

# An Emerging Africa-Europe Agenda for Ocean Governance and Blue Economy

This publication is a part of a series circulating the findings of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance and the Blue Economy.

Ocean governance and the blue economy are receiving increased international attention and recognition for their potential to strengthen local economies, mitigate climate change, and restore biodiversity. To fully embrace the opportunity this presents, both the African and European Unions have identified the critical need for cross-continental cooperation to bolster relevant knowledge and capacities in the sector.

To this end, on 28 April 2023, the Africa-Europe Foundation organised a high-level discussion to kick-start a new Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance and Blue Economy. It brought together actors from across continents and organisations to explore the scope of activity the partnership could and should embrace.



The meeting offered an opportunity for African and European Union Institutions - represented by AU Commissioner Josefa Sacko and EU DG MARE Director-General Charlina Vitcheva - to detail their expectations for the cross-continental partnership. Both parties underscored the same three major priorities: 1) coordinating a solution to maritime insecurity and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; 2) implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in the sector, and in small-scale fisheries in particular; and 3) fostering sustainable economic development, including through the 'Centres of Excellence in Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa'.

**“Africa seeks to strengthen its partnership with Europe, to identify areas of joint work that can reinforce existing collaboration.”**

**– Josefa Sacko, African Union Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, and Sustainable Environment**

The Strategy Group's Co-Chairs - H.E. Nancy Kirigithu and Mr Pascal Lamy - pointed to the complementary nature of Africa's intention to gain more from inclusive and sustainable ocean management, and Europe's intention to be more environmentally sound. Together, both continents can set the blue economy on a path of more virtuous growth.

How?

According to other stakeholders in the room, this can be achieved by focusing specifically on scientific research, climate, and local communities. They voiced their expectation that the partnership tackle obstacles to ocean sustainability by 1) improving the management of ocean resources; 2) re-empowering local stakeholders; and 3) creating sustainable and fair growth.



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

### **What opportunities can drive the partnership?**

Below are key takeaways and proposals emerging from the multistakeholder dialogue:

**1** The partnership should be **underpinned by science, data, technology and innovation – in line with the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development**. For example, data to measure and track ocean biodiversity and fish stocks is critical to support the livelihoods of coastal communities. This will lay the foundation for robust capacity building and sharing, which can be supported by initiatives such as the above-mentioned Centres of Excellence and Horizon Europe.

**2** The partnership should **reverse the degradation of ocean resources and support the livelihoods of small-scale fishing communities**. This entails: 1) adapting consumption patterns to match sustainable and fair resource exploitation in African and European waters; 2) strengthening marine spatial planning, security and biodiversity management; 3)

empowering small-scale fishers through greater representation in the negotiation and management of partnership agreements (i.e. SFPAs) or through innovative initiatives like sustainable seafood labels; and 4) organising youth and women fellowship programmes and trainings on ocean-related issues, including in entrepreneurship and conservation.

**3** The partnership should **create an inclusive, fair and sustainable growth model for the sector**. In this regard, it should prioritize: 1) ocean-based renewable energy and green-growth infrastructure (e.g., ports, shipping lines and security) for decarbonised industrialisation and African connectivity – in line with the African Continental Free Trade Area; 2) nature-based solutions such as promoting sustainable value-chains, eco-tourism, and blue bonds; and 3) creating demand-driven and public-private finance that is accessible to coastal communities, and empowers women and youth in particular.

**4** The partnership should encourage Africa and Europe to **join efforts at the multilateral level to address collective responsibility and strengthen international governance**. Opportunities for such cooperation exist in the realisation of the Treaty of the High Seas and the UN Treaty on Plastic Pollution for example, as well as in ensuring the full implementation of latest policy developments such as the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies.

**“Dialogue is the only means to build commonalities and overcome any divergences. As such, the Africa-Europe Strategy Group, that we are setting up in partnership with the African Union, will offer a fantastic dialogue platform.”**

– **Charlina Vitcheva, European Commission Director-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries**

A true blue economy can deliver an equitable vision of the Africa-Europe Partnership; but it must be pursued with honest intent, full resources, and just implementation among and within countries.

From the side of the Africa-Europe Foundation, to translate innovative proposals into concrete action, the first working meeting of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance and Blue Economy is set to take place in June 2023.