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2050 AIM STRATEGY AND BLUE ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA, 2012-2025

Abu, Christian Ukeame, PhD
Department of Political Science, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt
christian.abu@ust.edu.ng

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ABSTRACT
Africa's maritime domain is one of the continent's most strategic economic and geopolitical assets. With over 38 coastal and island states, vast Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), and critical sea routes connecting Africa to global trade networks, the maritime sector offers significant opportunities for economic transformation, regional integration, and sustainable development. Yet, maritime insecurity, piracy, illegal fishing, weak institutional coordination, environmental degradation, and inadequate infrastructure continue to undermine these prospects. Although the African Union's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime (AIM) Strategy provides a comprehensive framework for maritime governance and blue economy development, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to examining its political economy and implementation constraints across Africa, creating an important knowledge gap that this study addresses. Guided by Maritime Security Theory, this study examines the developmental implications of the 2050 AIM Strategy using a qualitative documentary research design based on African Union policy documents, International Maritime Organization publications, and recent scholarly literature. The findings indicate that while the strategy offers a coherent framework for integrating maritime security, environmental sustainability, and economic development, implementation has been constrained by weak state capacity, inadequate financing, fragmented regional cooperation, and persistent insecurity, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea and the Horn of Africa. The study concludes that effective implementation requires stronger continental cooperation, greater investment in maritime infrastructure and blue economy sectors, enhanced naval capabilities, and harmonised legal and institutional frameworks.

Keywords: 2050 AIM Strategy, Blue economy, Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), Illegal Fishing, Maritime Security.

Introduction

Africa's maritime domain has assumed unprecedented importance within the contemporary global political economy as oceans increasingly shape international trade, geopolitical competition, environmental sustainability, food security, and regional integration. Maritime transportation remains the dominant mode of global commerce, accounting for approximately four-fifths of world merchandise trade by volume and facilitating increasingly complex global production and supply chains (UNCTAD, 2023). Consequently, maritime spaces have evolved beyond traditional sea lanes into strategic geopolitical arenas where states compete for influence over shipping routes, offshore hydrocarbons, fisheries, submarine communication cables, critical minerals, and emerging blue economy resources (Bueger, 2015; Till, 2018). Contemporary maritime governance therefore extends beyond naval defence to encompass economic development, environmental protection, institutional resilience, technological innovation, and sustainable ocean governance (Okafor-Yarwood & Belhabib, 2024). For Africa, whose future economic transformation increasingly depends upon maritime trade, regional integration, and sustainable exploitation of marine resources, effective governance of the maritime domain has become a strategic developmental imperative rather than simply a security concern.

Africa possesses one of the world's most strategically significant maritime environments. The continent borders the Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, and Southern Ocean while controlling access to globally important maritime chokepoints such as the Suez Canal, Bab el-Mandeb Strait, Mozambique Channel, and the Cape of Good Hope. Collectively, African coastal and island states command approximately 13 million square kilometres of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) containing substantial fisheries, offshore hydrocarbon reserves, seabed minerals, renewable marine energy resources, coastal tourism assets, and globally important shipping corridors (African Union, 2020; Okafor-Yarwood & Belhabib, 2024). These maritime assets present enormous opportunities for industrialisation, employment creation, food security, foreign direct investment, maritime logistics, and sustainable economic diversification. As the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) seeks to deepen intra-African trade and strengthen regional value chains, efficient maritime transport systems and well-governed ports have become indispensable for improving continental competitiveness within the global economy (Adewumi, 2021; Ukeje, 2022).

The growing prominence of the blue economy has further elevated the strategic importance of Africa's maritime sector. The blue economy promotes the sustainable utilisation of ocean and coastal resources to generate economic growth while preserving marine ecosystems and enhancing social inclusion. Rather than viewing marine resources solely through extractive perspectives, contemporary blue economy thinking integrates fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transport, coastal tourism, offshore renewable energy, marine biotechnology, shipbuilding, ocean science, and ecosystem conservation within broader sustainable development frameworks (Smith-Godfrey, 2016; Okafor-Yarwood & Belhabib, 2024). Increasingly, scholars argue that blue economy governance should simultaneously advance economic productivity, climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and social equity through integrated ocean management (Voyer et al., 2018; Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2021). Consequently, the African Union identifies the blue economy as one of the principal drivers of Agenda 2063, recognising that sustainable exploitation of marine resources can reduce structural dependence on primary commodity exports while supporting inclusive growth and regional integration (African Union, 2020).

In the face of these considerable opportunities, Africa's maritime domain continues to experience persistent governance deficits and multidimensional security threats that significantly undermine sustainable development. Piracy, armed robbery at sea, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, crude oil theft, trafficking in narcotics and persons, marine pollution, cyber threats targeting port infrastructure, and weak maritime law enforcement remain widespread across several coastal regions (Ukeje, 2022; Iheduru, 2023). Although piracy incidents have declined considerably following enhanced regional cooperation under the Yaoundé Architecture, criminal networks have increasingly diversified into illegal oil bunkering, kidnapping, trafficking, and cyber-enabled maritime crime (Sobrino-Heredia, 2022; Okafor-Yarwood & Eastwood, 2025). Likewise, illegal fishing continues to deprive African economies of billions of dollars annually while threatening food security, coastal livelihoods, biodiversity, and fiscal revenues (Okafor-Yarwood, 2020; Denton & Harris, 2021). These interconnected maritime threats increase shipping costs, discourage foreign investment, weaken regional trade competitiveness, and constrain Africa's ability to harness the developmental potential of its oceans.

Despite the growing policy significance of Africa's maritime domain and the adoption of the African Union's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime (AIM) Strategy, important gaps remain in the scholarly literature. Existing studies have largely examined maritime security, piracy, the blue economy, or ocean governance as separate themes, with limited attention to the political economy of the 2050 AIM Strategy and the institutional, financial, and governance factors shaping its implementation across Africa. Consequently, there remains insufficient understanding of how the strategy integrates maritime security, economic development, environmental sustainability, and regional cooperation to advance Africa's broader development agenda. Addressing this gap, this study examines the political economy and developmental implications of the 2050 AIM Strategy, with particular emphasis on its implementation challenges, governance architecture, and potential contribution to sustainable maritime governance and blue economy development in Africa.

The governance challenges confronting Africa's maritime domain have become increasingly complex due to changing geopolitical and environmental conditions. Intensifying strategic competition among major powers has expanded foreign naval deployments, maritime security partnerships, port infrastructure investment, and blue economy diplomacy across African coastal regions. Simultaneously, climate change has accelerated sea-level rise, coastal erosion, biodiversity loss, ocean warming, and increasingly frequent extreme weather events that threaten fisheries, coastal settlements, ports, and maritime infrastructure (IPCC, 2023). Recent scholarship therefore argues that maritime governance must integrate security, environmental sustainability, technological innovation, institutional resilience, and economic development within a single governance framework capable of addressing increasingly interconnected maritime challenges (Bueger, 2015; Okafor-Yarwood & Belhabib, 2024). The maritime domain has consequently become a critical arena through which Africa's developmental aspirations intersect with broader questions of geopolitical competition, climate resilience, and sustainable ocean governance. The study is periodised from 2012 to 2025 because 2012 marks the adoption of the African Union's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime (AIM) Strategy, while 2025 provides a contemporary timeframe for assessing its implementation, achievements, and emerging governance challenges across the continent.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrated maritime governance framework that combines the perspectives of Bueger (2015) and Till (2018) to analyse the implementation of the African Union's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (2050 AIM Strategy). Rather than viewing maritime security solely through a military lens, the framework conceptualises the maritime domain as a governance space where security, economic development, environmental sustainability, institutional capacity, and regional cooperation are closely interconnected.

Bueger (2015) argues that maritime security extends beyond naval defence to include four interrelated dimensions: national security, economic development, marine environmental protection, and human security. Consequently, threats such as piracy, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, trafficking, and marine pollution undermine not only state security but also economic productivity, environmental sustainability, and the livelihoods of coastal communities. Addressing these challenges therefore requires effective governance, legal harmonisation, and regional cooperation.

Similarly, Till (2018) maintains that maritime power depends on secure sea lanes, effective maritime governance, law enforcement, commercial shipping, diplomacy, and international collaboration. This perspective is particularly relevant to Africa, where maritime insecurity is largely driven by weak institutions, limited enforcement capacity, and fragmented regional coordination rather than conventional interstate conflict.

Combining these perspectives provides an appropriate framework for analysing the 2050 AIM Strategy, whose objectives include strengthening maritime security, promoting the blue economy, protecting marine ecosystems, enhancing institutional capacity, and fostering regional integration. The framework enables the study to assess how governance effectiveness, regional cooperation, and institutional capacity influence the implementation of the Strategy between 2012 and 2025. Although the framework has been criticised for its state-centric orientation, these critiques reinforce the need to situate maritime governance within broader political economy and sustainable development contexts (Chapsos & Malcolm, 2017; Okafor-Yarwood & Belhabib, 2024). Accordingly, it provides a suitable analytical lens for examining the opportunities and constraints shaping Africa's maritime governance agenda.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative documentary research design to examine the implementation of the African Union's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (2050 AIM Strategy) and its implications for maritime governance, maritime security, and blue economy development in Africa between 2012 and 2025. The approach is appropriate because it facilitates the analysis of policy frameworks, institutional processes, and governance dynamics using existing documentary evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study reviewed 65 documents, comprising 20 policy publications from the African Union (AU), International Maritime Organization (IMO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and African Development Bank (AfDB), together with 45 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021 and 2025. Documents were included if they addressed the 2050 AIM Strategy, maritime governance, maritime security, or the blue economy in Africa and were published by reputable institutions or peer-reviewed journals. Documents focusing on non-African contexts, lacking scholarly credibility, or duplicating evidence were excluded.

Data were analysed using the thematic analysis framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). Relevant information was coded and organised into themes relating to maritime security, institutional capacity, regional cooperation, blue economy development, environmental sustainability, and geopolitical competition. To enhance credibility, findings were triangulated across institutional publications and scholarly literature, thereby strengthening the reliability of interpretations. Although limited to documentary evidence, the breadth and quality of the sources provide a robust basis for assessing the implementation and developmental implications of the 2050 AIM Strategy in Africa.

Findings / Discussion

Maritime Security as the Foundation of Governance

The findings indicate that maritime security constitutes the foundation upon which effective maritime governance and sustainable blue economy development depend in Africa. The 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (2050 AIM Strategy) recognises that "Africa's seas and oceans are key drivers of economic and social development" (African Union, 2014, p. xx), demonstrating that maritime security is conceived not merely as a defence objective but as an essential prerequisite for economic growth, environmental sustainability, and regional integration. This finding is consistent with the integrated maritime governance framework adopted in this study, which views security, governance, and development as mutually reinforcing (Bueger, 2015; Till, 2018).

The documentary evidence further shows that the Strategy marked a significant shift from fragmented, state-centred maritime responses towards a coordinated continental approach. It envisions "a sustainable thriving blue economy in a secure and environmentally sustainable manner" (African Union, 2014, p. xx), linking maritime security with institutional coordination, maritime law enforcement, marine environmental protection, and blue economy development. This reflects the growing recognition that Africa's maritime challenges require integrated governance rather than isolated national interventions.

The analysis also reveals that implementation of the Strategy has strengthened regional maritime cooperation, particularly through the Yaoundé Architecture involving ECOWAS, ECCAS, and the Gulf of Guinea Commission. Documentary evidence and recent studies indicate that enhanced intelligence sharing, coordinated naval patrols, and improved maritime domain awareness have contributed to a notable decline in piracy and kidnapping incidents in the Gulf of Guinea compared with the period before coordinated regional action (Sobrino-Heredia, 2022; Ukeje, 2022). These developments demonstrate the value of collective security arrangements in addressing transnational maritime threats.

Beyond security gains, the findings show that improved maritime safety has generated important economic benefits. Safer shipping routes have enhanced investor confidence, reduced operational risks, supported port efficiency, and facilitated maritime trade, thereby contributing to the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and broader regional integration (UNCTAD, 2023; Adewumi, 2021). The evidence therefore confirms that maritime security functions as a catalyst for economic transformation rather than simply a security objective.

Nevertheless, the documents indicate that maritime threats continue to evolve. While piracy has declined, organised criminal networks have diversified into illegal oil bunkering, trafficking, cyber-enabled maritime crime, and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. These emerging threats require continuous adaptation of maritime governance institutions and stronger regional cooperation. As discussed in the implementation challenges section, institutional capacity and resource constraints continue to influence the effectiveness of these responses.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the 2050 AIM Strategy has established a coherent governance framework that integrates maritime security with sustainable development and regional cooperation. Although implementation remains uneven across African states, the Strategy has significantly reshaped continental thinking by positioning secure maritime spaces as essential to Africa's economic transformation, environmental sustainability, and long-term blue economy development.

Institutional Capacity and Governance Constraints

The findings indicate that institutional capacity is the principal determinant of the successful implementation of the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (2050 AIM Strategy). Although African states have adopted continental and regional maritime governance frameworks, implementation has remained uneven because many coastal states lack the administrative, financial, technological, and human capacities required to translate policy commitments into practice. The Strategy itself recognises that achieving its objectives requires "strengthened national and regional institutional capacities" (African Union, 2014, p. xx), highlighting effective governance as the foundation of sustainable maritime development.

The documentary evidence shows that fragmented institutional arrangements remain a major obstacle to implementation. In many countries, responsibility for maritime affairs is shared among navies, maritime administrations, fisheries agencies, customs services, environmental authorities, and port regulators with limited coordination. This fragmentation often produces overlapping mandates, weak enforcement, and inconsistent policy implementation, reducing the effectiveness of responses to piracy, illegal fishing, trafficking, and marine pollution (Ukeje, 2022; Iheduru, 2023).

The analysis further demonstrates that limited financial investment constrains operational effectiveness. Maritime governance requires sustained expenditure on surveillance systems, patrol vessels, port infrastructure, communication technologies, and maritime domain awareness. However, competing national development priorities frequently result in inadequate funding, leaving many agencies with obsolete equipment and limited operational capacity. The Strategy therefore emphasises the need for "adequate and sustainable resource mobilisation" to support implementation (African Union, 2014, p. xx).

Another important finding is the shortage of specialised human and technological capacity. Effective maritime governance increasingly depends on expertise in maritime law, hydrography, cybersecurity, fisheries management, and digital surveillance technologies. While development partners have supported training and technical assistance, many African maritime institutions continue to experience skills shortages and limited technological capability, particularly in monitoring large Exclusive Economic Zones (Okafor-Yarwood & Belhabib, 2024).

The findings also reveal continued reliance on external partners for financing, equipment, and technical support. Although these partnerships have strengthened maritime governance, they raise important questions regarding institutional sustainability and long-term policy autonomy.

Overall, the evidence demonstrates that the principal implementation challenge is not the absence of policy, but the limited institutional capacity to implement it effectively. The findings support the integrated maritime governance framework by demonstrating that secure and productive maritime spaces depend on capable institutions, effective coordination, sustainable financing, and continuous capacity development. These institutional constraints also help explain the uneven implementation outcomes discussed in the subsequent findings on environmental governance and regional cooperation.

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing and Marine Resource Governance

The findings indicate that illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing remains one of the greatest obstacles to achieving the objectives of the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (2050 AIM Strategy). The Strategy recognises that Africa's marine resources are critical to sustainable development and calls for their "sustainable conservation and exploitation" (African Union, 2014, p. xx). This demonstrates that fisheries governance is viewed not only as an environmental concern but also as an economic and maritime security priority.

The documentary evidence shows that IUU fishing continues to impose substantial economic losses across African coastal states through illegal harvesting, underreporting of catches, tax evasion, and depletion of commercially valuable fish stocks. Recent estimates suggest that Africa loses between US$7 billion and US$10 billion annually to IUU fishing, reducing government revenue, threatening export earnings, and weakening food security (Belhabib et al., 2021; FAO, 2024). Countries such as Senegal, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique are particularly affected because fisheries remain important sources of employment, foreign exchange, and household nutrition.

The findings further reveal that IUU fishing has significant social and environmental consequences. Declining fish stocks reduce the livelihoods of artisanal fishing communities, increase rural poverty, and intensify food insecurity in many coastal areas. At the same time, destructive fishing practices, including bottom trawling and illegal harvesting of protected species degrade marine ecosystems, threaten biodiversity, and undermine the sustainability of other blue economy sectors such as tourism, aquaculture, and marine biotechnology (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2021).

The analysis also shows that IUU fishing has become increasingly transnational. Many illegal operators exploit flags of convenience, complex ownership structures, and weak cross-border enforcement to evade prosecution. The 2050 AIM Strategy therefore emphasises strengthened regional cooperation, information sharing, and harmonised legal frameworks to improve the protection of Africa's marine resources (African Union, 2014, p. xx). These findings highlight the importance of collective action through the African Union and Regional Economic Communities in addressing maritime crimes that transcend national jurisdictions.

As discussed in the previous subsection, institutional and technological capacity constraints continue to affect implementation across many coastal states. Nevertheless, the evidence demonstrates that the 2050 AIM Strategy has elevated fisheries governance from a sectoral policy issue to a strategic component of maritime governance, recognising that sustainable management of marine resources is essential for economic resilience, food security, environmental sustainability, and the long-term success of Africa's blue economy.

Blue Economy Development, Regional Cooperation, and Continental Maritime Governance

The findings indicate that the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (2050 AIM Strategy) has repositioned the blue economy as a strategic driver of Africa's economic transformation. The Strategy envisions "a sustainable thriving blue economy in a secure and environmentally sustainable manner" (African Union, 2014, p. xx), while the African Union Blue Economy Strategy identifies the blue economy as a key pillar for inclusive growth, employment creation, and regional integration (African Union, 2020, p. xx). These documents demonstrate a clear shift from viewing the maritime domain primarily as a security space to recognising it as a source of long-term economic prosperity.

The documentary evidence shows that Africa's extensive coastlines, abundant fisheries, offshore energy resources, and strategic shipping routes provide significant opportunities for industrialisation, maritime trade, tourism, aquaculture, and renewable ocean energy. Given that more than 90 per cent of Africa's external trade is transported by sea (UNCTAD, 2023), efficient ports and maritime transport systems are indispensable to the successful implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The findings therefore suggest that investment in maritime infrastructure is central to improving regional connectivity and strengthening Africa's competitiveness in global trade.

The analysis further reveals that regional cooperation has become one of the Strategy's greatest achievements. Through the African Union and Regional Economic Communities, African states have expanded joint maritime patrols, information sharing, fisheries management, and legal cooperation to address shared maritime challenges (Sobrino-Heredia, 2022; Ukeje, 2022). The Strategy similarly emphasises "enhanced cooperation and coordination among Member States" (African Union, 2014, p. xx), recognising that effective maritime governance requires collective action rather than isolated national responses.

The findings also show that sustainable blue economy development depends on balancing economic growth with environmental protection. Investments in fisheries, coastal tourism, marine transport, and offshore energy must be accompanied by ecosystem conservation, climate adaptation, and responsible resource management to ensure long-term productivity (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2021).

As demonstrated in the previous subsection, institutional and financing constraints continue to affect implementation across many coastal states. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that the 2050 AIM Strategy has transformed Africa's maritime policy by integrating economic development, regional cooperation, and environmental sustainability within a common continental governance framework. Its long-term success will depend on sustained investment in maritime infrastructure, stronger regional partnerships, and policies that enable African states to derive greater value from their ocean resources.

External Geopolitical Competition, Environmental Sustainability, and Maritime Governance

The findings show that implementation of the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (2050 AIM Strategy) is increasingly shaped by two interconnected forces: growing geopolitical competition in African maritime spaces and worsening environmental pressures. The Strategy seeks to ensure the "sustainable exploitation of Africa's maritime resources" while protecting the continent's strategic interests (African Union, 2014, p. xx). This objective has become more important as African ports, shipping routes, offshore energy reserves, submarine communication cables, and marine resources attract greater international attention.

The documentary evidence indicates that external powers have expanded their maritime engagement with Africa through port investment, naval cooperation, surveillance support, infrastructure financing, training, and technology transfer. These partnerships have improved maritime domain awareness and strengthened some national and regional capabilities. However, they have also increased competition for access to strategic ports, commercial routes, offshore resources, and security partnerships. Africa's maritime domain is therefore not only an economic and security space but also an arena in which global powers pursue commercial and geopolitical influence.

This external engagement presents both opportunities and risks. Foreign financing and technical assistance can help African states modernise ports, improve surveillance, develop maritime infrastructure, and strengthen naval capacity. At the same time, excessive dependence on external actors may weaken policy autonomy and leave African institutions reliant on foreign funding, equipment, and expertise. The Strategy's call for "common objectives and concerted actions" among African states is therefore important for ensuring that international partnerships support continental priorities rather than displace African ownership (African Union, 2014, p. xx). As established in the institutional-capacity subsection, the long-term value of such partnerships depends on whether they build sustainable local capabilities.

Environmental pressures constitute an equally serious governance challenge. Climate change, sea-level rise, coastal erosion, ocean warming, marine pollution, biodiversity loss, and declining fish stocks increasingly threaten coastal settlements, port infrastructure, fisheries, tourism, and other blue economy activities. The African Union's maritime framework recognises the need for "environmental protection and sustainable management of marine resources" (African Union, 2014, p. xx). Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that national implementation has often given greater attention to piracy and maritime crime than to ecosystem restoration, climate adaptation, and pollution control.

This imbalance has significant developmental consequences. Degraded marine ecosystems reduce fish productivity, weaken coastal livelihoods, damage tourism assets, and increase the vulnerability of ports and settlements to climate-related hazards. Environmental sustainability must therefore be treated as a core element of maritime security rather than a separate policy concern. This interpretation is consistent with the integrated maritime governance framework, which links security, economic development, human welfare, and environmental protection (Bueger, 2015; Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This study examined the implementation of the African Union's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (2050 AIM Strategy) between 2012 and 2025 and demonstrates that the Strategy has established a coherent continental framework linking maritime security, blue economy development, environmental sustainability, and regional cooperation. The analysis shows that its significance lies not only in addressing maritime threats but also in repositioning Africa's maritime domain as a strategic asset for sustainable development and continental integration. However, the study finds that implementation outcomes have varied considerably across African states, reflecting differences in governance effectiveness, institutional capacity, and commitment to regional cooperation. By integrating security, economic, environmental, and geopolitical perspectives within a single analytical framework, this study contributes to the growing literature on African maritime governance by demonstrating that the success of the 2050 AIM Strategy depends less on the existence of continental policies than on the capacity of national and regional institutions to implement them effectively. The study therefore concludes that strengthening implementation, fostering greater African ownership of maritime governance, and balancing economic development with environmental stewardship are essential for translating the Strategy's aspirations into lasting developmental outcomes and for positioning Africa's maritime domain as a catalyst for sustainable growth, resilience, and regional integration.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The study found that institutional fragmentation and weak implementation capacity were the greatest obstacles to achieving the objectives of the 2050 AIM Strategy. African governments should therefore strengthen maritime governance institutions through clearer legal mandates, improved coordination among maritime agencies, and sustained investment in skilled personnel and institutional development. These reforms will improve policy implementation, regulatory enforcement, and the overall effectiveness of maritime governance.

2. The findings showed that illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, together with evolving transnational maritime crimes, continues to undermine Africa's maritime security, food security, and economic development. African states should invest in modern surveillance technologies, integrated maritime domain awareness systems, and scientific fisheries management while strengthening regional enforcement against piracy, illegal fishing, trafficking, and marine pollution. This will enhance the protection of Africa's marine resources and reduce the significant economic losses associated with maritime crime.

3. The study found that regional cooperation has improved maritime security outcomes, but implementation remains uneven because many states continue to depend heavily on external technical and financial support. The African Union and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) should strengthen intelligence sharing, harmonise maritime legislation, and expand joint maritime operations while investing in indigenous maritime research, technology, education, and industries. Building stronger domestic capabilities will improve strategic autonomy and ensure the long-term sustainability of continental maritime governance.

4. The findings revealed that environmental sustainability has received less implementation attention than traditional maritime security despite its importance to long-term blue economy development. African governments should integrate climate resilience, marine ecosystem protection, pollution control, and sustainable fisheries management into all maritime policies while expanding investment in strategic blue economy sectors.

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