



**GULF OF GUINEA  
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BLOG POST BY LAWRENCE DOGLI

# **5 ESSENTIAL TRAITS THAT MAKE YOUTH CRUCIAL TO ADDRESSING OCEAN**

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As the maritime industry faces pressure to mobilize actions for major structural transformations and common shared solutions in addressing the many threats that the ocean faces, the relevance of engaging a workforce in a new ocean front: one that is more digitized, innovative and diverse than ever before, is increasing.

What do African leaders need to know about the youth as they forge a course to build a future-ready maritime workforce that will industrialize new ocean sectors, grow their economies and provide employment opportunities for their citizens?

In this blog, I want to share five traits that make the youth crucial to addressing ocean challenges, post-COVID. African leaders that fail to involve young people in seeking solutions that address some of the defining issues including marine pollution, diminishing marine and coastal ecosystems, ocean acidification and illegal and over-fishing, risk the flowering of much needed science-based innovative solutions for ocean prosperity.

### **1. Young people are data-literate.**

Data-fuelled ocean industries provide exponential transformations in the management of ocean resources for sustainable economic development. The collection of information such as ocean patterns, sea floors, ocean currents and water temperatures could help us manage the impact of climate change, reduce pollution including plastics, and increase the equitable usage of ocean resources particularly in vulnerable coastal communities.

As the maritime industry continues to generate tremendous amount of data, countries with more data-literate people will become key to transforming ocean data into knowledge and actions for innovation and sustainability, and ultimately drive actions to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

This will require efforts by various stakeholders to share data, provide resources including innovative platforms and knowledge tools to build a digital ocean ecosystem. Young people will then play a key role and be responsible for collating and visualizing ocean data in planning for vibrant and productive ocean industries.

At the national level, institutions that play various roles in the management and usage of ocean resources should view ocean data as a national asset and garner the momentum to lead initiatives that are needed for studying and understanding ocean data.

The most successful ocean economies recognise the importance of analyzing ocean data to unlock the many benefits the ocean provides for its citizens.

### **2. They're comfortable adopting the ever-expanding technologies, new ocean sectors and markets.**



The World Economic Forum report on Future of Jobs projects that in the mid-term of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, job destruction will most likely be offset by job growth in the 'jobs of tomorrow'—the surging demand for workers who can fill blue and green economy jobs, roles at the forefront of the data and AI economy, as well as new roles in ocean engineering, cloud computing and fisheries product development.

These emerging professions also reflect the continuing importance of human interactions in the new ocean economy and how these can be effectively merged not only with the increasing demand for blue economy jobs, but also with the emergence of ocean-based technology and IoT sensing as well as novel approaches to offshore energy production, sustainable aquaculture, shipping logistics efficiency and more.

While there have been concerns of mass job displacement and competing claims to unique human capabilities by artificial intelligence, a robust and indigenous African leadership will be essential to connecting economic and social systems that complement human capabilities instead of replacing them – in areas like ocean science education and training.

In all cases, organizations should institute regulatory guidelines when adopting technologies, keeping in mind that there may be friction between people and culture, especially in coastal communities.

### **3. They are empowered**

How can the maritime industry respond to the undersized “voice gap” of young people all around the world? That is, a gap between the levels of influence youth can potentially have in addressing oceanic challenges given the current global context, and the opportunities they have to speak up.

The high levels of imbalance we’re seeing in terms of inclusivity and equity in a sustainable ocean economy, and the policy and economic implications that flow from it, likely has to do with the size of engagement with the broad constituency of ocean users and supporters, particularly the youth.

Today, young people are finding their voices and using available social platforms to share their views and lead ocean actions. They are finding meaning and purpose in the work they do.

African leaders should seize this opportunity to engage in a new ocean social contract that delivers meaningful progress and social impact while supporting young people to drive change and develop innovative solutions that solve the many ocean challenges. Tenets of such a contract include;

- Identification of young people with leadership and innovative skills
- Continuous investment in skills development and knowledge sharing among youth
- Respect for young people’s voice
- Generation of opportunities for young people to access perspectives of other ocean narratives and ways of working

### **4. They respect and understand the value of “good jobs.”**

Today’s youth have standards: This in the context of an ocean economy means the urgent need to focus on both social and economic motivation as a crucial component of ocean development.



As such, African leaders should aim to ensure that the outcomes of future ocean economies not only focus on monetary values but also support people's needs and aspirations. If not, the impact of ocean values and the contributions of youth efforts to ocean services may not be fully realized.

This situation tends to hurt national economic policies as subjective well-being has become a measure of social and economic performance, now known as economics of happiness.

Raising young people's decision-making and engagement levels leads to higher worker satisfaction. Happier youths are more enthusiastic about their work and more likely to stay at their jobs. African leaders should prioritize developing ocean action plans that link young people's well-being and experience with the maritime industry priorities and transformational goals.

#### **5. They are resolute to advances in equity and the environment.**

As we navigate towards future ocean governance, it is essential that African policy makers while defining an inclusive blue economy, cultivate fairness and equity in the workforce. Actions include exposing young people to STEM at an early age; making higher ocean science education more affordable and more equitable; hiring based on skill set rather than degree; and assessing and diversifying professional ocean networks.

In terms of changing institutional culture, the maritime industry should consider tapping into broader, more diverse youth networks when recruiting staff.

For young people in particular, the idea of equity extends to governance and environmental issues equally. A recent millennial employee study found that more millennials won't take a job if it doesn't have a strong corporate social responsibility policy, and would be more loyal to a company that helps them contribute to social and environmental issues.

In setting environmental priorities for maritime sustainability, industry should consider adopting "inside-out" approaches, which allows for inputs from young people. This approach is particularly essential in terms of strategies for sustainable maritime businesses as it requires convening those who define the culture of a company — including young people — and discussing what the company exists for and the contribution it wants to make in the world – in the case of maritime, ocean transformations.