



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

HARNESSING THE BLUE ECONOMY IN CENTRAL AFRICA

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR BLUE GROWTH



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- “Innovations for a climate-resilient blue economy transition in Central and Eastern Africa”, held on 2 October 2024, which convened over 100 participants from 45 countries, including government officials, private sector representatives, civil society and development partners, encompassing all member States of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Participants explored the blue economy strategies of the African Union and ECCAS, analytical tools for natural resource valuations, innovative financing instruments and entrepreneurial innovations that leverage blue resources to address development challenges.
- “Unlocking the value of blue resources in Africa and the Indian Ocean”, held on 5 March 2025 and co-hosted by the Indian Ocean Rim Association, which attracted over 100 participants and was focused on the ECA blue economy valuation toolkit and its role in supporting evidence-based policymaking in Africa.

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Executive summary

Central Africa has vast and diverse, although largely untapped, aquatic resources. The subregion is at a crossroads: it can either harness the transformative potential of the blue economy or risk further ecosystem degradation. The blue economy refers to the sustainable use, management and conservation of all natural water ecosystems, including oceans, coasts, lakes, rivers and groundwater, and their supported economic activities and ecosystem services. Integrating economic, social and environmental sustainability, the concept promotes inclusive growth across coastal, island and landlocked States (United Nations, ECA, 2016). As opposed to siloed, uncoordinated, sector-specific approaches, the blue economy applies an ecosystem-based perspective that minimizes sectoral barriers to reflect the uninhibited flow of water within interdependent ecosystems.

This report evaluates the current state of the blue economy in the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) across its 11 member States: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe. Major opportunities and critical challenges are identified, and recommendations are made for policymakers, development partners and other stakeholders. In the absence of a comprehensive evaluation of the whole of the blue economy, the present report includes an analysis of the state of the sectors that are prioritized in the ECCAS blue economy strategy: fisheries and aquaculture, shipping and maritime transport, coastal and marine tourism, and sustainable energy and mineral resources.

OPPORTUNITIES

There are growth opportunities within and across the priority sectors. In fisheries and aquaculture, there are promising prospects in the small but rapidly growing aquaculture industry, which may eventually help to meet rising local demand and reduce reliance on non-regional imports. Port expansion and modernization projects in Angola, Cameroon and the Congo, and other recent investments in maritime infrastructure, may position Central Africa to improve its regional trade competitiveness. With strategic enhancements, underutilized inland waterways, such as the Congo and Ubangi Rivers, may offer a more sustainable, affordable and safer alternative to road transport.

Although it remains insufficiently prioritized in most of the subregion, the tourism sector is gaining some traction through strategic initiatives, for example in Cameroon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe. With increased marketing, aquatic ecotourism could boost regional tourism. Renewable energy, in particular hydropower, is significantly underdeveloped, despite vast resources in the subregion.

DEEPWATER AND ULTRA-DEEPWATER AREAS ARE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT SOURCES OF ANGOLA'S OIL PRODUCTION.

Source: GeoExpro



RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT, IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER AFRICAN SUBREGIONS, CENTRAL AFRICAN COUNTRIES HAVE RELATIVELY FEWER HOLISTIC NATIONAL POLICIES AND INSTRUMENTS DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT THE BLUE ECONOMY.

Recent initiatives and research in innovative offshore technologies, such as ocean thermal energy in Sao Tome and Principe, may unlock more water-based energy sources and improve the subregion's energy mix and access to energy.

The potential for all those opportunities can be amplified by leveraging the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and other regional agreements to develop cross-sectoral regional value chains and by facilitating the movement of people and the flow of productive assets.

CHALLENGES

Just as the opportunities are vast, so too are the subregion's hurdles to harnessing the blue economy, which include fragmented governance of shared aquatic resources, siloed planning for industrial development, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to finance and insufficient technical expertise. Persistent maritime insecurity, ecosystem degradation, the impacts of climate change and limited regional cooperation are additional aggravating factors. Without elevated political commitment, and the implementation of comprehensive and integrated national strategies, the blue economy's potential risks remaining untapped.

BLUE ECONOMY POLICY AND TOOLS

The interdependency of blue economy sectors, stakeholders and blue resources necessitates a careful, coordinated and informed approach, in order to increase the use of blue resources and simultaneously avoid harming the environment or the economic and social potential of other industries and communities. Effective policies and instruments underpin successful blue economy development; the blue governance framework for the blue economy strategy of the African Union (Seisay, Oroko and Chakdenga, eds., 2020) includes a set of tools to create an enabling environment:

- Integrated spatial planning and management
- National blue economy coordination units working across sectors
- Blue economy accounting
- Sustainable blue funding mechanisms
- Application of harmonized blue economy standards

Research suggests that, in comparison with other African subregions, Central African countries have relatively fewer holistic national policies and instruments developed to support the blue economy. There are several sector-specific policies and planning frameworks, however, that can broadly contribute to blue economy goals.

Although such a siloed approach is not ideal, given that it foregoes the significant benefits of cross-sectoral coordination, it does represent a repository of analysis and frameworks that may help to inform an eventual national blue economy strategy. Furthermore, ECCAS is assisting its member States in formulating national strategies aligned with the regional and subregional strategy, to ensure coordinated and impactful implementation. At the national level, 6 of 11 ECCAS members States – Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe – are either designing or implementing a blue economy strategy.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To harness the blue economy in Central Africa effectively, ECA proposes the following high-level action plan, including short-term and long-term goals:

Political prioritization and policy strengthening.

In the short term, States should validate the ECCAS blue economy strategy and adapt it to local contexts and launch public awareness campaigns. In countries where the Blue Economy is a national priority, Governments should establish and reinforce dedicated Blue Economy units with clear mandates to coordinate implementation across all relevant Ministries and sectors. In the long term, they should strengthen resource governance at all levels by empowering local and Indigenous communities and implementing frameworks for marine spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management.

Fostering regional cooperation.

In the short term, the ECCAS Commission, in collaboration with the Gulf of Guinea Commission should establish an online subregional blue economy working group to improve stakeholder engagement. In the long-term, they should strengthen maritime security cooperation, for example by fully operationalizing the Yaoundé Architecture; finance regional maritime security frameworks and initiatives sustainably; and enhance cross-border cooperation.

Sector-specific investments.

In the short term, States should support the expansion of aquaculture and accelerate hydroelectric projects, ensuring transparency, community engagement and inclusive benefit-sharing. In the long term, they should invest in cross-sectoral infrastructure through public-private partnerships; diversify tourism offerings; and encourage private sector financing for renewable energy research and development through regulatory reform and pre-feasibility assessments.



CENTRAL AFRICA
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Innovative financing.

In the short term, States should develop financing strategies that leverage successful regional pilot projects. In the long term, they should scale up innovative financing mechanisms, such as debt-for-nature swaps and blue bonds, ensuring inclusive community participation. These should be supported by regional partners, like the African Development Bank and the Bank of Central African States, as well as global actors, such as The Nature Conservancy, who have strong track records in tailoring solutions to the region's unique contexts.

Synergies with development initiatives.

In the short term, States should align their blue economy objectives with those of broader initiatives, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area and the Industrialization and Economic Diversification Master Plan for Central Africa. In the long term, they should promote local governance, empower communities and reduce dependence on external sources of finance.

Analysis, capacity-building and knowledge-sharing.

In the short term, development and research partners should support States to conduct baseline blue economy valuations, using tools such as the ECA blue economy valuation toolkit, natural capital accounting or satellite accounts, to inform policymaking. They should also facilitate the development of regional innovation hubs to foster entrepreneurship, knowledge exchange, investment and collaboration in the Blue Economy ecosystem. In the long term, States should establish partnerships with research institutions and educational programmes, with a view to developing necessary skills and capacities, in particular among women and young people.

Central Africa can unlock the transformative potential of its blue economy, fostering sustainable development and regional economic growth. ECA stands ready to support its members interested in conducting more detailed assessments of the blue economy at the national level. Such efforts can ultimately drive economic diversification, job creation and inclusive growth, in alignment with the goals of the Douala Consensus and the Industrialization and Economic Diversification Master Plan for Central Africa.

THE BLUE ECONOMY

BLUE ECONOMY: IT REFERS TO THE SUSTAINABLE USE, MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION OF AQUATIC AND MARINE SPACES AND THE DIVERSE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES THAT THEY SUPPORT.

The concept of the blue economy has been attracting attention as an important driver of sustainable development, despite the absence of a consensus on its definition. Broadly, it refers to the sustainable use, management and conservation of aquatic and marine spaces and the diverse economic activities that they support. It promotes a development path that is socially inclusive, ecosystem-based and low-carbon, advancing the three pillars of economic, social and environmental sustainability, as outlined in such global agendas as that set out in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in 2012 in Brazil, entitled “The future we want”. In addition, the concept reflects the critical role of healthy aquatic ecosystems in supporting livelihoods and facilitating inclusive growth across coastal, island and landlocked States (United Nations, ECA, 2016).

The ocean economy, notably only a part of the broader blue economy, has been expanding faster than other global sectors, as shown in Figure I. Much of this growth is driven by the marine and coastal tourism industry, as shown in Figure II. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) recently estimated that trade in ocean goods and services reached \$2.2 trillion in 2023 (2025a). Between 1995 and 2000, the ocean economy grew by 2.5 times, compared with 1.9 times for the global economy. Wide cross-country disparities, however, reflect uneven capacities to harness those opportunities. In 2023, Africa accounted for only 2 per cent of the global ocean economy, with most ocean-based export revenue being generated in marine and coastal tourism.



FIGURE I:
Growth index of the global ocean economy and the global economy, 1995–2020

Source: UNCTAD (2025a)

— Global ocean economic activity
— Rest of economy

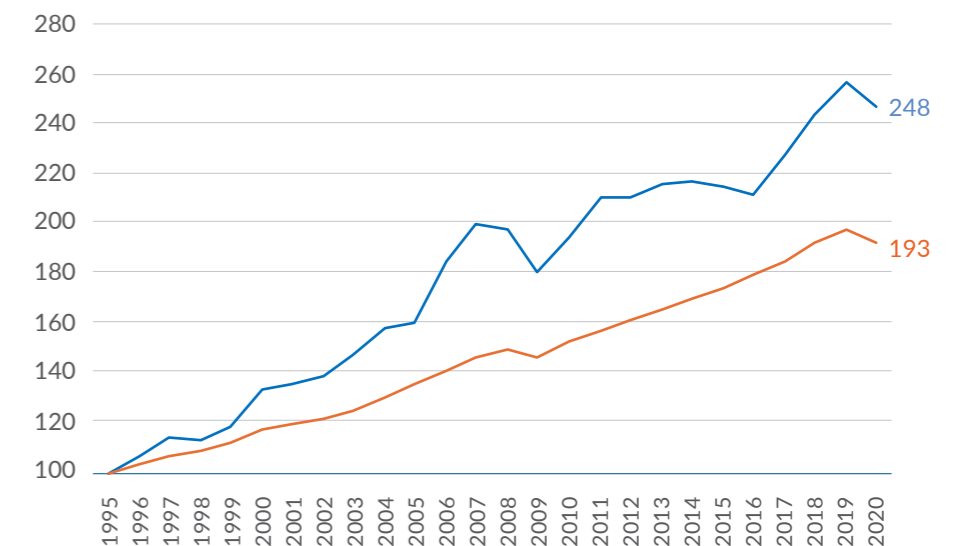
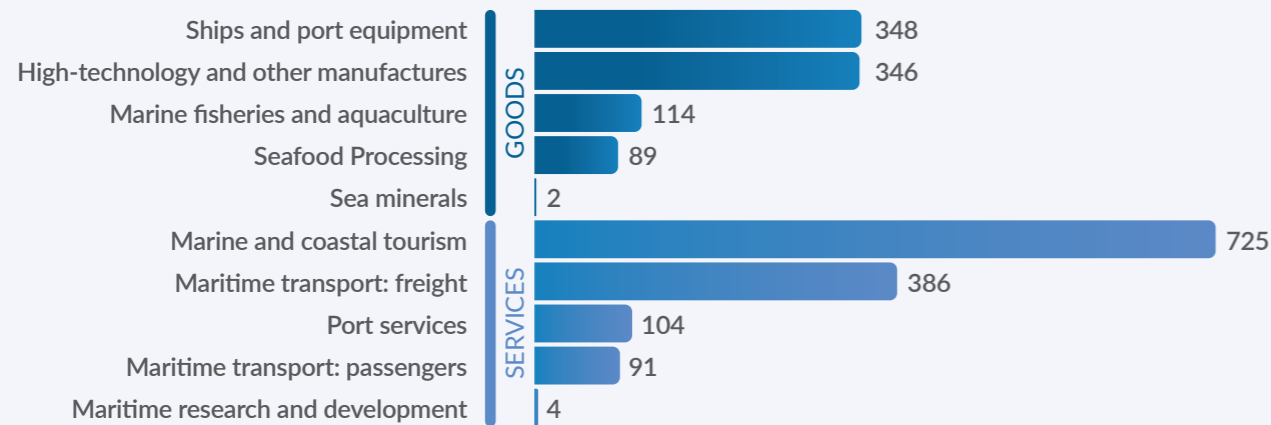


FIGURE II:
Exports per category of ocean-based goods and services, 2023
(Billions of United States dollars)

Source: UNCTAD (2025a)



Sustaining the momentum in the ocean economy will depend on the balance between tussling opposing forces: high and rising demand for aquatic food, coastal tourism and marine-based innovations; and trade disruptions, resource depletion, the impacts of climate change and the limited flow of aid and investment towards sustainable ocean sectors. In the future, there will be more complex debates on such topics as the opportunities and the potential environmental and social risks of deep-sea mining for critical minerals (UNCTAD, 2025a). As the ocean economy, and by extension the broader blue economy, continues to expand, Africa must be better positioned to seize more of its opportunities, or risk being left behind in the next wave of growth.

A. From sectors to systems: the African blue economy framework

In an African context, the blue economy, its activities and sectors are interpreted broadly, as shown in Table I, underscoring the importance of all natural water ecosystems: oceans, seas, coasts, lakes, rivers and underground water.

Crucially, however, the blue economy is not simply a list of water-based sectors, and nor does it concern decisions being made in silos with weak intersectoral coordination and fragmented governance. It is a framework for multisectoral, integrated and participatory planning as shown in Figure III. Building on integrated coastal zone management, the blue economy involves an ecosystem-based approach that intertwines economic, social and environmental dimensions at both the activity and governance levels. With that model, sectoral barriers are minimized in order to reflect the natural, uninhibited flow of water within shared and interdependent ecosystems.



TABLE I:
Principal blue economy ecosystem services and sectors

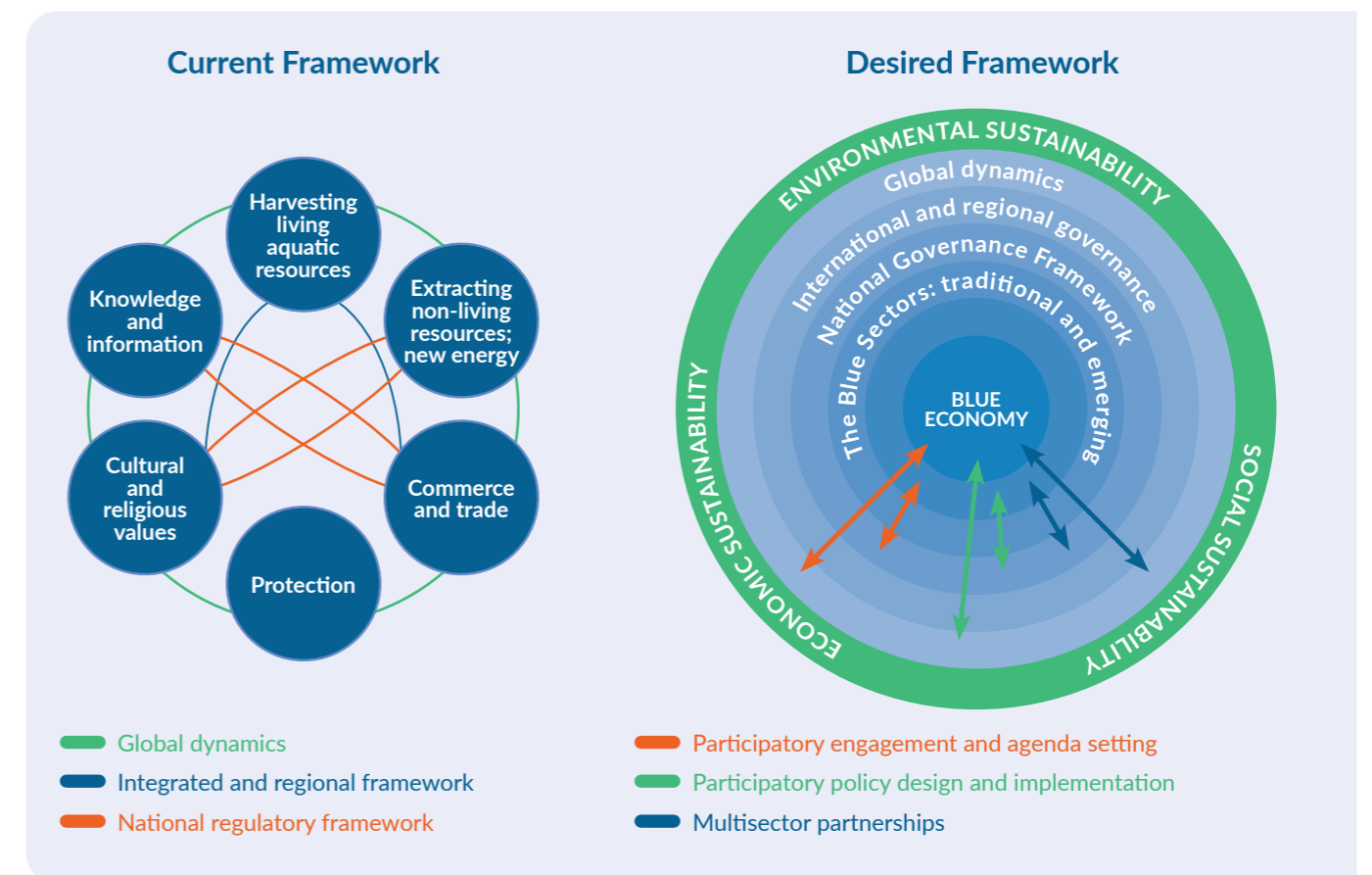
Source: United Nations, ECA (2016).

THE BLUE ECONOMY INVOLVES AN ECOSYSTEM-BASED APPROACH THAT INTERTWINES ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSIONS AT BOTH THE ACTIVITY AND GOVERNANCE LEVELS.

Ecosystem service	Blue economy sectors
Harvesting of living aquatic resources, including seafood, plant marine organisms and marine-biotechnological products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inland, coastal and deep-sea fishing • Aquaculture • Mariculture • Pharmaceuticals, chemicals, cosmetics and genetic research
Extraction of non-living resources and generation of new energy sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep-sea and seabed mining • Offshore oil and gas • Renewable energy • Marine salt harvesting • Coastal mining of sand, gravel and other construction materials
Commerce and trade in and around oceans and rivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime transport and services • Port infrastructure • Shipbuilding and repairs • River transport • Tourism and recreation
Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coastal protection • Marine ecosystem protection • Water resource protection
Cultural and religious values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural and religious practices
Knowledge and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biophysical, socioeconomic and political research

FIGURE III:
The Ideal Shift in Blue Economy Governance

Source: Adapted from United Nations, ECA (2016).



It is hard to overstate the necessity of effectively harnessing the full potential of the blue economy if the objectives of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, are to be achieved. Blue economic activities in Africa were estimated to generate \$296 billion annually and support 49 million jobs in 2019 (African Union, Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources, 2019),¹ estimates that, although significant, belie the vastness of the continent's marine and inland water ecosystem potential. Recognizing that potential and the urgency, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, at its twenty-second ordinary session, declared the period 2015–2025 the Decade of African Seas and Oceans, in order to raise awareness and to promote a sustainable and prosperous blue economy. The commitment to blue economy development was further reinforced through the integrated maritime strategy of the African Union and Agenda 2063. In 2019, the Inter-African Bureau of Animal Resources of the African Union developed the *Africa Blue Economy Strategy*, with a view to promoting an inclusive, integrated and sustainable socioeconomic transformation tailored to the needs and aspirations of the continent.

B. From potential to progress in Central Africa²

Once the eleventh largest lake in the world, Lake Chad has shrunk by 90 per cent since the 1960s, owing to overuse and climate change (Usigbe, 2019; Li, 2024). The decline has contributed to a 45 per cent slowdown in population growth in Chad, in particular in rural communities around the lake. The resulting economic impact includes economic welfare losses of 9 per cent in Chad and 6 per cent across the bordering countries (Li, 2024). Lake Chad's story illustrates the stark vulnerabilities that Central Africa faces, and the scale of the opportunity that will be lost without urgent, coordinated action to protect the subregion's strained aquatic resources.

Although Central African economies have demonstrated resilience during multidimensional crises, they continue to grapple with challenges related to diversification, structural transformation and inclusive prosperity (United Nations, ECA, 2025a). The blue economy of the subregion, however, exemplifies that Central Africa is "richer in opportunities and resources than in challenges" (United Nations, 2023). Accordingly, some Central African States are turning to their vast and largely untapped water resources to accelerate their economic transformation and support sustainability.

IT IS HARD TO OVERSTATE THE NECESSITY OF EFFECTIVELY HARNESSING THE FULL POTENTIAL OF THE BLUE ECONOMY IF THE OBJECTIVES OF AGENDA 2063.

Global discussions on the blue economy have traditionally been focused on oceans, seas and coasts, reflecting the priorities of island and coastal States. That focus risks minimizing the value of inland freshwater ecosystems that form part of the blue resources that are available for use. Africa is home to 9 per cent of the world's freshwater resources³ (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, OECD, and World Bank, 2025), and Central Africa is particularly well endowed. Led by Cameroon, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the subregion accounted for nearly half of the renewable internal freshwater resources in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020.⁴ The Democratic Republic of the Congo alone has 13 per cent of global hydropower potential, and the Congo and Gabon rank among the top 10 countries globally for per capita volumes of renewable water resources (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2021).⁵ In addition, Central Africa hosts 52 marine and coastal wetlands that are included in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance for their role in conserving global biological diversity.

Rich and diverse aquatic resources stretch from the Gulf of Guinea across the continent, including several African Great Lakes, such as Lakes Tanganyika, Albert, Kivu, Edward and Mweru; large river basins, such as those of the Congo, Ubangi and Sangha Rivers; and other inland bodies of water.

Those ecosystems are already important sources of food, irrigation, hydropower, shipping and tourism. In that context, blue economy strategies must cover all natural bodies of water of the **mostly or entirely landlocked Central African States – Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda – in addition to the coastal or island States – Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Sao Tome and Principe.**

Those resources, however, face many threats from changing climatic conditions and human-caused pressures that disrupt the land-sea continuum. In Sao Tome and Principe, for example, overfishing and oceanic changes have depleted coastal fish stocks, forcing fishers further offshore in unsafe vessels. Across the subregion, inadequate waste management is contributing to growing water pollution, compounding already serious climate-related ecological risks. As a result, Central Africa is far from reaching ecological protection targets under Sustainable Development Goal 14, on life below water, of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and related regional goals.

In the face of those risks, the blue economy in Central Africa offers a pathway to accelerating economic diversification and industrialization, on the one hand, and restraining increases in energy and water consumption, on the other hand.

ONCE THE ELEVENTH LARGEST LAKE IN THE WORLD, LAKE CHAD HAS SHRUNK BY 90 PER CENT SINCE THE 1960s, OWING TO OVERUSE AND CLIMATE CHANGE.

¹ The African Union has estimated that sectors in the African blue economy generated \$296 billion in 2018 and are projected to generate \$405 billion by 2030 and \$576 billion by 2063, driven by population growth, deeper integration, and economic and environmental protection strategies (African Union, Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources, 2019). Although other less conservative estimates exist, the figure has been cited by ECA, the World Bank (2022) and other institutions.

² In the present report, "Central Africa" refers to the member States of ECCAS, as of May 2025, where data are available.

³ Calculation using data from Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, OECD, and World Bank (2025) – processed by Our World in Data.

⁴ ECA estimate based on FAO AQUASTAT data (2025). Total renewable water resources represent the long-term average annual flow of rivers (surface water) and recharge of aquifers (groundwater), generated from endogenous precipitation or as inflow from neighbouring countries and as a part of shared lakes or border rivers.

⁵ (FAO, 2021).

In the Industrialization and Economic Diversification Master Plan for Central Africa,⁶ the transformation of natural capital into productive capital is identified as a strategic pillar, and increased investments are called for in port modernization, hydropower and the protection of carbon sinks in blue and green ecosystems. The Master Plan remains a sectoral development framework, however, and does not reflect the intersectoral, systemic approach that is needed to harness the blue economy effectively.

Although Governments are increasingly acknowledging the blue economy's importance, its potential remains untapped; progress in developing supportive policies, financing and other instruments has been uneven. In response, ECCAS (n.d.) has prepared a subregional blue economy strategy that flows from the blue economy strategy of the African Union. In the ECCAS strategy, the multidisciplinary nature of the blue economy is acknowledged, and priorities are identified for the five thematic areas of focus that are outlined in the continental strategy, as highlighted in Figure IV. In a further sign of regional commitment to the blue economy, four Members of ECCAS – Angola, Cameroon, Congo, and Equatorial Guinea – were among eight signatories to the 2025 Yaoundé Declaration, pledging to strengthen efforts to advance the blue economy in the Gulf of Guinea (ECA, 2025b; World Resources Institute, 2025). Signed on 10 July 2025 at the close of the *International Conference on the Sustainable Blue Economy in the Gulf of Guinea*, the Declaration⁷ focuses on regional cooperation, transparent governance, data sharing, and capacity building, with a goal for 100% sustainable ocean management by 2030.

C. Overall situational assessment of the Central African blue economy

The blue economy in Central Africa holds immense potential, fuelled by abundant aquatic resources, growing demand and low, but growing, investments in critical industries. As the appetite for economic diversification increases and recognition of the need to manage natural capital sustainably grows, the subregion has a timely opportunity to adopt an integrated, cross-sectoral blue economy approach. The potential of the blue economy can be amplified by using the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area to develop cross-sectoral regional value chains, for example linking together innovations in aquaculture, logistics, renewable energy, ecotourism and other value-added blue industries.

Progress in the subregion is constrained by limited political ownership and a lack of high-level prioritization to drive a truly multisectoral, integrated and participatory approach. As a result, blue economy development continues to be viewed in a fragmented manner, with a focus on individual industries rather than the holistic system.

ALTHOUGH GOVERNMENTS ARE INCREASINGLY ACKNOWLEDGING THE BLUE ECONOMY'S IMPORTANCE, ITS POTENTIAL REMAINS UNTAPPED.



⁶ The Plan Directeur d'Industrialisation et de Diversification Économique pour l'Afrique Centrale, which has been prepared by ECA and has been technically validated, has not yet been finalized.

⁷ Held on 9 to 10 July 2025, the Conference was convened by the President of Cameroon, in partnership with the Gulf of Guinea Commission and the President of the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, with high-level participation from the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed and the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, Ambassador Peter Thomson. ECA presented its recent research on the blue economy in Central Africa and insights from applying its Blue Economy Valuation Toolkit in other subregions. The Declaration, available at <https://mefar.org/yaounde-declaration/>, was reported adopted by Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia and Nigeria, though it has not yet formally published.

FIGURE IV:
Strategic priorities of the ECCAS blue economy strategy

Source: ECA.

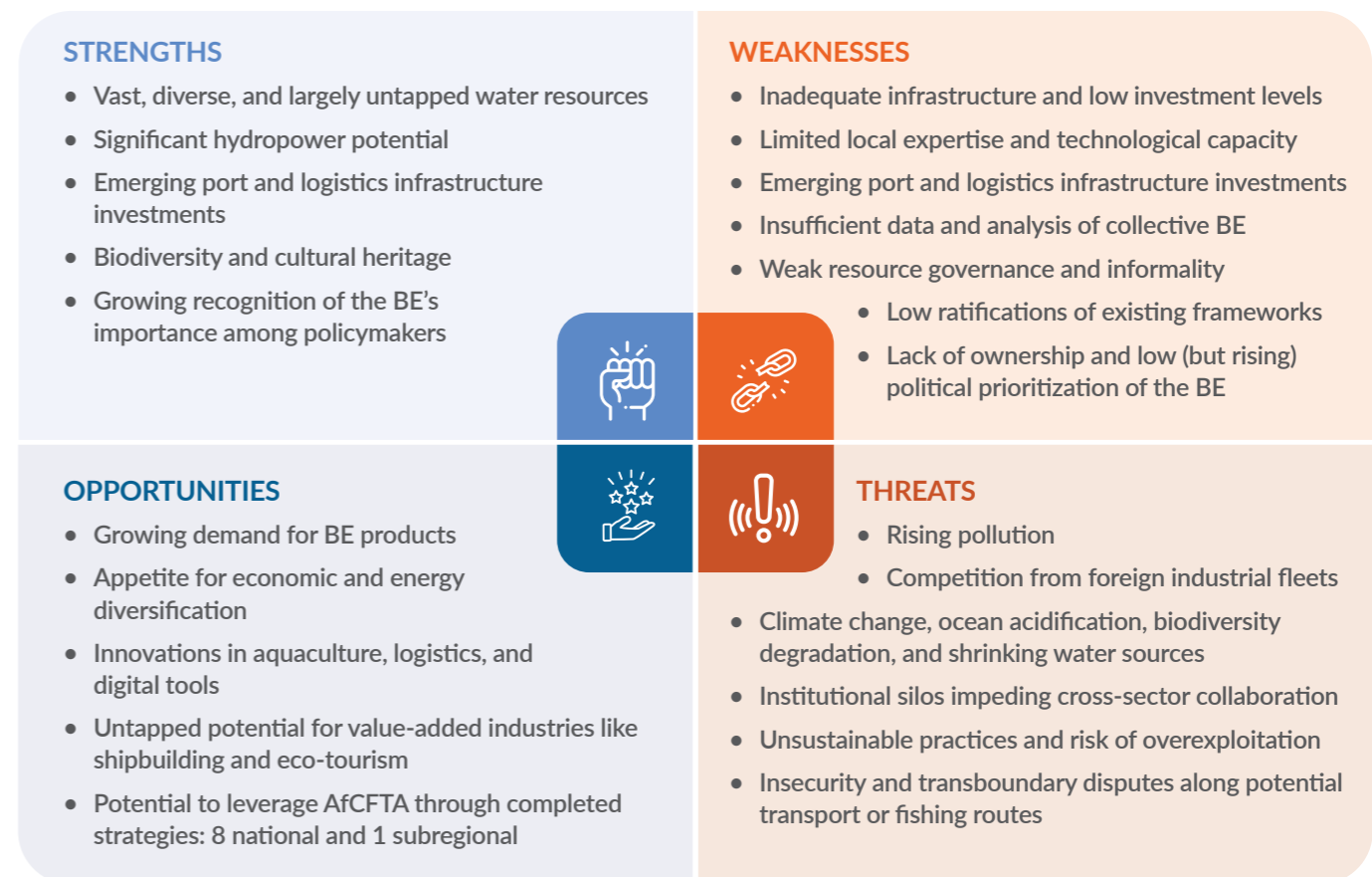


Those weaknesses are compounded by limited technical capacity, data and analytical gaps, underdeveloped infrastructure and insufficient resource governance. The sustainability of blue ecosystems is further threatened by maritime insecurity, transboundary disputes, climate change, biodiversity loss, foreign and regional competition for resources, and unsustainable practices. These are summarized in Figure V.

Unlocking the potential of the blue economy requires stronger regulation, targeted investment, improved capacity, regional integration and the adoption of supportive policies and instruments to address the challenges and foster innovation in the sector.

FIGURE V: Summary SWOT Analysis of the Central African Blue Economy

Source: ECA.



SECTORAL SNAPSHOTS OF BLUE OPPORTUNITIES

For Central Africa to tackle critical priorities, such as economic and trade diversification, poverty reduction, job creation, food and nutritional security, and energy generation, opportunities in the blue economy must be harnessed urgently. In the absence of comprehensive assessments of the blue economy in the subregion, sectoral indicators offer a useful, albeit partial, view of the landscape. The present section provides an overview of the current state, opportunities and challenges within the four sectors that are prioritized in the ECCAS blue economy strategy. Relevant policies are discussed in section III.

A. Fisheries and aquaculture

Small-scale fisheries have historically supported food security and livelihoods in Central Africa, but fish catches and income levels have declined in recent years as a result of overfishing, climate change and disruptions caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. In 2022, African capture fisheries production was 10.6 million tonnes, or 12 per cent of the global total (FAO, 2024), and is expected to remain stable through to 2063, despite rising demand for aquatic foods driven by population growth. In Central Africa, domestic fish and seafood supply in 2019 was only slightly higher than in 2010.

Although regional production rose between 2010 and 2014, it began declining even before the pandemic, as result, primarily, of stagnant or reduced output from the subregion's main producers, Angola, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as shown in Figure VI. The sector is strained by many challenges, including depleted stocks, inadequate storage, informality, water pollution, data gaps, poor governance, illegal operations and competition from industrial fleets from outside Africa (Nyawung and others, 2022).

FIGURE VI: Domestic fish and seafood supply, 2010–2019

(Thousands of tonnes)

Source: ECA visualization of data from the Corporate Database for Substantive Statistical Data of FAO (2025).

Note: Fish caught by foreign fleets or for export, which may be substantial, are not included.



In 2021, inland sources accounted for 35.5 per cent of the subregion’s capture fisheries production (Cai, Yan and Zhou, 2023). Although data on the utilization of inland fishery resources are sparse, it was estimated in 2014 that the freshwater fish production of the Democratic Republic of the Congo was only 30 per cent of its potential annual yield (Breuil and Grima, 2014). There would appear to be, therefore, significant scope for sustainable expansion to meet demand. Such expansion, however, must be balanced against the very real threats of habitat degradation and overexploitation, which have already contributed to a 76 per cent decline in African wildlife populations over the past 50 years (World Wildlife Fund for Nature, 2024).

Central Africa depends heavily on imported fish to meet local demand, with import values rising tenfold over three decades, according to data from UNCTAD (2025b), as shown in Figure VII. Cameroon, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo together account for over 60 per cent of the subregion’s fish imports. Only one third of the imports to Cameroon and the Congo originate from within Africa, as shown in Figure VIII.⁸ The remaining two thirds are often low-quality frozen or dried fish and are sourced from outside the continent, further undermining the domestic industry. In contrast, the Democratic Republic of the Congo sources three quarters of its fish imports from other African States. Regarding exports in Figure VII, Angola was responsible for almost 60 per cent of Central African fish exports in 2023. Only 24 per cent of the exports, however, were destined for African markets, underscoring the limitations of intraregional trade.



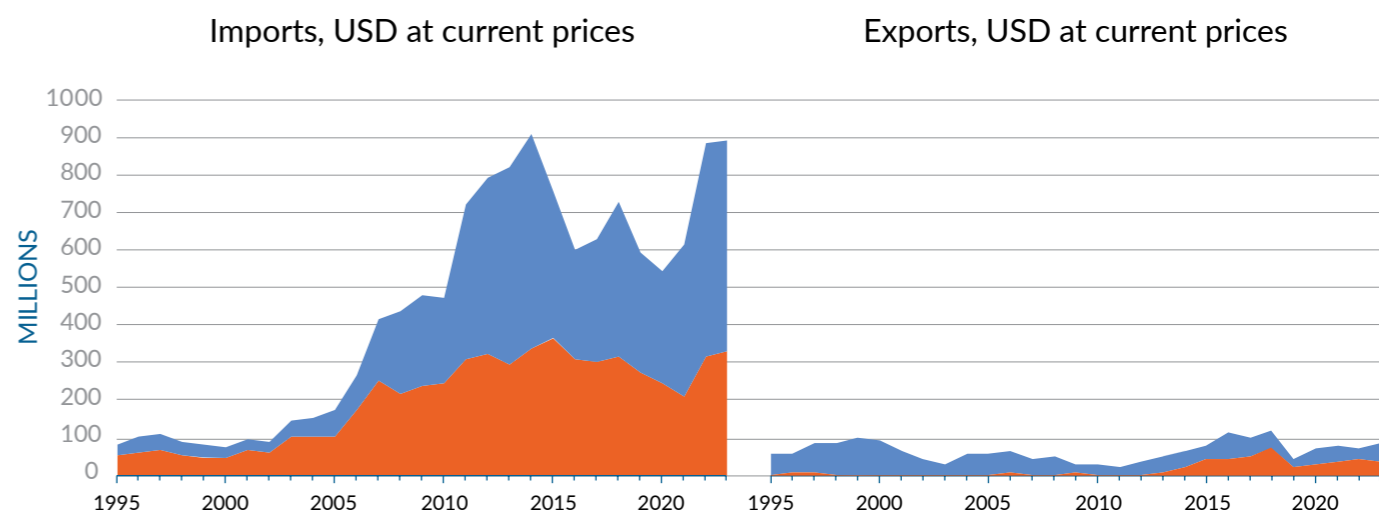
CENTRAL AFRICA DEPENDS HEAVILY ON IMPORTED FISH TO MEET LOCAL DEMAND, WITH IMPORT VALUES RISING TENFOLD OVER THREE DECADES.

FIGURE VII: Central African fish and seafood imports and exports,^a at current prices, 1995–2023

(Millions of United States dollars)

Source: ECA visualization of data from UNCTAD (2025b).

From Africa From RoW

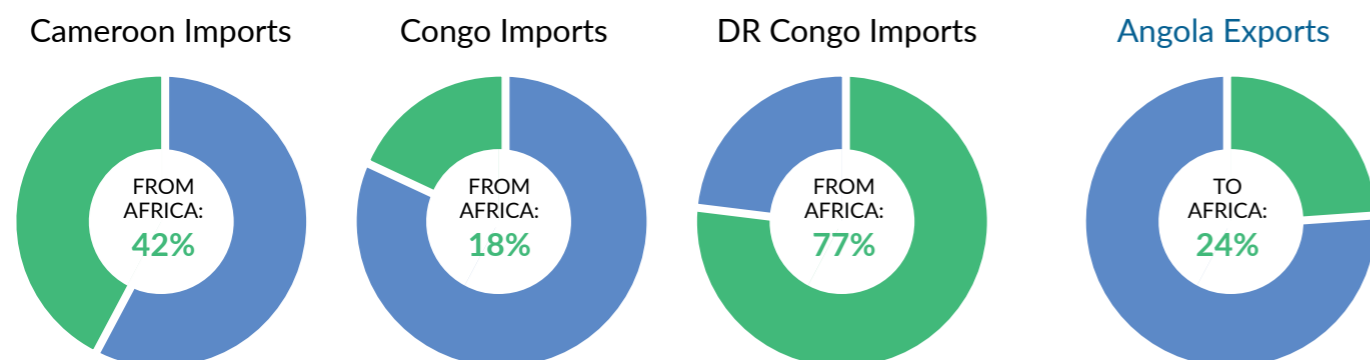


⁸ ECA calculations using data from UNCTAD (2025b).

^a Fish, crustaceans, molluscs and preparations thereof. Amounts may be underestimated, owing to the unavailability of official statistics for informal trade.

FIGURE VIII: Intra-African share of major fish and seafood trade in Central Africa, 2023

Source: ECA calculations and visualization using data from UNCTAD (2025b).



AQUACULTURE IS RAPIDLY EXPANDING IN CENTRAL AFRICA, GROWING AT AN AVERAGE ANNUAL RATE OF 9.4 PER CENT BETWEEN 2000 AND 2021, BUT ACCOUNTED FOR A MINUSCULE 0.8 PER CENT OF TOTAL AQUACULTURE PRODUCTION TONNAGE IN AFRICA AND 1.2 PER CENT OF ITS VALUE IN THAT YEAR (CAI, YAN AND ZHOU, 2023).

Aquaculture has the potential for high profitability and job creation, but producers face significant growth barriers, including insufficient seed,⁹ a lack of funding and high input costs. It could, however, eventually fill the deficit between fisheries production and demand, given that it grew at 11 per cent annually in sub-Saharan Africa from 2000 to 2019, with the number of cages surging from 9 in 2006 to over 20,000 in 2019 (Ragasa and others, 2022; Dijkstra, 2023). The growth was driven by a particularly fast rise in Angola and Cameroon (Cai, Yan and Zhou, 2023).

There have been suggestions that such a growth rate will not be sustained under a business-as-usual scenario. Closing the growing gap between domestic demand and regional supply in Africa requires a food system transformation that can cost over \$10 billion in investments in fish feed, labour and seed, accompanied by greater efforts to increase capture fisheries supply, reduce waste and boost intraregional fish trade (Chan and others, 2021). Angola will provide a promising case study: a recent presidential decree in the country concerns boosting operations and stimulating the aquaculture industry, improving production capacity, infrastructure, training, market access and input supply, and formalizing informal fish farmers (Angola, 2025).

RECOMMENDATIONS: FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE

To shift the trend in rising imports, revitalize the fishing sector and meet regional demand, several opportunities can be leveraged:

Aquaculture.

Central Africa needs more feasibility studies on aquaculture ventures that incorporate a value chain approach, assessing the costs and opportunities for farmers and consumers in the subregion. Aquaculture farmers should adopt technology and innovative practices and explore new value added products. Integrating aquaculture into training institutes alongside traditional agriculture can boost youth employment and entrepreneurship in the industry (Meutchieye and Wikondi, 2018; FAO, 2022).

Regional trade agreements.

Central African countries should actively leverage the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and other regional agreements to boost intraregional fish and seafood trade, strengthen fisheries value chains and attract investment. Such agreements create growth opportunities for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular those led by women and young people. Governments should continue improving trade infrastructure and implementing national and subregional protocols to the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area on trade facilitation, investment and compliance with sanitary and phytosanitary standards, fostering an enabling environment for regional fisheries (Nomenjanahary, Iftikhar and Tsowou, 2024). Development partners should be encouraged to support tailored training programmes that strengthen the capacity of fishers and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises along the entire fisheries value chain to access wider markets under the Agreement.

Innovative approaches.

Governments should facilitate the use of digital tools and community-supported fishery programmes that offer additional opportunities to enhance local marketing, sales and distribution, with a view to driving growth and efficiency in the sector.

⁹ "Fish seed" refers to fish species in their early life stages that are used to stock aquatic farming environments.

B. Maritime and river transport, ports and security

Maritime transport

Maritime transport is the backbone of globalization and world trade, handling 90 per cent of African trade by sea (Lopes, 2016). Amid geopolitical conflicts and major disruptions, including the Red Sea shipping crisis, the African maritime industry has demonstrated resilience. Between 2018 and 2023, passenger ship port calls on the continent grew by 24 per cent, keeping pace with global trends, and container ship port calls rose by 12 per cent, outpacing the global increase of 7 per cent (UNCTAD, 2025b). Tanker traffic in African ports grew by 15 per cent, exceeding the global average of 12 per cent (UNCTAD, 2025b). The effective implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area is expected to boost intra-African freight demand by 28 per cent and maritime freight demand by 62 per cent by 2030 (ECA, 2022; UNCTAD, 2023). Accommodating that surge will require substantial upgrades in port infrastructure, shipping fleets, logistics, capacity-building and customs procedures, and those challenges present opportunities to foster growth in emerging blue economy industries, such as shipbuilding, and the integration of artificial intelligence and blockchain technology into logistics, which could make the African maritime sector globally highly significant.

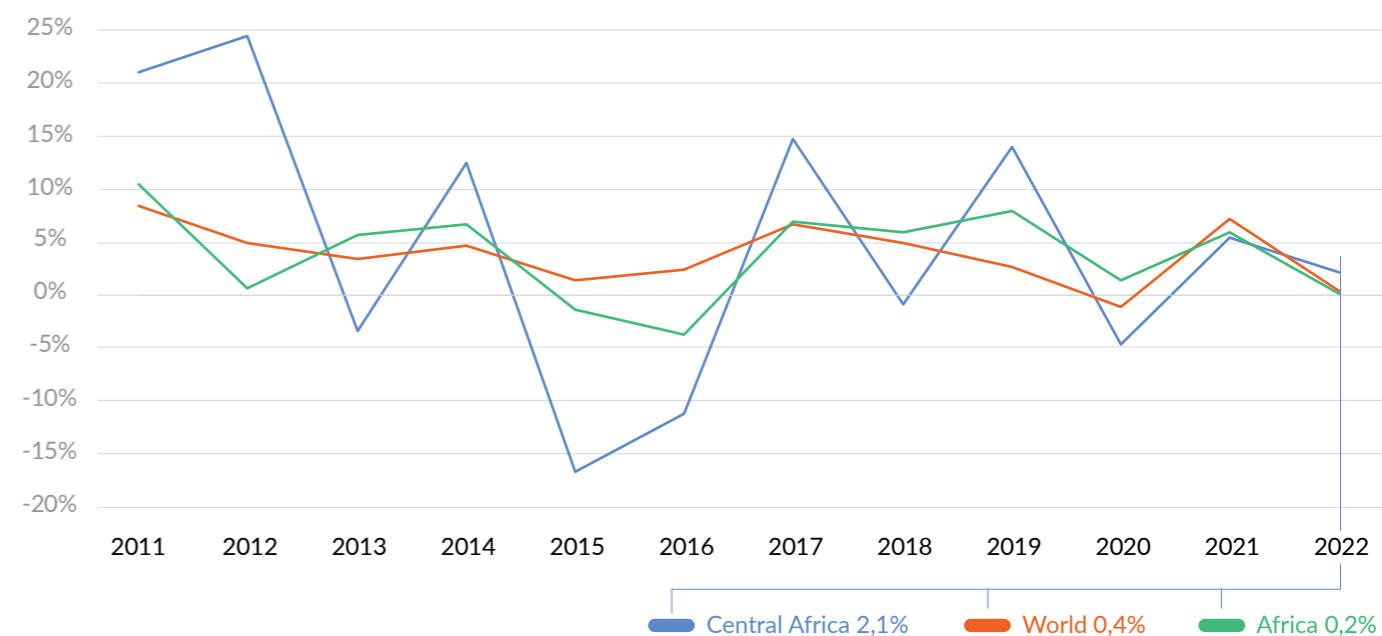
Central Africa plays a very modest role in the maritime sector, with ports that are not sufficiently integrated to serve as robust multimodal hubs for regional transport.¹⁰ The ports have historically been uncompetitive and bound by significant challenges, including infrastructure limitations, congestion, delays, poor inland connectivity and complex customs processes. Of 100,000 annual port calls across Africa, less than 6 per cent are in Central African ports (UNCTAD, 2025b),¹¹ representing just 0.1 per cent globally. In addition, the subregion accounted for only 6–7 per cent of African container throughput, despite its coastal States being home to 12 per cent of the continent's population. That small base is, however, growing rapidly: from 2018 to 2023, tanker and container ship port calls in Central Africa increased by 64 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively, far faster than global and continental growth rates (UNCTAD, 2025b).

Growth in the Central African maritime sector is likely to continue, driven by substantial investments, often through public-private partnerships. The investments are aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of Central African maritime ports by reducing bottlenecks, expanding shipping capacity and modernizing services. For instance, in 2024, the Luanda Port Authority secured \$380 million in concessional financing to upgrade and modernize the port by 2026. The Autonomous Port of Pointe-Noire in the Congo is constructing a new €400 million container terminal, which is expected to become operational by 2027. The Autonomous Port of Kribi in Cameroon is undergoing a second expansion, including upgrades to access roads, logistics, equipment and storage facilities, and is developing an integrated industrial zone. Coupled with free trade zones, those investments are poised to boost the Central African economy, enhance trade competitiveness and position the subregion as an emerging player in the maritime sector.

CENTRAL AFRICA PLAYS A VERY MODEST ROLE IN THE MARITIME SECTOR, WITH PORTS THAT ARE NOT SUFFICIENTLY INTEGRATED TO SERVE AS ROBUST MULTIMODAL HUBS FOR REGIONAL TRANSPORT.

FIGURE IX: Growth in container port throughput, 2011–2022 (Percentage)

Source: ECA using data from UNCTAD (2025b).



Roads dominate inland transport in Central Africa, but significant inefficiencies, stemming from political instability, insecurity, a low network density and infrastructure deficits, raise costs considerably. Landlocked states, in particular, face freight costs that are 50 per cent higher than coastal states, owing to their lack of direct maritime access (Arvis, Raballand and Marteau, 2010).

In Central Africa, road transport costs average \$0.12 per ton-km, far exceeding the global benchmark of \$0.01–0.04 per ton-km and often doubling costs seen in Eastern and Southern Africa (World Bank, 2023a). Data from the “Trade-and-Transport” data set of UNCTADstat (2025b) further highlight the disparity, revealing significant variations across countries and trade directions. In 2021, the global average ad-valorem freight rate for traded goods – the ratio of transport expenditure to the free-on-board value of transported goods – was 0.08, as shown in Figure X. In contrast, that rate quadrupled for exports from, and almost tripled for imports to, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Sao Tome and Principe, the average cost of transporting imports was, similarly, exceptionally high relative to their value.

IN CENTRAL AFRICA, ROAD TRANSPORT COSTS AVERAGE \$0.12 PER TON-KM, FAR EXCEEDING THE GLOBAL BENCHMARK OF \$0.01–0.04 PER TON-KM AND OFTEN DOUBLING COSTS SEEN IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA.

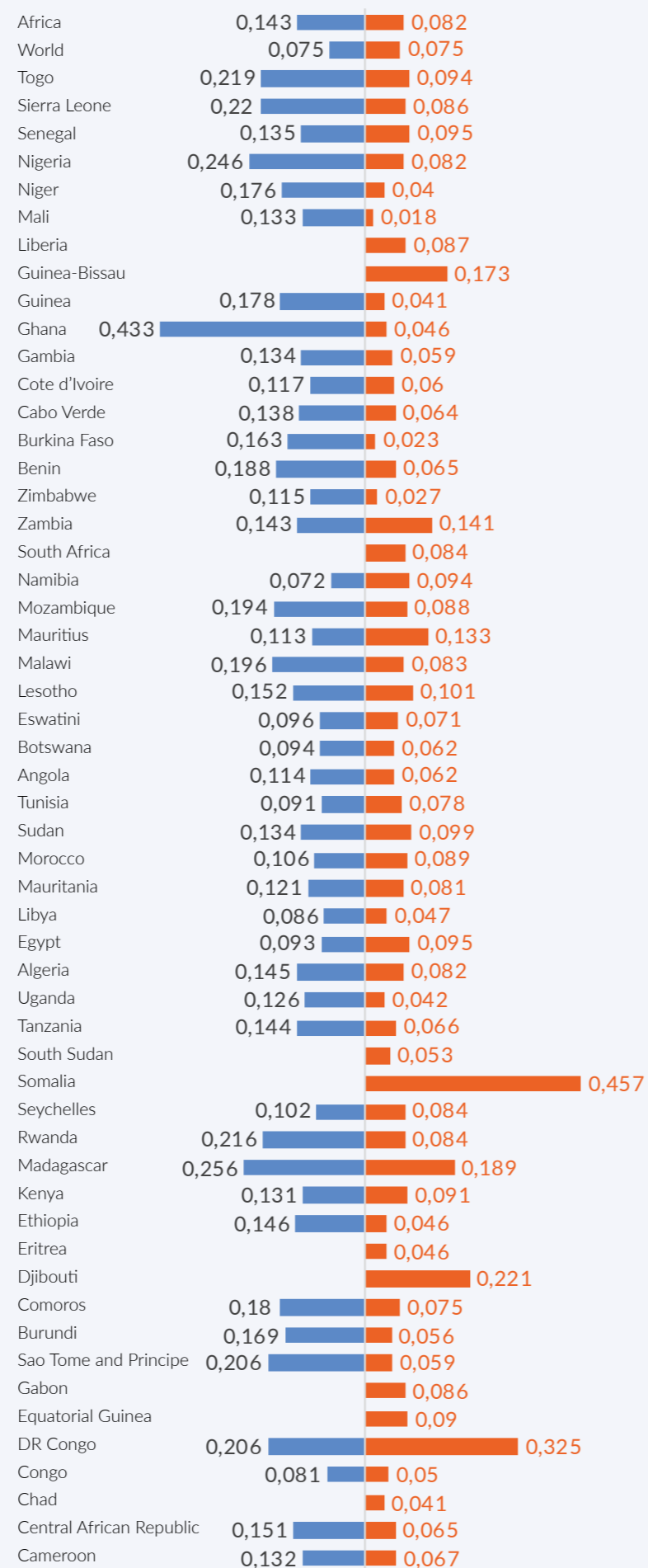
¹⁰ The major deep-water ports in the subregion are in Luanda, Angola; Douala and Kribi, Cameroon; Pointe-Noire, Congo; Malabo and Bata, Equatorial Guinea; and Libreville and Port-Gentil, Gabon.

¹¹ Calculated based on the six countries included in UNCTADstat: Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.

FIGURE X: Ad-valorem freight rates, 2021

Source: Data from UNCTAD (2025b).

Imports Exports



DESPITE SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENTS IN MARITIME TRANSPORT, INLAND WATER TRANSPORT REMAINS COMPARATIVELY UNDERDEVELOPED, UNDERMINING ITS POTENTIAL AS A COST-EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE MODE OF TRANSPORTATION.



Inland water transport

Inland water transport offers an underutilized solution to enhancing regional connectivity, lowering transit costs and reducing environmental impacts by safely transporting passengers and goods with less energy and fewer greenhouse gas emissions. The more frequently transited waterways of Central Africa, including the 14,500 km of navigable Congo River in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Ubangi River connecting Bangui with Brazzaville and Kinshasa, are major transit routes. Such transportation, however, faces numerous challenges that threaten navigation conditions:

- Seasonal disruptions from unreliable water levels, floods and silting.
- Deteriorating infrastructure and outdated vessels.
- Transboundary disputes and security issues, including illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, illegal immigration and other criminal activities.

An example of the challenges encountered in inland water transport is in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The country has a rich inland water network, with over 40 rivers and lake ports and three seaports linked with rail and road networks. A vital transport corridor connects Pointe-Noire port in the Congo with Matadi port in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, located 150 km from the mouth of the Congo River. As the sole inland waterway link between the Atlantic Ocean and the interior of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Matadi handles 90 per cent of the country's maritime traffic and serves as a critical export hub for copper, cobalt, coffee and timber (OrbitsHub, 2025). Despite receiving some 350 ships annually and handling 2.5 million metric tonnes of cargo, the port faces major operational constraints. Its shallow draft and limited depth prevent access by large vessels, requiring cargo transshipment to feeder ships at nearby ports (Logistics Cluster, 2025). Outdated equipment, including aging cranes, further hampers efficiency. To improve functionality, infrastructure upgrades are urgently needed, including dredging, modern cargo-handling equipment and improved rail links to reduce reliance on the overburdened Kinshasa–Matadi road. The National Agency for Investment Promotion has been working to attract domestic and foreign investment to finance those upgrades. Given its role in green value chains, in particular in the transit of minerals for electric batteries, improving the port's environmental performance is a strategic priority.

Despite significant investments in maritime transport, inland water transport remains comparatively underdeveloped, undermining its potential as a cost-effective and sustainable mode of transportation. Efforts to advance inland water transport align with several subregional frameworks and initiatives, including:

- **International Commission for the Congo-Ubangi-Sangha Basin:** a specialized agency of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) established by Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure freedom of navigation, promote inland navigation and manage water resources in an integrated manner.

- **Economic Interest Group for the Joint Maintenance of the Waterways of the Congo and the Central African Republic and National Waterways Authority of the Democratic Republic of the Congo:** public institutions developing and maintaining navigability of the Congo, Ubangi and Sangha Rivers.
- **CEMAC-DRC River Navigation Code:** a legal framework for reinforcing safety in river navigation and transport.
- **Regional project for improving road and river transport corridors in Central Africa:** an initiative financed by the World Bank aimed at improving transport infrastructure, connectivity and trade between the Central African Republic and the Congo with investments that help to boost resilience to climate change.

The effective implementation and increased financing of those initiatives could help to unlock the full potential of inland water transport in Central Africa, thereby providing an efficient and sustainable alternative to high-cost road transport and fostering regional integration, and diverse and inclusive economic growth.

Security

The vast potential of the blue economy in Central Africa stands in contrast to the persistent natural and anthropogenic threats that compromise the safety and security of the subregion's waters. The Gulf of Guinea is a hotspot for blue crime, including drug trafficking, the theft of crude oil, or so-called "oil bunkering", illegal fishing, kidnapping and piracy. Although piracy incidents have declined in recent years, from 81 in 2020 to 18 in 2024, the Gulf of Guinea accounted for 23 per cent of the global total number of crew taken hostage in 2024 (International Chamber of Commerce, Commercial Crime Services, 2025). The Security Council of the United Nations, ECCAS and States in the Gulf of Guinea have all expressed concern about the enduring threat of maritime insecurity.¹² Recognizing that unlocking the potential of the subregion's blue economy rests on maritime security, there have been calls to elevate that concern to the same level of priority as the economic, social and environmental pillars of blue economy development.

¹² See, for example, the report of the Secretary-General on the situation of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea and its underlying causes (S/2022/818).

The transnational nature of maritime threats necessitates a coordinated, multinational response. Strengthening maritime security requires States to ratify and implement conventions of the International Maritime Organization, cooperate under regional frameworks, such as the West and Central Africa Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control, and continue combating piracy through such mechanisms as the Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa (the Yaoundé Code of Conduct). Modern legal frameworks, including the CEMAC merchant shipping code and the CEMAC-Democratic Republic of the Congo code for inland waterway navigation, further support sustainable growth in maritime and inland waterway activities (ECCAS, n.d.).

The Yaoundé Code of Conduct, adopted by 25 West and Central African States, led to the establishment of the Yaoundé Architecture (Figure XI), which is a five-tiered cooperation framework for real-time collaboration and information-sharing at the political, strategic, regional, zonal and national levels across member States of ECCAS, the Economic Community of West African States and the Gulf of Guinea Commission. Its core institutions include the Interregional Coordination Centre for the Implementation of the Regional Strategy for Maritime Safety and Security in Central and West Africa, the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in West Africa and the Regional Coordination Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa. Pursuant to the Code, multinational maritime coordination centres are envisioned in five zones, supported by national focal points tasked with coordinating intelligence-gathering, information-sharing and maritime security operations with neighbouring States. Information-sharing and coordination are facilitated by the Yaoundé Architecture Regional Information System platform.

The Yaoundé Architecture is credited with having a meaningful impact on the declining levels of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. Despite the initial political support and progress in creating coordinating regional institutions, the Architecture is not yet fully operational, owing to several barriers, including (Yücel, 2021):

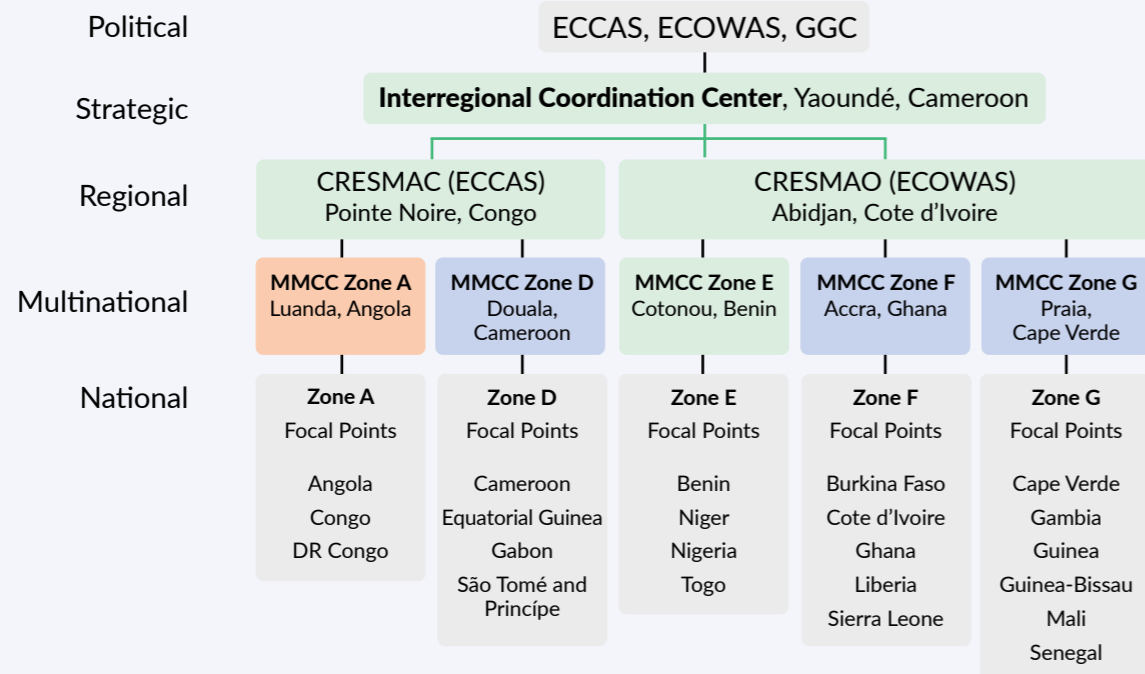
- Tensions between national sovereignty and transnational cooperation, in particular regarding such provisions as joint patrols under a multinational command structure, which some States may view as a threat to sovereignty.
- Uneven legal harmonization, with several countries yet to align national legislation fully with international frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and regional agreements, such as the Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy for 2050. Although Cameroon, the Congo, Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe have either adopted or revised anti-piracy laws, some countries, such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea, lack legislation that is compliant with the Convention (Lindskov Jacobsen, 2023).
- Inadequate and uneven financing, which has left national maritime security institutions, such as navies and coast guards, underfunded and understaffed, limiting their capacity to collaborate or to respond to threats effectively.



THE YAOUNDE ARCHITECTURE IS CREDITED WITH HAVING A MEANINGFUL IMPACT ON THE DECLINING LEVELS OF PIRACY IN THE GULF OF GUINEA.

FIGURE XI:
Yaoundé Architecture

Sources: ECA based on Maritimafrika (2020), Yücel (2021) and Africa Center for Strategic Studies (2024).



Note: Visualization is based on public reporting as of April 2025.

Abbreviations: CRESMAC, Regional Coordination Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa; CRESMAO, Regional Centre for Maritime Security in West Africa; ECCAS, Economic Community of Central African States; ECOWAS, Economic Community of West African States; GGC, Gulf of Guinea Commission; MMCC, multinational maritime coordination centre.

Although all the multinational maritime coordination centres had been established by December 2024, those in zones A and D may not have been fully operational, despite zone D being functional as recently as 2020 (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024; Okafor-Yarwood and Pigeon, 2020). The possible regression may reflect resource constraints, evolving political contexts and persistent coordination challenges. Gaps in seamless communication and information-sharing continue to compromise maritime domain awareness and weaken the effectiveness of joint regional security strategies (Malaquias, 2023).

To address those shortcomings, countries should consider bridging the physical patrolling gaps with technology-based solutions, including satellite tracking, drone surveillance and multinational integrated communications platforms. Nigeria stands out as a leader in West Africa in maritime security, deploying a network of radars, electro-optic systems and cameras for tracking vessels (Africa Defense Forum, 2025). In the Western Indian Ocean, island States, such as Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles, use satellite-based vessel monitoring systems and long-range identification and tracking to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing across 3.8 million square kilometres of ocean. In addition, valuable lessons can be drawn from the experiences and successes of parallel frameworks in Eastern Africa, such as the Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden (the Djibouti Code of Conduct), of 2009, the Jeddah Amendment to the Djibouti Code of Conduct, of 2017, and the European Union Programme to Promote Regional Maritime Security in the Eastern and Southern Africa-Indian Ocean.

NIGERIA STANDS OUT AS A LEADER IN WEST AFRICA IN MARITIME SECURITY, DEPLOYING A NETWORK OF RADARS, ELECTRO-OPTIC SYSTEMS AND CAMERAS FOR TRACKING VESSELS.

For the blue economy to flourish in Central Africa, maritime security must be strengthened through greater legal harmonization, adequate resourcing of security institutions, reinforcement of other mechanisms at the national level and renewed political commitment to operationalizing international frameworks, such as the Yaoundé Architecture.

RECOMMENDATIONS: MARITIME AND RIVER TRANSPORT, PORTS AND SECURITY

To accelerate growth in the maritime and river transport sector and strengthen security on the waters of Central Africa, the following areas should be prioritized:

Integrated port and waterway infrastructure.

Continued upgrades to port infrastructure, logistics and connectivity will help to improve the efficiency and competitiveness of Central African ports. Inland water transport should be prioritized through greater investment in navigational aids, port facilities and vessel modernization, offering a safer and cost-effective alternative to road transport for goods and passengers.

Legal and regulatory harmonization.

Central African States should accelerate the ratification and a of international and regional agreements, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the West and Central Africa Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control and the Yaoundé Code of Conduct. Harmonized legal frameworks will strengthen maritime governance, improve safety and environmental compliance and help to maintain the downward trajectory in blue crimes, in particular piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

Maritime security and regional cooperation.

Most countries urgently need to strengthen national maritime institutions and integrate them more fully into the Yaoundé Architecture. Full and sustained operationalization requires the closure of financing, capacity and coordination gaps. Countries should adopt technology-based solutions to improve maritime domain awareness and combat more effectively illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and piracy. ECCAS member States are encouraged to validate the draft ECCAS blue economy strategy and fast-track the development of comprehensive national blue economy strategies, with support from African Union agencies and development partners.

Financing and partnerships. Investment in sustainable and climate change-resilient transport projects, including river corridors, should be scaled up. Public-private partnerships should be expanded, with a view to mobilizing capital for port and waterway development and ensuring sustainable funding for river navigation agencies.



FOR THE BLUE ECONOMY TO FLOURISH IN CENTRAL AFRICA, MARITIME SECURITY MUST BE STRENGTHENED.

C. Coastal and marine tourism

The African travel and tourism sector capitalizes on the continent’s rich and diverse natural and cultural heritage, serving as a significant contributor to economic growth, employment and foreign currency earnings. In 2024, the sector was estimated to have contributed \$211 billion, or 7.8 per cent, of total African gross domestic product (GDP) and support 28 million jobs, representing 5.6 per cent of the workforce (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2025). Although those figures include significant non-coastal segments, such as safaris and land-based cultural attractions, there is some evidence that coastal and marine tourism plays a vital role in the African blue economy. Prior to the pandemic, the African Union estimated that coastal tourism contributed \$80 billion, or 3.4 per cent, of GDP and 24 million jobs in 2018, with projections of \$138 billion with 35 million employed by 2063 (African Union, Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources, 2019).

Despite its potential, the development of tourism in Central Africa has not been prioritized historically, with natural resource extraction receiving greater policy and investment focus. The lack of prioritization is borne out by the travel and tourism development index, which is produced by the World Economic Forum to assess the sustainability and development level of the sector in countries on a scale from 1, the worst, to 7, the best, for related factors and policies. In the 2024 index (World Economic Forum, 2024), the subregion’s economies ranked poorly for tourist services, infrastructure, culture and non-leisure resources, as shown in Figure XII, reflecting the underdevelopment and limited appeal of the tourism sector. Insecurity further dampens demand, and, unlike other regional blocs, ECCAS has made little progress in advancing collaborative efforts to promote tourism. As a result, the highest ranked ECCAS country was ranked ninety-third out of 119 countries, and other ECCAS member States were even closer to the lower end of the index rankings.

Some ECCAS member States, however, are embracing tourism as a national strategy for economic diversification, often with a focus on conference tourism and ecotourism. Rwanda, for example, has used innovative approaches, partnering with European football clubs to boost its tourism profile. By 2023, it earned \$620 million from over 1.4 million visitors, a 36 per cent revenue increase from 2022 (Rwanda Development Board, 2024). Cameroon has similarly leveraged its global football reputation, investing \$885 million in 2022 to upgrade sport facilities, transport and hospitality infrastructure for hosting the Africa Cup of Nations (United Nations, ECA, 2022a). Sao Tome and Principe has positioned tourism as a cornerstone of its economic growth strategy: it had the fastest growing tourism economy in Africa between 2009 and 2019, and the contribution of tourism to its GDP was the third highest on the continent in 2019 (United Nations, ECA, 2021a). ECA is supporting efforts to enhance tourism statistics and strengthen analytical capacity, with a view to unlocking the potential of tourism and translating it into tangible contributions to GDP.



SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE HAS POSITIONED TOURISM AS A CORNERSTONE OF ITS ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGY.

FIGURE XII:
Travel and tourism development index performance, 2024

Source: ECA adaption from World Economic Forum (2024).



Note: National rankings, out of 119 countries, are shown in parentheses.

Abbreviation: ICT, information and communications technology.

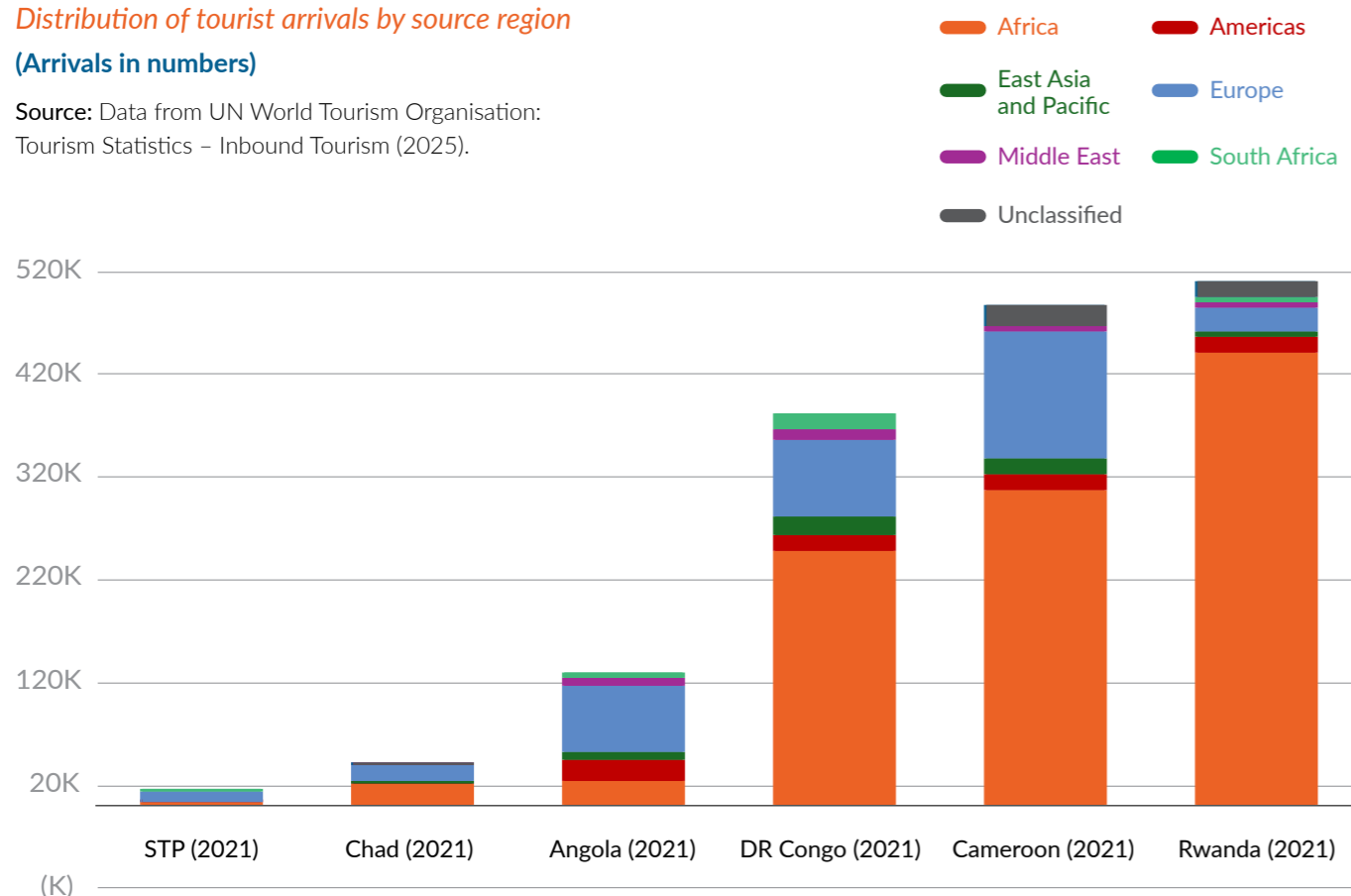
Beyond safaris and conference tourism, aquatic ecotourism presents significant opportunities in Central Africa. Inland and coastal wetlands offer great potential, given their rich biodiversity. The subregion has 52 Ramsar Sites, including 14 in the Congo, 9 in Gabon, 7 in Cameroon and 6 in Chad. Recreational hunting and fishing dominate tourism activities in African Ramsar Sites. Central Africa, however, can focus on less common activities, such as water sports, nature observation and guided tours, for more sustainable growth in wetland tourism.

In the ECCAS blue economy strategy, maritime and aquatic tourism is identified as a particularly weak point in subregional tourism policies. Developing aquatic ecotourism in Central Africa requires significant investment in coastal and inland water infrastructure. Such development, however, must be ecologically sound, inclusive of local communities and resilient to the impacts of climate change. Protecting blue carbon ecosystems and prioritizing the conservation of coastal habitats are critical for sustainable growth in this emerging sector.

The sustainability of tourism depends on the diversification of visitor source markets. Based on data from the World Tourism Organization/UN Tourism (2025), over 60 per cent of international arrivals in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in 2021 came from within Africa, as shown in Figure XIII. Easing travel restrictions, improving intraregional air connectivity and leveraging the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area could boost tourism. To capitalize on the intra-regional tourism opportunity, Central African States must tailor tourism policies to appeal to African travellers. Given the similarity of nature-based tourism across Africa, ECA advocates diversification into cultural, conference, sports and urban tourism in order to attract more visitors from within the continent. Coastal and aquatic tourism, including leisure activities, water sports and maritime experiences, present a significant opportunity to diversify regional tourism offerings and appeal to tourists from Africa.

FIGURE XIII:
Distribution of tourist arrivals by source region
(Arrivals in numbers)

Source: Data from UN World Tourism Organisation: Tourism Statistics – Inbound Tourism (2025).



RECOMMENDATIONS: COASTAL AND MARINE TOURISM

To boost the nascent coastal and marine tourism sector in Central Africa, the following areas should be prioritized:

Tourism infrastructure.

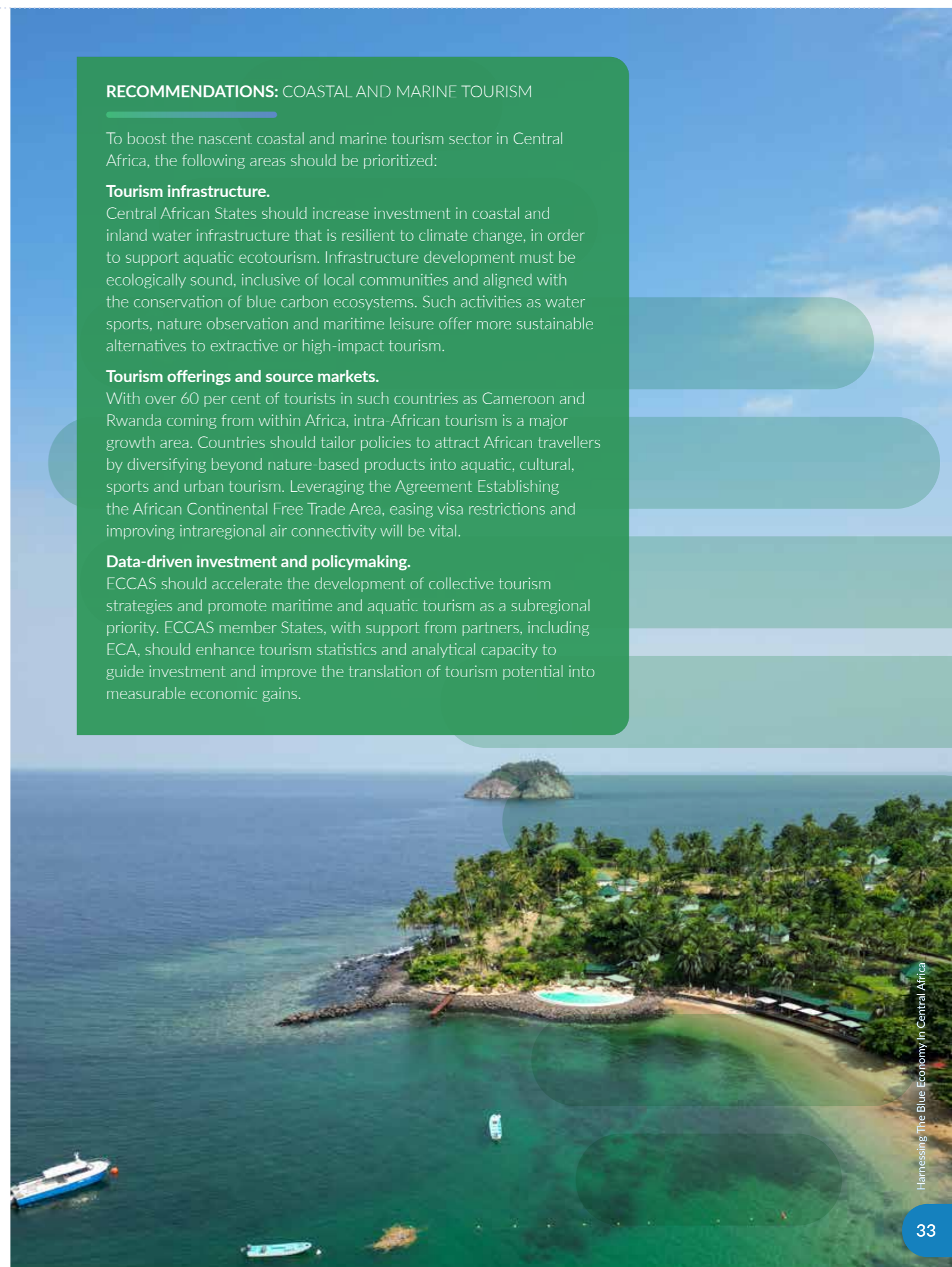
Central African States should increase investment in coastal and inland water infrastructure that is resilient to climate change, in order to support aquatic ecotourism. Infrastructure development must be ecologically sound, inclusive of local communities and aligned with the conservation of blue carbon ecosystems. Such activities as water sports, nature observation and maritime leisure offer more sustainable alternatives to extractive or high-impact tourism.

Tourism offerings and source markets.

With over 60 per cent of tourists in such countries as Cameroon and Rwanda coming from within Africa, intra-African tourism is a major growth area. Countries should tailor policies to attract African travellers by diversifying beyond nature-based products into aquatic, cultural, sports and urban tourism. Leveraging the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, easing visa restrictions and improving intraregional air connectivity will be vital.

Data-driven investment and policymaking.

ECCAS should accelerate the development of collective tourism strategies and promote maritime and aquatic tourism as a subregional priority. ECCAS member States, with support from partners, including ECA, should enhance tourism statistics and analytical capacity to guide investment and improve the translation of tourism potential into measurable economic gains.



D. Sustainable energy

Central Africa has vast fossil fuel resources that dominate the export sector, but local access to reliable and affordable energy remains alarmingly low, as shown in Figure XIV. Over 150 million people, or 66 per cent, of the subregion's population, lack access to electricity, forcing households to rely heavily on unsustainable traditional biomass (World Bank, 2024a).¹³ The energy deficit also constrains industrialization to light manufacturing industries with a low energy intensity (United Nations, ECA, 2022b). Closing the electrification gap for those households and businesses is critical to raising living standards, creating jobs, improving security, driving digitalization and propelling sustainable growth. Recognizing the urgency, several Central African Governments endorsed the Mission 300 initiative at the 2025 Africa Energy Summit, pledging to expand electricity access to 300 million Africans by 2030. The Dar es Salaam Energy Declaration, the outcome document from the Summit, includes proposed reforms to advance the energy transition and revitalize the energy sector.

66 PER CENT, OF THE SUBREGION'S POPULATION, LACK ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY.

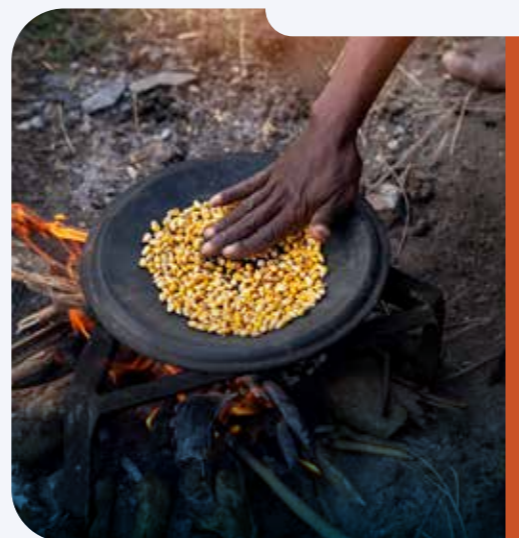
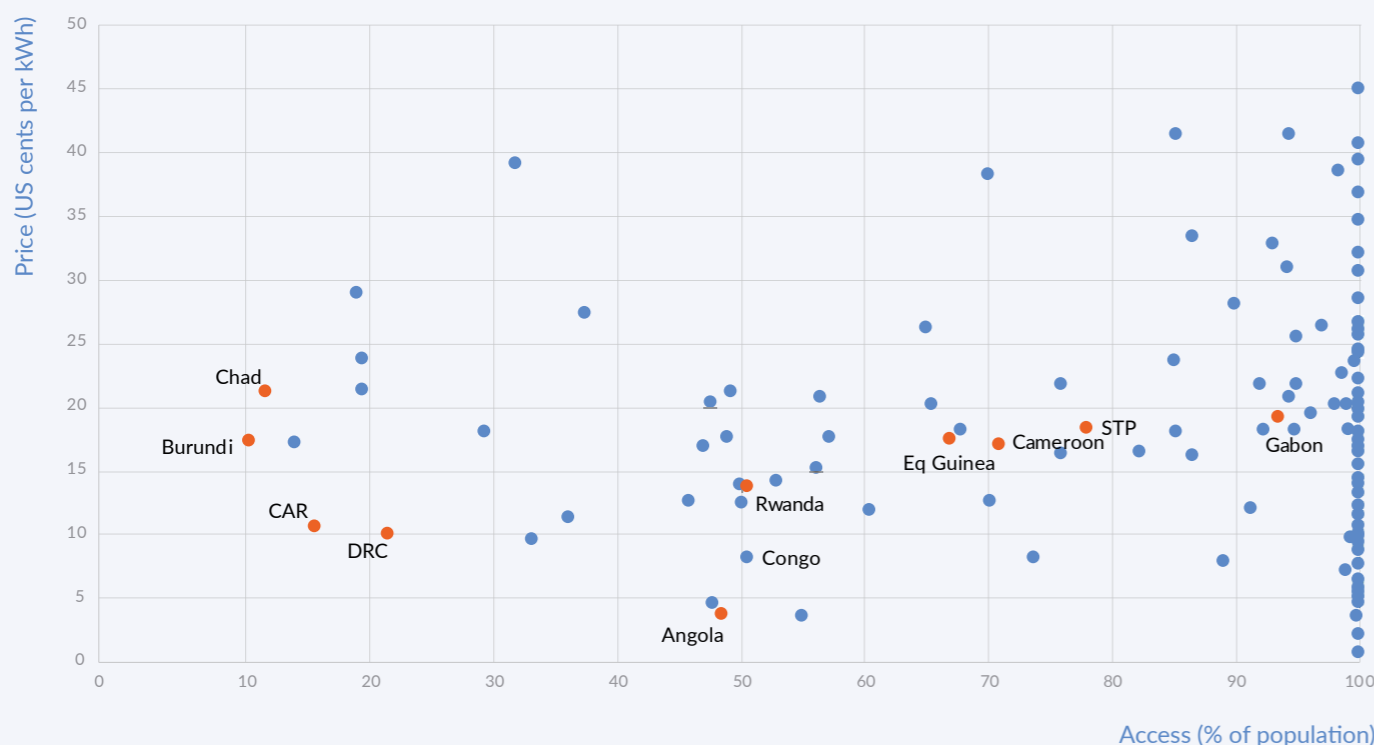


FIGURE XIV:
Electricity access and electricity prices
Electricity access as percentage of population (horizontal axis)
Electricity prices as United States cents per kilowatt-hour (vertical axis)

Source: Access data from World Bank (2024a); prices from World Bank Doing Business, 2019 (World Bank, 2021)



13 ECA weighted average calculation for ECCAS countries.

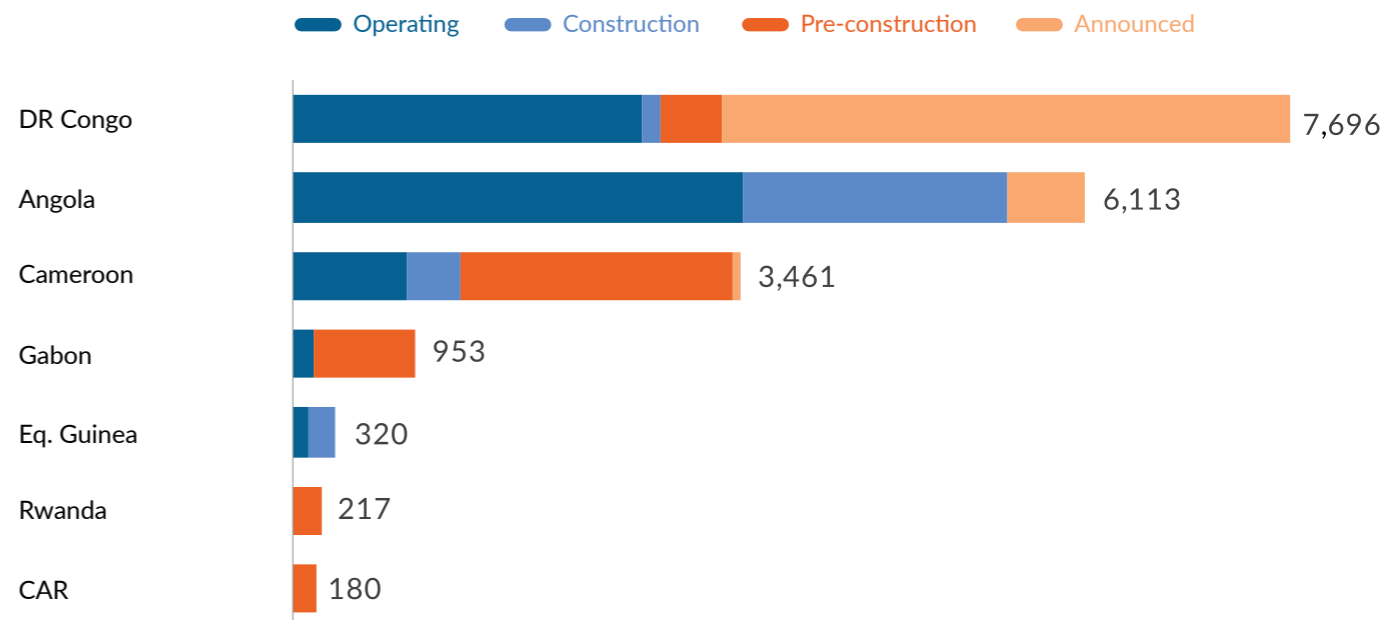
Fortunately, the vast renewable energy potential in the subregion, in particular in hydropower, can close the electricity gap. The hydropower resources of Central Africa could power the entire continent, but only 10 per cent of all African hydropower potential has been harnessed (Ingram, 2023; International Hydropower Association, 2024), constrained primarily by limited access to finance, volatility and governance issues. For instance, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has about 13 per cent of the world's technically feasible hydropower potential (some 100,000 MW) (Gnassou, 2019), but only an estimated 2.5 per cent had been developed by 2018, despite early investor interest (World Bank, 2018). By 2017, Cameroon and Gabon had tapped less than 5 per cent of their hydropower potential (Andritz Hydro, 2017), also principally owing to a lack of funding.

The tide is changing for hydroelectric projects in Central Africa, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as shown in Figure XV. Waves of new project announcements and financing commitments are helping to improve the outlook. In December 2024, the African Export-Import Bank announced financing for a 200 MW hydropower project on the Lufira River in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a reflection of its commitment to mobilizing private capital for renewable energy projects in the region. In 2025, the Congo will begin constructing a 600–800 MW hydroelectric dam, financed and led by the construction company, China Overseas. The World Bank-backed Nachtigal Hydropower Plant in Cameroon is expected to be completed in 2025, delivering 420 MW, enough to meet nearly 30 per cent of the country's energy needs.

Tapping the hydropower potential of Central Africa necessitates long-term investments, transparent governance structures and robust planning frameworks into which environmental and community considerations are integrated. Success in hydropower could transform the subregion's energy landscape, fuelling industrialization and a clean energy transition.

FIGURE XV:
Hydropower capacity, by stage of installation
Megawatts

Source: Data from Global Energy Monitor (2024).



Coastal and island states in Central Africa have the potential to tap into offshore renewable energy resources, such as wind, waves, tides, ocean currents, and salinity and temperature gradients. Advances in technology and global support are steadily improving the financial viability of some of those blue innovations, including in Central Africa. For example, Sao Tome and Principe is set to host the world's first floating ocean thermal energy conversion platform, a project led by Global Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion with funding from the Green Climate Fund. The 1.5 MW platform could serve as a pioneering model for both Central Africa and other small island States globally, which face some of the world's highest energy costs and significant trade imbalances. Transitioning to clean, ocean-derived energy could be transformative for those economies.

The relative nascency of offshore renewable energy juxtaposed with entrenched traditional energy sources in Central Africa poses significant challenges for that emergent energy sector. Continued global investment in research and development is necessary to drive down the costs associated with marine energy technology development. To unlock the full potential of offshore renewable energy in Central Africa, broader energy sector reforms are needed to enhance efficiency and create a more attractive environment for private investment. Mobilizing funding through concessional financing and guarantees from donors and development partners is essential for scaling up renewable energy projects. The impact of such initiatives has the potential to extend well beyond Central African shores, offering a blueprint for sustainable energy solutions worldwide.

RECOMMENDATIONS: SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

Collaboration between Governments, development partners and the private sector is critical to improving the energy mix. Leveraging aquatic ecosystems and blue resources for sustainable energy is possible with the following factors:

Renewable energy infrastructure.

Central African Governments should prioritize long-term investment in hydropower and other renewable energy sources in order to close the subregion's severe electricity access gap. Scaling up flagship projects, such as those under way in Cameroon, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, requires transparent governance, robust planning frameworks and the integration of environmental and community safeguards.

Energy sector reforms to attract private capital.

To unlock the full potential of inland and offshore renewable energy, Governments must implement reforms to improve regulatory efficiency and reduce investment risks. Mobilizing concessional finance, guarantees and blended financing can help to scale up bankable energy projects and stimulate the engagement of the private sector and local investors.

Innovations in offshore energy.

Offshore renewable energy has been insufficiently explored in the subregion, and is nascent globally, but such initiatives as the ocean thermal energy conversion platform in Sao Tome and Principe demonstrate its strong potential. Continued support for research, development and regional technology transfer will be essential to driving cost reductions and replicating successful pilot projects across coastal and island States. Governments and development partners should, therefore, facilitate more pre-feasibility studies to support further the development and roll-out of those new energy sources in the subregion.

BOX 1:

Blue economy industrialization through micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises

ACROSS AFRICA, SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES REPRESENT 95 PER CENT OF ALL REGISTERED BUSINESSES, 80 PER CENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND 50 PER CENT OF GDP.

The blue economy presents cross-cutting opportunities for structural transformation, fostering innovation, empowering women and young people and supporting the growth of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises. Across Africa, small and medium-sized enterprises represent 95 per cent of all registered businesses, 80 per cent of employment and 50 per cent of GDP (Cooper, 2023; Lumley, 2023). In Central Africa, they account for 80–85 per cent of businesses and are central to industrialization and regional integration (ECA, 2024b). Micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular those led by women and young people, face persistent barriers, including limited access to finance and markets, weak integration into value chains, high energy and digital costs, and bureaucratic hurdles. Those challenges are reflected in the blue economy.

ECA has been supporting its members to address those gaps. In Central Africa, it has worked to expand access by small and medium-sized enterprises to emerging value chains and has proposed dedicated special economic zones linked with blue economy sectors.^a In Southern Africa, ECA has identified entry points to the green and blue economies for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises.^b In Eastern Africa, it supported Seychelles in launching a digital portal to connect such enterprises with investors in the blue and circular economies.^c

^a See the Industrialization and Economic Diversification Master Plan for Central Africa and United Nations, ECA, 2024b.

^b See United Nations, ECA, 2023.

^c See Joint SDG Fund-funded project with UN System for Seychelles and Mauritius: Contributing to establish and enabling environment to promote sustainable Green and Blue Economy in Mauritius and Seychelles.

BOX 2:

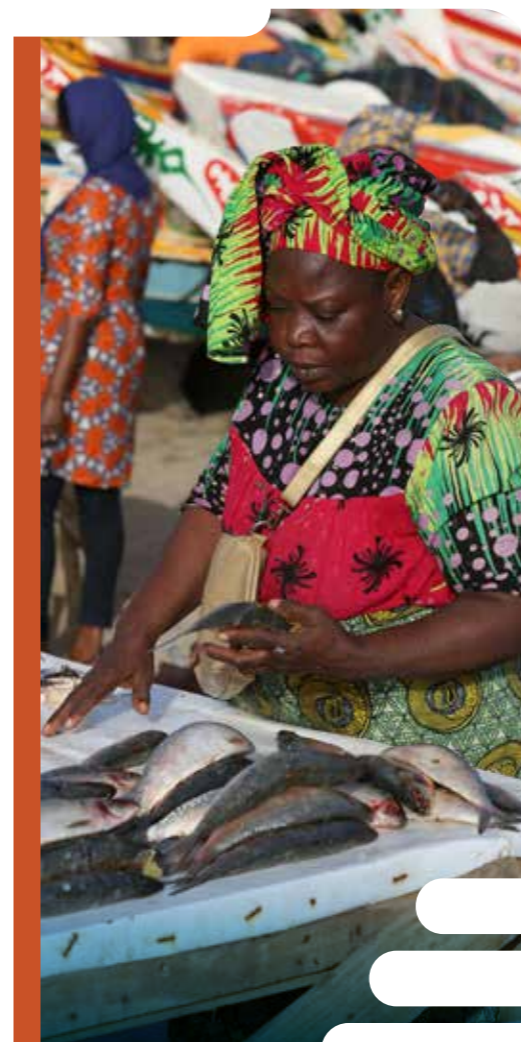
Empowering women in the Central African blue economy^a

^a Co-written with Blue Women Africa.

Globally, women play a significant role in maritime transport, coastal and maritime tourism, and fisheries, in particular in post-harvesting activities. They are often confined, however, to low-paid, low-status and poorly protected jobs (Bertarelli, 2021). Very exceptionally, women are found in such blue economy subsectors as offshore mining, oceanographic and oceanic research, marine conservation, biodiversity and biotechnology, renewable energies, the nautical industry, shipbuilding, oil and gas and mariculture.

In West and Central Africa, this pattern persists, limiting women's participation to undervalued subsistence, artisanal or informal economic activities (Edu-Afful and Osei-Tutu, 2023). Those in professional blue economy roles often face limited growth opportunities, gender stereotyping and exclusion from decision-making spaces and financing. Beyond the blue economy, broader structural barriers hinder women's economic empowerment. An estimated 70 percent of informal cross-border trade in Africa is conducted by women.

GLOBALLY, WOMEN PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN MARITIME TRANSPORT, COASTAL AND MARITIME TOURISM, AND FISHERIES, IN PARTICULAR IN POST-HARVESTING ACTIVITIES. THEY ARE OFTEN CONFINED, HOWEVER, TO LOW-PAID, LOW-STATUS AND POORLY PROTECTED JOBS.



The security threats for women cross-border traders in Central Africa are well documented: in some States, over one third face verbal abuse, financial abuse, or physical or sexual violence (Larouche-Maltais, 2022). In addition, recent ECA analysis shows that the women of ECCAS member States are underrepresented in leadership roles in regional and global value chains and earn significantly less than their male counterparts (United Nations, ECA, 2024a). Cultural norms further restrict their access to productive assets, maritime education and certain nautical careers (Edu-Afful and Osei-Tutu, 2023).

Despite the barriers, progress is under way. Women's movements in the maritime sector, such as the Network of Professional Women in the Maritime and Port Sector for West and Central Africa, African Women in Maritime, Women in Maritime of West and Central Africa and Blue Women Africa, are driving change by increasing visibility, providing mentorship and advocating gender inclusion in the maritime space.

To tackle the challenges, ECCAS, in its blue economy strategy, calls for diversification of the talent pool, capacity-building, the leveraging of existing gender-focused programmes and alignment of education and training with inclusive best practices. That approach includes ensuring women's access to education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and places emphasis on raising awareness of opportunities and addressing barriers, such as safety concerns, through innovative solutions. Blue Women Africa urges governments at all levels to enforce zero-tolerance policies on discrimination, adopt laws to ensure fair recruitment and career advancement, and increase female representation in leadership positions. It is vital to host events to showcase women's achievements and establish confidential reporting mechanisms and comprehensive support services, including psychological, institutional and legal assistance, for victims of harassment and discrimination.

The full participation of women and other underrepresented groups is essential for harnessing the blue economy in Central Africa and fostering a more equitable, inclusive and resilient future. Gender considerations must be embedded in coastal planning, decision-making and resource management, and it is essential to address disparities across blue economy sectors and expand women's access to emerging industries, in order to deliver broad economic and social benefits.

BLUE ECONOMY TOOLS AND POLICIES IN CENTRAL AFRICA

COUNTRIES IN CENTRAL AFRICA HAVE DEVELOPED RELATIVELY FEWER HOLISTIC NATIONAL POLICIES AND INSTRUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE BLUE ECONOMY ECOSYSTEM COMPARED WITH COUNTRIES IN OTHER SUBREGIONS.

The blue economy involves several interdependent sectors, stakeholders and resources that are unconstrained by national boundaries. A careful, coordinated and informed approach is, therefore, needed, in order to increase the use of blue resources while avoiding harm to the environment or the economic and social potential of other industries and communities. Countries in Central Africa have developed relatively fewer holistic national policies and instruments to support the blue economy ecosystem compared with countries in other subregions, but that is likely to change as the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources ramps up support for mainstreaming the African Union blue economy strategy at the subregional and national levels, with financing from Norway.

Within Central Africa, ECCAS has prepared a subregional blue economy strategy that is centred on the five thematic areas of focus identified in the African Union blue economy strategy, as shown in Figure IV. ECCAS and the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources are assisting ECCAS member States in formulating national strategies that are aligned with that subregional framework, with a view to ensuring coordinated and impactful implementation. At the national level, 6 of the 11 current ECCAS member States – Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe – have either started designing or progressed to implementing a comprehensive blue economy strategy, as shown in Figure XVI. Among them, Sao Tome and Principe has gone the furthest by developing an action plan and an investment plan to accompany its strategy, with recommendations for components to be financed by internal revenue and for the use of public funds to encourage private capital or concessional external financing (March and others 2024; United Nations, 2022).¹⁴

In the absence of an integrated or holistic blue economy strategy, several Central African countries have developed policies and planning frameworks for blue economy industries that can contribute to some of the goals of a blue economy strategy. Although such a siloed approach is not ideal, given that it foregoes the significant benefits of cross-sectoral coordination, it does represent a repository of frameworks that may help to inform an eventual national blue economy strategy. For example, as the national blue economy strategy is finalised in Cameroon, it is imperative to integrate the priorities included in its national sectoral plans for fisheries and aquaculture, maritime ports, and marine and coastal management, in addition to those of its overall national development strategy.

¹⁴ Sao Tome and Principe is one of only four African countries with an implementation plan for their national blue economy strategy, the others being Mauritius, Seychelles and South Africa. Only Namibia has a blue economy policy. (March and others, 2024).

ALTHOUGH 18 AFRICAN STATES ARE MAKING USE OF MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING, ONLY 2 – SEYCHELLES AND SOUTH AFRICA – HAVE MADE THAT TOOL APPLICABLE TO THEIR LOCAL CONTEXT AND HAVE MADE IT FULLY OPERATIONAL.

The following tools for creating an enabling environment for the development of the blue economy are identified in the blue governance framework of the African Union (Seisay, Oroko and Chakadenga, eds., 2020):

- Marine spatial planning, or other integrated planning and management.
- National coordination units for the blue economy, with mandates to work across sectors and ministries.
- Blue economy accounting, and other valuations.
- Sustainable blue funding mechanisms.
- Application of harmonized blue economy standards.

Research suggests that those tools are highly underutilized in Central Africa, as shown in Figure XVI, although their use is not mainstreamed even elsewhere on the continent. The underutilization of the tools is largely due to unfamiliarity with or a lack of prioritization of the blue economy among policymakers, and significant capacity constraints with regard to the tools. For example, although 18 African States are making use of marine spatial planning, only 2 – Seychelles and South Africa – have made that tool applicable to their local context and have made it fully operational. The following subsections explore tools related to the accounting and financing of the blue economy.



15 The analysis is at the national level, and it is important to note the development of the blue economy at the subregional level. For example, the Blue Fund for the Congo Basin, hosted by the Central African States Development Bank, is the main financial instrument of the Congo Basin Climate Commission. The Fund has financed more than 250 national and subregional projects that are based on green and blue economy principles. For more information, see www.lefondsbbleu.africa/fr/.

FIGURE XVI:
Status of national blue economy policies, tools and enablers in Central African States

Source: ECA adaptation of and update to Karani and others (2022) and March and others (2024).

Note: The four categories of blue economy policy status are: none known (no recorded mention of developing the country's blue economy); intention or planning (national officials have recorded their intention to develop the blue economy or have begun developing a strategy); strategy (there is a published, official blue economy strategy or planning document); and action plan or policy (the Government has published an action plan to accompany the strategy or has integrated blue economy policy into passed law). Orange markers indicate that the work was started, but updated information is not available.



Comparative progression in Africa

**NATURAL ASSETS
MUST BE VALUED AND
REGULARLY ASSESSED
IF THEY ARE TO BE
USED TO UNLOCK
INNOVATIVE FINANCING
INSTRUMENTS.**

A. Blue accounting

Within the emergent universe of natural capital accounting, blue accounting is a relatively newer concept that has been prioritized by a small number of Governments to measure the progressive impact of the blue economy on development. There is growing awareness of the opportunities for leveraging nature-based valuations to develop more comprehensive assessments of national financial, human, cultural and natural capital assets, each segment of which needs careful management and strategic investment in order to remain productive in the long term. Furthermore, natural assets must be valued and regularly assessed if they are to be used to unlock innovative financing instruments. The small but growing array of tools that can account for the value and economic impact of blue resources are described below.

1. Blue economy valuation toolkit

The blue economy valuation toolkit has been developed by ECA in order to facilitate quantitative economic, social and ecological valuations of the blue economy in African States. With that information, countries can strategize on the ways to optimize blue resources for enhanced socioeconomic and ecological gains. So far, it has been applied to Djibouti, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Seychelles and the United Republic of Tanzania, primarily with support from ECA and the leadership of a blue economy coordinating unit within the respective Governments. More information about the toolkit is provided in box 3.

2. Blue economy satellite account

A satellite account is an extension of the System of National Accounts for measuring the value of economic activities that span multiple sectors but are not classified as standalone industries. By disaggregating subindustry inputs, outputs and interactions, satellite accounts enable a powerful reshaping of data across economic functions or themes, often in a cross-sectoral nature, facilitating the assessment of direct, indirect or induced impacts on GDP, debt, trade and other macroeconomic indicators (Van de Ven, 2021).

Although satellite accounts are widely used in such sectors as education, tourism, health, sports, and information and communication technology, they have been relatively underutilized in the blue economy, owing, in part, to the level of complexity of the analysis: many sectors and dimensions must be parsed and evaluated. As a result, approaches to blue economy satellite accounts have varied and have been guided by country-level priorities and the availability of data. Some formal national statistical systems, including those of Portugal and the United States of America,¹⁶ have begun implementing ocean satellite accounts that are focused on marine-based activities. Parallel efforts have emerged in the academic community, non-governmental organizations, development banks and international organizations, although many have not been officially adopted.

The Caribbean Development Bank introduced a methodology for blue economy satellite accounts and applied it in a case study for Jamaica, where the blue economy is largely coastal and ocean-based (Ram, Ramrattan and Frederick, 2019). In Africa, the blue economy development fund of Mozambique, ProAzul, is leading a pilot project on the country's first blue economy satellite account, adapting the methodology used by Portugal to the local context. The initiative is a partnership involving the national statistical agencies of Mozambique and Portugal, the World Bank and the Directorate-General for Maritime Policy of Portugal (World Bank, 2024b).

3. Natural capital accounting: water

Natural capital accounting involves the application of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting to the measurement and valuation a country's natural assets, such as water, forests and wetlands, and the ecosystem services that they provide. Through natural capital accounting, environmental and economic data are integrated with one another, complementing the System of National Accounts.¹⁷ One such application is water accounts, which track the stock, flow, use and quality of water resources and their relationship with economic activity. In the blue economy, water accounts can support evidence-based policymaking by highlighting the contribution of water resources and ecosystem services to the economy, and the environmental impacts of production and consumption.

In Central Africa, ECA has been raising awareness of the value and application of natural capital accounting. As part of a capacity-building programme on environmentally extended input-output tables, ECA and FAO supported Cameroon in 2019 with a pilot project to develop forest accounts, specifically a table of physical wood flows. There is currently no known application of water accounts in the subregion, however. Although some progress has been made, Central African States have not fully implemented recommendations to account for and develop natural capital, which contributed to a 2021 finding that "natural resources and ecosystem services are degraded due to a lack of conservation incentives in markets and institutions" (United Nations, ECA, 2021c).

**IN THE BLUE ECONOMY,
WATER ACCOUNTS CAN
SUPPORT EVIDENCE-
BASED POLICYMAKING
BY HIGHLIGHTING THE
CONTRIBUTION OF
WATER RESOURCES AND
ECOSYSTEM SERVICES
TO THE ECONOMY.**



¹⁶ For more information see the [2016-2018 Maritime Satellite Account](#) of the National Statistical Institute of Portugal or the [2023 Marine Economy Satellite Account](#) produced by the Bureau of Economic Analysis of the United States.

¹⁷ It is important to note that unlike blue economy satellite accounts, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting and other environmental accounting systems go beyond the scope of the System of National Accounts and include, for example, an assessment of ecosystem services for which there are no established markets.

BOX 3:
*ECA blue economy
valuation toolkit*

Source: United Nations, ECA, 2021b.

**A SIGNIFICANT
CHALLENGE PERSISTS:
THE UNDERESTIMATION
OF THE SOCIO-
ECONOMIC AND
ECOLOGICAL VALUE
OF VAST AND DIVERSE
AQUATIC ECOSYSTEMS
IN AFRICA.**

Since launching “Africa’s Blue Economy: A Policy Handbook” in 2016, ECA has supported its members in developing national and regional blue economy strategies. The work has informed strategies in the Comoros, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Seychelles and other countries, and in regional organizations, such as the East African Community, the Indian Ocean Commission, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the African Union, through its 2019 blue economy strategy.

A significant challenge persists: the underestimation of the socioeconomic and ecological value of vast and diverse aquatic ecosystems in Africa. To bridge the gap, ECA engaged a team of experts to develop the blue economy valuation toolkit, which enables States to assess the contributions of blue resources to economic, environmental and social well-being. Designed with the African context in mind, the toolkit is spreadsheet-based and programmed with macros. Users enter data from reliable national and international data sources, such as the System of National Accounts or ecosystem services data with the International Union for Conservation of Nature habitats classification scheme, and the tool generates assessments for each dimension, accommodating variations in data availability.

The toolkit has been successfully tested across island, coastal and landlocked contexts and has provided impactful insights. In Seychelles, it helped to identify that 27.4 per cent of GDP and 41 per cent of total employment was attributed to the blue economy, on the basis of data from 2018, as shown in the figure (United Nations, ECA, 2021b). In Djibouti, the analysis was integrated into the national development plan for the period 2020–2024. The tool has been applied in several African States and has contributed to policy development and sustainable resource management. ECA is now enhancing the toolkit by transforming it into an online platform and preparing for its expanded roll-out in Central Africa.

Summary of the valuation of the blue economy in Seychelles, 2020



27.4%
of GDP in 2020



41%
of total
employment



US\$40 billion
marine ecosystem
services

B. Blue financing

Six African States – Cabo Verde, Comoros, Gabon, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe, and Seychelles – have used national blue economy financing tools (March and others, 2024). Notably, the first debt-for-nature swap on continental Africa – a \$500 million deal in 2023 in Gabon, which involved the refinancing of some of its debt – is expected to generate \$163 million in dedicated marine conservation funding over the next 15 years, as described in box 4. At the end of the same year, Sao Tome and Principe signed an agreement with Portugal to convert €3.5 million of its bilateral debt into climate investments.

In an increasingly diverse, sophisticated and complex development financing landscape, countries need to be aware of new financing sources and innovative instruments that have been leveraged with a view to financing efforts to protect and grow the blue economy. More information on some of those sources and instruments is described below (Caribbean Development Bank, 2018; International Finance Corporation, 2023). The list is not exhaustive: other financing methods and instruments, such as impact bonds, public-private partnerships, financial technology and blue tokens, diaspora financing and innovative blended finance models, can be tailored to mobilize resources for blue economy initiatives (March and Failler, 2025).

1. Blue-focused development funds and grant programmes

Globally, there is a growing suite of donor-financed development funds, often administered by finance institutions, that provide grants to support the development and conservation of ocean, coastal and inland water resources through projects led by non-governmental organizations or through capacity-building initiatives targeting early-stage enterprises in the blue or circular economies. Notable examples include the PROBLUE multi-donor trust fund, housed at the World Bank; the Blue Planet Fund of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, financed from the official development assistance budget of the country; the Green Climate Fund; and the grant programme of the Blue Action Fund, which is financed by the Governments of France, Germany, Ireland, Norway and Sweden.

Of note for Central Africa, the Blue Fund for the Congo Basin is a financial tool of the Congo Basin Climate Commission. The Fund was established following a 2017 memorandum of understanding signed by ten countries, and, since 2021, it has been administered by the Central African States Development Bank. The Fund now includes 17 member countries: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, Morocco, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, South Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. The €3 billion Fund is aimed at financing sustainable development in the Congo Basin, including alternatives to deforestation, improved agricultural irrigation and ecotourism. Despite growing political momentum, in particular driven by the Congo, implementation has been slow, owing to financing shortfalls. Achieving the Fund’s potential will require stronger governance, enhanced transparency and greater international and regional financial commitments.

**GLOBALLY, THERE IS
A GROWING SUITE OF
DONOR-FINANCED
DEVELOPMENT FUNDS,
OFTEN ADMINISTERED BY
FINANCE INSTITUTIONS,
THAT PROVIDE GRANTS
TO SUPPORT THE
DEVELOPMENT AND
CONSERVATION OF
OCEAN, COASTAL
AND INLAND WATER
RESOURCES.**



**A SIGNIFICANT
CHALLENGE PERSISTS:
THE UNDERESTIMATION
OF THE SOCIO-
ECONOMIC AND
ECOLOGICAL VALUE
OF VAST AND DIVERSE
AQUATIC ECOSYSTEMS
IN AFRICA.**

2. Blue bonds

Modelled after green bonds, blue bonds finance ocean-based sustainable activities, offering investors both financial returns and environmental impact. Although they are typically issued at market rates, small interest discounts may be available for projects with strong social or environmental commitments.

The world's first sovereign blue bond was issued by Seychelles, leveraging the blue economy concept to access discounted international capital. Facilitated by The Nature Conservancy and supported by the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility, the bond helped to strengthen marine conservation, fisheries management and seafood value chains. In 2023, Gabon issued the world's largest blue bond, also facilitated by The Nature Conservancy, as described in box 4.

Expanding blue bonds across Central Africa and other regions with limited access to affordable climate finance requires addressing certain challenges: securing multilateral support for technical assistance and guarantees; ensuring compliance with industry best practices; aligning with national debt sustainability strategies; and developing a strong project pipeline to deploy blue bond proceeds effectively (Caribbean Development Bank, 2018).

3. Debt swaps

Debt-for-nature swaps involve the exchange of national debt for conservation investments, channelling funds toward environmental protection. Typically, a conservation organization purchases a country's debt at a discount and negotiates its conversion into conservation payments-in-kind. Although the swaps can provide funding for sustainability initiatives, they often provide limited debt relief and come with high legal and financial transaction costs.

The instrument is not new to Central Africa. In 2006, Cameroon and France signed the subregion's first debt-for-nature swap, redirecting debt-service payments towards development programmes, including protection of the Congo River basin.¹⁸ Delays in reaching the completion point, however, meant that Cameroon continued servicing unsustainable debt for years, which ultimately reduced the scope of the intended relief (French Debt and Development Platform, 2021). More positively, a coalition of civil society organizations in the two countries independently monitored projects funded by the swap.

Although it remains a niche and debated solution, rising debt distress and climate vulnerability have renewed interest in debt swaps, in particular through a climate justice lens. African island States have pioneered successful debt swaps for marine conservation, from Seychelles in 2015 to Cabo Verde and Sao Tome and Principe in 2023. Expanding their use across Central Africa requires drawing lessons from those successes to ensure effective implementation.

4. Blue carbon

A carbon credit is a certified, transferrable unit representing one tonne of carbon dioxide or greenhouse gas emissions reduced, avoided or removed from the atmosphere. The credits are traded in voluntary or compliance carbon markets, allowing emitters to offset unavoidable emissions by purchasing credits created as a result of nature-based solutions that protect, sustainably manage or restore natural ecosystems in forestry, agriculture and coastal or freshwater wetlands. Wetlands are particularly powerful carbon sinks, sequestering up to 10 times more carbon than terrestrial ecosystems,¹⁹ and covering only 2 per cent of the global ocean while accounting for 50 per cent of total ocean carbon sequestration (World Bank, 2023b; Duarte and others, 2013).

The African Union has recognized the potential of the trade of carbon credits to accelerate economic development, create jobs, improve access to climate finance and resilience to climate change, and advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063. In 2023, the International Finance Corporation identified eight registered or developing blue carbon projects in Africa, as shown in Table II, signalling growing interest in leveraging blue ecosystems for financing and conservation.

Concerns have been raised, however, about carbon credit schemes, land rights violations and the marginalization of farmers, small fishers and other local or Indigenous communities. The pursuit of climate resilience cannot be paid for by perpetuating climate injustice against already vulnerable populations. It is essential to ensure that local communities are active participants in project development and share equitably in the benefits of blue carbon conservation and restoration.

**WETLANDS ARE
PARTICULARLY
POWERFUL CARBON
SINKS, SEQUESTERING
UP TO 10 TIMES
MORE CARBON
THAN TERRESTRIAL
ECOSYSTEMS.**



¹⁸ The swap was part of a debt reduction and development contract programme of France, which was designed to provide debt relief to highly indebted countries by redirecting debt repayments into development projects.

¹⁹ Estimates for the multiplying effect of coastal over terrestrial ecosystem carbon storage range from 5 (World Bank, 2023b) to 10 (Duarte and others, 2013)

TABLE II:
Blue carbon removal and avoidance projects in Africa, 2023

Source: International Finance Corporation (2023).

Project name	Status	Size (hectares)	Annual emission reductions or removals (tCO ₂ e)
Livelihoods' Mangrove Restoration Grouped Project in Senegal	Registered	10 415	30 000
Blue Forest & Mozambique: Building Africa's Largest Mangrove Restoration Project	Under development	183 000	2 965 555
Senegal and West Africa Mangrove Programme	Under development	42	2 547
The Haidar el Ali Mangrove Initiative (Senegal)	Under development	2 000	30 170
Mangrove Restoration Project with Sine Saloum and Casamance Communities, Senegal	Under validation	7 020	95 470
Mikoko Pamoja (Kenya)	Registered	125	9 880
Tahiry Honko (Madagascar)	Registered	1 400	1 375
Vanga Blue Forest (Kenya)	Registered	460	5 000

5. Blue levy

Countries can explore domestic resource mobilization strategies, such as a blue levy to finance blue economy initiatives. Levies can take the form of a tourism entry fee, an environmental protection levy or other dedicated charges on specific services. Widely used in small island developing States and European cities, such levies help to mitigate the environmental impact of overtourism and generate revenue for conservation, infrastructure or other blue economy priorities. When transparently managed and appropriately utilized, a blue levy can be an effective and sustainable blue economy funding tool. It is critical to set the rate carefully, however, in order to avoid undermining the competitiveness of the destination or reducing tourism-related income.

In Africa, tourism levies have been used to fund destination marketing, conservation efforts and tourism development. In South Africa, tourists pay a 1 per cent charge to use specific travel and tourism services, and, in Botswana, tourists pay \$30 at every port of entry. More specific to the blue economy is the tourism environmental sustainability levy that was introduced in Seychelles in August 2023 as a per-person, per-night tax to raise funds for environmental conservation and the sustainable management of the archipelago's natural resources. The charge is collected directly by providers of tourism accommodation upon checkout. Within a Central African context, where many tourist and other blue economy industries operate informally, entry fees may be a more practical option than levies on hotel rates or formal services.

BOX 4 *Historic Gabon debt conversion*

Source: Adapted from Mapangou (2024).

IN AUGUST 2023, GABON AND THE NATURE CONSERVANCY FINALIZED A LANDMARK \$500 MILLION, AA2-RATED DEBT CONVERSION, THE LARGEST BY THE ORGANIZATION TO DATE AND THE FIRST ON MAINLAND AFRICA.

In August 2023, Gabon and The Nature Conservancy finalized a landmark \$500 million, Aa2-rated debt conversion, the largest by the organization to date and the first on mainland Africa. The transaction reduced the debt interest rate of Gabon, extended repayment periods and resulted in the allocation of at least \$163 million to marine conservation and the enhancement of fishing regulations.

Its main features were:

- **Debt refinancing:** replacement of 2025 and 2031 Eurobonds with a debt neutral position, and issuance of new 2038 bonds at <7 per cent coupon (compared with >10 per cent yield-to-maturity), with a 4.5-year grace period on interest payments and 10-year average life.
- **Marine conservation:** finance for a legally enforceable marine spatial plan to protect and manage 30 per cent of the exclusive economic zone of Gabon, support for a blue economy road map and enhancements with regard to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing regulations.
- **Conservation funding:** establishment of an independent trust fund, Le Fonds de Préservation de la Biodiversité au Gabon, with an annual allocation of \$5 million for conservation, at least 40 per cent of which is for funding government activities and the remainder is for supporting marine-centric activities led by local non-governmental organizations, the private sector, academic institutions and other stakeholders.

The transaction demonstrates the scalability of such debt conversions led by The Nature Conservancy across diverse contexts and credit profiles, highlighting resilience to political transitions and offering a replicable model for future nature-based debt refinancing in Central Africa.





CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ULTIMATELY, THE SUCCESS OF THE BLUE ECONOMY IN CENTRAL AFRICA DEPENDS ON A COORDINATED, CONTEXT-SENSITIVE APPROACH IN WHICH SUSTAINABILITY, INCLUSIVENESS AND LONG-TERM PROSPERITY ARE PRIORITIZED.

The blue economy holds immense potential for Central Africa, offering pathways to sustainable economic growth, job creation and environmental conservation. Achieving that potential, however, requires deliberate and strategic policymaking that balances economic development with ecological sustainability. Adapting the blue economy strategies of the African Union and ECCAS to local contexts, with a focus on the sectors that align with each country's long-term needs and comparative advantages, offers a crucial framework for advancing the blue economy agenda.

Ultimately, the success of the blue economy in Central Africa depends on a coordinated, context-sensitive approach in which sustainability, inclusiveness and long-term prosperity are prioritized. By embracing innovation, strengthening governance and fostering regional collaboration, the subregion can harness its blue economy to drive transformative growth and resilience.

By implementing the recommendations outlined below, and with the support of ECA and many other development partners, Central Africa can harness the transformative potential of its blue economy, fostering sustainable development and regional economic growth.

In addition to the sector-specific recommendations provided earlier in the present report, ECA advocates the following areas of focus, each with short-term actions, intended to be taken within one to three years, and longer-term actions, which could be implemented over more than three years.

A. Strengthened ownership, political commitment and governance

Clear political prioritization is essential for developing and protecting the blue economy in Central Africa. Governments should develop and fully support at the highest levels tailored national strategies to leverage blue resources for economic diversification, in line with the Douala Consensus. For enhanced policy coherence and implementation, Governments and regional entities must ratify and actively operationalize existing regional blue economy-related frameworks through clear action plans, funding mechanisms and performance monitoring. There is ample room to strengthen regulatory frameworks that balance economic development with environmental sustainability to ensure long-term growth and resource preservation.

Strategic, context-sensitive planning is essential, if the full potential of the blue economy is to be unlocked. Each country should identify and prioritize sectors that align with its immediate needs and comparative advantages. For countries where achieving food security is paramount, fisheries and aquaculture should take precedence. Countries grappling with conflict should avoid prioritizing tourism until stability is restored. Policymakers must avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and ensure that tools, policies and investments are carefully selected and tailored to the realities on the ground.

1. Short-term action

Members of ECCAS should validate the draft ECCAS blue economy strategy and raise public awareness of the concept and the potential of the blue economy in Central Africa through targeted, creative communication campaigns. Efforts should use compelling, audience-specific content delivered across diverse platforms and should be endorsed at the highest levels of Government to ensure visibility and impact.

States should develop comprehensive national blue economy strategies, complemented by public awareness campaigns that highlight the impact of pollution. In addition, they should democratize knowledge-sharing platforms and incorporate Indigenous and local knowledge into policymaking for sustainable resource management. For States where the blue economy is a national priority, Governments should establish and reinforce dedicated Blue Economy units with clear mandates to coordinate implementation of a national blue economy strategy across all relevant Ministries and sectors.

2. Longer-term action

Under the leadership of the Gulf of Guinea Commission and ECCAS, States should establish security as a core pillar of the blue economy in Central Africa, including by undertaking regular assessments of progress in addressing maritime threats and blue crime, such as piracy, terrorism, illegal pollution and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, in addition to evaluations of economic, social and environmental outcomes. They may consider publicly sharing these assessments in order to combat lingering perceptions of high insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, which undermines the progress made to strengthen security. Furthermore, States should promote the integration of circular economy principles into national development plans to enhance sustainability and climate resilience. In addition, Governments should consider implementing marine spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management frameworks in order to strengthen the governance of all aquatic ecosystems.

Governments should develop policies that strengthen local governance and empower local communities to be the first beneficiaries of blue incomes and employment. They should also scale up efforts to protect and enhance the direct and indirect benefits of blue ecosystems that are derived through provisioning, regulating, cultural, and other ecosystem services.

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD DEVELOP POLICIES THAT STRENGTHEN LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND EMPOWER LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO BE THE FIRST BENEFICIARIES OF BLUE INCOMES AND EMPLOYMENT.

**B. Enhanced regional cooperation**

Safe and secure maritime environments and economic integration are contingent on regional cooperation. Leveraging successful frameworks, such as the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, and increasing political and financial support for the Congo Basin Climate Commission will facilitate collaborative efforts in maritime security and sustainable resource management. ECCAS partner networks that promote regional integration and development in the environment and natural resource sector, such as the Network of Civil Society Organizations for the Green Economy in Central Africa, the Group of Experts on Climate in Central Africa and the Network of Enterprises for the Green Economy in Central Africa, must be engaged to operationalize and reinforce the ECCAS blue economy strategy. Careful attention should be given to promoting gender inclusion in the blue economy by strengthening the role of relevant organizations, including the Women in Maritime of West and Central Africa and Blue Women Africa.

1. Short-term action

The ECCAS Commission, in collaboration with the Gulf of Guinea Commission and other regional entities, should establish a virtual working group that comprises public, private and civil society stakeholders in order to facilitate continuous dialogue, knowledge-sharing and strategic alignment of blue economy activities across the subregion.

2. Longer-term action

States should fully operationalize and sustainably finance national zonal components of the Yaoundé Architecture, with clearly allocated funds and reinforced commitments to transnational maritime cooperation.

C. Greater infrastructure investments

Strategic investments in enabling infrastructure and technologies for priority blue economy sectors are critical for regional economic integration, competitiveness and resilience.

1. Short-term action

States should facilitate the development or expansion of aquaculture farms and accelerate the implementation of ongoing hydroelectricity projects, ensuring transparency, community engagement and inclusive benefit-sharing.

2. Longer-term actions

States should implement large-scale infrastructure projects using public-private partnerships, as part of efforts to create a more enabling environment for the private sector to lead and finance expansions of priority blue economy sectors. In addition, States should diversify tourism offerings to attract intra-African visitors, supported by the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and improved regional connectivity. Furthermore, States should introduce regulatory reforms to attract private investment in renewable energy and scale up offshore renewable energy exploration, learning lessons from successful pilot projects, such as the ocean thermal energy conversion platform in Sao Tome and Principe.

STATES SHOULD DIVERSIFY TOURISM OFFERINGS TO ATTRACT INTRA-AFRICAN VISITORS, SUPPORTED BY THE AGREEMENT ESTABLISHING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA AND IMPROVED REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY.



D. Innovative financing mechanisms

Innovative financing can help Central African States to access new resources for sustainable blue economy projects. Governments could explore such opportunities and initiatives as carbon market development and the Blue Fund for the Congo Basin in order to attract financing and should leverage grants, concessional financing and blended finance to mobilize private sector investments. Several countries in Central Africa provide practical models for leveraging blue resources to improve debt sustainability and ecosystem protection.

1. Short-term action

States should develop a subregional blue economy financing strategy that is aligned with the ECCAS blue economy strategy, incorporating lessons from successful pilot projects in the subregion. States should engage bilateral donors and development partners that are active in blue economy financing, such as the African Development Bank, the Green Climate Fund and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, to establish or reinforce dedicated funding mechanisms that provide grants or seed investments, managed by the Central African States Development Bank, to enable non-governmental stakeholders to take promising blue economy concepts to practical testing.

2. Longer-term action

Supported by the African Development Bank and the Bank of Central African States, States should carefully implement and scale up proven innovative financing mechanisms, including blue bonds and debt-for-nature swaps, to support blue economy projects sustainably, including those that are led by Governments. All financing instruments should be developed transparently and inclusively, ensuring that Indigenous and local communities participate meaningfully in the design stage and that their rights are safeguarded throughout the process.

E. Alignment with broader development initiatives

In adapting the blue economy strategies of the African Union and ECCAS to local contexts, a holistic approach is critical. Development in one sector must not undermine opportunities or sustainability in other sectors. For instance, coastal infrastructure projects must avoid harming fish stocks or degrading vital ecosystem services. The subregion needs to align emergent national blue economy strategies with broader regional and global initiatives, in order to protect natural capital, maximize growth opportunities and amplify development impacts.

1. Short-term action

States should integrate blue economy priorities into their national strategies linked with such initiatives as the African Continental Free Trade Area, digital economy development and regional value chain development. Where appropriate, the blue economy and its related principles should be integrated into subregional and national master plans for industrialization and economic diversification.

SUPPORTED BY THE AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK AND THE BANK OF CENTRAL AFRICAN STATES, STATES SHOULD CAREFULLY IMPLEMENT AND SCALE UP PROVEN INNOVATIVE FINANCING MECHANISMS.

2. Longer-term action

States should develop policies that empower local communities and foster enabling environments for domestic investors, with a view to reducing reliance on foreign capital in profitable and high-potential maritime industries and promoting locally driven blue economy growth.

F. Investment in knowledge, skills and data

Improving analytical capacity, data generation and knowledge exchange can accelerate the implementation of blue economy strategies and evidence-based policymaking in Central Africa. Development partners and academic institutions should support countries facing statistical capacity constraints by using such tools as the ECA blue economy valuation toolkit and such methodologies as natural capital accounting, in order to facilitate the quantification of blue economy potential and to guide policymaking. Furthermore, Governments must foster partnerships among universities and other research institutions, with a view to generating data and driving innovation in blue economy strategies in Central Africa. There is an underutilized opportunity to learn from experts in other African subregions that have advanced further in their blue economy research and development. Partners can support capacity-building programmes to equip stakeholders with the tools and knowledge to develop and implement blue economy strategies effectively. Governments and academic institutions should prioritize training on the use of blue economy-related tools and methodologies, thereby fostering skills development.

1. Short-term action

Development partners, including the United Nations System should collaboratively host a regional innovation hub for Central African entrepreneurs, researchers and technical experts for the joint design and refinement of technologies that tackle specific development roadblocks in priority blue economy sectors. States should deliver targeted training to build skills for decent work and entrepreneurship in emerging blue economy industries, with a strong focus on the participation of women and young people. Development and research partners should support States in conducting baseline valuations of the blue economy using the ECA toolkit, while strengthening statistical and analytical capacities of ECCAS member States to support evidence-based policymaking. The ECCAS Commission, African Union agencies, ECA, FAO, UNDP and other development partners should strengthen partnerships among themselves in order to align their efforts and avoid duplication.

2. Longer-term action

Research institutions, universities and private sector entities should establish sustained partnerships and networks among themselves to ensure continuous collection of data, innovation and long-term analytical capacity. Furthermore, they should strengthen or establish maritime education and training programmes to create a pipeline of skilled young people who are capable of capitalizing on emerging opportunities within blue economy sectors.

THERE IS AN UNDERUTILIZED OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN FROM EXPERTS IN OTHER AFRICAN SUBREGIONS THAT HAVE ADVANCED FURTHER IN THEIR BLUE ECONOMY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT.



GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
aquaculture	The farming of aquatic organisms, including fish, crustaceans and seaweed, under controlled conditions to meet rising food demand.
blue economy	The sustainable use, management and conservation of marine and freshwater resources, and the diverse economic activities and ecosystem services that they support. In a successful blue economy, those activities must be managed in an integrated, fair and circular manner that protects and restores aquatic ecosystems. Furthermore, they must be socially inclusive, ecosystem-based and low-carbon, and thus align with the three pillars of economic, social and environmental sustainability.
blue economy valuation toolkit	A tool developed by ECA to assess the economic, social and environmental value of blue economy sectors, used to inform policymaking.
blue carbon	Carbon stored in coastal and marine ecosystems, such as mangroves, seagrasses and tidal marshes, which are crucial in climate regulation.
blue financing	Financial instruments and investments that support the sustainable use, conservation and restoration of ocean and freshwater ecosystems. Blue financing involves the mobilization of public and private capital through such tools as blue bonds, carbon markets and debt-for-nature swaps to fund projects in sustainable fisheries, coastal tourism, marine conservation, ocean-based renewable energy and other sectors.
carbon markets	Trading systems in which carbon credits are bought and sold to help offset greenhouse gas emissions and finance climate mitigation projects.
Douala Consensus	An agreement adopted by Governments of Central African countries during the thirty-third session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts for Central Africa, held in Douala, Cameroon, in September 2017, to prioritize economic diversification and inclusive industrialization in the subregion.
illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing	Fishing activities that violate national, regional or international laws, often threatening fish stocks and marine biodiversity.
Industrialization and Economic Diversification Master Plan for Central Africa	A strategic framework adopted by ECCAS to transform the natural capital of Central Africa into productive capital by promoting industrialization, economic diversification and regional integration, with a focus on such sectors as agroprocessing, energy and minerals. The plan has been prepared by ECA and has been technically validated, but has not yet been finalized.
integrated coastal zone management	A governance approach that promotes the sustainable use of coastal zones by coordinating across sectors and levels of government.
marine spatial planning	A coordinated process for analysing and allocating marine space to balance ecological, economic and social objectives.
maritime domain awareness	The effective understanding of activities associated with the maritime environment that affect security, safety or commerce.



ANNEX

The table below is a summary of global, regional, and subregional policies and instruments that support the blue economy in Central Africa. It is not intended to provide an exhaustive list of related policies and instruments that are applied in the subregion.

Policies and instruments to support the blue economy in Central Africa

Source: Source: ECA.

Level or country	Priorities in blue economy-related documents	Selected policies and instruments
Global and continental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fisheries and aquaculture Sustainable energy, extractive minerals and innovative industries Shipping, transportation, trade and port operations Maritime zone management, environmental sustainability, conservation, and ecosystem and biodiversity protection Governance, institutions, social implications and financing Maritime safety and security 	<p>2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy A plan of the African Union to foster increased wealth creation from the region's maritime domain through an environmentally sustainable, secure and thriving blue economy. It is aimed at establishing a combined exclusive economic zone to share benefits and minimize transnational threats.</p> <p>Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa Guidance from the African Union and the African Union-New Partnership for Africa's Development for an enabling policy environment for a fish sector that creates equitable social and economic development.</p> <p>Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union Goal 6 of the agenda includes a reference to using the blue or ocean economy for accelerated economic growth. Other goals concern health and nutrition, economic transformation, climate resilience, natural resource management, biodiversity conservation, connectivity and security.</p> <p>2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sustainable Development Goal 14 concerns life below water. All the other Goals are also relevant.</p> <p>Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa A legally binding treaty that reinforces the interdependent African blue economy and maritime security agendas. For more information, see Egede (2017).</p> <p>Africa Blue Economy Strategy Guidance from the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources for the development of an inclusive and sustainable blue economy that significantly contributes to transformation and growth in Africa.</p>

Level or country	Priorities in blue economy-related documents	Selected policies and instruments
Subregional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fisheries and aquaculture Maritime transport and ports Maritime safety and security Coastal and maritime tourism Energy and minerals Governance and financing Capacity building, employment and entrepreneurship Ocean data gathering, analysis and sharing 	<p>International Commission for the Congo-Ubangi-Sangha Basin A commission established to ensure freedom to access, navigate, equip and operate on the river. The Commission promotes inland navigation and integrated water resources management. For more information, see Grosdidier de Matons (2014).</p> <p>Central African Economic and Monetary Community-Democratic Republic of the Congo River Navigation Code (Regulation No. 14/99/CEMAC-036-CM-03) Rules to reinforce safety in river navigation and transport.</p> <p>Central African Economic and Monetary Community Merchant Shipping Code (Regulation No. 03/01 UEAC 088-CM-06) Rules concerning shipping, maritime transport, safety, environmental protection and other related areas.</p> <p>Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa (the Yaoundé Code of Conduct) Code adopted by 25 West and Central African countries to manage and reduce the adverse impacts of illicit maritime activities, including piracy and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Part of the Yaoundé Architecture to support coordination and information-sharing for maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea led by the Regional Coordination Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa (established in 2014). Inspired by the ECCAS regional maritime security strategy adopted in 2008 and the Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden (the Djibouti Code of Conduct) (Sumner, 2023).</p> <p>ECCAS Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy Plan to develop an inclusive and sustainable blue economy that contributes significantly to transformation and growth of the continent.</p> <p>Yaoundé Declaration Adopted at the close of the International Conference on the Sustainable Blue Economy in the Gulf of Guinea (9 to 10 July 2025), eight countries committed to sustainably managing 100 per cent of their oceans by 2030, with a focus on regional cooperation, capacity building, and combating illegal activities.</p>

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