

## SA IORAG - Conference Report

### Participants, Institutes:

Ms Nicole du Plessis, SAEON  
Mr KGame Molope, NWU  
Prof Ken Findlay, CPUT  
Ms Babalwa Siswana, HSRC/NMU  
Mr Nhlanhla Ginindza, UWC

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### Name of Conference, Country:

1st Sustainable Blue Economy Conference hosted by the Government of Kenya; co-hosted by the Governments of Canada and Japan.

### Date/s of Conference:

26-28 November 2018

### Purpose of attending the Conference:

Representing the SA IORAG; networking.

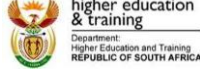
### Relevance to South Africa:

At the 24<sup>th</sup> IORAG Meeting, in Durban, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2018, the Kenyan delegation informed the meeting that they were hosting the 1st Sustainable Blue Economy Conference and invited IORA MS to attend. As the Blue Economy is one of the focus areas of IORA and the oceans economy is of importance to SA, the SC at the 14<sup>th</sup> SC meeting resolved that relevant academic group leads would be invited to attend and nominate students; the Coordinator was also requested to attend.

### Brief Summary of the Conference:

1st Sustainable Blue Economy Conference was hosted by the Government of Kenya, co-hosted by Governments of Canada and Japan. The overarching theme for the event was the “Blue Economy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

In the opening address President Uhuru Kenyatta indicated that he was “excited by the enormous economic prospects of the blue economy” but also “deeply concerned about the challenges of sustainable use of this critical resource”.



As of the end of the conference the website (<http://www.blueeconomyconference.go.ke/>) boasted 18,810 Participants, 184 Countries, 300+ Events and 200+ Speakers.

The South African Government delegation was led by Minister of Transport, Dr Blade Nzimande, and South Africa hosted one of the sessions to highlight the progress made through Oceans Phakisa. The session focused on the economic developments facilitated through the programme.

The conference highlighted that there is still much confusion surrounding what is meant by the Blue Economy, and whether this would continue with the 'business-as-usual' economic development of the ocean or follow an environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive economic development model.

## Student Feedback:

### Babalwa Siswana

The Conference provided the opportunity for interaction with other researchers/academics, government officials and provided opportunities to build new research partnerships with delegates from other institutions and countries.

Being part of the SA IORAG Trade and Investment Group, the conference presented an opportunity for understanding of IORA in terms of knowledge and skills training institutions and how can the sectors be made more attractive to empower women, youth and vulnerable groups economically while creating jobs in blue economy. This was one of the important topics, as it discussed the employment opportunities for conversation management, rehabilitation and data collection and observation of aquatic resources. It was also discussed how these opportunities and training could be funded. The overall topics at the conference also focused on the research conducted on topics such as employment, job creation, and poverty reduction.

### Nhlanhla Ginindza

The Conference was made up of thematic sessions that were mostly running parallel.

One of the key discussions was from the session on the link between climate change and sustainable blue economy. The scientific evidence is increasingly very clear that Africa will be among the worst affected continents, particularly the central and West African countries. On the contrary, these African countries are among the least carbon emitters. There is a clear disjuncture between the presented scientific evidence and the political will to promptly change policy direction among the highest carbon emitters. The countries that contribute a significant amount of carbon emissions are willing to pay for their emission more than they are willing to significantly reduce or curb their emissions.

The Blue Economy cannot be sustainable without meaningful involvement of women and youths, particularly those from coastal communities. Their involvement needs to be from research that considers their unique needs such as opportunities for empowerment and functional institutional arrangements. The traditional top-down approach to tackling poverty has proven to result in failed programmes. One of the key approaches that were raised in the conference was the interdisciplinary approach to practical and sustainable development. This approach also fosters a buy-in from intended beneficiaries.

Business has a role to play in ensuring that Africa's Blue Economy project becomes a success. One of the raised missing links has been environmental and societal ethics in business that was done in the maritime space. It was thus encouraging that business is adopting sustainable development as one of their key deliverables as they position themselves for investing in blue economy. There are somewhat observed contradictions in the planned projects and their models as they seem to be driven by economic interests.

The conducted research to inform financial investments seems to have focused on economic returns at the expense of environmental integrity and inclusive social development.

Most of the coastal African States lack the capacity and resources to exploit the available opportunities in the marine environment. The common issue raised was that most African countries are almost entirely waiting for foreign assistance to help them tap into the ocean economy in terms of infrastructure, research capacity, prospecting, setting up regulatory environment, political will and general governance of the seemingly new economic sector.

My participation at the Sustainable Blue Economy Conference has helped SAEON toward the achievement of its vision knowledge exchange that is informed by scientific research to guide the decision-making process for a better society.

### Future Research Areas:

- Natural Capital Accounting
- Implications of the global blue economy agenda for African States
- The impacts of climate change on marine ecosystems and implications for food security, fisheries modelling, social and economic research techniques, governance and fisheries resource management.



## **Brief highlights from the Sustainable Blue Economy Conference that was held in Nairobi, Kenya**

Nhlanhla Ginindza  
PhD Student  
University of the Western Cape, South Africa

14 December 2018

### **BACKGROUND**

The Sustainable Blue Economy Conference was organised and hosted by the Kenyan Government with the main support from the partnership with the Canadian and Japanese Governments in Nairobi, Kenya from 26-28 November 2018. The conference was the first of its kind to be organised and hosted globally. Presidents, ministers, members of parliaments, and other dignitaries pledged to create an enabling environment for the establishment or development of blue economy in their respective countries. Specialists from the freshwater and marine environments spoke on different aspects of blue economy from different disciplinary perspectives, such as the economics, environmental conservation, mining, climate change, social science, technology and engineering, and others.

### **KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM SELECTED SESSIONS**

Political representatives from different countries undertook to strengthen their governments to develop partnerships that will enable them to exploit opportunities available in oceans and inland water bodies. Some of the delivered statements by the leaders reflected ongoing partnerships in implementing programmes or projects. The commitments were largely to create an enabling environment for a blue economy, while others were simply statement of intent.

The fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing within exclusive economic zones of some African states are seen to be beyond their control. One of the binding factor is the power imbalance that informed the fishing agreements between countries or regions. Tackling the IUU fishing from high value fisheries resources by fishers from powerful countries will be approached very cautiously. There are fears that enforcing fisheries laws on foreign fishing companies may jeopardise trade agreements. Other related talks focused on the launch of Kenya Coast Guard for, among other reasons, to combat IUU fishing and combat the illegalities taking place within the Kenyan territorial waters. The related discussions centred on Africa's lack of capacity and technology to patrol or monitor economic activities within their territorial waters for the benefit of their citizens. African countries were encouraged to review access or rights agreements with trading partners to their energy, mineral and fisheries resources by foreign nationals.

Most fishing states in Africa need technological intervention to prevent fish quality and value loss in the supply chain. Some joint ventures and partnerships between African companies and, mostly, Asian companies have begun research and pilot projects to produce storage boxes for fish and fisheries products. The high-tech storage boxes with real-time data transmission are seen to be a long-awaited solution. The funding model for accessing or buying the boxes make the solution financially accessible and applicable in remote communities where electricity may not be available. The quality retention in fish make the storage boxes an attractive solution.

South Africa's Operation Phakisa is one of the most inspiring oceans economy projects from the African continent to begin exploiting the vast opportunities for economic development. One of the most encouraging parts of the session was the involvement of women, the in the entire chain of Operation Phakisa and the deliberate effort to capacitate previously disadvantaged social groups. The public-private partnerships that continue to grow in the project makes it a stable and attractive investment opportunity. Most importantly is that it is informed by well-researched best practices that are conscious of sustainability.

Climate change session was the most interesting session because it was able to bring in all the separate side events into one session. It was clear that the available scientific evidence points to the difficulties that countries have to plan around, particularly the developing countries in Central and West Africa. Although the main talk centred on the projected impacts under the four modelled scenarios (representative concentration pathways) of climate change by 2100, the focus on adaptation and mitigation generated more interest from participants, particularly when considering the need for development among the most affected or those countries projected to suffer the most in the coming years. The effect of climate change will vary among countries. However, the primary challenges will be difficulties on livelihoods, health and general development needs. The severity of weather patterns will highly affect rural communities who have limited economic and resilience options to support their food security, health, water and sanitation needs. Unsustainable coastal development, habitat loss for some species, increase in reports of invasive species, pollution, competition for space among economic sectors (eco-tourism, aquaculture, oil-gas exploration, fishing, mining) were cited as matters of importance that needs inclusive and well-consulted solutions. Political decisions will have to consider and balance all these issues, and be guided by the best available evidence-based advice.

The South Korean, Canadian, Japanese, and Chinese Governments committed to partnership with African countries in terms of research and technology-driven development of blue economy for mutual benefits. Their proposals had a lot of opportunities for African countries, particularly, small companies and established industries. The identified areas include mining, oil and gas exploration, the automation of the supply and value chain, capacity development within governments and industry players, adoption and domestication of high-end technology for better processes and government businesses.

## MAJOR TAKE-AWAYS

- The adoption of blue economy as a concept and a powerful instrument for sustainable development seem to be lagging behind in Africa. The African coastal countries have woken up to the available possibilities presented to them by their ocean space for economic development. Some of the commitments sounded more as political rhetoric than realistic plans that will be implemented in systematic manner. However, there is a political will to attract investment to grow local economies from blue economy. Processes are at various stages to create an enabling environment for a thriving oceans economy that supports the pillars of sustainability.
- There is an acknowledgement that research is important and should be central in the growth and development of blue economy. There seem to be some gap in terms of how research links with the development agenda of countries as some disciplines of research receive more attention.

- The involvement of women and youths in blue economy needs to be supported by policy and opportunities. The need is particularly high in rural communities where these groups are historically disadvantaged.
  - My participation at the conference was beneficial for my personal and academic development. The objectives or goals that were planned to be achieved from the conference were achieved, particularly the establishment of new networks and strengthening of the existing networks. My study will benefit from the perspectives and insights on how oceans economy is approached in different countries and its influence on communities and development outcomes. The lessons from the conference are incorporated in my study to shape some of my approaches, particularly in positioning the study to be an insightful tool to influence policy direction and options. The conference also available a comparison of practises in my research that will be useful in the implementation of government programmes.
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