



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa



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*“Driving job creation and economic growth through sustainable,
inclusive, science-and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda
and Agenda 2063”*

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Kampala, (hybrid)

SDG14 Background report on the sub-theme of life below water

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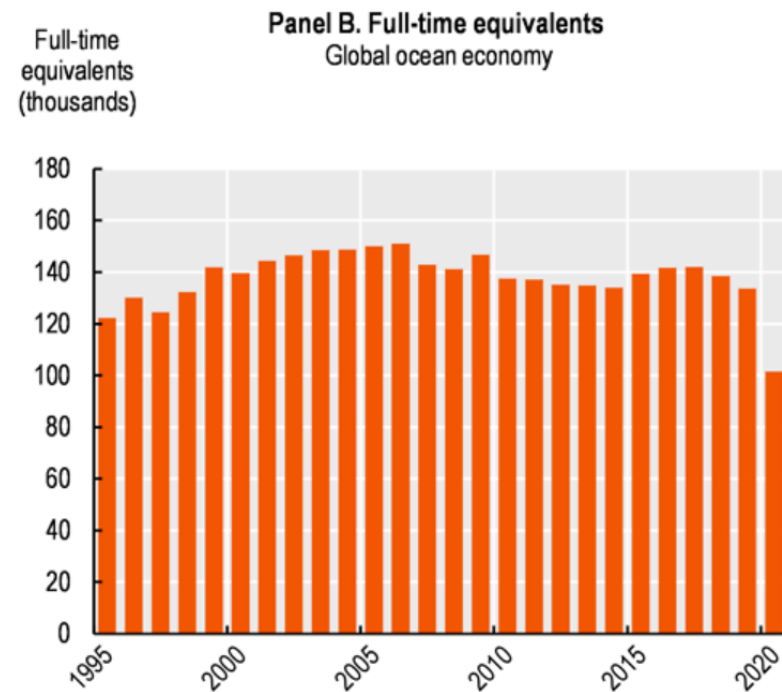
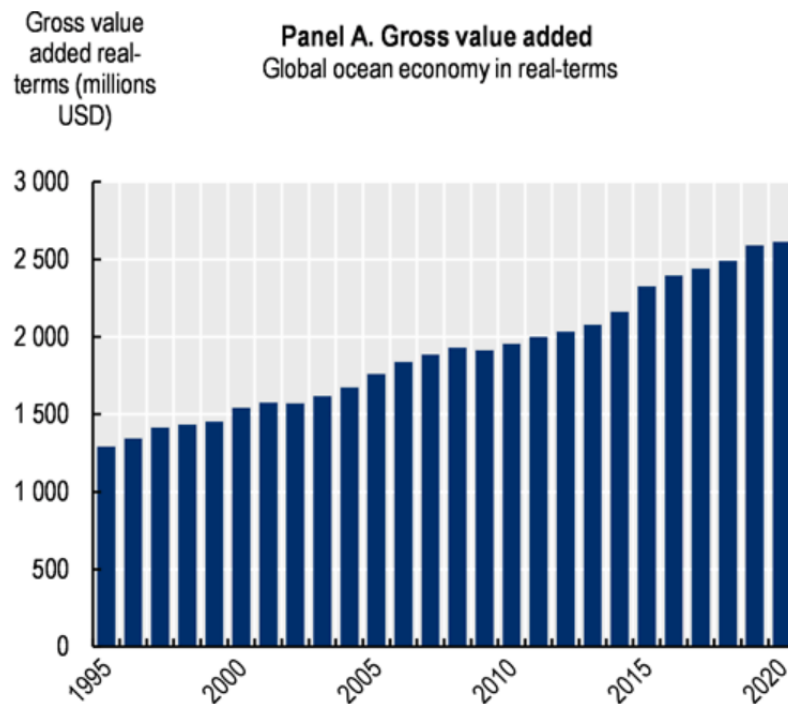
10 April 2025



Sustainable blue economy and blue livelihoods



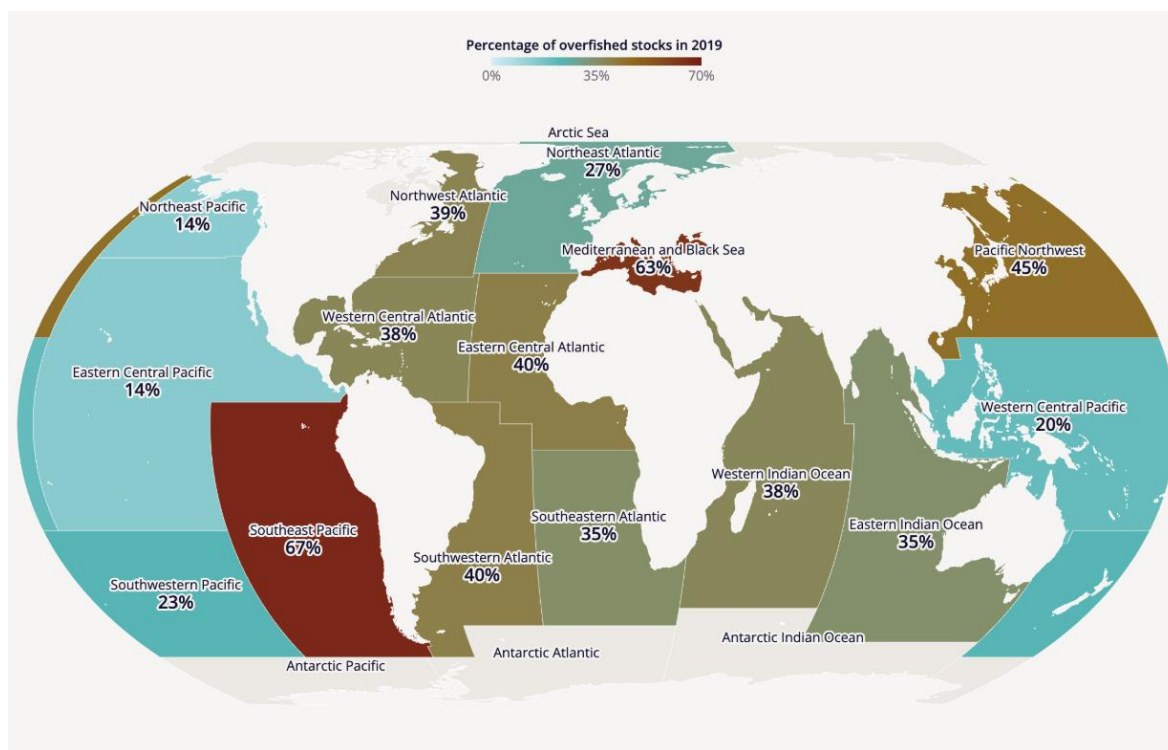
- On the global scale, the **ocean economy** contributed **3% to 4% of global gross value** added between **1995 and 2020**, doubling in size to **USD 2.6 trillion** over this period.
- The ocean economy is a **vital source of employment** representing **over 100 million full-time equivalent jobs (FTE)** in 2020.



Source: OECD (2025), The Ocean Economy to 2050, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a9096fb1-en>.

- **Africa** has the potential to **lead the growth of the Blue Economy**, covering its oceans, lakes, and rivers.
- The African Blue Economy could **grow** from \$296 billion in 2018 to **\$576 billion by 2063**, driven by sustainable strategies and population growth.
- Focus should be on **empowering women and youth**, with the Blue Economy supporting 49 million jobs in 2018, expected to rise to **56 million by 2030**.
- Special focus should also be dedicated to the needs of **small-scale fishers** who play a significant role in ensuring food security, providing employment and generating livelihoods.

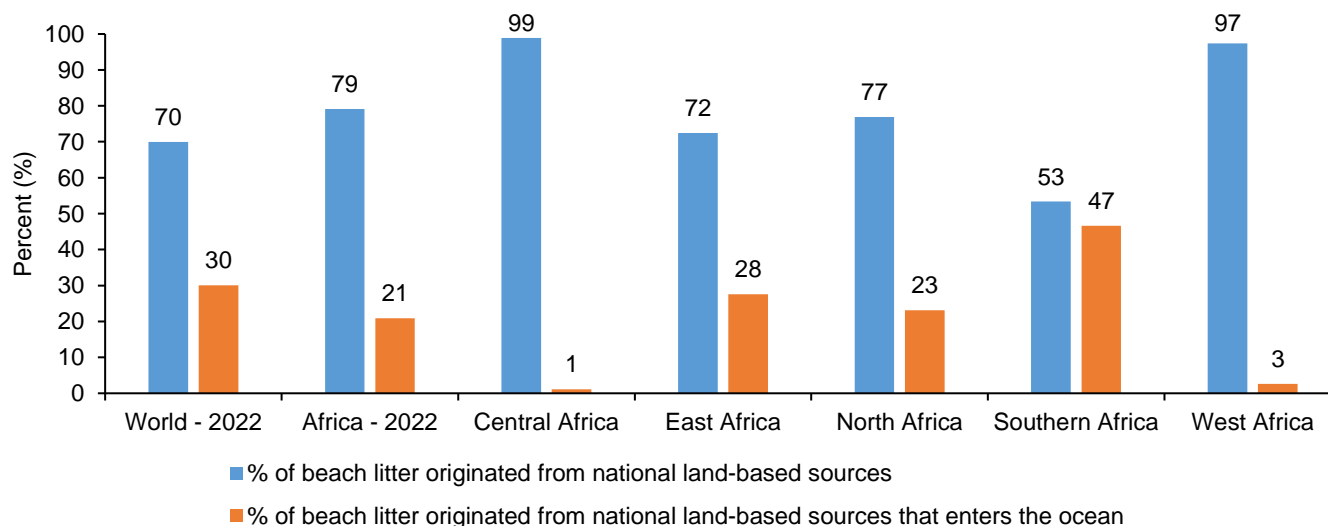
- **Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing** costs an estimated **\$10 billion annually** to African economies.
- **IUU fishing and overfishing** can lead to declining fish populations, reduced fish size, and the extinction of fish species.
- **Climate change impacts** threaten the sustainability of life below water.



Source: The World Bank, Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals 2023 based on data from FAO. 2022. *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022. Towards Blue Transformation*. Rome.

- **Africa accounts for 8% of plastic pollution**, despite producing only 5% of global plastic and despite single-use plastic ban in 34 countries.
- Over **2 million tons of litter entered the beach in 2022**, a rise from 1.7 million tons in 2017.
- 2024 Ocean Health Index Clean Water score for Africa: **52.7 (out of 100)**

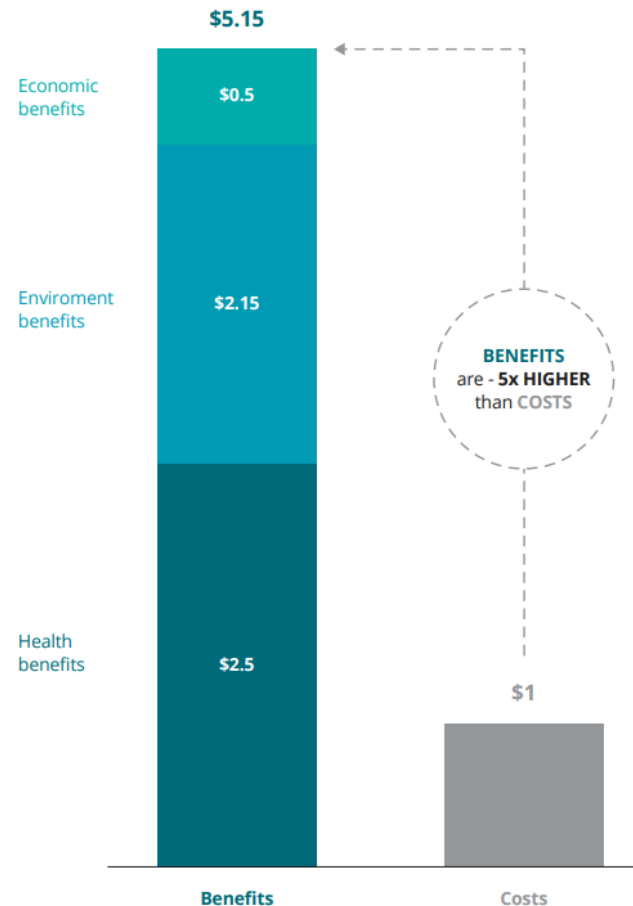
Marine waste from land-based sources by sub-region in 2021/22



Source: SDG Indicators Database, accessed on 4 December 2024.

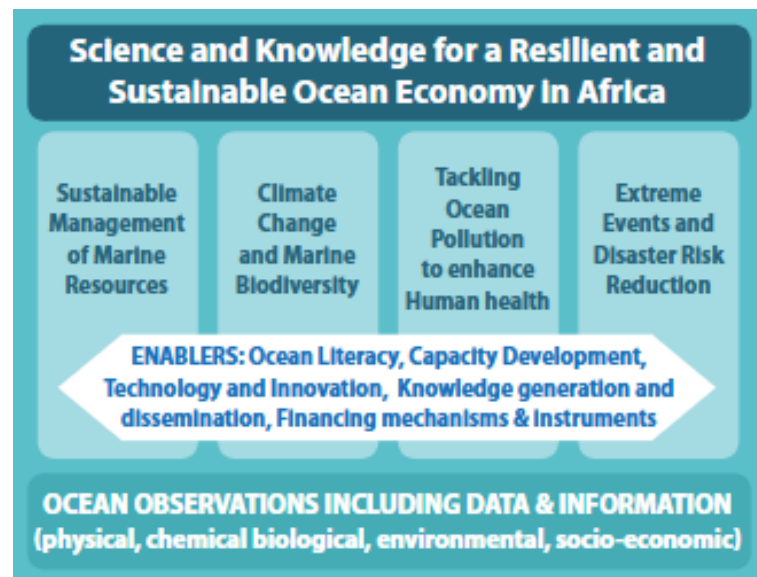
- With 38 coastal states, **Africa can shape global ocean governance**, in particular on :
 - The High Seas Treaty
 - Deep-sea mining regulations
 - The WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement
- **SDG 14 is the least financed SDG**, having received only **3.5% of total funding at the SDG midpoint**.
- African countries need to **continue exploring ocean-linked innovative financing** instruments, such as blue bonds, debt swaps, blue carbon credit schemes.

Sustainable ocean investments yield benefits at least 5x higher than costs



Source: A drop in the ocean Closing the gap in ocean climate finance Mike Barber, William Mitchell, Tassilo von Hirsch, Tarunika Vyas November 2021, adapted from Konar, M., & Ding, H. 2020

- **Ocean Science research** and innovation in Africa suffer from **limited funding owing to competing government priorities**.
- Training experts are driven to work in other regions, owing to the **lack of employment opportunities** on the continent and compensation disparities.
- **Critical thematic and geographical gaps remain** in ocean and science and knowledge.
- Application of scientific knowledge in management and policymaking is uneven.



Source: UNESCO, *Blue economy: ocean science as a catalyst for developing a blue economy in Africa*

- Protecting life below water is vital for Africa's **economic growth, food security, and climate resilience**.
- **Pollution, overfishing, and climate change** threaten ocean health, with gaps in management and funding hindering progress.
- **Collaboration, equitable governance**, and more resources are essential, focusing on **youth and women** in the blue economy.
- African states must improve **waste management, marine protection**, and involve **local communities** in conservation.
- Invest in **ocean science, data collection, and capacity building**, with more **national funding** and support for young scientists.
- Development partners should boost **financial and technical support** for ocean initiatives, avoiding duplication and maximizing efficiency.

Africa must shape global ocean governance, and advocate for sustainable ocean practices, resource equity and conservation with one voice.

What are Africa's key messages for the upcoming UN Ocean Conference 3 ?



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Ideas
to
Action