

Transitioning to a Sustainable Blue Economy

A practical framework



© 2026 United Nations Environment Programme

ISBN: 978-92-807-4289-3

Job number: DEP/2771/NA

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59117/20.500.11822/49653>

This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part and in any form for educational or non-profit services without special permission from the copyright holder, provided acknowledgement of the source is made. The United Nations Environment Programme would appreciate receiving a copy of any publication that uses this publication as a source.

No use of this publication may be made for resale or any other commercial purpose whatsoever without prior permission in writing from the United Nations Environment Programme. Applications for such permission, with a statement of the purpose and extent of the reproduction, should be addressed to unep-communication-director@un.org.

Disclaimers

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Mention of firm names and commercial products in this document does not imply endorsement by the United Nations Environment Programme or the authors. The use of information from this document for publicity or advertising is not permitted. Trademark names and symbols are used in an editorial fashion with no intention of infringement of trademark or copyright laws.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Environment Programme. We regret any errors or omissions that may have been unwittingly made.

©Maps, photos and illustrations as specified

Suggested citation

United Nations Environment Programme (2026). *Transitioning to a Sustainable Blue Economy: A Practical Framework*. Nairobi.

Production: Ecosystems Division, United Nations Environment Programme

<https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/49653>

Transitioning to a Sustainable Blue Economy

A practical framework

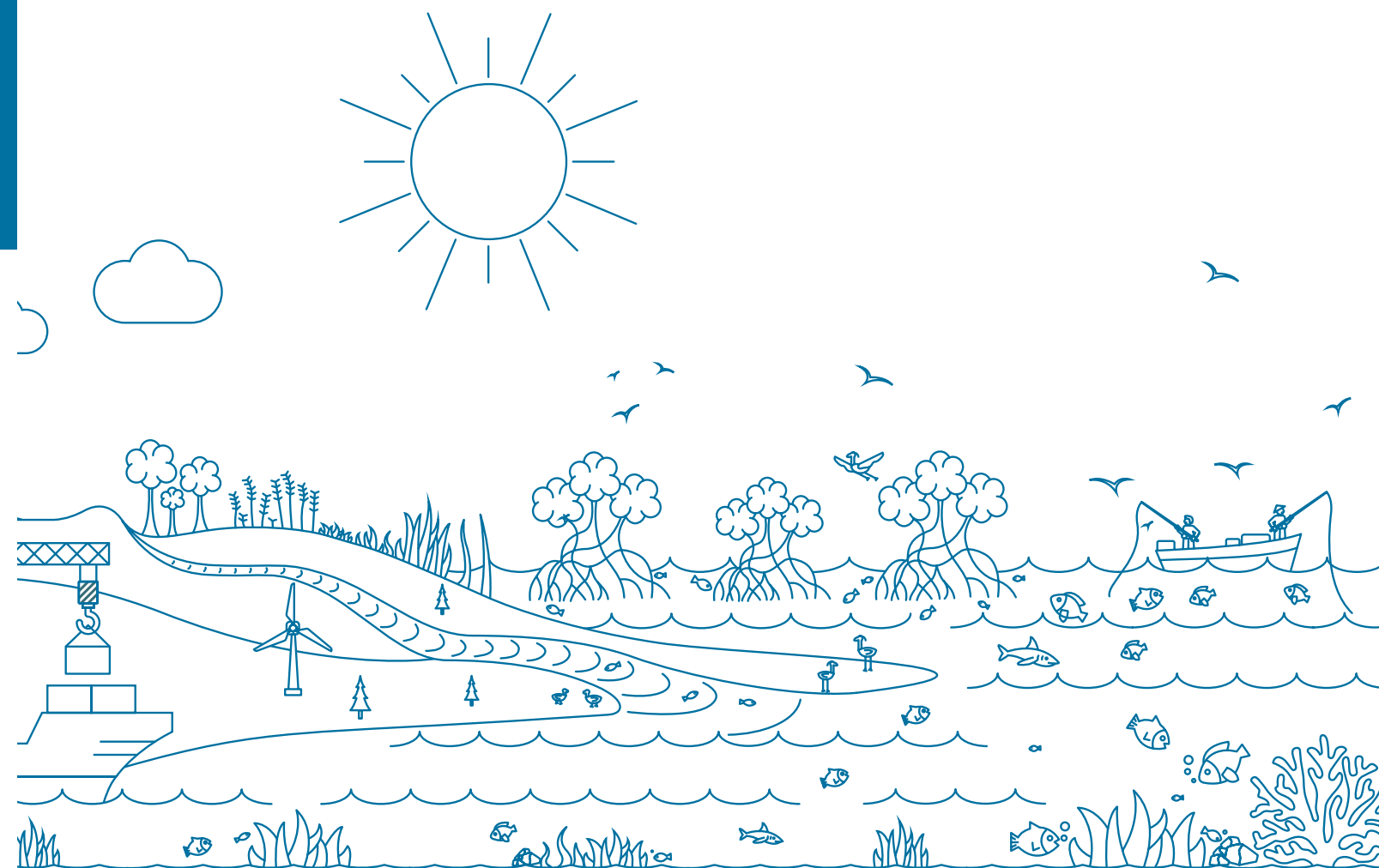




Photo credit: Unsplash

Acknowledgements

Authors

Tegan Evans (University of Portsmouth), Steve Fletcher (University of Portsmouth), Lucy Greenhill (Howell Marine Consulting), Dickon Howell (Howell Marine Consulting), Antaya March (University of Portsmouth), Beth Siddons (Howell Marine Consulting), Ole Vestergaard (UNEP).

Contributors

Hugh Breakey (University of Wollongong), Freya Croft (University of Wollongong), Klaas de Vos (Ocean Fox Advisory), Ruth Fletcher (UNEP-WCMC), Louise Lieberknecht (GRID-Arendal), Chris McOwen (UNEP-WCMC), James Vause (UNEP-WCMC), Michelle Voyer (University of Wollongong).

Reviewers

Patrizia Busolin (UNEP/Barcelona Convention), Margarita Caballa (UNEP/COBSEA), Antoine Cahn (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), Ludgarde Coppens (UNEP),

Chris Corbin (UNEP/Cartagena Convention), Louise Heaps (World Wildlife Fund), Larry Hildebrand (independent expert), Hyeon Jeong Kim (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), Balakrishna Pisupati (UNEP), Angelique Pouponneau (Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust), Mahesh Pradhan (UNEP/COBSEA), Karen Sack (Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance), Jessica Smith (UNEP Finance Initiative), John Virdin (Nicholas Institute for Energy, Environment & Sustainability, Duke University), Alan Whaites (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, UK Govt), Makiko Yashiro (UNEP).

Designers

Creative Mouse, Kerry Gilhar (UNEP)

This work was funded by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Government of Sweden through the UNEP Sustainable Blue Economy Initiative.

List of abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEA	Cumulative Effects Assessment
COBSEA	Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ICZM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
NbS	Nature-based Solutions
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OECM	Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures
PER	Public Expenditure Review
PPP	Public Private Partnerships
RRA	Rapid Readiness Assessment
SBE	Sustainable Blue Economy
SEA	Strategic Environment Assessment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SOP	Sustainable Ocean Plan
ToC	Theory of Change
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP FI	United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative
UNEP-WCMC	United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre

Table of contents

Acknowledgements	iv	5.2 Phase 2: Setting vision and direction	45
Abbreviations	v	Develop shared vision, goals and outcomes for the SBE	45
Foreword	vi	Planning the transition	47
Executive summary	vii	In Focus: Theory of Change	49
1 Introduction	1	Delivering policy coherence	51
2 About the transition framework	3	In Focus: Achieving Policy Coherence	52
2.1 The purpose of the Transition Framework	4	Financing the transition to an SBE	54
2.2 Achieving global policy goals	8	In Focus: SBE Financing Principles	55
2.3 Who is the transition framework for?	10	Enablers for Phase 2: Key activities	57
2.4 Using the transition framework	11	Phase 2 summary	58
2.5 Links to other guidance and frameworks	12	5.3 Phase 3: Delivering the transition	59
3 The sustainable blue economy	13	Planning and decision-making	59
3.1 Defining the sustainable blue economy	15	Integrated management	61
3.2 Goals of a sustainable blue economy transition	18	Monitoring, evaluation and learning	63
3.3 Challenges in delivering a sustainable blue economy	23	In Focus: Nature-based solutions and SBE	63
3.4 Enablers of a sustainable blue economy	24	Enablers for Phase 3: Key activities	68
Effective leadership	24	Phase 3 summary	68
Integrated institutional frameworks	24	6 Summary	69
Participatory approaches	24	7 Appendices	71
International cooperation	25	1. Rapid Readiness Assessment (RRA)	72
Sustainable finance	25	2. Tools, resources and examples	75
Capacity and resources	26	7.1 Phase 1: Understanding the system	75
Accessible data, information and knowledge	26	Equity & social baselines	75
4 The transition framework	27	Gender mainstreaming in sustainable blue economy	76
4.1 Phase 1: Understanding the system	31	Environmental baselines	78
4.2 Phase 2: Setting vision and direction	31	Economic baselines	79
4.3 Phase 3: Delivering the transition	32	System mapping	80
5 Implementing the transition framework: tools, approaches & activities	33	7.2 Phase 2: Setting vision and objectives	81
5.1 Phase 1: Understanding the system	34	Planning the transition	81
Equity and social status	34	Delivering policy coherence	81
Environmental status	35	Financing the transition	82
Economic status	37	7.3 Phase 3: Delivering the transition	83
Governance baseline	37	Marine spatial planning	84
In Focus: Assessing policy frameworks	39	Integrated coastal zone management	84
In Focus: Rapid Readiness Assessment	42	Sustainable ocean plans	85
Enablers for Phase 1: Key activities	43	Land-sea planning	85
Phase 1 summary	44	Marine protected areas	85
		Other effective area-based conservation measures	86
		Nature-based solutions	86
		7.4 Monitoring, evaluation and learning	87
		References	88
			vi

Foreword



Imagine if countries treated the ocean, coasts and inland water systems not as limitless resources to exploit, but as foundational assets for economic stability, climate resilience and people's wellbeing.

Imagine if governments aligned decisions across ministries and sectors, ensuring that policies on fisheries, tourism, shipping, energy and infrastructure reinforced rather than undermined one another.

Imagine if economic growth linked to the ocean was no longer tied to pollution, ecosystem destruction, and biodiversity loss. And if coastal communities had a real voice in shaping the decisions and investments that affect their lives and livelihoods.

People, nature and economies could thrive together.

Restored mangroves, coral reefs and seagrasses would help protect coastlines from storms, support recovering fish stocks, and store vast amounts of carbon. Pollution from land and sea would decline. Businesses would create jobs while helping restore and protect nature. Coastal communities would live healthier, more prosperous lives, with greater resilience and a strong voice in shaping their future.

This is what a sustainable blue economy looks like.

It is environmentally necessary and economically smart. Investments in sustainable ocean management can generate environmental, social and economic returns five times greater than their cost. Contracting Parties to several Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans are already showing that integrated sustainable ocean governance delivers real results.

But we still see too much fragmented governance, short-term thinking and contradictory investment. Government institutions too often work in silos, with overlapping mandates and competing priorities that weaken both environmental protection and economic resilience.

This is exactly the challenge UNEP's Sustainable Blue Economy Transition Framework is designed to help address.

Building on UNEP's core strength of turning global ambition into practical guidance that countries can apply, adapt and scale, the Framework and its Rapid Readiness Assessment tool help governments better understand where they are, align policy across sectors and develop pathways toward a sustainable blue economy.

The Framework places nature-based solutions, participatory governance and whole-of-government cooperation at the centre of decision-making. It encourages countries to look beyond short-term gains and consider the wider environmental, social and economic impacts of their decisions. It also helps governments direct limited resources where they can deliver the greatest long-term benefits for people and nature.

Over the last year, in conversations with ministers, scientists, businesses and coastal communities around the world, I have seen countless examples of courage, creativity and cooperation. I have seen growing recognition that healthy marine, coastal and inland water ecosystems are the foundations of sustainable development.

That is exactly what the transition to a sustainable, equitable and regenerative blue economy now requires.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Gardner'.

Susan Gardner
Director, Ecosystems Division
United Nations Environment Programme



Photo credit: Ocean Image Bank/Lars Von Ritter Zahony

Executive summary

The United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) Transition Framework has been developed to provide countries with practical guidance to support progress towards a sustainable, regenerative, and equitable blue economy. It is designed to support existing national and international development initiatives, contribute to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals and tackle the accelerating triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature loss and pollution by delivering on the commitments of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Paris Agreement, the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, other Multilateral Environmental Agreements including Regional Seas Conventions & Action Plans.

The SBE Transition Framework helps countries to consider their existing situation, including current governance and status of their ecosystems and resources, identify actions to deliver sustainable blue economy outcomes, and put in place practical steps that make the transition tangible and real.

Four SBE goals are set out to guide countries in developing a practical transition pathway towards a sustainable blue economy, determined by national priorities and circumstances, and steer change through integrated policy and management. These are: GOAL 1: To protect, restore, and maintain healthy and resilient ecosystems; Goal 2: To deliver equity, equality, and inclusivity throughout SBE processes and outcomes; GOAL 3: To support climate stability and resilience; and GOAL 4: To promote circular economy approaches for sustainable consumption and production, reducing pollution and waste.

The Transition Framework is structured around 3 phases of transition:

1. Understanding the System - tools and approaches to bring together an understanding of the current situation in a region or state that is shared across stakeholders as a foundation for change.

2. Setting Vision and Direction - how to progress towards a collectively shared vision, underpinned by specific goals and outcomes at a national level, to guide the transition.

3. Delivering the Transition - an overview of how the SBE transition is delivered through on-going, everyday processes of decision-making, marine planning, and evidence-based, adaptive management approaches.

Countries are at different stages in realising their SBE ambitions. Recognising the diversity of national circumstances and development priorities, the Framework does not promote a single model. Instead, it supports countries in developing context specific and tailored Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) transition pathways that build on existing efforts, address national priorities and enable measurable progress over time.

Nature-based solutions are central to this transition. Protecting, restoring and regenerating ecosystems such as mangroves, coral reefs, seagrasses, wetlands and river basins can deliver multiple benefits simultaneously, including climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster risk reduction, food security, livelihoods and biodiversity conservation. By embedding nature-based solutions at the core of planning and implementation, the Framework promotes integrated responses to the triple planetary crisis that are effective, resilient and sustainable over the long term.

To support early, informed and inclusive action, the Framework is complemented by the Sustainable Blue Economy **Rapid Readiness Assessment (RRA)** tool. The RRA provides governments with a pragmatic starting point for assessing existing policies, institutions, capacities and financing arrangements through a structured and participatory process. It helps establish a shared vision, clarify priorities, identify gaps and identify enabling actions, and build momentum for reform, laying the groundwork for nationally owned and realistically sequenced transition pathways.

Delivering the transition requires that public and private resources are aligned with sustainability objectives. Coherent policies, incentives and investment frameworks are essential to ensure that finance supports ecosystem protection and regeneration rather than reinforcing harmful practices. By emphasising long-term value, risk

reduction and inclusive outcomes, the Framework supports the redirection of financial flows toward sustainable and regenerative development pathways.

Leadership must be matched by transparency, accountability and learning. The Transition Framework therefore embeds Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) as a core pillar of the SBE transition. MEL enables governments to track progress, understand trade-offs, assess social, economic and environmental outcomes, and adapt policies and actions as conditions evolve.

Achieving a sustainable blue economy requires the active participation of a broad range of stakeholders, including marginalised groups. Gender-responsive and inclusive approaches are essential to ensure that the benefits of the blue economy are equitably shared and that all voices are heard in the decision-making process.

This Transition Framework is particularly useful for governments and public sector officials, given their essential role in leading the SBE transition including through policy implementation at national level.

At its core, the framework enables a systems-based approach through whole-of-government action, supported by meaningful participation across society. It places policy coherence at the centre of the transition, linking environment, finance, development planning, climate action and ocean sectors around a shared national vision, while reinforcing the responsibility of governments to uphold gender equality, protect the rights and livelihoods of marginalised groups, and align public and private finance with sustainable and regenerative development objectives.

The framework is also useful for the international funding and donor community, as they seek to support and enable the transition to an SBE. Recognising the important role of development partners, including multilateral donors and funding organizations, this framework supports understanding of clear entry points and priority areas to direct funding towards, based on an understanding of an effective transition and guided by a country's specific vision and outcomes for a sustainable blue economy.



Photo credit: Ocean Image Bank/Srikanth Manneperi

1 Introduction

A healthy ocean is essential for a sustainable future for people and the planet. Harnessing the resources of the ocean, coasts and inland water ecosystems is critical to meeting this demand but it is imperative that we do so in a sustainable manner. With a growing human population and increasing demand for resources, these ecosystems now face a triple-planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. These are closely interconnected and put the wellbeing of current and future generations at risk. By developing sustainable, resilient and equitable blue economies, countries can address these challenges and meet global targets such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Paris Agreement.

A Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) unlocks multiple environmental, social and economic benefits and drives sustainable development. Transitioning to an SBE requires overcoming the disconnected way our ocean, coasts and freshwater ecosystems are currently managed and operating in new ways which can fully address our economic, social and ecological needs.

Changing how we manage these resources is essential to ensure benefits for current and future

generations, to restore, protect and maintain diverse, productive and resilient ecosystems; and should be underpinned by clean technologies, renewable energy and circular economy approaches.

Achieving a sustainable blue economy also requires the active participation and empowerment of women and marginalised groups. Gender-responsive approaches are essential to ensure that the benefits of the blue economy are equitably shared and that all voices are heard in the decision-making process.

UNEP is assisting countries and stakeholders to navigate the path towards an SBE. UNEP's aim is to help countries and businesses move to an environmentally sustainable, resilient, equitable and regenerative blue economy in which economic activities that rely on the ocean, don't harm it.

UNEP's SBE Transition Framework provides a whole-of-government approach to the governance of human interactions across ocean, coastal and inland water systems to facilitate equitable sharing of economic and social benefits, while protecting ecosystems from degradation and regenerating those already in a degraded state. In an SBE, ecosystem integrity underpins the sustained delivery of economic and social benefits.

2

About the Transition Framework

Photo credit: Ocean Image Bank/Gregory Piper

2.1

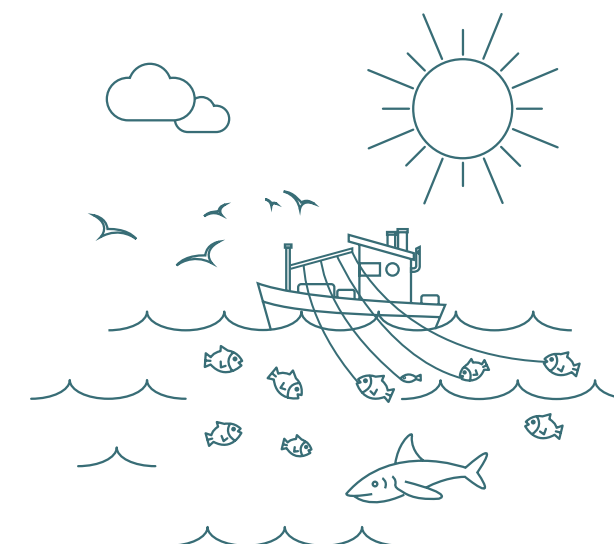
The purpose of the Transition Framework

The UNEP SBE Transition Framework provides practical guidance to support countries in designing a strategic approach to inclusive, sustainable and resilient development. Transition to an SBE requires ambitious change, moving from 'business as usual' to decouple economic development from ecosystem degradation, enabling nature-positive, regenerative approaches that ensure healthy and well-functioning ecosystems and human prosperity. This Framework provides a way to understand the change needed and how to progress towards an SBE in a coordinated and effective way.

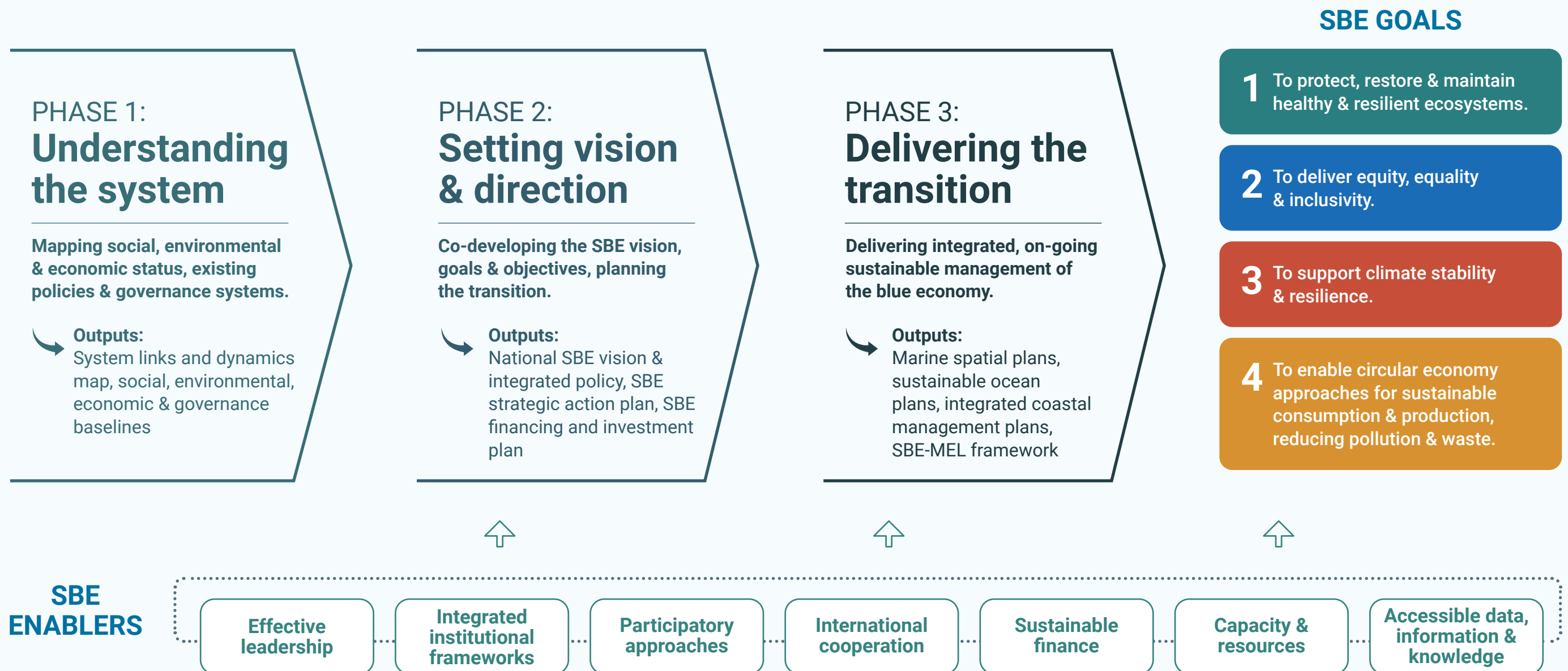
Current governance of ecosystems and resources is complex and fragmented, with different aspects managed by different government departments, or across national and sub-national levels, often with overlapping or conflicting goals and mandates. To ensure our actions are sustainable, and that we are operating within planetary boundaries, we need to manage our activities in a holistic and integrated way, taking a systems-based approach that considers the interconnections between governance, social needs and ecological health. Policy coherence is essential in order to consider interactions between decisions taken at different scales, to understand potential synergies and trade-offs, and to support the collaboration needed to address them.

The SBE Transition Framework supports the development of a structured, strategic approach to delivering the system change needed to transition to an SBE underpinned by policy coherence across government entities. It sets out three phases of a system-based transition, each with a set of activities that collectively support the development of a coherent and targeted approach to deliver SBE (Figure 1). It recognises that different parts of the system may already be evolving and seeks to help stakeholders respond to their specific circumstances and navigate the transition in a learning-based way.

Achieving the SBE transition requires change across institutions and processes, with new ways of doing things and solutions developed to respond to intersecting challenges. This means working together to embrace complexity and operating in a learning-based way, with flexibility to test new ideas and reflect on the outcomes, including what works in different contexts. Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) is essential to underpin an adaptive approach, ensuring accountability for the learning process and supporting evidence-led change, including refining of policies, programmes and management actions.



Sustainable Blue Economy Transition process



▲ Figure 1. Overview of the Sustainable Blue Economy Transition Framework

To support countries in navigating an SBE transition this Framework:

Provides a holistic, system-based perspective for understanding and progressing the transition in an integrated way.

Enables a learning-based approach, based on understanding local contexts, and supports establishing a clear direction for SBE delivery.

Defines strategies to enable systemic change, based on understanding challenges, barriers and practical actions.

Empowers relevant actors and encourages collaboration for positive action, supporting stakeholders to navigate the transition through both incremental and large-scale change.

Using this Framework, countries can:

Ensure policy coherence so that interlinkages are understood, policies related to different sectors and objectives do not undermine each other, and synergies are leveraged.

Develop an integrated approach for the SBE based on defining a national vision, strategic policy outcomes, sectoral planning and a sustainable finance strategy.

Develop and implement policies that ensure coordinated management of terrestrial and marine resources, promoting sustainable practices that consider the interconnectedness of land and sea ecosystems.

Identify strategic goals, actions and indicators to guide national implementation.

Establish and build on the tools and approaches best suited to a given national context at different points in the transition.

Develop robust monitoring and evaluation to track progress.

Develop the skills, capacity, data and research needed for effective implementation through coordinated data collection, analysis and information sharing.

The Framework recognises that each country, region, or local area has its own dynamic context, including varying levels of experience and progress towards the SBE, institutional capability and capacity, environmental conditions, socio-economic factors, and cultural factors. These differences mean that what works in one country, may not be appropriate in another. This Framework supports addressing the unique challenges and opportunities in specific contexts, by providing guidance that can be tailored to suit the relevant conditions, enhancing the likelihood of effective implementation and of local ownership and engagement. Recognising the substantial global action already underway to progress the SBE in some form, the Framework supports countries to better understand their current situation and enables the development of a coherent, coordinated approach to delivering measurable progress towards an SBE, building on what already exists.

2.2

Achieving global policy goals

Developing an integrated approach to an SBE transition can promote synergies and efficiencies to support delivery of goals across multiple agendas, recognising the nexus between climate, ecosystem health, human wellbeing and the SBE. The Transition Framework enables a whole-of-government approach that supports countries in achieving national ambitions and the delivery of international targets, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹, the Paris Agreement², the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework³, the Sendai Framework⁴, and the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions⁵, amongst many others (Figure 2).

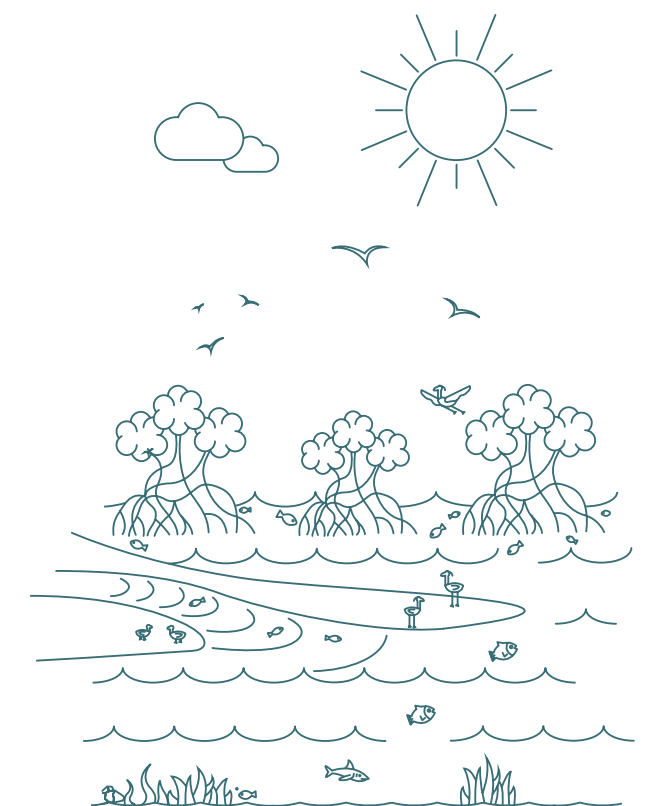
Critically, the SBE can support climate change mitigation and adaptation action under the Paris Agreement by supporting the adoption of nature-based solutions (NbS, further detailed in 5.3) for the restoration and protection of blue carbon ecosystems, which will also support commitments to tackle biodiversity loss under the KM-GBF and improve disaster risk reduction and resilience under the Sendai Framework. Area-based management approaches, such as marine spatial planning (MSP), can help to manage the marine space to enable other ocean-based climate solutions (e.g. renewable energy, adaptive fisheries management, etc.) to support climate resilient pathways aligned with an SBE transition.

The delivery of all SDGs are currently off target and urgent measures and transformative thinking are required to achieve the agenda. By promoting an integrated approach, underpinned by policy coherence, the Transition Framework supports countries to make progress towards multiple SDGs, not just SDG14: Life Below Water.

SDG 17 focuses on *how* the other SDGs should be delivered and is embedded throughout this Transition Framework.

This includes targeted investments in least developed countries (Target 17.5), enabling knowledge sharing and cooperation (Target 17.6), policy coherence for sustainable development (Target 17.14), recognition of national leadership (Target 17.15), effective partnerships (Target 17.17) and availability of reliable data (Target 17.18) (among others).

To support progress on Target 17.14 UNEP have developed a methodology⁶ which details mechanisms for addressing policy and institutional coherence at different levels and supports countries to assess and enhance their progress towards each indicator. This guide informs actions that enable policy coherence in different aspects of the Transition Framework, particularly in Phase 2 (Section 5.2).



Sustainable Development Goals

Transitioning to an SBE is critical to delivering SDG 14, “Life Below Water,” promoting the sustainable management of marine resources whilst reducing marine pollution, protecting ecosystems, and ending overfishing. The SBE also provides a strong framework to accelerate the delivery of at least 98 targets across SDGs 1-16, including poverty eradication, food security, good health, gender equality, sustainable consumption and production, climate resilience and ecosystem health. It also helps operationalise SDG 17 in guiding how the SBE can be implemented through local, national, regional partnership, making all 19 targets of SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals relevant.

Paris Agreement

The SBE supports delivery of ocean-based actions for climate change mitigation and adaptation, including protecting and restoring blue carbon ecosystems, developing coastal community resilience, climate resilient fisheries management, and transitioning to ocean-based renewable energy, thereby contributing to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs).

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

Targets under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework include protecting 30 per cent of land, water and sea and restoring 30 per cent of degraded ecosystems. The SBE supports delivery of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) through ecosystem restoration, the sustainable use of biodiversity and equitable benefit sharing.

Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction

The SBE can support the seven global targets, and four priorities under the Sendai Framework by building resilience in blue sectors and habitats and sustainable use of blue resources.

Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions

The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions address hazardous waste and pollution. Priority areas that strongly align with the SBE include minimising pollution, accident prevention, and capacity building.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



▲ **Figure 2.** Accelerating achievement of global policy goals through the SBE

2.3

Who is the Transition Framework for?

This Transition Framework is designed for decision-makers, planners and stakeholders engaged in advancing an SBE. It provides governments with a structure for understanding how to transition to an SBE and how to steer their activities in a coordinated way, working across relevant departments, sub-national governments (provincial, local), transboundary across governments and organizations (regional and global), and with the many stakeholders who must be part of taking the SBE forward. Governments lead policy implementation, while private sector actors drive innovation and investment, and NGOs and civil society facilitate capacity building and community engagement. More broadly, it helps all stakeholders by providing a framework for developing and communicating a shared vision and plans for transition, to understand what role they play within it and how they might act to steer change. By setting out the processes of planning and management within an SBE, along with the tools needed to deliver an integrated approach, the Framework supports identifying entry-points, solutions and actions for progress.

Delivering an SBE transition must be undertaken in a collaborative and participatory way between public bodies, private sector, NGOs and civil society, to ensure that it reflects the specific country or local context, promotes equitable outcomes and supports a learning-based approach. Governance must extend beyond ‘top-down’, government-led approaches in order to be collaborative, participatory and learning-based. When applying this Framework, decision-makers are encouraged to enhance bottom-up participation of diverse groups throughout the

transition and take action to support and enable local empowerment, including through devolved decision-making units and co-management approaches, engaging local communities to have a voice in the decision-making process.

To ensure inclusivity, the framework outlines strategies for engaging underrepresented groups, such as establishing consultation mechanisms and promoting equitable access to decision-making processes.

Beyond national boundaries, regional and inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) play an important role in supporting international cooperation around development agendas. Regional organizations can provide technical support and coordinate transboundary actions, while IGOs can facilitate capacity building and funding alignment. The Framework provides a structure for harmonising efforts across borders, facilitating the sharing of best practices, resources, and knowledge, strengthening collective capacity to achieve an SBE.

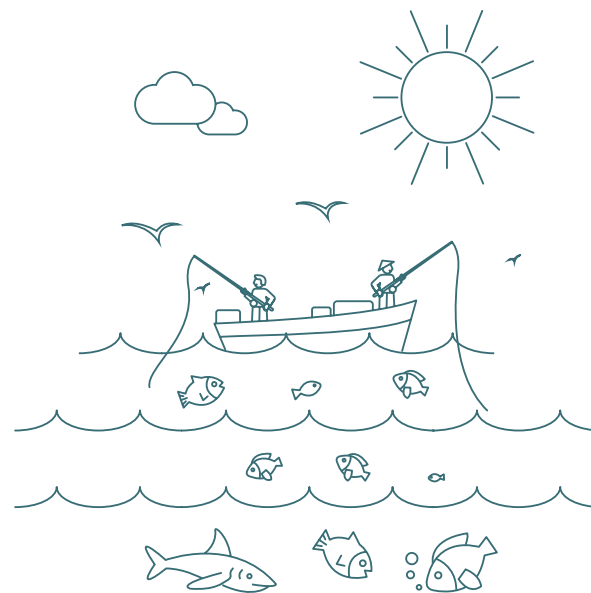
Globally, development partners such as donor country governments, multilateral development banks and UN agencies, play an important role in supporting SBE transitions, particularly in low-capacity or low-income countries and regions. This Framework is intended to support development partners working in partnership with national and local organizations, by helping countries to communicate their specific needs and ambitions and supporting a shared understanding of what the transition entails.

Using the Transition Framework

The Transition Framework supports SBE policy, planning, actions and investments by providing a structured approach. It is flexible and adaptable, recognising and integrating with existing systems and processes. It acknowledges the interconnections between the SBE and other systems, such as land-based decision-making and the green economy, and should be used with these linkages in mind, where relevant. This Framework can be applied in:

- **Designing processes and activities**, such as Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), Sustainable Ocean Planning (SOP), Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Land-Sea Planning (LSP) and Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) to ensure these processes and activities are aligned with SBE goals.
- **Policy development**, providing a structured approach to integrate the SBE goals, helping to shape coherent and inclusive policies.
- **Structuring dialogue with stakeholders** and embarking on more collaborative working processes, to ensure that the transition to an SBE is effectively and equitably shaped through collective input. By offering tools like participatory system mapping, the framework enables cross-sectoral dialogue and fosters alignment between government agencies, private actors, and local communities.
- **Designing and implementing monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) frameworks**, providing a structure for identifying outcomes and indicators to assess progress and measure the effectiveness of SBE related initiatives. MEL supports adaptive management and ensures that resources are allocated effectively, while maintaining transparency and accountability.

- Assisting the **design of country interventions for donor support** to understand gaps or key priorities in line with the SBE, whilst preventing overlaps and inefficiencies. The Framework can enable clear communication between donors and national stakeholders to ensure that interventions are responsive to local conditions and challenges, and to build stronger partnerships and trust among parties.
- **Coordinating efforts between departments responsible for delivering the blue economy** or aspects of it, including with other agencies and organizations, to ensure that their activities are integrated and mutually reinforcing.
- **Informing the management of freshwater systems**. Although predominantly framed for ocean and coastal areas, it can be used in the same way to structure a coordinated, cross-cutting approach connecting to freshwater ecosystems and resource management, although slightly different tools may be relevant.

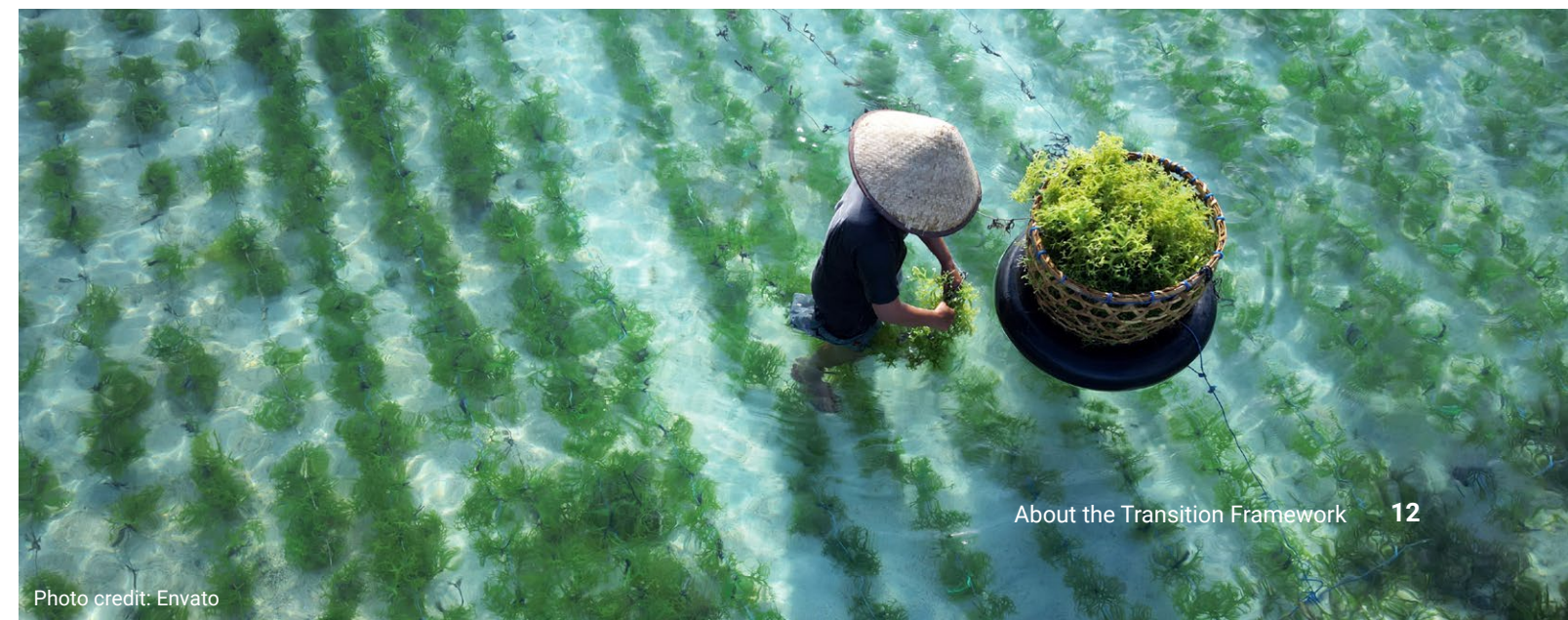


Links to other guidance and frameworks

The Transition Framework is an overarching approach that complements the delivery of existing tools, principles and approaches to the SBE. Specific reference to existing blue economy guidance is made throughout the Framework, including:

- **The High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy** (the Ocean Panel) identifies five areas of transformation that integrate effective protection, sustainable production and equitable prosperity for a sustainable ocean future. The objectives ('areas of transformation') of the Ocean Panel align with the goals of the SBE Transition Framework.⁷ The **Handbook on Sustainable Ocean Plans. A Practitioners' Guide (2025)**⁸ outlines five steps to sustainable ocean management, see further Section 5.3.
- The Transition Framework recognises the Guiding Principles for a Sustainable Blue Economy of **World Wildlife Fund (WWF)**, which seeks to ensure that the economic development of the ocean contributes to prosperity of people and planet, today and into the future.⁹
- The Framework recognises the Regenerative Blue Economy initiative of the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**, which is rooted in the protection, resilience and regeneration of marine ecosystems and natural capital.¹⁰
- The **UNEP FI Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Initiative**¹¹ provides guidance for investment into and for the blue economy to rebuild ocean prosperity, restore biodiversity and regenerate ocean health. The Transition Framework closely aligns to UNEP FI's SBE Finance Principles, which are outlined in Section 5.2.
- The **World Economic Forum (WEF)** Ocean Finance Handbook outlines considerations for sustainable financing of the blue economy, including identification of opportunities for investment (see Section 5.2).¹²
- The **OECD** guide Promoting Sustainable Ocean Economies provides recommendations on how development co-operation providers can support partner countries in transitioning to a sustainable ocean economy.¹³
- The Transition Framework directly aligns with **World Bank's** Making Waves report outlining recommendations to achieve sustainable and inclusive development by going beyond individual sector approaches and support policies that include harmonized strategies and practices, breaking silos and connecting different industries and sectors.¹⁴

Other examples of tools and guidance are outlined in Section 5 - Implementing the Transition Framework: Tools, Approaches & Activities.



A large blue container ship is sailing on the ocean in the background. In the foreground, two dolphins are leaping out of the water, creating white splashes. The sky is a pale blue.

3

The Sustainable Blue Economy

Defining the Sustainable Blue Economy

Recognising that the blue economy should not only focus on expanding economic growth in our ocean and seas, definitions and approaches have evolved to bring focus to the environmental and social benefits and considerations of sustainable economic development, where economic growth is decoupled from negative ecological and social consequences. Definitions and approaches in use include those set out by multilateral development partners and organizations such as the WWF⁹, the OECD¹³, World Bank¹⁴, the G20¹⁵, the IUCN¹⁰, and the UNDP¹⁶, with other definitions in use by regional and national institutions worldwide.

The blue economy has many different interpretations and definitions, leading to ambiguity surrounding what is included and excluded. This has led to a lack of consistency in whether the focus is on the governance arrangements, the ocean-based sectors conceived as representing a blue economy, or the sustainability outcomes that it should aim to deliver. The plurality of definitions and interpretations can lead to a lack of clarity in communication and understanding among stakeholders, reflecting differences in worldviews and perspectives, and can limit progress towards sustainable outcomes. The diversity of interpretations can also lead to fragmented policy implementation, making it essential to establish shared objectives and measurable outcomes.

This framework provides a common foundation by focusing on outcomes that balance economic, environmental, and social priorities, supporting alignment across these diverse interpretations.

To support the global community in achieving sustainable outcomes, UNEP defines an SBE as follows:

A Sustainable Blue Economy is an integrated approach to management that protects and regenerates healthy and resilient ecosystems, delivers equitable and inclusive benefits for people, and addresses the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

A high-level statement is important to secure political support and create a strong narrative which emphasises the multi-faceted nature and benefits of the SBE. However, these statements are not fully adequate to support the complicated and messy process of system change required to make progress on the ground. Achieving real change requires defining tangible and measurable outcomes and practical actions to achieve them, as set out in this Transition Framework.

The regenerative approach¹⁷ to the SBE recognises society's dependence on healthy ecosystems, and the role that those ecosystems play in addressing poverty, malnutrition, and gender inequality for populations dependent on marine resources for subsistence and livelihoods. As such, the regenerative approach seeks to ensure that ecosystems such as mangroves, coral reefs, seagrasses, kelps, salt marshes, coastal wetlands, rivers and lakes are able to support human development needs, now and in the future.

Considering the interactions across the land-sea interface is crucial to achieving an SBE (Figure 3). In all coastal countries, and particularly in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the land and sea are inextricably linked. Degradation of the biosphere including biodiversity loss, pollution and climate change, occurs across system boundaries and 80 per cent of marine pollution results from discharge from land-based sources.¹⁸ To address these land-sea interactions, it is essential that cohesive strategies for protecting connected terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems are developed to alleviate the harm caused to the ocean, ensuring adequate freshwater flows, preventing wastewater, urban and solid waste, agricultural runoff, and toxic industrial waste from entering the ocean and further degrading ocean ecosystems. It is also impossible to deliver an SBE without considering land-based components, including the ports needed for shipping and fisheries, or the pipelines and cables needed for offshore energy and telecommunications.

The Transition Framework considers the relationship between marine and land-based planning and management, to support more integrated decision-making to achieve SBE goals.

In recent years, the scope of the blue economy has been expanded in some settings to include inland water systems, such as in the ASEAN Blue Economy Development Framework¹⁹ and the African Union's Blue Economy Strategy²⁰, recognising interconnectivity between these systems and similar need for integrated approaches. This Transition Framework has been developed principally to focus on the management of ocean and coastal ecosystems, whilst recognising the critical importance of coordinating with land-based decision-making to address connectivity between these systems. In terms of large inland lakes and other aquatic ecosystems, this document is not tailored specifically to those systems however the goals and approaches which underpin the Transition Framework are broadly applicable.



▲ Figure 3. Interactions across the land-sea interface



3.2

Goals of a Sustainable Blue Economy



The SBE Transition Framework has been developed to meet four main goals. These goals are aligned to the SDGs and define the core outcomes that the Transition Framework aims to deliver. These goals seek to translate the definition of the SBE into measurable outcomes and should inform all decisions and actions related to an SBE transition.

The Goals of a Sustainable Blue Economy are:

GOAL

1

To protect, restore, and maintain healthy and resilient ecosystems.

GOAL

2

To deliver equity, equality, and inclusivity throughout SBE processes and outcomes.

GOAL

3

To support climate stability and resilience.

GOAL

4

To enable circular economy approaches for sustainable consumption and production, reducing pollution and waste.

For each goal, examples of outcomes are provided on the following pages which can be used to measure progress towards overarching SBE goals and are an important component of taking forward the transition in a practical way.

GOAL 1

To protect, restore, and maintain healthy and resilient ecosystems.

Healthy and productive ocean, coastal and inland water ecosystems are essential to sustain and enhance the economic, social and environmental benefits for human wellbeing. In addition to steering conservation and restoration efforts, this goal directly supports ecosystem-based management and NbS for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Outcomes that demonstrate progress towards protected and restored healthy ecosystems could include:

- An increase in the extent and quality of ecosystems with clear evidence of restoration and NbS.

- Reduced drivers of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation that affect the delivery of ecosystem services.
- Increased extent of effectively managed networks of marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), including freshwater ecosystems.
- An increased percentage of finance is used for conservation or restoration efforts, including NbS, which can be used to deliver the above outcomes.

GOAL 2

To deliver equity, equality, and inclusivity throughout SBE processes and outcomes.

Equity, equality, and inclusivity should underpin SBE transitions to ensure a resilient, just, and sustainable future in line with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Equity means acknowledging the need to remove barriers to resources and opportunities that some groups face and includes inter-generational equity. Equality recognises that all people should have equal rights and opportunities to access coastal, marine and aquatic resources and benefits. Inclusivity involves ensuring that all relevant voices, particularly those from underrepresented or marginalised groups, including women, have the opportunity to contribute to decision-making and implementation processes.

SDG 14 (Life Below Water) supports equity and inclusivity, emphasising the need to ensure equitable access to marine and aquatic resources and opportunities for all, particularly vulnerable communities. Equitable outcomes rely on inclusion and fairness in processes and benefit sharing; preventing harm; respecting rights and supporting all to thrive.

Outcomes that demonstrate progress towards equitable and inclusive processes could include:

- Marginalised groups are given a seat at the table and can shape policy if power imbalances are addressed and voices are incorporated meaningfully. This includes promoting women's participation in decision-making processes, access to resources, and benefits from the blue economy.
- Established rights-holders are informed and meaningfully involved in decision-making. Their consent is respected for operations that impact those rights.
- The benefits of a blue economy are shared equitably with local communities, indigenous peoples, and other marginalised groups, including women, to deliver a fair and just transition.
- Policy and management do not exacerbate existing inequalities or silence marginalised voices.
- Blue economy activities deliver goods, high quality jobs, and learning opportunities for all actors, and allow all people in society to live lives they consider to be worthwhile.



Photo credit: Envato

GOAL 3

To support climate stability and resilience.

Climate stability and resilience are fundamental elements of an SBE. Climate change threatens the health and productivity of critical ocean and coastal ecosystems and planetary climate regulation. The Paris Agreement, under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, outlines the global agenda for climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. Prioritising resilience in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction will also support adaptation to climate-related challenges.

Outcomes that demonstrate progress in climate stability and resilience could include:

- Carbon neutrality or negativity is achieved across blue economy activities, infrastructure and communities.
- NbS for climate mitigation and adaptation, and ecosystem-based adaptation interventions, are integrated into conservation and restoration efforts, sustainable resource management and coastal development planning.
- A significant increase in measures for the mitigation and adaptation to the risks of climate change, including NbS and the restoration of blue carbon.
- Improved integration of climate models and future scenarios in SBE planning and management, to support environmental, social, and economic resilience.
- Resilience is planned and prioritised in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

GOAL 4

To promote circular economy approaches for sustainable consumption and production, reducing pollution and waste.

Unsustainable production of goods and provision of services, and the pressure this places on the environment, cannot continue in the transition to an SBE. In line with SDG 12, which aims to ensure sustainable consumption and production, businesses and stakeholders within an SBE must promote efficient resource use and reduce environmental impact from over-exploitation and pollution. Adopting circular economy approaches aims to maintain the value of products, materials and other resources for as long as possible within the economy, enhancing the efficiency of resource use and reducing the waste associated with industrial processes.

At national level, goal 4 outcomes include:

- Identifying, understanding, and addressing the discrete and cumulative impacts of blue economy sectors on ecosystems.
- Increased regulatory and financial incentives for good practice and innovation to minimise harmful extraction and production processes, supported by a robust policy and regulatory framework.
- Increased financial or physical contributions of sectors dependent on nature to manage waste systems, and restore and regenerate nature (polluter pays principle).
- Reduction of pollution present in water bodies.
- Increased reuse of resources, materials and products in line with the waste hierarchy.
- Increased ability of consumers to easily identify and access products that are produced with resource efficiency and less waste, and are designed for long-term use.

The four overarching goals set out serve to steer the development and implementation of a national or local SBE policy, strategy and action plan. Each country or area will need to define its own specific objectives and targets to ensure that these overarching goals and outcomes are contextually relevant and tailored to the unique needs and vision of their respective setting. For a more detailed discussion on developing national or local objectives and aligning these with the four overarching goals, see Section 5.2.



Challenges in delivering a Sustainable Blue Economy

Achieving the change required to deliver the goals of the SBE is ambitious and various challenges exist, which require targeted action to address. These include:

- **Fragmented institutional frameworks** with a lack of coordination across policy areas or sectors, across the land-sea interface, or between national and sub-national levels.
- **Limited data availability and accessibility**, leading to a lack of evidence-based decision-making.
- **Poor management of public finances**, including how they are allocated, spent and accounted for.
- **Capacity and resource constraints** across public institutions and stakeholders, including human, technical and financial.
- **Limited monitoring and evaluation** to understand progress towards SBE objectives.
- **Competing interests and illegal activities**, often compounded by constrained enforcement capacity.
- **Inequality** and limited representation in decision-making.
- **On-going environmental degradation**, including land-based pollution sources, destructive fishing practices and damage to coastal habitats.
- **Intensifying climate change** impacts, including ocean acidification and extreme weather events.

It is important to note that these challenges are not the same everywhere, and the transition pathway towards an SBE will be distinctly shaped by the specific country (and regional) context. Smaller countries, including SIDS, face unique circumstances which can intensify the challenges and undermine progress. Most SIDS, or 'large ocean states', have extensive ocean areas but are more vulnerable due to their size, geographic isolation and exposure, and fragile ecosystems, and they are extremely vulnerable to climate change and natural hazards. Their economies are often relatively undiversified with limited private sector activity, high debt-to-GDP ratio, and they are remote from international markets yet highly susceptible to global market fluctuations.²¹

The lack of financial, technical and human resource capacity is more acute, and access to international aid can be difficult for countries which are not identified as Least-Developed Countries (LDCs).

The relevance of context is highlighted throughout different phases of this Transition Framework and is underlined in:

- The approach taken to developing a system understanding of economic, environmental and social factors (Phase 1);
- The participatory and co-developed vision and national approach to policy and decision-making (Phase 2); and
- Effective monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) as part of adaptive management and implementation (Phase 3).

Many low-capacity or low-income countries rely on international funding which can present additional challenges because accessing that finance is often bureaucratically burdensome and allocated in policy siloes within restricted timeframes. This can place onerous demands on countries, hampering the potential for long-term positive impact. To support the SBE transition at a national level, development partners must consider how best to support countries based on their context and capacity to manage multiple concurrent programmes from different funders, and ideally deliver programmes in a more coordinated way. Streamlining and simplifying development finance mechanisms and processes could go a long way to improving access to the finance needed, and to alleviate the capacity and resource demands on the countries that need it most.

It is also necessary to recognise the importance of access to finance in reducing inequalities. While access to low interest finance in the developing world is required for countries to implement policy in pursuit of the SDGs, high-income countries must meet commitments for the provision of development assistance. Meeting these commitments in the future is essential to support an SBE transition and the delivery of SDG 10.

Enablers of a Sustainable Blue Economy

The transition to an SBE and the implementation of new policies and management mechanisms depends on enhancing or creating key enabling conditions that are needed to underpin long-term SBE delivery, evolving existing processes towards a new, more sustainable business as usual. These enabling conditions include effective leadership, integrated institutional frameworks, participatory approaches, international cooperation, sustainable finance, capacity and resources (human and technological) and accessible data, information and knowledge.

Effective leadership

Strong, ethical, and mandated leadership is essential to steer the transition, mobilise support, provide a focal point for coordinated action, maintain momentum and build political will across all areas of government. This is necessary to provide strategic coordination and accountability, as well as direct investment and resources.

However, the transition cannot be driven solely by government, and public bodies must work in collaboration with the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders, both women and men, to deliver change. Those in power must seek to empower local communities and wider stakeholders through devolved decision-making, wherever possible, and fostering local governance including co-management arrangements.

Integrated institutional frameworks

Addressing the trade-offs which are central to achieving an SBE requires an integrated approach to policy development, planning and management. This requires overcoming traditionally fragmented approaches, to be more integrated horizontally (between different government departments and agencies) and vertically (between national and sub-national governance bodies).

A formalised, cross-sectoral coordination body with a mandate for SBE coordination can provide the necessary strategic oversight across the institutional system.

Policy coherence is central to the SBE transition, where the policy and regulatory frameworks reflect the interlinkages between multiple policy areas, enabling management of conflicts and promoting synergies (see Section 5.2). Adopting relevant frameworks which support integrated management is essential, such as Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), as well as integration between land-sea planning (see Section 5.3).

Participatory approaches

Active, inclusive and gender responsive participation goes beyond traditional interpretations of stakeholder engagement, embedding co-development and participation at every stage to ensure an inclusive and equitable SBE. Governments and public bodies have a responsibility to identify and engage with stakeholders during policy development and implementation, and throughout decision-making processes. The development of context-sensitive processes for effective engagement and participation is central to the role of governments in the SBE transition, empowering others and ensuring inclusive and equitable processes and outcomes.

Participatory approaches include involvement and collaboration of stakeholders in governance and decision-making, including those who are directly affected. This should not be tokenistic but should increase access to decision-making for marginalised groups and ensure that policy makers embed equality in their processes in an accountable way.

It must involve processes such as meaningful consultation, collaboration and collaborative decision-making. There is a wealth of innovation in participatory approaches to support this, including expanding traditional models of decision-making, for example, through application of deliberative democracy and citizen juries.²² Gender-balanced consultation mechanisms must be established to ensure that women and marginalised groups have equitable access to decision-making processes. This includes creating platforms for women to voice their concerns and contribute to policy development, ensuring their perspectives are integrated into the SBE transition.

Coalitions of stakeholders operating in a participatory way can catalyse positive change and support progress by sharing knowledge and capacity, and seizing opportunities through mutually supportive actions. Building networks which inform and support the transition is essential to deliver real system change; these do not need to rely on existing bureaucratic structures and can operate through informal networks and channels.

International cooperation

International solidarity and cooperation between countries is essential when transitioning towards an SBE. Collaboration at regional and international scales is essential to address transboundary challenges, harmonise policies and leverage collective resources and expertise. This includes giving a voice to low-capacity or low-income countries, particularly LDCs and SIDS, in international forums and processes, such as the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction or the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Bilateral, regional, or international cooperation on issues related to SBE can also be critical to tackle shared maritime challenges, such as migrating fish stocks due to climate change, or maritime safety.

Regional cooperation frameworks, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), provide key mechanisms for supporting cooperation between neighbouring countries to address shared ambitions and challenges. National SBE transitions can be best supported through international mechanisms which

can direct international finance and support coherent approaches to achieving common interests.

Sustainable finance

Sustainable finance across public and private sectors is integral to SBE delivery. Appropriate incentives and support are needed to drive investment in sustainable activities, as well as long-term commitment and funding for the design and implementation of sustainable initiatives, including technological innovation and capacity building. This includes gender-responsive financing mechanisms that support women-led initiatives and businesses in the sustainable blue economy, ensuring that financial resources are accessible to women and marginalised groups, providing them with the necessary support to develop and scale their projects. It might involve grants, loans, and investment opportunities specifically targeted at women entrepreneurs.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are essential to ensure capacity and innovation, such as advancing marine renewable energy, aquaculture or biotechnology. PPPs are needed to diffuse investment risks across partners in novel technologies and initiatives. Tax incentives promote investment into sustainable economies and mobilise private finance²³ and these partnerships will play a pivotal role in generating an enabling financial environment for the transition to an SBE.

The UNEP FI Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles are foundational to guiding investment in the blue economy. Launched in 2018, they are the world's first global guiding framework for banks, insurers and investors to finance an SBE, and support the financial industry to mainstream sustainability of ocean-based sectors. As such, adopting these principles would help generate the right enabling environment to foster sustainable financing mechanisms for the transition to an SBE (see Section 5.2 - Financing the Transition). Other guidance for delivering sustainable finance includes The Ocean Finance Handbook¹² and the Ocean Investment Protocol.^{24,25}

A range of fiscal solutions exist for implementation initiatives for the transition, such as limiting spending in areas that deplete natural capital, equity financing, blue bond issuance, exchange or cancellation of debt for blue investments, donations as international aid, etc. Each of these instruments requires careful consideration to ensure feasibility and applicability.

It is necessary for a country or region to generate a system that attracts and enables investment. Furthermore, financial sustainability should enable countries to move away from debt-centric finance mechanisms towards a self-sufficient SBE in the long-term, aligning with the UNEP FI SBE Finance Principles.

Capacity and resources (human and technological)

Adequate capacity must be established in all bodies with a role or responsibility in the transition to an SBE, as well as for the people who must engage with it. Given the interdisciplinary focus of the SBE, it is likely that new combinations of skills and knowledge will be needed, along with innovative approaches to enabling tasks, such as working with new stakeholder groups or more closely with the private sector. It is essential that capacity building includes the stakeholders who will be engaged in SBE delivery and outcomes to enable them to take part in the transition process. For example, develop gender-responsive capacity-building programs that address the specific needs of women in the sustainable blue economy, ensuring that training and resources are accessible to women and marginalised groups, providing them with the skills and knowledge needed to participate fully in the SBE. Priorities will include how to capture and incorporate social values into ocean and coastal governance, how to engage with people traditionally outside of ocean and governance processes, how to develop decision-making processes that genuinely take account of a full range of relevant social, environmental and economic values, and how to manage assets fairly across sectors.

Accessible data, information and knowledge

Access to robust scientific research, data, monitoring and modelling is crucial to understand the environmental, social, and economic impacts, risk, needs and priorities that must inform decision-making and adaptive management, as well as drive innovation to deliver an SBE.

Ensuring access to relevant, usable, quality data, and centralising and integrating information from varied sources is necessary to support decision-making and cooperation between relevant sectors and groups (e.g. government, scientists, the private sector, academia, indigenous peoples and local communities), catalysing knowledge sharing and drive innovation. Proactive data capturing and non-competitive sharing amongst stakeholders can contribute to a more holistic, evidence-based governance approach for an SBE, including collaboration at regional and international scales to facilitate technology transfer and capacity building.

Many indigenous, traditional and local communities have deep rooted links with nature, and their values, knowledge and practices can inform contextually relevant approaches and solutions for sustainable use and management. Identifying, developing and ensuring access to relevant scientific, indigenous, traditional, and local knowledge, information and data is a fundamental requirement for countries to realise an integrated SBE that promotes evidence-based decision-making, participatory approaches, equitable benefits sharing, and local stewardship.





The Transition Framework

The SBE Transition Framework supports the practical development of a strategic approach towards an SBE to deliver system change. It sets out three phases of a structured, system-based transition, each with a set of activities that collectively support the development of a strategic approach to SBE delivery (Figure 4). Certain activities are likely to already be underway (such as development of a national policy or MSP) and the Framework sets the transition in this context, seeking to complement and build on existing activity by helping to identify what else is needed to ensure progress. It recognises that progress towards SBE delivery may already be underway in different parts of the system and seeks to support stakeholders in responding to their specific circumstances, helping them navigate the transition through both incremental and large-scale change.

Delivering ambitious system change is non-linear and occurs over a long period of time. Achieving more equitable and sustainable outcomes requires change at many levels, including shifting narratives, structures and power through new policies, processes, relationships, infrastructure and

behaviour. Systems are inherently complex, and the journey of transition requires focusing our effort on different parts of the system and the relationship between them, while being aware of ripple effects across it.

The Transition Framework described here considers where and how action might be taken forward in the most strategic way, relevant to the specific context. It supports SBE stakeholders to step back and understand the system in which they are operating, take a broader perspective on historic conditions and emerging patterns, and re-think how they can act to address the goals of the SBE.

The three phases presented below are used to structure the process in a practical way to steer change across SBE governance and the many processes and actions within it. Each phase takes time, and it may be necessary to revisit activities throughout the transition to refine understanding and bring more actors and people into the process, strengthening the collaboration needed to keep the transition moving forward.

The Transition Framework is organised in three phases that help steer the transition:

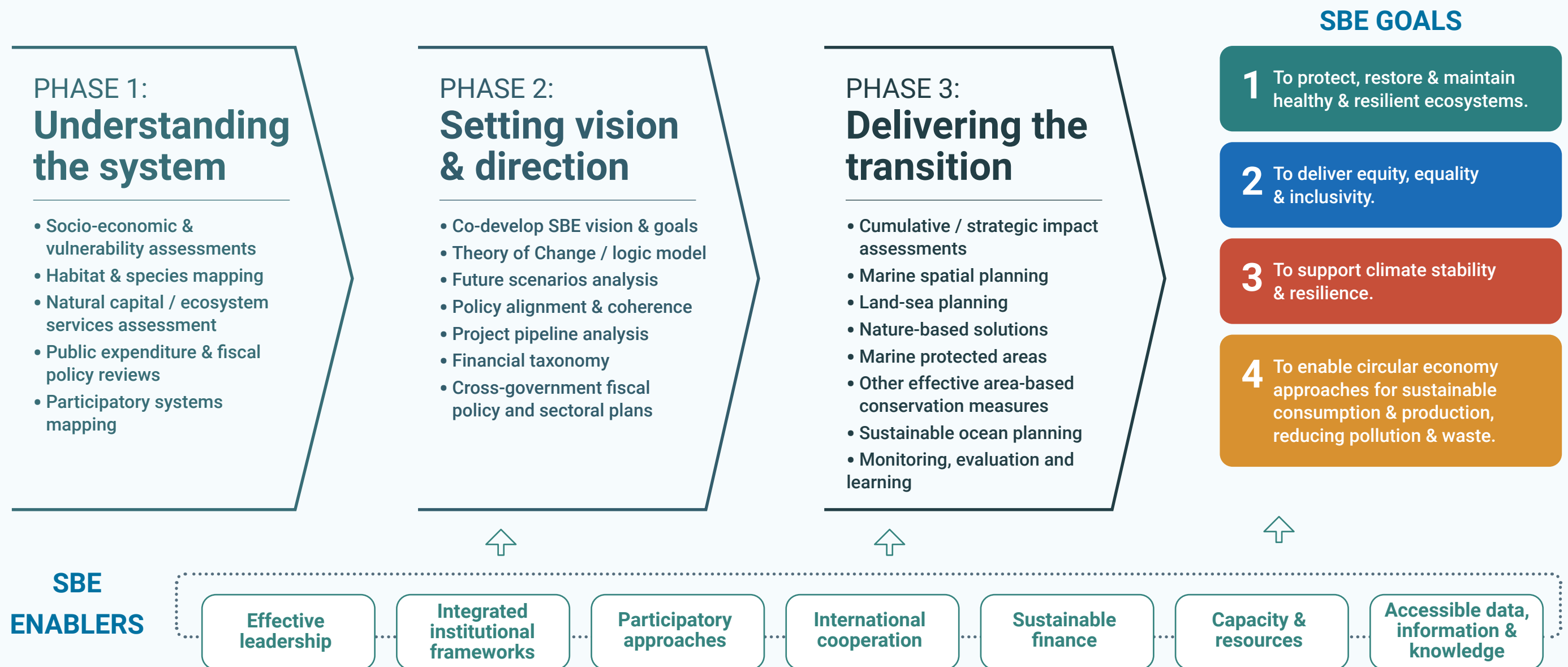
PHASE 1:
Understanding the system

PHASE 2:
Setting vision & direction

PHASE 3:
Delivering the transition

Sustainable Blue Economy

Activities supporting the transition



▲ Figure 4. Activities supporting the transition

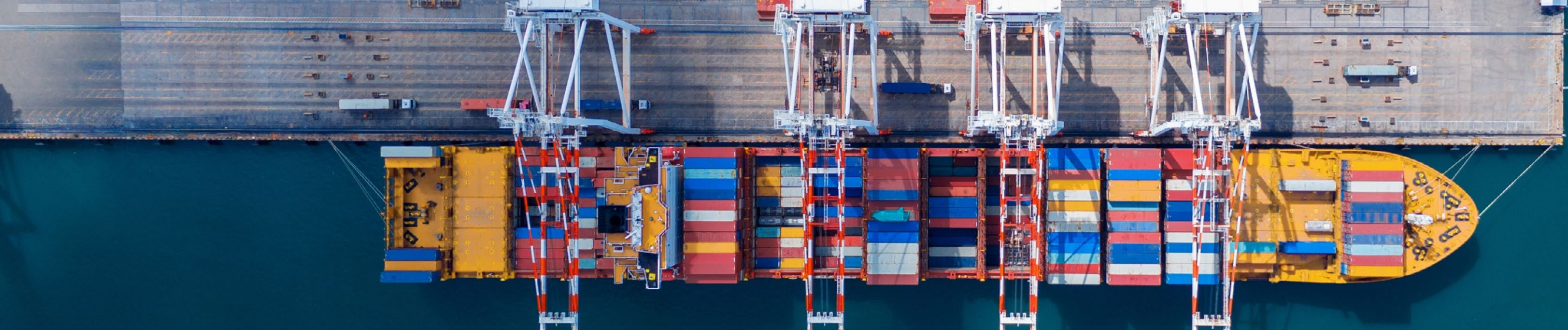


Photo credit: Shutterstock

4.1 PHASE 1: Understanding the system

Phase 1 focuses on taking stock of the existing situation in a country, developing an understanding of the real problems that an SBE can help to address, and preparing for the transition. It is concerned with learning how the current system functions and seeks to raise awareness amongst key stakeholders about where current blue economy efforts are making progress or are not working as well as they should. This includes bringing together an understanding of the social, ecological and economic status of a country's SBE, along with governance and institutional arrangements and their functionality. Systems mapping helps identify synergies and can guide policy coherence and sector coordination in delivery of all four overall SBE goals. Undertaking Phase 1 activities in a collaborative and accessible way is essential to deepen understanding of why changes are needed and build public and political support for the transition.

4.2 PHASE 2: Setting vision and direction

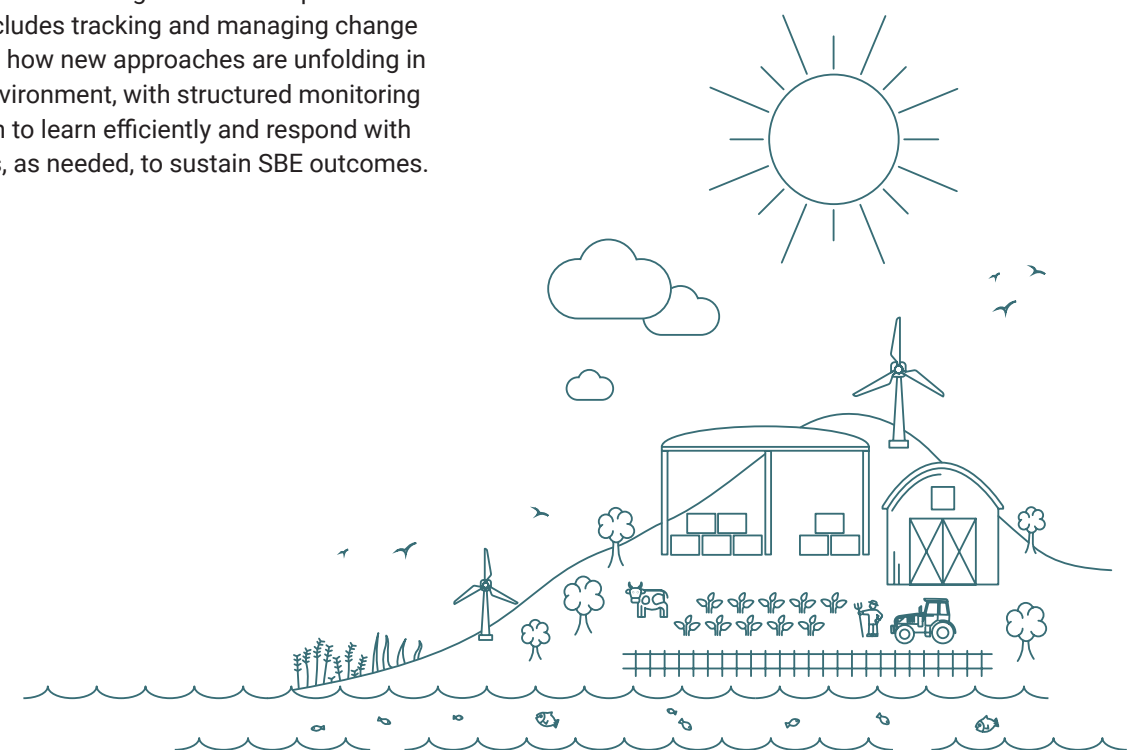
Phase 2 considers how to influence the system to create the desired change through new integrated policy and planning approaches. It centres on developing a shared understanding of the problems being addressed and reflecting this in a strategic approach which is guided by a long-term vision.

Through meaningful participation, diverse stakeholders are encouraged to develop a common language and understanding of the processes and goals of the change needed, acknowledge the issues and perspectives of others, and develop a sense of ownership of decisions and actions that will support and enhance progress to shared SBE goals. Developing a vision which is shared across different groups, to agree on the purpose of the new system and how it needs to change, builds support and momentum for the transition.

The SBE is influenced by overlapping policy areas and an integrated approach to policy delivery is essential. Setting out a high-level vision for the SBE, underpinned by specific goals and outcomes, provides an anchoring framework for an SBE transition to steer change across the many areas of policy which must support it, including environment, fisheries, marine transport, climate change, land planning, and others. Vision development is followed by the development of strategic plans for moving forward with systemic change in a practical way, through SBE planning and programming, which embed the goals of the SBE throughout the nested change processes within it.

4.3 PHASE 3: Delivering the transition

Phase 3 is an on-going operational phase where the vision and planning from Phase 2 are translated into practice and incorporated into the array of decision-making processes that address how human activities are managed. It includes a suite of operational processes and approaches that can be used to deliver policy through the planning, spatial allocation and regulation of SBE sectors and activities across different government departments. This phase includes tracking and managing change and observing how new approaches are unfolding in a changing environment, with structured monitoring and evaluation to learn efficiently and respond with new decisions, as needed, to sustain SBE outcomes.



5

Implementing the Transition Framework: Tools, approaches & activities

5.1

PHASE 1:

Understanding the system

Delivering an SBE through the three phases of the Transition Framework requires a structured approach and the application of a range of tools and approaches. This section provides practical guidance, referencing tools and approaches, with a framework for how these can be undertaken in a coordinated and complementary way. References to tools and guidance are not exhaustive and instead provide an introduction to support the application of the Framework. The specific approach adopted should be informed by local context and capacity and be designed to deliver long-term implementation of the SBE.

Links to resources and examples of the tools and approaches outlined in Section 5 are presented in Appendix 2.

Key activities

SBE baselines

- > Assessing equity & social status
- > Assessing environmental status
- > Assessing economic status

Governance baseline

- > Institutional mapping
- > Participatory system mapping
- > Rapid Readiness Assessment

Establishing a baseline understanding of the current situation in a country or local area is foundational to visioning and taking forward the transition. This includes assessing the equity and social status (Section 5.1), environmental status (Section 5.1) and economic status (Section 5.1). This helps to understand progress already made towards the four SBE Goals, and the critical issues and opportunities which must be prioritised when planning and delivering the SBE transition in Phase 2 and Phase 3.

Phase 1 also includes understanding a country's governance baseline, including relevant institutional and policy arrangements and their functionality (Section 5.1). This includes how priorities are established, how activities are funded, and how departments, organizations and stakeholders cooperate across different policy areas, sectors, and levels of governance.

Understanding and addressing gaps in functionality across the system is essential for a country to achieve their SBE aims in an integrated and coherent way.

In addition to informing SBE planning and implementation, establishing current baselines early in the SBE transition journey provides a benchmark against which to monitor and evaluate progress towards the SBE Goals and any national objectives or targets developed during Phase 2. Findings from Phase 1 also inform the development of SBE criteria and indicators as part of MEL processes (see Section 5.3). Baseline assessments also help to identify critical gaps in information, knowledge or data that need to be addressed to enhance understanding and enable on-going MEL.

Approaches for understanding the equity and social status, environmental status and economic status in a particular country (or local area) within the context of an SBE are set out below.

Equity and social status

The SBE must deliver **equity, equality, and inclusivity (Goal 2)**. Understanding the status of equity and equality across the SBE system is essential to ensure that the push towards economic development of the ocean does not result in the marginalisation of some users or sectors.

This includes understanding who is at risk, and the systemic drivers of inequity (such as legal, economic, and political factors) as well as cultural and historically entrenched inequality, so that they may be addressed.

Assessing the socio-economic baseline and relevant demographic status is essential to support the development of tailored SBE objectives and priorities to ensure equitable approaches and outcomes. Assessing existing conditions supports understanding the likely social and economic implications of subsequent interventions, positive or negative, such as job creation, impacts on livelihoods, cultural heritage and impact on marginalised groups. This information should inform the goals and objectives that are developed in Phase 2, including the design and prioritisation of sustainable social development policies and activities to support an SBE transition. It also provides a baseline against which progress and impacts of decisions and actions can be monitored and evaluated in relation to how communities, and their lives and livelihoods, are affected through delivery of the transition (Phase 3).

Assessing equity and social status

The following examples represent some of the approaches which can be adopted to help understand equity and social status in a country, region, or local area:

- **Socioeconomic assessment:** assists the relevant authorities to understand the impacts, opportunities, and trade-offs of the implementation of an SBE. This can be used to inform fiscal planning for activities later in the transition process.
- **Socioeconomic climate vulnerability and risk assessment:** assists relevant authorities to understand the vulnerability of marine resources, communities, and other assets to climate change, including causal factors and adaptation capacity. This can be used to design climate change adaptation and risk management interventions and consider how these can be supported through an SBE approach.
- **Gender-specific socio-economic assessments:** can help understand the unique challenges faced by women in the blue economy. Use this data to inform policy and action plans, ensuring that interventions address gender disparities and promote equitable outcomes. For example, assess the impact of blue economy activities on women's livelihoods, health, and access to resources.
- **Inclusive wealth index:** measures a nation's manufactured, human and natural capital to establish their current contributions and inform policy decisions. Unlike GDP, this approach can

facilitate intergenerational equity rather than short-term gains, and can also help to identify where further investments into human capital are needed (such as education and training to deliver on SBE objectives).

- **Human poverty assessment:** can be used to establish current poverty circumstances and assess the effectiveness of blue economy (and other) programmes which are designed to alleviate poverty by regularly measuring their progress. By assessing factors beyond income, such as access to education, healthcare, and basic services, it helps policymakers understand the socio-economic challenges in these regions and respond accordingly in SBE direction setting.

Environmental status

An SBE must **conserve, protect and restore blue ecosystems (Goal 1)**. To fully integrate environmental considerations into policy development and decision-making, a country must bring together an understanding of the current environmental baseline and key pressures on blue ecosystems and biodiversity at the start of the transition process. This baseline understanding will inform priorities for ecosystem protection and restoration to support planning and decision-making in Phase 2, and to guide the design and implementation of key SBE activities in Phase 3 such as MSP, NbS for climate adaptation, or MPA management.

Collated information is needed on the extent and condition of blue ecosystems and the cumulative human pressures affecting them. Existing monitoring and assessment can support a baseline understanding of ecological condition, which can be used to inform NBSAPs and National Red Lists of Threatened species, amongst others. Where national data is unavailable, additional assessment may be needed, and gaps in monitoring or knowledge can be considered when designing MEL processes to track SBE progress and effectiveness.

Understanding natural capital highlights the connection between SBE sectors and the sustainability of blue ecosystems, whilst also providing relevant indicators for socio-economic assessment of blue resources and the goods and services provided to the economy. Ocean accounting allows states to improve their reporting abilities, in line with international targets. There are various existing tools for ocean accounting which differ

based on inputs, outputs, data requirements, focus, sectors and ease of usability, with examples of these outlined below.

Considering the implications of climate change on the current baseline, and into the future, is critical to inform decision-making to ensure that strategies and activities supporting the transition promote climate change resilience and adaptation (Goal 3). Climate Change Vulnerability Assessments contribute another dimension to the environmental baseline, based on climate-related risks to species, habitats and ecosystems.

Assessing environmental status

Examples of tools or approaches that could be adopted to understand environmental status include:

- **Habitat, key species and human activity mapping:** helps identify critical ecosystems, track species health, and monitor human activities by incorporating stakeholder input and local knowledge, enabling the prioritisation of valuable areas and addressing sources of pressure. This tailored, precautionary approach aids in managing natural resources at local scales, guiding targeted interventions, and identifying where detailed environmental accounting would be beneficial for SBE interventions.
- **Integrated environmental assessment (IEA):** is a process that analyses the interactions between human activities and the natural environment to identify and evaluate their impact on ecosystem health and natural resources. IEAs are used to inform environmental policy and decision-making, and can be applied to a variety of environmental issues. IEA is a useful tool to help inform the development of evidence-based environmental policy and decision-making, bring relevant scientific findings to a broad audience and raise awareness of changing environmental conditions, as well as identify emerging environmental issues.
- **Environmental climate vulnerability assessment:** evaluates how ecosystems, species, and human activities are vulnerable to climate change impacts and identifies at-risk areas and sectors within the blue economy that may be most affected by climate change. This helps governments prioritise climate adaptation measures, directing resources and investments to areas with the greatest need for resilience-building. In the transition to an SBE,

assessments like this can be used to promote policy synergies and coherence between climate, environmental, and economic policies, ensuring that blue economy initiatives are aligned with broader national climate goals (in line with Goal 3 of an SBE).

- **Natural capital accounting:** focuses on quantifying and valuing natural resources and ecosystems, treating them as assets that provide essential services to the economy and society. This approach highlights the economic value of preserving natural capital. Within the SBE transition, it enables governments and businesses to assess the trade-offs between economic activities and environmental preservation, ensuring that marine resources are managed in a way that maintains their long-term value and resilience.
- **Natural capital assessments:** provide a location-specific assessment of the interactions between natural assets and resources and the benefits and values that nature delivers to people and the economy (and vice versa). This localised insight allows for tailored management strategies, such as restricting harmful activities in vulnerable areas or developing activity that promotes local livelihoods, ensuring the sustainable use of marine resources at the community level.
- **Ecosystem services accounting:** quantifies the benefits that ecosystems provide to humans by integrating these services into national accounting frameworks and helps policymakers understand the economic value of ecosystem services and the potential costs of ecosystem degradation. This enables policymakers to better understand the financial risks associated with ecosystem degradation and justify investments in conservation and sustainable practices. By quantifying the returns from protecting ecosystems, it can attract blue finance (see Section 5.2) and guide resource allocation.
- **Environmental satellite accounts:** focuses on quantifying the environmental costs and benefits associated with economic activities, helping to identify the environmental impacts of economic growth. It enables policymakers to make informed decisions about resource management, regulatory measures, and financial investments, ensuring that economic growth aligns with environmental sustainability.

Economic status

Assessing the current economic status allows a country or local area to understand the financial value and importance of an SBE both now and in the future, and how public, private, and development finance is directed towards SBE-relevant activities. This includes understanding the current levels of economic activity in the blue economy, their related beneficiaries, and the incentives which drive activity. Recognising global markets helps understand the role of the blue economy in raising export revenues, while understanding the size and ownership of businesses helps appreciate where the benefits of blue economic activity fall. Current public spending is important, including how economic activities are regulated and taxed and the levels of public sector revenues currently received.

Understanding existing SBE financial flows identifies gaps in investment and emerging opportunities for sectoral growth to inform public expenditure and other Phase 2 activities to enhance the enabling conditions necessary to unlock private investment and secure long-term financing of the SBE (Section 5.2). Understanding financial flows is also important to identify possible entry points towards more sustainable consumption and production practices (Goal 4).

Assessing economic status

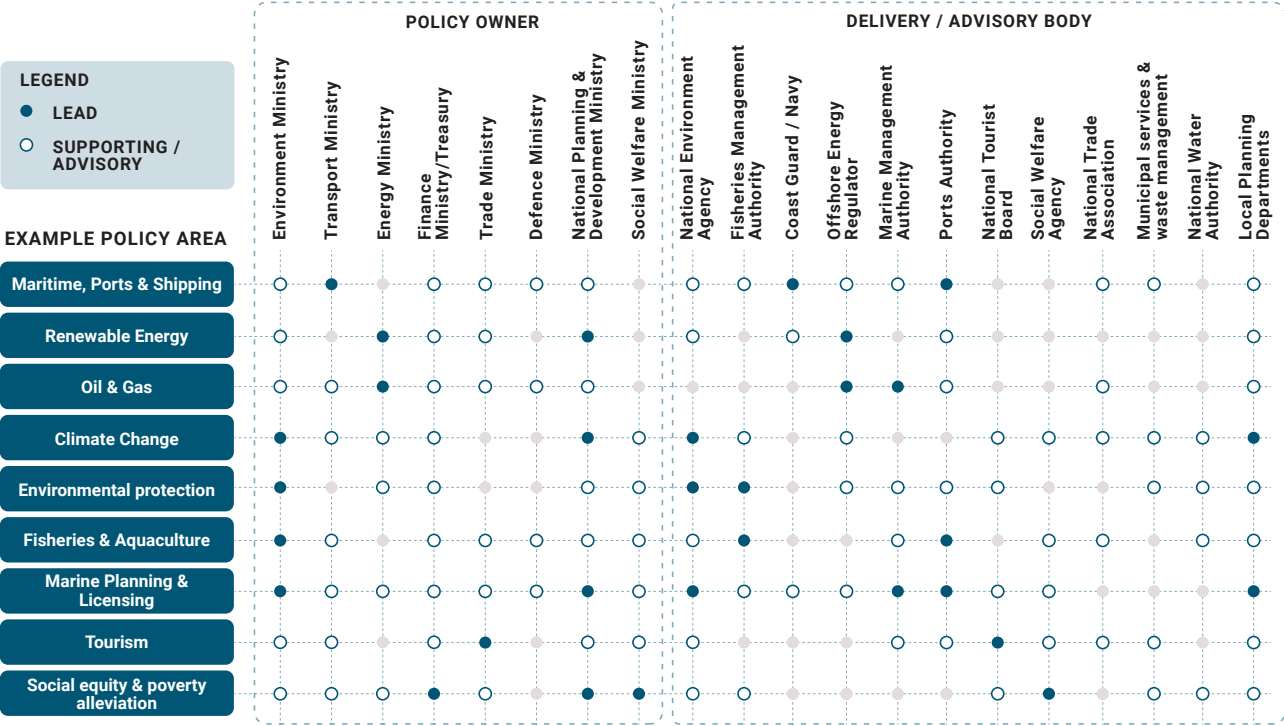
- **Macro-economic analysis:** examines the contribution of the blue economy to the wider economy. This analysis helps governments understand the economic significance of blue economy sectors, assess potential growth opportunities, and identify risks or inefficiencies that need to be considered in planning the transition. It can also help to identify the economic impacts of circularity interventions, and the broader effects on supply, demand, and prices.
- **Marine asset assessment or audit:** records the extent and condition of the assets the blue economy is dependent upon. By providing this baseline, it informs more targeted management strategies, guiding resource allocation, conservation efforts, and sustainable use practices for asset-rich areas.

- **Green fiscal policy assessment:** evaluates how the tax and spending policy of a government impacts the incentives faced by private businesses operating within the marine environment. It supports the transition to an SBE by identifying opportunities to reform fiscal policies— such as introducing marine conservation taxes, phasing out harmful subsidies, or providing incentives for innovative or sustainable activity—thereby aligning private sector activities with all four SBE goals.
- **Public Expenditure Review:** examines economic and financial incentives by looking at tax and spending regimes, and identifying perverse subsidies and incentives which compromise an SBE. This creates a more favourable investment climate for blue finance initiatives and can enhance a government’s ability to attract blue finance by demonstrating a commitment to reforming policies that support sustainability within the SBE.
- **Circularity gap analysis:** helps to understand where resources are wasted, underused, or lost within the blue economy. By mapping these inefficiencies, it identifies opportunities to keep resources in use for longer, reducing pollution and waste, and promoting sustainable production and consumption.

Governance baseline

Institutional arrangements relevant to the SBE are often fragmented with accountability and delivery spread across different government departments, including at national and sub-national level. To deliver the transition to an SBE, it is necessary to understand both formal and informal institutional arrangements, including policy ownership and delivery responsibilities, gender dimensions, as well as capacity, including human and technical resources. This provides the foundation for developing policy coherence as set out in Phase 2 (Section 5.2).

A simple approach to understanding the governance system in a particular context includes institutional mapping, which sets out government departments and agencies responsible for various aspects of the SBE. As governance doesn’t happen in a vacuum, more advanced approaches such as participatory system mapping are useful to build understanding of the functionality of the system, including how it is responding to the specific context, and supports stakeholders develop a more realistic understanding of the complex system within which they are operating.



▲ Figure 5. Example of mapping of policy holders and delivery bodies

Institutional mapping

Institutional maps can be compiled based on a review of available policy and legislative documents, supplemented by interviews with key government departments to understand policy ownership and delivery responsibilities. This approach shows the interactions between relevant government departments, and other actors with a role in achieving the SBE, including the private sector, NGOs and civil society, to support the coordination needed to operate in a more integrated way.

Mapping the key policy areas relevant to the SBE alongside the government departments and agencies responsible for their development and delivery and presenting them in a matrix format is a simple and effective way of understanding the current SBE system and helps to identify overlapping responsibilities, interests and mandates across government. Visual mapping can be tailored according to the level of information required. The example in Figure 5 shows institutions categorised according to key areas of the SBE to identify responsible departments and where others also have some responsibility. It is also helpful to map institutions against the main policy and legislative instruments relevant to the SBE that they have a mandate for as each agency will be directly accountable to the provisions within them.

Undertaking these exercises in a participatory way is valuable to promote greater awareness of individual roles within the wider governance system, providing the groundwork for more effective coordination and cooperation. Facilitating dialogue between relevant departments helps them to co-identify opportunities for collaboration to minimise duplication and realise resource efficiencies, and to address potential trade-offs between sector interests.

Mapping the specific commitments and milestones of key policies on a timeline is also helpful to understand potential for coordination and alignment between departments and agencies in delivery of those commitments, as well as identifying areas of potential conflict.

Any SBE transition must recognise and build upon the existing legislative and policy frameworks that are currently impacting progress towards sustainable development of the blue economy. Once that existing system is mapped, it is then necessary to understand how well those frameworks are aligned to the overarching SBE Goals to identify gaps in policy, or commitments and activities that are inconsistent with the Goals, or each other. These insights can be used to guide national priorities for future amendments or reform to policy frameworks. The In Focus section provides a set of questions to help assess the scope and effectiveness of policy and institutional frameworks in addressing the four SBE Goals.

Assessing Policy Frameworks against the SBE Transition Goals

The following example questions can be used to assess existing policy frameworks against the SBE Goals, although countries may wish to tailor the criteria to meet national or local priorities:

SBE goal 1

To protect, restore, and maintain healthy ecosystems

- Is there a mechanism to identify drivers of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation that are affecting important ecosystems (and natural capital)?
- Are policies in place to incentivise restoration of degraded habitats or safeguard natural ecosystems?
- Is there a process to identify MPAs and other effective area-based conservation measures?
- Is there a way to identify what are 'important/critical' natural capital or ecosystems in the marine environment?
- Is there a way to support finance for conservation or restoration efforts and NbS?
- Are sectors which depend upon nature, such as fisheries, engaged in the protection and restoration of blue ecosystems?

SBE goal 2

To deliver equity, equality, and inclusivity

- How are goals of equity, inclusivity and wellbeing represented in policy and legislation?
- Are there mechanisms and incentives in place to preserve access and harvesting rights for local individuals and groups who depend on marine food sources for food security?
- Are there mechanisms in place to understand and address barriers experienced by marginalised groups to accessing benefits in the SBE, for example in relation to access to jobs, distribution of benefits or disproportionate negative impacts?
- Are there examples of good practice such as the use of open media, trusted scientists, effective judicial systems, impartial regulators, active civil society representation?

SBE goal 3

To support climate stability and resilience

- Are mechanisms in place to promote and facilitate the transition towards carbon neutrality across blue economy sectors, infrastructure and communities?
- Are NbS for climate mitigation and adaptation being integrated into conservation and restoration efforts, resource management and coastal planning?
- Are coastal climate change adaptation and risk management strategies joined up with conservation, restoration, sustainable resource management and coastal development planning to enable NbS?
- Is resilience being mainstreamed into planning and prioritised in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction?

SBE goal 4

To enable circular economy approaches that deliver sustainable consumption and production, reducing pollution and waste

- Is there support for increased identification, understanding and addressing the discrete and cumulative impacts of blue economy sectors on ecosystem and community health?
- Do incentives exist to promote innovation or use of existing technology and business models that minimise (or eliminate) harmful extraction and production?
- Are there policies and regulations in place and enforced to effectively manage pollution and ensure resource consumption is within sustainable limits?
- Are there incentives or support for industries that provide end-of-life recycling?
- Can consumers identify / access products that are less wasteful / designed for longer term use? Does government policy support this?
- Do businesses responsible for pollution/waste that impacts marine ecosystems (either during production OR consumption) face a cost associated with these impacts?

Participatory system mapping

Participatory system mapping is a powerful tool to support a more detailed understanding of the interactions between policies relevant to an SBE and promote more integrated working to address them. Importantly, this approach looks beyond a government's policy delivery system to consider how it is affected by current and changing context. This supports stakeholders in thinking through the possible effects of their activities on the real world to inform better decision-making.

Different approaches can be taken (see Useful Resources, Appendix 2), but in general they enable stakeholders to work together in a facilitated way to produce a map that indicates key system factors (which can fluctuate, such as marine ecological status or poverty levels in coastal communities), and cause-and-effect relations between them.

Maps can be digitised and become a 'living' visual tool which can be revisited to maintain focus on more coherent policy delivery towards overarching outcomes and to mitigate siloed thinking. The process of working together to produce the map is as important as the end result, as stakeholders with different roles and perspectives develop a shared understanding of the system and collectively identify issues and actions to mitigate adverse outcomes and promote synergies.

Undertaking such assessments in a participatory way is important to support capacity building and joint learning, by engaging stakeholders in developing a shared understanding of the current system, the barriers faced, and the solutions which might be taken forward. This includes an important opportunity to better understand the informal rules and power dynamics which influence the institutional system, to identify realistic pathways for change in each specific context.

System mapping should be an iterative process which is continued throughout the transition, to support on-going learning and to reflect on progress. It also supports the development of more specific Theory of Change exercises in Phase 2 - Planning the Transition (Section 5.2) and associated MEL process (Section 5.3).

Rapid Readiness Assessment

For countries wanting to quickly establish a better understanding of their current SBE-related system, the UNEP SBE Rapid Readiness Assessment (RRA) is a useful first step in getting started on the transition journey. The RRA is a straightforward tool to understand the current state of transition, or readiness for it, and can create momentum and accelerate the transition. The RRA sets out key steps which can be applied in any context, at any time, to bring together a snapshot of the current situation and identify key areas of the national or local blue economy system that need to be addressed.

In focus

Sustainable Blue Economy Rapid Readiness Assessment (RRA)

Through a participatory process tailored to national or local context, ideally taking about 3-4 months, the RRA provides a high-level 'snapshot' of the current status of a country's policies and institutions in progressing towards an SBE. It also identifies important enabling actions that can be taken to drive progress at national and sub-national levels. It can be applied sub-nationally, e.g. to a province or region, within the context of national efforts and engaging national government and neighbouring provinces accordingly. Aligning the RRA to the SBE enablers (Section 3.4) provides a streamlined set of criteria against which to assess a country's current capacity and specific needs for embarking on the SBE transition.

By its nature, the RRA provides a rapid overview and is not intended as a comprehensive analysis, however, it is a useful tool to kick-start an SBE transition process or to catalyse progress on existing SBE efforts.

An effective SBE RRA will:

- Provide a high-level 'snapshot' of a country's current blue economy.
- Identify key aspects and opportunities associated with the SBE transition.
- Highlight the key challenges and barriers hindering progress towards an SBE.
- Assess the status of the key SBE enabling conditions, aligned to the Transition Framework.
- Deliver a co-developed set of actions to catalyse progress towards an SBE.

By convening a wide range of SBE stakeholders, the RRA process can help identify and overcome siloed thinking, encouraging participants to step away from their day-to-day tasks to focus on the bigger picture and their role within it. It creates a sense of purpose and momentum toward a shared goal, helping to mobilise stakeholders and catalyse action, whether a country or local area is at the start of an SBE transition or already part way along the journey.

The RRA method has so far been applied in different contexts including Viet Nam, Antigua and Barbuda, Trinidad and Tobago and Kenya. These experiences have demonstrated its value in supporting stakeholders to understand and conceive their transition as a shared journey, drawing connections between different activities and developing a unified sense of purpose and direction in relation to the SBE.

A detailed guide for application of the SBE RRA approach can be found in Annex I with reports available from previous RRAs conducted in the Caribbean:

- > [Rapid Readiness Assessment for Antigua and Barbuda](#)³⁹
- > [Rapid Readiness Assessment for Trinidad and Tobago](#)⁴⁰



Enablers for phase 1: Key activities

The SBE transition relies on seven key enablers to support sustained delivery. In Phase 1, these enablers can be enhanced through the following actions:

Effective leadership	Identify leadership roles within government, the private sector and civil society who can act as champions for the transition and support baseline assessment and system mapping exercises.
Integrated institutional frameworks	Assess the different institutions involved in SBE planning and delivery for awareness and integration.
Participatory processes	Undertake stakeholder mapping to understand networks and coalitions of stakeholders operating across the SBE and create appropriate participatory processes to be used throughout the transition.
International cooperation	Identify opportunities for collaboration at regional and international scales to ensure that transboundary challenges are managed harmoniously.
Sustainable finance	Undertake value chain analyses to understand the financial costs and benefits of transitioning to an SBE.
Capacity and resources (human and technological)	Secure sufficient resources to deliver baseline assessments and system mapping.
Accessible data, information, and knowledge	Identify and obtain available data and information to conduct baseline analysis and system mapping, including indigenous, traditional and local community knowledge and gender perspectives.



Phase 1 summary

By undertaking a suite of activities outlined in Phase 1, national or local policy makers and stakeholders will have established a fundamental understanding of the current social, environmental, and economic status within the SBE. This includes a useful overview of key gaps, pressures, and opportunities that will inform future priorities and set direction in Phase 2. The governance baseline will also be understood, outlining the institutional, policy, and stakeholder frameworks that are essential for coordinated action in transitioning to an SBE. Consolidating the baseline assessments provides an understanding of the linkages and dynamics between the economy, society and the environment in the current system.

It will also identify dependencies, impacts and the drivers of change in order to understand where the current system can be positively influenced to reduce adverse economic, social and environmental impacts.

These baselines will underpin decision-making during Phase 2 (Planning the Transition), where detailed planning, priority setting, and policy development take place to support the SBE transition. Baseline data also acts as a benchmark for MEL, to monitor progress towards SBE goals and outcomes during Phase 3 (Delivering the Transition).



Photo credit: Ocean Image Bank/Naja Bertold Jensen

PHASE 2:
Setting vision and direction

Key activities

Developing a shared vision, goals & outcomes

Planning the transition

- > Theory of Change
- > Logic modelling
- > Scenario analysis
- > Back-casting

Delivering policy coherence

Financing the transition

- > Financial taxonomy
- > Fiscal policy and sectoral plans

Phase 2 builds on the system understanding developed in Phase 1 to establish a shared vision, set direction and guide policy and planning to take the transition forward. This phase centres on co-development, recognising the wide number of actors and stakeholders who should be involved to ensure the transition process is inclusive and equitable.

In many countries, policy may already be in place addressing blue economy. In these cases, this Phase emphasises the relevance of revisiting and, where necessary, reaffirming the SBE vision and ensuring that it is complemented by relevant strategic planning to take the transition forward in practice.

Develop shared vision, goals and outcomes for the SBE

Co-development of a strategic approach to the SBE and setting this out in policy is critical to delivering an SBE. This includes providing a clear vision that describes the desired future end-state of the transition, underpinned by context-specific goals and outcomes, and sets direction for SBE implementation enabled by coherent planning across relevant policy areas and sectors.

Benefits of a shared SBE vision, goals and outcomes

A clearly articulated SBE vision, with supporting goals and outcomes, is essential to:

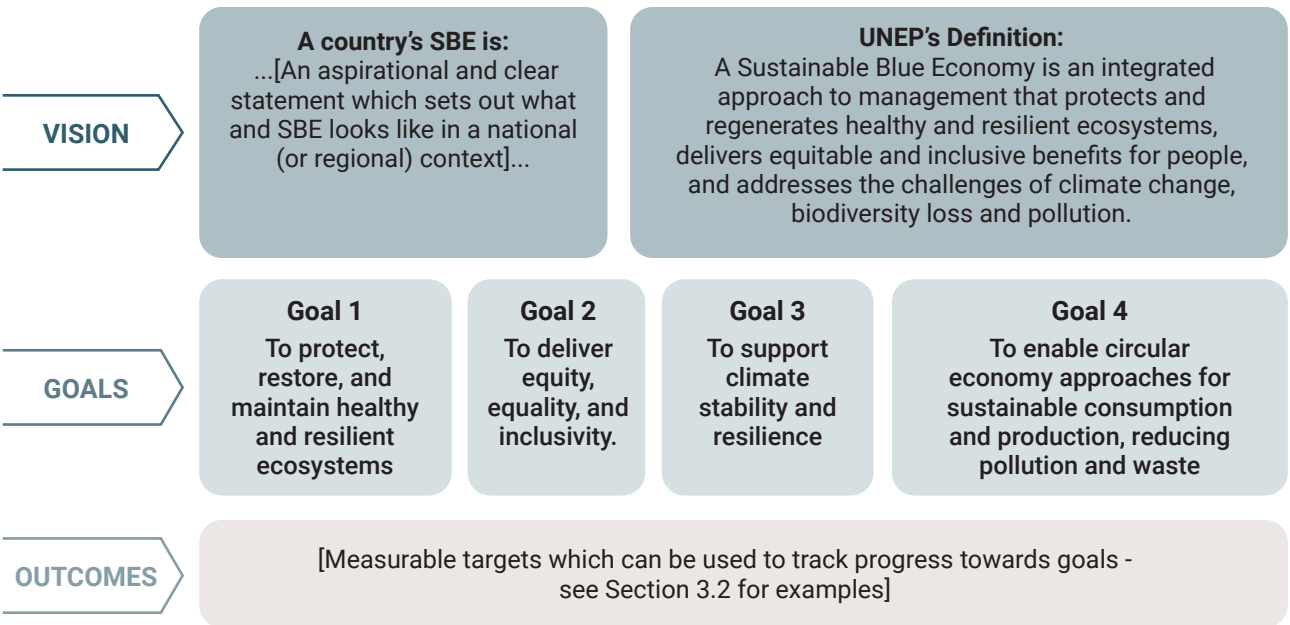
- Help political leaders communicate the unique approach to the SBE in their country or local area and demonstrate alignment with the SBE goals and global targets.
- Support leadership at all levels to champion the SBE transition when conducting stakeholder engagement.
- Steer SBE decision-making, planning, and implementation at all levels and across relevant sectors.
- Support programming of interventions at national and local levels.
- Redirect financing to sustainable development activities by aligning donor support and private investment with SBE ambition.
- Inform the design of MEL processes, including criteria and related information needs.

The Transition Framework provides a structure to develop (or re-articulate) national policy for the SBE. Using this Framework, the relevant department or authority can lead an open and deliberative process which focuses on articulating the SBE in a way that reflects the priorities and policy, economic, environmental and social context of a particular country (or local area).

The UNEP definition of an SBE can be used as the basis for developing a vision statement which describes the desired future state in a particular country or local area (see Figure 6). It is important that this is undertaken collectively through a process of dialogue with key stakeholders to ensure it reflects their views and priorities, as well as gender dimensions, and to develop shared ownership of the overall direction of travel to reach that future state. For example, the SBE vision should include

gender equality and the empowerment of women. This involves setting specific goals and outcomes that address gender disparities and promote the active participation of women in a sustainable blue economy, ensuring that women have equal access to decision-making processes, resources, and benefits.

Underpinning the overarching vision statement, the four SBE Goals provide a guide to help define the desired SBE outcomes in a national context, reflecting the priorities identified through the system understanding derived in Phase 1 and the stakeholder dialogue supported in this phase. Examples of outcomes aligned to the SBE Goals are provided in Section 3.2. Working across government departments and wider stakeholders a set of national outcomes should be agreed, to then identify actions for delivering the SBE transition, and measure progress towards the goals and overarching vision.



▲ **Figure 6.** Example structure to guide the development of a vision, goals and outcomes based on the SBE definition and goals presented in Section 3.

This process would ideally be undertaken as part of the development of national SBE policy or strategy so that the statement can be formalised and adopted by political leaders and integrated across other processes. An overarching policy instrument provides an anchoring framework for considering the SBE throughout the whole of government, embedding the goals of an SBE at the centre of decision-making.

It should be undertaken in a participatory way, working across government ministries and departments and non-governmental stakeholders.

Investing adequate time and resources in an inclusive process yields many benefits, reflecting local context including gender aspects, promoting awareness of the SBE, engendering a sense of ownership, and ensuring the approach reflects shared priorities. Priority goals and outcomes should be identified through dialogue and consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders, to ensure legitimacy and that marginalised groups are part of the decision-making process.

Planning the transition

Turning the transition into practical reality requires detailed planning of actions and interventions, embedding SBE considerations throughout planning and management processes. As the many parts of the SBE are delivered across different departments and agencies, the high-level vision, goals and outcomes need to be supported by strategic planning, which can steer change at multiple levels and through different processes. This includes the planning and programming of different government departments, where activities are identified to enable policy implementation and budget allocated accordingly.

The vision, goals and outcomes provide the basis for designing the actions required to take forward the SBE transition. An overarching strategic action plan is needed to support the goals and outcomes set out in national policy and cuts across sectors and policy areas to achieve the greatest benefit. Priority actions should optimise synergies across sectors and manage trade-offs between them.

The SBE transition needs to be as integrated and cross-sectoral as possible. However, different aspects of the SBE are typically managed separately and distinct plans may need to be developed for sectors or policy areas, such as ecosystem conservation, protection and restoration, fisheries, shipping, tourism, national climate mitigation or adaptation planning.²⁵ Each sector of the SBE will face specific challenges in transitioning to more sustainable approaches, including decarbonising their operations, economic diversification, implementing circular economy approaches, or responding to changing conditions, for example due to competition, degrading resources, or climate change.

These changes must consider a ‘just transition’, i.e. recognising the economic and livelihood contributions of the SBE to communities and the need to support sector transitions based on principles of fairness, and through collaboration between government and private actors, to help adapt each sector to a changing world. To do this, there is a need to attract both public and private investment to support innovation, and collaboration with government to develop a supportive policy environment which disincentivises unsustainable practices and facilitates the transition.

Sector planning that is guided by an overall SBE vision and is integrated into the operational approaches and actions of distinct actors can support consistency and coherence between them. This allows ownership to be devolved to the most appropriate level and organization, whilst maintaining central oversight of the transition.

Embedding each of the four SBE Goals in specific sectors requires detailed analysis and understanding of the transition pathway needed within the overall national SBE framework. This approach will support integration and identify how sectors can operate in a more coordinated way, such as shared infrastructure development or joint capacity building and training.

The development of sector plans and programmes should be supported by a clear and coherent overarching SBE policy, developed collaboratively across ministries and departments, with delivery supported by institutional coordination structures and processes.

Actions set out in SBE planning and programming should be:

- **Specific:** targeting a particular area of action or improvement.
- **Measurable:** quantifiable in relation to an indicator of progress towards SBE goals.
- **Accountable:** defining responsibility clearly.
- **Realistic:** outlining attainable results with available resources.
- **Time-related:** including a timeline for expected results.
- **Funded:** all actions should have funding or resource assigned to them.

Implementing the SBE transition can be facilitated through frameworks and tools that guide the management of sector activities across spatial areas and at different levels of management or implementation. Such tools can include, for example, SOP, MSP, ICZM, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). These processes are described further in Phase 3.

Approaches for change planning and management

Change management processes and tools, such as Theory of Change (ToC) and Logic Modelling, can support co-development of actions and interventions needed to deliver the transition. Other approaches, including organizational development, may also be relevant as they seek to evolve institutions to respond to challenges and better achieve their objectives and outcomes.

- **Theory of Change (ToC):** can help describe how activities and interventions will lead to a desired change within a specific context (see In Focus: Theory of Change). ToC exercises can be conducted at multiple levels and can be nested

together, where they address different components or sectors of the same system.

For example, an overarching organizational SBE ToC could be complemented by ToCs for individual government departments (or other organizations) that address specific sectoral elements within the SBE. Embedding ToC in the requirements related to programme design within government provides a way to ensure that activities and investments are aligned and address common SBE goals and outcomes.

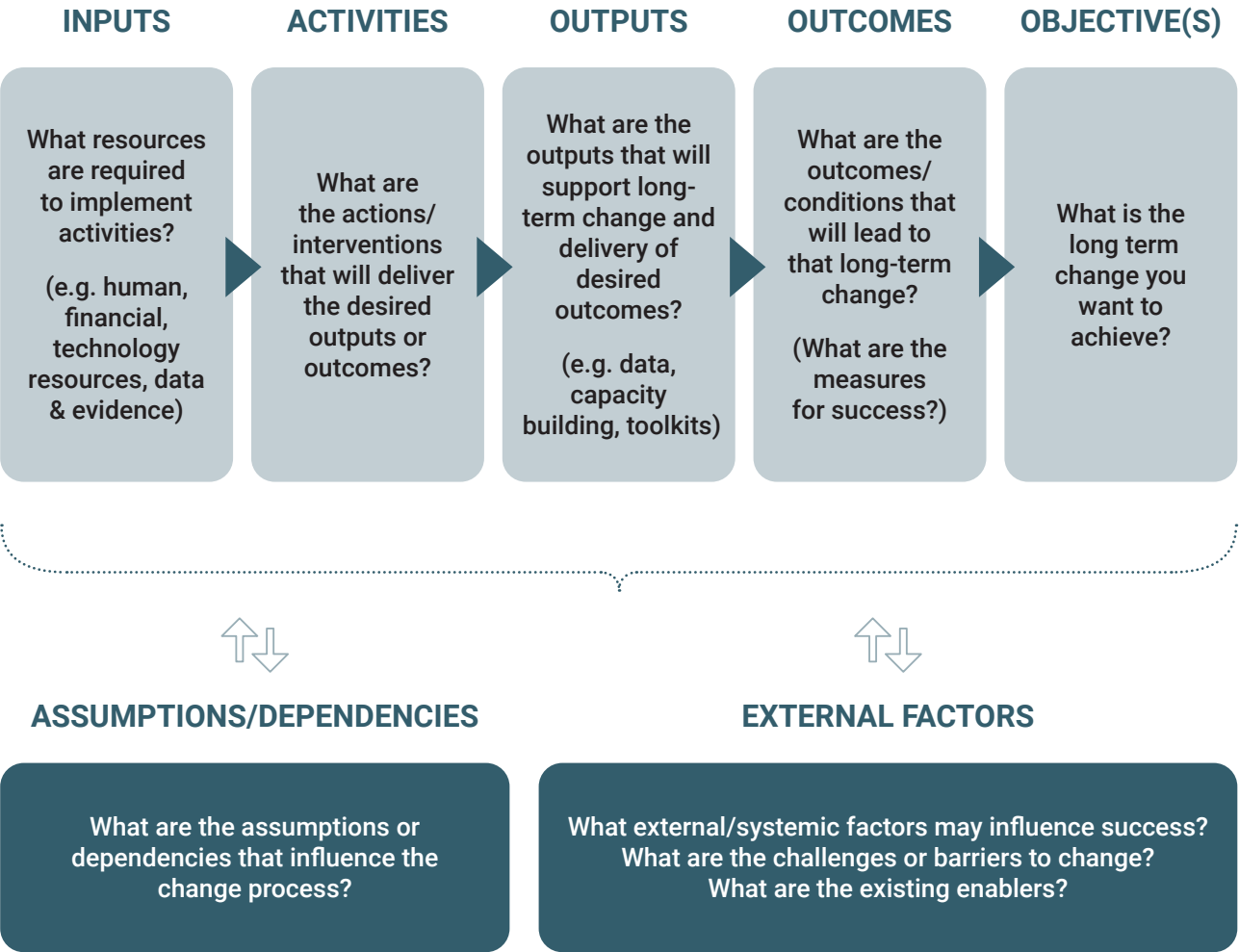
- **Logic modelling:** similar to the ToC approach, but involves a simplified way to map the relationship between resources, activities and outcomes in a process of change, exploring how suggested interventions will achieve the desired goals.



In focus

Theory of Change

ToC is a process of facilitated dialogue producing a guiding framework with supporting narrative that articulates how an activity (or set of activities) is expected to lead to specific objectives or impacts. It describes the relationships between actions, outcomes and the context in which change is delivered. Different methodologies can be applied but typically include the elements set out in Figure 7.



▲ Figure 7. Example outline of a ToC Framework.

ToC Framework

Ultimately, it is the process of co-developing the ToC with relevant participants that is essential – the product is simply a way of visualising the outcomes of that process and can be adapted to communicate the ToC in the most effective way. ToC development should include a wide range of participants who will be involved in the delivery of or impacted by the SBE transition. It can support consensus-building and shared understanding, as well as helping to build stakeholder networks. Creating space for diverse perspectives within a facilitated dialogue process can help identify important issues and challenge assumptions, identify a range of contextual factors, and better predict expected impacts or outcomes of interventions for change to support more equitable outcomes. Involving stakeholders in the ToC process helps to increase buy-in for the transition, engendering a sense of ownership amongst participants for the objectives and activities, which will catalyse greater commitment to their successful implementation.

Using a ToC approach enables better understanding of how a programme of activities can lead to the achievement of the long-term goal(s), developed collectively by the people involved.

The process is useful in informing the planning and design of activities based on a detailed understanding of how change, or impact, is expected to be achieved. ToC can also support program evaluation as it sets measures of progress towards agreed outcomes during delivery.

Since an SBE transition will require several workstreams across different sectors and groups of stakeholders to achieve outputs and outcomes, it may be useful to develop an “umbrella” ToC that outlines a high-level strategy supported by a series of “nested” ToCs that map the sector-specific change pathways needed to deliver it. Examples of where an umbrella ToC complemented with sector-specific ToCs may be useful include:

Integrated policy development: where multiple departments and/or agencies will be responsible for delivery. The new integrated policy is developed to deliver the overarching change framework (the umbrella ToC), along with sector-specific ToCs for each relevant agency or body to ensure outcomes and objectives are aligned to deliver the umbrella ToC.

Project development: where a programme of change (umbrella ToC) is delivered through multiple work packages or project pipelines (nested ToCs) that are developed to support the programme’s objective(s).

Organizational development: where a department or agency works in a structured way to identify interventions and organizational changes required to support SBE delivery across categories such as:

- **Management (functions, structures and relationships).**
- **Operations (processes, systems, procedures, incentives and values).**
- **Human and financial resources (policies, deployment and performance).**
- **Knowledge and infrastructure.**
- **Monitoring and evaluation.**

Developing a shared vision, goals and outcomes for the SBE in a specific context can be supported using a range of tools, which help stakeholders to collectively explore possible future scenarios and define ambitions which are realistic and relevant. These methods help to prioritise policy or sector goals, and to explore the potential impacts of those goals, alongside changes caused by external factors, such as climate change and pollution.

Tools which can help refine the vision, goals and outcomes in a national context include:

- **Scenario analysis:** involves understanding the possible futures that may result from policies, decisions and interventions.
- **Back-casting:** scenario analysis can be supported with back-casting, working backwards from the projected scenario and identifying the practical steps required to move from the present to the ideal future. Back-casting explores the feasibility and implications of different long-term policy goals, and the measures required to reach them, ensuring that visions are realistic and achievable.

These approaches help to consider long-term goals, and the interventions designed to achieve them, in the context of different futures to assess their feasibility and effectiveness in response to potential contextual changes, such as the social, economic and environmental impacts of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. Stress-testing goals, outcomes and activities in this way helps to better understand and prepare for the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss, supporting the development of robust strategic plans for the long-term delivery of an SBE.

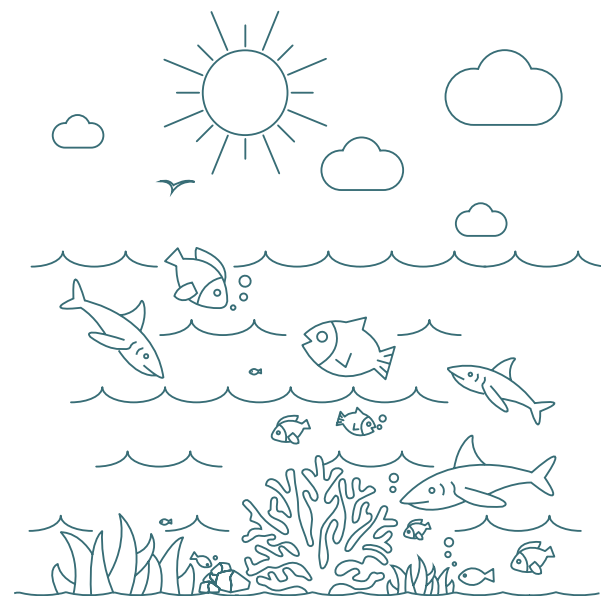
Delivering policy coherence

Central to improving effectiveness in the delivery of the SBE is the need to enhance policy coherence. Understanding the interlinkages and interfaces between concurrent policy delivery is essential to assess and manage conflicts and identify areas of synergy. Areas of synergy indicate where action can support progress towards multiple policy goals, such as NbS addressing climate change and ecosystem health (see Section 5.3).

Achieving policy coherence requires understanding:

- What policy synergies exist?
- Where might policies conflict with or negatively impact the delivery of others?
- Where are there trade-offs and risks?
- Are there opportunities to achieve further policy efficiency?
- What are the best policy interventions to drive forward the SBE transition?

It is important to recognise that in exploring policy coherence there may be conflicts and tensions emerging between policy areas. These tensions may not have previously been made explicit, but have implications for the organizations that work within them.



In Focus

Achieving policy coherence

Policy coherence needs to be supported through practical action at multiple levels. This includes^{26,27}:

Inter-ministerial and cross-sectoral coordination

Institutional mechanisms which bring together relevant ministries and governmental entities to enhance policy coherence across different policy areas relevant to the SBE. This would ideally include a coordination body convened by central government which has a mandate for aligning internal and external policies. Coordination is needed at both technical and political level, recognising the increasingly political challenges of emerging trade-offs in an SBE context. This can be enabled by:

- A mandate to make decisions regarding trade-offs.
- A coordination body, convened by a centralised government body.
- A mandate for aligning internal and external policies, including ensuring that the drafting or amendment of relevant policy or legislation recognises the overall national SBE vision, is aligned to its goals and objectives, and makes links to appropriate supporting policy and legislation.
- Coordination at both political level and technical level.

Alignment of policies and plans

Mechanisms must be in place to support alignment and coordination during policy development and design of the plans and programmes which deliver policy goals. This includes coherence across different levels of government, including between central and sub-national bodies (such as regional or provincial governments), and horizontally between sub-national bodies.

This can be supported by:

- Regular formal exchange between central government and subnational levels, and among sub-national levels.
- Using tools such as cost-benefit analysis during policy development to assess policy impacts across all sectors and SBE interests, including those at sub-national level, and international 'spill-overs' such as cross-border and international impacts.
- Mechanisms to systematically collect the inputs of sub-national government entities and share them among those entities, and entities at different levels.
- Defining planning cycle timeframes that facilitate alignment or systems that allow for the regular review of plans, policies, regulations and programmes to facilitate such alignment.
- Using tools to ensure substantive coherence such as policy or planning and budgeting templates or checklists that require demonstration of alignment between sub-national and national level policies before validation and budget allocation.
- Identifying key SBE nexus issues to drive connections between policy areas and forming working groups to address them. For example, develop NbS that bring together climate change and conservation aspects in coastal or marine spatial planning that ensures offshore wind energy development is conducted in harmony with marine conservation.

- Developing and adopting guidelines that explain how different policy instruments relate and how they should be implemented in a coherent way, for example, in relation to coordination between land and marine planning.

Monitoring and reporting for policy coherence

MEL mechanisms are critical to systematically monitor and evaluate the effects of policies and inform adaptive action to better manage synergies and conflicts. This requires:

- Defined mechanisms for regular appraisal of policies and programmes, including MEL frameworks at multiple levels.
- Development of an indicator framework for tracking policy effectiveness towards SBE goals and objectives, based on specific indicators which represent the key components of the SBE transition.
- Reviewing targets and indicators set out in existing frameworks relating to key policy delivery and considering how these might be revised to be consistent across instruments and aligned to the SBE vision, goals and objectives.
- Data and information management systems for integrating data of different types and that facilitate availability, accessibility and comparability of centralised data.

Financing for policy coherence

Policy coherence must be supported through mechanisms which promote alignment of private and public finance and track related expenditure. This can be ensured through:

- Checklists to ensure that plans and budgets reflect aspects of policy coherence for an SBE before validation and budget allocation, at all government levels.
- Integrated financial information systems to facilitate tracking, reporting and informed decisions on resource allocation at all levels of government, or public expenditure reviews that are tagged to the various dimensions of an SBE.
- A requirement that international development cooperation funds are aligned with national policies and priorities of both donors and recipients.

Tools that consider the combined implications of different policy outcomes are helpful for exploring policy coherence. MSP, ICZM and other area-based management approaches that include visioning or scenario development are essential to guide people to consider the actual implications of multiple policy

drivers and how they interact. Specific management instruments can then be deployed to maximise synergies, for example the co-location of activities or adjustment of policy aims and ambitions to better realise a suite of benefits. These tools are explored in more detail in Phase 3 (Section 5.3).

Financing the transition to an SBE

Sustainable private and public sector finance is essential for the transition to an SBE. Mechanisms to secure long-term funding need to be identified in an iterative manner, alongside policy development and sector planning, and put in place to support action. This includes ensuring that funding mechanisms are flexible and adaptive to the evolving needs of the SBE transition. Long-term funding is essential to:

- Secure appropriate human resources and technical equipment to implement transition activities.
- Undertake research, enable innovation, and support adaptive and iterative processes.
- Implement coherent monitoring and data evaluation.
- Enable effective participation of stakeholders, and ensure improved outcomes and access to benefits for women and marginalised communities.
- Build the capacity of institutions responsible for enacting change as well as the actors and stakeholders involved in the coalitions for change.
- Enable continuous and coherent implementation of planning and management.

The SBE transition process provides a useful foundation to deliver an integrated, whole-of-government approach for public financing to catalyse the transition and provide the foundation for continual, long-term funding mechanisms needed to underpin an SBE. Conducting a public expenditure review as part of economic baselining (Section 5.1) will identify existing financial flows across the full range of government departments, policy areas and sectors relevant to the SBE, and inform future public expenditure. Developing integrated fiscal policies and sector-level plans that are aligned with the SBE vision, goals and objectives, improves coherence through cross-sectoral expenditure that will channel public finance in ways consistent with achieving the SBE goals. Tools such as cost-benefit analysis, scenario planning, or trade-off evaluation can support financial decision-making, including conflict resolution and informing trade-offs.

Robust environmental regulations and financial frameworks that redirect capital to sustainable and circular activities and interventions as part of an

SBE approach are key enablers needed to access alternative sources of finance (private finance, philanthropic grants, multilateral development funding, debt conversions, etc.). Additionally, disincentivising harmful practices through environmental taxation or subsidy reforms can redirect funds towards more regenerative activity. Improving investor confidence and de-risking investment in this way helps to unlock private finance and demonstrates government leadership.

Coherent SBE strategies and plans provide the basis for applications to access international finance such as from development banks, multilateral funds, or philanthropic funding. These organizations can provide necessary financial resources, particularly in the planning and short-term implementation stages of an SBE transition. To reduce long-term debt burdens and dependency on international funding, and ensure a more resilient financial approach, countries should aim to transition towards a mix of public and private investment financing.

Public finance provides a stable and reliable source of funding that can be strategically allocated through a portion of the national budget specifically for enhancing the SBE, implementing tax incentives, or setting up payment for ecosystem services (PES) schemes. To enhance public finance, public-private partnerships (PPPs) are needed to leverage private sector efficiency, innovation, and capital, reducing the financial burden on governments. Similarly, Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) is a public-private approach which has recently emerged as a potential mechanism to ensure long-term finance and the right enabling conditions to support the conservation of large-scale ecosystems permanently.²⁸

Public and private finance should be guided by the UNEP FI SBE Finance Principles (see In Focus: SBE Finance Principles) and the practical guides 'Turning the Tide: How to Finance a Sustainable Ocean Recovery'²⁹ and the World Economic Forum's 'The Ocean Finance Handbook'.¹² Nature positive financial initiatives, such as the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD), encourage the private sector to incorporate nature-related opportunities and risks into their strategic planning, further enhancing economy-wide sustainability. Aligning SBE guidance for investors with TNFD and other initiatives will be a powerful way to steer private finance towards supporting SBE transitions globally.

In focus

Sustainable Blue Economy Financing Principles

The UNEP FI **Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles**²⁹ are a global guiding framework for banks, insurers and investors to finance an SBE transition and associated activities.

While the Finance Principles are primarily directed towards private financial institutions (banks, investors and insurers) due to their pivotal role in how the blue economy is financed, they are also supportive of public finance. Public finance is particularly important and influential to the development of an SBE as many activities are determined during the planning stage, well before private financial institutions are involved with financing. In light of this, the application of the Finance Principles, as well as the accompanying **Turning the Tide**³⁰ and **Diving Deep**³¹ guidance to the public sector are especially important for the SBE Transition Framework. The guidance **‘Setting Sail: Target setting in the Sustainable Blue Economy’** (2024) supports financial institutions in implementing sector guidance, including setting targets for SBE.³²

The Finance Principles can bridge private and public financing as they provide a common basis of understanding between public and private sector stakeholders on the dimensions of an SBE. Through this, the Finance Principles may act also as a supporting framework for public-private partnership and opportunities for blended financing in the SBE. This is particularly relevant to implementing the Transition Framework which requires long-term financial sustainability, including shifting away from dependence on donor or development partner financing. Further resources can be found at [UNEP FI Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Initiative – Mobilising Capital for a Sustainable Ocean](#).

The Portuguese Government has signed up to these Principles as one of the first governments to adopt them, alongside various multilateral development banks such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and European Investment Bank.

Approaching financing for an SBE can be considered strategically through the following stages which align with the SBE transition process (Table 1):

Planning stages: Necessary for laying a solid foundation for the SBE, a full public expenditure review, followed by the development of integrated, cross-government fiscal policies and sectoral plans, ensures public financial planning is coherent and that finance flows are aligned to the SBE visions, goals and objectives. Funding for activities associated with planning the transition can be effectively sourced through donor contributions and development partner programmes. These external resources provide the necessary financial support for in-depth research, capacity building, and the development of actionable plans that align with the SBE goals.

Short-term implementation: To build tangible actions towards the SBE, a blend of development partner programming and public finance contributions will be

necessary. Development partners can offer technical assistance or the provision of services to kick-start projects and robust SBE strategies and policy frameworks, alongside integrated public finance plans, demonstrate governmental commitment to and ownership of the transition process. This mixed financing approach enables the initiation of key transition actions while maintaining financial stability and mitigating risks associated with excessive borrowing.

Long-term implementation: Long-term sustainability requires a robust and diversified financing model, with a significant emphasis on public sector finance, supported by private investment and PPPs. Review of public expenditure should be incorporated into the MEL process to ensure that public finance is subject to regular scrutiny and is revised and redirected where needed, determined by changes in the SBE landscape and to reflect shifts in sustainable development priorities.

Financing stage	Transition Framework phase	Description of financing needs	Financing avenues
Planning	Understanding the system	Financing baseline analysis and system mapping initiatives	Development or donor programming: • Technical assistance • Service providers
	Developing a shared vision	Supporting participatory approaches to visioning processes	Development or donor programming: • Grants • Technical assistance
	Transition planning	Finance plan - all actions need to be accompanied by provisions for financing and resources that are not dependent on donors or development partners	Development or donor programming: • Technical assistance • Service providers
Short and long-term implementation	RRA	Financing the RRA approach and stakeholder engagement process	Development or donor programming to start: • Service providers • Technical assistance Public-private finance for later RRAs if needed
Short and long-term implementation	MEL	Financing integrated monitoring and evaluation processes across sectors	Technical assistance to start Public-private finance to continue
Long-term implementation	Planning and management	Financing capacity building and management approaches to support long-term delivery	Public-private finance

Table 1: Financing the different phases of the Transition to ensure financial self-sufficiency in the SBE:

Approaches to support Sustainable Finance

Several tools and approaches can be used to facilitate the setup of sustainable finance for the SBE, including:

- **Financial taxonomy:** to prevent ‘greenwashing’, a green, or sustainable, taxonomy is a classification system, adopted by governments, that identifies which investment options are sustainable, and which are not. Some countries, including Indonesia and South Africa, have developed their own taxonomies.

- **Pipeline analysis:** pipeline analysis is a method used to evaluate and prioritise a portfolio of potential projects or investments which involves assessing projects based on criteria such as environmental impact, financial viability, and alignment with national goals and priorities. By systematically analysing the pipeline of projects, governments and investors can identify those that offer the highest potential for positive SBE outcomes in line with the SBE goals. This approach ensures that capital is allocated to initiatives that contribute most meaningfully and mitigate risks.

Enablers for phase 2: Key activities

Actions to enhance the key enablers during Phase 2 include:

Effective leadership	• Maintain clear and consistent leadership, established during Phase 1, to convene and coordinate stakeholders to support the development of a shared vision, goals, and objectives. Throughout this process, there will be opportunities to identify and engage potential SBE leaders who can champion the SBE transition with wider stakeholders at different levels. • Leadership during Phase 2 will also be critical for advocacy for the SBE agenda across government departments and sectors, to promote collaboration on transition planning and to steer action to support policy coherence and cross-sector financial planning.
Integrated institutional frameworks	• Establish a cross-governmental coordination mechanism(s) with the remit for working across policy areas of relevance to the SBE. In countries with devolved government structures (e.g. province or county-level governments), there will be a need for coordination mechanisms between national and devolved levels of government, as well as coordination between devolved bodies to address transboundary issues, where appropriate.
Participatory processes	• Develop a comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan addressing key components of the transition, ensuring that activities are designed and co-created with stakeholders in a participatory and gender responsive manner.
International cooperation	• Where needed, seek out financial or capacity building support from development partners, NGOs, or philanthropic sources, to enhance available resources to design and deliver the SBE transition.
Sustainable finance	• Develop full cost estimates and finance plans for all enabling elements in the transition plan. This may include reallocation of existing public funds, donor funded activities or innovative financing mechanisms.
Capacity and resources (human and technological)	• Develop a plan for meeting the priority capacity needs to implement the SBE transition and support ongoing delivery of the SBE, including education, awareness, and professional development.
Accessible data, information, and knowledge	• Set up a central SBE data management network or research institute. An example of this is the Blue Economy Research Institute in Seychelles.³³

Phase 2 summary

By the end of Phase 2, policy makers will have a clearly articulated vision, goals, and strategic outcomes for the SBE transition, co-developed with stakeholders across sectors. This phase ensures that relevant policies, institutional frameworks, and financial strategies are aligned with the SBE vision and supported by an inclusive, participatory and gender responsive process. The outcomes from Phase 2 establish the foundation for implementation by providing a detailed roadmap that aligns sectoral plans, investments, and cross-governmental collaboration, while also identifying synergies and managing trade-offs.

Shifting from Phase 2 to Phase 3 involves turning these strategic plans into actionable interventions, with Phase 3 focusing on delivery. MEL mechanisms will ensure that the progress of these interventions is tracked, and the feedback is used to update and refine the strategies set in Phase 2. This iterative process guarantees that plans remain adaptive and responsive to real-world challenges and opportunities that emerge during implementation.



PHASE 3:

Delivering the transition

Key activities

Planning & decision-making

- > Strategic environmental assessments
- > Cumulative effect assessments
- > Environmental impact assessments

Planning & decision-making

- > Marine spatial planning
- > Integrated coastal zone management
- > Sustainable ocean plans
- > Land-sea planning
- > Marine protected areas
- > Other effective area-based conservation measures
- > Nature-based solutions

Monitoring, evaluation & learning

In Phase 3, insights from Phase 1 and the vision setting and planning from Phase 2 are operationalised to deliver an integrated system of on-going management that underpins the transition to an SBE. Activities in Phase 3 include enhancing existing SBE processes that may already be in place and introducing new management approaches or interventions that can be adopted to drive progress towards the SBE vision, goals and objectives set out in Phase 2.

The benefits of enhanced policy coherence will support comprehensive spatial planning and facilitate integrated management and delivery. Effective financial planning will incentivise investment in long-term SBE interventions, capacity building, and innovation.

There is no start or end date to Phase 3 – rather it represents the evolution of the current SBE system towards a new, more sustainable framework for governance, implementation, and adaptive management. The process of transitioning to this new system can take a number of years. Systemic change is iterative and the pace of progress will be inconsistent and will vary across sectors, policy areas, and at different scales, but should focus on continual improvement through adaptive management.

Transitioning to an SBE depends on a range of decision-making processes which address how human activities are controlled and managed, including the suite of approaches used to deliver policy through the planning and regulation of SBE sectors and activities across different government departments. Many of these approaches can provide multiple benefits that will support SBE Goals, but it is important that they are developed and delivered in an integrated and complementary way so that action in one area does not undermine action in another.

As new approaches and interventions are implemented, it will be important to track their environmental, social and economic impacts to ensure outcomes are aligned to expectations and SBE goals and objectives. Establishing MEL processes will support adaptive management and underpin evidence-led planning and decision-making in the context of shifting priorities and future changes in pressures and impacts.

Planning and decision-making

Processes such as strategic environmental assessment (SEA), environmental impact assessment (EIA), cumulative effects assessment (CEA), and others are regularly applied planning and decision-making tools. In most cases, these are legislative requirements with globally recognised standards and detailed guidance on how such processes should be undertaken. Each provide a critical point at which the environmental, social and economic implications

of certain activities should be considered to inform decisions on what development and activities should be progressed, and in what way.

These approaches are frequently adopted to inform decision-making within integrated management frameworks, such as MSP, to ensure that individual activities are aligned with broader SBE objectives and outcomes, to manage competing priorities for resource and space, and to take into account the cumulative environmental impact of multiple human activities in the marine area.

Strategic environmental assessment

In European countries, SEA is a legal requirement which must be undertaken during policy or plan development, including sectoral plans and marine plans, to understand whether there are likely to be negative environmental effects and whether amendments are needed. SEAs are intended to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account when developing large-scale plans or programmes, identifying environmental impacts that are likely to arise as a result. In the context of an SBE transition and on-going delivery, SEAs can be a useful tool for integrating environmental consideration at the highest level of marine planning and management, particularly in the context of planned economic growth.

Cumulative effects assessment

SBE planning and management requires an understanding of cumulative effects (or impacts), and tools such as CEA (also referred to as cumulative impacts assessment) are used to take a holistic approach to assessing the likelihood and consequences of effects arising from multiple activities (proposed and existing) on marine and coastal ecosystems. This is essential to ensure environmental and social thresholds are respected and supports cross-sectoral management of activities across the SBE so that trade-offs between sectors can be understood and managed. CEA can be particularly helpful when used to inform decision-making in MSP and ICZM.

There are numerous approaches for undertaking CEA, or related assessments, each with varying benefits, challenges, and applications, and this diversity of options presents challenges in understanding which to use. A recent study reviewed the available literature on approaches to CEA, in the context of marine

planning, and presented key recommendations to be considered to make sure the method selected is fit-for-purpose³⁴, and include:

- Define specifically what CEA is needed for, the context, questions and guiding principles, and determine what output best meets end user needs.
- Consider the potential for using a number of tools (a CEA toolbox) to answer a range of questions, and revise as the process is taken forward to account for changing circumstances, including technological advances.
- Integrate a standardised risk-based approach, including definitions and terminology, to provide decision-makers with transparent assessments of the expected effectiveness of management interventions to mitigate predicted high risks.
- Focus on agreeing the baseline to ensure impact assessments are informed by a common foundation, informed by Phase 1 activities. Iteration is essential to improve the baseline and data used over time.
- Given the requirement for CEA across multiple policy, planning and delivery themes of the SBE, there may be a need to develop institutional CEA capability that can be shared across multiple agencies. A central team of CEA specialists could be a valuable resource for assessing whether a CEA is required, identifying which method should be applied and conducting or supporting the assessment.

Environmental impact assessment

EIAs are an important regulatory mechanism for proposed projects, generally by the private sector such as an aquaculture facility or an offshore wind farm, to understand environmental impacts and inform the need and design of mitigation, and whether the proposal should be approved. In the context of managing SBE activities, EIAs help to inform planning and permitting decisions, identifying potential impacts with a view to avoiding, reducing, or offsetting them to maintain environmental integrity. Where impacts are found to be unavoidable, EIAs can result in necessary mitigation or compensation measures, such as nature-based solutions, which should be designed in the wider context of planning and implementation to meet SBE goals.

Integrated management

Developing approaches and tools for integrated, area-based management, such as MSP, ICZM, SOP, MPAs and OECMs are important in translating policy into decision-making regarding how activities are balanced and managed. These represent processes and arenas through which trade-offs between multiple activities are negotiated and managed while working towards the SBE Goals. This is central to delivering the SBE in practice and should be seen as complementary to integrated SBE policy in enabling the transition.

Marine spatial planning

MSP is defined by UNESCO-IOC as a “public process of analysing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities to achieve ecological, economic and social objectives that are usually specified through a political process”. An integrated, cross-sectoral approach for area-based marine management designed to overcome the challenges and conflicts wrought by single-sector management, MSP helps to balance trade-offs and decision-making across environmental, social and economic priorities. MSP uses ecosystem-based management to develop integrated, multi-objective marine plans, and uses participatory approaches for decision-making to ensure equitable outcomes and deliver a coherent management framework that enables SBE delivery.

Integrated coastal zone management

ICZM is the continuous and dynamic process by which decisions are taken for the sustainable use, development, and protection of coastal and marine areas and resources. ICZM is based on integration, adaptation, ecosystem and participatory approaches. Many countries already have established ICZM frameworks and processes, and these can be aligned to emerging SBE goals and strategies to catalyse progress towards integrated management for SBE delivery. If capacity and resource allows, existing ICZM processes can also be integrated with MSP frameworks to support coherent land-sea planning.

Land-sea planning

LSP is a process for examining and making decisions about the distribution of marine activities, ecosystems, natural resources, and human settlements across subnational, national, and regional scales at the land-sea interface to deliver sustainable outcomes. LSP should seek to optimise synergies and alignment between planning processes and systems, notably terrestrial planning and MSP. LSP is important as a means of addressing the impacts of maritime and land-based activities at the land-sea interface as part of a coherent SBE delivery strategy. Effective LSP facilitates coordination amongst government agencies, addressing data sharing and management issues, and resolving overlapping interests across sectors or different levels of governance.

Sustainable ocean plans

Alongside approaches such as MSP and ICZM, new initiatives are emerging which seek to enhance and support delivery of SBE policy. This includes SOPs which were launched by the Ocean Panel as a tool to sustainably manage a nation’s ocean area, facilitating long-term sustainable economic and social development by protecting natural blue ecosystems that underpin that development. SOPs are created through inclusive, integrative and iterative processes and emphasise place, ecosystem and knowledge-based approaches that are sustainably financed and capacitated. As such, the process for developing and delivering sustainable ocean plans are well aligned to the SBE Goals.

Marine protected areas

MPAs are spatially defined management areas that are legally designated for the conservation and recovery of natural and cultural resources. MPAs vary in their levels of protection, ranging from areas that facilitate the sustainable use of resources to those where all extractive or impactful activities are prohibited. Well-managed MPAs are an ecosystem-based management tool and provide a means to enforce restrictions on human activities, such as pollution and unsustainable practices, in areas that provide critical ecosystem services and goods.

MPAs that are well planned and managed, climate smart and developed with equitable and gender-balanced stakeholder engagement are one of the most effective ways of protecting, conserving and restoring the health of ocean and coastal systems and the services they provide. The protection and conservation of ocean and coastal systems through MPAs benefits major ocean industries including fisheries, tourism and coastal protection and development, while ensuring habitats and coastal livelihoods are protected and where possible, enhanced. MPAs are therefore an effective mechanism used to support the transition to an SBE and should be incorporated as part of a strategic approach underpinned by evaluation of effectiveness to reflect on progress towards SBE outcomes.

Other effective area-based conservation measures

OECMs are geographically defined spaces that are not formally designated as protected areas but are governed and managed in ways that achieve positive long-term outcomes for the conservation of biodiversity, regardless of whether that is the primary goals of the measure. These measures can include indigenous and community conservation areas for cultural or religious purposes, locally managed marine areas (LMMAs), privately conserved areas, and certain sector-based conservation areas such as fisheries management zones.

Since OECMs can be governed by a range of rights holders, they are good example of bottom-up management approaches that facilitate SBE leadership at different levels of governance and recognise existing efforts that contribute to SBE delivery.

Nature-based solutions

NbS are interventions designed to deliver multiple benefits for people, the economy, and the environment, meaning that an NbS targeted at a particular goal (such as restoring mangroves for improved coastal protection) can also provide additional benefits (supporting local livelihoods, improving food and water security, sequestering carbon, and promoting climate change adaptation and resilience). NbS are underpinned by an ecosystem-based approach, recognising the services that nature provides and the critical role of nature as a foundation for sustainable societies and economies (see In Focus: Nature-based solutions and the SBE). The Transition Framework acknowledges the goods and services that healthy marine and coastal ecosystems provide, and NbS are a proven tool that can catalyse progress on SBE delivery, particularly aligned with Goals 1, 2 and 3.



In focus

Nature-based solutions and the SBE

NbS protect, restore or enhance natural assets to support human wellbeing, resilience and biodiversity to ensure the provision of ecosystem services. In 2022, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) reached a multilateral agreement on the definition of NbS:

“Nature-based solutions are actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human wellbeing, ecosystem services, resilience and biodiversity benefits”.³⁵

Ocean and coastal NbS are nature-positive actions that protect and enhance marine natural capital. In turn, this increases nature's capacity to provide the ecosystem services that we depend on for a functioning society and economy, improving humanity's resilience and ability to adapt to the triple planetary crises. NbS can also be designed to support progress on the SDGs and are an important tool as part of broader national strategies to address diverse challenges such as climate change, food and water insecurity, disaster impacts, and threats to human health and wellbeing, while reducing environmental degradation and biodiversity loss.

Well-designed and managed NbS can help address environmental, social, and economic priorities identified at local, national, or regional levels to support SBE goals, and can be adapted to respond to changing environmental, social, and economic drivers of the sustainability agenda. At the same time, the transition to an SBE can help to provide the enabling conditions for NbS implementation as part of an integrated and coherent policy and implementation framework, helping to overcome the key challenges to delivering NbS, such as sustainable finance and capacity building.

As with all management interventions, NbS can produce a range of outcomes - positive, negative, or neutral - depending on different perspectives and how they are assessed. For instance, restoring and protecting a coastal habitat might boost biodiversity, provide climate change mitigation and strengthen coastal defences, but could also have adverse economic effects for certain stakeholders, such as those that rely on existing use for subsistence or fuel. When designing NbS, it's crucial to consider the specific ecological and social context, engage stakeholders, evaluate potential outcomes and interactions with other interventions, weigh trade-offs, and prioritise actions and results to ensure they are aligned with SBE goals and objectives. Further resources for NbS and blue carbon can be found in Appendix 2.

MEL is critical to ensuring progress towards the SBE Goals, for example working towards more sustainable consumption and production practices, is achieved in a reflexive and effective manner.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)

Achieving the SBE transition requires change across institutions and processes, developing new solutions and ways of working to respond to intersecting challenges. This means working together to embrace

complexity and operating in a learning-based way with the flexibility to test new ideas and reflect on the outcomes, including what works in different contexts.

The design and implementation of effective MEL frameworks are essential to underpin an adaptive approach to the planning and implementation of the SBE transition.

As a mandatory approach, MEL ensures accountability for the learning process and can support evidence-led change, including refining of policies, programmes and management actions.

Often there are MEL teams in government who are responsible for the overall monitoring and evaluation of programmes, and they collect and analyse data for other teams to measure progress and support decision-making. Nested MEL processes can be associated with various programmes and initiatives, at different scales, for example evaluating the delivery of a specific policy instrument, the delivery of an MPA programme, or the implementation of MSP. Ensuring alignment across MEL processes, and including consistent SBE criteria within them, helps to evaluate SBE progress in a coherent and efficient way.

MEL, or related approaches, are also used to provide assurance for investors and donor organizations that their programmes and investment are contributing to meaningful impact.

The Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) recently assessed a decade's worth of World Bank support for the Blue Economy. The report Making Waves, World Bank Support for the Blue Economy, 2012-23¹⁴ offers recommendations which will inform the World Bank's approach to advancing blue economy approaches going forward. Criteria and frameworks which integrate sustainability into decision-making are in development globally and aligning these with national MEL programmes would support efforts to access international finance and technical assistance.

MEL processes should include stakeholders who are part of the programme or initiative, to include their reflections on what works or does not. This is essential to ground the learning in particular contexts and enhance the collective learning process.

To be effective, MEL processes need to be initiated at the beginning of the transition and must be sustained with long-term resourcing and commitment, with clear accountability for the process. Establishing the responsibility for delivering and coordinating MEL activities associated with the SBE transition is a key first step to ensure senior leadership support and long-term commitment.

The institutional lead of the SBE should have overall responsibility for MEL, although it will rely on contributions from, and coordination with, other government departments and delivery teams to build understanding and support learning.

MEL can be hampered by overly complex processes that reduce its ability to support a flexible and learning-based approach. It is important that MEL frameworks are designed to optimise learning and support an adaptive approach, including strong leadership and a responsive institutional structure.



Designing and delivering MEL

MEL should be considered throughout the three phases of the Transition Framework (see Figure 8). In Phase 1, activities which support the design of MEL centre on the analysis of the governance baseline (see Section 5.1) and include:

- Based on the mapping of institutional responsibilities, understand who is responsible for leading MEL, for the overall transition and across relevant teams, and who can manage the data gathering and collation associated with it.
- Based on analysis of the SBE policy delivery system, understand where MEL is, or could be, applied to policies and programmes which form part of the SBE.
- Review existing targets and indicators set out in frameworks relating to SBE policy delivery and how these might be revised to provide consistency across instruments and alignment to the SBE vision, goals and outcomes.
- Understand existing capacity and capability for data management including the infrastructure and technical resources needed to ensure an integrated, centralised, accessible and robust data management platform that can support MEL.

During Phase 2, the visioning and integrated policy development phase, the development of specific outcomes which are measurable and aligned with the SBE goals and principles provide the basic framework for MEL.

This includes:

- Defining specific targets which represent nationally derived outcomes under each of the four goals of the SBE. These indicators should reflect the conditions and ambitions of the SBE, and enable analysis of whether anticipated outcomes are being achieved as well as ensure that negative impacts are not generated.
- Developing an indicator framework to measure progress towards these targets which can be integrated into MEL frameworks across policies and programmes at multiple levels.

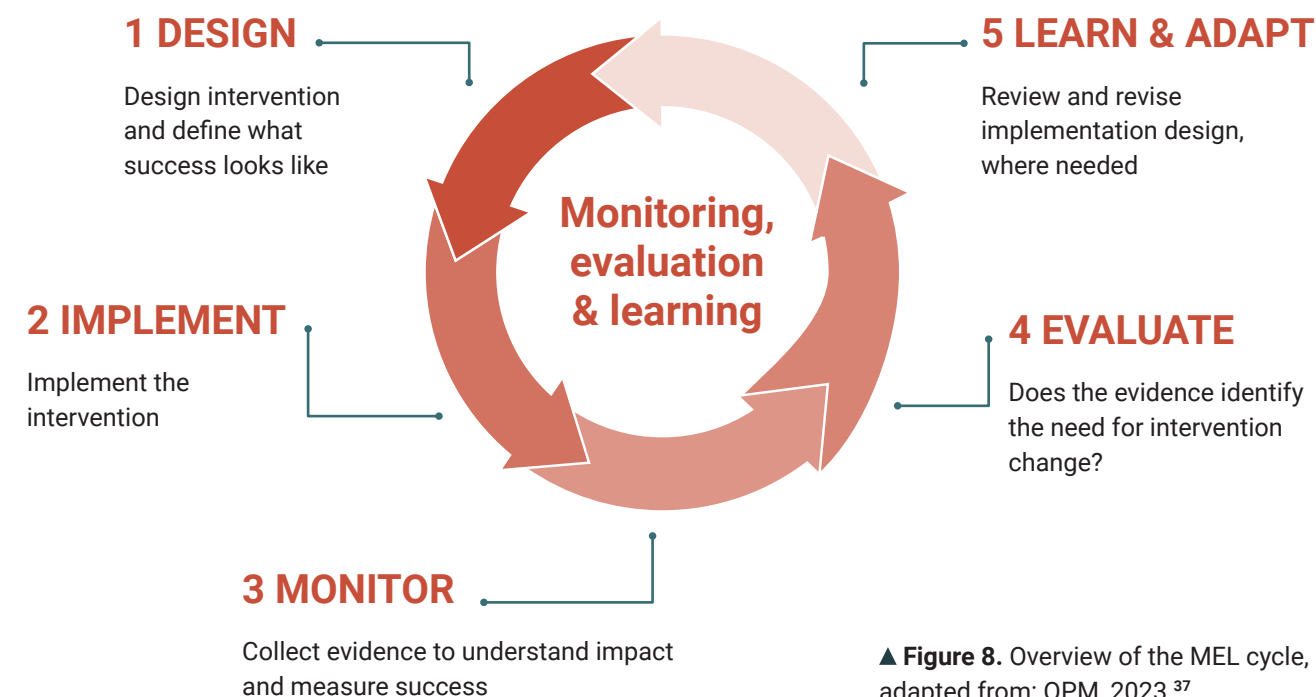
- In some contexts, a national or regional Blue Economy Index might be available or could be developed, such as the Blue Economy Development Index in Indonesia.³⁶ These provide indicators across a range of SBE aspects and can be used as an analytical tool to determine performance and can be integrated into MEL at different levels. Data availability can be a key challenge in ensuring the viability of any MEL or index approach and should be used to indicate where targeted action is needed to address data gaps.
- Theory of Change (ToC) or related approaches such as logic modelling (see Section 5.2) are fundamental to informing MEL. They provide the opportunity for people to work together to articulate a direction of travel, and how they expect change, or impact, to be achieved. The process of identifying goals, objectives, outcomes, along with the risks and assumptions made, inform designing a MEL framework which can ensure these are reflected upon and revised later. Undertaking ToC at the design phase – of a policy, programme or intervention – can be revisited as part of MEL to support learning and an adaptive approach.

In Phase 3, MEL is delivered alongside the long-term processes of marine management, where different people and teams collect data in a coordinated way to report on progress and support learning and adaptation. There will be nested MEL frameworks for measuring progress in relation to different aspects of the SBE, including delivery of policy, such as an SBE or Blue Economy Roadmap, or contributing sub-components, such as a particular MPA programme or MSP implementation. All should be aligned and linked through the use of common indicators and approaches.

As MEL processes are delivered, it's important to ensure responsiveness across relevant institutions and consider possible changes to management approaches or organizations. Sustained commitment to and long-term resourcing of MEL is essential to understand progress and provides the basis for on-going political support. The continuing dialogue and deliberation between government colleagues and wider stakeholders supports learning and the refinement of practice over time. This can include highlighting successes and sharing learning on challenges across programmes to identify the institutional change needed to deliver SBE outcomes.

Monitoring to underpin MEL will indicate data gaps and can guide actions to collect knowledge to enhance the evidence base for SBE implementation, informing the design of appropriate strategies. Monitoring can be delivered through partnerships between public bodies, stakeholders and scientific

research institutions at national, regional and global scales. Beyond each country or local context, MEL is critical to promote learning in relation to SBE transition worldwide and sharing experience by publishing outputs and engaging in international fora would expedite and advance progress globally.



▲ **Figure 8.** Overview of the MEL cycle, adapted from: OPM, 2023.³⁷

Ensuring equity through MEL processes

Equity rests on four key principles - **Achieving Fairness, Preventing Harm, Respecting Rights, and Supporting Flourishing** - and encompasses both processes and the outcomes they produce.²²

Process-based equity focuses on how people are treated and the fairness of decision-making, while outcomes-based equity addresses the results of actions, emphasising the responsibility to deliver just outcomes and avoid reinforcing or creating disadvantage.

To assess equity in SBE policy implementation, MEL processes can include:

- Indicators focused on the distribution of costs and benefits, for example distribution benefits
- Restorative justice indicators³⁸
- Disaggregated indicators associated with particular rights holders and marginalised groups, such as compensation arrangements and restitution of land to Indigenous Peoples

Enabling gender mainstreaming through MEL processes

Integrate gender-specific indicators into MEL frameworks to track progress on gender equality. Examples of Gender-Specific Indicators for MEL:

- Participation: Percentage of women participating in SBE decision-making processes.
- Access: Number of women accessing resources and benefits from the blue economy.
- Impact: Assessment of the impact of SBE activities on women’s livelihoods, health, and well-being.
- Capacity Building: Number of women receiving training and capacity-building support
- Financial Support: Amount of funding allocated to women-led initiatives and businesses.

Ensure that data collection and analysis include gender-disaggregated data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how the SBE transition impacts women and marginalised groups. For example, measure the participation of women in decision-making processes, access to resources, and benefits from the blue economy.



Photo credit: Envato

Enablers for Phase 3: key activities

The key activities to support each of the enablers during Phase 3 include:

Effective leadership	• Ensure that effective leadership is maintained throughout the transition process so that progress is sustained through identifying and nurturing future leaders.
Integrated institutional frameworks	• Adopt & coordinate relevant management frameworks, e.g. MSP and ICZM.
Participatory processes	• Ensure that stakeholders and marginalised communities are provided opportunities to actively participate in MEL processes and contribute to responsive decision-making.
International cooperation	• Continue participation in regional and international frameworks and forums to share knowledge, learning and experiences surrounding the transition to the SBE.
Sustainable finance	• Identify sustainable financing mechanisms proactively throughout the transition.
Capacity and resources (human and technological)	• Continual monitoring of internal capacity and resource needs, ensuring that there is sufficient support across all stages of SBE delivery, including management, implementation, enforcement, and monitoring.
Accessible data, information, and knowledge	• Data and information sharing are interlinked with MEL, which relies on long-term, targeted data collection to track progress and inform adaptive management.

Phase 3 summary

Phase 3 focuses on translating high-level strategies into practical action through integrated management and governance processes, ensuring that the economic benefits of the SBE are balanced with environmental protection and social inclusion. Sustaining outcomes relies on continuous decision-making and adaptation, where MEL systems provide real-time data to assess progress and guide necessary adjustments. This phase represents the delivery of the SBE transition across the medium and

long-term, moving to the maintenance of SBE Goals as business as usual, recognising that progress will be iterative and timescales for delivery may differ across policy areas, sectors, and activities.

The iterative relationship between Phase 3 and earlier phases is essential to the transition: insights gained through MEL processes will inform updates to strategic planning (Phase 2), while information gathered through monitoring frameworks may fill gaps in data for baselines (Phase 1), ensuring the transition remains adaptive and responsive to changing conditions and new challenges.



Summary

Transitioning to an environmentally sustainable, resilient and equitable blue economy is an opportunity to redefine how we interact with our ocean, coasts and inland water systems in the face of human needs and the triple-planetary crisis of climate change, nature loss and pollution. The UNEP SBE Transition Framework offers an approach to strengthen and evolve existing blue economy systems and guide decision-makers to develop and deliver bespoke pathways towards an SBE.

The Transition Framework sets out the critical components of developing and implementing a strategic approach to delivering an SBE for a country, local area or wider region. It supports countries in understanding how the various activities related to policy development and delivery fit together to enable a transition towards a more inclusive, integrated and coherent approach. Ensuring that no one is left behind is a crucial ingredient for sustainability, hence equality, inclusivity, and a rights-based approach are recommended across all the relevant policies, strategies, and plans.

Transitioning to an SBE requires a governance framework that takes account of land-based policies and activities that impact on the ocean and coasts. The ocean-based economy must be fully embedded within the wider economy, overcoming existing

divisions between the land-based and ocean-based economy. This applies at local, national and global scales. The transition to an SBE therefore needs to take place across multiple spheres and scales within which we influence the ocean environment, the benefits we derive from it, and the way those benefits are distributed. As such, the management systems and governance arrangements for generating an SBE must include core maritime activities and immediate coastal linkages as a minimum, but also recognise and account for linkages to address inland water systems through a comprehensive enabling environment connecting land and sea.

There is no blueprint for addressing the imperative for rapid change being driven by the accelerating planetary crisis. Achieving real change will depend on our ability to work together, embrace uncertainty, and make progress wherever possible. The Transition Framework supports a structured, learn-by-doing approach, encouraging stakeholders to think creatively and collaboratively to respond to challenges in ways that are relevant to their own contexts. By acting inclusively, and sharing knowledge and learnings at all scales, we can accelerate the transition to a more sustainable future for the benefit of current and future generations.

7

Appendices

Appendix 1

Sustainable Blue Economy Rapid Readiness Assessment (RRA)

The Sustainable Blue Economy Rapid Readiness Assessment (RRA) tool is designed to enable quick and efficient understanding of the activities needed to deliver a transition. The RRA process - particularly its facilitated dialogue - provides a range of opportunities and benefits for SBE transition planning, including:

- Education and awareness raising across the SBE stakeholder landscape to create a shared understanding of the benefits of the SBE transition, and the related challenges and opportunities.
- Mobilising and motivating stakeholders, and developing stewardship and buy-in.
- Facilitating collaboration, inclusivity and representation in SBE decision-making, planning, and implementation.
- Developing a shared ambition, priorities, and appetite for change.
- Catalysing future action.

The RRA has been developed by UNEP to streamline information gathering through a participatory process of facilitated dialogue and rapid desk-based review. There is no singular way to conduct an SBE RRA, but the following phases provide a simple and standardised approach that can be scaled up or down according to context, requirements, and the resources available, recognising that each country or local area has its own unique cultural, political, economic, and environmental context.

Key steps of an RRA process include:

- 1.Establishing a lead function:** Identifying who will be responsible for coordinating the RRA process (usually the government department or cross-government committee mandated to deliver the SBE transition). This provides leadership for the process, and accountability for delivery.
- 2.Identifying key stakeholders:** To ensure inclusivity and representation throughout the SBE transition process, and to promote buy-in and stewardship of future actions, the broadest range of relevant stakeholders should be engaged throughout the RRA process. Effort must be made to consider marginalised groups and to support their participation in bringing them into the process.
- 3.Outreach and awareness raising:** There are a range of approaches to kick-start outreach, and there may be existing channels that can be leveraged across different stakeholder groups.

- An introductory webinar can be a helpful, low-cost way to prepare participants for the RRA process and early engagement provides an opportunity to familiarise them with the SBE Transition Framework and to outline the full RRA process. Alternative routes for engagement may also be needed to ensure accessibility and inclusivity.

4.Information gathering - rapid desk-based review: a high-level, rapid review of the current national SBE landscape which considers the existing status of the following core enablers for the SBE transition (Section 3.4), identifying key challenges and opportunities for progress, for example:

- The existing legislative and policy framework for the SBE, including relevant social and environmental sustainability goals, and plans for SBE growth.
- The mandated leadership, institutional infrastructure, capacity and sustainable finance required.
- The stakeholders and coalitions needed to develop and deliver the transition.
- The data and monitoring required to inform decision-making and MEL.

5.Information gathering - facilitated dialogue: Dialogue is the most important aspect of the RRA and should be the focal point of the information gathering phase, bringing together a broad range of relevant stakeholders across all levels to develop a shared understanding of the benefits and priority outcomes of an SBE transition. The RRA provides a forum to share perspectives on the current landscape and their/ other's role(s) within it, explore the key challenges and opportunities related to the SBE transition, and collectively prioritise high-level actions or next steps. Consider marginalised groups and how to support bringing them into the dialogue.

6.RRA report and action plan: The RRA report articulates the findings of the RRA with identified actions to take forward the SBE as co-developed by participants through the RRA process. These will generally focus on short-term (1-3 years) 'quick win' actions that can catalyse progress, and may focus on enhancing existing processes and initiatives and allocation of resources. The RRA report and action plan includes a consultation phase to ensure broad support and ownership.

RRA: Facilitated dialogue

Depending on the number of participants involved and accessibility considerations, a facilitated RRA workshop can be held virtually, in a hybrid format, or in-person. If resources and access allow, it is ideal to host an in-person workshop, to foster networking and relationship building through the dialogue. Workshops can be conducted with a 1- or 2-day agenda, designed to fulfil country or local objectives for the RRA process, but discussions should be facilitated to encourage open and accessible discussion across the fullest range of stakeholders. By focusing on open lines of enquiry (e.g. “what is the problem we are trying to solve?”), the dialogue can improve stakeholder engagement by avoiding specialised knowledge or technical jargon, for example:

- What are the key problems transitioning to an SBE can help to solve?
- What are the main opportunities an SBE could help to achieve?
- What are the key challenges and barriers hindering progress towards an SBE?
- What are the priority near term (1-3 year) high-level actions that could catalyse progress towards an SBE?
- Who are the key stakeholders or coalitions that will need to be involved?

The RRA workshop can also help to inform a Theory of Change process as part of Phase 2 (Planning the Transition) (Section 5.2).

Following the workshop, there may be a need to conduct additional information gathering to fill gaps in knowledge, clarify insights from the workshop, or to confirm outcomes of the analysis. Depending on requirements, additional engagement could include online surveys, sector-based focus groups, or one-to-one interviews with key stakeholders.

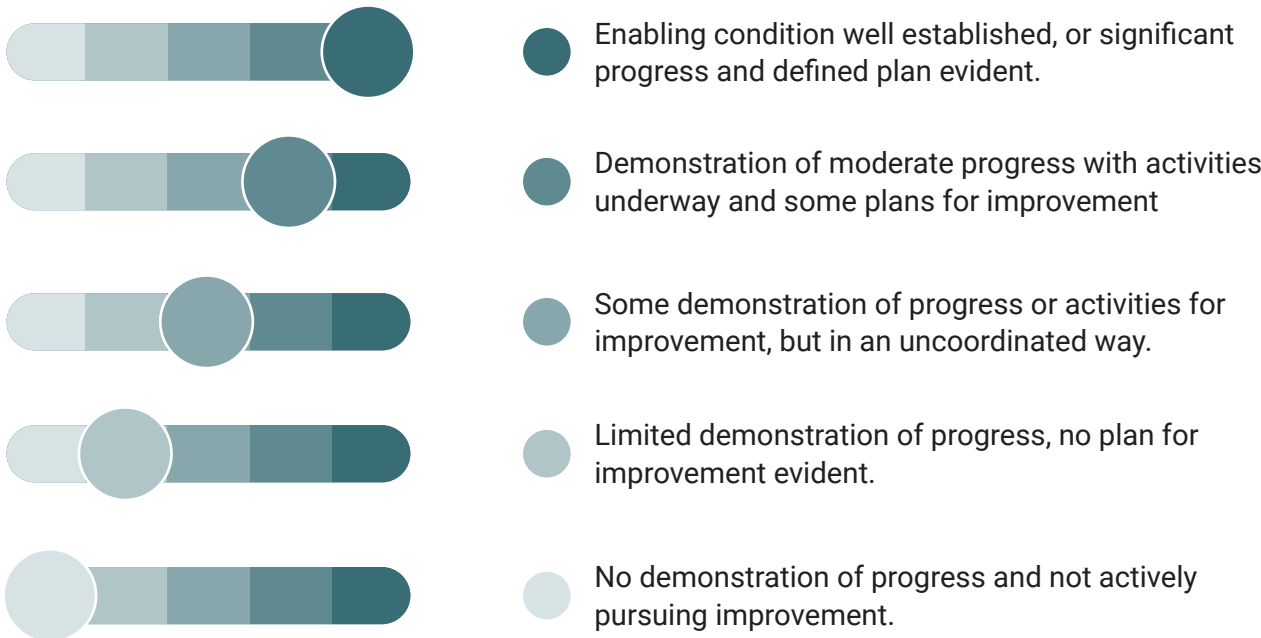
Conducting the readiness assessment

To articulate the findings of the RRA process, it is necessary to define and agree the assessment criteria, that will determine the outcome of the RRA for a country. This will need to include consideration of how to assess ‘how ready is ready enough?’.

It can be helpful to frame this question in terms of current progress made towards the seven SBE enabling

conditions detailed in Section 3.4. The scale in Figure 9 has been adopted in pilot RRAs, conducted in Antigua and Barbuda³⁹, and Trinidad and Tobago⁴⁰, with each enabling condition individually assessed against the same scale.

This scoring approach provides a way to interpret readiness in a relative way and will be based on largely qualitative judgements. Defining the assessment criteria before the dialogue phase can help to inform engagement and information gathering objectives.



▲ Figure 9. Scale used to assess readiness for an SBE transition.



Tools, resources and examples

7.1 SBE Transition Phase 1: Understanding the System

Equity and social baselines

Useful resources

UNDP (2017) [Social Vulnerability Assessment Tools for Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Programming](#)

This is a guidance document that provides an outline and a proposal to assist managers and practitioners in developing social vulnerability studies concerning climate change and disasters in countries affected by climate change. The document also provides relevant case studies.

IPCC (2002) [Vulnerability assessment for climate adaptation](#)

A technical paper that presents a structured approach for different levels of analysis putting climate change vulnerability into a conceptual context.

IUCN [The Climate Change Resilience and Adaptation Planning Tool for MPAs and Marine OECMs](#)

Guidance on how to adapt MPA management in the context of climate change.

UNEP [Inclusive Wealth Report](#)

The Inclusive Wealth Report 2023, the fourth iteration of the series, is a global assessment of the inclusive wealth of 163 countries for 1990–2019. The inclusive wealth index measures the wealth of countries through the analysis of a country's productive base including the assets from which human wellbeing is derived, - manufactured, human and natural capital.

World Bank [Poverty and Inequality Platform](#)

The Poverty and Inequality Platform (PIP) is an interactive online tool that offers access to the World Bank's estimates of poverty, inequality, and shared prosperity, as well as a methodology handbook. PIP

provides a comprehensive view of global, regional, and country-level trends for more than 160 economies around the world.

World Bank [Poverty & Equity Assessments \(national assessments\)](#)

The World Bank's Poverty and Equity Assessments are undertaken at a national scale and are detailed national reports that analyse poverty and inequality through household data, identifying key socio-economic drivers and disparities across different population groups. These assessments inform targeted poverty reduction strategies and monitor progress towards achieving the SDGs.

UNFCCC (2025) [A New Decade for Advancing Gender-Responsive Climate Policies That Benefit All](#)

A series of UN Climate change resources highlight the benefits of including a gender perspective in various areas of climate action, demonstrating how such inclusion improves efficiency and provides broader social benefits.

Rahaman, M.S., Dana, L.P., Anjum, N. (2024) [Empowering Women in Building a Sustainable Blue Economy](#).

In: Leal Filho, W., Salvia, A.L., Eustachio, J.P.P., Dinis, M.A.P. (eds) Handbook of Sustainable Blue Economy. Springer.

Outlines how women are significant contributors to the blue economy through various roles, and how women's empowerment is a powerful driver of building a sustainable blue economy

Examples

Socio-economic Assessment:

[Socio-Economic and Ecological Assessment of the Blue Economy in Tanzania \(2022\)](#)

[Socio-Economic Assessment of the Blue Economy in Seychelles \(2021\)](#)

[Socio-economic baseline assessment in Thayawthatangyi and Langann Islands Myeik Archipelago, Myanmar \(2014\)](#)

[Center for Global Development. The Socioeconomic Impact of Climate Change in Developing Countries in the Next Decades \(2024\)](#)

Climate Risk Assessment:

[Africa Climate Security Risk Assessment \(2023\)](#)

[Climate risk report for the East Africa region \(2022\)](#)

Inclusive Wealth Assessment:

[Inclusive Wealth of Pakistan: The Case for Investing in Natural Capital and Restoration \(2021\)](#)

[Measurement of the ocean wealth of nations in China: An inclusive wealth approach \(2018\)](#)

Human Poverty Assessment:

[Towards a More Inclusive Zanzibar Economy: Zanzibar Poverty Assessment \(2022\)](#)

Gender mainstreaming in sustainable blue economy

Useful resources

Gender Responsive Sustainable Blue Economy Policy and Planning

UN-Women (2018) [Increasing women's participation in the policy making processes on local level: Manual for civil society organizations](#)

Provide guidelines for civil society organizations on the most successful methods and practices for ensuring greater inclusion of women in the public policy-making processes on the local level and strengthen their influence in the community.

CARE (2019) [GENDER MARKER MINI-GUIDE Monitoring Evaluation and Learning \(MEL\) in Practice](#)

A practical guide on monitoring, evaluation and learning criteria for gender markers and what these MEL criteria on gender means in practice, illustrated with case examples.

Shaleh, S.R.M., Fui-Fui, C., Mustafa, S. (2020) [Gender Roles in Inclusive Blue Economy](#)

Addresses how to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in the blue economy, including descriptions of a range of relevant terms.

UNCTAD (2021) [The blue economy is an ocean of opportunity to advance gender equality](#)

Examples on the potential for women in the blue economy by improving gender equality in tourism and fisheries sectors.

International Growth Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science (2023) [Sustainable fishing and women's labour in the blue economy](#)

Blog discussing how women's labour in the blue economy is often undocumented, unequally compensated, and more vulnerable to climate shocks. Formalising women's employment and investing in their education can help improve gender equity and sustainable development outcomes for them and the oceans.

UNDP and UN-Women (2022) [Women's Meaningful Participation in Transitional Justice - Advancing Gender Equality and Building Sustainable Peace](#)

Research brief exploring what women's meaningful participation in transitional justice means in policy and practice. It addresses the unique barriers to women's meaningful participation in transitional justice processes as a result of gender-based discrimination.

Useful resources

Frontiers in Political Science (2023) [Diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Blue Economy: Why they matter and how do we achieve them? Frontiers in Political Science, Vol. 4, 2022](#)

This paper reviews the ongoing social inequalities in the blue economy and distribution of benefits and costs across different groups in society. It also explores why equity matters, and how it can be achieved. The paper suggests that lack of equity considerations within the blue economy investments can undermine ocean-based activities such as marine wildlife conservation, in turn disrupting the ocean sustainability agenda.

Mariama Williams (2023) [Financing the Blue Economy: Impacts and Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the global South](#)

Review paper that undertakes a critical south feminist evaluation/analysis of new development and gender equality financing in general and proposed blue economy financing mechanisms in particular, highlighting primary beneficiaries, potential risks and other concerns.

Nordic Council of Ministers (2024) [Ensuring Gender Equality in Nordic Blue Economy](#)

Technical report on the current state of gender equality in the maritime sector. It offers actionable

recommendations for policymakers, industry leaders, and educational institutions to promote gender equality and harness the potential and value of women in this field.

World Bank (2024) [The Blue Economy: An Ocean of Opportunity for Women](#)

A compilation of project examples and lessons on women empowerment in the blue economy in the Caribbean.

UNDP (2024) [Women's Vital Role toward achieving a Sustainable Ocean Future. Enablers and essential contributors to a healthy ocean and a sustainable Blue Economy](#)

The transformative potential of women's inclusion in the Blue Economy is illustrated through various examples across the Asia-Pacific region

Grameen Foundation (2025) [Building Economic Inclusion via the Blue Economy](#)

Regional program to advance inclusive commercial engagement and women's economic empowerment (WEE) in the Pacific Islands. It focuses on the power of the blue and green economies to deepen the market participation of women entrepreneurs in the island nations of Palau, Nauru, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands.



Photo credit: Envato

Environmental baselines

Useful resources

Natural Capital Accounting:

United Nations System of Environmental-Economic Accounting

The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) is a framework that integrates economic and environmental data to provide a more comprehensive and multipurpose view of the interrelationships between the economy and the environment and the stocks and changes in stocks of environmental assets, as they bring benefits to humanity. It contains the internationally agreed standard concepts, definitions, classifications, accounting rules and tables for producing internationally comparable statistics and accounts.

Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (2022) [Ocean Accounts Framework](#)

This is a conceptual framework that aims to enhance the consistency, comparability and coherence of ocean-related maps, data, statistics, and indicators across social, environmental and economic domains. The Framework describes the following components of the marine realm:

- Interactions between the ocean economy and the ocean environment.
- The stocks and changes in stocks (flows) of ocean assets (natural capital) that provide benefits to people.
- The social and governance factors affecting the status and condition of environmental assets and associated benefits.
- Guidance on ocean economy satellite accounting.

The Oceans Accounts Framework is aligned with other international guidance, including the SEEA Central Framework and SEEA Ecosystem Accounting.

Additional guidance from the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership includes [Ocean Accounts for Sustainable Ocean Plans: Enabling Decision-Makers to Measure Progress](#). The document provides guidance on integrating ocean accounts with Sustainable Ocean Plans to achieve holistic ocean governance, enhancing policy coherence, optimising resource allocation, and fostering inclusive stakeholder engagement.

Satellite Accounting:

Caribbean Development Bank (2019) [Measuring the Blue Economy: The System of National Accounts and Use of Blue Economy Satellite Accounts](#)

The report explores the use of national accounts data to measure the impact of increased investments in the blue economy. It also includes a case study, using Jamaica's System of National Accounts to estimate direct and indirect growth impact of blue economy activities.

OECD (2021) [Blueprint for Improved Measurement of the International Ocean Economy: An Exploration of Satellite Accounting for Ocean Economic Activity](#)

The blueprint outlines national approaches to measuring ocean economies, establishes an OECD definition of ocean economic activities for statistical purposes, and introduces a plan to improve international ocean economy statistics through the development of satellite accounts.

Climate Vulnerability Assessment:

NOAA Fisheries. [Climate Vulnerability Assessment Tool](#)

A tool to determine the climate change vulnerability of different marine species and habitats.

Examples

European Strategy for environmental accounts 2024-2028

Natural Capital Assessment of the Orkney Marine Region Area (2021)

Marine Accounts, Natural Capital, UK (2021)

Natural Capital Accounting Pilot Study in A Protected Marine Area in the Balearic Islands (2021)

Ascension Island Natural Capital Assessment: Marine ecosystem services report (2018)

Marine Economy Satellite Account 2014-2021

Economic baselines

Useful resources

UNECA [Blue Economy Valuation Toolkit](#)

Provides methods and tools to assess the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of the blue economy. It evaluates the contributions of blue economy sectors to GDP, job creation, and social welfare, and helps capture changes in stocks of natural capital and ecosystem services. By offering a comprehensive framework, the toolkit supports informed decision-making and policy development, promoting an SBE.

UNEP, IMF, GIZ [The Green Fiscal Policy Network](#)

This network aims to support governments in designing and implementing fiscal policies that promote environmental sustainability, climate action, and economic development. By providing technical assistance, research, and policy recommendations, the network helps countries reform tax systems, reduce environmentally harmful subsidies, and create incentives for green investments.

[Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action. Driving Climate Action through Economic and Fiscal Policy and Practice \(2022\)](#)

This guidance provides key areas in which finance ministers can take actions to prepare and improve climate change readiness of financial systems. Methods covered include macroeconomic modelling, climate-informed fiscal risk assessment, green budgeting, public investment and asset management, and green public procurement. The document draws from applied experience and provides insights into useful tools and frameworks; while also covering what consequences a country, region, or local area can face in cases of inaction.

World Bank (2021) [Blue Public Expenditure Review Guidance Note](#)

This guidance note, developed as part of the PROBLUE programme, is intended to help country economists to plan and undertake a Blue public expenditure review (PER), to better understand where and how resources are currently spent to address, improve and oversee marine and coastal ecosystems and sectors, and to measure the success of that investment. The guidance will help to inform future public expenditure planning to support the SBE transition.

Country or local area Diagnostics

Organizations such as the OECD and multilateral development banks regularly undertake country diagnostics or analyses to inform their activities and those of the global investment community and wider stakeholders. These can provide useful insights into a country's current situation in relation to the SBE and using these as a reference point can provide a strong framework and consistency in reporting between countries. International reporting requirements for United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention on Biological Diversity also provide useful economic data.

Examples

Sustainable Ocean Economy Country Diagnostics of Indonesia (2021)

System mapping

Useful resources

Center for the Evaluation of Complexity Across the Nexus (CECAN). [Participatory Systems Mapping: a practical guide](#)

A step-by-step guide following eleven steps to develop a participatory system map using simple tools such as pen, paper, and post-it notes.

UNDP (2021) [Integrated Approach Using System Mapping for Forest Positive Agricultural Commodities Impact Brief](#)

This impact brief focuses on how the Good Growth Partnership has used system mapping in its Integrated Approach to foster sustainable agricultural commodity production in Indonesia, Liberia, Brazil, and Paraguay.

New Climate Institute / GIZ. [The Actor and Policy Mapping Tool](#)

An open-source tool to map actors, policies, and policy planning processes. It can help to track linkages between actors and policies, and to visually display policy planning processes.

European Commission. [Knowledge for Policy. System mapping tool](#)

This step-by-step guide provides a clear outline of how to develop a policy system map. It is a product of the European Commission's platform for evidence-based policymaking, which aims to bridge the science-policy gap by bringing scientific evidence and policymaking together.



Photo credit: Envato

7.2 SBE Transition Phase 2: Setting Vision and Objectives

Planning the transition

Useful resources

United Nations Development Group [Theory of Change – UNDAF Companion Guidance](#).

Guidance to support the development of a ToC in the context of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, which can be applied to different contexts to help design and navigate a ToC process.

[Center for Theory of Change](#)

The Center for Theory of Change is a non-profit organization that promotes standards and practice for the development and implementation of ToC, with a particular focus on its use in international development, sustainability, education, human rights and social change. The website includes free-source resources to explain the ToC process.

United Nations (2021) [Policy Scenario Analysis Using SEEA Ecosystem Accounting](#)

A report by the UN's System of Environmental Accounting (SEEA), providing guidance on how to improve the effectiveness of decision-making for sustainable development through the use of ecosystem accounts in scenario analysis, and particularly how to link the use of scenario analysis models with policymaking. The report also includes case study examples from China and South Africa.

OECD (2020) [Sustainable Ocean for All: Harnessing the Benefits of Sustainable Ocean Economies for Developing Countries, The Development Dimension](#)

Provides a comprehensive analysis for policy makers to inform policies for sustainable ocean economies in low-capacity or low-income countries. It gives insights into trends in selected ocean-based industries, and examples of policy instruments, including economic tools to promote ocean conservation and its sustainable use. The report contains a financial analysis of required assistance for low-capacity or low-income countries to transition into an SBE. Based on a cross-country evaluation, the report provides tailor-made recommendations for more ambitious and effective policy frameworks, including cooperation and finance needs to help low-capacity or low-income countries achieve sustainable ocean economies.

United Nations Global Compact [Practical Guidance for the UN Global Compact Sustainable Ocean Principles](#)

These documents provide good practice examples and implementation support for sustainable actions for each sector. Furthermore, each guidance gives an overview of challenges and opportunities in relation to sustainability.

Examples

[Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data Theory of Change](#)

The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data's ToC explains how their activities are intended

to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impacts and provides an example of how to present a high-level ToC framework and narrative.

Delivering policy coherence

Examples

[Indonesia's Blue Economy Roadmap \(2023\)](#)

[St Lucia's National Ocean Policy and Strategic Action Plan \(2019\)](#)

[Fiji's National Ocean Policy 2020-2030 \(2020\)](#)

[Chile's National Ocean Program \(2018\)](#)

Financing the transition

Useful resources

UNEP FI (2021) [Turning the Tide: How to Finance a Sustainable Ocean Recovery](#)

Detailed strategies and mechanisms for financing the restoration and sustainable use of ocean resources, providing policymakers, investors, and stakeholders with frameworks and actionable recommendations for mobilising capital towards ocean recovery efforts.

UNEP FI (2022) [Diving Deep: Finance, Ocean Pollution and Coastal Resilience](#)

A science-based, actionable toolkit aiming to help banks, insurers and investors align decision-making with a healthy ocean and a sustainable blue economy.

Friends of Ocean Action (2020) [The Ocean Finance Handbook](#)

Outlines financial instruments, investment opportunities, and best practices for financing sustainable ocean initiatives, serving as a resource for financial institutions, investors, and project developers to navigate and implement sustainable blue finance projects effectively.

[Taskforce for Nature-related Financial Disclosures](#)

An initiative aimed at developing a framework for organizations to report and act on evolving nature-related risks and opportunities, encouraging businesses to integrate nature-related considerations into financial decision-making and risk management.

WWF (2021) [Navigating Ocean Risk - Value at Risk in the Global Blue Economy](#)

Navigating Ocean Risk assesses the financial risks that business-as-usual practices pose to the asset management community, quantifying potential losses from ocean degradation and climate impacts. It helps asset managers understand their exposure to ocean risks and supports a shift towards more sustainable blue economy investments.

UNEP FI (2024) [Setting Sail: Target setting in the Sustainable Blue Economy](#)

A manual to support financial institutions in implementing the Turning the Tide and Diving Deep sector guidance and setting targets for the Sustainable Blue Economy.

UNEP FI and UN Global Compact (2025) [Ocean Investment Protocol](#)

A framework for financial institutions, policy makers and industry leaders to lead the growth of the sustainable ocean economy to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 14 – Life Below Water – and other related SDGs.

OECD (2025) [Promoting Sustainable Ocean Economies. Guidance for Development Co-operation](#)

Provides a comprehensive and cross-cutting set of recommendations on how development co-operation providers can support partner countries in transitioning to a sustainable ocean economy.

Examples

Green/sustainable taxonomies:

[Indonesia Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance \(in Indonesian\)](#)

[South African Green Finance Taxonomy \(2022\)](#)

Pipeline analysis:

[The Sustainable Development Analysis and Opinion Mechanism](#)

7.3 SBE Transition Phase 3: Delivering the transition

Useful resources

OECD (2006) Applying Strategic Environmental Assessment. Good Practice Guidance for Development Co-operation

This practical guidance on key steps in the process of SEA presents twelve different ‘entry points’ for the application of SEA in development cooperation. For each entry point, the guide provides a checklist of questions and hands-on case studies. Evaluation and capacity development for SEA processes are also included.

International Institute for Environment and Development (2004) Strategic Environmental Assessment: An International Review With a special focus on developing countries and countries in transition

As a rapidly evolving field, the SEA of policies, plans and programmes provides new approaches and areas of application. This review offers insights into current trends of SEA applications, tools and initiatives and thereby presents a baseline and reference guide for SEA.

JPI Oceans (2024) Handbook for cumulative effect assessment

The JPI Oceans Handbook for CEAs is a practical tool that uses examples to highlight where CEAs have been undertaken in practice.

EIA Convention on Biological Diversity. Environmental Impact Assessment

This is a supplementary resource to prepare training and workshops on the use and application of EIAs. It is intended for this guide to serve as a reference for conducting EIAs in practice drawing directly from the respective sections of the document on planning preparing and practicing EIAs.

International Association for Impact Assessment Best practice guidance for biodiversity inclusive impact assessment - A manual for practitioners and reviewers in South Asia

This guide goes beyond a traditional impact assessment that only considers effects on the environment by applying tools for both ecological and economic impact evaluation. The guide also provides insights into international best practices applied in a regional context

Marine spatial planning

Useful resources

World Bank ProBlue (2022) Marine Spatial Planning for a Resilient and Inclusive Blue Economy Toolkit

A series of guidance notes and factsheets related to the different MSP phases, the data and tools to inform different steps, and economic analyses to guide investments.

UNESCO-IOC/European Commission MSPglobal International Guide on Marine/Maritime Spatial Planning

The MSPglobal Guide has been developed to assist governments, partners and MSP practitioners in the development of marine spatial plans.

European Union (2024) MSP Tools and Guidance

A source of different tools and guidance documents for MSP practitioners and interested parties considering the development, implementation, monitoring and/or evaluation of marine plans.

The Marine Spatial Planning Index (2023) A tool to guide and assess marine spatial planning

This index is considered a guiding tool for practitioners in MSP and provides insights on how MSP developed and changed over time. The tool translates MSP principles into practices through a

user-friendly interface and allows for comparison between individual and multiple activities and initiatives across marine regions.

UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (2024) Marine Spatial Planning

UNESCO published its first guide on MSP titled “Marine Spatial Planning: A Step-by-Step Approach toward Ecosystem-based Management” in 2009. Since then, the guide has become an internationally recognised conceptual approach to MSP. In 2017, following the second International Conference on MSP, the IOC adopted the “Joint Roadmap to accelerate MSP processes worldwide” (MSProadmap) with the aim of increasing maritime areas in which MSP has been applied by one third by 2030. Four years later, the IOC joined the new coalition Ocean Action 2030, which provides assistance on Sustainable Ocean Plans to the countries of the Ocean Panel. In the same year, the IOC published a new guide called ‘MSPglobal: international guide on marine/maritime spatial planning (2021), which draws on the progress made since IOC’s first guide of 2009.

Integrated coastal zone management

Useful resources

World Bank (1996) Guidelines for Integrated Coastal Zone Management

This is a conceptual presentation of the application of ICZM within the context of evolving sustainable practices.

UNEP (1995) Guidelines for integrated management of coastal and marine areas

This is a general guidance for policymakers, managers and practitioners to develop and implement ICZM at national level.

Examples

Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Continental Ecuador and Galapagos Islands: Challenges and Opportunities in a Changing Tourism and Economic Context (2019)



Photo credit: Envato

Sustainable ocean plans

Useful resources

High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, (2021) [100 per cent Sustainable Ocean Management: An Introduction to Sustainable Ocean Plans, 2021](#) This guiding framework is meant to support the development of ‘Sustainable Ocean Plans’ considering the ‘who, what, when, where, why and how’ and described initial steps for sustainable ocean planning.

High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, (2025) [Handbook on Sustainable Ocean Plans. A Practitioners’ Guide](#)
A practical guide to help countries design and implement Sustainable Ocean Plans (SOPs). SOPs are comprehensive, country-driven frameworks to sustainably manage 100% of the ocean area under national jurisdiction.

Land-sea planning

Useful resources

EU MSP Platform (2024, <https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/>)
The European Union MSP Platform offers guidance on how to integrate and align LSP into MSP across key marine development sectors.

NatureServe (2016) [Integrated Land-Sea Planning Toolkit](#)
This is a US-developed planning tool kit that provides map-based scenario development options. This toolkit has been used across the US coasts.

[Taking Account of Land-Sea Interactions in Marine Spatial Planning \(2019\)](#)
Considering the integration of LSP in MSP, this book chapter provides insights into the role and limitations of MSP in relation to the connecting marine planning to activities on land. It sets out a framework for the consideration of land-sea-interactions exploring different dimensions and examples within the European context and presents future opportunities to improve the marine planning.

Marine protected areas

Useful resources

IUCN (2019) [Guidelines for applying the IUCN protected area management categories to marine protected areas](#)
IUCN provides guidance on how to apply there MPA management categories to areas worldwide, to ensure management is reported in a coherent, transparent, consistent and comparable manner. These categories are applicable to all forms of MPAs, if the site meets the IUCN definition for a ‘protected area’, which is ‘a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values’. To further facilitate such reporting and evaluating MPA management, IUCN published a supplementary second guidance

on MPAs in 2019, which supplement the first edition of 2008.

IUCN (2024) [Protected Area Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool](#)
This tool supplements the IUCN MPA management evaluation through the IUCN categorisation.

UNESCO (2015) [Managing effectively the world’s most iconic marine protected areas: A Best Practice Guide](#)
The guide provides a step-by-step approach to defining a clear, future-oriented vision for MPA management, enabling decision-makers, practitioners, and MPA managers to prioritise actions that will shape positive outcomes for marine areas.

Other effective area-based conservation measures

Useful resources

IUCN [Site-level Tool Identifying Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures \(2019\)](#) and [Recognising and Reporting Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures \(2019\)](#)
The first tool aims to support anyone involved in these measures to determine whether a site qualifies as OECM in line with the legal definition under the Convention on Biological Diversity. The second guidance aims to assist Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to develop a good practice of reporting and recognising OECMs in the assessment

of progress towards the achievement of their conservation targets.

Caribbean Protected Areas Gateway (2024, in Spanish) [OECM Guidelines for Central America](#)
A guide for both government officials and practitioners involved in OECMs that provides a tool to identify, evaluate and monitor such measures in the regional context. Its aim is to support and strengthen planning processes and actions to achieve OECM’s objectives.

Nature-based solutions

Useful resources

IUCN (2020) [Guidance for using the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions](#)
As a results of input and insights from over 800 experts, this document sets out pathways on how nature can provide solutions to global environmental challenges. It provides a framework for designing, implementing and evaluating NbS. There are 8 overarching criteria and 28 indicators that support users in their understanding and application of NbS.

UNDP (2023) [Blue Economies and Nature-based Solutions for Enhanced Climate Action in Latin America and Caribbean Small Island Developing States](#)
This guide provides advice on how to better incorporate blue economy and NbS in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for enhanced climate action, and reviews the status of LAC SIDS in this context, identifying opportunities to enhance action.

World Bank / Problue (2023) [Unlocking Blue Carbon Development: Investment Readiness Framework for Government](#)
This tool supports governments in determining their investments in blue carbon under the Paris Agreement, to deliver real and scalable impact for communities and economies.

IFC (2023) [Deep Blue: Opportunities for Blue Carbon Finance in Coastal Ecosystems](#)
This guide provides an overview of the emerging blue carbon market, and how financial institutions can support blue carbon markets.

High-Level Panel for Sustainable Ocean Economy (2023) [The Blue Carbon Handbook: Blue carbon as a nature-based solution for climate action and sustainable development](#)
This guide provides guidance regarding blue carbon ecosystem management as a solution for climate action, including advocating for a holistic approach that considers integrating adaptation, resilience, biodiversity conservation and community livelihoods.

World Economic Forum (2022) [High Quality Blue Carbon Principles and Guidance](#)
This tool outlines principles and guidance to support alignment amongst stakeholders for blue carbon projects and credits.

Ocean Risk & Resilience Action Alliance and Conservation International (2024) [High-Quality Blue Carbon. Practitioners Guide 2024](#)
The Guide is designed to create a shared understanding of “high quality” in blue carbon projects, helping to foster more transparent and effective collaboration between project developers, investors, and other stakeholders.

Nature-based solutions - examples

Nature-based Solutions Initiative – NbS Case Study Platform and **NbS Policy Platform**

Building with Nature in Indonesia (2015-2018)

Pacific Ecosystem-based Adaptation for Climate Change Plus (PEBACC+) (2022-2026)

Enhancing climate resilience of India's coastal communities, India (2018-25)

7.4 Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Useful resources

International Institute for Environment and Development MEL Handbook for SDG 14 (2019)
This handbook supports governments and agencies in developing MEL practices to ensure regular result tracking for SDG 14 and the 2030 Agenda more broadly, and the dissemination of lessons learnt at local, national, regional and global levels. It focuses on how a range of actors in a variety of contexts can use MEL to understand which SDG 14 targets and initiatives are working, which are not, why, for whom and how. Ultimately, it advocates for widespread learning on how to accelerate progress towards the

transformations needed for success in conserving and using our oceans, seas and marine resources in a sustainable way.

Global NAP Network / United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Adaptation Committee (2024) Toolkit for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning for National Adaptation Plan Processes
This toolkit for MEL is designed for government actors coordinating National Adaptation Plan (NAP) processes, stakeholders, and development partners supporting adaptation planning and implementation.

Examples

Oxford Policy Management (2023) MEL and Adaptive Programming: Experience from two multi-year programmes in international development
This report reflects on MEL experience across international development programming across two case studies and identifies features which support successful learning and adaptation. This includes designing participatory processes for developing theories of change (ToCs) that include implementing organizations or individuals, how to synchronise data collection and analysis within a learning and adaptation cycle, and how to ensure accountability in MEL, including being able to trace how evidence feeds into decision-making and leads to adaptation.

IISD (2024) National Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Systems for Climate Change Adaptation: A comparative analysis of nine countries
This report explores how nine countries are advancing

climate adaptation through innovative monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) systems, shedding light on their progress, challenges, and the integration of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) considerations.

World Bank (2024). Making Waves - World Bank Support for the Blue Economy (2012–23)
This evaluation assesses how well the World Bank is supporting a blue economy approach to achieve sustainable and inclusive development of ocean and coastal states. A key recommendation is to go beyond individual sector approaches and support national policies that include harmonized strategies and practices, breaking silos and connecting different industries and sectors.

For more information on UNEP's work on Sustainable Blue Economy transition and readiness support, please visit: <https://www.unep.org/topics/ocean-seas-and-coasts>

References

1. United Nations. Sustainable Development Goal Targets and Indicators. 2015. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
2. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *The Paris Agreement*. 2015. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>
3. United Nations Environment Programme Convention of Biological Diversity. *The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*. 2022. Available at: <https://www.cbd.int/gbf>
4. United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. *The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*. 2014. Available at: <https://www.undrr.org/implementing-sendai-framework>
5. United Nations. *The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions*. Available at: <https://www.brsmeas.org/>
6. United Nations Environment Programme. *Methodology for SDG-indicator 17.14.1: Mechanisms in place to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development*. Available at: https://wesr.unep.org/media/docs/projects/methodology_17_14_1.pdf
7. High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy. *Transformations for a Sustainable Ocean Economy - A Vision for Protection, Production and Prosperity*. 2020. Available at: <https://oceanpanel.org/>
8. Barzuna C, Haugan P, Barbière J, Swift A, Khan M, Ansong JO et al. *Handbook on Sustainable Ocean Plans: A Practitioners' Guide*. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute; 2025. Available at: <https://oceanpanel.org/>
9. World Wide Fund for Nature. *Principles for a Sustainable Blue Economy*. 2015. Available at: https://www.wwf.fr/sites/default/files/doc-2017-07/15_principles_for_a_sustainable_blue_economy.pdf
10. International Union for Conservation of Nature. *Towards a regenerative Blue Economy*. 2024. Available at: <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2024-005-En.pdf>
11. United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative. *Sustainable Blue Finance - Mobilising Capital for a Sustainable Ocean* [Accessed at 1 May 2026]. Available at: <https://www.unepfi.org/blue-finance>
12. World Economic Forum - Friends of Ocean Action. *The Ocean Finance Handbook*. 2020. Available at: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_FOA_The_Ocean_Finance_Handbook_April_2020.pdf
13. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. *Promoting Sustainable Ocean Economies - Guidance for Development Co-operation*. 2025. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/promoting-sustainable-ocean-economies_72055d7f-en.html
14. World Bank. *Making Waves. World Bank Group Support for the Blue Economy, 2012-2023 – An Independent Evaluation*. 2024. Available at: <https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/evaluations/making-waves>
15. Group of Twenty. *Chennai High-Level Principles for a Sustainable and Resilient Blue/Ocean-based Economy*. 2023. Available at: <https://g20.utoronto.ca/2023/230728-environment.html>
16. United Nations Development Programme. *Action brief – an ocean of opportunities*. 2023. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-02/UNDP-RBAP-Blue-Economy-Action-Brief-2023.pdf>
17. O'Brien K, Garibaldi L and Agrawal A (eds.). *Thematic Assessment Report on the Underlying Causes of Biodiversity Loss and the Determinants of Transformative Change and Options for Achieving the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (Transformative Change Assessment)*. Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services; 2024. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11382215>
18. Diez SM, Patil P, Morton J, Rodriguez DJ, Vanzella A, Robin D et al. *Marine Pollution in the Caribbean: Not a Minute to Waste*. World Bank; 2019. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/482391554225185720/pdf/Marine-Pollution-in-the-Caribbean-Not-a-Minute-to-Waste.pdf>
19. Association of Southeast Asian Nations. *ASEAN Blue Economy Development Framework*. 2023. Available at: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/ASEAN-Blue-Economy-Framework.pdf>
20. African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources. *Africa Blue Economy Strategy*. 2019. Available at: <https://www.au-ibar.org/resources/africa-blue-economy-strategy>
21. Alliance of Small Island States. *About Small Island Developing States*. Available at: <https://www.aosis.org/>
22. Croft F, Breakey H, Voyer M, Cisneros-Montemayor A, Issifu I, Solitei M et al. *Rethinking blue economy governance–A blue economy equity model as an approach to operationalise equity*. Environmental Science & Policy. 2024; 155, 103710. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1462901124000443>
23. United Nations Environment Programme, Food and Agriculture Organisation, International Maritime Organisation, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, International Union for Conservation of Nature et al. *Green Economy in Blue World*. 2012. Available at: <https://wedocs.unep.org/rest/api/core/bitstreams/aa37baea-9e63-44ef-9420-2634c7cf65a5/content>
24. United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative and United Nations Global Compact. *Ocean Investment Protocol*. 2025. Available at: <https://www.unepfi.org/publications/ocean-investment-protocol/>
25. United Nations Global Compact has published practical guidance that can support the development of sectoral plans. Available at: <https://un-globalcompact.org/take-action/practical-guidances-for-the-un-global-compact-sustainable-ocean-principles>
26. Informed by United Nations Environment Programme's *Methodology for SDG-indicator 17.14.1: Mechanisms in place to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development*. Available at: https://wesr.unep.org/media/docs/projects/methodology_17_14_1.pdf
27. United Nations Environment Programme. *Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development Handbook on indicator 17.14.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals*. 2024. Available at: <https://www.unep.org/resources/publication/policy-coherence-sustainable-development-handbook-indicator-17141-sustainable>
28. The Government of Belize is currently designing the world's first fully coastal Project Finance for Permanence with WWF and TNC.
29. The United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative 'Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles' are: Protective, Compliant, Risk-aware, Systemic, Inclusive, Cooperative, Transparent, Purposeful, Impactful, Precautionary, Diversified, Solution-driven, Partnering, Science-led. See further at: <https://www.unepfi.org/blue-finance/the-principles/>
30. United Nations Environment Programme. *Turning the Tide: How to Finance a Sustainable Ocean Recovery*. 2021. Available at: <https://www.unepfi.org/publications/turning-the-tide/>
31. United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative. *Diving Deep: Finance, Ocean Pollution and Coastal Resilience*. 2020. Available at: <https://www.unepfi.org/publications/diving-deep>
32. United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative. *Setting Sail: Target setting in the Sustainable Blue Economy*. 2024. Available at: <https://www.unepfi.org/publications/setting-sail-target-setting-in-the-sustainable-blue-economy>
33. See for example the Blue Economy Research Institute in Seychelles: <https://unisey.ac.sc/beri/>
34. Willsteed EA, Collin S and Koehler L. *Cumulative effects assessments to support marine plan development*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee; 2024. JNCC Report 768. Available at: <https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/ad2730d3-493e-438c-981d-66d1dd25a8c5/jncc-report-768.pdf>
35. United Nations Environment Assembly. *Nature-based solutions for supporting sustainable development*. 2022; UNEP/EA.5/Res.5 Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3999268?ln=en&v=pdf>
36. Archipelagic and Island States Forum. *Blue Economy Development Index*. 2023. Available at: <https://bedi.aisforum.org/>
37. Riemenschneider N, Selvester K, Erikson M and Jasper P. *MEL and Adaptive Programming*. Oxford Policy Management; 2023. Available at: https://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/migrated_bolt_files/mel-adaptive-programming-wp.pdf
38. European Environment Agency. *Delivering justice in sustainability transitions*. 2024. Available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/publications/delivering-justice-in-sustainability-transitions>
39. Commonwealth Secretariat. *Rapid Readiness Assessment for the Transition to a Sustainable Blue Economy: Pilot project in Antigua and Barbuda*. 2023. Available at: <https://thecommonwealth.org/publications/rapid-readiness-assessment-transition-sustainable-blue-economy-pilot-project-antigua>
40. Commonwealth Secretariat. *Rapid Readiness Assessment for the Transition to a Sustainable Blue Economy: Pilot project in Trinidad and Tobago*. 2023. Available at: <https://thecommonwealth.org/publications/rapid-readiness-assessment-transition-sustainable-blue-economy-pilot-project-trinidad>

Special thanks to UNEP's funding partners. For more than 50 years, UNEP has served as the leading global authority on the environment, mobilizing action through scientific evidence, raising awareness, building capacity and convening stakeholders. UNEP's core programme of work is made possible by flexible contributions from Member States and other partners to the Environment Fund and UNEP Planetary Funds. These funds enable agile, innovative solutions for climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste.

Support UNEP. Invest in people and planet.
www.unep.org/funding



www.unep.org
unep-communication-director@un.org