



BLUE ECONOMY BLUES

HOMEF introduction to Blue Economy



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This document is sponsored by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) with funds of the Federal Ministry for Economic cooperation and Department of the Federal Republic of Germany.

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Acknowledgements

This paper is an output of our project on Life Below Water and Alliance Building - Fisheries, livelihoods and the Blue Economy with the support of Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung.



About HOMEF

HOMEF is an ecological think tank and an advocacy organization promoting environmental/climate justice and food sovereignty in Nigeria and Africa.

Our main thrust is examining the roots of exploitation of resources, peoples and nations. We nurture movements for the recovery of memory, dignity and harmonious living with Mother Earth.

HOMEF believes in the rights of Mother Earth, the need to equip communities to push back oppression and the need for justice for the environment, our food systems and natural cycles at every level of policy engagement.

HOMEF believes in contextual solutions over externally generated and imposed ideas and is firmly rooted in the ideals of solidarity and dignity.

Our Core Values: justice & equity in all circumstances, people and the planet in harmony and free from exploitation, dignity (respect), action (solidarity), and knowledge.

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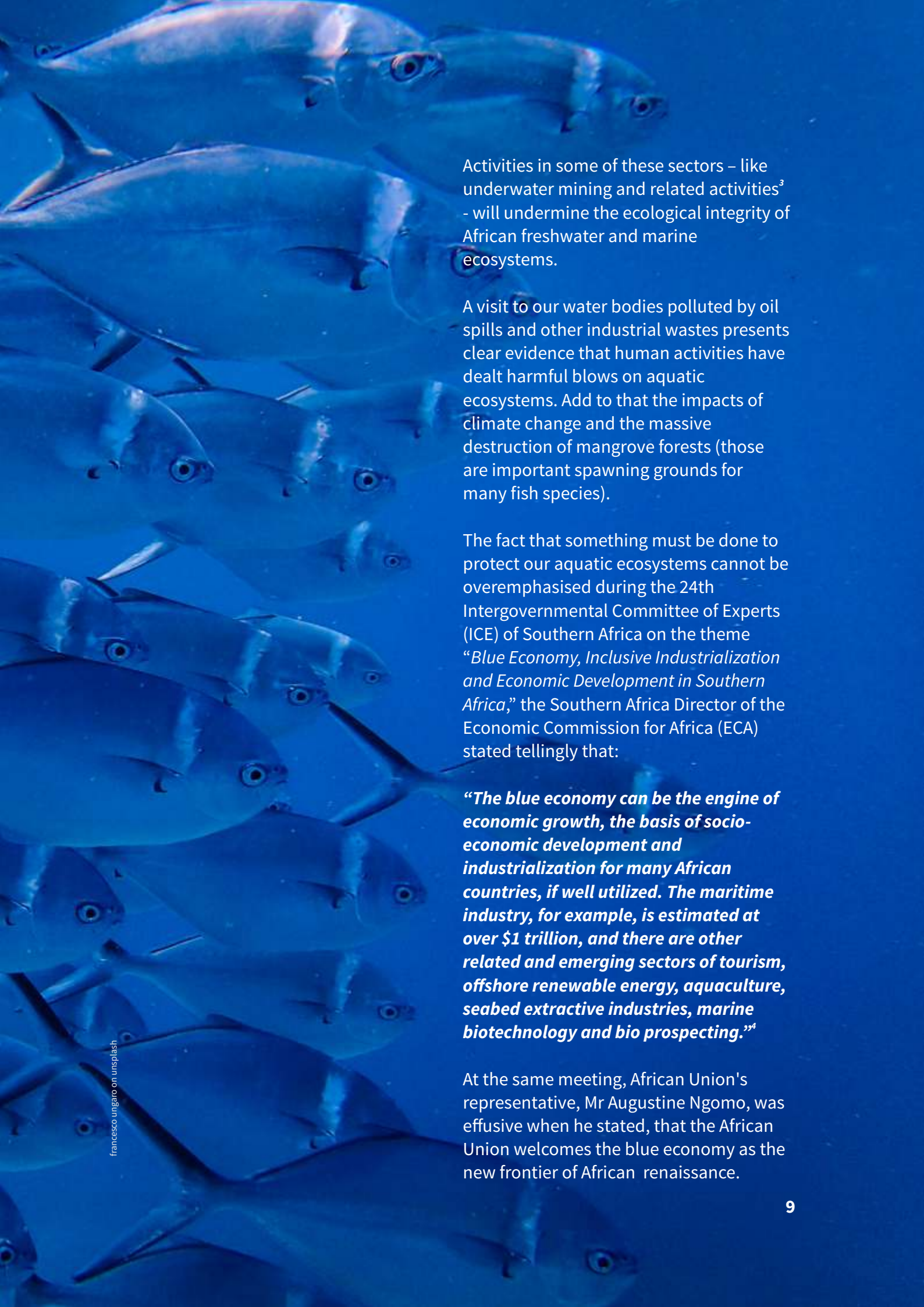
Introduction

The Blue Economy conceptualizes the sustainable use and appropriate management of aquatic and marine resources and ecosystems. These ecosystems include inland water bodies as well as the oceans. The geography of these ecosystems has implications in geopolitics, especially with regard to national boundaries and extent of ownership of resources in the marine sphere. Boundary delineation in areas that have resources of interest such as hydrocarbons, can raise tension between nations. There are examples of these between Ghana and Cote D'Ivoire as well as between Nigeria and Cameroon over the Bakassi.

Out of the fifty-four countries in Africa, thirty-eight are coastal states. The entire continent is surrounded by water and about 90 percent of imports and exports are done by sea. There is little wonder that most infrastructural developments on the continent start from the hinterland and end at seaports. With a continental shelf measuring 6.5 million square kilometres, it is obvious that the continent has a storehouse of huge quantities of living and non-living aquatic resources. The view that these resources are “underexploited” is a definitive pull to exploiters or investors towards the region.

Pioneered by the SIDS as an economic pathway for coastal states¹, international and regional agencies are upbeat about the Blue Economy. It is assumed that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and other regional and national instruments provide good regulatory frameworks under which to run the oceans economy or Blue Economy². Blue Economy aligns with all the SDGs, especially SDG14— “life below water.”

It is believed that Africa can build a Blue Economy using the experience gained from the Green Economy approach towards a low-carbon economy. According to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), The Blue Economy in the African context covers both freshwater and marine spaces, including oceans, seas, coasts, lakes, rivers, and underground water. It encompasses a range of productive sectors, including fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, transport, shipbuilding, energy, bioprospecting, and underwater mining and related activities.



Activities in some of these sectors – like underwater mining and related activities³ - will undermine the ecological integrity of African freshwater and marine ecosystems.

A visit to our water bodies polluted by oil spills and other industrial wastes presents clear evidence that human activities have dealt harmful blows on aquatic ecosystems. Add to that the impacts of climate change and the massive destruction of mangrove forests (those are important spawning grounds for many fish species).

The fact that something must be done to protect our aquatic ecosystems cannot be overemphasised during the 24th Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (ICE) of Southern Africa on the theme “*Blue Economy, Inclusive Industrialization and Economic Development in Southern Africa*,” the Southern Africa Director of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) stated tellingly that:

“The blue economy can be the engine of economic growth, the basis of socio-economic development and industrialization for many African countries, if well utilized. The maritime industry, for example, is estimated at over \$1 trillion, and there are other related and emerging sectors of tourism, offshore renewable energy, aquaculture, seabed extractive industries, marine biotechnology and bio prospecting.”⁴

At the same meeting, African Union's representative, Mr Augustine Ngomo, was effusive when he stated, that the African Union welcomes the blue economy as the new frontier of African renaissance.

He declared that the Blue Economy opens doors for Africa's industrialization and economic development. "Like the role played by charcoal and steam engines for the first industrial revolution or oil and electricity for the second, the exploitation of the ocean potentialities can lead us to our economic revolution.

The potential of oceans, lakes, and rivers is unlimited...We can be inspired by other nations and regions, learn and acquire experience from them but Africa must focus on its own path, on its own strengths and realities. Our evolution towards blue economy is an ambitious but achievable adventure...It moves us from an economy of harvests from limited resources to an economy of harvesting unlimited resources if we organize ourselves well.

With the exploitation of unlimited resources come also sustainable financial means. But to approach this revolution we must completely change our perceptive."⁵

Blue Economy Blues-The Concerns

The push for a Blue Economy is just not what it claims to be. It is rather a push for deriving of economic gains from our freshwater and marine ecosystems. It

means a fundamental shift in the way streams, rivers, lakes and the oceans are perceived.

The Blue Economy is a top-down concept that claims to enhance the living standards and livelihoods of the people. Freshwater and ocean fish provide food and nutritional security to over 200 million Africans and provide income for over 10 million. Mangrove forests on coastlines offer a strong line of defence in times of hurricanes, cyclones and storms and also serve as spawning ground for a variety of fish species.

West Africa contains approximately 14% of the world's mangrove area⁶ although a lot of this continues to suffer degradation due to industrial and other pressures.

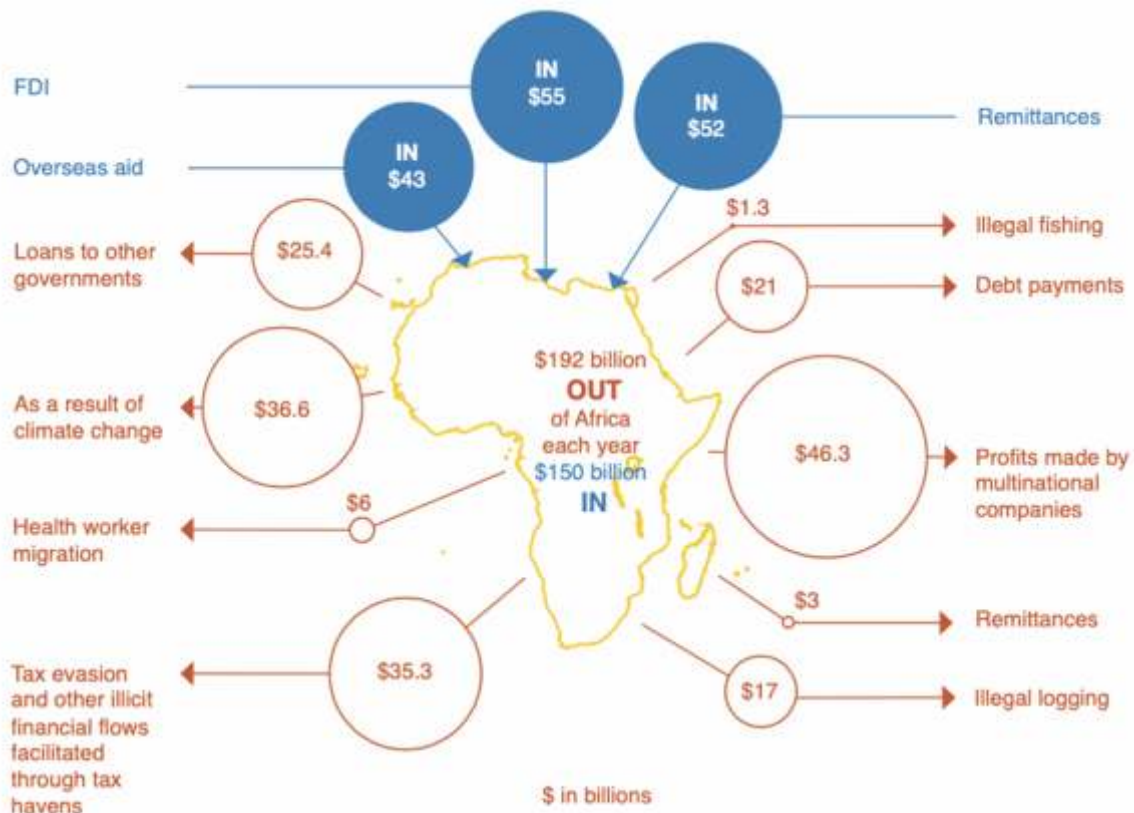
Investments in marine biotech research especially for cosmetics,

pharmaceuticals, bioenergy and "new" food is expected to reach USD 5.9 billion by 2022 and investment in this sector can raise peculiar problems for Africa with its largely lax and compromised biosafety regimes⁷.

Illegal fishing and maritime insecurity will become more pronounced with the enthronement of the Blue Economy.



The Blue Economy is a top-down concept that claims to enhance the living standards and livelihoods of the people.



Source data from: KPMG, World Bank, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) 17/4/13, Health Poverty Action, Jubilee Debt Campaign, World Development Movement, African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD), Friends of the Earth Africa, Tax Justice Network, People's Health Movement, War on Want, Community Working Group on Health Zimbabwe, Medact, Healthworkers4All Coalition, GroundWork, Friends of the Earth South Africa, Friends of the Earth Mozambique.

Figure: Financial flows into and out of Africa (2010)⁸

To understand the Blue Economy, one needs to look at the concept that inspired its creation.

That concept is that of the Green Economy.

The Green Economy is another top-down concept that jars the organic relationship of humans with their physical environment as it essentially deconstructs that relationship and builds up on a philosophy that distances humans and other species from the environment and presents that environment as a thing to be

manipulated, transformed and exploited in a way that delivers gains along subsisting unequal power alignments.

The green economy concept was conceived as a key driver for development and encompasses a series of technological, managerial, and behavioural changes, in particular to build on principles and parameters of sustainability and inclusion into production, consumption and trade while maintaining high rates of economic growth.⁹

Inherent in this construct is the desire to lock in the mindset that perpetual growth or lineal development is both desirable and inescapable.

The current paradigm of growth and of development has led to the extreme exploitation of Nature, decimation of biodiversity, destruction of habitats and extinction of species.

The continuous destruction of ecosystems has been fingered as possibly being directly connected to the emergence of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) that is ravaging the world.

It should be noted that efforts to skew attention from seeking radical alternatives to the current socio-economic system has led to the formulation of concepts like sustainable development, green economy and now the Blue Economy.

The claim is that the green economy is built on the pillars of sustainable development – social, environmental and economic balance. The balance of these three pillars is often problematic as the economic ends often trumps the social and the environmental.

Another problematic area is the hanging of sustainability on intergenerational justice, an objective that endless growth on a finite planet can obviously not deliver. Considering the contradictions in the approaches of both sustainable development and the green economy, it is not surprising that ways of exploiting water bodies “sustainably” has emerged and coming

quickly on its heels is the concept of the Green New Deal.

Green Economy Foundation

According to the United Nations Development Programme, greening the economy refers to the “process of reconfiguring businesses and infrastructure to deliver better returns on natural, human and economic capital investments, while at the same time reducing greenhouse gas emissions, extracting and using less natural resources, creating less waste and reducing social disparities.”¹⁰

The agency also stressed that although the concept of 'green economy' does not replace sustainable development, it believes that “achieving sustainability rests almost entirely on getting the economy right.”¹¹

The green economy has been criticised as an effort of the neoliberal economic system to ease the crisis of capitalism. One critique sums it up this way: 'the mistake of capitalism that led us to this current multiple crisis is that the free market had not gone far enough. And so, with the “green economy,” capitalism is going to fully incorporate nature as part of capital.

They are identifying specific functions of ecosystems and biodiversity that can be priced and then brought into a global market as “Natural Capital.”¹² Some of the gifts of nature are captured as ecosystem services, essentially privatized, priced and brought into the market.

Type of ecosystem services	Blue Economy sectors
Harvesting of living aquatic resources (seafood, plant marine organisms, and marine-biotechnological products)	Fishing (inland, coastal, and deep seas) Aquaculture Mariculture Pharmaceuticals, chemicals, cosmetics, genetic research
Extraction of nonliving resources and generation of new energy resources	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 the ocean and rivers	Maritime transport and services Port infrastructure Shipbuilding and repairs River transport Tourism and recreation
Protection	Coastal protection Marine ecosystem protection Water resource protection
Cultural and religious values	Cultural and religious practices
Knowledge and information	Biophysical, socioeconomic, and political research

Table: Ecosystem “services” and sectors¹³

The central idea is the financialization of Nature on the premise that humans will only protect something they pay for. This thinking has generated a number of economic projects including REDD¹⁴ type ones that focus on function of forests – the capturing and storage of carbon.

Broadly speaking, the green economy presents these environmental services as some of what humans should pay for: storage of carbon by soils; vegetation, and oceans; habitats for plants, animals, and micro-organisms;

filtering of fresh water; and even pollinators.

Blue Economy Red Flags

Three red flags emerge from the mindset incubating and promoting the blue economy for Africa. These are captured from the quotes above and are as follows:

- **Seabed extractive activities** – this includes extraction of oil, gas and other minerals and can lead to the degradation of aquatic and marine



photo : <https://chinadialogueocean.net/6682-future-deep-seabed-mining/>

ecosystems through seismic/sonic disturbances and general pollution from extractive activities.

- **Marine biotechnology and bioprospecting** – African nations are currently being pressured to accept genetically engineered crops and animals without much concern about the Precautionary Principle that is central in the Cartagena protocol of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Marine biotechnology may include genetic engineering of fish species leading directly to contamination of natural species and potential for biodiversity erosion.

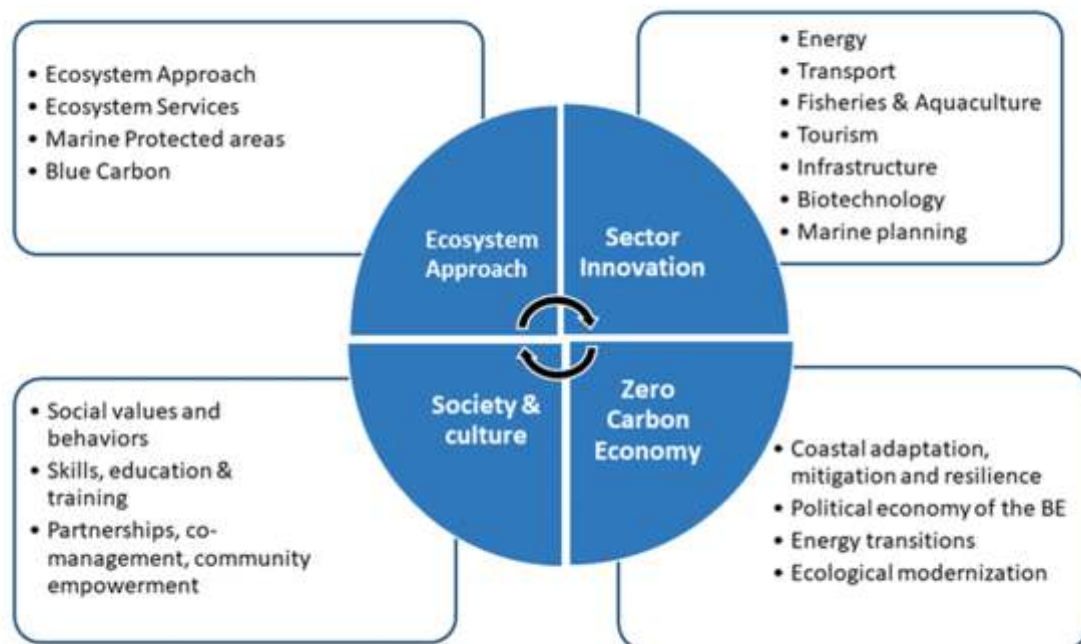
Bioprospecting would raise

complex issues of exploitation as well as biopiracy.

- **The idea that our aquatic resources are limitless** – This mindset can easily lead to over exploitation of aquatic resources including overfishing.

With the rise of carbon trading and the tendency towards technological solutions to climate change, the oceans may become a target for geoengineering.

One of the geoengineering approaches already experimented on is ocean fertilisation¹⁵ – *a process where algae bloom is triggered by dumping of iron filings, or other nutrients, in the ocean.* This could lead to increased acidification of the oceans, according to some critics of the process.



Blue Economy themes¹⁶

“Africa needs to define its own understanding of prosperity and progress, while promoting innovative thinking and practices that will enhance human and ecological well-being.”

Africa's Blue Economy Handbook states frankly, “within the context of the Blue Economy, there are limited innovations, experiences, and practices that can be used to lead this transition. In order to carve its path, Africa needs to define its own understanding of prosperity and progress, while promoting innovative thinking and practices that will enhance human and ecological well-being.”¹⁷

With this in mind, the School of Ecology (SoE) on Blue Economy Blues examines the concept of Blue Economy with the objective of showing its limitations and advancing what we can propose as a people-to-policy approach to relating with our aquatic resources in ways that promote the wellbeing of our peoples while defending the integrity of the ecosystems.

Conclusion: A Peoples' Economy

It is a settled fact that economic growth does not necessarily indicate a good measure of human wellbeing. There are cases where economies are said to be enjoying roaring growth whereas the rate of poverty in such societies rise in tandem. Building a Blue Economy for the purpose of economic growth may actually be running off the mark.

The GDP sums up the goods and services produced and traded in an economy. Building an economy under the impetus of such an index pushes policy to ignore the finite nature of physical systems as well as limits in social systems. Human Development Index (HDI) and the Gross National Happiness (GNH)¹⁸ are much closer people-centred pursuits.

Specifically, Africa can interrogate and systematize ways of pursuing wellbeing using traditional concepts such as Ubuntu¹⁹, Eti-uwem²⁰ and Harambee²¹.

Sustainability is not unlimited growth and is not possible with dependence on non-renewable energy sources or on actions working against Nature. Each people must freely determine what they believe gives meaning to their life in terms of collective and individual wellbeing.

An economy that addresses human wellbeing with an understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings in the web of life must necessarily be grown from the grassroots or bottom up. Such an economy cannot be imposed or prefabricated for all climes. Vital stakeholders in building economic frameworks on the aquatic and marine ecosystems must be gender sensitive and youth inclusive.

The purpose of this document is mostly to guide conversations on Blue Economy with particular reference to Africa. We hope that it provides a foothold for such conversations to happen productively.



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