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No PB 07/2026 May 2026

REPOA Brief

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Tanzania's Blue Economy at a Crossroads: Governance Challenges and Strategic Priorities

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Tanzania's blue economy vision is clear and ambitious, but fragmented institutional mandates and sector-based accountability continue to undermine coherent, system-wide implementation.

Although the Vice President's Office is mandated to coordinate the blue economy, the absence of legally binding authority over sectoral planning, budgeting, and licensing limits its ability to resolve cross-sector trade-offs.

Environmental sustainability and social inclusion are formally recognised but remain marginal to core economic decision-making, entering policy and investment processes too late to shape outcomes or manage long-term risk.

Introduction

Tanzania's blue economy has emerged as a strategic pillar of national development, reflecting the country's extensive marine and inland water resources and their growing importance for livelihoods, trade, food security, energy development, and environmental sustainability. The adoption of the National Blue Economy Policy (NBEP) in 2024 marks a major milestone, providing a unified vision and elevating the blue economy within the national development agenda.

However, the central argument of this policy brief is that **strategic vision has advanced faster than governance capability**. While the NBEP articulates an integrated and forward looking framework, the institutional system through which it is implemented remains fragmented, weakly coordinated, and misaligned with the cross sectoral and spatially contested nature of marine and aquatic systems. Implementation continues to rely on sector based legal mandates, vertical accountability structures, and institutions originally designed to manage discrete sectors rather than interconnected socio ecological systems.

The governance challenge is further compounded by Tanzania's Union structure, in which certain maritime domains fall under Union jurisdiction while Zanzibar retains authority over fisheries and coastal resource management within its waters. As economic activity expands offshore and competition for marine space intensifies, there is risk that gaps in coordination, authority, and benefit sharing can become binding constraints to sustainable development.

This brief synthesises evidence on policy, governance, and institutional arrangements for the blue economy in Tanzania. It highlights systemic challenges, distils key messages for decision makers, and identifies priority areas where further policy embedded research is required to support adaptive, integrated, and sustainable blue economy governance.

Methodology

This policy brief draws on qualitative data collected in March and April 2026 from field consultations with eight (8) key stakeholders in Zanzibar and eight (8) in Mainland Tanzania, complemented by a review of national policies and international literature. Consultations involved key ministries and institutions responsible for constituent Blue Economy (BE) sectors. Focusing on institutional mandates, coordination mechanisms, sectoral priorities, implementation dynamics, private sector participation and emerging tools such as marine spatial planning, insights were triangulated to assess governance challenges and opportunities shaping the development and effective implementation of Tanzania's BE.

Key Findings

Fragmentation of institutional mandates

Blue economy governance in Tanzania is polycentric, involving multiple institutions across national, Union, and sub national levels. Authority is widely dispersed among sector ministries and agencies responsible for fisheries, transport, energy, environment, security, and investment. No single institution possesses binding authority to adjudicate trade offs among competing uses of marine space or to manage cumulative impacts across sectors.

Weak Horizontal Coordination and Overlapping Mandates

Regulatory and enforcement responsibilities overlap horizontally, particularly in marine and offshore spaces where fisheries, maritime transport, energy exploration, environmental protection, and security activities intersect. This overlap results in duplicated approvals, fragmented compliance monitoring, increased transaction costs, and uneven enforcement, especially offshore where institutional presence is weakest. Field consultations in both Dodoma and Zanzibar confirm that overlapping mandates contribute to inefficiencies in licensing, investment facilitation, and resource management:

"In the process of obtaining permits, it is often unclear which ministry has the full mandate. An investor may be required to move from one ministry to another because some permits are not issued by a single authority." A Senior Official with the **Ministry of Industry and Trade (Mainland)**

Similarly, institutional overlaps affect accountability and implementation:

"There are overlaps across ministries in the implementation of responsibilities, and many initiatives are not aligned, resulting in weak coordination and miscommunication." **Ministry of Industry and Trade (Mainland)**

Table 1 highlights a few examples of institutional overlaps from Tanzania mainland and Zanzibar. The overlaps ultimately weaken policy effectiveness by slowing decision-making, discouraging private investment, and limiting the government's ability to implement a coherent and well-coordinated BE strategy.

Table 1: Areas of Institutional Overlap in Tanzania Mailand and Zanzibar

Institution	Main mandate	Main areas of institutional overlap	Examples of similar roles creating contradictions
Vice President's Office (Union and Environment) (Mainland)	Environmental management, climate policy, and coordination of cross-sector environmental issues.	Overlaps with sector ministries on marine pollution control, coastal ecosystem protection, environmental licensing, and blue economy coordination.	May require environmental compliance measures for coastal projects while sector ministries separately approve investments, causing delays or conflicting conditions.
Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries (Mainland)	Fisheries development, aquaculture, marine resource use, and fisheries licensing.	Overlaps with environmental and trade institutions on resource management, export standards, marine conservation, and licensing.	Can promote expanded fishing or aquaculture permits while environmental authorities seek catch limits or protected zones.

Ministry of Blue Economy and Fisheries (Zanzibar)	BE policy leadership, fisheries, marine investment promotion, ocean-based sector coordination.	Overlaps with tourism, environment, and infrastructure institutions on marine spatial use, coastal investment approvals, and resource governance.	May prioritise marine investments or port-related activity in areas also targeted for tourism conservation or local livelihood use.
Ministry of Tourism and Heritage (Zanzibar)	Tourism development, coastal tourism investment, heritage conservation.	Overlaps with BE ministry on beach/coastal zoning, marine tourism licensing, and use of coastal resources.	Tourism expansion plans for hotels, marinas, or beach facilities may conflict with fisheries landing sites, conservation plans, or maritime uses promoted by other institutions.

Source: Authors' Own

Limited Union Level Governance Integration

Tanzania has made strides in strengthening the coordination of BE governance through establishment of inter-governmental platforms such as the National BE Coordination Committee, and other joint planning processes. Nonetheless, the Union governance structure introduces additional complexity. While Union institutions oversee certain maritime domains, Zanzibar retains autonomy over coastal and fisheries governance. Mechanisms for joint planning, enforcement, and benefit sharing remain underdeveloped, creating uncertainty as economic activities expand into the Exclusive Economic Zone.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Tanzania's BE holds considerable promise as a driver of inclusive and sustainable development. The country has established a strong policy foundation and demonstrated progress in key sectors such as tourism and maritime transport.

The government's continued commitment to advancing the BE provides a strong foundation for addressing remaining implementation challenges. Building on this progress, further strengthening of governance and institutional arrangements will be important to support more coordinated and effective implementation across sectors. Without addressing these governance constraints, Tanzania risks underutilizing its BE potential, facing continued inefficiencies in investment and resource management, and undermining long-term environmental sustainability.

Recommendations

First, strengthening cross-sector coordination by providing the Vice President's Office with clearer procedural authority to review, align, and arbitrate sector planning, budgeting, and licensing decisions that affect marine and aquatic resources. This does not require dismantling sector mandates but establishing binding coordination rules for projects with significant spatial or environmental impacts.

Second, integrating environmental and social safeguards upstream in economic decision-making. Sector ministries should be required to demonstrate, at concept and appraisal stages, how proposed investments incorporate ecosystem protection, climate resilience, and social inclusion objectives. This shift would reposition safeguards as value-protection instruments rather than compliance requirements.

Third, institutionalising Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) as a central governance tool. Piloting MSP in high-pressure coastal and offshore areas would enable government to identify sensitive ecosystems, livelihood zones, and competing uses, and to guide licensing and investment decisions more predictably.

Fourth, strengthening Union-level governance for offshore resources. Clear mechanisms for joint planning, enforcement, and benefit-sharing between Union and non-Union institutions are essential as activity expands in the Exclusive Economic Zone.

Fifth, investing in an integrated blue economy monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework that tracks economic, social, and environmental outcomes together. Such a system would support adaptive governance, improve accountability, and enable evidence-based policy adjustment as competition for marine space intensifies. These actions should be phased, politically informed, and supported by sustained capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and applied policy research to ensure durability, feasibility, and nationally owned reform momentum statewide.

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