

**Draft**

**Africa Union Ocean Governance Strategy  
and Implementation Plan**

## **Preface**

The Africa Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan has been developed to address existing governance gaps, enhance coordination and implementation 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 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 collaboration between governments, regional economic communities, civil society, private sector stakeholders, and development partners. By fostering cooperation and shared responsibility, the Africa Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan aims to position the continent as a leader in sustainable ocean management while ensuring the long-term prosperity of its people and ecosystems.

## Table of Contents

LIST OF ACRONYMS .....	iv
Glossary .....	v
Executive Summary.....	vi
Foreword.....	vii
1. Introduction .....	1
1.1 Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Ocean Development in Africa.....	2
1.2 Assessing existing Ocean Governance Frameworks .....	2
1.3 Ocean Governance Gaps and opportunities in Africa.....	5
1.4 Justification for African Union response.....	8
2. STRATEGIC FRAMING FOR THE AFRICA UNION OCEAN GOVERNANCE STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN .....	8
2.1. Mandate .....	8
2.2. Scope of the strategy .....	10
2.3. Vision .....	10
2.4. Goal.....	10
2.5. Overall Objective .....	10
2.6. Specific Objectives .....	10
2.7. Guiding Principles of the Strategy and Implementation Plan.....	11
2.8. Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation.....	12
2.9. Harmonization and Coordination with Other AUC Initiatives .....	12
3. STRATEGIC INTERVENTION PATHWAYS.....	12
4. Institutional Framework.....	15
4.1. Regional Economic Communities (RECs) .....	15
4.2. African Union Member States .....	15
4.3. Specialized Agencies and Bodies.....	16
4.4. The Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and Regional Seas Programmes.....	16
5. MONITORING AND REPORTING MECHANISMS.....	16
5.1 Monitoring Governance .....	17
6. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN.....	18
6.1 IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX.....	18
6.2 Operationalisation of the Implementation Matrix.....	20

## **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 Organizations
RSPs	Regional Seas Programs
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
MPA	Marine Protected Area
IUU	Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (Fishing)
CBD	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 is 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 emphasizes the conservation and responsible use of ocean resources to support economic growth, livelihoods, and ecosystem health.

## **Executive Summary**

Africa is endowed with vast ocean and aquatic 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. Recognizing 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 ocean resources.

This strategy aligns with key international, continental, and regional frameworks, including United Nations Convention on Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), 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 marine biodiversity conservation, foster sustainable financing mechanisms, and enhance capacity-building efforts across the continent.

A major component of the strategy is accelerating regional and continental coordination, harmonization and implementation of ocean governance policies across Africa. This involves mobilizing key stakeholders, including national governments, regional economic communities (RECs), development partners, private sector actors, and civil society organizations, to facilitate effective policy implementation and enforcement. Additionally, the strategy underscores the importance of community engagement, recognizing that local 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 coastal and marine ecosystems, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. By implementing proactive measures, including ecosystem-based management, marine spatial planning, and adaptive governance structures, Africa can ensure long-term ocean sustainability while maximizing economic benefits from its marine resources.

Implementation of the strategy will require strong political will, cross-sectoral collaboration, and financial investment. The strategy proposes mechanisms for mobilizing domestic, regional, and international 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, and private sector actors, this strategy provides a roadmap for a resilient, inclusive, and prosperous ocean governance framework for Africa. It lays the foundation for protecting Africa's marine ecosystems while ensuring that ocean-based economic activities remain sustainable and beneficial for present and future generations.

## Foreword

It is becoming increasingly clear that protection of the marine environment, for the Africa Region and beyond, requires the effective implementation of provisions made by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) Process which ensued, as well as the entire emerging international, regional and bilateral ocean regimes. Such a task represents significant challenges to all States, and it is not surprising that even the most developed of nations are encountering challenges in their attempts to elaborate the appropriate policies on a national level as well as multilaterally. 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 environmental protection and move towards the development of a comprehensive oceans management framework, many States are beginning to elaborate ocean policies and regional strategies in a manner consistent with the LOSC and the UNCED Process, 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 biosphere. The ocean is vital for life on Earth, bringing invaluable benefits and services for people and for the whole planet. It plays a crucial role in climate regulation, provides more oxygen than all forests combined and is essential in addressing pressing global challenges such as food security, energy and green transition. It is part of the social and cultural heritage of coastal communities and is 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 ocean is still often overlooked. It is used for unlawful purposes such as piracy, terrorism or armed robberies at sea, human trafficking, illicit substances and weapons smuggling. 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 for 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 and borders to take meaningful action. The Africa Ocean Governance Strategy and Implementation Plan is a key instrument in supporting regional collaboration on ocean governance and more effective international partnerships. It provides a framework for joint action and clearly expresses our needs and priorities. It 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 AU and its Member States are invited to increase engagement for safeguarding a clean, healthy, productive and resilient ocean that is used sustainably under safe and fair work conditions all while ensuring stability and security at sea.

This Strategy and Action Plan builds not only on the AU's, its Member States' and development partners' roles as reliable partners and strong sustainability advocates but also as leaders by example and responsible actors with the ambition to raise standards at and across scale in an inclusive way, together with international partners through all cooperation channels acting together for common goals on ocean governance.

I am grateful to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as the secretariat for AMCEN, for supporting the development of this strategy. We would especially like to thank the drafters of this strategy Robert Wabunoha, Margaret Oduk, Norah Mugita, Joyce Nyagah (UNEP) and Linda Amorngor-Oje Etta, Emmanuel Siakilo, Georges Mba Asseko, Oldman Koboto (African Union Commission) with the overall guidance of Rose Mwebaza (Regional Director, Africa Office, UNEP) and Harsen Nyambe (Director of SEBE, AUC), Yvonne Waweru and Julius Francis (Experts).

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



## 1. Introduction

Africa is endowed with abundant aquatic resources (such as oceans, lakes, rivers, streams, estuaries, and wetlands), which, if sustainably harnessed, can create wealth and economic growth for tremendous socio-economic transformations 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 km<sup>2</sup>, and their continental shelves extend over a total area of some 6.5 million km<sup>2</sup>. 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 the 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 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 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.<sup>1</sup> This valuation underscores the significant economic potential of Africa's marine and coastal resources. If considered as a single entity, the ocean economy would rank as the eighth largest economy globally, positioned between India and Italy. These figures highlight the substantial, yet underutilized, potential of Africa's blue economy. By effectively harnessing marine and coastal resources, Africa can significantly enhance its economic growth and development.

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.

Despite all these potentials, Africa still suffers from large-scale poverty, with 46 percent of the population living in extreme poverty. It is 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. However, growth has generally not been accompanied by broad-based social progress and structural transformation of the economy and the critical task for ocean governance is how the underutilized aquatic resources could be tapped to increase their contribution to creating more wealth and economic growth for the social transformation of the population.

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<sup>1</sup> Infosheet Bulletin: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Partnership on Ocean Governance and Blue Economy, The Africa-Europe Foundation, October 2024

## **1.1 Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Ocean Development in Africa**

Sustainable use of Africa's aquatic resources has been recognized 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 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, such as Goal 6, which 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 and the impacts of climate change, including rising sea levels, coral bleaching, and extreme weather events.

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

## **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 marine resources and biodiversity.

Ocean policies and institutional frameworks/mechanisms exist at various levels, including international, continental, regional, national, and subnational, relevant to African ocean governance, and most African countries are parties to and operate within them. Most of these frameworks promote international and regional cooperation and range from the UNCLOS to other conventions and programmes. These frameworks include conventions relating to, fisheries, climate, high seas, biodiversity, pollution, ports, safety and security. Most of the Africa countries are a party to and operate within the above conventions. Although the UNCLOS is the global legal

framework for ocean governance, its implementation requires action at the regional and national levels. The other different frameworks include conventions relating to fisheries, climate, high seas, biodiversity, pollution, shipping and ports, safety, and security. Most of the Africa countries are a party to and operate within the above conventions.

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, 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 organizations, 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 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 treaty. Implementation agreements have allowed the convention 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.

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 the ocean frequently occur in isolated silos, without effective mechanisms to harmonize 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. This thematic compartmentalization overlooks the intricate connections 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 marine ecosystems is essential. The Lomé Charter, which complements the AIM Strategy, underscores the strategic commitment of African governments to better

integrate security and developmental objectives. Nonetheless, this balance remains difficult to achieve in practice.

Legal and institutional fragmentation further complicates governance efforts. Regional seas conventions such as the Abidjan, Nairobi, and Jeddah Conventions, play an essential role in marine protection, but they lack direct mandates beyond their jurisdictions. Similarly, Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) have made efforts to promote the sustainable use of marine fisheries, yet overlapping mandates and coordination challenges persist, reducing their overall effectiveness.

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. Harmonizing 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.

Africa has capacity to effectively manage its oceans. 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.

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.

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. Strengthening the mandates of regional seas conventions to encompass blue economy activities could further enhance their relevance and impact.

While the Africa Blue Economy Strategy represents a commendable step toward a more integrated approach, it falls short in fully engaging coastal communities and addressing the environmental consequences of economic growth. Improving its linkages with earlier African Union strategies and enhancing its coherence would significantly bolster its effectiveness.

The Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement will facilitate regional cooperation, support capacity-building initiatives, ensure harmonized 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 can support Africa’s interests in the global discussions on ocean governance.

In conclusion, 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, with limited coordination among different structures. Efforts are often sector-specific, failing to recognize the interdependence of coastal and marine 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**

<b>Gaps</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
<b>Lack of a mechanism for enabling common ocean agenda</b>	<b>Unified African Voice promotes creation of Common Positions, a stronger voice and enhancing Africa's influence in international fora.</b>
<b>Limited cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination</b>	<p><b>Cross-Sectoral Cooperation:</b> Establish cooperative linkages with global and regional frameworks to institutionalize cross-sectoral mechanisms and coordinate sectoral activities for effective implementation.</p> <p><b>Integrated Governance:</b> Promote harmonization of policies and strengthen institutional frameworks to enhance coherence across governance structures.</p>
<b>Focus on single sector and underrating importance of interdependence</b>	<b>Holistic Approaches:</b> Encourage integrated management approaches that recognize the interdependence of sectors, fostering synergies for sustainable ocean governance.

<b>No continental institutional structure/approach for cooperation and coordination among various regional and sub-regional ocean-related institutions</b>	<b>Strengthened Continental Framework:</b> Develop a continental institutional structure for enhanced coordination among regional and sub-regional bodies, facilitating unified actions in ocean governance.
<b>Inconsistent or overlapping policies and mandates of existing organizations and mechanisms</b>	<b>Policy Harmonization:</b> Create opportunities for streamlining and aligning policies and mandates across organizations to avoid duplication and ensure coherent action.
<b>Weak implementation, compliance, and enforcement of existing instruments and frameworks due to inadequate human and financial resources/capacity and political will</b>	<p><b>Accelerated Implementation:</b> Leverage the African Union's political leadership to mobilize stakeholders and fast-track the implementation of existing instruments, with a focus on compliance and enforcement.</p> <p><b>Resource Mobilization:</b> Enhance investment in capacity building, and financial resources to support stronger enforcement and compliance with ocean governance frameworks.</p>
<b>Lack of sustainable financing mechanisms for oceans</b>	<p><b>Promotion of public and private investments on oceans:</b> Mobilize sustainable financial and technical resources, including natural capital accounting and ocean accounting systems, to support sustainable ocean management.</p> <p>Enabling Blue Economy business environment attracts investments in technologies, fostering sustainable economic growth in the marine sector.</p>

<p><b>Weak science-based data and information management, capacity gaps, reporting, and their governance systems</b></p>	<p><b>Advancing Role of Science:</b> Strengthen decision-making through the enhanced use of scientific data and information, improving data quality and accessibility for better policy formulation.</p> <p><b>Advancing Natural Capital Accounting and Ocean Accounts</b> to monitor ocean health and enable accurate valuation of Africa’s aquatic and marine assets and resources to support Africa’s blue economy.</p> <p><b>Integrating indigenous and traditional knowledge in policy making</b> to ensure that Africa’s coastal and marine ecosystems are managed sustainably and equitably.</p> <p><b>Database Integration:</b> Establish a comprehensive knowledge base and network governance systems to enhance the management and accessibility of ocean-related data.</p> <p><b>Africa’s Maritime History:</b> document Africa’s peoples historical uses of coastal and marine resources and involvement in maritime activities</p> <p><b>Capacity Building:</b> Address institutional and human resource gaps to improve the interpretation and application of scientific data in policymaking.</p> <p><b>Reporting Mechanisms:</b> Develop institutional frameworks for regular reporting on the state of marine environments to guide policy and management decisions.</p> <p>Integrate indigenous and traditional knowledge and community participation into governance frameworks promotes sustainable management practices.</p> <p>Innovation and Technology helps to keep pace with global advancements and enhance ocean governance.</p>
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<p><b>Limited stakeholders' engagement in ocean management</b></p>	<p><b>Widening Inclusivity in Ocean Governance:</b> Expand stakeholder engagement, including women, youth, civil society, and the private sector, to optimize resource use and improve ocean governance outcomes.</p> <p><b>Empowerment Policies:</b> Develop robust policies to actively involve women and youth in ocean governance, ensuring their contributions are recognized and utilized.</p> <p><b>Private Sector Partnerships:</b> Foster systematic engagement of the private sector to leverage their expertise and resources in ocean governance initiatives.</p>
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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 heavily depends upon human capital, mineral deposits, oil and gas, biodiversity, infrastructure (including ports and harbours), fisheries, aquaculture, industry, tourism and energy, among other things.
- b) The need to reverse the adverse effects of ocean exploitation. 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 the involved ocean sectors through regional and cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination.

## 2. STRATEGIC FRAMING FOR THE AFRICA UNION 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 harmonization, coordination, capacity building, resource mobilization, and monitoring and reporting across the continent. Given Africa's vast and diverse marine and aquatic resources, the African Union recognized the need for a structured governance framework to ensure sustainable and equitable management of ocean and aquatic spaces. This realization



led has led to the development of this present Africa Ocean Governance Strategy (AOGS), 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, AMCEN 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 (EEZs) and adjacent waters, addressing governance challenges that hinder Africa's ability to harness its ocean wealth.

The commitment to the strategy was reaffirmed at subsequent AMCEN sessions, including the Sixteenth Session (2017, Libreville, Gabon) and the Seventh Special Session (2018, Nairobi Declaration), where ministers emphasized the need for a structured framework to govern the region's blue economy. At the Eighteenth Session of AMCEN in Dakar, Senegal (2022), ministers reiterated their commitment to finalizing and implementing the Africa Ocean Governance Strategy to ensure sustainability in ocean management.

Following AMCEN's decisions, the Africa Union Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water, and Environment at its Second Ordinary Session in 2017, endorsed AMCEN's decisions, recognizing 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 STC held in November 2023, emphasized 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 STC urged African Union Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Regional Fisheries Management organisations (RFMOs), and Regional Seas Programmes (RSPs) to utilize 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 is aligned with existing international and regional frameworks, while also addressing Africa's unique governance challenges and aspirations.

With the endorsement of the African Union through the STC, the Africa Ocean Governance Strategy will serve as the continent's overarching framework for coordinating efforts, strengthening institutional governance, mobilizing financial resources, and fostering regional and international partnerships for sustainable ocean management.

## **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. Marine spaces include areas within (internal waters, territorial waters, Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ)), Continental shelves, high seas and the Area Aquatic spaces include inland waters that connect to the marine space.

## **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 utilization of aquatic and marine resources through integration of environmental, economic and social priorities in Africa.

## **2.5. Overall Objective**

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

## **2.6. Specific Objectives**

- a) Establishing an overarching ocean governance framework,
- b) Mobilising of 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 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 environmental resources should (i) be assigned to institutional levels that maximize ecological input, (ii) ensure the flow of ecological information between institutional levels, (iii) take ownership and actors into account, and (iv) internalize 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 environmental 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 environmental 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 and ecological, of alternative decisions concerning the use of environmental 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 environmental resources. Full stakeholder awareness

and participation contributes to credible, accepted rules that identify and assign the corresponding responsibilities appropriately.

Beneficiaries of the Ocean Governance strategy involves a broad range of stakeholders. Stakeholders will be drawn from key ocean sectors including fisheries, tourism, mining, transport and shipping, ports, conservation, and maritime security. They may include fishers, all those who working in the key ocean sectors, international/development partners, indigenous communities, business community, research institutions, practitioners, representatives of civil societies and policymakers at different levels.

## **2.8. Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation**

The AUC emphasized 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, International Organisations, private sector.

## **2.9. Harmonization and Coordination with Other AUC Initiatives**

The ocean governance strategy was designed to complement and harmonize with other African Union initiatives to ensure that the strategy supports broader continental development goals.

Additionally, the strategy was aligned with Africa's commitments to the **United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly **SDG 14: Life Below Water**, ensuring that Africa's efforts in ocean governance also contribute to global sustainability targets.

## **3. STRATEGIC INTERVENTION PATHWAYS**

The strategic intervention pathways are interrelated and are purposed to address the cross-cutting and overall challenges, threats and opportunities that the ocean space and resources face. The Strategy has two strategic intervention pathways that are critical in unpacking the avenues through which the objectives in 2.6 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 mobilization; 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 ocean science that informs decisions is imperative for effective ocean governance.

This intervention pathway aims to strengthen mechanisms for the implementation of the Strategy and implementation Plan by providing a framework for financing and for making existing

knowledge (under the custody of institutions such as WIOMSA, CBD scientific centres of Africa, centres of excellence etc) available for policy and decision making through synthesizing 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 for investment in sustainability and behavioural change.

Intervention Area	Suggested Actions
I. Establish mechanisms to mobilise finance for ocean governance at scale in Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Guide joint strategic and sustainable investments through increased public, private and philanthropic investment in ocean governance.</li> <li>b) Support the integration of ocean governance in fiscal policy and public financial management systems.</li> <li>c) Support the implementation of policy, institutional and legal reforms for enhanced resource mobilization and scaled-up, transformative finance for ocean governance.</li> <li>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 Action Plan.</li> </ul>
II. Establish mechanisms to mobilise finance for ocean governance at scale in Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Guide joint strategic and sustainable investments through increased public, private and philanthropic investment in ocean governance.</li> <li>b) Support the integration of ocean governance in fiscal policy and public financial management systems.</li> <li>c) Support the implementation of policy, institutional and legal reforms for enhanced resource mobilization and scaled-up, transformative finance for ocean governance.</li> <li>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 Action Plan.</li> </ul>
III. Establish mechanisms for knowledge management, technology transfer, capacity building, communication, education, awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Align programmes on ocean governance in Africa with the policy and science aspects.</li> <li>b) Strengthening the science to policy interface to support evidence-based decision making in AU policy processes.</li> <li>c) Incorporating indigenous and traditional knowledge in AU policy making processes.</li> <li>d) Developing and strengthening platform(s), institutions and networks for technology, assessment and reporting on the</li> </ul>

	<p>continent's aquatic and marine waters and their associated values.</p> <p>e) Aligning data and information on marine and coastal ecosystems to the African Statistical System</p> <p>f) Developing and strengthening platforms and institutions for documenting and preserving Africa's maritime history.</p> <p>g) Strengthening human and institutional capacity.</p>
IV. Strengthen implementation, compliance and enforcement of existing instruments and frameworks	<p>a) Mobilize actors and stakeholders in the implementation of existing instruments, with a focus on compliance and enforcement.</p> <p>b) Enhance investment in capacity building, and financial resources for enforcement and compliance with ocean governance frameworks</p>
V. Strengthen monitoring systems and processes for ocean governance (monitoring pollution and resource use)	<p>a) Establish and or strengthen systems and processes for monitoring</p> <p>b) Develop or strengthen protocols for monitoring marine resources and pollution</p>

### **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 maritime 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 Action Plan and implementation process. This can only be achieved through when all actors and stakeholders work together harmoniously towards a common vision.

Intervention Area	Suggested Actions
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<p>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</p>	<p>a) Establish and operationalize a coordination mechanism on ocean governance.</p> <p>b) Development of a unified Africa Voice/ common position in the global ocean agenda</p> <p>c) Enhance collaboration and cooperation through strategic partnerships on ocean governance.</p> <p>d) Provide mechanisms for engagement and dialogue of the private sector, non-state actors, and marginalized groups in ocean governance processes.</p>
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#### 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 political will to drive the development and implementation of policies related to the blue economy and ocean governance.

- a) AU Executive Council: Approves high-level strategies, including the Ocean governance strategy and other relevant frameworks, ensuring the alignment with Agenda 2063 objectives.
- b) Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, and Sustainable Environment (ARBE): Directly involved in coordinating the efforts of member states and regional bodies in managing ocean resources.
- c) Specialized Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment (STC-ARDWE): Advises the AUC on policies and initiatives relating to ocean governance.

##### 4.1. Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

The Regional Economic Communities (RECs) play a critical role in harmonizing 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, pollution, and climate change.

##### 4.2. African Union Member States

Individual AU member states are responsible for enacting and enforcing ocean governance policies at the national level. 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 marine environments, which must be in harmony with international maritime laws, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- c) Enforcement: Member states are responsible for implementing policies, including surveillance, policing, and enforcement of maritime zones and exclusive economic zones (EEZs).

#### **4.3. Specialized Agencies and Bodies**

A variety of specialized 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**

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

### **5. MONITORING AND REPORTING MECHANISMS**

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

- a) African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM): Offers a platform for member states to review their progress on implementing 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.



The Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning (MERL) tool will be useful for tracking milestones of the Action 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 Action 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. 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 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 GDP and a healthy environment, the monitoring and evaluation process of the Strategy will ideally inform on how regional cooperation within the continent contributes to livelihoods and to income distribution, to climate change resilience, or to a circular ocean economy. The monitoring feedback will need to contribute to a broad understanding of how policy changes affect the ocean economy, and how changes in the ocean affect the economy, coastal cities, and coastal 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 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 avail of funding cycles, or to coordinate actions on regional oceans processes.

## 6. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

### 6.1 IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

The implementation of this 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 marine resources while safeguarding them for future generations.

<b>Africa Ocean Governance Strategy &amp; Implementation Plan (2025-2035)</b>				
<b>Intervention Area</b>	<b>Suggested Actions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Budget (USD)</b>
<b>1. Establish and strengthen mechanisms to mobilize finance for ocean governance at scale in Africa</b>	1a. Guide joint strategic and sustainable investments through increased public, private, and philanthropic investment in ocean governance.	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	1,000,000
	1b. Support the integration of ocean governance in fiscal policy and public financial management systems.	Number of fiscal policies and budget allocations supporting ocean governance.	2025-2030	1,000,000
	1c. Support the implementation of policy, institutional, and legal reforms for enhanced resource mobilization for ocean governance.	Number of policy and regulatory actions directed at resource mobilization for ocean governance.	2025-2035	1,500,000
	1d. Support conducive co-investment, knowledge sharing, and B2B platforms to facilitate sustainable financing.	Number of knowledge exchanges that lead to partnerships between governments, development partners, and private sector on investments in ocean governance.	2025-2035	1,000,000

<b>2. Establish and Strengthen mechanisms for knowledge management, technology transfer, capacity building, communication, education, and awareness</b>	2a. Harmonizing programs on ocean governance in Africa with scientific, policy, and practice questions.	Number of harmonized programs and policies.	2025-2030	2,000,000
	2b. Strengthening existing platform(s), institutions and networks 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	2025-2035	2,500,000
	2c. Strengthening existing institutions, networks, and schemes to support blue technology transfer.	Number of institutions, networks, and schemes involved in sharing blue technology.	2025-2035	1,500,000
	2d. Strengthening institutional capacity for ocean governance.	Number of institutions strengthened on ocean governance issues at local, national, regional, and continental levels.	2025-2035	2,000,000
<b>3. Strengthen implementation, compliance and enforcement of existing instruments and frameworks</b>	3a. Mobilize stakeholders in 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.	2025-2030	1,000,000
	3b. Enhance investment in capacity building, and financial resources for enforcement and compliance with ocean governance frameworks	Financial resources mobilized and number of capacity-building programs conducted for enforcement agencies, legal institutions, and local communities.	2025-2035	1,000,000
<b>4. Strengthen coordination between the African Union, RECs, regional bodies, and relevant stakeholders in</b>	4a. Establish and operationalize a coordination mechanism on ocean governance.	Existence of a secretariat on ocean governance at the AUC.	2025-2030	3,000,000

<b>supporting Member States to achieve ocean governance</b>				
	4b. Enhance collaboration and cooperation through strategic partnerships on ocean governance.	Number of multi-sectoral committees or forums established to drive ocean governance.	2025-2035	1,000,000
	4c. Provide mechanisms for engagement and dialogue of the private sector, non-state actors, and marginalized groups in ocean governance processes.	Number of partnerships between governments, non-state actors, and communities aimed at sustainable ocean governance.	2025-2035	1,000,000
<b>5. Strengthen monitoring systems and processes for ocean governance (monitoring marine and aquatic pollution and resource use)</b>	5a. Establish and strengthen systems and processes for monitoring marine pollution.	Number of national and regional marine pollution monitoring programs established.	2025-2035	2,000,000
	5b. Develop and strengthen protocols for monitoring marine resources and pollution.	Number of standardized monitoring protocols adopted by member states.	2025-2035	2,000,000

## 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 Africa Ocean Governance Strategy.

<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Continental Implementation</b>	<b>Regional Implementation (RECs, ROGS, RSP, RFMOs)</b>	<b>National Implementation</b>

<b>Strengthen legal and institutional frameworks</b>	Develop and harmonize policies under African Union (AU), NEPAD-AUDA and AMCEN	Align regional policies through RECs, regional seas conventions, RFMOs	Enact and enforce national laws/policies in line with regional and continental commitments
<b>Enhance ocean governance coordination mechanisms</b>	Establish an Africa-wide Ocean governance platform	Strengthen regional coordination bodies	Develop national coordination frameworks involving key stakeholders
<b>Promote sustainable blue economy</b>	Implement the Africa Union Blue economy strategy	Regional investment in marine industries and fisheries	Develop /Implement national blue economy policies and investment frameworks
<b>Enhance marine research, data, and knowledge-sharing</b>	AU and UNEP-led continental research initiatives and data-sharing platforms	Regional marine research networks and observatories	National research programs and capacity-building for marine scientists
<b>Strengthen capacity-building and financial investment</b>	Mobilize international and regional funding for ocean governance	Develop region-specific training and investment programs	Train local institutions and allocate national budgets for marine conservation
<b>Strengthen implementation, compliance and enforcement</b>	Develop guidance for compliance and enforcement	Implement compliance and enforcement mechanisms	Implement programmes on compliance and enforcement
<b>Strengthen monitoring systems for addressing marine and aquatic pollution and resource use</b>	Develop a continental framework for monitoring marine and aquatic pollution, resource use, and climate impacts	Establish regional marine pollution and resource monitoring programmes	Implement national-level marine pollution and resource monitoring systems, reporting processes, and enforcement mechanisms

This structured approach ensures that interventions are effectively implemented at all governance levels, fostering collaboration and impact-driven ocean governance across Africa.

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