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## Advancing the Blue Economy Through Gender Equality: Insights from the South African Maritime Sector

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### Abstract

*This study examines the structural, cultural, and systemic variables affecting women's involvement in the African maritime sector and provides evidence-based measures to promote gender equality in the Blue Economy. A qualitative, policy-oriented research design was employed, integrating ethnographic observation with secondary data analysis and using an ethnographic lens to provide critical perspectives on the lived experiences of women in marine situations. Interviews conducted with 20 female professionals provided instructive information about the direct experiences of female professionals in the marine field regarding their perceptions of gender mainstreaming issues based on their lived experiences. The study establishes that gender equality in the maritime industry is essential for the Blue Economy to realise its maximum potential in Africa. The inclusion of women in the economy not only facilitates its expansion but also fosters social justice and environmental protection. To establish a sustainable and inclusive marine sector, it is necessary to implement institutional reforms, mentorship, digital learning, targeted financing, and data-driven workforce planning. The study recommends that to promote gender equality in the marine industry, it is necessary to ensure that women occupy technical leadership and power positions. Legislation, initiatives that support women's leadership, and positive measures that facilitate their advancement to strategic and high-level roles can achieve this. The findings stipulate that promoting gender equality is not only a matter of social fairness but also a matter of economic and environmental need. Recommendations stress the need for data-driven monitoring, targeted investment, and structural changes to make the Blue Economy fair, open, and long-lasting.*

**Keywords:** South Africa, Skills Development, Blue Economy, Gender Equality, Gender Stereotype, Maritime Sector

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of the Blue Economy has emerged as a transformative framework for enhancing the economic well-being of coastal communities while promoting sustainable practices. It encompasses various economic activities linked to oceans, seas, and coastal regions, aiming to balance economic growth with environmental sustainability. This dual focus is essential, as the health of marine ecosystems directly influences the livelihoods of millions who rely on these resources for their economic well-being. The marine industry is a key factor in economic growth, social inclusion, and protecting the environment. The global maritime industry is facing a critical shortage of seafarers, and the untapped potential of women offers an opportunity to help address this gap. Women comprise less than 2% of the global seafaring workforce, with significant barriers hindering their full participation and contribution to the sector (Sahu & Doppalapudi, 2025; Reva & Kumalo, 2020).

Economically, the Blue Economy has a substantial global impact, with an estimated contribution of between \$3 trillion and \$5 trillion annually through sectors like fisheries and tourism. This economic potential underscores the necessity of including women in decision-making processes to maximise the benefits derived from marine resources. Seas add over \$2.5 trillion to the global economy every year. However, women are still very under-represented in marine jobs, especially in leadership, technical, and operational roles. This article looks at the gendered dynamics in Africa's marine sector, focusing on systemic impediments, chances for inclusion, and legislative changes (Ali, 2025). The insights come from the author's work as a thought leader in transport economics and skills development, as well as from ethnographic observations and sectoral statistics (Ekstedt et al., 2024; Alharthi and Hanif, 2020).

Africa's maritime industry is a key part of its economic potential. Africa's Blue Economy has a lot of resources, but they are not being used to their full potential. The continent has more than 30,000 km of coastline and several large rivers (Tran, 2025). Oceans around the world add over \$2.5 trillion to the economy each year, but systematic exclusion, especially of women, makes it hard for growth to be sustainable (World Economic Forum, 2025). Gender imbalance in the maritime sector is not just a social issue; it also stifles innovation, hinders environmental stewardship, and keeps the economy from working as well as it could. Women are more likely to hold informal and low-value jobs, and they have less access to leadership, decision-making, and ownership of maritime assets (Matovu et al., 2025; Sanmi-Lawal, 2022).

This study rigorously analyses the relationship between gender equality and the blue economy, utilising South Africa as a case study and incorporating insights from the author's keynote address presented at the World Maritime University Conference in Malmö, Sweden, titled "Advancing the Blue Economy Through Gender Equality."

## 1.1 Goals of the Research

The objective of this study is to examine the structural, cultural, and systemic variables affecting women's involvement in the African maritime sector and to provide evidence-based measures to promote gender equality in the Blue Economy.

1. Investigate barriers to gender equality that hinder the full growth and development of women in Africa's Blue Economy.

2. Examine the current representation and involvement of women in South Africa's marine industry.
3. Explore interventions to promote inclusive growth in the Blue Economy, with a particular focus on addressing gender imbalances.
4. Construct recommendations for a for a sustainable, gender-inclusive Blue Economy.

## 1.2 Questions for Research

1. What are the cultural, institutional, and systemic hurdles that keep women from working in the marine industry?
2. How does including women in the Blue Economy help the economy expand, protect the environment, and promote social justice?
3. What are the best ways to promote gender equality in maritime industries?
4. How can South Africa use policy, training, and data systems to make inclusion and change happen on a larger scale?

# 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## 2.1 The Blue Economy: Concept and Importance

The Blue Economy is the long-term exploitation of ocean resources to boost the economy, improve people's lives, and keep ecosystems healthy. It includes fishing, shipping, offshore energy, tourism, marine biotechnology, and conservation. Women still do not have enough representation in important fields, even though they have a lot of potential. For example, women make up only 2% of seafaring labour, 34% of ship-owning firm workers, and about 20% of the national maritime authority (Ahmed, 2025).

## 2.2 Africa's Chance to do Business at Sea

Africa's long coastlines and rivers make it a wonderful place for marine businesses to thrive. Women in coastal areas in Africa commonly work in fishing, processing, and tourism, but they are not allowed to own businesses, make decisions, or run activities that are worth more. For instance, women are 31% of South Africa's marine workforce, despite being over half the population (Grimett, 2022).

## 2.3 Cultural Barriers

Historical and cultural norms have influenced access to maritime resources. African females in rural areas were typically told not to go near bodies of water, which kept them from getting early exposure, learning new skills, and later participating in careers. This cultural caution, while protective, unwittingly engendered gendered exclusions in maritime commercial operations (Grimett, 2024).

Research in maritime studies, gender studies, and blue-economy literature underscores that cultural barriers are significant impediments to women's full engagement in maritime industries. These barriers are social and normative (ideas about who "belongs" at sea or in ports), organisational (cultures that are built into the workplace), and communal (gender expectations in families and communities). They work on a lot of different levels, like the global maritime culture, national labour markets, and local port and shore jobs. They make it harder to identify skilled workers, make it harder to break down barriers between different types of jobs, and make it harder to reach the goals of blue-economy planning (Popa et al., 2025; Bhirugnath-Bhookhun & Kitada, 2017).

A prevailing theme in the literature is the "masculinised" culture associated with seafaring and port labour. Long-standing myths

about physical strength, endurance, and the "hardy male" maritime identity push women to the side and make male-dominated peer networks seem normal. This cultural framing affects hiring, how people act on and off the ship, and what they believe regarding their career paths (for example, the idea that women are not proficient at watching, engineering, or leading). Research indicates that these identity norms are universal, yet they manifest in distinct local variations within African and South African contexts, where traditional gender roles may be more pronounced or articulated differently (Popa et al., 2025; Mogano et al., 2025; Rohe et al., 2018).

The blue economy's promise of sustainable growth from ocean sectors depends on getting the most out of human resources. When women are culturally excluded, it reduces the pool of available talent, limits innovation by limiting the number of perspectives, and makes it harder for everyone to get equal access to economic opportunities in fisheries, ports, maritime logistics, aquaculture, and marine services. Furthermore, omitting half of the population goes against the social sustainability pillar of blue-economy strategies. Literature contends that gender-blind blue-economy planning may perpetuate historical inequalities and overlook economic opportunities (Rizky et al., 2025; World Bank, 2022).

Persistent stereotypes related to identity: women are often pushed into "softer" maritime jobs like administration, shore-based logistics, and fisheries processing, while men still mostly hold technical and seafaring jobs. Occupational segregation is self-reinforcing. There are few women in technical groups, so employers and trainers keep hiring based on gender stereotypes, and young women do not have as many role models or encouragement to go into technical maritime training. Evidence from African and global sector reviews shows that there are few women in seafaring – historically, only single-digit percentages – and they are making slower progress in technical and leadership roles (IMO, 2025; Grimett, 2024).

#### 2.4 Case Studies by Region

Republic of South Africa South Africa has made enormous strides in getting women to work in maritime fields. Women make up about 31% of the workforce, and they hold many senior positions at Transnet Port Terminals (44%) and leadership positions at SAIMI (almost 50%). But there are still differences, especially for Black, Coloured, and Indian women, who do not have enough representation in technical, operational, and decision-making jobs (SAIMI, 2024). Republic of Ghana Women make up 16% of the workforce at the Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority in Ghana. Mentorship programs and targeted hiring efforts have helped more women acquire jobs, especially in management and administration (Abraham et al., 2017).

Republic of Nigeria In Nigeria, just 9.3% of sailors are women, which means that only 567 out of 6,039 are women. The low representation shows both cultural and systemic problems, such as not enough access to maritime training, cultural norms that keep women from moving around, and not enough policies that focus on gender (Olowofoyeku, 2021; Justesen, Nguyenová & Megwa, n.d.). Senegal provides a paradigm of economic empowerment via pragmatic actions. Women who process fish have seen their incomes rise because of better processing facilities and access to microcredit. This study shows that investing in infrastructure and making sure everyone has access to financial services can help

both gender equality and economic growth at the same time (Bara Dème et al., 2023).

Kenya is a unique example of women taking the lead in caring for the environment. Women are at the forefront of marine conservation efforts that combine traditional knowledge with modern scientific techniques, demonstrating the connection between gender equality and environmentally friendly practices (Ojwala et al., 2024).

#### 2.5 Gender Equality

Research affirms that economies promoting gender equality surpass those that do not, as gender equity enhances economic and social output. As societies evolve and amass both physical and human capital, women's productivity rises, resulting in a societal transition towards gender equality that optimises overall social production. The establishment of the blue economy frequently neglects gender equity goals. Although high-level blue economy policies emphasise economic and environmental objectives, they often overlook equitable considerations, especially gender equality. The disparity is significant, as the marginalisation of women, particularly in small-scale fishing, constrains their contributions to and advantages from blue economy projects. In underdeveloped nations, oceans sustain 47 million individuals involved in small-scale fishing and fish trading. Although women regularly operate small-scale fisheries, they are typically marginalised from decision-making processes that influence Blue Economy initiatives, sustaining existing inequalities (Diachkova and Kontoboitseva, 2022; Voyer et al., 2022; Cohen et al., 2019).

Women account for 29% of the overall workforce in the industry, with just 20% within the workforce of national maritime authorities in member states of the IMO. Even more stark is that women comprise just 2% of seafarers and 10% of search and rescue teams in national maritime authorities. This result indicates an urgent necessity for gender parity and the advancement of women in the blue economy, potentially pointing to the importance of gender equality in the maritime sector. The role of women's entrepreneurship in the blue economy has been widely recognised as a key driver of socio-economic benefits. Sallah and Caesar (2020) emphasise that women's entrepreneurial activities in the blue economy foster both economic growth and social change. This phenomenon is especially significant in developing economies, where women's participation can serve as a catalyst for broader economic development and gender parity. Enhancing women's participation in the blue economy makes gender equality a catalyst for economic development, which improves both individual and community economic well-being (Rizky et al., 2025; IMO, 2022).

In the South African context, the government has identified some of the elements that undermine substantive equality for women. Flowing from its counsel should be the development of an oceans economy that champions the economic development of women. Such an approach will be based not only on the NDP 2030 but also on South Africa's constitutional values of dignity, equality, and non-sexism, which have been shaped by its constitutional jurisprudence. The government has emphasised the importance of women's participation in the ocean economy and the necessity of gender mainstreaming to implement the constitutional provisions for gender equality, which are integral to the transformational principles of South Africa's Constitution. Although the initiative is a work in progress, South Africa has yet to fully optimise the



participation and engagement of women as a pivotal force in the ocean economy (Ntola, 2021).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Framework

A qualitative, policy-orientated research design was employed, integrating ethnographic observation with secondary data analysis and reflexive insights. The study's author provides viewpoints as a thought leader and authority in transport economics within the context of skills development, complemented by insights from an industry insider, which adds contextual depth and allows for the integration of leadership, policy, and practical sector realities (McLeod, 2024).

#### 3.2 Sources and Methods of Data Analysis

The data sources comprise interviews with 20 female professionals in maritime sectors, including fisheries, ports, shipping, and logistics; secondary data obtained from the TETA 2024 Workforce Skills Planning (WSP) and Annual Training Report (ATR); the IMO-WISTA Women in Maritime Survey 2024; and case studies from Transnet Port Terminals (TPT), African Marine Solutions (AMSOL), and the South African International Maritime Institute (SAIMI). The interviews provided instructive information about the direct experiences of female professionals in the marine field regarding their perceptions of gender mainstreaming issues based on their lived experiences (Taherdoost, 2021; Monday, 2020). Thematic programming was used to analyse the data and provide qualitative insights. A comparison of developments from different countries helped establish best practices and existing gaps. Keynote addresses, stakeholder engagement, and direct observations of marine efforts serve as main data sources that offer firsthand insights into industry operations (Rosairo, 2023).

#### 3.3 Ethnographic Method

The ethnographic perspective provides essential insights into women's experiences in marine contexts, revealing several key characteristics through field observations and interviews. Community restrictions include bans on swimming, fishing, or going to work on the coast for rural females, which makes it harder for them to take part in maritime activities. Cultural narratives, like stories and proverbs that stress prudence, unintentionally restrict women's freedom and chances in the field. Mentorship emerges as a significant factor, as direct engagement with role models has been shown to enhance the retention and diligence of women entering traditionally male-dominated marine professions. These insights underscore the necessity of culturally attuned interventions and community engagement initiatives to effectively eradicate systemic barriers and advance gender equality within the marine sector (Black et al., 2021; Ploder & Hamann, 2020).

### 4. DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1 Barriers in the structure, culture, and systems

To achieve the objectives of fostering a more inclusive and sustainable Blue Economy in Africa, it is essential to leverage global partnerships through entities such as the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the Women's International Shipping & Trading Association (WISTA), and other international organisations. These partnerships can help people share their best practices, new ideas, and programmes that create skills, which are all important for breaking down systemic barriers and speeding up progress in gender equality, technical skills, and sectoral

development (Cristas et al., 2025). It is essential to evaluate South African and other African maritime programs against worldwide standards to ensure that regional programs remain competitive, adhere to global trends, and employ the latest methodologies. This convergence not only makes African efforts more credible and effective, but it also gets the continent's Blue Economy ready to be more involved in the global maritime sector (Walker, 2018). To fully realise Africa's potential, it is essential to develop a worldwide reach that attracts investment, encourages knowledge sharing, and makes sure that Africa's Blue Economy makes a real contribution to international goals for sustainability, economic growth, and gender parity (Mojafi & Van Der Westhuizen, 2025).

A complicated mix of structural, cultural, and institutional barriers exacerbates gender inequalities in the maritime sector. Structural inadequacies encompass the lack of access to boats, tools, and financial resources, hence impeding women's ability to operate freely in fisheries, shipping, or coastal tourism. The absence of transparent recruiting processes promotes inequitable hiring practices, while gender-based job segregation and restricted promotion prospects perpetuate systemic obstacles in maritime agencies and commercial shipping companies. Cultural norms play a crucial role. The conventional belief throughout Africa that females should refrain from water-related activities has historically limited women's access to maritime skills and confidence-enhancing experiences. Social stories that say maritime labour is mostly for men and is hard on the body make women less likely to think about maritime jobs (Sanmi-Lawal, 2022; Kitada, 2020).

The author's ethnographic observations during the keynote speech validate these assertions. In rural areas, women are typically prohibited from engaging with water or participating in associated activities, such as labour. Consequently, fear emerges as a constraining element, even in the presence of profitable opportunities (Semkunde et al., 2021; Nevins, 2020).

#### 4.1.1 Obstacles to Gender Equality in the Maritime Industry

Even though the Blue Economy has a lot of economic promise, it is still not very inclusive since women encounter a lot of structural, cultural, and systemic hurdles that make it difficult for them to become involved. Cultural isolation is a big part of the problem. In many African communities, traditional norms prohibit girls from doing things like swimming in rivers. For example, in the keynote presentation, people said things like, "Don't go near the river!" which have historically limited skill development and confidence building, which has led to long-term disempowerment in jobs relating to maritime logistics, seafaring, and marine conservation (Sitti Raehanah M. Shaleh et al., 2020). Moreover, women typically lack access to essential resources like boats, equipment, financing, and licences, which impedes their ability to initiate or expand enterprises within the fishing and marine sectors. Women remain under-represented in leadership roles throughout Africa. For example, women in South Africa make up only 31% of the maritime workforce and an even smaller percentage of executive roles. This creates a cycle in which policies, resource allocation, and mentoring opportunities disproportionately benefit men. Unsafe workplaces where women are harassed and abused because of their gender make it much less likely that they will enter or stay in the field (Grimett, 2024). Lastly, data gaps, which are caused by gender-disaggregated data that is not consistent, full, or compartmentalised, make it hard to plan for the workforce, track progress, and put in place targeted transformation initiatives. To

fully realise women's potential in Africa's blue economy, it is important to deal with many different kinds of hurdles.

#### 4.2 The Importance of Leadership and Mentorship

Transformational leadership is important for promoting gender equality in the marine sector since it helps bring about beneficial change. Leaders and mentors can support inclusive policies by promoting gender equality in maritime organisations. This will create a culture of fairness and diversity. They provide a beneficial example by showing women employees how to act fairly and ethically, which builds their confidence and trust and encourages them to participate and lead. They also help people share information through structured mentorship programmes that encourage skill development, capacity building, and professional progress. Transformational leaders build networks that help women go forward in their careers and become leaders by giving them chances to work together, obtain funding, and move up in their careers. These activities all work together to move the industry towards a future that is fairer and more open to everyone (Karimi et al., 2023; Mulyani et al., 2020).

#### 4.3 Chances to be included

WOMSA, WISTA, and Maritime EmpowerHer are all examples of mentorship programs that help women advance their careers by giving them advice, role models, and chances to network in the maritime industry. Digital learning platforms may also connect women in remote areas with experts from around the world. This makes training and exchanging knowledge easier, which helps women improve their skills. To provide women entrepreneurs even more power, they need specific financial tools like loans, grants, and credit facilities to help women-led businesses grow, produce new ideas, and make a bigger impact on the Blue Economy (Emma, 2024; Dragomir et al., 2018).

Even though there are still problems, there are big chances to improve gender equality and Africa's Blue Economy through smart initiatives. Women in Maritime Associations (WIMAs), both at the national and regional levels, provide important networks, mentoring, and advocacy that help women in the industry become more visible and grow professionally. Programmes like the IMO Women in Maritime Program and Maritime EmpowerHer in South Africa offer scholarships and training to help women enhance their abilities, obtain certified, and become leaders in the maritime business. Digital learning platforms make it even easier for everyone to get information and make connections in their field by offering online training and mentorship. This breaks down geographic barriers and connects girls and women in remote areas with experts and industry leaders from around the world. Policy and regulatory changes are also particularly important. By establishing binding objectives, enforcing workplace standards, and providing additional assistance to women-owned maritime businesses, governments and industry organisations may establish gender equity as an integral component of their operations. The establishment of sectoral data observatories—centralised, real-time dashboards that display workforce statistics by gender, ethnicity, and age—enables individuals to make decisions based on evidence, maintain accountability, and monitor the success of transformation initiatives. If used correctly, these chances can help speed up gender equality and long-term growth in Africa's Blue Economy (SAIMI, 2024; Kuteesa et al., 2024; Lwamba et al., 2022).

Even with these problems, a number of programmes are making it easier for more women to get involved. WOMESA and WISTA are

two groups that have been immensely helpful in offering mentorship, advocacy, and leadership training. For instance, WOMESA South Africa's relaunch in 2023 added new programmes to help young women get the skills they need to work in the marine industry. WISTA South Africa adds to this by offering women in shipping and maritime logistics professional networking and capacity-building activities. Digital learning platforms are another chance to make a big difference. Online courses and mentorship programs can help women in rural areas access knowledge, networks, and global expertise by breaking down geographic and social obstacles. These platforms also make it possible for women to keep learning and growing in their careers, which is important for keeping them in mid- and senior-level positions. Funding methods that are specific to a project are also significant. Women-led marine businesses can receive financial help for everything from aquaculture to coastal tourism and new technologies. Such support lets them grow their businesses, hire people, and become part of the official economy (Lakshmidevi & Geetha, 2024; Ketchiwou & Freda, 2023; Barkhuizen et al., 2022).

The inclusion of women in the maritime industry significantly impacts the economy and the environment. Women contribute to the economy by establishing their enterprises and working in logistics, tourism, and fisheries. Affording women more authority makes the whole sector more competitive and resilient. Women often take care of natural resources in an environmentally friendly way. Their active participation in marine conservation efforts makes fisheries more sustainable, decreases environmental damage, and supports SDG 14. Furthermore, promoting inclusive participation leads to new ideas in sectors like ship repair, aquaculture, and marine technology. Women-led projects often produce new ways to solve problems in these fields, which helps both advancement and sustainability (Karadencheva, 2025; Anariba et al., 2024; Huck, 2022).

#### 4.4 Case Studies from the Region

There are 31% women working in South Africa's marine sector, and women hold 44% of executive roles at Transnet Port Terminals (TPT). This stat shows that women are more represented and in charge than men. About 9.3% of seafarers in Nigeria are women, which shows that more women need to be included in important operational jobs. Women make up 16% of port-related jobs in Ghana. This data shows progress, but there is still room for advancement in port employment equality. Microcredit and better facilities help women fish processors in Senegal, which helps small-scale fisheries and their livelihoods. Kenya shows how gender integration may be done in new ways by having women manage marine conservation projects that combine traditional knowledge with scientific methods. This initiative shows how including women can help protect the environment in a way that lasts. These countries show different levels of success and still have chances to improve gender equality in Africa's maritime and marine industries (Bara Dème et al., 2023; Reva & Kumalo, 2020).

#### 4.5 Effects on the economy and the environment

Including women in the maritime and marine industries increases overall productivity, makes households more resilient, and increases the national GDP by getting more people to work. By using resources responsibly and safeguarding marine environments, their active involvement in conservation efforts makes the environment more sustainable. Furthermore,

encouraging inclusive innovation encourages entrepreneurship in fields like maritime technology, tourism, and logistics. This leads to growth in those fields, creates jobs, and supports the Blue Economy's long-term growth (Kelling et al., 2025; Martínez-Vázquez et al., 2021; Mouton, 2018).

By promoting inclusive growth, women employed in the fishing, tourism, and maritime sectors can contribute to the economy and the environment. This implies that women employed in these regions have the potential to enhance productivity, generate income, and contribute to poverty reduction. Women's traditional knowledge is also crucial for managing marine resources. It helps with conservation efforts and supports sustainability in line with SDG 14. Additionally, broader inclusion encourages entrepreneurship, which leads to new ideas and business growth in maritime logistics, aquaculture, and technology-based services. This all helps make the Blue Economy stronger and more sustainable (Matovu et al., 2025; Barrios et al., 2020).

#### 4.6 Leadership and Representation

To help women move up to higher positions in the marine sector, support their leadership, and keep female talent, it is important to use succession planning tools. Encouraging women to lead innovative projects in sectors like logistics, aquaculture, and marine conservation may help technology move forward and protect the environment while also giving women a bigger voice and more recognition for their work. Also, creating awards and recognition programmes for women who show leadership in their field honours their accomplishments and encourages others to seek out leadership roles, which promotes a culture of excellence and inclusion.

#### 4.7 Working along with other countries

To share best practices and encourage international cooperation, it is important to strengthen connections with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the Women's International Shipping and Trading Association (WISTA), and other worldwide organisations. Comparing local projects to worldwide standards helps the sector stay competitive and fosters new ideas. Also, study tours, exchanges, and cross-border mentorship programs can help female leaders connect with each other, share knowledge, and grow their skills. Such initiatives will help the Blue Economy become more gender-equal and excellent in its own right (Kormych, 2020; IMO, 2020).

## 5. CONCLUSION

For the Blue Economy to reach its full potential, gender equality in Africa's marine industry is necessary. Including women in the economy helps it expand, protects the environment, and promotes social justice. Institutional reforms, mentorship, digital learning, targeted financing, and data-driven workforce planning are all important things that make these changes possible. Leaders must promote inclusion, change the organization's culture, and make sure that everyone is responsible. By intentionally putting these plans into action, Africa can create a Blue Economy that is fair, long-lasting, and good for everyone (Rizky et al., 2025). The Blue Economy is intricately connected to the overarching Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 14, which emphasises the preservation and sustainable utilisation of oceans, seas, and marine resources. Incorporating gender concepts into Blue Economy programmes enhances women's economic

empowerment and advances the broader objectives of social fairness and environmental sustainability (Rizky et al., 2025).

The Blue Economy is a big chance and a big problem for Africa. It shows that female inclusion must be a key part of sustainable marine expansion. When women are included, the economy is more resilient, the environment is better cared for, and social justice is improved. Conversely, excluding women prevents the sector from realising its full potential. Africa can make the most of its maritime resources by using focused interventions like mentorship programmes, digital learning platforms, institutional data observatories, legislative changes, and initiatives for inclusive leadership (Sikhunyana & Mishi, 2023). Cultural exclusion of women reduces the pool of available talent, restricts innovation by limiting the number of perspectives, and makes it more difficult for all individuals to obtain equal access to economic opportunities in fisheries, ports, maritime logistics, aquaculture, and marine services (Rizky et al., 2025).

South Africa's experience shows that there has been a lot of improvement, but there are still some disparities, especially for Black, Coloured, and Indian women in technical and leadership jobs. It is no longer discretionary to institutionalise gender equality; it is now a necessary step towards attaining long-term prosperity, global competitiveness, and fair Blue Economy development (Carrim, 2021; Matotoka & Odeku, 2021). Leaders need to move beyond just talking about things to really doing them, making sure that no woman is left out of defining the continent's maritime future. As the keynote speaker said, "Another world is not only possible, but she is also on her way." "On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing." The dream of a Blue Economy that is fair, inclusive, and long-lasting is within reach if we take the right measures today (Matotoka & Odeku, 2021).

The African Blue Economy has a lot of untapped potential, yet women are still left out of significant engagement. As shown by the keynote speech and the study that followed, promoting gender equality is necessary for long-term economic growth, protecting the environment, and social justice. Institutional changes, digital learning platforms, targeted funding, mentorship, and data-driven workforce planning are all critical. Leaders need to encourage inclusivity and ensure accountability. Africa's maritime future hinges on taking planned, quantifiable steps to turn plans into action. The continent can achieve a genuinely inclusive and sustainable Blue Economy by promoting equity, visibility, and voice (Rizky et al., 2025).

The Blue Economy in Africa has a lot of potential to promote sustainable growth, protect the environment, and improve social conditions. However, systemic gender inequality is still holding it back from reaching its full potential. Africa can reap a lot of economic, environmental, and social benefits by actively putting women in leadership, technical, and operational roles. South Africa exemplifies both progress and ongoing challenges that require resolution. For example, women make up 31% of the maritime workforce and hold higher-level positions in some organisations. However, Black, Coloured, and Indian women still face problems, especially in technical, operational, and mid-management roles (Hoareau, 2025; Issifu et al., 2023).

## 6. RECOMMENDATION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS



To foster gender equality in the marine industry, it is crucial to ensure that women are in positions of technical leadership and power, as this will foster inclusive governance and encourage the expression of diverse perspectives. Such goals can be achieved through the implementation of specific legislation, initiatives to support women in becoming leaders, and positive measures to facilitate their advancement to more strategic and high-level positions. Moreover, the cultivation of mentorship and succession planning is crucial for the development of a robust pipeline of female maritime leaders, as it provides them with guidance and opportunities to acquire new skills and allows them to advance in their careers. Mentorship programs connect women who are just starting their careers with experienced leaders. This helps them learn new things and feel more confident. Structured succession planning makes sure that things stay the same and gets women ready for future leadership roles. These techniques work together to create a place where women can do well, make a difference, and help the industry move towards gender equality and long-term success.

Collaboration with global organisations such as the IMO, the Women's International Shipping & Trading Association (WISTA), and other international organisations is crucial to enhancing the sustainability and inclusivity of Africa's Blue Economy. These partnerships can facilitate the sharing of best practices, new ideas, and skill-building programs, all of which are crucial for dismantling systemic barriers and accelerating progress in gender equality, technical skills, and sectoral development. Also, it is important to compare South African and other African maritime programs with international standards to make sure that regional programs stay competitive, follow global trends, and use the latest methods. Developing a global reach is essential to fully realise Africa's potential, attract investment, promote knowledge exchange, and ensure that Africa's Blue Economy makes a real difference in worldwide goals for sustainability, economic growth, and gender parity. Moreover, empowering women through targeted training and financial resources can significantly enhance their contributions to the Blue Economy, promoting inclusive growth (Caroline, 2024; Ivanova, 2024).

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