

OUR BLUE HORIZON

OPENING NEW DEVELOPMENT FRONTIERS WITH THE BLUE ECONOMY

James Alix Michel

IN 2015 the world has two major challenges to address. Taken as a whole, these will draw up the legacy that we, as leaders of the world, wish to confer upon our children. The first relates to how we respond to the threat of climate change. The second relates to the objectives that we will set ourselves as we move beyond the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), namely the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Both are questions that fundamentally affect the world we live in, and the world we believe our children should live in.

There is a case for optimism. Many countries, including my own, have made huge advances in relation to the MDGs. And more than ever, there is a growing consensus that we must act to keep temperature rises below two degrees Celsius.

But there are also plenty of stormy clouds ahead that we ignore at our peril. A sustainable climate change agreement cannot be one that leaves behind any UN Member State. Indeed, recent scientific data has further shown that the window for action is closing fast. If we don't act decisively at the Paris COP21 negotiations in December 2015, many aspects of climate change will bring about irreversible damage to our planet's ecosystem.

Similarly, even though we have transformed the perspectives of a generation of people in the developing world through the MDGs, conflicts, civil strife, disease and the vulnerability of many countries have continued to undermine development gains, and even in some cases reverse certain aspects of the global *acquis*. The fragility of the global economic recovery, and the rise of terrorism and its attendant evils that undermine

James Alix Michel is the President of Seychelles.



Seychelles' President James Michel

Photo: Office of the President Seychell

the fabric of development, have further exacerbated these concerns.

It is evident that, as we face these challenges of 2015, business-as-usual is not an option. To succeed in terms of the new SDGs, and in terms of halting climate change, we need game-changing strategies.

Seychelles is Africa's smallest nation and one of the smallest sovereign states in the world. We have no natural resource endowments and no large internal market. But we are connected to nature and to the rest of the world by the sea that surrounds us. From our perspective, we are looking to our oceans to provide this game-changing strategy.

Our oceans remain one of the world's last development frontiers. While many countries know of the importance of fisheries—and the risk of over-fishing that comes with it—we have yet to truly approach our oceans as a development space. We need to focus on building sustainable long term opportunities that can be shared among myriad coastal and island nations, while also bringing advantages to those that are not littoral states.

The current approach to oceans is based on exploitation and extraction. But because we have as yet only explored fractions of the potential resources, and because we also remain relatively unburdened by the obsolete

infrastructure that is involved in many unsustainable land-based industries, our oceans offer one of the most exciting vectors for new sustainable development opportunities.

BLUE GROWTH

By sharing Seychelles’ experience and our vision for ocean-based development, we hope to inspire a new path towards a Blue Horizon. We want to share this unprecedented opportunity that is represented within the Blue Economy, whereby we can harness the potential of our untapped oceanic frontier.

We are well placed to be a model for this Blue growth. Despite the fact that Seychelles is one of the smallest sovereign island states in terms of land mass and population, it can also be characterized as a ‘large oceanic state.’

The landmass of Seychelles is a mere 455 square kilometers; however, it benefits from an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 1.37 million square kilometers. In other words, the maritime space belonging to Seychelles is roughly three and half times greater than the total size of the Federal Republic of Germany. For the Seychellois people, the sea has long been considered a source of food, employment, and economic growth; an earner of foreign exchange; and a source of cultural and social enjoy-

ment. Nevertheless, its potential has been greatly underestimated, vastly unexploited, and remains largely unknown.

We have embraced the emerging concept of the Blue Economy as a mechanism to realize sustainable economic development from an ocean-based economy. More than half of the state’s land mass has been declared a natural reserve, and much of the rest consists of poor soils, difficult terrain and land reclaimed from the sea for housing, industry, port and airport development.

The maritime space belonging to by Seychelles is roughly three and half times greater than the total size of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Blue Economy combines the need to maximize the economic potential of our ocean while also preserving it. For it to be successful, the country’s economy has to be sustainable and viable. The oceans deliver a wide range of services, many of which have particular

economic or social value. The oceans provide a broad range of essential services that support economic well-being and human health, which are often undervalued in current decisionmaking frameworks.

As such, Seychelles faces the challenge of fully realizing the economic potential of its living and non-living marine resources through a holistic approach that fully accounts for all marine resources and environmental services.

This task is situated in the context of the report published by United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and other institutions entitled *Green Economy in a Blue World*, in preparation for the Rio+20 Conference. This landmark report proposed three key principles in the sustainable use of the oceans. These are: 1) resources should be harvested, grown and traded in an efficient and sustainable manner; 2) economic benefits should be equitably distributed and socially beneficial; and 3) the carbon footprint of the sector should be reduced, while the potential for marine ecosystems to act as carbon sinks should be protected.

OUR BLUE ECONOMY STRATEGY

It is with this in mind that the Seychelles Government, in collaboration with key actors such as the Commonwealth Secretariat, national stakeholders from Government institutions, private business, civil society and NGOs, has begun the process of developing a tangible and attainable Blue Economy Strategy.

Seychelles has defined the goals of this strategy in the following manner:

- Economic diversification to reduce vulnerability from reliance on a small number of existing sectors (namely fishing and tourism);
- The creation of high value jobs (while unemployment levels in

Seychelles are not high by international standards, the creation of higher value jobs is seen as a priority);

- Increase the contribution made by marine sectors to GDP;
- Sustainable economic development—to achieve these goals while sustaining the ecological integrity of the marine environment of Seychelles and its ability to support the livelihoods of present and future generations of Seychellois.

As part of the process of defining an inclusive Blue Economy Strategy, Seychelles has identified a number of sectors as key transition areas to take us towards the ‘Blue Horizon,’ where we successfully tap into the full potential of our ocean, while also protecting it.

The first is the preservation of the maritime environment. As an archipelagic nation, which is the custodian of a vast expanse of the world’s most pristine ocean, Seychelles has historically viewed the marine environment as the pathway to sustainable development.

By protecting our oceans, we protect our future. Our marine environment supports the existing twin pillars of the economy: namely tourism and fisheries. The relatively rapid socio-economic de-

velopment since Seychelles attained independence has been matched by an equally proactive approach to conservation.

Emerging strategies for a Blue Economy will require a renewed focus on policies for conservation, marine spatial management, and risk assessment to promote the productivity and resilience of marine ecosystems. These efforts can build on a history of conservation, but must be innovative to ensure that Seychelles continues to fulfill its obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

A number of key policies will guide the transition to a Blue Economy, whilst maintaining ecosystem functionality, promoting resilience and conserving biodiversity. The Seychelles Sustainable Development Strategy and the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plan have been formulated, and meet local requirements vis-à-vis the CBD. In some cases, alignment will be required with the concept of the Blue Economy, but in a general sense these policy interventions establish a solid framework for sustainable development.

Here I wish to underscore that Seychelles was a key actor in the 1979 establishment of the Indian Ocean

Whale Sanctuary, under the auspices of the ICRW/IWC. These and other maritime protection actions have been accompanied by a strong commitment to protected areas in general, for Seychelles has designated over 50 percent of its landmass under one form of protection or another—the highest proportion in the world.

The Seychelles Government will continue to review and assess the effectiveness of the current protected area network to meet conservation objectives. Efforts are ongoing to prioritize gaps for future expansion of the national network. This will ensure greater representation and replication of protected marine ecosystems, thereby promoting resilience to threats such as climate change. The maritime spatial planning process that engages multiple stakeholders (e.g. fishing, energy, tourism, government, and conservation) in the development of a sustainable usage plan is a key initiative, and is already well advanced.

This is in keeping with the pledge the Government of Seychelles made at the High Level “Leaders Valuing Nature” event during the June 2012 Rio +20 Summit, in which we agreed to designate 30 percent of our EEZ as marine-

Seychelles has designated over 50 percent of its landmass under one form of protection or another—the highest proportion in the world.

protected area network to meet conservation objectives. Efforts are ongoing to prioritize gaps for future expansion of the national network. This will ensure greater representation and replication of protected marine ecosystems,

protected areas (MPA) by 2015—of which half would be dubbed a “no-take” area. This is part of a debt-swap-for-adaptation initiative, which can raise sufficient funds to manage the protected area network, invest in sustainable use of its marine resources, and build resilience to adapt to climate change.

Seychelles is also working with America’s largest environmental organization, the Nature Conservancy, to mobilize an \$80 million debt-swap. Under this initiative, the Seychelles government will set up the Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT) to purchase and restructure the debt the country has accumulated.

Moreover, Seychelles benefits from a proactive and effective community of environmental NGOs, as well as a private sector cognizant of issues pertaining to the environment. There is, as a consequence, great potential for civil society and the private sector to contribute to conservation. Strategic partnerships between state and non-state actors will be required to meet the Blue Economy goals of equitability and efficient financing mechanisms for conservation and sustained use of marine ecosystem goods and services.

Innovative awareness campaigns by NGOs have placed concepts of sustainability at the forefront of education and community action initiatives.

Core to this strategy is the need for such partnerships to foster capacity building.

As a country that has also prioritized sustainable tourism as a driver of growth, it is evident that developing a structure that is conducive to private sector partnerships is required. Innovative awareness campaigns by NGOs have placed concepts of sustainability at the forefront of education and community action initiatives. Further awareness programs on marine ecosystems, their value, and their fragility, will serve to support the transition to Blue growth, and build on a strong foundation.

The partnerships that Seychelles fosters in ensuring that the marine environment takes center stage in the Blue Economy must not only be national in scope, but regional as well. Though Seychelles sits in the middle of the Western Indian Ocean, many of the threats to our marine environment are trans-boundary and straddle a large high seas area, which suffers from gaps in governance.

Shared responsibility for the management of marine ecosystems and utilization of shared resources must be met through strategic bilateral and

multilateral partnerships. Marine trans-frontier conservation is a means of adapting to and mitigating climate change impacts on the marine environment. An example of such partnerships is the co-management of the extended continental shelf of the Mascarene Plateau, shared by Mauritius and Seychelles.

Seychelles understands that the preservation of its unique and pristine marine environment is core to the notion of fully embracing a Blue Economy. We recognize that this is not merely a matter of policy, but must be turned into objectives that are met through effective action by state and non-state actors, supported by an environmentally educated and aware public.

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES & AQUACULTURE

The second sector falling under the purview of Seychelles’ Blue Economy Strategy is fisheries and aquaculture.

Marine fisheries are a key contributor to the social, economic and cultural fabric of Seychelles and its people. Consequently, the fisheries sector has taken a central role in the nation’s development agenda—from successive national development plans to strategies for economic growth. However, turning the concept of the Blue Economy into an operational policy offers a holistic approach for development that

recognizes the potential for fisheries to contribute even further to society, while also reducing the ecological and carbon footprint of this sector within and beyond the boundaries of the state.

The development and management of fisheries has been guided over the last decade by the ‘Fisheries Policy of 2005.’ Policies and strategies are in the process of being revised to adopt the concept of a Blue Economy, which will be facilitated by the new Fisheries Act, enacted in October 2014. The objectives and actions that are commensurate with the dimensions of the Blue Economy—namely sustainability, equitability and efficiency—are described below.

If fisheries and aquaculture are to take center stage in the development of a Blue Economy for Seychelles, a number of challenges must be overcome. While many of the challenges to achieve a Blue Economy are global and highly relevant in Seychelles’ context, such as fleet overcapacity and overfishing, others are less problematic locally, such as destructive fishing or marginalization of fishers and fish workers.

In addition, several challenges take on a rather unique dimension in Seychelles, notably the external threat posed by piracy. This, among other factors, has resulted in a sharp rise of fish prices, thus having a negative impact on food security.



Photo: Seychelles Tourism Board

Seychellois artisanal fishers

Artisanal fisheries in Seychelles already meet many of the criteria for Blue Economy activity. The rights of access to this particular sector are defined in law, being reserved for Seychellois, and the distribution of rights within society is equitable and accessible through inclusive policies. Seychelles will continue its policy of prohibiting destructive and energy-intensive fishing gears, such as trawls, in order to protect traditional ways of fishing and reduce our carbon footprint.

The new Fisheries Act provides an enabling environment for fisheries’ development and management. The provisions of the legislation are commensurate with international best practices on fisheries management and are explicit in the adoption of an “ecosystem approach” to fisheries. An objective for

governance reform is the formation of state-community partnership arrangements for fisheries management (termed ‘co-management’) that decentralize decisionmaking and define user rights to promote transparency and local stewardship of natural resources. This has been facilitated by increased engagement by community-based fishermen associations with which the government is partnering to better target appropriate facilities that benefit local fishermen, such as markets, ice plants, and associated facilities.

The ministry responsible for fisheries has already signed the first co-management partnership agreement with the Praslin Fishers’ Association, an association of fishers from the second largest island of the Republic. This ecosystem approach will be replicated in other

communities if the initiative proves a success (as it is bound to) on the island of Praslin. Moreover, global eco-labeling schemes are proving a strong economic incentive for governance reform. Support to the Fishing Boat Owners' Association has already seen the adoption of a local labeling scheme that has met with a positive response by local tourism markets.

Port Victoria is the hub for the Indian Ocean tuna purse sein-ing fleet and is the site of one of the world's largest tuna canning factories. Both the fleet and the canning provide significant social and economic benefits to the country.

The role of Port Victoria as the center for regional tuna fishing activities is a central element in the implementation of the Blue Economy in Seychelles. Resource rents from the fishery—including fees for access of distant water fishing nations to Seychelles' EEZ—are being reinvested in new infrastructure and facilities to improve port capacity and efficiency. With much of the indirect and direct revenue from the

fishery achieved through expenditure of the fleets and the canning factory on local goods and services, this expansion will serve to widen the distribution of socio-economic benefits—a basic tenet of the Blue Economy.

The success of the tuna fishery and the economic benefits derived from it will depend on the ability of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) to successfully manage the stocks. At the moment, the major tropical tuna stocks of the Indian Ocean are generally assessed to be sustainable—but proactive measures and regional governance are still required.

As targets and limits to utilization are set, coastal states and distant water fishing fleets in the region must address how the available harvest will be shared. Seychelles will continue to promote the rights of coastal states to benefit from the entire historical catch in their EEZs as quota systems are developed. We will also continue to emphasize the need for island states and coastal states, as guardians of the resource, to strengthen their position in relation to distant fishing nations.

Seychelles will continue to promote the rights of coastal states to benefit from the entire historical catch in their EEZs as quota systems are developed. We will also continue to emphasize the need for island states and coastal states, as guardians of the resource, to strengthen their position in relation to distant fishing nations.

Moreover, Seychelles intends to play a leading role in improving sustainability, transparency, and local ownership through the IOTC. And Seychelles' efforts towards promoting the landing of all by-catch in Port Victoria is designed to provide opportunities for local investments in processing or export industries, as well as access to affordable raw material.

The threat of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing poses a significant challenge to a Blue Economy in Seychelles and the wider region. Seychelles is committed to fight this problem and has devoted a considerable amount of resources towards monitoring, controlling and surveillance of its EEZ. Seychelles was, for instance, the first African country to ratify the Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, and has urged our partners to follow suit.

For a new sustainable fisheries scenario to be entrenched at a global level, we need to strengthen the role of those states that are the guardians of the resource. We cannot continue with scenarios where those with money seek to exploit, while those without offer the space for the exploitation.

For a new sustainable fisheries scenario to be entrenched at a global level, we need to strengthen the role of those states that are the guardians of the resource.

Sustainable fisheries start with sustainable ocean and coastal management. Aquaculture has the potential to achieve a similar importance to the Blue Economy of Seychelles in the form of capture fisheries. The waters of Seychelles are some of the cleanest in the world, and the vast underwater coastal plateau areas

provide suitable environments for rotational cage culture.

The labor force is well educated and the infrastructure is adequately developed. In addition, the country rests outside the cyclonic belts.

The Seychelles Mariculture Master Plan is set to be launched in 2015 in accordance with the principles of an ecosystem approach.

The need to minimize the ecological impact of aquaculture is paramount, given the nation's reputation as a tourist destination. Therefore, the sector plan will dictate the technologies and innovations required to maintain ocean health and ensure that aquaculture products can compete globally on the same basis as the tourism industry—namely fish grown in a pristine, well-managed environment.

It is expected that by 2020—with five percent occupancy of suitable areas for mariculture—the production

of fish by aquaculture could be in the region of 50,000 tonnes per annum, representing a significant contribution to GDP growth.

OCEAN-BASED TOURISM

Since the birth of tourism in the 1970s, the great pull of the islands has always been the winning combination of a spectacular sun, sea and sand vacation, combined with a near-perfect climate and a unique island-style way of life that allows travelers to ‘get away from it all.’ These ingredients are, in a nutshell, the very foundation of a Seychelles holiday that must be strengthened and built upon to achieve a prosperous and sustainable Blue Economy.

Seychelles needs to make full use of the economic potential presented by the Blue Economy—not only in terms of growing the existing base sustainably, but also by constantly improving and upgrading our tourism experience, so that it consistently meets the expectations of today’s discerning traveler.

Piracy has been a major problem affecting the economic performance and effectiveness of all sectors of Seychelles’ Blue Economy, and in particular maritime tourism. For example, the aggregate business turnover of the Seychelles’ yacht fleet dropped by 22 percent in euro terms between 2008 and 2010. It is estimated that yachting

activities attract approximately 15 percent of visitor arrival in Seychelles.

The contribution of sustainable tourism to the Blue Economy includes the further development of cruise tourism, as part of the campaign to strengthen the regional ‘Vanilla Islands’ brand, sport fishing, yachting events, yacht charters, and diving holidays, among others.

Our Festival of the Sea also continues to draw further engagement towards sustainable ocean-based tourism. This is an essential component of both national and international sensitization to the twin imperatives of economic and environmental sustainability, which are at the core of the Blue Economy concept.

In order to promote excellence in people-centered development and decent work within the maritime tourism sector, Seychelles will grow the capabilities and influence of the Maritime Training Center, and the Seychelles Tourism Academy, which will be dedicated to meeting the needs and skill requirements of the industry, whilst also injecting an element of Creole color and personality into its operations.

Sustainably is fostered by ensuring that our Blue Economy plans are firmly rooted in our cultural practices and expectations, which is why it is essential that our training frameworks continue to be molded with these in mind.

OCEAN-BASED RENEWABLE SOURCES OF ENERGY

Seychelles depends highly on imported oil to meet its energy needs, including electricity generation, which is based on both heavy fuel oil and light fuel oil. As part of its commitment to a Blue Economy, Seychelles is looking for alternative sources of energy—in particular those that take advantage of its unique relationship with the oceans—and for innovative ways for developing that energy base. However, Seychelles is also endowed with quite abundant renewable energy sources, such as solar, biomass, wind, and ocean-based renewable energy.

The cost in fuel imports [is] the equivalent of 20 percent of the country’s budget.

The country’s primary energy consumption was 176,673 TOE in 2011, and its growth rate was 4.6 percent per year between 2000 and 2011. This brings the cost in fuel imports to the equivalent of 20 percent of the country’s budget, and makes the cost of power generation vulnerable to external factors—some of which are unique to the peculiar context of Seychelles.

For example, the costs of freight and insurance have gone up as a consequence of the piracy threat, raising the costs of energy generation. Also, the absence of land borders makes it

impossible to import electricity from neighboring countries.

The Seychelles energy policy for 2010–30 has as an objective to reach five percent share of renewable energy in primary energy consumption by 2020, and 15 percent by 2030. The new strategy for developing renewable energy is based on the liberalization of the electricity generation sector to include

private operators utilizing renewable energy.

Seychelles is well placed to take advantage of ocean-based energy sources, such as offshore wind power, wave power, Ocean

Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC), tidal power and the utilization of marine currents. All of these technologies are expensive, and are untested in the Seychelles context, but Seychelles provides the perfect laboratory in which such ground-breaking technologies can be assessed.

TRANSPORTATION

As a mid-oceanic archipelago with high dependency on the importation of goods, Seychelles relies on long-range shipping for its economic development. Shipping will therefore serve a vital function in achieving Blue growth across all sectors of the economy.

Crucially, with a strategic position near some of the world's busiest shipping lanes, a focus on efficiency and service provision in Seychelles' ports will improve competitiveness and attract additional international shipping, which will ensure that the ports themselves provide a substantial contribution to the Blue Economy.

Upon its creation in 2004, the Seychelles Ports Authority (SPA) was mandated with the task of administering our country's main international commercial and industrial fishing ports as well as domestic jetties. The vision of the SPA is to transform Port Victoria into the region's most efficient and attractive maritime hub. To achieve this vision, the SPA has continuously sought to improve efficiency and quality of service, while effectively responding to developments in shipping technology, with the ultimate aim of attracting more shipping lines to Port Victoria.

Increasingly, the functions of ports and port authorities require constant adaptation to meet the rapid restructuring of supply chains and shipping logistics. Seychelles ports are key components of the value-driven chain systems that will underpin Blue growth—be they the systems involving the capture, processing, and export of tuna products, or the importation of goods and material for the tourism industry.

The adoption of a Blue Economy development strategy has magnified the role of Port Victoria in facilitating supply chains and creating an efficient system to ensure that the country maximizes the benefits from the resources of the ocean. The SPA has launched a port development master plan for Port Victoria that is integrated with a fisheries policy related to industrial tuna fisheries, as well as policies relating to imports and exports. The plan will create an enabling environment for all stakeholders to contribute in situating ports as the facilitator of Blue growth.

MARINE MINERAL RESOURCES

Seychelles' EEZ and the Extended Continental Shelf (managed jointly with Mauritius), represent almost 1.8 million square kilometers of ocean space. Seychelles is unique in that islands emerging from the main shallow waters of the Seychelles Plateau are rugged, verdant granitic peaks that testify to their continental origin as part of the one-time super continent of Gondwana.

The mineral resources that might be available as a result of this geological origin can provide a strong foundation to the Blue Economy, provided that technological challenges can be addressed—developing a profitable extraction and, congruently, ensuring that there are no adverse environmental impacts.

There is no doubt that Seychelles has the potential for large oil and gas accumulations in offshore fields. A recent publication issued by the United States Geological Survey, as part of its *World Oil and Gas Assessment*, has confirmed the potential of Seychelles in terms of hydrocarbon accumulation.

However, with only four wells drilled so far, Seychelles' EEZ is highly under-explored and currently less than five percent of it is under active exploration. There are currently three companies operating in the EEZ for the purposes of exploration.

The Government has recognized the importance that a discovery of petroleum would have on the economic objectives of the country. We have recently carried out a comprehensive review of the Seychelles upstream petroleum legal framework, as well as our regime to facilitate oil exploration and eventual production within our maritime boundaries. In addition, the deep ocean floor has potential for other minerals, such as those found in poly-metallic nodules. The granite rocks of the island on the Mahé Plateau could produce quartz sands and other bi-products. The lack of large areas of flat land along the coast has favored the accumulation of the quartz sands (gravel) offshore. The quartz sands can be potentially mined and stored on land to supply the booming construction industry on the three main inhabited islands.

In terms of the development of potential hydrocarbon or mineral deposits, the strong legal framework already in place in Seychelles ensures both the transparency of any potential concessions, as well as adherence to the highest environmental standards.

MARITIME SECURITY

Seychelles is a maritime nation with vital interests in the seas around it. As any other Small Island Developing State, the ability to stay connected in the region and the world correlates to its ability to secure its maritime space. Without that ability, trade routes will be closed and many of the daily productive activities of the Seychellois people will not be able to be carried out.

The development of a successful Blue Economy model is entirely dependent on our ability to secure our oceanic space. As Seychelles experienced during the height of the piracy threat, an unsafe maritime environment raises drastically the costs of doing business at sea, a crucial element in a Blue Economy.

In the context of the current global maritime environment, the country is faced with challenges concerning coastal and offshore defense and protection, regulation of shipping, management of water-borne trade, search and rescue, maritime environment security, law enforcement, and scientific research and development—among other concerns.

Our current priority is to develop maritime domain awareness and also build strong regional, maritime security partnerships. Safe navigation in Seychelles waters, as well as secure navigation on the high seas, are prerequisites for a successful Blue Economy model. Ensuring this is not just the responsibility of one country.

Seychelles has taken the lead in building regional partnerships to enhance the security of our maritime space. As co-chair, together with Japan and the United Arab Emirates, of the Working Group on Maritime Operations of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia, we have sought to enhance regional capacity to tackle threats to maritime security in the Indian Ocean. Recognizing the increasingly inter-connected nature of maritime criminality from piracy and drug trafficking to terrorism, people trafficking and arms trafficking, Seychelles has also established a regional intelligence and information sharing center—REFLECS3—which has already proven instrumental in terms of disruption of several such regional networks.

The Blue Economy will depend on the further strengthening of such regional partnerships.

OUR BLUE ECONOMY VISION

The successful and sustained development of a Blue Economy strategy will require governance and policies that integrate environmental and economic considerations. The mix of marine resource development will be determined by existing governance structures and will also require new legislation, rules, strengthening institutions, and, potentially, the establishment of entirely new institutions.

Seychelles has taken the lead in building regional partnerships to enhance the security of our maritime space.

For Seychelles, the Blue Economy is a way of thinking and formulating policies that focus attention on the main resources with which the maritime environ-

ment has endowed our country, as well as on the need to preserve them. Seychelles’ vision and aspirations are centered on sound growth for people under the imperative of sustainability.

The Blue Economy is one of the biggest opportunities for individual countries—in the region and beyond—to collectively create sustainable economic opportunities through long-term investments in sustainable fisheries, responsible exploration and exploitation of undersea resources and minerals, renewable and affordable energy from the sea, and fair trade through reliable sea routes.

The Blue Economy is about intelligent growth—about a better utilization of opportunities provided by the marine environment to reduce the environmental cost of development. It is about including long-term environmental costs calculation of the assessment of net benefits of various development strategies. It is about effectively monitoring the consequences of our activities. And it is about preserving the ability of the ecosystems to constitute effective carbon sinks, thus reducing our overall carbon footprints.

By following policies that pursue sustainable utilization, we ensure inter-generational equity—for the strategic objective is to leave to our younger generations an environment that is better than that we received from our elders.

The Blue Economy is, thus, about social justice in the broadest sense, as sustainable growth cannot be achieved without poverty eradication, gender equality, and a solid education base for the population as a whole.

It is also about transparency and good governance. A national stakeholders

consultation took place in December 2014, ensuring that both state and non-state actors were truly involved in forging ahead on the basis of our shared goal. It is also important that the business community is fully implicated in the Blue Economy, so as to build public-private partnerships in creating viable and sustainable projects. Sustainable incomes and livelihoods require healthy marine ecosystems and, equally, healthy ecosystems. These can only be achieved if people and communities have sustainable incomes and livelihoods. Such ‘win-wins’ can be achieved when marine ecosystem considerations are an integral part of social and economic decisionmaking.

A shared vision of this Blue Horizon is one that can change the curve of development. The year 2015 can make all the difference. We cannot just extend the deadline of the MDGs and then say the job is done. We cannot just say we will defer a climate agreement by another year. In 2015 and beyond, Seychelles offers its hand in partnership to all those who want to make a difference through this shared opportunity provided by the Blue Economy. ●