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The impact of Blue Economy on Youth Employment Generation in Nigeria

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***Abstract* – This study examines the contribution of Nigeria's Blue Economy to youth employment generation, focusing on fisheries and aquaculture, maritime transport and logistics, coastal and marine tourism, and emerging sectors such as marine renewable energy. Despite Nigeria's extensive coastline, inland waterways, and Exclusive Economic Zone, decades of over-dependence on crude oil have left the country's marine and aquatic sectors underdeveloped, while youth unemployment in coastal and riverine communities remains high. The study was guided by three objectives: to examine the current and potential scale of youth employment across major Blue Economy value chains; to identify the socio-economic, institutional, environmental, skills-related, and gender-specific barriers limiting youth participation; and to propose evidence-based policy reforms and interventions to expand decent employment opportunities. A mixed-methods design was adopted, combining a thematic review of secondary data (government publications, international reports, and peer-reviewed literature) with primary data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 150 youths (aged 15–35) in coastal communities across Lagos State, of which 138 were validly returned (a 92% response rate). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings show that although awareness of and future interest in the Blue Economy is high among Lagos youths, actual participation remains low, with 32% of respondents unemployed and a further significant share in unstable, informal, or part-time work. Infrastructure deficits limited technical and vocational skills, weak access to finance, and institutional/policy fragmentation emerged as the most significant barriers to youth engagement. The study concludes that Nigeria's Blue Economy holds substantial untapped potential for decent youth employment and recommends targeted vocational training, improved landing-site and port infrastructure, streamlined institutional coordination, and accessible financing schemes to convert this potential into inclusive job creation.**

Keywords - **Blue Economy; Youth Employment; Fisheries and Aquaculture; Maritime Transport; Coastal Tourism; Value Chains; Youth Participation; Nigeria.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Blue Economy, especially in resources rich economically disadvantaged countries, has become a key tenet in debates of sustainable economic development. The term “blue economy” refers to the sustainable use of ocean, coastal, and inland water resources for economic growth, better livelihoods, and job creation while maintaining environmental sustainability. It was first made popular by Pauli (2010) and later formalized at the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (UNEP,2013; World Bank & UNDESA,2017). It includes both established industries like ports, tourism, Fishing, and marine transportation as well as newer ones like aquaculture, marine biotechnology, offshore energy, and blue carbon projects.

The Blue Economy has shown enormous economic potenti al on a global scale. With the potential to create more than 40 million jobs globally, the ocean eco nomy was estimated to be worth US$1.5 trillion in 2010 a nd is expected to surpass US$3 trillion by 2030 (OECD, 2 016; WWF, 2019).

According to estimates, the industry supports almost 49 mi llion jobs in Africa and contributes more than US$300 billi on a year (UNECA, 2016; World Bank, 2019). These numbers demonstrate the increasing significance of marine and aquatic resources as alternate sources of economic diversification, especially in developing nations dealing with high rates of unemploy ment, food insecurity, and environmental deterioration.

Nigeria is in a unique position to take advantage of the Blu e Economy's prospects. The nation has abundant marine and aquatic resources, including a huge 8 53-kilometer Atlantic coastline, an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of more than 216,000 sq uare kilometers, and more than 10,000 kilometers of inlan d waterways (NIMASA, 2022). Nigeria’s economy is still largely reliant on crude oil, which provides more than 80% of export prof its and a sizeable amount of government revenue, notwiths tanding these advantages (CBN, 2023). The nation’s capacity to attain sustainable and inclusive growth has been hampered by thi s over-reliance which has led to the marginalization of other productive industries including fis heries, marine transportation, and coastal tourism (Adeye mi & Abiodun, 2013; Elisha, 2019).

The effects of this structural imbalance are especially notic eable in Nigeria's labor market, where underemployment a nd youth unemployment continue to be severe.

Widespread poverty, little for employment, and social instability persist in coastal an d riverine areas, which should ideally profit from marine-

based economic activities (NBS, 2023). These issues have been made worse by the underdevelopment of important Blue Economy sectors, which has encouraged young participation in illegal activities like piracy, oil bunkering, illegal fishing, and irregular migration (Egbedokun & Ajayi, 2019; Esin & Zelibe, 2024).

Successive Nigerian governments have implemented policy frameworks targeted at advancing the Blue Economy after realizing the necessity of economic diversification. Growing policy attention to the industry is seen in initiatives like national Development Plan (2021-2023), the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (2017–2020) and the federal ministry of marine and blue economy (2023). However, despite these initiatives, Nigeria's Blue Economy development is still hampered by lack of infrastructure, poor institutional coordination, environmental deterioration, a lack of technical expertise, and restricted access to funding.

More importantly, there is a significant gap in empirical research examining how the Blue Economy can be strategically leveraged to generate sustainable employment opportunities for Nigerian youth. Existing studies have largely focused on sectoral performance or environmental sustainability, with limited attention to employment dynamics and value-chain opportunities within the Blue Economy. existing studies on the Blue Economy in Nigeria and Africa have predominantly examined sectoral performance, economic growth, environmental sustainability and the general development potential of fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transport and coastal tourism (Yusuff & Ibidapo-Obe, 2024; Esin et al., 2025; Mbaka, 2025; Ukagwu et al., 2025). Although some recent studies have begun to examine employment generation, particularly in specific localities such as Lagos, limited empirical attention has been devoted to systematically examining employment dynamics and value-chain opportunities across the diverse Blue Economy sectors. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in understanding how Blue Economy activities can generate direct and indirect employment, support entrepreneurship, strengthen local value chains and create inclusive livelihood opportunities in Nigeria. In view of this, the purpose of this study is to investigate how the Blue Economy can contribute to youth employment. In particular it seeks to evaluate how important industries, like aquaculture, maritime transportation, and coastal tourism contribute to the creation of jobs; pinpoint the main obstacles preventing youth involvement: and suggest institutional and policy changes required to fully realize the sectors potential tackling these problems, the study adds to the expanding body of knowledge on sustainable development and offers stakeholders, practitioners, and policymakers evidence-based perspective for advancing equitable economic growth in Nigeria.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Global assessments consistently point to the ocean economy as a major and expanding source of output and employment. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016) projected that the ocean economy would double in size by 2030, rising from approximately USD 1.5 trillion to USD 3 trillion and generating over 40 million jobs across fisheries, maritime transport, coastal tourism, offshore energy, and marine biotechnology. This projection is broadly corroborated by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF, 2019), which estimated that the Blue Economy generates roughly USD 2.5 trillion in annual net economic value and sustains more than 350 million livelihoods worldwide when full value-chain effects are considered.

At the continental level, the case for the Blue Economy as an employment engine is well documented. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 2016) estimated that African Blue Economy sectors generated approximately USD 300 billion in output and sustained close to 49 million jobs, while the African Union's Blue Economy Strategy (2019) projected growth to USD 405 billion and 57 million jobs by 2030, and as much as USD 576 billion and 78 million jobs by 2063 under Agenda 2063. Coastal and marine tourism alone was projected to generate over USD 100 billion in value added and 28 million jobs by 2030. South Africa's Operation Phakisa offers one of the continent's most rigorously evaluated cases: post-implementation reviews (Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, 2019, 2021) confirmed substantial job creation in aquaculture, ship repair, and marine protection, but identified skills mismatches as the principal constraint on faster employment growth this underscore the importance of aligning training systems with sectoral demand. A more recent continental labour market analysis by FSD Africa and Palladium (2025) projected 1.5 to 3.3 million new direct jobs in green and blue sectors across Sub-Saharan Africa by 2030, identifying Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and Mozambique as the countries with the greatest employment potential.

Nigeria-focused empirical work has increasingly applied rigorous econometric methods to quantify the relationship between Blue Economy outputs and macroeconomic performance. Esin and Zelibe (2024), using an Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) bounds-testing framework over the 1990–2024 period, found statistically significant long-run positive effects of fishery production, aquaculture output, marine transportation, freshwater

resources, and marine tourism on GDP per capita. Marine tourism exhibited the strongest unemployment-reducing effect, with a one percent increase in tourism receipts associated with a 0.43 percent reduction in youth unemployment. Notably, aquaculture showed a negative short-run employment coefficient, attributed to the capital-intensive, mechanised nature of commercial operations outpacing labour absorption. At the sub-national level, Esin and Nse (2024) found that coastal tourism growth in Akwa Ibom and Cross River states generated an estimated 12,000 additional service-sector jobs between 2018 and 2023, though only 12 percent of tourism workers had received formal training this indicates a persistent skills deficit limiting the quality, if not the quantity, of employment created.

Complementary evidence on maritime transport comes from Osuji and Agbakwuru (2024), who estimated direct maritime employment in Nigeria at 350,000–400,000 workers but found that foreign nationals dominate the highest-skilled, highest-paying roles, with Nigerian youth confined largely to informal, low-wage activities; a pattern linked to weak enforcement of the Cabotage Act (2003) and the limited annual output of Nigerian maritime training institutions relative to industry demand. National statistics corroborate the sector's scale and its unrealised potential: the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022, 2023) reported that fisheries contribute 3.0-5.0 percent of agricultural GDP and employ over 1.48 million people, yet a persistent supply-demand gap of approximately 3.6 million metric tonnes of fish signals substantial untapped employment potential across the value chain. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN, 2023) further noted that foreign direct investment across fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transport, and tourism remained below USD 500 million annually between 2018 and 2022; a fraction of oil and gas sector inflows; constraining the pace of employment expansion. Muhammad, et al. (2021) similarly documented Nigeria's rich fisheries biodiversity (over 500 species) alongside the absence of systematic programmes to convert this endowment into commercial-scale employment, echoing UNECA's (2016) broader observation that sub-Saharan Africa's aquatic resources remain undervalued in national planning.

Literature examining youth participation specifically offers the most direct evidence base for this study. WorldFish and the International Water Management Institute (2024), surveying households in Oyo, Ogun, Lagos, and Anambra states, found that fewer than 2 percent of youth aged 15–35 engaged in aquaculture as a primary livelihood, despite policy rhetoric positioning the sector as a youth-employment priority. Barriers cited included limited access to land and water bodies (68 percent), inability to afford inputs (62 percent), lack of technical knowledge (57 percent), and negative social perceptions of fishing as a low-status occupation (44 percent); this indicates a marked gap between policy aspiration and youth realities. FAO (2020) found comparatively higher youth participation in artisanal capture fisheries, with 40–50 percent of artisanal fishers aged 18–35, though the workforce remains predominantly male, with women concentrated in lower-value post-harvest and retail roles.

Qualitative evidence from Egbedokun and Ajayi (2019), based on focus group discussions with coastal youth in Bayelsa, Rivers, and Delta states, identified five structural barriers: kinship-based entry into artisanal fishing, absence of accessible credit mechanisms, inadequate post-harvest infrastructure (with losses exceeding 40 percent of catch value), oil-spill-related environmental degradation, and insecurity from piracy and militancy this findings is consistent with NIMASA's (2022) identification of insecurity, environmental degradation, and skills deficits as the leading constraints on Blue Economy employment. On maritime transport, Elisha (2019) documented that foreign nationals continued to occupy 70-80 percent of technical and officer-level vessel positions as of 2019 despite the Cabotage Act, reflecting the limited output of Nigerian maritime academies and shipping companies' preference for internationally certified personnel. Esin (2024) added that illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing removes an estimated 210 tonnes of fish daily from Nigerian waters, directly undermining the income stability of artisanal youth fishers, and argued that stronger enforcement combined with community-based monitoring could meaningfully improve employment outcomes within three to five years. At a broader scale, the State of the Nigerian Youth Report (2025) estimated that approximately 80 million Nigerian youth i.e. 53 percent of the youth population are unemployed or underemployed, and identified the Blue Economy as among the highest-potential sectors for absorbing this population, contingent on addressing the structural barriers documented above through coordinated investment in skills, infrastructure, and policy implementation.

Esin, Evans, and Ndekhede (2025) examined the performance of Nigeria's capture and aquaculture fisheries and its impact on economic growth. Using multiple regression, descriptive statistics, and secondary data, the study primarily looked at fish output, demand, and economic performance. Although fisheries are a major source of income, the study did not fully examine employment opportunities along the fisheries value chain, including processing, storage, transportation, marketing, and distribution. Furthermore, the contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to Nigeria's Blue Economy was examined by Ukagwu et al. (2025) the authors focused on production, employment, trade, environmental degradation, and legislative restrictions. Nevertheless, the

study is primarily a sectoral overview and does not include a thorough empirical analysis of the employment distribution across the various stages of the value chain for fisheries and aquaculture.

Mbaka (2025) examined the correlation between economic growth in Nigeria and the Blue Economy by employing indicators such as port throughput, shipping connectivity, water transportation, and fisheries. Using quarterly data from 2010–2023, the study employed an ARDL model to identify substantial long-term relationships between real GDP and a variety of Blue Economy indicators. However, the study prioritized macroeconomic growth over employment generation, labor absorption, or value-chain linkages. Yusuff and Ibidapo-Obe (2024) investigated Nigeria's Blue Economy's focus areas, opportunities, and difficulties. The study examined the potential contributions of fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, renewable energy, and maritime transportation to GDP, job creation, and food security. However, rather than objectively pinpointing employment prospects and value-chain activities, the study primarily addresses the potential of various industries at an aggregate level.

Challenges facing the blue economy have also been identified, for instance in a study by Asua and Nwangwu (2026) on Nigeria's Blue Economy development, environmental deterioration, and marine insecurity. The development of the Blue Economy is hampered by problems including oil spills, artisanal refining, armed robberies at sea, and unsustainable fishing, according to the qualitative analysis of the study. Crucially, they also highlight the necessity of engaging youth in productive ways. However, the study focuses more on environmental deterioration, insecurity, and the development of the Blue Economy than it does on employment prospects and value-chain involvement.

Ojo et al. (2025) in a recent study that focused on Blue Economy activities and employment generation in Lagos State's Eti-Osa LGA. Fisheries, coastal tourism, and marine transportation were shown to constitute substantial Blue Economy activities and employment. However, the study did not fully map employment across Nigeria's broader Blue Economy value chains, and its geographic focus is restricted to a single local government region.

In conclusion, the reviewed literature establishes a consistent finding: the Blue Economy possesses substantial, empirically demonstrated potential for employment generation at global, continental, and national levels, and youth participation in fisheries and aquaculture tends to exceed that of adults where entry barriers are low. However, the evidence is equally consistent in identifying structural constraints; limited access to finance and land, skills mismatches, weak infrastructure, insecurity, and environmental degradation that hinders the potential from being fully realised, particularly for young people. Notably, much of the Nigeria-specific quantitative literature (e.g., Esin & Zelibe, 2024; Osuji & Agbakwuru, 2024) operates at the macroeconomic or sectoral level using secondary data, while youth-specific studies (e.g., WorldFish & IWMI, 2024; Egbedokun & Ajayi, 2019) tend to be geographically limited or qualitative in nature. Few studies combine national-level secondary evidence with direct primary data from Lagos State youth to assess both the scale of employment and the lived barriers to participation within a single framework. This study addresses that gap by integrating secondary desk-review evidence with primary survey data from Lagos State to provide a more grounded assessment of youth employment potential and constraints within Nigeria's Blue Economy.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-method research design, integrating qualitative analysis of secondary sources with quantitative analysis of primary survey data. The qualitative component drew on government reports, policy documents, and academic literature to establish the national context of Nigeria's Blue Economy and youth employment, while the quantitative component captured firsthand employment experiences, perceived barriers, and policy expectations of youths in Lagos State. This combination was considered appropriate given the multidimensional nature of the subject, which spans infrastructural, institutional, and socio-economic dimensions that neither data source could adequately capture in isolation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The design was structured around three objectives: (i) to examine the current and potential scale of youth employment in Blue Economy value chains, (ii) to identify the main barriers to youth participation, and (iii) to propose practical policy interventions.

Population and Sampling

The study population comprised two strata. The secondary population consisted of policy documents, statistical bulletins, and peer-reviewed articles published between 2016 and 2026 addressing the Blue Economy and youth employment in Nigeria, with particular reference to the nine coastal states (Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, and Edo) and four inland waterway states (Kogi, Niger, Benue, and Anambra). The primary population comprised youths aged 15–35 years resident in coastal and riverine communities in Lagos State, consistent with the age classification adopted in Nigeria's National Youth Policy and the African Youth Charter. Lagos was purposively selected owing to its status as Nigeria's commercial hub and its extensive coastline of over 853 km, which supports substantial youth

engagement in fishing, maritime transport, and beach tourism.

Secondary sources were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct relevance to the study objectives and the presence of employment data, barrier analyses, or policy recommendations. For the primary data, a sample of youths was drawn from coastal communities in Badagry, Lekki, Epe, and Lagos Island. A total of 150 questionnaires were administered, of which 138 were correctly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 92%. Since the study population is limited to particular age group and area, therefore the sample technique is purposive in nature

Sources and Methods of Data Collection

Secondary data were obtained through a systematic desk review of official and reputable sources, including publications of the National Bureau of Statistics, the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency, the National Inland Waterways Authority, and the Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy, alongside reports of the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, WorldFish, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2026 supplemented these institutional sources. Searches were conducted across academic databases and institutional repositories using targeted keyword combinations, and retrieved documents were screened, summarised, and organised according to the research objectives.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising four sections: respondent demographics; current and potential employment status; perceived barriers to participation, measured on a five-point Likert scale; and open-ended questions on respondents' suggestions and future interest in Blue Economy opportunities. The instrument was pre-tested with 10 youths to assess clarity, and adjustments were made based on the pilot feedback. The questionnaire was administered both in person, across selected coastal locations, and electronically via Google Forms, over a three-month period between January and March 2026. Informed consent and assurances of confidentiality were provided to all respondents before participation.

Data Analysis Techniques

Secondary data were analysed thematically, with documents coded and organised under three themes corresponding to the study objectives: employment scale, barriers to participation, and recommended interventions. Key statistics were tabulated for clarity. Primary data were coded and analysed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were computed for demographic and employment-related responses, while mean scores were derived for Likert-scale items to rank perceived barriers by severity. Responses to open-ended questions were analysed thematically and grouped into recurring categories. Findings from the secondary and primary analyses were subsequently integrated to compare national-level patterns with community-level evidence from Lagos State, providing a more comprehensive basis for interpretation.

Validity and Reliability

Validity was strengthened through triangulation across multiple reputable data sources and expert review of the questionnaire prior to administration. A pilot test involving ten respondents further confirmed the clarity and appropriateness of the survey instrument. Reliability was assessed through cross-verification of employment statistics across independent secondary sources and through Cronbach's Alpha testing of the Likert-scale items, which yielded a coefficient above 0.7, indicating acceptable internal consistency for social science research (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The high response rate of 92% further supports the dependability of the primary data collected.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings from the analysis of primary data collected from 150 youths aged 15–35 years across six coastal and riverine communities in Lagos State (Badagry, Epe, Ikorodu, Lagos Island, Lagos Mainland, and Lekki/Eti-Osa), triangulated with secondary evidence from government and international sources. Findings are discussed in relation to the study's three objectives: the scale of youth employment in Blue Economy value chains, the barriers constraining participation, and the policy interventions youths themselves consider most impactful.

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The sample was predominantly young, with 60.7% of respondents aged between 20 and 29 years and over 80% aged 29 or below, confirming that the survey captured the segment of the population most directly targeted by Blue Economy youth-employment initiatives. Males constituted 65.3% of respondents, consistent with the labour-intensive character of activities such as fishing, dredging, and

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maritime operations, while the 34.7% female representation reflects growing involvement of women though still secondary concentrated in seafood processing and small-scale trade. This gendered pattern is in line with earlier findings by FAO (2020), which similarly reported women clustered in post-harvest and retail segments of the value chain rather than active fishing.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age 15-19 20-24 25-29 30-35	30 49 42 29	20.0 32.7 28.0 19.3
Gender: Male Female	98 52	65.3 34.7
LGA: Badagry Epe Ikorodu Lekki/Eti osa Lagos Island Others/Mainland	35 30 27 24 20 14	23.3 20.0 18.0 16.0 13.3 9.3
Educational Qualification: No formal Education Primary Secondary OND/NCE/Diploma HND/B.Sc. Postgraduate	15 26 50 33 20 6	10.0 17.3 33.3 22.0 13.3 4.0
Employment Status: Unemployment (Not Seeking) Unemployment (Seeking) Employed (Part-time Employed (Full time) Self-employed Student	18 30 37 20 33 12	12.0 20.0 24.7 13.3 22.0 8.0

Educational attainment was low: 60.6% of respondents had secondary education or below, and 82.6% had not progressed beyond OND/NCE/Diploma level. Employment status findings were similarly concerning, with 32.0% of respondents unemployed and a further 24.7% in part-time or casual work, meaning that 56.7% of the sample was either unemployed or engaged only in unstable, informal work. These figures are consistent with the State of the Nigerian Youth Report (2025) estimate which indicates that over half of Nigerian youth are unemployed or underemployed, and this underscores the urgency of the employment question this study investigates.

Table 2: Awareness and Participation in the Blue Life Economy

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, I know it well	48	32.0	32.0	32.0
	Yes, but vague idea	55	36.7	36.7	68.7
	NO, never heard	47	31.3	31.3	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Awareness of the Blue Economy among respondents was found to be limited: only 32.0% reported good knowledge of the concept, while 68.0% (i.e. 36.7% + 31.3%) had either a vague understanding or had never heard of it. This low awareness is a notable finding, suggesting that policy communication around Nigeria's National Policy on Marine and Blue Economy (2025–2034) has not yet reached grassroots coastal populations at scale.

Table 3: Ever Worked/Earned Income from Blue Economy Activities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, currently	52	34.7	34.7	34.7
	Yes, previously	33	22.0	22.0	56.7
	No, never	65	43.3	43.3	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Despite this low conceptual awareness, actual engagement in Blue-Economy-related income activities was substantially higher, with 56.7% of respondents reporting current or past involvement, though only 34.7% were presently active. The gap between past and current participation (a 22-percentage-point decline) indicates a meaningful pattern of disengagement over time, plausibly linked to the barriers.

Table 4: Sectors of Involvement (Multiple Responses)

		Frequency	Percent of those involved	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Fisheries (Artisanal)	58	68.2	68.2
	Aquaculture	20	23.5	91.7

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	Maritime/Tourism	25	29.4	121.1
	Seafood processing	18	21.2	142.3
	Dredging/Construction	14	16.5	158.8

Among those engaged, artisanal fisheries dominated (68.2% of participants), followed by maritime and tourism-related activities (29.4%) and aquaculture (23.5%). The relatively low share in aquaculture corroborates WorldFish and IWMI's (2024) finding that fewer than two percent of Nigerian youth pursue aquaculture as a primary livelihood despite its policy prominence and is consistent with Esin and Zelibe's (2024) observation that aquaculture's capital-intensive, mechanised character limits its capacity for youth labour absorption relative to artisanal fisheries.

Table 5: Future Interest in Blue Economy (With Support)

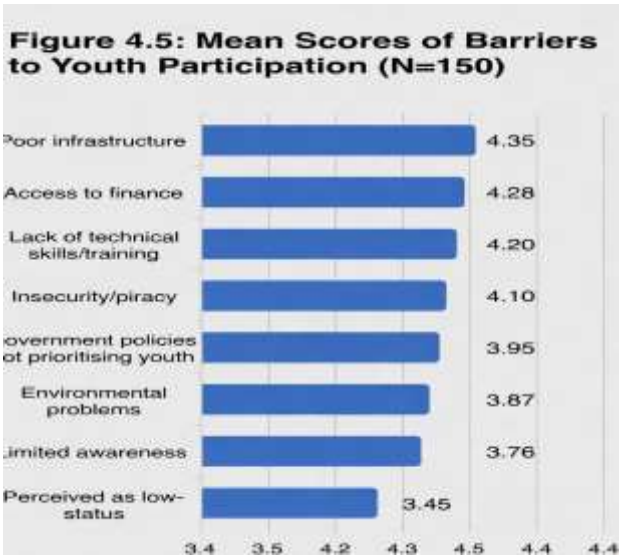
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, definitely	78	52.0	52.0
	Yes, possibly	45	30.0	82.0
	No	9	6.0	88.0
	Already full-time	18	12.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	

Encouragingly, latent demand for participation was high: 82.0% of respondents expressed willingness to engage in the Blue Economy if provided adequate support, with 52.0% "definitely" willing. This finding is important for policy formation and indicates that low current participation reflects structural constraints rather than a lack of youth interest, reinforcing the World Bank S4YE (2023) conclusion that the sector's low entry barriers make it inherently attractive to young people once enabling conditions are met.

Objective 2: Barriers to Youth Participation

Table 6: Mean Scores of Barriers (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree)

Statement (Barrier)		Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
Valid	Poor infrastructure	4.35	0.82	1
	Access to finance	4.28	0.79	2
	Lack of technical skills/ training	4.20	0.88	3
	Insecurity/piracy	4.10	0.95	4
	Government policies not prioritizing youth	3.95	0.91	5
	Environmental problems	3.87	0.94	6
	Limited awareness	3.76	1.02	7
	Perceived as low-status	3.45	1.12	8



Respondents rated poor infrastructure as the most significant barrier to participation (mean = 4.35), followed closely by limited access to finance (mean = 4.28) and inadequate technical skills or training (mean = 4.20). Insecurity and piracy ranked fourth (mean = 4.10), while perception of fishing as a low-status occupation ranked lowest (mean = 3.45), suggesting that social stigma is a comparatively minor deterrent relative to material and structural constraints.

These findings is consistent with the barriers identified in Egbedokun and Ajayi (2019) where the authors similarly found inadequate infrastructure, absence of accessible credit, and insecurity to be dominant constraints among coastal youth in Bayelsa, Rivers, and Delta states, while NIMASA (2022) identified insecurity, environmental degradation, and skills deficits as the leading constraints nationally. The consistency between this study's quantitative rankings and earlier qualitative findings strengthens confidence that infrastructure and finance rather than social attitudes toward fishing ; are the primary devices through which youth participation could be expanded. The lower ranking of environmental problems (mean = 3.87) relative to infrastructure and finance is a notable departure from Esin's (2024) emphasis on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing as a major threat to artisanal livelihoods, suggesting that from the perspective of prospective and current youth participants, immediate practical barriers to entry weigh more heavily than longer-term resource sustainability concerns.

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Objective 3: Policy Interventions and Responsibility Recommendations and Policy Perspectives (Objective 3)

Table 7: Most Impactful Interventions (Multiple Response)

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Improving infrastructure	85	61.6	61.6
	Vocational training centers	78	56.5	118.1
	Youth-targeted microfinance	62	44.9	163.0
	Strengthening security	51	37.0	200.0
	Awareness campaigns	38	27.5	227.5
	Apprenticeships with private sector	29	21.0	248.5
	Policy review	25	18.1	266.6
	Environmental clean-up	22	15.9	282.5
	Total Responses	390		

When asked to identify the most impactful interventions, respondents prioritized improving infrastructure (61.6%) and establishing vocational training centres (56.5%), followed by youth-targeted microfinance (44.9%) and strengthening security (37.0%). This ranking aligns directly with the barriers identified in Objective 2, indicating strong internal consistency in respondents' assessment of both the problems they face and the solutions they consider most relevant. Thematic analysis of open-ended responses reinforced this pattern, with the strongest expressed demand for training in modern aquaculture and fish farming (35%) and boat mechanics/repair (28%), alongside repeated calls for improved funding, cold storage facilities, and on-water security.

Table 8: Stakeholders Responsibility

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Shared responsibility	68	49.3	49.3
	Federal Government	32	23.2	72.5
	State Government (Lagos)	19	13.8	86.3
	Private sector	11	8.0	94.3
	Others	8	5.8	100.0
	Total Responses	150	100.0	

On the question of responsibility, nearly half of respondents (49.3%) viewed youth engagement in the Blue Economy as a shared responsibility across stakeholders, while a cumulative 86.3% assigned primary responsibility to some combination of shared effort, the Federal Government, or the Lagos State Government. This finding suggests that while youths expect government leadership; consistent with the scale of infrastructure and policy interventions required; they do not view the private sector or civil society as absolved of a role, pointing toward multi-stakeholder frameworks as the most acceptable model for intervention design.

In conclusion, these findings support and extend the existing empirical literature in three respects. First, they provide primary, youth-level evidence for a pattern previously observed mainly at the macro or sectoral level: that Nigeria's Blue Economy possesses substantial latent employment potential; evidenced by high willingness to participate (82.0%), that remains unrealised because of structural rather than attitudinal constraints. Second, the close alignment between this study's barrier rankings and earlier qualitative findings (Egbedokun & Ajayi, 2019; NIMASA, 2022) suggests that the constraints facing Lagos youth are broadly representative of those documented elsewhere along Nigeria's coastline, lending external validity to interventions designed around infrastructure, finance, and skills.

Third, the gap between past and current participation (56.7% versus 34.7%) is a finding not prominently addressed in earlier literature and points to an important dynamic: youth are not merely failing to enter the sector, but are actively exiting it, which raises the stakes for retention-focused interventions alongside entry-focused ones.

These findings collectively suggest that Nigeria's stated ambition of creating 3 million Blue Economy jobs is credible in terms of youth demand but contingent on addressing a well-defined and consistently identified set of structural barriers; chiefly infrastructure, finance, and skills — through coordinated, multi-stakeholder action.

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Recommendations and Policy Perspectives (Objective 3)

Table 9: Most Impactful Interventions

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Improving infrastructure	85	61.6	61.6
	Vocational training centers	78	56.5	118.1
	Youth-targeted microfinance	62	44.9	163.0
	Strengthening security	51	37.0	200.0
	Awareness campaigns	38	27.5	227.5
	Apprenticeships with private sector	29	21.0	248.5
	Policy review	25	18.1	266.6
	Environmental clean-up	22	15.9	282.5
	Total Responses	390		

V. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the contribution of Nigeria's Blue Economy to youth employment, using Lagos State's coastal and riverine communities as a case study. The findings confirm that the Blue Economy holds considerable but largely untapped potential for absorbing Nigeria's youth labour force. A meaningful share of respondents were already informally engaged in Blue Economy activities, predominantly artisanal fisheries, and an overwhelming majority expressed willingness to expand this engagement given adequate support. This suggests that youth disengagement from the sector is not a matter of disinterest but of unresolved structural constraints.

The study further establishes that these constraints cluster around three dominant factors; inadequate infrastructure, limited access to finance, and insufficient technical skills which is compounded by low public awareness, security concerns along waterways, and a policy environment that has not yet been deliberately designed around youth inclusion. Where these barriers are addressed, the Blue Economy can realistically become a significant source of decent employment for Nigerian youth especially in the coastal areas, in line with the ambitions of the National Policy on Marine and Blue Economy (2025–2034) and the mandate of the Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy. The study concludes, therefore, that unlocking youth employment potential in the Blue Economy is less a question of demand-side interest and more a question of deliberate, coordinated supply-side investment.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Invest in coastal infrastructure. The Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy, NIMASA, NIWA, and the Lagos State Government should prioritise the construction and rehabilitation of jetties, cold storage facilities, fish markets, and access roads in coastal communities such as Badagry, Epe, and Ikorodu, given that infrastructure was identified as the most significant barrier to participation.
- Establish youth-focused vocational and technical training centres, in partnership with maritime academies and technical colleges, targeting the areas of demonstrated youth demand; through modern aquaculture, boat mechanics, tourism guiding, and seafood processing.
- Expand access to youth-targeted finance through low-interest, collateral-light credit and grant schemes designed by microfinance institutions, development banks, and government agencies for young people entering or scaling Blue Economy enterprises.
- Strengthen security on inland and coastal waterways, with NIMASA and the Nigerian Navy enhancing surveillance and enforcement against piracy to protect youth engaged in fishing and maritime activities.
- Launch sustained awareness campaigns in coastal communities, given that over two-thirds of respondents had limited or no knowledge of the Blue Economy.
- Promote public–private partnerships and apprenticeships, incentivizing maritime and tourism operators to offer structured, market-relevant work experience for youth.
- Review and harmonise Blue Economy policies and institutional mandates, with the Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy leading efforts to streamline overlapping agency mandates and embed youth employment explicitly as a policy priority.
- Address environmental degradation, intensifying efforts to curb oil spills, uncontrolled mangrove harvesting, and plastic pollution, which threaten the long-term sustainability of Blue Economy livelihoods.

Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies should expand the geographical scope of this research to cover all nine coastal states and four inland waterway states identified in Nigeria's Blue Economy policy framework, enabling regional comparison of youth employment dynamics. Longitudinal research tracking youth participation over time would also help evaluate the actual impact of policy interventions such as the National Policy on Marine and Blue Economy (2025–2034).

Further work should examine gender-specific dynamics of participation in greater depth, given the comparatively lower representation of young women in this study's sample and should explore emerging sub-sectors such as marine renewable energy and blue biotechnology, which remain under-researched within the Nigerian context.

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