



Article

Interrogating The Blue Economy Development Framework: Prospects for Governance and Security in the Gulf of Guinea

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Abstract

It is envisaged that with the emplacement of the appropriate Blue Economy Development Frameworks (BEDFs), the huge potentials in the Gulf of Guinea would be further harnessed and made to complement the efforts to diversify and develop the regional economy. This paper questions the capacity of BEDFs to address the governance and security challenges of the region. To explore this question, it adopts the Germond-Duret framework which posits that the notion of the Blue Economy stems from the spread of discourses and practices that originally pertain to land. It is posited that BEDFs, like other mainstream development paradigms, have West-centric dispositions and blind spots which means that the framework will likely prove incapable of effectively overcoming the governance and security challenges in the GoG. The paper, using a qualitative analytical approach and leveraging on secondary data, finds that there are gaps in extant BEDFs, and that these undermine the prospects for the realisation of the Blue Economy aspirations of the countries of the region. Whilst the GoG had benefited from diverse forms of international support and collaborations, the paper recommends that the region be alert to the political ramifications of these partnerships, especially, their possible deleterious impacts on development efforts.

Keywords: Blue Economy, Ocean Governance, Gulf of Guinea, Maritime Security, Development

Introduction

The notion of the Blue Economy has increasingly taken the centre stage in the strategic thinking of coastal countries across the world. This growing recognition of coastal, marine, and maritime sectors as pivotal facilitators of international economic growth and development has come, amongst other things, on the heels of the pursuit of national economic diversifications beyond land-based activities.

African countries in general, and those of the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) in particular have actively keyed into the tenets and the logic of the Blue Economy. It is now widely accepted that a successful emplacement of the Blue Economy presents huge opportunities to tackle the continent's perennial problems of poverty, food insecurity, un/under-employment, and chronic energy deficits, among others. At the 2018 Global Conference on Sustainable Blue Economy held in Nairobi, Kenya, the Authority of Heads of State and Government directed the African Union (AU) to work with relevant stakeholders to develop a blueprint for Africa's Blue Economy Strategy (ABES) that will guide sustainable

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development and utilisation of resources of the oceans, seas, Lakes and Rivers for Blue Economy growth and livelihoods. ABES, adopted in 2019, was designed to work with other continental and global policies and initiatives, prominent among the Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14), the AU Agenda 2063, the African Maritime Integrated Strategy (AIMS) 2050, and the Lomé Charter, to mention but a few.

African Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS) 2050 (African Union, 2012) operates with the purpose of giving effect to the combined operation of the AU Constitutive Act, particularly its Articles 3 (Sections (f) - promote peace, security and stability on the continent, and (j) promote sustainable development at economic, social, and cultural levels as well as integration of African economies), and 4 (Sections (d), establishment of a common defence Policy for the African continent). The AIMS document was developed in recognition that the African Maritime Domain (AMD) has vast potentials for wealth creation, and that the member states have common maritime challenges, opportunities as well as responsibilities.

In the bid to provide a broad framework for the sustainable protection and exploitation of Africa's maritime resources, the AU has had to lock hands with its traditional allies across the sea. It cannot be overemphasized therefore that at the heart of a Combined Exclusive Maritime Zone of Africa (CEMZA) - the common maritime space intended to boost trade, protect the environment and fisheries, share information and boost border protection and defence activities - lies the need for partnership and collaboration.

It is imperative however to interrogate the character and even ideological predilections of the overarching contexts of these partnerships and cooperation arrangements. Their technicist and 'apolitical' underpinnings often elide the deep-rooted issues which lie at the root of global economic inequities and structural imbalances. Studies have shown that the tenets of mainstream development thinking, like the ones upon which BEDFs rest, rather than confront the hegemony of the (neo) liberal order and the lopsided development logic that it promotes, instead ends up aligning with and promoting and normalizing the very same development agenda.

Findings show however that the AMD and the GoG especially are experiencing challenges like rapid population growth, urbanization, piracy, unsustainable anthropogenic activities, poor institutional frameworks, and climate change which hinder full Blue Economy transitions. With a booming mining, and oil and gas industry as well as a massive role in the global flow of trade and commerce, Africa's maritime sector has emerged powerfully on the global front burner, drawing the attention of major goods, services and energy consuming countries like the UK, China, India, and the US among others to the waters of her (African) continent. The presence of the resultant heightened activities has generated high levels of sea traffic and consequently various forms of challenges including maritime crimes and

criminalities. The AIMS lists the major crimes in the GoG and other maritime domains of Africa to include piracy and armed robberies at sea, illegal arms and drug trafficking, maritime terrorism, human trafficking, and smuggling. Others include money laundering, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, resource overexploitation and environmental pollution.

These unlawful activities and the adverse conditions they precipitate have negative impacts on the regional economy. They also expose the gap in policing the sector and the lack of infrastructure necessary for responding to crime and criminality in the maritime domain.

The GoG as well as the various maritime domains of Africa have, on these accounts, been drawn into the mainstream of the global discuss on ocean governance security. Ocean governance is one of the most central issue areas in contemporary international development theory and practice. It emerged as part and parcel of the construction of the post-WWII international order. The UN Conventions on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the overarching international legal framework for the protection and management of globally shared ocean resources, particularly in *areas beyond national jurisdictions* (ABNJs). UN governance of ABNJs, just like other mainstream maritime development frameworks, has often times come under criticism as being inadequate, incomplete or incongruous with the maritime interests of designated countries or regions in specific issue areas such as fisheries, biodiversity, seabed mining and/or exploration, to mention but a few.

Using a qualitative methodology this paper attempts to contribute to the ongoing discuss on the effectiveness or otherwise of Blue Economy Development Frameworks (BEDFs) for Africa. It leverages secondary data from diverse sources to interrogates the prospects of the World Bank-European Union (EU) articulated BEDF as a tool for actualising not only the goals of sustainable economic growth and development but also that of ocean governance and security in the GoG.

The Significance of Governance and Security in the Gulf of Guinea: Outlining the Problems

Stretching from Liberia all the way to Gabon, the Gulf of Guinea, GoG, spans 17 countries with a total coastline of about 2,874 nm. The region is approximately 575,000 sq nm. The GoG is arguably one of the world's leading transit hub catering to an estimated \$300 billion dollar flow of commerce annually. Presently, 70% of Africa's oil production comes from the GoG and, with the possibilities of more discoveries of offshore hydrocarbon deposits, the numbers will likely rise. Over 5.4 million barrels of oil is estimated to be produced daily in the GoG (CSIS, 2021).

The governance and security of the Gulf of Guinea is, therefore, of pivotal concern to Africa as well to other regions and international actors external to the region. Multiple states in the Gulf of Guinea produce oil. Recent estimates show that the Gulf of Guinea provides 15% of US oil consumption and 20% of European consumption. Furthermore, the region serves the international economy by being integrated into global logistics networks. Ports in the region are important hubs for international trade

(Ukeje and Ela, 2013). For instance, the Danish shipping line Mærsk alone pays between 600-700 port calls annually to Nigerian ports. So, it becomes more than necessary for large parts of the world that the waters in the Gulf of Guinea are safe for passage.

A range of international actors including but not limited to the European Union (EU), the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), France, the United States, the United Kingdom and Denmark have launched extensive maritime security strategies of their own focusing in the Gulf of Guinea (Larsen and CNissen., 2018). Their respective strategies incorporate an array of initiatives which, among other things, emphasise the need to address piracy and other maritime crimes in the region, promote economic growth and development and strengthen maritime security in the region (Larsen and CNissen., 2018).

The Blue Economy Development Framework (BEDF), pioneered by the World bank and the EU, is one of such initiatives. Fast catching on as an acceptable working template in international governance, it is presented as a sustainable development framework for developing countries that addresses equity in access to, development of and sharing of benefits from marine resources (World Bank and European Commission, 2021). Overall, the BEDF tool kit is purported to have been designed to promote a sustainable ocean economy that produces jobs, foods, and drives economic growth while catering to the needs of a healthy environment. Managers of state in Africa, in line with this World Bank template, envisage that a national BEDF will integrate and harmonise multi-sectoral activities in a model that assures efficient and optimum resource use and productivity, strategic economic linkages, and social inclusiveness.

Against the backdrop of the huge potential of the GoG, however, are myriad security challenges, risks, and threats. Leakages and waste, even more significant, sabotage and other forms of crimes and criminalities continue to thrive constituting major drawbacks for the growth and development of the region's Blue Economy. In the oil sector, for example, and taking a time-line of over the past decade only, the GoG countries lose billions every year. Nigeria, for example, continues to lose billions of dollars to oil theft. Between 2011-2014 alone, it lost \$ 15.9 billion. Another \$ 2 billion is lost annually to theft of marine resources and illegal fishing by Nigeria and other West African countries taken together (Ojoye, 2018). These invariably stymie the full realisation of development opportunities as envisioned across the entire spectrum of the ecosystem. In effect both for traditional sectors as well as the new frontiers of the ocean that are being discovered and opened, the establishment of a broad spectrum of enforceable global governance system that would help regulate and manage different coastal and marine environments has become an urgent and critical imperative.

The question is: can the BEDF effectively address the Governance and security challenges in the maritime domain of the GoG? This question is significant for several reasons not least of which is the

fact that notwithstanding the fact that the oceans is a global common, every country and region has peculiar development aspirations in connection with its maritime domain and the waters beyond its national jurisdiction. Are there gaps in extant development frameworks like the BEDF? If so, can they stymie the realisation of the Blue Economy aspiration of the GoG region? What do African countries in general and those in the GoG in particular need to do to overcome such limitations, if they exist?

The Blue Economy as an Analytical Framework for Ocean Governance and Security

This paper adopts Germond-Duret's horizontal-reciprocity framework which posits that the notion of a Blue Economy stems from the spread of discourses and practices which originally applied to land to also include the sea. Informed by post structuralist political ecology, the framework demonstrates how three discusses - the perception of the sea as placeless, and the diffusion of development and sustainability norms - contributed to and facilitated the acceptance of the idea of a Blue Economy by shaping their representation and practices from land to the sea. To explain this diffusion, Germond-Duret's horizontal reciprocity framework utilises the concepts of reciprocity, horizontality, and normalisation.

Germond-Duret (2022) argues that in Western thinking, land and sea have conventionally been regarded as separate entities - even as complete opposites - due to their distinct natures and the consequent possibilities of human activity (Anderson and Peters, 2016). The notion of 'horizontal reciprocity' is advanced to characterise the land - sea connection (via spatial, narrative and normative diffusion¹) and by so doing bypass the land-sea binary and supporting the construction of the Blue Economy in a broader context which brings together all the interconnecting processes, dynamics and narratives on land.

The idea of normalisation is pivotal to Germond-Duret's (2022) framework. It is argued that in the land-sea context, normalisation is not about suppressing the characteristics of the sea for it to mirror land. Rather the notion of normalization sets out to ensure coherence and compliance with existing norms. Germond-Duret then appealed to Foucault's formula which posits that the purpose is not that 'they might all be like one another' but that the spaces, structures and agents of both land and sea might be incorporated into the dominant discourse of (sustainable) development. Expressed differently, the extension from land to sea is part of a larger process of what might be called the normalization of the sea through its inclusion in the dominant model of development.

Germond-Duret's framework underscores the construction of the sea as an empty space, a 'no-man's land' so to speak rather than a place of human and social relations. This disposition it is argued has

¹ Spatial diffusion refers to the diffusion of practices from land into another space (here, the sea, not just as a flat entity but considered in its volumetric dimensions), effectively extending the realm and the influence of the land. Narrative diffusion refers to the diffusion of existing narratives, discourses and dominant thinking. Normative diffusion refers to the normalisation of the sea according to the models developed on land.

contributed to the normalisation of the sea as an exploitable space open to development most notably from an economic perspective and has facilitated the acceptance of the Blue Economy agenda that opens and extends possibilities. This idea taken together with Western construction of sea space have been used to justify and enable intervention, be they for missionary purposes, development projects, exploitation of natural resources, or nature conservation. Germond and Germond-Duret (2016) joins other scholars (Connery, 1994; Steinberg, 2001) in the view that at sea this representation has resulted in the free flow of goods and capital, the projection of power, and the normalisation of the phenomena, via the concept of *mere liberum* (free sea).

In characterizing the sea as placeless, a notion of free access is triggered which also allows for the application of the tenets or concepts of economic growth to the maritime space. Once the ocean is 'normalised in this manner, existing land-based models of development can then also be applied without contestation even though the entire idea appears to imbue the idea of the Blue Economy with the contradictory representation of system that encourages the the unbridled exploitation of the global stewardship of marine resources albeit in a sustainable manner. Helmreich's concept of the Blue-Green is said to help capture this ambiguity whereby ocean spaces and marine resources are seen both as commodities or bio-capital and yet as resources requiring protection. It is posited that: in this sense, capitalism can be associated with a homogenising and normalising Force, which enables the pursuit of a neoliberal agenda (albeit with sustainable narrative) at sea. This fits with a Blue Economy in a domain characterised by limited regulation and extended freedom (Connery, 1994).

Even though Development remains a highly contested concept, the notion of the Blue Economy continues to be routinely imported into the development discourse. Global institutions in particular associate the Blue Economy with the dominant development orthodoxies, especially the notions of economic growth and market expansion (Germond- Duret, 2022). The World Bank, for instance, defines the Blue Economy as 'sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, and ocean ecosystem health' (World Bank, 2021). In this vein, the Blue Economy is conceptualised not just as an ocean-based economy but as 'Development Spaces' where:

...spatial planning integrates conservation, sustainable use, oil and mineral wealth extraction, bioprospecting, sustainable energy production and marine transport (UNCTAD, 2014).

Other scholars connect the Blue Economy with economism, opacity (lack of participation by local population) and technicality (preferences for managerial over political approaches) that are characteristic of development (Germond- Duret, 2022). However, defined, development invariably is open to external interventions aiming to exploit natural resources for the benefit of the economy. The

Blue Economy has been easily integrated into this narrative as it aims to support ‘sustainable growth in the marine and maritime sectors’ (European Commission, ‘2020). providing another path towards development without challenging ‘development’ as a concept and practice. This in fact is presented as an advancement and/extension of extant development models, envisioned to function better, with no acknowledgement of past dysfunctionalities, efficiencies, or errors. A major insight of the discuss was contributed by Choi (2017) when he attributed to the Blue Economy characteristics which go well beyond the economic. For Choi, the concept of the Blue Economy is yet another path to development which has veritable political implications. Voyer et al (Voyer et al, 2018). similarly outlines the political trajectories of the Blue Economy as ‘a new governance tool... used to articulate appropriate use within the oceans.’

Many a development studies have underscored the exclusivist and marginalizing predilections of neoliberal development tendencies and paradigms. In connection with the sea, the placelessness of the sea, the perennial issue of the engagement of the local population or the lack thereof similarly occupies a central place. The opacity of some development interventions and decisions, and the lack of participation of local population, in development and conservation projects have been the subject of debate, recognising the risk that people’s involvement only serves to legitimise decisions already made (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Germond-Duret, 2011; Mawdsley and Rigg, 2003). Similarly, for Blue Economy initiatives, Barbesgaard (2018). suggests that the people who are impacted are not adequately represented in governance fora or, if they are, that the process only serves to legitimise a neoliberal agenda. Empirical research has found coastal communities who feel that their concerns are not taken into sufficient consideration, and who have not always welcomed the operationalisation of the concept of the Blue Economy (Hadjimichael et al, 2014).

Overall, Germond-Duret (2022) framework and the associated discussion connects the Blue Economy with the economism, opacity and technicality that are characteristics of mainstream development discourses. It is also ventured that the concept, given its quick and widespread endorsement, has been Westernised and adapted to fit the western liberal model of development. And that there may also be a desire to conform the model, using the same language and narrative, to facilitate investment in the maritime economic sector and marine conservation.

Governance and Security Challenges in the GoG

Governing and securing the GoG, like any other maritime domain, requires the emplacement of multi-level systems at international, regional and national levels. To cite Admiral Mahan, (2020). maritime security is a circumstance in which countries can guarantee security and interests at sea. It is the assurance of unhindered ocean trade, safe navigation, the safeguarding of coastal communities and their means of livelihood, protecting the food chain, and preserving the maritime contribution to the

economic well-being of the littoral states. The combined existence and function of ocean governance and maritime security assures the protection and preservation of maritime assets, prevention of crimes at sea, preservation and maintenance of Sea Lines of trade and commerce, and communication and the sustainable development and use of maritime ecosystems' resources as envisaged under the notion of the Blue Economy.

Driven by the overarching contexts and notions of the blue economy, quite a few initiatives have emerged culminating in the emplacement of critical Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) support infrastructure which include but are not limited to institutions, systems, and processes for engagement with the exigencies of ocean governance in general and maritime security challenges in the GoG in particular. Under the overarching international assistance of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), and pursuant to UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2018 and 2039 of 2011 and 2012 respectively, which were adopted by the Heads of State and Governments of 25 West and Central African countries on 26 June 2013, the Maritime Organisation of West and Central Africa was established. This organization comprise 20 coastal maritime countries and has the mandate to pursue and sustain realization of a stable maritime environment in the region. The AU adopted the Integrated Maritime Strategy (2050 AIMS) on 31st of January 2014. The 2050 AIMS was roundly hailed as a hallmark achievement of the AU. The document outlines some far-reaching maritime challenges as well as goals for the AU spanning over the next quarter of a century (Stockbruegger2014).

Cross-continental initiatives supporting the Ocean Governance and security efforts of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) led, in 2009, to the establishing of the regional information sharing centre, the Maritime Security Regional Coordination Centre for Central Africa (CRESMAC)Congo,ated in Angola. (Mathew, 2012). This organization, divided into three zones, monitors the waters along the coast of Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, Gabon, Republics of Congo and Angola. Each zone is monitored by a Multinational Maritime Coordination Centre (MMCC). In 2014, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECOWAS) followed a similar track to ECCAS in drawing up its own maritime security strategy for the West African region. It established a regional coordination centre for West Africa, CRESMAO, in Côte d'Ivoire. It extended the zoning idea from ECCAS along the west coast of Africa, spanning Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, the Gambia, and Senegal (zones E, F, G). An MMCC was set up in Zone E to manage the waters off the coasts of Nigeria, Togo and Benin, where piracy attacks were concentrated.

The Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) made a seminal contribution to the regional maritime domain in 2012, when it passed the Luanda Declaration of Peace and Security in the GoG Region. The GCC subsequently birthed the Yaoundé Code of Conduct (YCC) which established the framework for

combatting piracy, armed robbery, and other maritime crimes. As part of the Yaoundé process, an Inter-Regional Coordination Centre (ICC) was set up in Yaoundé, Cameroon, to act as a governing body stretching across West and Central Africa. This was also followed by the adoption of the 2016 African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa, also called the Lomé Charter on the Security, Safety, and Development of the African maritime domain under the auspices of the AU. The Charter was an epic advancement towards the African Blue Economy and maritime security aspiration.

Mention must also be made, even if only in passing, of efforts at the national levels of the various GoG countries. Standing out is the Falcon Eye System, Nigeria's Integrated Surveillance, Monitoring and Control Security system for the coverage of Nigeria's maritime domain and the GoG. This system was deployed in 2021. Among many others, the features of the Falcon Eye include 13 functional radar sites and five High Frequency over the horizon radar sites which are fed through 3 regional Control Centres situated at the Naval Ops Command Headquarters (Nilsson, et al, 2014). Thus far the Falcon Eye has functioned with zero percent redundancy.

Further at the national level, but as far as administration of the domain is concerned it is recognized that quite a few other initiatives also exist helping to enhance the overarching policy instrument for governance of the Nigerian maritime domain. The Harmonised Standard Operating Procedures (HSOP) on Arrest, Detention, and Prosecution of Vessels and Persons in Nigeria's Maritime Environment had been emplaced, as far back as 2016, to coordinate and synergise the activities of all the relevant Maritime Law Enforcement Agencies (Naval War College, 2020).

Laudable as these initiatives are, they remain consistent with the framings of Germond-Duret, especially in terms of perceived land -sea dichotomies. Beside faintly hinting at the possibility, neither the BEDF nor the other initiatives on the continent are organically integrated into the mainstream of onshore socio-economic development strategies.

A careful reading of BEDFs exposes an overall inclination towards exclusion of the objective conditions of the countries of the GoG. To lay out impressive strategies for the exploitation of marine resources, even on sustainable terms, without robust attention to the critical issues surrounding state capacities elides the question. Onshore conditions of poverty, marginalization, corruption, resource over exploitation, etc. provide incubation sites for robust breeding of treats and risks to governance and security which are then exported to the sea.

The Blue Economy Aspirations of the GoG - Confronting the Challenges or Staying the Course

Governance and insecurity in the GoG are characterised by a complex interplay of a web of factors internal and external to the region. The outcome of policies driven by extant BEDFs are therefore mixed. Therefore, that identification of causative factors – absence of the political will, or capacity, or

critical support infrastructure on the one hand or deficits in the development frameworks on the other hand - in each set of conditions may be a difficult exercise.

At the security realm, it will be noted that states in the region have varying legal, administrative and institutional capacities and resources driving and/or sustaining their security architecture. At the regional levels however, many of the zonal coordination centers and facilities that have been established lack the necessary equipment to function. As a result, various international actors have stepped up, playing key roles in policy formulation and implementation, and in the determination of the overall content of the maritime security architecture of the region (Chimwara, 2016). The UN, the EU, and the IMO, as well as countries like Germany, France, and Spain, have been supporting ECOWAS, ECCAS and the GGC's efforts to enhance MDA. Their financial, material, and technical support remains crucial to the functioning of the Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC) and the Multinational Maritime Coordination Centre (MMCC).

There can be no gainsaying that on account of these international support and collaborations, significant progress had been made in curbing atrocities in the GoG, particularly, the incidences of piracy and armed robberies at sea. Records even show that piracy in some part of the region (Nigeria especially) dropped to zero from an all-time high at some point in 2022 (The Paunch, 2022). However, evidence can also be adduced indicating the persistence of other forms of criminalities (Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated fishing, sea pollution, money laundering, and human trafficking and smuggling, among others) albeit with varying intensity across the region.

The nefarious acts of sea criminals have given rise to the continuous demand for even more actions from governments for better ocean governance. Maritime policy responses however have come in manners reminiscent of the typical mainstream failure to fully acknowledge the importance of land-based challenges, and the interconnection of same with maritime domains. Consequently, it has being argued that:

Implementing a new institutional structure on the continent, as set out in 2050 AIM strategy, may indeed be a good idea, but this 'solution' completely disregards the land-based reasons for and root causes leading to the current condition of maritime insecurity in the GoG. In other words, the AU's strategy does not approach the issue from a perspective that addresses the various onshore challenges, including the need for good governance, reduction of corruption, marginalisation, etc (Jacobsen and Riber, 2015).

A major deficit of the Blue Economy as a development framework and approach to ocean governance and security lies in the way that coastal communities adjourning the entire stretch of the GoG appear to have been relatively blind-sided in the overall scheme of things. As the case of Nigeria's Niger Delta amply demonstrates, these coastal communities are the bridgehead to their respective maritime domains

and the immense resources of their marine ecosystems. Studies have shown that often the coastal communities are the incubation sites for many of the atrocities that are perpetrated at sea – piracy and armed robberies at sea, maritime terrorism, drugs and human trafficking, etc. - and that, without prejudice to the fact that the region has faced conflicts and exploitation, consigning them to the margins has immediate ramifications for the efficacy of patrolling and monitoring the region's waters, identifying, tracking and curbing crimes and criminalities at sea.

Conclusion

There is no gain saying the fact that for Africa in general and the GoG in particular, the Blue Economy and associated Development Frameworks offer great opportunities which amply complements the prospects in traditional economic and environmental milieus. It presents African countries with unique opportunities to achieve their respective national sustainable development objectives. However, like most mainstream development frameworks, the BEDF has some lacunae which may undermine the prospects for the realization of the Blue Economy aspirations of the GoG countries.

Most importantly, given the technicist and economistic orientations of mainstream maritime development theories, the notion and application of a BEDF in Africa at this time appears generally deficient in their security related ocean governance provisions. Africa must rethink the Blue Economy stratagem on offer, and consider the prospect of developing its own transformation models that will cohere with the AIMS 2050 and the other continental initiatives.

African countries are actively positioning their respective maritime domains and activities to take advantage of the traditional and emerging development opportunities in the GoG. As envisioned under the AIMS 2050 and as they proceed to build their respective capacities ahead of the forthcoming 38 African countries' trans-border negotiations that will define the African maritime sector going forward, the collaborations and partnerships that they seek under the rubric of the Blue Economy must also be mindful of the political predilections of development agendas. Without prejudice to the benefits of extant international collaborations and partnership, African countries in general and those of the GoG in particular, must, for historical and emancipatory reasons, continue to be reminded that no development agenda is politically neutral.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interest Statement

I hereby declare that there are no financial interests or connections, direct or indirect, or other situations that might raise the question of bias in this work as reported, or the conclusion, implications or opinions stated - including pertinent commercial or other sources of funding for me or any of the institutions I am connected to personally or professionally.

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