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PATHWAY TO AN ALL INCLUSIVE SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY IN THE SOUTH WEST INDIAN OCEAN REGION

Safeguarding the future of our marine resources and livelihoods

The purpose of this policy brief is to underscore the importance of an all-inclusive Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) in the South West Indian Ocean region. SWIO countries are currently developing their SBE plans and this policy brief would be helpful. This policy brief is particularly useful to the government and development agencies who are interested in investing in sustainable blue economy and empowering coastal communities in harnessing the potential of blue economy for shared prosperity and aspirations. The concept of sustainable blue economy essentially seeks to promote socio-economic growth, inclusivity, improvement of livelihoods while ensuring the sustainability of the aquatic and marine ecosystems and resources therein with a view to achieving long-term prosperity.

SUMMARY

Livelihoods of the coastal communities in the SWIO region depends largely on ocean health, and in the sustainable use and management of the oceanic resources. The marine resources play an important role in contributing to the livelihood, food and nutritional security for the coastal communities in the SWIO. Despite this important contribution, these resources are facing various threats and risks, namely overfishing, and illegal fishing resulting to decline of fish stocks, and destruction of critical habitats for fish. This has been made worse by climate change and ocean pollution (including plastics pollution). A further pressure by governments for exponential growth of economies in the oceanic resources such as mining and other extractives such as oil and gas as well as large scale agriculture and infrastructure development, if not adequately monitored and addressed risks a further loss of biodiversity and coastal communities' food security and livelihoods.

The future of the SWIO coastal communities in the face of blue economy development largely depend on the SWIO governments' political will to collectively adopt and implement strategies and policies that support a sustainable blue economy while safeguarding rights, livelihoods and well-being of the coastal communities.



INTRODUCTION

Blue Economy has widely been viewed as an organizational framework that supports the development, resource and environmental management policies and programs on natural marine and inland water resources¹. The key drivers of Blue Economy are to create wealth and socioeconomic development in the maritime environment while considering sustainable use of the marine resources therein on the long-term. Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) thus, seeks to promote shared prosperity, social inclusion and improvement of livelihoods through a multi-sectoral approach policy framework while safeguarding ocean health. Sustainable Blue Economy serves as a contribution towards achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), more specifically SDG Goal 14 on sustainable exploitation of underwater resources, SDG Goal 2 on improving food security and eliminating hunger all geared towards achieving SDG Goal 1 on ending poverty.

Agenda 2063 of the African Union recognizes Blue Economy as a frontier for sustainable growth for the transformation of the continents' socioeconomic potential and job creation. The launch of Africa's Blue Economy Policy Handbook in 2016 by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) demonstrates African Unions' commitment and support to the Blue Economy framework. In 2019, the African Union developed Africa Blue Economy Strategy to provide a strategic framework for exploitation and development of inland waters and marine resources.



The South West Indian Ocean (SWIO) region has a long coastline including the Island states supporting over 100 million inhabitants living within the 10km of the coastal strips⁴ of whom majority extensively rely on marine resources for livelihoods and food security. The Western Indian Ocean is valued at about US\$333.8 Billion, and further remains as an important biodiversity hotspot with over 11257 marine species, of which 13% of them are endemic to the SWIO region. With such high economic potential and rich biodiversity, the SWIO region stands to remain a focal area for Blue Economy Development.



However, while the Blue Economy concept remains promising in supporting growth of economies, questions arise on the placement and capacity of the communities such as small-scale fishers and stakeholders to sustainably, and optimally exploit the natural marine resources considering the diverse and economically competitive nature of the Blue Economy sector.

SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY

The World Bank asserts that the 'Blue Economy concept' promotes economic growth, social inclusion, and the preservation or improvement of livelihoods while ensuring environmental sustainability of the oceans and coastal areas (World Bank 2017).

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) from a conservation and development perspective has viewed the Sustainable Blue Economy as a marine-based economy that provides social and economic benefits for current and future generations. Sustainable Blue Economy aims to restore, protect and maintain the diversity, productivity and resilience of marine ecosystems, based on clean technologies, renewable energy and circular material flows.

These sustainable Blue Economy views presented in this policy brief align with the outcomes of the International Sustainable Blue Economy Conference that was held in Nairobi (2018), with recognition of the crucial role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-State Actors (NSAs) in the sustainable Blue Economy space.

Whereas there is no agreed definition of sustainable blue economy, the concept seeks to promote sustainable use and management of marine based resources, socio-economic growth, improvement of livelihoods and inclusivity with a view to achieving long-term prosperity. This is in line with the objectives and aspirations of SWIOTUNA and partners.

SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY AT RISK

The potential to grow the blue economy is limited by a series of risks and challenges. Despite the relatively intact coastal and marine ecosystems of the Western Indian Ocean, there are growing signs of distress in many parts of the region. The following key socio-economic and environmental challenges to achieving sustainable blue economy in the SWIO region:



Limited understanding of SBE and its importance:

the civil society has not clearly understood the concept of Sustainable Blue Economy, thus a barrier to effective engagement and participation in the SBE planning, growth and development.



Depletion of fish stocks and marine habitat degradation:

overfishing mainly from Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU), destruction of critical habitats and use of illegal fishing gears. This is a threat to marine resource sustainability, food security and communities' livelihoods.



Poor ocean governance: Most of the SWIO countries have not developed and implemented SBE policies and strategies. There is also lack of a harmonized approach and framework for promoting SBE development by the SWIO countries. This undermines regional governments' collaboration and collective decision-making.



Lack of inclusive and collective SBE decision-making framework: the absence of structured framework by SWIO governments to include civil society in SBE decision and policy making space at national and regional level risks the community voice exclusion in SBE decision-making. The lack of inclusivity in SBE has marginalized the coastal communities in the region and consequently access to marine resources, including fisheries has been unfair and inequitable.



Lack of substantial SBE research support: the SWIO governments have not adequately supported and promoted collaborative research to inform policy and decision making on SBE space. There are limited funding and networking at both national and regional levels.



Lack of SBE data: lack of reliable SBE data at national and regional levels deters opportunity for informed SBE decision-making, negotiations for sustainable fisheries access and management.



Climate change: climate change remains a great threat to food security and livelihoods for the coastal communities. Coastal communities do not clearly understand how climate change relates to their marine resources and how they can mitigate against climate change.



Plastic pollution: in addition to endangering human and marine life, plastic pollution can alter habitats and natural processes, which can reduce ecosystem productivity, resilience and ability to adapt to climate change.



Lack of integrated planning: lack of a regional planning framework and a drive for regional SBE collaboration has seen SWIO countries undertaking SBE planning at country level.



No inclusive financing mechanism: Small-scale enterprises in the marine resources value chain including fisheries have no financing mechanism in the mainstream financing facilities.

ACCELERATING A SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY IN THE SWIO REGION

With the current uptake of sustainable blue economy by governments in the SWIO region, it is apparent that there is increasing pressure on the ocean resources to ensure growth in economies, secure food security and livelihood for future generations. The exploitation of the oceanic resources will therefore require safeguards for a fair balance between growing economies, livelihoods, protecting biodiversity, enhancing ocean ecosystem health, the resilience against climate change and other emerging issues such as plastic pollution, acidification and eutrophication. The CSOs and local communities are critical in

supporting a transition to a SBE aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), AU Agenda 2063, African Blue Economy Strategy and the protection of 30% of the Oceans by 2030 (30x30 Agenda).

The 2015 Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Mauritius declaration on Blue Economy and the International Sustainable Blue Economy Conference (2018) recognizes the need towards improved governance structures to preserve ocean resources for future generations.



PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Transitioning to a sustainable blue economy in the SWIO region will require a paradigm shift from the Business As Usual (BAU) to an all-inclusive approach where the ocean assets are managed sustainably while taking into consideration the key players, including the CSOs. Non-State Actors (NSAs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) drawn from the SWIO region have identified the following policy areas as integral to supporting and accelerating growth of sustainable blue economy in the region. These recommendations are informed by various studies and CSOs consultations, including the study commissioned by WWF Madagascar on assessing the foundations for delivering a sustainable Blue Economy in the SWIO region, and the CSO SBE policy workshop held in Dar Es Salaam on the 19-20th October 2022.



1. Develop and adopt SBE policies, strategies and plans: need to address policy, legal and regulatory framework gaps with a view to improving ocean governance at both national and regional levels.

2. Promote national and regional SBE partnerships: the SWIO governments need to build partnerships at national and regional levels with the private sector and other NSAs to sensitize, create awareness and educate communities, CSOs and other actors on SBE. This will create a better understanding of Sustainable Blue Economy concept amongst the local communities and other relevant agencies hence improved ownership and stewardship in the management of the marine based resources in a collective approach.



3. Establishing a structured framework for CSOs engagement on SBE matters: deliberate effort by governments to support, create space for non-state actor's national and regional networks representation in decision-making processes and frameworks.



4. Fair and equitable access to maritime resources

including fisheries: a need for an enabling environment for communities to benefit from the Sustainable Blue Economy and safeguard their livelihoods. The competitive and competing utilization and exploitation of the oceanic resources including extractives such as Oil and Gas, if not closely monitored leave coastal communities more vulnerable with limited benefits. Access and use of marine resources should be fair and equitable for all the players in the maritime sector.



5. Safeguarding fish stocks, critical habitats and communities' livelihoods in the SWIO: collaboratively develop and support a strong and effective Monitoring Control and Surveillance (MCS) system and infrastructure for near and off-shore waters to combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. A further, innovative and technological approach to enhance low-cost data collection and monitoring is required for knowledge management and informed decision-making.

6. Research and innovation: enhance and support collaborative scientific marine research and innovation in the SWIO region, while integrating science and indigenous knowledge into SBE management, governance and monitoring.



7. Regional data integration: there is urgent need to harmonize data collection and analysis to enable regional data sharing and analyses. This will support the development of regional ocean governance management strategies and policies for shared prosperity in the SWIO region.

8. Financing the transition to an all-inclusive

SBE: support communities and CSOs to effectively transition from current business as usual utilization of the ocean resources to a sustainable Blue Economy through innovative financing mechanism and incubation approaches that work for coastal communities and the larger industries.



9. SBE Capacity Building and Development: a need to build communities and non-state actors' capacity at national and regional level to effectively engage and advocate for Sustainable Blue Economy development and planning at national, regional and international levels. Experiential learning from other countries provides a good opportunity for innovation and uptake of best practices.

NEXT STEPS AND WAY FORWARD

It is apparent that the role of the civil society organizations (CSOs) and local communities has been recognized as important in achieving sustainable blue economy, however, the following actions are paramount to support the process, that:

- SWIO governments take urgent action and put in place a structured and all-inclusive framework for policy dialogue and sustainable blue economy development, while paying particular attention and consideration to effective involvement of local communities and CSOs.
- The SWIO governments should enact relevant policies and legislations that entrench and integrate local communities and CSOs in all levels of ocean governance.
- More tailor-made training is needed to cover the range of ocean opportunities potentially available to coastal communities.
- The SWIO range states should prioritize and fast track the development in a participatory and inclusive manner the SBE strategies and Marine Spatial Plans.

- SWIO governments should identify and document existing opportunities within the blue economy sectors with a view to scaling them with the coastal communities. Work closely with mainstream lending institutions to facilitate access to finance and technical support coastal communities in implementing SBE community enterprises.



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Further Information:

SWIOTUNA Secretariat -Nairobi Office:

P.O. Box 7668-00508, Nairobi. Tel: +254 720 575050
Dannys Court, Mombasa Road, Hse No. B13, Nairobi

SWIOTUNA Secretariat -Mombasa office:

P.O. Box 85148-80100, GPO, Mombasa
Bububu Estate, Off Mtongwe Road, Likoni, Hse No. D83, Mombasa
Website: <https://www.swiotuuna.org/>
Email: info@swiotuuna.org / swiotuuna@gmail.com

Social Media Handles:



South West Indian Ocean Tuna Forum -Swiotuna



@swiotuna