

Abstract

More than half of the world's population lives within 60 km of the shoreline, and in Africa trends in population growth indicate that this figure could rise to three quarters by the next century. The lives and reasonable aspirations for economic advancement of these coastal residents are inextricably linked to the productivity of coastal and marine resources. The coastal areas bordering the African continent have traditionally supported highly productive ecosystems from which fish and other aquatic resources have been harvested. Furthermore these natural systems provide valuable services in terms of recreation, tourism, transportation in addition to their natural protective functions against coastal erosion and flooding.

Unfortunately, in many parts of the region, most of the natural resources are over-exploited and the fragile coastal and marine systems severely degraded by unregulated human activities. As a result, the productivity and usefulness of these coastal and marine areas have dramatically diminished and the prospects for sustainable development are greatly jeopardised.

There are a number of reasons for this serious situation. In general there is lack of knowledge and understanding of the coastal and marine resources and their interaction with terrestrial and oceanic processes. This lack of information and awareness, together with ineffective coastal and marine planning and management further aggravated the situation. In this paper, the present status and trends of coastal and ocean development in the African region are examined. The existing capacities in the region to implement sustainable development strategies are also assessed.