A parallel session co-organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on SDG14, during the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD 2022), shed light on pathways for steering progress towards attaining the SDG14 goal by 2030.

The parallel session on the theme Life below Water reviewed progress and discussed how countries could advance ongoing efforts of conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources. A panel discussion drawn from policymakers and high-level officials heard countries' experiences and progress and proposed the best ways forward to achieve blue, inclusive, and resilient growth in Africa. The session was held in Kigali, Rwanda on 04 March 2022.

The FAO Subregional Coordinator, Chimimba David Phiri noted that, with an annual global fish production number estimated at 179 million tonnes, fisheries and aquaculture plays a crucial role in food and nutrition security for millions of people. To preserve and improve gains from this sector with huge potentials, Phiri called for improved investment, innovation, and entrepreneurship for a blue, inclusive, and resilient growth.

"Transformative actions to ensure a sustainable blue economy in Africa includes building technical capacities in fisheries and aquaculture, supporting the youth to involve in generating income from fisheries and aquaculture, increasing country capacities to mobilize sustainable financing and strengthening regulatory frameworks." He added.

The session discussed solutions for the various challenges facing the fisheries and aquaculture sector, such as insufficient financing, overfishing, illegal fishing and maritime security problems. Climate change is another challenge affecting the availability and trade of fish products, causing huge social-economic implications, particularly on countries whose economies are heavily dependent on the sector and associated service sectors.

Chairing the session, State Secretary for Business Promotion of the Republic of Cabo Verde – Adalgisa Barbosa Vaz, proposed taking advantage of the synergies between Sustainable Development goals, improving technical capacities, and monetizing carbon emission to protect water resources.

The panelists agreed that without the resources to support climate action,

implementation of the aspirations of several agreements and frameworks that support the sustainable blue economy will not be possible. FAO’s Chief scientist, Ismahane Elouafi, who moderated the session, stressed that African countries urgently needed significant amount of resources to support blue economy plans, and to mitigate constraints imposed by climate change.

The high-level panelists consisting of high officials from Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Bissau, São Tome & Principe, the African Union Commission, OceanHub Africa, and the United Nations, pointed out the vast potential in synergies observed between SDG 14 and several other SDGs. Partnerships and collaboration between actors who face common challenges and solutions are critical during tracking progress in improving ocean and marine resources through the SDG-Sustainability Impact Score.

Challenges and opportunities in building blue economies

Thirty-eight of Africa’s 54 countries are coastal and maritime zones, and Africa’s lake zones are estimated to cover approximately 240,000 sq. km while its transboundary river basins cover 64 per cent of the continent’s land area. More than three billion people rely on the ocean for their livelihoods and over 80 per cent of world merchandise trade is carried out by the sea. This shows a huge potential in fisheries and aquaculture for youth who can drive the use of technologies and innovation to develop the sector and serve to curb unemployment. Lively discussions touched upon key challenges and opportunities of the sector, and suggested means to improve progress to achieve blue growth in Africa.

Despite their significant contribution to poverty eradication, economic growth and food security, oceans are increasingly undermined by human activities. Rising carbon dioxide emissions, overfishing, and land-based pollutants are threatening marine ecosystems and the people who depend on them. These changes have long-term repercussions and require urgent efforts to scale up the protection of marine environments, investment in ocean science and support for small-scale fishing communities and the sustainable management of the oceans.

As countries tackle the SDGs and the Agenda 2063 synergistically to progress on SDG 14, the focus must also be on gender mainstreaming, gaining political momentum, social and legal structures and good governance. African countries and development actors should advance investment in marine data, science, technologies, and youth entrepreneurship to make lasting changes in achieving a

sustainable blue economy in Africa.

The Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development took place in Kigali, Rwanda, from 03-05 March 2022. The theme of this year’s regional forum was Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. SDG 14 was one of the five goals selected as priority areas of focus. (End)