COMMUNIQUE

High-Level African Blue Food Leadership Roundtable



Travellers Beach Hotel & Spa, Mombasa, Kenya
June 15, 2026

I. INTRODUCTION

The High-Level African Blue Food Leadership Roundtable was convened on 15 June 2026 in Mombasa, Kenya, on the margins of the Our Ocean Conference 2026, by Africa Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), Aquatic Blue Food Coalition (ABFC), World Resources Institute (WRI), Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), and other partners.

The Roundtable brought together 60 participants representing African Union institutions, Ministers, senior government officials from AU Member States, regional organisations, development and technical partners, private sector actors, civil society organisations, women and youth networks, research institutions and blue food champions to discuss the strategic role of aquatic foods in advancing Africa's food security, nutrition, climate resilience, livelihoods and inclusive blue economy transformation. Organising institutions included representatives from AUDA-NEPAD, the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition, the World Resources Institute, Environmental Defense Fund, and Oceana. Member State representatives included those from the governments of Kenya, Ghana, Madagascar, Namibia, Sierra Leone, Seychelles, Mauritius, Cabo Verde, Comoros, São Tomé and Príncipe, Gabon, and Benin, regional bodies including IGAD, technical partners including FAO, BMZ, GIZ, WorldFish, and the Global Seaweed Coalition; civil society and non-state actor platforms including AWFISHNET and CAOPA, private sector and innovation actors including OceanHub Africa, the Healthy Seaweed Cafe, Plan International Kenya, Cascadia Seaweed; and independent experts working across fisheries, aquaculture, climate, food systems, nutrition and the blue economy. This broad participation reflected strong collective interest in advancing African leadership on blue foods and strengthening coordinated action across policy, investment and implementation. The Roundtable served as a platform for agreement of key priorities and endorsement of establishment of an African Blue Food Champions Network.

II. HIGH LEVEL OPENING & REMARKS

The opening session was moderated by Jón Erlingur Jónasson (Chair of the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition and Special Envoy for the Ocean, representative of Iceland) and featured welcoming and high-level remarks from the following: Mr. Peter Thomson (United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean), Mr. Keriako Tobiko (Executive Advisor to the CEO of AUDA-NEPAD), Hon. Hassan Joho (Cabinet Secretary for Mining, Blue Economy and Maritime Affairs of Kenya), Hon. Emelia Arthur (Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture Development of Ghana), Hon. Prof. Jean Maharavo (Minister of Fisheries and Blue Economy of Madagascar), Hon. Inge Zaamwani (Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Land Reform of Namibia), and Hon. Ahmed Saybom Kanu (Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources of Sierra Leone).

The opening interventions reflected a strong commitment to elevate blue foods as a strategic solution for food security, nutrition, climate resilience and sustainable economic development across Africa. Participants emphasised the need to expand sustainable fisheries and aquaculture production, strengthen blue food value chains, improve post-harvest infrastructure and market access, increase the inclusion of women, youth and small-scale actors, and mobilise greater public and private investment in the sector.

A key outcome of the opening session was the strong endorsement expressed by the high-level speakers for the establishment of an African Blue Foods Champions Network to strengthen political leadership, coordinate action and accelerate the integration of blue foods into national, regional and continental policy frameworks.

Welcoming remarks from Jón Erlingur Jónasson (Iceland): In his welcoming remarks, Jón Erlingur Jónasson highlighted the importance of aquatic blue foods as a vital yet often overlooked contributor to food security, nutrition, climate resilience, livelihoods and economic development. Reflecting on the establishment of the ABFC following the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, he noted the Coalition's growth into a global partnership bringing together governments, international organisations, civil society, academia and the private sector to advance the recognition of aquatic foods in policy and development agendas. He emphasised the Coalition's commitment to supporting countries through knowledge sharing, collective technical expertise and partnerships, while calling for stronger political leadership across Africa to elevate blue foods as a strategic continental priority. Jónasson also acknowledged the contributions of AUDA-NEPAD, EDF and WRI in supporting the organisation of the Roundtable.

Keynote speech from Amb. Peter Thomson, United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean: Amb. Thomson emphasised that sustainable blue foods are central to food security, nutrition, climate resilience, biodiversity and economic development. He recognised the leadership of the African Union and AUDA-NEPAD and highlighted the importance of regional cooperation in managing shared aquatic resources. He noted Africa's significant untapped aquaculture potential and called for sustainable fisheries, responsible aquaculture, healthy ecosystems and inclusive value chains that create opportunities for women, youth and coastal and inland communities. He encouraged African leaders to integrate blue foods into national climate strategies, food systems pathways, nutrition policies and blue economy plans. He welcomed the proposed African Blue Foods Champions Network as an important platform for strengthening political leadership, regional collaboration and translating commitments into investment and implementation. Mr. Thomson also stressed that sustainable blue food systems depend on healthy aquatic ecosystems and responsible resource management. He expressed concern over the estimated US$22 billion spent annually on harmful fisheries subsidies and urged the 18 African countries among the 45 countries yet to join the first WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies to do so. He also highlighted the importance of concluding negotiations on further disciplines addressing overcapacity and overfishing. He concluded by urging African leaders to use the Our Ocean Conference to mobilise partnerships and investment and move decisively from recognising the potential of blue foods towards concrete implementation.

Welcoming remarks from Hon. Keriako Tobiko (Senior Advisor on Climate and Environment, AUDA-NEPAD): Representing the CEO of AUDA-NEPAD, Mrs Nardos Bekele-Thomas, H.E. Mr. Keriako Tobiko highlighted the strategic importance of blue foods as a critical solution to Africa's interconnected challenges of food insecurity, malnutrition, climate change, and economic vulnerability. He emphasized the immense opportunities provided by Africa's oceans, lakes, rivers, and coastal resources for enhancing nutrition, creating jobs, and supporting inclusive economic growth, particularly for women, youth, and small-scale actors. While recognizing the progress made through continental frameworks such as Agenda 2063, the Africa Blue Economy Strategy, the Policy Framework and Reform

Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa, and the CAADP Kampala Declaration, Mr. Tobiko underscored the need to move beyond policy recognition towards concrete implementation, financing, monitoring, and delivery of blue food initiatives. In closing, he called for African leaders, ministers, development partners, and stakeholders to strengthen collaboration and demonstrate greater ambition in advancing the blue foods agenda and highlighted the upcoming COP32 in Ethiopia as a pivotal opportunity for Africa to present a coordinated, evidence-based, and finance-ready blue foods package through the proposed African Network of Blue Food Champions.

High level opening remarks from Hon. Emelia Arthur, Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture Development of Ghana: H.E. Emelia Arthur, underscored the strategic importance of blue foods in addressing interconnected challenges including food insecurity, malnutrition, climate change and economic development. The Minister highlighted that fisheries and aquatic foods are not only a source of nutrition and livelihoods for the people of Ghana, but also a matter of national security. While noting that the contribution of blue foods to national development remains insufficiently recognised and reflected in public budgets, H.E Arthur outlined Ghana's ongoing efforts to reform fisheries management, support small-scale fishers, expand aquaculture, combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and enhance transparency. The Minister also highlighted the establishment of Africa's first Blue Food Innovation Hub in partnership with the World Economic Forum and welcomed the proposal to create an African Blue Foods Champions Network. She called on African leaders to place blue foods at the centre of food security strategies and to champion transformative action that challenges the status quo.

High level opening remarks from Hon. Prof. Jean Maharavo, Minister of Fisheries and Blue Economy of Madagascar: H.E. Jean Maharavo presented Madagascar's blue economy strategy, emphasizing the centrality of oceans to national development, food security, livelihoods, and coastal community dignity. He described Madagascar's extensive maritime assets (over 5,600 km coastline and over 1 million km² EEZ) and outlined strategic priorities which is shifting from resource extraction to value creation through sustainable fisheries, responsible aquaculture expansion, value-chain development (including crab and other marine products), marine spatial planning, strengthened ocean governance, transparency, monitoring and surveillance (including digital tracking), and investments in infrastructure and market access. Minister Maharavo also highlighted key challenges for Madagascar which include climate change, overfishing, post-harvest losses, weak cold-chain infrastructure, limited finance, and data gaps. The Minister called for continental cooperation through an African Blue Food Leadership Network and partnerships to improve coastal infrastructure such as landing sites, strengthen digital access, and drive a unified African voice to ensure blue foods support nutrition, resilience, sovereignty, and economic development by 2030.

High level opening remarks from Hon. Ahmed Saybom Kanu, Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources of Sierra Leone: The H.E. Ahmed Saybom Kanu emphasized the link between blue food, food security, sustainable development goals, climate resilience and job creation and Sierra Leone's coastal resources (200 mile EEZ and about 200 marine species). The Deputy Minister described national actions taken by Sierra Leone since 2011 including creation of four marine protected areas, development of sector policies, legislation and a sector strategy. He outlined the strategic objectives for the country regarding resource assessment, strengthened fisheries management, regulation, monitoring, enforcement,

and unlocking economic potential through aquaculture. Deputy Minister Kanu highlighted the opportunity for the country to leverage from a Chinese-funded project to generate an estimated $50 million annually and create thousands of jobs. He called for decentralised institutions, resource distribution to fishing communities, pan-African cooperation, and shared regional investment and maintenance capacity. Deputy Minister Kanu concluded by appreciating development partners including the World Bank and Iceland for support to develop bankable projects for investment.

High level opening remarks from Hon. Inge Zaamwani , Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Land Reform of Namibia: H.E. Inge Zaamwani presented Namibia's commitment to advancing blue foods for sustainable development, emphasizing the nutritional, economic, and climate-resilience benefits of marine resources. The Minister outlined the national importance of the fisheries sector estimating the contribution of the sector to approximately 5% of Namibia's GDP and to over 21,000 direct jobs. H.E> Zaamwani noted the importance of managing the sector through a science-based framework, and called for strengthened science and data-driven decision-making, increased investment in value-chain infrastructure and market access, enhanced regional and continental cooperation, and inclusive strategies that benefit women, youth, and small-scale fishers. The Minister expressed gratitude for the initiative to convene the high level champions and reaffirmed Namibia's commitment to participate and continue to engage in the high-level panel for a sustainable ocean.

Official Opening of the Roundtable from Hon. Hassan Joho, Cabinet Secretary for Mining, Blue Economy and Maritime Affairs of Kenya: Hon. Hassan Joho officially opened the Roundtable by underscoring the central role of blue foods in advancing food security, nutrition, sustainable development and inclusive livelihoods. He described blue foods as efficient, nutrient dense and climate friendly sources of animal protein that can help address hidden hunger while maintaining a lower ecological footprint. He outlined Kenya's national efforts to anchor capture fisheries and aquaculture within food production policies and Vision 2030, including the objective to increase per capita fish and seafood consumption from 4.5 kilograms to 10 kilograms by 2030 through the Eat More Fish campaign, public education, improved affordability and greater availability. H.E Joho further highlighted Kenya's integration of blue foods into the national food strategic reserve, investments in mariculture, seaweed farming, cage farming, aquaculture centres of excellence, fish handling, cold storage, processing facilities, market infrastructure, international fish ports and an accredited fish quality laboratory. The Cabinet Secretary also emphasised support to small scale actors through community led Beach Management Units, school based aquaculture and aquaponics initiatives, and the potential inclusion of blue foods in school feeding programmes. He acknowledged persistent challenges related to post harvest infrastructure, finance, data, governance and the exclusion of women, youth and small scale producers, and called for coordinated policy, research, infrastructure investment, strong community institutions and inclusive markets. H.E. Joho reaffirmed Kenya's readiness to work with partners to scale proven interventions and pilot bold innovations, and confirmed that Kenya would join and committed Kenya's willingness to champion the African Blue Food Champion Network as a platform connecting political leadership with technical expertise, investment opportunities and implementation support.

III. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE HIGH-LEVEL ROUNDTABLE

Session 2 started with a round of self-introductions. Some participants, including the representative from Mauritius, expressed strong support for the African Blue Foods Champions Network, emphasizing the strategic importance of blue foods to Africa's Island States.

Presentation of the Background and Objectives of the Roundtable: Dr. Bernice Mclean, Senior Programme Officer and Head of the Blue Economy Unit of AUDA NEPAD. Dr. Bernice Mclean presented the background and objectives of the High Level African Blue Food Leadership Roundtable, framing the discussion around the urgent convergence of food insecurity, climate change, population growth and the rising cost of nutritious diets in Africa. Dr. Mclean introduced the Policy Paper jointly prepared by the Roundtable organisers on: "*Aquatic Blue Foods for Africa: A strategic policy agenda for climate-resilient food systems, nutrition, and inclusive growth.*" She provided an overview of the strategic messages of the Policy Paper, noting that the document serves as an information resource for decision-makers for positioning aquatic blue foods as a strategic solution for strengthening food security, improving nutrition, creating jobs and building climate resilient food systems across the continent. She emphasised key points from the paper, including that more than 200 million Africans depend on fish as a primary food source, while fisheries and aquaculture already support approximately 15 million direct jobs and contribute an estimated 18 percent of animal protein consumed in Africa, an amount that is higher than the global average.

Dr. Mclean further outlined the transformative potential of stronger blue food policies by 2050, including new employment opportunities, economic growth and improved climate resilience. This includes the need to integrate blue foods more prominently into national development plans, climate policies, food systems strategies, and investment frameworks was also emphasised, while leveraging existing African Union instruments, including Agenda 2063, the Africa Blue Economy Strategy, the Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa (PFRS), and the CAADP Kampala Declaration. The concluding message of the Policy Paper is the need to sustain political leadership, strengthen peer learning and exchange, and accelerate implementation through practical and actionable frameworks emerging from the roundtable process. This requires that blue foods is positioned as a central pillar of Africa's climate adaptation, food systems transformation, and blue economy agenda, with the aim of presenting a coordinated African blue foods package at future global forums, including COP32 in Ethiopia in 2027.

The main objectives of the Roundtable were to:

i. Highlight the role of blue foods in advancing Africa's climate, food security, nutrition, livelihood and blue economy agendas;
ii. Share national, regional and global perspectives on opportunities for blue foods to deliver multiple development benefits;
iii. Build collective ownership around a shared African policy agenda for blue foods;
iv. Showcase practical examples of blue food policy and implementation approaches that are already working;
v. Identify concrete commitments related to blue foods, including integration into climate strategies and reduction of food loss and waste across fisheries and aquaculture value chains;

vi. Explore the value of an African Blue Foods Champions Network as a platform for political leadership, peer exchange and coordinated advocacy; and
vii. Agree on key messages, next steps and follow-up mechanisms to sustain momentum beyond the Roundtable and the Our Ocean Conference.

The session was concluded with a call for stronger political leadership, policy alignment and practical commitments, including the integration of blue foods into climate strategies, food systems pathways, nutrition policies and public procurement agendas, while advancing the proposed African Network of Blue Food Champions as a platform for sustained leadership, peer exchange and accelerated implementation.

IV. NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON BLUE FOODS

Moderator: Dr. Kristin Kleisner, Associate Vice President Ocean Science, EDF

Dr. Kleisner introduced the session by positioning fisheries and aquaculture as nutrition and development priorities, combining policy-level framing with attention to local and regional implementation. Through the panel discussions, Dr. Kleisner highlighted the clear linkage among the topics of nutrition, policy, regional implementation, and social inclusion and invited panelists to speak on national or regional priorities on food systems and climate and opportunities for blue foods to deliver co-benefits:

Panelist 1: Dr. Nii Moi Thompson, Senior Advisor to the President on the Sustainable Development Goals: Dr. Thompson presented a development-planning perspective on Africa's blue economy as a policy specialist, emphasizing the need to move beyond policy design toward effective implementation and measurable results. Drawing on Ghana's experience, he highlighted key frameworks, including the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy, the Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, the Aquaculture Development Fund, the National Aquaculture Programme Plan, and the State of the Ocean Plan. While these policies and strategies provide a strong foundation, he noted that progress is often limited by weak institutional performance, inadequate human and financial capacity, poor time management, and low productivity in fisheries and aquaculture. He argued that sustainable blue economy transformation depends on stronger institutions and more efficient use of available resources. Dr. Thompson identified laws, regulations, delivery systems, technical leadership, and social norms as critical institutional enablers. He also stressed the need to invest in skills, leadership, finance, infrastructure, and workforce productivity. Given Africa's resource constraints, he emphasized that improving efficiency and productivity must be a central development priority. Dr. Thompson concluded by calling for a shift in focus from what policies and programmes exist to how they can be effectively implemented, scaled, and delivered to achieve tangible outcomes for communities, economies, and aquatic food systems across the continent.

Panelist 2: Mr. Alexis Grosskopf, Founder and CEO of OceanHub Africa: Mr. Grosskopf highlighted three emerging areas shaping the future of Africa's blue food sector and creating opportunities for sustainable growth and resilience, from the perspective of the private sector. First, seaweed production and value addition are expanding rapidly, offering strong potential for climate resilience, diversified livelihoods, and women's economic empowerment through women-led enterprises. Second, inclusive and distributed aquaculture systems that support smallholder farmers and outgrower models can strengthen local food systems, broaden

participation, and increase access to nutritious aquatic foods. Third, accessible technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), sensors, and artificial intelligence can improve production management, boost productivity, and enable data-driven decision-making across aquatic food value chains. Drawing on his organization's experience, Mr. Grosskopf noted that 39–40% of applications they receive come from ventures in the blue food sector, reflecting growing entrepreneurial interest and innovation. He noted that while many enterprises show strong market potential, their business models are often not yet mature enough to attract conventional investment. He identified three main barriers to scaling: limited access to tailored financing and business support for early-stage ventures; infrastructure gaps that force entrepreneurs to build and manage key supply chain functions themselves; and restricted access to premium markets due to certification requirements, quality standards, and the absence of reliable off-take arrangements. Addressing these challenges, Mr. Grosskopf argued for the critical need to unlock investment, accelerate growth, and realise the full potential of Africa's blue food enterprises.

Panelist 3: Dr. Eshete Dejen, Head, Sustainable Environment Protection Unit, IGAD: Dr. Dejen provided a regional perspective on food security and the growing role of blue foods within the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region. He noted that food insecurity affects approximately 20 million people annually across IGAD Member States, despite the region's substantial aquatic resources, including Somalia's extensive coastline and marine potential. As food systems resilience initiatives increasingly integrate coastal fisheries and livestock systems, he emphasized the opportunity for blue foods to contribute to nutrition, livelihoods, climate resilience, and broader economic development. To unlock this potential, Dr. Dejen outlined several strategic priorities being advanced within IGAD. These include developing national blue economy strategies through regional partnerships, diversifying blue food sources beyond traditional fisheries, and promoting seaweed farming in suitable areas. He also highlighted the importance of adapting proven technologies and best practices from other Regional Economic Communities (RECs), strengthening aquatic food value chains to improve productivity and market access, enhancing ocean and climate forecasting systems to support fisheries management and resilience planning, and advancing aquaculture technologies suited to arid and semi-arid environments. Dr. Dejen argued that these measures are essential for strengthening food security, expanding economic opportunities, and building climate-resilient aquatic food systems across the IGAD region.

The panelists emphasized the need to build a unified African blue food system that strengthens resilience, enhances food security, and supports sustainable economic growth. They called for scaling successful pilot initiatives into transformative, continent-wide programmes, supported by enabling policies, effective regulatory frameworks, scientific evidence, innovative financing, strong institutional leadership, and private sector engagement. The speakers also stressed the importance of aligning regional cooperation with national action to ensure coordinated development of Africa's blue food and blue economy sectors. The discussion highlighted the need for stronger valuation systems and evidence-based decision-making to guide policy, investment, and resource allocation across marine and inland aquatic food systems. Panelists noted that innovation should extend beyond technology to include community-driven solutions, local knowledge, and inclusive approaches that benefit vulnerable populations. They also argued that measures of progress should go beyond gross domestic production (GDP) to capture employment, income generation, and broader social well-being. Several practical success stories were showcased, including the institutionalization

of blue economy governance, regional initiatives to address plastic pollution, sustainable ocean plans supported by blue bonds, blue carbon initiatives and tax incentives, and local innovations that convert abandoned quarries into productive agricultural enterprises. Together, these examples demonstrated the potential of integrated and scalable solutions to advance Africa's sustainable blue economy transformation.

V. FROM VISION TO ACTION: WHAT'S ALREADY WORKING

Moderator: Rachel Thoms, Research Associate II, Ocean Program, WRI

Introduction by Dr. Andreas Schaumayer, Head of Division for Food Security and Fisheries (BMZ). Dr. Schumayer opened the session by highlighting the growing momentum behind aquatic foods and the need to fully integrate them into national food and nutrition strategies. He welcomed the role of the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition in raising the profile of aquatic foods on the international agenda, emphasising the importance of increased investment, transparent fisheries governance and ratification of the WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement by countries. Dr. Schumayer showcased BMZ's support for small-scale fisheries and farming as well as sustainable aquaculture initiatives at the local level.

Panelist 1: Ms. Sonia Sharan, Senior Manager, Impact and Economics, Oceana. Ms. Sharan, presented a case study from Daram, a remote fishing community in Samar, Philippines, where up to 40 percent of fish is lost after landing despite the community's strong dependence on seafood for food security and livelihoods. She explained that Oceana Philippines worked with local communities and government authorities to identify the drivers of post harvest losses and mobilise investment in improved handling, infrastructure and value chain practices. The initiative aims to reduce fish losses to 10 percent, demonstrating how targeted post harvest interventions can increase the availability, accessibility and value of nutritious aquatic foods without increasing fishing pressure. Ms. Sharan emphasised that reducing fish loss and waste can strengthen food security, improve nutrition, support sustainable fisheries management, enhance livelihoods and build climate resilience. She also highlighted the need for sustained financing, infrastructure investment and long term community and government partnerships to ensure lasting impact and scalability.

Panelist 2: Ms. Lovin Kobusingye, President, African Women Fish Processors and Traders (AWFishNet). Ms. Kobusingye highlighted the central role of women in Africa's blue food value chains, particularly in fish processing and trade, while noting that many continue to face limited access to training, finance, market opportunities and post harvest infrastructure. She outlined the work of AWFISHNET across its 44 country chapters in supporting women fish processors and traders to strengthen business skills, improve product quality, reduce losses, enhance packaging and negotiate better market opportunities. She further emphasised that inclusive blue food value chains must also create opportunities for youth and persons with disabilities, because their participation can strengthen livelihoods, improve food security and expand the economic value of aquatic food systems. Ms. Kobusingye called for increased investment in post harvest infrastructure, targeted training, market access and support for women led enterprises to scale successful models and ensure that women, youth and persons with disabilities benefit more fully from Africa's blue food transformation.

Panelist 3: Ms. Beryl Oduor, Senior Project Manager, Plan International Kenya. Ms. Odur spoke on Advancing Gender-Responsive Seaweed Production, Value Addition and Commercialization. Ms. Odur presented the COSME Project in Kenya, implemented in partnership with Cascadia Seaweed company, as an example of how seaweed farming can support sustainable coastal development, women's economic empowerment and climate resilience. She explained that the project promotes seaweed as a sustainable blue food and livelihood opportunity for coastal communities by supporting production, value addition, market development and climate assessments. The initiative places particular emphasis on addressing barriers faced by women, including limited access to finance, markets, processing technologies, business development services and supportive policies. Ms. Odur highlighted the potential of seaweed to diversify incomes, create livelihoods, strengthen climate resilient food systems and expand opportunities for women in emerging blue food value chains, while noting that improved access to finance, markets, processing technologies, business development services, and gender-responsive policies will be essential to scale the seaweed sector.

Panelist 4: Ms. Karly Kelso, Acting Senior Director, Global Ocean Strategies, EDF. Ms. Kelso presented guidance developed by the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition and partners to support the inclusion of blue foods in Nationally Determined Contributions. She noted that, as aquatic food systems gain increasing recognition in global climate discussions, countries require practical tools to translate this momentum into national policy and implementation. In response, the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition and partners developed guidance to support the inclusion of blue foods in Nationally Determined Contributions. The guidance provides concrete policy options, indicators, benefits and implementation pathways across fisheries, aquaculture, aquatic food supply chains, sustainable consumption, blue carbon habitats and enabling measures. Drawing on Mexico's experience, Ms. Kelso demonstrated how such guidance can help countries move from broad climate ambition to actionable commitments that strengthen food security, climate resilience, livelihoods and emissions reduction efforts. She emphasised that countries will need targeted technical support, inclusive stakeholder engagement and financing to integrate blue foods effectively into climate strategies and to move from policy commitments to implementation.

In closing the session, Rachel Thoms invited the panellists to identify one priority recommendation for senior government officials seeking to accelerate progress in blue food systems. The panellists converged on the need to move from recognition to implementation through targeted investment, stronger coordination and enabling policies. Sonia Sharan of Oceana emphasised the importance of increasing financing for post harvest solutions while recognising the wider social, environmental and nutritional value of blue foods. Lovin Kobusingye of AWFISHNET called for stronger collaboration across actors and renewed attention to reducing food loss in ways that benefit women, youth and small scale value chain actors. Beryl Oduor of Plan International Kenya highlighted the need for infrastructure investment and supportive policies to unlock the potential of seaweed production and value addition. Karly Kelso of EDF underscored the importance of breaking institutional silos and building stronger bridges across sectors and government ministries so that blue foods can be fully integrated into climate, food security, nutrition and development agendas.

VI. AQUATIC FOOD SYSTEMS: BALANCING NUTRITIONAL GOALS, ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION AND LIVELIHOODS

Keynote Address: Dr. Manuel Barange, Assistant Director General and Director of Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, FAO. Dr. Barange delivered the keynote address on the role of aquatic food systems in balancing nutrition, ecosystem conservation and livelihoods. He highlighted that aquatic foods are a cornerstone of global food security, environmental sustainability and economic resilience, with global consumption of aquatic foods having grown at twice the rate of population growth since 1960. He noted that despite this growth, the sector continues to face significant pressures, as only 64.5 percent of global capture fisheries are sustainably exploited, while the remainder are affected by overexploitation and weak management. Dr. Barange emphasised that aquaculture has become the main driver of sector growth and now accounts for 53 percent of global aquatic animal production, although major regional disparities remain. He highlighted the importance of inland fisheries to Africa's food security, explaining that in Sub Saharan Africa, aquaculture contributes only 8 percent of aquatic animal production. He cautioned that the continent is projected to experience a decline in per capita aquatic food availability by 2034 unless significant efforts are made to strengthen aquatic food value chains and address current negative trends.

Dr. Barange underscored that Africa will need to increase aquatic food supply by an estimated 74 percent by 2050 to meet population demand and maintain current consumption levels. In response to this challenge, he presented FAO's Blue Transformation framework, which promotes the sustainable expansion of fisheries and aquaculture while strengthening nutrition, livelihoods and ecosystem stewardship. He stressed that achieving this transformation will require stronger legal and regulatory frameworks, improved access to finance, better data and evidence systems, and more resilient aquatic food value chains. Dr. Barange further highlighted FAO's support to countries through instruments and programmes such as the Port State Measures Agreement, international guidelines and standards, FISH4ACP and the EAF Nansen Programme, which contribute to capacity building, sustainable resource management and the long term resilience of aquatic food systems.

VII. ACTION LABS: ADVANCING CONCRETE COMMITMENTS

Action Lab 1: Africa Champions Lead the Way in Integrating Blue Foods into Climate Strategies

Facilitators: Mr. Keriako Tobiko and Dr. Bernice Mclean (AUDA-NEPAD)

Dr. Bernice Mclean introduced the Action Lab by highlighting the growing impacts of climate change on terrestrial, marine and freshwater ecosystems, including rising ocean temperatures, sea-level rise, ocean acidification, and the declining capacity of oceans to absorb carbon dioxide. She underscored the strong political momentum behind the African Blue Foods Champions Network initiative and stressed the importance of positioning blue foods as a key component of climate action in the lead-up to COP31, COP32 and beyond.

Mr. Keriako Tobiko emphasised the critical role of institutions in advancing the blue foods agenda and recognised the progress already achieved through previous climate negotiations. While blue foods have gained increasing visibility at successive COPs, he stressed the need to move from recognition to implementation and action. Looking ahead to COP32 in Ethiopia, he called for strengthened efforts to integrate blue foods into climate and development agendas and to ensure that African countries are able to present coordinated, evidence based and implementation ready priorities.

The Action Lab discussion was guided around three main areas. First, participants were invited to identify practical entry points for integrating blue foods into national climate and development frameworks, including Nationally Determined Contributions, adaptation plans, food systems strategies and related policy instruments. Second, the discussion considered how African countries could strengthen coordination within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process and build common positions on food systems, adaptation and aquatic resources. Third, participants reflected on the potential value of a coordinated African Blue Foods Champions Network, including the incentives for participation and the technical, financial and coordination support required to make the Network effective. The discussion provided an opportunity for countries and institutions to identify barriers, share experiences and propose practical pathways for embedding blue foods more firmly within Africa's climate agenda.

The Action Lab discussion focused on practical entry points for integrating blue foods into national climate and development frameworks, strengthening African coordination within UNFCCC processes, and assessing the value of an African Blue Foods Champions Network. Participants identified barriers, shared experiences and proposed ways to better position blue foods within Africa's climate agenda, including the technical, financial and coordination support needed to move from policy recognition to implementation.

Key recommendations from Action Lab 1:

- **Leveraging NDCs as an entry point for blue foods and climate action:** Promote the integration of blue foods into national climate agendas through countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs).
- **Establishing a knowledge-sharing platform:** Create a platform that consolidates and disseminates existing guidance, best practices, case studies, and resources—including materials from the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition—and adapts them for African contexts.
- **Strengthening AUDA-NEPAD's coordination role:** Position AUDA-NEPAD as a central coordinator to support countries in advancing blue food and climate priorities, facilitating collaboration and technical assistance across the continent and with the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition.
- **Building common African positions for global engagement:** Develop and strengthen coordinated African perspectives and advocacy on blue foods and climate issues at major international forums, including COP negotiations.
- **Facilitating peer learning among African countries:** Encourage the exchange of experiences, lessons learned, and successful approaches for integrating blue foods into national policies and development strategies, recognizing the region's diverse contexts and opportunities.

Additional broad considerations from LAB 1 included:

- Strengthen institutional capacity, governance frameworks, and multi-level coordination mechanisms to improve policy coherence, implementation, knowledge exchange, and cross-sectoral collaboration for sustainable aquatic food systems.

- Increase recognition of blue foods within climate and development agendas by integrating them into national policies and climate commitments, strengthening collective advocacy, and providing practical guidance for implementation.
- Scale up marine spatial planning and ecosystem-based, community-led approaches to secure space for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture while ensuring local ownership and long-term sustainability.
- Promote climate-resilient aquatic food systems by increasing access to climate finance, risk-management mechanisms, adaptation measures, compensation schemes, and resilience-building investments.
- Support the sustainable development and diversification of aquaculture and other climate-resilient aquatic foods, including seaweed, through targeted investment, innovation, climate-resilient infrastructure, environmentally responsible production practices, and early warning systems.
- Strengthen private sector participation in blue food value chains, particularly for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), by improving access to finance, enhancing investment readiness, supporting viable business models, reducing trade barriers, and facilitating partnerships through dedicated engagement platforms.
- Document, share, and scale up best practices and innovative approaches that can be adapted across different contexts to accelerate sustainable aquatic food systems development.
- Strengthen awareness, education, and skills development through ocean literacy initiatives, professional training, and the integration of blue foods into educational curricula.
- Diversify aquatic food production and consumption systems to enhance food security, livelihoods, ecosystem restoration, and resilience to climate and environmental shocks.

- Address critical data and evidence gaps, particularly on the linkages between terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, and on the impacts of land based activities on aquatic food systems, biodiversity and ecosystem health.

- Make greater use of existing global initiatives, i.e. the UN Global Seaweed Initiative, and give greater attention to Antarctic affairs in global and African policy dialogues, recognising that rising temperatures, ecosystem disruption and potential fisheries declines in the Antarctic region have wider implications for ocean health, climate stability and global food security.

Several countries and institutions expressed interest in joining or supporting the African Blue Foods Champions Network, including representatives from Mauritius, Gabon, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Benin. This built on the earlier endorsement expressed by Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar and Sierra Leone during the opening session, reflecting growing political momentum for a coordinated African platform on blue foods, climate action and implementation.

Action Lab 2: Food Loss and Waste Across Fisheries and Aquaculture Value Chains

Facilitator: Sonia Sharan, Oceana

Participants in Action Lab 2 emphasized that reducing food loss and waste across fisheries and aquaculture value chains is critical for improving food availability, nutrition, incomes, and resilience. They identified the need for greater investment in cold chain systems, processing and storage facilities, market infrastructure, technology, and inclusive value chain development. Particular attention was given to supporting women, youth, and small-scale actors to enhance participation and benefits across aquatic food systems.

Key Recommendations from Action Lab 2:

1. **Strengthen stakeholder inclusion and practitioner engagement by** ensuring that fishers, processors, traders, women, youth, and other value chain actors are actively involved in policy development and decision-making processes.
2. **Leverage existing networks and establish African Blue Foods Champions Network by** building on existing fisheries and aquatic food platforms rather than creating new parallel structures.
3. **Shift the narrative from fish waste to fish value by** promoting a "100 percent value" approach that recognizes every part of the fish as a potential economic asset.
4. **Generate evidence and quantify economic opportunities by** conducting assessments and surveys to quantify physical fish losses, economic losses, and potential gains from value addition.
5. **Develop supportive policy and regulatory frameworks by** strengthening policies and regulations on fish handling, processing, standards, traceability, and market access.
6. **Promote inclusive value chains for women and youth by** expanding access to finance, infrastructure, technology, and markets for women and youth who are heavily engaged in fish processing and value addition activities.
7. **Invest in infrastructure, renewable energy and innovation by** Expanding cold-chain facilities, storage infrastructure, and processing technologies to reduce post-harvest losses
8. **Strengthen market access and value addition by** supporting the development of premium and export markets for high-value blue food products and by-products.
9. **Improve fish handling and welfare practices by developing** guidelines, training programmes, and awareness campaigns on proper fish handling, harvesting, and processing practices.
10. **Focus champion messaging on high-impact priorities by** encouraging Blue Food Champions to concentrate advocacy efforts on a limited number of high-impact issues, particularly the full utilization and value of fish, reducing losses across the value chain, creating jobs, and improving incomes.

In addition, participants called for a gradual shift in public support away from environmentally harmful practices toward investments that promote climate smart, nutrition sensitive and sustainable aquatic food systems.

VIII. COMMITMENT ANNOUNCEMENTS, COMMUNIQUE PRESENTATION AND NEXT STEPS

A representative from each Action Lab presented a summary of the key discussions, inputs, and recommendations that emerged from their respective sessions. The reports highlighted strong convergence around the need to integrate blue foods more effectively into climate and development agendas, reduce food loss and waste across fisheries and aquaculture value chains, strengthen inclusive participation of women, youth and small scale actors, and mobilise greater technical and financial support for implementation. Participants also underscored the value of the proposed **African Blue Foods Champions Network** as a platform for sustained political leadership, peer learning, coordinated advocacy and practical follow up.

Following the Action Lab reports, **Karly Kelso (EDF)** provided an overview of the draft Communiqué, outlining its key messages, recommendations, and proposed next steps. Participants were informed that the Communiqué would be finalized following the Roundtable and subsequently shared with all participants for their review and input.

IX. CLOSING REMARKS

A closing address delivered by **Dr. Paul Orina, Director General, Kenyan Marine and Fisheries Research Institute.** Dr. Orina emphasized the critical role of blue food systems and the importance of translating scientific evidence and policy dialogue into practical action to reduce climate change impacts. He highlighted the growing recognition of blue food systems in Africa, including the establishment of dedicated blue economy ministries and increased research investment in some countries, while stressing that these gains must be linked to national planning processes, including Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans and the road to COP32 in Ethiopia. Dr. Orina also drew attention to key implementation challenges, including the need for stronger political engagement, improved community outreach, action to address urban pollution and pressures on aquatic ecosystems, and measurable follow up mechanisms. He encouraged participants to consider practical tracking tools, including scorecards, to monitor progress and ensure that the recommendations of the Roundtable translate into sustained implementation.

Annex 1: Agenda

08:30 – 09:00 Arrival & Registration

09:00 – 10:00 Session 1: High-Level Welcome, Keynote Speech and Minister's Remarks

- **Jón Erlingur Jónasson,** Chair of the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition and Special Envoy for the Ocean, Iceland
- **Mr. Peter Thomson**, United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean
- **Mr. Keriako Tobiko,** Executive Advisor to the CEO of AUDA-NEPAD
- **Hon. Emelia Arthur,** Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture Development of Ghana
- **Hon. Prof. Jean Maharavo,** Minister of Fisheries and Blue Economy of Madagascar
- **Hon. Ahmed Saybom Kanu,** Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources of Sierra Leone
- **Hon. Inge Zaamwani,** Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Land Reform of Namibia
- **Hon. Hassan Joho,** Cabinet Secretary for Mining, Blue Economy and Maritime Affairs of Kenya

10:00 – 10:15 Coffee Break and Photo

10:15 – 10:30 Session 2: The Shared Policy Paper - Aquatic Foods for Africa

- **Bernice Mclean,** Senior Programme Officer, AUDA-NEPAD

10:30 – 11:30 Session 3: National and Regional Perspectives on Blue Foods

- **Dr. Kristin Kleisner,** Associate Vice President Ocean Science, EDF
- **Dr. Nii Moi Thompson,** Senior Advisor to the President on the Sustainable Development Goals, Ghana
- **Alexis Grosskopf,** Founder and CEO, OceanHub Africa
- **Dr. Eshete Dejen**, Head, Sustainable Environment Protection Unit, IGAD

11:30 – 12:30 Session 4: From Vision to Action: What's Already Working

- **Dr. Andreas Schaumayer,** Deputy Head of Division, Trade and Development, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany
- **Rachel Thoms,** Research Associate II, Ocean Program, WRI
- **Sonia Sharan,** Senior Manager, Impact and Economics, Oceana
- **Lovan Kobusingye,** AWFISHNET
- **Beryl Oduor,** Plan International Kenya
- **Karly Kelso,** Senior Director, Global Ocean Strategies, EDF

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch

13:30 – 13:50 Session 5: Keynote Speech

13:50 – 14:10 Session 6: Action Labs Introduction

- **Sonia Sharan,** Senior Manager, Impact and Economics, Oceana

14:10 – 16:15 Session 7: Action Labs: Advancing Concrete Commitments

16:15 – 16:30 Coffee break

16:30 – 17:00 Session 8: Commitment Announcements, Communique, & Next Steps

- Karly Kelso, Senior Director, Global Ocean Strategies, EDF

17:00 – 17:15 Closing Reflections

- Dr. Paul Orina, Director General, Kenyan Marine and Fisheries Research Institute

BREAK

18:00 -20:00 Dinner: From Ocean to Plate - A Culinary Innovation Showcase for Sustainable Oceans

Annex 2: Participant List

High-Level African Blue Food Leadership Roundtable | 15 June 2026 | Mombasa, Kenya

#	Name	Title	Organisation
1	Afisah Zakariah	Chief Director: Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection	Ghana
2	Ahmed Saybom Kanu	Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources	Sierra Leone
3	Alexandra Phillipe	Marine Policy Manager	EBCD
4	Alexis Grosskopf	Founder and CEO	OceanHub Africa
5	Andreas Schaumayer	Head of Division for Food Security and Fisheries	BMZ
6	Andriantsilavo RABARY	Director for the promotion of Blue Economy	Madagascar
7	Anke Schneider		GIZ
8	Beatrice Alluga	Deputy Director, Fisheries	Kenya
9	Berchie Asiedu	Deputy Executive Director: Fisheries Commission	Ghana
10	Bernard Fulanda	Pwani University	Kenya
11	Bernice Mclean	Senior Programme Officer, Blue Economy	AUDA-NEPAD
12	Beryl Oduor	Senior Project Manager, COSME Project	Plan International Kenya
13	Betsy Njagi	Principal Secretary State Department for The Blue Economy and Fisheries, Ministry of Mining Blue Economy and Maritime Affairs.	Kenya
14	Carole Ogandagas	Ministère des Eaux et Forêts, de l'Environnement, du Climat, Chargé du Conflit Homme Faune	Gabon
15	Chamouine Soidri	Director for Marine Resources	Comoros
16	Chantal de Cupertino Koko	Regional Director of Fisheries and Blue Economy, Ministry of Fisheries and Blue Economy, Antsirabe	Madagascar
17	Delvis Fortes	Co-ordinator: FishGov2 project	AU-IBAR
18	Emelia Arthur	Minister of Fisheries and Blue Economy	Ghana
19	Eric Aligula	Head: The Oceans and Blue Economy Office	Kenya
20	Eric Baah	Director, Policy, Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring, and Evaluation, Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture	Ghana
21	Eric Nadiope	Consultant	AU-IBAR
22	Eshete Dejen	Head, Sustainable Environment Protection Unit	IGAD
23	Eyram Agbemava	Technical Advisor, SDGs Advisory Unit, Office of the President Annex (State Protocol)	Ghana
24	Fatuma Mang'ena	Healthy Seaweed Cafe	Tanzania

#	Name	Title	Organisation
25	Faustine Sinzogan	Ministry of the environment and Transport in charge of the Sustainable Development	Benin
26	Hassan Joho	Cabinet Secretary for Mining Blue Economy and Maritime Affairs	Kenya
27	Inge Zaamwani	Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries Water and Land Reform	Namibia
28	Jean Maharavo	Minister of Fisheries and Blue Economy	Madagascar
29	Jemima Makanda	Administrative Assistant	AU-IBAR
30	Jennifer O'Neill	Director of Cascadia Nature-based Solutions	Cascadia Seaweed
31	Jón Erlingur Jonasson	Special Envoy for the Ocean	Iceland, Aquatic Blue Food Coalition
32	Jonathan Baines	Program Manager, Ocean Program	WRI
33	Jorn Schmidt	Director for Sustainable Aquatic Food Systems	WorldFish
34	Joseph Mahongah	Director of Fisheries and Aquaculture	Kenya
35	Karly Kelso	Acting Senior Director, Global Ocean Strategies	EDF, Aquatic Blue Food Coalition
36	Keriako Tobiko	Advisor, AUDA-NEPAD	South Africa
37	Keriako Tobiko	Special Advisor of Climate Change	AUDA-NEPAD
38	Kristin Kleisner	Associate Vice President, Oceans Science	EDF
39	Lovin Kobusingye	President, AWFishNet	Uganda
40	Manuel Barange	Assistant Director General and Director, Fisheries and Aquaculture Division	FAO
41	Maximillian Schwartz	*International Affairs Officer*	EBCD
42	Maxwell Nkambule	Project Assistant	AUDA-NEPAD
43	Meera Koonjul	Director of Fisheries, Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping	Mauritius
44	Mohamed Kemokai	Fisheries Officer, Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources	Sierra Leone
45	Mohamed Kemokai	Fisheries Director	Sao Tome & Principe
46	Mohamed Seisay	Specialist Fisheries and Aquaculture	AU-IBAR
47	Nichola Dyer		Global Seaweed Coalition
48	Nii Moi Thompson	Senior Advisor to the President on the Sustainable Development Goals	Ghana
49	Oluwafunmilola Shelika	Treasurer and Nigeria President, AWFishNet	Nigeria

#	Name	Title	Organisation
50	Paubert Tsimanaoraty Mahatante	Blue Diplomacy Expert,	Madagascar
51	Paul Orina	Director General Kenya Marine Fisheries Institute	Kenya
52	Peter Thomson	Envoy for the Ocean	United Nations
53	Rachel Thoms	Research Associate II, Ocean Program	WRI
54	Rhodaline Abba	Public Relations Officer: Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture	Ghana
55	Robert Mbeche	Director, Food Program	WRI Africa
56	Sikana Sumbwa	Finance Officer	AU-IBAR
57	Sonia Sharan	Senior Manager, Impact and Economics	Oceana, Aquatic Blue Food Coalition
58	Susan Onyango	Director for Communications and Outreach: Africa	WRI
59	Teofilus Nghitila	Executive Director, Water and Marine Resource, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Land Reform	Namibia
60	Veronique Nibourette	Principal Secretary of the Blue Economy	Seychelles