



New guidelines aim to support mangrove restoration in the Western Indian Ocean

Nairobi, 24 July 2020 - For many coastal communities, including those in the Western Indian Ocean region, mangroves are critical to economic and food security. A new set of [guidelines on mangrove restoration for the region aims to support the restoration](#) of its degraded mangrove ecosystems and support recovery from the economic impacts of COVID-19.

Mangrove forests are among the most powerful [nature-based solutions](#) to climate change, but [with 67 percent of mangroves](#) lost or degraded to date, and an additional 1.0 percent being lost each year, they are at a risk of being destroyed altogether. Without mangroves, 39 percent more people would be flooded annually and [flood damage](#) would increase by more than 16 percent and US \$82 billion. They protect shorelines from eroding and shield communities from floods, hurricanes, and storms, a more important service than ever as sea levels continue to rise. Mangroves also provide nursery areas for marine life and support many threatened and endangered species. Restoring mangroves can make communities more resilient to environmental changes and the economic shocks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

While governments acknowledge the importance of mangroves, the success of restoration efforts has been limited. The new [Guidelines on Mangrove Ecosystem Restoration for the Western Indian Ocean Region](#) analyze risks and challenges to restoration projects and point to potential solutions.

Coastal residents in the Western Indian Ocean region – which includes Comoros, Kenya, France (Reunion), Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, and Tanzania – eat or sell the fish that live around the mangroves; harvest honey from the bees that the forests support, and use their wood as building material and fuel for subsistence or sell it for income. Because the livelihoods of coastal communities depend on mangroves, restoring them can contribute to “[building back better](#)” through green recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mangrove forests can also drive eco-tourism and create jobs.

“Mangroves really are essential life support system for coastal communities in the Western Indian Ocean region,” said James Kairo, Chief Scientist at the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute and lead author of the guidelines. “If degradation continues, communities will be without food from fisheries or a means to make a living.”

The guidelines were developed by the member states of Nairobi Convention with support from UNEP–Nairobi Convention, the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association and the Western Indian Ocean Mangrove Network. They can be used by governments; resource managers; scientists; civil society, and communities at large as they embark on mangrove conservation and management initiatives.

“These Guidelines are really the first for the Western Indian Ocean region to address past mangrove restoration failures head-on and assess the reasons why,” said Jared Bosire, UNEP–Nairobi Convention Project Manager. “Of critical importance is that they provide a step-by-step guide on how to build successful restoration projects which avoid several of the pitfalls that we have kept witnessing.”

The Guidelines also feature case studies from around the Western Indian Ocean region, highlighting best practices and lessons learned. They can be used to guide action on mangroves as part of the upcoming UN [Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#) (2021-2030) and support progress towards achieving Sustainable



Development Goal 14.2 on protecting and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems. Mangroves also capture and store significantly higher rates of carbon dioxide per unit area than terrestrial forests, so mangrove restoration can be incorporated into countries' [Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement](#).

“It’s hard to overstate just how important mangroves can be to both the environment and economy,” said Kerstin Stendahl, Head of UNEP’s Ecosystems Integration Branch. “They are truly a super solution — without them, we’d have more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, fewer fish and less food, and more damage from cyclones and other storms.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

These Guidelines were developed under the [Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the Protection of the Western Indian Ocean from Land-Based Sources and Activities](#) project of the Nairobi Convention, funded by the Global Environment Facility.

The Nairobi Convention, signed by Comoros, France, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, and Tanzania, aims to promote a prosperous Western Indian Ocean region with healthy rivers, coasts, and oceans. It provides a platform for governments, civil society, and the private sector to work together for the sustainable management and use of the marine and coastal environment.

The UN Environment Programme is the leading global voice on the environment. It provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

The Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association is a leader in advancing the educational, scientific and technological development of all aspects of marine and coastal sciences throughout the Western Indian Ocean region and promoting the conservation and sustainable development of the coastal and marine environment.