaculture, and their empowerment can lead to more sustainable and equitable use of ocean resources.
- **Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation** | The quality of marine resources plays a critical role in the water cycle (and vice-versa) and the ocean can be a source of freshwater through desalination.
- **Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy** | The ocean provides renewable energy through offshore wind, wave, and tidal power.
- **Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth** | The ocean economy significantly contributes to global GDP, and sustainable ocean industries can create jobs and economic growth.
- **Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure** | The ocean provides opportunities for innovation in areas such as marine biotechnology and sustainable aquaculture. Maritime infrastructures like ports have a vital role in many economies around the world.
- **Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities** | The ocean can help reduce inequalities by providing opportunities for small-scale fisheries and coastal communities to participate in the blue economy. |
- **Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities** | The ocean plays a critical role in coastal ecosystems and can contribute to support economic development and thus sustainable and climate-resilient urban planning.
- **Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production** | Sustainable fishing practices and responsible aquaculture can help ensure the long-term health of ocean ecosystems and resources.
- **Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals** | Partnerships between governments, civil society, and the private sector are critical for sustainable ocean management and conservation.

SECTION 2: ASSESSMENT

Building on the state of play showcased in chapter one, the second chapter provides an assessment of key challenges and opportunities for strengthening cross-continental

cooperation, exploring a number of issues that can underpin the development of an Africa-Europe Ocean partnership.

2.1. Sustainably and Equitably Managing the Ocean

While the prospects for enhanced Africa-Europe cooperation on blue economy and ocean governance are promising, there are obstacles to fostering a closer partnership between the two continents. These challenges are economic and political and linked to climate, biodiversity and security.

The ocean is a key driver of global human and economic development and offers remarkable prospects for many nations in Africa and Europe. Although the maritime environment provides significant economic and financial opportunities, unchecked exploitation can cause major damage if it occurs in a lawless and ecologically fragile place. Therefore, proper ocean governance and environmental protection must always be considered while implementing and developing blue economy strategies and establishing or reinforcing partnerships.

The blue economy approach seeks a balance between the economic potential of ocean resources and the need to ensure ocean health, sustainability, and social equity. In this context, the United Nations defined the blue economy as a system of industries and policies determining whether ocean resource exploitation is sustainable. Understanding and better managing the numerous facets of marine sustainability, from sustainable fisheries and ecosystem health to pollution prevention, is a significant problem for the blue economy.

The development of a sustainable blue economy should consider socio-economic advantages and ecological preservation. However, on the former, both in Africa and Europe, there is a major asymmetry in the financial weight of global and local actors in the blue economy. This can result in local businesses and traditional livelihoods being outcompeted by global businesses and government efforts with limited social inclusion and issues of environmental sustainability.

The governance of the blue economy forces us to acknowledge that a cross-sectoral approach, coupled with international cooperation in various partnerships and effective enforcement of agreements, will be necessary to sustainably manage ocean resources whilst ensuring its inclusivity and social dimension.

Yet, the ocean is vulnerable to the “tragedy of the commons”, which refers to a situation where people with access to shared resources act in their individual interests and eventually deplete the collective resources and harming the ecosystem, unsustainable practices make it less likely to achieve the goals of sustainable development and livelihoods. Coordinated action and collective efforts are needed from the international community to agree on official levels and ensure effective enforcement.

2.2 Improving Ocean Governance

A broad approach to tackling ocean governance issues is a prerequisite for Africa and Europe to pursue multilateral obligations that the United Nations championed actively. These obligations include fulfilling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Goals.

Due to the transboundary and cross-sectional nature of the ocean, [Bueger \(2015\)](#) identifies four action areas as key for ocean governance. Firstly, coordination across several sovereignties, jurisdictions and actors. This coordination must be translated at national, regional and global levels to align strategies, laws and governance.

Secondly, an understanding of the state of the ocean is necessary for regular monitoring. Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) and information sharing are required for practical international cooperation considering sea activities, the ocean's health, threat detection and sharing of best practices. Further, this information sharing should include indigenous knowledge systems on ocean conservation and governance developed across generations. This bottom-up inclusive approach is necessary to build trust, confidence and a sense of ownership in the partnership that will encourage a culture of sharing.

Finally, Bueger underlines that the capacity of most states for ocean governance is weak and needs strengthening. Capacity building should not be interpreted as transferring knowledge and technology from Europe to Africa but rather as a dialogue process that facilitates collective learning and problem-solving. As two continents with vast maritime space and ocean traditions, both sides could greatly benefit from making the best of the EU's long-lasting technical expertise and lessons learned in ocean governance and blue economy whilst supporting the African continent to unlock the potential of its blue natural and economic capital.

The current context, with Malta occupying a temporary seat at the UN Security Council and Comoros' Chairmanship of the African Union for 2023, implies a unique opportunity for Small Island States to use their weight on the global stage. It is the first time that island states have taken leading positions in several multilateral institutions simultaneously at UN Security Council and AU levels. This rare occurrence presents a unique opportunity to champion improved ocean governance and the concerns of SIDS globally.

2.3 Driving Africa-Europe agency in a changing geopolitical context

Collective African agency expresses itself in various forms, most notably through *Agenda 2063: The Africa we Want* – Africa's developmental blueprint and aspirational vision for its engagement with partners to deliver sustainable development and human security for its people.

The current multipolar global order is full of opportunities for cooperation where Africa can exercise agency and use its soft power to advance foreign policy agendas through its many partnerships with traditional partners, such as the EU, and emerging powers, including China, India and the Gulf States on various security, economic and trade matters. In support of this, the European Council and its Member States unanimously agreed to [support a seat for the African Union at the G20](#) in June 2023, as it was discussed at the time of the 6th AU-EU Summit in 2022.

This global multipolarity has transformed Africa's engagement in global affairs with diverse partners to forge partnerships based on mutual interests. This diversity of partnerships means that Europe, while remaining essential to the continent, no longer holds a monopoly as Africa's most significant partner. This is seen in the relative decline of the EU-27's share in Africa's external trade from 38.4 % in 2000 to 27.4% in 2021.

The driving force behind the Africa-Europe agency in a changing geopolitical context is the need for increased cooperation and collaboration between the two continents. As the world becomes more interconnected and global challenges such as climate change, migration, and security threats become more pressing, it is essential for Africa and Europe to work together to find solutions.

Africa and Europe need to work on new opportunities for cooperation, such as the growing importance of Africa as a strategic partner for Europe in areas such as trade, investment, and security. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a prime example of this, as it presents a unique opportunity for increased trade and economic integration between Africa and Europe.

However, challenges must be addressed, such as the legacy of colonialism, unequal power dynamics, and the need for greater representation and participation of African countries in global decision-making processes.

To drive the Africa-Europe agency forward in this changing context, it is important to prioritise dialogue, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to addressing common challenges.

Cooperation on ocean governance presents a golden opportunity to advance the Africa-Europe agency, as both continents have extensive coastlines and rely heavily on the ocean for economic, social, and environmental reasons. However, the ocean faces numerous challenges, including overfishing, pollution, and climate change, which require a coordinated and collaborative approach.

The Africa-Europe agency can play a key role in promoting sustainable ocean governance by facilitating dialogue and cooperation between African and European institutions and countries. This can include sharing best practices, developing joint initiatives, and promoting the implementation of international agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Sustainable Development Goals, and ratifying and implementing the High Seas Treaty, which, at a time when the world seems divided on so many issues, is “a rare triumph for multilateralism”.

Overall, the Africa-Europe agency can play a crucial role in promoting sustainable ocean governance by fostering dialogue, cooperation, and joint action between African and European countries. This can help address the ocean's challenges and promote a more sustainable and prosperous future for both.

The 6th African-Union – European-Union Summit held in February 2022 provided a valuable opportunity to recast the cross-continental relationship, repurpose it, and get away from a relationship focused primarily on development aid. It was underpinned by a Joint Vision for 2030, which committed the two continents to a renewed Partnership to build a common future as closest partners and neighbours.

In this context, the two continents agreed that the Joint Vision for 2030 should consolidate a renewed Partnership for solidarity, security, peace and sustainable economic development and prosperity for citizens and for future generations, bringing together our people, regions and organisations.

2.4 Increasing Political and Administrative Governance Leadership

AU-IBAR points to the limited capacity of AU member states to effectively implement blue economy strategies and policies related to marine environmental protection. The lack of effective policy added to regulatory fragmentation also impact the capacity to attract the investment needed for innovation, knowledge and technological transfers. The limitations regarding resources, including soft power, vulnerable legal framework, capacity and capabilities, also extend to maritime security and safety.

African states must increase their political resolve to promote the institutional capacity needed for economic growth and environmental sustainability while reinforcing social inclusion to achieve a successful blue economy. Unstable and fragile political regimes exacerbate capacity deficits to ensure effective maritime security and good governance. This challenges meaningful cooperation between the Europe and Africa on ocean governance.

The blue economy holds great promise for promoting inclusive economic growth, providing opportunities to populations, and attaining key goals for sustainable development. As such, it is recommended that Africa and Europe work in a mutually supportive fashion to ensure their respective administrations and policy frameworks are aligned to respond to their political aspirations in relation to ocean governance and the blue economy.

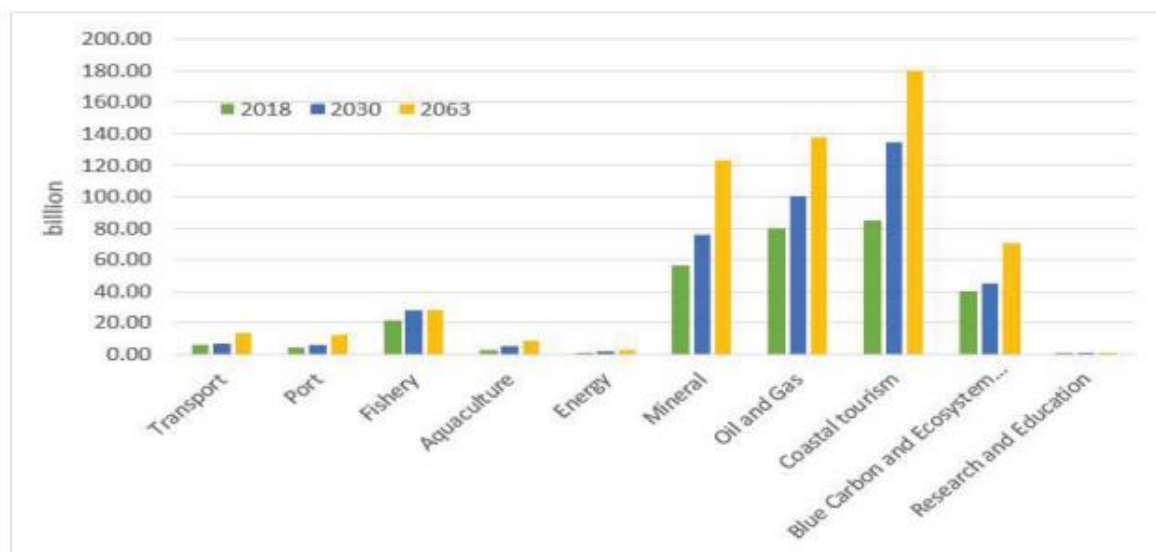
2.5 Enhancing the Investment Climate and Business Opportunities

Africa and Europe seek to boost private investment and stimulate entrepreneurship in blue economy sectors. For both continents, progress on ocean governance improves investments and trade prospects while enhancing the efficiency of value chains. The blue economy represents a key avenue to economic diversification and sustainable growth. It can also contribute to improving the business environment and investment climate.

At present, in addition to traditional financing tools like grants, the EU is looking to support Africa by crowding-in private investments via blended financial instruments and guarantees to leverage resources in capital markets with international, European and national financial institutions. Facilitating improvements in supply and value chains (including through the modernisation of ports and shipping, the development of transport corridors and reduced freight rates for cargo transport) and promoting economic integration can assist in increasing trade, boosting economic growth and cooperation among countries.

However, the variable level of incoming investments in Africa reflects both global uncertainty and the diverse business environment in each country – for example, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Egypt, and Morocco collectively attracted 58% of total Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in 2016, while more fragile countries face systemic challenges in attracting private investment. Therefore, cooperation in ocean governance must be tailored to the national political and business environment to foster fruitful outcomes.

Creating a favourable investment climate, leveraging domestic and international funds, and encouraging strengthened Africa-Europe blue economy cooperation will demand deeper engagement from public and private actors from both continents.



The value created by Blue Economy sectors in Africa (value added) and components (value of services) - ABES, 2020

The Africa-Europe partnership on ocean governance should strive towards implementing blue economy policies that are equitable and sustainable. This will become even more critical as more ocean space is exploited for food, energy, transport, addressing climate change, and protecting biodiversity.

It is also paramount to dramatically increase the level of support for Entrepreneurship Support Organisations (ESOs) as they have and will have a central role to play in accelerating the development of a sustainable blue economy. Therefore, the Africa-Europe Partnership should deliberately integrate this aspect to strengthen cooperation on ocean governance and the blue economy, as well as focus on coastal communities' technical assistance and grant disbursement, and blue entrepreneurship startup support.

2.6 Understanding the Multiplicity of Actors

Stakeholder representation is another challenge to meaningful cooperation between Europe and Africa. Both continents share a common concern, which is that most coastal and lake communities in Africa are poor, lack education and capacity, have few tenure rights over resources, and are often excluded from decision-making.

It is important to balance the interests of big corporations, which have the means to exercise great economic and political pressure on local communities that are impacted the most and rarely get their voices heard. Furthermore, strategic governance plans, such as the Africa Integrated Maritime (AIM) strategy, have not always included a contingency plan that could accelerate buy-in by all African states. Issues related to low political buy-in within institutions competent to coordinate and secure the implementation of maritime strategies and an inadequate mechanism for cooperation are challenges identified in the past.

Insufficient cooperation among countries, regional and subregional institutions, including intra-African trade, can jeopardise effective and meaningful cooperation with the EU. For the blue

economy, the lack of coordination between African Union Member States extends across governance, monitoring, and enforcement areas, which are key to maritime security and safety.

Okafor-Yarwood et al., (2020) propose a collaborative approach where the management of the blue economy involves multi-level actors and stakeholders in the development process. Their analysis argues this should be implemented from the start, from goal setting to evaluation of the outcome, bridging the gaps between top-down and bottom-up approaches. Such a collaborative management approach should underpin the Africa-Europe partnership on ocean governance.

Nevertheless, implementing this strategy can be expensive and time-consuming. Low confidence in the long-term engagement of multi-level stakeholders, and the divergent interests at stake make it difficult to agree on priorities, which can challenge collaborative blue economy management. Despite such challenges, collaborative management should increase openness in resource sustainability techniques, give local people a sense of belonging and ownership, and reduce risks of miscommunication.

2.7 Collective Action to Preserve Ocean Biodiversity and Address Climate Change

Globally, the diversity of marine life is dwindling at an alarming rate. Driven by multiple interacting anthropogenic stressors, marine ecosystem functions are degrading, species distributions are shifting, wildlife populations are rapidly disappearing, and novel ecosystems are forming with unknown characteristics and services.

These losses to marine biodiversity and ecosystem health pose a threat to the well-being and survival of a large portion, if not the entire human population, which is dependent on the numerous benefits provided by marine biodiversity and ecosystems, such as climate regulation, coastal protection, the production of food and medicines, leisure activities, and livelihoods.

There are fundamental links between the earth's system and ocean health. A crucial part of the ocean's function is to regulate the climate and buffer the effects of climate change. Heat, water, and greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide are stored, transported, and exchanged between the atmosphere and the ocean. Due to the damage emanating from the human-induced climate crisis, the ocean is warming and rising, with many adverse consequences for the natural and urban world and its populations.

The current state of ocean affairs requires international cooperation. In Africa and Europe, it is urgent to work towards reversing the climate and biodiversity crises and coping with increased pollution, unsustainable fishing and resource exploitation, and mounting pressure stemming from coastal cities and port infrastructures, shipping and other ocean-related economic activities.

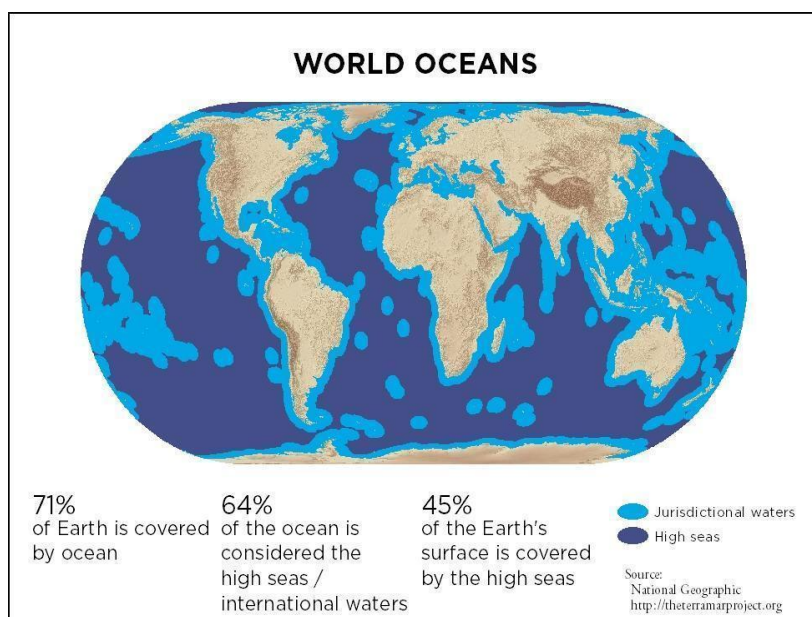
As humans exist as part of a larger ecosystem that depends on the well-being of the ocean, it is in the interest of the future of humanity to cooperate and identify nature-positive solutions to adapt and mitigate the impact of climate change.

Nonetheless, climate finance to Africa falls short of what is needed to fund climate adaptation action and address loss and damage. While Africa received nearly \$20 billion in climate funding between 2016 and 2020, this contrasts with annual adaptation costs estimated at \$30-50 billion for the period to 2030.

In addition, complexities regarding application and accreditation processes to access climate finance can be time-consuming and often result in excluding African countries and organisations from accessing available finance.

The EU can assist in addressing the time-consuming character of the processes, alongside building the expertise of African countries to develop the necessary institutional, financial, and administrative competencies through technical partnerships and blue financial solutions tailored to local socio-economic contexts. A clear opportunity emerges in extending climate action to the ocean as part of the Africa-Europe partnership.

A noteworthy initiative which may also benefit from Africa-Europe collaboration concerns the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ), more than 200 nautical miles from land. ABNJ, which comprise two-thirds of the world's oceans, are commonly referred to as the 'high seas' and constitute those areas where no nation claims rights and responsibilities.



Map of the world's oceans depicting the ABNJ

The high seas form 64% of the global ocean space. The international agreement on the 'conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction' (BBNJ) concluded in June 2023 is a welcome development that can bolster Africa-Europe cooperation at the multilateral level. Africa and Europe could combine efforts to ratify the agreement to bring it into force promptly. The process of ratifying and the implementation of the Agreement will need to be informed by scientific and legal matters, generating substantial room for collaboration between African and European stakeholders from both the public sector and civil society (including private sector companies).

It was crucial to have the high seas Treaty concluded in order to enact the UN biodiversity conference's 30x30 pledge, which promises to protect 30% of the ocean by 2030. In the absence of the BBNJ treaty, the 30x30 target faces the risk of failing due to the absence of legal mechanisms to regulate the establishment of marine protected areas. African countries, such as Seychelles, have already shown leadership by turning 30% of their EEZ into marine protected areas.

Furthermore, the time is ripe for new thinking around blue economy activities and supporting efforts driving diversification into sustainable and nature-positive economic activities. Half of the ocean's economic output stems from offshore oil and gas drilling, with most blue economy companies operating in this sector. These companies receive significant state subsidies, while their revenues contribute little to government budgets and community development.

Given the contributions of marine resources and the effects of resource depletion on livelihoods, building more extensive collaboration and networks between Africa and Europe would significantly contribute to balancing coastal demands, safeguarding important ecosystems, and enhancing the resilience of coastal inhabitants.

2.8 Maritime Security Must Underpin the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership

Effective ocean governance and generating revenues from Africa's blue economies may be difficult in the near future, given weak enforcement vis-à-vis the wide-ranging set of maritime security issues. These range from piracy, kidnapping, armed robbery, arms smuggling, drug trafficking and human trafficking, against which African security agencies have very limited capacity to act.

Since maritime security issues off the coasts of Africa are often multi-faceted, and involve multiple jurisdictions, proactive, coordinated national and regional responses are urgently needed. Furthermore, Africa faces a critical lack of naval and coastguard vessels and surveillance, which must be resolved to ensure proper ocean governance.

Security and development are closely intertwined and require continental-level deliberations and decisions. Research by the Institute for Security Studies shows maritime security is essential to developing blue economies. Maritime threats undermine socioeconomic development and make securing trade routes, protecting ocean economies, and harnessing their benefits challenging.

Uncertainty over border delineations causes border disputes. This can be the result of the discovery of gas and oil deposits in several water bodies, accelerating maritime insecurity and climate change. In addition to this, there is a growing threat to ocean-based food security and overall ocean health due to IUU fishing. According to a recent financial transparency coalition report, half of the global industrial IUU fishing vessels operate in Africa's coastal waters, costing the continent up to \$11 billion annually in forgone earnings and fish harvested.

Africa's geographical seascape and the importance of maritime trade necessitate the continent invest in strengthening maritime security to meet the projected growth in blue economy activities. In parallel, efforts must be stepped up to fight against illegal and illicit activities at sea or threats to the marine environment, like IUU fishing or ocean dumping.

Strengthening cooperation and action between Europe and Africa on marine security issues can provide very tangible ways of promoting enhanced ocean governance. Therefore, a framework for sharing technology and enhancing cooperation on security-related issues would constitute a noteworthy endeavour to enhance Africa-Europe cooperation.

2.9 The Emerging Indo-Pacific Concept

The interconnected maritime space straddling the Indian and Pacific Oceans remains crucial as the world becomes increasingly globalised and continents become interlinked. Several Indo-Pacific commentators believe that Africa could be trapped by great-power competition, disrupting Africa's development efforts in the Indian Ocean. Individual states are engaged in bilateral relations with major global powers on development, peace and security matters, but there is no clear African strategy for a common Indo-Pacific position.

Many of the world's biggest economies, including China, Japan and the US, are active in this ocean region. According to research by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 60% of trade is carried through its waters, and the combined economies of Indo-Pacific countries account for 60% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The Indo-Pacific seems to be rapidly becoming an arena for geopolitical contestation and cooperation for advancing global influence and interests among global powers.

Recently, the Netherlands, Germany, and France have each developed strategies to engage the region. In Spring 2021, the EU adopted a [strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#). The EU Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific held in Paris, France, in February 2022 saw a shift from a purely security and defence approach to also focus on connectivity and digital issues, climate change, and the protection of ocean biodiversity as key objectives of an EU strategy for the region.

The significance of this landscape for Africa's maritime security and governance should not be understated, but Africa's role is currently unclear. Most Indo-Pacific strategies do not consider engagement with Africa a priority, and African countries themselves are underprepared, having yet to publicly articulate clear foreign policy strategies in response. South Africa has referred to the opportunities provided by the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) for pursuing cooperation in blue economic activities, such as trade and energy, and for further collaboration with Pacific countries to stamp its place as a true maritime nation.

The geostrategic importance of maritime nations like South Africa extends to Africa's land-locked countries that have seen investment in regional infrastructure projects, such as Africa's newest mega bridge, the Kazungula bridge, to link the Democratic Republic of Congo through Zambia and Botswana to the Port of Durban, in order to facilitate the trade of crucial mineral resources such as cobalt.

The emerging Indo-Pacific concept is key to partnership on ocean governance because it recognises the importance of the Indian and Pacific Oceans as a single strategic space. The concept emphasises the need for cooperation among countries in the region to address common challenges such as maritime security, sustainable development, and climate change.

The EU and AU have a shared interest in promoting sustainable ocean governance in the Indo-Pacific region. The EU is a major player in global ocean governance, with a comprehensive policy framework that includes measures to protect marine biodiversity, combat the unsustainable use of marine resources, and promote sustainable fisheries. The AU, on the other hand, has a strong focus on the Blue Economy, which aims to promote sustainable economic growth and development through the responsible use of ocean resources.

By working together, the EU and AU can leverage their respective strengths and expertise to promote sustainable ocean governance in the Indo-Pacific region. This could include supporting regional initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the Pacific Islands Forum, as well as promoting cooperation on issues such as marine pollution, ocean acidification, and marine spatial planning.

SECTION 3: AREAS OF ACTION

Building on the African Union- European Union heads of state summit of February 2022, leaders agreed on joint action for a revised and enhanced cross-continental partnership. In the same vein, one can already expect 2023 and future years to see a high degree of opportunity for Africa and Europe to deepen their partnership on ocean governance and the blue economy.

Furthermore, strategic milestones such as the Africa Climate Summit, COP28 in Dubai and the forthcoming United Nations Ocean Conference to be co-hosted by France and Costa Rica in June 2025, the 6th International Marine Protected Areas Congress to be hosted by Senegal in 2026 (IMPAC6), the 2024 UN Ocean Decade Conference in Barcelona, and 2024 'Our Ocean Conference' in Greece are all key international events that offer an opportunity for Africa and Europe to work together, towards common goals. Improved coordination can also leave a legacy of cooperative ocean action for the future of AU-EU cooperation on ocean governance.

But to achieve this, it will be important to acknowledge the different priorities of the two continents to make sure it works in practice. As such, recommendations to enhance Africa-Europe cooperation on ocean governance must be underpinned by the following elements:

- 1) Build a shared purpose and address diverging approaches across priority domains.
- 2) Expand the Africa-Europe partnership to diverse actors and create an inclusive network.
- 3) Encourage fresh policy thinking and strategic foresight for enhanced cooperation that extends beyond short to medium-term cycles.
- 4) Catalyse innovative practices, investment, pilot projects, and partnership actions from a wide range of stakeholders.
- 5) Connect work under the Africa-Europe partnership into global governance arenas, and build a wide coalition of international partners.

This part of the report is divided into two sections, outlining first a set of priorities for the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance that is being set up by the European

Commission in partnership with the African Union Commission, and second, a set of recommendations targeted at the ocean community at large, but with a focus on the Africa-Europe partnership.

3.1 Potential Areas of Action to Guide the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance

- 1. Develop a Comprehensive Action Plan:** The Strategy Group's strategic mandate is to jointly identify common priorities, objectives, and key thematic work-streams. Building on the experience of its members, it should define a plan of action so that the priorities and objectives are translated into concrete proposals and initiatives. The plan of action should be based on a thorough analysis of the current state of ocean governance in Africa and Europe, the existing cooperation between the two continents on ocean-related matters and the challenges and opportunities, as outlined in this scoping report.
- 2. Monitor Progress and Evaluate Effectiveness:** There is an evident need to monitor progress and evaluate the effectiveness of existing initiatives and actions. This will help the partnership achieve its desired outcomes, ensure necessary adjustments are made promptly. Moving forward, it would be valuable for the Strategy Group to work collectively to identify and assess existing/previous projects and initiatives on ocean governance and blue economy which have been transformative and that could be scaled-up, replicated, and amplified for the benefits of Africa and Europe.
- 3. Build Capacity and Provide Technical Assistance:** Building on Europe's expertise and lessons learned, the partnership should offer technical assistance and capacity building to African countries to help develop ocean governance frameworks tailored to their situation. As such, it is recommended for the Strategy Group to advance an action plan that is geared towards the provision of training, sharing of best practices, and that facilitates knowledge exchange between the two continents. The Strategy Group should identify and highlight opportunities with the most potential for mutual learning and co-benefits, where Europe can learn from Africa as well as Africa learn from Europe.
- 4. Support the establishment of Africa's Regional Centres of Excellence:** The Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance could recommend the establishment of regional centres of excellence on ocean governance and the blue economy, by ensuring that the outcomes of its work are shared with such centres for greater impact of their functions. Such centres could serve as focal points for research, training, and capacity building on sustainable ocean governance and blue economy practices. They could also facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration among stakeholders in the region, and across Africa and Europe, thus promoting the development of a skilled workforce and fostering blue economy innovation. These centres could provide a platform for exchanging best practices and lessons learned, to inform policy decisions and improve the effectiveness of ocean governance initiatives.
- 5. Enhance the Role of Women and Youth:** The Strategy Group should prioritise the inclusion and participation of women in ocean governance and management. This includes

promoting gender equality and empowering women to participate in decision-making processes related to ocean governance. The Strategy Group should also work to engage and empower youth to become active participants in ocean governance and management, as they are the future stewards of the ocean.

6. **Strengthen Regional Collaboration, Coordination:** The Strategy Group should consider ways to foster collaboration and coordination among relevant stakeholders, including governments, civil society organisations, academia, and the private sector. This will help to ensure that its efforts are aligned with the needs and priorities of all stakeholders. The Strategy Group's function is to serve as dialogue platform to discuss convergent and divergent issues and aim at strengthening regional cooperation and collaboration between Africa and Europe.
7. **Contribute to Education and Awareness:** Due attention should be given by the Strategy Group to education and awareness-raising through the sharing of stories, opinion pieces, projects, and initiatives that can promote ocean literacy and increase public understanding of the importance of ocean governance and sustainable management. This includes promoting science-based findings and promoting evidence-informed policymaking.
8. **Prioritise Sustainable Development:** The Strategy Group should prioritise sustainable development in all its recommendations. The Strategy Group should also keep in mind that the benefits of ocean resources are to be shared equitably among all stakeholders, and promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth.
9. **Promote Innovation, Technology and Local Knowledge:** The Strategy Group should promote innovation and technology in ocean governance and management, as well as local knowledge. This includes considering the use of new technologies, tools, and traditional practices to improve ocean monitoring, data collection, and analysis. The Strategy Group through its recommendations should also work to promote innovation in sustainable ocean-based industries, such as aquaculture, renewable energy and the decarbonisation of the shipping industry.
10. **Catalyse partnerships and resources:** Through its work, the Strategy Group should aim to catalyse the cross-continental partnership, call on decision-makers to mobilise greater technical and financial resources for the implementation of SDG14 globally, and to support the implementation of initiatives and actions specific to Africa and Europe. This includes working towards a greater interest from the two continents for the ocean.

The Strategy Group should also draw lessons from Europe and Africa regarding ocean governance and management. Europe has a long history of ocean governance and fisheries management and has developed a number of best practices and policies that could be adapted and applied in Africa. For example, Europe has developed a number of regional frameworks, such as the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which could serve as a model for similar frameworks in Africa.

At the same time, Africa has unique challenges and opportunities when it comes to ocean governance and management, and the Strategy Group should take these into account. For example, many African countries have large coastal populations that rely on the ocean for their livelihoods, and the Strategy Group should work to ensure that their needs and perspectives are taken into account in decision-making processes. Additionally, Africa has a wealth of marine biodiversity and resources that could be sustainably managed and developed for the benefit of local communities and the wider region.

Overall, the Strategy Group should seek to learn from Africa and Europe and develop a comprehensive approach to ocean governance that considers the unique challenges and opportunities of the African and European contexts.

3.2 Potential Areas of Action to Guide the Africa-Europe Partnership on Ocean Governance

These recommendations are aligned to the issues outlined above and grouped into five categories: (1) public policy and regulation; (2) capacity building and co-innovation; (3) building shared prosperity from the blue economy; (4) Marine Domain Awareness; and (5) finding ocean-based actions to address the climate and biodiversity crises.

3.2.1 Public Policy and Regulation for improved ocean governance

The world is mid-way the UN 2030 Agenda and it remains far off track to meet SDG14 — which commits to conserving and sustainably using our oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development- and the other ocean-related goals of the 2030 Agenda (as listed in section 1.9). To date, the level of commitment and investment in the ocean has not matched the global magnitude of the challenge.

A coordinated approach is required to ensure we achieve SDG14 by 2030 and no one is left behind. Immediate actions are needed from governments, international finance and development institutions, the private sector, and communities to accelerate action and cooperation on the ocean.

The transition to a sustainable blue economy model in Africa and Europe requires new approaches to policy, regulation, financing, technology, innovation, and skills to achieve these goals. Building capacity in people and organisations is urgently needed to address these challenges in a wide range of fields across the blue economy.

Regulation stands out as a field of applied knowledge – blending *engineering, economics, and law* – to guide African and European countries in designing and implementing blue economy strategies and agreeing on ocean governance. The blue economy sector faces rapid innovation and transformation in its passage to a more sustainable future, and innovations in public policy and regulation around ocean governance can greatly facilitate this transition.

The Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership should prioritise establishing marine protected areas, prevent illegal fishing practices, fight against the overexploitation of marine resources and

support the sustainable development of artisanal small-scale fisheries in Africa. The Partnership could also focus on reverse mentorships, with Africa teaching Europe about artisanal small-scale fisheries, as well as to work jointly and to learn from each other to reduce the impact of industrial fishing and seafood production. It should address maritime security issues through standardised legal and regulatory frameworks and promote the development of sustainable blue economy sectors.

The partnership should serve as a model for international cooperation and responsible ocean governance, promoting the sustainable use and conservation of shared ocean resources for the benefit of present and future generations. By working together, African and European countries can ensure the protection of marine biodiversity, promote sustainable fisheries management, and support the development of an environmentally sustainable and socially responsible blue economy.

Across the two continents, Africans and Europeans need to shape the blue economy, creating and enhancing the institutions needed to build and operate the required infrastructure. Mutual understanding of strategies, oversight, coordination, information exchange and multilateral partnerships will enhance cooperation on blue economy governance for capacity building on regional matters and global debates. Africa and Europe could convene an AU-EU ocean governance and blue economy Ministerial Conference, supported by the work of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance, to advance continental priorities, seek common ground and mobilise a Team Europe approach for the benefit of the cross-continental partnership.

In the partnership, the EU could continue to offer the AU support to complete its Ocean Governance Strategy and jointly assess both common and divergent interests between the EU's International Ocean Governance agenda and Africa's Strategy. This is important as it provides an avenue to share practices and lessons learned.

The AU and EU can foster dialogue and cooperation through regular meetings, workshops, and conferences. This will help to build trust and understanding between the two continents and foster collaboration. The Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance is expected to play its role in providing a dialogue platform on this specific issue.

The same could be done at the level of Blue Economy strategies. As part of the Africa-EU Global Gateway conversation, the EU may also wish to explore whether Africa wants to cooperate further on ocean matters so that the blue economy becomes an agenda for cooperation within the Africa-Europe partnership. In addition, giving teeth to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by investing in blue economy infrastructure could unlock the potential of the AfCFTA for intra-African trade and boost inter-continental connectivity as global demand for African resources continues.

In the context of the EU's policy for Europe's Outermost Regions, which put emphasis on the development of the Blue Economy, the European Commission has developed step-by-step methodological guidance to implement and evaluate Blue Economy strategies. Such a guide could serve as a tool to support the development of blue economy strategies on the African continent and to ensure coherence as the two continents work towards greater ocean governance.

A partnership between Africa and Europe on the ocean has the potential to play into the broader politics of the climate and biodiversity negotiations, where Europe is keen to mobilise other countries, including African nations, to demand greater ambition from the big emerging economies. Looking more broadly, a European call to support the membership of the African Union at the G20 beyond just South Africa, and support for more African resolutions at the UN General Assembly would further demonstrate that the partnership rhetoric is more than skin-deep.

Moreover, the Partnership could propel an ocean focus into the international climate and security interlinked agenda. A critical opportunity lies in the coordination of Comoros' AU chairmanship and Malta's current membership of the UN Security Council. Indeed, Malta's advocacy for including the issue associated with sea-level rise onto the global agenda would add critical echo to Comoros and many African and Small Island Developing States. This can take the form of agenda coordination at the UN, steered by the AU and EU representations in New York.

The EU's ambitions to become a regional leader in international ocean governance and, specifically, its ocean governance partnership with Africa must encompass closer strategic relations with SIDS. The existence of the EU's outermost regions and overseas territories implies, beyond history and culture, geographical proximity between the EU and most African SIDS. This relationship must be reinforced in documents such as the EU strategy for the Indo-Pacific as well as geopolitical, trade and cooperation dimensions. The main question to guide EU engagement with SIDS should focus on the importance of SIDS for the EU and what the EU can offer to assist SIDS in developing their capacities to promote sustainable blue economies, mitigating and adapting to the challenges of climate change, and promoting international cooperation given the challenging current context.

Furthermore, to improve the investment climate between Africa and Europe and thus enhance blue growth and structure a global ocean governance system, a credible regulatory framework is much needed; one that makes investors (both domestic and foreign) confident of investing in Africa. African governments have a very important role to play by ensuring policy consistency and continuity and the enforcement of regulations and public policy.

Misalignment of public policy practices between Africa and Europe can hinder cooperation at multiple levels of governance. This can be mitigated by AU-EU dialogue, which identifies lessons from past experiences and actions, reflects on existing challenges, and builds potential shared actions for sustainable development. In taking forward these actions, it is crucial that the Africa-Europe agenda better reflects the concerns of local communities active in the blue economy and most affected by present and future ocean governance.

3.2.2 Capacity building and innovation

Cooperation between Africa and the EU in the fields of research and training stems from the 1975 Lomé Convention. This partnership between the two continents has enhanced science, technology and innovation in a range of fields. Improving research and access to data is

essential for monitoring and supporting ocean governance based on science and information. Furthermore, co-innovation, exchange, vocational training, and professional development offer multiple benefits for revitalising the ocean partnership between Africa and Europe.

Knowledge and experience need to be applied to the challenges of the Africa-Europe partnership, including the imperative of achieving SDG14. Building new capabilities in Africa and Europe requires local institutions to develop the specialist knowledge and expertise required, backed by partners who are at the forefront of international experience. African and European experts will also have an opportunity to innovate regulatory solutions that fit the local industry needs, drawing on the interests of all stakeholders. Ocean governance must genuinely engage all people—across gender, geography, and income—to develop equitable solutions. National governments must be empowered and supported to determine the transition path that best suits their local context.

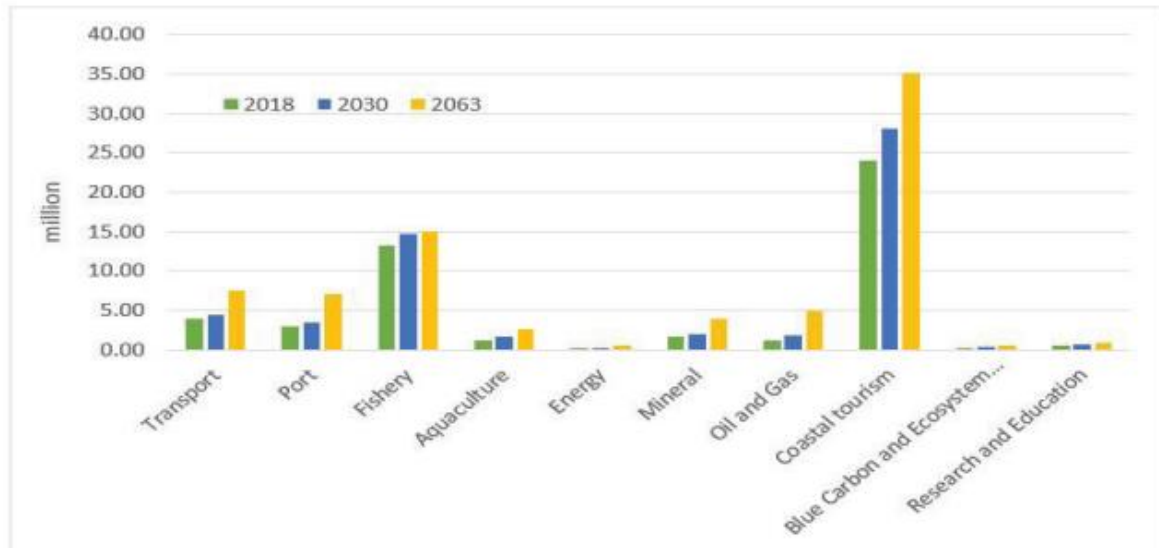
There is a need to overcome the challenges of institutional asymmetry between Europe and Africa by mainstreaming joint work on ocean governance and blue economy across multiple institutions, governance levels and geographies. Both Africa and Europe can learn from their past attempts at partnership working - and make sure that any Africa-Europe cooperation on the ocean is sustained by multiple points of contact, to avoid it getting stuck on the shelf in the form of a summit communiqué. This could include regional diplomacy, bilateral cooperation between European and African countries, academic collaboration, data-sharing partnerships, and coastal city-level partnerships.

A way forward is to resource governmental and regional Centres of Excellence (CoEs) in Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa (CoEs) in the five sub-regions of the continent for the benefit of the ocean and blue economy. These CoEs could have the power to lead and coordinate ocean governance efforts across agencies and departments and would help promote effective and robust policy frameworks and shape funding and actions. The international community, including Europe, could commit the resources, both technical and financial - to help the AU and national governments and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) establish and capacitate these Centres of Excellence. Working towards this may result in the successful delivery of ambitious policies and programmes and operations to deliver the blue economy commitments made by national governments.

Moving forward, both continents must work jointly to increase the participation of women and integrate gender issues not only to improve impacts for women and girls, but for solutions to be more effective. Women are a key part of the ocean value chain, from fishing and processing to selling, entrepreneurship and executive leadership. The private sector must rapidly scale opportunities for women to participate formally in the sector as providers and decision-makers instead of simply as users, aiming to increase the share of women entrepreneurs and employees in the ocean sector to at least 50% by 2030. In addition to this, there is a need to implement mentoring for the inclusion of young people in blue economy activities, including entrepreneurship and decision-making across Africa to gain from the continent's demographic dividend. This would contribute to ensuring that the blue economy transition leaves no one behind.

The Africa-Europe Partnership should co-design youth and women employment strategies that address the boom of the blue economy sector. With the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027

being revised through 2023, Africa and Europe can jointly identify priority employment sectors in the blue economy and reflect their expected size in respective youth employment strategies (with the AU's Continental Strategy for Technical and Vocational Educational and Training to Foster Youth Employment Strategy). This policy alignment should serve to jointly identify parallels in blue economy infrastructure and digital service needs on both continents.



Employment generated by Blue Economy sectors and components (ABES, 2020)

Research has also a large role to play in securing a sustainable pathway for future generations. While there is continued scope for ocean-based technical and fundamental training, the greatest progress needs to be made in finding ways of nurturing local and territorial initiatives through indigenous knowledge, co-innovation, experimentation with local actions and scaling up. Amongst the array of ocean-related projects to enhance research and innovation, the Africa-Europe partnership should improve ocean literacy by building on and aligning the work of AU-IBAR and Horizon Europe's upcoming work programme.

The EU's Horizon 2020 programme is the EU's flagship research and innovation programme for ocean-related research and innovation. Such a hub can be replicated on the African continent and include an exchange of expertise and knowledge based on an interdisciplinary approach and international collaboration.

Another dimension for possible collaboration is that of technology and the cyber domain in the context of maritime low-carbon transitions and security concerns. Unlike their European counterparts, African states are far from developing the technology necessary to fully explore their maritime resources, shift towards green shipping, or even more efficient port management and security. Therefore, a framework for sharing technology and enhancing cooperation in areas of cybersecurity and low-carbon technologies would constitute a noteworthy element within Europe-Africa cooperation.

As an example, the Africa Maritime Technology Cooperation Centre (MTCC) is part of the EU-financed Global MTCC Network. The Africa branch of the MTCC Network (GMN) aims to promote cutting-edge low-carbon technologies and operations in maritime transport and help

participating countries develop national energy-efficiency policies and measures for their maritime sectors. The impact of the Africa MTCC is important in reducing harmful emissions from ships and navigating into a low-carbon future.

Furthermore, the Africa-Europe partnership should mainstream the contribution of the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) & Africa's geoportal, spatial data, and environmental stations into ocean public policy making. Integration of cross-continental spatial monitoring tools could enable information exchange, mutual learning and co-innovation while reinforcing the capacities of policymakers, experts and local communities from the two continents to better manage the ocean. Further support for the programme should be unlocked to extend into the policing of fishing areas both within and outside countries' jurisdictions, the protection of MPAs, including new marine wilderness areas of the high seas, and to improve security for enhanced trade and tourism.

More challenging will be resource and capacity sharing (as capacity building is unidirectional, when it is in actuality a two-way process) related to deep-ocean and open-ocean scientific research and technology transfer. The deep ocean is critically under-explored globally but especially so in Africa, where exploration is often linked to exploitation. Forty-one countries within Africa contain deep ocean within their EEZ, which make up 11% of the deep sea within national jurisdiction globally. For Europe, it is 25 countries, which make up 14% of the deep sea within national jurisdiction globally. These are not inconsequential numbers that represent huge opportunities for both continents. However, there is a critical need for more deep-sea science, so that it can inform holistic management of the blue economy. It is also critical given the importance and fragility of the deep ocean that we ensure the blue economy is sustainable and equitable. Capacity sharing and technology transfer will allow countries in both regions to more fully benefit from the high seas.

3.2.3 Sustainable Blue Economy for Shared Prosperity

The ocean community must address the tensions and trade-offs inherent in achieving SDG14 while ensuring pathways for a just and inclusive blue economy transition. Firstly, the AU and EU must establish a common understanding of the Blue Economy: The two continents can work together to establish a common definition and understanding of the blue economy. This will help to align their approaches and facilitate collaboration.

Europe and Africa must increase funding to match the magnitude of the ocean challenge and its potential benefits. Ocean governance and the blue economy must rise up the funding agenda, as a priority within national budgets, with funders offering concessional and blended finance solutions for investment in the ocean and the blue economy. Prioritizing more resources for the ocean can help mobilize the attention needed to influence the political will and commitment-setting within national governments.

Both continents need to work jointly to scale up investment in ocean governance and expand shared blue economy opportunities while understanding Africa's need to support a rapidly growing population, economic growth, and other development goals today and in the near term. Given the political context following the 6th AU-EU summit and the call for strengthening

the economic partnership, this is a unique moment to deepen the existing ocean partnership and foster G2G, G2B and B2B matchmaking and investment.

For the Africa-EU partnership to reach the next level, it also implies a strategic rethink of how to do business together better. This demands unleashing EU investment funds for productive purposes, together with additional finance from multilateral development banks and climate funds, less hobbled by the administrative burdens and conditionalities which frustrate Africa's urgent economic development needs. For the EU, it also means thinking of investment in a stepwise timeframe, starting with what's needed to achieve SDG14 and then taking Africa's longer-term aspirations towards 2063.

The two continents, working together, need to make sure that both the public and private sector play their role in shaping a positive policy environment, creating jobs, working in partnership, and collaborating to put the poorest economies on a better trajectory to be able to grow sustainably. Demonstrating tangible success in transactions and investments will substantially diminish investors' perception of risk while fostering the right drumbeat for EU-Africa public-private partnerships in critical domains, thus helping build bridges between the two continents and longer-term shared economic prosperity.

Across both continents, the blue economy sector is one where entrepreneurs and SMEs have the potential to flourish if the right policy, investment climate, enabling environment, and governance system are put in place, thereby creating skilled jobs and local added value. But as noted earlier, there are large asymmetries in the financial and political capital held by commercial interests and local communities.

Aquaculture and fishery-SMEs are the backbones of African and European ocean-related food systems, with the majority of food produced and consumed on the two continents passing through SMEs. Aquaculture and fishery-SMEs are major and, in many cases, the most dynamic part of African and European coastal food systems and associated fabric. Governments, financial service providers, development finance institutions and other actors need to give robust attention to the investment needs of this sector. It is a matter of food security and blue growth supporting local employment.

While the centrality of aquaculture and fishery-SMEs for Africa's food security and inclusive growth may be recognised, progress to improve the broader investment environment around SMEs remains slow and uneven. In this context, access to finance – equity, debt, other forms of capital, and services, including insurance – is often mentioned as the main challenge impeding growth and undermining the resilience of these enterprises. This is particularly true of companies operating in less dynamic markets or poorly structured value chains, of women and young entrepreneurs, and of start-ups and enterprises with disruptive business models. Unlocking the potential of African aquaculture and fishery-SMEs requires re-aligning the financial ecosystem to match the volume and types of finance available with the needs of SMEs.

To reinforce the Africa-Europe ocean partnership and contribute to African SME growth, there is a need to call on the European and African Union Commissions, related Development Banks (EIB, EBRD and AfDB), and European Development Financial Institutions (EDFIs) to make

risk-sharing tools (notably guarantees and first-loss capital) and financial incentives (e.g. matching grants, pay-for-success mechanisms, funding for impact tracking), more accessible to investment vehicles that work directly with ocean-related SMEs. By matching financial resources with the growing number of investment vehicles operating in the African ocean-sector, significant progress in the short term can be made to unlock potential and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

A sizable opportunity for the Africa-Europe ocean partnership also lies in offshore renewable energy. Many African countries require better access to renewable energy as an alternative to fossil fuel extraction, while the EU also seeks greater supplies of green hydrogen worldwide in order to decarbonise its economy. The partnership should support Africa's fair and sustainable ocean-based renewable energy industries through technological transfers and a sustainable development agenda. Cooperation would be bolstered through policy alignment on technical standards, interoperability, and guarantees for investments, such as the European Guarantee for Renewable Energy under the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD+).

Europe and Africa can collaborate to promote ocean-based economic development that is both sustainable and inclusive, creating job opportunities and fostering economic development in coastal communities. This can be achieved through joint investments in sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, renewable energy, and tourism.

3.2.4 Marine Domain Awareness

Collaborative fisheries management: Fisheries in Africa and Europe are facing similar challenges, including the deterioration of marine environment, overfishing and illegal fishing. Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen cooperation on fisheries management practices such as monitoring, control, and surveillance, as well as sharing data and best practices to promote sustainable management through the creation of regional fusion data-sharing centres and marine spatial planning.

The EU's Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive, which requires EU member states to develop and implement MSP frameworks to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources, is an important framework that Africa can replicate within its own context through stakeholder engagement, data sharing, and adaptive management.

In order to effectively govern a space, knowledge and access to that space is required. This is an important factor to consider, given that much of the ocean remains unexplored.

Marine Domain Awareness (MDA) is the ability to understand and track activities in the maritime domain. Collaboration between Africa and Europe on MDA can help to improve maritime security, prevent illegal activities, and promote sustainable use of marine resources. To achieve this, Africa and Europe can share information, develop joint MDA initiatives, build capacity, foster partnerships, and support regional organisations.

Sharing information on maritime activities, developing joint MDA initiatives, and building capacity in MDA through training programs and technology transfer can help improve the ability of African countries to monitor and manage their maritime resources. Fostering partnerships between governments, industry, and civil society and supporting regional organizations can promote collaboration on MDA initiatives and align MDA initiatives to promote sustainable development.

This can be achieved through monitoring and information sharing: Strengthening Ocean governance requires reliable and up-to-date information about ocean conditions, including temperature, currents, and marine biodiversity. European and African countries can collaborate to develop enhanced data collection and sharing systems. This includes sharing satellite data and oceanographic research, which can help inform policies and decisions.

Europe and Africa can work together to strengthen marine conservation efforts. This can be achieved through shared expertise, technical assistance, and infrastructure and capacity building investment.

3.2.5 Climate and Biodiversity: Enabling Nature-Positive Solutions

A focus on the ocean should not come at the expense of support for climate change adaptation and environmental protection. African countries are amongst the world's most vulnerable to climate shocks and are already suffering billions of dollars in losses each year from extreme weather events. It will be important for the EU to listen to and show that it is actually hearing, Africa's call for accelerated support to cope with these impacts. This could involve the following:

- Collaboration on the development, implementation, and revision of climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies in the context of the COP28 Global Stocktake, such as the sharing of best practices related to adaptation, promotion of renewable energy, and investment in research and development of new technologies.
- Support for countries to develop appropriate policy frameworks to develop blue economy strategies within the context of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plans (NBSAPs). The current situation on ocean and marine resources needs to fit within climate and biodiversity-related strategies, to garner stronger help from the international community through climate finance for ocean protection. The establishment of regional resource centres, as noted earlier, would help build an evidence base that translates into informed choices, and supports national plans that are equitable, based on an effective regulatory environment.
- Support for African economies to integrate the ocean into NDCs and national maritime spatial planning. NDCs can create transformational change in a country's climate and energy plans and must include ambitious targets for the ocean. Governments submitting their revised NDCs should ensure the ocean is fully embedded, with robust targets to meet climate and development goals. Likewise, governments should engage in integrated maritime spatial planning that addresses the full suite of community needs to maximize economics, climate and livelihood benefits from ocean access.

Coastal habitats are gaining attention for their significant capacity to store carbon, namely mangroves, salt marshes, and seagrasses. They also provide vital ecological functions, such as serving as the primary nursery environment for numerous fish, crustaceans, birds, and marine mammal species. Additionally, coastal ecosystems act as protective natural barriers against storm damage, other environmental risks, and coastal erosion. As Africa and Europe work together in the fight against climate change, there is space for further collaboration, given that Africa is well endowed with natural resource ecosystems that are critical for carbon absorption and sequestration.

By leveraging the leadership of SIDS in climate and biodiversity action, the rest of the world has an opportunity to address a number of interlinked crises. In that context, COP15 saw the establishment of the SIDS Coalition for Nature, co-led by Cabo Verde, Seychelles, and Samoa, designed to provide SIDS with the necessary financial and technical support. SIDS show exemplary climate and biodiversity leadership and pursues innovative climate solutions to the multiple crises that they have been experiencing, but international cooperation, including from Europe, will be an important factor in sustainable economic and human prosperity. Innovative financial instruments such as blue bonds and debt-for-nature/climate swaps can contribute to developing regenerative blue economies and climate adaptation.

The effects of climate change, ecological dynamics, and environmental transformations extend beyond traditional hard security problems that cause violent conflict within and between states. They also stretch to broader risks that endanger individuals and society, as shown by mounting pressures from pervasive plastic pollution, persistent chemicals and damaging oil spills.

For instance, despite decades of policy work, countries party to the Nairobi convention, a regional treaty that works to protect, manage, and develop the Western Indian Ocean, still lack the capabilities to respond to marine pollution, due to limited personnel, and inadequate training and equipment. International cooperation to prevent marine pollution should form the basis for cooperation between Africa and Europe, to draft contingency plans for preparedness and response to marine pollution incidents. A draft of such a plan has been underway for several years under the Nairobi Convention for the Western Indian Ocean region. It could also serve as a basis for strengthened Africa-Europe cooperation for larger regional oceanic areas.

Among the multiple pan-African initiatives that bring together Africa's regional institutions, development financing bodies, member states and donors to tackle the barriers to effective nature-positive solutions, the Great Blue Wall initiative, which was born out of the Western Indian Ocean region and that aims to support the establishment of a connected network of regenerative seascapes in Africa, could be scaled up and accelerated. Political buy-in and ambitious commitments from EU member states could unlock tremendous regenerative blue economies whilst ensuring climate action and biodiversity protection.

CONCLUSION

There is immense potential for enhanced cooperation between Africa and Europe regarding ocean governance and blue economy aspirations. However, there are also challenges to overcome. First, for an Africa-Europe partnership on ocean governance and blue economy to

thrive, it must demonstrate mutual and equitable benefits. African and European stakeholders should play equal roles and share the burdens and benefits of any initiatives.

Bold action must be taken to ensure that the billions of people that rely on the ocean have the means to benefit from it in a safe, clean, and sustainable way. Africa and Europe will succeed by working together through sustained, well-coordinated efforts that harness the strengths and resources from a broad range of public and private actors and channel significantly increased know-how and funding to the sector.

The latest Synthesis report of the IPCC makes a very sobering reading, with evidence showing significantly greater global climate impacts than had been anticipated, especially in Africa. The scale of damage to ecosystems, infrastructure, livelihoods and health are rising even faster as the planet risks breaching 1.5C of global heating in the next few years.

To move towards a long-term, balanced Africa-Europe ocean partnership, there will need to be what the former UNECA Executive Secretary has described as a shift from 'how Europe could help Africa' to 'how we can help the planet together'. This will imply forging a genuine partnership between Europe and Africa on the ocean, recognising each other's priorities. In this context, acknowledging the asymmetries between the continents and a greater ability to listen and work together could unlock a better relationship.

ANNEX: OCEAN GOVERNANCE & BLUE ECONOMY: AN EMERGING AGENDA FOR THE AFRICA-EUROPE PARTNERSHIP HIGH-LEVEL EVENT AT THE IBRAHIM GOVERNANCE WEEKEND 28.04.2023

SUMMARY NOTE

On 28 April 2023, the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) organised a high-level dialogue to initiate the work of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance, which is supported by the European Commission and in partnership with the African Union Commission. The event brought together around 130 participants, both in person and online.

This multistakeholder discussion, convening both continental institutions (European Commission and African Union Commission) and co-chairs (Pascal Lamy and Nancy Karigithu), contributed to define the possible scope of focus for this new Africa-Europe Partnership on Ocean Governance and Blue Economy.

The two institutions detailed their expectations for this partnership whilst the Co-chairs of the Strategy Group provided an overview of expected priority given the cross-continental state-of-play and present challenges. A wide range of experts substantiated the picture of Africa-Europe cooperation on ocean governance and blue economy from the point of view of international policymaking, scientific research, climate and sustainability, development cooperation, local communities and small-scale artisanal fisheries.

With growing attention to the ocean and the blue economy, Africa and Europe seek to grow their capacities in that sector, and believe that cross-continental cooperation would enable it.

The AU and the EU underscored the same three major expectations from the partnership. (1), building commonalities and overcoming divergences so that cooperation on ocean governance and sustainable blue economy feature high in the AU-EU partnership (2) accelerating the **implementation of ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 14**, and (3) **fostering joint sustainable economic opportunities and human development at cross-continental level.**

The Strategy Group's Co-Chairs identified the complementarity of Africa's intention to gain more from inclusive and sustainable ocean management, and Europe's intention to be more environmentally sound. Africa-Europe cooperation can set the blue economy on a path of virtuous growth.

The other stakeholders in the sector expect the partnership to tackle conjectural obstacles to ocean sustainability. They expect it to tackle the drivers of decline of the ocean state that hampers the blue economy's sustainable expansion. In their view, the partnership should, indeed, **improve the management of ocean resources** (1), **re-empower local stakeholders** (2), and **create sustainable and fair growth** (3).

In sum, the scope of activity of the Africa-Europe Partnership on Ocean Governance and Blue Economy could be centred on resource management, social policy, and sustainable economic growth.

First, the partnership could aim at **reversing the degradation of ocean resources and of the livelihood of local communities, including small-scale fishers**. This could entail: (1) adapting consumption to sustainable and fair resource exploitation in African and European waters, (2) strengthening marine spatial planning, maritime security and biodiversity restoration and conservation – such as with the [Western Indian Ocean Governance Initiative](#) launched and with international resolutions on biodiversity, (3) providing small-scale fishers with greater representativity in the negotiation and management of SFPAs, the definition of seafood labels and investable value-chains, (4) access to climate and development finance, and (5) youth and women fellowship programmes/training on ocean-related issues, including for entrepreneurship, and conservation.

Second, the partnership could **create the conditions for an inclusive, fair and sustainable development of blue economy sectors**. In this regard, the partnership could prioritize: (1) ocean-based renewable energy and green-growth infrastructure (including ports, shipping lines and safety) for decarbonised industrialisation and African connectivity – in line with the AfCFTA, (2) nature-based solutions, sustainable value-chains, eco-tourism, and blue bonds – including by means of investing in existing initiatives of scale, and (3) regulating private sector activities, raising awareness, and creating demand-driven and public-private finance, to empower coastal communities, women and young people in particular.

Third, the partnership could **enhance capacity through science, data, technology and innovation – in line with the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development**. Science should underpin the partnership. The partnership could provide socio-economic and environmental benefits to communities at large. Data is most necessary regarding ocean biodiversity and fish stocks, particularly in the interest of coastal communities. The role of scientific bodies like the ‘Centres of Excellence in Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa’ set up by the AUC could be further considered.

Fourth, through the partnership, Africa and Europe could **join efforts at multilateral level to address collective responsibility regarding the state of the ocean and strengthen international ocean governance**. As such, opportunities for the two continents lie in working jointly towards the ratification and implementation of the “High Seas treaty”², the Plastic Treaty that is being negotiated, the Ocean and Climate Dialogue at the UNFCCC COPs, and in ensuring the full implementation of latest policy developments, including the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies. A sustainable blue economy can deliver on an equitable vision of the partnership. But it must be pursued with honest intent, full resources, and just implementation among and within countries.

² International legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS) on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ)

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doi: 10.2926/125437
ISBN 978-92-9405-027-4

