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Research Article

HARNESSING THE BLUE ECONOMY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN ASSESSMENT OF POLICY, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND LIVELIHOODS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA (2023-2026)

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Abstract

The Blue Economy has surfaced as a vital avenue for sustainable economic diversification in the coastal areas, especially in resource-dependent regions such as Akwa Ibom, Nigeria. This research investigates the growth, potential, and obstacles of the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom State within the framework of the ARISE Agenda (2023-2026). The study was anchored on Sustainable Development theory. The study was conducted within the coastal communities of Eket Federal Constituency to evaluate policy frameworks, infrastructure initiatives like the Ibom Deep Seaport and Oron Maritime Hub, human capital development programmes, and collaborations with organisations such as the UNDP. A descriptive research design was employed for the study. A total of 352 study respondents were engaged in the study through Fetterman's Big-Net Approach of sample size. Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire and analysed in simple percentages. A purposive sampling technique was used to engage study respondents from the coastal communities and nearby inland settlements. The findings reveal that although Akwa Ibom has considerable coastal and marine resources capable of creating jobs, improving food security, and decreasing reliance on oil, challenges remain in policy integration, coastal erosion, and security issues. The research concludes that a cooperative strategy that includes the government, the private sector, and local communities is crucial for establishing a sustainable and inclusive Blue Economy. Policy suggestions

include enhancing fisheries governance, investing in marine research, and ensuring that traditional fishing communities are incorporated into formal economic planning.

Keywords: Blue Economy, Akwa Ibom State, ARISE Agenda, Ibom Deep Seaport, Sustainable Development, and Maritime Policy

Introduction

The blue economy has gained prominence as an emerging economic sector with the capacity to integrate sea and resources within the coast for the sustainable development of nations' economies situated in coastal areas. The phrase "blue economy" pertains to the "ocean economy" or the "coastal economy" and includes the social and economic aspects related to the marine environment, coastlines, and oceans (Tonye and Ligha, 2025). The Blue Economy embodies a revolutionary strategy focused on leveraging ocean resources to foster sustainable economic growth, safeguard the environment, and promote social equity (Yousef, 2024). The World Bank defines the Blue Economy as the "sustainable utilisation of ocean resources to foster economic growth, enhance livelihoods, and create jobs, all while safeguarding the health of ocean ecosystems" (World Bank & United Nations, 2017). The European Commission characterises the Blue Economy as including "all economic activities associated with oceans, seas, and coasts," emphasising the goal of attaining "sustainable and inclusive blue growth" (Commission, 2021). This concept promotes the sustainable utilisation of marine and coastal resources through the encouragement of global dialogues, the creation of regulatory frameworks, and the execution of innovative financing mechanisms such as blue bonds and public-private partnerships. According to Yousef (2024), The term "Blue Economy" was initially presented at the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), where it was acknowledged as a crucial component of sustainable development. In a similar vein, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) emphasizes the significance of sustainable economic growth, especially regarding how marine-based industries can contribute to wider economic goals while ensuring the health of the oceans (OECD, 2016).

The Blue Economy represents a revolutionary approach to sustainably utilising ocean resources while promoting economic growth, innovation, and resilience to climate change and by combining environmental responsibility, social equity, and technological advancements, stakeholders can fully realise the potential of oceans and seas as drivers of sustainable development (Yousef, 2024). According to Tonye and Ligha (2025), the blue economy, which is already widely utilised across numerous continents and nations, is recognized as the seventh-largest economy in the world, with an annual value surpassing 1.5 trillion USD. It supports 30 million jobs and has the potential to provide protein sources for over 2 billion people. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has projected a "blue growth" that could elevate the economy's value to $3 trillion by 2030, fuelled by increased global interest, diverse investment opportunities, and promising future outlooks (OECD, 2024). Sustainable development acts as the core principle for fulfilling human development goals while ensuring that natural systems can continue to provide resources and ecosystem services. It ensures that the needs of the present generation are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Britannica, 2026). Sustainable development does not have a singular, comprehensive, and universally accepted definition. Generally, it is perceived as a holistic approach to human development that often includes, but is not limited to, the following objectives, principles, and values: a global viewpoint on social, economic, and environmental policies that takes into account the needs of future generations, recognizes the inherent worth of a healthy natural environment, highlights the importance of biodiversity, and emphasizes the protection and acknowledgment of Indigenous cultures' needs, while also promoting economic and social equity across worldwide communities, and ensuring the responsible and transparent implementation of governmental policies. Sustainable development is intricately linked to the idea of sustainability, which is fundamentally normative (Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019). UNESCO has elucidated the difference between these two concepts: "Sustainability is frequently viewed as a long-term goal (i.e., a more sustainable world), while sustainable development includes the various processes and pathways to achieve it." The Rio Process, which commenced at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, has elevated the concept of sustainable development to a prominent position in international discourse. Sustainable development is the fundamental principle underlying the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These global targets for the year 2030 were established in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and are designed to address urgent global challenges such as poverty, climate change, biodiversity loss, and peace (Purvis et al., 2019).

The Arise Agenda is the political pathway of Governor Umo Eno, PhD, the Executive Governor of Akwa Ibom State, to drive his administration's economic, social, cultural, political, agricultural, educational, and human capital development within his tenure. The recent shift of focus to the blue economy of Akwa Ibom State shows the wealth which has long been deposited and explored to benefits of the state and Nigeria as a whole, as recorded by Exxon Mobil Nigeria Limited, which explored the blue economy of the state for decades. The ARISE Agenda functions as the comprehensive governance framework created by Pastor Umo Eno, the Governor of Akwa Ibom State. It is founded on five essential pillars: Agricultural Revolution, Rural Development, Infrastructural Maintenance and Advancement, Security Management, and Educational Advancement (aksgov.ng, 2026). According to Essiet (2026), Akwa Ibom State is progressively turning to the sea as a means to achieve enhanced economic growth. Under the guidance of Governor Umo Eno, the state is advancing a blue economy initiative designed to position Akwa Ibom as a key hub for trade and investment in the region. This vision encompasses more than just physical infrastructure; it focuses on integrating ports, roads, industry, and commerce to generate employment, increase exports, and create new avenues for prosperity. Central to this initiative is a commitment to transform long-held potential into tangible economic results. This integration of the blue economy into the ARISE agenda of the state governor becomes imperative to examine the growth, available potentials and the challenges of the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom State.

Statement of the Problem

The blue economy has recently surfaced as an essential strategy for sustainable development. For instance, the European Union has implemented a blue growth strategy that promotes the sustainable use of marine resources. On the other hand, the African Union has launched the Blue Economy Strategy, aimed at promoting sustainable economic growth, improving food security, and generating employment through the development of marine resources (Henderson, 2019). With a coastline of 129km, Akwa Ibom State has the longest coastline in Nigeria and is rich in marine resources. This coastal area has been known for its rich resources that have attracted many economic activities within the coastal region of the state. The coastline has been an economic hub for fishing business, crude oil exploration, water transportation and other related businesses. Despite this rich economic base and deposits, the previous governments of Akwa Ibom State and the federal government of Nigeria significantly tied their economic activities in the coastal area to oil and gas. In response, the current state government has placed a high priority on the Blue Economy as part of the ARISE Agenda (2023-2026) to facilitate diversification, generate employment, and promote sustainable development. This study, therefore, investigates the progress, challenges, and potential of the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom from 2023 to 2026.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to evaluate the growth, potential, and challenges associated with the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom State within the ARISE Agenda of Governor Umo Eno. Specifically, this study sought to:

1. Investigate the ARISE agenda policies and institutional frameworks that support the growth of the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Assess the effects of major infrastructure projects on the potential of the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom State.
3. Identify the environmental, security, and governance obstacles that impede the sustainable growth of the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Blue Economy

The concept of 'Blue Economy' was initially presented by Professor Gunter Pauli, an innovator committed to turning "dreams into reality" (San, 2024). In 1994, he was tasked by the United Nations (UN) prior to the Conference of the Parties 3 (COP3) to investigate prospective business models. This conference, held in Kyoto, Japan, led to the establishment of the Kyoto Protocol, which tackled issues related to climate change. Professor Pauli likely considered the negative effects of climate change concerning blue economy initiatives and the viability of policies designed to promote economic growth and development through the use of marine resources while protecting the ocean's assets (San, 2024). Purcell (2023) characterises the blue economy as a framework that encapsulates the possibilities for sustainable development and responsible resource management throughout the world's oceans and coastal areas. Additionally, she asserts that all elements associated with coastlines, seas, or oceans are encompassed within the blue economy (Purcell, 2023). This definition holds particular significance for maritime environments.

As noted by San (2024), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates that the blue economy contributes $1.5 trillion annually to the global economy, with forecasts suggesting that this amount will double by 2030. This sector provides employment for over 31 million individuals, and 40% of the world's population lives in coastal areas. The African Union (AU) estimates that the blue economy represents roughly $300 billion of the continent's overall economy. Given Nigeria's abundant marine resources, the Africa Blue Economy Alliance (ABEA), leveraging data from the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), has evaluated the untapped potential of Nigeria's blue economy to be an impressive $296 billion. Furthermore, Sarwat (2022) indicates that recent studies generally define the blue economy as encompassing six dimensions, each characterized by principles and practices aimed at ensuring the sustainable use of ocean resources for the benefit of both present and future generations.

The dimensions identified are: Economic Dimension, Social Dimension, Environmental Dimension, Technological Dimension, Cultural Dimension, and Governance Dimension. Yousef (2023) elucidated that the economic facet of the blue economy is centred on promoting economic growth and development while ensuring sustainability. This facet encompasses various activities such as fishing, aquaculture, marine biotechnology, tourism, shipping, and renewable energy. The guiding principles of this facet stress the importance of creating value from ocean resources, fostering innovation, and developing sustainable business models that benefit local communities. The social facet of the blue economy seeks to ensure that the benefits derived from ocean resources are equitably distributed among all stakeholders. This facet addresses a range of social issues, including human rights, labour standards, gender equality, and community development. The guiding principles of this facet emphasise the importance of forming partnerships, engaging with local communities, and considering the social impacts of economic activities. The environmental facet of the blue economy is committed to protecting the health and integrity of ocean ecosystems. This facet addresses various environmental challenges, including biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, pollution prevention, and ecosystem-based management. The guiding principles of this facet concentrate on ensuring that economic activities do not compromise the ecological sustainability of ocean resources.

The technological dimension of the blue economy centres on the advancement and application of innovative technologies to promote sustainable economic activities within marine environments. (Yousef, 2023). This dimension encompasses a range of technical fields, including marine robotics, sensors, artificial intelligence, renewable energy technologies, and biotechnology. The guiding principles of this dimension highlight the necessity of fostering innovation, promoting technology transfer and dissemination, and ensuring the responsible and sustainable use of new technologies. The cultural dimension of the blue economy underscores the significance of recognizing and preserving cultural heritage and traditional knowledge associated with ocean resources. This dimension encompasses various artistic practices, such as fishing, seafaring, storytelling, and cultural tourism. The guiding principles of this dimension prioritize respect and appreciation for cultural diversity, acknowledgment of the cultural importance of ocean resources, and the encouragement of cultural exchange and collaboration. The governance dimension of the blue economy is dedicated to establishing effective governance frameworks that enable the sustainable management of ocean resources. This dimension tackles various governance challenges, including institutional frameworks, policy coordination, and stakeholder engagement. The guiding principles of this dimension strive to create transparent, participatory, and accountable governance structures that facilitate the sustainable use of ocean resources (Yousef, 2023).

Blue Economy and Sustainable Development

In 2019, the African Union highlighted that Africa's blue economy holds considerable promise for economic diversification and sustainable development, responding to the continent's pressing requirement for alternative income sources to foster economic growth. Mauritius regards the blue economy as a crucial element of its economic strategy, channelling investments into sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, and marine renewable energy. The related policies and strategic initiatives have spurred economic growth by creating jobs and improving the livelihoods of coastal communities, thus benefiting both sub-national and national economies (Mauritius Ministry of Ocean Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping, 2017).

In South Africa, the Operation Phakisa Initiative aims to boost economic growth by leveraging the economic potential of its oceans. This initiative primarily targets marine transport, offshore oil and gas exploration, aquaculture, and marine protection services (South African Government, 2014). Launched in 2014 as a vital component of the National Development Plan focused on socio-economic growth, Operation Phakisa highlights the ocean economy, which is expected to contribute up to R177 billion to the gross domestic product (GDP) by 2033, while creating between 800,000 and 1 million direct jobs. Furthermore, the initiative seeks to establish a network of marine protected areas to ensure the protection of at least 5% of ocean space. It also envisions collaboration among expert teams from government, labor, business, academia, and other sectors to formulate comprehensive plans with ambitious targets, along with thorough monitoring and evaluation of implementation strategies and potential challenges. South Africa looks forward to additional economic opportunities through the transportation of over 300 million tonnes of cargo and 1.2 million tonnes of liquid fuel along its coastline, which will generate opportunities around the ports and subsequently drive economic growth (South African Government, 2014). Ghana has made notable strides in promoting its blue economy as part of its holistic strategy for sustainable development and economic growth, particularly in the fisheries sector. The Ghana Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector Development Plan is designed to promote sustainable fisheries and aquaculture to ensure food security and stimulate economic growth. This plan includes initiatives to combat illegal fishing, enhance fishery management, and encourage aquaculture development (Ghana Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, 2015).

Nigeria's blue economy presents a promising alternative pathway for economic diversification, sustainable development, and growth. The country's significant reliance on crude oil exports has led to local economic instability, often swayed by fluctuations in the global oil market. By capitalizing on its vast marine and coastal resources, Nigeria can achieve sustainable economic growth that will foster job creation, enhance livelihoods, and safeguard the marine environment (Anammah and Ezenyimulu, 2023). The creation of the Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu signifies a strategic initiative aimed at harnessing and optimizing this potential. Nigeria's coastal areas are rich in biodiversity and marine resources, offering opportunities in fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transport, and tourism. Nevertheless, the implementation of the blue economy in Nigeria faces several obstacles, including inadequate operational infrastructure, negative perceptions of security risks in coastal communities, the lack of an official blue economy policy framework, and insufficient stakeholder awareness and engagement. Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative approach between the public and private sectors, the establishment of clear and measurable objectives and milestones, effective policy frameworks and structures for the blue economy, and sustainable practices that promote economic growth (Benzaken, 2022).

Agunsoye, Okoye, and Sankey (2025) asserted that ensuring the security of the maritime environment is essential for achieving sustainable development through the blue economy in

Nigeria. This security is crucial for addressing challenges that deter investors and undermine the blue economy, such as armed piracy, oil theft, infrastructure vandalism, illegal fishing, and aquaculture practices. The responsibility for this security function, which is vital for the successful implementation and initiation of the blue economy, primarily lies with the Nigerian Navy and other key security stakeholders. In the South-South region of Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta, various activities associated with the blue economy are somewhat common; however, they are not adequately regulated, monitored, or evaluated by the government. This region, rich in oil and gas resources, also witnesses informal initiatives in fisheries, aquaculture, and marine tourism. A lack of political will, inconsistent state policies, and an overwhelming emphasis on oil and gas revenues have all contributed to the neglect of the blue economy, its immense potential, and the opportunities it presents.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sustainable Development Theory

Sustainable Development Theory serves as a fundamental framework guiding the initiatives of the United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP). This theory seeks to balance current socioeconomic progress with environmental protection. It is built upon three essential pillars: economic growth, social equity, and environmental conservation, ensuring that the needs of the present population are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Lapinskien, 2025). The concept of sustainable development has been acknowledged for more than forty years. Many critics argue that the concurrent use of the terms "develop" and "sustain" is contradictory; however, it remains a prevalent topic in global development dialogues. The term "Sustainable Economic Development" refers to economic progress that strives to align economic growth with environmental and social sustainability. Since the 1970s, following the Club of Rome's introduction of the theory of "The Limits to Growth," the quality of the environment has been regarded as a vital prerequisite for economic progress. This shift has resulted in the development of ideas such as the green economy, digital modernization, environmental conservation, renewable resources, and the fight against climate change as integral components of economic development.

This study explores the implementation of the Theory of Sustainable Development, which emphasizes the need to balance current socioeconomic progress with environmental protection. It is based on three essential pillars: economic growth, social equity, and environmental conservation, ensuring that the needs of the present population are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This establishes a theoretical framework advocating for the integration of the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom State, aimed at achieving sustainable development that benefits both current and future generations, beginning with the ARISE agenda of Governor Umo Eno. This entails the formulation of policies, the construction of infrastructure, the enhancement of human capacity, the establishment of economic hubs along the coastline, and the provision of necessary security for businesses and investors involved in the state's blue economy.

METHODOLOGY

This study examines the development, opportunities, and obstacles of the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom State, framed by the ARISE Agenda (2023-2026). A descriptive research design was utilised for this investigation. The research was carried out in the coastal area of Oron, Ibeno, Ibaka, Ukpeneikang, Esit Urua, Edonwik, and Enwang communities of Eket Federal Constituency to evaluate policy frameworks, infrastructure initiatives like the Ibom Deep Seaport and Oron Maritime Hub, human capital development programmes, and collaborations with organisations such as the UNDP. Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire with participants' observations, and analysed in simple percentages. A purposive sampling technique was used to engage study respondents from the coastal communities and nearby inland settlements. A total of 352 study respondents were engaged in the study. This was done based on the Fatterman's 2010 "Big-net" approach of sample size which proposed that everyone willing to be part of the study become the sample of the study.
For ethical consideration, study respondents were given the liberty to participate in the study willingly and the permission to withdraw at will whenever they needed to. Necessary permissions were obtained from community leaders before embarking on community entry. Questions were asked objectively, and questions that were interpreted as cases demanded were done directly as written in the English language and were coded for analysis.

FINDINGS

ARISE Agenda Policies and Institutional Frameworks that Support the Growth of the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom State

Table 1: Responses on ARISE Agenda Policies and Institutional Frameworks that Support the Growth of the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom State

S/N	STATEMENTS	A	SA	N	D	SD
1.	The state government through the ARISE agenda has supported fishing business through provision of grants	161 (45.7%)	131 (37.2%)	14 (4.1%)	31 (8.8%)	15 (4.2%)
2.	The state ministry of agriculture through the ARISE agenda has made provisions for subsidise tools and equipment for business in the coastline area	144 (40.9%)	138 (39.2%)	19 (5.4%)	51 (14.5%)	0 (0.0%)
3.	Creation of Local Government Areas' Department of Fisheries as part of the ARISE agenda has provided access to state government assistants by local fishermen and fishing business individuals within the coastline area of the state	147 (41.8%)	143 (40.6%)	21 (6.0%)	23 (6.5%)	18 (5.1%)
4.	Creation of Local Government Areas' Bureau of Cooperative & Rural Development as part of the ARISE agenda provided access to state government supports and empowerment programmes by rural business men and women along the coastline	139 (39.5%)	127 (36.1%)	17 (4.8%)	41 (11.6%)	28 (8.0%)
	Total	591	539	71	146	61

Source: Fieldwork (2026)

Table 1 presents the feedback from study participants regarding the questions posed in the questionnaire concerning the ARISE agenda policies of Governor Umo Eno and the institutional frameworks that facilitate the development of the blue economy in Akwa Ibom State. A significant majority of respondents expressed agreement or strong agreement that the ARISE agenda has had a positive impact on the coastline, thereby enhancing the lives of the residents and establishing foundations for the advancement of Akwa Ibom State's Blue Economy in Nigeria. In total, 591 affirmative responses were recorded from the 352 study participants regarding their views on four distinct statement questions. Among these, 539 respondents strongly agreed on the influence of ARISE agenda policies on the state's blue economy. Conversely, 146 respondents disagreed with the statements, 61 strongly disagreed, and 71 remained neutral regarding the four sets of statements. These findings suggest that the incorporation of the blue economy into the economic framework of Akwa Ibom State by Governor Umo Eno, through his ARISE agenda, is evidently impactful, demonstrating significant effects on both the coastline and the local populace.

Major Infrastructure Projects on the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom State

Table 2: Responses on Major Infrastructure Projects on the Blue Economy of Akwa Ibom State

S/N	STATEMENTS	A	SA	N	D	SD
1.	Ibom Deep Sea port and industrial city serves as a major boost to the blue economy in Akwa Ibom State	163 (46.3%)	127 (36.1%)	14 (4.1%)	43 (12.2%)	18 (5.1%)
2.	Oron Maritime hub serves as a major boost to the blue economy in Akwa Ibom State	148 (42.0%)	129 (36.6%)	31 (8.8%)	23 (6.5%)	21 (6.1%)
3.	Modern cold rooms at Oron Marine Terminal serves as a major boosting base for the blue economy in Akwa Ibom State	168 (47.7%)	135 (38.4%)	18 (5.1%)	31 (8.8%)	0 (0.0%)
4.	Modern fish drying facilities at Oron Marine Terminal serves as a major boosting base for the blue economy in Akwa Ibom State	147 (41.8%)	156 (44.0%)	13 (4.1%)	25 (7.0%)	11 (3.1%)
	Total	626	547	76	122	50

Source: Fieldwork (2026)

Table 2 presents the feedback from study participants regarding the statements posed in the questionnaire concerning Major Infrastructure Projects related to the Blue Economy of Akwa Ibom State. A significant number of respondents expressed agreement or strong agreement that the ARISE agenda has positively influenced the blue economy, particularly through initiatives such as the Ibom Deep Seaport Project, the Oron Maritime hub, the establishment of modern cool rooms, the provision of contemporary fish drying facilities, and other amenities that facilitate waterway transportation and commerce in the coastal region of Eket Federal Constituency. A total of 626 affirmative responses were gathered from 352 study participants concerning their opinions on four distinct statement questions. Of these, 547 respondents expressed strong agreement regarding the positive infrastructural influence of the ARISE agenda on the blue economy of the state. In contrast, 122 participants disagreed with the statements, while 50 strongly disagreed, and 76 remained neutral on the four sets of statements. These results indicate that the incorporation of the blue economy into Akwa Ibom State's economic framework, led by Governor Umo Eno through the ARISE agenda, has significantly and visibly impacted the state's coastline and its inhabitants due to the infrastructural encroachment by the state government. This encroachment has altered the coastline and fostered optimism for increased job creation and enhanced sustainable economic development within the blue economy context.

Environmental, Security, and Governance Obstacles that Impede the Sustainable Growth of the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom State

Table 3: Responses on Challenges of the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom State

S/N	STATEMENTS	A	SA	N	D	SD
1.	Coastline area faced smuggling, piracy, and insecurity that limited its potential in the blue economy sector of Akwa Ibom State	147 (41.8%)	107 (30.4%)	21 (6.0%)	52 (14.8%)	25 (7.0%)
2.	Poor road infrastructure has been a limiting factor to the blue economy in Akwa Ibom State	151 (42.8%)	149 (42.3%)	16 (4.5%)	23 (6.5%)	13 (3.8%)

3.	Erosion is a great challenge to the coastline which pose challenges to the blue economy of Akwa Ibom State	171 (48.6%)	135 (38.4%)	8 (2.2%)	21 (6.0%)	17 (4.8%)
4.	Complicating social order through traditional governance of the coastal communities pose serious challenge to the blue economy in Akwa Ibom State	167 (47.4%)	145 (41.2%)	0 (0.0%)	40 (11.4%)	0 (0.0%)
	Total	636	536	45	136	55

Source: Fieldwork (2026)

Table 3 presents the responses of participants in the study regarding the statements posed in the questionnaire concerning the challenges confronting the Blue Economy in Akwa Ibom State. A significant number of respondents expressed agreement or strong agreement that, despite the efforts of the ARISE agenda led by His Excellency Pastor Umo Eno, PhD, the coastal region of Eket Federal Constituency continues to grapple with security issues such as smuggling, piracy, the complicating influence of community leaders, poor road infrastructure in certain communities, inconsistent power supply, and erosion affecting various parts of the area. In total, 636 affirmative responses were recorded from the 352 study participants regarding their views on four distinct statement questions. Among these, 536 respondents strongly agreed on adverse challenges facing the state's blue economy. Conversely, 136 respondents disagreed with the statements, 55 strongly disagreed, and 45 remained neutral regarding the four sets of statements. These findings suggest that the blue economy integrated into the economic framework of Akwa Ibom State as championed by Governor Umo Eno through the ARISE agenda, is evidently facing some challenges which are posing serious threat to the emerging blue economy in the state. It should be noted that the state government has inaugurated maritime security with the mandate of tackling the insecurity problems of the coastline. This effort is to make the region safe for investment and economic activities.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In July 2025, Akwa Ibom entered into an agreement with UNDP aimed at enhancing tourism, the blue economy, skills training, and innovation. The findings of the study indicated that the state, through the ARISE agenda, is making investments in the Ibom Deep Seaport and Ibom Industrial City, which are regarded as the "foundation for future economic expansion." The project has received all necessary regulatory approvals and is progressing towards realization. It is anticipated to enhance maritime trade, logistics, and local content participation, contributing to the sustainable blue economy of Akwa Ibom State. Artisanal fishing continues to be a significant source of livelihood along Qua Iboe, a vital water resource in the coastal region of the state. The state government, through the ARISE agenda, is empowering fishing communities as an essential component of blue economy development, while also incorporating traditional fishing practices into contemporary policy frameworks. The findings give credence to the African Union (2019) postulation that the blue economy in Africa presents significant potential for economic diversification and sustainable development, addressing the continent's urgent need for alternative income sources to stimulate economic growth.

Gathered data shown that the recent investment in the Oron Maritime Hub, a multi-billion-naira initiative launched in September 2024, aims to transform the Oron coastline into a secure and functional maritime city for sustainable economic growth. This project includes a 525-meter shoreline protection system to address coastal erosion, as well as terminal buildings, passenger ferry jetties, cold storage facilities, and a recreational garden. The hub provides employment for over 1,000 artisans and technical specialists. Additionally, the hub features modern cold storage rooms, advanced fish drying facilities, and anchors for fishing boats which promise the sustainable development of the area and the Akwa Ibom State at large. The results support the assertion made by San (2024), which states that the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates the blue economy's annual contribution to the global economy to be $1.5 trillion, while also providing employment for over 31 million individuals, given that 40% of the world's population lives in coastal areas.

CONCLUSION

Akwa Ibom State boasts Nigeria's longest coastline, stretching 129 kilometres along the Gulf of Guinea. Historically, the state's economy has been predominantly reliant on oil and gas; however, under the leadership of Governor Umo Eno and his ARISE Agenda, there is a strategic pivot towards the Blue Economy. This strategy highlights the sustainable use of oceanic and waterway resources to promote economic development, create jobs, and improve livelihoods, all while protecting marine ecosystems in line with UNDP guidelines. The Blue Economy includes a range of sectors such as fisheries, maritime transport, coastal tourism, renewable marine energy, aquaculture, and marine biotechnology. For Akwa Ibom, this shift is seen as a way to diversify its economic foundation beyond oil and to generate employment opportunities for both skilled and unskilled individuals. Experts indicate that the maritime sector's potential could surpass that of oil if it is properly developed through investments in ports, logistics, and aquaculture. Akwa Ibom is proactively positioning itself to participate in the global blue economy. Although it possesses considerable coastal and marine resources that could enhance job creation, strengthen food security, and lessen reliance on oil, the state encounters challenges related to policy integration, coastal erosion, and security issues. If fully harnessed, the blue economy could yield significant employment opportunities and foster sustainable development across the Niger Delta. As Governor Eno remarked, "we will pursue the Ibom Deep Seaport project to actualisation" and ensure it does not turn into a "white elephant project."

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

A cooperative strategy that includes the government, private sector, and local communities is essential for creating a sustainable and inclusive Blue Economy.

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