

BACKGROUND PAPER

# Blue Economy and CITIES

**UN HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



IMPLEMENTING  
THE NEW  
URBAN AGENDA





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**UN**  **HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



# UN-Habitat background paper on BLUE ECONOMY AND CITIES

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# Key Messages



1. **The Blue Economy encompasses all waterbodies**, including the world's oceans, lakes, rivers and wetlands. Inland cities are affected as much as coastal or island cities.



2. **Cities are at the forefront of the Blue Economy.** Many urban centres are located along coasts and waterfronts around the world. Cities must recognize the value of their natural capital, including their waterbodies.



3. **Harnessing the potential of cities to benefit from the Blue Economy** – such as sustainable livelihoods, green and blue job creation, sustainable housing and infrastructure, waste management, ecological protection and restoration of coastal and waterfront areas.



4. **Integrating urban planning and marine spatial planning must be a priority for Blue Economy.** Bringing together spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) through the development of integrated coastal and marine spatial plans (CMSP) are therefore important steps to guide national government policy-makers, local government officials, marine protection experts and other civic stakeholders.



5. **Governance arrangements** of coastal, marine and other waterbody environments must be harmonized for better economic, social and environmental outcomes. These must go along with appropriate institutional priorities, goals, plans and actions on all levels of government.



6. **Anticipating, mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change** is an essential component of the Blue Economy. National and local investments in infrastructure, community resilience and environmental protection must be complemented by shared global and regional principles, strategies and priorities. Improving countries' and cities' readiness to access international climate funds will become crucial in developing a Blue Economy.





7. **Resilient urban planning and design, and low-carbon plans for infrastructure and basic services** are needed to promote local economic development and to protect cities from further contributing to environmental degradation – paying special attention to water management, wastewater, oceans and marine pollution.



8. **Prosperity is a key driver of healthy and sustainable Blue Economies.** Without the full engagement of women, youth, and other marginalized groups, these economies will not work to their optimal level.



9. **Restoring and protecting coastal and other water ecosystems** will be crucial for both cities – in terms of strengthening their resilience to climate-induced shocks – and oceans. Often, the most vulnerable and poorest populations that live in informal settlements are least prepared, will be most deeply affected, and take longest to recover.



10. **Investments in data, science and cutting-edge technology** will be critical in supporting governance prioritization, reforms and shaping management decisions to achieve sustainable 'blue' transformations.



11. **More scientific research is needed** to draw the linkages between cities and the Blue Economy, in terms of cities as hotspots of vulnerability, as well as drivers of sustainable development.



2.1 Defining the Blue Economy

The Blue Economy is an emerging concept which encourages better stewardship of our ocean and other blue resources. It provides for an inclusive model in which coastal zones, or those with significant waterbodies – which sometimes lack the capacity to manage their rich water resources – can begin to extend the benefit of those resources to all. The use of the term stems from the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) outcomes where member states pledged to “protect and restore the health, productivity and resilience of oceans and marine ecosystem to maintain their diversity, enabling their conservation and sustainable use for present and future”<sup>1</sup>. The terms ‘Blue Economy’ or ‘Blue Growth’ have over the years become common policy usage around the world. Despite increasing high-level adoption of the Blue Economy, as a concept as well as a goal of policy-making and investment, there is still no globally accepted definition of the term.

According to the World Bank<sup>2</sup>, the Blue Economy refers to the sustainable use of ocean and other water resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and job creation. The activities that are undertaken need to provide social and economic benefits for current and future generations and should also aim at restoring, protecting, and maintaining the diversity, productivity, resilience, core functions and the intrinsic value of the marine ecosystem. Furthermore, they must be based on an economic system that emphasizes clean technologies, renewable energy, waste reduction and the recycling of materials<sup>3</sup>.

In a broader sense, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) recognizes the limitation of only including oceans and marine issues in the concept, and proposes to expand it to an integrated and innovative approach to the economic consumption of the resources of oceans, lakes, rivers and other

Table 1: A definition of the Concept of the Blue Economy

*“A sustainable ocean economy emerges when economic activity is in balance with the long-term capacity of ocean ecosystems to support this activity and remain resilient and healthy.”*

Essentially, the Blue Economy concept is a lens by which to view and develop policy agendas that simultaneously enhance ocean health and economic growth, in a manner consistent with principles of social equity and inclusion.

*(Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015)*

Table 2: Blue aspects of the Green Economy

The main objectives of the Green

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