BOOK REVIEW

3rd High Level Conference of The Blue Belt Initiative

Building a foundation to boost Blue Food and Jobs under a Blue Economy Development Approach

BLUE BELT INITIATIVE

Credits and Technical Mentions

Publisher: Institut National de Recherche Halieutique (INRH)
2, Rue de Tiznit, Casablanca, Morocco
www.inrh.ma

Editorial Committee: Faraj A., Brehmer P., Diop H., Moustaphid H., Belfaqih R.

Edition Date: Edited in December 2024 by INRH with the support of IRD
Graphic Design & Layout: Agence Com2market
Photo Credits: All photographs and illustrations © INRH / Blue Belt Initiative (BBI) archives

Citation. You can use the following format for citing this document.
Faraj A., Brehmer P., Diop H., Moustaphid H., Belfaqih R., Hajji N. 2025. 3rd High level Conference of the Blue Belt Initiative: Building a foundation to boost Blue Food and Jobs under a Blue Economy Development Approach. Book review, INRH, Casablanca. 56p.

SUMMARY

KEY DATES

2024

- Third High-Level Conference of the Blue Belt Initiative (BBI). in Tangier, bringing together thirty-one (31) member states, including representatives from 26 African countries.
- The Benin-Liberia fisheries surveys, conducted under the Memorandum of Understanding between Morocco, Benin, and Liberia, were initiated by the BBI Blue Belt cooperation platform and funded by the Ministerial Conference on Fisheries Cooperation among African States bordering the Atlantic Ocean (ATLAFCO).

2023

- The Second High-Level Conference of the Blue Belt Initiative (BBI) was held in Agadir, bringing together 22 member states and representatives from 16 African countries to strengthen international cooperation on sustainable fisheries and marine resource management.

2022

- UN Conference on the Oceans in Lisbon, UN Secretary-General António Guterres sounded the alarm on the "Ocean Emergency," highlighting the critical threats facing marine ecosystems.

2021

- The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) was launched with the vision of "the science we need for the ocean we want," aiming to advance global marine research, innovation, and collaboration for a healthier and more sustainable ocean.

2019

- The First High-Level Conference of the Blue Belt Initiative (BBI) took place in Agadir, bringing together over 22 countries with the support of international organizations to advance sustainable fisheries and marine resource management.
- The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Summit called for a Decade of Action to accelerate global efforts in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

2018

- The High-Level Panel on the Ocean Economy and Fishing Industry emphasized the strategic importance of the sector for Africa, highlighting the Blue Belt Initiative as a South-South integrated regional cooperation and development tool for advancing sustainable fisheries and marine resource management.
- CRANS Montana Forum, Dakhla.

2017

At the Ocean Conference on SDG14 held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, USA, the Blue Belt Initiative (BBI) organized a side event titled "Africa in Action for Fisheries and Aquaculture to Face Climate Change: Solutions and Dialogue for the Ocean Economy," showcasing Africa's commitment to sustainable fisheries and climate resilience. "

2016

- The implementation of the Paris Agreement stands as a pivotal milestone in the Ocean-Climate Dialogue, offering a vital pathway toward enhancing our planet's resilience to climate challenges.
- The first African Summit marked a historic declaration as African Heads of State committed to uniting their efforts in delivering a coordinated global response to climate change.
- At COP22 in Marrakech, The Kingdom of Morocco launched the Blue Belt Initiative, a groundbreaking program integrated into the International Climate Action Agenda .

ABOUT THE BLUE BELT INITIATIVE

Under the Blue Belt Initiative (BBI), the fisheries and aquaculture sectors are being empowered as key drivers of economic growth through strategic and collaborative efforts that enhance resilience to climate change. The BBI operates as a dynamic network of partners, including regional and international organizations, decision-makers, project leaders, professionals, and scientists. By providing a platform that seamlessly integrates knowledge, political action, wealth creation, and ocean resilience, the BBI strengthens national policies. Serving as a catalyst for innovation, the platform supports project developers by facilitating access to funding, tracking progress, and fostering the exchange of expertise, experiences, and innovative solutions. This collaborative approach ultimately promotes sustainable ocean-based economic development for a brighter future.

With 38 member states, including 30 African countries and the European Union, the BBI focuses primarily on coastal zones and exclusive economic zones. These areas concentrate the majority of fishing and aquaculture activities and are responsible for over 85% of the world's fisheries catches. As the most impacted and sensitive regions to direct anthropogenic activities and climate effects, they require urgent attention. The BBI prioritizes these zones to address the immediate challenges they face and ensure their long-term sustainability.

The BBI has developed a comprehensive set of priority solutions within the framework of its roadmap, "Climate Smart Solutions for Fisheries and Aquaculture," which targets both adaptation and mitigation of climate change. Key solutions include supporting the emergence of coastal observation systems and their integration into international networks, empowering the fisheries industry to achieve climate and economic resilience, and promoting sustainable aquaculture to reduce the effects of climate change. These solutions aim to create a sustainable and resilient future for fisheries and aquaculture, ensuring they continue to thrive in the face of global environmental challenges.

African countries : Angola, Benin,Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Togo

International partners :
Europe : Spain, France, Norway, Portugal,Russia (Fed. Russia)
Asia : Saudi Arabia,Oman (Sultanate of Oman)
America : El Salvador

HIGHLIGHT : SCIENTIFIC FISHERIES AND ECOSYSTEM SURVEYS IN BENIN AND LIBERIA

Advancing Research and Capacity Building through South-South Cooperation

As part of the Blue Belt Initiative's strategic framework, strengthening ocean observation systems and advancing ocean research are key priorities. To address this, the initiative identified the need for scientific surveys to assess fisheries stocks and the health of marine ecosystems in poorly monitored regions of Africa—areas that have been largely overlooked. This urgent action was recognized as a crucial step toward enhancing sustainable ocean management across the continent.

In 2024, a significant milestone in South-South scientific cooperation was achieved between the Kingdom of Morocco, the Republic of Benin, and the Republic of Liberia. This partnership, launched under the Blue Belt collaborative platform and financed by ATLAFCO, represented a bold step forward in regional scientific collaboration. Building on the agreements made during the Second High-Level Conference of the Blue Belt Initiative in 2023, memoranda of understanding were signed between Morocco, Liberia, and Benin. These agreements facilitated the mobilization of the oceanographic fisheries research vessel Al Hassan Al Marrakchi and scientific teams from Morocco's National Fisheries Research Institute (INRH) to conduct joint ecosystem surveys and assess fisheries stocks in the waters under the national jurisdiction of both Benin and Liberia. ATLAFCO played a pivotal role by providing the essential financial support for this groundbreaking initiative, further strengthening regional cooperation in marine research and sustainable fisheries management.

Building on these agreements, the Al Hassan Al Marrakchi embarked on a nearly two-month scientific expedition from January 15, to March 5, 2024, with strong mobilization from all stakeholders. During the expedition, comprehensive oceanographic survey campaigns were conducted, focusing on evaluating fisheries stocks and the health of marine ecosystems in the maritime zones of Benin and Liberia.

The Al Hassan Al Marrakchi is an advanced oceanographic platform designed to support in-depth research and observation. Equipped with multifunctional laboratories specializing in acoustics, oceanography, hydrography, and marine biology, the vessel is capable of studying all components of the marine ecosystem. Although primarily used in national waters, it was also designed to conduct regional scientific surveys, facilitating South-South cooperation under the Blue Belt Initia-tive, with support from ATLAFCO.

Beyond the technical research, the initiative placed a strong emphasis on capacity building. Throughout the expedition, joint workshops and training sessions were held, providing a platform for scientists and technicians from Morocco, Benin, and Liberia to exchange knowledge and skills in oceanographic survey techniques, data analysis, and laboratory operations. These activities not only enhanced technical expertise but also fostered a collaborative spirit, further solidifying the foundation of the Blue Belt Initiative and promoting mutual learning among the partner countries.


الحسن المراكشي
AL HASSAN AL-MARRAKCHI


الحسن المراكشي
AL HASSAN AL-MARRAKCHI

Presentation of Ecosystemic Survey Results from the Liberian and Beninese EEZs 3rd Blue Belt Initiative High-Level Conference at the Ministerial Segment

Following the analysis of samples collected aboard the Al Hassan Al Marrakchi at the INRH laboratories in Morocco, comprehensive reports were compiled by the scientific teams for both Benin and Liberia. These reports cover all aspects of the survey, from oceanographic data to genetic analysis.

During the Ministerial Segment of the 3rd Blue Belt Initiative High-Level Conference, the final reports, along with photo albums showcasing the fish species encountered, were officially presented to officials from Liberia and Benin. His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Sadiki, Her Excellency Mrs. Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko, and His Excellency Omar Hilale handed over these documents.

BLUE FOOD & JOBS: A FERTILE SPRINGBOARD FOR EMPLOYABILITY AND FOOD SECURITY

Unlocking the potential of blue food for sustainable growth

Developing blue food in Africa offers a promising potential to address both food security challenges and environmental sustainability. This approach, centered on the responsible use of marine resources, aligns with broader efforts to transform traditional food systems. By sustainably harnessing the ocean's wealth, African communities can diversify their protein sources while reducing reliance on imported seafood products.

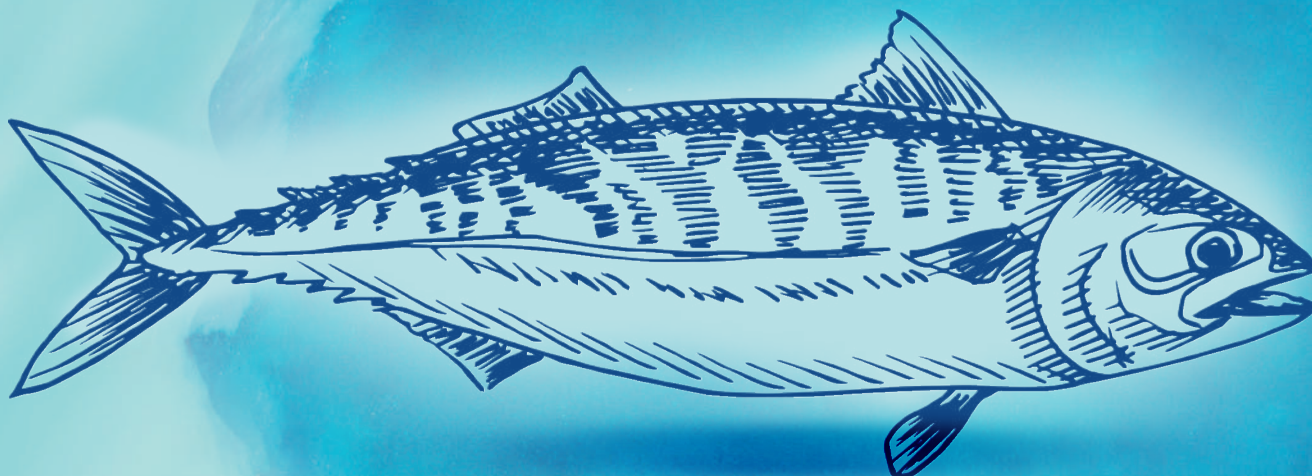
The potential of blue food is vast and multifaceted. Enhanced valorization of marine products through modern processing techniques and improved resource management paves the way for local economic growth that remains respectful of environmental limits. Sustainable aquaculture and responsible fishing practices serve as critical levers to boost production and meet rising demand, all while preserving delicate marine ecosystems. Collaborative initiatives among public and private stakeholders facilitate the sharing of expertise and the development of technologies tailored to African coastal realities. This model of a blue economy not only promotes job creation but also strengthens value chains, ensuring a more integrated and resilient economic framework along the continent's shores.

The inherent diversity of blue food highlights the extensive range of available marine products—from various species of fish, crustaceans, and mollusks to seaweeds and other marine bioproducts. Optimizing the entire value chain—from sustainable capture or aquaculture, through processing and distribution, to marketing—is essential for enhancing product quality and competitiveness. This comprehensive approach not only stimulates innovation but also fosters synergies among the many actors involved in the marine sector.

In summary, the expansion of blue food represents a significant opportunity for Africa to reimagine its food systems sustainably. By committing to responsible management of marine resources and fostering multisectoral partnerships, African member states can effectively meet the growing nutritional needs of their populations while safeguarding their marine environments. This shift toward an inclusive blue economy holds immense promise for sustainable and resilient growth, benefiting local communities and the broader marine ecosystem alike. The promise of blue food is substantial, inviting concerted efforts to unlock its full potential across the continent.

WHY AQUATIC FOODS?

RICH SOURCE OF PROTEIN WITH MULTIPLE NUTRIENTS



MINERALS

Fe IRON

Essential for brain development and cognitive function in children and adolescents, and increases maternal survival rates.

I IODINE

Essential for brain development in fetus and young children and helps prevent stillbirth.

Zn ZINC

Crucial for childhood survival, reduces stunting in children and fights diarrhea.

Ca CALCIUM

Helps prevent preeclampsia and preterm delivery and is essential for strong bones and teeth.

VITAMINS

A VITAMIN A

Essential for childhood survival, prevents blindness, helps fight infections and promotes healthy growth.

D VITAMIN D

Essential for the development of strong, healthy bones, teeth and muscles in children and helps prevent preeclampsia, preterm delivery and low birth weight.

B12 VITAMIN B12

Essential for healthy pregnancy, helps prevent brain and spinal cord birth defects and supports healthy maintenance of nervous systems and brain in children.

OMEGA 3 ESSENTIAL FATTY ACIDS

Helps prevent preeclampsia, preterm delivery, low birth weight and supports cognitive development in the first 1000 days and throughout adolescence.

BLUE FOOD & JOBS: A FERTILE SPRINGBOARD FOR EMPLOYABILITY AND FOOD SECURITY

Harnessing the limitless Potential of Blue Jobs

Blue jobs in Africa are emerging as a catalyst for inclusive growth and sustainable development, weaving together economic opportunity, social empowerment, and environmental stewardship. For instance, the aquaculture sector in Africa has surged by 455% since 2000—the highest growth rate in the world—demonstrating a clear, growing interest in harnessing marine resources for food production. This rapid expansion not only addresses the continent's rising demand for aquatic foods but also underscores the need for future developments to prioritize sustainability and directly benefit communities in need.

The ripple effects of blue jobs extend well beyond aquaculture. The Blue Economy's substantial revenues into coastal economies, generating a wide range of employment opportunities in sectors such as marine resource management, seafood processing, and eco-tourism. By optimizing these opportunities, the Blue Economy model can deliver inclusive growth. When governments, businesses, and local communities collaborate, they can ensure that the socioeconomic benefits of sustainable marine development are shared equitably, boosting food security and reducing poverty.

Industrializing the fisheries and aquaculture sectors further illustrates the potential of blue jobs. In 2011, these sectors provided employment for over 12 million people, notably, while most fishing jobs are held by men, women make up 59% of the workforce in seafood processing, highlighting the importance of gender inclusivity. In some regions, each fisherman's job creates more than one additional onshore opportunity, emphasizing the multiplier effects that can spur further job creation along the value chain.

Coastal communities are pivotal in this transformation. Their active involvement not only helps safeguard marine ecosystems but also ensures that they directly benefit from local Blue Economy initiatives. With rapid urbanization and an expected surge of 450 million working-age individuals by 2035, the demand for climate-smart and resilient job opportunities is immense. Robust policies and circular economic strategies are essential to harness these opportunities, paving the way for a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable Blue Economy that will drive Africa's future.

Powering blue food and jobs based on science and knowledge

SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE, SEAWEED AND SHELLFISH FARMING

- Fish feed
- Hatchery, nursery
- Purification
- Freezing, transport, packaging
- Aquaculture equipment industry
- Consulting and technical assistance
- Veterinarian diagnosis and sales

RESILIENT SMART FISHERIES

- Co-management and empowerment
- Sustainable Fish Stock management
- Spatial planning
- Sentinel fishery
- "User-Observer"
- Surveillance, control, monitoring, enforcement

INNOVATIVE AND VALORIZED SEAFOOD PROCESSING

- Pilot innovative laboratories
- Quality and Safety Enhancements
- Food engineering
- Blue Pharmaceuticals and Cosmetics
- Blue pet food
- Ocean-based Agricultural fertilizers
- Health monitoring
- Sustainable biorefinery processing

HUMAN RESOURCES AND FISH STOCK MANAGEMENT

- Capacity building
- Fishing vessel of the future
- Detection softwares
- Motorization
- Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)
- Eco-friendly gear and nets

RESEARCH, COASTAL OBSERVATION AND DATA-BASED SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

- Oceanography, biology, chemistry, and cartography
- Fish stock assessment
- Marine Spatial Planning
- Data science
- Artificial Intelligence and New Technologies

THE 3RD HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE OF THE BLUE BELT INITIATIVE

The 3rd edition of the High-Level Conference of the Blue Belt Initiative (BBI), themed "Building a Foundation to Boost Blue Food and Jobs Under a Blue Economy Development Approach," was held on October 7th and 8th in Tangier, Morocco. Over the two days, the event was structured to address critical aspects of blue food and jobs. The first day featured a scientific conference that examined blue food and jobs from both scientific and actionable perspectives. Experts delved into challenges, identified opportunities, and proposed concrete, research-based solutions. The second day's ministerial conference focused on national contributions, potentials, and challenges in implementing blue food and jobs, accelerating South-South and multilateral cooperation. The conference concluded with a common declaration aimed at promoting blue food and jobs across Africa, marking a unified step toward sustainable development in the region.

I. Scientific Conference
Meeting of Experts

1.Participation

The conference was structured into two key segments: an expert meeting followed by a high-level ministerial session. The expert meeting, designed to generate actionable recommendations for the ministerial discussions, brought together 113 participants from 31 countries, including representatives from governments, international organizations, academia, and the private sector. This diverse gathering ensured a comprehensive exchange of ideas and perspectives, setting the stage for informed and impactful policy decisions during the ministerial segment. The participants included expert from:

- **African countries:** Morocco, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.

- **International partners:** Spain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia.

- Additionally, representatives from the African Union Commission - Directorate of Blue Economy and Environment (BEE), the African Union Inter Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD, France), ICSEM (Spain), University of British Columbia (Canada), University of Tasmania (New Zealand), Moroccan Policy Center for the New South, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GCPM), World Bank, Centre de recherches océanographiques de Dakar-Thiaroye (ISRA/CRODT), Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Institut Mauritanien de Recherches Océanographiques et de Pêches (IMROP), Commission Régionale des Pêches du Golfe de Guinée (COREP), Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC), Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission (CSRP, Northwest Africa), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO / Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (UNESCO/IOC), United Nations representative, and ATLAFCO (Atlantic coast covering 22 African coastal countries)...

2. Objectives

This meeting explored blue food and jobs from both scientific and applied perspectives, focusing on identifying challenges, exploring opportunities, and developing concrete, research-based solutions. These solutions were informed by scientific research, expert analysis, and targeted recommendations to enhance growth in the blue food sector and create related jobs. The primary goal was to scientifically assess the health of Africa's coastal oceans, highlighting the needs and solutions for improving blue food provision and job creation. Keynote speakers introduced each topic, framing subsequent roundtable discussions. Experts and scientists then delivered analytical presentations and case studies, engaging in dialogues to extract and communicate core messages and ensure comprehensive understanding.

3. Agenda

01 09^{h}00-10^{h}00

Session 1
Opening Remarks

02 10^{h}00-11^{h}00

Session 2
Status of Blue Economy in coastal African countries

03 11^{h}15-12^{h}15

Session 3
Unlocking the potential of Blue Food through scientific innovation under the blue economy development approach

04 12^{h}15-13^{h}15

Session 4
Exploring high-growth Blue Economy sectors for job creation and workforce development in Africa

05 14^{h}15-15^{h}15

Session 5
Addressing challenges: towards building a resilient, climate-ready Africa

06 15^{h}15-16^{h}15

Session 6
Fueling Blue Food and Jobs: Advancing Sustainable Growth through Regional Tools, Cooperation, Science-Based Mechanisms, and Policy for the Sustainable Use and Exploitation of Africa's Ocean

07 16^{h}30-17^{h}30

Session 7
Financing blue food and jobs proiects and programs in Africa

4. Executive Summary

4.1- KEY TAKEAWAY

During the conference, participants emphasized the pivotal role of sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, and marine resource management in ensuring food security and supporting livelihoods across Africa. Discussions centred on the urgent need to improve governance, infrastructure, and market access within the fisheries value chain. Key issues related to blue food production, job creation, financing, and innovation were raised, highlighting the importance of modernizing practices in these sectors. The Blue Belt Initiative was recognized as a vital framework for advancing sustainable ocean governance and enhancing the resilience of Africa's coastal communities. Below are the key takeaways from the conference on Africa's Blue Economy.

Participants emphasized the critical role of sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, and marine resource management in ensuring food security and livelihoods across Africa. Improved governance, infrastructure, and market access within the fisheries value chain were highlighted as essential for promoting resilience and economic sustainability in coastal communities.

•The need to modernize fisheries laws, combat illegal fishing, and enhance both artisanal and industrial fisheries infrastructure was underscored. Key strategies discussed included the development of inclusive enterprises, fish distribution networks, and value addition at landing sites to increase market competitiveness. The role of fisheries in fostering blue job growth was also emphasized, particularly in sectors such as fishing, processing, distribution, and tourism.

•Participants recognized the significant potential of aquaculture in contributing to food security and economic growth. The discussions focused on updating aquaculture legislation, conducting feasibility studies, and piloting sustainable aquaculture practices. Aquaculture's role in blue food production was noted for alleviating pressure on wild fisheries, with calls for infrastructure development, investment-friendly policies, and enhanced support for education and research. Innovative financing solutions, including blended finance and impact investments, were proposed to mobilize capital for sustainable aquaculture initiatives.

•Marine and coastal tourism, including ecotourism, were acknowledged as important drivers of blue job growth. Participants highlighted the potential of tourism to create jobs in hospitality, guiding, and service industries while also promoting environmental conservation and sustainable practices.

•Participants recognized the critical need for innovative financing mechanisms to support blue food production, job creation, and infrastructure development. Blended finance models, impact investments, and partnerships with multilateral organizations like the World Bank were proposed as key approaches to mobilize capital for sustainable projects. Access to credit for small-scale enterprises and tailored financial instruments were highlighted as essential for supporting local communities and fostering growth in blue economies.

•The conference underscored the importance of South-South cooperation in accelerating the development of Africa's blue economy. Sharing knowledge, technology transfer, and capacity-building initiatives between African nations and other developing countries were seen as vital to overcoming shared challenges. Regional partnerships, particularly through the Blue Belt Initiative, were highlighted as mechanisms to enhance collaboration, strengthen governance, and improve the management of marine resources across borders.

The expert meeting provided a valuable platform for sharing experiences and best practices in developing national blue economy strategies, investing in research and development, strengthening governance, and fostering regional and international cooperation. A proposal for a declaration summarizing the key messages was presented for endorsement by the Ministerial segment of the Conference, reflecting the collective commitment to advancing Africa's blue economy in alignment with the Blue Belt Initiative. Central to this proposal is the establishment of a Blue Belt Initiative Platform, which will serve as an inclusive and permanent forum for stakeholder dialogue supported by a dedicated secretariat. This platform will engage African countries, relevant continental, regional, and sub-regional organizations, international development partners, and private sector representatives to collaboratively develop a 'roadmap' aimed at effectively mobilizing and leveraging the investments and resources necessary to promote sustainable oceans, blue food production, and the creation of sustainable blue jobs.

The meeting included presentations from six-panel discussions covering various aspects of the blue economy. It concluded with a summary of key recommendations for advancing sustainable growth in the sector.

4.2 OPENING CEREMONY

The opening ceremony of the expert meeting on Africa's Blue Economy set a tone of optimism and collaboration, bringing together high-level dignitaries, experts, and stakeholders from across the continent and beyond. The event commenced with a warm welcome to all participants, highlighting the strategic importance of the discussions that would unfold over the coming days. Emphasizing the critical role of the blue economy in promoting sustainable development, food security, and job creation, the opening remarks underscored the collective responsibility of African nations to harness their vast marine and coastal resources. The ceremony reflected a shared commitment to advancing regional cooperation and innovation, with speakers expressing their gratitude for the leadership of the host country and the invaluable support from international partners. This introduction set the stage for constructive dialogue aimed at shaping the future of Africa's blue economy.

Welcoming Remarks: His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Sadiki, Minister of Agriculture,Maritime Fisheries, Rural Development, Water, and Forests of the Kingdom of Morocco

In his welcoming address, His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Sadiki outlined the initiative's primary objectives: fostering sustainable food production systems and creating employment opportunities within the blue economy. He emphasized the ocean's immense potential to enhance food secu-rity and drive job creation while acknowledging the challenges posed by climate change, pollution, and overfishing. Dr. Sadiki highlighted the importance of responsible marine resource manage-ment and expressed confidence in the partici-pants' expertise to produce meaningful outcomes, particularly in preparation for the forthcoming High-Level Ministerial meeting.

Opening Remarks

Mr. Amadou Moustapha Ndiaye, World Bank Country Director for Morocco and the Middle East

Mr. Amadou Moustapha Ndiaye, in his opening remarks, emphasized the immense potential of the blue economy to create jobs and improve food security. He noted that it could generate nearly $300 billion for Africa and create some 50 million jobs, especially in coastal regions. However, Ndiaye also recognized the serious impact of overfishing that threatens these critical resources. He outlined the World Bank's commitment to supporting the blue economy through integrated national strategies, better data management, and stronger governance. Mr. Ndiaye emphasized the importance of public-private partnerships, innovative financing, capacity building, and social inclusion. Citing data from the African Union, FAO, and OECD, he advocated for sustainable and integrated management of ocean and coastal resources, with a focus on blue food and blue jobs. He concluded that by addressing challenges and seizing opportunities, the blue economy could drive a more prosperous and sustainable future for coastal communities.

4.3 Panel Sessions

Session 2: "Status of Blue Economy in coastal African countries"

Keynote address: Dr. Hamady Diop, International development consultant and CEO and Founder of DnS Consulting, member of the Scientific Committee of the Blue Belt Initiative (BBI)

Dr Hamady Diop, delivered the keynote, emphasizing the BE's capacity to contribute over $300 billion to Africa's economy and create up to 50 million jobs, aligned with the African Union's Agenda 2063. He acknowledged the progress, with 35 African countries adopting blue economy policies and initiatives such as marine spatial planning, blue bonds, coordination mechanisms and sustainable fishing technologies. However, challenges like climate change and unsustainable fishing remain. Three key messages from the address are listed below.

• Africa's Blue Economy (BE) holds great potential for economic growth and food security, with notable progress in countries like South Africa and Kenya. However, sustained focus on sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, and blue tourism is vital for long-term success.

• Prioritizing sustainable practices in fisheries, aquaculture, and coastal tourism, supported by innovation and eco-friendly approaches, is essential for diversifying livelihoods and protecting marine ecosystems.

• Public-private partnerships and regional cooperation are crucial, as traditional public financing alone is insufficient. Domestic resource mobilization, private sector involvement, and regional initiatives like the Blue Belt Initiative (BBI) are key to scaling up BE efforts across Africa.

PANELISTS
• Mr George Mba Asseko, Division Blue Economy, African Union
• Ms Linda Etta, Senior Blue Economy Advisor, African Union
• Dr Obinna Anozie, Coastal and Marine Ecosystems Specialist, IBAR, African Union
• Dr Amadou Tall, Senior Fisheries and Aquaculture Expert

The panel discussion revealed a blue economy landscape in Africa that is rich in potential yet fraught with challenges. While over 35 African countries have developed national and regional blue economy strategies, inadequate funding, a lack of political will, and limited integration into national fiscal policies hinder progress. Experts highlighted critical gaps in technical training and infrastructure, emphasizing the need for sustainable practices in aquaculture and fisheries. The conversation underscored the importance of engaging local communities to ensure ownership and success in blue economy initiatives. Overall, the panel emphasized the necessity for collaborative efforts and innovative financing mechanisms to unlock the blue economy's full potential for sustainable development.

Panel key messages
• Establish dedicated blue finance initiatives and promote innovative financing models, such as blue bonds, to secure sustainable funding for blue economy projects. This includes integrating blue economy initiatives into national fiscal policies to ensure adequate budget allocations.
• Invest in specialized training centres and curricula that address skill gaps in the blue economy, with a focus on increasing accessibility for underrepresented groups, particularly women. Collaborate with educational institutions to develop relevant training programs.
• Actively involve local communities and stakeholders in blue economy discussions to foster ownership and understanding. Encourage public-private partnerships to develop bankable projects, ensuring alignment with local needs and priorities.

Session 3: "Unlocking the Potential of Blue Food through Scientific Innovation"

Keynote address: Dr. Hassan Moustahfid, Keynote speaker, Senior Scientist– USIOOS, Vice President of the UN Ocean Decade Africa Task force and Chair of the scientific committee - BBI

Dr. Moustahfid's keynote address focused on unlocking the potential of blue food through scientific innovation, with a particular emphasis on advancements in sustainable aquaculture technologies, ecosystem-based fisheries management, and climate-resilient practices. The address centered around the following messages:

• **Blue Food and Blue Jobs:** Dr. Moustahfid defined blue food as food sourced from aquatic environments and blue jobs as those associated with sustainable seafood production. These sectors are vital for global food security, with over 3.2 billion people relying on fish as a primary protein source. The blue economy plays a key role in sustaining livelihoods, ensuring food security, and fostering economic stability for coastal communities.

• **Current Challenges in the Blue Economy:** Overfishing, marine pollution, and climate change are critical threats to the health of marine ecosystems and fish stocks. Unsustainable fishing practices deplete resources, pollution compromises ecosystem health and food safety, and climate change disrupts species distribution and abundance. Addressing these challenges requires innovative and sustainable solutions.

• **Technological Innovations for Sustainability:** Dr. Moustahfid highlighted the role of smart fishing technologies and ecosystem-based fisheries management (EBFM) in ensuring sustainable blue food production. Examples include Image FlowCytoBot (IFCB), which uses AI and machine learning to monitor and classify harmful algal blooms (HABs), supporting real-time forecasting and management. He also introduced the concept of Digital Twins of the Ocean (DTO), which simulate marine environments to predict changes and guide more effective resource management. Additionally, technologies like Backyard Buoys offer low-cost, scalable marine systems for community-managed ocean buoys. These buoys collect valuable data, complementing indigenous knowledge and supporting local blue economy efforts, including hazard protection.

• **Advancing Technology Adoption and Capacity Building:** Dr. Moustahfid emphasized the power of partnerships in accelerating the adoption of these technologies. By engaging with global initiatives such as the blue belt Initiative and Ocean Decades Initiatives, African nations can gain access to research funding, technical expertise, and innovative technologies. These partnerships also promote international scientific dialogue, enabling African voices to shape global conversations on sustainable ocean management. Capacity-building is essential to strengthening local research institutions and enhancing the skills of the workforce, ensuring long-term sustainability in the blue economy. By participating in international forums, African nations can advocate for their specific challenges and secure support for sustainable practices.

• **The UN Ocean Decade Program – SEAWARD Africa:** Dr. Moustahfid also shared the UN Ocean Decade Program, The Science and Knowledge for a Resilient and Sustainable Ocean Economy in Africa (SEAWARD Africa) initiative. This program aims to build scientific and technical capacity across African nations to support the transition toward a resilient and sustainable blue economy. By focusing on research, innovation, and capacity-building, SEAWARD Africa will enable countries to address their specific challenges while contributing to the global goal of ocean sustainability.

To foster innovation and sustainability in the blue economy, Dr. Moustahfid in his recommendation proposed a multifaceted approach for governments and stakeholders:

•Increase funding allocations for fisheries and aquaculture research through grants and tax incentives.
•Establish public-private partnerships to leverage additional resources and expertise.
•Create favorable regulatory frameworks that encourage investment in sustainable technologies.
•Engage local communities in research agendas to ensure relevance and increase support for sustainable practices.
•Invest in capacity-building to strengthen local institutions and promote success stories that inspire further investment in innovation.
•By adopting these strategies, governments can enhance their blue economy, support sustainable food systems, and ensure long-term resilience for marine ecosystems and coastal communities.

PANELISTS

• Dr. Aboubakar Sidibé, Chief technical advisor at FAO- Regional coordinator of the CCLME project, Guinea
• Mr. Amrani Mohamed, Secretary General of the Moroccan National Institute of Fisheries Research (INRH), Morocco.
• Mr. Abdelouahed Ben Mhammed, CEO and Founder of "Intelligentica", Morocco.
• Dr. Kharroubi Mariem, Head of INRH's specialized seafood valorization and technology centre, Agadir, Morocco.
• Dr. Patrice Brehmer, Senior Marine Scientist – IRD, Scientific Adviser of the Permanent Secretary of the Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission (SRFC), Co-chair of the scientific committee – BBI.

The panel discussion centred on Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM) and its vital role in addressing the challenges of pollution and overfishing through a holistic approach. It emphasized that EBFM considers all components of marine ecosystems, not just the targeted fish species, highlighting the negative impacts of human-driven factors such as overfishing and marine pollution. Collaboration among fishers, scientists, and policymakers was underscored as essential for effective data collection and sustainable management, with examples like Morocco's National Institute of Fisheries Research showcasing successful partnerships. The discussion also explored the integration of technology, including AI and machine learning, to optimize fishing practices and enhance marine resource management.

PANEL KEY MESSAGES

•Actively engage governments, research institutions, and local fishers in partnerships that facilitate data collection and knowledge sharing. Implement training programs to empower fishers and ensure their voices are integral to sustainable fishery management.
•Allocate funding and resources to promote data sharing, integrate AI and machine learning in fisheries management. Develop pilot projects that ensure long-term elemenatry data collection (fisheries and oceanography), utilize advanced predictive models for fish stock distribution and optimize fishing techniques, ensuring that research infrastructure is robust and sustainable.
•Establish and promote long-term partnerships across African countries focused on sustainable fisheries management. •Create regional consortia that coordinate research efforts and share best practices, moving beyond short-term initiatives to achieve lasting impacts in the blue economy.

Session 4: "Exploring high-growth BE sectors for job creation and workforce development in Africa"

Keynote address: Mrs Majida Maarouf, Director of ANDA

In her remarks, Madame Majida Maarouf, highlighted the impressive growth of the aquaculture sector in Morocco from 2000 to 2022 and emphasized the need for a structured strategy to develop aquaculture across Africa further. This strategy should encompass comprehensive planning, robust legal frameworks, capacity building, and investment incentives. She called for inclusive legal frameworks to support small projects and marginalized groups, encouraging participants to review relevant laws for a deeper understanding.

Key messages

- Aquaculture is a crucial component of the blue economy, contributing to economic growth and job creation. It plays a significant role in food security and sustainable resource management, and there is potential for substantial growth in production and employment in the coming years.
- The development of aquaculture requires comprehensive planning and a supportive legal framework to attract investment and ensure sustainable practices. Effective planning can mitigate conflicts among resource users and promote environmental and social acceptability.
- There is a strong need to develop human resources and technical skills in the aquaculture sector to meet production goals and improve livelihoods. The legal framework should also facilitate inclusivity, supporting small projects and ensuring the participation of youth, women, and local cooperatives in the industry.

PANELISTS
• Mrs. Yolanda Molares, Director of ICSEM, Spain
• Dr. Ussif Rashid Sumaila, University of British Columbia, Fisheries Economics Research Unit, Canada
• Mr. Georges Mba Asseko, Moderator Head of Blue Economy Division, African Union

The panel discussion emphasized the critical importance of sustainable aquaculture for food security and job creation in Africa. It highlighted the need for collaboration between the private and public sectors to establish a structured approach to aquaculture in Morocco and beyond. The discussion called for comprehensive planning and robust legal frameworks to facilitate growth, particularly within the context of the blue economy. The panel also stressed the need for sustainable practices, technological innovation, and a skilled workforce to support the sector and create diverse job opportunities across the aquaculture value chain. The conversation reaffirmed the necessity for regional collaboration among African nations to share knowledge, technology, and best practices, ultimately striving for a more sustainable and inclusive blue economy.

PANEL KEY MESSAGES
• Stakeholders should prioritize collaboration between the public and private sectors, focusing on creating legal frameworks and infrastructure that foster sustainable aquaculture practices.
• There should be an emphasis on technological innovation and skills development to empower local communities and enhance production capabilities.
• Integrating aquaculture with tourism could create significant economic benefits while preserving biodiversity.

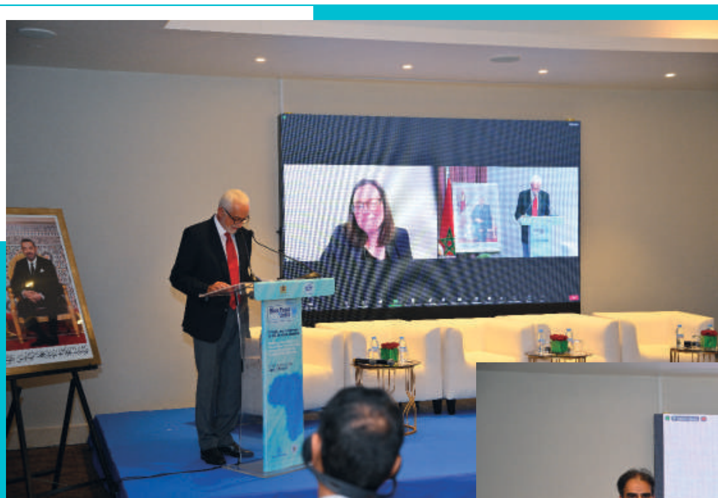
Session 5: “Addressing Challenges: Toward Building a Resilient, Climate-Ready Africa”

Keynote speaker: Dr. Julia L. Blanchard, Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, University of Tasmania

In her keynote address, Dr. Julia Blanchard highlighted the urgent need for innovative strategies and collaborative efforts to address the climate change challenges facing Africa's fisheries and blue economy. With rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, and shifting fish stocks threate-ning the livelihoods of millions, she emphasized that building a climate-ready Africa requires adapting fisheries and aquaculture practices while enhancing the sustainability of the blue economy. By integrating climate resilience into this framework, Africa can safeguard marine resources, ensure food security, and foster sustainable blue jobs. Dr Blanchard underscored the importance of scientific research and community engagement, advocating for a holistic approach that empowers local communities and leverages scientific advancements to navigate climate impacts and secure a resilient future for Africa’s blue economy.

Key messages

- Projections indicate widespread losses in fish biomass under high emissions scenarios, underscoring the urgent need for African countries to engage in climate adaptation planning to mitigate these impacts effectively.
- Collaboration among countries and organizations is crucial for sharing knowledge and models. A coordinated approach to climate impact modelling can enhance resilience and adaptation strategies across the African continent.
- Future research initiatives should focus on developing frameworks to assess human impacts on marine ecosystems and integrating regional models to address uncertainties in adaptation planning.



PANELISTS
• Mrs Carole Megevand, Program Leader Sustainable Development, World Bank, Switzerland
• Mr Rama Chandra Reddy, Senior Environmental Economist specialist, Climate Change impact in fisheries, USA
• Dr Jilali Bensbai, Head of Fisheries department, INRH, Morocco
• Dr Abdoulaye Sarré, Expert, former chair of small pelagic assessment in North West Africa, Senegal

The panel discussion focused on the challenges climate change poses to the blue economy in Northwest Africa, emphasizing the urgent need for adaptive strategies and collaboration. It began with alarming insights into the impacts on small pelagic fish resources and coastal ecosystems, particularly in Senegal, where rising sea levels threaten low-lying areas and mangrove habitats. The conversation highlighted changing ocean dynamics, including reduced oxygen levels and altered fish reproductive cycles, stressing the need to harmonize human activities with ocean health. It also addressed the interconnected risks to fisheries, aquaculture, and tourism, advocating for innovative employment opportunities and adaptive strategies. The dialogue concluded with a call for coordinated responses to climate impacts across sectors, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive data analysis, continuous research, and collective efforts to address climate change in the blue economy.

PANEL KEY MESSAGES
• Establish comprehensive frameworks that integrate environmental, economic, and social dimensions of coastal management, engaging multi-sectoral stakeholders to develop cohesive strategies that enhance resilience to climate change while protecting critical ecosystems.
• Foster partnerships among African nations, research institutions, and international organizations to share data, best practices, and research while prioritizing long-term studies to address climate impacts and improve modelling accuracy, along with investing in capacity-building initiatives for local researchers and decision-makers to implement evidence-based solutions.
• Promote the adoption of sustainable aquaculture and fisheries practices resilient to climate variability by implementing adaptive management strategies, investing in innovative technologies, and creating economic opportunities, with collaborative efforts from governments and the private sector to develop financing mechanisms that support research, infrastructure, and training for sustainable practices.

Session 6: “Fueling Blue Food and Jobs: Advancing Sustainable Growth through Regional Tools, Cooperation, Science-Based Mechanisms, and Policy for the Sustainable Use and Exploitation of Africa’s Ocean”

Keynote address: HE Dr Paubert Mahatante, Minister for Fisheries and the Blue Economy of the Republic of Madagascar

His Excellency Dr Paubert Mahatante delivered a keynote address focusing on the transformative potential of Africa's blue economy. He explored opportunities to harness ocean and coastal resources for sustainable growth amidst the challenges of climate change. He shared insights from national experiences, underscoring the urgent need for enhanced cooperation, innovation, and resilience to tackle these shared challenges. He also highlighted the importance of strategic frameworks, regional partnerships, and scientific research as essential tools for fostering sustainable development.

Key messages

• African nations and institutions must actively collaborate to address shared challenges, particularly those posed by climate change and the blue economy. Strengthening partnerships within Africa and with international stakeholders is essential for developing sustainable solutions and ensuring long-term resilience. Madagascar’s efforts to create several strategic frameworks in areas like fisheries, aquaculture, and maritime transport highlight the importance of structured approaches to managing blue economy resources.

•African countries must proactively build resilience and prepare for the continent's rapidly growing population, which is projected to reach 2.5 billion by 2050. As climate change increasingly threatens food security and job creation, nations need to develop adaptive strategies for the sustainable management of natural resources. This includes investing in human capital, addressing malnutrition, and leveraging the blue economy to create economic and social opportunities.

•Africa must prioritize research, knowledge-sharing, and innovation to drive sustainable development. Without these elements, the continent will struggle to harness its natural resources for transformative growth fully. The speaker urged African nations to take control of their future through collective intelligence while continuing to collaborate with international partners to build a resilient and sustainable blue economy.

PANELISTS

- Dr. Abdelmalek Faraj, General Director of INRH
- Mrs. Tansdstad Merete, Coordinator of EAF Nansen - FAO
- Mr. Khallahi Brahim, Permanent secretary of CSRP
- Mr. Miguel Bernal, Executive Secretary of GFCM
- Mr. Taoufik El Ktiri, Executive Secretary ATLAFCO

The panel discussion focused on the pressing challenges and opportunities in sustainable fisheries management in Africa, addressing critical issues such as food security, the impacts of climate change, and the need for enhanced collaboration between research institutions and the private sector. Participants highlighted successful initiatives, such as ATLAFCO and the EAF Nansen Programme, which promote South-South cooperation and build capacity in fisheries research. The conversation underscored the importance of adaptive management strategies that consider socio-economic factors alongside biological data to ensure the long-term sustainability of marine resources.

PANEL KEY MESSAGES

- Strengthen public-private partnerships by facilitating transparent collaborations between the private sector and research institutions to drive sustainable fisheries practices. Encourage private investors to recognize their dependence on foundational research for effective management and monitoring of marine resources.
- Create adaptive programs and funding mechanisms that respond to the challenges posed by climate change and ecosystem health. Integrate new themes into funding proposals to attract donor interest and ensure the long-term sustainability of fisheries.
- Promote strategic cooperation among African countries to harmonize policies and share resources effectively. Build robust networks through scientific collaboration to improve capacity building and lead to better management practices across the region.

Session 7: “Financing blue food and jobs projects and programs in Africa”

Keynote Address: Mr. Kieran Kelleher, Fisheries Consultant - World Bank

In his keynote address, Mr Kiran Kelleher draws on decades of experience in mobilizing resources for the blue economy. He emphasizes the critical need for strategic collaboration and innovative financing solutions, especially in Africa, where securing funding is vital for advancing blue food and blue jobs initiatives. These initiatives are essential for the continent's economic growth and environmental sustainability. Kelleher’s insights highlight the importance of integrating diverse financial mechanisms and fostering partnerships to unlock the blue economy's potential, ensuring a sustainable and resilient future for coastal communities.

Key messages

- The growing gap between the demand for blue finance and the availability of affordable financial resources highlights the need for a more coordinated approach to mobilize funds effectively, ensuring that countries can sustain their ocean development goals.
- Regional collaboration, exemplified by the blue finance architecture established by 10 countries in the Western Indian Ocean, is essential for aligning investment priorities, addressing common challenges, and streamlining access to resources necessary for sustainable ocean management.
- Establishing a blue finance platform that fosters continuous dialogue among stakeholders—including countries, regional economic communities, and private investors—can enhance cooperation and create a supportive ecosystem for generating accessible and affordable funding for the blue economy.

PANELISTS

- Mr. Mahmoud Al-Bouche, Economist, Policy Center for the New South- Morocco
- Mrs. Joan Fulton, Senior Advisor, Ocean Assets, Switzerland
- Mrs. Najat El Moutchou, Environmental consultant, World Bank- Morocco

The panelists highlighted the urgent need for innovative financing approaches to support the blue economy, which is critical for sustainable growth and job creation in Africa. Traditional funding models are inadequate to tackle the complexities of blue food projects, emphasizing the importance of integrating innovative financial instruments alongside existing methods. The speakers shared insights on successful initiatives, discussed the challenges in emerging markets, and stressed the necessity for collaboration across sectors to optimize financial strategies for the blue economy.

PANEL KEY MESSAGES

- Embrace innovative financial models such as blue bonds, blended finance, and blue carbon credits to attract investment and address the financing challenges within the blue economy.
- Enhance public-private partnerships by fostering collaboration between the public and private sectors, aligning interests, and ensuring that financing mechanisms are tailored to the specific needs of various stakeholders, leveraging successful case studies to guide implementation.
- Focus on capacity building and awareness by investing in developing a skilled workforce and improving local financial markets' understanding of the blue economy. Emphasize the importance of sustainable practices and resource management to stabilize job creation and economic growth.

Closing Session

Mrs. Michel Diaz, Senior Environmental Specialist and Pro Blue Manager at the World Bank

Mrs. Michel Diaz, Senior Environmental Specialist and Pro Blue Manager at the World Bank was warmly welcomed by attendees as she shared her insights on the immense potential of the blue economy, emphasizing its capacity to generate significant economic opportunities and job crea-tion, particularly for communities reliant on marine and coastal resources. She highlighted projec-tions suggesting that the blue economy could contribute up to $3 trillion globally by 2030, inclu-ding the already generated $300 billion and 49 million jobs in Africa, representing an impressive opportunity for growth and sustainability. Throughout the discussions, Diaz emphasized the importance of a multidimensional approach that involves various stakeholders—policymakers, academics, and private sector representatives—to effectively manage marine resources and enhance productivity, along with the critical role of effective monitoring and governance in foste-ring sustainable economic growth. Notably, she discussed the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in marine resource management, which can streamline processes and tackle challenges like insecure resource identification and adaptation strategies. Diaz also shared success stories from countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Madagascar, and Mozambique, showcasing how technology transfer and innovation can unite diverse groups to improve marine resource monitoring and productivity. In conclusion, she called for ongoing collaborative efforts and innovation to unlock the blue economy's full potential, stressing the importance of strategic investments, governance, and innovative financing while underscoring the need for local community engagement to ensure the sustainability of these initiatives. She reiterated the World Bank's commitment, through Pro Blue, to continue supporting African states in implementing programs focused on blue food and blue jobs.

II. Ministerial Segment
Meeting of Ministers

Executive Summary

The Ministerial Segment of the Third Session of the High-Level Conference of the Blue Belt Initiative, held in Tangier, Morocco, brought together 31 African states and key international organizations to address the crucial role of the blue economy in Africa's sustainable development. The segment focused on identifying challenges and opportunities in providing blue food and creating blue jobs, emphasizing the need for science-based solutions, strong governance frameworks, collaborative partnerships, and innovative financing mechanisms. Experts stressed the importance of integrating scientific research with blue economy initiatives, investing in sustainable practices, and establishing a digital platform for information sharing. They also highlighted the need for effective governance, regional cooperation, and a paradigm shift in financial models to better support the blue economy.
The Minister Session concluded with the Tangier Declaration, outlining a roadmap for collaborative efforts to enhance Africa's sustainable blue economy. Key recommendations include:

- Enhanced contributions to global ocean science: Increasing investments in ocean research within the framework of the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

- Strengthened regional actions: Expanding collaborative efforts to secure investments in blue food initiatives and job creation programs.

- Establishment of a dedicated Blue Belt Initiative platform: This platform, supported by a secretariat, would facilitate ongoing dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, including African countries, regional organizations, and the private sector, to develop a comprehensive roadmap for mobilizing investments in sustainable oceans, blue food, and employment generation.

1. Objectives

The meeting explored blue food and jobs from both scientific and practical perspectives, aiming to identify challenges, seize opportunities, and develop concrete solutions. Grounded in scientific research and expert analysis, these discussions focused on fostering sustainable growth in blue food systems and employment while addressing the health of Africa's coastal oceans.

Keynote speakers introduced each topic, setting the stage for in-depth roundtable conversations. Experts and scientists presented analytical insights and case studies, leading to dynamic discussions that distilled key takeaways. The event brought together 31 state representatives alongside organizations such as the FAO, the World Bank, the African Union, and the United Nations, highlighting a strong commitment to advancing blue food and job opportunities across Africa.

A major focus was on demand-driven, regionally tailored solutions to enhance blue food production and job creation while considering ocean health and the status of the Blue Economy. Discussions emphasized cooperation mechanisms and financial mobilization to support science, governance policies, and blue transformation across the continent. These deliberations are expected to culminate in a common declaration under the Blue Economy strategy to promote blue food and job development in Africa.

2. Ministerial Participation and Agenda

The Ministerial Session featured representatives from Morocco, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Oman, and Spain. Key figures included the Commissioner of the African Union's Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, and Environment, Morocco's Permanent Representative to the UN, and the Practice Manager for Environment, Natural Resources, and the Blue Economy in the MENA region, along with representatives from the FAO and the World Bank.

The meeting's agenda provided a comprehensive program centered on Africa's blue economy. It began with an introductory film and opening speeches from high-level dignitaries, including His Excellency Mohammed Sadiki, Morocco's Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, and Her Excellency Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko from the African Union.

The first session emphasized the role of science and data in supporting blue food and job development, featuring insights from experts and ministerial representatives. The second session addressed governance and policy frameworks, focusing on overcoming challenges and identifying opportunities within the blue economy. This was followed by an official ceremony presenting scientific survey results from Benin and Liberia.

After a lunch break, the third session explored financing opportunities for blue food initiatives, with contributions from financial and policy experts. The final session underscored the importance of international cooperation in advancing blue food and job creation, with discussions led by various delegations. The meeting concluded with key recommendations and the Declaration of Tangier, reaffirming the need for collaborative efforts to enhance Africa's sustainable blue economy.

3. The Future of Africa's Blue Economy

The discussions reinforced the immense potential of Africa's blue economy, which, with its vast coasts and oceans, serves as a critical source of food, employment, and cultural identity. The blue economy promotes the responsible use of ocean resources, prioritizing environmental conservation through sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. As climate change intensifies, innovative strategies for marine resource utilization and conservation are becoming increasingly essential.

With the fisheries sector employing over 12 million people and contributing significantly to Africa's GDP, the potential for blue food and job creation is vast. Unlocking this potential requires coordinated efforts to enhance existing skills, build capacity, and mobilize investments. Initiatives such as the Blue Belt Initiative play a key role in fostering regional collaboration, strengthening coastal resilience, and promoting sustainable marine resource management through a science-based approach.

International cooperation—through South-South, bilateral, and multilateral partnerships—is crucial for overcoming challenges in marine resource utilization. Governments, financial institutions, and the private sector must work together to harness Africa's blue economy for sustainable development. Morocco's partnership with the World Bank, emphasizing blue food, job creation, and climate resilience, serves as a model for such collaboration.

The recent ATLAFCO meeting underscored the importance of regional cooperation in fisheries, particularly in strengthening observation programs and harmonizing inspection initiatives. The meeting also highlighted the need for stronger partnerships, increased financial commitments, and active stakeholder participation. A proposal to host the next ministerial meeting in Morocco in February aims to address outstanding challenges and drive concrete action.

4. A Defining Moment for Africa

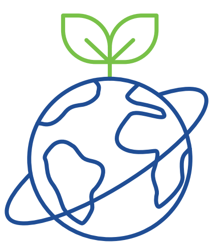
Africa stands at a pivotal moment in its blue economy journey. By prioritizing blue food production, job creation, and sustainable ocean management, the continent can achieve long-term growth while safeguarding its marine ecosystems. Cooperation, innovation, and strategic investment will be essential to realizing this vision and ensuring a resilient future for Africa's coastal communities and ocean-based economies.

Key Takeaways

1. Africa's Oceans Hold Immense Potential: The blue economy represents a transformative opportunity for Africa, leveraging its vast marine resources to promote sustainable development. With rich biodiversity and extensive coastlines, Africa's oceans can significantly contribute to food security and economic growth. By focusing on sustainable practices, the continent can harness these resources to create jobs and improve livelihoods for millions, ultimately positioning itself as a leader in the global blue economy.

2. Collaboration is Key: Effective collaboration between various stakeholders—including governments, international organizations, private sector entities, and local communities— is crucial for unlocking the full potential of the blue economy. By fostering partnerships and sharing best practices, countries can collectively address shared challenges and explore innovative solutions. This united approach will enhance the management of marine resources and ensure that all parties benefit from sustainable ocean practices.

3. Blue Food is Vital: Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture are essential components of Africa's food security strategy. As the demand for protein sources rises, blue food can play a pivotal role in meeting nutritional needs while supporting local economies. Investing in sustainable fishing practices and responsible aquaculture will not only provide food but also create opportunities for job growth, particularly in coastal communities where livelihoods are heavily reliant on marine resources.



4. Climate Resilience is Paramount: The impacts of climate change pose significant threats to Africa's oceans and coastal communities. Rising sea levels, ocean acidification, and increased extreme weather events require innovative strategies to protect marine ecosystems and ensure the resilience of communities dependent on them. By prioritizing climate adaptation measures and fostering sustainable practices, Africa can safeguard its marine environments and enhance the well-being of its populations.

5. Strategic Investment is Needed: To realize the vision of a thriving blue economy, Africa must secure adequate financing and implement responsible resource management practices.
Investments in marine research, technology, and infrastructure are vital for promoting sustainable growth. By creating favorable conditions for public-private partnerships and engaging with international financial institutions, African nations can mobilize the necessary resources to support their blue economy initiatives and ensure long-term sustainability.

5. Expert remarks

During the first scientific segment of the conference on October 7, 2024, experts articulated key takeaways (Annex II) for the Ministerial Segment, focusing on science, governance, cooperation, and finance in relation to the blue economy. A summary of expert inputs is hereby presented

5.1 On Science and Data

• Dr. Patrice Brehmer emphasized that the blue economy represents a sustainable maritime economy that can enhance food sovereignty, climate resilience, and economic development through job creation. He stressed the importance of integrating scientific research with blue economy initiatives, arguing that effective development in sectors like fishing and aquaculture requires robust local scientific expertise. Investment in sustainable practices must be supported by interdisciplinary scientific research, and there is a call for standardized, long-term marine data collection to inform policy decisions. He advocated for establishing a digital analytical platform to enhance information sharing and governance.

• Dr. Hassan Moustahfid highlighted the necessity of investing in data and science to support fisheries and aquaculture. He cited successful examples from the U.S. and Chile, where scientific assessments and data analytics have led to the restoration of fish stocks and advancements in salmon farming, respectively. He urged full support for the Blue Belt Initiative as a collaborative platform to enhance the blue economy across Africa, emphasizing that the time to act is now.

5.2. On Governance and Policy

• Dr. Georges Mba Asseko noted that the blue economy is crucial for sustainable growth and food security in Africa. While many countries have developed strategies for the blue economy, implementation remains a challenge. He highlighted the need for coherence in policies, technical training, and access to funding. Public-private cooperation is essential to drive innovation and create a favorable investment climate.

•Dr. Miguel Bernal from FAO outlined the need for the blue economy to contribute to food security as Africa's population grows. He emphasized that effective governance in fisheries and aquaculture requires adequate resources, capacity, and cooperation at national and regional levels. Integrated ocean governance is vital for managing shared resources and ensuring that African priorities are included in global dialogues.

5.3. On Cooperation

• Dr. Khallahi Brahim stressed the importance of regional cooperation in implementing the blue economy. He advocated for the sharing of information and joint research initiatives to enhance scientific capabilities and harmonize national policies. Cooperation is also vital for market access and combating illegal fishing, which threatens marine resources and coastal livelihoods.

• Dr. Hamady Diop highlighted that South-South cooperation can facilitate the sharing of best practices and knowledge in sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. He called for aligned policies and community engagement to empower local stakeholders and ensure food security in the blue economy.

5.4. On Finance

• Mrs. Sylvia Michele Diez pointed out the need for a paradigm shift in financial models to better support the blue economy. She identified gaps in blue finance due to fragmented demands and differing priorities among countries. A transition to new financial models is essential to align with national priorities related to blue food and jobs.

• Dr. Amadou Tall discussed various financial instruments that can support the blue economy, including loans from development banks, climate funds, and private sector investments. He emphasized the role of public-private partnerships and innovative financing mechanisms, like blue bonds, to mobilize resources for sustainable marine ecosystem management.

In summary, the conference underscored the critical interplay between science, governance, cooperation, and finance in advancing Africa's blue economy, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts to achieve sustainable growth and food security.

6. Conclusions

The Ministers and Representatives of African States, alongside representatives from international and regional organizations, extend their sincere gratitude to His Majesty King Mohammed VI for his invaluable support and the warm hospitality extended during the Third Session of the High-Level Conference of the Blue Belt Initiative, held in Tangier, Morocco, on October 7-8, 2024. Tangier stands as a powerful symbol of the thriving blue economy.

They commend the Kingdom of Morocco for launching the Blue Belt Initiative during COP22, recognizing its pivotal role in addressing the ocean's essential contributions to ecosystem services, food security, and sustainable development. Building on previous dialogues and declarations, they reaffirm their unwavering commitment to fostering sustainable coasts and oceans, advancing the blue economy, and generating employment opportunities.

Acknowledging the vital contributions of fisheries and aquaculture to multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), they also recognize the mounting pressures on marine ecosystems due to climate change, pollution, and illegal fishing. In light of the upcoming UN Ocean Conference, they underscore the critical role of the ocean in sustaining life and driving development.

They envision a resilient ocean, underpinned by scientific research, innovation, and multi-stakeholder partnerships, to enhance blue food production and job creation. To achieve this, they recommend:

- **Enhanced contributions to global ocean science:** Increasing investments in ocean research within the framework of the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.
- **Strengthened regional actions:** Expanding collaborative efforts to secure investments in blue food initiatives and job creation programs.

They propose the establishment of a dedicated Blue Belt Initiative platform to facilitate ongoing dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders. This platform, supported by a secretariat, should actively engage African countries, regional organizations, and private sector representatives in developing a comprehensive roadmap for mobilizing investments in sustainable oceans, blue food, and employment generation.

Furthermore, they respectfully call upon all Blue Belt Initiative partners to actively support the platform’s functions and align their efforts with regional cooperation frameworks and national priorities. This coordinated approach will ensure effective implementation and maximize impact.

The Ministerial Session concluded the meeting with the reading of the Tangier Declaration (see Annex III).

7. Delegates

HE Mr. DOS SANTOS CANDIDO

Secretary of State for Fisheries and Marine Resources

ANGOLA

Mr. DOUSSA AGUEMON

Chief of Staff of the Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries

BENIN

Mr. MOUSSA ZIDA

Director General of Agropastoral Development

BURKINA FASO

HE Mr. JORGE DOS SANTOS

Minister of Communities and President of the National Assembly

CABO VERDE

HE Dr. TAÏGA

Minister of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries

CAMEROUN

HE Mr. GERVAIS MBATA

Minister of Water and Forests, Hunting and Fishing

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Mrs. PASCALINE MBANGU KIKUMBI

Secretary General for Fisheries and Livestock

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Mr. FOFANA BINA

Director of Fisheries - Ministry of Animal and Fisheries Resources

IVORY COAST

HE Mr. JUAN JOSÉ NDONG TOM

Minister of Agriculture of Equatorial Guinea

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Mr. JOSÉ MANUEL JAQUOTO

Counsellor for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at the Spanish Embassy

SPAIN

GUGU SIBONAKALISA PEARL

HE Under Secretary

ESWATINI

HE Mr. BRANLY MARTIAL

Ambassador in Kingdom of Morocco

GABON

HE Mr. BUBA SANYANG

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources

GAMBIA

HE Mrs. MAVIS HAWA KOONSON

Minister of Fisheries Development & Aquaculture

GHANA

HE Mrs. FATIMA CAMARA

Minister of Fisheries and Maritime Economy

GUINEA

HE Mr. MARIO MUSSANTE DA SILVA LOUREIRO
Minister of Fisheries and Maritime Economy
GUINEA-BISSAU

HE Mrs. JESSICA MUTHONI GAKINYA
Ambassador
KENYA

Mr. MOHAMMED ELQAHTANI
DG of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture
KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Mr. WILLIAM Y. BOEH
Deputy Director General of Technical Services, National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority
LIBERIA

HE Mr. ABDEL MOHAMMAD SUKTAM HASAN
Minister of Marine Resources
LIBYA

HE Dr. PAUBERT TSIMANAORATY
Minister for Fisheries and the Blue Economy
MADAGASCAR

HE Mr. YOUBA BA
Minister of Livestock and Fisheries
MALI

Mr. SIDI ALI SIDI BOUBACAR
Secretary General for Fisheries, Maritime Infrastructures and Ports
MAURITANIA

Mr. NIANDOU MOUNKAILA
Managing Director, Société du Patrimoine des Eaux
NIGER

Mr. OMORAGBON OSAKPAMWAN
General Director of Fisheries
NIGERIA

Mr. Jean Samba
Director of Fisheries Planning and Aquaculture
REPUBLIC OF CONGO

HE Mr. ABEL DA SILVA BOM JUSUS
Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries
SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE

HE Dr. FATOU DIOUF
Minister of Fisheries, Maritime and Port Infrastructures
SENEGAL

HE Mrs. PRINCESS DUGBA
Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources
SIERRA LEONE

HE Mr. KHALID SALIM BAMKHALIF
Ambassador
SULTANATE OF OMAN

Acknowledgments

Third High-Level Conference of the BBI Committees

ADVISORY AND SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

- **Dr. Faraj Abdelmalek,** (Chair), Ex-CEO of INRH
- **Dr. Hassan Moustahfid,** USIOOS, and Vice President of the UN Decade Africa Taskforce
- **Dr. Patrice Brehmer,** IRD, Scientific Advisor to the Permanent Secretary of SRFC
- **Dr. Hamady Diop,** CEO and Founder of DnS Consulting
- **Ms. Rajaa Belfaqih,** Interim Coordinator of the BBI Secretariat
- **Mrs. Nour Hajji,** Communication Specialist, INRH

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

- **Chair: Dr Abdelmalek Faraj,** INRH
- **Mr. Martin Ochoa,** World Bank
- **Mrs. Madjiguene Seck,** World Bank
- **Mrs. Nadia Kassali,** World Bank
- **Mrs. Yolanda Molares,** ICSEM, World Bank
- **Mrs. Najat El Moutchou,** World Bank
- **Mrs. Carlota Barañano,** ICSEM, World bank
- **Dr. Hassan Moustahfid,** USIOOS, and Vice President of the UN Decade Africa Taskforce
- **Dr. Patrice Brehmer,** IRD, Scientific Advisor to the Permanent Secretary of SRFC
- **Dr. Hamady Diop,** CEO and Founder of DnS Consulting
- **Mrs. Nour Hajji,** Communication Specialist, INRH
- **Mrs. Rajaa Belfaqih,** Interim Coordinator of the BBI Secretariat
- **Mr. El Ktiri Taoufik,** Executive Secretary of Atlafco
- **Mr. Mohamed Yassine El Aroussi,** Chief of the Cooperation Division at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Rural Development, Water and Forests

COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA COMMITTEE

- **Mrs. Nour Hajji,** Communication Specialist, INRH
- **Mrs. Rajaa Belfaqih,** Interim Coordinator of the BBI Secretariat
- **Mrs. Omaima Gouitaa,** Communication counselor at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Rural Development, Water and Forests
- **Mrs. Madjiguene Seck,** World Bank
- **Mrs. Nadia Kassali,** World Bank

LOCAL TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

- Team of the National Institute for Fisheries Research in Morocco, INRH
- Team of the National Office of Fisheries in Morocco (ONP)
- Team of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Rural Development, Water and Forests of Morocco
- Team of the Ministerial Conference on Fisheries Cooperation among African States bordering the Atlantic Ocean (Atlafco)

Annex I : Agenda of the Ministerial Meeting

01 10h00- 10h45

• Introductory movie • Opening speeches: HE Mohammed Sadiki, Ex-Minister of Agriculture, Maritime Fisheries, Rural Development, Waters and Forests of the Kingdom of Morocco. HE Mrs. Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko, Commissioner of agricultural food and blue economy of the African Union. HE Omar Hilale, Morocco's Permanent Representative of Kingdom of Morocco to the UN : The importance of African and South-South cooperation to meet aquatic food sovereignty. Mrs Maria Sarraf, Practice Manager for the Environment, Natural Resources and the Blue Economy in the MENA region. Keynote speaker: Pr. Rashid Sumaila in Oceans & Fisheries Economics of the University of British Columbia : Blue food & jobs development sustainably is possible and economically beneficial.

02 10h45 - 11h45

Session 1 : Science and Data

Takeaway from day 1: Dr. Patrice Brehmer, Senior Marine Scientist (IRD), Scientific Adviser of the Permanent Secretary of the Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission (SRFC), Co-chair of the scientific committee - BBI.
Expert insight: Dr. Hassan Moustahfid, Vice President of the Africa and Adjacent Island States Ocean Decade Taskforce: What science and data can power blue food and Jobs?
Ministerial speeches: Contribution, challenges and demands • Angola : He Mr. Dos Santos Alvaro Da Cunha Candido, Secretary of State for Fisheries and Marine Resources. • Benin: Mr DOUSSA AGUEMON, Chief of Staff of the Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries. • Burkina Faso: Mr. MOUSSA ZIDA, Director General of Agropastoral Development. • Burundi : Mr. LÉONARD BUTOYI, Deputy Minister for the Environment, Agriculture and Livestock. • Cabo Verde : HE Mr. Jorge Pedro Maurício dos Santos, Minister of Communities and President of the National Assembly. • Cameroun : HE Dr. Taïga, Minister of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries. • Central African Republic : HE Mr. Gervais Mbata, Minister of Water and Forests, Hunting and Fishing. • Côte d'Ivoire : FOFANA Bina, Director of Fisheries, Ministry of Animal and Fisheries Resources.

03 11h45- 12h35

Session 2 : Governance and policy

Takeaway from day 1: Dr. Georges Mba Asseko Head of UA- Blue Economy Division. Expert insight : Dr. Miguel Bernal Representative of FAO : What policies and governance are needed to meet the needs of Blue Food and Jobs?
Ministerial speeches: Contribution, challenges and demands (Head of Delegation) • Democratic Republic of Congo: Mrs. Pascaline Mbangu Kikumbi, Secretary General for Fisheries and Livestock. • Equatorial Guinea : HSE Juan José Ndong Tom, Minister of Agriculture of Equatorial Guinea. • Eswatini: HESE Under Secretary, Gugu Sibonakalisa • Ambassador SE Branly Martial Oupolo, Ambassador of Gabon in Kingdom of Morocco. • Gambia: Mr. BubaUBA SANYANG, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources. • Ghana: HE Mrs. Mavis Hawa Koonson, Minister of Fisheries Development and Aquaculture. • Guinea: HE Mrs. Fatima Camara, Minister of Fisheries and Maritime Economy. • Guinea -Bissau: HE Mr. Mario Mussante da Silva Loureiro, Minister of Fisheries and Maritime Economy.

04 12h35-12h50

Official Ceremony: Restitution of scientific survey in Benin and Liberia

- Dr. Abdelmalek Faraj, Director of INRH : Introduction speech.
- The movie of the Survey : Dive in the scientific survey in Liberia and Benin
- Dr. Najib Charouki, Head of mission in Liberia and Benin.

05 12h50-14h30

Lunch Break

06 14h30-15h30

Session 3 - Finance

Takeaway from day 1: Ms. Sylvia Michele Diez, Program Manager for PROBLUE at the World Bank. Expert insight : Dr Amadou Tall, ECOWAS Consultant: what financing opportunities are available to develop blue food and jobs. **Ministerial speeches:** Contribution, challenges and demands (Head of Delegation) • Kenya: Ambassador Jessica Muthoni Gakinya. • Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Mr. Mohammed Elqahtani, DG of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture. • Liberia: Mr. William Y. Boeh, Deputy Director General of Technical Services, National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA). • Libya: HE Mr. Abdel Mohammad Suktam Hasan, Minister of Marine Resources. • Madagascar : SE. Dr Paubert Tsimanaoraty Mahatante, Minister for Fisheries and the Blue Economy. • Mali: SE Mr. Youba Ba, Minister of Livestock and Fisheries. • Mauritania : Mr. Sidi Ali Sidi Boubacar, Secretary General for Fisheries, Maritime Infrastructures and Ports.

07 15h30-16h30

Session 4 : Cooperation

Takeaway from day 1: HE Dr. Brahim Kallahi Permanent Secretary of SRFC. Expert insight : Dr. Diop Hamady, International development consultant and Post Malabo Presse Coordinator: How could we go forward by south-south cooperation to develop blue food and jobs?.
Ministerial speeches: Contribution, challenges and demands (Head of Delegation) • Niger: Mr. Niandou Mounkaila, Managing Director, Société du Patrimoine des Eaux.• Nigeria : Mr. Omoragbon OSAKPAMWAN WELLINGTON, Director General of Fisheries. • Sao Tome and Principe: HE Mr. Abel da Silva Bom Jusus, Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries. • Senegal: HE Dr. Fatou Diouf, Minister of Fisheries, Maritime and Port Infrastructures. • Sierra Leone: HE Mrs. Princess Dugba, Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources. • Sultanate of Oman: Ambassador Khalid Salim Bamkhalif. • Spain: Mr. José Manuel Jaquotot, Counsellor for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at the Spanish Embassy.

08 16h30-17h00

Recommendations and closing remarks

• Declaration of Tangier, Dr Hamady Diop, International development consultant and Post Malabo Presse Coordinator Closing remarks by His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Sadiki, Ex-Minister of Agriculture, Maritime Fisheries, Rural Development, Waters and Forests of the Kingdom of Morocco

Annex II: Expert Key Messages

On Science and Data

“The Blue Economy can simply be defined as the maritime economy with a sustainable and socially inclusive approach. Yesterday's technical session highlighted the strong potential of the blue economy to ensure food sovereignty for African states, strengthen climate resilience and support economic development through job creation. The challenges are certainly numerous, but scientists are in a position to provide solutions to the demands of political decision-makers, as long as they are given the means to do so. And by the same means, they can help these decision-makers move towards sustainable governance of marine resources. The relationship between blue economy initiatives and scientific research is inextricable, and cannot be dissociated. Any effort to develop sectors such as fishing or aquaculture without a solid base of local scientific expertise risks being ineffective, or even counter-productive. Investment in sustainable practices must be accompanied by solid interdisciplinary scientific support. Common solutions are emerging, and require political support. A profound transformation in the way policies are approached to support innovation-driven research, to ensure that government strategies and budgets are well directed. A profound transformation in the approach to policies supporting innovation-driven research, to ensure that government strategies and budgets are well directed. Each state should support, and ensure the effective operation of, efforts to collect standardized, long-term “marine” data essential to the development of Blue Economy, and which are often the same as those required for the proper management of fisheries resources. We recommend setting up and maintaining a digital analytical platform to facilitate, improve and accelerate the delivery of scientific expertise. This type of platform supports the sharing of information, thereby enhancing the excellence of scientific advice and facilitating governance.” - Dr Patrice Brehmer, Scientific Advisor of the Permanent Secretary of the Sub-regional fisheries Commission. Co-chair of the scientific committee - BBI.

“Today, I urge you to recognize the vital importance of investing in data and science for the future of our aquatic blue food sectors—fisheries and aquaculture—and the jobs they create. First, consider sustainable fisheries management. Many agencies around the world have effectively utilized scientific assessments to rebuild fish stocks. For example, in the United States, 50 fish stocks have been successfully restored as of 2023, thanks to the implementation of precise catch limits based on reliable data. This effective management has both protected marine ecosystems and secured thousands of jobs in the U.S. fishing industry. By investing in similar initiatives, we can ensure sustainable practices that benefit our economies and preserve our resources. Next, let’s examine aquaculture. Chile's transformation of its salmon farming industry showcases the power of scientific investment. By employing data analytics for fish health and feeding practices, Chile has become a global leader, creating thousands of jobs in rural areas. We can adopt this model to enhance our own aquaculture sectors, fostering innovation and sustainable employment. Lastly, we must prioritize climate resilience—what I call “Africa Climate Ready Fisheries.” Through scientific research and data analysis, we can adapt to climate impacts, preserving jobs and ensuring food security. The evidence is clear: investing in data and science is essential. I also call for full support of the Blue Belt Initiative as a collaborative platform to share best practices across Africa. Let us commit to fostering a vibrant blue economy that empowers communities and safeguards our marine resources for generations to come. The time to act is now! Thank you.” - Dr Hassan Moustahfid Senior Scientist -USIOOS, Vice President of the UN Ocean Decade Africa Task Force and Co-chair of the scientific committee - BBI.

On Governance and Policy

"Blue Economy is the core drive for sustainable growth and food security in Africa. Most of the countries have already developed their strategies and implementation plans for the BE. Now it is time to take action and ensure implementation and implementation capabilities. Several challenges should be addressed: Coherence in politics, there is a need to interlink sectoral policies among them so that a BE approach is ensured. Technical training is a must. Despite having several universities and training centers, they are not specialized on BE and specifically on the knowledge challenges that the different activities require. Access to funding instruments adapted to the country needs Public private cooperation is a must to drive innovation and competitiveness. The role of public administration is creating a favorable ecosystem that attracts investors to fulfill the value chain of the blue sectors. It is necessary to concentrate efforts on designing bankable projects aimed to generate impact of value. So those countries are those who should submit the projects to potential donors, so as to avoid the possibility."- Dr Georges Mba Asseko Head of Blue Economy Division African Union.

"1. By 2050 Africa will grow to 2.5 billion people, which means that 25 percent of the world's population will be African. Providing sufficient food, nutrition, and jobs for this growing population, requires an increasing contribution from the ocean, and in particular from aquatic food production systems. 2. Through the Blue Transformation FAO aims at supporting this continent through long-term vision and investment planning as well as cooperation with relevant initiatives such as the Blue Belt Initiative, and key players in the blue economy, such as the World Bank PROBLUE. 3. At the regional level, FAO management bodies such as the GFCM, as well as advisory bodies such as CECAF and WECAF and projects like NANSEN, are tailoring the Blue Transformation principles to the specific needs of various African subregions. 4. In particular, the GFCM leads an effective fisheries and aquaculture policy-making in north Africa, contributing to maintain a production of 2 million tons of nutritive blue foods and securing nearly 1 million jobs, ensuring the achievement of regional objectives such as the reduction of overfishing and the development of aquaculture. 5. The effective governance of fisheries and aquaculture requires the know-how and technical expertise of FAO and its regional organizations, but also requires adequate capacity, resources and commitment at national level, securing a level playing field and a framework of cooperation that allows to effectively manage shared resources. 6. Integrated ocean governance also requires intersectoral cooperation, and initiatives such as Blue Belt, as well as the African Conference that we will have tomorrow, should make sure that African needs and priorities are fully integrated in global dialogues such as the ones promoted by the UN Ocean Conference of Nice in 2025. 7. I look forward to hearing the vision of African countries in this panel and to continue working with you towards an effective ocean governance and investments in the blue economy."- Dr Miguel Bernal, Representative of FAO Executive secretary of GFCM.

On Cooperation

"At the expert session, we stressed the importance of sub-regional and regional cooperation in implementing the Blue Economy in Africa. Our oceans are a precious source of economic growth, but their sustainable management is crucial to ensure their preservation. The Blue Economy is an integrated approach to combining economic prosperity and environmental protection, and several African countries have already made progress along this path. To maximize results, it is essential to capitalize on the experience gained. Exchanges of information, data and experience between countries are fundamental to the shared management of marine resources, as are joint research programs on stock assessment and aquaculture development. This sharing helps to strengthen scientific and technical capacities across the region. The harmonization of national policies, particularly in the fisheries sector, is also essential. Close cooperation between states will enable common management standards to be established for shared resources, thereby reducing conflicts and optimizing their exploitation. Another key pillar of cooperation is market access. The African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AFCFTA) can play a major role in ensuring fair market access for all stakeholders, while introducing sustainable practices and innovations in emerging sectors. To succeed, however, appropriate infrastructure is required. Finally, the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing remains an urgent priority. Regional cooperation in monitoring and data sharing is essential to protect marine resources and the livelihoods of coastal communities. Cooperation between governments, the private sector, researchers and civil society is the key driver for achieving a sustainable Blue Economy in Africa."- Dr Khallahi Brahim, Permanent Secretary of SRFC Sub- Regional Fisheries Commission."To advance the blue economy and related employment opportunities through South South cooperation, countries can engage in the sharing of best practices and expertise in sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. Additionally, they can establish joint research initiatives with the objective of innovating in blue economy technologies and creating investment partnerships with the aim of mobilizing resources. By aligning policies, facilitating market access, and engaging local communities, these nations can enhance their capacity and leverage local knowledge. Furthermore, the promotion of technology transfer and collaborative training programs will empower stakeholders, thereby ensuring sustainable growth and food security in the blue economy." - Dr Hamady Diop, Post Malabo Process Coordinator Member of the BBI Scientific Committee.

On Finance

"The Blue Economy refers to processes and transformation, and for this we need a shift in the paradigm of financial models. Currently, there is a lot of funding that is not being fully utilized. And this is largely due to fragmented demand arising from different priorities, disagreements on taxonomies, and differing decision criteria. This has resulted in a large gap for blue finance between supply and demand. To address this, we have to transition to new financial models designed specifically for the Blue Economy, ensuring they align with the priorities of the different countries, especially in relation to blue food and blue jobs." - Mrs Sylvia Michele Diez Senior Environmental Specialist World Bank."A variety of financial instruments supports the growth of blue food and related jobs, creating a multifaceted funding approach. International development banks, such as the World Bank and African Development Bank, play a crucial role by providing loans, grants, and technical assistance for sustainable marine resource development. In parallel, climate funds enhance these efforts by backing blue economy projects, particularly in fisheries and aquaculture. The private sector further strengthens this initiative, with venture capital and impact investing driving innovation in blue food startups. Public-private partnerships enable governments and companies to effectively pool resources for greater impact. Additionally, debt-for-nature swaps allow countries to reduce external debt while advancing environmental stewardship. Complementing these strategies, blue bonds provide a targeted means to raise capital for the preservation and sustainable management of marine ecosystems" - Dr Amadou Tall Senior Fisheries and Aquaculture Expert.

Annex III: The Tangier Declaration

We, the undersigned Ministers and Representatives of African States, together with representatives from international, regional, and sub-regional organizations, gathered in Tangier, Kingdom of Morocco, on 7 and 8 October 2024, for the Third Session of the High-Level Conference of the Blue Belt Initiative, convened through the invitation of His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Sadiki, Minister of Agriculture, Maritime Fisheries, Rural Development, Waters and Forests of the Kingdom of Morocco.

Express our heartfelt **gratitude** to His Majesty King Mohammed VI for His gracious support, the warm welcome provided by the beautiful city of Tangier — the flagship of the blue economy — and the resources allocated to ensure the success of this important event.

Acknowledging the launch of the Blue Belt Initiative by the Kingdom of Morocco as part of the Action Agenda of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change during COP22 in Marrakech and its realization through the Blue Belt platform and the Agadir Declarations.

Noting the strategic framework of the Blue Belt Initiative, which builds on earlier highlevel dialogues, including actions initiated during COP22 and guidance from the 2019 and 2023 Agadir Declarations. This initiative addresses the ocean's essential role in ecosystem services — such as greenhouse gas sequestration and oxygen production — as well as its significance to food security, nutrition, livelihoods, global maritime trade, cultural heritage, biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, the blue economy, and poverty eradication.

Appreciating the contribution of the Blue Belt Initiative to fostering constructive dialogue and enhancing mutual understanding and collaboration between African nations. We reaffirm our collective commitment to tackling key challenges and advancing our shared goals for sustainable coasts and oceans, as well as the sustainable development of Africa's blue economy, blue food, jobs creation, and exchange of knowledge and scientific expertise.

Valuing the vital contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to advancing multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG14 (Life Below Water), the eradication of poverty and hunger, sustainable consumption and production, inclusive 2/3 economic growth, decent work, and the promotion of peaceful and accountable institutions.

Acknowledging the significant cumulative pressures facing marine and coastal ecosystems, including those from climate change, ocean acidification, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, pollution and the disproportionate impacts on less-developed, island and smaller African nations.

Emphasizing the importance of the upcoming UN Ocean 3rd Conference, "Our Ocean, Our Future, Our Responsibility," in underscoring the ocean's role in sustaining life and shaping our future.

Recognizing the necessity of integrating climate and ecosystem considerations into national economies to ensure blue food and job creation, human development, and sustainable use of ocean resources.

Articulating a vision for a resilient ocean and a sustainable, science-based seafood production system that fosters blue food and job creation. Highlighting the urgent need to advance scientific research, expertise, innovation, ocean observation systems, and inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships to implement an integrated and ecosystem-based approach across all sectors of the blue economy.

Recognizing the crucial need to enhance Africa’s contribution to global ocean science efforts within the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), in alignment with the African Union “Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.”

Recognizing the necessity for strengthened regional strategic actions within the Blue Belt Initiative to secure the technical and affordable resources, as well as investments, for further development of blue food and blue jobs through an inclusive collaborative regional blue platform.

Acknowledging the opportunity presented by the Blue Belt Initiative to enhance regional cooperation and mobilize resources to address shared priorities and challenges.

RECOMMEND The establishment of a Blue Belt Initiative platform that serves as an inclusive and permanent stakeholder dialogue, supported by a dedicated secretariat. This Platform will engage African countries, relevant continental regional and subregional organizations, international regional and bilateral development partners, and representatives of the private sector to cooperatively develop a ‘roadmap’ for effectively mobilizing and leveraging the investments and resources necessary for sustainable oceans, blue food and sustainable blue jobs.

RESPECTFULLY REQUEST the Blue Belt Initiative partners to support the core functions of the Platform in alignment with their respective strengths, resources and priorities. We urge all partners to actively engage with and collaborate through the Platform to ensure alignment with regional cooperation instruments and with shared national blue priorities.

-Tangier, Kingdom of Morocco October 8, 2024

ACRONYM AND ABBREVIATION

AFCFTA: African Continental Free Trade Agreement
AI: Artificial Intelligence
ANDA: Agence Nationale pour le Développement de l'Aquaculture
ATLAFCO: Ministerial Conference on fisheries cooperation among African States bordering the Atlantic Ocean
AU: African Union
AUC: African Union Commission
AU-IBAR: African Union Inter Bureau for Animal Resources
BBI: Blue Belt Initiative
BE: Blue Economy
CEO: Chief Executive Officer
COP22: Conference of the Parties on its twenty-second session (Marrakech 7-18/11/2016)
COREP: Commission Régionale des Pêches du Golfe de Guinée
CRODT: Centre de Recherches Océanographiques Dakar-Thiaroye
CSRP/SRFC: Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission, Northwest Africa
EBFM: Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management
EAF: Ecosystemic Approach to Fisheries
ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States
FAO: Food and Agricultural Organisation
FCWC: Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea
GCPM: General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean
HE: His/Her Excellency
ICSEM: Consultora especializada en sostenibilidad
IMAS: Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies
INRH: Institut National de Recherche Halieutique
IRD: French national research institute for sustainable development
MIC: Morocco Intelligentica Cie,
PCNS: Policy Center for the New South, Morocco
OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SDG: Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
IOC: Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission
UBC: University of British Columbia
UN: United Nations
WB: World Bank


BLUE
BELT
INITIATIVE