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CONSERVATION IS EXPANDING

– THE WORKFORCE ISN'T | *By Deidre de Vos and Arthur Tuda*



Over the past decade, countries across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) have made impressive gains in marine conservation. More than 140 marine protected areas (MPAs) are now in place across the region with almost 40 percent established since 2010, reflecting strong political commitment and growing regional momentum to protect vital marine ecosystems.

Yet, behind this success lies a less visible challenge – while protected areas continue to multiply, investment in the people responsible for managing them has not kept pace.

Across the region, fewer than half of staff working in MPAs have received formal training. As conservation targets become more ambitious, this gap is expected to widen.

By 2030, the WIO region will need thousands of additional conservation professionals to meet global biodiversity commitments.

Many new recruits enter conservation roles with little structured preparation and are expected to learn on the job, often under pressure and with limited guidance

and inconsistent support. The consequences are uneven performance, high staff turnover and institutions that struggle to build the consistency needed for effective management.

Practitioners increasingly recognize this is a systems issue rather than a training issue.

Emerging work by WIOMSA suggests that closing this gap requires a fundamental shift in the way capacity is built. Instead of relying on isolated workshops, there is a move towards strengthening systems – linking training to partnerships, institutional development and real operational needs.

Through the Western Indian Ocean Marine Protected Areas Management Network (WIOMPAN) [Workforce Strategy](#), WIOMSA and its partners are promoting a programme-based approach to workforce development. The idea is straightforward: conservation outcomes depend as much on how systems function as on individual effort.

This shift is already visible in the ways in which enforcement is evolving across the region. For years, success was measured by effort – boats deployed, patrols conducted – yet illegal fishing persisted. Recent regional exchanges are shifting this mindset. In February 2026, Blue Nature Alliance, WIOMSA and WildAid led a systems-informed enforcement workshop in Mombasa, Kenya, confirming a move towards data-driven, risk-based and coordinated approaches. Rather than doing more, countries are focusing resources where they have the greatest impact and strengthening the link between detection and action. The same logic applies to conservation staffing.

Preparing people from day one

A key weakness in conservation systems has been the absence of structured entry points for new staff. Recruitment often happens without proper preparation which undermines long-term performance.

In March 2026 an initiative in Watamu, Kenya, demonstrated what is possible when this changes. Newly recruited Kenya Wildlife Service cadets completed a one-week training programme on MPA and coastal wetlands management, delivered not as a stand-alone workshop but as part of a broader workforce system.

WIOMSA's existing MPA management course was adapted to include coastal wetlands and the training was delivered through a partnership that brought together Wetlands International Eastern Africa, the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, WorldFish and the Wildlife Research and Training Institute. This ensured that science, policy and practical experience were integrated and directly supported the cadets' future work on the ground.

The course focused on essential skills such as ecosystem management, climate resilience, community engagement and the use of practical tools like Global Mangrove Watch and the Wetlands Atlas.



The real value lay not only in what was taught, but rather in *when and how* the training took place. Equipping staff from the outset builds shared knowledge and strengthens consistency, retention and organizational resilience.

A similar shift is underway in locally led conservation. Locally managed marine areas (LMMAs) are central to community-based conservation across the WIO region, but their impact is difficult to assess due to varied and often informal approaches.

This is beginning to change. New tools, like the LMMA Competency Framework are defining effective local management, with trained assessors applying them across countries. In March 2026, MIHARI (Madagascar's national network of LMMAs) and WIOMSA trained assessors who have worked in more than 150 LMMAs. The result is greater visibility, consistency and evidence to guide investment and support.

The WIO region has expanded protected areas at scale; the next challenge is effective management. This requires skilled people working within systems that support learning, coordination and long-term institutional strength. For governments, partners and donors, the message is clear: investment in conservation must pair infrastructure with people and systems. This is where lasting impact lies.

HIFADHI BLU: BEFORE YOU FUND THE PROJECT, TEST THE SYSTEM



Across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region, marine conservation rarely struggles because of a lack of ideas. More often, it falters because the systems required to turn those ideas into durable outcomes – governance, compliance, institutional legitimacy, financing and local ownership – are weak, fragmented or absent.

This challenge shaped the Hifadhi Blu Systems Workshop, convened by WIOMSA with support from Advance Conservation Strategies and funding from the Minderoo Foundation. The workshop took place from 22 to 24 April in Zanzibar and brought together nine shortlisted sites and 36 participants in a rigorous co-design process to stress-test projects ahead of final funding decisions. The shortlisted portfolio consists of a range of ecological and governance realities.

In Vamizi Island, Mozambique, conservation is challenged by conflict legacies, migrant fishers and weak governance. In Baraawe, Somalia, the absence of formal marine governance makes system creation the first priority. And in Kenya's joint co-management areas (JCMAs) in Shimoni-Vanga and Malindi-Magarini, fragmented by-laws and uneven enforcement constrain effective fisheries governance.

In Malindi-Watamu Marine Protected Area in Kenya, the challenge is not creating governance but operationalizing it – strengthening management through SWAT systems and improved monitoring, control and surveillance. In Dwesa-Cwebe in South Africa, ecological value exists alongside a major governance gap: the lack of an approved, participatory management plan.

In Nosy Hara, Madagascar, Madagascar National Parks faces intertwined challenges in enforcement, biodiversity monitoring and community engagement. In Aldabra Atoll, Seychelles, the Seychelles Islands Foundation focuses on tourism governance, biosecurity and institutional systems. In Mafia Island, Tanzania, the priority is stronger fisheries governance and compliance. In the South East Marine Protected Area of Mauritius (SEMPA), the focus is on strengthening institutional management systems and resilience in a distinct island context.

These projects differ in geography, governance maturity and conservation challenge but that diversity is what makes the Hifadhi Blu process significant. It is not testing a single project model but rather whether systems-informed design can strengthen conservation investments across fundamentally different realities before funding decisions are made.

During the Hifadhi Blu Systems Workshop, shortlisted teams had to confront questions like: what must happen first? Which interventions are premature? Which assumptions are weak? And, what could break under political, ecological or institutional stress?



For Vamizi, systems mapping revealed that rebuilding enforcement coordination had to come before more technical interventions such as artificial reefs. Governance repair became phase 1. For Baraawe, multiple outcomes were consolidated into one foundational priority: build legitimate co-management first. For Kenya's JCMAs, broad governance ambitions sharpened into practical legal architecture: by-law review, drafting and enforcement readiness.

One of the workshop's key innovations was when Cohort 1 grantees – already navigating implementation realities – joined the process as operational case studies. Through a structured learning exchange, shortlisted Cohort 2 and 3 sites were able to interrogate what had actually worked, where implementation had been hardest and what earlier design decisions they would change in hindsight. This shifted the workshop from project redesign alone to portfolio intelligence.

Cohort 1's experience helped newer sites move beyond theory by exposing recurring realities: governance bottlenecks, stakeholder fatigue, institutional delays, monitoring complexity and the need for stronger Phase 1 sequencing. Hifadhi Blu is not only funding sites but it is creating a regional feedback loop in which implementation

lessons shape future investment before mistakes are repeated. This cohort model may prove to be one of the programme's strongest design features.

Across the nine shortlisted sites, three broad pathways emerged:

- some require **governance creation** (Baraawe and SEMPA);
- others require **governance repair** or harmonization (Vamizi, JCMAs and Mafia Island); and
- others require **governance operationalization** (Aldabra, Malindi-Watamu, Nosy Hara and Dwesa-Cwebe).

Conservation funding is often awarded according to proposal quality, with implementation flaws discovered only after resources are committed. Hifadhi Blu is testing whether donor capital can be better protected by combining systems redesign, peer learning and phased selection before funding decisions are finalized.

Following the workshop, all nine shortlisted sites are revising their concept notes, workplans, budgets and Phase I priorities. Final grantee selection will take place at the end of May 2026.

**For the WIO region, Hifadhi Blu's emerging lesson is clear:
in complex conservation systems, what matters most is not how compelling a proposal
sounds but whether the system beneath it is strong enough to make it work.**

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR A SUSTAINABLE BLUE FUTURE IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN

| By Elin Frändberg and Björn Möeller

Between 21 and 30 April 2026, a regional workshop took place in Mombasa, Kenya within the framework of the Sida-funded International Training Programme (ITP) “Planning for a Sustainable Blue Future in the Western Indian Ocean: Institutional Strengthening for Marine Spatial Planning (MSP)”.



The workshop gathered stakeholders who are actively engaged in national MSP processes across seven countries in the Western Indian Ocean region. Its primary aim was to strengthen participants' knowledge and provide practical insights to support ongoing MSP development at the national level.

This workshop built on an earlier session held in Zanzibar in November and December 2025 and was organized in close collaboration with the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute. The programme is led by the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management, in partnership with WIOMSA, the Nairobi Convention, the consultancy firm NIRAS and the Geological Survey of Sweden.

Throughout the two-week programme, participants engaged with a broad range of MSP-related themes.

These included MSP experiences from Kenya, Seychelles and South Africa, as well as ecosystem-based planning approaches, strategic environmental assessment, data management, stakeholder participation and transboundary collaboration.

The agenda combined theoretical sessions with hands-on work, particularly through activities linked to participants' “change projects” which are targeted initiatives addressing specific organizational challenges. A field excursion to Kisite Mpunguti National Park and Wasini Island provided an opportunity to interact with local stakeholders and apply workshop insights in a practical setting.

Two previous cohorts have already contributed to tangible progress across participating countries, with results ranging from increased awareness and improved internal coordination to the establishment of institutional frameworks, national guidelines and data systems for MSP. Across contexts, participants' change projects have served as important catalysts, supporting the integration of MSP into national processes and advancing both implementation and long-term institutionalization.

As the programme approaches its final phase, participants will complete their change projects and host national MSP seminars. The third iteration of the MSP ITP is scheduled to conclude in September 2026. Recruitment for the next cohort, involving new participants from the same seven countries, will begin in the summer of 2026.



STRENGTHENING A REGIONAL OCEAN AGENDA



A coalition of more than a dozen regional and international organizations converged on Maputo in April with a shared goal: to turn fragmented ocean conservation efforts into a coherent, policy-ready agenda ahead of two landmark international forums.



The April 2026 meeting, hosted by the Western Indian Ocean Consortium (WIO-C), included representatives from WIOMSA, WWF, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Rare, Blue Ventures, Coastal Oceans Research and Development in the Indian Ocean, Wetlands International, Fauna & Flora, ABALOB, the MIHARI Network and the Pew Charitable Trusts, as well as the Nairobi Convention. Together, they represent a critical mass of science, conservation and policy expertise across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO).

The Nairobi Convention's active participation was a highlight of the meeting, providing a direct link between technical work and policy processes. This ensured that ongoing efforts spanning OECMs (other effective area-based conservation measures), seagrass, fisheries, plastics and blue finance are increasingly aligned with regional decision-making frameworks.

Progress across WIO-C working groups highlighted growing maturity, with several moving from dialogue to delivery. Specifically, advances in regional policy briefs, strategies and financing mechanisms signal a shift toward more coordinated and sustained conservation action.

The articulation of regional priority actions for governments ahead of the upcoming 11th Our Ocean Conference and the Nairobi Convention Conference of Parties 12, together with the development of a regional indicator framework, underscore a strong commitment to accountability and measurable impact.

The Maputo meeting marked an important step in positioning the WIO-C, not only as a network but as a functional regional platform capable of linking science, policy and finance to support ocean governance in the WIO.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND POLICY THROUGH SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

By Randall Mabwa
and Obakeng Molelu



Storytelling is emerging as a powerful tool for ocean conservation in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region.

Photos by Adam Jenkins, GET Impact Services

Fifteen scientists and journalists from across the region convened in Johannesburg, South Africa in April

for the inaugural Marine Science Communication (Scicomm) Lab, an initiative of WIOMSA and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, which is pioneering creative, narrative-driven approaches to placing marine research on the policy agenda.

Participants from eight WIO countries participated in the five-day programme from 13 to 18 April 2026. The training provided a first cohort of marine scientists and science journalists with a suite of communication competencies, including foundational storytelling, narrative framing and empathy-based audience mapping, as well as the application of advanced digital tools such as spatial storytelling to transform complex data into compelling, actionable narratives.

The Scicomm Lab was designed not only as a once-off training event, but as a catalyst for long-term regional impact. Key outcomes include:

- **Establishment of a Community of Practice:**

The programme has set the pace for a collaborative regional network of emerging science communicators and practitioners dedicated to ensuring that scientific knowledge effectively informs the WIO marine science and policy nexus through creative storytelling.

- **Personal communication roadmaps:**

Every participant left the lab to develop a one-year personal communication project within the ArcGIS Creator Suite, ensuring the skills gained are applied to their ongoing research and conservation efforts.

- **Actionable storyboards:**

Teams produced structured storyboards and digital communication blueprints that serve as ready-to-use tools applicable to engaging non-expert decision-makers.

By advancing multidisciplinary and creative approaches to communicating science that balance community relevance with policy impact, the Scicomm Lab sets the benchmark for driving sustainable conservation efforts across the WIO.

More information on upcoming labs and the Community of Practice will be hosted on the [WIOMSA science-to-policy page](#).

REGIONAL DRIVE TO TURN SEAGRASS DATA INTO ACTION | *By Damboia Cossa & Arthur Tuda*



Seagrass ecosystems, long overlooked in marine conservation, are gaining renewed attention across the Western Indian Ocean as scientists and policymakers attempt to translate growing data into coordinated action.

At a regional meeting held on 13 April 2026 in Maputo, Mozambique, government representatives, researchers and conservation groups met as part of the Consortium for the Conservation of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems in the Western Indian Ocean Seagrass Working Group to advance a draft regional strategy under the Nairobi Convention. The discussions revealed a familiar challenge: while knowledge and policy interest around seagrass are expanding, implementation remains uneven and fragmented.

“Across the region, we are not starting from zero,” one participant noted during the meeting. “But the pieces are not yet connected in a way that delivers impact at scale.”

The proposed regional strategy aims to address these gaps by linking data, policy, finance and implementation into a more integrated system. It also highlights the need for cooperation across borders, particularly for shared ecosystems, monitoring systems and emerging blue carbon initiatives.

Many of the same participants reconvened for a regional workshop from 16 to 17 April, under the Large-scale Seagrass Mapping and Management Initiative, a partnership led by WIOMSA, the University of Southampton and The Pew Charitable Trusts. The workshop focused on one of the region’s most immediate priorities: building a reliable scientific baseline.

Teams from Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar and Zanzibar presented progress from ongoing field surveys. Using standardized methods, researchers are collecting geo-referenced data on seagrass extent and condition, contributing to what could become the first consistent regional dataset.

For many participants, the exercise goes beyond mapping. **“The question is no longer just where seagrass is,” a researcher involved in the process said. “It’s how that information feeds into planning, climate commitments and investment decisions.”**

The workshop also highlighted practical challenges. Participants pointed to equipment limitations, data processing bottlenecks and coordination difficulties across institutions. Peer exchanges allowed teams to compare approaches and troubleshoot shared constraints, from field logistics to data quality control.

Despite these hurdles, progress is beginning to show in policy. Several countries are exploring ways to incorporate seagrass into their Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement. Others are considering the role of seagrass in marine spatial planning and blue economy strategies. Engagement is also widening, with increasing involvement from local communities alongside national agencies and research institutions.

The coming months will be critical. The regional seagrass strategy is expected to move towards consultation and potential adoption at the Nairobi Convention's Conference of Parties later in the year, providing a possible framework for aligning national efforts.

For now, the region appears to be at an inflexion point – moving from fragmented projects towards a more coordinated approach. Whether that shift results in large-scale conservation outcomes will depend on how effectively countries can turn data and dialogue into sustained action on the ground.



CAN SOCIAL PROTECTION BE USED TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES? | *By Julius Francis*



Many important and emerging topics were presented and thoroughly discussed at the recently concluded fifth World Small-Scale Fisheries Congress held in Hua Hin, Thailand, under the theme “Small-Scale Fisheries for Advancing Just Harmony, Young Futures and Regenerative Wisdom.”

The objective of the Congress was to provide a platform for future global actions to support viable and sustainable small-scale fisheries. Among the topics discussed were social protection and its potential role in fisheries management and coastal conservation.

The goal of the special session, “Protecting people, nature and food through social protection: lessons from Thailand, Zanzibar, Bangladesh, and Tunisia”, was to exchange research and policy initiatives to better connect social protection with fisheries management and related conservation measures from four countries. Social protection interventions hold unrealized potential to support and encourage environmental stewardship in small-scale fisheries – and this session set out to explore this potential. It was organized by the International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED) in cooperation with WIOMSA, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers and WorldFish.

Chaired by Annabelle Bladon from IIED, four case studies were presented by Ramphueng Tisa, a member of the Federation of Thai Fisherfolk Associations from Trat Province (Thailand); Samiya Ahmed Selim, University of Liberal Arts (Bangladesh); Julius Francis, WIOMSA and University of Dar es Salaam (Zanzibar); and Yessine Ben Arfa, FAO (Tunisia).

“For small-scale fishers, social protection cannot be limited to emergency relief only after crises happen. It must connect to every dimension of life: our livelihoods, our family economies,

our communities, and the health of our seas. Because a healthy sea means a healthy society,” said Ramphueng Tisa.

Eddie Allison of WorldFish concluded: “I am impressed by how far the ideas and implementation of social protection have come since the days of food-for-work and cash-for-work programmes that forgot to include fisherfolk ... now there is an understanding of need and a well-informed search for how to do it. Great work all!”. He distilled the session’s key lessons into three points:

- Although **fishing communities** frequently have well-developed self-help systems, they may not be sufficient to address the challenges they face: external social protection systems are required.
- **States and their development partners** are increasingly acknowledging and meeting social protection needs but their effectiveness varies. Consultation, delivery, inclusion and prioritization could all be improved.
- **Social protection** encompasses a wide range of possible mechanisms and entry points. Making the most of the numerous options requires context-specificity, collaboration and thinking far beyond the fishing industry.

The case studies provided evidence that social protection programmes and fisheries management strategies working in tandem can advance a range of Sustainable Development Goals, among them poverty reduction, eradicating hunger, promoting health and well-being, gender equality, reducing inequality and promoting decent work for fishers and workers.

MODERN FISHERIES TECHNOLOGIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND SAFETY

By Zahor Mwalim, Pascal Thoya and Alexander Tilley

Fisheries are the lifeblood of Zanzibar's coastal communities, contributing about 5.7 percent to gross domestic product, sustaining 63 000 livelihoods and feeding families across the archipelago.

Zanzibar Fisheries

5.7% GDP contribution

63 000 Jobs [14% women]

Guest of honour, Her Excellency Mboja Ramadhan Mshenga, Deputy Minister of Blue Economy and Fisheries

Her Excellency Mboja Ramadhan Mshenga, Deputy Minister of Blue Economy and Fisheries, officially opened the Forum. She stressed that technology is no longer optional in modern fisheries management and called on all stakeholders to embrace digital innovation as an essential instrument in protecting Zanzibar's marine ecosystems and securing long-term productivity for future generations.

Overfishing, climate change, weak enforcement and a chronic shortage of reliable data continue to erode the foundations on which these communities depend.

The 2026 Zanzibar Fishers Forum convened to confront these challenges head-on with technology, collaboration and fishers' voices at its centre. Yet the sector is under strain. Overfishing, climate change, weak enforcement and a chronic shortage of reliable data continue to erode the foundations on which these communities depend. The 2026 Zanzibar Fishers Forum convened to confront these challenges head-on with technology, collaboration and fishers' voices at its centre.

The 2026 Fishers Forum brought together approximately 300 fishers, fish processors, government officials, researchers, representatives of non-governmental organizations and marine conservation practitioners in Zanzibar. It was organized by the Asia-Africa BlueTech Superhighway through the Digital Coast WorldFish project, in collaboration with the Ministry of Blue Economy and Fisheries, the Zanzibar Fisheries and Marine Resources Research Institute, the Department of Marine Conservation and the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development. The Forum marked a milestone in participatory fisheries governance and WIOMSA served as a key partner in making the event a reality.

A central focus of the Fishers Forum was the Digital Coasts initiative and the roll-out of Positioning and Data Systems (PDS) on small-scale fishing vessels across Zanzibar. WorldFish research analyst Zahor Mwalim described how PDS devices can combine vessel tracking with catch records when integrated with the Peskas open-source analytics platform to generate near-real-time, spatially filtered insights on fishing effort, gear use and habitat preferences.

A total of 65 PDS units are targeted for installation in 2026, signalling a concrete commitment to expanding the digital monitoring of small-scale fisheries across Zanzibar. At the same time, the Peskas App – a mobile tool that allows fishers to submit their own catch data directly – is set to be introduced with a fisheries identification system that will formalize and track individual fisher participation in data collection. Together these tools are expected to transform the ways in which fishing communities engage with fisheries governance.

The data co-generated through these systems will feed directly into local marine spatial planning processes, providing evidence-based insights for habitat protection, stock assessment and identification of high-yield fishing zones – ultimately reducing fuel costs, ecological pressure on overfished areas and search time at sea.

The session generated discussions on the urgent need for targeted policies to support and protect gleaning as a livelihood.



Recognizing the invisible workforce

Dr Narriman Jiddawi, senior marine scientist at WIOMSA, presented a comprehensive assessment of gleaning fisheries, the collection of shellfish, sea cucumbers and other invertebrates from tidal flats and reef platforms, an activity predominantly carried out by women. Her presentation highlighted the underappreciated role of gleaning in sustaining household nutrition and income, particularly for women and marginalized coastal communities.

The session generated discussions on the urgent need for targeted policies to support and protect gleaning as a livelihood. Of Zanzibar's 63 000 fisheries jobs, 14 percent are held by women, largely in post-harvest and gleaning activities. Yet these contributions remain poorly documented and underserved by existing management frameworks. The Forum called for their formal recognition in fisheries data systems and the activity conducted by WorldFish in collaboration with the ministry at four landing sites in Unguja and Pemba.

Closing the Fishers Forum, Dr Salim Hamza commended participants for their shared dedication to responsible, sustainable fishing – from innovative technological solutions to field stories and policy insights. He reminded delegates that fishers are not merely resource users, but active stewards of Zanzibar's delicate marine ecosystems.

Dr Hamza announced that future editions of the Fishers Forum will expand in duration to enable deeper, more comprehensive dialogue across fisheries and the broader marine space – a reflection of the growing ambition and collective resolve of Zanzibar's fishing communities to shape a sustainable future for generations to come.

The 2026 Fishers Forum reaffirmed a simple but powerful principle: when fishers are equipped with the right tools, data and institutional support, they become the most effective guardians of the ocean they depend upon.

STRENGTHENING INCENTIVE-BASED APPROACHES IN COASTAL CONSERVATION AND FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN ZANZIBAR



The welfare of fishermen has not received as much attention as fish and their environment. However, incentive-based approaches offer an opportunity to formally link fisheries management and social protection for the first time, putting the welfare of fishermen at the centre of fisheries management.”
– Mr Zahor Kassim, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Blue Economy and Fisheries

Zanzibar is moving to put the welfare of its fishing communities at the heart of coastal conservation, and a new action plan may offer the policy mechanism to make it happen. A stakeholder validation workshop held on 31 March 2026 convened 40 participants from government agencies, non-governmental organizations and community organizations to refine a strategy for using social protection as an incentive for coastal stewardship – for the first time formally connecting the two.

The workshop was jointly organized by the Ministry of Blue Economy and Fisheries and WIOMSA and was formally opened by Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Blue Economy and Fisheries, Mr Zahor Kassim. Its participants reviewed a draft action plan for strengthening incentive-based approaches in coastal conservation and fisheries management, explored policy harmonization and improved understanding of the ways in which social protection can serve as an incentive for coastal stewardship.

Two background documents were presented and a policy brief contributed to the discussions.

The workshop culminated in a set of recommendations for bridging policy gaps, strengthening institutional coordination and promoting innovative incentive-based solutions. **The recommendations are:**

- **Include gender and social protection data in the Fisheries Frame Survey**, specifically on women's participation in fisheries; their role in decision-making and leadership; and social protection coverage.
- **Clarify the criteria for fisher identification cards and registration** because these determine who formally qualifies as a fisher.
- **Ring-fence a portion of the 30 percent of Marine Conservation Area revenue** that is retained for community development to fund social protection interventions.

This preparatory work was undertaken by WIOMSA and the International Institute for Environment and Development, as part of the Asia-Africa BlueTech Superhighway project. The initiative is funded by the UK International Development under the Blue Planet Fund.

CHANGING THE CONSERVATION NARRATIVE IN AFRICA AND BEYOND | *By Sue Snyder*



Conservation in Africa is often cast as being at odds with economic development – a tension that has long undermined both. A major conference in Nairobi in March 2026 set out to reframe that narrative. Bringing together more than 450 participants from 40 countries, the Business of Conservation Conference made the case that wildlife conservation and economic growth are not competing priorities, but complementary ones – and that conservation is ultimately, everyone's business.

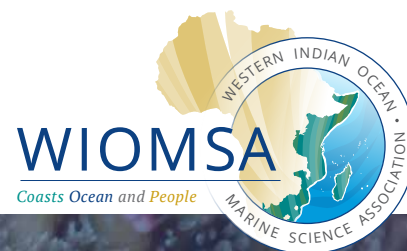
Hosted by the African Leadership University's School of Wildlife Conservation (ALU SOWC) recently hosted the Business of Conservation Conference in Nairobi from 4 to 7 March, in partnership with the International Institute for Environment and Development and African Parks, the conference aimed to catalyse economic development through the sustainable use of wildlife resources.

A key focus was on sustainably financing conservation and community-led conservation, with some sessions specifically focused on the blue economy. Dr Arthur Tuda from WIOMSA led a discussion on understanding the different nature-based economies and their role in supporting the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. He also facilitated a parallel session titled "Beyond blue rhetoric: Redesigning ocean conservation as an economic system".

In one of the parallel sessions, Gus le Breton, the African plant hunter, in partnership with ALU SOWC, launched the Africa BioTrade Advisory Group consisting of a network of experts committed to unlocking the potential of Africa's biodiversity through innovative and sustainable BioTrade opportunities. Members include entrepreneurs, technical experts, researchers and policymakers dedicated to creating economic growth and conserving biodiversity.

A survey conducted after the conference indicated that participants believe it plays a significant role in fostering professional development, strengthening cross-sector collaboration and influencing organizational strategies. Participants also reported that they had gained valuable professional connections, initiated new collaborations and integrated new ideas and approaches in their organizations through their engagements and participation at the conference.

WIO RESTORE LAUNCHES WITH STRONG REGIONAL PARTICIPATION AT INCEPTION MEETING | *By Vera Horigue*



A new regional initiative to reverse coral reef decline in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) got under way recently, drawing strong participation from across the region. The launch of WIO RESTORE on 23 March 2026 brought together 58 practitioners, scientists, marine protected area managers and government representatives in an online inception meeting – a turnout that signals the depth of regional appetite for a coordinated approach to reef restoration.

WIO RESTORE

ONLINE INCEPTION MEETING

Join the informative session which will introduce the WIO RESTORE project's goals, activities, and the multi-country implementation approach, focusing on capacity-building and governance and provide a platform for partner engagement and collaboration.

23rd March 2026
09:00-10:30 AM EAT

WIO RESTORE, formally titled “Sustaining Coral Reef Restoration Outcomes in the Western Indian Ocean through Multi-Level Governance Engagement,” is a three-year initiative led by WIOMSA in partnership with Southern Cross University, the Institut Halieutique et des Sciences Marines at the University of Toliara, Madagascar, and the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute. Funded by the Coral Restoration and Development Accelerator Platform, WIO RESTORE aims to transform coral restoration in the region by combining innovative larval restoration science, biodiversity monitoring, symbiont culture research and governance analysis to help ensure that restored reefs remain ecologically resilient, socially supported and economically viable beyond the lifetime of individual projects.

At the meeting, Dr Arthur Tuda of WIOMSA introduced the project's vision and highlighted the urgent need to address three major challenges facing coral restoration in the region: continuing coral reef decline; limited research and development capacity for scalable restoration approaches; and governance gaps that leave restoration fragmented and poorly integrated into long-term policy and financing systems. He explained that WIO RESTORE will focus on Kenya and Madagascar as demonstration countries, while generating lessons and tools relevant to the wider WIO region.

The meeting showcased the project's key technical and governance innovations. Distinguished Professor Peter Harrison and Dr Dexter dela Cruz presented the larval restoration component, including the use of the LarvalBox system for slow-release larval delivery, and research on culturing heat-tolerant symbionts to support coral resilience. Professor Gildas Todinanahary introduced the role of autonomous reef monitoring structures for biodiversity monitoring and recruitment studies. Dr Vera Horigue and Atty Yvonne Waweru discussed the governance research component which will apply ocean governance accounting to examine the legal, institutional and financial conditions needed to sustain coral restoration over time.

The diversity of perspectives shared during the session underscored the complexity of coral restoration and the value of regional collaboration in shaping solutions that are grounded in science and practice.

Over the next 36 months, WIO RESTORE will support restoration site establishment, training, monitoring, governance assessment, stakeholder engagement, policy development and regional knowledge exchange. Through this integrated approach the project seeks not only to test and adapt restoration innovations, but also to strengthen the enabling conditions for coral restoration to succeed at scale in the WIO region.

INTEGRATING CLIMATE PROJECTIONS AND ESTUARY MANAGEMENT

By Peter Ruvuga, Cosmas Munga, Johan Groeneveld, Louis Celliers, Fiona Mackay, Joseph Maina, Fridah Munyi, Mwanahija Shalli and Kulwa Mutaki



CliMPA and Estuarize 2.0 teams after a joint meeting in Bagamoyo, Tanzania

Marine protected areas (MPAs) and estuarine systems may seem like separate fields of study, but climate change is increasingly linking them. In February 2026, two research teams working under WIOMSA's SCALABLE programme met in Bagamoyo, Tanzania, to explore that connection and to identify where their work on climate projections and estuary management could be strengthened through collaboration.

Team members on the two projects, CliMPA (MPA Climate Futures) and Estuarize 2.0 (Science to management through stakeholder engagement in Western Indian Ocean estuarine systems) **identified topics of convergence for future collaboration, shared progress and exchanged offers of mutual support.** CliMPA is developing processes and pathways by which Western Indian Ocean managers can gain access to climate change information needed for managing MPAs under future climate conditions.

Outputs included development of a framework to integrate climate information and data into the design, planning and management of MPAs, using Mafia Island Marine Park as a case study. Another output is the publication of synoptic-level climate change factsheets containing critical climate information. Estuarize 2.0 is engaged with local stakeholders in small-scale fisheries, floodplain agriculture, livestock keeping and forestry to establish Estuary Working Groups (EWGs) at the community and district level for the Tana (Kenya), Ruvu (Tanzania), Bons Sinais (Mozambique) and uMgeni (South Africa) estuaries. EWGs will bring together users of different estuarine resources and governance bodies to monitor changes in estuaries and co-design management solutions for individual systems.

The two teams jointly identified climate change data, integration of climate information and land-use and land-cover (LULC) analyses as topics of convergence. Although the geographic locations and spatial scales of the research areas

are different, **the management of MPAs and estuaries has much to gain from the distinct perspectives and data sources offered by the two projects.** For example, climate change affects estuarine ecosystems through more frequent floods and droughts, whereas changes in estuarine ecosystems and LULC would influence nearby MPAs throughout the WIO region. For instance, the Mafia Island Marine Park lies adjacent to the Rufiji Estuary; thus, changes in LULC and functionality of the Rufiji Estuary are likely to influence the Mafia Island ecosystem and MPA.

Other areas for potential collaboration include developing a shared recommendation based on work in MPAs and estuaries and contributing manuscripts to a planned SCALABLE special issue of the *Western Indian Ocean Journal of Marine Science*. For now, CliMPA and Estuarize 2.0 are expected to finalize their planned activities and deliverables by October 2026, with **potential for upscaling new findings and platforms for the management of estuaries and MPAs in the WIO region.**



The CliMPA and Estuarize 2.0 seeking possible areas of convergence during their joint session in Bagamoyo

GROUNDBREAKING REPORT HIGHLIGHTS THE STATE OF COASTAL AND MARINE NATURE-BASED TOURISM

A pioneering regional report, led by the School of Wildlife Conservation at African Leadership University and funded through WIOMSA's SCALABLE project grant, has just been released! The report, titled "State of Coastal and Marine Nature-Based Tourism in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) Region," shines a spotlight on an often overlooked but vital sector – nature-based tourism (NBT) – as a key pillar of the blue economy in the region.

Despite the importance of tourism in supporting livelihoods, economies and conservation, it remains understudied and is frequently sidelined in biodiversity and blue economy policy discussions throughout the WIO region. This comprehensive report addresses that gap by presenting case studies from ten WIO countries, documenting the range of activities available and the socioeconomic values they generate for local communities and national economies.

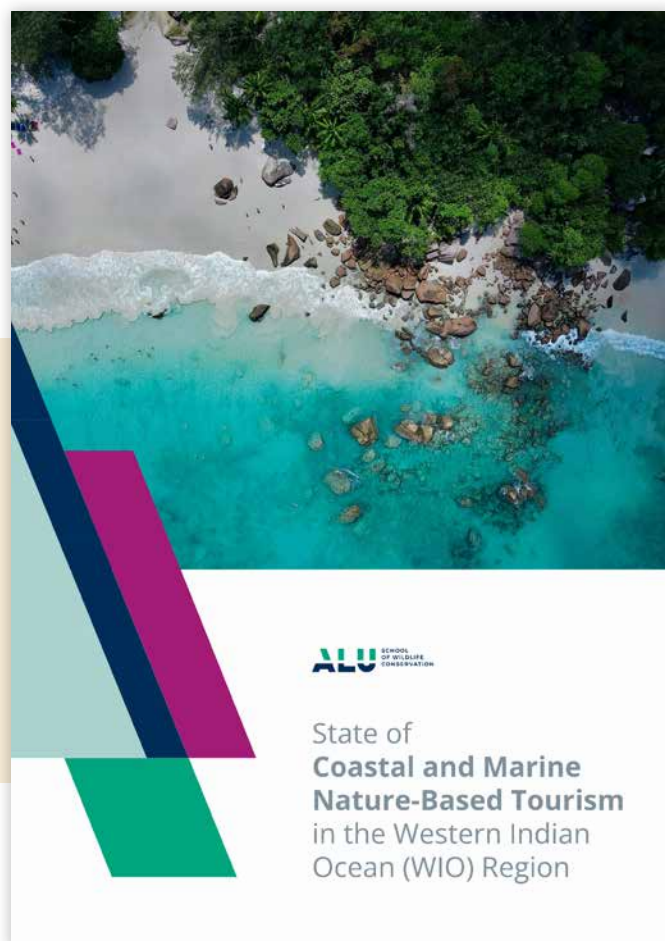
The report delves into the realities of NBT along the WIO coastline, exploring how these activities intersect with conservation efforts, create employment and contribute to sustainable development.

To mark the release of the report "State of Coastal and Marine Nature-Based Tourism in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) Region", the School of Wildlife Conservation and WIOMSA invite you to a special webinar on the state of coastal and marine NBT in the WIO region. The session will take place on **Thursday, 28 May 2026 at 12:00 EAT (11:00 CAT).**

This interactive event will bring together experts, practitioners and stakeholders to discuss the latest trends, challenges and emerging opportunities in the sector. Drawing on insights from ten featured countries, the webinar will foster dialogue on how NBT can further contribute to sustainable livelihoods, economic growth and conservation in coastal and marine environments.



READ THE FULL REPORT:
[Available here](#)



FREE WEBINAR

Coastal & Marine Nature-Based Tourism Report WEBINAR

Join ALU SOWC and WIOMSA to explore the latest findings on Coastal and Marine Nature-Based Tourism (NBT) in the Western Indian Ocean

**INSIGHTS FROM
10 COUNTRY
CASE STUDIES**

**LATEST NBT FINDINGS
IN THE WESTERN
INDIAN OCEAN**

**STRATEGIC ROADMAP
FOR SUSTAINABLE
REGIONAL GROWTH**

SECURE YOUR SPOT!

SCAN TO REGISTER
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**THURSDAY
MAY 28TH, 2026**

12:00 PM EAT

ZOOM WEBINAR

DATE
THURSDAY
28 MAY 2026

TIME
12:00 EAT
(11:00 CAT)

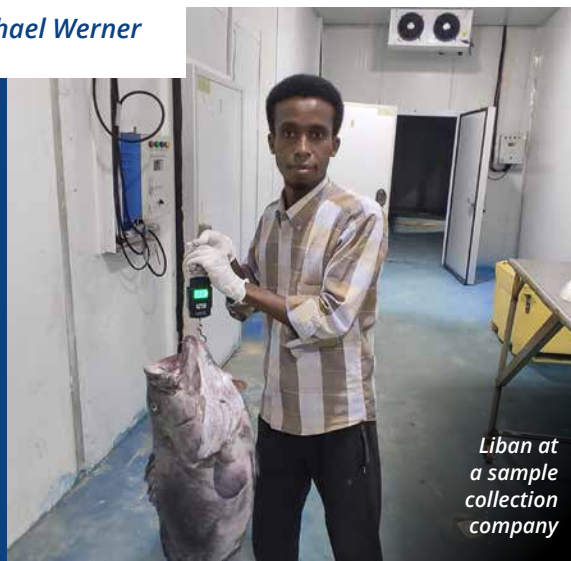
**REGISTER
here to attend
the launch:**
[ZOOM LINK](#)

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MOUNTING FISHING PRESSURE THREATENS THE FUTURE OF SOMALIA'S GROUPER STOCKS

| By Liban Isse Farah, Oscar Puebla, Achim Meyer and Karl-Michael Werner

For the first time, grouper stocks along Somalia's eastern coastline have been systematically and scientifically monitored, and the findings are a cause for concern. A new study funded by WIOMSA has found that more than half of blue and yellow grouper caught at surveyed landing sites were below the size of sexual maturity, with significant numbers taken during the spawning season, pointing to fishing practices that could push already vulnerable stocks towards commercial extinction.



Liban at a sample collection company

Groupers are top predators that play a significant role in the marine food chain. Somalia hosts some of the highest grouper biodiversity in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) and the species contributes significantly to local livelihoods and the national economy. However, several grouper species are listed as data-deficient or threatened and concerns have been growing over unsustainable fishing practices and illegal fishing activity – problems that have intensified since the collapse of the central government. The absence of reliable biological and ecological data on commercially important species such as the blue and yellow grouper (*Epinephelus flavocaeruleus*) has left Somalia fisheries management without the tools needed to protect them.

The primary objective of the study was to monitor the biological status of blue and yellow grouper earlier to provide timely baseline data that can aid sustainable fisheries management. The research was funded by a WIOMSA Marine Research Grant.

The study monitored three regional fish landing sites along Somalia's east coast: Lower Shabelle, Banadir, and Middle Shabelle for a period of one year. The parameters assessed include growth profile, length at capture, gonadosomatic index, condition factor and spawning season. The results revealed significant temporal changes in the gonadosomatic index which peaked in June and September, while the condition factor was relatively stable over the months. The male to female ratio was not statistically significantly different from the 1:1 ratio. The length at maturity where 50 percent of males reach sexually maturity was estimated at 56.5 cm, corresponding to fish of 3 kg.

Total sampling indicated over half of the blue and yellow grouper population captured were individuals below 50 cm while a significant number were captured during spawning period, indicating fishers targeting breeding grounds, an unsustainable fishing practice. This threat is not specific to a certain grouper species but can be inferred to all grouper species due to late maturation and spawning aggregation behaviour.

Effective fisheries management and initiatives to raise awareness among the fishers targeting undersized fish and spawning aggregations are essential for ensuring long-term sustainability of grouper stocks. This urgency is underscored by the severe threats of population decline and commercial extinction confronting blue and yellow groupers, particularly those species categorized as threatened or vulnerable.

Recommendations to impose management measures to ensure the sustainability of this species, include:

- Beach and fisheries management units must be established and trained for inspection of catch and fish landing as integral components of fisheries management to enforce fisheries regulations.
- Gear improvements are necessary to avoid targeting undersized species.
- Fishing during spawning season at spawning aggregation sites should be prohibited.
- Further long-term monitoring and research should be conducted.

HUDONET RELEASES NETWORK ACTION PLAN FOR THE INDIAN OCEAN HUMPBAC DOLPHIN



The Indian Ocean Humpback Dolphin Conservation Network (HuDoNet) has released its first **Network Action Plan**, a collaboratively developed framework to guide coordinated research, policy engagement and conservation action for the Endangered Indian Ocean humpback dolphin (*Sousa plumbea*) across its range.

The Indian Ocean humpback dolphin inhabits shallow coastal waters in the western and northern Indian Ocean, occurring along the coasts of 23 range states from southern Africa to southern Asia, many of them common to WIOMSA. Humpback dolphin populations are typically small and fragmented and are closely associated with intensively used coastal habitats, making the species particularly vulnerable to fisheries bycatch, habitat degradation, pollution and other human pressures. While research and conservation initiatives exist in parts of the range, effort and capacity remain uneven and large areas are still data-poor.

HuDoNet was established in 2023 to help address these challenges by connecting researchers and

conservationists working on humpback dolphins across the species' range. The network currently includes nearly 100 members from 18 countries, including several researchers based in the Western Indian Ocean region. By facilitating collaboration, data sharing and joint initiatives, the network seeks to strengthen regional scientific capacity and support evidence-based management – objectives closely aligned with WIOMSA's mission to advance marine science for sustainable development in the WIO.

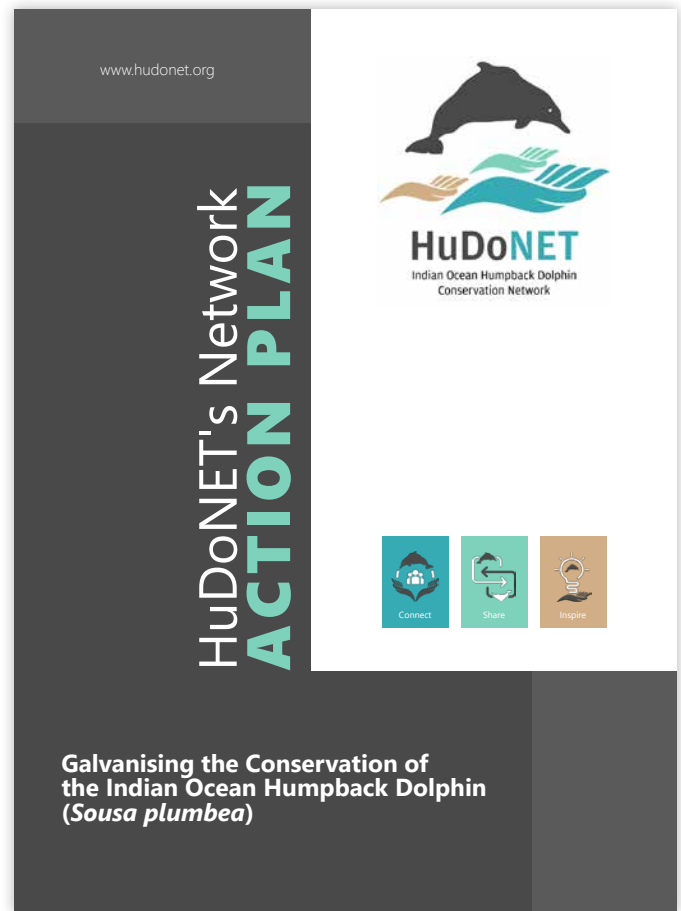
The Network Action Plan was developed through a structured planning process adapted from the IUCN Conservation Planning Specialist Group framework. Five thematic working groups – Biological Research; Threats and Solutions; People; Policy; and Network Success – convened a series of online meetings between August 2024 and October 2025 to collate existing knowledge, identify priority gaps and opportunities, and agree on feasible, near-term actions.

Rather than attempting to produce a comprehensive species action plan at this early stage, HuDoNet focused on identifying a limited set of achievable, short- to medium-term actions that could be advanced through collaboration within the existing network. The result is a set of thirteen Priority Actions designed to strengthen the evidence base, support practical threat mitigation, enhance community

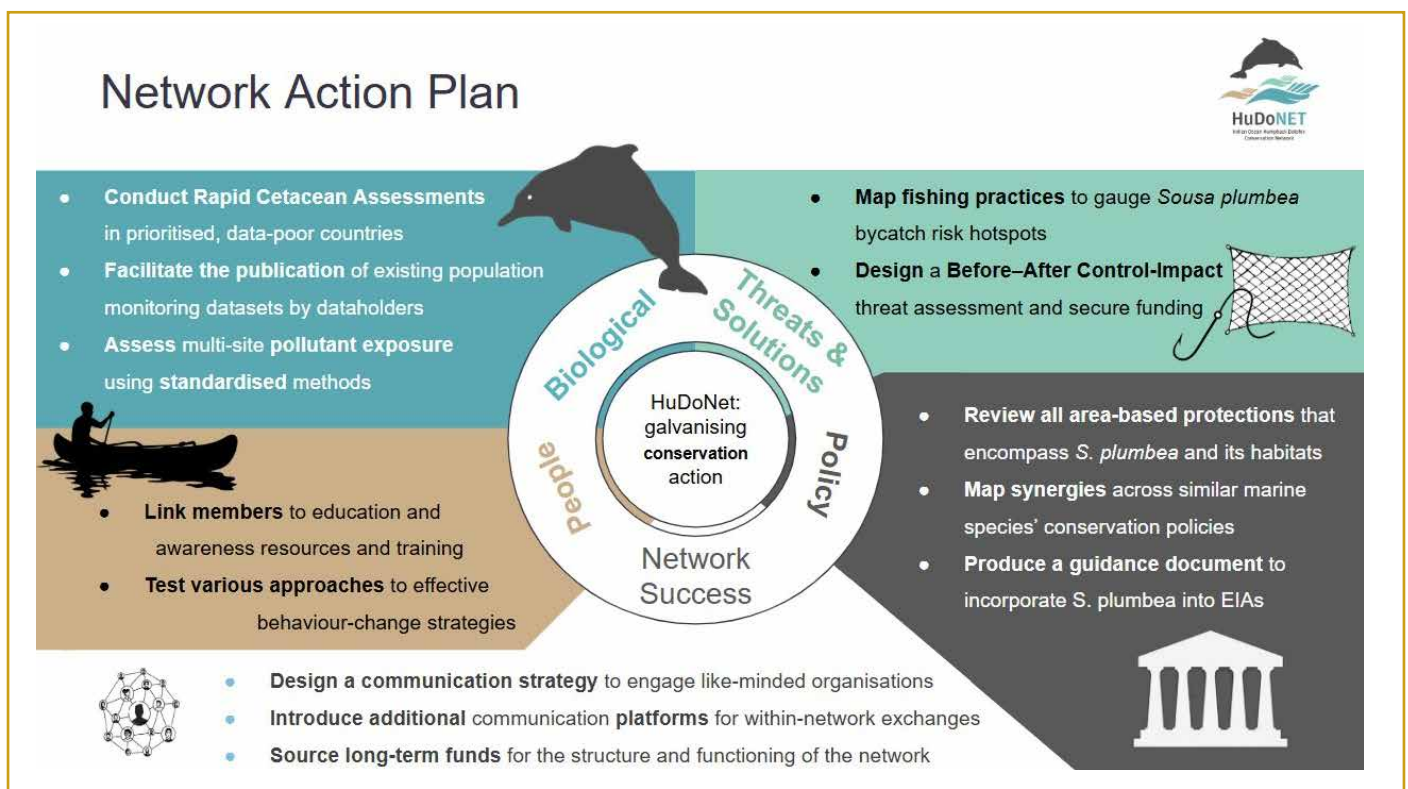
engagement, leverage existing policy frameworks, and build the organisational foundations needed for longer-term conservation planning.

The Priority Actions include initiatives to expand basic knowledge of humpback dolphin distribution and abundance in data-poor regions, facilitate the analysis and publication of existing datasets, and coordinate multi-site studies on key threats such as chemical pollution and fisheries bycatch – issues of growing concern throughout the Western Indian Ocean. Other actions focus on mapping spatial protection measures across the species' range, identifying synergies with conservation initiatives for ecologically similar coastal species, and developing guidance to better incorporate humpback dolphins into Environmental Impact Assessments.

By focusing on coordination, knowledge sharing and targeted action, HuDoNet aims to reduce duplication, amplify existing efforts and support more consistent consideration of humpback dolphins in research agendas and management decisions across their range. The Network Action Plan is intended to be a living document that will guide HuDoNet's activities over the next few years and provide a foundation for the eventual development of a longer-term, outward-facing Species Action Plan.



The full HuDoNet Network Action Plan is available on our website at [HuDoNet's Action Plan](#).



CLIMATE CHANGE MAY RESHAPE TUNA FISHERIES IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN



Skipjack tuna shoal feeding on the surface

A new study published in *Frontiers in Marine Science* highlights how climate change could alter the distribution of *Katsuwonus pelamis* across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO), with important implications for regional fisheries and food security.

The research shows that future changes are unlikely to be uniform. Under low-emissions scenarios, tuna distribution is projected to remain relatively stable through mid-century, with only minor localized declines by 2100. However, under high-emissions scenarios, stronger ocean warming may drive a gradual eastward expansion of tuna populations and increased abundance in some equatorial regions, particularly along the Somali coast.

Rather than a simple decline or increase in fish stocks, the study points to spatial redistribution driven by changing ocean temperature, productivity and salinity. These findings underscore the need for adaptive, regionally coordinated fisheries management that can respond to shifting marine ecosystems.

With skipjack tuna representing a key resource for many WIO nations, understanding how climate change may reshape its distribution is critical for sustaining both livelihoods and marine biodiversity.

THIS RESEARCH WAS FUNDED AND SUPPORTED BY UNIVERSITY EDUARDO MONDLANE AND THE BAZARUTO CENTRE FOR SCIENTIFIC STUDIES' [Resort-to-Research \(R2R\) model](#), developed in partnership with [Kisawa Sanctuary](#). By linking conservation, science, and sustainable funding the model enables continuous research efforts in a region where long-term data are critically needed.



READ THE FULL STUDY
[Available here](#)

NEMC MARKS 40 YEARS OF ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP IN TANZANIA

On April 29, 2026, Dr. Sware Semesi, Director General of the National Environment Management Council (NEMC), officially launched a series of activities to commemorate the Council's 40th Anniversary in Dar es Salaam. This milestone recognizes four decades of NEMC's commitment to environmental stewardship, sustainable resource management, and national development since its establishment in 1986 under the Vice President's Office.



The anniversary celebrations will culminate in a national event on 29 May 2026, bringing together government leaders, development partners, private sector stakeholders, civil society, environmental experts, and the public. The climax event will provide a platform to reflect on achievements, share lessons, and chart future priorities for environmental management in Tanzania.

Reflecting on Achievements

Since its founding, NEMC has played a central role in aligning Tanzania's economic growth with environmental sustainability. Key accomplishments include supervising over 35,000 development projects through Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA), issuing more than 20,000 environmental permits, and preventing environmental losses worth billions of shillings through enforcement and pollution control. The Council has also built capacity among more than 12,000 environmental professionals, supported major national projects, and reached 4.2 million citizens through education campaigns.

Driving Innovation and Protection

NEMC has handled over 9,000 cases of environmental law violations, enhanced environmental monitoring systems, and deployed modern technologies like mobile labs and drones. These efforts have contributed to reduced urban air pollution and improved water quality, while expanding community participation and private sector engagement in environmental initiatives.

Looking Forward

As Tanzania advances toward its National Development Vision 2050, NEMC remains focused on promoting a safe environment, sustainable resource use, and climate resilience. The Council recognizes that ongoing challenges—such as climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss—require collective action from all sectors.

Commemoration Activities

Leading up to the main event on 29 May, NEMC is organizing nationwide activities, including planting 40,000 trees, educating over 20,000 stakeholders, beautifying Mnazi Mmoja Grounds through the “Mazingira Challenge,” and hosting a national stakeholders’ forum to discuss the future of environmental management.

A Call for Collective Responsibility

Launching the celebrations, Dr. Semesi emphasized that the 40th anniversary is both a tribute to NEMC's legacy and a renewed call to action. “Economic transformation and environmental conservation can and must progress together,” she noted. NEMC calls on all Tanzanians to collaborate, innovate, and take shared responsibility for the country's environment and quality of life.

Theme: 40 Years of NEMC – Protect the Environment, Safeguard the Nation
#OurEnvironmentOurLife

KENYA TO HOST TWO LANDMARK MARINE SCIENCE CONFERENCES IN 2026

The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region is gearing up for a historic year as Kenya takes centre stage, hosting two major gatherings for ocean and aquatic science – the 11th Our Ocean Conference in Mombasa and the third Aquatic Resources and Blue Economy Conference (ARBEC III) in Nairobi.

Our Ocean Conference, Mombasa

The 11th Our Ocean Conference will convene heads of states, ministers, scientists, civil society leaders and the private sector to renew and galvanise commitments for a healthy, productive, and sustainably managed ocean. Held for the first time in Africa's WIO region, the Mombasa edition marks a significant moment in the global ocean governance agenda.



The main conference (16–18 June 2026) will be preceded by a two-day pre-conference seminar on 14 to 15 June, offering dedicated technical sessions, side events and networking opportunities for delegates.

Themes expected to feature include:

- Ocean-based climate solutions and adaptation
- Marine protected areas and biodiversity
- Sustainable fisheries and food security
- Blue finance, investment and innovation
- Marine pollution and plastic reduction

Abstract submissions, registration details and side-event opportunities will be announced soon. Members and partners are encouraged to monitor the WIOMSA website and official communication channels for updates.

Aquatic Resources and Blue Economy Conference, Nairobi

The third edition of the ARBEC III will bring together researchers, practitioners, policymakers and the private sector from across the WIO region and beyond. ARBEC III provides a premier platform for sharing cutting-edge research, advancing policy dialogue and building partnerships that translate science into tangible action for the sustainable use of aquatic resources.



Hosted in Nairobi over five full days (23 to 27 November 2026), the conference will feature plenary sessions, thematic parallel sessions, poster presentations, a WIOMSA member country update forum and dedicated networking opportunities.

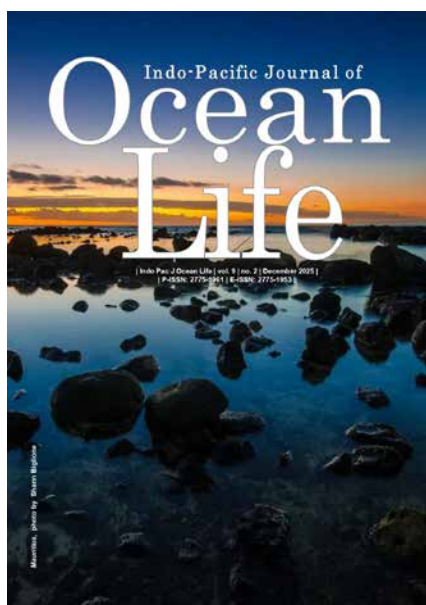
Conference themes include:

- Aquatic biodiversity and ecosystem health
- Sustainable fisheries management
- Blue economy policy and governance
- Coastal community livelihoods and equity
- Climate resilience and ocean-based solutions

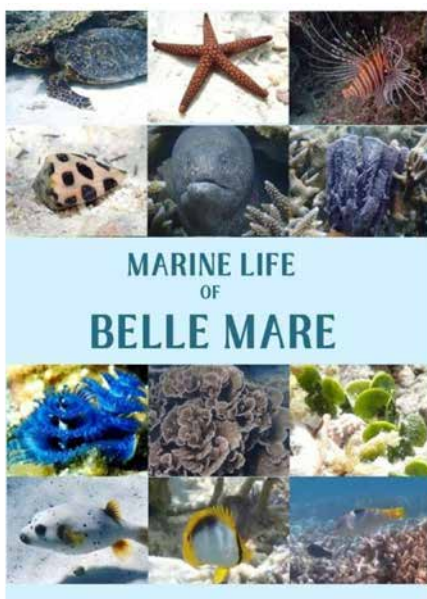
MAURITIUS IS ADVANCING MARINE SCIENCE, COLLABORATION, AWARENESS AND RESTORATION

Mauritius continues to strengthen its role within the Western Indian Ocean marine science community through enhanced collaboration, scientific dissemination, sensitization campaigns and capacity-building initiatives. Recent efforts have focused on advancing research outputs, strengthening cross-sector partnerships and promoting knowledge exchange.

In parallel, ongoing asexual coral restoration programmes and innovations in sexual propagation highlight Mauritius' commitment to science-driven and community-based conservation.



 [READ THIS HERE](#)



The marine field guide

University of Mauritius

A landmark 2025 special issue of the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Ocean Life* dedicated to marine studies from Rodrigues Island, has brought together peer-reviewed research from the University of Mauritius and international researchers, on coral health, herbivorous fish biomass, corallivory dynamics and ecosystem functioning – shedding new light on the ecological importance of Rodrigues reefs and the increasing pressures they face.

A follow-up seminar, “Findings from Rodrigues Expeditions” held at the University of Mauritius on 17 March 2026, drew students, researchers, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to explore findings on reef fish, coral predation, coral disease, thermal stress and endemic coral resilience – highlighting the value of cross-sector collaboration in advancing marine science and dissemination.



*Professor Ranjeet Bhagooli presenting on “Endemic coral, *Acropora rodriguensis* and its thermal stress response” during the seminar at the University of Mauritius*

The Biodiversity and Environment Institute

The Biodiversity and Environment Institute, together with the University of Mauritius, Shizuoka University and Mitsui O.S.K. Lines, has published “Marine Life of Belle Mare”, a field guide documenting over 200 marine taxa that bridges scientific research and public outreach for one of Mauritius' most significant coastal ecosystems.

Reef conservation

Under a UNDP/Adaptation Fund regional project, Reef Conservation and partners have generated over 50 000 coral fragments and restored approximately 0.6 hectares of degraded reef within Blue Bay Marine Park, combining ecological monitoring with community training and awareness programmes.



Pocillopora corals on rope nurseries ready to be planted to restore degraded reefs (Photo by Reef Conservation)

Odysseo Foundation

Odysseo Foundation's 15-day outreach mission in Rodrigues reached 1 374 students across 22 schools, raising awareness of mangroves and seagrass, as well as coral reefs, through interactive sessions. The mission was supported by the Australian High Commission, Trash to Music and Shoals Rodrigues.



Odysseo Foundation raising awareness on key marine ecosystems (Photo by Odysseo Foundation)

Through the Restoration of Blue Carbon Ecosystems project, Odysseo Foundation has been running community sensitization campaigns in the Le Morne region, engaging students and Scout Mauritius members in workshops and field-based learning on the role of mangroves and seagrass in climate regulation and coastal protection.

Innovation, restoration, and climate resilience – Reef Conservation and Eco-Sud

Mauritius is moving beyond traditional coral reef restoration methods, with initiatives now incorporating sexual coral reproduction, such as gamete collection, larval rearing and transplantation of juvenile corals to strengthen genetic diversity and resilience. Reef Conservation's land-based coral sanctuary and Voluntary Marine Conservation Areas are safeguarding rare and threatened species, while citizen-facing programmes like "Plant-a-Coral," broaden community participation and stewardship.



Research Project Manager at Reef Conservation, Sruti Jeetun, conducting a field survey and observing a colony of Plerogyra sinuosa, listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Photo by Reef Conservation)

WIOMSA BOARD OF TRUSTEES FOCUS ON STRATEGY, PARTNERSHIPS AND THE FUTURE



The WIOMSA Board of Trustees convened its 48th meeting on 26 and 27 March 2026 in the Seychelles, bringing together Board members and partners for two days of focused discussion on the Association's governance, programmes and strategic direction.

After orientating new Board members and reviewing progress on previous decisions, **the Board approved adjustments to the Year 3 SCALABLE project priorities, aimed at strengthening WIOMSA's science-policy interface in a shifting funding landscape.**

The Board agreed on a cautious but ambitious approach to the WIOMSA Trust Fund and discussed WIOMSA's role at the 2026 Our Ocean Conference, emphasizing the need for

clear regional messaging and strong science-policy links ahead of the Nairobi Convention COP12.

The second day focused on the external SCALABLE Programme evaluation and its implications for WIOMSA's strategic direction through 2030, closing with agreed next steps to align the Association's work with its new strategic plan.

UPDATES FROM THE NETWORK FOR WOMEN IN MARINE SCIENCE

The Network of Women in Marine Science (WiMS) continues to build on 2025's momentum, with recent webinars and engagements deepening understanding of gender mainstreaming and reinforcing the importance of male allyship. Here are some highlights.

A safeguarding and well-being workshop delivered by Aurelie Gremaud-Laforet on 10 February **guided participants through recognizing and addressing vulnerability, abuse and exploitation in research and conservation settings**. Participants found it eye-opening, noting it would help them to evaluate their organizations' policies and foster safer, more equitable work spaces.

On 10 March, WiMS and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management marked International Women's Day with a training webinar on assessing Risk and Negative Side Effects (R+NSE) in conservation projects, with a focus on gender and vulnerable groups. **Led by Oscar Maldonado, the session showcased improvements to the R+NSE tool and featured reflections from WiMS members who had applied it in practice.** Participants worked through a fictitious Marine Protected Area fishing closure case study, generating lively discussion on gender-sensitive risk management. Feedback indicated strong interest in applying the R+NSE tool further.

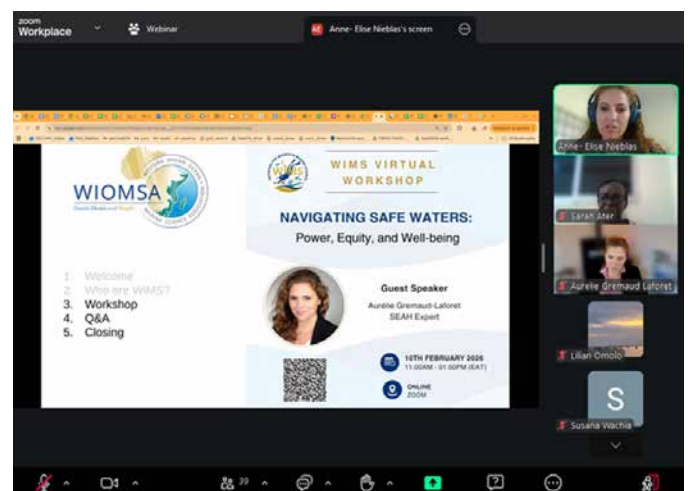


The new "Risk and Negative Side Effect Assessment in Conservation Projects" booklet, produced as an output of the March webinar, provides practical guidance on integrating gender and inclusion into conservation risk assessments. Access the booklet [here](#).

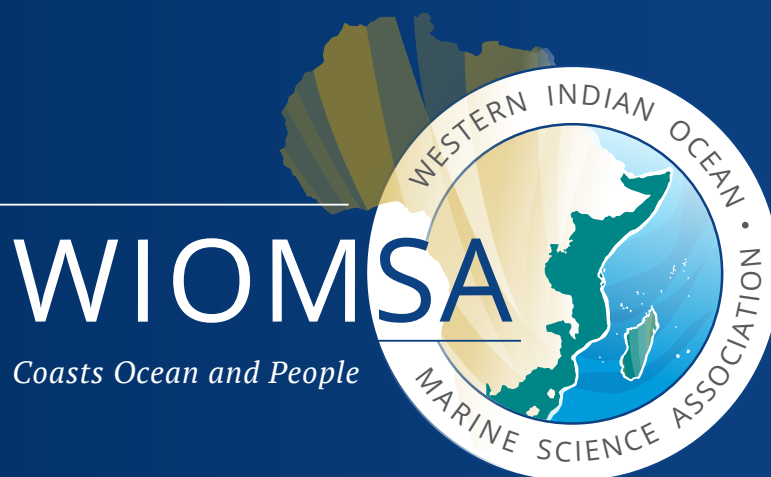
DID YOU MISS THE WEBINAR?
Catch up with the recording [here](#):



Over the past two years, WiMS webinars have drawn growing participation from both men and women across the WIO, a trend boosted by intentionally including male speakers. **The webinars have fostered shared learning and practical discussion on gender mainstreaming, with WiMS remaining committed to raising gender consciousness** through policy development and capacity-building. More activities are planned throughout the year!



Screen grab of webinar on 10 February 2025



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