

Creating an enabling framework for the development of Africa's Blue Economy¹

Oceans cover over 70% of the earth's surface and are central to life on earth. They are a rich source of food and valuable minerals, a vast waterway for international trade and movement of people, and for many, a giant recreation and cultural heritage space. Today more than two thirds of the world's population live within 100 kilometres of coastlines. In Africa, 38 of 54 African states are coastal states. More than 90% of Africa's imports and exports are transported by sea and some of the most strategic gateways for international trade are on the African continent, which underscores the continent's geopolitical importance and the relevance of sound ocean governance to the continent's well-being.

The blue economy and Africa's sustainable economic growth

Much has been said and written about the "blue economy" which has emerged as an important driver of sustainable economic growth for most regions of the world. The search for growth in this sector, the so called, blue growth or environmentally sustainable economic growth based on the oceans, is a balancing act. The varied and sometimes conflicting stakeholders all have a legitimate interest in the process, while the overall health of the oceans themselves is a common concern. What is needed is collaboration within and across different sectors to address impacts and reduce conflicts.

Efforts to ensure environmentally and socially sustainable commercial activities, products, services and investments which are dependent on and impact coastal and marine resources require great awareness, action, research and political will. The various actors and stakeholders in the shipping and the maritime sectors tend to operate in isolation from each other. It is often the case that operational areas such as maritime safety and security navigation, port and infrastructure development, transport policy including maritime transport policy, marine environmental protection, fisheries, aquaculture, bioprospecting, oil and mineral extraction, security, customs and border control, all fall within different departments or different ministries. The importance of a holistic approach to balance the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in relation to the oceans is a key component of the Blue Economy.

The importance of sound ocean governance frameworks to Africa's sustainable development

The need to use the world's (and Africa's) oceans sustainably is intensifying as a result of both the continuing increase in the exploration and use of marine resources, the opportunities they provide and the pressure to preserve marine spaces for users other than the industry. Accordingly, to ensure the sustainable development of activities in the marine space, such activities must be balanced with the capacity of the oceans to remain healthy and diverse in the long term. In the discussion on ocean governance and development of activities in the marine space, the international community is making efforts to ensure that the use of marine spaces does not disproportionately limit the ability of shipping to support and contribute to the global economy, socio-economic progress and development, and assist in the delivery of related aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The theme of Africa@Nor-Shipping 2019 – 'Unleashing the potential of Africa's Blue Economy' is supportive of several of the Sustainable Development Goals and relates particularly to Goal 14:

¹ Largely reproduced from the concept note for IMO's side event in Nairobi, Kenya on 26 November 2018.

"Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development" which in effect provides a mandate for Africa's Blue Economy based development paradigm.