



FONDS FRANÇAIS POUR
L'ENVIRONNEMENT MONDIAL

Request for Proposals

Advancing Seagrass Science, Policy, and Practice in the Western Indian Ocean

In a collaborative effort, the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) invite research proposals to enhance scientific knowledge and practical understanding of seagrass ecosystems in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO). This funding opportunity seeks to address key knowledge gaps and strengthen the evidence base for seagrass conservation, restoration, and governance as countries in the region increase efforts to preserve biodiversity, advance climate action, and pursue regenerative blue economy pathways.

Implemented under the **Marine and Coastal Science for Management (MASMA) Programme** and supported by the **Western Indian Ocean Coastal and Ocean Resilience (WIOCOR) Project**, this call seeks to generate policy-relevant, management-oriented research that links science directly to decision-making and on-the-ground action.

The total funding envelope available under this call is **EUR 300,000**.

Funding will be granted through a competitive selection process. **Up to two projects will be supported**, with individual grants of **up to EUR 150,000 per project**.

Projects funded under this call must be completed within a maximum duration of twelve (12) months.

Context

Alongside reducing greenhouse gas emissions, achieving global climate and biodiversity targets requires protecting, restoring, and sustainably managing natural ecosystems that sequester carbon, support livelihoods, and bolster resilience to climate change. Although terrestrial ecosystems have received considerable attention, coastal blue carbon ecosystems—especially seagrass meadows—remain underrepresented in science, policy, and investment, despite their disproportionate contributions to carbon sequestration, fisheries productivity, and coastal protection.

Seagrass ecosystems are increasingly recognised as vital nature-based solutions, providing long-term carbon storage, nursery habitat for commercially important fisheries, shoreline stabilisation, and support for food security and cultural practices. However, in many regions, including the Western Indian Ocean (WIO), seagrass science and management are still in early development stages, with limited spatial mapping, fragmented monitoring efforts, and weak integration into climate, biodiversity, and ocean governance frameworks.

Current seagrass research and management efforts in the WIO include site-specific ecological studies, localised restoration initiatives, and emerging blue carbon evaluations. Decisions on expanding conservation, restoration, and funding mechanisms—such as inclusion in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), marine spatial planning, and blue economy strategies—require not only ongoing field-based research but also a more comprehensive and policy-relevant understanding of seagrass conditions, ecosystem services, governance frameworks, and socio-economic connections over the next decade.

The gap between scientific knowledge and the needs of policy and management limits effective conservation, investment, and governance reforms. This funding opportunity aims to bridge that gap by promoting applied, interdisciplinary seagrass research that directly guides management, policy, and practice, and supports the expansion of seagrass protection and restoration efforts across the Western Indian Ocean.

Scope of Work

Projects should examine the condition, functions, services, and management-related dynamics of seagrass ecosystems and demonstrate clear relevance to societal and policy decision-making for expanding seagrass conservation, restoration, and governance measures in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) in the coming years. The identification of local or national priorities may be included within the project scope and budget. Projects that incorporate inclusive and co-design approaches and establish partnerships with non-academic stakeholders (e.g., local and traditional knowledge holders, community leaders, small-scale fishers, women's groups, and the aquaculture sector) are highly encouraged.

Projects must adhere to the following requirements:

Geographic scope

All research activities must be conducted within the **Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region**, with a primary focus on the **WIOCOR project countries: Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Tanzania**. Projects may include comparative or complementary analyses involving other WIO countries where this clearly strengthens **regional learning and knowledge exchange**.

Target ecosystems

Target seagrass ecosystems must demonstrate their commercial, livelihood, and/or cultural importance, especially where seagrass beds support fisheries productivity, food security, coastal protection, or traditional practices. Target meadows, associated species, and ecological processes may be found in nearshore, intertidal, or shallow subtidal environments. While systems of socio-economic importance are prioritised, ecosystems of high ecological value—such as connectivity hubs, refugia, and keystone habitats—should also be considered.

Research approach

Research should be **guided by clearly defined hypotheses, research questions, or problem-oriented inquiries**, and may employ a range of **scientific, interdisciplinary, or practice-based approaches** relevant to seagrass conservation and management.

Proposed research should address **biological, ecological, socio-economic, governance, and/or coupled socio-ecological processes**, and demonstrate clear relevance to **real-world conservation, restoration, and policy contexts**.

Research questions or hypotheses should build on **existing scientific and practical knowledge**, while also allowing space for **innovative or non-conventional approaches**, including interdisciplinary perspectives and **locally grounded knowledge systems** where appropriate. Investigations may explore, but are not limited to, topics such as **ecosystem condition and resilience, ecosystem service delivery, thresholds and recovery dynamics, governance effectiveness, and social-ecological interactions**.

Proposals may also explore **emerging or under-researched aspects of seagrass ecosystems**, including **behavioural, cultural, economic, technological, or governance dimensions** that can generate new insights for conservation and management.

Projects may incorporate **ecosystem, carbon, or socio-economic modelling, scenario analysis, or parameterisation**, as well as other **analytical, participatory, or decision-support approaches** that contribute to strengthening the **understanding, management, and long-term stewardship of seagrass ecosystems**.

Methods and tools

Research may employ field-based assessments, spatial analysis, remote sensing, socio-economic surveys, policy and institutional analysis, and participatory approaches, provided these methods are appropriate to the research questions and management objectives. Priority should be given to approaches that generate **standardised, scalable, and decision-relevant evidence**, with secondary consideration of methodological innovation (e.g. novel monitoring techniques, integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge, or citizen science).

Real-world applicability

Research designs must reflect realistic management, policy, and investment scenarios likely to be implemented in the WIO over the short and long terms, including marine spatial planning, seagrass restoration programmes, climate adaptation strategies, biodiversity commitments, and regenerative blue economy initiatives.

Projects should align with international and regional best practices in seagrass research, conservation, restoration, and governance. Proposals must demonstrate adherence to ethical research standards, open science principles, and inclusive engagement with rights-holders and stakeholders.

Projects involving fieldwork, community engagement, or data generation must show clear protocols for ethical conduct, data management, knowledge sharing, and benefit sharing, and ensure that research processes and outputs are accessible and relevant to local stakeholders and decision-makers.

Proposals must **clearly identify and justify the knowledge gaps they intend to address**, with reference, where appropriate, to **national and regional priorities for seagrass research, conservation, and management in the Western Indian Ocean**. The proposed research should contribute to **strengthening the regional evidence base needed to inform effective seagrass conservation, restoration, and sustainable management**.

Proposals should consider the use of **innovative tools and emerging technologies**, where appropriate, to strengthen seagrass monitoring, assessment, and management in the region.

Out of Scope

The following types of activities are **not eligible for funding under this call**:

- **Studies that do not directly address seagrass ecosystems**, such as projects focused exclusively on other habitats or taxa without a clear and explicit linkage to seagrass ecology, conservation, or management.
- **Purely descriptive or baseline studies** that do not articulate a clear pathway to informing **management decisions, policy development, conservation planning, or restoration practice**.
- **Activities limited to awareness-raising, education, or outreach** without a substantive research component or without generating new knowledge relevant to seagrass management.
- **Projects focused primarily on infrastructure development or equipment acquisition** without a clearly defined research programme and expected scientific outputs.
- **Consultancy-style outputs**, such as descriptive policy reviews, general assessments, or commissioned reports that do not involve **clearly defined research questions, analytical frameworks, or empirical investigation**.
- **Monitoring activities that lack a clear research question or analytical framework**, unless they are explicitly linked to testing hypotheses, evaluating management interventions, or improving decision-making.
- **Projects with a narrow local focus** that do not demonstrate relevance to **broader national or regional seagrass management priorities**.
- **Activities that duplicate ongoing research or programmes** without clearly demonstrating added value, innovation, or complementary insights.
- **Projects that do not include a clear plan for data management, knowledge sharing, and dissemination** relevant to seagrass conservation and management.

Required Deliverables

- **Open-access publication(s)** presenting the study findings in peer-reviewed journals or equivalent scientific outlets.
- All datasets generated through the project should be made **openly accessible in accordance with FAIR data principles** (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable).

- Recognising that some datasets may require **quality control, national approvals, or community consent prior to release**, data should be published no later than **six (6) months after project completion or the publication of the associated research outputs**, whichever occurs first.
- Data sharing must comply with the **WIOMSA MASMA Programme data management plan, IUCN data-sharing requirements, and applicable national regulations**, while ensuring appropriate safeguards for sensitive or community-derived information.

Budget

The **maximum budget per project is EUR 150,000**, inclusive of all eligible costs. Within this amount, **indirect costs may be included but must not exceed 5% of the total project budget**.

The budget may be used to support personnel costs, research and fieldwork expenses, travel, data analysis, and stakeholder or community engagement activities, including appropriate compensation for non-academic partners involved in co-design, data collection, or knowledge exchange.

Team Criteria and Eligibility

Proposals must be submitted by a **consortium of institutions from the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region**, involving partners from **at least two eligible WIOCOR countries: Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, or Tanzania**. One institution must serve as the **lead institution** and designate a **Principal Investigator (PI)** responsible for the overall coordination and management of the project.

The **Principal Investigator (PI)** must hold at least an **MSc or MA degree in a relevant discipline** and be affiliated with an institution based in one of the **eligible WIOCOR countries**. The PI should demonstrate appropriate **research leadership and project management capacity**.

Institutions from **other Western Indian Ocean countries outside the WIOCOR project countries** may participate as **collaborating partners**, provided their involvement strengthens the scientific or regional value of the project. However, **these institutions are not eligible to receive grant funding under this call**, and any costs related to their participation must be covered through **co-funding or in-kind contributions**.

Proposals are encouraged to include **interdisciplinary teams** that combine expertise across **ecology, socio-economics, governance, and policy**, and to demonstrate **collaboration with non-academic partners** such as government agencies, NGOs, community organisations, or private sector actors where relevant to the research objectives.

Proposals should demonstrate a **clear approach to strengthening leadership and capacity among the next generation of seagrass scientists in the region**. Teams are encouraged to include **early career researchers and students**, with opportunities for meaningful participation, skills development, and leadership in project activities.

Project teams should demonstrate **strong complementarity with ongoing initiatives in the region**. The focus of this call is to **advance applied, policy-relevant science**, rather than generate entirely new baseline datasets.

Participation of **non-academic partners** (e.g., government agencies, NGOs, community-based organisations, practitioner groups, or private sector entities) is **strongly encouraged**. Where involved, such partners should be **meaningfully engaged in project activities**, appropriately compensated where relevant, and **acknowledged in research outputs** in line with the nature of their contributions.

Collaboration with **institutions or experts from other Western Indian Ocean (WIO) countries** is permitted and encouraged where it adds **regional value**. However, **institutions based in non-WIOCOR WIO countries are not eligible to receive grant funding under this call**, and any associated costs must be covered through **co-funding or in-kind contributions**.

Proposal Evaluation

All proposals will undergo **independent scientific peer review**. Final funding decisions will be made jointly by WIOMSA and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), based on scientific and technical merit, alignment with regional priorities, and availability of funds.

Proposals will be assessed using the following evaluation criteria:

- **Scientific quality and originality** of the proposed research, including the clarity of the research questions or hypotheses and the appropriateness of the methodological approach.
- **Relevance to seagrass conservation, management, and policy priorities** in the Western Indian Ocean region, including the potential to inform decision-making and practical management actions.
- **Feasibility and robustness of the proposed work plan**, including the clarity of objectives, the sequencing of activities, and the ability to deliver meaningful results within the **12-month project timeframe**.
- **Budget justification and cost-effectiveness**, including whether the proposed budget is realistic, well justified, and aligned with the proposed activities and expected outputs.
- **Strength and complementarity of the project team**, including the expertise of participating institutions, the clarity of roles and responsibilities, and the degree of **regional collaboration** among partners.
- **Team composition, inclusivity, and capacity development**, including opportunities for the participation and leadership of **early career researchers**, engagement with non-academic partners, and approaches that support equitable and inclusive research partnerships.

- **Potential impact and contribution to strengthening the regional evidence base** for seagrass conservation, restoration, and governance in the Western Indian Ocean.

Application Process

Proposals must be submitted as a **single PDF document** using the [proposal template provided here](#). All submissions must be made electronically through the [WIOMSA Proposal Central System](#). Use of this system requires **prior registration and approval of the applicant organisation**.

Applicants are **strongly encouraged to register early**, as the organisational approval process may take **2–5 working days**. Late registration may result in an inability to submit the proposal by the deadline.

Timeline

- **10th March 2026**: Call for Proposals opens
- **15th April 2026** Submission deadline
- **15th – 30th April 2026**: Independent scientific peer review
- **May 2026**: Award decisions communicated
- **1 June 2026**: Project start date