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CHRONICLES

VOL.2  
NOVEMBER 2024

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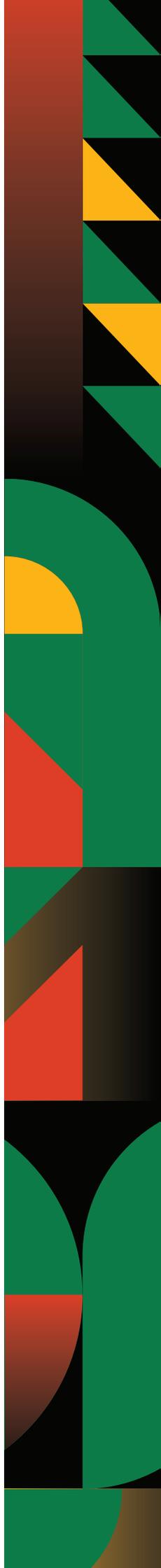
*Thabo Mbeki*  
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AFTER THE GREAT FALL  
**REVIVAL AND  
RESTORATION  
IN AFRICA**

MALANCHA CHAKRABARTY  
LUKHANYO NEER  
Editors

*Cape  
Town*  
Chronicles  
Vol. 2

AFTER THE GREAT FALL  
**REVIVAL AND  
RESTORATION  
IN AFRICA**





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Attribution: Malancha Chakrabarty and Lukhanyo Neer, Eds., *After the Great Fall: Revival and Restoration in Africa*, November 2024, Observer Research Foundation.

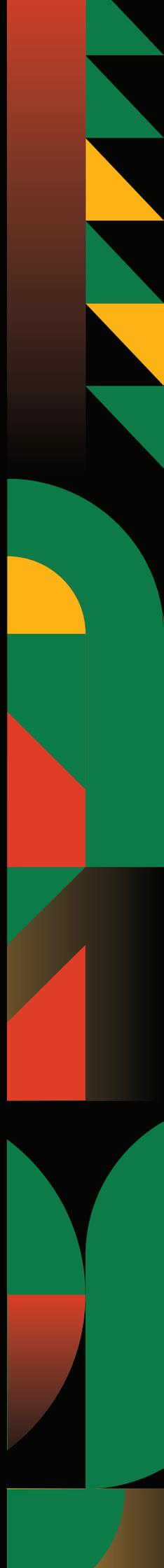
ISBN: 978-81-19656-40-0

ISBN Digital: 978-81-19656-26-4

Editorial and Production Team: Vinia Mukherjee, *Editor and Producer*; Aswathy Gopinath, Monika Ahlawat, and Preeti Lourdes John, *Assistant Editors*; Rahil Miya Shaikh, *Design and Layout*

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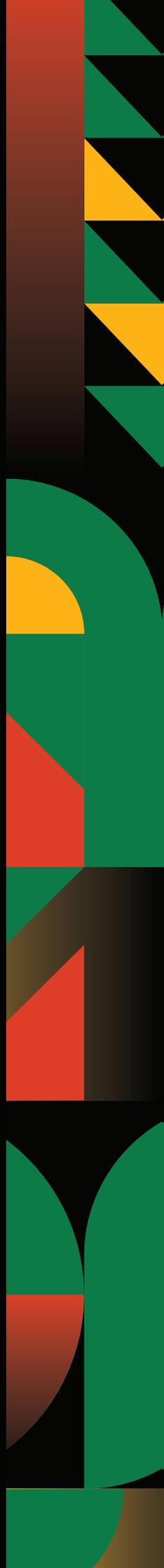
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# Leveraging the Blue Economy for Sustainable Development

*Masanori Kobayashi*

The blue economy is an important policy sector in southern Africa, although its modalities across the countries are mixed. Mozambique, for instance, is experiencing growth, while South Africa, Angola, and Namibia are showing negative trends. Fishing yields are stagnant in South Africa and Namibia, but increasing in Angola and Mozambique. Namibia leads in seafood exports, while South



Africa and Mozambique are net importers. South Africa has protections in place for over 15 percent of its waters, while others are lagging.<sup>1</sup> Tourism thrives in three nations, except in Angola. Fossil fuels dominate energy production, with renewable energy still in its development stages. This article suggests that despite some progress in the blue economy in southern African countries, there is a need for more research and human resources development.

Oceans and ocean-based economic activities are important for sustainable development and poverty eradication. The 'Blue Economy' includes fisheries and aquaculture, shipping, tourism, renewable energy, mineral resources and fossil fuels, blue carbon (mangroves, seagrass beds, and tidal flats, among others), and marine biodiversity. Balancing economic growth, social integration, and livelihoods with the environmental sustainability of oceans and coasts is central to the blue economy. Governments, international organisations, research institutions, and NGOs are actively promoting the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and marine resources to achieve this goal.<sup>2</sup>

The Sustainable Blue Economy Conference in Kenya in 2018 emphasised strengthening efforts in shipping, tourism, energy, fisheries, climate change, and waste management.<sup>3</sup> The Sustainable Blue Economy Investment Forum, co-hosted by the governments of Portugal and Kenya before the Second United Nations Ocean Conference in June 2022, discussed ocean-related issues,<sup>4</sup> focusing on legislation and capacity building in ocean-related sectors such as ocean conservation, pollution prevention, decarbonising fisheries, aquaculture, shipping, ocean-based renewable energy, and tourism. Delegates also highlighted the need to combat illegal and unregulated/unreported (IUU) fishing.<sup>5</sup> Seychelles and certain other countries have led marine conservation efforts, introducing blue bonds<sup>a</sup> in 2015 and benefiting from a World Bank debt guarantee in 2020 and a low-interest loan from the Global Environment Facility.<sup>6</sup>

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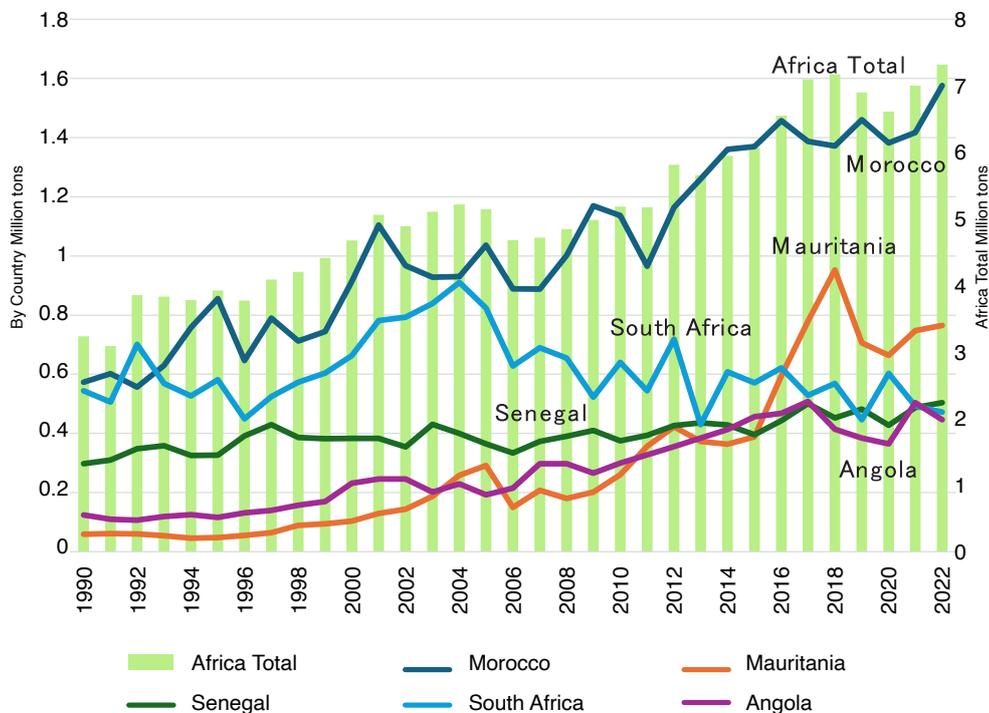
<sup>a</sup> A 'blue bond' is a debt instrument that national governments, development banks, and corporations issue to raise financing for marine and ocean-based projects that have long-term sustainability objectives and benefits. See: <https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/restore-our-ocean-and-waters/blue-bond>

Efforts to promote the blue economy in African countries have gained momentum alongside economic growth in recent years, helped in part by policy coordination and financial cooperation within the African Union (AU), the African Development Bank, and individual countries. At present, 54 African countries have a working blue economy,<sup>7</sup> with 38 coastal and island states, though their geographic and socioeconomic conditions vary.<sup>8</sup> In addition to the pan-African regional institutions, five sub-regional institutions promote policy coordination and collaboration. This article focuses on South Africa, Namibia, and Mozambique, drawing on research from June and July 2023, to explore the progress, challenges, and future prospects of sustainable blue economies in Southern Africa.

### Marine Conservation in Southern Africa

Over the past 10 years, Africa's population has surged by about 320 million, or a 28.1-percent growth rate,<sup>9</sup> resulting in greater demand for protein-based food sources. This, in turn, has caused overfishing in Africa's littorals, provoking calls for marine conservation and the establishment of maritime protected zones (MPAs). The status of MPAs within Africa's Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) varies widely. Seychelles leads with 32.8 percent of its waters designated as MPAs, followed by Gabon (28.8 percent), Sudan (15.96 percent), and South Africa (15.5 percent).<sup>10</sup> Mozambique has only 2.1 percent of its waters protected as MPAs. Even in designated MPAs, protection measures remain limited, raising concerns.

**Figure 1: Top Five Marine Fish Producers and Total Africa (1990-2022)**



Sources: FAO, FishStatJ Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics<sup>11</sup>

### Tourism in Africa

The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted maritime tourism in Southern Africa, particularly cruise tourism, coastal travel, and related businesses. South Africa experienced a significant decline in tourist numbers due to a ban on cruise ship docking and reduced port operations, leading to widespread cancellations that affected coastal communities dependent on tourism for their livelihoods. The initial lockdown measures also closed non-essential port services, further stifling the industry. Recovery has been slow due to ongoing safety concerns, regulatory hurdles, and inconsistent government support. Despite eased restrictions after the pandemic, the industry struggles to return to pre-2020 levels, with low visitor confidence and international travel.

## **Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing (IUU) in Africa**

Despite intensive fishing activity along Africa's western and eastern coastlines, maritime law enforcement agencies struggle to track the movement of fishing vessels. This has led to growth in IUU fishing in the territorial waters and EEZs of African countries. The situation is exacerbated by an absence of collaboration with regional fishery management organisations and other governing bodies.

In 2016, the Port State Measures agreement (PSMA) entered into force, aiming to combat illegal fishing by denying port access to vessels involved in such activities through stringent inspections and enforcement measures. While a number of Southern African states like South Africa, Mozambique, Namibia, and Angola have joined the PSMA, many others have not, limiting regional efforts against IUU fishing. Many African states lack the resources, technical capacity, and political will to sign on to the PSMA and do not use satellite imagery and technologies like Automatic Identification System (AIS) to monitor fishing activities.

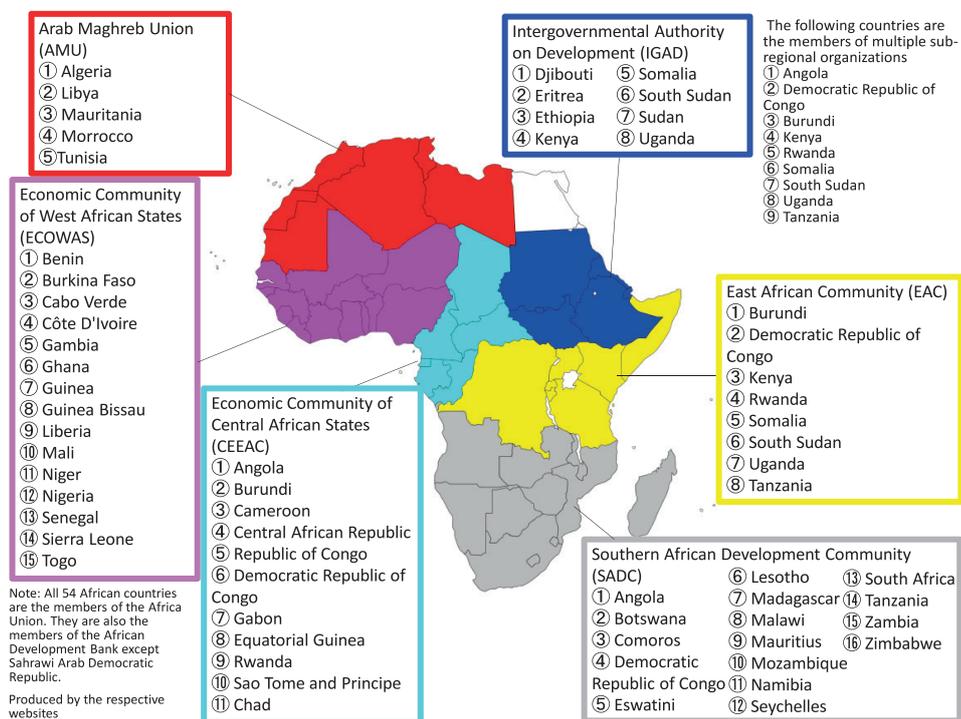
## **Institutional Framework for African Regional and Sub-Regional Cooperation**

Established in 2002, the Africa Union (AU) coordinates regional policy across 55-member states divided into five sub-regions: Central, East, North, South, and West Africa. The African Development Bank collaborates with the AU, supporting sustainable development through projects in food production, energy, and livelihood improvement. The AU's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), launched in 2001 and reorganised in 2018 as the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), focuses on capacity building and sustainable progress.

Other key organisations, such as the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), support sustainable development through collaborative initiatives in specific areas. At the sub-regional level, organisations such as the Arab

Maghreb Union (AMU), Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) foster cooperation within their respective regions, with some countries participating in multiple sub-regional bodies.

**Figure 2: Sub-Regional Organisations and Their Member States in Africa**



Source: Author's own, based on information provided by respective sub-regional organisations and using Mapchart, <https://www.mapchart.net/world.html>

## Blue Economy in Southern Africa

Compared to other littoral states in the continent, South Africa has a large economy and serves as a shipping hub in the southern region. Mozambique and Namibia also play important roles in maritime security, fishery resource management in the Indian Ocean, and promoting renewable energy. In April and May 2023, during visits of then Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, and Mozambique, he highlighted Mozambique as an important port hub for strengthening connectivity in the free and open Indo-Pacific and fostering growth in the country and the surrounding region.<sup>12</sup> Namibia, located on the Atlantic side of southern Africa, has low sea temperatures due to the Benguela Current moving northward from the south, but the area where it meets the Angola Current moving southward is a rich fishing ground.

In 2018, the Norwegian government launched the 'High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy' that includes Kenya, Ghana, and Namibia. Since then, the panel has focused, among others, on developing infrastructure as a supply base for alternative fuels, generating hydrogen and ammonia from solar and wind power.<sup>13</sup> The following sections discuss the movements and challenges for promoting the blue economy in South Africa, Mozambique, and Namibia.

In 2019, to promote the blue economy, the Mozambican government established the Blue Economy Development Fund, known as ProAzul. ProAzul collaborates with public, private, and civil society organisations to promote sustainable fisheries, fishing villages, and marine life conservation. Technical support is provided by the World Bank, the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and other NGOs such as the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

In Angola, the European Union (EU), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and other organisations are conducting

policy dialogues and trainings to diversify the domestic economy heavily reliant on oil production and exports for earning foreign currency. Efforts are focused on raising the income levels for the poor through sustainable fishing and related activities. The Angolan government and the European Commission have established a cooperative framework, identifying blue economy and maritime security as key issues for project implementation, affirming their commitment to advancing blue economy investments and sustainable fisheries.<sup>14</sup>

While South Africa has developed a policy document positioning the blue economy as a key policy domain,<sup>b,15</sup> Namibia has clarified the system of inter-ministerial cooperation within the government to realise the policy goals outlined in the policy document. Mozambique, meanwhile, is working to establish an institutional framework to finance and promote joint projects related to fisheries, fishing villages, and marine biodiversity. Angola is collaborating with the EU to transition from a fossil fuel-centred economy to a blue economy, seeking to formulate policies for a funding mechanism in the marine sector.

### Fisheries in Southern African Countries

The fisheries sector in Southern Africa faces both progress and challenges. In South Africa, wild-capture fisheries are under pressure from overfishing and illegal fishing, leading to a decline in species like abalone, West Coast rock lobster, and various line fish species. Organised crime-driven illegal harvesting further threatens long-term sustainability. Sea surface fisheries have been impacted differently across the region—Namibia and South Africa have seen significant decline in fish catches over the past decade, with rising seafood imports, while Angola and Mozambique have increased both their fishing yields and seafood exports.

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<sup>b</sup> Growing the Oceans Economy and Tourism was declared a pillar of the national economic policy by then President Jacob Zuma in his address delivered in 2015.

## Marine Conservation in Southern Africa

South Africa leads Southern Africa in MPAs, with 15.5 percent of its water protected, followed by Mozambique (2.15 percent), Namibia (1.71 percent), and Angola (0.01 percent).<sup>16</sup> Despite these protections, overfishing and poaching persist across the region. For example, the Robben Island, a 5 km<sup>2</sup> MPA near Cape Town, faces challenges due to overfishing.<sup>17</sup> This area is rich in biodiversity—home to kelp, abalone, lobster, penguins, and seabirds—and is particularly vulnerable. While abalone fishing is permitted in designated coastal management zones, illegal fishing of other species hampers conservation efforts.

Another problem area is the Koh Loban MPA, where marine life and biodiversity are declining due to overfishing, illegal fishing, and poaching. Abalone, highly valued for its market price, is especially targeted, threatening local marine ecosystems. The pressures on these protected areas highlight the need for more effective management and enforcement measures to curb illegal activities and ensure sustainable use of marine resources.

## Renewable Energy in Southern Africa

Renewable energy promotion in Southern Africa is driven by the SADC Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Center. South Africa's energy mix is dominated by coal (73 percent), with smaller contributions from gas, wind, solar, and nuclear.<sup>18</sup> Namibia relies on hydropower (52.6 percent) and solar (25.8 percent) but imports 60 percent of its electricity. Namibia aims to source 70 percent of its electricity from renewables by 2030, focusing on producing ammonia and hydrogen for export.

Mozambique aims to increase renewable energy to 44 percent by 2030, focusing on hydropower, solar, and wind. Angola, whose hydropower accounts for 58.7 percent of its electricity basket, is expanding solar and wind facilities but has yet to explore marine-based renewables. Meanwhile, Namibia is positioning itself as a global hub for hydrogen and ammonia production, developing the necessary port and shipping infrastructure.

Key South African ports like Durban and Port Elizabeth are evolving to support renewable energy. With support from the World Bank, Saldanha Port aims to produce 120,000 tons of hydrogen fuel by 2035.<sup>19</sup> Namibia is also developing ports to support hydrogen and ammonia production especially at Lüderitz port, where a US\$9.4-billion investment will generate 300,000 tons of hydrogen and 700,000 tons of ammonia annually by 2027.<sup>20</sup> A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on green hydrogen was signed with the Japanese government in 2023 and other environmental initiatives is expected to enhance resource extraction efforts in the region.<sup>21</sup>

### Research and Human Resource Development in the Maritime Sector in Southern Africa

The South African International Maritime Institute (SAIMI), established at Nelson Mandela University in 2014, leads research and human resource development to support the maritime economy, including the Phakisa project.<sup>c</sup> SAIMI conducts marine research across the Western Indian Ocean and hosts students from South Africa and other neighboring countries. Universities, like the University of Cape Town, also contribute to marine research and seek international partnerships.

The University of Namibia has a Marine and Coastal Resources Research Center at its Sam Nujoma Campus near Henties Bay, focusing on aquaculture and desalination research. The Namibia University of Science and Technology is exploring hydrogen and ammonia fuel generation, while the International University of Management trains entrepreneurs to boost the private sector's role in the blue economy. These institutions aim to enhance research and leadership development for maritime sector growth.

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<sup>c</sup> Operation Phakisa is a delivery programme launched in July 2014 to help implement the National Development Plan, with the aim of boosting economic growth and creating jobs. See: <https://www.operationphakisa.gov.za/Pages/Home.aspx>.

In Mozambique, the Institute of Oceanography in Maputo and the Faculty of Oceanography and Coastal Studies at Eduardo Mondlane University in Quelimane focus on ocean research and education, though their facilities lag behind those of South Africa and Namibia. Angola's University of Namibe and the Angolan Academy of Fisheries and Marine Sciences conduct marine research and promote international collaboration. While South Africa and Namibia lead in research capacity, Mozambique's institutions require facility upgrades to remain competitive.

### **Challenges and Prospects for Promoting the Blue Economy in Southern Africa**

The four Southern African countries prioritise the blue economy, but differences exist in policy positioning, implementation systems, funding, and challenges in assessing progress. Effective evaluation of policy implementation requires research and analysis to update policies and guide future adjustments based on the results.

Experts attribute the decline in ocean health in South Africa to rising seawater temperatures and upwelling in the western Indian Ocean though some areas are experiencing temperature declines. This points to the need for research to identify the underlying factors and develop effective solutions. Additionally, research can also help explain how disasters, geopolitical changes, and the state of the economy, including rising fuel costs, have an adverse impact on blue economy.

For fisheries, it is essential to analyse the factors contributing to the decline in catches and the economic effects of increased catches. Among the four southern African countries, only Mozambique has increased its catches in the last five years. Examining tourism's role in the blue economy is also crucial.

We must monitor the progress of renewable energy, particularly the application of hydrogen and ammonia in shipping and their export, along with trends in Southern African countries and others in the region. A life-cycle assessment of renewable energy is necessary, encompassing

production and consumption. This assessment should evaluate how renewable energies contribute to global sustainability and promote economic growth while improving livelihoods in the affected countries.

In terms of research, education, and human resources/leadership development, a broader perspective on Southern Africa is needed, programs targeting countries within the SADC sub-region. University officials from South African and Namibian universities recommend incorporating an interdisciplinary curriculum and providing start-up support. They also suggest collaborating with research institutions in interdisciplinary research and cross-disciplinary industry-government-academia collaboration.

## Conclusion

The conservation and sustainable use of marine resources is an important policy issue in Africa, especially as resource use is expected to grow further in the coming years in parallel to population increase and economic development. Regional governments need a comprehensive approach to address illegal fishing. It is necessary to enhance monitoring system in protected areas while also addressing social factors such as poverty, alternative income generation, schooling, and support for sustainable fisheries initiatives. Further, policy analysis and research should adapt to changing conditions, and governments must build institutions and strengthen social capacity to promote a sustainable blue economy.

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**Masanori Kobayashi** is Program Director of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation based in Tokyo, working on sustainable blue economies.

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