www.repoa.or.tz

No PB 16/2026 July 2026

REPOA Brief

From Potential to Performance: Strengthening Tanzania's Blue Economy Governance Architecture

By Gilbert Boois

Key Messages

Untapped Scale
Tanzania's Blue Economy contributes an est. 12% of mainland GDP and an est. 40% of Zanzibar's GDP, yet remains significantly under-optimised due to fragmented governance and weak institutional coordination.

Governance Gap
No apex authority with binding decision-making power exists to coordinate competing sectoral mandates across fisheries, mining, energy, transport, and environment.

Implementation Deficit
Comprehensive policies exist on paper but consistently fail to translate into measurable outcomes a pattern documented in Namibia and directly relevant to Tanzania.

Urgency of Action
Strategic choices made now will determine whether Tanzania's Blue Economy delivers inclusive growth or replicates the policy-practice gaps seen across comparable African coastal states.

Objective

To analyse Tanzania's Blue Economy governance architecture, identify critical institutional gaps, and propose evidence-based reforms that can unlock the full potential of Tanzania's ocean and freshwater resources for inclusive and sustainable national development.

1 Introduction

Tanzania is one of the most endowed Blue Economy nations in Africa. Its 1,424 km of Indian Ocean coastline, 223,000 km^2 Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and vast inland water resources, including portions of Lakes Victoria, Tanganyika, and Nyasa, underpin a diverse portfolio of ocean-based economic activity. Application of the UNECA Blue Economy Valuation Toolkit in 2023 confirmed that the Blue Economy contributed 11.9% of Mainland Tanzania's GDP and 39.6% of Zanzibar's GDP in 2020. Wages generated by the Blue Economy formed 9.9% of Gross National Income on the mainland and 25.4% in Zanzibar. Ecosystem services were valued at USD 104.24 billion for mainland Tanzania (74.8% from freshwater lakes) and USD 100.76 billion for Zanzibar (led by coral reefs).

Despite its scale and diversity, Tanzania's Blue Economy remains under-optimised. The sectors that power it include fisheries, maritime transport, coastal tourism, aquaculture, oil and gas, marine conservation and are governed by separate ministries with overlapping and sometimes contradictory mandates, without a coordinating authority capable of binding them to shared decisions. The result is a Blue Economy that is large in theory but constrained in practice.

What the numbers tell us

The Blue Economy contributes an estimated 12% of mainland Tanzania's GDP and an estimated 40% of Zanzibar's GDP. Ecosystem services from Tanzania's inland lakes alone are valued at USD 78 billion. Over 4 million people depend directly or indirectly on fisheries and aquaculture. Tourism contributed an est. 17% of GDP pre-pandemic. Yet sectoral growth in fisheries was only 1.4% in 2024 which is considered far below potential. These are the numbers of an economy that needs governance, not just resources.

2 Evidence based lessons from Namibia's comparative study

This policy brief draws on evidence from a comprehensive comparative study of Namibia's Blue Economy experience conducted between November 2025 and March 2026. Namibia, as a middle-income African coastal state with 20+ years of ocean governance experience and a finalised Blue Economy Policy (2022–2031), provides a relevant available comparator for Tanzania. The study involved 14 stakeholder consultations across government, state-owned enterprises, industry associations, and academia, addressing seven research objectives.

2.1 Policy requires apex authority to produce achievable outcomes

Namibia developed its Blue Economy Policy over five years (2017–2022) through a multi-stakeholder process. Despite finalisation in 2022, however as of 2026, the policy is yet to achieve Cabinet approval. The root cause is the absence of a coordinating authority capable of compelling inter-ministerial consensus and driving Cabinet approval.

Mandates in Namibia are distributed across at least five ministries including fisheries, mining and energy, environment, works and transport, and trade, without binding coordination mechanisms. It is therefore clear that a policy requires an apex authority for its provisions to produce achievable outcomes.

> **Lesson for Tanzania**
>
> Tanzania should establish an apex Blue Economy Coordination Office with Cabinet-level authority and binding decision power to support finalising its Blue Economy policy. Voluntary inter-ministerial cooperation produces and supports compliance; therefore, a coordination mechanism must be established first in support of the policy development process.

2.2 Regulatory fragmentation undermines Blue Economy competitiveness

In Namibia, regulatory contradictions between ministries have created concrete economic costs. For example, goods (such as fertiliser) in transit require Environmental Impact Assessments; agricultural inspection hours that are limited to office hours delay port clearances; and customs interpretations push cargo to competing ports. For Tanzania, with 18+ million tonnes of annual port cargo and multiple overlapping regulatory authorities across its major ports, the risk of similar regulatory contradictions is high. Without a harmonisation audit conducted under apex authority, each ministry will continue optimising for its own mandate rather than for achieving collective Blue Economy competitiveness.

2.3 Marine Spatial Planning should be legally binding

Tanzania has published MSP guidelines through the Vice President's Office (2023) and is in early-stage discussions on marine zoning. Namibia's experience provides a cautionary tale, where the completed MSP process, with documented stakeholder consultations and finalised spatial allocations, has not yet produced Cabinet approved, binding inter-sectoral agreements.

Tanzania's marine domain involves competing claims between fisheries (over 200,000 small-scale fishers), coastal tourism (particularly Zanzibar), natural gas exploration, seaweed farming, and transport shipping lanes. Without legally binding MSP (which should be enforceable through licensing conditions and backed by dispute resolution mechanisms) spatial conflicts will escalate as emerging sectors expand.

3 The gaps in Tanzania's governance architecture

Tanzania's current institutional landscape for Blue Economy governance is characterised by the following features, each of which represents a reform opportunity:

- **Multi-ministerial fragmentation:** Key Blue Economy sectors are managed by the Ministries of Livestock and Fisheries (mainland fisheries), Blue Economy and Fisheries (Zanzibar), Energy (offshore oil and gas), Works and Transport (ports and maritime), Natural Resources and Tourism (marine parks and tourism), and the Vice President's Office (environmental coordination and MSP). Improved Inter-ministerial coordination through a single authority presents a reform option.

- **Mainland-Zanzibar coordination deficit:** Tanzania's dual governance structure creates an additional layer of complexity unique among African Blue Economy states. Zanzibar's Ministry of Blue Economy and Fisheries operates separately from mainland institutions, yet the two systems share an EEZ, face common IUU fishing threats, and serve overlapping markets. Formalising and adequately resourcing coordination mechanisms between the two systems presents a reform option.
- **Community governance gap:** Beach Management Units (BMUs) and Shehia Fisheries Committees (SFCs) form the frontline of Tanzania's co-management architecture. However, BMUs are under resourced; have limited digital capacity, weak accountability frameworks, and insufficient legal clarity on their roles relative to district councils. Strengthening and resourcing this co-management system is a policy reform option.
- **Investment readiness constraints:** Fragmented regulatory authority, unclear licensing pathways for emerging sectors, and the absence of a consolidated Blue Economy investment framework limit Tanzania's ability to attract private capital needed for port expansion, cold chain infrastructure, aquaculture development, and offshore energy. Improving the BE's investment readiness calls for regulatory authority reform.

The dual challenge

Tanzania faces two simultaneous governance challenges that reinforce each other: at the national level, it lacks the apex institutional authority to coordinate across ministries and compel binding decisions; at the community level, it has the structural architecture for co-management (BMUs, SFCs, CFMAs) but insufficient resourcing, accountability, and legal clarity to make it effective. Both levels should be addressed concurrently.

4 Prioritizing Governance unlocks opportunities

The evidence from Namibia, Seychelles, Mauritius, and South Africa's Operation Phakisa demonstrates that governance reforms, when properly designed and implemented, produce measurable Blue Economy gains. Seychelles' debt-for-nature swap and blue bond restructured USD 21.6 million in sovereign debt into marine conservation commitments and mobilised USD 15 million in fresh capital, made possible by clear institutional mandate and credible policy frameworks. South Africa's Operation Phakisa contributed approximately ZAR 17 billion to GDP and created 29,000 jobs by 2019 through measurable delivery targets and quarterly accountability reviews.

For Tanzania, the governance dividend could be transformative since the fisheries sector growth has been only 1.4% which is a fraction of what evidence-based management, reduced IUU fishing, and post-harvest infrastructure investment could deliver. Aquaculture remains underdeveloped at an estimated 20% of national fish output despite Tanzania's extensive inland water resources. Dormant sectors such as blue carbon markets, seagrass and mangrove restoration, and offshore renewable energy remain inaccessible without the governance architecture to structure investment.

5 Policy directions

	Key recommended policy actions
Establish Apex Blue Economy Coordinating Authority	Tanzania should establish a Blue Economy Coordination Office at Cabinet or Vice President's Office level, with binding authority over sector-specific ministries on cross-cutting Blue Economy decisions. The office should have a dedicated budget, a full-time secretariat, and legislative mandate.
Concurrent Policy and Institutional Development	Cabinet approval of Tanzania's Blue Economy policy framework should be secured concurrently with institutional development, and Ministerial buy-in must be built into the policy development process through the apex authority as a concurrent activity.

Enact Legally Binding Marine Spatial Plan	Tanzania's MSP guidelines (2023) must be translated into a legislatively enacted spatial plan with binding effects on sectoral licensing authorities, including spatial allocations for fisheries, tourism zones, shipping lanes, conservation areas, and emerging energy infrastructure with formal dispute resolution and compensation frameworks for displaced users.
Conduct Regulatory Harmonisation Audit	The apex authority should commission a comprehensive audit of regulatory requirements across Agriculture, Environment, Customs, Immigration, and sectoral licensing bodies, with a mandate to resolve contradictions before the Blue Economy policy is finalised. The audit should examine cross-border trade facilitation at Tanzania's major ports and the interaction between mainland and Zanzibar regulatory regimes.
Strengthen and Resource BMUs and SFCs	Tanzania's co-management architecture of BMUs on the mainland and SFCs in Zanzibar must be strengthened through dedicated funding lines, digital capacity support, revised legal frameworks clarifying accountability relationships with district councils, and regular stock assessment data sharing.
Establish Mainland-Zanzibar Coordination Mechanism	A formal joint coordination mechanism between mainland Blue Economy institutions and Zanzibar's Blue Economy institutions should be established, with shared protocols for IUU fishing enforcement, joint EEZ monitoring, and coordinated investment promotion.

References

REPOA (2026). Final Aggregate Report: Scoping Study on the State of the Blue Economy in Tanzania — Building on the Namibian Experience. Dar es Salaam: REPOA.

UNECA (2023). Blue Economy Valuation Toolkit: Application to Tanzania. Addis Ababa: UNECA.

URT (2023). Guidelines for the Development of Marine Spatial Plan (MSP) in the United Republic of Tanzania. Vice President's Office.

African Union (2014). 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS). Addis Ababa: AUC.

Republic of South Africa (2019). Operation Phakisa: Ocean Economy Progress Report. DEFF.

World Bank/Conservation International (2018). Seychelles Blue Bond Prospectus. Washington DC: World Bank.

WIOMSA (2024). State of the Coast for Mainland Tanzania: Transitioning to Blue Economy. Zanzibar: WIOMSA.

URT (2022). Fisheries Sector Master Plan 2021/22–2036/37. Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries.

REPOA
Knowledge is Power

REPOA Main Office
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