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REPOA Brief

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Lessons from the South – sharing Namibia's Blue Economy journey for Tanzania

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Key Messages

Comparable Context

Namibia and Tanzania are both middle-income African coastal states with established fisheries sectors, emerging offshore energy potential, and ambitious Blue Economy aspirations.

Six High-Confidence Lessons

Six findings emerged with very high analytical confidence from Namibia's experience: manual processes waste capacity, infrastructure lags licensing, skills deficits are systematic, railways are underused, climate adaptation is reactive, and innovative financing remains untapped.

Three Policy Tensions

Three critical divergent findings require Tanzania's attention including: - genuine stakeholder participation; policy commitments to community benefits, and spatial planning completion vs. binding implementation.

Transferable lessons

Namibia's lessons must be adapted to Tanzania's specific context which has a larger scale, dual governance (mainland/Zanzibar), Western Indian Ocean ecosystem, and EAC regional integration.

Objective

To distil evidence-based lessons from Namibia's 20-year Blue Economy development journey, including successes, gaps and opportunities, and translating them into actionable policy priorities for Tanzania, sequenced by impact and feasibility.

1 Introduction: The case for a Southern African comparator

Namibia offers a rare and useful comparative case as a middle-income African coastal state that has been building its Blue Economy for over 30 years; the country has made significant governance choices, achieved measurable successes in specific sectors, has identified gaps and opportunities that illuminate Tanzania's implementation framework. Both countries share similar developmental status with established fisheries sectors under pressure from Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and climate change; emerging offshore oil and gas sectors; and advanced port infrastructure serving regional logistics. Namibia's fishing sector directly employs an estimated 16,500 people, whereas Tanzania's supports over 4 million. Therefore, even though the scale differs, the countries face similar structural challenges.

About this study

This policy brief draws on a comprehensive comparative study of Namibia's Blue Economy conducted between November 2025 and March 2026, involving 14 stakeholder consultations across government ministries, state-owned enterprises, industry associations, and academia. The study addressed seven research objectives: policy and regulatory frameworks; maritime security; trade facilitation and logistics; critical infrastructure; financing mechanisms; skills gaps; and social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

2 Six high-confidence lessons for Tanzania

Six findings emerged with very high analytical confidence from triangulated evidence across multiple independent sources. Tanzania can act on these with high certainty that they reflect systemic patterns rather than outlier experiences.

Finding	What Namibia shows	What Tanzania should do
Manual Processes as Universal Bottleneck	Only 57% of vessel time is spent on cargo operations in Namibia	Tanzania to consider implementing a Maritime Single Window, Port Community System, and National Single Window and to ensure digitalisation
Infrastructure lags licensing in emerging sectors	Infrastructure is not adequate for emerging industries, yet licensing has proceeded.	Mandate infrastructure adequacy assessments with inter-ministerial certification as a precondition for production licenses in offshore oil, gas, and emerging energy.
Skills deficits are systematic (30%)	A30% systematic skills deficit across Namibia's Blue Economy sectors has been quantified and training infrastructure is considered insufficient for current needs.	Tanzania to consider a well-endowed Blue Economy Training Fund, mandate skills transfer in all oil/gas/hydrogen licenses with progressive localisation targets and establish training priorities.
Railway underutilisation despite compelling economics	95–99% of corridor cargo moves by road despite rail infrastructure; one train equals an estimated 40 trucks in emissions and 30–50% cost savings for bulk cargo.	Tanzania to consider addressing railway service quality (frequency, reliability, pricing) alongside capital investment and avoid the 95% road dependency trap.
Climate adaptation is reactive, not proactive	The Benguela upwelling faces existential climate threats with no long-term ocean monitoring programme in place. In addition to quota managed fisheries, the country should proactively implement adaptive fisheries management.	Tanzania faces analogous threats in the Western Indian Ocean including coral reef degradation, monsoon disruption and rising sea temperatures. The country to consider investing in long-term ocean monitoring, species vulnerability assessments, and adaptive management frameworks.
Innovative financing remains untapped	Neither Namibia nor Tanzania has accessed blue bonds, blended finance facilities, or dedicated climate finance instruments despite clear eligibility. Seychelles mobilised USD 15M through a sovereign blue bond in 2018 and restructured USD 21.6M of sovereign debt into marine conservation.	Tanzania should engage development partners for blue bond structuring, establish a blended finance facility for Blue Economy infrastructure, and pursue GEF and GCF funding for coastal climate adaptation.

3 Three critical enabling factors Tanzania should emulate

The Namibia study identified three critical enabling factors that Tanzania must anticipate and proactively address them.

Enabler 1: Stakeholder participation — consultation or inclusion?

Stakeholder consultations should be broad-based, inclusive and participatory and must lead to Ministerial or cabinet approval that directs future action. For Tanzania: Independent validation of stakeholder participation quality should be built into Blue Economy policy development. Early conceptualisation formal consultations must include fishing communities, BMUs, and small-scale operators with transparent, documented feedback loops from consultation to policy revision.

Enabler 2: Community benefits & impact

Namibia's own Ministry acknowledged that "policy is not translating to tangible community benefits" despite comprehensive policy language on inclusive development. Some 240,000 people depend on Namibia's fisheries, but coastal communities do not benefit proportionally from the value generated. This reflects the well-documented challenge of translating high-level commitments into structured benefit-sharing without legislative mechanisms. For Tanzania: With over 4 million people depending on fisheries and aquaculture, Tanzania should legislate community benefit-sharing mechanisms, for example, mandating 3–5% of Blue Economy resource extraction revenues to flow through Community Development Trusts with genuine community representation.

Enabler 3: Legislating planning outcomes

Namibia completed a Marine Spatial Planning process with documented consultations and finalised spatial allocations; however, Cabinet endorsement is not yet achieved. Tanzania has the opportunity to design legal bindingness into the MSP process from the outset and to achieve Cabinet approval of spatial allocations, legislative incorporation into sectoral licensing conditions, and formal dispute resolution mechanisms with binding arbitration authority.

4 Namibia's replicable success

The Namibia study identified three critical enabling factors that Tanzania must anticipate and proactively address them.

- **Fisheries observer and monitoring system:** The Fisheries Observer Agency (FOA) operates a nationally mandated observer programme providing real-time data on catches, discards, and vessel compliance. This data underpins quota management and IUU enforcement. Tanzania's monitoring infrastructure should be strengthened along similar lines.

- **Small-scale fisheries formal recognition:** Namibia's 2022 NPOA-SSF formally recognised and empowered small-scale fishers, establishing Small-Scale Fisheries Organisations (SSFOs) in major coastal towns. Tanzania has its own NPOA-SSF (covering 200,000+ fishers) but BMU capacity gaps limit its implementation.

- **Marine Spatial Planning institutional infrastructure:** The MSP Unit provides a model for a dedicated spatial planning function with cross-sectoral convening authority. Tanzania's Vice President's Office holds MSP responsibility but would benefit from a dedicated unit with adequate technical capacity and budget.

- **Walvis Bay as regional logistics gateway:** Walvis Bay's transformation into a regional logistics hub serving Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and the DRC demonstrates that logistics hub ambitions require sustained investment, regulatory harmonisation, and service quality improvement. Tanzania's Central Corridor is well positioned to replicate this model.

KEY RECOMMENDED POLICY ACTIONS	
Apply the Six Lessons Directly	The six convergent findings from Namibia on digitalization, infrastructure sequencing, skills, railways, climate adaptation, and financing can be incorporated into Tanzania's Blue Economy implementation plan.
Validate stakeholder participation independently	Commission independent assessment of stakeholder participation quality in Blue Economy policy development, with specific attention to fishing communities, BMUs, and small-scale operators.
Legislate benefit-sharing before licensing	Enact community benefit-sharing legislation mandating 3–5% of resource extraction revenues to Community Development Trusts before issuing new licenses for offshore oil, gas, or large-scale aquaculture. Voluntary commitments do not survive commercial pressure.
Make MSP Legally Binding from Day One	Design Tanzania's formal MSP process with legal bindingness built in from the outset to include Cabinet approval, legislative incorporation, dispute resolution with arbitration authority.
Adapt, not replicate	Tanzania's dual governance structure, larger scale, Western Indian Ocean ecosystem, and EAC integration context require adaptation of Namibia's lessons rather than direct replication, therefore each recommendation must be reviewed for Tanzania-specific contextual fit.

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