

Appraisal and Challenges of Sustainable Maritime Development: Vision 2030 Nigerian Blue Economy

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Abstract

This paper explores the socio-economic significance of the Nigerian Blue Economy, the nexus between sustainable development goals, maritime economic growth and the potentials of the blue Economy. The paper further discusses the bottlenecks and challenges that could possibly hinder the realization of sustainable growth and development of maritime domain in Nigeria. The paper examine the possible ways by which the blue economy can be safely and realistically achieved its objectives aligning with 2030 agenda for sustainable development. It conclude by providing adequate solutions and recommendations for a better and more efficient and effective maritime blue economic growth and development.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, (SDGs), Economic Growth, Maritime Domain

1.0 Introduction

Since its independence, Nigeria is still classified as a developing country because it has, to a large extent, failed to properly utilize the wealth that nature endowed it with.¹ One of the major factors for this rather uninspiring categorization, is the country's heavy reliance on petroleum. Unfortunately, the oil industry has, in recent years, faced a steady decline in economic returns due to the global search for more eco-friendly alternatives to crude oil. To save the country from this economic quagmire experts in various industries have called for the diversification of the Nigerian economy from heavy reliance on the oil industry to

other sources of revenue, with particular attention to the maritime sector. The maximization of the potential of the Nigerian maritime sector which houses the blue economy is now considered an imperative step towards achieving the country's sustainable development goals as well as steady economic growth.

Advocates of increasing productivity think that blue economy outputs have a high potential to boost the Nigerian economy to the degree of economic progress required.² The blue economy is critical not just for a diverse range of species and ecosystems, but also for the food chains, livelihoods, and environmental stability. The sea (blue economy) covers more than 75% of the Earth's surface and houses and over 50 percent of all living things, giving the mistaken impression that it is an infinite resource. This results to catastrophic over exploitation and deterioration, with far-reaching implications far beyond their shorelines.³ Many economic development objectives, as well as the shift to a wholly green economy, rely on ocean related problems for long-term viability. The "blue economy," a complementary "blue" component of that transformation, offers a novel solution to dealing with marine monitoring while getting their advantages in a more equitable and sustainable manner. According to a study, it has become abundantly clear that without improved long-term management of the seas, the people that

¹Sule Abiodun, 'Importance of Effective Management of Nigerian Blue Economy' (2021) Vol (2) Issue (8) Page 1457-1463 <www.ijrpr.com> accessed 12 April 2024

² Augustine Jacob & Okon Umoh, 'The Nigerian Blue Economy: Economic Expansion Issues and Challenges' (2022) 2(1): 29-33 Socio Economy and Policy Studies (SEPS) <www.seps.com.my> accessed 12 April 2024

³Ibid

relies on them would perish. The 2030 development plan acknowledges the potential for a link blue economy, environmental development, and economic growth are all intertwined.⁴

This drive towards economic exploration via maritime has become influenced by the need for the economic processes of the maritime industry to be conducted with sustainability in mind⁵. The blue economy holds immense potential for Nigeria, offering a promising pathway towards achieving sustainable development goals and fostering economic growth. As Africa's most populous country and with a coastline stretching over 850 kilometers along the Gulf of Guinea, Nigeria is strategically positioned to harness the vast resources of its marine environment⁶. The concept of the blue economy emphasizes the sustainable use of ocean resources to support various economic sectors while preserving the health of marine ecosystems. In the Nigerian context, this entails leveraging the country's maritime assets, including fisheries, aquaculture, shipping, offshore oil and gas, tourism, and renewable energy, to drive inclusive and environmentally sound development.

The rise of Nigeria's fisheries and aquaculture sectors is greatly facilitated by the country's rich marine biodiversity. There's a lot of room for growth in domestic seafood production given the abundance of different fish species along the coast, which will help meet the growing demand for seafood both

domestically and globally.⁷ Additionally, spending money on sustainable fishing methods and aquaculture approaches can improve food security, provide jobs, and reduce poverty especially in coastal areas where people's livelihoods are strongly correlated with marine resources. Moreover, Nigeria's ports enable the flow of commodities and goods, making the country's maritime sector a vital conduit for both internal and foreign trade. Increasing the effectiveness and competitiveness of Nigeria's shipping sector requires enhancing port facilities, optimizing logistical procedures, and enhancing marine security.⁸

Nigeria's coastal regions, with their immaculate beaches, rich marine life, and cultural heritage sites, also offer enormous tourism potential. Nonetheless, coordinated efforts to solve issues like inadequate infrastructure, environmental degradation, and security concerns are necessary to fully realize this potential. By adopting a holistic and integrated approach that balances economic prosperity with environmental sustainability, Nigeria can leverage its maritime resources to create a more inclusive, resilient, and prosperous future for its people.⁹ Through strategic policy interventions, investments in infrastructure and human capital, and multi-stakeholder collaboration, Nigeria can emerge as a leading player in the global blue economy arena, driving sustainable development and prosperity. Nigeria is at a critical juncture in its efforts to harness the transformative

⁴ Ibid

⁵Treasure Okure, 'Painting the Pros Blue: The road to Blue Economy in Nigeria' (2022) Unilag Law Review <<https://unilaglawreview.org/2021/11/17/painting-the-ports-blue-the-road-to-blue-economy-in-nigeria/>> accessed 12 April 2024

⁶Sungkawati E, 'Opportunities and Challenges : Adopting "Blue-Green Economy" Terms to Achieve SDGs' (2024) 2 Revenue Journal 01 <<https://doi.org/10.61650/rjme.v2il.333>> accessed 12 April 2024

⁷Nagy H & Nene S, 'Blue Gold : Advancing Blue Economy Governance in Africa' (2021) 13 Sustainability (Basel) 7153 <<https://doi.org/10.3390/sul3137153>> accessed 12 April 2024

⁸ Ibid

⁹Techera E, 'Achieving Blue Economy Goals: The Need for Improved Legal Frameworks across the Indian Ocean' (2019) 1 Seychelles Research Journal <<https://seychellesresearchjournalcom.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/achieving-blue-economy-goals-erika-techera.pdf>> accessed 12 April 2024

potential of the blue economy to achieve sustainable development goals and foster economic growth.¹⁰ Opportunities for innovation, research, and technological improvement are provided by the blue economy.¹¹

1.1 Significance of the Nigerian Maritime Industry

The term “Maritime” is broadly defined as anything involving the sea, including the navigation of commercial transactions on the sea or via any means requiring shipping transportation. The Nigerian Maritime Industry can be described as an all-encompassing industry, which embraces all maritime-related business activities that take place within the country's maritime environment. It ranges from offshore economic activities such as fishing, salvage, towage, and underwater resources to on-shore economic activities such as port activities, maritime transport (shipping), ship construction, repairs, and maintenance activities as well as the enterprises involved in carrying out these activities. The Maritime Industry is one of the sectors with the potential for unprecedented success in terms of revenue generation, employment opportunities and economic expansion with barely a quarter of this potential being currently harnessed. The economic importance of the Nigerian maritime transportation industry cannot be overemphasized as it accounts for about 95% of the vehicular means of Nigeria's international trade.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Roberts J. & Ali A., 'The Blue Economy and Small States' (2016) 1st edn, Commonwealth Secretariat

<https://bluecharter.thecommonwealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/BlueeconomyandSmallStates_UPDF.pdf> accessed 12 April 2024

¹² Marvin Abe, “Sustaining the progress of the maritime industry in Nigeria” (2021) <https://www.thecable.ng/sustaining-the-progress-of-the-maritime-idnsutry-in-niger/ampaccessed> 12 April 2024

The maritime industry holds immense potential, as it serves as a vital lifeline for international trade, transportation, resource exploitation, and tourism. Nigeria's shipping sector is estimated to be capable of generating N7 Trillion annually.¹³

Although, the potential contribution of the sector to the country's socio-economic growth has been overlooked by the government in the past. Recent moves from the government has shown a departure from such grave neglect.

One of the significant aspects of the Nigerian maritime sector is its transportation industry. The maritime transport industry generates employment both directly-by those actively employed in this industry itself and indirectly by creating a need for employment in its supplier industries. In Nova Scotia, for example, the maritime transport industry generated a total of 93,500 jobs or 25% of total employment in the state (The Philippine Environmental Governance). Similarly, in the UK, a study estimated that the maritime transport industry generated around 212,000 jobs in 2007.¹⁴ It has been argued that in Nigeria, an estimated 10% of job opportunities are provided by both the private and public sector of the maritime transport industry.

The public sectors under this industry include; The Nigerian Customs Services, Immigration office, Nigerian Navy, NDLEA, Standard Organization of Nigeria, Department of State Security Service, Federal Environmental Protection Agency, NAFDAC, Nigerian Port Authority, Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency.¹⁵ There are also numerous private companies which are involved in maritime transport activities. The maritime transport industry does not only create employment in the industries but also creates employment opportunity in other dependent

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Christiana Ogonna & Matthew Ogunniyi, 'Has Maritime Transport Sector Impacted on the Growth of Nigeria's Economy?' (2013) Vol 4. No 8 Journal of Business and Economics <<https://ir.unilag.edu.ng>> accessed 12 April 2024

¹⁵ Ibid

industries like shipbuilding, ship breaking, ship repairing and maritime training. The growth of other economic activities in Nigeria, such as freight forwarding, dockwork, stevedoring operations, towage, pilotage, warehousing, and cargo handling, which all rely on the maritime transport industry for their survival, is influenced by the number of jobs available in this sector. Additionally, it has encouraged Nigerians to work in the informal economy through small commerce, peddling, and other activities.¹⁶ Even though the country's unemployment rate is currently at an all time high, without the jobs and employment opportunities this industry provides, Nigeria's unemployment rate would have increased, contributing to the country's economic imbalance.¹⁷ As Africa's largest oil producer, Nigeria's maritime transport industry has been the lifeline for its oil and gas exports. Crude oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and other petroleum products are transported through the country's ports, connecting Nigeria with global markets.¹⁸ Additionally, as an import-dependent economy, the industry facilitates the importation of vital goods, machinery, and raw materials, supporting various sectors of the economy, such as manufacturing, agriculture, and construction.

Furthermore, the Nigeria maritime industry is a springboard to economic growth. It opens up the country to a wider international market aids exportation and foreign competition and accelerates diversification of the economy.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ National Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Statistics — Volume I: Unemployment and Underemployment Report, (Q4 2017-Q3 2018).

¹⁸ MF Fiscal Affairs Department, 'IMF Survey: Strong and Equitable Growth: Fiscal Policy Can Make a Difference' <<https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2015/09/28/04/53sopol063015a>> accessed 12 April 2024

¹⁹ Faizah Muhammad, 'Boosting the Nigerian Economy: The Maritime Sector as a Way Forward' (2023)

In line with this, maritime transport is considered as 'the backbone of global trade and global economy' on which the jobs and livelihoods of billions of people rely.²⁰ This demonstrates the crucial role it plays in the development of the economy.

As Nigeria seeks to move away from heavy reliance on crude oil revenues, the maritime sector presents enormous opportunities for economic diversification. The sector naturally integrates with several productive industries fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, shipping, marine logistics, offshore energy, and coastal manufacturing under what is now known as the blue economy framework.²¹

The development of deep-sea ports such as Lekki Deep Sea Port and ongoing port reforms demonstrate the sector's potential to unlock new revenue sources. Expansion of maritime trade enhances customs revenue, port charges, shipping levies, and taxes accruing to the government.²²

The maritime domain also supports non-oil exports, including agricultural commodities and solid minerals, helping the country broaden its foreign exchange base. Additionally, improved maritime infrastructure attracts foreign investment, stimulates industrialization near port corridors, and strengthens regional trade through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).²³

By creating multiple streams of economic activity from shipping services to marine resource exploitation, the maritime sector offers Nigeria a sustainable pathway for reducing unemployment, enhancing GDP

<<https://medium.com/@mfaizahatu/boosting-the-nigerian-economy-the-maritime-sector-as-a-way-forward-c36b573ef929>> accessed 12 April 2024

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Adekeye Adebajo, 'Maritime Security and the Gulf of Guinea' (2019) African Security Review 28(2)

²² Ibid

²³ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Review of Maritime Transport (Annual Report 2020)

contribution, and achieving long-term structural transformation of the economy.

1.2 Blue Economy: The Origin and Conceptualization of the Blue Economy

The emergence and recent evolution of the blue economy in several fora bear testimony to its importance as an alternative economic model for sustainable development that acknowledges nations' dependency on the oceans.²⁴ It also reflects a modern view that further development can also be feasible while maintaining sustainability and social justice, including intergenerational equity as the main guiding principles.²⁵

The concept Blue Economy as an economic philosophy was first introduced by Professor Gunter Pauli in 1994 when asked by the United Nations to reflect on the business models of the future in preparation for COP3 in Japan where the Kyoto Protocol was decided.²⁶ The idea 'blue economy' was propounded within the urban center Summit of 2012 that is additionally acquainted as 'Rio+20', by the world organization setting Program. Practically, the planned idea is an application of each 'green economy' in cycle with inexperienced growth and ideas to the ocean realm. Social equity in parallel with less environmental hurt and economical resource utilization were the very important causes behind underpinning the blue economy idea within the Rio+20 summit.²⁷ Blue economy acknowledges the ocean realm because of the new inducted platform of ocean development still as ocean governance. The idea mirrors the dragging line between socioeconomic

development and reckless environmental degradation. The term blue economy has been utilized in various ways.²⁸ However, it's understood to comprise a variety of economic sectors and connected policies that alone confirm whether or not the utilization of oceanic resources is property. The blue economy idea seeks to market economic processes, social inclusion, and therefore the preservation or improvement of livelihoods, while at the same time guaranteeing the environmental property of the oceans and coastal areas. It's considered the decoupling of socio-economic activities and development from environmental degradation and optimizing the advantages which can be derived from marine resources.²⁹

According to the World Bank, the blue economy is the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs whereas protecting the health of the oceans.³⁰ The European Commission defines the blue economy as all economic activities associated with oceans, seas, and coasts. It covers a large variety of interlinked established and rising sectors. The Commonwealth of Nations considers it, as an arising idea that inspires a higher situation of our ocean or 'blue' resources. Conservation International in Bertazzo added that the blue economy additionally includes economic edges that will not be marketed, like carbon storage, coastal protection, cultural values, and

²⁴United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). (2016). The Blue Economy.<www.uncca.org> Accessed 9 April 2024

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶Pauli, G. (2010). The Blue Economy: 10 years-100 innovations-100 million jobs. United State: Paradigm Publications

²⁷UNEP (2013). Green Economy Definition.<<http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/AboutGEI/>> Accessed 9 April 2024

²⁸Ibid

²⁹Wairimu, E., and Khainga D.,(2017). Kenya's Agenda in Developing the Blue Economy, <http://kippra.or.ke/kenyas-agenda-in-developing-the-blue-economy/> Accessed 9 April 2024

³⁰World Bank, (2016). Blue economy development framework - Growing the Blue Economy to combat poverty and accelerate prosperity, <<http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/446441473349079068/AMCOECC-Blue-Economy-Development-Framework>>

diversity.³¹ The Center for the Blue Economy says, the concept is currently a widely used term around the world with 3 connected however distinct meanings the general contribution of the oceans to economies, the necessity to deal with the environmental and ecological property of the oceans, and therefore the ocean economy as a growth chance for each developed and developing countries.³²

According to OECD projections, by 2030, the Blue Economy will stand out as an economic sector that has an on the spot or indirect link to the ocean that would outmatch the expansion of the global economy entirely, in terms of its usefulness and employment within the coming decade.³³ The marine energy, marine biotechnology, coastal business enterprise, transport, and food production sectors might provide unexampled development and investment opportunities.³⁴ The East Asian Seas (EAS) Congress outlined the blue economy as:³⁵

“a resource ocean primarily based economic model that's for the most parts mitten by coastal and marine ecosystems and resources, however one that employs environmentally sound and innovative infrastructure, technologies and practices, as well as institutional and funding arrangements, for meeting the goals of: (a) property and inclusive development; (b) protective the coasts and oceans, and reducing

*environmental risks and ecological scarcities; (c) addressing water, energy and food security; (d) protective the health, livelihoods and welfare of the folks within the coastal zone; and (e) fostering an ecosystem-based global climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.*³⁶

At the core of the Blue (ocean), the economic idea is the decoupling of socioeconomic development from environmental degradation.³⁷ To attain this, the Blue Economy approach is supported upon the assessment and incorporation of the Billion Dollars' worth of the natural (blue) capital into all aspects of economic activity (conceptualization, planning, infrastructure development, trade, travel, natural resources exploitation, energy production/consumption).³⁸ Potency and optimization of resource use square measure preponderating while respecting environmental and ecological parameters.³⁹ This includes wherever sustain sourcing and usage of natural raw materials and utilizing wherever possible "blue" low energy choices to grasp efficiencies and edges as against the business as was common "brown" situation of high energy, low employment, and industrial development model.⁴⁰

1.3 How Does the Blue Economy Differ from the Traditional Economic Model

The blue economy differs from traditional economic models by emphasizing sustainable utilization of ocean resources to drive economic growth while preserving marine ecosystems and promoting social equity.⁴¹

³¹Bertazzo, S. (2018). What on Earth is the blue economy? Human Nature - Conservation

³²Elisha, O. D. (2019). The Nigeria blue economy: Prospects for economic growth and challenges. International Journal of Scientific Research in Education, 12(5), 680-699.

³³OECD (2012).The Future of the Ocean Economy - exploring the prospects for emerging ocean industries to 2030 Mare.Retrieved, European Commission.

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵The East Asian Seas (EAS) Congress (2009).Building a blue economy: Strategy, opportunities, and partnerships in the Seas of East Asia. EAS Congress Bulletin, 131(9)

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷Elisha,O. D. (2019). The Nigeria blue economy: Prospects for economic growth and challenges. International Journal of Scientific Research in Education, 12(5), 680-699.

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Sustainable BlueEconomy Commonwealth Secretariat<https://thecommonwealth.org/bluec-harter/sustainable-blue-economy> » accessed 29th March 2024

Traditional economic models often focus on exploiting resources without adequate consideration for long-term sustainability or the health of ecosystems.⁴² In contrast, the blue economy integrates economic growth with environmental sustainability, aiming to balance economic development with the protection of marine resources, Improvequality of human life without unnecessary putting pressure or strains on sea, marine, and ocean life.

It encompasses a wide range of sectors beyond conventional activities like fisheries and maritime transport, including emerging industries like renewable energy, aquaculture, and marine biotechnology.⁴³

The blue economy also recognizes the intrinsic value of intangible “blue” resources such as traditional ways of life, carbon sequestration, and coastal resilience, highlighting the importance of holistic and sustainable development that benefits both present and future generations.⁴⁴

Examples of blue resources protected by the blue economy include marine biodiversity, coastal habitats like mangroves, seagrass, and coral reefs, as well as marine nurseries and habitats.⁴⁵ The blue economy emphasizes the

conservation and sustainable use of these resources to maintain ecosystem health, support biodiversity, and ensure the resilience of marine ecosystems.⁴⁶ By safeguarding these blue resources, the blue economy aims to mitigate the impacts of climate change, promote sustainable development, Contribute to eradicating poverty and protect the livelihoods of coastal communities. Additionally, the blue economy focuses on implementing measures to reducepollution, preserve marine ecosystems, and enhance the overall health of oceans and coastal areas.⁴⁷

The blue economy protects traditional ways of life by recognizing and valuing the cultural heritage and practices of communities dependent on marine resources.⁴⁸

By promoting sustainable management of ocean resources, the blue economy aims to ensure the preservation of these traditional ways of life that are intertwined with the sea. This approach acknowledges the importance of indigenous knowledge and practices in maintaining the health of marine ecosystems and coastal areas.⁴⁹

Additionally, the blue economy seeks to empower local communities by involving them in decision-making processes related to

⁴² Blue economy - Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_economy » accessed 29th 2024.

⁴³Essential conditions and missing links for a sustainable blue economy <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1462901122000016> accessed 29th March 2024.

⁴⁴Our Precious Blue Economy, As an Economic Model - LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/our-precious-blue-economy-economic-model-boatmatesocial-lf> » accessed 29th March 2024.

⁴⁵The Blue Economy: Converging on the Waves <http://www.gdrc.org/oceans/blue-economy/blue->

[economy.html](#) » accessed 29th March 2024.

⁴⁶Successful Blue Economy Examples With an Emphasis on International <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2019.00261/full> » accessed 29th March 2024.

⁴⁷Four ways the blue economy is helping protect the world's shared <https://www.wartsila.com/insights/article/four-ways-the-blue-economy-is-helping-protect-the-world-s-shared-oceans> » accessed 29th March 2024.

⁴⁸Successful Blue Economy Examples With an Emphasis on International <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2019.00261/full> » accessed 29th March 2024.

⁴⁹The blue economy: benefits of investing in ocean conservation <https://www.activesustainability.com/water/blue-economy/>» accessed 29th March 2024.

the sustainable use of marine resources, thus safeguarding their traditional practices and livelihoods. Through initiatives that prioritize environmental sustainability and social equity, the blue economy contributes to the preservation of cultural identities and the well-being of communities reliant on the sea for their way of life.⁵⁰

2.0 The Concept of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is the maintenance of a balance between the present human need for development on the one hand and the preservation of natural resources and the ecosystem upon which the present and future generations depend for sustenance on the other.⁵¹ The World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”⁵² The essence of this form of development is to achieve a stable relationship between human activities and the natural world, which does not diminish the prospects of future generations to enjoy a quality of life at least as good as the present generation.⁵³ This requires the protection of environmental quality while meeting the need for economic growth and development.⁵⁴

Several international agreements constitute the basis of the concept of sustainable development including the Convention on

Biological Diversity,⁵⁵ the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20),⁵⁶ the International Conference on Financing for Development,⁵⁷ the World Summit on Sustainable Development,⁵⁸ the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification,⁵⁹ and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.⁶⁰ These conventions mainly deal with the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources, the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources, and bio-diversity.

2.1 Establishing the Nexus between the Nigerian Blue Economy, SDGS and Economic Development

Nigeria's blue economy encompasses a wide array of marine resources, including fisheries, aquaculture, shipping, offshore oil and gas, tourism, and maritime transport. These sectors contribute significantly to the nation's economy, providing employment, revenue, and opportunities for trade. However, the sustainable utilization of these resources is crucial to ensure long-term prosperity while

⁵⁰Blue Economy: What You Need to Know – Deep Trekker
<https://www.deeptrekker.com/resources/blue-economy>» accessed 29th March 2024.

⁵¹OlufLanghelle, 'Sustainable Development and Social Justice: Expanding the Rawlsian Framework of Global Justice' (200) 9 *Envtl. Values* 296, 298-99

⁵²Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴Ibid

⁵⁵ Convention on Biological Diversity, June 5, 1992, 1760 U.N.T.S. 30619 (ratified by 190 states and supplemented by the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity Jan. 29, 2000, which entered into force on Sept. 11, 2003) (translated by author).

⁵⁶ Rep. of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, A/CONF.216/16 (June 22, 2012).

⁵⁷Ref. of the international conference on financing for Development, Monterrey, Mexico, ch. 1, resolution 1, annex, A/CONF.227.20 (March 22, 2002)

⁵⁸Rep. of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa A/CONF. 199/20 (Sept. 4, 2002).

⁵⁹U.N. Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, Senate Treaty Doc. 104-29 (June 17, 1994).

⁶⁰See U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, GE.05-62220€ 200705 (1992).

preserving the marine ecosystem.⁶¹ By aligning its blue economy initiatives with the SDGs, Nigeria can pursue economic development that is socially inclusive, environmentally responsible, and economically viable.

At the heart of the nexus between Nigeria's blue economy and the SDGs lies the principle of sustainable development. The SDGs provide a comprehensive framework for addressing global challenges, including poverty, hunger, climate change, and inequality. By integrating the principles of sustainability into its blue economy strategy, Nigeria can contribute to the achievement of multiple SDGs, particularly those related to poverty eradication, food security, and environmental conservation.⁶²

One of the key pathways through which the Nigerian blue economy can contribute to the SDGs is through the promotion of inclusive and equitable economic growth. By investing in sectors such as fisheries and aquaculture, which are vital sources of livelihoods for coastal communities, Nigeria can create employment opportunities, reduce poverty, and promote social inclusion. Moreover, empowering women and small-scale fishers in these sectors can further enhance their contribution to sustainable development.⁶³

Environmental sustainability is another critical dimension of the nexus between Nigeria's blue economy and the SDGs. The marine environment provides essential ecosystem

services, including carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and coastal protection. However, unsustainable practices such as overfishing, pollution, and habitat destruction threaten the health and resilience of marine ecosystems. By adopting policies and practices that promote sustainable resource management and conservation, Nigeria can safeguard its marine biodiversity while supporting SDGs related to climate action, life below water, and sustainable cities and communities.⁶⁴

Harnessing the potential of Nigeria's blue economy also requires investments in infrastructure, technology, and human capital. Improving maritime transport infrastructure, modernizing fishing fleets, and enhancing port facilities can facilitate trade and economic growth while reducing transportation costs and enhancing efficiency. Moreover, investing in education and training programs for the maritime sector can build the skills and expertise needed to support sustainable development and innovation.⁶⁵

International cooperation and governance are essential for realizing the full potential of Nigeria's blue economy and advancing the SDGs. Given the transboundary nature of marine resources, collaboration with neighboring countries, regional organizations, and international partners is crucial for effective resource management, maritime security, and disaster risk reduction.⁶⁶ Strengthening institutions, promoting good governance, and enhancing regulatory frameworks can foster trust, cooperation, and

⁶¹Miller K, K Thompson, P Johnston, and D Santillo, 'An Overview of Seabed Mining Including the Current State of Development, Environmental Impacts and Knowledge Gaps', (2018) 4 *Frontiers in Marine Science*

⁶²Ndanusa M, Y. Harada Y, and M Islam M. 'Challenges to Growth in Tourism Industry of a Developing Country: The Case of Nigeria' (2014) 10 *Asian Social Science* <<http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ass/article/view/40850>> accessed 18 April 2021

⁶³Oladele A, O Digun-Aweto O, and P Van Der MerweP, 'Potentials of Coastal and Marine Tourism in Nigeria' (2018) 13 *Tourism in Marine Environments*

⁶⁴OloweV, 'Africa 2100: How to Feed Nigeria in 2100 with 800 Million Inhabitants'[2020] *Organic Agriculture*

⁶⁵Patil PG, JViridin, C S Colgan, M G Hussain, P Failler, T Vegh, *Toward a Blue Economy: A Pathway for Sustainable Growth in Bangladesh*, (Washington, DC: The World Bank Group 2018)

⁶⁶Pauli G, *The Blue Economy: 10Years, 100 Innovations, 100 Million Jobs* (Paradigm Publications 2010)

sustainable development in the maritime domain.⁶⁷

However, realizing the potential of Nigeria's blue economy also entails addressing various challenges and risks. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, maritime piracy, and maritime pollution are significant threats that undermine the sustainability of marine resources and hinder economic development.

2.2 Legal Framework for Achieving Blue Economy in Nigeria

A blue economy offers many financial, development and socio-cultural benefits but the environmental risks associated with these benefits cannot be overlooked. A 'blue economy' plan for Nigeria therefore needs not only to identify and develop those sectors that have a high potential for sustainable yield and growth but must also include an environmental protection plan suitable for coping with present and future challenges associated with increased ocean activities.⁶⁸

The aim of the extant legal framework on marine blue economy and water management is to appraise its adequacy in ensuring the sustainable conservation and preservation of the health of the ocean ecosystem whilst the economic goals of the blue economy are being pursued in Nigeria.⁶⁹

At the fountainhead of all laws relating to the protection of the marine environment in Nigeria is Section 20 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999. The section provides that 'the State shall protect and improve the environment and safeguard the water, air and land, forest and wildlife of

Nigeria'.⁷⁰ This provision from which all other environmental protection laws in Nigeria derive validity makes it the core responsibility of the federal government to protect and improve the environment. More specifically on the marine environment, the section states that the State shall 'safeguard' the waters of Nigeria. The use of the word 'safeguard' according to the Learned Justices of the Supreme Court in *Attorney General Lagos State vs Attorney General of the Federation and 35 others*,⁷¹ indicates the intention of the government to channel resources towards protecting of the waters of Nigeria from any form of harm. Although the provision fails to spell out in clear terms how this function is to be performed, it serves as a rallying point for all governmental policies and regulations on environmental protection. The provision ensures that any policy initiative on the blue economy in Nigeria must necessarily include action points on the protection and improvement of the waters of Nigeria to ensure its sustainability.

Similarly, by vesting in the Federal Government the right to use and control all surface and ground water in Nigeria,⁷² the provisions of the Water Resources Act allow the government to make holistic plans to develop and manage sustainably the usage of the country's blue economy resources. The Act in section 5(a) (ii) empowers the minister to make proper provisions for the adequate supplies of suitable water for the generation of hydro-electric energy for navigation, fisheries and recreation. Section 6 of the Act imposes a duty on the Minister charged with the responsibility for matters relating to water resources to draw up from time to time, an up-to-date comprehensive master plan for the development, use, control, protection, management and administration of all water

⁶⁷ Pershing A and others, 'Chapter 9: Oceans and Marine Resources. Impacts, Risks, And Adaptation in the United States: The Fourth national Climate Assessment, Volume II <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/9/assessed> 20 April 2021

⁶⁸ Abubabkar Hassan Hamisu, 'A Study of Nigeria's Blue Economy Potential with Particular Reference to the Oil and Gas Sector', (2019) World maritime University Dissertations 1234

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), s 20

⁷¹ (2003) 12

NWLR (pt.

833) SC

⁷² The National Water Resources Act Cap N83 LFN 2004, SI

resources and to periodically review in the light of prevailing economic, financial and technological conditions, activities, plans and proposals of public authorities exercising powers relating to water resources. The flexible nature of this provision allows the government to regularly update its strategy for the protection and management of water resources in Nigeria to cope with the environmental impacts of intensified ocean activities owing to the expansion of the ocean-based economy in Nigeria. The minister is also expected to make provisions to ensure that the possible consequences of particular developmental proposals on the marine environment are properly investigated and considered before each proposal is approved.⁷³ This is to have a detailed and well-coordinated plan for the investigation, use, control, protection, management and administration of water resources in Nigeria.⁷⁴ Comparably, the Environmental Impact Assessment Act⁷⁵ also requires a mandatory environmental impact assessment be done for all new projects and activities having an impact on the environment.⁷⁶ Section 2 restricts the commencement of any public or private project without considerations for its environmental impact.⁷⁷ As such an expansion of the existing use to which ocean resources are put to will require an impact assessment to make certain that such planned investment or developmental activities conforms to the sustainability goal of the blue economy. One key environmental risk that can undermine the achievement of the goals of the blue economy is the pollution generated by maritime transport especially ship-source oil pollution. This challenge is magnified by the strong interdependence between the key economic sectors that make up the blue economy as such any negative environmental

impact in any of the sectors could ultimately lead to the collapse of the other. It therefore goes without saying that achieving sustainability and resilience in the maritime transport sector is of paramount importance to the survival of the blue economy as a whole. In order to militate against this challenge, protect the living components of the ocean ecosystem and preserve the health of the ocean, The Oil in Navigable Waters Act prohibits the discharge of oils into the navigable waters of Nigeria.⁷⁸ Sections 1, 3 and 5 of the Act make the discharge of any oil or mixture containing oil into the navigable waters of Nigeria a crime punishable by payment of a fine.⁷⁹ It provides further in section 5 that for the purpose of preventing or reducing discharges of oil and mixtures containing oil into the sea, all Nigerian ships are required to be fitted with such equipment necessary to prevent oil pollution. The Act also restricts the transfer of oil at night without requisite notice⁸⁰ and imposes a duty to report any discharge of oil into waters of harbors on the owner or master of the vessel in Section 10. Failure to make such reports in the prescribed format would make such person guilty of an offence under the Act and shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine.⁸¹ The Oil Pipelines Act⁸² equally prevents the pollution of the marine environment by regulating the grant of licenses for the establishment and maintenance of oil pipelines. In standardizing the processes, the Act seeks to prevent the pollution of lands and waters by oil pipelines.⁸³ Section 14 of the Act imposes a duty of care on the holder of such license or permit for the purpose of laying an oil pipeline either on land or water to take all reasonable steps to avoid any unnecessary damage to the environment in pursuance of the

⁷³The National Water Resources Act S 5(f).

⁷⁴The National Water Resources Act S 5 (g)
(i)

⁷⁵Environmental Impact Assessment Act CAP E12 LFN 2004

⁷⁶Ibid, s 1

⁷⁷Ibid, s 2

⁷⁸Oil in Navigable Waters Act Cap 06 LFN 2004

⁷⁹Ibid, s 6

⁸⁰Ibid, s 9

⁸¹Ibid, s 10(2)

⁸²Oil Pipeline Act Cap 07 LFN 2004

⁸³See Preamble to the Act

permit.⁸⁴ This is to prevent the exploration activities for oil and gas and the subsequent laying of pipelines for transportation from interfering with other aspects of the blue economy, such as fishing, thus presenting sustainably the ocean ecosystem as a whole.⁸⁵ In the same manner, The Petroleum Act⁸⁶ regulates the activities in the Nigerian petroleum industry to prevent the pollution of water courses and the atmosphere. This is to see to it that all exploitative activities carried out upon the grant of a license or lease under the Act are carried out in such a manner as to prevent the pollution of water ways in the Nigeria thereby preserving the ocean ecosystem.⁸⁷ Furthermore, The Oil Terminal Dues Act⁸⁸ also prohibits the discharge of oil into any part of the sea from a pipeline, vessel or as a result of any operation for the evacuation of oil.⁸⁹ Notwithstanding these provisions of the law, where the discharge or spill of oil or mixtures containing oil inadvertently occur, the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) established by The National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (Establishment) Act⁹⁰ is empowered to provide timely and effective response to such incidents through the implementation of the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan.⁹¹ In order to reduce overfishing and restore marine ecosystems through sustainable fishing and aquaculture, the Sea Fisheries

Act⁹² regulates fishing practices within the territorial waters of Nigeria. The Act prohibits fishing methods such as use of explosive substances or poisonous or noxious matter capable of introducing toxic substances into the marine environment.⁹³ It provides that anyone caught fishing with such prohibited substances shall be liable upon conviction to a term of two years imprisonment or to a fine of N50,000.⁹⁴ It further provides that such fishing boats or apparatus used in the perpetration of such unlawful act as well as the fish derived from the process shall be forfeited.⁹⁵

For the purpose of ensuring compliance with environmental laws and regulations in Nigeria particularly as it relates to safeguarding the health of the ocean ecosystem, The National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) Act⁹⁶ provides for the establishment of The National Environmental Standards and Regulations And Enforcement Agency (NESREA).⁹⁷ Section 7(h) specifically provides that the agency is saddled with the responsibility of enforcing through compliance all environmental regulations and standards on noise, air, land, seas, ocean and other water bodies in Nigeria.⁹⁸ As the highest and most potent institution for environment enforcement in Nigeria,⁹⁹ the Agency through the powers granted by the Act ensures the enforcement of all laws relating to the discharge of hazardous substances into the air or upon the land and water of Nigeria or at the adjoining shorelines except where such discharge is permitted or authorized under any law in force in Nigeria.¹⁰⁰ Additionally,

⁸⁴Ibid, s 14

⁸⁵A. G. Eze, T C Eze, 'A Survey of the Legal Framework for the Control of Oil and Gas Pollution from Some Selected Countries', (2014) 31 Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization 1

⁸⁶Petroleum Act CAP P10 LFN 2004

⁸⁷Petroleum Act CAP P10 LFN 2004 S 9(1)(a)(iii)

⁸⁸Oil Terminal Dues Act CAP 08 LFN 2004

⁸⁹Ibid s. 6.

⁹⁰National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (Establishment) Act (NOSDRA) 2006

⁹¹National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (Establishment) Act See Ss 1 and 5

⁹²Sea Fisheries Act CAP S4 LFN 2004

⁹³Ibid, s. 10(1)

⁹⁴Ibid, 10(2)

⁹⁵Ibid, s 13

⁹⁶National Environmental Standards and Regulations and Enforcement Agency (NESREA) Act 2007

⁹⁷Ibid, s 1

⁹⁸Ibid, s 7(h)

⁹⁹Ibid, s 31

¹⁰⁰Ibid, s 27

the Act also empowers the agency to make regulations on water quality standards for the purpose of protecting public health and welfare in Nigeria.¹⁰¹

2.3 The Role of the Nigerian Navy

The Nigerian Navy (NN), established under the Armed Forces Act, is primarily responsible for the defense of Nigeria's territorial waters and the protection of its maritime assets. In the context of national maritime security, the Navy functions as both a deterrent and enforcement body.

As Chilaka¹⁰² explains, the Nigerian Navy's restructured operations since 2015 including the establishment of the Western Naval Command, Central Naval Command, and Eastern Naval Command have enhanced surveillance and response capabilities in the Gulf of Guinea. The Navy also collaborates closely with NIMASA under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Maritime Security Cooperation, facilitating joint patrols, information sharing, and coordinated response to maritime incidents.

The Navy's contribution to the Deep Blue Project includes the deployment of interceptor boats, surveillance aircraft, and command vessels, all integrated into the C4i network. This collaboration has been pivotal in reducing piracy incidents, with reports showing an over 80% decline in recorded attacks between 2020 and 2023.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, funding constraints, limited logistics, and personnel training gaps continue to challenge the Navy's operational capacity. Additionally, jurisdictional conflicts between military and civilian agencies occasionally undermine seamless enforcement operations.

¹⁰¹Ibid, s (c), 7(d), 20, 23(2) and 24 (3)

¹⁰²Chilaka, E. M. (2025). The declining hegemony of pirates and drug traffickers in Nigerian waters versus the burden of U.S. conditions of entry. SAGE Publications.

¹⁰³Abdulsalam, M. M. (2025). From policy to practice: Addressing implementation challenges in the ISPS Code to advance SDG 8. LexScriptio Journal.

2.4 The Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act, 2019

The SPOMO Act 2019 stands as the legal centerpiece of Nigeria's contemporary maritime security regime. Enacted to domesticate Articles 100-107 of UNCLOS, it defines piracy, armed robbery at sea, and related offenses while providing penalties, including life imprisonment and heavy fines.

The Act's practical significance is twofold: it establishes legal clarity and enhances deterrence. Before its enactment, maritime offenses were prosecuted under general criminal laws, which were inadequate for maritime-specific crimes. As Anele¹⁰⁴ observes, the SPOMO Act has empowered NIMASA and the Navy to conduct joint investigations, while the Federal High Court exercises exclusive jurisdiction over maritime crimes.

One landmark case under the SPOMO regime was *The Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Henry Chukwu and other* (2021), where the accused pirates were convicted for hijacking a vessel off the Bonny Island. This ruling set a regional precedent and demonstrated Nigeria's capacity to domesticate international maritime law effectively.

However, Abubakar¹⁰⁵ critiques that despite legal progress, enforcement remains inconsistent due to inadequate prosecution resources, political interference, and gaps in evidence collection.

3.0 Challenges to Sustainable Development of Maritime Blue Economy in Nigeria

Nigeria's aspiration to achieve sustainable shipping is hindered by a constellation of security, institutional, and environmental challenges. Despite progressive frameworks such as the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act, 2019, the Deep Blue Project, and Nigeria's compliance with international conventions like MARPOL, UNCLOS, and the ISPS Code, the country's

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Ibid

maritime environment remains volatile. Maritime insecurity continues to cost Nigeria billions annually in lost revenue, increased insurance premiums, and reputational damage in the global shipping market.¹⁰⁶

The multi-dimensional challenges that undermine maritime security and sustainable shipping in Nigeria include piracy and oil theft, corruption and governance deficits, technological and infrastructural inadequacies, environmental degradation, weak legal enforcement, institutional inefficiency, and human capacity limitations.

3.0.1 Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea

Piracy and armed robbery remain the most persistent and destabilizing threats to Nigeria's maritime domain.

Ehiane¹⁰⁷ explains that the rise of maritime piracy in Nigeria is linked to high unemployment rates, organized crime networks, and weak maritime surveillance. Many pirates in the Niger Delta are former militants or unemployed youth skilled in navigation and armed conflict. Piracy activities include hijacking oil tankers, kidnapping for ransom, and theft of petroleum products.

Maritime insecurity, characterized by piracy, armed robbery at sea, and maritime terrorism, poses significant threats to the safety of maritime activities in Nigeria. These security challenges not only endanger the lives of seafarers and maritime stakeholders but also deter investments, disrupt trade flows, and hinder economic growth.

Pirate target vessels transiting through the strategic waterways, including the Gulf of Guinea and the Niger Delta.¹⁰⁸ Piracy not only

poses risks to the safety and security of seafarers but also disrupts maritime trade, increases insurance premiums, and raises the cost of doing business in maritime domain. Moreover, the prevalence of piracy undermines investor confidence, deters foreign investment, and hampers efforts to harness the economic potential of Nigeria's maritime sector.

Armed robbery at sea is another manifestation of maritime insecurity in Nigeria, particularly in the waters off the coast of Lagos and the Niger Delta. Criminal gangs armed with weapons target vessels at anchor, coastal terminals, and offshore installations, seizing valuable cargo, equipment, and personal belongings from crew members. The frequency and severity of armed robbery incidents pose significant risks to maritime safety and security, undermining confidence in the security of Nigeria's maritime domain. The specter of maritime terrorism looms large in Nigeria's maritime domain, fueled by the presence of militant groups, insurgents, and extremist organizations operating in the Niger Delta and the Gulf of Guinea. Maritime terrorists target vessels, offshore installations, and maritime infrastructure, seeking to disrupt energy supplies, sabotage economic activities, and sow fear and instability in coastal communities. The threat of maritime terrorism not only undermines the safety and security of maritime activities but also poses broader security implications for national and regional stability.

Maritime insecurity and piracy have significant implications for Nigeria's economic growth and development, undermining the country's potential as a maritime hub and hindering efforts to diversify the economy away from oil dependence. The costs associated with piracy, including increased insurance premiums, security measures, and delays in maritime transit, impose a heavy burden on businesses

¹⁰⁶Amao, O., Adesanya, O. P., Ola, A. A. (2024). Maritime piracy and the sustainable development of Nigeria's blue economy. SAGE Journals

¹⁰⁷Ehiane, S. O. (2025). The emergence of maritime piracy in Nigeria and the challenges in combatting the menace.

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¹⁰⁸Ayoade J, 'Water Resources «And Their Development in Nigeria / Les Ressources En

Eau Et Leur Exploitation En Nigérie' (1975)
20 Hydrological Sciences Bulletin

operating in the region, dampening investor confidence and deterring foreign investment. Moreover, the perception of insecurity undermines Nigeria's reputation as a safe and reliable trading partner, constraining trade flows, and limiting access to international markets. Addressing maritime insecurity is therefore critical to unlocking the economic potential of Nigeria's blue economy, promoting trade facilitation, and attracting investments in maritime infrastructure and services.

Although the Deep Blue Project and SPOMO Act have contributed to a decline in incidents, the persistence of piracy demonstrates the complexity of maritime insecurity. Beckley¹⁰⁹ notes that limited naval coverage, logistical constraints, and inadequate patrol vessels restrict the ability of security forces to maintain sustained presence across Nigeria's 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone.

3.1 Oil theft and Illegal Bunkering

Oil theft, often described as "economic terrorism," represents one of the gravest challenges to maritime security and sustainable maritime development in Nigeria. According to Onuoha¹¹⁰ Nigeria loses an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 barrels of crude oil daily to theft, sabotage, and illegal bunkering. These activities not only deplete national revenue but also devastate the environment and maritime ecosystems.

Illegal bunkering involves the diversion of crude oil through sophisticated networks that include international buyers, corrupt officials, and criminal syndicates. In some cases, collusion between security operatives and criminal cartels perpetuates the cycle of oil

¹⁰⁹ Beckley, E. O. (2024). Maritime security in Nigeria: Perspective for a comprehensive approach. Springer

¹¹⁰ Onuoha, A. U. (2023). Maritime security challenges and oil theft in the Niger Delta: Implications for sustainable development in Nigeria. UBJAD Journal.

theft. As a result, the government's anti-piracy and anti-bunkering initiatives are often compromised by internal corruption and lack of accountability.

This illicit trade also contributes to marine pollution, as unregulated artisanal refineries discharge toxic waste into rivers and coastal areas. The resultant environmental degradation has decimated fish populations, eroded livelihoods, and intensified poverty across coastal communities.¹¹¹

3.2 Corruption and Governance Deficits

Corruption is perhaps the most systemic obstacle to effective maritime governance in Nigeria, Ehiane¹¹² documents cases where enforcement personnel collaborate with pirates, aid the illegal export of crude oil, and manipulate vessel inspection reports for personal gain.

At institutional levels, corruption manifests through procurement fraud, embezzlement, and nepotism in appointments within key agencies like NIMASA and the Nigerian Ports Authority.

Ifedi¹¹³ argues that pervasive corruption not only undermines enforcement of the SPOMO Act but also discourages international cooperation and investment.

Moreover, the absence of transparency in port operations and revenue collection contributes to inefficiency. Many vessels avoid Nigerian ports due to excessive bureaucratic bottlenecks, arbitrary charges, and security

¹¹¹ Asua, S. A., & Nwangwu, C. (2025). Maritime insecurity, environmental degradation and the development of Nigeria's blue economy. African Affairs Journal.

¹¹² Ethiane, S.O. (2025). The emergence of maritime piracy in Nigeria and the challenges in combatting the menace. Journal of Law, Security and Society

¹¹³ Ifedi, F. O. (2020). Security challenges in Nigeria's maritime sector: Implications for sustainable development goals. Godfrey Okoye University Publications

concerns, preferring neighboring ports in Ghana and Benin Republic. This diversion significantly reduces Nigeria's maritime competitiveness and revenue generation.

3.3 Technological and Infrastructural Limitations

A critical challenge to sustainable maritime growth in Nigeria is the technological and infrastructural gap that constrains maritime domain awareness (MDA) and surveillance operations. Modern shipping and port security depend on sophisticated technologies such as Automatic Identification Systems (AIS), Long-Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT), and satellite-based maritime intelligence. However, Nigeria's systems remain fragmented and underfunded.

Beckley¹¹⁴ observes that although the Deep Blue Project introduced a technologically advanced C4i Command Centre, technical failures, limited maintenance, and inadequate training of operators hinder optimal utilization. Many port facilities also lack cybersecurity infrastructure, exposing them to hacking, data theft, and fraudulent cargo documentation.

Furthermore, poor intermodal connectivity between ports and inland transportation systems leads to congestion and delays, reducing efficiency and increasing the cost of doing business. Fadola¹¹⁵ emphasizes that many Nigerian ports still rely on outdated scanning technologies, inadequate lighting, and poorly trained personnel, factors that compromise both safety and sustainability.

3.4 Environmental Degradation and Climate Risks

Environmental degradation poses a direct threat to the sustainability of Nigeria's maritime economy. Oil spills, marine pollution, illegal dredging, and waste dumping have severely damaged coastal ecosystems.

¹¹⁴Ibid

¹¹⁵Fadola, A. B. (2024). Port security compliance: Safeguarding Nigeria's critical maritime infrastructure.

Asua&Nwangwu¹¹⁶ note that the Niger Delta is among the most environmentally degraded regions globally, with high levels of hydrocarbon contamination, deforestation, and declining biodiversity.

Maritime insecurity compounds these environmental challenges. Illegal bunkering vessels often discharge crude oil residues into open waters, while piracy discourages legitimate environmental monitoring and fishing activities. Consequently, both security and sustainability are compromised.

Furthermore, climate change exacerbates coastal erosion, rising sea levels, and flooding, threatening port infrastructure and maritime communities. Despite being a signatory to the Paris Agreement (2015) and MARPOL, Nigeria's adaptation measures remain underdeveloped. Inadequate investment in green shipping technologies and renewable energy alternatives underscores the gap between policy commitments and practical implementation.

3.5 Weak Legal Enforcement and Prosecution Gaps

The SPOMO Act (2019) provides a robust legal framework for combating piracy, but its enforcement is constrained by logistical, procedural, and institutional deficiencies. Abubakar¹¹⁷ identifies issues such as insufficient legal expertise, poor inter-agency coordination, and inadequate evidence gathering as key obstacles to successful prosecutions.

Moreover, some judicial officers lack specialized training in maritime law, leading to delays in case resolution. As Jande¹¹⁸ points

¹¹⁶Asua, S.A. &Nwangwu, C. (2025). Maritime insecurity, environmental degradation and the development of Nigeria's blue economy, African Affairs Journal.

¹¹⁷Abubakar, S. (2023). Law and policy in combatting piracy by maritime enforcement agencies: A Nigerian perspective. World Maritime University

¹¹⁸Jarde, .I.T. (2025). State intervention in Nigeria's maritime sector: Challenges and

out, the absence of dedicated maritime courts and limited awareness of international maritime conventions among prosecutors and judges reduce the deterrent value of existing laws.

In addition, jurisdictional overlaps between NIMASA, the Nigerian Navy, and the Marine Police create enforcement ambiguities. This fragmentation leads to duplicated efforts and occasional clashes over authority during maritime operations.

3.6 Institutional Weakness and Bureaucratic Inefficiency

Institutional inefficiency remains a recurring obstacle to effective maritime governance. Overlapping mandates among NIMASA, the Navy, and the Nigerian Ports Authority often lead to conflicting priorities. Umoette¹¹⁹ observes that bureaucratic inertia and political interference undermine the operational independence of maritime agencies.

Furthermore, the absence of a unified maritime strategy hinders policy coherence. While NIMASA focuses on regulation and safety, the Navy emphasizes defense, and the NPA prioritizes trade facilitation often without synchronized planning. This disjointed structure results in resource duplication, poor data sharing, and inconsistent responses to maritime threats.

Administrative bottlenecks, including slow procurement processes and outdated operational procedures, also discourage private sector participation. As a result, the maritime sector struggles to attract long-term investment essential for port modernization and environmental sustainability.

policy solutions. *African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences*

¹¹⁹Umoette, N. (2025). The impact of maritime piracy and its implications for sustainability in Port Marcourt Seaport and the Niger Delta. Plymouth University

3.7 Human Capital Deficits and Capacity Challenges

Human resource limitations further weaken Nigeria's maritime security framework. The shortage of skilled personnel in navigation, marine engineering, and maritime law enforcement constrains operational effectiveness. Many officers lack the technical proficiency required to operate sophisticated surveillance systems, interpret maritime intelligence, or prosecute complex piracy cases.

Beckley highlights that training programs at NIMASA's Maritime Academy of Nigeria (MAN), Oron, remain underfunded and outdated. Furthermore, brain drain and low remuneration contribute to high turnover rates among maritime professionals. The result is a workforce ill-equipped to handle the demands of modern maritime security and sustainable, shipping management.

Moreover, the absence of continuous professional development programs for judicial and enforcement officers undermines Nigeria's capacity to align domestic enforcement with international maritime standards.

3.8 Socio-Economic Factors and Maritime Insecurity

Maritime insecurity is not merely a policing issue it is deeply intertwined with Nigeria's socioeconomic realities. High youth unemployment, regional inequality, and poverty in coastal communities fuel participation in maritime crimes. Umoette argues that the failure to provide alternative livelihoods has entrenched piracy as an informal economy in the Niger Delta.

Additionally, ethnic tensions and political marginalization exacerbate grievances that criminal actors exploit to justify illegal activities. Without addressing the socio-economic root causes of maritime crime, enforcement measures will continue to produce only temporary results.

3.9 The International Dimension: Compliance and Reputation

Nigeria's maritime challenges also have an international dimension. Non-compliance with international safety and environmental standards has occasionally resulted in restrictions on Nigerian ports. For instance, under the U.S. Coast Guard's Conditions of Entry (2019), vessels from Nigerian ports faced increased inspection requirements due to security concerns. This damaged Nigeria's reputation and increased operational costs for ship-owners.

3.10 Observations from the Industry Stakeholders

Experts in Nigeria's maritime sector have warned that persistent policy, gaps, weak institutional coordination and lack of technical sovereignty are undermining the country's ability to unlock an estimated N1 trillion annual potential in the marine and blue economy.¹²⁰ Their concerns come despite the federal governments unveiling in 2025 of Nigeria's first national policy on marine and Blue Economy, a framework designed to reposition the marine sector as a major pillar of economic diversification.

Industry, stakeholders argue that policy pronouncements have not translated into measurable outcomes. They cautioned that without urgent structural reforms, Nigeria risk forfeiting billions of dollars in sustainable revenue, millions of potential jobs and its strategic ambition to serve as the maritime hub of West and Central Africa.

The national Chairman of the Nigeria institution of maritime Engineers and naval Architect's (NIMENA), DrEferboSylvanus,¹²¹ said "Nigeria's inability to generate at least N1 trillion annually, from the sector reflect structural and policy weaknesses that go beyond mere documentation.

Likewise, according to EncoheOgenyi, on corruption flash points at the ports-8 she said.¹²²

"Protecting, and promoting the National agricultural health, regulating, genetically, engineered organisms, administering, the plants and Animal Acts and carrying out wildlife damage management activities is among the purpose of Animal and plant Quarantine in Nigeria's ports.... But some officials of the Quarantine make undue demand and collect fee for services not rendered. Specifically, upward of N20,000 to N40,000 un-receipted fee collected for fumigation and other services which are usually not rendered".

Also, the bureaucratic bottlenecks that often delay, cargo release due to clearance documentation and approvals. The delays at ports were often caused not by the time taken for inspections but as a result of inspections and fragmented procedures, overlapping checks, and idle waiting times.¹²³ These bottlenecks and lack of single workflow causes increasing trade costs, and weakening confidence in Nigerian costs ports. President Bola Tinubu in April 2024 inaugurated National Single Window (NSW) steering committee to streamline import/export processes, reduce costs, to tackle corruption at ports, to offer a single interface for traders and agents, data harmonization, improved transparency, e-payment, centralized risk management and projecting an annual economic benefit of \$2.7 billion.¹²⁴

The initiative according to the federal government, will significantly, reduce delays, eliminate duplication of processes, curb inefficiencies and lower the cost of doing business at Nigeria's port. But stakeholders raised concerns including fears of sabotage, possible network issues, manpower and skill gaps and the integration of the Nigeria

¹²⁰National Economy, Monday, february 16, 2026 P.

¹²¹Ibid p.1.

¹²² Ships and Ports weekly 3-9 October, 2011 p.5

¹²³ The Nation Saturday, February 14, 2026 p. 2

¹²⁴New Telegraph, Wednesday, February 18, 2026 p. 22

customs service's B'Odogwu system into the new platform.¹²⁵

The Lekki Deep Sea Port, the first of its kind in the country and one of the biggest ports in West Africa, has the potential to generate about \$200 billion in government revenue over its 45-year concession period.¹²⁶

The port lying within Lekki free zone in Lagos. These attributes which are catalysts to trade, have begun to wane, making clients now see the port like any other in the country.

The complaints¹²⁷ stemming from freight forwarding agents at the facility, as a result of sharp practices from the quarantine department, are contrary to the government's intervention of making the port an outlet to decongest other ports in Lagos as well as enhance Nigeria's competitiveness as a logistic hub.

Also, according to findings by Daily sun,¹²⁸ persistent infrastructure deficits, inefficient cargo-handling processes and weak enforcement of maritime laws continue to erode revenue that should ordinarily accrue to the economy. Analysts¹²⁹ estimate that between N300 billion and N400 billion could be saved yearly. If the right reforms are introduced and effectively enforced.

Beyond direct revenue losses, stakeholders¹³⁰ say broader trade inefficiencies, driven by unregulated shipping and terminal charges, regulatory ambiguity and periodic industrial disruptions may be costing Nigeria between N700 billion annually. They also identified bureaucratic bottlenecks in documentation and deplorable port access roads as major disincentives to trade, these challenges, they noted, have forced some shipping lines to divert cargo to neighbouring countries with more efficient port systems.

¹²⁵Ibid. p. 22

¹²⁶The Guardian Weekend, February 14-15, 2026, p. 4

¹²⁷Ibid p. 4.

¹²⁸ Daily Sun Wednesday February 18, 2026 p.24.

¹²⁹Ibid p.24

¹³⁰Ibid. p.24

Industry stakeholders¹³¹ also warned that Nigeria may be losing as much as N400 billion annually in its maritime sector due to weak policy execution, regulatory loopholes and structural inefficiencies.

Also The Nigeria Customs Services (NCS) on Tuesday¹³² said it seized 13 containers of prohibited, expired and falsely declared goods worth over N6.91 billion at Apapa Port in Lagos. The comptroller – General of customs, Adewale Adeniyi told newsmen at the Apm Terminals in Apapa port, that officers uncovered the contraband following detailed scanning analysis and physical examination. He said further that the importation of expired drugs and controlled substances posed a direct threat to public health, while the concealment of codein-based products represents a calculated attempt to fuel substance abuse and undermine health care system.¹³³

The Sea Empowerment and Research Center (SEREC) also noting that Nigeria customs is entrenched with revenue collection, trade facilitation, border security and anti-smuggling operations, SEREC said further that aggressive revenue benchmarks have resulted in frequent valuation disputes, reclassification controversies, post – clearance demand notices, and delays and compliance fatigue.¹³⁴

Moreover, the agencies such as the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Nigerian maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Nigerian Shippers' Council (NSC), are currently being evaluated and driven by revenue-generation benchmarks rather than statutory mandates stakeholders claim.

Irked by this situation, the head of SEREC research, Eugene Nweke,¹³⁵ said "this trend

¹³¹Ibid p.24

¹³²Nigerian Tribune Wednesday 11 March 2026 p. 8

¹³³Ibid p.8

¹³⁴The Guardian Weekend, March 7-8, 2026 p. 74.

¹³⁵The Guardian Weakened, March 7-8, 2026 p. 74

has now extended beyond core maritime institutions to include standards product control, freight regulation, and environmental enforcement bodies operating within the port corridor. He stated that a review of the mandates of NIMASA, NPA, NSC, SON, NAFDAC, NESREA, and CRFFN reveals that their primary statutory obligations are safety regulation, infrastructure management, trade facilitation, environmental compliance, and professional oversight, not revenue maximization.

It added that the use of third parties (consultants) to engage in indirect revenue sources, via loyalty and leasing, constitutes operational exploits.¹³⁶

SEREC¹³⁷ noted that the core mandates of NPA according to the NPA Act (cap N126 LFN 2004) are port-infrastructure development, channel maintenance, undertaking landlord port administration, and marine services. Also, through NIMASA Act 2007 mandated the agency to take charge of maritime safety administration, flag and port state control, cabotage enforcement, seafarer's certification, and marine pollution prevention, the agency is now focusing on revenue-targeted enforcement which distorts safety inspections into punitive revenue tools rather than compliance assurance mechanisms.

Making reference to the NSC, SEREC¹³⁸ said: "if revenue pressure influences regulatory discretion, the council's neutrality in protecting cargo owners may be compromised. Moreover, "in addition to the NSC aiming to strike a sustainability balance, deliberate financial funding support by the government is apt, especially, to ensure that its industry economic regulatory roles are not hijacked" Nigeria could unlock up to \$3 billion in logistics investment and generate about \$18 million in annual efficiency savings if the planned National single window trade platform is implemented with strong private sector participation. Dele Kelvin Oye, the chairman of the Alliance for Economic

Research and Ethics (AERE),¹³⁹ has said ahead of the system's march 27, 2026 launch. The National single window platform integrates every agency touching trade namely, Nigeria customs service, NAFDAC, Standards organisation of Nigeria, Nigerian Ports Authority, NIMASA, and the newly empowered Nigeria Revenue Service (NRS) into one digital ecosystem where traders/users submit documents once, pay online, and track cargo in real-time".¹⁴⁰

The Nigeria – TurkiyeBusiness Council Chairman said:¹⁴¹ "After three failed attempts, the march 27, 2026 launch offers a chance and this is Nigeria's fourth attempt at implementing a single window to get trade facilitation right, but only if the private sector takes the wheel.

The unpleasant development of high freight charges and cargo diversion witnessed at our seaports also calls for urgent need to abolish the high charges. Besides, Nigeria is reported to be losing about \$500 million in revenue¹⁴² to Ghana, Benin Republic, Togo, Niger and Cote d'ivoire due to unnecessary, freight costs and operational inefficiency. The challenges are pushing exporters and importers to route shipments of goods and services to these neighbouring countries – where cargo charges are lower and clearance faster. Until recently, Nigeria was a preferred destination hub for freight forwarders. It has lost that position as a result of high charges.¹⁴³

It is also for the same reason that the United States and Russia are reported to be planning to position these West African ports as their preferred maritime hubs in the sub-region. Despite the fact that Nigeria's maritime sector is valued in excess of \$6.4 trillion, and annual revenue estimated at N1.6 trillion, Nigeria ports are losing their prime position among West African Ports¹⁴⁴

¹³⁶Ibid p. 74.

¹³⁷Ibid p. 74

¹³⁸Ibid p. 74

¹³⁹Vanguard, Monday, March 7, 2026 p.23

¹⁴⁰New Telegraph, Monday, March 9, 2026 p. 26

¹⁴¹Ibid p. 26

¹⁴²Daily Sun, Monday 9, 2026 p. 1

¹⁴³Ibid p. 11

¹⁴⁴Ibid p. 11

4.0 Recommendations

As a means of achieving the specified end of the goals of the blue economy, the following are recommended. Firstly, given the multiplicity of alternatives there is a need to weigh the relative importance of each sector of the blue economy to determine the value of its contribution to the economy. This will enable the right policy decisions to be made with regards to developing the most productive in terms of economic returns. Secondly, the interrelated nature of all the segments of the blue economy calls for a system of checks and balances which can best be facilitated through the proper enforcement of the letters of the law. The Nigerian environmental governance landscape is characterized by an array of legislation but fraught with the challenge of enforcement of the laws. The laws and procedures guiding ocean protection and conservation have been found to becomprehensive and robust, thus, making the problem not to be with the written legislation but with its enforcement. The punitive sanctions that would encourage better environmental behavior in these laws have been found to be ineffective with individuals and corporate bodies finding the economic rewards of violation more compelling than the likelihood of sanctions for infractions. For instance, failure to comply with sections 1, 3 and 5 of the Oil in Navigable Waters Act which prohibits the discharge of oil into Nigerian waters is punishable by a mere fine of two thousand naira. This meagre amount to be paid as fine is deemed inconsequential compared to the environmental impact of the intentional or accidental discharge of oil into the ocean ecosystem. Thirdly, realizing the full potential of the blue economy requires the efforts of all and sundry. Although the government may be required to provide the enabling environment to facilitate the diversification of resources into the development of the blue economy, the private sector also has a pivotal role to play in its success.

There is also the need to raise awareness to better educate stakeholders on what the blue economy is and why it matters. To achieve

this, there is the need to remove all informational barriers that are often created by educating public, private, and civil society, and youth in sectors that forecasts suggest will provide the next generation of new jobs. It is further recommended that for the blue economy to be sustainable, the country needs to develop and/or strengthen national policies to better integrate blue economy considerations into national and sub-national policy and governance frameworks.

Likewise, balancing security, imperatives with development objectives in Nigeria's maritime domain requires a strategic blend of technological innovation, institutional reform, and infrastructural investment. One of the most important strategies is the adoption of improved surveillance technologies to monitor Nigeria's vast maritime space effectively. Modern tools such as satellite monitoring systems, and automated identification systems and long range coastal radars enhance real time tracking of vessels and help detect suspicious activities early. Initiatives like the Deep Blue Project, which integrates drones, patrol boats, and surveillance aircrafts, demonstrate the importance of technology in addressing maritime threats. When security agencies have access to advanced surveillance tools, they can ensure safer maritime operations without disrupting commercial activities, thereby protecting economic interests.

Inter-agency cooperation is another essential strategy for achieving a balance between security and development. Nigeria's maritime governance involves multiple agencies, including the Nigerian Navy, NIMASA, Customs, Immigration, and the Marine Police, each with specific mandates. Effective coordination among these agencies reduces duplication of functions, improves intelligence sharing, and ensures rapid responses to security incidents. Joint task forces, integrated command centres, and harmonised operational protocols enable these institutions to work collectively toward securing maritime trade routes and offshore installations. When agencies operate cohesively, security operations become more efficient, facilitating

smoother economic activities and enhancing investor confidence.

Strict enforcement of maritime laws also plays a crucial role in balancing security with development. Strong legal frameworks such as the SPOMO Act, the Merchant Shipping Act, and the Cabotage Act provide the regulatory foundation for policing Nigeria's territorial waters. For security to support development, these laws must be consistently and transparently enforced to deter criminal activities such as piracy, smuggling, and illegal bunkering. Effective prosecution of offenders not only strengthens the rule of law but also sends a strong signal to foreign investors and shipping companies that Nigeria is committed to maintaining a predictable and secure maritime environment. Consistent enforcement enhances trust and ensures that economic activities are not undermined by criminality or institutional weaknesses.

Capacity building for maritime personnel is another vital strategy because sustainable security depends on the skills and professionalism of those operating on the front lines. Continuous training in navigation, intelligence gathering, environmental protection, and modern policing techniques ensures that security agencies can effectively implement maritime laws without compromising economic operations. In addition, investing in human capital ensures that Nigeria has the technical expertise required to manage ports, operate surveillance systems, and regulate offshore activities.

Nigeria has developed an impressive corpus of maritime legislation and policy frameworks aimed at securing its waters and promoting sustainable shipping. The SPOMO Act (2019), NIMASA Act (2007), and Deep Blue Project (2021) represent progressive legal and operational milestones. However, there is still fragmentation among regulatory and enforcement agencies, leading to duplication of responsibilities and weak inter-agency coordination.

By focusing on these areas, Nigeria can unlock the potential of its blue economy and address the challenges of coastal international trade. This can contribute to sustainable

economic growth, job creation, and improved livelihoods for Nigerians.

4.1 Conclusion

The Blue Economy holds substantial potential for contributing to accelerated GDP growth of Nigeria, offering opportunities for innovation and development in the coastal, marine, and maritime sectors. Diversifying the national economy beyond the oil, coastal, marine, and maritime sectors is crucial for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fostering sustainable blue economic growth.

The maritime blue economy presents significant opportunities for Nigeria's coastal seaborne trade with vast potential for economic growth, job creation, and sustainable development. However, the challenges facing Nigeria marine blue economy such as inadequate infrastructure, security concerns, corruption, regulatory inefficiencies, piracy, oil theft, environmental degradation, and institutional inefficiency, must be effectively addressed to fully harness the benefits of the blue economy.

Without addressing the root socio-economic and governance factors, the pursuit of sustainable marine blue economy will remain aspirational. This study concludes that Nigeria needs to prioritize investment in modern port and infrastructure, enhance maritime security measures, streamline regulatory frameworks, and develop a skilled workforce to overcome these challenges. By fostering public-private partnerships, promoting sustainable blue economy activities, and empowering coastal communities, Nigeria can unlock the full potential of its maritime blue economy, drive economic growth, and establish itself as a competitive maritime hub in the region.

Embracing the principles of the blue economy while addressing the challenges of Nigerian maritime domain is essential for sustainable economic development and prosperity in the country. Likewise, if Nigeria successfully integrates its legal, institutional and technological capacities, it can transform its marine blue economy from a liability into a catalyst for national prosperity and regional stability. Ultimately, a secure and sustainable

marine economy will not only enhance Nigeria's global trade competitiveness but also safeguard the livelihoods and ecological heritage of future generations.