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Africa's Blue Economy: The next frontier for economic resilience beyond natural treasures

The week is the Continent's premier platform for advancing sustainable blue growth



The African Union (AU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are proud to co-host the second edition of the Africa Blue Economy Week 2025 (ABEW25), taking place from 23–25 September at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa. Under the theme “**From Pledges to Stronger Partnerships: Accelerating Africa's Blue Economy**,” this year's event brings together policymakers, scientists, entrepreneurs, youth, and community leaders from across the continent and beyond to turn commitments into concrete action for Africa's aquatic future. Africa Blue Economy Week is the continent's premier platform for advancing sustainable blue growth, showcasing best practices from across Africa, and commemorating the African Day of Seas and Oceans.

Africa's blue economy—spanning over 13 million square kilometres of exclusive economic zones, 47,000 kilometres of coastline, and vast inland water bodies—holds

immense promise for sustainable development, food security, job creation, renewable energy, marine transport, trade, tourism, and climate resilience. Yet, the region faces significant challenges, including overfishing, marine pollution, climate change, and limited investment.

"The Africa Blue Economy Week 2025 reminds and encourages us to work collaboratively towards pooling finances and maximising the potential of the Blue Economy in Africa," stated Dr Jihane El Gaouzi, Head of the Sustainable Environment Division at the African Union Commission, representing Mr Harsen Nyambe Nyambe, the AUC Director of Sustainable Environment and Blue Economy (SEBE).

A new era for ocean governance

ABEW25 comes at a pivotal moment for Africa's leadership in global ocean governance. The High Seas Treaty—formally known as the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement—received its 60th ratification from Morocco on 19 September 2025, followed closely by Sierra Leone, triggering its entry into force by January 2026.

Over 30 African countries have signed the treaty, and among them, eleven AU member states have now completed the ratification process. This milestone signals Africa's growing commitment to protecting marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction, with momentum expected to continue building.

Innovation and Partnership

Africa's blue economy is not just about governance — it is about innovation, partnership, and real impact on the ground. Across the continent, a surge of blue economy projects and ocean innovations is transforming communities and livelihoods. From real-time detection of illegal fishing in Mauritius to sustainable artisanal fishing in Madagascar, and empowering women fish processors with digital tools, these solutions are making a tangible difference for people and the planet.

"Our goal for the Africa Blue Economy is ambitious: to generate \$405 billion and create 57 million jobs by 2030. The clock is ticking – less than five years remain; therefore, we must accelerate and innovate," said Dr. Matthias Naab, UNDP Regional Service

Centre for Africa “We need stronger commitments and action to unlock Africa’s next frontier—where people, planet, and prosperity come together in harmony.” He added.

New regional initiatives are also gaining momentum. The African SIDS Blue Economy Project, launched in August 2025, supports Cabo Verde, Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe, and Seychelles in strengthening regional integration, developing a blue economy database, and piloting innovative projects. Meanwhile, the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem (BCLME) Climate-Resilient Blue Economy Project, launching in October 2025, will mainstream climate-resilient blue economy approaches within the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem, shared by Namibia, South Africa, and Angola.

These projects are closely aligned with the new UNDP-AU Continental Blue Economy Programme 2025–2029, which focuses on strengthening the capacity of AU member states and regional economic communities, creating livelihood opportunities for youth and women, enhancing environmental sustainability and trade, and improving coordination and data-driven decision-making through tools like the AU Blue Economy Dashboard.

Accelerating action for impact

The blue economy is not an option for Africa, but a necessity for development and resilience. Effective governance, robust partnerships, and innovative financing are essential to unlock the continent’s aquatic potential. Youth and women are central to this vision, as are evidence-based decision-making, digital innovation, and regional integration through frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The ratification of the High Seas Treaty by African nations is more than a diplomatic milestone — it is a call to action for Africa and the world. As the region demonstrates its growing leadership in ocean governance, translating ambition into impact will require the collective efforts of governments, regional bodies, industries, communities, and development partners.

Africa Blue Economy Week 2025 stands as the continent’s annual platform where these ambitions converge. It is where challenges are addressed, solutions are shared,

and the future of Africa's blue economy is shaped—collaboratively, inclusively, and sustainably—for people and planet.

About the African Union Commission's Blue Economy Division

The AU Commission (AUC) institutionalized the Blue Economy Division in its governance arrangement following the 2019 institutional reform. Since then, African Leaders have decided to embed it as a key component of the AUC's mandate. To this end, the institutional reform process of the AUC endowed its senior leadership with the blue economy portfolio. It established a Blue Economy Division in May 2021, with the primary goal of implementing the Africa Blue Economy Strategy and contributing to the achievement of Agenda 2063.

Learn more at <https://au.int/en/directorates/sustainable-environment>

About the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

The UNDP operates in nearly 170 countries and territories, working to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities and exclusion. UNDP assists countries in developing policies, leadership skills, partnering abilities, institutional capabilities, and building resilience to sustain development results. Learn more at www.undp.org/africa

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