MARITIME ORGANIZATION OF WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

INCREASING FERRY SAFETY AND SUSTAINABILITY IN AFRICA: ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

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PLAN

1_INTRODUCTION

2_MOWCA IN BRIEF

3_SAFETY ISSUES IN THE OPERATION OF FERRIES IN AFRICA

3_SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

4_PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

5_CONCLUSION

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❑ ABOUT MOWCA

- ❑ a personal initiative of late 1st President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire
- ❑ established as an intergovernmental organization, on 7 May 1975, through the Abidjan maritime transport charter
- ❑ 25 member States among which are 20 coastal States and 5 landlocked countries

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ABOUT MOWCA

SPECIALIZED ORGANS

- **Union Of African Shippers' Councils (UASC): a platform to enable discussions between shippers and sea carriers for the stabilization of freight rates and the improvement of quality of maritime transport services ;**
- **Port Management Association Of West And Central Africa (PMAWCA) : to promote cooperation between the ports in order to improve port efficiency ;**
- **African Shipping Lines Association (ASLA) : to promote shipping companies owned by nationals of the sub-region;**
- **Regional Maritime University in Accra for training of Anglophone Cadets and Sea Farers;**
- **Regional Academy Of Science And Technology Of The Sea in Abidjan for training of Francophone Cadets and seafarers;**

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ABOUT MOWCA

MISSION:

- The promotion of cost-effective shipping services to enable member states to have control over the cost of sea transport of their foreign trade;
- The promotion of maritime security and safety to enable unhindered traffic of vessels;
- The harmonization of maritime laws for the repression of criminality at sea;
- The capacity building of actors of maritime transport to provide the industry with qualified staff;
- The sustainable funding of the shipping industry with the establishment of a Development Bank;
- The facilitation of transit transport to landlocked member states.

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HOW MOWCA HAS HANDLED WATER SAFETY :

- Engaged in dialogue with member states;
- Obtained approval from Gabon Authority on Regional workshop
- Focus on importance of inland waterways navigation for movements of people and cargo;
- Ferry accidents that resulted in the loss of lives in the sub region;
- The Regional Workshop on the safety of inland waterways and passenger ferries held in Libreville, Gabon June 7-11, 2024

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MOWCA ACTION ON FERRY SAFETY

THE LIBREVILLE ACTION PLAN :

- The regulatory framework
- The training of crew and technical support staff
- The seaworthiness of vessels
- Passenger boarding and disembarkation
- Cargo loading and lashing
- The prevention of accidents of navigation through traffic monitoring, aids to navigation, notices to Mariners
- The Search and Rescue mechanisms
- Emergency plans.

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ABOUT MOWCA

EXPECTATIONS OF MOWCA FROM INTERFERRY:

Exploring areas of joint activities:

- the holding of a national and/or regional workshop on inland waterways transport in Nigeria.
- the training of trainers and ferry inspectors.
- the establishment of partnership between members of INTERFERRY and local operators.

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SAFETY ISSUES IN FERRY OPERATIONS IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

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SAFETY ISSUES

- **OVERLOADING:** overcrowding is one of the primary causes of ferry accidents. Many vessels are poorly regulated, allowing operators to exceed passenger and cargo limits.

- **AGING AND UNSAFE VESSELS:** Many ferries in operation are old and not maintained adequately. This leads to mechanical failures and structural weaknesses that compromise safety.

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SAFETY ISSUES

- **INADEQUATE REGULATION AND ENFORCEMENT: many African countries have insufficient regulatory frameworks governing maritime transport, or the existing laws are poorly enforced. There is often a lack of oversight regarding vessel inspection, crew certification, and compliance with safety standards.**

- **LACK OF SAFETY EQUIPMENT: ferries often operate without sufficient life-saving equipment such as life vests, lifeboats, and emergency communication systems, which are vital in the event of an accident.**

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SAFETY ISSUES

- **WEATHER-RELATED RISKS: many accidents occur due to bad weather, as ferries operate despite rough conditions due to a lack of weather monitoring systems or pressure to meet transport demand.**

- **POOR CREW TRAINING: many ferry operators and crew members lack adequate training in navigation, emergency response, and safety management.**

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SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES IN THE OPERATION OF FERRIES IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

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SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

- **ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION: older ferries are typically powered by diesel engines, which emit greenhouse gases and contribute to air and water pollution.**

- **UNREGULATED WASTE DISPOSAL: ferry operators often dispose of waste (such as oil, garbage, and sewage) directly into waterways, harming aquatic ecosystems and affecting communities reliant on these waters.**

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SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

- **HIGH ENERGY CONSUMPTION: traditional ferry systems are energy-intensive, relying on inefficient engines that consume large amounts of fuel.**

- **LIMITED ADOPTION OF GREEN TECHNOLOGIES: there is limited investment in sustainable technologies such as electric or hybrid ferry systems, which could reduce pollution and lower operational costs.**

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PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

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1

STRENGTHENING LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

A robust legal framework is essential for maritime safety and sustainability. Countries should endeavor to ratify and implement international maritime conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) guidelines. Additionally, regional agreements, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, should be strengthened to promote cooperation among African nations through the harmonization of laws, establishing uniform maritime laws across countries to combat illegal activities effectively, increased penalties by imposing stricter penalties for maritime crimes, such as illegal fishing and pollution, public awareness campaigns, by educating communities about maritime laws and their importance in protecting marine resources. Governments need to improve regulatory frameworks, ensuring that ferry operators comply with international maritime safety standards. this includes mandating regular inspections, enforcing passenger limits, and ensuring that vessels have adequate safety equipment.

2. **MODERNIZING FLEETS:** investment in new, safer ferries is essential. older vessels should be phased out, and incentives for private and public sector operators to upgrade fleets could be implemented.

3. **CREW TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION:** ensuring that ferry crews are properly trained in navigation, emergency procedures, and safety management can significantly reduce the risk of accidents. capacity-building initiatives from international maritime organizations can assist in training local crews.

4. **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS:** governments and ferry operators must work together to establish clear emergency protocols, improve access to life-saving equipment (life jackets, lifeboats), and create awareness among passengers regarding safety procedures.

5. **TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION:** real-time monitoring systems, such as GPS tracking and weather monitoring devices, should be installed on ferries to allow operators to navigate safely and avoid hazardous conditions. Innovations such as automatic identification systems (AIS), drone surveillance, and satellite monitoring can help in tracking ferries/vessels and detecting illegal activities. there is the need to develop a maritime data network and create regional maritime information-sharing platforms to facilitate collaboration between countries. also, by investing in research through the support of research initiatives focused on marine ecosystems, climate change impacts, and sustainable fishing practices. We also need to focus on promoting innovation and encouraging local tech startups to develop maritime safety and monitoring solutions.

6. ENGAGING LOCAL COMMUNITIES: The involvement of local communities is vital for the success of maritime safety and sustainability initiatives. These communities are often the first responders to issues such as illegal fishing and pollution. It is therefore imperative that we undertake community training programs by providing education on maritime safety, sustainable fishing, and environmental stewardship; empowering local leaders to undertake advocacy for sustainable practices and engaging with authorities; creating incentives by offering financial or other incentives for communities to adopt sustainable practices.

7. TRANSITION TO GREEN TECHNOLOGY: Governments and the private sector should promote the adoption of cleaner ferry technologies, such as electric, hybrid, or solar-powered ferries. While the initial investment may be high, the long-term benefits in terms of reduced fuel costs and environmental impact are substantial.

8. **WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS:** Implementing proper waste disposal systems on ferries and ensuring that waste is treated or disposed of properly can reduce water pollution and protect marine ecosystems. There is the need for strengthening environmental regulations by enforcing stricter regulations on waste disposal and emissions from ferries/vessels; implementing clean-up initiatives; organizing regular clean-up operations to address marine debris and oil spills; and promoting research on marine pollution through support studies to understand the impacts of pollution on marine life and human health.

9. **INCENTIVIZING RENEWABLE ENERGY:** governments should create incentives for ferry operators to adopt renewable energy sources or retrofit older ferries with more fuel-efficient engines and solar panels. this can reduce fuel consumption and the ferry's carbon footprint.

10. COLLABORATIVE REGIONAL SOLUTIONS: Many African countries share water bodies (e.g., Lake Victoria). regional collaboration, such as through the African Union or sub-regional economic bodies, can lead to harmonized safety standards, joint investments in infrastructure, and environmental protection efforts.

11. PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS: Educating ferry passengers about environmental responsibility and safety can create demand for safer and greener ferry services. Passengers should be aware of safety protocols and encouraged to hold operators accountable for sustainable practices.

12. IMPROVED PORTS AND TERMINALS: Upgrading ferry terminals and ports with better docking facilities, passenger amenities, and waste management systems will help ensure safer and more sustainable ferry operations.

13. SMART FERRY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS: Installing smart systems that manage passenger flow, cargo weight, and safety checks can prevent overloading and reduce the risk of accidents. These systems can also track fuel efficiency and reduce energy consumption.

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CONCLUSION

Improving ferry safety and sustainability in Africa requires a multi-pronged approach involving better regulations, modernization of fleets, investment in green technologies, and public awareness. With the right policies and investments, ferries can become safer, more reliable, and environmentally friendly, providing a vital and sustainable mode of transportation for millions of people across the continent.

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