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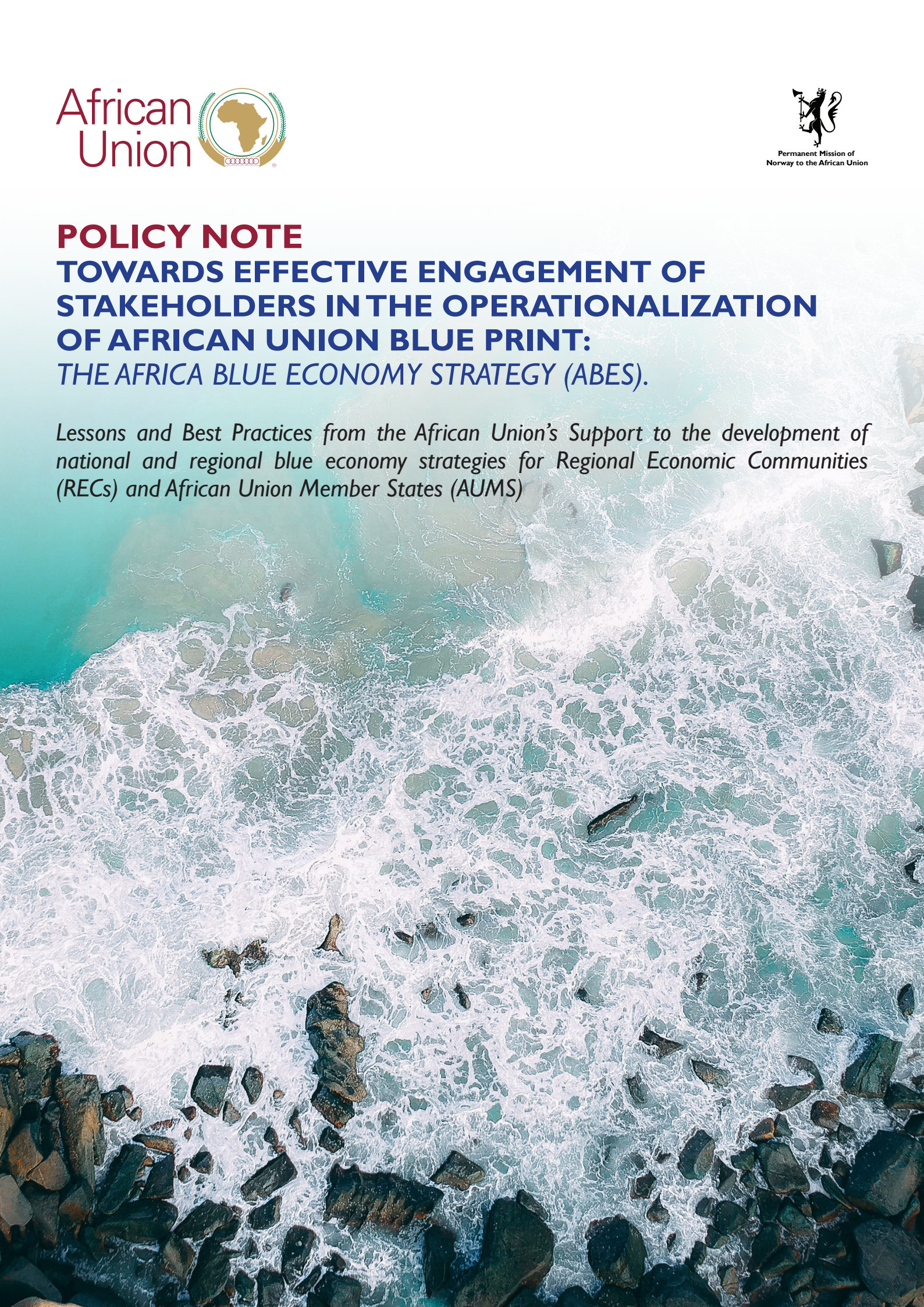
Permanent Mission of Norway to the African Union

POLICY NOTE

TOWARDS EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS IN THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF AFRICAN UNION BLUE PRINT:

THE AFRICA BLUE ECONOMY STRATEGY (ABES).

Lessons and Best Practices from the African Union's Support to the development of national and regional blue economy strategies for Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and African Union Member States (AUMS)



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Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official Policy or position of the African Union – Inter African Bureau for Animal Resources.

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Introduction and Background

The Africa Blue Economy Strategy was endorsed by the highest AU Policy Organ, the Summit of African Heads of States and Governments in February 2020, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and the AU Policy Organ urged the African Union Commission to facilitate the operationalization of the Strategy at the national and regional levels.

Blue Economy sectors play a crucial role in livelihoods, employment, wealth creation, poverty alleviation and subsequently contribute significantly to the overall economic development of Africa. An inclusive and sustainable blue economy is preconditioned on stakeholders' engagement and ecosystem health. Thus, the sustainable development and implementation of the Blue Economy Sectors require effective engagement of stakeholders at the regional and National Levels, to ensure that they domesticate the Africa Blue Economy Strategy (ABES). Consequently, it is critical to adequately take into account cardinal issues that are necessary to optimize stakeholders' involvement, and these include the following:

- Inclusive Participation through ensuring representation from diverse interested parties, including but not confined to governments, local resource-dependent communities, the private sector, academia, development partners and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).
- Capacity Building by providing training and resources to stakeholders to enhance their effective and strong participation (characterised by their full understanding and ability to contribute effectively during the consultative processes).
- Policy Alignment, including harmonization of national policies with the strategy's objectives to create a coherent approach.
- Establishment of a continental repository for policy and legal frameworks, as well as other knowledge products, to facilitate the access and sharing of information and best practices.
- Public Awareness Campaigns through appropriate information sharing and knowledge dissemination strategies, as well as educating the public about the importance of the blue economy and its benefits.
- Promotion of environmental sustainability as demanded by the nexus between environmental sustainability and economic development from the use of blue economy environmental resources.
- Ensuring Monitoring and Evaluation through the establishment of mechanisms to track progress of the effective implementation of Blue Economy strategies.

The Blue Economy holds immense potential for Africa's sustainable development. It focuses on utilizing aquatic resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and environmental sustainability. Africa's coastal, inland and island nations are working on strategies to harness this potential while addressing challenges like overexploitation, pollution, and climate change.

The Africa Blue Economy Strategy (ABES) provides a framework for Member States and Regional Economic Communities to develop their inclusive Blue Economy sectors, by harnessing water-dependent sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transport, aquatic mining, renewable energy and blue tourism. Under the auspices of the Mission of the Kingdom of Norway to the African Union, the AU-IBAR is implementing a project to support African Union Member States and Regional Economic Communities to develop national

and regional Blue Economy Strategies aligned to the African Blue Economy Strategy. The information in this policy brief has been collected from the said project activities and outputs.

This policy note portrays the synthesis of lessons and best practices based on the African Union's support to RECs and AU-MS to develop their national and regional blue economy strategies coherent with the ABES. The purpose of this policy note is to provide a roadmap and policy pathways that advocate partnerships with relevant service providers and other stakeholders for guided interventions aimed at developing sustainable Blue Economy Strategies in Africa.

Methodology

From the Norwegian-funded project, AU-IBAR has supported fifteen AU member states (AU-MS) and five Regional Economic Communities (REC) for the development of their national and regional blue economy strategies, respectively in line with the African Blue Economy Strategy (ABES). Technical assistance was provided to the fifteen AU Member States for the development of their National Blue Economy Strategies. Blue governance coordination mechanisms and the Implementation Plans for the National Blue Economy strategies were also formulated for each of the member States to accompany the strategies.

Additionally, support was provided to four of the aforementioned fifteen AU Member States to organize national stakeholders' consultative workshops to validate the identified priority areas of the national Blue Economy Strategies, the national blue governance coordination mechanisms, and the Implementation Plans.

The overall objective of organizing the national stakeholders' consultative workshops was to solicit stakeholders' views and input. The aim was geared towards enriching and finalizing the development of the National Blue Economy Strategy for the AU Member States. The purpose was to ensure ownership and secure buy-in by key and relevant stakeholders.

The specific objectives were to:

i. Identify priority issues, challenges and actions that can be translated into key thematic areas in developing the National Blue Economy Strategy for AU Member States based on the ABES framework;
ii. Gather inputs from stakeholders to improve the Key Issues identified by the consultant under different thematic areas towards developing the National Blue Economy Strategy Implementation Plans;
iii. Set up Blue Governance and Coordination Mechanisms at regional and national levels in the implementation of the National Blue Economy Strategy; and
iv. Create awareness, build capacity and share lessons learnt and best practices in the Application of the Blue Economy Concept;

Participants to these national consultative/validation workshops were generally drawn from the national stakeholders and development Agencies that were relevant for the development and implementation of the BES, as provided by the authorities responsible for Blue Economy Development of each of the AU Member States. Common stakeholders among all the African Member States included the following:

Table 1. *Stakeholders and Development Agencies Commonly Involved in BES Consultation*

State Agencies	Non-State Agencies	Development Partners
Fisheries and Aquaculture	Private Sector	African Development Bank
Environment and Climate		FAO
Maritime and inland watercourse Transport	Fishers and Fish Farmers Associations	European Union
Energy, Mining, Oil, and Gas	Regional Non-State Actors in Fisheries and Aquaculture	African Union Commission
Coastal and Marine tourism		World Bank
Gender, Women and Youths		UNDP
State Tourism Agency		Regional Economic Communities
Ministry of Justice		UNECA
Finance and Economic Planning		UNIDO
Water Development	Continental Non-State Actors	
Agriculture and Land		IFAD
Local Government		

AU-IBAR has further supported four of the fifteen AU member states (Nigeria, Botswana, Lesotho and Liberia) in organizing the Final Validation Workshop following specified procedures.

The validation workshops sensitized a broad range of stakeholders on the provisions of the draft national blue economy strategies; Solicited stakeholders' final consolidated Inputs and comments from wider perspectives and ownership; Stimulated buy-in from high-level policy/law makers and government officials; Provided a platform for a broad-based consensus final validation of the national blue economy strategy; as well as identification of roadmap for national blue economy development (including resource mobilization agenda).

The host ministries were encouraged to have more stakeholders during the validation workshop in order to ensure a wide range of views before finalizing the NBES. Hence, a large number of participants attended the Final Validation Workshop in each of the four countries, drawn from a broad range of stakeholders, including Ministers of Marine and Blue Economy as well as other key relevant Ministers and Parliamentarians.

Table 2. *Variation in Stakeholder Participation in the Validation Workshop among Selected Member States*

Member States				RECs
Nigeria	**Botswana**	**Lesotho**	**Liberia**	**UMA**
Nigerian Institute for Oceanography and Marine Research (NIOMR)	Ministry of Lands and Agriculture	Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security & Nutrition, Department of Livestock Services	Ministry of Public Works	Algeria - Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries, Online Participation
National Space Research and Development Agency	Ministry of Environment & Tourism	Ministry of Environment and Forestry- LMS	A.M.E. Zion University	Algeria - Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries; Online Participation
Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy	Ministry of Minerals	Ministry of Environment and Forestry – Department of Soil and Water Conservation	Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism	Algeria - Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries; Online Participation

Member States				RECs
Nigeria	**Botswana**	**Lesotho**	**Liberia**	**UMA**
Women's Effect Initiative International (Women for Women Initiative International) NGO	Parliament of Botswana	Motheo Holdings- Small Scale Fish Farm	Cuttington University	Libya - Coordinator for the Development of The Blue Economy, Ministry of Marine Wealth
Olusegun Agagu University of Science and Technology	Water Utilities Corporation	National University of Lesotho (NUL) – Animal Science Department	Stella Maris Polytechnic University	Libya - Blue Economy Policy Officer, Ministry of Marine Wealth
School of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources,	Department of Environmental Protection	Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA)	Liberia Maritime Authority	Libya - Marine & Aquaculture, Ministry of Marine Wealth
Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA)	Department of Rural Development	Min. of Health – Environmental Health	Monrovia City Cooperation	Mauritania - Deputy Director at the Directorate of Resources Ministry of Fisheries
National Inland Waterways Authority, NIWA,	Department of Enterprise Development	Min. Natural Resources- Mining	World Maritime University Alumni Association of Liberia	Tunisia - Director of the preservation of resources, Ministère of Environment
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO NG)	Department of Meteorology	Min. Natural Resources – Mines and Geology	Liberia Petroleum Refining Company	Tunisia - Head of Service of Marketing, Processing, and Exportation, Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources, and Fisheries
Federal Ministry of Environment	African Women Fish Processors and Traders (AWFISHNET)	Ministry of Natural Resources – Department of Water Affairs	Environmental Protection Agency of Liberia	Tunisia - Chef de service à la Direction de preservation des resources, Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources, and Fisheries
Ministry of Agriculture, Rivers State, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.	Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources	Min. of Tourism, Sports, Arts and Culture	Honorable House of Senate, Republic of Liberia	Morocco - Head of the Department of Programs and Projects; COMHAFAT
Ministry of Agriculture, Ogun State Department of Fisheries Services, Ministry of Agriculture	Botswana International University of Science & Technology	Min. of Gender, Youth and Social Development- Department of Gender	Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation	Morocco - Secretaire Générale Confederation National of Artisanal Fisheries Morocco
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Department of Aquaculture & Fisheries Management,	University of Botswana	Animal Science Student at the National University of Lesotho	Honorable House of Representatives	Morocco - President – North Africa Region AWFISHNET
Faculty of Engineering, Baze University, Abuja	National Agricultural Research & Development Institute	Min. of Trade, Industry and Business Development - Industry	Liberian Coast Guard	Morocco - Cadre de la Peche UMA
Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Environment & Mineral Resources	Fish Farmers Association	Ministry of Local Government, Chieftainship and Home Affairs	Ministry of National Defence	Morocco - Director of Food Security UMA
Fisheries Society of Nigeria	OKACOM Secretariat	Prime Minister's Office/ Cabinet	Paynesville City Corporation	Morocco - Director for food security, UMA

Member States				RECs
Nigeria	**Botswana**	**Lesotho**	**Liberia**	**UMA**
National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development	Min. Law and Justice- Law Reform Commission, Parliamentary Council	National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA)	Morocco - Head of the Multilateral Cooperation Division, Department of Environmental Cooperation
Center for Gender Economics in Africa (CGE Africa)	Ministry of Entrepreneurship	Lesotho Fish Farmers Coordinator	Liberia Artisanal Fishermen Association (LAFA)	Morocco - Division Chief, Office of Marine Fisheries, Department of Marine Fisheries
Rivers State Ministry of Environment.	Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	Africa Women Farmers Allies	Co-Management Association (CMA)	Morocco - Fisheries Engineer in charge of Programme Department of Blue Economy
Wildlife Crime Interventions. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)	Food Bank Botswana	Ministry of Energy Department of Energy	Consultancy and Research Hub	Egypt - Dean - Faculty of Fisheries Resources, University of Suez
African Marine Environment Sustainability Initiative (AFMESI)	Department of Meteorology	Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	University of Liberia, Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture Sciences (UL-DOFAS)	Egypt - Faculty of Fisheries Resources – Marine University of Suez
Nigeria Trawler Owners Association (NITOA)	Masunyana Investment T/a -Aquatic Treats	Ministry of Finance and Development Planning	Ministry of Transport	Egypt - Director of Central lab. Of Aquaculture Research; Ministry of Agriculture
Nigerian Tourism Development Authority	Ministry of Transport & Public Works	Ministry of Education and Training	National Port Authority of Liberia	Egypt - Chairman the Lakes and Fish Resources Protection and Development Agency (LFRPDA)
Ministry of Environment, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State)	Algeria Embassy	Parliament of Lesotho - Economic and Development Cluster	Liberia Petroleum Regulatory Authority	Egypt - Director of Technical Support Unit for LFRPDA The Lakes and Fish Resources Protection and Development Agency (LFRPDA)
Center for Blue Economy Research and Development	Youth Representatives	Fisheries Management and Industrial Officer [SADC]	Ministry of Internal Affairs	Egypt - General Manager International Cooperation the Lakes and Fish Resources Protection and Development Agency (LFRPDA)
Ministry of Solid Minerals Development	Botswana Investment & Trade Centre	Chief Fisheries Officer - African Development Bank	United Methodist University	
Senior Governance and Blue Economy expert, International consultants	Botswana Bureau of Standards	Tayali Analytics	Liberia Electricity Regulatory Commission (LERC)	

Member States				RECs
Nigeria	**Botswana**	**Lesotho**	**Liberia**	**UMA**
Centre For Environmental and Agricultural Resources Development (CEARD)	National Planning Commission	AU-IBAR	Ministry of Agriculture, Liberia	
Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria			Ministry of Finance & Development Planning	
			Ministry of Foreign Affairs	
			National WASH Commission of Liberia	
			National Disaster Management Agency of Liberia	
			Ministry of Mines and Energy	
			Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection	
			Forestry Development Authority	
			Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism	
			National Port Authority of Liberia	
			Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services	
			Ministry of Justices	
			Ministry of Finance & Development Planning	
			AU-IBAR	
			Ministry of Internal Affairs	
			University of Sierra Leone	
			Policy Research Network for Fisheries and aquaculture in Africa	

With reference to RECs, UMA attracted additional support to organize the Final Validation Workshop of the Regional Blue Economy Strategy of the North African Countries (UMA Member States Plus Egypt). AU-IBAR provided support to UMA for the development of the Regional Blue Economy strategy, the blue governance coordination mechanisms and the Implementation Plans for North Africa. The support was in the form of organizing a final validation workshop about a regional blue economy strategy for the North African Countries (UMA Member States Plus Egypt). About 40 participants in the workshop were from: Libya; Mauritania; Tunisa; Morocco; Cote d'Ivoire; Egypt; Suez University; CLAR; ATLAFCO; Platform Magrebine North Africa (NA); AWFISHNET; Media; Consultants; Experts; and AU-IBAR.

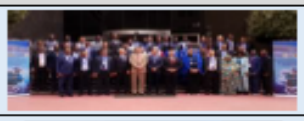
The overall objective of the Regional Broad-Based Consultative and Final Validation Workshop was to raise and sustain awareness among broader-based regional stakeholders, as well as to provide a draft Regional BE Strategy for UMA and North Africa for validation and hence engendering regional ownership of the draft strategy.

The following outcomes were achieved through the workshop in Cairo:

i. A wide range of Stakeholders were sensitized on the Provisions of the Draft Regional Blue Economy Strategy of UMA and North Africa;
ii. Valuable inputs were made by broad-based stakeholders and comments received/recorded from diverse perspectives, thereby enhancing ownership;
iii. High-Level Policy/Law Makers and Government Officials apprised for buy-in;
iv. The Final Regional Blue Economy Strategy was developed and validated with broad-based consensus;
v. Roadmap for Regional Blue Economy Development (Including Resource Mobilization Agenda) was established;

Information regarding the AU Member States and the Regional Economic Community supported in 2024 is summarized in the table below:

Table 3. *Summarized Activities for supporting RECs and AU-MS in 2024*

SN	AU MEMBER STATES		CONSULTATION DRAFT STRATEGY	VALIDATION FINAL STRATEGY	FISHERIES & AQUCULTURE
1.	DR Congo 24-26 April, 2024				
2.	Libya 13-15 May, 2024				
3.	Angola 20 -22 June, 2024				
4.	Cameroon 29 -31 July, 2024				
5.	CAR 9--11 Dec, 2024				
6.	Zimbabwe 4-6 Nov, 2024				
7.	Nigeria 8-10 April, 2024				14-16 October, 2024
8.	Botswana 26-28 March 2024				18-20 Nov 2023
9.	Lesotho 26-28 August 2024				02-04 Dec, 2024
10.	Liberia 24-26 Sept 2024				16-18 Dec, 2024
11.	Tanzania 27-29 Nov, 2024				
	REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES		CONSULTATION DRAFT STRATEGY	VALIDATION FINAL STRATEGY	FISHERIES & AQUCULTURE
1.	SENSAD 27-30 Dec 2023				
2.	UMA 27-30 Dec 2023				28-30 Dec 2024

Problem

There is limited understanding of the process, procedures and overall benefits of the concept of blue economy and the underpinning instruments by various stakeholders along the value chain in Africa. There is also apprehension among communities, particularly of the potential negative aspect of the so-called "squeeze" that some sectors face from multiple pressures from other blue economy sectors. There is also inadequate funding to support the needs of practitioners. The solution to this needs to be coordinated coherently. It is for these challenges that AU-IBAR, within the mandate provided by the decisions of the STC of 21-25 October 2019, notably, for the African Union Commission to support (i) adequate awareness creation, capacity building and sharing of best practices of the application of the Blue Economy concept and (ii) setting up Blue Governance mechanisms to ensure planning and coordination at continental, regional and national levels (AU 2019).

The development of the Blue Economy in Africa indeed faces strategic and technical challenges. Based on the studies within this framework and interactions with stakeholders at national and regional levels, the following key challenges were identified:

i. ***Climate Change:*** Africa is disproportionately affected by climate change, with rising sea levels, increased temperatures, and more frequent extreme weather events. These changes threaten marine ecosystems and the livelihoods of coastal communities. Climate Change impacts, such as changing rainfall patterns and increased temperatures, can affect water availability and quality in inland regions. This can have adverse effects on aquatic ecosystems and the communities that rely on them.,
ii. ***Pollution:*** Pollution from industrial activities, agricultural runoff, plastic waste and other anthropogenic activities poses a significant threat to marine environments. This pollution can harm marine life and disrupt the balance of ecosystems.
iii. ***Overexploitation:*** Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing depletes fish stocks and undermines the sustainability of marine resources. Open-access allocation regimes incentivize resource overexploitation. Indiscriminate deforestation of mangroves disrupts the ecosystem and leaves coastal regions vulnerable to extreme weather. These practices also affect the livelihoods of local coastal communities.
iv. ***Maritime Security:*** Piracy, armed robbery, trafficking and vandalization of submarine and coastal infrastructure are major concerns, particularly in regions like the Gulf of Guinea and the Gulf of Aden. These security threats hinder the safe and efficient operation of maritime activities.
v. ***Policy, Institutional and Governance Challenges:*** The Multisectoral nature of Blue Economy development brings up the major issue of coordination and governance. Many African countries face challenges in formulating and implementing effective policies for the Blue Economy. Policy incoherence, weak governance and lack of enforcement mechanisms can hinder sustainable development.
vi. ***Economic Constraints:*** Limited financial resources, lack of public reinvestment, and high levels of debt in many African countries restrict investment in Blue Economy initiatives. This lack of funding can hold back the development of sustainable marine industries.
vii. ***Lack of Infrastructure:*** Inadequate infrastructure, such as ports and transportation networks, can limit the growth of the Blue Economy. Improving infrastructure is essential for supporting sustainable marine activities. Many inland states lack the necessary infrastructure, such as ports and transportation networks, to support Blue Economy activities. This can impede the efficient movement of goods and services.

viii. ***Poor Water Management and Governance:*** Inland as well as coastal states often face challenges related to water management and governance, including a lack of transboundary cooperation, pollution, over-extraction, and inefficient use of water resources. These issues can affect the sustainability of aquatic ecosystems and the livelihoods of communities that depend on them.

ix. ***Inadequate Project Funding:*** Projects such as Blue Economy Strategies lack sufficient funding to meet the numerous demands from the AU Member States.

x. ***Inadequate Attention to Conservation and Aquatic Animal Welfare:*** There is a limited integration of aquatic biodiversity conservation and animal welfare considerations in Blue Economy planning and implementation. Overlooking the health and well-being of aquatic animals, including those in capture fisheries and aquaculture systems, poses risks to ecosystem sustainability, food safety, and ethical standards. The absence of dedicated welfare protocols and habitat protection strategies, including against invasive species, undermines the long-term viability of aquatic resources and weakens the One Health and One Welfare foundations of the Blue Economy.

In order to mitigate some of these challenges, the following actions were undertaken as part of the process to support Member States and RECs:

a. ***Conduct of Broad-Based Validation:*** to raise and sustain awareness, among broader-based national stakeholders, of the provisions of draft national BE Strategies for validation and hence engendering the country's ownership of the draft strategy.

b. ***Identify Priority Areas:*** to strengthen the national blue economy components and formulate a blue economy action plan for each sector to ensure planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and resource mobilization.

c. ***Identify Pilot Blue Economy Projects:*** Identify and develop National Blue Economy Pilot Projects or Programs.

d. ***Value Chain Mapping and Gender Mainstreaming:*** potential Blue Value Chains were identified and incorporated into the National Blue Economy Strategies. Specific attention was put on Blue Economy Value Chains that empower the Youth, Women and the Vulnerable members of the community.

e. ***Development of Resource Mobilization Strategy for National Blue Economy:*** this included innovative ways through which the MS and RECs can mobilize financial and technical resources used to implement the Blue Economy Strategies.

f. ***Development of the Communication Strategy:*** to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are made aware of the Blue Economy Strategy and to take part appropriately.

g. ***Development of the Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy and Key Indicators:*** to ensure that the Blue Economy Strategy is implemented accordingly and that progress (and or failure) is accounted for. Additionally, the M&E Strategy is critical for the MS and RECs to consolidate lessons learned and share them accordingly.

h. ***Adequate attention to conservation and aquatic animal welfare:*** promote the adoption of regionally contextualized aquatic animal welfare standards and conservation frameworks within national Blue Economy strategies. This includes mainstreaming welfare indicators in monitoring systems, training stakeholders on responsible aquaculture and capture fisheries practices, and establishing protected aquatic ecosystems. AU-IBAR and partners should lead in developing continental guidelines and facilitating

their domestication through RECs and Member States, aligned with the Africa Blue Economy Strategy and global One Health principles.

Root causes (Key Issues)

- Inadequate knowledge of the BE concept and tools;
- Weak intersectoral or interagency linkage to foster blue governance at the national level (which agency should take the lead);
- Weak coordination at continental levels among agencies (e.g., UNECA, WB, AfDB, etc.);
- Incessant demand by an increasing number of member states and regional institutions for support to development on BE strategies
- Weak participation of women and youth in BE
- Pollution from industrial activities, agricultural runoff, and plastic waste poses a significant threat to marine environments.
- Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing depletes fish stocks and undermines the sustainability of marine resources
- Piracy and armed robbery at sea, trafficking and vandalization of submarine and coastal infrastructures are major concerns, especially in the Gulf of Guinea and Aden
- Limited recognition of aquatic biodiversity and animal welfare as foundational elements of Blue Economy sustainability, leading to weak integration in policy, planning, and capacity building efforts
- Inadequate fisheries resource allocation regimes incentivize overexploitation

Lessons

Developing the Blue Economy in Africa offers valuable lessons for sustainable development and socioeconomic transformation. Based on the studies within this framework and interactions with stakeholders at national and regional levels, some key lessons were identified as follows:

- ***Alignment to ABES:*** Deliberate efforts are required for National Blue Economy initiatives and opportunities to be aligned within the Africa Blue Economy Strategy. This is crucial for coherence and leveraging on the existing continental frameworks.
- ***Policy Coherence and Governance:*** Integration of the main sectors' management plans and policies into harmonized blue economy strategies is essential for enhanced policy coherence and cross-sectoral collaboration. Effective policies and governance structures are essential for the successful implementation of the Blue Economy. Governments need to create regulatory frameworks that promote sustainable practices and ensure compliance with environmental standards. Effective understanding of the governance frameworks is essential for coordinating and overseeing blue economy activities, underpinned by robust institutional capacities and clear roles.
- ***Sustainable Resource Management:*** The Blue Economy emphasizes the sustainable use, management, and conservation of aquatic and marine resources. This approach ensures that resources are utilized in a sustainable way.
- ***Economic Diversification:*** Investing in sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, renewable energy, and maritime transport can diversify economies and create new job opportunities. This diversification helps reduce dependency on traditional sectors and promotes economic resilience.

- ***Regional Cooperation:*** Collaboration among African countries is crucial for addressing common challenges and sharing best practices. Regional cooperation can lead to the development of shared infrastructure, such as ports and transportation networks, which can boost trade and economic growth and enhance transboundary management.
- ***Climate Change Adaptation and mitigation:*** The Blue Economy strategy includes measures to address the impacts of climate change on marine and coastal ecosystems. This involves promoting climate-resilient practices and investing in renewable energy sources to reduce carbon emissions.
- ***Social Inclusion:*** Ensuring that the benefits of the Blue Economy reach all segments of society, including marginalized communities, which is vital for achieving inclusive growth. This includes providing access to education, training, and employment opportunities in Blue Economy sectors.
- ***Environmental Protection:*** Protecting marine environments from pollution, overexploitation, and other threats is a key component of the Blue Economy. This involves implementing measures to combat illegal fishing, reduce plastic waste, institute sustainable resource allocation mechanisms, prevent the introduction of invasive species and preserve biodiversity, amongst others.
- ***Conservation and Aquatic Animal Welfare Integration:*** A key lesson is the need to explicitly integrate aquatic biodiversity conservation and animal welfare into Blue Economy strategies. This includes adopting welfare-sensitive aquaculture and fisheries practices, protecting habitats critical to aquatic species, and recognizing animal welfare as both an ethical obligation and a determinant of food safety, ecosystem health, and long-term economic viability.
- ***Valuation:*** Lack of knowledge of the extent and type of blue economy endowment, as well as the economic value, is a serious drawback to harnessing blue economy resources. It is crucial that valuation exercises are prioritized for the mobilization of blue economy potentials into resources for societal well-being.

By learning from these lessons, African Member States can harness the potential of their marine and aquatic resources for sustainable development and socioeconomic transformation.

Actions for success

In order to remedy these challenges, which are having major impacts on the development of the blue economy on the continent, it is imperative to take strong, appropriate measures to empower stakeholders. The following actions should be considered:

- Organization of stakeholders along the value chain into associations that build trust and confidence for enhanced partnerships and strong participation.
- Training and capacity building to improve their technical knowledge and expertise of the sector (Ocean literacy, environmental justice, human rights, etc) as well as to enable them to understand the process and procedures in Blue Economy Development.
- In consideration of the environment and terrain of the BE, there is a need for the provision of specialized knowledge products for stakeholders such as information guides, case studies, success stories, policy briefs and periodic publications.
- Empower stakeholders, member states and regional institutions to conduct a valuation of BE Resources;
- Mainstream aquatic biodiversity conservation and animal welfare into stakeholder empowerment programs by developing context-specific guidance, training modules, and policy toolkits. This includes integrating

One Welfare principles into national and regional Blue Economy initiatives to promote sustainability, ethics, and resilience.

Fig. 1 shows the summary of seventeen (17) Actions that should be taken to ensure the success of the process of developing the Blue Economy Strategy at the national and regional levels. The sequence and number of actions are country or region-specific, therefore, implementation of these should be informed by the context of the countries and regions under which the support is being delivered.

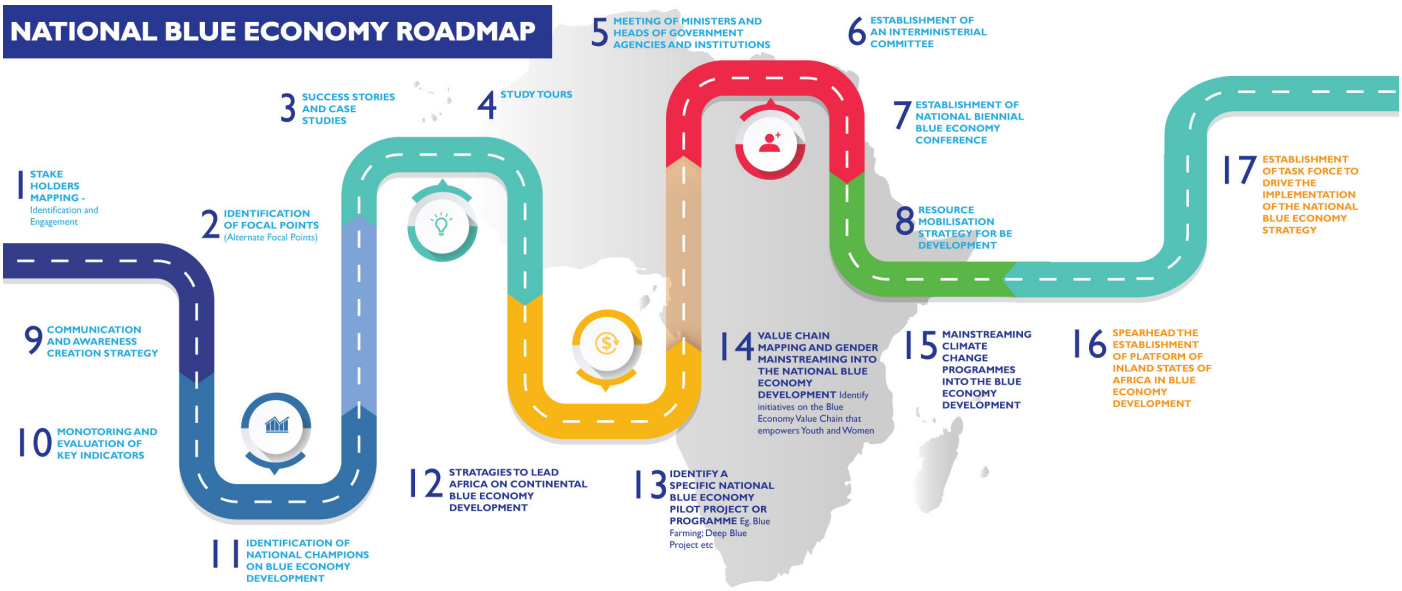


Fig 1: *Consolidated Proposal for National Blue Economy Development Roadmap from Supported AU Members States*

Way Forward

- Continue domesticating the Africa Blue Economy Strategy at the Regional and National levels;
- Enhance capacity for sustainable blue governance instruments, including marine and fresh water spatial planning, blue accounting, implementation plans, M&E and nexus between climate change and aquatic ecosystems;
- Support the development of fisheries and aquaculture value chains within the context of the Blue Economy;
- Strengthen and operationalize blue governance mechanism, institutional strengthening, gender and social inclusion, poverty reduction, sustainable blue financing;
- Strengthening conservation of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems;
- Develop and implement a programme on Aquatic Animal Health and biosecurity;
- Integrate aquatic animal welfare into Blue Economy programming, by establishing welfare guidelines, promoting humane practices across aquatic value chains, and aligning animal welfare with One Health and food safety frameworks;
- Operationalize the AU-IBAR Strategic Plan to drive coordinated implementation of continental priorities;
- There is a need to secure a better framework for monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the national and regional progress.
- Coordination mechanism is arranged with effective institutional structures and oversight at the highest political level.

- Needs assessments of AU MS for Blue Economy Development, as well as to determine the status of BE Strategies in AU member states and regional institutions
- Capacity building and strengthening of existing institutions must be considered. Advancing knowledge, creating awareness and sensitizing stakeholders on environmental issues and promoting development of the blue economy in the region can be enhanced through education, research and innovation.
- 8. Collaborative partnership is vital for effective BE development. It is necessary to enhance sustainable fisheries. Considering issues related to fisheries habitats and coral reefs.

Policy Recommendations

Key recommendation is to take measures and further steps to mitigate some of the identified challenges and next steps proposed by stakeholders, including;

i. ***Conduct of Broad-Based Validation to raise and sustain awareness***, among broader-based national stakeholders, of the provisions of draft national BE Strategies for validation and hence engendering the country's ownership of the strategy.

ii. ***Develop Identified Priority Areas:*** to strengthen the national blue economy components and formulate a blue economy action plan for each sector to ensure planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and resource mobilization

iii. ***Pilot Blue Economy Projects:*** Identify and develop a Specific National Blue Economy Pilot Project or Programme for example, Blue Farming, Deep Blue Project, etc.

iv. ***Support to undertake valuation of BE resources:*** Lack of knowledge of the types and extent of BE resources, as well as their economic values, is one of the most important drawbacks to achieving the full potential of BE contribution to poverty alleviation and overall economic development

v. Value Chain Mapping and Gender Mainstreaming into the National Blue Economy Development by identifying initiatives on the Blue Economy Value Chain that empower Youth and Women;

vi. ***Strengthening stakeholder engagement processes***, including broader participation from civil society and the private sector, was a need to enhance buy-in and implementation effectiveness.

vii. A need for continuous investment in capacity building across governmental and non-governmental sectors is highly recommended to address skill gaps and ensure effective policy implementation.

viii. ***Monitoring and Evaluation Framework;*** Need to secure a better framework for monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the collective and individual national progress is essential.

ix. ***Others Include:*** Development of National (i) Resource Mobilization Strategy for National Blue Economy Development; (ii) Communication and Awareness Creation Strategy (iii) Monitoring and Evaluation Key Indicators;

x. ***Mainstream Aquatic Animal Welfare into Blue Economy Policies:*** Integrate aquatic animal welfare as a cross-cutting policy concern by developing national guidelines, aligning with international best practices, and incorporating welfare considerations into aquaculture, fisheries, trade, and environmental regulations. This supports ethical sustainability, enhances food safety, and reinforces Africa's leadership in One Health and One Welfare governance.

Conclusion

The Blue Economy sector holds immense promise for Africa's sustainable development, food security, economic diversification, and climate resilience. However, this potential remains underutilized due to fragmented institutional structures, limited stakeholder capacity, insufficient awareness of the value and diversity of Blue Economy resources (a condition often referred to as "resource blindness"), and inadequate integration of critical cross-cutting concerns - particularly aquatic biodiversity conservation and animal welfare.

While progress is being made, much of it is incremental, and there remains a pressing need for coordinated efforts to optimize the social, economic, and ecological returns of the Blue Economy. This includes addressing policy gaps, enhancing stakeholder knowledge and engagement, and ensuring inclusive governance frameworks that reflect One Health and One Welfare principles.

Securing adequate and sustainable financial investments is also essential to unlock the full value of Africa's Blue Economy while safeguarding the integrity of aquatic ecosystems and the welfare of the animals that inhabit them. National and regional strategies must therefore mainstream animal welfare and habitat protection across aquaculture, capture fisheries, transport, tourism, and trade systems, as a pillar of ethical, resilient, and sustainable development.

In summary, enhancing stakeholder participation across all levels, through capacity building, conflict resolution mechanisms, inclusive policy development, and better access to scientific and traditional knowledge, will be vital to realizing the Africa Blue Economy Strategy. By embracing an integrated approach that places ecosystem health, animal welfare, and social inclusion at its core, Africa can lead a transformative Blue Economy agenda that secures both present livelihoods and future prosperity.

Further Reading

1. ***The Africa Blue Economy Strategy***
2. ***Consultancy Reports on National and Regional Blue Economy Strategies***
3. ***African Union. 2019.*** Report and Recommendations of Senior Officials of the 3rd Ordinary Session of the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment. Third Ordinary Session of the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment. 21-25 October 2019. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. STC3/ARDWE/EXP.
4. ***African Union (2020).*** Africa Blue Economy Strategy. African Union Commission. [ABES provides the continental framework guiding Blue Economy development across AU Member States, with thematic areas on fisheries, environment, governance, and climate resilience.]
5. ***AU-IBAR (2021–2024).*** Consultancy Reports on National and Regional Blue Economy Strategies. AU-IBAR, Nairobi. [Reports from AU-IBAR-supported technical assistance to Member States and RECs in developing Blue Economy strategies.]
6. ***African Union (2019).*** Report and Recommendations of Senior Officials of the 3rd Ordinary Session of the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment. STC3/ARDWE/EXP. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. [Provides the AU's mandate for supporting BE strategy development and governance.]
7. ***WOAH (2021).*** Aquatic Animal Health Code – Chapter 7. Welfare of Farmed Fish. World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH). [Outlines international standards for aquatic animal welfare, particularly in aquaculture.]
8. ***FAO (2022).*** FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries – Technical Guidelines for Aquaculture Development. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. [Provides best practices for sustainable aquaculture, including ecosystem and welfare considerations.]
9. ***UNEP (2021).*** Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles. United Nations Environment Programme – Finance Initiative. [Defines criteria for sustainable investment in Blue Economy sectors.]
10. ***CMS (2020).*** Guidelines for Addressing the Impact of Marine Debris on Migratory Species. Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. [Relevance to aquatic ecosystem protection and migratory species within BE strategies.]
11. ***AU-IBAR (2022).*** The One Health Approach in Africa – AU-IBAR Technical Briefing. Nairobi. [Highlights integration of animal, environmental, and human health in African policy frameworks.]
12. ***Browman, H.I. et al. (2019).*** "Principles of Fish Welfare." ICES Journal of Marine Science, 76(1): 66–76. [Scientific discussion on sentience, welfare, and the ethical dimensions of aquatic animal use.]
13. ***Cox, J.H. et al. (2023).*** Animal Welfare and the Blue Economy: Integrating Ethical Standards in Africa's Aquatic Value Chains. African Animal Welfare Journal, Vol. 5, No. 2. [Examines the intersection of aquatic animal welfare and BE policy in African contexts.]
14. ***Mbaka, M. et al. (2022).*** Aquaculture in Africa: Aquatic animal welfare, impact on the environment, and the sustainability of the sector.



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