

Consultancy to Develop a Comprehensive Strategic Guide
on Blue Economy for the Regional Seas Programme

(Regional Seas Unit, Ecosystems Integration Branch, Ecosystems Division, UNEP)

Strategic Guide on Sustainable Blue Economy for the Regional Seas Programme

FINAL

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1. Introduction

The Ocean is fundamental to life on our planet and to our future and a vital engine of economic development. For decades, as the seas have been degraded by human activities, UNEP has promoted the protection and sustainable management of the world's marine and coastal environments. The Regional Seas Programme has been an effective instrument to develop and implement policies, strategies and collaborative action for integration and sustainability in protecting the marine and coastal ecosystems.

As the concept and approaches of a Sustainable Blue Economy become increasingly central to Ocean sustainability and Governance, the Regional Seas Programme and its regional components (Conventions and Action Plans as well as thematic Regional Strategies and Plans) need to forcefully undertake the task of tailoring and implementing solutions to address different contexts, benefitting from local knowledge, monitoring environmental conditions, scaling-up local actions, and facilitating data sharing and capacity building. They can help exploit in a sustainable way economic opportunities that cannot be achieved by countries alone at the national level, while tackling environmental challenges that by nature have a regional dimension.

This *Guide on Blue Economy for the Regional Seas Programme* is intended to be a steppingstone for the Regional Seas – with their diverse legal, institutional, and implementing set-up, their wide range of capacity and available resources, their unequal levels of influence and scope, the individual Conventions and Action Plans are at various stages of developing and getting involved on the path towards Ocean sustainability and improved Ocean Governance. They have to make strategic choices that are not uniformly applicable in all regions around the globe, but they also have a common strength: the mandate to leverage regional cooperation among nations that are facing shared challenges and need common solutions.

“One-size-fits-all” does not apply to this *Guide* for the variety that characterizes the Regional Seas programmes around the world. Regions are too diverse for the *Guide* to go into specific responses to specific regional issues. Rather, it intends to provide the common principles, objectives, tasks and process that are generally valid because of all Regional Seas Programmes' strengths and roles, as well as the Blue Economy definition, sectors, enablers and tools, stakeholders, and financing challenges that apply to any region.

In a nutshell, the goal is to achieve coherence of action by the Regional Seas Programme as a whole, while equipping the individual Conventions and Action Plans with the basic elements for a shared way forward. The *Guide* will also serve as a convincing tool for those Secretariats that are still struggling to demonstrate that they have a role to play in this field, as well as for those that have had sustainable Ocean-based economy, ICZM, MSP in their policies and programmes for many years, with the support of their Member States/Contracting Parties and of advanced enabling conditions in their regions. Finally, the *Guide* contributes to a better understanding at global, regional, and national levels of the critical role that the Regional Seas Programme can have in terms of effective Ocean governance in support of a Sustainable Blue Economy.

The preparation of this document is based on the review of a wealth of research, information, strategies, and case studies currently available on Blue Economy. Consultations with several Regional Seas Programmes have taken place, demonstrating the large disparity existing among them in terms of their involvement in the development of a Sustainable Blue Economy in the regions, but also the crucial role that they have.

2. The Ocean and Its Regional Governance

a. The Ocean in Numbers

There is one global Ocean, the vast body of water that covers more than 70 per cent of the Earth - the waters flow and intermingle, and support life and livelihoods all around the globe.

The Ocean is fundamental to life on our planet and to our future and a vital engine of economic development. It provides a range of ecosystem services, supplies us with oxygen to breathe, hosts immense biodiversity, plays a key role in climate regulation, acting as a sink and reservoir of greenhouse gases, contributes to food security, nutrition and decent jobs and livelihoods, provides a means for maritime transportation, including for global trade, and forms an important part of our natural and cultural heritage.

In 2015, the WWF valued the global Ocean-related activities and assets at USD 24 trillion. According to the OECD, the Ocean economy - defined as the sum of the economic activities of Ocean-based industries, together with the assets, goods and services of marine ecosystems - amounted to USD1.5 trillion in 2010. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the OECD projected a doubling of the Ocean economy from 2010 to 2030.¹

These estimates are impressive, but appear to be conservative, considering that a variety of vital economic activities supported by the Ocean - for example, marine business and finance, Ocean surveillance, and marine biotechnology – are not captured accurately due to lack of data. Still, today the goods and services the Ocean provides would make it the world's seventh-largest economy – a highly misused system, if, as UNDP calculates, annual socioeconomic losses due to Ocean mismanagement amount to nearly USD 1 trillion².

b. The Current State of Implementation of SDG 14

Given the essential role, albeit not fully understood or valued, that a sustainable Ocean-based economy could have for sustainable development and poverty eradication, it is no surprise that the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, which is integrated and indivisible in its nature, dedicates a stand-alone Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 14) to the Ocean and its conservation and sustainable use. Reaching that Goal would contribute significantly to the realization of the 2030 Agenda, through universal and multi-level action and the mobilization of institutional and legal frameworks at global, regional, and sub-regional scale.

The principle of integration that governs the 2030 Agenda means that the adoption of low-carbon, resilient and inclusive development pathways is needed to reduce carbon emissions, conserve natural resources, transform our food systems, create better jobs and advance the transition to a greener/bluer, more inclusive and just economy. These considerations apply equally to the largest ecosystem on Earth, i.e. its Ocean. On the other hand, in a business-as-usual fossil fuel use scenario, many Ocean species and ecosystems, and the food security and livelihoods of billions of people, face existential threats.

Progress has been made towards reaching SDG 14, but the 2030 targets remain a long way off, highlighting the urgency of ambitious action. The UN *2022 Sustainable Development Goals Report* paints a particularly sobering picture of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including SDG 14. The latest available data and indicators show that progress towards SDGs has been mixed. The report indicates that the 2030 Agenda “*is in grave jeopardy due to multiple, cascading and intersecting crises.*”

¹ OECD: [Ocean Economy and Innovation](#)

² UNDP. 2022. [Ocean Promise](#)

COVID-19, climate change and conflict predominate. Each of them, and their complex interactions, impact all of the Goals, creating spin-off crises in food and nutrition, health, education, the environment, and peace and security. To put the world on track to sustainability will require concerted action on a global scale.”

On SDG 14, while there has been some progress in reducing marine pollution and increasing marine protected areas (although still with limitations in terms of their management and effectiveness), overfishing and ocean acidification continue to pose significant challenges. Furthermore, SDG 14 remains the most underfunded SDG, despite the potential role that its achievement holds in addressing the continuing triple planetary crisis of climate, biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste. According to UNCTAD, only 1.6% of total Official Development Assistance was directed to the ocean economy from 2013 to 2018, while \$175 billion per year will be the minimum needed to achieve SDG 14 by 2030, especially given the impact of COVID-19 and other recent setbacks³.

Achieving the SDG 14 agenda requires fundamental change across several Ocean- and land-based sectors such as agriculture, tourism, industry, and services such as waste management. Combating the decline in Ocean health necessitates intensified protection efforts; an integrated approach that directly addresses the links between land, water, and Ocean ecosystems in support of effective natural resources management and economic development; and ultimately solutions for a Sustainable Blue Economy that supports the effective management of marine fisheries and low-carbon aquaculture, and prioritizes offshore renewable energy and the decarbonisation of maritime transport. Developing a Sustainable Blue Economy paradigm is paramount to the achievement of SDG 14 and of a better future, where a healthy Ocean supports thriving marine life and people and contributes significantly to stabilising the climate.

c. The Regional Dimension of Ocean Governance and Sustainability

Governance arrangements at local, national, subregional, regional and global levels, are all part of a structure in which each of the levels is important, with mutual ties that are critical for its effectiveness. In this context, the significance of regional and subregional levels in global Ocean governance is being increasingly recognised, and regional approaches are prominent in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

In coastal and marine ecosystems, most issues are transboundary - the Ocean is a global resource and coordination of the solutions to its many issues *at the global level* is essential. In recent decades, it has become clear that *the regional and sub-regional levels are equally critical components of Ocean governance and work*. The regional dimension has proved to be strategic for the conservation and sustainable use of the Ocean and its resources, often stimulating action closer, further and faster than institutions at the global or national level. Through regional structures and approaches, the implementation of global agreements (e.g. SDGs, the Ocean-based action of the Glasgow Climate Pact, the Global Biodiversity Framework and its 30x30 Pledge, UNEA decisions, etc.) is facilitated and effectively amplified.

A well-integrated regional Ocean governance approach is seen as a pre-requisite for achieving effective Sustainable Blue Economy development and implementation. Good governance of the Ocean cannot be achieved by States acting individually, nor simply at the global level. Similarly, the successful implementation of solutions in support of the sustainable use of marine resources that takes place mostly at national and local levels, requires to be inscribed in the frame of regional cooperation for the conservation and sustainable use of the Ocean. This is a cornerstone of ecosystem-

³ UNCTAD. 2023. Trade and Environment Review 2023 - Building a Sustainable and Resilient Ocean Economy beyond 2030

based management, and the basis for intergovernmental organisations, states, research institutions, civil society and the private sector to collaborate from different angles, take into account the diverse interests, for example, of fisheries, nature conservation, agriculture, aquaculture, industry and tourism, and respond to the requirements for capacity development and sustainability.

Regional frameworks for action:

- Facilitate the delivery of global mandates by translating commitments taken by countries at the global level.
- Harmonize policies and regulations across countries and regions to avoid conflicts and gaps in Ocean governance.
- Benefit from stronger political will and “peer pressure” for action (this is the case especially in the context of Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans).
- Are better aligned with and responsive to the challenges, opportunities and needs at smaller-than-global scale, providing shared solutions that are tailored to the regional and national communities. This in turn reinforces coherence, inclusivity, political and awareness connections, and participation of local communities in shared solutions.
- Effectively coalesce resources and initiatives of regional and national actors around common issues, making it possible for States and stakeholders to cooperate at an ecosystem scale and work together across sectors and national boundaries.
- Support effective and focused science-policy linkages, facilitating the sharing of knowledge and best practices among stakeholders, to improve understanding and decision-making for the Ocean.
- Most importantly, regional organisations, mechanisms and instruments play a crucial role in enabling cooperation and coordination across territorial and sectoral boundaries.

In the Ocean institutional landscape, regional organisations have multiplied in the past half century, and the development of regional governance for the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources has emerged as one of the most important legal and policy trends. Several studies have remarked the plethora of regional intergovernmental arrangements for governance of Ocean ecosystems - counting more than 160 regional arrangements related to ecosystem-based management of oceans.

Regional Ocean Governance reflects the efforts among multiple countries to work together to conserve and sustainably use their oceans, coasts, and marine resources – they vary widely in scope, mandate, legislative context, and spatial extent. This diversity reflects their diverse origins and the diverse needs and priorities in various places, contexts, sectors, and marine ecosystems.

There are at least five common forms that regional Ocean governance takes:

- Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans;
- Regional Fisheries Bodies;
- Political and economic communities that engage in regional Ocean governance;

- Leader-driven Regional Ocean Governance initiatives; and
- Ad hoc agreements and initiatives.

The Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans that are part of UNEP Regional Seas Programme are essential regional mechanisms for conservation of the marine and coastal environment. Since its establishment in 1974, this action-oriented Programme implements region-specific activities, bringing together stakeholders including governments, scientific communities and civil societies. The focus of its work across 18 regions is on promoting regional Ocean governance to deliver the global Ocean agenda and respond to emerging issues, new policies and initiatives.

The following image provides an overview of the key areas of work of Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans, showing the relevance, breadth, and significance of their role in support of Ocean sustainability.

Figure 1. Key areas of work of Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans⁴



Source: UNEP-WCMC

The transboundary nature of issues relating to the sustainable use of Ocean ecosystems, their effectiveness, the interactions among them, the roles of the various actors that comprise them and how they relate to the local, national, and global levels are not yet fully understood. Furthermore, the UNEP Regional Seas Programme is characterized by the profound diversity of regional clusters, in terms of their situation, institutional set-up, access to financial resources, and implementation modalities. This diversity poses significant challenges but brings also added value to the framework offered by the Programme in response to the need for a structured and holistic approach for the development of a Sustainable Blue Economy.

The existing structure of the Regional Seas Programme, albeit tenuous and complex, facilitates the achievement of global Ocean-related objectives beyond the simple sum of the Conventions and Action Plans that are part of it, by offering an integrated and coherent approach in line with the interconnected nature of Ocean conservation, the sustainable use of its resources, and the cumulative impacts of human activities.

⁴ UNEP. 2022. Contributions of Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans to a Healthy Ocean.

3. Sustainable Blue Economy: Definition and Sectors

a. Definition

The term “Blue Economy” generally refers to **all economic activities related to Oceans, seas and coasts**. There is, however, no consensus on the exact definition and the field of application depends on the organization that uses it, but there is relative consistency among the varying definitions. Increasingly, the term “Sustainable Blue Economy” is adopted to emphasize the nexus between sustainability, economics, and the Ocean. In this context, diverging opinions exist over the legitimacy of individual sectors as components of the Sustainable Blue Economy, such as carbon-intensive industries like oil and gas and the emerging industry of deep seabed mining.

The UN first introduced Blue Economy in 2012 and underlined sustainable management, based on the argument that marine ecosystems are more productive when they are healthy. The UN notes that the Blue Economy is exactly what is needed to implement SDG 14 and specifies Blue Economy as a range of economic activities related to Oceans, seas and coastal areas that are sustainable and socially equitable. The UN iterates that the Blue Economy should “promote economic growth, social inclusion, and the preservation or improvement of livelihoods while at the same time ensuring environmental sustainability of the Oceans and coastal areas”. This points out the importance of global cooperation across borders and sectors. This also indicates that governments, organizations and decisionmakers need to join forces to ensure that their policies won’t undermine each other.

For the purpose of this *Guide* and its application by the Regional Seas Programme, the following UNEP definition of **Sustainable Blue Economy** is used:

Sustainable Blue Economy is the sustainable use of Ocean and coastal resources which generates equitably and inclusively distributed benefits for people, protects and restores healthy Ocean ecosystems, and contributes to the delivery of global ambitions for a sustainable future.

Thus, for the purposes of this document, the sustainable, resilient and inclusive Blue Economy is a goal for the wider Blue Economy, i.e. the general economic activity in the context of marine and coastal environments regardless of sustainability considerations.⁵

The Sustainable Blue Economy aims at enhancing prosperity and increasing social equity through initiatives which restore or maintain the integrity and productivity of marine and coastal ecosystems. Individual sectors are better and more sustainably managed through an integrated approach that recognizes their mutual and cumulative effects. Furthermore, and this is an important consideration especially at the regional level, a Sustainable Blue Economy needs to be culturally appropriate and focused on social equity and well-being. Effective protection of the Ocean, sustainable use of its resources and equitable prosperity go hand in hand to create a triple win for people, planet and the economy.

b. Sectors and the Importance of Integration

The Blue Economy *in its entirety* consists of sectors that are linked to the living natural resources of the Ocean (such as fisheries) as well as those related to non-living and therefore “non-renewable” resources (including extractive industries, such as dredging, seabed mining, and offshore oil and gas).

⁵ The UNEP Sustainable Blue Economy Transition Framework and Rapid Readiness Assessment is currently being tested.

The following table, prepared by the World Bank and UNDESA⁶, provides a summary of the types of activities in the Blue Economy *in its entirety*, related industries and sectors, and drivers of growth.

TYPE OF ACTIVITY	ACTIVITY SUBCATEGORIES	RELATED INDUSTRIES/SECTORS	DRIVERS OF GROWTH
Harvesting and trade of marine living resources	Seafood harvesting	Fisheries (primary fish production)	Demand for food and nutrition
		Secondary fisheries and related activities (e.g., processing, net and gear making, ice production and supply, boat construction and maintenance, manufacturing of fish- processing equipment, packaging, marketing and distribution)	Demand for food and nutrition
		Trade of seafood products	Demand for food, nutrition, and protein
		Trade of non-edible seafood Products	Demand for cosmetic, pet, and pharmaceutical products
		Aquaculture	Demand for food, nutrition, and protein
	Usage of marine living resources for pharmaceuticals and chemicals	Marine biotechnology and bioprospecting	R&D and usage for health care, cosmetic, enzyme, nutraceutical, and other industries
Extraction and use of marine non-living resources (non-renewable)	Extraction of minerals	(Seabed) mining	Demand for minerals
	Extraction of energy sources	Oil and gas	Demand for (alternative) energy sources
	Freshwater generation	Desalination	Demand for freshwater
Use of renewable non-exhaustible natural forces (wind, wave, and tidal energy)	Generation of (offshore) renewable energy	Renewables	Demand for (alternative) energy sources
Commerce and trade in and around the Oceans	Transport and trade	Shipping and shipbuilding	
		Maritime transport	Growth in seaborne trade; transport demand; international regulations; maritime transport industries (shipbuilding, scrapping, registration, seafaring, port operations, etc.)
		Ports and related services	
	Coastal development	National planning ministries and departments, private sector	Coastal urbanization, national regulations
	Tourism and recreation	National tourism authorities, private sector, other relevant sectors	Global growth of tourism
Indirect contribution to economic activities and environments	Carbon sequestration	Blue carbon	Climate mitigation
	Coastal Protection	Habitat protection, restoration	Resilient growth
	Waste Disposal for land-based industry	Assimilation of nutrients, solid waste	Wastewater Management
	Existence of biodiversity	Protection of species, habitats	Conservation

⁶ World Bank; UNDESA. 2017. The Potential of the Blue Economy: Increasing Long-term Benefits of the Sustainable Use of Marine Resources for Small Island Developing States and Coastal Least Developed Countries.

Guidance issued by UNEP Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Initiative (SBE FI)^{7,8} excludes non-renewable extractive industries (e.g. offshore oil and gas, and deep-sea mining) as well as unsustainable practices in other sectors. The Sustainable Blue Economy focuses on the following seven key ocean sectors, chosen due to their scale and clear links to marine ecosystems, as well as the central role they play in global economic development, alongside their impacts on the environment and society:

- Seafood, including fisheries and aquaculture, as well as their supply chains.
- Ports.
- Maritime transportation.
- Marine renewable energy, notably offshore wind.
- Coastal and maritime tourism, including cruising.
- Coastal infrastructure and resilience, including Nature-based Solutions.
- Waste prevention and management, including plastics.

Other sectors of significance to the Sustainable Blue Economy, such as bioprospecting, blue carbon, and conservation finance (e.g. for ecosystem services), are still at an emerging stage.

The important fact in this regard is that huge investments are still flowing to industries and activities harmful to the oceans and ultimately the planet. Considerations of how to tackle them in the context of a longer-term transition to sustainability need to be developed. In the meantime, regardless of the different ways in which the various sectors are conceptualized and arranged, the defining elements of a Sustainable Blue Economy are the *environmentally sustainable approach* and the *integrated approach* to the development of those sectors. This is what promotes the balance among the multiple and often competing uses of the Ocean space and resources. It also strengthens synergies between the Ocean and other ecosystems, such as coastal zones, rivers, and forests.

Integration promotes cross-sectoral and multi-level cooperation among various stakeholders, such as governments, private sector, civil society, research institutions, and international organizations, to ensure coherent, relevant and coordinated policies and action for the Ocean. It supports innovation and capacity-building especially for small-scale and local actors, increasing their resilience and competitiveness, particularly important for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) that are the stewards of some of the largest ocean territories, where the Sustainable Blue Economy approach could be transformative for national development agendas.

In conclusion, the promotion of an integrated approach to Blue Economy so that its sectors develop in an equitable, sustainable and viable way is one of the priorities that Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans must advocate and support. This approach balances and connects different Ocean uses to optimize the overall Ocean economy and to achieve a more effective management of Ocean-based activities.

⁷ UNEP FI. 2021. Turning the Tide: How to Finance a Sustainable Ocean Recovery—A Practical Guide for Financial Institutions

⁸ UNEP FI. 2021. Rising Tide: Mapping Ocean Finance for a New Decade.

c. Some Regional and Sub-Regional Inter-Governmental Ocean Strategies

Organization	Title	Year
African Union	Africa Blue Economy Strategy	2019
UN Economic Commission for Africa - UNECA	Africa's Blue Economy: A Policy Handbook	2016
Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa	Regional Blue Economy Strategy and Implementation Plan for 5 years (2021-2025)	2020
Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)	Jakarta Declaration of the Indian Ocean Rim Association on the Blue Economy in the Indian Ocean Region	2017
Western Indian Ocean Great Blue Wall	Great Blue Wall Initiative	2022
Association of Southeast Asian Nations - ASEAN	ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Blue Economy (ASEAN BE Framework to be delivered in 2023)	2021
Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia - PEMSEA	Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia Implementation Plan 2023-2027	2022
Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia - PEMSEA	Changwon Declaration Toward an Ocean-based blue economy: Moving Ahead with the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia	2012
UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific - UNESCAP	Res. 76/1. Strengthening cooperation to promote the conservation and sustainable use of the Oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific	2020
Organization of Eastern Caribbean States - OECS	OECS Blue Economy Strategy and Action Plan	2021
UNEP Caribbean Environment Programme - CEP	Regional Strategy for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region 2023-2030	<i>Being published, 2023</i>
European Union - EU	Communication on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future	2021
European Union - EU	The Atlantic Strategy and the Action Plan 2.0	2020
European Union - EU	European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and Action Plan	2009 and 2021
European Union - EU	EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and Action Plan	2014 and 2020
Association of the Overseas Countries and Territories of the European Union - OCTA	Blue Economy Roadmap	2021
Initiative for the Sustainable Development of the Blue Economy in the Western Mediterranean Region - WESTMED	EC Communication on the Initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean	2017
UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan - MAP	Barcelona Convention: Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Mediterranean Protocol	2008
UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan - MAP	Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016-2025	2015

Organization	Title	Year
The Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden - PERSGA	Harnessing Ecosystem Services and Transforming to Sustainable Blue Economy in Red Sea and Gulf of Aden	<i>Being developed, 2023-2027</i>
Pacific Islands Forum	2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent	2019
The Commonwealth	The Commonwealth Blue Charter	2021
Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO and European Commission	MSPglobal: international guide on marine/ maritime spatial planning	2021
G20	High-Level Principles for Sustainable and Resilient Blue Economy	<i>Under preparation</i>

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4. Elements of Action by the Regional Seas Programme

a. Main Objectives

What can the Regional Seas Programme do to achieve the transformative vision of a Sustainable Blue Economy? In general terms, the Programme supports a regional cooperation process that integrates top-down and bottom-up collaboration of multi-level and multi-sector stakeholders. However, priorities and methodologies vary vastly among the individual Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans.

Several factors define such diversity:

- The nature of the individual Regional Seas Programme, its role in the governance set-up of the region, and relationship with other Inter-Governmental Organizations present in the region.
- The maturity, capacity and efficiency of the individual Regional Seas Programme in each of its three dimensions (legal, institutional, and operational).
- The role that the individual Regional Seas Programme is given in the complex set-up of legal, institutional and operational conditions that facilitate the sustainable Blue Economy in the region.
- The capacity to launch and manage a multi-level and multi-sector regional process that engages concerned stakeholders in the joint identification of challenges and opportunities at regional level; to identify, monitor, and align diverse financial opportunities; and to plan investments in the medium-long term, both at national and regional level.
- The readiness of the Member States/Contracting Parties to overcome specific interests in certain sectors of the Blue Economy and rather pursue an integrated approach to Ocean governance and sustainability (the UNEP *Sustainable Blue Economy Rapid Readiness Assessment* tool, currently under pilot testing, aims to address this and related points).
- The presence in the region of initiatives promoting a Sustainable Blue Economy and facilitating regional cooperation and prosperity.
- The occurrence of specific enablers in the region, as listed in the sections below, and of approaches such as Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP).
- The capacity to overcome challenges and constraints, as indicated in the sections below.

Keeping in mind the above factors, the overall objective of the contribution to a Sustainable Blue Economy by the Regional Seas Programme can be stated as follows:

To provide support to policymakers, decisionmakers and stakeholders and to their transboundary and regional collaboration in ensuring environmental sustainability of the Ocean and coastal areas, while pursuing economic sustainability, social inclusion, improved livelihoods, and the delivery of global ambitions for a sustainable future.

Such objective can be broken down into specific tasks that should be common to all Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans:

1. To promote the integration of sustainability principles into Ocean-related decision making at the regional, national, and local levels, coherently with global agreements and commitments.
2. To better the knowledge of Ocean-related environmental, social, and economic issues through assessment, monitoring, evaluation, and data and knowledge access and sharing.
3. To improve the management of Ocean resources by identifying, developing, and implementing opportunities for coordinated cross-sectoral policies and harmonized legislation at the regional and national levels.
4. To catalyse cooperation, partnership, and capacity-building.
5. To facilitate access to financing and investments.

In addition, the Regional Seas Programme in its entirety has four other main tasks *across regions*, given its coordinating role of individual Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans:

6. To ensure a coherent approach for all Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans to the definition and development of a Sustainable Blue Economy, aligned with UNEP *Sustainable Blue Economy Transition Framework* and *Rapid Readiness Assessment*.
7. To promote the achievement of global agreements and goals relevant to Ocean sustainability and Sustainable Blue Economy, supporting and amplifying the cumulative contribution of individual Regional Seas Programmes.
8. To stimulate global actors' interest, support and funding to benefit Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans and their effective implementation.
9. To expand knowledge and innovation, providing opportunities for the exchange of technologies and digitalisation, experience, best practices and lessons learned, and capacity among the individual Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans.

b. The Regional Seas Programme's Way Forward for a Sustainable Blue Economy

The specific sectors and modalities of intervention to reach the objectives listed above, as well as their relative importance and feasibility in the individual regions, depends on the identification of priorities, the buy-in by stakeholders, and the availability of financial resources. This section describes the type of action that individual Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans may take towards the definition, development, and endorsement of a Sustainable Blue Economy strategy in their regions, as well as the type of action by the Regional Seas Programme as a whole and its coordinating unit.

The following sections of this Guide will then focus on four specific elements of the above process, namely Enablers and Tools, Challenges and Obstacles, Stakeholders, and Financing, which have great significance in the work of the Regional Seas Programme and its individual components for the development of a Sustainable Blue Economy.

i. Action by individual Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans

The process described in Figure 3. below illustrates the main steps that would lead to the definition of a *Regional Strategy for a Sustainable Blue Economy* around which stakeholders would coalesce in their political, financial, and implementing roles. The process may differ in each region, both in terms of its progress (certain Regional Seas have developed and implemented strategies for Ocean economy sustainability for decades, while in others the discussion on an integrated approach to Blue Economy with Member States has not yet commenced) and in terms of influencing factors.

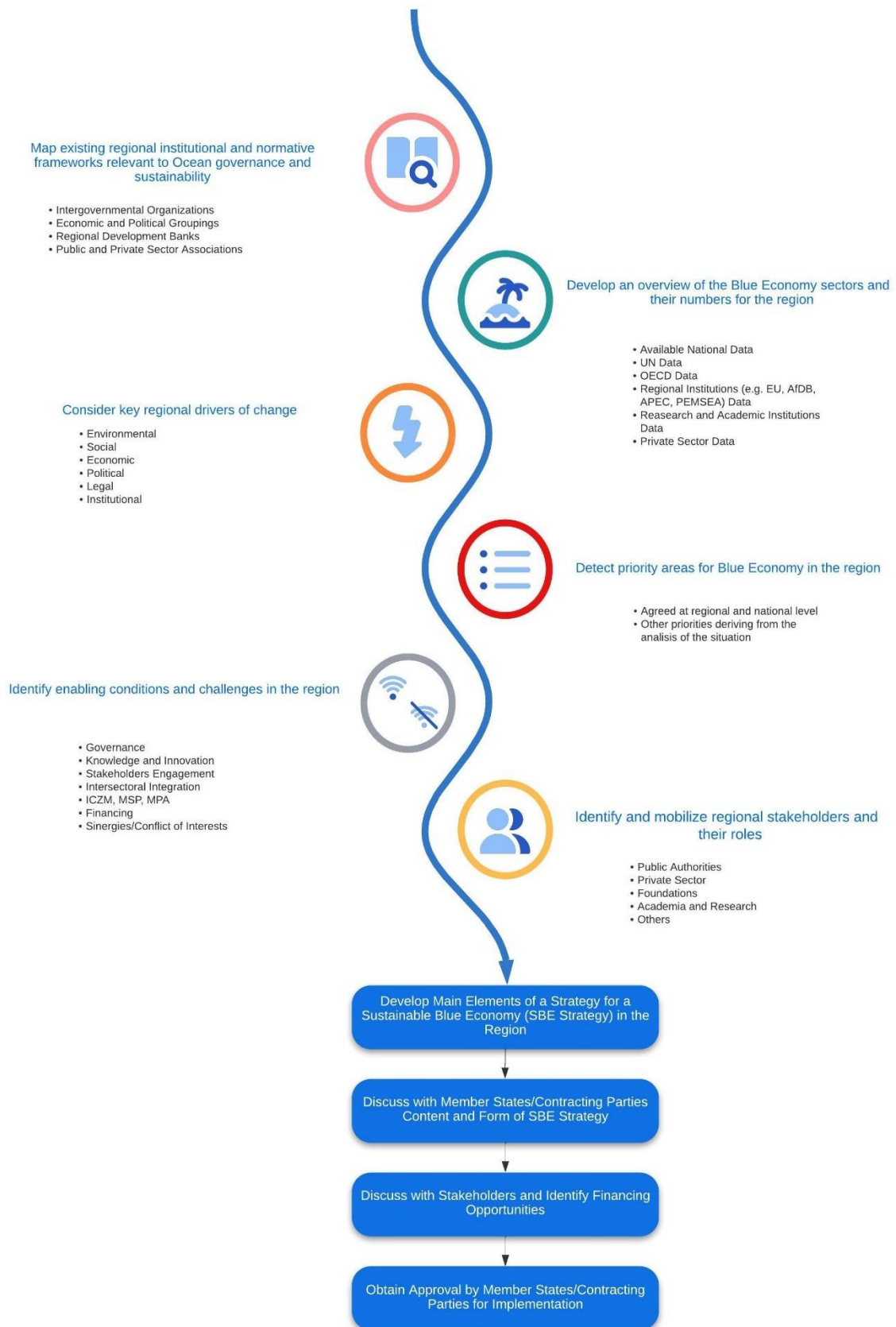
The following main steps, however, can be considered valid for all Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans:

- Analysis of the institutional and normative set-up in the Region that influences the Regional Sea governance, the profile of its political actors, existing platforms for developing and managing the Ocean economy, etc.
- Understanding of the Regional Sea economy and its sectors as it derives from available data and figures.
- Consideration of the regional drivers of change and their political, economic, regulatory and environmental influence.
- Identification of the priorities for the Blue Economy sectors in the region. These could have already been agreed by Governments and other stakeholders – or, depending on the situation, should be proposed for agreement by the Regional Sea Convention or Action Plan itself. Criteria for such prioritization could be the gross value of the sector at national/regional level, the employment rate if compared to other sectors, the existing national policies focusing on Blue Economy, etc).
- Knowledge and understanding of the enabling conditions, tools, and challenges and of their interplay that influences sustainability of the Blue Economy in the region (see sections c. and d. below). This step would include a map of the financing opportunities available for the region.
- Identification and involvement of the key multi-level and multi-sector regional actors and stakeholders and their specific interests, giving special consideration to local actors.

Once these steps are concluded and the elements for the preparation and negotiation of a *Regional Strategy for a Sustainable Blue Economy* developed, the process of negotiation, consultation and approval will be undertaken, depending on the nature of the specific Regional Sea Convention or Action Plan and the capacity and means available to its Secretariat.

The revision of existing strategies and programmes to include Sustainable Blue Economy approaches will also be undertaken if necessary to ensure coherence and implementation.

Figure 3: Stages of Action by Individual Regional Seas Programmes



ii. Action by the Regional Seas Programme in Its Entirety and by Its Coordinating Unit

- Support the Regional Seas Programmes to ensure coherence of approach. This could be achieved, for example, by further developing and adjusting this *Guide* based on their future expectations, needs, experience, and lessons learned.
- Participation in global processes and fora of relevance to the Sustainable Blue Economy, representing the Regional Seas Programmes and amplifying their contribution to the achievement of globally agreed goals.
- Interlocution with global players and negotiation of financial support to the work of Regional Seas programmes towards a Sustainable Blue Economy.
- Provision of platforms and opportunities for consultation, exchange of knowledge and building capacity among the Secretariats of the Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans.

c. Addressing Gender Inequality for a Sustainable Blue Economy

Women play a significant role in several Blue Economy sectors, such as in fisheries, aquaculture, processing and trading of marine products, waste management, coastal tourism, conservation activities, and coastal disaster-risk reduction, among others. According to UNCTAD, women make up most of the workforce in coastal and maritime tourism and fisheries. Although fisheries are often seen as a male-dominated sector and women's contribution as minimal, the reality is that in the Pacific Islands, for example, women are responsible for more than half of small-scale fishery catches, and globally they dominate the processing sector, both at small-scale and in industrial factories, where more than 85% of the workforce is female.

Yet, women's contribution to Blue Economy is overlooked, undervalued, and underrepresented, and in most cases, they are in the lowest-paid, lowest-status and least-protected jobs. Jobs are underpaid or informal, temporary or part-time. Women have a significant presence in processing but are very rarely seen in managerial and decision-making roles. They struggle to access resources vital for economic betterment, such as capital or credit or training opportunities; they don't have equal access to opportunities, resources, financing, market information, technology, training, mobility and bargaining power. Too often, cultural norms and societal biases continue to worsen their vulnerabilities, preventing women from developing and contributing their full potential in the Blue Economy and exposing them to exploitation and unfair competition.

The relative lack of understanding and knowledge about that contribution risks exacerbating existing inequalities. The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) reports, for instance, that the expansion of the fish exports trade has led to the promotion of industrial fish processing factories that provide opportunities for wage workers – but have a negative impact on women in the informal and small-scale processing sector, who cannot compete with the prices factories are offering to fishers nor adapt to changing market demands and have consequently lost their jobs. In research and policymaking, gender must be mainstreamed, from project inception and design to implementation, whether talking about fiscal policy and incentive-based management, or natural capital accounting, or impact investment or plastic pollution.⁹

International efforts have shown that more systematically and effectively integrating women in coastal economies along with addressing disparities has decreased gender gaps. These efforts have also delivered an increase in women's income, improvements in local livelihood activities, and brought positive impacts to marine life conservation. Thus, addressing gender gaps is key for women's development, and that of their families, communities, and the economy, as well as the progress and sustainability of the Blue Economy.

⁹ IIED. 2019. *Steering Gender to the Centre of the Blue Economy*

In this context, the Regional Sea Programme can play a significant role in ensuring that women's contribution to a Sustainable Blue Economy be given attention and full recognition. This means to promote and support deliberate inclusiveness and investments in gendered policies and frameworks that can significantly advance equitable economic growth and improvement of livelihoods. Individual Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans could stimulate, develop, and implement initiatives that:

- Promote the development and access to gender-disaggregated data to increase the understanding of challenges and opportunities within Blue Economy sectors and of the role of women in the various value chains.
- Prioritize regional and sub-regional policies and measures, informed by appropriate gender considerations, whose objective is to enhance the political, economic and social empowerment of women in policies and strategies at all levels across the Blue Economy sectors.
- Encourage the formal recognition of women's work across formal and informal sectors.
- Facilitate regulatory frameworks for employment supporting equal rights and access, including the reduction of gender wage gaps.
- Provide capacity-building in work and representation through appropriate training and support structures.
- Sustain social security measures that prevent the exclusion of women in Blue Economy sectors.

d. Enablers and Tools for the Transition to a Sustainable Blue Economy

Recognizing that the key factors to be addressed are related to enabling conditions - and not only natural resource availability - is a foundational step towards a strategic approach to achieving a Sustainable Blue Economy at the global and regional levels. Enablers are essential for achieving strategic objectives and should be considered when developing a strategic plan.

Social conditions and governance capacity should be considered in addition to natural resource availability, conditions and risks. In fact, elements such as political stability, effective administration, good governance, and infrastructure are essential to ensure natural resource sustainability and availability. A 2021 study published by Nature shows that enabling conditions scores, which reflect the capacity to deliver sustainable and equitable benefits from development, are more variable than the scores for available resources¹⁰. This is a key consideration for the development of a Sustainable Blue Economy at the regional and sub-regional level.

An indicative list of enabling conditions and tools is provided hereafter and, as shown in Figure 3. above, the ability to identify the enabling conditions that are present in the region is a crucial step in defining the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats influencing the Sustainable Blue Economy development and, at the same time, in pinpointing areas that require attention and support by the individual Regional Seas Programmes. The UNEP Sustainable Blue Economy Rapid Readiness Assessment, when finalized, will be an essential tool for Regional Sea Programme to achieve such purpose.

In fact, certain factors can be improved and turned into enablers through targeted investments and cross-scale cooperation, which is generally at the core of the mandate of Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans. The latter support policymakers to engage stakeholders and promote evidence-based, collaborative planning that ensures that sectors are chosen carefully, that local benefits are

¹⁰ Cisneros-Montemayor, A.M., Moreno-Báez, M., Reygondeau, G. *et al.*. 2021. Enabling conditions for an equitable and sustainable blue economy. *Nature* **591**, 396–401

prioritized, and that the blue economy delivers on its social, environmental, and economic goals. Knowledge gaps can be addressed by integrating historical natural and social science information on the drivers and outcomes of resource use and management, thus identifying equitable pathways towards integration and sustainability.

In other words, it is important for the Regional Seas Programmes to invest efforts and resources to strengthen the enabling conditions that accelerate and scale up action towards the development of a Sustainable Blue Economy:

- **Ocean Literacy:** The awareness on the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of the global Ocean and its resources. UNESCO defines it as “an understanding of the Oceans influence on you and your influence on the Ocean”. Indigenous communities and their traditional knowledge systems for the management of marine and coastal ecosystems provide valuable models of stewardship, conservation and ecosystem-based adaptation.
- **Ocean Monitoring and Surveillance, Data Access and Analysis:** The development of sound, sustainable and ecosystem-based policies and measures for Oceans and coasts needs to be supported by scientific knowledge including research and observations. This is in turn based on the collection of appropriate data and their analysis on various aspects of the Ocean and coastal areas, such as physical, chemical, biological, and socio-economic parameters; and the availability of latest, quality-assured data and the maintenance of long-term series of observations, with open access. Observations contribute also to monitoring and assessing the development of Ocean economic activities and to improving integrated management strategies such as Marine Spatial Planning. The general public is both a user of these observations and a provider of data via original citizen science projects. However, levels of financial resources, technologies, capacities and institutional frameworks for monitoring, assessment, data development, analysis, information exchange and dissemination are very unequal among and within regions, causing significant gaps that negatively impact knowledge and the development of sound, science-based policies.
- **Innovation and Learning:** Cutting-edge, innovative solutions are necessary to achieve change on the scale required both in traditional sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, marine transportation and in emerging sectors such as Ocean renewable energy and marine genetic biotechnology. Developing new technologies and solutions to address the challenges and opportunities of the Ocean enhances the efficiency and productivity of existing sectors and activities, fosters collaboration and knowledge sharing among different stakeholders, and ultimately helps build capacity and skills for the people who depend on the Ocean for their livelihoods and well-being.
- **Effective science-policy dialogue:** A robust science-policy dialogue on Blue Economy issues helps orienting policymaking on the basis of scientific research and evidence. It bridges the gap between scientific knowledge and policy action, by making science more accessible, relevant and credible for policy- and decision-makers, and by making policy more transparent, accountable and evidence-based for scientists.
- **Efficient governance and regulatory, institutional and policy frameworks:** Governance and management for optimal use of Ocean space and resources; institutions that are responsive, representative and accountable; policies that are adequate and inclusive; regulations and procedures that enhance transparency and accountability and protect the public interest and wellbeing; and the efficient use of public and private resources are conducive to environmental, economic and social effects that support a Sustainable Blue Economy.
- **Coherent regional and national planning:** Given the complex interconnections between economic, social and environmental challenges that the Blue Economy encompasses, and their multiple global-regional-national linkages, multi-level policy and planning coherence is

essential to foster synergies, reconcile domestic policy objectives with internationally agreed objectives, and overcome fragmented responses.

- **Synergies between different sectors and integration across stakeholders:** Coordinating mechanisms to overcome fragmented governance between sectors and between terrestrial and marine arrangements enhance the development and implementation of integrated cross-sectoral strategies. These mechanisms involve coordinated institutional structures, processes that are connected, shared information, as well as working methods and a collaborative administrative culture that systematically take into account the sectoral interconnections and their effects.
- **Multi-stakeholder dialogue and participatory design of appropriate goals and strategies:** Stakeholder engagement is necessary for strategic planning in all sectors of Blue Economy, as it improves decision-making, increases transparency and accountability, and strengthens risk management, reputation and social acceptance and consent. Multi-stakeholder dialogue and integration within and among sectors, and between national and regional levels, produce more efficient resource management.
- **Available financing and access to investments:** As indicated by the World Bank¹¹, investments in Blue Economy must be sustainable and preserve Ocean health across various Oceanic sectors. Such investments cannot be considered in isolation but should instead be part of a dynamic, sustainable, and interconnected Ocean economy - an approach that is a prerequisite to promote sustainable development in Blue Economy sectors. This is a field of particular significance at the regional level, where large discrepancies exist among regions and subregions. The UNEP Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Initiative provides guidance and frameworks to ensure investment, underwriting and lending activities are aligned to SDG 14, enabling financial institutions to rebuild ocean prosperity, restore biodiversity and regenerate ocean health. Its resources for financial actors include the set of Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles¹² that are the foundational keystone to invest in the ocean economy.
- **Development of innovative approaches and incentives to leverage financing in areas with high sustainability potential:** Innovative finance approaches and the inclusion of Sustainable blue economy finance principles in traditional financing and investments are needed. These may include public-private cooperation to increase capacity and share risks; reputational incentives (e.g. “blue labels”); financial incentive mixes for investors and businesses to engage in new emerging sectors; reduced risk of liabilities for long-term investors (e.g. through guarantees); and Blue Economy Investment Platforms for the regional sea basin.
- **Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM):** ICZM is the combination of all relevant policy areas, sectors, and levels of administration, as well as of the terrestrial and marine components of the target territory, in both time and space. As such, it focuses on the linkages between sectoral activities to achieve more comprehensive goal and enhances the integration of the objectives and of the many instruments needed to meet them.
- **Marine Spatial Planning:** As a public process of analysing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic and social objectives, MSP is instrumental to achieve an integrated and more rational use of marine space and the interactions among its uses, to balance demands for development with the need to protect the environment, and to deliver social and economic outcomes in an open and planned way. MSP is in itself a tool to achieve the ICZM objectives.

¹¹ World Bank. 2021. “Riding the Blue Wave: Applying the Blue Economy Approach to World Bank Operations”

¹² <https://www.unepfi.org/blue-finance/the-principles/>

- **Marine Protected Areas:** MPAs help conserve marine biodiversity, ecosystem services, and cultural values, which are essential for human well-being and development. They support sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, and other Ocean-based sectors, enhance resilience to climate change and natural disasters by protecting coastal ecosystems such as mangroves and coral reefs, and provide opportunities for scientific research, education, and awareness-raising on marine issues. If designed and managed effectively and equitably MPAs can be a powerful tool for Blue Economy.

e. Challenges and Obstacles to the Transition to a Sustainable Blue Economy

The Blue Economy faces many challenges that threaten its sustainability and potential for growth, including at the regional level. Issues such as poverty alleviation, economic development, energy security, food security, and biodiversity conservation and ecosystem health are at the core of the debate on a Sustainable Blue Economy and the evolution of individual sectors of Ocean can have unintended and unforeseen impacts on others. Furthermore, development based on living marine resources can be important at local scales but may not be sustainable or socially desirable at larger scales.

Below, a number of challenges that the Regional Seas Programme faces in its support to Ocean sustainability are listed - at the same time, the individual Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans are well equipped in terms of mandate and recognized capacity to prioritize and support responses to these factors, and will be further supported by the UNEP *Sustainable Blue Economy Transition Framework*:

- **Unabated degradation of the Ocean as an ecosystem:** The Ocean is under immense pressure from a wide range of human activities and this will increase unless governments take bold action to ensure the protection of its natural resources. This pressure reduces the productivity and resilience of the Blue Economy sectors and affect the livelihoods and well-being of millions of people. Pollution from solid waste including plastics, offshore oil and gas, shipping, sewage, and fertiliser and agricultural runoff are significant challenges. Rapid urbanisation of coastal zones further aggravates pollution, habitat loss and resource pressure. Because of ineffective fisheries management, harmful fishing practices and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, many fish stocks are overfished or have collapsed. Climate change (sea-level rise, Ocean warming and Ocean acidification) further increases the strain on many species and habitats. All of this severely compromises the health and resilience of marine ecosystems and the ability of the Ocean economy to sustainably develop and prosper.
- **Inadequate Governance arrangements:** The Ocean is a shared and interconnected resource that requires coordination and cooperation among different actors at local, national, regional and global levels. However, there are often gaps, overlaps or inconsistencies in the legal frameworks and institutional arrangements that govern the Blue Economy sectors, hindering their effective management and regulation, and the coordination and cooperation among different stakeholders. The sustainable management of Ocean resources requires collaboration across states and across the public-private sectors on an unprecedented scale. As already stated, factors such as territorial disputes, political instability, corruption, and inadequate infrastructure are as – or even more – important in some cases than natural resource availability for realizing a Sustainable Blue Economy.
- **Possible conflict of interests:** The use of Oceanic resources can lead to conflicts of interest, competition or misuse, as Ocean economic sectors increasingly utilize adjacent or overlapping Ocean spaces and share inputs to production. As such, interactions between sectors will become increasingly common and potentially alter the private and social profitability of enterprises and sectors, worsening conflicts between different kinds of Ocean users, such

as industrial fishing fleets and large-scale fish farms that sell to global seafood markets, which are pushing small-scale fishers out of business.

- **Gaps in research, knowledge and data:** Many aspects of the Ocean functioning and resources are still unknown, poorly understood, insufficiently or not at all measured or recorded. This limits the ability to assess the potential and risks of the Blue Economy, to monitor its progress and impacts, and to design effective policies and regulations. Although in recent years a growing number of publications in this field has seen the light (they have increased by 179% in 18 years — 89% over the past 12 years, and 28% over the last 6 years), only around 1.7% of total national expenditure on research and development is allocated to Ocean science¹³.
- **Limited understanding and interest in a strategic approach to Sustainable Blue Economy:** An important obstacle to developing a strategy for Sustainable Blue Economy is the lack of understanding of the many aspects of Ocean sustainability and how to manage its complex and interdependent aspects, from sustainable fisheries to ecosystem health to pollution. Some Member States and communities argue that the entire debate is abstract and inconclusive and distracts resources from “real” issues of livelihood and development.
- **Lack of capacity and investment:** The Blue Economy sectors require adequate human, technical and financial resources to develop sustainably and inclusively. However, several countries, especially Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and coastal Least Developed Countries (LDCs), face challenges in building their capacities and attracting investments for the Blue Economy. Additionally, investments that are needed to support certain important ecosystem functions such as protected areas, but have difficulties in generating any market return, and hence are unlikely to attract much private finance.
- **Unrecognized trade-offs and risks and consequent difficulties for communities and nations to achieve an equitable voice in decision-making.** Increasing exploitation of marine resources for economic gain can harm marine life and habitats, which then reduces the long-term economic value and local livelihoods from the Ocean. As companies and governments race to capitalize on the use of coastal and marine resources, substantial risks can arise for people and the environment. Downplaying the uneven distribution of benefits and potential harms has consequences on the social justice implications of rapid and unchecked Ocean development. Disparities in local capacity can worsen the unequal sharing of benefits from natural resources, again highlighting the need for a focus on social equity within a Blue Economy that supports wider well-being. As an example of the risks, the GEF indicates that the “eight core Ocean industries (offshore oil and gas, marine equipment and construction, seafood, container shipping, shipbuilding and repair, cruise tourism, port activities, and offshore wind power generation) generated US\$ 1.9 trillion in revenues in 2018. Across all eight Ocean industries, the 100 largest transnational corporations accounted for 60% of total revenues. Of those 100 transnational corporations, the highest share of total revenues was concentrated in just 11 countries.”¹⁴ Clearly, this situation creates huge imbalances of influence, wealth and power, contributes to unequal access to goods and services, presents significant barriers for small and medium-sized enterprises in entering global markets, and ultimately poses risks to achieving sustainability goals.
- **Scepticism about the growing interest in the Blue Economy:** The concerns expressed above, if not addressed convincingly, may lead to resistance and scepticism about the concept of a Sustainable Blue Economy especially at the local level, with the perception that traditional

¹³ IOC-UNESCO. 2020. Global Ocean Science Report 2020—Charting Capacity for Ocean Sustainability. K. Isensee (ed.), Paris, UNESCO Publishing.

¹⁴ Global Environment Facility. 2022. The GEF and the Blue Economy: a STAP Advisory Document

users are excluded from Ocean development. This would affect an important segment of the stakeholders who are essential to the sustainable use of Ocean resources. The presence of vulnerable resource-dependent communities along many of the world's coasts exacerbates this challenge and highlights a specific area of concern that needs to be central for Regional Seas Programmes, where investment and research are necessary to develop available Ocean resources in a manner that is socially equitable, environmentally sustainable and economically viable.

f. Stakeholders of a Sustainable Blue Economy

To achieve a sustainable Ocean economy, one that balances the economic benefits of Ocean use with the environmental and social costs, it is essential to identify and then engage with its stakeholders. The latter have different roles, interests, perspectives, and capacities and may differ in capacity, resources, and influence across the various regional seas. They may also experience conflicts or synergies among themselves or with other stakeholders. Therefore, it is important to involve them in a meaningful and inclusive way to foster dialogue, collaboration, and co-creation of solutions for a Sustainable Blue Economy.

The very nature of the Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans as catalysers of cooperation and dialogue, has generally led to the establishment of robust networks of partners at global, regional, national, and local levels. This asset provides important opportunities for association and teamwork and can lead to a successful involvement of the stakeholders and to the amplification of the shared efforts towards a Sustainable Blue Economy. In addition, the UNEP *Sustainable Blue Economy Transition Framework* will help enable pro-active, nuanced and meaningful stakeholder engagement.

Stakeholders who have an interest or influence in the Ocean, or who are affected by its use and management include:

- **Ocean users.** The Ocean is used by individuals, groups, and organizations for various purposes such as fishing, aquaculture, shipping, tourism, energy production, mining, research and recreation, through activities that have a strong impact on the Ocean. The livelihoods, income, well-being and enjoyment of the users may depend on Ocean resources and services – thus, they are strongly invested in maintaining and enhancing those resources and services. At the same time, as described above, they may also be responsible for the unsustainable development of Ocean-based economic activities.
- **Ocean managers.** These are the authorities or entities that have the mandate or responsibility to regulate, plan, coordinate or oversee the use and management of the Ocean: national governments, intergovernmental bodies, regional organizations, local governments, and customary or indigenous authorities. Ocean managers have a stake in ensuring that the Ocean is governed in an integrated, coherent and effective way that aligns with national and international laws and policies, and that addresses the needs and interests of different Ocean users and sectors.
- **Ocean influencers.** These are the actors or groups that have the power or ability to shape public opinion, policy decisions or market trends related to the Ocean. They include media, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, academia, think tanks, investors and consumers. Ocean influencers have a stake in raising awareness, generating knowledge, advocating for change or creating demand for a sustainable Ocean economy.
- **Ocean beneficiaries.** These are the people or communities that benefit from the Ocean directly or indirectly, whether they use it or not. They include coastal populations, indigenous peoples, vulnerable groups, future generations... in a nutshell, humanity as a whole. Ocean

beneficiaries have a stake in enjoying the benefits of a healthy and productive Ocean that provides food security, climate regulation, biodiversity conservation and cultural values.

Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans connect with stakeholders, establishing partnerships between public and private sectors and strengthening engagement and stewardship, depending on the specificities of their region. Their role is to facilitate bringing together relevant actors from government, business, academia and civil society, from the entire range of activities - including petroleum, fishing, aquaculture, shipping, renewable energy, mining, tourism and recreation - to collaborate for a sustainable future of the marine environment. In regions where platforms and mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation exist in the framework of other organizations and initiatives, Regional Sea Conventions and Action Plans need to actively participate and contribute.

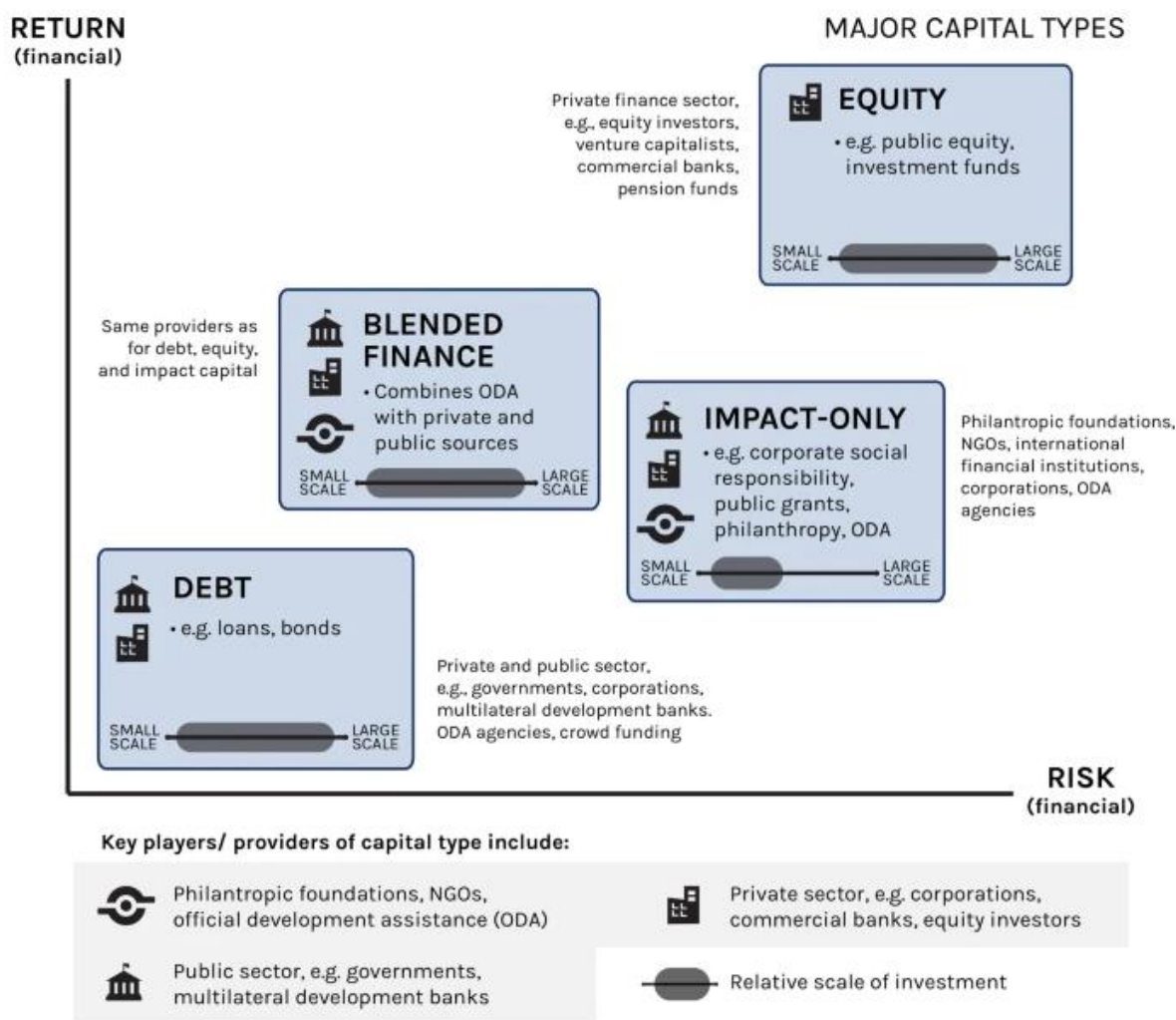
At the local level, defining and implementing sustainable solutions in communities requires the knowledge, involvement and stewardship of local stakeholders. Planning at the local level - especially in developing countries - requires taking approaches that are tailored to the diverse environmental and socioeconomic contexts and governance systems in these regions.

The implementation of locally relevant projects is also a necessary action to achieve the SDGs and Ocean sustainability. Studies demonstrate that active community participation and inclusion of traditional and local knowledge have proven useful at the local level for establishing and operating effective Ocean governance - civil society and local communities are at the forefront of conservation as they have direct access to the sea and experience any slight changes themselves. Thus, Regional Seas Programmes should support and, where appropriate, facilitate the active involvement of local and traditional communities in all stages of integrated Ocean planning and development at the local level through processes that consider the cultural, scientific, societal, economic and political contexts that underpin robust stakeholder participation.

g. Financing and Investment for a Sustainable Blue Economy

The transition to a Blue Economy that balances sustainability with the needs of the billions of people who depend on the Ocean for livelihoods, is an extraordinary challenge that requires important changes in how finance flows to Ocean-related economic activities. This is true at all levels from global to local. Data on global finance for the Ocean from various sources – private and public, domestic and international – is still insufficient and unequal throughout the regions. Furthermore, Ocean economic sectors are too diverse and too often managed and financed independently from one another to have a comprehensive view of how much finance reaches Ocean-based sectors and what percentage of that can be considered sustainable.

Figure 3: Characterization of major Ocean finance capital types:¹⁵



Financing for a Sustainable Blue Economy involves investments in the various mature and emerging sectors that make up the Ocean economy, including natural capital, extractable marine resources, marine and coastal development, and knowledge and creative sectors. Public financing, Official Development Assistance, and Philanthropic grants, despite their comparatively smaller size, in the context of the Blue Economy are estimated as being much more prominent and significant than commercial capital, loans, bonds, and equity.¹⁶

In any case, public and private investments in the Ocean economy are currently insufficient, resulting in significant financing gaps. The corollary challenge to this is the fact that Ocean investment, especially in times of recovery from economic crises, is not necessarily sustainable in environmental and social terms. In fact, *investment more likely flows to less sustainable activities that may produce economic short-term returns but have long-term negative impact on the health of the Ocean.*

¹⁵ Sumaila, U.R., Walsh, M., Hoareau, K. *et al.* 2021. Financing a sustainable Ocean economy. *Nat Commun* **12**, 3259

¹⁶ WEF Friends of Ocean Action. 2020. The Ocean Finance Handbook: Increasing finance for a healthy Ocean

Public funding has played a big part in Ocean conservation and investment in sustainable Ocean activities, both domestically and internationally through official development assistance and other concessional financing. In terms of official development assistance (ODA) for the Ocean economy, according to OECD in 2020 there was an increase of 25%, to a high of USD 3.7 billion. Of this amount, 81% (USD 3.0 billion) targeted sustainability. However, ODA for the sustainable Ocean economy only represents 1.2% of total ODA. Most of it went to three areas: Ocean conservation (USD 464 million), sustainable and traceable fisheries (USD 301 million), and greening ports and maritime infrastructure (USD 242 million).¹⁷

Access to Ocean finance and resources is limited and not equitably distributed. The paradox is evident for developing countries that generally are most reliant on Ocean economy sectors in terms of the share of their GDP that depends on those activities. Yet, they only capture a small fraction of the global value added from the Ocean economy and of the investments. Challenges in accessing the science, policy evidence and financing have considerably constrained developing countries' ability to harness new opportunities from a sustainable Ocean economy.

According to the European Commission (EC), the Ocean economy is projected to grow over the coming decade, and there is a growing interest of investors across all sectors of the blue economy. In a recent report of the EC, out of a survey sample of 87 investors, 76 plan to invest an average of €124.5 million in the blue economy by 2030. The main drivers for investment, apart from economic return, are innovation, impact and sustainability.

The risk is that, by 2030, one third of investments in the blue economy could be unsustainable - i.e., at least 250 billion euros invested in activities harmful to the oceans and ultimately the planet. Development banks are leading the shift to activities that preserve the ocean and ensure long-term prosperity, but they are unable to make significant changes alone. All financial players should be involved, including private equity funds, impact investors and policymakers.¹⁸

Barriers remain that prevent adequate financing of a sustainable Blue Economy. They include a weak enabling environment for attracting sustainable Ocean finance, insufficient public and private investment in the Ocean economy, high risk perceptions, a lack of investment-grade projects at scale, insufficient track record of successful deals and projects, as well as investors' own lack of awareness and technical knowledge of the emerging Blue Economy sectors and concrete investment opportunities.

Access to financing by local communities remains very limited, as they may not wish or be able to develop investment-grade projects but need to maintain and improve their livelihoods based on less innovative economic activities depending on ocean resources.

In this complex and difficult situation of unsustainable practices and missed opportunities, Regional Seas Programmes can play a key role in mobilizing financial resources or increasing the efficient use of existing financing for a Sustainable Blue Economy:

- Provide and strengthen inter-governmental frameworks and platforms for cooperation and action, for attracting investment and funding on Ocean-related issues, for promoting more integrated financing that should address multiple issues relating to the Ocean (e.g. Climate Change, Pollution, Biodiversity), and for discouraging investment of activities that undermine the sustainability of the Blue Economy.

¹⁷ OECD. 2022. Development co-operation for a sustainable Ocean economy in 2020: A snapshot

¹⁸ European Union. 2020. Unsustainable Finance in the Blue Economy: Where Does the Money Come From? Recommendations Report

- Support Governments in establishing institutional, policy and regulatory frameworks that create the conditions for attracting finance for a Sustainable Blue Economy.
- Facilitate the implementation of global and regional programmes and the access to initiatives on Ocean finance.
- Enhance knowledge, data and capacity to stimulate investment and funding in their regions, based on UNEP FI's Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles.
- Help mobilize and leverage public and private funds for the conservation and sustainable use of the marine and coastal environment, such as through establishing and managing Marine Protected Areas, promoting Blue Economy initiatives, supporting the creation of Public-Private Partnerships, and addressing pollution and climate change impacts.
- Communicate on these actions to build awareness both of financing opportunities for governments and communities, and of potential investment prospects for the financial sector.
- Facilitate the access to financial resources by local communities, promoting adjustments to governance and decision-making processes to ensure that local actors have agency in adaptation planning and implementation.

Crucially, the Regional Seas Programme, within the mandate and capacity of each Convention and Action Plan, has a significant role to play to facilitate developing countries' access to the policy evidence, innovations, and financial resources needed to seize new, sustainable, investment opportunities from the Ocean economy and drive a sustainable recovery.

Global support to Sustainable Blue Economy financing is rapidly growing. A few of the most important institutions and initiatives that can be tapped into by the Regional Seas Programme are listed below:

- [UNEP FI Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Initiative](#): This is a UN-convened global community focused on the intersection between private finance and Ocean health, supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles. It works across the financial community to provide guidance and frameworks to ensure investment, underwriting and lending activities are aligned to SDG 14. Over 80 Institutions representing USD 11 trn in total asset SIZE have now joined the Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Initiative as Members or Signatories to the [Principles](#). Among fostering capacity building and peer exchange, this initiative develops market-first resources and tools for financial institutions to use when working with ocean sectors, providing science-based recommendations on which activities to exclude from financing and investment (due to their high risk and harm) and which activities present best practise opportunities.
- [Global Environment Facility \(GEF\)](#): Since its inception, the GEF's investments in the International Waters focal area have surpassed \$1.15 billion. These funds have leveraged another \$7.7 billion from partners for marine-related projects and programs. Blue economy themes in GEF-8 (2022–2026) include “Clean and Healthy Oceans” that addresses land-based sources of marine pollution, with a focus on wastewater from industrial, agricultural, and municipal sources. The work of the GEF is guided by five high-priority building blocks for investment, namely: Using data to drive decision-making; Changing Ocean accounting so that it reflects the true value of the Ocean; Promoting goal-oriented Ocean planning, with a particular focus on areas under national jurisdiction, using processes that are science-based, inclusive, participatory and adapted to the local context; De-risking finance and using innovation to mobilise investment, for example in sustainable fisheries, mariculture, ecotourism linked to marine protected areas, and offshore wind energy production; and Stopping land-based sources of marine pollution, including the reduction and treatment of waste flows from agriculture, industry, and municipal sources, as well as introducing circular economy principles to avoid the generation of plastic waste.

- [Blue Natural Capital Financing Facility \(BNCFF\)](#): The Facility supports the development of sound, investable BNC projects with clear ecosystem service benefits, based on multiple income streams and appropriate risk-return profiles. The BNCFF is managed by IUCN and funded by the Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Calls for Proposals are regularly issued.
- [Blue Carbon Accelerator Fund \(BCAF\)](#): The Fund supports the development of blue carbon restoration and conservation projects in developing countries and helps pave the way for private sector finance. The BCAF was established by Australia and IUCN as a dedicated funding scheme with a vision to help increase coastal blue carbon ecosystems conservation and restoration for the benefits to climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity and livelihoods of coastal communities. Calls for Proposals are regularly issued.
- [The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership](#): Launched in early 2023 and coordinated by Italy, the Partnership represents an unprecedented effort of 60 Partner institutions from 25 countries and the European Commission to pool research and innovation investments and align national programmes at pan-European scale. As a Horizon Europe co-funded partnership, its strategy takes into consideration the R&I agendas of the sea basins (Mediterranean, Black Sea, Baltic and North Sea) and the Atlantic Ocean and builds on lessons learned from previous initiatives. The planned investments over 7 years amount to EUR 450 M. The partnership is launching six co-funded calls for research and innovation proposals over a seven-year timeframe.
- [PROBLUE](#): PROBLUE is an Umbrella Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) administered by the World Bank, designed to help countries chart a course towards a Blue Economy approach. PROBLUE focuses on four key themes: The sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture; Addressing and preventing the threats posed to Ocean health by marine pollution, including litter and plastics; Supporting the sustainable development of key Oceanic sectors such as coastal tourism, maritime transport and offshore renewable energy; Helping governments build their capacity to manage their marine and coastal resources in an integrated fashion to deliver more and long-lasting benefits to countries and communities, including the development of nature-based solutions to climate change. So far, the World Bank development partners have contributed just over USD 200 million to PROBLUE.
- [EU BlueInvest Fund](#): The European Investment Fund, backed by the European Strategic Investment Fund, has earmarked finance for enterprises with innovative products and services that can help the blue economy deliver the EU's Green Deal priorities. The BlueInvest Fund provides finance to funds that are wholly or partly targeting the blue economy or to individual enterprises backed by more general funds. In 2020 the BlueInvest fund successfully deployed €75 million contribution plus €15 million from InnovFin Equity to a number of Venture Capital Funds, who will use these guarantees to invest up to €300 million in the blue economy in the next 5 years, most of it in the EU.

h. Opportunities for Cooperation with the UN System on Blue Economy

Selected UN Bodies	Selected References for Sustainable Blue Economy	Relevance for Regional Sea Programme (1=lowest / 3=highest)
UNDP	Action Brief: An Ocean of Opportunities - How the Blue Economy Can Transform Sustainable Development in Small Islands Developing States (2023)	2
UNCDF	BRIDGE Facility: catalytic concessional loans and guarantees from UNCDF as growth capital (2022)	3
UN-HABITAT	Blue Economy and Cities (2018)	2
UNCTAD	Trade and Environment Review 2023 - Building a sustainable and resilient ocean economy beyond 2030 (2023)	3
UN WOMEN	Women's economic empowerment in fisheries in the blue economy of the Indian Ocean Rim: A baseline report (2020)	3
WTO	Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (2022)	1
FAO	Achieving Blue Growth: Building vibrant fisheries and aquaculture communities (2018) Fisheries and Aquaculture Information Collections FAO and non-FAO administered Regional Fishery Bodies	3
IFAD	Support to livelihoods involving aquatic resources from Small-scale Fisheries, Small-scale Aquaculture, Coastal Zones and in Small Island Developing States (2018)	3
UNESCO	Marine spatial planning and the sustainable blue economy: policy brief (2021)	3
UNWTO	Tourism for SDGs Platform	3
World Bank	PROBLUE Multi-donor Trust Fund (2022)	3
UNDESA	UNDESA Databases (2023)	3
UN Regional Commissions	ECA Economic Commission for Africa; ECE Economic Commission for Europe; ECLAC Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; ESCAP Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; ESCWA Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	3

5. Conclusions

This document lays out how the Regional Seas Programme can scale up its work in support of a Sustainable Blue Economy. For this transition to be successful, a number of crucial considerations come to the fore:

- The Ocean's role as a vital engine for development is growing and is progressively better understood. A Sustainable Blue Economy is based on understanding and managing competing policy and development objectives while ensuring protection of Ocean ecosystems.
- The sustainable use and management of Ocean resources relies on adequate governance and on a multi-level and multi-sectoral approach to which the Regional Seas Programme can effectively contribute. This integrated approach aims at reconciling environmental and economic objectives and needs to inform ocean policy across all the areas that affect the ocean, nationally and regionally, and eventually at incorporating ecological and social considerations into decision-making.
- Despite their diversity, the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans have a common objective: to provide support to policy- and decision-makers and stakeholders and to their transboundary and regional cooperation in ensuring environmental sustainability of the Ocean and coastal areas, while pursuing economic growth, social inclusion, improved livelihoods, and the delivery of global ambitions for a sustainable future.
- Their mandates express a vital role in the development of a Sustainable Blue Economy, enhancing enabling conditions and addressing challenges in a way that goes beyond the capacity of individual countries.
- To support a Sustainable Blue Economy at the regional level, Regional Seas programmes have to invest in institutional, regulatory and implementing capacities at regional and national levels; in knowledge, innovation, and data and knowledge development, analysis and access; in a more effective push for integration across sectors of the Ocean economy; in promoting the full application of tools such as ICZM, MSP, and MPA; in involving all categories of stakeholders, and especially those who are most vulnerable to the risk of suffering from increased investments in Ocean economic activities that may be unsustainable or contribute to greater inequality; and in facilitating the mobilization of financial resources and their use in support of sustainable use of Ocean resources.

This document outlines a basic process and identifies factors that influence positively or negatively the achievement of the Regional Seas Programme's goal to facilitate and support a Sustainable Blue Economy. Although the challenge of constructing it requires more than commitment and mere adjustments to the existing programmes of Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, it also offers them an invaluable opportunity to further their unique role and relevance in the panorama of actors at global and regional levels.