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Policy Brief 'Roadmap towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership'

A Joint AU-EU Roadmap on Ocean
Governance and Blue Economy

The importance of the ocean is increasingly being recognised on a global scale in terms of geopolitical balance, the maintenance of global supply chains, food security, climate change and in addressing pressing and long-lasting socio-economic, environmental, and governance challenges. Both the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) acknowledge the urgent need to harness global action for the ocean while concurrently considering the bottlenecks and opportunities that lie at different levels of development across Africa and Europe. However, to date, the blue economy and ocean governance have been absent from existing AU-EU partnership.

Against this background, the European Commission Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, in partnership with the African Union, set up the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance. The Africa-Europe Foundation facilitated the work of the Group.

Moving towards 2030, the Group proposes to advance effective ocean governance mechanisms and improved inclusion of regeneration in the blue economy approaches promoted by the EU and AU, at regional and national levels, given the urgent need for more resilient and healthy ecosystems to support the sustainable development of global and local economies. The Group outlines that there is true momentum to improve the state of the ocean, a global common good, at regional and international levels – as well as to elevate it politically and financially. **The key recommendation of the Strategy Group is the design, formalisation and implementation of an Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership.** Such partnership would aim to promote sustainable, regenerative blue economy practices at national, regional, and continental levels, alongside the implementation of robust ocean governance mechanisms to support these efforts.

Recent ocean data collection has led to the critical realisation that the world's ocean health is in distress. An enhanced Africa-Europe cooperation, through an Ocean Partnership between the two continents, will:

- Increase the level of mutual understanding and alignment of priorities between Africa and Europe,
- Expand the sharing of indigenous and modern knowledge as well as cutting-edge technologies,
- Contribute to capacity building, greater finance and investment, and
- Increase collective momentum for ocean governance at cross-continental level, notably, in the lead up to the 7th AU-EU Summit and the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3), set to take place in 2025 and geared towards 2030 and a post-2030 Agenda.

A Joint Vision for an Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership

The proposed Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership will consist in 1/ a joint vision for a mutually supportive partnership that will focus on equal benefit sharing through inclusive and equitable processes and 2/ concrete outcomes for the two continents on ocean policy and action, including the blue economy. The partnership will be designed to facilitate more effective cooperation between Africa and Europe on ocean governance and blue economy issues, adopting a nature-positive and people-driven approach which not only favours sustainability, and minimises harm, but incorporates elements of restoration, regeneration, and resilience.

The Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership Roadmap will contribute to advancing a shared vision for an enhanced partnership that will address ocean governance and regenerative blue economy development, as well as strengthen the capacities of both Africa and Europe through exchanges and joint understanding of respective development challenges for a more sustainable and regenerative blue economy and a more efficient international ocean governance.

This Policy Brief highlights specific actions that would be needed for the development and implementation of an Africa-Europe Partnership on Ocean Governance and the Blue Economy. The recommendations and priority intervention areas emerge from a multi-disciplinary and -generational consultation process involving experts from Africa and Europe. This

document complements the 'Roadmap towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership'. It only reflects the views of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance. The European Commission and African Union Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

The 'Roadmap towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership' has been elaborated along three priority intervention areas:

1. Ocean Governance
2. Capacity Sharing
3. Finance and Investment

Specific actions under each of these areas have been identified. Their implementation within the scope of the 'Roadmap towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership' builds on past and ongoing work conducted at the level of the two continents. It seeks to advance ocean policy and action across different ocean sectors, to the mutual benefit of both Africa and Europe and form the foundation for a strengthened cooperation under a formal Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership

Enablers for an effective Africa Europe Ocean Partnership

To maximise the effectiveness of the proposed Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership, overcome challenges, and ensure the delivery of the actions under the joint vision for ocean governance and blue economy across Africa and Europe, the roadmap suggests the following enabling actions:

- Produce a **Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation** for the institutionalisation of an Africa-Europe Partnership on Ocean Governance and Blue Economy. The signature of this Memorandum of Understanding would mark the official commencement of the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership.
- Set up an Africa-Europe **Blue Resilience, Regeneration, and Restoration Hub (B3R-Hub)**, to support the implementation of the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership, enhance existing initiatives and contribute to the emergence of new collaborations. The B3R-Hub would serve as the main coordination body through which the Roadmap to operationalise the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership would be implemented.
- Establish an **Africa-Europe Advisory Panel for the B3R-Hub and Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership**, to ensure objectives and development activities are evidenced-based, informed, and designed using scientific principles and data-driven conclusions.
- **Enhance the working relationship between the AU Blue Economy Division (ARBE) and the EU Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE)**. An enhanced partnership between these departments would result in more effective coordination between development partners, dissemination of best practices, and implementation of blue economy policy and international agreements.
- **Foster strong stakeholder coalitions between AU Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the European Union Member States**, with the objective to foster amicable collaboration and improve the delivery of project outcomes and blue economy strategies at regional and national levels under a joint Africa-Europe vision aligned with both continents' aspirations and priorities.

- **Prioritise cross-cutting activities** rather than sectoral or siloed ones, thus conferring benefits to multiple sectors instead of generating major trade-offs between singular ones. The integration of this holistic view under the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership would facilitate an optimal resource use by ensuring that socio-economic, environmental, and governance goals are achieved in an integrated way.
- Advance **a joint Africa-Europe Ocean research agenda** to address key knowledge gaps surrounding ocean governance, the blue economy, and other relevant ocean-related topics. The joint research agenda would complement and guide current and future development projects and initiatives to address prioritised activities under the roadmap, while also building capacity for ocean literacy across geographies, expertise and generation.
- Promote **a joint Africa-Europe Ocean literacy programme, and support current ocean literacy programmes where they exist**, across both continents. Ocean literacy is essential in understanding the dynamics that affect different ocean-related activities and how to leverage them. It is also essential to facilitate public participation in development initiatives, developing education, and garner wide support, including political and financial buy-in for greater cooperation on initiatives under the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership.
- Elaborate **a joint Africa-Europe plan to overcome safety challenges and maritime security, as well as Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU)** in Africa. Combating IUU fishing in African waters has benefits for Africa and Europe, as it may result in addressing the overexploitation of fish stocks, which destroys marine habitats, distorts competition and damages the livelihoods of coastal communities not least in developing countries.
- **Institutionalise an AU-EU Ocean Governance and Blue Economy Ministerial Summit** under the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership, meeting every two years to review progress and share development solutions between partners and stakeholders. In doing so, Africa and Europe would convene leaders from the two continents to elevate the bar politically and financially for the ocean. In between, organise joint Africa-Europe convenings and workshops with other agencies and programmes to facilitate strong working collaborations.

Intervention Area 1: Ocean Governance

Ocean governance has, for long, remained an undervalued dimension of the Africa-Europe relations. This is seen as a missed opportunity to advance the implementation of SDG 14 and the other ocean-related targets of the 2030 Agenda. The potential of effective and coherent ocean governance is significant in the context of Africa-Europe relations as it could facilitate enhanced trade, diplomatic relations, and socio-economic, and environmental opportunities at varying scales.

The development of a joint vision on ocean governance and the alignment of policies (at national, regional, and continental levels) could facilitate greater cross-continental and global impact in terms of the protection, regulation, and optimal management of ocean resources and services. It would also reaffirm the message that Africa and Europe are united on the conservation, protection and sustainable use of the ocean.

Co-driving a global sustainable ocean agenda: Cooperation and collaboration on ocean governance hold a strategic opportunity for both Africa and Europe. They have the potential to positively impact the sustainable development agenda, at a time when international treaties are being implemented or negotiated (Global Plastics Treaty, BBNJ Agreement – the High Seas Treaty -, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the WTO fisheries Agreement, regulations on deep-sea mining), and ahead of the UNFCCC COP29, the 7TH AU-EU Summit and the third UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3) scheduled in 2025. With a joint position and common understanding of global treaties that are being implemented or negotiated, the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership could facilitate a greater number of ratifications and help secure their operationalisation.

The following activities are integral inclusions of the 'Roadmap towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership' (AU-EU Ocean Action Plan) under the Ocean Governance intervention area:

- Support Africa-Europe Inter-Agency coordination through developing large, long-term and high impact programmes (Priority: **High**).
- Share best practices for negotiation and support for effective implementation of international treaties, conventions, and sustainability targets (Priority: **Medium**).
- Exchange effective approaches for the implementation of national blue economy strategies (Priority: **Medium**).
- Promote fisheries transparency and equitable benefit sharing (Priority: **High**).
- Facilitate dialogues on access to the sea and leveraging inland country aquatic resources (Priority: **Low**).
- Elevate Gender equality and the participation of women and youth in the maritime sector (Priority: **High**).
- Improve working conditions and social protection for seafarers and dockworkers (Priority: **Medium**).

Intervention Area 2: Capacity Sharing

Capacity sharing is a crucial element of the proposed Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership. It is considered instrumental in facilitating the translation of a joint vision on ocean governance and the blue economy into actionable change and sustainable ocean development in African and European livelihoods. The term capacity 'building' has deliberately been replaced with capacity 'sharing' as a means to emphasise the spirit of fostering a genuine Partnership between Africa and Europe.

Building new capabilities in Africa and Europe requires local institutions to develop specialist knowledge and expertise, backed by partners who have proven the effectiveness of their expertise and experiences on the international stage. This knowledge could be leveraged to link blue economy scientists, policymakers, entrepreneurs, academia, youth, indigenous peoples, and local communities across Africa and Europe, promoting the exchange of best practices and developing tailored solutions for addressing common ocean challenges, making it a win-win scenario for both Africa and Europe.

A Two-way process: Capacity sharing in the context of the Partnership should be embedded into the following principles:

- Enable socio-economic and environmental benefits at all levels;
- Create opportunities for entrepreneurship;
- Develop agency in vulnerable groups in the blue economy, including women, youth, Small Developing Island States (SIDs) and indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs);
- Contribute to good ocean governance;
- Foster amicable relations between partners.
- Progress on these fronts would not only address pressing and long-standing socio-economic, environmental, and governance challenges, but it would position Africa and Europe strategically as a united front in the context of emerging global challenges and transitions.

The proposed Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership recognises the importance of evidence-based policymaking and the need for accessible, reliable data and cutting-edge science to inform decision-and policy making processes. The role of the Africa-Europe Partnership would thus be to primarily focus on developing networks for sharing information, policy, research, and data.

The following activities are integral inclusions of the ‘Roadmap towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership’ (AU-EU Ocean Action Plan) under the Capacity Sharing intervention area. All have been identified to optimally facilitate capacity sharing and cooperation between Africa and Europe:

- Partnership’ (AU-EU Ocean Action Plan) under the Capacity Sharing intervention area. All have been identified to optimally facilitate capacity sharing and cooperation between Africa and Europe:
- Facilitate the sharing of experiences on blue economy policy development and emerging ocean policy (Priority: **High**).
- Promote Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), as well as blue economy monitoring and accounting (Priority: **High**).
- Strengthen and structure an Africa-Europe network of research and education institutions for ocean governance and the blue economy (Priority: **Medium**).
- Accelerate the development of wide-spread ocean literacy (Priority: **High**).
- Enhance and build shared Africa-Europe capacity for ocean governance and regenerative blue economy (Priority: **High**).

Intervention Area 3: Finance and Investment

Accessing finance at an affordable cost is an ongoing challenge, and the transition to a sustainable regenerative blue economy requires a fundamental shift in how financial resources are allocated and managed. The Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership has the potential to be at the forefront of this transformation, aligning financial systems with the goals of sustainable development through ocean governance and the blue economy.

This would entail not only increasing investment in sustainable ocean-related activities but also ensuring that financial flows are directed away from practices that harm the ocean and undermine their long-term health. Furthermore, leveraging public development banks, comprising development, financial institutions, multilateral development, national and regional banks, international financing corporations, and investment and guarantee funds present a unique opportunity to advance equitable finance towards the blue economy.

The role of the proposed Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership in the context of finance and investment would be to identify and operationalise innovative financing mechanisms to facilitate ocean resilience, regeneration, and restoration; the deployment of sustainable blue economy strategies; as well as to co-develop capacity, scale-up, and duplicate impactful experiences. By enhancing the capacity of governments, businesses, entrepreneurs, and communities to collaborate, the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership would play a critical role in creating a more conducive environment for impact investment and foster a culture of financial responsibility and stewardship.

Co-driving finance and investment: The Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership should aim to catalyse private sector investment by supporting the development of a strong blue entrepreneurship ecosystem that has the potential to deliver:

- Significant impact on the ground (by and for local stakeholders);
- Connect entrepreneurs and other related stakeholders from both continents;
- Foster cooperation, knowledge and experience-sharing;
- Accelerate and scale-up blue economy entrepreneurship in Africa and Europe.

Beyond entrepreneurship, innovative financing mechanisms with recognised potential include (but are not limited to) payment-for-ecosystem services (PES) schemes, compensation for natural capital (including debt-for-nature swaps or ocean swaps), blue carbon market, improved allocation of global tax, blue bonds, blue tokens and FinTech, blended finance facility and novel insurance mechanisms to incentivise investment by creating confidence for a particular development project.

By implementing such mechanisms, Africa and Europe could generate development finance themselves and reduce reliance on official development assistance (ODA) funding support for national and regional development goals. The development of the blue economy across Africa and Europe can generate the synergies needed to facilitate the immediate and long-term financing of new initiatives as well as ensure the continuation of current projects and programmes.

The following activities are integral inclusions of the 'Roadmap towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership' under the Finance and Investment intervention area. All have been identified to realise the availability of financial resources over the immediate and long term, under the Africa-Europe Partnership.

- Contribute to the joint elaboration of an Africa-Europe Blue Finance Roadmap (Priority: **High**).
- Promote the establishment of new ocean and blue economy financial mechanisms (Priority: **High**).
- Accelerate large national and regional regenerative blue economy project investment (Priority: **High**).
- Facilitate the creation and operationalisation of regional banks for international blue economy development (Priority: **Medium**).
- Launch of annual Africa-Europe business forums for blue economy (Priority: **Low**).

Operationalising the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership and facilitating transformation:

The momentum for improved ocean governance and a sustainable regenerative blue economy is welcome and on the rise. However, given the state of the ocean, it becomes clear that an enhanced cooperation between Africa and Europe on these issues is instrumental. Both continents and their institutions have a particular role to play in driving the global sustainable ocean agenda, in the lead up to the 7th AU-EU Summit and the third United Nations Ocean Conference, set to take place in 2025.

This Policy Brief, which captures the main outputs of the ‘Roadmap towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership’, highlights concrete actions that have been identified within three key intervention areas.

The full operationalisation of the ‘Roadmap towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership’ is a unique opportunity to elevate and drive political and financial momentum and coherence ahead of key international policy events, including changes of leadership at the EU/EC and AUC levels in 2024 and 2025 respectively – which can result in impact on a global scale, but require institutions, countries, programmes to engage, collaborate, and contribute as partners.

The Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership would be an opportunity for transformative collaboration between the continents with the ambition to achieving various SDGs, as well as addressing the major ocean crises of biodiversity loss, pollution, climate change and declining resources.

Notes:

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