www.repoa.or.tz

No PB 09/2026 May 2026

REPOA Brief

# Social and Environmental Safeguards as Foundations for an Inclusive and Resilient Blue Economy in Tanzania

**By Jamal Msami**

## Key Messages

- Social and environmental safeguards are not regulatory add ons but foundational mechanisms that determine whether Blue Economy growth is inclusive, legitimate, and sustainable.
- Persistent gaps between policy commitments and implementation continue to exclude women, youth, and marginalised coastal and inland water communities from meaningful benefits.
- Without stronger integration of climate risk, participatory governance, and transparent benefit sharing, Blue Economy expansion risks amplifying inequality and ecological vulnerability.

## Introduction

The expansion of Tanzania's Blue Economy presents significant opportunities for economic growth, employment creation, and regional competitiveness. However, it also introduces social and environmental risks which, if insufficiently managed, can undermine livelihoods, deepen inequalities, and degrade the ecological systems upon which blue sectors depend. Social and environmental safeguards are therefore not peripheral considerations, but central determinants of the legitimacy, resilience, and long term sustainability of the Blue Economy.

The National Blue Economy Policy (2024) recognises inclusion, equity, and environmental sustainability as cross cutting priorities. Yet, experience from Tanzania and comparable maritime economies demonstrates that safeguards often remain unevenly operationalised (The Citizen, 2025; UNEP, 2022), particularly when economic expansion accelerates faster than governance capacity (UNEP, 2022). Ports, fisheries, tourism, conservation initiatives, and infrastructure investments can generate substantial benefits, but may also produce displacement, exclusion, environmental degradation, and conflict if safeguards are weak, fragmented, or poorly enforced.

This policy brief examines the current state of social and environmental safeguards within Tanzania's Blue Economy ecosystem, focusing on three interrelated dimensions: social inclusion; benefit sharing and participatory governance; and environmental risk management and resilience building. It argues that safeguarding systems in Tanzania remain conceptually sound but operationally constrained, and that moving from principle based commitments to implementation oriented frameworks is now critical to ensuring that Blue Economy growth translates into inclusive and sustainable development.

## Methodology and Data

This study employed a mixed methods research approach to generate a comprehensive understanding of the research problem through the integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence.

First, a comprehensive documentary and literature review was undertaken to establish the conceptual and empirical foundations of the study. The review covered peer reviewed academic literature as well as grey sources, including policy documents, legal and regulatory frameworks, government strategies, institutional reports, publications by international and non governmental organisations, and comparative research on the blue economy in selected countries. This review informed the analytical framework, identified knowledge gaps, and guided the design of empirical tools.

Second, the study conducted secondary analysis of existing data obtained from official statistics, institutional databases, and published reports. These data were examined to identify trends, patterns, and structural dynamics relevant to the research objectives.

Third, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with more than 60 respondents, comprising over 20 institutional actors and approximately 40 additional key respondents in Dodoma, Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar in March and April 2026. Participants were purposively selected based on their expertise, institutional roles, and involvement in policy formulation, regulation, implementation, or programme delivery. Semi structured interview guides enabled consistent coverage of key themes while allowing flexibility to explore context specific insights.

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, while secondary quantitative data were subjected to descriptive and trend analysis. Ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and responsible data use were observed throughout the study.

## Findings

**Social Inclusion in the Blue Economy**

Women play a critical yet undervalued role in Tanzania's Blue Economy, particularly in small-scale fisheries, fish processing, marketing, and coastal tourism. Despite their central contribution to food security and local economies, women face structural barriers including insecure access to productive resources, limited decision-making power, restricted access to finance, and unequal labour conditions (FAO, 2020). Socio-cultural norms further concentrate women in informal, low-return segments of value chains, limiting upward mobility.

Policy recognition of gender inclusion has improved. The National Blue Economy Policy (2024) explicitly identifies gender equality as a cross-cutting issue. However, translation into targeted capacity building, access to productive assets, leadership development, and enforceable safeguards remains uneven (URT, 2024). As a result, gender inclusion often remains rhetorical rather than transformative.

Youth represent a substantial share of coastal and lakeside populations and are central to the long-term sustainability of the Blue Economy. Sectors such as fisheries, logistics, maritime services, aquaculture, and eco-tourism offer considerable employment potential. However, youth participation is constrained by skills mismatches, informal employment arrangements, and limited access to startup capital (ILO, 2019). The absence of structured entry pathways into higher-value segments risks trapping young people in precarious livelihoods, weakening innovation and productivity.

Marginalised coastal, lacustrine, and riverine communities face compounded vulnerabilities. Small-scale fishers and informal traders experience declining stocks, competition from industrial activities, and limited voice in resource governance (Béné et al., 2016). Large-scale investments such as port expansion, tourism developments, or conservation initiatives can further exacerbate exclusion if social safeguards are weak, leading to displacement, loss of access to blue resources, and conflict.

**Benefit Sharing and Participatory Governance**

Benefit sharing refers to the equitable distribution of economic, social, and environmental gains arising from Blue Economy activities. Field evidence shows that benefit-sharing mechanisms are most visible in community-based fisheries management, marine protected areas, and tourism concessions. These mechanisms seek to align conservation incentives with local development outcomes, providing income, infrastructure, or social services linked to stewardship (UNEP, 2022).

However, benefit sharing remains project-dependent and uneven. Revenue flows are often modest, short-term, and insufficiently transparent. Weak integration with local development planning reduces long-term impact and undermines trust. Where benefits are uncertain or poorly communicated, community support for conservation and compliance erodes.

Participatory governance structures such as Beach Management Units (BMUs) and community participation in coastal zone management provide important platforms for local engagement. Nonetheless, these structures often suffer from limited financial sustainability, uneven capacity, and restricted influence over higher-level decision-making (Jentoft and Eide, 2011). Top-down planning processes particularly in infrastructure development and marine spatial planning inadequately incorporate local knowledge, resulting in resistance, mistrust, and suboptimal outcomes.

### Environmental Risks and Vulnerabilities

National marine and freshwater ecosystems face mounting pressures from overfishing, habitat destruction, pollution, and unsustainable coastal development. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing accelerates stock depletion, disproportionately affecting small-scale fisheries (Okafor-Yarwood, 2019). Pollution from urbanisation, agriculture, and maritime activity further degrades ecosystem health and human wellbeing.

Climate change adds a critical layer of risk. Sea-level rise, coastal erosion, shifting fish distribution, and increased frequency of extreme weather events threaten infrastructure, livelihoods, and ecosystems. Inland waters are similarly affected by hydrological variability and temperature change (IPCC, 2022). Without forward-looking safeguards, Blue Economy growth risks locking in vulnerability rather than resilience.

### Resilience Building and Safeguard Instruments

Ecosystem based management and nature based solutions form a cornerstone of resilience building. Marine protected areas, mangrove restoration, and integrated coastal zone management contribute to biodiversity conservation while supporting fisheries productivity and climate adaptation (UNEP, 2022). These approaches have demonstrated positive outcomes where adequately resourced and locally supported, but scaling remains constrained by financing gaps and institutional fragmentation.

Tanzania's environmental impact assessment (EIA) framework provides a legal foundation for mitigating environmental risks. However, enforcement, monitoring, and post approval compliance remain uneven. Safeguards are often strongest at approval stages but weaken during implementation and operation (UNEP, 2021). Social resilience similarly depends on diversified livelihoods, access to information, and institutional support, underscoring the need for integrated social environmental safeguards.

## Conclusion

Social and environmental safeguards are foundational determinants of Tanzania's Blue Economy legitimacy, resilience, and long-term success. Persistent gaps between policy commitments and implementation continue to exclude women, youth, and marginalised communities, while environmental pressures and climate risks threaten ecological foundations.

Unless safeguards move from principle-based commitments to well-resourced, implementation-oriented systems, Blue Economy expansion risks reinforcing inequality and ecological vulnerability. Strengthening inclusive governance, transparent benefit sharing, and climate-resilient environmental safeguards is therefore not merely a regulatory obligation, but a strategic investment—one that enhances social cohesion, environmental resilience, and investor confidence, and positions Tanzania's Blue Economy as a model of inclusive and sustainable development.

## Policy Recommendations

**First**, the Government should prioritise the operationalisation of inclusive, enforceable, and climate responsive safeguard systems across all Blue Economy sectors. Gender and youth responsive safeguards should be translated into measurable targets, budget allocations, and monitoring frameworks to move beyond aspirational commitments.

**Second**, benefit sharing mechanisms should be strengthened through clearer legal frameworks, predictable revenue flows, transparent allocation, and integration with local development planning. Enhancing the authority and capacity of participatory institutions—such as BMUs and local councils—would improve legitimacy, stewardship, and compliance.

**Third**, environmental safeguards must evolve from project level compliance tools into system level resilience frameworks. This requires explicit integration of climate risk assessment, ecosystem services valuation, and adaptive management into planning and investment decisions. Strengthening monitoring, enforcement, and community based oversight will be critical.

**Fourth**, integrated social environmental monitoring systems should be developed to improve accountability, learning, and adaptive governance across the Blue Economy.

## References


Béné, C., Arthur, R., Norbury, H. et al. (2016) 'Contribution of fisheries to food and nutrition security'

FAO (2020) Gender and the Blue Economy. Rome: FAO.

ILO (2019) Skills and Jobs in Coastal Economies. Geneva: ILO.

IPCC (2022) Sixth Assessment Report: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Geneva: IPCC.

Jentoft, S. and Eide, A. (2011) Poverty Mosaics in Small-Scale Fisheries. Dordrecht: Springer.

OECD (2020) Social and Environmental Dimensions of the Blue Economy. Paris: OECD.

Okafor-Yarwood, I. (2019) Illegal Fishing and Maritime Insecurity in Africa. Cham: Springer.

The Citizen (2025) 'Tanzania eyes safer waters, blue economy boost via EU initiative', The Citizen, 04 August 2025. Available at: https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/tanzania-eyes-safer-waters-blue-economy-boost-via-eu-initiative-5141868.

UNEP (2021) Environmental Impact Assessment Effectiveness in Developing Countries. Nairobi: UNEP.

UNEP (2022) Financing the Blue Economy: Toolkits and Case Studies, Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

UNEP (2022) Nature-Based Solutions for Coastal Resilience. Nairobi: UNEP.

United Republic of Tanzania (URT) (2024) National Blue Economy Policy. Dodoma: Government Printer.





REPOA Knowledge is Power

**REPOA HQs**
157 Migombani/REPOA streets, Regent Estate,
PO Box 33223, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
Tel: +255 (22) 2700083 Cell: +255 78 455 5655
Website: https://www.repoa.or.tz
Email: repoa@repoa.or.tz

**Branch Office**
2nd Floor Kilimo Kwanza Building 41105
Makole East, Kisasa, Dodoma, Tanzania