

The Future of the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership: Trends and Policy Choices for Enhanced Cooperation

Produced by the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) for the new institutional and programming cycle of the European and African Union Commissions (AU-EU), leading to the 7th AU-EU Heads of State Summit in 2025.



Foresight Paper on OCEAN GOVERNANCE & BLUE ECONOMY

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This Foresight Paper is a contribution of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance in preparation for the 3rd United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) (UNOC3). The Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance is an initiative led by the European Commission Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), in partnership with the African Union Commission. The initiative is implemented by the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF).

In the context of the UN Ocean Conference, this Foresight Paper is a unique resource that explores the future of the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership, building on present and future trends. Addressed to decision makers, and actors on the ground, it seeks to position the ocean and the blue economy as a strategic domain of cooperation to realise a joint prosperous, sustainable and resilient future.

To advance such vision, the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance calls for the implementation of an Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership, consisting in a joint vision for a mutually supportive relationship focusing on equal benefit sharing through inclusive and equitable processes and outcomes for the two continents on ocean policy and action, including the blue economy.

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Executive Summary

The ocean's significance is increasingly being recognised globally for its role in maintaining geopolitical balance, global supply chains, and addressing socio-economic, environmental, and governance challenges. The African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) both acknowledge the need for global action to harness the ocean's potential in addressing different development needs across the African and European continents.

Despite this, reference to ocean governance and the blue economy have been largely absent from previous AU-EU Summit declarations, missing opportunities for achieving SDG14, the 2030 UN Agenda, and enhancing cooperation in this strategic domain.

The expected formalisation of the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership embedding Ocean Governance and the Blue Economy aims to advance a shared vision for ocean governance and regenerative blue economy development, strengthening capacities through joint exchange.

This partnership is particularly significant as 2025 marks the 25th anniversary of the Africa-Europe Partnership, a pivotal moment for strengthening collaboration between the two continents. Set against the backdrop of the new EU-AU institutional policy cycle, the next five years present a critical window to advance Africa-Europe cooperation. This momentum will be essential in preparation for key events, including the third UN Ocean Conference, the 7th AU-EU Heads of State Summit, and other major global policy forums. As the African Union implements the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYIP) of Agenda 2063 and the European Union advances its 'EU Oceans Pact'—serving as a strategic framework for ocean governance and the blue economy—alongside the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package, deepening cooperation on sustainable ocean development and blue economy will be crucial.

Moreover, understanding future scenarios that influence ocean governance, blue economy development, and sustainable development cooperation is essential. This paper explores key considerations for successful Africa-Europe cooperation on sustainable ocean and blue economy development, and discusses different drivers of development, the potential outlook for future cooperation, and priority changes that need to be considered.

The African blue economy generated a value of USD 296 billion in 2022, with future projections expecting to yield USD 576 billion in 2063. The development of the coastal tourism sector, oil and gas, mineral, and blue carbon and other ecosystem services sectors in Africa is expected to result in the most significant contributions in terms of added value to the future blue economy, whereas fisheries, marine transport, and coastal tourism are expected to produce the most employment.

The blue economy in Europe continues to expand and increased in scale with individual sectors continuing to develop economically, except for the coastal tourism sector. Despite this, the coastal tourism sector remains the largest blue economy sector in terms of value added and employment, followed by the maritime transport industry. In 2021, the European blue economy employed 3.6 million people, had a turnover of an estimated 624 billion Euros, and contributed to 171 billion Euros in gross value added (GVA), despite the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Current drivers of blue growth in Africa include a growing African population which is expected to reach up to 3 billion in 2063, whereas the European population is expected to remain fairly stable. In addition, African coastal and marine environments have degraded, resulting in reduced delivery of essential ecosystem services; whereas the status of European blue economy environments varies significantly, and is further complicated by significant data limitations. The nonoptimal state marine, coastal, and freshwater habitats across Africa and Europe highlight the need for cooperative action to ensure the delivery of essential ecosystem services that underpin the functioning of the blue economy. The increased anthropogenic pressures on blue economy resources (such as needing to satisfy the nutritional requirements of a growing African population, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, marine and water pollution, unsustainable exploitation and extraction), as well as reversing the environmental degradation of blue economy ecosystems has been identified as suitable loci for future Africa-Europe cooperation.

Many development programmes and projects have been established as forms of previous Africa-Europe cooperation, with many different examples. The EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package is a key mechanism to be leveraged in driving blue economy development, by narrowing the global investment gap worldwide through the allocation of €150 billion of investment to bolstering cooperation with African partners. There are 35 flagship projects currently in the Global Gateway pipeline that constitute Africa-Europe collaboration on sustainable ocean development, with significant wider support for sustainable ocean development in Africa through other regional development organisations.

Executive Summary

The implications for Africa-Europe cooperation and collaborative efforts on different sectors of the blue economy should involve attention to the following: developing and upgrading maritime transport and infrastructure, as well as ensuring maritime security; enhancing the production of African fishery and aquaculture resources, and facilitating intercontinental trade thereof; negotiation compromise and regenerative solutions with regards to the extraction of minerals, oil, and gas; prioritising coastal tourism development and ecosystem restoration and regeneration; the operationalisation of blue carbon and other ecosystem services as a sector of the blue economy; joint development of research, education, and training programmes on ocean science and the development of widespread ocean literacy; implementing a holistic approach where the development concerns and challenges of multiple blue economy sectors are addressed simultaneously.

Priority changes in policy and practices are needed for the development of the blue economy through joint effort between Africa and Europe. For this reason, different blue economy sectors and cross-cutting sustainable ocean development needs can be considered under four different priority intervention measures (which are equally prioritised) to which collaborative action between Africa and Europe can be directed to: 1) Conservation, restoration and the regenerative blue economy; 2) Advancing more equitable and inclusive partnerships; 3) Value-added supply chains and regional coastal integration; and 4) Enhancing maritime security, safety and sovereignty. These intervention pillars align with the priorities of both continents and are designed to address multiple interests and deliver co-benefits as loci of action.

In addition, the call from the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance for the implementation of an 'Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership' sets the backdrop for future collaboration between Africa and Europe. The partnership is centred on leveraging ocean governance, capacity sharing, and finance and investment to drive sustainable ocean development across both continents. Guiding principles have been developed for guiding Africa and Europe's respective ocean domains in line with the four pillars: shift from a mindset of "Blue Growth" to the joint mindset of the "regenerative, resilient, and restorative blue economy"; integrating and maintaining transparency into Africa-Europe collaboration; ensuring inclusive and equitable processes and outcomes; shift of attracting foreign direct investment to reduce reliance and dependence on direct foreign aid; value addition of ocean and blue economy supply chains; and knowledge sharing for informed policy formulation and co-development.

The development of structures and mechanism associated with an enabling environment for facilitating blue economy development may also be prioritised for cooperative action. An enabling environment for sustainable ocean development across both Africa and Europe could thus involve the following: the development of widespread ocean literacy; enhancing the working relationship between relevant institutions; negotiating strong stakeholder coalition and buy-in; prioritising cross-cutting development activities through a holistic approach; capacity sharing and technical support; maintaining a common ideal of ocean governance and joint vision for ocean policy; development of sustainable financing mechanisms and co-investment through the blue economy; and the joint development of strategic development plans and roadmaps for sustainable ocean development.

The ocean and its potential in contributing to a more prosperous future has historically been overlooked and undervalued, yet it offers untapped opportunities to meet present and future needs. The ocean and the blue economy represent an immense opportunity for collaboration, offering solutions to some of the most pressing challenges faced by both Africa and Europe.

With the recent changes of EU, AU, and EU-AU policy cycles, several critical questions arise: How can the Africa-Europe partnership effectively integrate ocean governance and the blue economy to address global challenges? What strategies will best harness the untapped potential of the blue economy? In what ways can emerging sectors within the blue economy contribute to sustainable development and economic growth? How can investment in ocean governance be optimized to ensure long-term benefits for both continents? Addressing these questions will be essential in realizing the vision of a prosperous and sustainable future driven by the ocean's vast potential.

Acronyms and Glossary

ABES	Africa Blue Economy Strategy
AEF	Africa-Europe Foundation
AFD	Agence Française de Développement (French Development Agency)
AU	Africa Union
AU-IBAR	African Union International Bureau for Animal Resources
AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency - NEPAD
ARBE	AU's Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, and Sustainable Environment
BBNJ	Biodiversity of areas Beyond National Jurisdiction
BE	Blue Economy
B3R-Hub	Africa-Europe AU-EU Blue Resilience, Regeneration, and Restoration Hub
CBAM	EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
COE	Centre of Excellence
COP	Conference of the Parties (see UNFCCC)
DG MARE	European Commission Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
EU	European Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Money Fund
IMO	International Maritime Organisation.
IUU fishing	Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated fishing
MCSCC	Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Coordination Centre
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation (Global Europe development portfolio)
OG	Ocean Governance
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
RECs	Regional Economic Communities (Africa)
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organisation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SFPA	Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements

Acronyms and Glossary

STYIP	Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan of the African Union Agenda 2063
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UAE	United Arabs Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNEP-FI	United Nations Environmental Programme Finance Initiative
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation
UNOC	United Nations Ocean Conference
UNOC3	United Nations Ocean Conference 3 (scheduled for 2025)
UNSG	United Nations Secretary General
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Definitions

Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership	A joint vision for a mutually supportive relationship focusing on equal benefit sharing through inclusive and equitable processes and outcomes for the two continents on ocean policy and action, including the blue economy. The partnership should be designed to facilitate more effective cooperation between Africa and Europe on ocean governance and blue economy issues, with a focus on sustainability, restoration, regeneration, and resilience. The Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership would contribute to advancing a shared vision and Roadmap for an enhanced collaboration, as well as reinforcing the capacities of both Africa and Europe through joint exchange and understanding of respective development challenges for a strengthened international ocean governance framework and regenerative blue economy.
Regenerative Blue Economy	An economic model that combines rigorous and effective regeneration and protection of the ocean and marine and coastal ecosystems with sustainable, low, or no carbon economic activities, and fair prosperity for people and the planet, now and in the future. It also acknowledges the importance of knowledge-sharing, policy alignment, and joint action to achieve its objectives. It also aims to transcend traditional models of development assistance, and advocate for more equitable and collaborative approaches where both Africa and Europe contribute with solutions.

This document reflects the views only of the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF), and the European Commission and the African Union Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Introduction

The importance of the ocean is increasingly being recognised on a global scale in terms of geopolitical balance, the maintenance of global supply chains, 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 has been largely absent from existing AU-EU partnership programming, and is seen as a missed opportunity for achieving the ocean-related sustainable development goal (SDG14), implementing the 2030 UN Agenda, and furthering cooperation between Africa and Europe as a whole.

The formalisation and implementation of an Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership embedding Ocean Governance and the Blue Economy is considered a key development opportunity towards this aim, and consists of advancing a shared vision for an enhanced partnership through which to address ocean governance and regenerative blue economy development, as well as to strengthen the capacities of both Africa and Europe through joint exchange and understanding of respective development challenges for more a sustainable and regenerative blue economy and international ocean governance.

In the context of Africa-Europe relations, strengthened ocean governance and blue economy could unlock significant opportunities; from enhanced trade and ensuring the resilience of international supply chains, supporting strategic competitiveness to strengthening regional maritime security, maintaining geopolitical balance, and addressing the pressing and long-standing challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and broader environmental, socio-economic, and governance concerns. Africa and Europe should position themselves strategically as a united front on ocean related challenges and opportunities, including through joint policy and action on the multilateral stage.

The Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership is a key opportunity to ensure ocean governance and the development of the regenerative blue economy is prioritised at the UN Ocean Conference where SDG 14 will be assessed and turbo-charged, as well as in preparation of the second African Climate Summit (ACS) and the 7th AU-EU Heads of States Summit, as well as global policy events.

With the start of the new EU-AU institutional cycle and the African Union's launch of the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063, 2025 is shaping up to be a pivotal year for Africa-Europe cooperation. The EU's Ocean Pact—serving as a strategic framework for ocean governance and the blue economy—alongside the rollout of the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package and the EU's efforts to meet its climate targets under the Green Deal 2050, will define key areas of collaboration.

Against this backdrop, deepening the Africa-Europe Partnership on Ocean Governance and the Blue Economy is critical. Strengthening this cooperation will not only support regional economic development and food security but will also contribute to global efforts in trade, security, climate resilience, biodiversity protection and economic transformation.

In advance of these decisive upcoming political events, it is opportune to look at different scenarios and factors shaping the future landscape of ocean governance, the blue economy, and sustainable ocean development cooperation between Africa and Europe. Particularly, by exploring future trends of emerging sectors within the blue economy, including shipping, decarbonisation, alternative fuels, the blue bio-economy, and blue carbon. The Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership can offer unique insights on the transformative potential that the ocean offers in meeting the demands of climate change, health, energy, and food security.



Strategic Positioning

This Foresight Paper focuses on long term sustainable ocean development goals of the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership embedding Ocean Governance and the Blue Economy. It is supported by a series of shorter-term actions as outlined in the Roadmap of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance, entitled **'Roadmap Towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership'**.

This paper explores key considerations and influences that impact the scope of continued Africa-Europe cooperation regarding the development of ocean governance and the blue economy, and how these affect broader cooperation prospects between the two continents over the long term towards 2050/2063. The paper attempts to inform how different challenges and risks in jointly cooperating on ocean governance and the blue economy may be addressed over the next institutional policy cycles of continental development bodies, including both the AU and EU Commissions, as well as discussing key themes for development cooperation under and beyond the agenda of the sustainable ocean development up to 2030, and towards 2050 and 2063.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: Section 1 discusses the scope for cooperation outlook concerning ocean governance and the development of the blue economy under the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership and beyond; Section 2 presents an overview of the current status of Africa-Europe development cooperation, including the various planned development programmes under the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package and other

international developmental organisations; and Section 3 covers considerations for policy and implementation, including principles through which to guide the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership, the development of an enabling environment for ocean governance and blue economy development, and four priority intervention areas.

It is the only resource dedicated to understanding current and future trends and guiding the future direction of this Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership. Shaped around 4 pillars, it provides solution pathways for (1) Conservation, restoration, and the regenerative blue economy (Pillar 1), (2) Advancing more equitable and inclusive partnerships (Pillar 2), (3) Value-added supply chains and regional coastal integration (Pillar 3), and (4) Enhancing maritime security, safety and sovereignty (Pillar 4).

This Foresight Paper significantly strengthens the AU-EU Partnership by addressing critical issues. It offers valuable insights on how the Africa-Europe partnership can effectively integrate ocean governance and the blue economy to tackle global challenges. The paper outlines strategies to harness the untapped potential of the blue economy, explores how emerging sectors can contribute to sustainable development and economic growth, and highlights ways to optimize investment in ocean governance for long-term benefits for both continents. By tackling these key questions, the Foresight Paper aligns AU and EU policies on ocean governance and the blue economy, ensuring a cohesive and strategic approach.

1. Current and Future Trends: Implications for the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership

The Africa-Europe Partnership on Ocean Governance and the Blue Economy facilitates the backdrop for future collaboration on sustainable ocean development. Future cooperation between Africa and Europe on matters relating to sustainable ocean development has been proposed as a structured, formal and ambitious Africa-Europe Ocean

Partnership encompassing Ocean Governance and the Blue Economy. Such a 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.



1.1 Trends and key drivers affecting ocean governance and blue economy development

The Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership is influenced by a myriad of global and regional trends. While this document focuses on major trends in terms of blue economy development such as economic sector status, environmental status and anthropogenic drivers, it is essential to acknowledge several overarching trends that significantly impact the partnership. These trends include demography, urbanisation, trade, pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss, and nutrition. Each of these areas warrants detailed exploration to fully understand their implications for sustainable development and cooperation.

Current drivers of growth in Africa hamper the development of the blue economy across the continent. The drivers of growth in Africa are still highly dependent on raw materials, natural resources, with relatively low technological processing capacity. The continent represents a small share of global trade (3.2% of exports and 3.3% of world imports)¹. A persistent lack of economic transformation and limited performance and competitiveness in the processing and value addition of its main blue economy sectors (fishery resources, aquaculture, innovation, shipping and transportation) continues to hold back Africa's national and regional economies. In addition, the overregulation of some national African states hampers the spontaneous development of trade and entrepreneurship insofar as they limit the development and growth of small to medium size enterprises (SMEs) and hamper intra-continental and inter-continental trade (such as with Europe).

Global drivers of change also have the potential to hamper the development of the blue economy. More globally (including Africa and Europe), key trends affecting the natural environments that underpin the blue economy include ocean pollution (including marine litter, plastic pollution, nutrient and chemical pollution, and sound pollution); ocean warming and changing ocean conditions (such as ocean acidification); overfishing of capture fisheries which includes illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing; threats to ocean and coastal biodiversity; sea-level rise; as well as anthropogenic drivers such as geopolitical conflicts; destructive extractive industries (such as deep-sea exploration and mining for valuable raw materials); and the exacerbation of climate change (which contributes to increasingly erratic and extreme weather events).

Blue economy drivers will have to be managed to optimally facilitate blue economy development over the future. Other drivers affecting ocean governance and the development of the blue economy include differences in the supply and demand of blue economy goods and services projected over the future; the state of degradation of natural ecosystems on which the blue economy relies on; and population dynamics and its interplay with the pressure on available blue economy resources.

I. Economic trends analysis: 2063 Blue Economy goods, services and supply

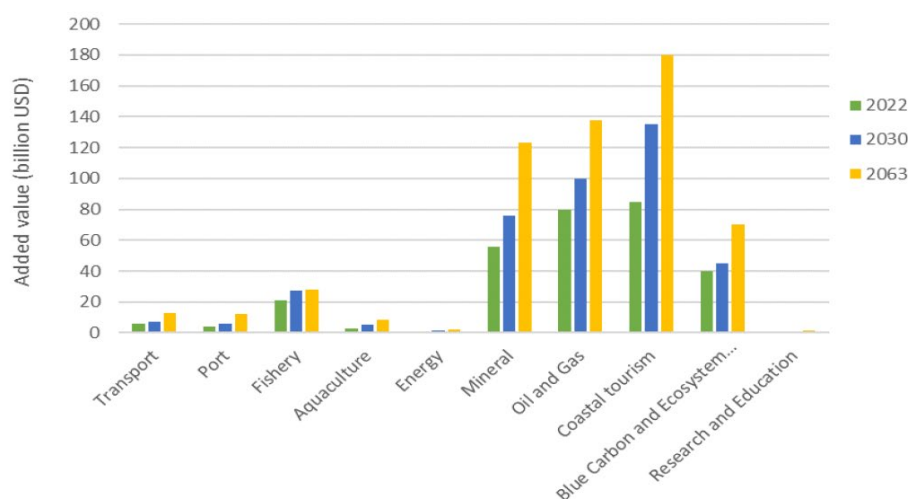
Blue Economy strategies for Africa and Europe have been developed independently from one another and have similar aims of guiding the development of blue economy resources, such that they become significant contributors to advancing knowledge,

transformation, economic growth, and sustainable development at the continental level. However, current blue economy goods and services supply will need to progress and be developed to meet the demands of the future (in 2063 and beyond).

¹ AU-IBAR, 2019. Annex 5. Policies, Institutional and Governance, Employment, Job creation and Poverty Eradication, Innovative Financing in the Context of Africa Blue Economy. Nairobi, Kenya



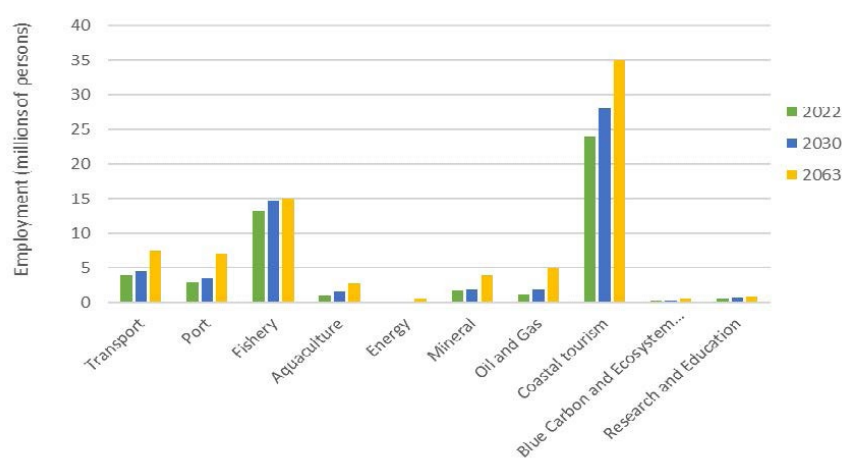
FIGURE 1: THE ESTIMATED PROJECTED VALUE ADDITION OF DIFFERENT BLUE ECONOMY SECTORS IN AFRICA



Added value in blue economy sectors in Africa is projected to increase in the near future. African Blue economy sectors generated a value of USD 296 billion, in 2022. An observable trend common across all blue economy sectors in **Africa** is that the added value has been projected to increase over the coming future years (coastal tourism, oil and gas, mineral, and

blue carbon and other ecosystem services sectors (Figure 1), to the value of USD 576 billion in 2063. The transport sector, port activities, capture fisheries, aquaculture, energy, and research and education sectors have been projected to contribute relatively low added value to the continental blue economy (Figure 1).

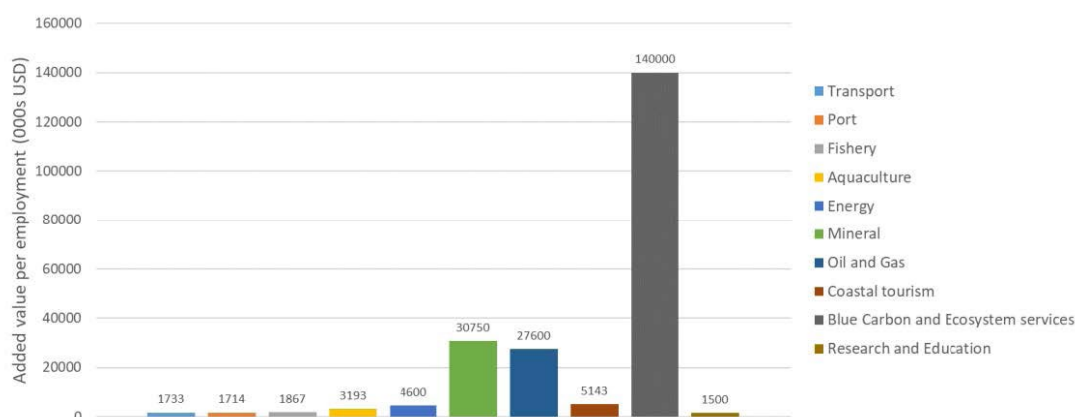
FIGURE 2: PROJECTED INCREASE IN EMPLOYMENT ACROSS DIFFERENT BLUE ECONOMY SECTORS IN AFRICA



Different blue economy sectors disproportionately offer greater employment potential than others. The employment generated by the African Blue Economy in 2022 was estimated at 49 million jobs but is expected to increase to 78 million jobs in 2063 (amounts to 5% of the expected population in 2063). The potential for the generation of employment is also disproportionate between different blue economy sectors (Figure 2), with the coastal tourism sector having been projected to generate the greatest fraction of

employment opportunities over the coming years, followed by the capture fisheries, transport, and port activities and infrastructure sectors (Figure 2). The other blue economy sectors (aquaculture, energy, mineral, oil and gas, blue carbon and ecosystem services, and research and education) represent some of the smallest fractions of the employment potential of the blue economy and projections over the coming years continue to reflect this trend (Figure 2)..

FIGURE 3: THE POTENTIAL ADDED VALUE GENERATED PER UNIT OF EMPLOYMENT PROJECTED FOR 2063 IN AFRICA.



The dynamics between added value and employment potential of different blue economy sectors will have to be balanced for the purposes of sustainable ocean development. Projections indicate that the blue carbon and ecosystem services sector has the potential to yield the greatest added value for each person employed in the sector over the coming years up to 2063, relative to other blue economy sectors in Africa (Figure 3), at USD 140,000 per person employed in the sector. Projections further indicate that the oil and gas, and mineral sectors also have potential (Figure 3). However, other

sectors such as the coastal tourism and fisheries sector constitute a significant fraction of employment and thus decent livelihoods and should not be ignored (Figures 2 and 4). Projections of other blue economy sectors show significant employment generation potential for the added value reinvested into the development of those sectors (Figure 4), specifically the research and education sector, transport, port activities and infrastructure, fisheries, and aquaculture sectors (Figure 4), ranging between 200 to 600 jobs for every million USD invested back into the blue economy.

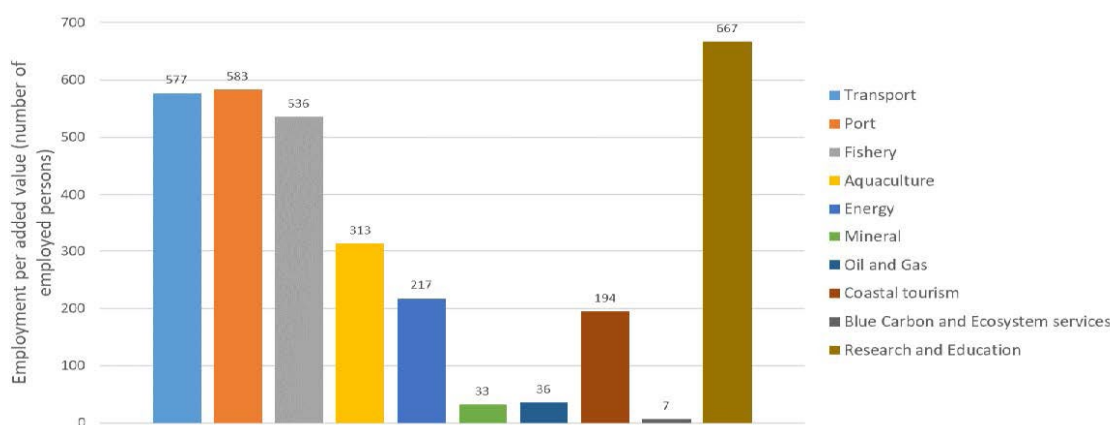
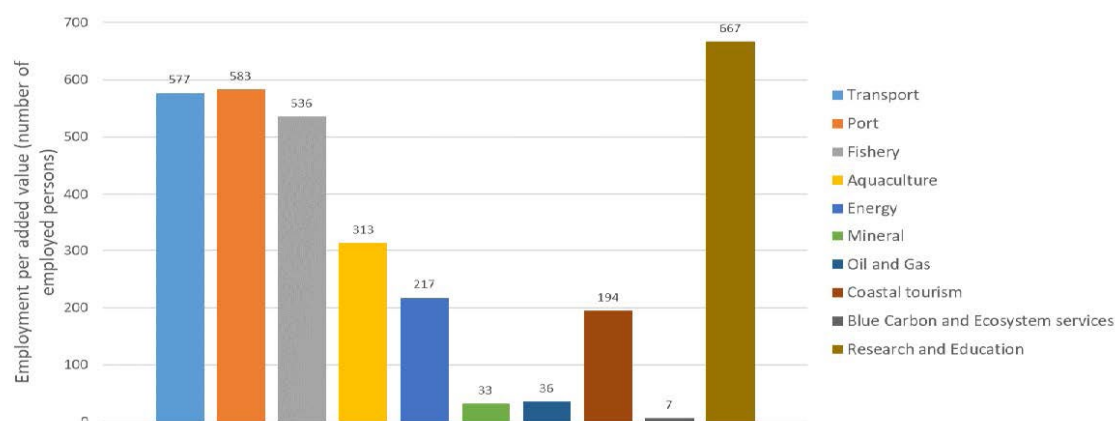


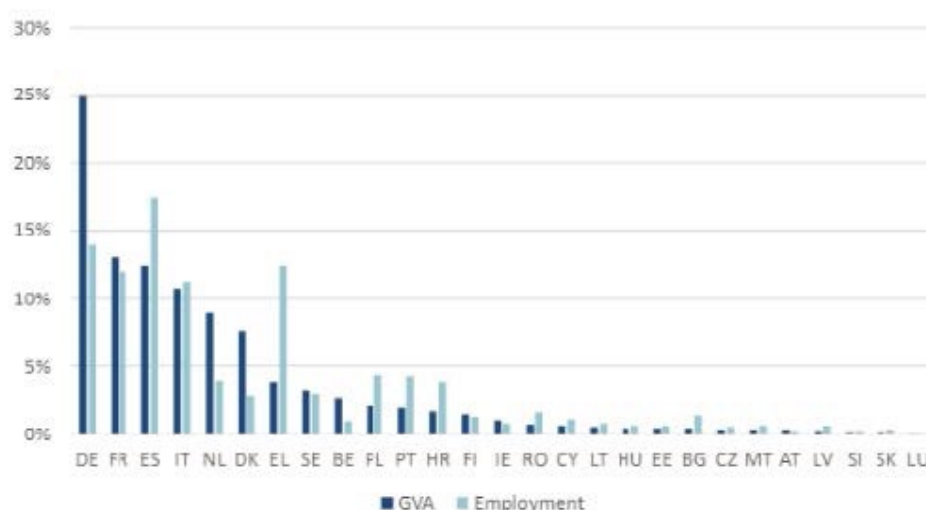
FIGURE 4: EMPLOYMENT GENERATION POTENTIAL PER ADDED VALUE REINVESTED INTO DIFFERENT BLUE ECONOMY SECTORS PROJECTED FOR 2063 IN AFRICA.



The blue economy in Europe continues to develop and increase in scale (compared to previous years). In 2021, the European blue economy employed 3.6 million people, had a turnover of an estimated 624 billion Euros, and contributed to 171 billion Euros in gross value added (GVA), despite the impacts

of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The contribution of the Blue Economy to each member state's economy varies greatly (Figure 5)², but is expected to increase in all countries with significant ocean resources.

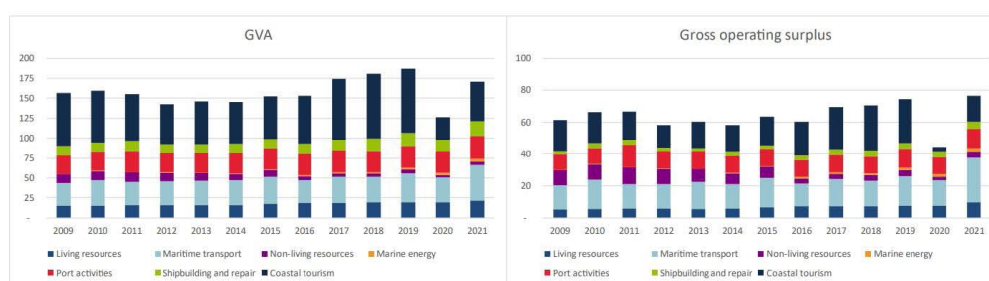
FIGURE 5: NATIONAL PROPORTIONAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE EU BLUE ECONOMY (2021), IN TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT AND GROSS ADDED VALUE (GVA).



In Europe, individual blue economy sectors have continued to develop in terms of economic performance, except for the coastal tourism sector, which is still in recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, the coastal tourism sector remains the largest blue economy sector (Figure 6), having generated 29% of blue economy GVA and 54% of blue economy employment. Maritime transport was the second largest sector in 2021, having generated 25% of the blue economy GVA. The marine renewable energy sector (primarily offshore wind) and the

marine living resources (fisheries, aquaculture, processing and distribution of fish products) sector both increased significantly from 2020 to 2021, by 45% and 24% respectively. Other blue economy development trends indicate that certain specific sectors have consistently increased (from 2015 to 2021), specifically offshore wind energy (+326%), shipbuilding and repair (+54%), maritime transport (+29%), marine living resources (+27%), and port activities (+11%)².

FIGURE 6: GVA AND GROSS OPERATING SURPLUS (€ BILLION) IN THE EU BLUE ECONOMY BY SECTOR³



Expected hinderances for the development of the blue economy in Europe include climate change, global economic downturns, loss of ecological health (see Section 1.1ii) and geopolitical tensions. The potential negative effects of climate change on the blue economy along the European coastline have also been estimated. If current (2024) levels of coastal protection were not to be raised, the annual economic damages from coastal flooding could range between an estimated 137 billion and 814 billion Euros by 2100 under alternative emissions and mitigation scenarios, highlighting the vulnerability of coastal communities living in the outermost regions of Europe². The current geopolitical landscape marked by disruptions caused by tariff wars, risks of economic downturn and nationalistic approaches are expected to limit investment, generate uncertainty around development, increase fuel and energy prices, and disrupt trade and shipping routes.

Africa-Europe cooperation is a key opportunity for the accelerated development of the blue economy over the future. The trends and drivers of the blue economy across Africa and Europe suggest that future Africa-Europe cooperation and collaborative efforts may be needed, specifically for the continued development of blue carbon and ecosystem services and research and education sectors in Africa; coastal tourism, maritime transport, and port activities, and fisheries sectors as common development priorities across both continents; and the marine renewable energy and shipbuilding and repair sectors in Europe (if historical trends should continue as data suggests).

² European Commission (2024). The EU Blue Economy Report 2024. Publications Office of the European Union. Luxembourg. Available at:

https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-blue-economy-report-2024-innovation-and-sustainability-drive-growth-2024-05-30_en

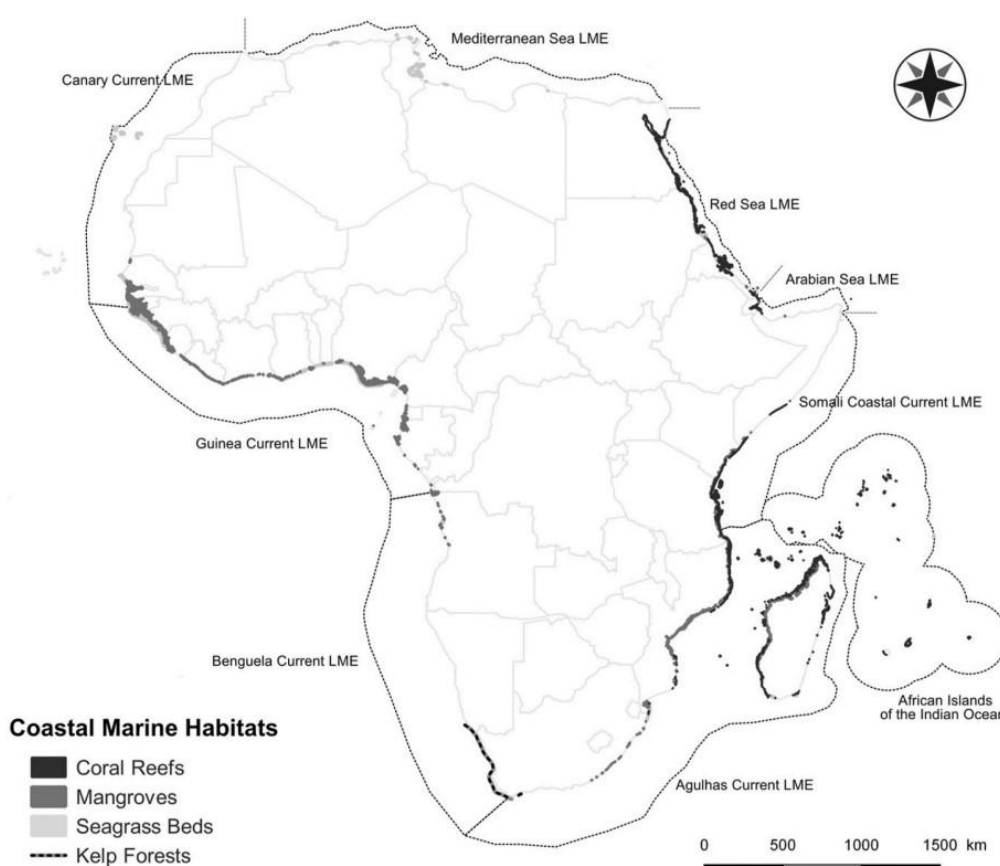
³ ibid

II. Status of African and European blue economy environmental ecosystems

African coastal and marine environments have degraded, resulting in reduced delivery of essential ecosystem services. The status of African Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs) has degraded with the optimal functioning of coastal habitats having been hampered by anthropogenic pressures, despite being essential to maintain a suitable living environment for African populations (and other populations more globally through the ecosystem services they provide)⁴. Marine habitats exposed to stress are less resilient, i.e., more sensitive to disturbances, have reduced adaptive capacities, and have therefore an increased vulnerability, and reduced capacity to

provide ecosystem services at their theoretical maximum. The combined extent of coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds across Africa has been estimated at approximately 117,000 km² following a heterogeneous distribution across African islands and LMEs (Agulhas Current, Arabian Sea, Benguela Current, Canary Current, Guinea Current, Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, and the Somali Coastal Current)³. The Guinea Current LME has the greatest combined surface areas of coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds at ~ 60,000 km², followed by the Agulhas Current LME at ~ 22,000 km² (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7: DISTRIBUTION OF COASTAL ENVIRONMENTS THROUGHOUT LARGE MARINE ECOSYSTEMS (LMES) ACROSS AFRICA.



⁴ Trégarot, E., Touron-Gardic, G., Cornet, C. C., & Failler, P. (2020). Valuation of coastal ecosystem services in the Large Marine Ecosystems of Africa. *Environmental Development*, 36, 100584.

The ecosystem delivery of African large marine environments (LMEs) is suboptimal, and varies geographically.

The marine habitats of the Guinea Current LME are facing the most significant anthropogenic pressures relative to other African LMEs and have been estimated to function at only 25% of their total capacity³. More moderate anthropogenic pressures as endured by the marine habitats of the African islands in the Indian Ocean, the Somali Coastal Current LME, and the Arabian Sea LME have resulted in an estimation of these systems delivering ecosystem services at 50% of their optimal capacity³. The respective ecosystem services delivery capacities of the Agulhas Current LME, Benguela Current LME, Canary Current LME, Mediterranean Sea LME, and the Red Sea LME have been estimated to function at 75% of their total individual capacities³.

The status of European blue economy environments varies significantly, and many systems are degraded, and the issue is further complicated by significant data limitations.

The status of European ecosystems, including marine and freshwater ecosystems that underpin the blue economy, show a mixed picture with relevant trends for meeting policy targets not having been achieved for 2020 (particularly those pertaining to biodiversity), but still having the potential to meet longer term goals for the coming near future (2030)⁵, with many systems not having achieved “Good Environmental Status”⁶. The Baltic Sea, for example, is one of the most polluted seas in the world, facing issues such as eutrophication, hazardous substances, and overfishing. According to the European Environment Agency (EEA), only 11% of the Baltic Sea’s coastal and marine habitats are in good status. The Greater North Sea, which includes waters between the UK and Denmark, also faces significant pressures from activities such as shipping, fishing, and oil and gas exploration. The EEA reports that only 12% of marine habitats in the North Sea are in good status. The Celtic Sea and the Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast show similar trends, with substantial portions of marine habitats failing to meet GES criteria due to pressures like pollution, overfishing, and climate change impacts⁶.

In Macaronesia, including the Azores, Madeira, and the Canary Islands, marine ecosystems are relatively better preserved but still face challenges from invasive species, climate change, and localised pollution. The Mediterranean Sea, including the Black Sea, experiences intense anthropogenic pressures due to its densely populated coastal regions, significant maritime traffic, and tourism activities. The EEA highlights that 93% of assessed fish stocks in the Mediterranean are overfished⁷.

Further to this, data coverage and collection remain insufficient across some European marine regions, posing a challenge for consistent and reliable assessments. This data gap hinders comprehensive evaluations of the status of marine and coastal ecosystems in Europe, including outermost regions and overseas territories. The EU has recognised these challenges and is investing in improving monitoring and data collection efforts through initiatives like the Marine Knowledge 2020 strategy, which aims to provide a more detailed and accurate picture of the state of European marine environments⁸.

Looking ahead, the ‘European Oceans Pact’, launched by the European Commission in 2025, sets out a vision for a more integrated approach to ocean-related policies. This initiative seeks to promote coherence across all EU policy areas related to the ocean, with a strong focus on supporting resilient and healthy marine and coastal ecosystems, advancing the blue economy, and shaping the future of the Africa–Europe Partnership.

AEF’s contribution to the EU Ocean Pact draws on several key areas that can provide meaningful external dimensions to the initiative. It builds on the work of AEF and the Africa–Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance, highlighting opportunities for both to support the upcoming EU-AU policy and programming cycle, which will begin in February 2025 following leadership changes at the African Union Commission.

⁵ European environment — state and outlook 2020 (SOER 2020). report: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/soer2020-europes-environment-state-and-outlook-report>

⁶ Good Environmental Status (GES) assessments of EU marine waters by integration level-MSFD Art.8 (2018) [full dashboard]: <https://water.europa.eu/marine/resources/msfd-reporting-data-tools/ges-assessment-dashboards/general-dashboards>

⁷ ibid

⁸ Section 3.7 Marine Ecosystems. p268 IN: Mapping and assessment of ecosystems and their services : an EU wide ecosystem assessment in support of the EU biodiversity strategy / Publications Office of the European Union, 2020. - ISBN 978-92-76-17833-0. (EUR) [10.2760/757183]

The nonoptimal state marine, coastal, and freshwater habitats across Africa and Europe highlight the need for cooperative action in this regard. The state of degradation of African marine ecosystems and the consequent inability of these ecosystems to optimally deliver crucial ecosystem services to sustain the blue economy; together with the need for improved

data collection and consolidation across European marine and coastal environments with many of them not having achieved “Good Environmental Status”, highlight the need for Africa-Europe cooperation in addressing these challenges as they are likely present on both continents (albeit to different extents) and remain to be resolved.

III. Addressing anthropogenic pressures on key blue economy resources

The African population is expected to grow significantly, whereas the population of Europe is expected to age and decline, with both continents exerting significant pressure on blue economy resources. Currently, the African population is estimated at 1.5 billion people, whereas projections for the African population have been estimated at 1.6 billion in 2030, and approximately 3 billion in 2063⁹. Africa has historically experienced a 1.1% increase in per capita consumption of fish (1961-2021)¹⁰, and current average per capita fish consumption is 9.4 kg/year⁸, which implies that by 2063, average per capita fish consumption should increase to approximately 14.9 kg/year (if the historical increase in per capita production remains consistent over the coming years), amounting to 45 million tons of fish needed annually for 2063. The total fisheries and aquaculture production in Africa amounted to an estimate of 13 million tons in 2022⁸. The estimated population of Europe is 450 million people (2022) and is expected to increase to a peak of 453 million in 2026, and then gradually decrease to 447 million in 2050. The per capita fish consumption in Europe is high and has been estimated to be 22.2 kg/year (in 2021)⁸, and with historical increases of between 0.7 - 0.9 % annually (1961-2021)⁸, but with a population that is largely stable, consumption of fish per capita and the total amount of seafood required to satisfy the nutritional requirements of Europe is not expected to change significantly.

The need for goods and services from blue economy sectors, specifically fisheries, is expected to be significantly greater than what the African and European blue economy currently provides. Europe has historically been the leading importing region of fish globally, with their share of the total import of aquatic animal products having decreased over the past two decades⁸. However, Europe as a region is expected to continue being a net importer of seafood products over the coming years⁸, likely owing to high fish consumption per capita that is not projected to change going forwards. While intra-European Union trade flows

in seafood are significant, even when exclusively considering EU imports originating from non-EU countries, the EU remains the global leader in seafood imports⁸. The largest proportion of EU imports from non-EU countries were sourced from Norway (27%), followed by China (6%), Morocco (5%), and the United Kingdom (UK, at 5%). The majority of these imports consisted of salmonids, cods, shrimps, tunas and squids. In terms of both value and volume (live weight equivalent), Africa is a net exporter. The bulk of African imports comprises cheap small pelagic species, such as mackerels or sardines, which play a crucial role in diversifying diets for populations heavily reliant on a limited range of staple foods. Despite being a net exporter of seafood, Africa is a net importer of protein, with the protein content of African imports of aquatic animal products surpassing that of exports by nearly 50%⁸. Despite engaging in relatively modest levels of inter-continental seafood trade (4% of total global seafood exports, and 3% of total global seafood imports), Africa enhances its protein supply from seafood through trade⁸, and is as a consequence heavily reliant on local fishery resources to sustain its peoples.

Intercontinental fish trade is a key area for Africa-Europe cooperation, in the light of increasing anthropogenic pressure on key fishery resources, for addressing the nutritional requirements of growing populations. Considering the global and continent-wide demand for seafood, driven by factors such as population growth; preference for fish as a diet of choice for health reasons; the growing affluent middle-class; and growing demand for aquaculture products, Africa should consider only allocating its high-value fishery resources for export and continue the current trend of importing greater amounts of protein than it exports as this has greater potential for meeting the nutritional requirements of its increasing population over future years. This marks another locus with potential for future Africa-Europe cooperation over the coming years.

⁹ AU-IBAR, (2019). Africa Blue Economy Strategy. Nairobi, Kenya.

¹⁰ FAO. 2024. The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2024. Blue Transformation in action. Rome.
<https://doi.org/10.4060/cd0683en>

Increasing populations globally exacerbate global pressures on blue economy resources in Africa and Europe.

In addition to increasing pressure on fishery resources, the increasing population growth in Africa (and elsewhere globally) exacerbates known anthropogenic pressures on blue economy resources such as through environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, marine and water pollution, unsustainable exploitation and extraction, IUU fishing, disruption of global supply lines (such as through maritime piracy and geopolitical instability), global warming, increasingly extreme weather phenomena, and other climate change induced stressors such as sea-level rise. As but one example, sea-level rise constitutes a particular threat both economically in terms of infrastructure, and in terms of human displacement, as more than 25% of Africa's population live within 100km of the coastline¹¹ and an estimated 80 million people in Europe live in the 100-year event flood coastal plain as well as in the contiguous land zone below 10m of elevation¹². According to IPCC AR6 WG2 (2022), current annual damages from flooding (1.3 billion Euros) will increase in the range of 13-19 billion Euros by 2050, and 93-960 billion Euros in Europe alone¹³.

Addressing global drivers and influences of the development of the blue economy mark opportunities for Africa-Europe cooperation in addressing common challenges.

The increasing reliance on blue economy resources, such as demonstrated for fishery and aquaculture resources (see above), across both continents over the coming years (Figures 1-6) indicate suitable cooperation loci for future Africa-Europe cooperation and collaborative efforts. In general, the regeneration and restoration of ecosystem health to maximize the delivery of essential ecosystem services, enhance the sustainability of blue economy activities and operations, and improve the value addition capacity of blue economy supply chains are crucial areas for cooperation between Africa and Europe. This approach, as concluded for addressing gaps in the African fishery and aquaculture sector, highlights the importance of collaborative efforts. These focal areas extend to jointly addressing global drivers, concerns, and pressures, such as the decarbonisation of the blue economy sectors, decreasing marine pollution, ensuring maritime security, and increasing capacity for climate change mitigation and adaptation, to support the development of a productive regenerative blue economy and sustainable ocean development moving forward.

2. State-of-play on Africa-Europe cooperation: Ocean Governance and Blue Economy

A joint vision of sustainable ocean development is urgent.

Cooperation and collaboration between Africa and Europe purport the advancement of a joint vision of sustainable ocean development. Advancing a joint vision for a mutually supportive relationship between the two continents focuses on equal benefit sharing through inclusive and equitable processes and outcomes on ocean policy and action, including on the development of the

regenerative blue economy. The integration of such a joint vision can facilitate enhanced collaboration, as well as reinforcing the capacities of both Africa and Europe through joint exchange and understanding of respective development challenges for a strengthened international ocean governance framework and regenerative blue economy.

¹¹ Niang, I., Ruppel, O.C., Abdrabo, M.A., Essel, A., Lennard, C., Padgham, J. and Urquhart, P., (2014). Africa. Climate change 2014: impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability. Part B: regional aspects. Contribution of working Group II to the fifth assessment report of the intergovernmental panel on climate change. Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Part B: Regional Aspects: Working Group II Contribution to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, pp.1199-1266.

¹² van de Wal, R. S. W., Melet, A., Bellaïre, D., Voudoukas, M., Camus, P., Ferrarin, C., Oude Essink, G., Haigh, I. D., Lionello, P., Luijendijk, A., Toimil, A., and Staneva, J. (2023). Sea Level Rise in Europe: Impacts and consequences, State Planet Discuss. [preprint], <https://doi.org/10.5194/sp-2023-38>, in review, 2023.

¹³ IPCC, 2022: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, 3056 pp., doi:10.1017/9781009325844.

2.1 Past and present status of Africa-Europe cooperation

Many development programmes and projects have been established as forms of Africa-Europe cooperation. Previous Africa-Europe collaboration for sustainable development comprises many examples jointly addressing challenges such as climate change mitigation and adaptation, migration, supporting the development of biodiversity, trade and economic development, humanitarian aid and relief, and other challenges under the UN sustainable development goals. This includes a number of programmes and projects implemented by international and regional development organisations such as UNECA, UNEP, UNDP, FAO, AFD, GIZ, African regional blocks, Team Europe initiatives, and programmes developed with individual national states across the two continents.

There are many examples of cooperative actions between the two continents. Among some the previous work, notable cooperative actions include the development of 15 sustainable fisheries partnership agreements between the EU and African national states, COST-Action, SEA-EU, UN Ocean Decade programme, the Great Blue Wall initiative, and political instruments such as the Moroni Declaration on the Blue Economy, the Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change and the Tangier Declaration - all addressing some of the most pressing ocean development and climate change challenges of our time. The recent modernisation of the Samoa agreement also provides a common basis for strengthening cooperation on resilience to natural disasters and a framework for better equipping ACP countries and the EU to face key growing challenges. This is further highlighted by the acknowledgment that the WestMED initiative remains a successful example of cooperation and a catalyst for the development of the blue economy, by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) states, including states from both Europe and Africa (recognised in 2021 at its Second Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Blue Economy). In addition, the European Commission also welcomed the Agreement on Sustainable Fisheries reached at Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), leading to 11 new conservation and management measures adopted. The development of key international policy instruments and agreements, such as the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982), “Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution” known as the Barcelona Convention and its associated protocols (1978), African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa (Lome Charter, 2016), have also resulted from cooperative and collaborative action between national states and regional structures and institutions.

Several key dialogue, networking, and communication platforms have been established to facilitate Africa-Europe collaborative effort. Other cooperative action includes the

establishment of a number of key platforms and joint-institutions such as the EU-AU institutional partnership (including ministerial and commission meetings and dialogues, as well as summits of national heads of state) to further dialogues and facilitate cooperation between stakeholder, exchange ideas, and jointly develop solutions to the common challenges endured by both continents. This includes the development of national, regional, and continental blue economy strategies such as the *Africa Blue Economy Strategy (2019)*, the inclusion of the blue economy under the *EU Green Deal*, and the more recent development of the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package.

The EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package is a key mechanism to be leveraged in driving development progress.

The Global Gateway Investment Package is the EU's contribution to narrowing the global investment gap worldwide. It is in line with the commitment of the G7 leaders from June 2021 to launch a values-driven, high-standard and transparent infrastructure partnership to meet global infrastructure development needs. The Global Gateway is also fully aligned with the UN's Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the Paris Agreement. In 2023, ninety key projects were launched worldwide across the digital, energy and transport sectors through Global Gateway to strengthen health, education, and research systems globally. The Global Gateway Package is being implemented through Team Europe initiatives: the EU, its Member States and European financial institutions work together to support concrete and transformational projects jointly identified in priority areas, such as supporting the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Currently, **35 flagship projects** under the EU-Africa Global Gateway programming in Africa include elements related to the blue economy. However, only a limited number of these focus specifically on infrastructure development—such as water systems, ports, and blue renewable energy. This reveals a disconnect between the priorities outlined in the Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) and Action Documents (ADs)—which emphasise blue economy development—and the actual flagship projects implemented under the Global Gateway. Moreover, the blue economy actions that are represented in the flagship initiatives often target single sectors in isolation, which runs counter to the integrated and cross-sectoral principles of a sustainable blue economy. There is, therefore, a clear opportunity to recalibrate the investment agenda under the Global Gateway framework to better reflect regenerative blue economy thinking. This means moving beyond traditional sector-based investment approaches and embracing more holistic, interconnected strategies that align with the broader vision of

inclusive and sustainable ocean development. The full potential of the Global Gateway strategy to drive meaningful blue economy development has yet to be fully realised. Greater alignment with the Agenda 2063 by the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package would benefit the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership, including on ocean governance and the blue It is recommended that the EU conduct a comprehensive review of all current blue-related actions under the Global Gateway to identify where the principles of a holistic and regenerative blue economy can be retrospectively integrated. In addition, a focused assessment of all flagship projects and initiatives in coastal and island states—and potentially in countries with significant freshwater resources—should be undertaken to determine the extent to which non-blue actions (such as those related to education, gender equity, or climate resilience) align with and contribute to the broader objectives of the blue economy approach. Such an evaluation would help uncover hidden synergies and inform more coherent, cross-sectoral investment planning moving forward.

The previous lack of the integration of sustainable ocean development and blue economy development under the previous efforts between Africa and Europe, signal the need for joint efforts regarding sustainable ocean development in future. There has been limited integration of the blue economy and ocean governance concerns in the context of the institutional relationships between the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU). Both the AU and EU recognise the need for progress in ocean governance while concurrently considering socio-economic opportunities at different levels of development across the African and European continents. The EU Comprehensive Strategy with Africa adopted in March 2020, the EU's Communication

on International Ocean Governance and a new approach for a sustainable blue economy, and the recently adopted AU's Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYMP) point to the need to increase investments in ocean governance, including sustainable fisheries and the blue economy. They identify the domain as an area of cooperation between Africa and Europe. Yet, the domain of partnership on the ocean and blue economy was absent from the main dialogues and conclusions of the 6th EU-AU Heads of State Summit (held in February 2022); and still represents the least funded Sustainable Development Goal within the framework of Agenda 2030. Given the ocean shared seascapes between and around Africa and Europe, the health of the ocean is a common responsibility, and the proper management of marine resources around the world is of essence, it remains fundamental for the two continents to align, work jointly, seek mutual understanding and unlock opportunities to mainstream ocean and blue economy across the Partnership.

EU–Africa cooperation on Ocean Governance and the Blue Economy is well-positioned to deliver large-scale impact and holds significant untapped potential to address both current and future needs. It offers a critical pathway for mainstreaming ocean governance and blue economy principles into broader development agendas and illustrates where the partnership can be most effectively leveraged. This cooperation presents concrete solutions to some of the most pressing challenges facing both continents—ranging from climate resilience to sustainable resource management. Its relevance is especially heightened in the context of the upcoming EU-AU policy and programming cycle, scheduled to begin in February 2025, following the anticipated leadership changes at the African Union Commission.

2.2 Ocean and blue economy development in the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package

The EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package can be leveraged for sustainable ocean development in Africa and Europe. The EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package, aims to support Africa for a strong, inclusive, green and digital recovery and transformation, through the potential allocation of up to €150 billion of investment to bolstering cooperation with African partners. The investment package also aims to develop multi-country infrastructure to facilitate trade and mobility, both within Africa and between Africa and Europe.

The EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package focuses on areas of infrastructure that bring solutions to various challenges in the current geopolitical context. It is centred around five policy drivers: digital; climate and energy, transport, health, and education and research. There are a number of flagship projects in the Global Gateway pipeline, that constitute Africa-Europe collaboration on sustainable ocean development, however most of these are driven through the digital, climate and energy, and transport policy drivers (Table 1).



TABLE 1: FLAGSHIP AND OTHER OCEAN AND BLUE ECONOMY RELATED DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN THE PIPELINE OF THE EU-AFRICA GLOBAL GATEWAY AFRICA INVESTMENT PACKAGE.

Theme	Project description	Location	Policy driver
Infrastructure	Construction of a first undersea high-voltage electricity cable interconnection between Italy and Tunisia (ELMED interconnection)	Tunisia	Digital
	Casamance Project: upgrade and enhanced operation of the port of Ziguinchor	Senegal	Transport
	Expansion & rehabilitation of Port of Banjul	Gambia	Transport
	Mindelo port expansion	Cape Verde	Transport
	Construction of land-based and maritime/port infrastructures	Mauritania	Transport
	WASUNA project: building an innovation platform around the Taabo hydroelectric scheme	Côte d'Ivoire	Climate and Energy
	Lagos Inland Water Transport construction and upgrading	Nigeria	Transport
	Construction of the Nachtigal Hydroelectric dam (400 MW)	Cameroon	Climate and Energy
	Rehabilitation and expansion of drinking water infrastructure in the major city of Mbuji Mayi	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Climate and Energy
	Rehabilitation of the Kariba Dam	Zambia	Climate and Energy
	Cool Port Addis project: development of cold storage infrastructure	Ethiopia	Transport
	Doubling the capacity of the desalination plant	Djibouti	Climate and Energy
	Rehabilitation of irrigation infrastructure along the Shabelle and Juba rivers	Somalia	Climate and Energy
	Gulf of Guinea Interregional Network Extended (GOGIN+), Gulf of Guinea Interregional Network - GOGIN II	Gulf of Guinea countries (from Angola to Senegal)	Transport
	Support and Development of Port Cotonou	Benim	Transport
	Extension and Upgrading of the infrastructures of Port of Pointe-Noire	Republic of Congo	Transport
	Port Victoria rehabilitation and extension	Seychelles	Transport
Digital Infrastructure	Establishment of a green and digital corridor between the Portuguese Port of Sines and the Angolan Port of Barra Do Dande	Angola	Transport
Energy Infrastructure	Talaky Be project: set-up of hydro agricultural infrastructures, rehabilitation/building of rural roads and 3,300 hectares of irrigated perimeters	Madagascar	Climate and Energy
	Rehabilitation of Nalubaale-Kiira Hydropower Plant (380MW)	Uganda	Climate and Energy
Energy	Improving and securing electricity generation from renewable energies: rehabilitation of the Ruzizi II hydropower plant and common switchgear of hydroelectric power plants INGA I and II	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Climate and Energy
	Construction of Kakono Hydropower Plant	Tanzania	Climate and Energy
	Modernisation and extension of two hydropower plants	Mozambique	Climate and Energy

Theme	Project description	Location	Policy driver
Finance	Loans and grants to private and public companies to invest in Green and Sustainable Industries	Egypt	Climate and Energy
Pollution	Cleanup of Hann Bay	Senegal	Climate and Energy
Pollution / Coastal defence	UNEP Regional Seas Programme: Addressing marine pollution and degradation of oceans and coastal areas among countries sharing common bodies of water with a demonstrated value of a regional approach to environmental action	Global, including Africa	Climate and Energy
Coastal defence	Enhance coastal protection through nature-based solutions	Togo	Climate and Energy
	Coastal Protection in Beira	Mozambique	Climate and Energy
	West Africa Sustainable Oceans Programme (WASOP), and West Africa Coastal Areas (WACA) management programmes	Benin, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo	Climate and Energy
Ocean conservation	Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in UNCLOS	Western Indian Ocean and Gulf of Guinea regions in Africa.	Climate and Energy
	Support ocean observation programmes (Copernicus, Wekeo, Neccton) and research to advance ocean models for climate predictions.	Global	Digital
Restoration	UNEP SIDS Restoration Flagship: to strengthen SIDS' capacity in integrating marine and coastal ecosystem restoration and conservation into economic recovery and sustainable growth	Comoros	Climate and Energy
Biodiversity	Protection of marine biodiversity and preserving marine ecosystems in the Blue Benguela Current (Southern Africa), Maldives, Suriname and the French Southern and Antarctic Lands.	Southern Africa), Maldives, Suriname and the French Southern and Antarctic Lands.	Climate and Energy
Blue Economy	Assist African countries to develop their blue economy in a sustainable manner, by increasing the economic benefits from sustainable use of marine resources.	Western African countries, Mauritania, Mozambique, Angola	Climate and Energy
	Support the sustainable development of a blue economy in the Mediterranean region, through the Blue Mediterranean Partnership.	Mediterranean border countries	Climate and Energy

Despite a number of examples of blue economy related projects funded through the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package, there is still much room for other sustainable ocean development domains. There are 35 flagship Global Gateway development projects taking place in Africa that target different sectors of the Blue Economy. The current suite of flagship projects and initiatives predominantly focus on infrastructure development, specifically water infrastructure,

ports, and blue renewable energy. There are only a handful of flagship projects that focus on protection and restoration, blue interventions for climate change, blue technological development, or improving blue economy knowledge and research, with none focussing on blue carbon, blue financing or ocean governance. As such the cooperation in this regard may be well suited to focus on filling the gaps particularly around restoration and regeneration.



There is significant wider support for sustainable ocean development in Africa (and elsewhere globally).

There are a number of other organisations and institutions that contribute to the shared vision of sustainable ocean development across the African continent, by funding and implementing development programs with their own networks of development partners and stakeholders. These include (but are not limited to) the United Nations and the dedicated departments under their umbrella (such as UNECA, UNEP, UNDP, UNIDO, UNESCO, FAO, and others); Agence Française de Développement (AFD); the African Development Bank (AfDB); AUDA-NEPAD; the World Bank; Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ); as well as regional organisations such as the African Union (and its departments); European Union (and its departments); African Regional Communities (RECs); Indian Ocean Rim Association

(IORA); Organisation of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (OACPS); universities and academic institutions; non-governmental organisations such as the World Wildlife Fund; The Nature Conservancy; Conservation International; International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN); as well as private sector philanthropic organisations. These organisations and institutions represent potential future implementation and funding partners for sustainable ocean development, the development of ocean governance, and of the regenerative blue economy across Africa (and the globe).

Through the dedicated efforts of these organisations, a number of sustainable ocean development projects have been planned for implementation and continued support over the future coming years (Table 2).

TABLE 2: SUSTAINABLE OCEAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS THAT HAVE BEEN PLANNED FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN AFRICA.

Project description	Location	Organisation (s)
The Great Blue Wall initiative: i) Effectively and equitably conserve at least 30% of the ocean by 2030; ii) Conserve and restore critical blue ecosystems to achieve net-gain by 2030; iii) Unlock the development of a regenerative blue economy that directly benefits coastal communities and delivers conservation outcomes.	Western Indian Ocean countries	UENCA, WWF, IUCN, Conservation International, WIOMSA, Wetlands International, OceanHub Africa, USA, UK (among others)
FAO Blue Growth Initiative: an inclusive and participatory approach to foster sustainable fisheries management. The aim is to safeguard food security and decent work benefits derived from wild fish stocks; as well as exploring alternative sources of food security and decent work, such as aquaculture.	Global, including African countries	FAO
Deltas associated with large rivers: seeking solutions to the problem of sustainability. This project seeks to study the present status and threats of 25 representative deltas and their capacity to support regional sustainable development.	Egypt	State Key Laboratory of Estuarine and Coastal Research (SKLEC), East China Normal University (China)
Empowering women for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable development.	Global, with case studies in Kenya	World Maritime University - Sasakawa Global Ocean Institute (Sweden)
Observing and Predicting the Global Coastal ocean (Coast Predict): integrate observations with numerical models to produce predictions of natural variability and human-induced changes in coastal areas.	Ghana, Morocco, Namibia, South Africa	Alma mater Studiorum University of Bologna (Italy)
Ocean Biomolecular Observing Network (OBON): ocean observation network and infrastructure development, for the improved management of ocean resources.	Benin, Cabo Verde, Côte D'Ivoire, Ghana, Morocco, Nigeria	The Partnership for the observation of the Global Ocean ("POGO", USA)
Ocean Cities: an international network of cities in harmony with the marine environment (OC-NET)	South Africa, northern African countries through the Medcities network	Mediterranean Center for Marine and Environmental Research (CMIMA-CSIC)
Sustainability of marine ecosystems through global knowledge networks (SMARTNET).	South Africa (through its formal affiliation with ICES and PICES). Expected to develop with other African countries (Angola, Cabo Verde, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe)	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES); The North Pacific Marine Science Organisation (PICES, Denmark)

Project description	Location	Organisation (s)
The Coral Reef Sentinels: a transformative programme to deploy autonomous robots to monitor the health of coral reefs around the world in near real-time.	Madagascar	The Smithsonian Institution (Panama)
SciNmeet: address the UN Ocean Decade's seven outcomes and contribute to Agenda 2063 with regards to the development of the Mediterranean Sea.	African countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia)	Italian Oceanographic Commission (IOC), particularly the CNR, CMCC, CoNISMa, DPC, ENEA, IIM, INGV, ISPRA, OGS, and SZN (Italy)
"Our Blue Future" Programme: multi-stakeholder initiative for an inclusive and sustainable blue economy in the Western Indian Ocean region. They are a public – private – civil society alliance that fosters a diverse network of impact-oriented partnerships, projects and champions.	Western Indian Ocean African countries (Comoros, Djibouti, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania)	Multiple stakeholders (GIZ, WWF, Wetlands International, ProAzul, Marine Stewardship Council, among others)
West Indian Ocean Fisheries Governance and Shared Growth Project (SWIOFish3): improve management of marine areas and fisheries in targeted zones and strengthen fisheries value chains in the Seychelles	Seychelles	World Bank
Sustainable Western Indian Ocean Programme (SWIOP)	Comoros, Djibouti, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania	World Bank
PROBLUE: The World Bank's blue economy development programme that supports the development of integrated, sustainable and healthy marine and coastal resources.	Global, including Africa	World Bank
ProAzul: Blue Economy Development programme for Mozambique	Mozambique	GIZ, World Bank, UN, EU,



2.3 Overall implications for Africa-Europe cooperation on sustainable ocean development

Given the increased pressures on blue resources that are expected over the future and the need to address the projected demands of the blue economy, the implications for Africa-Europe cooperation and collaborative efforts on different sectors of the blue economy should involve attention to the following:

Maritime transport, and port activities and infrastructure:

Due to significant expected increases in maritime transport, port and complementary transport infrastructure and systems should be upgraded and expanded to cope with the expected additional load. The expected development of autonomous shipping and autonomous vessels should coincide with the development of the required complimentary port infrastructure and local needs such as maritime cyber security and electricity provisioning. Crucially, ensuring **maritime security** as it relates to maritime transport should be of great concern as a prospect for future collaboration, as it has the potential to directly affect trade between Africa and Europe.

Capture fisheries and aquaculture: Due to the expected growth of the African population, enhancing the production of African fishery and aquaculture resources, including seaweed, through cooperative action, is crucial. Regional approaches should be employed for the management of cross-boundary fisheries to achieve maximum sustainable yield. Cooperative actions should involve addressing illegal, unreported, unregulated (IUU) fishing as a form of maritime security. The sharing of knowledge and scientific resources should be employed to accelerate the development of sustainable aquaculture in Africa. Incentives for the transition of currently unsustainable fishing and aquaculture practices to more sustainable ones should be established. Crucially, facilitating the ability of Africa to trade with extra-continental (and intra-continental) partners is essential in securing the import of seafood protein required to meet the nutritional demands of a growing populace across the entire continent of Africa (in 2063).

Coastal tourism: Coastal tourism development is particularly significant in the context of Africa-Europe cooperation as this sector is projected to generate the greatest added value and employment opportunity among all the other blue economy sectors. The sector is unique because efforts to boost tourism directly inject and stimulate local and national economies. The financial flows from tourism go straight to private actors and businesses, which then circulate through local economies. For this reason, it is essential to develop enabling environments and incentives for tourism-related business to spontaneously develop. The development of tourism goods and services that enhance tourist experiences (such as lodging, food and drink, cultural experiences, and recreational

activities to name a few) are essential for incentivising return visits and recommendations (either online or through word of mouth). Crucially, beyond facilitating the development of the tourism industry itself, Africa-Europe cooperation efforts should be centred on **ecosystem restoration** as the beauty of local natural environments constitute key attractions, and contribute significantly in influencing prospective tourist decision making (i.e., restoring ecosystems to pristine condition facilitate the perception of ideal holiday destinations and has the greatest potential in attracting increased numbers of tourists).

Blue carbon and ecosystem services: While still a relatively nascent blue economy sector, the development of blue carbon and other ecosystem services as an industry constitute an essential area for Africa-Europe collaboration. The development and implementation of regular and accurate **ecosystem monitoring** (such as through blue accounting) is essential for establishing baselines, and tracking and quantifying the delivery of any ecosystem services, such that discrete fungible tokens can be developed to facilitate trade through payment-for-ecosystem services systems (such as carbon credits, or listing and trading natural capital on regulated markets), and operationalise the industry. Cooperative efforts between Africa and Europe can also be directed towards the development of standards and certifications to verify any ecosystem services delivery that is being claimed; as well as the necessary policy and regulatory frameworks needed for operationalising trade within this industry, notably under the Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. In addition, **clarifying ownership laws** regarding the ownership of natural capital (land), and ownership of ecosystem services on rented property (at national levels) are essential for private sector participation in this developing industry.

Research and education: The joint development of research, education, and training programmes on ocean science and the development of **ocean literacy** is essential for the development of the blue economy both in Africa and Europe. The development of ocean literacy in particular is essential to facilitate local participation in the blue economy as well as contextualising human impacts on the crucial ocean and freshwater environments that underpin the blue economy. **Jointly enhancing the capacity of research institutions** (such as Centres of Excellence) which could serve as platforms for policy and technical discussions needed for progress on ocean action and cooperation. African Centres of Excellence often incorporate indigenous practices and traditional knowledge into their governance strategy. This can pave the way for European institutions to incorporate similar practices into their own approaches and resource management. Furthermore, a network of such dedicated research institutions can conduct blue

economy related science has numerous beneficial outcomes in the context of sustainable ocean development, such as enhancing understanding of climate change impacts on crucial ecosystems, facilitating the development of tailored sustainable management programmes for key ecosystems, reducing biodiversity loss and pollution, and sharing and disseminating best practices, contextual knowledge and specialised skills. It could also help both continents find common ground in areas of emerging interest, such as the science behind deep-sea mining. The creation of joint research agendas focused on targeted blue economy themes is recommended. These agendas should link policymakers with scientists, entrepreneurs, youth, and indigenous communities to co-design effective and context-sensitive initiatives. Furthermore, a cooperative Africa-Europe effort to establish an «Africa-Europe Research and Innovation Hub on Oceans» could significantly enhance international policy development related to the sustainable ocean and blue economy. This collaboration would also encourage knowledge sharing and foster cross-continental exchange of best practices and innovation.

Health and biotechnology: The research intensive “blue biotechnology” sector requires significant cooperation between governance at national and continental levels across Africa and Europe, but also with private industry stakeholders and academic research institutions to facilitate its establishment in the blue economy context. This sector may often be overlooked by leaders, but leveraging the potential of ocean DNA (Edna) and genetic wealth, in combination with biotechnology applications, could form a significant contributing factor in addressing future human and environmental health concerns (including marine and terrestrial). The use of eDNA is particularly promising in the context of disease outbreaks. Environmental DNA can be collected from water, sediment, or air samples and used to monitor the presence and spread of pathogens without the need for direct sampling of organisms. This allows for early detection of disease outbreaks in marine and coastal environments, facilitating timely interventions and management strategies to mitigate the spread of diseases. The development of this sector can galvanise other sectors of the blue economy in which biological pathways are play a fundamental role in their operation (such as fisheries, aquaculture, and ecosystem services development), and thus also incentivise investment into other ocean sectors as well. Collaborative research programmes and pooling of resources are necessary for bioprospecting the rich marine environment for the discovery of novel beneficial chemical compounds, and genetic diversity that could hold solutions for resolving wide-spread diseases in the medical and veterinary fields. In addition, due to being a nascent developing sector in many countries, significant cooperation will be required regarding the regulation surrounding the use of such blue biotechnology, ownership of genetic material and information used in marine biotechnology applications and making novel solutions widely available for improving public health.

Energy: The extraction of oil and gas (and other fossil fuels) is a controversial topic in the context of Africa-Europe cooperation, as is the ongoing debate related to sea-bed mining. The European Green Deal advocates for moving away from such resources and instead favouring renewable energies, whereas significant industrial development and prosperity can be achieved by unlocking these resources in Africa. However, Africa-Europe cooperation on this topic thus requires compromise on both sides, and could include establishing incentives for the transition to, and implementation of offshore renewable energy resources throughout Africa (including sustainable energies such as biogas), while developing frameworks and mechanisms for the efficient use of fossil fuel resources in Africa as well as mitigating the negative outcomes associated with these resources, for example such as through the revision of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in advance of COP30. In addition, ensuring the safety of personnel on existing offshore stations and incoming renewable sites, and enhancing the connectivity these stations and sites have with the mainland (to address emergencies – environmental and safety - and other needs) may constitute areas for further collaborative actions.

Deep-sea mining (DSM) has become a contentious issue in global governance, with mounting pressure from corporate interests to finalise exploitation rules by 2025 through the International Seabed Authority. While framed by proponents as essential for securing minerals like cobalt, nickel, and manganese critical to the green transition, DSM poses serious economic and ecological risks—especially to Africa-Europe partnerships focused on sustainable ocean governance and critical minerals. Scientific and economic assessments challenge DSM's necessity, highlighting that recycling and material efficiency could meet a substantial portion of global demand without seabed extraction. DSM could destabilise mineral markets, disproportionately impacting African economies reliant on terrestrial mining, and threatens marine ecosystems vital to African fisheries and carbon sequestration. With irreversible environmental damage and uncertain economic benefits, a joint Africa-Europe call for a moratorium or precautionary pause is increasingly urgent. Additionally, both continents must assess the implications of potential DSM in Exclusive Economic Zones around European-held islands located off Africa's coast calling for a joint commission to evaluate whether such exploitation aligns with long-term sustainability goals.

A holistic approach should be used for cooperative action.

While the blue economy can be divided into different industry sectors, it is necessary to emphasise that collaborative action between Africa and Europe should involve a holistic approach where the development concerns and challenges (as well as future prospects) of multiple blue economy sectors are addressed

simultaneously, instead of individual sectoral development. Such a cross-cutting approach facilitates the greatest potential gain from the resources that are available, and thus purport resource efficiency as well. For this reason, different blue economy sectors and cross-cutting sustainable ocean development needs can be considered under four different priority intervention measures

(which are equally prioritised) to which collaborative action between Africa and Europe can be directed to (Table 3): 1) Conservation, restoration and the regenerative blue economy; 2) Advancing more equitable and inclusive partnerships; 3) Value-added supply chains and regional coastal integration; and 4) Enhancing maritime security, safety and sovereignty.

TABLE 3: DIFFERENT BLUE ECONOMY SECTORS CAN BE CONSIDERED UNDER FOUR PRIORITY INTERVENTION AREAS FOR THE JOINT DEVELOPMENT OF THE BLUE ECONOMY BETWEEN AFRICA AND EUROPE.

Pillar 1: Conservation, restoration and the regenerative blue economy	Pillar 2: Advancing more equitable and inclusive partnerships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blue carbon and ecosystem services Capture fisheries (marine and freshwater) Aquaculture development Coastal tourism Energy Research and education Health and biotechnology Policy development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research and education Labour and social protection Trade Health and biotechnology Policy development
Pillar 3: Value-added supply chains and regional coastal integration.	Pillar 4: Enhancing maritime security, safety and sovereignty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blue carbon and ecosystem services Capture fisheries (marine and freshwater) Aquaculture development Coastal tourism Energy Research and education Manufacturing Transport Trade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trade Transport Port infrastructure and activities Capture fisheries Energy Maritime cyber security

Beyond blue industry development, the development of specific structures and mechanisms that contribute to an **enabling environment** for blue economy development can be prioritised to more effectively facilitate the realisation of coordinated efforts into actionable sustainable ocean development, in the context of Africa-Europe collaboration (see Section 3.3).

3. Priority changes in policy and practices

Priority changes in policy and practices are needed for the development of the blue economy through joint effort between Africa and Europe. Given that previous Africa-Europe cooperation regarding sustainable ocean development has been absent from the existing AU-EU partnership when also considering the scope for future cooperation, there are a number of priority changes in existing approaches, policies, and development practices that can be made to facilitate more effective and efficient collaborative sustainable ocean development going forward, and will support operationalising the Africa-Europe Ocean and Blue Economy Partnership. These include considerations of

change in terms of the guiding principles that underlie Africa-Europe collaboration on sustainable ocean development, the underlying enabling environment and infrastructure to facilitate new developments and initiatives, and the joint prioritisation of important intervention areas, specifically what concerns: i) conservation, restoration and regenerative blue economy approaches; ii) advancing more equitable and inclusive trade agreements and partnerships; iii) value-added supply chains and regional coastal integration; iv) enhancing maritime security and safety.

3.1 Priority intervention measures

Based on the aforementioned drivers and challenges, as well as the strategic agendas of Africa (such as Agenda 2063) and the European Union (including the Green Deal and Sustainable Blue Economy), the following pillars of cooperation have been identified. These pillars align with the priorities of both continents

and are designed to address multiple interests and deliver co-benefits. They represent a set of common areas for joint work where Africa and Europe can merge efforts and enhance their partnership:

Pillar 1: Conservation, restoration, and the regenerative blue economy

The blue economy functions in relying on the use of marine, coastal, and freshwater ecosystems that underpin various sectors and activities, through the ecosystem services they provide. This pillar focuses on the development of healthy ecosystems and habitats such that their capacity to deliver these ecosystem services is maximised, for continued long-term benefit for the blue economy. Healthy ecosystems can increase the supply of blue economy resources significantly¹⁴, and will be necessary to satiate future economic, sustainability, and social demands.

Prioritising restoration and active management of degraded ecosystems through Africa-Europe collaboration is essential for developing a regenerative blue economy and addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution impacts, and declining resources. The conservation of natural ecosystems has always been important to preserve natural history and capital, such as through limiting habitat loss and the control of invasive species. However, success on this front has been limited on relevant scales, with several ecosystems having been degraded as a result of anthropogenic pressures, such as mangrove deforestation, and various forms of

pollution: with diminished ecosystem services provisioning as a consequence, thus hindering blue economy development. The restoration and regeneration of degraded ecosystems should be prioritised and should be a target area for Africa-Europe collaboration. Where conventional conservation approaches have involved more passive threat elimination approaches (such as removing marine litter from habitats), an active management approach to the restoration of habitats and ecosystems should also be considered. This includes engaging together for the implementation of global environmental policies, such as the Global Biodiversity Framework, Borders Beyond Natural Jurisdiction, and cooperating on the Global Plastics Treaty. Jointly addressing other large-scale stressors on crucial blue economy ecosystems, such as pollution (including plastic pollution) and climate change impacts (rising sea-level, extreme weather events, among others) is necessary. Addressing the cause of such effects should be prioritised through the joint development of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies and systems (such as nationally determined contributions or NDCs) to halt (and ideally reverse) the exacerbation of climate change on a cross-continental (global) scale.



Active regeneration, beyond mere restoration, is most needed to enhance the health, resilience, and long-term productivity of blue economy ecosystems.

Regeneration involves enhancing ecosystem health, resilience, capacity to thrive and ability to adapt to changing pressures. It involves activities that support the natural ability of ecosystems to heal and improve, such as fostering biodiversity, enhancing soil and water quality, and promoting sustainable practices that contribute to long-term ecological health and productivity. In addition, cooperative action on ecosystem conservation and restoration, should involve the development of resilience in the ecosystems that underpin the blue economy. This means to develop environments and infrastructure such that they can withstand, tolerate, and adapt to environmental, economic, or climate disturbances in the future; without significantly compromising their ability to deliver ecosystem services. Resilient systems are thus better able to persist and function over the long-term future which will be necessary for their continued role in blue economy development.

The regenerative blue economy aims to improve natural environments by restoring ecosystems, reducing waste,

decarbonising sectors, and fostering equitable cooperation between Africa and Europe.

These concepts advocate for the development of the regenerative blue economy, which goes beyond sustainability by actively improving natural environments through restoring degraded ecosystems, reducing waste through circular economy and low carbon approaches, and improving the delivery of ecosystem services by recognising the value of healthy ecosystems for the functioning of the economy. Cooperation in this regard should focus on the development of regenerative management approaches for extractive industries (such as fisheries, oil and gas, and minerals) and decarbonising blue economy sectors such as shipping. This includes not only boosting investments in sustainable ocean development, but also redirecting financial flows away from supporting harmful practices. The regenerative blue economy acknowledges the importance of knowledge-sharing, policy alignment, and joint action to achieve its objectives. It also aims to transcend traditional models of development assistance, and advocate for more equitable and collaborative approaches where both Africa and Europe contribute with solutions.

Pillar 2: Advancing more equitable and inclusive partnerships

The regenerative Blue Economy advocates for more equitable and collaborative action where all stakeholders contribute with solutions. This pillar thus focusses on the development of more equitable and fair partnerships between the stakeholders on the African and European continents, and between the continents themselves, such as in the context of the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership.

The development of more inclusive partnerships between African and European blue economy stakeholders is paramount to fostering wide-spread participation and buy-in

for the required development of the blue economy (at all levels). The involvement of new players in the blue economy increases the development of novel solutions to current challenges and barriers and is a net good for the prospects of a thriving blue economy. Eliminating such barriers to participating in the blue economy facilitates faster and more expansive economic and environmental development, and result in the improvement of livelihoods across Africa and Europe. This includes cooperation on issues such as facilitating the participation of previously disadvantaged groups, such as women and indigenous peoples, in the blue economy, and the development of widespread ocean literacy and education. In particular, investing in youth inclusion is critical, positioning young

people as agents of transformation and long-term stewards of the continent's ocean resources. Competent stakeholders that wish to participate in the blue economy should have equal opportunity to do so (with no one group being disproportionately favoured to do so): this extends to equal opportunities for employment seekers, to equal opportunity for establishing businesses and conducting commerce in African and European states.

The development of equitable partnerships should be prioritised, so that no partner gets left behind.

Blue Economy partnerships of all sorts (including international government trade agreements) should be developed so that the delivery of benefits reach and translate to the local public domain (including previously disadvantaged groups). Doing so results in more equitable blue economy value chains ensuring that all participants (upstream and downstream) benefit from cooperative development action. The development of traceability in blue economy value chains and partnerships may be highly beneficial in enhancing the ability to track and ensure that benefits get distributed equitably to partners and participants. This also extends to re-investing in the development of the blue economy at the grass roots level, such as through education and community development programmes. Collaborative action between Africa and Europe

¹⁴ African Natural Resources Centre (ANRC). 2022. The Future of Marine Fisheries in the African Blue Economy. African Development Bank. Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. doi:10.1017/9781009325844.

could involve establishing a framework for the regular revision of established trade agreements, such as the sustainable fishery trade agreements (SFPAs), between regional representative organisations and individual states, such that equally mutually beneficial outcomes are prioritised.

In addition, ‘capacity sharing’, which is different from capacity building, should be integrated into future blue economy activities. Capacity building has deliberately been replaced with ‘capacity sharing’ to emphasise the spirit of joint partnerships, that are not unidirectional. Capacity sharing should be (at minimum) a two-way process, and all associated activities should be embedded by the following principles: (i) enabling socio-economic and environmental benefits (at national, regional, and

continental resolutions), (ii) creating opportunities for industries and entrepreneurship, (iii) develop the agency of vulnerable groups in the blue economy (including women and youth), (iv) contribute to good governance at various levels, and (v) foster amicable relations between the parties concerned.

Integrating equitability and inclusivity into blue economy partnerships and activities can further foster regional integration, as economic development through successful cooperation and collaboration is incentivised. At the continental level, progress on these fronts will not only address long-standing socio-economic and environmental challenges but will position Africa and Europe strategically as a united front in the context of emerging global challenges and transitions.

Pillar 3: Value-added supply chains and regional coastal integration

Similar to conventional free-market economies, the blue economy centres on trade and the development of products through a variety of value chains. This pillar focusses on the valorisation of blue economy value chains and the need for regional and coastal integration to facilitate blue economy commerce, management, and trade.

The natural ecosystems that underpin the blue economy are often not isolated to geopolitical borders of national states, but rather are likely to exceed them and thus emphasise the need for regional integration. These transboundary resources thus require coordination and cooperation between such states for their effective management and sustainable use (such as large marine ecosystems that underpin globally relevant fishery resources, like the Canary Current LME). Africa-Europe collaboration can thus be directed towards facilitating regional and coastal integration and unity, such that effective collaboration for the sustainable management of transboundary resources can occur. The African and European countries that border the Mediterranean Sea are a prime example for the need of regional coastal integration for sustainable management as well as facilitating the trade of its resources, such as through integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) and marine spatial planning (MSP) in guiding blue economy activities. Regional integration may also start with the joint development of blue economy education, training, and capacity building programmes, by harnessing the established links between academic institutions (and developing blue economy specialised schools) across both continents.

Regional integration is pivotal to facilitate trade of blue economy goods and services, both domestically and internationally (such as export markets). Cooperative actions can thus also be directed to link blue economy stakeholders in different states with those that have access to high-value international markets, such as facilitating links and partnerships between landlocked states with states that have access to well-functioning ports. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTA) is an international agreement that facilitates regional (and continental) integration, by attempting to remove the barriers to international trade on the African continent, such as reducing the import and export barriers at borders, to facilitate enhanced trade. Africa-Europe cooperative action on this front could involve the inclusion of European states as part of the AfCTA, in as it pertains to blue economy trade, as well as enabling landlocked countries without marine resources to participate in the blue economy.

In addition to facilitating trade, the development of value chain valorisation should be a priority for future Africa-Europe collaboration. Historically, the majority of African exports have comprised raw materials with limited to no processing being conducted in states on the African continent. This is a significant missed opportunity for creating value-addition in existing value chains that produced value-added products that can be sold on high-value international markets (such as ready-to-eat meals from the fishery sector), and thus result in significant economic development. To this end, collaborative action should aim to improve domestic resource mobilisation and ensure access to affordable finance to support investment in manufacturing capacity and resilient supply chains. Efforts should also focus

on strengthening governance, integrating human rights and environmental standards into trade partnerships, and enhancing the capacity of African states to produce value-added goods prior to export. This may include technology transfer initiatives to meet the processing, packaging, and marketing standards required by premium global markets. Such cooperation would enable African countries to retain a greater share of value within the supply chain, reversing historical patterns of extraction and export without local

benefit. This, in turn, would support sustainable blue economy development and enhance Africa–Europe trade relations. Additionally, with increasing consumer demand for transparency, collaboration on traceability systems across blue economy value chains is essential. Joint development of value-added tourism offerings, including authentic cultural and ecotourism experiences, also presents an opportunity for inclusive growth and diversification within the sector.

Pillar 4: Enhancing maritime security, safety and sovereignty

As the blue economy develops into a thriving industry, the need to secure blue economy assets and resources increases significantly (including offshore and other isolated assets). This extends to securing maritime safety for the purposes of trade and industry (both in port, elsewhere along the coast, or at sea). Both Africa and Europe share similar visions of strengthening maritime safety and security and thus have solid foundations for future cooperation in this regard.

Enhanced cooperation between Africa and Europe is key to ensuring maritime security, addressing crimes like piracy and human trafficking, and securing key infrastructure to support the blue economy. Maritime security pertains to ensuring the safety of maritime navigation and addressing maritime crime such as fraud; illegal immigration; piracy (both offshore and onshore); human trafficking; drug trafficking; illegal, unreported, unregulated (IUU) fishing; and cyber crime related to maritime industry. Such criminal activities specifically jeopardise the effective functioning, development, and future of the blue economy, by disincentivising investment and participation in the industry. Cooperative actions between Africa and Europe can thus entail the development (and updating if they exist) and implementation of joint plans to combat these crimes. Cooperative action to secure high-value targets such as ports and offshore drilling platforms are also of concern, especially as it pertains to cyber security. Other cooperation may involve the establishment and deployment of information exchanges, common intervention means, meetings between authorities, and concerted and synergistic policies, notably to eradicate flows of illegal immigration, networks trafficking humans condemned to slavery (such as for the prostitution of young women and children), combatting trafficking in drugs, arms, and psychotropic substances between the two continents, and enhancing cyber security. This further extends to jointly addressing the social and

economic challenges that incentivise crimes, such as maritime piracy and illegal immigration. Investigating the application of solutions such as autonomous vessels and shipping and how their implementation may be beneficial in combating maritime crime may be required, but this would in turn require support and capacity development to accommodate such mechanisms in ports and other infrastructure. Facilitating enhanced cooperation between ports and security organisations of different states may also contribute to enhancing maritime security.

Enhancing maritime safety through rigorous standards and cooperative protocols is vital for preventing accidents, protecting lives and the environment, and ensuring the sustainability and growth of blue economy activities within the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership. Enhancing maritime safety includes the need to ensure that vessels and blue economy facilities (such as drilling platforms, ports, and factories) meet rigorous safety requirements, to avoid and prevent significant accidents that have negative consequences for either humans (such as otherwise avoidable death), the environment (such as oil spills), or other blue economy stakeholders. The safety of maritime vessels falls under the responsibility of the flag state the vessel registers under. Cooperative actions could thus include the joint development of protocols for assessing the safety standards of vessels every time they come into port (ideally without negatively impacting trade) to eliminate substandard ships operating on the high seas (which may be more vulnerable to maritime piracy), the regular review of other blue economy facilities, and enhance the capacity of flag states to conduct such assessments, updating policy frameworks of African and European states to comply with widely accepted international safety standards may also facilitate trade by reducing the barriers to trade with other states that mandate compliance with such standards.



3.2 Principles to guide the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership

The following principles should be considered for guiding Africa and Europe's respective ocean domains in line with the four pillars, and strengthening Africa-Europe collaborative actions. The integration of these principles is

envisioned to re-establish healthy viable ocean-based livelihoods and provide a healthy future through the joint development of the regenerative and resilient sustainable blue economy across Africa and Europe.

I. Shift from a mindset of “Blue Growth” to the joint mindset of the “regenerative, resilient, and restorative blue economy”

Previous efforts surrounding ocean development concerned stimulating and developing the blue economy by focussing on the economic development of ocean industry sectors under what was termed “blue growth”. This approach was later modified to include a focus on the sustainability of ocean sectors under the sustainable blue economy, but this did not account for the need to restore and protect the natural marine (and other aquatic) resources on which the sustainable blue economy relies upon. While a sustainable blue economy focuses on the responsible use and conservation of aquatic and marine resources to ensure their availability for future generations, a regenerative approach actively seeks to improve the health and resilience of environments through initiatives that restore damaged habitats, enhance biodiversity, and create a net positive impact on the ecosystems, ultimately leading to more robust and resilient economies and societies that can withstand and better tolerate future changes (including climate and market stressors).

The regenerative blue economy focuses on both restoring and enhancing the health of aquatic, coastal and marine ecosystems with equitable and inclusive processes and outcomes. It goes beyond sustainability by actively improving natural environments through restoring degraded ecosystems, reducing waste through circular economy and low carbon approaches, and improving the delivery of ecosystem services by recognising the value of healthy ecosystems for the functioning of the economy. In addition, the concepts of resilience and regeneration in terms of the blue economy focus on developing the capacity of marine and aquatic resources to withstand and recover from disturbances, such as natural disasters, climate change, or economic shocks. The development of the regenerative, resilient, and restorative blue economy involves developing the ability to adapt, transform, and bounce back from adverse events while maintaining essential functions and structures, such that established mechanisms and resources are robust, flexible, and capable of learning and evolving in response to changing conditions.

II. Transparency, traceability, and accountability

Integrating and maintaining transparency into Africa-Europe collaboration will be essential to facilitate traceability and the capacity to measure the progress of sustainable ocean development initiatives over the course of future collaborations. Adopting transparent systems reduces the potential for individual corruption and has the capacity to engender investor confidence by further ensuring credibility and clarity of leadership over the course of implementing development initiatives. This in turn will build trust and ensure that partner institutions, stakeholders, and political leaders are held accountable for their joint responsibility in advancing ocean governance and the development of the regenerative blue economy. Integrating transparency, traceability, and accountability can further limit and mitigate future potential conflicts and breakdowns in communication between development partners, which is a win-win situation over the long term.

In addition, transparency is extremely important when considering data-driven decision-making, as the integrity of the data used to inform policy and development decisions must be maintained and trusted to be effective (for example: the use of environmental monitoring programmes and blue accounting for monitoring and tracking ocean and blue economy activities and development).

III. Ensure inclusive and equitable processes and outcomes

Equity and inclusivity should underpin the transition to a sustainable and regenerative blue economy across Africa and Europe. Several current sustainable development goals (SDG) work towards equitable processes and inclusivity and SDG 14: Life Below Water emphasises the need to ensure equitable access to marine and aquatic resources and opportunities under the umbrella of a regenerative and sustainable blue economy. This includes developing equitable access to the ocean for landlocked states, fairness and equal opportunities of participation and in benefit sharing, doing no harm, and respecting the rights and supporting the

flourishing of all. Some outcomes indicating the successful integration of inclusivity and equitability may include: that marginalised groups are given a seat at the table and can shape policy; established rights-holders are informed and meaningfully involved in decision making (their consent is respected for operations that impact those rights); policy and management do not exacerbate existing inequalities or silence marginalised voices; blue economy activities deliver goods and opportunities that support SDGs and allow all people in society to live lives they consider to be worthwhile. These outcomes include stakeholder engagement and public participatory approaches in decision making processes, such as meaningful consultation, collaboration and co-decision making. Stakeholder engagement and public participation are essential to ensure that policy makers are not just proponents of inclusivity, providing for inclusivity in leadership positions without holding such leaders accountable.

IV. Shift to attract foreign direct investment to reduce reliance and dependence on direct foreign aid

Insufficient, misallocated, and mismanaged funding is a major challenge to the implementation of sustainable ocean development action. Many African countries are recipients of official development assistance (ODA) funding, with some low capacity countries having significant proportions of their national government budgets fulfilled by ODA funding. While well-intentioned, having government budgets funded through ODA finance risks corruption and risks the unsatisfactory allocation of external support. This structuring of external support does not incentivise the necessary reforms needed for reducing reliance on external aid, nor the development of mechanisms through which respective national expenses can be addressed, and reinforces dependency on external support for annual government functioning. In addition, less than 1% of official development assistance (ODA) funding is allocated to the development of the ocean with SDG14 (Life below Water) being one of the most underfunded SDGs, facing a finance gap of nearly US\$ 150 billion per year.

Instead of ODA funding as a tool for sustainable development, Africa-Europe cooperation and collaborative efforts should be shifted to developing the financing mechanisms and structures that enable low capacity partner countries of the EU to reduce their aid dependence. This can be achieved by shifting the current approach to attracting private investment for sustainable ocean development, by supporting the development of innovative financing mechanisms (blue bonds, debt-for-ocean-swaps, blue carbon, blue biodiversity credits, and a strong blue entrepreneurship ecosystem that has the potential to deliver significant impact on the ground (by and for local stakeholders), and the potential to connect entrepreneurs and other related stakeholders from both continents; fostering cooperation, knowledge and experience-sharing, and ultimately accelerate and scale-up blue economy entrepreneurship in Africa and Europe. This approach should include the development of dedicated long term sustainable financing mechanisms and structures through which sustainable ocean development activities and programmes can be sustained over the long term, even after investment capital has been remunerated.

In doing so, Africa-Europe cooperation can contribute to unlocking the full potential of the blue economy and driving socio-economic development, while ensuring the long-term sustainability of ocean resources and the regenerative blue economy.

V. Value addition of ocean and blue economy supply chains

Future Africa-Europe cooperation on sustainable ocean development should entail the development of value-added ocean and blue economy supply chains, as not only will this bolster national blue economies but also holds potential for transitioning conventional value chains to more sustainable modes of operation. Value addition of ocean value chains conventionally involves incorporating unique differentiation of products and production methods, whereas value addition for sustainability could involve integrating circular economy and zero waste principles into existing supply chains. In a changing global landscape that increasingly values sustainability, the decarbonisation of value chains to reduce or eliminate the ecological (pollution) footprint they are associated with, may disproportionately incentivise customer buy in and improve sales, if limited alternatives are available. The first products and value chains that transition to more sustainable modes of operation may thus have the competitive advantage to build market reputation and ensure long-term public support. Sustainability certification of ocean and blue economy value chains can play a pivotal role in this regard, as widely accepted standardised sustainability certifications are a quick way to signal that a product or value chain is more sustainable than its competitors, and could thus influence buying decisions. Where currently sustainability certifications are widely employed in the capture fisheries industry, alternatives may have to be developed for other blue economy and ocean-based industries, as well as certifications that cover the entire value chain (and not just a subsection of it). In addition, integrating the concepts of transparency and traceability into value chains will be helpful in this regard, as well as constituting a new type of value addition by offering food and products “with a story” of who and what was involved with the production of any one item. Providing this as a kind of metadata of a product can build trust with the consumer base, as they would be able to verify for themselves whether a product meets their own personal sustainability standards and such traceability could thus influence buying decisions (particularly when alternative products do not supply such as a traceable production history), however verification standards may also have to be developed for this to be effective.

VI. Knowledge sharing for informed policy formulation and co-development

Knowledge and experience are required to develop new capacities across Africa and Europe for putting their joint vision of sustainable ocean development into practice across different blue economy sectors, and achieving SDG 14: Life Below Water. Commitment to data-driven policy making and programming is essential for addressing the complex challenges of ocean governance and the development of a sustainable regenerative blue economy, and maximising the impact of the Africa-Europe collaborative effort. Developing and maintaining networks for sharing information, policy experiences and successes, research, and data should be at the forefront of future Africa-Europe cooperation as such networks are essential for harnessing accessible, reliable data and cutting-edge science to inform decision-and policy making processes. Knowledge sharing in this context should be institutionalised into ocean governance policy, such that the best practices for implementing these programmes are put into action, and so that the most optimal approaches for the varied (and often unique) development contexts are utilised. In addition, making complex topics accessible and easily understandable will foster greater understanding and appreciation of the ocean, and play an important role to inspire responsible behaviour, encourage stewardship, and mobilise technical and financial support as well as critical political leadership for ocean governance and sustainable blue economy initiatives from the public. Harnessing this potential is key for strengthening Africa-Europe cooperation on sustainable ocean development as well as effectively implementing multi-national development plans (such as the Africa Ocean Decade Plan and EU Ocean Pact) and international treaties and sustainability targets (such as the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty, the Global Plastics Treaty, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, regulations on deep-sea mining, among others).

3.3 An enabling environment for ocean development

An enabling environment, once established, sets the stage for any future sustainable development that takes place, such as the development of ocean governance and of the regenerative blue economy at all levels (sub-national, national, regional, continental, global), by developing and formalising the long-term structures (mechanisms), policies, and institutions dedicated to addressing the different requirements to bring about sustainable change and reform. An appropriate enabling environment for sustainable ocean development can thus facilitate and ease the implementation of future ocean related projects as well as realise the full operationalisation of ocean and blue economy resources. An enabling environment for sustainable ocean development across both Africa and Europe could thus involve the following:

- **Enhance the working relationship between relevant institutions:** Developing a strong relationship between different institutions across Africa and Europe (such as the AU and the EU Commissions involving respective Directorates and Divisions and Member States in charge of Ocean and Blue Economy, and African RECs) is necessary for delivering common objectives under sustainable ocean development and provides the blueprint for an effective Africa-Europe Ocean and Blue Economy partnership. Enhanced working relationships and partnerships between institutions would result in more effective coordination between development partners, more effective and efficient use of available resources, contribute to the dissemination of best practices and sharing of knowledge, and contribute to the accelerated implementation of ocean and blue economy policy development, international agreements (such as multilateral environmental agreements), and specific ocean development projects and programmes.
- **Operationalise strong stakeholder coalition and buy-in:** Sustainable ocean development, as an international global movement, is a significant opportunity for the development of national economies and thus aligns with the objectives and mandates of many sub-national, national, and international institutions and stakeholders. Establishing strong stakeholder coalitions between relevant stakeholders would significantly improve the delivery of project outcomes at lower levels through enhanced coordination and buy-in by the representative organisations of stakeholders and beneficiaries on the ground (communities and individuals), and would further contribute to amicable future collaborations between institutions and stakeholders (including bilateral partnerships) to facilitate future sustainable ocean development initiatives for the benefit of the peoples and groups they represent.

- **Strategic development plans and roadmaps for sustainable ocean development:** The joint development of strategic action plans and development roadmaps can be instrumental in guiding the collaborative actions and activities of Africa and Europe, by coordinating and directing their resources in a targeted manner to address common challenges and problems. One such example is that IUU fishing as well as its associated maritime safety and security challenges (including other security challenges such as piracy) have long been significant challenges to overcome, as it has hindered the development of coastal countries in Africa, and resulted in depleted globally important and valuable fish stocks (in which Europe has a vested interest).

The development of the “Roadmap Towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership” is an example of a joint strategy proposal that works to create the conditions for greater cooperation on ocean governance, capacity sharing, and financing investment under the Africa-Europe Partnership for Ocean Governance and the Blue Economy. It concerns the activities needed for an enhanced Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership and was developed at a high-resolution level for addressing the lack of ocean action in previous institutional efforts between Africa and Europe. However, it sets the stage on which more targeted strategies can be developed, to coordinate activities and resources towards resolving common (current and future) ocean development concerns through collaborative effort. 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 declining resources, climate change, biodiversity loss, trafficking and insecurity, and pollution, notably in advance of the third United Nations Ocean Conference, the second Africa Climate Summit (ACS) and 7th AU-EU Heads of State Summit

- **A common ideal and joint vision for Ocean Governance:** Cooperation and collaboration on ocean governance hold a strategic opportunity for both Africa and Europe to drive different aspects of the sustainable development agenda forward. The development of a joint vision on ocean governance through the alignment of ocean governance policies (at national, regional, and continental levels) can facilitate greater cross-continental and global impact in terms of the protection, regulation, and optimal management of ocean resources and services (by leveraging a joint position when negotiating international development agreements and treaties); and limit disputes between partnered member states that may arise owing to different unaligned visions of sustainable ocean development. This includes developing a protocol for the revision of current policies and regulatory frameworks such that a coherent joint vision of blue economy development (and associated development priorities) is put forward throughout all blue economy sectors (at all levels). The development of a common ideal of ocean governance, if pursued with honest intent and just implementation amongst and within countries, can provide a shared space for building peace, security, and an equitable vision of sustainable ocean development over the long term, i.e. beyond 2030, for the benefit of the people and the planet.
- **Capacity sharing and technical support:** Knowledge and experience are required to develop new capacities across Africa and Europe for future sustainable ocean development. 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. Developing networks for sharing information, policy, research, and data 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, for addressing the complex challenges of current and future sustainable ocean development across Africa and Europe.
- **Sustainable financing and co-investment through the blue economy:** The scale of investment required to realise the full potential of the blue economy across both continents is vast, necessitating a collaborative approach. Africa and Europe have the potential to lead transformative change by aligning financial systems with regeneration, restoration, and sustainable ocean development goals through ocean governance and the blue economy. This involves not only boosting investments in sustainable ocean-related activities but also redirecting financial flows away from harmful practices. This includes identifying and operationalising innovative financing mechanisms to facilitate ocean restoration and resilience, establishing financing institutions dedicated to sustainable ocean development specifically, the deployment of sustainable blue economy and sustainable ocean development strategies, as well as to scale-up and duplicate impactful experiences across Africa and Europe. The development of the blue economy across Africa and Europe could generate the synergies needed to facilitate the long-term financing of future ocean development initiatives as well as ensure the persistence of current projects and programmes over the long term. In doing so, the Africa-Europe co-investment and collaboration can contribute to unlocking

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the full potential of the blue economy and driving socio-economic development, while ensuring the long-term sustainability of ocean resources.

- **Prioritise cross-cutting development activities through a holistic approach:** A holistic approach to sustainable ocean development considers the future development needs of multiple ocean sectors when prioritising development opportunities, whereas the siloed conventional approach focuses on the needs of only one sector at a time. The integration of this holistic view for the purposes of sustainable ocean development facilitates optimal and efficient resource use by ensuring that development goals are achieved through prioritising development activities that are cross-cutting and thus confer benefits to multiple sectors instead of generating major trade-offs between singular ones.
- **Widespread ocean literacy:** Ocean literacy is essential in understanding the dynamics that affect different ocean-related activities at various levels of resolution, and how to leverage them. It is thus necessary to develop joint ocean literacy programmes across both continents, and support current ocean literacy programmes where they exist, as this will facilitate enhanced delivery of development project outcomes by stakeholders and project participants, as well as ensure long-term engagement with ocean-related development among the public. The development of ocean literacy empowers the public to explore ocean related ventures, blue businesses, and ocean-based incubation and acceleration programmes (whether entrepreneurial, academic, social or cultural), to gain perspective around ocean-related needs, and thus offer support and buy-in for future ocean development initiatives.

Conclusion

The potential of the ocean to contribute to a more prosperous Africa-Europe partnership, and global order has historically been overlooked and undervalued. Yet, it offers untapped opportunities to meet present and future needs and aspirations.

Revitalised focus and smarter investment in ocean governance and the blue economy are essential as both Africa and Europe seek to turbo-charge existing SDGs and move towards the post-2030 Agenda. By assessing present and future trends, the partnership is guided to realise the solutions the ocean provides. It also becomes clear that mainstreaming ocean governance and the blue economy in the Africa-Europe Partnership is a prerequisite in the context of the changes of new policy cycles at the EU, AU, and AU-EU levels in 2025 and beyond.

This Foresight Paper, prepared for the 3rd United Nations Ocean Conference, provides critical insights to guide decision-makers and stakeholders in shaping the future of Africa–Europe cooperation on ocean governance and a regenerative blue economy.

It is particularly timely as it contributes with fresh policy thinking and innovative ideas ahead of the second Africa Climate Summit and the 7th AU–EU Heads of State Summit, both scheduled for 2025. The year 2025 presents a strategic opportunity to highlight the ocean and blue economy as key intersections of climate change, economic transformation, human development, trade, and security—core pillars of the sustainable development agenda.

In today's dynamic geopolitical context, there is significant potential for collaboration, with Africa well-positioned to exercise agency and leverage its soft power to advance foreign policy objectives through partnerships, including with the European Union.

This is a pivotal moment to elevate ocean and blue economy issues within Africa–Europe relations and to support targeted 'quick wins' that can accelerate cooperation and deliver tangible progress.



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