

Healthy oceans important drivers of African prosperity, food security

Mitigating the impacts of climate change and illegal fishing on oceans and coastal communities are increasingly important with fisheries and aquaculture emerging as transformational forces for African economies. This was FAO director-general José Graziano da Silva's key message to leaders at the [African Ministerial Conference on Ocean Economies and Climate Change](#) in Mauritius.



ValeriaRodrigues via [pixabay](#)

"Healthy and productive oceans are critical for combatting rural poverty, ensuring food security, improving nutrition and achieving Zero Hunger," he said.

"Stakeholders from fishing, shipping, energy generation and tourism, to list a few, require responsive and innovative solutions to turn climate change impacts into opportunities," according to Graziano da Silva.

Climate change is an oceans issue, too

African nations are increasingly realising the critical need to diversify beyond land-based activities and build their country's often rich relationships with the sea, the FAO leader said. But that relationship is becoming less and less predictable due to environmental changes. "Coastal communities are already being affected by a combination of ocean warming, rising sea levels, extreme weather events, salt-water intrusions, ocean acidification and subsequent changes to the resources they depend on for food and livelihoods," Graziano da Silva noted.

And yet, attention to climate change impacts on the ocean has lagged behind concerns for impacts on land and atmosphere. This will have to change in order to unlock the full potential of [blue growth](#) in broader marine and maritime economies, and prevent others from losing their existing livelihoods, Graziano da Silva said.

He underscored the disproportionate impacts on Small Island Developing States, saying that "For SIDS countries, this has become a fight for survival." In these countries, coastal communities are not only more dependent on natural resources but also less able to adapt to change - particularly those in Africa."

Port state measures essential to unlocking blue potential

Climate change is not the only challenge to coastal nations seeking to unleash their true blue potential.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing puts additional stress on oceans and marine resources, siphoning off billions worldwide in government revenue in the process. For this reason, FAO has been urging governments to sign on to the international [Port State Measures Agreement](#) that recently entered into force and will play a key role in combatting illegal fishing and improving fisheries management.

Currently, however, only 13 out of 34 SIDS countries are party to the agreement, of which only nine countries are in Africa, Graziano da Silva stressed as he urged governments to consider taking immediate action to implement the treaty. "At the next 'Our Oceans' Conference, September 15-16 in Washington DC, I would like to present publicly the list of countries that have ratified the PSMA," he said.

The blue economy

Global fish production has grown steadily in the last five decades, even outpacing world population growth. Between the 1960s and 2012, the average per capita fish consumption almost doubled, rising from just under 10 kg to more than 19 kg.

But the blue economy runs on more than just fish. In all, global ocean economic activity is estimated at \$3-5 trillion. Ninety percent of global trade moves by marine transport and over 30 percent of global oil and gas is extracted offshore. What's more, expanding knowledge of marine biodiversity has provided breakthroughs in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, food production, and aquaculture.

Graziano da Silva highlighted the role of ocean health in the UN's new Sustainable Development Goals, along with the success of last year's COP21 Climate Conference in Paris, where marine health featured prominently for the first time. Looking ahead at the upcoming COP22 in Morocco, the FAO leader said the organization will highlight how oceans can help grow economies and manage climate change at the same time.

"The goal of the international community should be not only building a sustainable green economy but also a blue one," he concluded.

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