



**AFRICA  
EUROPE  
FOUNDATION**

# **Harnessing Youth Innovation: The Role of Africa and Europe's Young leaders in driving Ocean Governance and Blue Economy**

**An Africa-Europe Youth Mapping Report on  
Ocean Governance and Blue Economy**

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## Executive summary

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The Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) recognizes the vital role of youth in shaping ocean governance and the blue economy, underscoring the urgent need to invest in their agency and prioritize their leadership. However, there is a need for a comprehensive understanding of the existing ecosystem to foster collaboration and establish impactful cross-continental initiatives.

With this in mind, this report aims to serve as a living document, providing a first attempt at mapping various youth-led blue innovation initiatives, platforms and profiles across Africa and Europe. It advocates for empowering African and European youth to drive ocean and climate action, with the goal to support the development of a cross-continental network of young leaders and establishing an Africa-Europe Youth Ambassador Program focused on ocean governance and the blue economy. Additionally, this report seeks to raise awareness of current challenges faced, enhance ocean literacy, and cultivate a youth-centered Africa-Europe Ocean community while strengthening the partnership between the two continents.

The report highlights the increasing engagement of youth in the sustainable management of ocean resources, fostering economic growth while safeguarding marine ecosystems. Young people from both Africa and Europe are actively participating in the global efforts related to climate action, biodiversity conservation and pollution management through avenues such as academia, activism, entrepreneurship, and policy advocacy. Central to their efforts is a dynamic process of acquiring, creating, and sharing knowledge about environmental protection and regeneration within their communities, as well as on national, regional, and global platforms.

This report illuminates the knowledge aspect of youth-led initiatives, organizations, and platforms within the blue economy, exploring how this knowledge drives and inspires youth engagement. It showcases initiatives spearheaded by individuals aged 18 to 35 across Africa and Europe, showcasing the contributions of youth representatives

advocating for cleaner oceans, sustainability, and biodiversity protection. The objectives of AEF include: (i) addressing the skills-demand mismatch through technical and vocational education training; (ii) ensuring greater youth representation in policy discussions; (iii) establishing a cross-continental youth advisory council on ocean governance; (iv) supporting capacity-building programs for youth-led initiatives; and (v) launching an Africa-Europe Young Ambassadors' program for Ocean and Blue Innovation at scale.

The findings underscore the significance of knowledge-sharing mechanisms that empower youth. In Africa, young actors in the blue economy often rely on community-based learning, traditional knowledge, and regional collaboration. Conversely, European youth benefit from access to formal education, scientific research, and digital platforms for advocacy. Despite these differing contexts, youth in both regions' face common challenges including limited resources, difficulties in accessing educational, and barriers to political participation.

The report also highlights opportunities for cross-regional collaboration, as both African and European youth express a strong interest in knowledge exchange, joint research initiatives, employment opportunities, and partnerships that extend beyond merely addressing global climate challenges within the blue economy. This study emphasizes the vital role of knowledge processes in fostering youth-led blue innovation and provides recommendations for stakeholders to strengthen support for youth engagement in climate resilience and sustainability efforts.

As this is a living document, AEF acknowledges that some youth-led initiatives and leaders across Africa and Europe may not be represented. We encourage readers and interested parties to contribute to the growth of this youth-led blue innovation community by providing feedback. Your input is highly valued and can be submitted to the following email address: [ocean@africaeuropefoundation.org](mailto:ocean@africaeuropefoundation.org).



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# Recommendations

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- 1. Importance of Mentorship for scaling up a youth-centred Africa-Europe Ocean Community:** Mentorship is crucial for scaling up a youth-centered Africa-Europe Ocean Community. Young emerging ocean leaders require access to skills, tools, and strategic thinking support, along with connections to mentors and peers in the blue economy sector. This support is essential for developing both personal (soft) skills and professional competencies, building on successful initiatives in ocean governance and the blue economy across Africa and Europe. The mentorship program should include regular networking events, digital platforms, and collaborative projects that tackle pressing issues such as marine conservation, climate change, and sustainable fisheries. By facilitating collaboration and knowledge exchange between youth from both continents, this will empower young leaders to represent their interests on key international platforms, including the UN Ocean Conference, the African Union's Blue Economy initiatives, and European Union marine policies. Additionally, the mentorship should focus on training youth entrepreneurs in establishing youth-led advisory boards, implementing shadowing opportunities for young delegates, and creating official youth representatives at relevant international forums. These efforts will enhance youth engagement and ensure their voices are heard in critical discussions about ocean sustainability.
- 2. Co-designing Specialized Funds for Youth-led Ocean projects:** Creating specialized funds dedicated to supporting youth-led ocean projects, which play a significant role in the financial ecosystem and contribute to the innovation and growth of the blue economy sector. Currently, investments in these innovative and small-scale initiatives are often perceived as high-risk and lack adequate opportunities. To address this challenge, specialized funding should be established that, following an initial screening process, provides grant (or micro-grant) funding to young entrepreneurs. This funding will support their investment efforts and facilitate the completion of necessary due diligence in collaboration with external advisors for accreditation. Furthermore, specialized funding should enhance the risk-taking capacity of young businesses by offering
- fast-track mechanisms for accrediting existing African and European entrepreneurs. This will enable them to scale their operations, thereby strengthening the local economic fabric and granting access to concessional funding mechanisms available in both Africa and Europe. Additionally, the funding strategy should incorporate crowdfunding platforms and foster partnerships with private sector investors focused on sustainable ocean ventures. To ensure transparency, clear processes for accessing funds must be established, along with initiatives aimed at promoting financial literacy among youth. This will empower young entrepreneurs to effectively manage and sustain their projects.
- 3. Establishment of an Africa-Europe Network of Youth-focused Knowledge Hubs:** The creation of an Africa-Europe network of youth-focused knowledge hubs dedicated to ocean governance and the blue economy would play a crucial role in enhancing youth participation in this sector. These hubs can provide actionable recommendations to encourage greater youth involvement in shaping the future of our oceans. These knowledge hubs will facilitate the exchange of best practices and promote co-innovation, equipping young ocean leaders with the skills and capabilities necessary for their professional development. The network will build upon and connect with various existing African and European Centres of Excellence (CoEs) and their associated partners within the blue economy sector, thereby fostering competencies for emerging young leaders in ocean governance. Additionally, these knowledge hubs will leverage a wealth of contextual, academic, and technical expertise, as well as local networks, to enrich the blue economy landscape. By doing so, it will empower youth to take a more active role in the sustainable management of ocean resources.
- 4. Co-developing an AU-EU Exchange Programme for Youth leaders in Ocean and Blue Economy:** An Africa-Europe cross-border exchange program for young leaders in ocean governance and blue economy will provide new and aspiring entrepreneurs with the opportunity to learn from experienced counterparts in participating countries. These learning exchanges will offer valuable insights and



examples that can inform best practices. The exchange program will specifically target youth participants from Africa and Europe who have demonstrated impact and legitimacy in areas such as aquaculture and fisheries, blue carbon ecosystems and services, renewable energy, maritime transport, coastal tourism, oil and gas, biotechnology, and research and education, where entrepreneurial opportunities align with development policy potential. Emphasizing skills development and

practical experience, the program will support young entrepreneurs in expanding their initiatives within a framework focused on ocean regeneration, resilience, and sustainability while fostering viable exchanges between the two continents. Host participants will benefit from fresh perspectives, opportunities to collaborate with international partners, and insights into innovative ocean ventures.

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## Introduction

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In an era marked by unprecedented global challenges, the health and sustainability of our oceans have become critical concerns that extend beyond national borders. The blue economy, which encompasses all economic activities related to oceans, seas, and coastal areas, offers a unique opportunity for sustainable development, innovation, and, importantly, youth employment. Recent reports indicate that the blue economy generated nearly USD \$300 billion for the African continent in 2018 and is projected to support 57 million jobs by 2030. According to the 2023 EU Blue Economy report, this sector employs 3.6 million people and generates €171 billion in gross value added (GVA) within the European Union, underscoring its potential as a major engine for economic growth. However, youth unemployment remains a pressing issue, with young people being 3.2 times more likely to be unemployed than adults. This stark reality highlights the urgent need to prioritize youth engagement and create meaningful employment opportunities within the blue economy sector.

This report examines the current landscape of youth engagement, as well as youth-led initiatives, platforms, and organizations in ocean governance and the blue economy, with a particular focus on Africa and Europe. Its goal is to provide a comprehensive analysis of existing engagement models, identify challenges in youth participation, and offer actionable recommendations to enhance youth involvement in driving ocean and climate action. By doing so, the report aims to strengthen collaboration between the two continents across generations. It emphasizes the importance of investing in youth agency and leadership

to raise awareness of contemporary challenges, improve ocean literacy, and cultivate a cross-continental network of emerging young leaders, to support the establishment of an Africa-Europe Youth Ambassador Program focused in ocean governance and the blue economy.

The development of a cross-continental network of young emerging leaders in ocean governance and blue economy acknowledges the shared marine resources and interconnected challenges faced by both Africa and Europe. This network aims to leverage diverse perspectives, fill knowledge gaps, and develop more resilient and inclusive strategies for ocean management. Such collaboration is crucial for effectively addressing the complex, transboundary issues related to the blue economy.

This report draws on extensive research, case studies, and consultations with young ocean professionals, ocean activists and ocean-related initiative founders from Africa and Europe. It highlights successful youth-led initiatives, analyzes the challenges to youth participation, and proposes innovative strategies for empowering the next generation of ocean leaders. Importantly, it also examines youth employment in the blue economy and identifies key areas where job creation and skill development are most needed.

As we navigate the complex challenges of ocean governance in the 21st century, the voices and actions of youth will be instrumental in charting a course towards a more sustainable and prosperous blue future. This report

calls to action, urging institutions, policymakers, industry leaders, and civil society to recognize and empower youth as essential partners in ocean stewardship and blue economy development. By prioritizing youth engagement, we can unlock the full potential of the blue economy while ensuring the long-term health and sustainability of our shared ocean resources.

## Report Objectives

1. A comprehensive mapping of (i) youth-led initiatives, platforms/networks, and organizations, and (ii) young leaders across Africa and Europe who are actively involved in ocean governance and the blue economy, demonstrating recognized impact and legitimacy.
2. To evaluate the current state of youth engagement in ocean governance and the blue economy across Africa and Europe, identifying successes, gaps/challenges, and potential areas for growth.
3. To analyze barriers to youth employment in the blue economy and highlight opportunities and skill development in emerging ocean-related sectors.
4. To provide actionable recommendations to support the development of the Africa-Europe Youth Ambassadors Programme to foster cross-continental collaboration and youth leadership in ocean governance and blue economy.

## Scope of the Report

The scope of this report encompasses a comprehensive mapping of youth engagement in ocean governance and the blue economy across Africa and Europe, to support the development of a cross-continental network of young leaders and lay the groundwork for a Africa-Europe Youth Ambassador Programme on Ocean Governance and Blue Economy. The research aims to identify and analyze up to 100 youth-led initiatives and organizations equally distributed between the two continents, actively contributing to sustainable ocean practices and addressing marine challenges. The study covers various sectors of the blue economy, including aquaculture, renewable energy, coastal tourism, maritime transport, and biotechnology, to provide a holistic view of youth involvement.

The report also includes a directory of 80 emerging young leaders aged 18-35 making significant contributions to ocean advocacy and governance. This directory serves

as a resource for fostering collaboration and networking opportunities among youth advocates. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining desk research with stakeholder consultations to gather qualitative and quantitative data.

Additionally, the scope extends to analyzing youth employment in the blue economy, identifying participation barriers, and highlighting job creation and skill development opportunities. By providing this comprehensive analysis, the report aims to inform the design and implementation of the Africa-Europe Youth Ambassadors Program, ensuring it effectively addresses the needs and aspirations of young people engaged in ocean governance and the blue economy across both continents.

## Approach and Methodology

- A desk-top-based review of academic and grey literature serves as the foundational approach for the research component of this study to identifying youth-led organizations, platforms, and initiatives that are actively engaged in ocean governance and the blue economy.
- The research began by exploring academic journals through Google Scholar, policy papers, and governmental reports such as the Youth Congress of Kenya, European Commission strategy and policy documents and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) communications; European Investment Bank (EIB), Kenya Marine and Fisheries Institute (KMFRI), International Maritime Organization (IMO), and the World Bank reports, that focus on youth involvement in ocean-related activities.
- Social media has become a vital tool for youth engagement, and platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram were monitored for relevant hashtags and discussions related to ocean governance and the blue economy to identify emerging youth and youth-led organizations that may not have been documented in formal reports but are active in advocacy and community engagement.
- Consultations were conducted through online surveys, utilizing tools such as Google Forms to facilitate data collection. This approach allows for gathering both quantitative and qualitative data, ensuring a well-rounded understanding of the current Africa-Europe Ocean and blue economy landscape.

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# SELECTION CRITERIA FOR YOUTH INCLUSION IN THE (AFRICA), (EUROPE) DIRECTORY ON OCEAN GOVERNANCE AND BLUE ECONOMY

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The young leaders included in the Africa-Europe youth directory were selected based on several criteria to ensure their contributions are impactful and relevant to the blue economy. Firstly, candidates must be between 18 and 35 with a recognised impact and legitimacy within ocean governance and blue economy. Secondly, their work must significantly impact their communities or the broader field of ocean conservation. This includes measurable outcomes such as policy changes, community engagement, scientific

advancements, or the implementation of sustainable practices. Thirdly, the selection process considered the diversity of geographical representation, ensuring that leaders from various regions of Africa and Europe are included. Finally, the candidate's potential for future leadership and ability to inspire others were key factors in their selection. This comprehensive approach ensures that the directory features a diverse and dynamic group of young leaders at the forefront of ocean governance.



An aerial photograph of a boat's wake in a body of water, tinted with a vibrant green color. The wake consists of white, frothy water trailing behind the boat, creating a series of curved, parallel lines that recede into the distance. The surrounding water is a deep, textured green with small ripples and waves. The overall composition is dynamic and energetic, suggesting movement and progress.

# Youth, Youth- Led initiatives and organizations in Africa and Europe



Youth engagement in ocean governance and the blue economy has gained significant traction, reflecting a growing awareness of the critical role young people play in advancing sustainable practices and influencing policy. Across Africa and Europe, young leaders and organizations are actively involved in initiatives to address challenges such as marine conservation, sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, and coastal resilience. These efforts align with global movements like the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) and regional frameworks emphasizing the importance of the blue economy as a driver of economic growth and environmental sustainability. Recognizing the transformative potential of youth, initiatives now focus on building capacity, fostering leadership, and enabling meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

The World Bank reported in March 2024 that economic activities within the blue economy in African countries are creating more job opportunities for young people than for older generations, with youth employment projected to reach 24.2% in these nations. Globally, the fisheries sector supports approximately 350 million jobs, a significant portion of which involves young individuals engaged in sustainable fishing practices and aquaculture. This high level of youth participation underscores the sector's potential to provide livelihoods and promote sustainable resource management among younger generations in both Africa and Europe.

Youth participation in ocean-related conferences has also increased, offering a platform for their voices to shape marine policies and practices. The Our Ocean Youth Leadership Summit, organized annually by the Sustainable Ocean Alliance, convenes approximately 100 young leaders from diverse regions to discuss solutions to marine sustainability

challenges. In 2023, the summit welcomed over 70 youth participants from 45 countries. Similarly, the United Nations Ocean Conference has seen a steady increase in youth representation, with youth delegations constituting 10% -15% of total participants in recent editions.

Across Africa and Europe, youth organizations are at the forefront of projects aimed at marine biodiversity conservation, ocean literacy, and sustainable aquaculture and fisheries. In this context, the establishment of an Africa-Europe Youth Ambassadors Program focused on ocean governance and blue economy is ideally positioned to leverage this momentum. The program will raise awareness of current challenges, promote ocean literacy, cultivate a community of youth leaders committed to ocean sustainability, and further strengthen cooperation between Africa and Europe.

Additionally, this program could facilitate the exchange of best practices and encourage co-innovation, equipping young ocean leaders with essential skills and capabilities for their professional development. It will focus on topics such as sustainable fisheries management, marine conservation, and governance frameworks while promoting knowledge exchange and collaborative actions across regions. Furthermore, providing mentorship and specialized funding for youth-led ocean projects can inspire young people to engage in ocean-related initiatives and advocate for policy changes.

Below are key youth-led initiatives that drive innovation and leadership in ocean governance and the blue economy across various sub-sectors that could become key contributors to the development Africa-Europe Youth Ambassadors Programme on ocean governance and blue economy.



An aerial photograph of ocean waves, showing white foam and dark blue water, with a semi-transparent green overlay covering the entire image. The text is positioned in the lower-left quadrant.

**Youth-led organizations  
championing for blue  
economy and ocean  
governance in Africa**





Africa's youth, comprising over 60% of the continent's population, drive innovation and sustainability in ocean governance and the blue economy. With the global blue economy valued at approximately \$1.5 trillion annually, Africa's vast and largely untapped aquatic resources offer immense economic growth, job creation, and environmental sustainability opportunities. From its extensive coastline stretching over 30,000 kilometers to its rich marine ecosystems and inland waters, Africa's blue economy holds the potential to transform livelihoods, particularly for its youth, who are actively engaging in initiatives addressing critical issues such as marine biodiversity loss, overfishing, and the socioeconomic challenges faced by coastal communities.

## Fisheries and Aquaculture

Youth involvement in Africa's blue economy is growing, with many young people and organizations leading initiatives that combine innovative approaches with community-driven solutions. The fisheries and aquaculture sector, a cornerstone of the African blue economy, employs over 12 million people across the continent, with a significant proportion of these jobs held by young individuals. In Kenya, 93% of professionals in the fisheries and aquaculture sector are between 20 and 39 years old, indicating a strong youth presence in the industry. The sector has recorded an annual growth rate of 7.6% over the past two decades, driven by increased demand for protein amid declining fish supply from natural stocks. This is according to the African Food Fellowship article on Making aquaculture attractive to the youth in Kenya. Various initiatives have been launched to address general youth unemployment, which affects approximately 400 million young Africans.

INITIATIVE	DETAILS
AquaWorld	<p><b>Country:</b> Nigeria</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> Implementing initiatives and projects to protect marine ecosystems and biodiversity. This involves marine habitat restoration, marine protected area management, and sustainable fishing practices. They also enhance the resilience of rural and coastal communities against the impacts of climate change, such as sea-level rise, extreme weather events, and coastal erosion. This includes climate adaptation strategies, disaster risk reduction initiatives, and community-based early warning systems.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> They organize beach clean-ups, talk shows, awareness campaigns, and educational programs to engage fishermen in coastal fishing communities.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Founded in 2019, this initiative has faced challenges in expanding its operations; there have also been issues with website payments, particularly with delays in processing subscription renewals. This is a common problem for organizations that rely entirely on donations to function, as financial constraints can affect their ability to maintain timely operations. The institution's website also has much information on the ongoing projects, but there is no particular information on the impact of their previous engagements, which makes it difficult to quantify what they have done in the past and how the projects helped the communities.</p> <p>AquaWorld has been present on several international platforms, such as Our Ocean Conference, and has received grants from the Sustainable Ocean Alliance for their projects.</p>

INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p>Aqua Farms Organization</p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Tanzania</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> Aqua-Farms Organization (AFO) promotes environmentally friendly and economically competitive aquaculture, conserving the aquatic environment and fisheries stock enhancement, supporting research on sustainable exploitation of aquatic resources and aquaculture, improving the lacustrine and coastal community health communities, and empowering the youth and women in the utilization of aquatic resources and aquaculture.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> Coral reef restoration &amp; monitoring, Seaweed restoration, Mangrove restoration, Aquatic resource education, and supporting economic aquaculture practices. They also promote sustainable fisheries and community health programs.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> AFO has empowered 22,000 local people, reached 85 fishing communities, conserved 2400 hectares of ocean water, planted 10,000 coral fragments, and planted 240,000 mangroves. As per AFO's 2023 annual report, it received funding from more than ten organizations, most of them being international donors who put cash towards three main projects on coastal community training, mangrove and coral reef restoration, which most are through grant applications.</p> <p>AFO works closely with the local coastal communities. This has helped them ensure the project's sustainability approach with efforts to empower local rangers as citizen scientists playing a pivotal role. By fostering a sense of ownership and stewardship among local stakeholders, its projects aim to ensure the continued protection and preservation of the restored reef ecosystems and mangroves.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> AFO has encountered significant data collection and management challenges, particularly in their fisheries and aquaculture projects. The 2023 report points to gaps in infrastructure, making it challenging to gather and manage real-time data, especially in remote areas. For example, the Kilwa Octopus Fishery project's current data systems are not robust enough to ensure comprehensive catch documentation and traceability, hindering effective fisheries management. Furthermore, the organization faces challenges with integrating data across multiple stakeholders, which often results in incomplete or inconsistent data. This is compounded by the limited technological access and the lack of trained personnel in certain regions. As a result, AFO has identified the need for stronger coordination, better training, and more advanced data management systems to improve transparency, reporting, and sustainability outcomes.</p>



## Marine biodiversity conservation

Marine biodiversity in Africa is crucial in maintaining ecological balance and supporting the livelihoods of millions, particularly in coastal communities. It provides vital resources, including food, tourism, and medicinal benefits. However, Africa’s marine ecosystems face severe threats from overfishing, habitat destruction, and the impacts of climate change. These challenges have highlighted the importance of engaging youth in conservation efforts to safeguard marine resources for future generations. Youth-led initiatives across Africa are becoming increasingly important in addressing these challenges. Young people are actively involved in projects focused on habitat restoration, coral reef protection, sustainable fisheries, and raising public awareness about the importance of marine ecosystems. While many young people are involved in conservation efforts through volunteering and internships, there are few sustainable career paths in marine biodiversity conservation. Additionally, there is a gap in

training and mentorship, which limits the ability of youth to transition into long-term, paid positions within the sector. In 2023, the Regional Resource Hub for Eastern & Southern Africa reported that while many young people are taking part in conservation through various initiatives, formal job opportunities in marine conservation remain scarce.

Youth-led initiatives working on marine biodiversity and action focus on equipping young people with knowledge of marine conservation and actions aimed at conserving marine biodiversity. Despite these efforts, there remains a significant gap in financial resources and mentorship opportunities. This limits the ability of youth to sustain careers in marine biodiversity conservation. To address these challenges, there is a need for increased investment in youth-focused training programs, sustainable job opportunities in the marine sector, and stronger policies to support youth engagement in marine conservation.

INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>Ocean Guardians Program - The Marine Megafauna Foundation</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Mozambique</p> <p>Focus Area: Ocean Guardians is a youth-led educational branch of the Marine Megafauna Foundation. The UNESCO-recognized program focuses on bringing local communities closer to the ocean, helping them understand why marine conservation and water safety are important. It aims to teach the next generation to love and protect the sea. They help children and young adults learn how climate change affects the reefs and fisheries. They encourage them to appreciate the Mozambican coastline and inspire them to live in good ways for their communities and the planet.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> Ocean Guardians works explicitly on coral reef restoration, marine conservation learning programs, and water safety &amp; swimming lessons. They also engage directly with their communities through initiatives such as Environmental Community Fairs, Plastic Pollution Awareness Events, and educational campaigns about school waste reduction, reuse, and recycling. They provide opportunities to intern in fields like fish farming and permaculture, ecotourism, SCUBA diving, and lifeguarding.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> Successfully reached over 3,826 young Mozambicans in the Inhambane Province with marine education. Ten schools in the region have adopted the integrated marine conservation curriculum.</p>



INITIATIVE	DETAILS
	<p><b>Challenge:</b> It is difficult for Ocean Guardian to maintain its distinct identity and secure dedicated resources while operating under the more extensive Marine Megafauna Foundation. The initiative tries to balance its localized education efforts with the foundation’s broader, global conservation priorities, which can sometimes overshadow its region-specific goals and limit its ability to effectively address the unique needs of the communities and young people it serves.</p>
<p><b>Zimbabwe Youth Biodiversity Network</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Zimbabwe</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> The Zimbabwe Youth Biodiversity Network (ZYBN) is dedicated to connecting, empowering, and supporting youth throughout Zimbabwe to take action on biodiversity and related issues. They organize workshops to train young people and participate as youth delegations in local and international biodiversity negotiations, holding the government accountable while supporting government-led initiatives. With the backing of aligned organizations and individuals, ZYBN mobilizes youth across Zimbabwe to learn, grow, and collaborate on addressing the biodiversity crisis for a just and sustainable future.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> ZYBN organizes workshops, capacity-building sessions, and policy advocacy, as well as participates in local and international biodiversity negotiations. They also engage in grassroots mobilization to address biodiversity challenges, including those within the blue economy. Through the Global Youth Biodiversity Network, ZYBN organizes an annual event called the Annual Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Symposium, which promotes the importance of protecting, conserving and improving biodiversity. Each symposium focuses on a specific theme, the subject of which is drawn from a variety of local and international environmental events and movements, including marine and blue economy.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> ZYBN has engaged over 3,000 youth in conservation initiatives since its inception while conducting over 10 biodiversity training programs and hosting the Annual Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Symposium, which has reached over 500 young participants annually since 2019.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> The Zimbabwe Youth Biodiversity Network faces significant challenges in integrating youth participation into national biodiversity policies, primarily due to limited collaboration with the government. This disconnect makes incorporating ZYBN’s policy recommendations challenging, causing delays in achieving key conservation goals. Additionally, the organization struggles with project continuity, as efforts often align with significant events rather than ongoing advocacy.</p>





INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>Wise Oceans</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Seychelles</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> WiseOceans Seychelles focuses on marine conservation by educating locals, tourists, and young people about the importance of ocean ecosystems. Through innovative initiatives like coral reef restoration, they emphasize the urgent need to protect marine biodiversity and build a connection between communities and the ocean.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> The organization conducts interactive Marine Education Sessions in schools, resorts, and public settings to foster awareness about marine life. Their coral nurseries involve cultivating coral fragments in underwater structures, which are then transplanted to rehabilitate damaged reefs. Snorkeling tours and workshops provide hands-on conservation experiences.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> WiseOceans Seychelles has made substantial contributions to marine conservation, including planting and maintaining over 6,000 coral colonies in restored reef areas. Their tailored Marine Education programs have reached thousands annually, with approximately 15,000 resort guests educated through interactive sessions about marine biodiversity and conservation. Additionally, their coral nursery projects have significantly improved the health and biodiversity of reef ecosystems, creating a sustainable model for future restoration projects.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> The program heavily relies on partnerships with other resorts on the island, such as Four Seasons Resort Seychelles, and involves local communities for funding and implementation. This reliance restricts its capacity to expand projects beyond specific tourism-focused locations.</p>

## Marine pollution management

The scale of plastic pollution in Africa is significant. In 2015, the continent generated 19 million tonnes of plastic waste with 17 million tonnes mismanaged. This represents a substantial portion of the global 60-99 million tonnes of mismanaged plastic waste produced that year. Africa is the second-largest contributor to plastic entering oceans, accounting for 7.8%. If current trends continue, Africa may surpass Asia by 2060 as the leading producer of mismanaged plastic waste. Additionally, several West African rivers, including the Cross, Imo, and Kwa Ibo Rivers, rank among the most polluted globally. In 2018, coastal

West Africa generated 6.9 million tonnes of plastic waste, with Nigeria contributing 4.7 million tonnes annually, 20% of which was produced within 30 km of the coast and often ended up in the ocean (World Bank, 2022).

Various youth-led initiatives are emerging across Africa to tackle the challenges of marine pollution, particularly plastic waste management. These efforts focus on raising awareness, better waste management practices, and promoting sustainable alternatives to plastics.



INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>Ecovironment</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Sierra Leone</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> The Ecovironment is a social enterprise focused on plastic recycling, founded in 2021. It is dedicated to environmental preservation by actively promoting effective plastic waste management and advocating for the sustainable use of natural resources. Through its proactive initiatives, Ecovironment aims to contribute to Sustainable Development Goal 13 (Climate Action) by recycling 1,000,000 tons of plastic waste by 2030 into everyday products such as floor tiles, bricks, decorative tiles, plaques, and flower pots. Additionally, the organization seeks to raise climate change awareness within households in Sierra Leone.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> Produce and supply eco-friendly floor pallets, bricks, decorating tiles, plaques and flower pots made from municipal plastic waste. Engaged in educating the general public about the hazards of plastic pollution and how it contributes to climate change and teaching them about environmental conservation. Organizes plastic recycling training.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> Ecovironment has been dedicated to facilitating rights transfer to local communities since its inception. Its community-driven approach has led to the development of various tailored projects aimed at fulfilling its mission. This includes promoting plastic waste management and addressing climate change impacts by building resilient communities through diverse initiatives. Over three years of operation, Ecovironment has successfully recycled more than 450 tons of plastic waste. The organization has also implemented participatory waste initiatives that empower local communities in 40 areas, reaching over 100,000 individuals. Furthermore, Ecovironment has established school clubs in over nine schools across Bombali District, equipping the younger generation with skills in plastic recycling and providing them with current education on climate change.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Ecovironment primarily operates in the Bombali District of Sierra Leone, focusing on plastic recycling and climate education. However, the organization faces significant financial challenges in expanding its operations beyond this region. Securing consistent funding for the purchase of advanced recycling technology and scaling its outreach programs to other districts also remain a problem.</p>
<p><b>End Plastic Pollution Uganda</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Uganda</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> The organization focuses on the intersection of people, the environment, and the economy. Through its efforts, it raises awareness, provides education, influences policy, and promotes environmental actions within local communities. Their initiatives aim to sensitize communities, educate youth and women, and strengthen waste picker organizations in Uganda. Additionally, they support the implementation of a zero-waste model for local communities.</p>

INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>End Plastic Pollution Uganda</b></p>	<p><b>Key Activities:</b> Advocate for sustainable business practices and work to eliminate single-use plastics. Influence and inform waste management policy-making processes at national, regional, and global levels. Promote, demonstrate, and inspire community action while encouraging individuals to take steps towards achieving a zero-waste world.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> The organization has engaged over 5,000 individuals in awareness and education initiatives, conducted seven brand audits, and analyzed 2,968 plastic waste items to identify major polluters.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Inefficient infrastructure for plastic collection, sorting, and recycling hinders their efforts. The organization faces difficulties in holding large polluting corporations accountable for their environmental impact.</p>
<p><b>SOS Environment Djibouti</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Djibouti</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> SOS Environment Djibouti, established in 2017 by a group of young activists, is dedicated to raising community awareness about waste management, recycling, and ecosystem restoration. The organization primarily focuses on managing plastic waste, particularly PET, which is widely distributed and locally produced in Djibouti. By collaborating with stakeholders from both the public and private sectors, SOS Environment implements projects aimed at collecting and recycling PET to prevent environmental harm. They also engage with hotels, producers, and recycling companies to address the issue of plastic waste more effectively.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> The organization conducts awareness campaigns and engages in the collection, sorting, and recycling of plastic materials. Additionally, they undertake initiatives focused on restoring mangroves along the country's coast.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> SOS Environment Djibouti faces several challenges, including the absence of a website to showcase their work, which makes it difficult to track and quantify their impact. Their minimal social media presence, with infrequent updates, further limits their ability to engage a broader audience. However, discussions with one of the founders revealed that the organization is actively involved on the ground and collaborates closely with volunteers. They have received funding from Group Coubeche to support their PET recycling program, but securing additional funding remains a challenge. Assistance in enhancing social media skills and digital presence would greatly improve their outreach and visibility.</p>



## Coastal tourism and cultural prevention

Coastal tourism in Africa significantly contributes approximately USD \$12 billion annually to the economy and supports millions of jobs. However, the rapid growth of tourism presents considerable challenges in preserving marine ecosystems and cultural heritage, making sustainable management practices increasingly vital. Youth-led initiatives in ocean and blue economy are increasingly addressing these challenges by promoting eco-friendly tourism practices and supporting ocean conservation efforts. Over 5,000 young people across

Africa are actively engaged in environmental conservation activities such as beach clean-ups, coral restoration, and waste management, while young entrepreneurs are launching eco-tourism ventures that prioritize sustainability and cultural preservation. Despite this growing youth engagement, such initiatives are more prominent in countries like Kenya, Madagascar, Tanzania, and South Africa, with certain regions still facing obstacles like limited funding and inadequate infrastructure.

INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>Mauritius Youth Network</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Mauritius</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> The organization trains young leaders in marine conservation and responsible tourism practices to foster sustainable practices and environmental stewardship.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> They conduct training sessions and workshops on marine conservation, coral reef restoration, and coastal erosion prevention, empowering youth with practical knowledge.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> Over 10,000 corals have been restored, and 2,000 youth have been trained and empowered to engage in conservation efforts.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> The lack of an active website to showcase their programs and initiatives limits the organization’s ability to share their work and engage a wider audience. Their minimal social media presence, characterized by infrequent posts, further hinders outreach and visibility. Additionally, the organization heavily relies on partnerships and collaborations for most of its activities, facing challenges due to limited funding, which restricts the scalability and sustainability of its programs.</p>
<p><b>End Plastic Pollution Uganda</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Madagascar</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> Korai represents a new generation of climate-positive companies that have transformed a former family coral farm into a nature-based solution provider aimed at regenerating the marine ecosystems of coastal Africa. By integrating marine conservation with sustainable tourism, Korai addresses both the ecological and economic needs of local communities.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> Coral reef protection, mangrove restoration, and eco-friendly accommodations.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> Since its inception, the organization has planted over 40,000 corals and restored significant stretches of mangrove forests.</p>



INITIATIVE	DETAILS
	<p><b>Good practice:</b> Koraii Africa effectively engages corporate partners by aligning its marine biodiversity projects with the sustainability goals of private companies, fostering mutually beneficial collaborations. This approach ensures consistent funding and increased visibility for their initiatives. Other youth-led initiatives can adopt this strategy by identifying synergies between their missions and corporate social responsibility objectives, crafting tailored proposals that highlight the environmental and social impacts these partnerships can achieve together. Koraii has participated in various platforms and conferences and has secured funding from multiple NGOs.</p>

## Renewable energy and Coastal infrastructure

According to the Energy and Environment Partnership Trust Fund (EEP Africa), Africa’s renewable energy and coastal infrastructure sectors offer significant opportunities for youth engagement and employment. This rapidly growing sector is fueled by the continent’s vast renewable energy potential and the urgent need to tackle energy access challenges. Increasingly, African youth are taking on various roles within the renewable energy sector, including technical positions, sales and marketing, project management, and research and development. EEP Africa reports that their projects have generated over 2,700 jobs for youth in the clean energy sector, which accounts

for 33% of the total jobs created. They also highlight that a single business selling 100,000 solar home systems annually can create jobs for up to 800 rural sales agents and 200-300 rural technicians, underscoring the sector’s job creation potential. However, as noted by UNDP, entering the renewable energy sector can be challenging for youth due to skills gaps, limited access to education and training programs, inadequate infrastructure in some areas, and regulatory barriers. Despite these challenges, the sector’s rapid growth continues to create demand for new talent, with companies often favouring youth for their eagerness to learn, technological proficiency, and strong work ethic.

INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>Mahlaseli Energy</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Lesotho</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> Mahlaseli Energy is a renewable energy company that provides solar and water solutions to promote sustainable development and enhance livelihoods. With a vision to lead in the deployment of renewable energy solutions, the company aligns its mission with blue economy principles by encouraging sustainable resource use and supporting rural electrification. Their ambitious goal of electrifying 50% of Lesotho’s rural communities demonstrates a strong commitment to integrating clean energy into local economies, boosting resilience, and fostering inclusive growth in underserved areas.</p>





INITIATIVE	DETAILS
	<p><b>Key Activities:</b> Delivering solar energy and clean water solutions to rural communities, implementing innovative water systems that incorporate renewable energy to improve access to safe drinking water, and providing training programs focused on renewable energy technologies.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> The organization has installed over 300 solar systems in households, schools, and clinics, improving energy access, reducing reliance on fossil fuels, and enhancing air quality.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> The lack of infrastructure in rural areas poses significant challenges for the deployment of solar and water systems, creating logistical obstacles in reaching underserved communities. Furthermore, securing funding for large-scale projects remains a persistent issue, hindering their capacity to expand operations and enhance their impact. Additionally, the slow market adoption of solar energy restricts progress, as raising awareness and changing perceptions about renewable energy demands considerable time and resources.</p>
<p><b>The Green Rwanda Initiative</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Rwanda</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> This initiative plays a vital role in advancing renewable energy development in the Lake Kivu region, with a particular emphasis on offshore wind energy projects. This focus supports Rwanda's efforts to diversify its energy sources and harness the natural potential of Lake Kivu for sustainable energy production.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> The organization is actively engaged in energy production within the renewable sector and works to raise awareness about the benefits of clean energy. These initiatives are designed to stimulate both public and private interest in adopting renewable energy, with a particular focus on offshore wind projects.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> This initiative bolsters Rwanda's goal of establishing a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy by 2050. By prioritizing renewable energy, it aligns with national climate objectives, facilitating access to cleaner energy while decreasing dependence on fossil fuels.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> The initiative faces a significant challenge due to a shortage of technical expertise needed for the maintenance of offshore systems. As a start-up, it also struggles to secure adequate funding to meet project requirements. Additionally, the absence of a well-developed website hampers its ability to effectively showcase its projects, engage potential stakeholders, and attract partnerships that are crucial for scaling its impact and promoting sustainable energy adoption.</p>



**Youth-led organizations  
championing for blue  
economy and ocean  
governance in Europe**



According to the European Commission’s Blue Economy Report, youth-led organizations across Europe are increasingly taking a prominent role in promoting the blue economy and ocean governance. In recent years, there has been significant growth in youth engagement within these initiatives. Younger workers represent approximately 17% of jobs in the blue economy sector, highlighting their growing interest and involvement in ocean-related industries.

Despite this, there remains significant room for improvement in supporting youth-led organizations. A study by the European Youth Forum highlights the development of digital platforms and one-stop shops as valuable resources for young people to access training, mentoring, and job opportunities in the blue economy sectors. This indicates that, while progress has been made, more comprehensive support systems are needed to fully harness the potential of youth engagement.

Youth-led organizations are not only focused on employment but are also actively engaged in policy development and advocacy for sustainable ocean practices. The United Nations Environment Programme has noted a growing recognition of the importance of incorporating the perspectives of younger generations in co-created policies to ensure that the interests of future generations are considered. Although data on the exact number of youth-led organizations dedicated to the blue economy and ocean governance in Europe is limited, current trends clearly indicate an upward trajectory.

## Marine Conservation and Ecosystem services

Across Europe, young people are spearheading conservation initiatives, contributing to over 500 active projects focused on species monitoring, biodiversity research, and raising awareness about marine sustainability (Garcia-Soto, 2021). Youth-led strategies, such as the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), play a crucial role in rebuilding fish stocks, promoting sustainable fishing practices, and enhancing ocean resilience against climate change and pollution (Oceans Research, 2023).

The active participation of young people, bolstered by technological innovation, is revolutionizing conservation efforts. By utilizing new tools such as drones, mobile apps, and artificial intelligence, youth are improving data collection and enhancing conservation strategies (Garcia-Soto, 2021). Furthermore, they are advocating for community-based approaches that involve local and indigenous communities, fostering stewardship and ensuring the long-term success of marine conservation initiatives (World Future Council, 2020). Through global collaborations, youth-led initiatives have successfully protected over 3.4 million square kilometers of critical marine areas since 2021 (Pew Bertarelli Ocean Legacy Project, 2023). With a continued emphasis on education, resources, and youth leadership, the goal of safeguarding 30% of the ocean by 2030 is increasingly attainable.

INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>Young Sea Changers</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Scotland</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> Young Sea Changers Scotland (YSCS) was established in 2022 to empower individuals aged 16 to 25 to advocate for marine health. The organization equips youth with the knowledge and confidence necessary to influence marine policy and tackle environmental challenges affecting their communities.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> Organizing events that unite young people for discussions, idea exchange, inspiration, and mutual support. Facilitating an online platform that enables youth to connect and collaborate, share resources, and stay informed about marine policy issues. Offering training, resources, and advocacy opportunities to empower young individuals. Engaging directly with marine policymakers and stakeholders to ensure that the voices of young people are heard.</p>



INITIATIVE	DETAILS
	<p><b>Impact:</b> YSCS has directly engaged over 3,000 young individuals, empowering them to participate in marine policy discussions and conservation projects. This initiative is fostering the next generation of leaders dedicated to protecting Scotland’s marine ecosystems.</p> <p><b>Good Practice:</b> A key practice that other youth organizations can learn from YSCS is their proactive approach to involving youth in policy platforms. By actively creating pathways for young people to participate in decision-making processes related to marine conservation, YSCS empowers young leaders to influence policy agendas. Other organizations can adopt similar strategies by offering training on policy advocacy, facilitating youth representation in governmental and international environmental forums, and establishing mentorship programs to help young individuals effectively navigate the policy landscape.</p>
<p><b>SOA Malta</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Malta</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> SOA Malta is dedicated to educating and empowering individuals about the challenges faced by marine ecosystems in Malta. Through accessible initiatives and educational programs, the organization provides a platform for ocean enthusiasts who wish to advocate for environmental protection. Currently, they are running a campaign on deep-sea mining (#defendthedeep), which features deep-sea documentaries aimed at raising awareness about the impacts of deep-sea mining, even in areas where such activities are not taking place.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> Beach clean ups, Education programs, campaigns and advocacy efforts.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> Founded in 2023, SOA Malta serves as a new hub within the Sustainable Ocean Alliance network, focusing on the ocean and blue economy sector. Since its establishment, SOA Malta has successfully conducted activities such as beach clean-ups, marine education programs, and campaigns addressing deep-sea mining. These initiatives have been supported by funding from SOA Global.</p> <p><b>Good Practice:</b> With few youth-led initiatives focused on deep-sea mining, SOA Malta is well-positioned to take the lead in this emerging area of marine conservation. Their engagement in deep-sea mining presents a unique opportunity to share best practices and shape the future of this industry, particularly throughout the Mediterranean region.</p>

## Biotechnology and Education

Youth participation in biotechnology and education within the blue economy in Europe is on the rise, supported by targeted initiatives aimed at addressing skill gaps in marine industries. The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFAF) have allocated €7.5 million to support youth-focused projects, emphasizing skills in aquaculture, marine biotechnology, and sustainable resource management (European Commission, 2023). These initiatives are designed to foster innovation and provide practical training through leadership programs and gamified educational tools, empowering young people to actively contribute to sustainable ocean management. Youth engagement in these sectors aligns with projections indicating that the blue economy will create millions of jobs by 2030, presenting significant opportunities for career development.

Despite significant progress in promoting youth engagement in the blue economy, challenges remain in ensuring equitable access to opportunities and raising awareness of career pathways within this sector. Many young people in Europe are still unaware of the vast potential available in marine industries, underscoring the need for stronger partnerships among educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and policymakers. Expanding mentorship programs, internships, and funding for youth-led initiatives could significantly enhance engagement and foster innovation. These measures can create pathways for more young individuals to enter and contribute to the blue economy.

INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>The Marine Diaries</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> England</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> The Marine Diaries is dedicated to communicating ocean science and raising awareness about marine conservation challenges, such as plastic pollution and climate change. Their mission is to make ocean-related knowledge accessible and engaging for audiences around the world.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> The organization conducts digital campaigns, educational programs, and storytelling initiatives, including innovative communicated methods such as blogs, podcasts and webinars, to share scientific insights and promote ocean literacy. They also organize youth-focused projects, such as advocacy workshops and content creation opportunities. Additionally, they create informative and engaging content to raise public awareness about ocean issues, advocating for the ocean and its inhabitants by amplifying their voices.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> The Marine Diaries has engaged thousands of individuals through its multimedia platforms, fostering meaningful conversations about ocean conservation and encouraging advocacy for the protection of marine ecosystems worldwide.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Despite their efforts, many young people are still unaware of the opportunities available within marine industries, highlighting the need for broader outreach and education. The Marine Diaries faces similar challenges related to funding and resources, which can restrict the scope of their initiatives. Additionally, establishing strong partnerships with educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and policymakers is essential but can be difficult to navigate effectively.</p>





INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>Ocean Uprise</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Belgium</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> Ocean Uprise, an initiative by Parley, focuses on empowering youth worldwide to protect marine ecosystems and address ocean threats like plastic pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> The program empowers young people aged 16 to 30 by equipping them with the tools and knowledge necessary to make a positive impact on marine conservation. It features hands-on workshops, educational materials focused on ocean protection, and opportunities to participate in summits and speaker sessions.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> The organization has mobilized over 250,000 volunteers worldwide, collaborating with more than 750 NGOs across 30 countries to protect marine ecosystems. The initiative’s focus on education has reached over 170,000 individuals through various programs, with more than 36,180 people participating in educational initiatives in 2020 alone.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Ocean Uprise faces challenges in maintaining consistent communication and alignment of goals across its global network. For example, some sister networks, including the one in Kenya, have become inactive due to breakdowns in communication. While global efforts are critical, it is also essential to adapt initiatives to local needs without compromising the overarching mission.</p>

## Youth empowerment and education for Ocean Stewardship

Empowering young people through education is crucial for enhancing their role in ocean stewardship and tackling critical challenges within the maritime sector. Youth-focused initiatives aim to impart knowledge in marine sciences, technology, and sustainable practices, enabling young individuals to contribute to emerging industries such as marine biotechnology, renewable energy, and sustainable fisheries (Siringi, 2019). This emphasis not only prepares a skilled workforce for the blue economy but also fosters an environmentally conscious generation capable of effectively addressing complex ocean-related issues.

Ocean education fosters a deeper understanding of the relationship between human activities and marine ecosystems, instilling a sense of responsibility among young people. Integrating ocean literacy into educational systems and providing experiential learning opportunities such as fieldwork and participation in local conservation projects has been shown to enhance youth engagement and foster long-term commitment to marine sustainability (European Marine Board, 2020).

Some initiatives forging youth empowerment and education for ocean stewardship include:

INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>The Thalassophile Project</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Bulgaria</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> The Thalassophile Project is a collaborative initiative that brings together organizations specializing in accessible pedagogy, marine conservation, and scientific research. Its primary objective is to make marine science, conservation, and «Blue Education» accessible to all European citizens, with a specific emphasis on inclusivity for d/Deaf and visually impaired individuals.</p> <p>The project tackles significant gaps in education by acknowledging the absence of tailored materials for d/Deaf and visually impaired audiences, as well as the limited awareness among adult education institutions regarding the barriers these groups encounter. Additionally, it aims to enhance educators’ competencies by providing them with the skills necessary to deliver accessible blue education. By addressing these gaps, the Thalassophile Project promotes inclusivity and empowers diverse groups to engage meaningfully with marine conservation and the blue economy.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> The organization creates educational episodes, fact sheets, and acts as a resource hub to deliver accessible information on marine science. Additionally, they implement outreach programs aimed at promoting ocean literacy.</p>
	<p><b>Impact:</b> The Thalassophile Project has made substantial strides in promoting accessible marine science and conservation education across Europe. By tailoring materials for d/Deaf and visually impaired learners, they have reached diverse audiences, creating a more inclusive learning environment. The project has delivered over 20 educational episodes and resources, impacting educators and learners in multiple countries through Erasmus+ collaboration.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> There is a notable lack of customized educational resources tailored specifically for d/Deaf and visually impaired audiences, which impedes effective learning and engagement with marine science and conservation topics. Additionally, conveying complex scientific and geopolitical issues related to marine conservation to diverse audiences presents challenges, especially when accommodating various learning styles and needs. The project also encounters limitations in funding and resources, which can restrict its capacity to develop and implement comprehensive educational programs focused on promoting inclusivity.</p>



INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>The Blue Generation Project</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Greece</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> The Blue Generation Project (BGP) aims to inspire and engage young people aged 15 to 29 to pursue sustainable careers within various sectors of the Blue Economy, including coastal tourism, aquaculture, ocean energy, marine biotechnology, shipbuilding, maritime transport, and fisheries. Central to this initiative is the Blue Generation Program which serves as an integrated outreach action designed to «attract, engage, and convert» youth into exploring the vast opportunities available in the Blue Economy job market. BGP provides comprehensive information on career prospects in countries such as Greece, Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania. It offers mentoring programs for young individuals interested in pursuing careers in the Blue Economy, along with skills validation tools to help them meet necessary qualifications. Additionally, the program facilitates mobility exchanges through study visits that allow participants to gain firsthand experience in various Blue Economy sectors.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> Providing training for youth workers through a Blue Career MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), hosting information days and activities in high schools, adult education centers, NGOs, unemployment services, and local associations to raise awareness about Blue Career opportunities, providing a complimentary Blue Career Guide and access to a Blue Economy Career Platform, along with short training courses designed to lead to direct employment in entry-level positions, and creating virtual reality videos that allow young people to experience various careers within the Blue Economy firsthand.</p>
	<p><b>Impact:</b> The Blue Generation Project has a significant impact on youth employment within the Blue Economy across Europe. It has directly engaged over 39,000 young individuals in promotional activities, offering tailored information and mentoring. As a result, at least 3,000 participants have transitioned into training or jobs in sectors such as aquaculture, ocean energy, and coastal tourism. The project also supports underrepresented groups, including NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), by providing innovative tools like virtual reality job experiences and a comprehensive career platform. These initiatives align with the European Union’s employment and sustainability goals.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> There is a significant challenge in attracting young individuals to maritime careers. Despite the potential for growth in the Blue Economy, many young people remain unaware of the opportunities available, leading to a shortage of skilled workers in this sector. Thus, there is a need for increased awareness among young leaders regarding the benefits and career paths within the Blue Economy, as well as strategies to engage them effectively through targeted promotional activities. The Project further faces funding and resource constraints which can impact its ability to implement comprehensive educational programs and outreach activities effectively.</p>



INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>Youth and Environment Europe</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Czech Republic</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> Youth and Environment Europe (YEE) is dedicated to empowering young people across Europe to engage in environmental decision-making and advocacy. The organization promotes youth-led climate action, particularly within the frameworks of European environmental governance. YEE serves as a platform for collaboration among environmental youth organizations, fostering awareness and participation in addressing climate issues. By uniting diverse voices, YEE aims to enhance the role of youth in shaping sustainable policies and practices across the continent.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> YEE fosters youth engagement through a variety of initiatives, including training programs, workshops, and campaigns focused on sustainability, environmental justice, and climate change. The organization coordinates youth participation in global and EU-level negotiations while advocating for climate justice. Additionally, YEE provides resources and support to empower young people to take an active role in environmental decision-making and advocacy efforts.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> YEE represents over 30 youth-led organizations across Europe, promoting the active participation of young people in climate governance. Their initiatives have mobilized thousands of youth to advocate for robust climate action within both European and international environmental policies.</p>
	<p><b>Challenge:</b> YEE actively participates in a range of platforms and sectors, including environmental policy advocacy, biodiversity conservation, climate action, and youth empowerment. However, this extensive engagement can strain its resources and capacity, making it difficult to maintain consistent influence and impact across all areas. Coordinating input from diverse sectors while ensuring alignment with YEE's overarching mission demands significant effort.</p>



## Innovation and Technology for Ocean Solutions

Innovation and technology are essential for developing solutions aimed at ocean conservation and the sustainable use of marine resources, with youth-led initiatives leading the charge for change. The Youth and Innovation Forum held in 2022 brought together 120 young individuals to tackle critical ocean challenges during a 24-hour innovation session. This event focused on key issues such as sustainable seafood traceability, zero-emission shipping, ocean electricity, ocean mapping, and waste reduction (United Nations, 2022). Additionally, the forum provided selected participants with the opportunity to influence the political process of the UN Ocean Conference by addressing the plenary and facilitating contributions to interactive dialogues.

Youth innovators encounter significant obstacles in turning their ideas into tangible solutions. While many young

people initiate promising projects, sustaining these efforts often proves challenging due to high maintenance costs and limited resources. Despite having clear and ambitious visions, a substantial number of youth-led initiatives struggle to progress beyond the pitching phase. This is often due to factors such as limited access to funding, inadequate training, and a lack of representation in decision-making processes (World Bank, 2024). Furthermore, collaboration between young innovators and key stakeholders such as government bodies and marine research institutions remains insufficient. This lack of support hinders the scaling and effective implementation of innovative solutions. As a result, many youth-driven initiatives in ocean conservation and sustainable resource management find it difficult to achieve long-term impact and broader adoption.

INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>Benthos.ai</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Germany</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> Benthos is committed to democratizing access to advanced technology for ocean conservation, empowering local communities and small-scale projects with innovative tools and data-driven insights. The organization is not solely focused on technology; it represents a movement aimed at fostering synergistic progress in marine conservation.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> The organization streamlines marine ecosystem assessments and works closely with local communities to connect them with essential funding, thereby facilitating practical conservation actions.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> Benthos is a start-up in the ocean conservation sector that has not yet achieved significant large-scale impact. However, it has played a vital role in supporting local communities by improving the effectiveness of their marine conservation efforts. By providing innovative, data-driven insights and tools, Benthos has enabled small-scale projects in coastal regions to make informed decisions regarding sustainable marine practices.</p>

INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>Reef Support</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Netherlands</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> Reef Support is dedicated to advancing the conservation of marine ecosystems, with a particular emphasis on coral reefs. The organization leverages cutting-edge AI technologies and fosters global collaboration to drive its initiatives.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> Reef Support develops advanced marine monitoring tools, including Open Coral AI, and facilitates hands-on conservation training through initiatives like Reef Rangers. Additionally, the organization supports data collection efforts for assessing ocean and coral health.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> Reef Support has partnered with over 30 global organizations to enhance coral reef health monitoring. Their innovative tools, including AI applications for coral restoration, are actively utilized in conservation efforts, improving the efficiency and accuracy of data collection. This initiative has garnered several awards and received grants from various NGOs, highlighting its significance in the field of marine conservation.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Efficiently processing and analyzing the large volumes of data collected from marine monitoring activities can be resource-intensive, necessitating robust technological solutions and specialized expertise. Reef Support faces constraints related to funding and resources, which can hinder its ability to develop and implement comprehensive marine conservation solutions. Additionally, the need for ongoing support poses challenges to the long-term viability of its initiatives. There is also a lack of fundamental knowledge and an integrated approach to coastal management in the regions where Reef Support operates, complicating the implementation of effective conservation strategies.</p>

## Water and River systems management

Most European youth engagement in the water sector has been facilitated through programs focused on campaigns and advocacy, water quality monitoring, river cleanup initiatives, and flood management efforts. Despite this engagement, there are significant gaps in youth participation, particularly in leadership roles and decision-making processes. Many young individuals encounter barriers such as limited access to education and training specific to hydrology, as well as insufficient policies that incorporate their voices into water governance (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2024).

The benefits of youth involvement in the management of water and river systems are substantial. Engaging young people in these initiatives enables them to gain practical experience in environmental monitoring and conservation while also developing essential skills in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) (Union for the Mediterranean, 2021). Furthermore, youth-led projects can promote community development and environmental protection through hands-on learning experiences.



INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>Youth for the Rhine</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Netherlands</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> Youth for the Rhine is dedicated to empowering young individuals to actively participate in shaping the future of the Rhine River basin, with a strong emphasis on promoting sustainable environmental practices and conservation efforts.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> The organization actively engages youth through advocacy efforts, educational campaigns, and collaborative events designed to promote environmental awareness, sustainable river management, and policy discussions.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> The group has successfully mobilized youth around the Rhine River, raising awareness of environmental issues affecting the region through community campaigns, educational programs, and outreach activities. They have empowered young individuals to actively participate in decision-making processes related to river conservation, ensuring that their voices are integral to developing sustainable solutions.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> The presence of youth groups across multiple countries in the Rhine region complicates the alignment of goals related to sustainable water management, biodiversity, and climate resilience. Variations in national policies, local regulations, and differing priorities can hinder collective action, making it challenging to develop unified strategies and effectively implement the network’s initiatives.</p>
<p><b>The Water Youth Network</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Czechia</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> The Water Youth Network is dedicated to empowering young people to become leaders in sustainable water management while advocating for equitable access to water resources. It connects youth globally to collaboratively address water challenges. The primary objective of the Water Youth Network is to provide both online and offline platforms for young individuals to engage with one another, promote their inclusion in decision-making processes, and facilitate the adoption of youth-friendly policies at all levels.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> The organization conducts capacity-building workshops, engages in advocacy and policy influence, and promotes community action on water-related issues. Additionally, it focuses on networking and building partnerships with other organizations to amplify its impact.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> The Water Youth Network has engaged over 10,000 young individuals and boasts more than 500 active members involved in water-related projects, advocacy, and policy change efforts on a global scale. The organization operates in 80 countries worldwide, including nations across Africa and Europe.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Differences in national policies and local regulations can create obstacles for youth participation in water governance, making it difficult for young leaders to influence decision-making processes effectively.</p>



INITIATIVE	DETAILS
<p><b>The Groundwater Youth Network</b></p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Croatia</p> <p><b>Focus Area:</b> The UNESCO Groundwater Youth Network (GWYN) aims to engage young professionals in groundwater-related issues by providing a platform for sharing ideas and experiences, promoting youth participation in decision-making, and facilitating capacity-building opportunities. The network advocates for youth involvement in international groundwater activities, striving to integrate the youth perspective into UNESCO's groundwater-related events. GWYN encourages youth engagement in critical areas, including water security, sustainable groundwater management, and climate resilience.</p> <p><b>Key Activities:</b> The network organizes workshops, campaigns, and educational programs aimed at enhancing groundwater literacy. Additionally, it facilitates youth participation in policy dialogues and promotes initiatives for groundwater conservation.</p> <p><b>Impact:</b> Through youth-led initiatives in various regions, the network has significantly contributed to raising global awareness of groundwater issues, informing policy discussions, and fostering active youth participation in water resource management. While the initiative is operational, it is still in the development phase, and a call for members remains open to provide opportunities for young professionals aged 18-35 from youth-led organizations to engage in shaping its activities.</p>





**Challenges to youth  
participation in ocean  
governance and blue  
economy across africa  
and europe**

## Participation Challenges in Key Blue Economy Sectors

### i) Shipping and Maritime Transport

While youth engagement in the blue economy has gained traction in areas such as marine conservation, sustainable fisheries, and environmental technology, there are still several sectors where their participation remains limited. One such sector is shipping and maritime transport. This industry, vital for global trade, the movement of essential goods, energy resources, and humanitarian aid, often demands significant capital investment, technical expertise, and compliance with complex regulations. The slow pace of innovation in this sector, coupled with its reliance on established infrastructure and traditional practices, makes it less appealing to young individuals, who typically gravitate toward fields that promise rapid technological advancements and environmental sustainability. To enhance youth involvement, the shipping industry could prioritize the adoption of more sustainable practices, such as transitioning to cleaner fuels and integrating digital technologies like automation and artificial intelligence. Recently, the Future Maritime Leaders Network was established to engage youth in this sector; however, the initiative has been slow to gain momentum.

### ii) Deep-Sea Mining

There is a growing recognition among human rights advocates that future generations deserve to inherit a healthy environment. Despite the increasing number of countries advocating for a prohibition on deep-sea mining, this issue has garnered limited attention from youth. This underscores the need for comprehensive scientific research to better understand deep-sea ecosystems before any exploitation occurs. Furthermore, the goals of the

Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) treaty emphasize that protecting marine biodiversity should take precedence over mining activities.

As young people increasingly prioritize conservation and sustainability, the extraction of minerals from the ocean floor is often seen as incompatible with their environmental values. To enhance youth participation in this sector, the industry must demonstrate a genuine commitment to minimizing environmental impacts while prioritizing transparency and ethical practices.

There is significant potential for high-level engagement with political leaders, which includes fostering dialogue and collaboration among young leaders, NGOs, governments, international organizations, and other influential figures who have previously expressed strong opposition to deep-sea mining. Building coalitions at this level could significantly enhance momentum toward a global prohibition on deep-sea mining. Additionally, the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) in 2025 presents an opportunity to involve youth, solidify commitments against deep-sea mining, galvanize support, and build coalitions among nations advocating for a precautionary approach to this issue.

The Sustainable Ocean Alliance, through its hubs and Youth Policy Advisory Council, has been actively working to engage youth in negotiations at the International Seabed Authority. This initiative aims to ensure that young people are central to decision-making processes related to deep-sea mining and should be further developed.



An aerial photograph of a waterfall, showing white foam cascading over dark, textured rocks. The water flows from the top left towards the bottom right, creating a series of white, frothy pools and channels. The overall scene is captured in a high-angle, top-down perspective, emphasizing the intricate patterns of the water and the ruggedness of the rock formations.

# **Navigating successes and pitfalls: insights from youth- led collaborations across Africa and Europe**



## Successful Practices in Youth-led Efforts

*Collaboration over Competition:* An effective practice that has emerged is the emphasis on collaboration rather than competition, fostering partnerships among youth groups, local communities, policymakers, and the private sector to tackle shared challenges. A notable example is the Africa Youth Climate Assembly Network, which has successfully empowered young people to address climate-related issues, including marine pollution, through collaborative initiatives. By working in tandem with local communities, the network has promoted sustainable practices, supported community-led conservation efforts, and advocated for policy reforms that enhance youth participation in ocean governance and the blue economy.

*Grassroots engagement together with local context awareness:* Youth-led projects that actively engage local communities and tailor their initiatives to specific local contexts have demonstrated a greater impact. A prime example is the Kenya Youth Biodiversity Network (KYBN), which has effectively implemented mangrove restoration projects along the Kenyan coastline. This initiative includes training programs for youth and the preservation of indigenous knowledge through intergenerational partnerships. By collaborating closely with coastal communities, KYBN ensures that its restoration efforts are rooted in local knowledge, addressing both environmental and socio-economic challenges.

*Innovative use of Technology:* Tech Hub Tanzania, effectively leverages digital platforms, including social media campaigns on Instagram and Twitter, to raise awareness about marine conservation and mobilize over 1,000 youth for environmental initiatives such as clean-up activities and tree planting. The Marine Debris Tracker app enables users to report and track litter and pollution in marine environments. Additionally, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) experiences, such as Ocean Rift, provide immersive virtual tours of marine ecosystems, helping users understand the impact of human activity on oceans. Platforms like Coursera also offer courses on marine biology and ocean conservation, creating further opportunities for youth involvement in marine protection efforts.

*Direct action combined with Education:* A highly effective strategy employed by young advocates combines direct environmental action with community education. A notable example of this approach is the Coastal Resource Centre in South Africa, which engages youth in cleaning up marine

debris while simultaneously educating local communities about the impacts of pollution on the environment. By removing substantial amounts of waste from coastal areas, the project directly enhances the physical environment. Concurrently, it conducts workshops for community members, fostering lasting awareness of the importance of sustainable practices.

*Consistency and long-term thinking:* Long-term thinking is essential for achieving sustainable environmental impact, as exemplified by the Plastic-Free Future Campaign in Ireland. Led by youth, this campaign focuses on eliminating single-use plastics from coastal areas and demonstrates a consistent commitment to environmental action through ongoing initiatives. Rather than being a one-time event, the campaign encompasses continuous efforts such as educational programs, grassroots advocacy, and collaboration with policymakers to promote regulations that support long-term environmental sustainability. The campaign's approach aligns with foresight analysis, addressing current challenges while anticipating future trends, including the increasing demand for sustainable materials and the implementation of stricter regulations on plastic usage.

## Ineffective Practices in Youth-Led Efforts

*Tokenism:* Tokenism is a prevalent issue in youth-led initiatives, where young individuals are included for the sake of appearances but are excluded from meaningful decision-making processes. This often occurs at conferences, where youth are prominently featured in keynote speeches yet are not involved in the negotiations or decision-making that lead to critical outcomes. For instance, at major COP events, young people engage in various activities, including actions, side events, and keynote speeches, and produce position papers or youth statements. However, these statements are seldom adopted by the presidency or reflected in the final COP outcomes. This situation undermines the potential contributions of youth participants and leads to frustration, as their voices are not genuinely considered in shaping the direction of the initiatives.

*Lack of focus and overextension:* Youth-led projects often risk overextending themselves by attempting to tackle multiple issues simultaneously, which can dilute their overall impact. A pertinent example is the Kisumu Environmental Champions, which initially concentrated on addressing plastic pollution in Kenya. However, the organization later expanded its focus to include environmental education,



advocacy, eco-friendly products, agriculture, and training for adolescents. While the project initially gained significant momentum and attracted a large number of participants, it soon lost traction as many volunteers found it challenging to remain engaged with such a wide array of initiatives. Consequently, the project's impact diminished considerably.

*Short-Termism:* A significant issue in youth-led environmental projects is the focus on short-term gains without addressing deeper, systemic issues. For instance, World Cleanup Day, an annual global initiative, mobilizes millions of volunteers to clean up waste in various regions, including Africa and Europe. While this event successfully attracts large numbers of participants and results in the removal of substantial amounts of waste, there is often insufficient follow-up action to address the root causes of pollution, such as inadequate waste management infrastructure and plastic production. Without long-term strategies and systemic changes, these efforts tend to have limited lasting impact on environmental sustainability.

*Over Reliance on external funding:* Many youth-led initiatives encounter challenges related to financial sustainability. For instance, the Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOP) national nodes, part of the UN Decade of Ocean Restoration, primarily depend on funding from UNESCO, which makes them heavily reliant on international grants to support their activities. Although the ECOP Morocco project achieved notable success in raising awareness about plastic pollution, it struggled to maintain momentum once funding was depleted. As a result, their on-the-ground activities ceased, limiting their efforts to organizing webinars and online actions. This dependency highlights the need for youth-led initiatives to explore diverse funding sources and develop strategies for long-term financial sustainability.

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## Conclusion

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The youth mapping report titled «Harnessing Youth Innovation: The Role of Africa and Europe Young Leaders in Driving Ocean Governance and Blue Economy» emphasizes the vital role of youth engagement in addressing the urgent challenges facing our oceans and marine ecosystems. The findings reveal that young leaders from both Africa and Europe are not only passionate advocates for sustainable practices but also innovative problem solvers actively contributing to the blue economy. Their initiatives encompass a diverse range of sectors, including marine conservation, aquaculture, renewable energy, and coastal tourism, reflecting a comprehensive approach to ocean governance.

Despite the significant contributions made by youth-led organizations, the report identifies several barriers that impede their full potential. These barriers include limited access to education and training, inadequate representation in decision-making processes, and a lack of sustainable funding mechanisms. Additionally, the tendency for youth initiatives to overextend their focus or prioritize short-term gains over long-term systemic change presents challenges to their effectiveness and sustainability.

To tackle these issues, the report presents actionable recommendations that emphasize the importance of mentorship in scaling up a youth-centered Africa-Europe ocean community. It also suggests co-designing specialized funds for youth-led ocean projects, establishing a network of youth-focused knowledge hubs across Africa and Europe, and creating an AU-EU exchange program for young leaders in the ocean and blue economy.

The future of ocean governance and the blue economy depends on the active participation and leadership of young people. By harnessing their creativity, energy, and commitment, meaningful, concrete and actionable change can be driven that not only protects our marine environments but also promotes sustainable economic growth. It is crucial for stakeholders across sectors to recognize and invest in the potential of youth, ensuring that their voices are heard and their contributions valued. Immediate action is necessary, as the health of our oceans and the well-being of future generations rely on the decisions we make today.

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## Annex

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Directory of youth leaders from Africa and Europe  
Youth-led Initiatives Championing for Ocean Governance and Blue Economy in Africa  
Youth-led Initiatives Championing for Ocean Governance and Blue Economy in Europe

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# Acknowledgements

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