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The Africa Union Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan (2025-2035)

Preface

The AU Africa Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan has been developed to address existing governance gaps, enhance coordination and implementation of existing frameworks, as well as promote sustainable economic opportunities of Africa's aquatic and marine resources.

The strategy and implementation plan builds on key African Union frameworks, such as Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, the Africa Blue Economy Strategy, and the 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy, ensuring alignment with continental aspirations for sustainable development.

The implementation of this strategy will require active collaboration between governments, regional economic communities, civil society, private sector stakeholders, and development partners. By fostering cooperation and shared responsibility, the AU Africa Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan aims to position the continent as a leader in sustainable ocean governance while ensuring the long-term prosperity of the people and ecosystems.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AU	African Union
AMCEN	African Ministerial Conference on the Environment
BBNJ	Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
RFMOs	Regional Fisheries Management Organisations
RSPs	Regional Seas Programs
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
MPA	Marine Protected Area
IUU	Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (Fishing)
CBD	UN Convention on Biological Diversity
WIOMSA	Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association

Glossary

Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) – A global framework under UNCLOS that focuses on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) – A maritime zone extending up to 200 nautical miles from a coastal state's baseline, where the state has sovereign rights over natural resources.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) – Designated regions of the ocean where human activity are regulated to conserve marine biodiversity.

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) – Sub-regional groupings of African states that facilitate regional integration and cooperation.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) – The primary international legal framework governing maritime activities, defining the rights and responsibilities of nations concerning ocean use and conservation.

Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing – Activities that contravene national, regional, or international fisheries regulations, posing threats to sustainable fisheries management.

Blue Economy – A sustainable economic framework that emphasises the conservation and responsible use of aquatic and marine resources to support economic growth, livelihoods, and ecosystem health.

Executive Summary

Africa is endowed with vast aquatic and marine resources that provide essential ecosystem services, economic opportunities, and social benefits. However, challenges such as pollution, overfishing, climate change, habitat degradation, and weak governance structures threaten the sustainability of these resources. Recognising these challenges, the Africa Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan provides a coordinated approach to strengthen governance, enhance regional cooperation, and promote the sustainable use of aquatic and marine resources.

This strategy aligns with key international, continental, and regional frameworks, including United Nations Convention on Law of the Seas, Agenda 2063, the Africa Blue Economy Strategy, and the 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy. It sets forth strategic interventions to strengthen legal and institutional frameworks, promote aquatic and marine resource conservation, foster sustainable financing mechanisms, and enhance science- policy capacity-building efforts across the continent.

A major component of the strategy is accelerating regional and continental coordination, raising Africa's voice in the global ocean space, harmonising and implementation of ocean governance policies and actions across Africa. This involves mobilising key stakeholders, including national governments, regional economic communities (RECs), development partners, private sector actors, and civil society organisations, to facilitate effective policy implementation and enforcement. Additionally, the strategy underscores the importance of community engagement, recognising that local lacustrine and coastal populations play a crucial role in conservation and sustainable resource management.

The strategy also addresses emerging global challenges such as marine pollution, climate change impacts on ecosystems, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. By implementing proactive measures, including ecosystem-based management, marine spatial planning, and adaptive governance structures, Africa can ensure long-term ocean health and sustainability while maximising economic benefits for the people.

Implementation of the strategy will require strong political will, cross-sectoral collaboration, and financial investments. The strategy proposes mechanisms for mobilising domestic, regional, and global funding sources to support capacity-building, technological advancements, and enforcement of governance frameworks. Additionally, it seeks to position Africa as a key player in global ocean governance discussions, advocating for equitable benefit-sharing and sustainable resource management in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

By fostering partnerships among governments, regional institutions, private sector and civil society actors, this strategy provides a roadmap for a resilient, inclusive, and prosperous ocean governance frameworks for Africa. It lays the foundation for protecting Africa's aquatic and marine ecosystems while ensuring that economic activities remain sustainable and beneficial for present and future generations.

With the endorsement by the African Ministerial Conference on Environment and adoption by the African Union structures, the AU Africa Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan will serve as the continent's overarching framework for facilitating and coordinating efforts, strengthening institutional governance, mobilising financial resources, and fostering regional and international cooperation for sustainable ocean management.

Foreword

It is becoming increasingly clear that protection of the aquatic and marine environment, for the Africa region and beyond, requires the effective implementation of provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Furthermore, political, environmental and social factors, also present within the Africa region, compound the complexity of this task. It is encouraging to note that, in an attempt to meet the challenges of marine and aquatic management and move towards development of comprehensive oceans governance frameworks, many States are beginning to elaborate national and regional ocean policies and strategies, in essence, Ocean Governance.

The world's Oceans are fundamental to the development and sustainability of human society, the maintenance of peace, and the health of the planet. The Oceans are vital for life on Earth, bringing invaluable benefits and services for people and the whole planet. The Oceans play crucial roles in climate regulation, provision of more oxygen than all forests combined and are essential in addressing pressing global challenges such as food security, energy and green transition. Further, the Oceans are part of the social and cultural heritage of lacustrine and coastal communities and are key for international commerce, as over 80% of global trade moves by sea and about two-thirds of the world's oil and gas supply either comes from the sea or moves by sea. Yet, the Oceans are still often forgotten. The Oceans are used for unlawful purposes, such as piracy, terrorism or armed robberies at sea, human trafficking, illicit substances and weapons smuggling, among others. The pressure being exerted by humanity on global resources is such that even the vast oceans are being impacted, and we urgently need a new paradigm shift for the governance of ocean resources in the face of growing uncertainty.

Oceans are highly dynamic and interconnected. Around two-thirds of the world's Oceans are areas beyond the national jurisdiction of states. Their specific characteristics and status imply a shared global responsibility and the need to cooperate and coordinate across boundaries, different oceans and borders in order to take meaningful action. The Africa Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan is a key instrument in supporting continental and regional collaboration on facilitating ocean governance and more effective intercontinental and global partnerships. The Strategy provides a framework for joint action and clearly expresses Africa's needs and priorities. The Strategy will unlock Africa's potential in building resilient institutions which are an integral component of the continental vision for 'an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens, representing a dynamic force in the international arena.

With this Strategy and Implementation Plan, the African Union, Member States and stakeholders are invited to increase engagement for safeguarding a clean, healthy, productive and resilient Oceans that can be used sustainably under safe and fair conditions while ensuring stability and security at sea. This Strategy and Implementation Plan builds not only on the African Union, its member States and development partners roles as strong sustainability advocates but also as responsible leaders and actors with the ambition to raise standards at and across scale in an

inclusive way, through cooperative means, acting together for common sustainable development goals.

I am grateful to the United Nations Environment Programme, as the secretariat for AMCEN, for supporting the development of this strategy. In the same breadth I thank the team that facilitated the development and drafting of this Strategy. The team included Robert Wabunoha, Margaret Oduk, Oldman Koboto, Norah Mugita, Joyce Nyagah from UNEP, Linda Amorngor-Oje Etta, Emmanuel Siakilo, Georges Mba Asseko, from the African Union Commission with the overall guidance of Rose Mwebaza, Regional Director, Africa Office, UNEP and Harsen Nyambe Nyambe, Director of Sustainable Environment and Blue Economy, AUC). I am also grateful to Yvonne Waweru and Julius Francis who provided the exceptional expert advice in the preparation of this Strategy.

Commissioner of Agriculture, Rural Development, Sustainable Environment and Blue Economy

1. Introduction

Africa is endowed with abundant aquatic and marine resources (marine, lakes, rivers, streams, estuaries, and wetlands, among others), which, if sustainably harnessed, can create wealth and economic growth for socio-economic transformation and prosperity. There are 39 African coastal and island States with a collective coastline of over 47,000 km, territorial waters, and exclusive economic zones (EEZs) totalling some 13 million km², and their continental shelves extend over a total area of some 6.5 million km². Africa is surrounded by three major oceans, the Atlantic, Indian, and Southern Oceans, as well as two semi-enclosed seas, namely, the Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea. Africa is also home to the world's second largest and longest rivers and aquatic areas (the Nile and the Congo), with 63 international river basins cover approximately 64 percent of the continent's land area. The African Great Lakes constitute 27 percent of surface freshwater, the largest proportion in the world. This network of aquatic and marine resources sustains natural life and provides ecosystem goods and services that are inextricably linked with life on the continent. A significant proportion of Africa's population lives within the coast, and the density of human coastal populations is increasing annually.

The continent's rich aquatic and marine resources include living and non-living resources such as water, fish stocks, mineral deposits, oil and gas, as well as unique biodiversity.

According to recent analyses, Africa's blue economy generated approximately USD 296 billion in 2022, with projections to reach USD 576 billion by 2063. This valuation underscores the significant economic potential of Africa's marine and coastal resources. If considered as a single entity, the blue economy would rank as the eighth largest economy globally. These figures highlight the substantial, yet underutilised, potential of Africa's blue economy. As technologies and innovations continue to improve, Africa's oceans and seas offer tremendous potential and opportunity to develop both non-renewable (oil and gas) and renewable energy sources (including wind, tidal, and wave), of which only a fraction has been exploited until now. By effectively harnessing aquatic and marine resources, Africa can significantly enhance its socio-economic development.

Despite all these potentials, Africa still suffers from large-scale poverty, with 46 percent of the population living in extreme poverty. It is also projected that Africa will account for much of the exponential growth in the world's population this century, and a quarter of the population on Earth in 2050 will be based in Africa. Generally growth has, however, not been accompanied by broad-based social progress and structural transformation of the economy. The critical task for ocean governance is how the underutilised aquatic and marine resources can be harnessed to increase their contribution in creating more wealth and economic growth for the social transformation of Africa.

1.1 Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Ocean Development in Africa

Sustainable use of Africa's aquatic and marine resources has been recognised as one of the critical solutions to the continent's socio-economic development and addressing its long-

standing challenges, including high poverty rates, unemployment, and slow economic growth. Aspiration 1 of the AU Agenda 2063, the Africa we Want, articulates a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development and makes numerous references to oceans, particularly in relation to the blue economy. This includes the sustainable use of natural resources, offshore energy, ports, and shipping. Goal 6, in Aspiration 1 envisages a blue/ocean economy as a significant contributor to continental growth and transformation.

African countries, however, continue to face numerous challenges in governing and managing their aquatic resources, including:

- overfishing and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which contributes to declining fish stocks, undermining the livelihoods of communities dependent on fisheries.
- increased human needs for food, energy, transportation, and recreation are causing unprecedented pressures on aquatic environments,
- loss of marine biodiversity and marine pollution (especially from land-based sources such as plastics, chemicals, and sewerage) pose a significant threat to Africa's marine ecosystems.
- piracy, which poses a significant challenge to maritime trade and security.
- impacts of climate change, including rising sea levels, coral bleaching, and extreme weather events.

While the continent's vast aquatic and marine resources have the potential to provide greater prosperity, these challenges hamper the ability of African countries to meet the aspirations of AU Agenda 2063. The realisation of the objectives of AU Agenda 2063 will be hard to attain without re-engineering how we steer collective action across the continent on managing and governing aquatic and marine resources.

Global frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 14 on "Life Below Water," offer additional entry points for advancing ocean governance. These goals provide actionable targets and timetables that can drive efforts to promote sustainable ocean use. Aligning Africa's Ocean governance initiatives with these global objectives can bolster progress and foster greater international cooperation.

Africa has capacity to effectively manage its aquatic and marine resources. However, the coordination of the capacity is inadequate. This capacity includes strategies for stakeholder engagement in ocean governance. Engaging coastal communities, local governments, and private sector actors is important to ensure inclusive decision-making processes.

Through better collaboration and cooperation, Africa can address its numerous challenges in the marine domain through the African Union, which is critical in promoting and defining the African approach to ocean governance.

1.2 Assessing existing Ocean Governance Frameworks

Ocean governance broadly describes structures, processes, rules, and norms shaping how relevant actors make decisions, share power, assign responsibility, and ensure accountability in using and managing the aquatic resources.

Ocean policies, institutional frameworks and mechanisms exist at various levels: international, continental, regional, national, and subnational. These frameworks include conventions relating to, fisheries, climate, high seas, biodiversity, pollution, ports, safety and security. Most Africa countries are a party to and operate within the above frameworks.

At the continental level, the African Union is the engine that drives sustainable development in the region. Its organs and institutions are naturally the principal frameworks for advancing ocean governance. The following frameworks under the AU broadly address aspects of ocean management: Agenda 2063 of the African Union, 2018 Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy, 2016 Lomé Charter on Maritime Security and Safety in Africa, the New Partnership for Africa's Development, Libreville Declaration on Health and Environment in Africa, Africa Blue Economy Strategy, 1991 Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes Within Africa. At regional and sub-regional levels, there are regional seas programmes, regional fisheries bodies, and regional and subregional economic communities and organisations, all of which are also critical actors in ocean governance in Africa.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) serves as the foundational global legal framework for ocean governance, influencing policies at continental, regional, and national levels, including in Africa. UNCLOS mandates the protection of the marine environment, regulates pollution control, and promotes marine scientific research. Africa has shown strong commitment to UNCLOS, with 47 out of 54 countries as parties to the convention. Implementation agreements have allowed UNCLOS to evolve, addressing emerging challenges such as deep seabed mining, sustainable fisheries management, and marine biodiversity conservation in areas beyond national jurisdiction, demonstrating its adaptability to new ocean governance needs. The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) will further facilitate regional cooperation, support capacity-building initiatives, ensure harmonised policies and joint actions, access to marine genetic resources, and implement area-based management tools. Through strengthened coordination mechanisms and inclusive decision-making, the BBNJ Agreement can support Africa's interests in the global engagements on ocean governance.

Despite the presence of UNCLOS, ocean governance in Africa remains fragmented. Management responsibilities are often distributed across multiple ministries and government bodies, leading to poor coordination and limited policy coherence. Ocean governance typically takes place within national waters, across sector-defined jurisdictions, or at broader regional seas and ocean basin scales. Unfortunately, efforts to manage aquatic and marine resources frequently occur in isolated silos, without effective mechanisms to harmonise actions and policies across sectors.

One significant challenge is the narrow sectoral focus of many existing policies and strategies. For instance, the African Union's Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture primarily addresses fisheries management, while the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime (AIM) Strategy places considerable emphasis on maritime transport and security. The Lomé Charter, which complements the AIM Strategy, underscores the strategic commitment on better integration of security and developmental objectives. This thematic compartmentalisation overlooks the intricate connectivity between different ocean-related sectors and undermines the potential for a coordinated and holistic governance approach.

Security concerns often dominate ocean governance discussions, overshadowing vital issues related to economic development and environmental conservation. While safeguarding maritime security is undoubtedly important, balancing these efforts with initiatives that promote the blue economy and protect aquatic and marine ecosystems is essential.

Legal and institutional fragmentation further complicates governance efforts. Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs) in Africa, that is, Abidjan, Nairobi, Mediterranean and Jeddah Conventions, play an essential role in marine protection, but lack direct mandates beyond their jurisdictions. Similarly, Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) have made efforts to promote the sustainable use of marine fisheries, yet overlapping mandates and coordination challenges persist, reducing their overall effectiveness. Strengthening the mandates of regional seas conventions to encompass blue economy activities can further enhance their relevance and impact.

Despite these challenges, significant opportunities for strengthening ocean governance in Africa exist. One key opportunity lies in fostering stronger integration between environmental, economic, and security dimensions. Harmonising frameworks such as the AIM Strategy and the Lomé Charter could promote better collaboration and policy alignment. Additionally, regional cooperation through platforms like the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Fisheries and the East African Community Treaty on Maritime Transportation holds great potential for fostering shared solutions and enhancing governance.

African initiatives such as the Libreville Declaration on Health and Environment and the Bamako Convention on hazardous waste also present valuable opportunities for integrating health and environmental considerations into ocean governance.

In summary, Africa's Ocean governance frameworks have made significant strides but still face persistent challenges due to fragmented sectoral efforts and limited implementation. A coherent and inclusive governance framework that fosters collaboration across sectors, engages stakeholders at all levels, and balances security, economic, and environmental objectives is essential. Such an approach would enable African countries to speak with a unified voice, leverage synergies, and ensure the sustainable development of marine and coastal environments.

1.3 Ocean Governance Gaps and Opportunities in Africa

Despite the existence of various global, continental, regional and national mechanisms, ocean governance in Africa remains fragmented and weak, sector-specific with limited coordination among different structures, failing to recognize the interdependence of aquatic resources. The governance landscape is marked by complex, overlapping mandates and jurisdictions, which undermine the effectiveness of institutional frameworks and governance infrastructure.

Below in Table 1 is a summary of major cross-cutting gaps and opportunities in ocean governance in Africa.

Table 1: Gaps and opportunities on ocean management in Africa

Gaps	Opportunities
Lack of a mechanism for enabling common ocean agenda	a stronger, unified African voice promotes creation of common priorities and positions and enhances Africa's influence in global fora
Limited cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination	Cross-Sectoral Cooperation: Establish cooperative linkages with global, regional and national frameworks to institutionalise cross-sectoral mechanisms and coordinate sectoral activities for effective implementation Integrated Governance: Promote harmonisation of policies and strengthen institutional frameworks to enhance coherence across governance structures
Focus on single sector and underrating importance of interdependence	Holistic Approaches: Encourage integrated management approaches that recognise the interdependence of sectors, fostering synergies for sustainable ocean governance
Weak continental institutional structures and approaches for cooperation and coordination among various continental and regional ocean-related institutions	Strengthened Continental Framework: Develop a continental institutional structure for enhanced coordination among continental, regional and national bodies, facilitating unified actions on ocean governance

Inconsistent or overlapping policies and mandates of existing organisations and mechanisms	Policy Harmonisation: Create opportunities for streamlining and aligning policies and mandates across organisations to avoid duplication and ensure coherent action
Weak implementation, compliance, and enforcement of existing instruments and frameworks due to inadequate human and financial resources, capacities and political will	Accelerated Implementation: Leverage the African Union's political leadership to mobilise stakeholders and fast-track implementation of existing instruments, with a focus on compliance and enforcement Resource Mobilisation: Enhance investment in capacity building, and financial resources to support stronger enforcement and compliance of ocean governance frameworks.
Inadequate sustainable financing mechanisms for oceans	Promotion of public and private investments on oceans: Mobilise sustainable financial and technical resources, to support sustainable aquatic and marine management Enabling blue economy business environment to attract investments, fostering sustainable economic growth in the ocean sector.

Weak science-based data and information management, capacity gaps, reporting, and their governance systems	Advancing role of science: Strengthen decision-making through the enhanced use of scientific data and information, improving data quality and accessibility for better policy formulation and investments. Advancing natural capital accounting and ocean accounting to monitor ocean health and enable accurate valuation of Africa’s aquatic and marine assets and resources in support Africa’s blue economy. Integrating traditional knowledge in policy making to ensure that Africa’s aquatic and marine ecosystems are managed sustainably and equitably Database integration: Establish a comprehensive knowledge base and network governance systems to enhance management and accessibility of ocean-related data and information. Africa’s maritime history: document Africa’s peoples historical management of aquatic and marine resources and activities Capacity building: Address institutional and human resource gaps to improve the interpretation and application of scientific data in policymaking Reporting mechanisms: Develop institutional frameworks for regular reporting on the state of aquatic and marine environments to guide policy and management decisions Integrate innovation and technological advancements to enhance ocean governance
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Limited stakeholders' engagement in ocean management	Widening Inclusivity in Ocean Governance: Expand stakeholder engagement and policies, including on women, youth, civil society, and the private sector, to optimise resource use and improve ocean governance outcomes. Integrate community participation into governance frameworks to promote sustainable management practices Private Sector Partnerships: Foster systematic engagement of the private sector to leverage their expertise and resources in ocean governance initiatives
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1.4 Justification for African Union response

Drawing from the global ocean governance landscape, Africa should strengthen its governance frameworks on oceans for the following reasons:

- a) the sustained contribution of oceans to spur national economies that depends on natural resources (minerals, oil and gas, ecosystem good and services, fisheries, , infrastructure (including shipping, ports and harbours), industry, tourism and energy, among other things.
- b) the need to reverse the adverse effects of ocean exploitation and degradation. The value of ecosystems goods and services provided by our oceans are not lost or degraded through the impacts of human activities, maritime insecurity and illegal and unregulated exploitation of resources, and
- c) the need to make integrated ocean policy decisions across sectors through regional and cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination.

2. STRATEGIC FRAMING FOR THE AU OCEAN GOVERNANCE STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

2.1. Mandate

The African Union Commission (AUC), in line with its constitutive documents and Agenda 2063, is responsible for policy harmonisation, coordination, capacity building, resource mobilisation, monitoring and reporting across the continent. Given Africa's vast and diverse marine and aquatic resources, the African Union recognised the need for a structured governance framework to ensure sustainable and equitable management of marine and aquatic spaces. This realisation has led to the development of this Africa Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan, aligning with global and regional frameworks such as UNCLOS, the Africa Blue Economy Strategy, and the 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS 2050).

The foundation for the Africa Ocean Governance Strategy was laid at the fifteenth session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) in 2015, through the Cairo Declaration on Managing Africa's Natural Capital for Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication. In this declaration, the environment ministers resolved to *"develop a governance strategy, in accordance with UNCLOS and regional seas conventions, on oceans and seas in Africa for the effective management of the region's shared maritime resources."* This decision aimed to strengthen ecosystem-based management within exclusive economic zones and adjacent waters, addressing governance challenges that hinder Africa's ability to harness its ocean wealth.

The commitment to the strategy by the environment ministers was reaffirmed at subsequent AMCEN sessions, including the sixteenth session (2017, Libreville, Gabon) and the seventh special session (2018, Nairobi Declaration), emphasising the need for a structured framework to govern the region's blue economy. At the eighteenth session of AMCEN (2022, Dakar, Senegal), the ministers reiterated their commitment to finalising and implementing the Africa Ocean Governance Strategy to ensure sustainability in ocean management.

Following the above AMCEN decisions, the Africa Union Specialised Technical Committee (STC) on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water, and Environment at its second ordinary session in 2017, endorsed AMCEN's decisions, recognising the strategic importance of the Africa Ocean Governance Strategy in advancing Africa's environmental and economic priorities. The endorsement further integrated the strategy into the African Union's policy framework, ensuring high-level political backing and institutional commitment to its implementation.

Further reinforcing the strategy, the fifth ordinary session of the AU STC on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water, and Environment held in November 2023, emphasised the critical role of Africa's aquatic biodiversity governance in regional, continental, and global environmental management. The committee endorsed mechanisms to enhance the participation of AU Member States in international ocean governance processes, acknowledging that while African nations have ratified several global and regional agreements, challenges in compliance, monitoring, and participation persist. The said STC urged African Union member States, regional economic communities (RECs), regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs), and regional seas programmes (RSPs) to utilise the newly endorsed mechanisms for strengthening governance, surveillance, and scientific research to improve decision-making in ocean governance. The African Union Commission was also tasked with coordinating and monitoring the implementation of these mechanisms, further reinforcing Africa's position in global discussions on ocean sustainability.

In response to these decisions, the United Nations Environment Programme, as the Secretariat for AMCEN, facilitated a series of background studies and multi-stakeholder consultations. These engagements, conducted in November 2018, November 2020, and June 2021, June 2024 brought together member States, regional bodies, and experts to provide guidance on the strategy's key priorities and focus areas. The consultative process ensured that the Africa Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan is aligned with existing international and regional frameworks, while also addressing Africa's unique governance challenges and aspirations.

2.2. Scope of the strategy

The scope of the strategy and implementation plan covers aquatic and marine spaces and resources of oceans, seas, rivers, lakes, and other water bodies. Aquatic spaces include inland waters that connect to the marine space. Marine spaces include internal waters, territorial waters, Exclusive Economic Zones, continental shelves, high seas and the Area.

2.3. Vision

Integrated and coherent people centred actions for safe, secure, clean, healthy, productive, and sustainably managed aquatic and marine spaces in Africa.

2.4. Goal

Promote sustainable utilisation of aquatic and marine resources through integration of environmental, economic and social priorities in Africa.

2.5. Overall Objective

To establish and operationalise an overarching ocean governance framework for integrated and coherent actions that facilitates and enables cross-sectoral collaboration, stakeholder inclusion, sustainable financing and collective evidence-based decision making and implementation for achieving AU Agenda 2063.

2.6. Specific Objectives

- a) Establishing an overarching ocean governance framework.
- b) Mobilising resources to facilitate implementation of the strategy.
- c) Catalysing investments in aquatic and marine spaces for sustainable ocean governance.
- d) Strengthening collaboration and partnership in aquatic and marine spaces,
- e) Facilitating knowledge management for sustainable ocean governance.

2.7. Guiding Principles of the Strategy and Implementation Plan

The key to achieving sustainable governance of the oceans is an integrated (across disciplines, sectors, spatial, governance levels, stakeholder groups, and generations) approach based on the paradigm of “adaptive management,” whereby policymaking is an iterative experiment acknowledging uncertainty, rather than a static ‘answer’. This Africa Union Strategy and Implementation Plan is anchored on six key principles.

Principle 1: Responsibility

Access to environmental resources carries attendant responsibilities to use them in an ecologically sustainable, economically efficient, and socially fair manner. Individual and

corporate responsibilities and incentives should be aligned with each other and with broad social and ecological goals.

Principle 2: Scale-matching

Ecological problems are rarely confined to a single scale. Decision-making on aquatic and marine resources should (i) be assigned to institutional levels that maximise ecological input, (ii) ensure the flow of ecological information between institutional levels, (iii) take ownership and actors into account, and (iv) internalise costs and benefits. Appropriate scales of governance will be those that have the most relevant information, can respond quickly and efficiently, and are able to integrate across scale boundaries.

Principle 3: Precaution

In the face of uncertainty about potentially irreversible economic, environmental and social impacts, decisions concerning their use should be based on the side of caution. The burden of proof should shift to those whose activities potentially damage the environment.

Principle 4: Adaptive Management

Given that some level of uncertainty always exists in aquatic and marine resource management, decision-makers should continuously gather and integrate appropriate ecological, social, and economic information with the goal of adaptive improvement.

Principle 5: Full Cost Allocation

All of the internal and external costs and benefits, including social, economic and ecological, of alternative decisions concerning the use of aquatic and marine resources should be identified and allocated. When appropriate, markets should be adjusted to reflect full costs.

Principle 6: Participation

All stakeholders should be meaningfully and adequately engaged in the formulation and implementation of decisions concerning aquatic and marine resources. Full stakeholder awareness and participation contributes to credible, accepted rules that identify and assign the corresponding responsibilities appropriately.

2.8. Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation

Africa Union emphasised inclusivity by engaging a wide range of stakeholders throughout the process. These consultations aimed to gather diverse perspectives, ensuring that the strategy addressed the multifaceted nature of ocean governance. Key stakeholders included: member States, regional economic communities, African organisations, private sector, women and the youth.

2.9. Harmonisation and Coordination with other AU Initiatives

The ocean governance strategy is designed to complement and harmonise with other African Union initiatives to ensure that the strategy supports broader continental development goals. Additionally, the strategy aligns with Africa's commitments to the **United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly **SDG 14: Life Below Water**, ensuring that its efforts in ocean governance contribute to global sustainability goals.

3. STRATEGIC INTERVENTION PATHWAYS

The strategic intervention pathways are interrelated and are purposed to address the cross-cutting and overall challenges, connectivity, threats and opportunities that the aquatic and marine resources spaces face. The Strategy has two strategic intervention pathways that are critical in unpacking the avenues through which the objectives in section 2.6 above will be achieved in a coordinated manner.

Strategic Intervention Pathway 1: Enhancing Means of Implementation

Effective implementation of ocean governance strategies and action plans will require support in terms of finance and resource mobilisation; technology transfer and enhanced capacity building; and awareness creation and outreach. Additionally, the significance of knowledge of the oceans' social, economic, and technological aspects and the extent of communities' dependence on oceans cannot be understated. Further, human and institutional capacity building, technology transfer and a mechanism for communicating consensus on aquatic and marine science that informs decisions and investments is imperative for effective ocean governance.

This intervention pathway aims to strengthen mechanisms for the implementation of the Strategy and its implementation plan by providing a framework for financing and for making existing knowledge (under the custody of institutions such as Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA), UN Convention on Biological Diversity scientific centres of Africa, centres of excellence on aquatic and marine related matters, among others, available for policy, decision making through synthesising and verifying critical information across sectors and themes, developing means of linking fragmented information in dashboards, hubs, or platforms, and generating public awareness of the importance of healthy oceans to support increased political will and investments in sustainability and behavioural change.

Intervention Area	Suggested Actions
I. Establish or strengthen mechanisms to mobilise and unlock financial opportunities at scale for ocean governance in Africa	a) Develop strategic and sustainable resource mobilisation and knowledge sharing mechanisms through public, private and philanthropic investments b) Encourage mainstreaming and integration of ocean governance in fiscal policies and public financial management systems

	c) Support the implementation of policy, institutional and legal reforms for enhanced resource mobilisation and scaled-up, transformative finance for ocean governance d) Support conducive co-investment, knowledge sharing and B2B platforms to facilitate a sustainable financing and resource mobilisation mechanism for the successful implementation of the Strategy and Implementation Plan e) Enhance investment in capacity building, and financial resources for enforcement and compliance with ocean governance frameworks
II. Strengthen capacity of the institutions, networks and platforms for ocean governance.	a) Align programmes on ocean governance in Africa with the policy and science aspects b) Strengthen science to policy interface to support evidence-based decision making in AU policy processes c) Incorporate traditional knowledge in AU policy making processes d) Develop and strengthen platform(s), institutions and networks for technology, assessment and reporting on the continent's aquatic and marine resources and their associated values e) Align data and information on aquatic and marine resources to the African statistical system f) Develop and strengthen platforms and institutions for documenting and preserving Africa's maritime history. g) Strengthen human and institutional capacity
III. Enhance implementation, compliance and enforcement of existing instruments and frameworks	a) Mobilise actors and stakeholders in the implementation of existing instruments, with a focus on compliance and enforcement b) Enhance investments in capacity building, and financial resources for enforcement and compliance with ocean governance frameworks
IV. Strengthen multi-level coordination and inclusive partnerships for ocean governance.	a) Establish and or strengthen systems and processes for monitoring b) Develop or strengthen protocols for monitoring marine resources and pollution

Strategic Intervention Pathway 2: Coordination, Cooperation and Stakeholder Engagement

This pathway aims to advance an effective coordination structure within African Union, foster increased collaboration and cooperation with relevant actors across all aquatic and marine domains, and enhance stakeholder participation. This enhances team participation needed for effective delivery, stimulates better support for the implementation process, fosters a deep sense

of ownership and commitment to the various responsibilities, and enables buy-in from all actors and stakeholders. Given the different levels of participation at the macro, meso, and micro-levels within the continent, such coordination, collaboration, and cooperation and stakeholder participation mechanisms are critical for the overall implementation of the Strategy and Implementation Plan and operational process. This can only be achieved when all actors and stakeholders work together harmoniously towards a common vision.

Intervention Area	Suggested Actions
I. Strengthen coordination between the African Union and its structures, as well as key regional partners and stakeholders in supporting member States to achieve ocean governance	a) Establish and operationalise a coordination mechanism on ocean governance. b) Develop a unified African voice and common positions in the global ocean agenda c) Enhance collaboration and cooperation through strategic partnerships on ocean governance. d) Provide mechanisms for engagement and dialogue of the private sector, non-state actors, and marginalised groups in ocean governance processes

4. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The African Union Commission, as the overarching body, plays a central role in steering the continent's ocean governance framework. Through the Directorate of Sustainable Environment and Blue economy, it provides the leadership, coordination, and facilitates political will to drive the development and implementation of policies related to the blue economy and ocean governance. The key institutions within the Africa Union Commission are:

- a) Africa Union Summit: highest body of heads of state and government that addresses pressing challenges and opportunities in Africa
- b) AU Executive Council: Approves high-level strategies, including the Africa Union Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan as well as other relevant frameworks, ensuring the alignment with Agenda 2063 objectives,
- c) Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, and Sustainable Environment (ARBE): directly involved in coordinating efforts of member States and regional bodies in managing aquatic and marine resources.
- d) Specialised Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment (STC-ARDWE): Advises Africa Union on policies and initiatives relating to aquatic and marine spaces.

4.1. Regional Economic Communities

The Regional Economic Communities (RECs) play a critical role in harmonising the efforts of AU member states and ensuring regional cooperation on ocean governance. Each REC adapts the continental frameworks to its regional context and coordinates regional-level implementation.

The RECs serve as bridges between the AUC and individual member States, enabling cooperation on shared challenges like illegal fishing, maritime security, port management, pollution, and climate change.

4.2. African Union Member States

Individual AU member States are responsible for developing and enforcing ocean governance policies, laws and programmes at the national and sub-national levels. Their role includes:

- a) Policy development and implementation: Member States align their national strategies with the continental ocean governance frameworks and provide resources for implementation.
- b) Legislation: National governments enact laws and regulations to manage their aquatic and marine environments, which should be in harmony with continental and global frameworks
- c) Enforcement: Member States are responsible for implementing policies, including surveillance, policing, and enforcement of aquatic and marine environment.

4.3. Specialised Agencies and Bodies

A variety of specialised African agencies and bodies have been established to handle specific areas of ocean governance. These bodies provide technical expertise, data, and analysis to support policy formulation and implementation.

- a) African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR): Coordinates the continent's efforts in fisheries and aquaculture management.
- b) AUDA- NEPAD: As the implementing and development agency of the AU, they advise and recommend on the implementation of development programmes across member States.
- c) Africa Development Bank: Financing for development and implementation in Africa.

4.4. The Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and Regional Seas Programmes

These are also very critical in driving implementation of the Strategy across the regions. This includes the various Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), Nairobi , Abidjan , Jeddah and Barcelona Conventions (RSPs), among others. RFMOs and RSPs will take the lead in developing regional ocean governance strategies (ROGs) to customise the African Union Ocean Governance Strategy.

4.5. Global Sectoral Organisations

These support implementation global commitments at the continental, regional and national levels and include UN bodies, the International Seabed Authority, International Whaling Commission, International Maritime Organisation, among others.

5. MONITORING AND REPORTING MECHANISMS

Monitoring and evaluation are crucial for the success of the AU Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan. The AU will establish a reporting mechanism to ensure progress tracking, accountability, and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and Agenda 2063. The most relevant monitoring and reporting mechanisms are:

- a) The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM): Offers a platform for member States to review their progress on implementing including on ocean governance strategies.
- b) Periodic Reports: Member States, RECs, and relevant agencies submit regular reports to the AU on the status of the ocean governance strategy's implementation.

To support the above, the Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning (MERL) tool will be used for tracking milestones of the Strategy and Implementation Plan, up to and including 2035. The monitoring and review of the action plan will also align with existing overarching frameworks. The MERL will ensure that there are opportunities to learn from and use evidence gathered as well as fostering mutual accountability in the adherence to the provisions of the Strategy and Implementation Plan.

Monitoring involves assessing the changes that occur and, if possible, the attribution of impacts and outcomes to specific drivers, interventions, or investments in the Strategy and Implementation Plan. However, changes in many higher-level indicators are the result of the compounding effects of multiple interventions or pressures and may be readily attributed to particular causes. Outputs of the monitoring process will inform the adaptive management of the proposed implementation arrangements of the Strategy.

The implementing arrangements for the Strategy will ideally enable the results of the monitoring to be effectively communicated to the public and to decision makers. This means that the social, economic and environmental ocean monitoring and national, regional and continental ocean governance will benefit from tracking and feedback on their effectiveness. Beyond its contribution to Gross Domestic Product and a healthy environment, the monitoring and evaluation process of the Strategy and Implementation Plan will ideally inform on how regional cooperation within the continent contributes to livelihoods and to income distribution, to climate change resilience, or to blue economy. The monitoring feedback will need to contribute to a broad understanding of how policy changes affect the blue economy, coastal urban settlements communities.

5.1 Monitoring Governance

Monitoring the governance component of the Strategy will be anchored on three distinct governance policy areas espoused in the Africa Governance Report (2021). (i) “sustainers”, or policies that form the core of ocean governance and represent the minimum requirements for functional governance; (ii) “compass pointers” or policies that state foundational ideals and the vision that underpins shared values, instruments and the rule of law; and (iii) “pivot point policies” that drive issues where action can change the trajectory of the continent’s ocean future.

The monitoring process is an essential ‘feedback loop’ that essentially contributes to a process of iterative adjustment to the Strategy and Implementation Plan along the implementation continuum. The timescale could be aligned with regional, continental, global timetable linked to financing cycles or other processes. At national level, some attention may also be directed to aligning the timescales of national ocean action plans to the available funding cycles, or to coordinate actions on regional oceans processes.

6. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

6.1 Implementation Matrix

The implementation of this Strategy and Implementation Plan is critical to achieving the vision of a clean, healthy, and productive ocean environment in Africa. Through enhanced cooperation, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement and implementation, Africa can unlock the full potential of its aquatic and marine resources while safeguarding them for use by future generations.

AU Africa Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan (2025-2035)				
Intervention Area	Suggested Actions	Indicators	Timeline	Budget (USD)
1. Establish and strengthen mechanisms to mobilise and unlock financial opportunities at scale for ocean governance in Africa	1a. Develop strategic and sustainable resource mobilisation and knowledge sharing mechanisms through public, private and philanthropic investments	Proportion of public, multilateral, private, and philanthropic funding directed towards ocean governance initiatives (e.g., Ports, shipping, security, marine protected areas, fisheries management, and coastal protection).	2025-2035	6,000,000
	1b. Support conducive co-investment, knowledge sharing, and business to business platforms, public-private partnerships, to facilitate sustainable financing	Number of knowledge exchanges that lead to partnerships between governments, development partners, and private sector on investments in ocean governance		
	1c. Encourage mainstreaming and integration of ocean governance in fiscal policies and public financial management systems	Number of fiscal policies and budget allocations supporting ocean governance		
	1d. Support implementation of policy, institutional, and legal reforms for	Number of policy and regulatory actions directed at resource mobilisation for ocean governance		

	enhanced resource mobilisation for ocean governance			
	1e. Enhance investment in capacity building, and financial resources for enforcement and compliance with ocean governance frameworks including encouraging regional financing structures	Financial resources mobilised and number of capacity-building programs conducted, funds and financing established for enforcement agencies, legal institutions, and local communities		
2. Strengthen capacity of the institutions, networks and platforms for ocean governance.	2a. Develop or strengthen science – policy interface platforms for informed decision making	Number of science-policy interface platforms developed or strengthened	2025-2030	10,000,000
	2b. Establish an Ocean Governance and Coordination Platform	Number of continental wide conferences or meetings held		
	2c. Promote establishment or strengthen existing platform(s), institutions and networks responsible for technology, assessment and reporting on the continent's aquatic and marine spaces, natural capital accounting and their associated values	Number of platforms established or strengthened Number of institutions, networks, and schemes involved in sharing blue technology, assessment and reporting on the continent's aquatic and marine spaces, natural capital accounting and their associated values		
	2d. Strengthening mechanisms for knowledge management, technology transfer, capacity building, communication, education, and awareness	Number of mechanisms for knowledge management, technology transfer, capacity building, communication, education, and awareness strengthened		
3. Enhance implementation, compliance and enforcement of existing	3a. Strengthen national and regional mechanisms for implementing existing instruments for enhanced compliance and enforcement	Number of national and regional institutions for compliance and enforcement strengthened	2025-2030	4,000,000

instruments and frameworks				
	3b. Establish multi-stakeholder platforms for catalysing the implementation of existing instruments, with a focus on compliance and enforcement	Number of multi-stakeholder partnerships established to support the implementation of ocean governance frameworks		
4. Strengthen multi-level coordination and inclusive partnerships for ocean governance.	4a. Establish and operationalize a coordination mechanism on ocean governance	Existence of a functional secretariat on ocean governance at the AUC	2025-2030	6,000,000
	4b. Enhance collaboration and cooperation through strategic partnerships on ocean governance	Number of multi-sectoral committees or forums established to guide ocean governance		
	4c. Provide mechanisms for engagement and dialogue with relevant stakeholders	Number of mechanisms between government and relevant stakeholders provided		
5. Strengthen integrated monitoring, assessments and reporting processes.	5a. Establish and strengthen systems and processes for monitoring, including the health of aquatic and marine ecosystems and marine pollution	Number of national and regional monitoring frameworks established, adopted and operationalised	2025-2035	6,000,000
	5b. Harmonise tools, methodologies and protocols to ensure consistency in assessments	Number of standardised assessment tools, methodologies and protocols adopted by member States		
	5c. Develop and operationalise reporting tools	Number of assessment tools, methodologies and protocols harmonised Reporting tools developed and operationalised		

6.2 Operationalisation of the Implementation Matrix

The following table outlines how each intervention will be implemented at the continental, regional, and national levels to ensure coordinated and effective execution of the AU Africa Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan. This structured approach ensures that interventions are effectively implemented at all governance levels, fostering collaboration and impact-driven ocean governance across Africa.

Intervention	Continental Implementation	Regional Implementation (RECs, ROGS, RSP, RFMOs)	National Implementation
Strengthen legal and institutional frameworks	Develop and harmonise policies in African Union, AMCEN and other continental bodies	Align regional policies through RECs, RSPs, RFMOs	Develop or review national laws/policies in line with regional and continental commitments
Enhance ocean governance coordination mechanisms	Establish an Africa-wide Ocean governance and coordination platform Establish an Africa Group of Negotiators on Oceans	Strengthen regional coordination bodies and platforms Develop Regional Ocean Governance strategies/action plans	Develop national inclusive coordination frameworks Nomination of national focal points on ocean matters Establish national ocean governance and coordination committees/ action plans
Promote sustainable blue economy	Implement continent-wide blue economy strategic frameworks	Promote regional investment platforms on blue economy	Develop and implement national blue economy policies and investment frameworks
Enhance marine research, data, and knowledge-sharing	Promote AU-led continental research initiatives and collaborate on data-sharing platforms	Promote regional marine research networks and observatories and collaborate on data sharing platforms	Implement national research programmes and capacity-building for aquatic and marine scientists
Strengthen capacity-building and financial investment	Mobilise international, continental and regional funding for ocean governance	Develop region-specific capacity building and investment programmes	Develop and implement capacity building programs and allocate

			national budgets for ocean governance
Strengthen implementation, compliance and enforcement	Develop guidance for compliance and enforcement	Support and implement compliance and enforcement programmes	Develop and implement programmes on compliance and enforcement
Strengthen monitoring and response systems for aquatic and marine ecosystems and resource use status	Support operationalisation of a continental framework for monitoring aquatic and marine ecosystems, resource use	Establish regional aquatic and marine ecosystems and resource use monitoring programmes	Implement national-level aquatic and marine ecosystems and resource use monitoring programmes.

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