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A Position Paper for Ocean Accounting in Africa

Africa Ocean Accounts Community of Practice



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Developed by the GOAP Africa Community of Practice at the inaugural African Dialogue on Ocean Accounting for presentation at the Third Global Dialogue on Ocean Accounting.

Background and Introduction

The Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP) Africa Community of Practice convened a two-session virtual African Dialogue on Ocean Accounting on 23 and 24 March 2022. The first session provided an information sharing opportunity introducing ocean accounts, GOAP, ocean accounts frameworks and their alignment to other ocean governance tools, as well as providing information on African case studies and opportunities for ocean accounts in African blue economy advancement. The second session comprised a roundtable dialogue to discuss opportunities, needs, perceived challenges, collaborations, and capacity development for ocean accounting in coastal African nations. These discussions resulted in this position paper for presentation at GOAP's Third Global Dialogue on Ocean Accounting.

Recognising that 70% or 38 of Africa's 54 sovereign states are coastal, that Africa has numerous imperatives for advancing blue economies at continental, regional or national scales, as well as the advantages and opportunities provided by ocean accounting in the advancement of sustainable and inclusive blue economy approaches in ocean sustainable development, the dialogue discussed various African thematic areas including:

1. Ocean accounting opportunities and needs.
2. Perceived challenges and recommended solutions.
3. Capacity development.
4. Alignment of ocean accounting with other governance tools.

These thematic areas were viewed through the lenses of the Research and Development, Management and Governance components of a science-to-policy interface to ensure evidence-based and informed decision-making processes in adaptive policy cycles of ocean sustainable development. Discussions drew heavily on the information shared in the first session. The importance of holistic ocean accounting processes to integrate social, economic, and environmental domains in ocean governance was recognised, particularly considering the role ocean accounts can play as indicators in:

1. Informed decision-making within policy development extending across multiple spatial scales from local to subnational, national, regional, and transboundary.
2. The integration of new ocean data and the identification of data gaps and needs.
3. Broader scope of valuation than 'ocean contribution to GDP' in terms of blue economy approaches of sustainability and inclusivity.
4. Justification of the value of Research, Management and Policy Development and their integration in the ocean governance space.
5. Providing information for the positioning of strategic development in ocean economic advancement.



Thematic areas of discussion

Ocean Accounting Opportunities and Needs

Economic accounting as an ocean accounts discipline

The dialogue recognised that ocean accounts provide important, relative metrics across time as indicators of ocean change that extend across transdisciplinary boundaries in support of ocean sustainable development. Accounting for changes in ocean economic sectors, however, remains an important element of the ocean accounting process, particularly in relation to heightening an understanding of ocean economies, their contribution to national economic priorities and strategies, and the relative importance of different ocean economy sectors. Drawing on experiences from the Gulf of Guinea and Southern Africa, the enhancement of this element of ocean accounting was agreed to be important in the advancement of African ocean resource uses. Research and associated collaboration on research and implementation of ocean economic accounts were identified as important in the realisation of African blue economies. In this regard, the accounting of small-scale fisheries was identified as important, given the critical and under-measured role these play in coastal African economies, and the role women play within these small-scale fisheries economies. The need for the linking of economic accounts to social accounts was identified as important in measuring inclusivity of marginalised groups within ocean economies.

The need to overcome silo'ed institutions through collaboration

Collaboration was identified as needed both within and across national accounting processes, particularly across inter-agency line ministries or departments within country programmes to break down the often silo'ed nature of such authorities and advance common cause. Discussants identified the role National Statistics Offices can play in this regard, as well as the role that ocean accounts can play across disciplines in identifying the need for policy changes. The advancement of collaborations was identified as critical in the need to link science to governance, particularly in West Africa where a relative vacuum was identified compared to other African regions. Technical and institutional barriers require removal to advance ocean accounts implementation through fostering institutional relationships and leveraging the communications of both ocean accounts and the benefits of their use. Training and capacity development were noted as important components of such advancement, particularly at a sub-national level where local capacity is often lacking. Regional bodies, commissions or conventions were identified as being essential platforms for both unlocking such collaborations and advancing capacity development across scales, as was drawing on ocean accounting experiences from across the globe.

Stakeholder inclusion and engagement

The need for stakeholder engagement in two-way communication (as both suppliers of input information and receivers of output product) within ocean accounting was identified as important in driving collaborative ocean accounting processes at differing spatial scales and disciplines. Likewise, as the interest in ocean accounting is growing in Africa, the need to increase visibility, impact and contribution of vulnerable groups, such as women in fisheries, must be captured in relevant ocean accounts processes.



Perceived Challenges in Ocean Accounting and their Solutions

Data Sharing and Access to data

Aligned with the discussion on stakeholder inclusion and silo'ed governance structures, discussants recognised that data sharing and access to data, often found in academic affiliation does not always extend to other stakeholders. Proprietorship and confidentiality are important considerations in industry data, although it was recognised that multiple data of non-confidential or non-proprietary nature are often collected by industry stakeholders. These data, however, are often archived in non-standardised architectures or formats as industry proponents or industry authorities are not primarily data-sharing organisations. It was understood that stakeholder engagement in ocean accounting processes could overcome such data challenges. The South African Marine Research and Exploration Forum (SAMREF) formed as a data sharing initiative under South Africa's Operation Phakisa Ocean Economy initiative and was identified as a successful model to broker industry data of a non-proprietary nature, particularly with both industry authorities and proponent companies.

Discussants highlighted that in relation to data sharing and access across countries or regions (particularly with respect to social science data), data are often inconsistent between nations or regions or there is a lack of data availability. In this regard, the example of a recent Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) report on A Blue Economy for Women's Economic Empowerment (<https://www.iora.int/media/24136/iorabeweereportfinalmay2019-min.pdf>) was identified. The importance of ocean accounts in identifying such inconsistencies or data paucity and the adapting of research direction to fill such gaps was identified, particularly within ocean accounts project or programme scoping where data matrices can identify gaps, needs and associated interventions.

It was recognised that the leveraging of data sharing opportunities requires inclusive engagement with the relevant partners in a full stakeholder engagement process. Overcoming identified challenges in stakeholder engagement requires full and inclusive stakeholder engagement.

Interest levels in data sharing and their importance often differ by sector, development agencies, and governments in different regions. The standardisation of data management practices requires mainstreaming to be a priority at the national level to mitigate the differences in data sharing, data availability and associated data quality limitations by sectors or regions.

Transdisciplinary Approaches

Ocean accounting requires integration of data in a truly transdisciplinary manner, while at the same time drawing on specialist input from diverse fields. Misunderstandings of method and methodology have the potential to compromise collaborations, particularly within academia where academic research output may raise challenges in terms of field specialities. The transdisciplinary example of ocean risk (and the applicability of the DAPSI(W)R(M) framework (Elliott et al. 2017) in assessing risk in ocean accounting in analytical manners) was identified, particularly in terms of where to integrate risk models within frameworks and across disciplines.

It was recognised that dialogue and engagement are critical to advance awareness and opportunities and to open doors that are restricted by transdisciplinary challenges. Communicating successes identified in case studies were recognised as critically important in breaking down barriers and identifying common goals.



Capacity Development in Ocean Accounts across the Research, Management and Governance arenas

Research Uptake and the Science-to-Policy Interface

The need for an assessment to ascertain capacity status and needs was identified as a precursor to the strategic deployment of capacity development. While such an assessment would be best driven at a regional level, experiences from across regions would be beneficial in the driving of training initiatives at different spatial scales (in the short, medium, and long term). The role of academia and the development of relevant novel curricula to improve ocean accounting penetration in blue economy advancement was identified, realising the roles of academia in research and technology development; training, learning and outreach; and community or broader civil society engagement. The value of an African Universities forum addressing different ocean accounting disciplines (for example natural capital accounting and the SEEA, or ocean economic accounting) was identified.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recognising the importance of ocean accounts (along with other ocean governance tools such as Marine Spatial Planning or Integrated Coastal Zone Management) in the advancement of blue economies in Africa, this paper makes the following recommendations:

1. Improvement of communication amongst ocean accounting practitioners and other stakeholders.

Proactive communication programmes will help realise the need to create awareness, appetite, engagement, and capacity building at different scales across African ocean accounting. Such communication needs to advance ocean accounting 'success stories' from local pilot studies across the globe.

In particular, the convening of in-person events (workshops, forums, conferences) to discuss how ocean accounting methods can be used to a) identify ocean ecosystems' contributions in socio-economic arenas, b) raise awareness of the potential uses of ocean accounting in the development of national plans, and c) to propel authentic partnerships among various stakeholders.

2. Strengthening the role of National Statistics Offices in ocean accounting.

The need for greater engagement of ocean accounting with National Statistics Offices was identified in terms of strengthening capacity in such institutions and supporting ocean accounts implementation to allow information flows to and from ocean accounting processes.

3. Development of capacity

There is a need for the development of transdisciplinary ocean accounting capacity, which may be achieved through tertiary education entities across the continent in establishing research, training curricula and outreach opportunities.

4. Development of data infrastructure.

Whilst ocean accounts are clear in their need for standardisation, there is a strong need for the development of common data architecture and infrastructure, in both within-accounts metrics of stocks and between-account metrics of flows.



Literature Cited

Elliott, M, Burdon, D., Atkins, J. P., Borja, A., Cormier, R., de Jonge, V. N., & Turner, R. K. (2017). "And DPSIR begat DAPSI(W)R(M)!" - A unifying framework for marine environmental management. *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 118(1), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpolbul.2017.03.049>