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HOW CAN NIGERIA LEVERAGE MARITIME DIPLOMACY FOR SECURITY AND BLUE ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT IN THE GULF OF GUINEA?

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Abstract
The blue economy has gained prominence in academic and policy debates since 2012, contributing approximately US$300 billion to Africa in 2018, with projections of US$405 billion by 2030. Nigeria's blue economy is strategically linked to the Gulf of Guinea, but security threats such as piracy, smuggling, terrorism, and IUU fishing hinder its growth. While Nigeria's development approach focuses on policies and domestic initiatives, the role of diplomacy in enhancing security and maximizing economic benefits remains largely overlooked. This paper examines Nigeria's maritime diplomacy in enhancing security in the Gulf of Guinea and advancing the nation's blue economy. We used an interpretive and pragmatist research philosophy to design this case study research. We used secondary data that was analysed using content analysis. We found that Nigeria's blue economy strategy is largely focused on offshore oil and gas production and shipping. Nigeria's maritime diplomacy is conducted on both bilateral and multilateral levels and has achieved limited success. This is largely due to the absence of the strategic involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to use its diplomatic expertise and networks to achieve Nigeria's maritime interests. We recommend that the MFA should be given greater participation in Nigeria's blue economy development strategy.
Keywords: Maritime diplomacy, Blue Economy, Security Challenges, Gulf of Guinea, Nigeria.

Introduction

In Africa, the Blue Economy is a significant economic driver, contributing approximately US$300 billion and supporting 49 million jobs in 2018. Coastal tourism alone accounted for US$80 billion, while fisheries contributed US$21 billion, providing livelihoods to millions, including artisanal fishers and processors. Aquaculture, the fastest-growing subsector, added US$2.8 billion to the economy and is crucial for food security. By 2030, the sector is expected to grow to US$405 billion, creating 57 million jobs (World Bank, n.d.). According to Bello and Bichi (2024) the "blue economy" is the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth and improvements in the well-being of people.

The Gulf of Guinea (GoG) faces severe security threats, with Nigeria particularly vulnerable due to its extensive coastline and abundant oil reserves. Maritime security threats in the region include piracy and armed robbery at sea, terrorism and sabotage, smuggling and trafficking, Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, maritime territorial disputes, and environmental threats (Mohammed & Dalaklis, 2024). A notable example is the 15 December 2019 attack on the MT Duke tanker, during which 20 crew members were taken hostage, and one died in captivity (Zabadi & Bot, 2023).

Existing literature on Nigeria's blue economy predominantly emphasizes kinetic security strategies for the Gulf of Guinea (Jacob & Umoh, 2022). Scholars such as Yussuf and Ibidapo-Obe (2024) and Jacob and Umoh (2022) have explored the potential of Nigeria's blue economy and the challenges to its expansion. Odey (2023) advocates for the active involvement of Niger Delta communities in blue economy initiatives, while Okafor-Yarwood et al. (2020) propose a collaborative framework that integrates both top-down and bottom-up approaches to blue economy management, emphasizing cultural livelihoods and ecosystem conservation. However, there is a paucity of studies that address the diplomatic dimension of Nigeria's blue economy development. This paper seeks to bridge this gap by examining the role of maritime diplomacy in securing the Gulf of Guinea and advancing Nigeria's blue economy. The dual function of maritime diplomacy in this context is grounded in the argument that a secure Gulf of Guinea is integral to the successful development of Nigeria's blue economy (Gilpin, 2017; Jacob & Umoh, 2022; Kamal-Deen, 2023).

The paper uses a qualitative research design guided by an interpretivist-pragmatist philosophy. Relevant data was gathered from journal articles and reports from government agencies and international organisations. The collected data was analysed using content analysis to discuss the opportunities and challenges in using maritime diplomacy to foster security in the GoG and develop Nigeria's blue economy.

The paper begins with an introduction that provides the background, problem statement, objectives, and research methodology. It then presents a conceptual understanding of maritime diplomacy, followed by an exploration of the complex interdependence theory as the theoretical framework. Next, the paper examines Nigeria's blue economy and highlights the security challenges in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG). It proceeds to analyze the role of maritime diplomacy in securing the GoG and fostering the development of Nigeria's blue economy at both bilateral and multilateral levels. Finally, the paper concludes with key findings and recommendations.

Maritime Diplomacy

Diplomacy is the use of tact and skill to pursue a country's national interest in the comity of nations. It is the process through which negotiations are conducted (Nicholson, 1961). Maritime diplomacy encompasses the strategic actions of a nation to preserve, protect, and promote its maritime interests using various policy instruments. It can be understood in two ways: (1) leveraging maritime assets such as the Navy and Coast Guard to achieve foreign policy goals like confidence-building measures, and (2) employing traditional diplomatic channels to resolve maritime disputes, such as continental shelf delimitation or Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) conflicts (Sugiharto, 2021).

Maritime diplomacy is fundamentally tied to a nation's core national interests, ensuring the economic, societal, and material well-being of its people. It operates through both cooperative (soft power) and coercive (hard power) measures, combining diplomatic, economic, and security strategies to assert influence in maritime affairs (Van Nieuwkerk & Manganyi, 2019). The effectiveness of a country's maritime diplomacy depends on its foreign policy strength and ability to project maritime power in alignment with its strategic interests.

In this paper maritime diplomacy is the use of cooperative diplomatic tools such as negotiations to secure Nigeria's maritime interests. The country's international maritime diplomacy focuses on enhancing maritime security, promoting trade, ensuring compliance with international conventions, and fostering regional cooperation. These efforts are critical in addressing challenges such as piracy, illegal fishing, and the need for improved port infrastructure, which have long hindered Nigeria's maritime development (Etor & Usiemure, 2024). In line with this definition, the next section discusses the complex interdependence theory and Nigeria's maritime diplomacy.

Complex Interdependence and Nigeria's Maritime Diplomacy

Nigeria's maritime diplomacy for fostering security in the GoG and developing its blue economy is rooted in complex interdependence. Originally developed by Robert O Keohane and Joseph S. Nye in the late 1970s, the complex interdependence theory challenges the assumptions of traditional realist emphasis on military and economic capabilities to explain foreign policy (Rana, 2015). Keohane and Nye (1977) posited that the world has grown increasingly interdependent. They define dependence as a state of being determined or significantly affected by external forces. Thus, interdependence simply means mutual dependence (Keohane & Nye, 1977, p. 8).

Complex interdependence assumes that states are not the only important actors in international relations. Issues on social welfare and global security are just as important. Cooperation is a dominant characteristic of international politics just as conflict. Complex interdependence combines the elements of realist power politics and neoliberal cooperation to provide a balanced perception of international relations (Rana, 2015).

Complex Interdependence is characterized by three main aspects: multiple channels of interaction, where interstate, and transnational networks, including NGOs and multinational corporations, play a crucial role in shaping policy decisions; the absence of a strict hierarchy among issues, meaning military security no longer dominates global affairs, allowing economic, environmental, and other concerns to take priority; and the diminishing role of military force, which, while still relevant in asymmetric power dynamics, is increasingly seen as an ineffective and costly means of achieving economic and environmental objectives in a highly interconnected world (Bharti, 2023; Saida, 2024).

According to Saida (2024), globalization and technology are key drivers of complex interdependence, accelerating interconnectedness through communication, transportation, and information sharing. This reduces the traditional notion of sovereignty and autonomy. Simply put states cannot address issues without cooperating with other states despite power disparities (Saida, 2024).

Nigeria cannot unilaterally address maritime security threats like piracy, illegal fishing, and resource exploitation, given the transnational nature of these challenges. The theory underscores the multiple channels of interaction, where Nigeria must engage not only with states but also with intergovernmental organizations like the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission to craft cooperative security frameworks. However, Nigeria's historical focus on military solutions contradicts the theory's emphasis on non-hierarchical issue prioritization, suggesting a need to integrate economic, environmental, and diplomatic strategies alongside security measures.

Moreover, despite globalization fostering interdependence, Nigeria faces asymmetric power dynamics, where more influential states like China and the U.S. shape regional maritime policies, sometimes marginalizing African-led initiatives. Nigeria's maritime diplomacy requires a balance of cooperation and strategic autonomy, ensuring that international partnerships do not create long-term economic dependencies that undermine sovereignty. Ultimately, Nigeria must leverage complex interdependence not just to maintain maritime security but to position itself as a key driver of the blue economy.

Nigeria's Blue Economy

Nigeria's untapped blue economy is estimated by the African Blue Economy Alliance to be valued at $296 billion and has the potential to foster food security, job creation, tourism, infrastructure development, green energy, and pharmaceutical development. The geographic scope of Nigeria's blue economy includes around 853km of Africa's total estimated 47,000km coastline. A 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone in the Gulf of Guinea; an oil and biodiversity-rich Niger Delta makes up 80% of Nigeria's coastline (Bello & Bichi, 2024).

According to Osuji and Agbakwuru (2024), there are ten (10) components of the blue economy including: a). Maritime transport, shipping, and trade. b). Cruise tourism c). Fisheries, offshore

aquaculture, and seafood processing. d). Renewable energy. e). Oil and gas exploration. f). Mineral resources. g). Recreation and sporting. h). Biotechnology and pharmaceuticals. i). Coastal protection and infrastructure. j). Ocean governance, waste management, and pollution control (Osuji & Agbakwuru, 2024).

Nigeria's maritime transport industry employs over 150,000 people and handles about 95% of the nation's international trade (Yusuff & Ibidapo-Obe, 2024), yet it contributed only 1.6% to GDP between 2016 and 2020 due to capital flight from foreign-owned fleets (Bello & Bichi, 2024). Between 2015 and 2021, Nigerian ports received 27,301 vessels, generating ₦1.87 trillion and remitting ₦277.23 billion to the Federation Account (Osuji & Agbakwuru, 2024).

There are no shipbuilding companies in Nigeria, only shipyards that provide repairs and maintenance services, including Nigerian Naval Dockyard (Lagos), Nigerian Naval Shipyard (Port Harcourt), Niger Dock (Snake Island), West Atlantic Shipyard (Onne), Starz Marine, Continental Shipyard (Apapa), Technitrade (Warri), Niger Benue Transport Company (Warri), Shipside Dry-dock (Port Harcourt), and West African Dockyard (Onne). A few shipyards specialize in building small boats for inland water transportation (Bello & Bichi, 2024).

Nigeria is developing deep seaports in Lagos, Ondo, Ibom, Bonny, and Benin Rivers to reduce vessel turnaround time, ease traffic, and attract foreign investment. The $2.59 billion Badagry Deep Seaport alone is projected to generate $53.6 billion over 45 years and create 500 million jobs. To strengthen local participation, Nigeria enacted the Coastal and Inland Shipping (Cabotage) Act in 2003, granting Nigerian ship-owners exclusive control over domestic seaborne trade, boosting employment and economic opportunities (Bello & Bichi, 2024).

The country’s coastal region provides good opportunities for coastal tourism. The Nigeria coastal zone is composed of tidal channels, beaches, ridges, sandbars, lagoons, marshes, freshwater and mangrove swamps (Bello & Bichi, 2024). The potential contributors to the tourism component in Nigeria’s blue economy include: Akwa Ibom State: Ibeno Beach, Iko Beach in Eastern Obolo (Cashew Beach); Bayelsa State: Okpoama Beach, Twon-Brass Beach, Olodiama Beach, Koluama Beach, Sangana Beach, Odi Beach, Kaiama Beach, Nembe Beach and the evergreen expanse of mangrove creeks; Cross River State: Coconut Beaches; Delta State: Asaba beach, Eku Beach,

Otuogo beach, Abraka beach and Ogulagha beach.; Edo State: Aghenebode Sand beach; Rivers State: Ikofo beach, Yowiks beach and Port Harcourt beach (Osuji & Agbakwuru 2024).

Fish accounts for 40% of Nigeria's protein intake and is crucial for food security, yet domestic production cannot meet demand. Fish output grew from 1.07 million tonnes in 2014 to 1.17 million tonnes in 2018 and is projected to reach 1.27 million tonnes by 2030, but a significant supply gap remains (Saba et al., 2024). The fishing industry sustains over 1.47 million people and contributed ₦2.98 trillion to GDP between 2015 and 2022. However, technical limitations hinder offshore tuna exploration. Nigeria has 40 trawling enterprises, mostly locally owned, though larger fleets are jointly controlled by foreign investors (Bello & Bichi, 2024). The total projected fish demand between 2020 and 2025 is 25,030,000 metric tons (mt), while domestic production is only 7,842,650 mt, leaving a substantial shortfall. The projected total consumption, which includes imports, is 10,729,850 mt, indicating that imports play a crucial role in bridging the gap (see Figure 1). This means Nigeria faces an average 68.7% fish supply deficit (Osuji & Agbakwuru 2024).

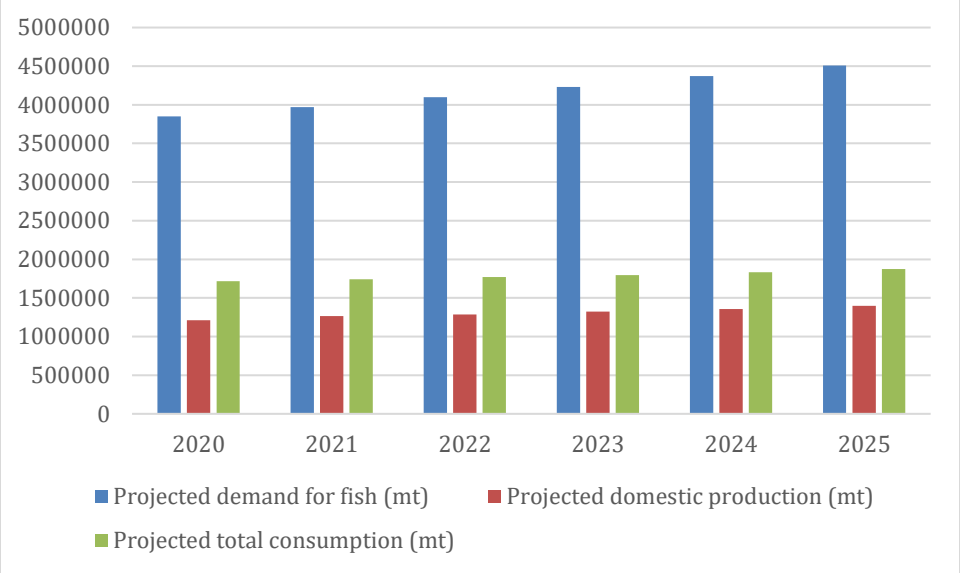


Figure 1: Projected Fish Supply Shortage in Nigeria from 2020 to 2025

Source: Osuji & Agbakwuru (2024)

The energy potential of Nigeria's blue economy extends beyond oil and gas to include wind, tidal, wave, biomass, and ocean thermal energy (Odey, 2023). Offshore oil and gas dominate the sector, with deep-sea production contributing 6.21% to GDP in Q1 2023 (Bala-Gbogbo, 2018). The NNPCL projected that by 2022, two-thirds of the nation's oil would come from offshore sources.

Major deepwater fields such as Agbami (250,000 bpd), Bonga (200,000 bpd), and Akpo (175,000 bpd) highlight the dominance of offshore crude production, while Agbami (450 mcf/D) and Akpo (320 mscf/D) lead in natural gas output (Osuji & Agbakwuru, 2024). Despite these developments, Nigeria's ocean renewable energy sector remains underdeveloped, with no contributions to GDP due to a lack of investment. Wave, tidal, and ocean thermal energy could significantly boost electricity generation, but technological and financial constraints hinder progress. While offshore hydrocarbons provide vital foreign exchange, the overemphasis on oil and gas prevents Nigeria from harnessing its full blue economy potential, particularly in sustainable energy sources that could diversify the country's energy mix.

Another neglected area is Nigeria's mineral resources below the seabed such as titanium, cobalt, nickel, iron, copper, zinc, molybdenum, strontium, and lead, with potential deposits of gold, silver, and ferromagnesium. There is no seabed mining in Nigeria, and these resources currently contribute nothing to the economy (Osuji & Agbakwuru, 2024). Similarly, the low utilization of marine biotechnology in Nigeria has been attributed to various problems, including inadequate manpower in the field, inadequate infrastructure, outdated equipment, and government financing for research (Ebeh, 2017).

Nigeria generates over 2.5 million tonnes of plastic waste annually, ranking among the top 20 contributors to the 83% of global plastic waste that enters the oceans, with an estimated 200,000 metric tons of plastic pollution (Yusuff & Ibidapo-Obe, 2024). This highlights weak ocean governance, inadequate waste management, and poor pollution control, as ineffective policies and lack of enforcement allow unchecked plastic leakage into marine ecosystems. To improve, Nigeria must strengthen regulatory frameworks, invest in recycling infrastructure, and enforce stricter pollution controls to protect its waters and sustain its blue economy.

Security Challenges in the Gulf of Guinea

The Gulf of Guinea faces numerous security challenges that threaten the region's stability and economic potential. These challenges, including piracy, illegal fishing, oil theft, drug trafficking, and human smuggling, disrupt maritime operations and undermine efforts to achieve sustainable development.

In 2020, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reported that 95% of global kidnappings at sea occurred in the Gulf of Guinea. The region saw 81 piracy incidents in 2020 (IMB Piracy Report, 2022). Key areas affected include the waters off Nigeria, Benin, and Ghana. Armed groups often target oil tankers and cargo vessels for ransom, disrupting regional trade. Between 2018 and 2019, the number of crew members that were kidnapped in the Gulf of Guinea increased by 50%, leading the region to account for 90% of global kidnappings at sea (Zabadi & Bot, 2023). About 92% of the hostage-taking and 73% of kidnappings happening in and around Africa are happening in the Gulf of Guinea (IOM, 2022). However, piracy declined to 19 incidents in 2022 due to enhanced maritime security measures (IMB Piracy Report, 2022) but challenges persist in the area of illegal fishing.

Illegal fishing depletes the region's fish stocks, undermining food security and economic livelihoods. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing costs West African economies around $1 billion annually, with the Gulf of Guinea countries bearing a significant portion of these losses. (FAO, 2021). A lack of effective monitoring and enforcement enables foreign vessels, particularly from East Asia, to exploit marine resources in the region. It presents a direct threat to the national security of the coastal states in the Gulf of Guinea (Zabadi & Bot, 2023). Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing has been linked to multiple issues and forms of organized crime. Some of these crimes are arms trafficking, drug smuggling, forced labour, piracy and more (UNODC, 2022).

Oil theft, often referred to as "bunkering," and the sabotage of oil infrastructure remains prevalent in the Gulf of Guinea. Nigeria, the largest oil producer in the region, loses approximately $3 billion annually due to oil theft and vandalism. Such activities disrupt production, cause environmental damage, and fuel criminal networks. (Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, 2022). Militant groups in the Niger Delta often target pipelines and oil installations, exacerbating insecurity and impacting revenue generation.

The Gulf of Guinea serves as a transit hub for drug trafficking networks, particularly for cocaine shipments from South America to Europe and North America. In 2021, authorities intercepted several significant cocaine shipments in ports across the Gulf of Guinea, including in Nigeria and Ghana. (UNODC, 2022). Transnational criminal organizations exploit weak governance and

porous borders to operate freely, using the Gulf of Guinea as a base for trafficking drugs, arms, and people.

Human trafficking and smuggling are pervasive, with victims often subjected to forced labor or sexual exploitation. There have been many reports of forced labor at sea in the Gulf of Guinea on illegal fishing boats. World Bank (2024) reports that some fishermen and immigrant workers have been forced to work on fishing boats in the Gulf of Guinea for months at a time without access to land. Some of these workers were deployed to sea each day in canoes and in the night where they were forced to return to the mother ship to unload fish. The Gulf of Guinea serves as a key transit point for migrants heading to Europe. Smuggling networks exploit vulnerable individuals, leading to dangerous sea crossings and human rights violations. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that thousands of migrants from Gulf of Guinea countries attempt dangerous crossings each year (International Office for Migration, 2022).

Oil spills, overfishing, and other harmful activities contribute to environmental degradation, which in turn exacerbates insecurity. Frequent oil spills from bunkering and poorly maintained pipelines cause extensive damage to marine ecosystems, impacting coastal communities reliant on fishing. (Niger Delta Environmental Survey, 2023).

The security challenges in the Gulf of Guinea are multifaceted, impacting economic stability, environmental sustainability, and human development. Addressing these issues requires a combination of regional cooperation, robust governance, and international support to create a secure and prosperous maritime environment.

Nigeria's Maritime Diplomacy for Security and Blue Economy Development

We analyse Nigeria's maritime diplomacy on bilateral and multilateral levels. Nigeria cooperates with countries including China, Spain and India to achieve its maritime security and blue economy aspirations. Similarly, Nigeria through platforms such as the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), Maritime Organisation of West and Central Africa (MOWCA), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), European Union (EU) and the World Bank actively seeks collaborations to improve its maritime industry.

Bilateral Maritime Diplomacy

Nigeria has pursued bilateral cooperation to bolster security and economic growth in the Gulf of Guinea. In November 2024, Nigerian President Bola Tinubu and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to deepen ties in maritime security and counter-terrorism. This partnership focused on coordinated measures to protect maritime trade routes and combat piracy, reflecting Nigeria's strategy to engage with global partners to address security challenges in the Gulf of Guinea (Associated Press, 2024).

Nigeria and China partner to develop the former's blue economy as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI aims to enhance infrastructure, trade, and maritime connectivity. The Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), under Dr. Dakuku Peterside, recognized the BRI as a game changer for global transport, offering Nigeria opportunities for port modernization, increased trade, and technological advancement. China's investment in ports, pipelines, and maritime infrastructure aligns with Nigeria's efforts to expand and decongest its port system, as seen in the Federal Government's commitment to improving multimodal transport systems to boost efficiency (NIMASA, 2018). One of the most notable successes of Nigeria's cooperation with China was the construction of the Lekki Deep Sea Port, a project expected to significantly boost Nigeria's trade capacity and position it as a regional trade hub (Etor & Usiemure, 2024).

Nigeria's partnership with Spain facilitated through the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), represents a strategic effort to bolster maritime security and expand the nation's blue economy. In 2017, Spain supported Nigeria with two bulletproof security boats to support Nigeria's security efforts within the GoG. These vessels, equipped with advanced technology such as a range of 500 nautical miles and speeds of up to 45 knots, are part of a fleet of seven fast-intervention boats to be deployed by NIMASA (NIMASA, 2024a).

The bilateral collaborations between Nigeria and the above-mentioned countries are not born out of the altruistic intentions of the latter but rather are the results of a complex interdependency. India and Spain are both major importers of Nigeria's oil which is largely transported via large tanker vessels. In 2022, India purchased about US$7.35 billion worth of crude oil from Nigeria,

while Spain imported US$6.72 billion (OEC, 2024). China uses the BRI and other platforms such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) to secure its energy and trade interests (Ijuye-Dagogo & Obuah, 2023; Obuah & Ijuye-Dagogo, 2022).

Multilateral Maritime Diplomacy

Nigeria played a crucial role in the establishment of the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) on 3 July 2001. The GGC includes Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria and São Tomé and Príncipe. Through the GGC, Nigeria collaborates with member states on maritime security initiatives such as joint patrols, information sharing, and capacity-building programs to combat threats like piracy and illegal fishing. This commitment to securing the Gulf of Guinea directly supports the growth of Nigeria's blue economy by ensuring a safer maritime environment for trade, investment, and sustainable resource exploitation. Additionally, Nigeria leverages international partnerships with organizations like the UN, EU, and US to enhance naval security through technical assistance and training programs (Agubamah, 2024).

On 5 December 2024, the Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMet) partnered with the Maritime Organization of West and Central Africa (MOWCA) to enhance the region's blue economy by improving maritime safety and operational efficiency. The partnership focuses on the uptake of maritime weather information, vital for mitigating risks in maritime transport. Leveraging NiMet's meteorological expertise and MOWCA's regional mandate, the partnership emphasizes the integration of accurate weather forecasts and early warning systems, aligning with SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea) conventions and World Meteorological Organization guidelines (Nigerian FLIGHTDECK, 2024).

Nigeria's collaboration with ECOWAS under the Support to West Africa Integrated Maritime Security (SWAIMS) program, funded by the EU from 2019 to 2024, has been vital in enhancing the blue economy and addressing maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. The program, targeting key coastal countries, achieved significant results, including strengthening maritime governance, facilitating joint operations, and training over 300 professionals. Nigeria benefited from advanced equipment for ECOWAS maritime centres, improved regional coordination, and the development of integrated maritime policies and alert systems. These efforts highlight

Nigeria's role in promoting sustainable maritime security and safe navigation in the region (DAI, 2024).

During the 79th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Atlantic Cooperation Summit in 2024, chaired by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, NIMASA's Director General, Dr. Dayo Mobereola, emphasized Nigeria's commitment to ensuring a sustainable, secure, and prosperous Atlantic region. In return, Blinken highlighted the significance of fostering connections across governments, civil societies, and private sectors to address common threats and harness innovative technologies (NIMASA, 2024b).

At the April 7, 2022, Joint Event on Nigeria-EU Maritime Security Cooperation in Lagos, Vice Admiral Awwal Gambo underscored the Gulf of Guinea's global significance for trade, with 1,500 vessels passing through daily. The EU delegation, led by Senior Coordinator Nicolas Berlanga, stressed the need for collective action to address piracy and transnational crime. The partnership supports the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and has contributed to reducing piracy in Nigeria to its lowest levels in over a decade. This collaboration is essential for ensuring maritime security, fostering trade, and advancing Nigeria's blue economy through multilateral efforts.

On 2 October 2024, a World Bank delegation visited the Nigerian Minister of Marine and Blue Economy to discuss areas of collaboration for a sustainable and integrated blue economy with an emphasis on fishery (Onyerucheya, 2024). The World Bank's Blue Economy for Resilient Africa Program (BE4RAP) program can aid Nigeria's blue economy by promoting institutional reforms, financial investments, and innovative governance. Nigeria can benefit from successful initiatives like marine spatial planning (MSP) in Morocco and Mozambique, modernizing fisheries through electronic monitoring systems seen in Mauritania and Senegal, and expanding marine plastic pollution management as in Tanzania and Ghana. Coastal resilience projects, such as those in Benin and Togo, could help protect Nigeria's coastal areas. The PROBLUE trust fund could support sustainable aquaculture and marine infrastructure, while community-based fisheries governance models could empower local participation. BE4RAP's integrated approach offers scalable solutions for Nigeria's sustainable use of marine resources (World Bank, 2022).

According to the Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy, Nigeria country has secured strategic collaborations, such as its partnership with the EU-funded West and Central Africa Ports Security

(WeCAPS) program, focusing on risk prevention and strengthening port security. Nigeria has also ratified six key international maritime conventions, including the Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships (2009) and the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel (1995), positioning itself as a key player in global maritime standards. Moreover, Nigeria's maritime boundary was extended by 16,300 square kilometres following the approval of the United Nations Commission on the Limits of Continental Shelf (Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy, 2024).

The country's international presence is further reflected in its participation in global maritime events, such as the inaugural Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting on Sustainable Ocean Use in Cyprus and the "Our Ocean Conference" in Athens, Greece. On the compliance front, Nigeria has conducted seventy-nine joint international verification inspections with American and EU scientists on fishing companies and vessels, ensuring adherence to international fishing standards (Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy, 2024).

The collaboration with entities like the EU, the World Bank, and MOWCA highlights Nigeria's commitment to enhancing maritime safety, port security, and fisheries management. However, despite these positive developments, significant challenges remain, such as the persistent threats of piracy and illegal fishing, which continue to undermine the region's stability and economic potential (Zabadi & Bot, 2023).

The integration of advanced weather forecasting, electronic monitoring systems, and collaborative efforts under frameworks like the Yaoundé Code of Conduct is crucial, but these initiatives must be complemented by robust enforcement mechanisms and regional cooperation to address transnational maritime crimes effectively.

The extension of Nigeria's maritime boundary and its ratification of international conventions further solidify its role in global maritime governance but require continued investment in infrastructure, training, and inter-agency coordination to maximize their benefits. Nigeria is making strides in securing the Gulf of Guinea and enhancing its maritime security, a sustained, multilateral, and holistic approach is essential to mitigate risks and unlock the full potential of the blue economy.

Conclusion

Nigeria's blue economy, valued at $296 billion, holds vast potential for economic growth, job creation, food security, tourism, and renewable energy. Despite handling 95% of Nigeria's international trade, the maritime industry contributes only 1.6% to GDP due to foreign-owned fleets. While port development and the Cabotage Act aim to boost local participation, the absence of shipbuilding companies limits progress. There are many coastal tourism opportunities but they remain underdeveloped. Fisheries in Nigeria face a 68.7% fish supply deficit, relying heavily on imports. Offshore oil and gas dominate, with deepwater production driving GDP, while renewable ocean energy remains untapped. Seabed minerals, including titanium, cobalt, and gold, are yet to be explored. Marine biotechnology faces challenges due to inadequate investment, infrastructure, and manpower. Nigeria generates 2.5 million tonnes of plastic waste annually, contributing significantly to ocean pollution, exposing weak governance and inadequate waste management.

To fully harness its blue economy, Nigeria must diversify investments beyond oil, improve local shipbuilding, strengthen fisheries, tap into renewable energy, and enforce stricter environmental regulations to ensure sustainability.

The Gulf of Guinea faces severe security challenges, including piracy, illegal fishing, oil theft, drug trafficking, and human smuggling, all of which threaten Nigeria's blue economy development. We present a model for a cooperative maritime security structure for the Gulf of Guinea. The model is maritime diplomacy. Diplomacy would be required to engender the necessary international support that would make for funding and technical support which are direly needed. Nigeria can advance its interest with regard to its blue economy interests.

Nigeria's maritime diplomacy involves extensive bilateral and multilateral engagements to enhance security and develop its blue economy. Through partnerships with China, India, and Spain, Nigeria promotes its port infrastructure, maritime trade, and security, notably through the Belt and Road Initiative and the provision of security vessels. Multilaterally, Nigeria collaborates with organizations such as ECOWAS, MOWCA, the EU, and the World Bank, participating in initiatives like the Gulf of Guinea Commission and the SWAIMS program to combat piracy, illegal fishing, and transnational crime. The country has also ratified key maritime conventions and extended its maritime boundary, further asserting its role in global maritime governance.

However, despite these achievements, significant challenges persist, including illegal fishing and maritime crime, which continue to threaten regional stability.

Nigeria's maritime diplomacy appears to lack the strategic involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The key Nigerian institutions piloting the country's maritime diplomacy include the NIMASA, NiMet, and the Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy. The MFA has a crucial role to play in coordinating and reinforcing Nigeria's maritime diplomacy. While NIMASA and the Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy manage technical and sector-specific engagements, the MFA is responsible for handling Nigeria's foreign relations and ensuring the alignment of these initiatives with broader national foreign policy goals. Given that maritime security, trade, and economic diplomacy are intricately linked to international relations, the MFA should facilitate and strengthen Nigeria's bilateral and multilateral engagements, ensuring that the country's maritime interests are effectively represented in international forums and negotiations. The MFA's diplomatic leverage is essential for securing global partnerships, managing maritime disputes, and advocating for Nigeria's interests in international maritime conventions, ensuring that these agreements contribute to both national and regional security, stability, and economic growth.

From the foregoing, we make the following recommendations:

1. Nigeria should enhance its partnerships with Gulf of Guinea nations and international partners to improve maritime security through joint patrols, intelligence sharing, and capacity-building programs. This will help combat piracy, illegal fishing, and other maritime crimes while promoting economic growth.

2. Nigeria should leverage international support to acquire modern surveillance technologies and strengthen legal frameworks for prosecuting maritime crimes.

3. The MFA should be given greater participation in Nigeria's blue economy development strategy. The MFA should drive the marine diplomacy agenda for a developed blue economy.

4. Nigeria should be a diversification from offshore oil and gas production to include other untapped areas such as coastal tourism, deep sea mining, fishery, and ship manufacturing.

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