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South(ern) Africa and the Indian Ocean – South Atlantic nexus: Blue Economy and prospects for Regional Cooperation

*Andrea Royeppen is a
Researcher and Francis A.
Kornegay is a Senior
Research Fellow, both at the
Institute for Global Dialogue
associated with Unisa.*

Andrea Royeppen & Francis A. Kornegay, Jr.

*Global Insight aims to
provide members of the
policy community with
concise but trenchant
analyses of topical
issues. Comments and
suggestions are invited.*

This policy brief builds on the *Global Insight: South and Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean – South Atlantic Nexus: Strategic and Blue Economy Dimensions*. That analysis summarised the outcome of the Institute for Global Dialogue-Department of International Relations (Policy Research and Analysis Unit) November 17-19, 2014 symposium on The Blue Economy and the Challenge of Maritime Security for South and Southern Africa. It highlights the geostrategic potential of a South African blue economy agenda interacting with the need for an integrated regional and sustainable approach to appreciate the developmental and economic opportunities of the maritime domain. Harnessing the blue economy forms part of the larger continental discussion on sustainable development seen in the African Union's Agenda 2063 as well as the post 2015 development agenda. As such, the importance of the Blue Economy was specifically highlighted in the AU's agenda 2063 where the current chairperson of the AU, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma referred to the blue economy as the 'maritime dimension' of the African renaissance.ⁱ

The success of economic diversification through the development of the maritime economy for South and Southern Africa will depend on a feasible architecture of cooperation beginning with existing regional arrangements to address the risks that are undermining the development of the blue economy. Maritime risks in the region are characterised by the security-development nexus, meaning that the protection of the blue economy cannot be discussed in isolation from maritime security issues. Thus far regional cooperation on maritime issues has largely been security centric. This policy brief looks at how increased regional development cooperation can actualise the development of a sustainable blue economy for bicoastal South and Southern Africa.

The case for maritime regional integration

Afro-Atlantic Littoral

The Benguela Current Convention is an important example of maritime cooperation around shared geopolitical interests. The Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem is considered one of the world's richest marine ecosystems and contains approximately 54.3 billion US dollars in 'ecosystem services' per year.ⁱⁱ It extends from Port Elizabeth in South Africa to Cabinda in Angola. The convention signed by South Africa, Namibia and Angola gave rise to the Benguela Current Commission. This commission outlines a regional approach to protect, harness and enhance this South Atlantic marine ecosystem for economic and social benefits. Areas of cooperation focus on offshore oil and gas production, marine diamond mining and commercial fishing. Also prioritised are information sharing, research and the harmonisation of maritime policies. It also has the potential to play an important dispute mediation role in the region. This was seen when the commission was called in to resolve a dispute between Angola and Namibia concerning the infiltration of twelve Angolan registered fishing vessels into territory around the Namibian/Angolan border which created

the potential of overfishing.ⁱⁱⁱ This commission has tremendous potential and is one of the largest marine economy conventions of its kind in the world.

A less active South Atlantic initiative is the Convention on the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West, Central and Southern African Region. Known as the Abidjan Convention, it was initially developed in 1984. It has only recently been revitalised. The Abidjan Convention is supported by 22 states from Mauritania all the way to South Africa with 17 of these states party to the Convention. As such, it embraces three of the AU's functioning regional economic communities (RECs): The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) which, between them, embrace the maritime security strategies adopted and being vetted by ECOWAS and SADC.

This convention provides a legal framework focusing on trans-boundary environmental challenges and prioritises inter-governmental cooperation on the management of highly productive ecosystems in the area.^{iv} It can potentially provide a useful framework of cooperation around maritime economic activities. This was echoed at the 11th Abidjan Convention held in Cape Town in 2014 where the theme was 'Promoting Blue Growth in Africa: Toward Sustainable Management of Marine Resources'.

With a combined coastline of 14 000 kilometres, the Abidjan Convention could have a definite impact on both ocean governance and the sustainable development of a maritime economy. As such, within the context of the AU's maritime strategy, efforts could be made by ECOWAS, ECCAS and SADC to coordinate an interface between the Abidjan Convention and the respective SADC and ECOWAS strategies. The latter's ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy (EIMS) is much the more robust of the two. Unlike the SADC strategy, it is not classified.

An ECOWAS-ECCAS civil society initiative involving participation of governments of these two RECs is the Gulf of Guinea-focused 'Abuja Declaration' launched at the conference on 'African Approaches to Maritime Security: West and Central Africa' from 21-23 May 2014. This declaration places emphasis on the need for EIMS to prioritize the local grassroots interests of coastal communities within the interregional scope of the Gulf of Guinea^v.

The Indian Ocean Regionalizing of Phakisa?

Although South Africa has catapulted Operation Phakisa to the top of its national developmental agenda, it is not clear this high profile Blue Economy initiative has/is being calibrated into a SADC regional strategic agenda. This might require Tshwane-Pretoria to possibly focus on an amending of the still classified SADC maritime security strategy to factor in both the Benguela Current Convention involving Angola and Namibia as well as the Abidjan Convention alongside similar marine ecosystem initiatives underway along the Indian Ocean littoral of SADC.

In addition, as raised by University of Professor Jo-Ansie Van-Wyk, the 2014 November symposium, embedded in the SADC strategy should be provision for a Southern African Continental-Shelf Agency to mediate and manage overlapping exclusive economic zone (EEZ) maritime claims by South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique. In fact, ideally – in going one step further – these claims might be collapsed into a regionally integrated SADC Maritime Commons Domain (SMCD) under tripartite joint management among the three SADC members. Operation Phakisa might be regionalized into an integrationist agenda with a balanced focus on both the South Atlantic as well as the Indian Ocean and sea lanes of convergence stride the Cape of Good Hope.

This is why a more consciously geo-strategic visioning of South African maritime strategy is called for: a balanced Indian Ocean-South Atlantic framework. Ironically, South Africa is more diplomatically focused

on the Indian Ocean via the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) which it will chair in a few years, succeeding Indonesia (which, in turn, succeeded Australia and India). It has been less active (or totally inactive) on the South Atlantic side, though it is a member of the Afro-South American Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic (ZPCSA). What this might call for is an amalgamation of South Africa's different 'stove piped' agency participants in different aspects of its national maritime-blue economy agenda into a consolidated inter-agency governing body like Indonesia is undertaking (and indeed, there might be a Tshwane-Pretoria/Jakarta dialogue in this respect among the two as members of IORA).

Conclusion: Recommendations

- *Interrogate the role of landlocked states in blue economy and development cooperation.* While littoral and island states are the points of departure in terms of maritime activity due to their positioning and greater reliance on economic maritime activity, landlocked states could also provide support in related activities. They should not be ruled out as development cooperation partners. Their interest is based on dependence on the sea for trade and food security. By incorporating landlocked states into more developmental cooperation around blue economy activities, it provides greater opportunity for regional cooperation.
- *Policy Review of the SADC Maritime Security Strategy:* Given the unclassified status of the ECOWAS Maritime Security Strategy (EIMS) which is an accessible document, current SADC policy of keeping its strategy classified needs to be reviewed in the interest of advancing the southern African maritime agenda. This might also include a review of the strategy in terms of its integration of other non-defence sector concerns.

- South Africa & ZPCSA: South Africa needs to priorities its commitment to the ZPCSA on the same level of its new-found commitment to IORA as a reflection of a balanced Indian Ocean-South Atlantic maritime security, oceans governance and Blue Economy strategy.

Notes

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- II. Attwood, C. 2013. 'World's First Large Marine Ecosystem Legal Framework signed by Angola, Namibia and South Africa'. Global Environment Facility. Available at: <https://www.thegef.org/gef/news/benguela-current-convention> (accessed 22 August 2015).
- III. The New Era staff reporter, 2015. Angolan Trawlers concern Namibian fishing sector. The New Era. Available at: <https://www.newera.com.na/2015/04/24/angolan-trawlers-concern-namibian-fishing-sector/> (accessed 20 August 2015).
- IV. The Abidjan Convention, no date provided. Welcome to the Abidjan Convention Secretariat. Available at: <http://abidjanconvention.org/index.php> (accessed 20 August 2015).
- V. C Ukeje & W M Ela. 2013. 'African approaches to Maritime Security' Friederich-Ebert-Stiftung. Available at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/nigeria/10398.pdf> (accessed 21 August 2015).



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3rd Floor Robert Sobukwe Building
263 Nana Sita Street
Pretoria South Africa

PO Box 14349
The Tramshed,
0126
Pretoria South Africa

+27123376082
+27862129442
info@igd.org.za
www.igd.org.za

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