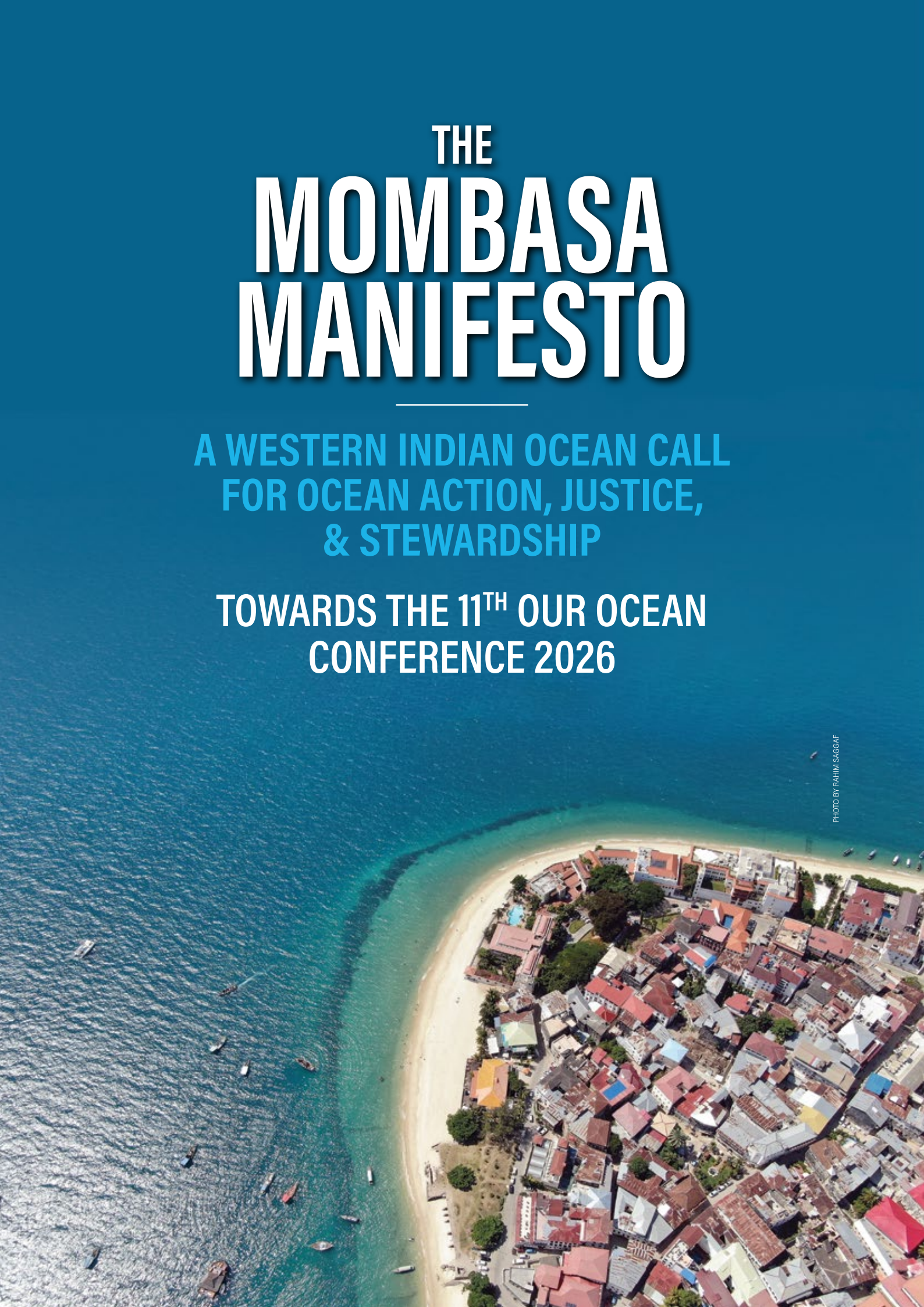


THE MOMBASA MANIFESTO

A WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN CALL
FOR OCEAN ACTION, JUSTICE,
& STEWARDSHIP

TOWARDS THE 11TH OUR OCEAN
CONFERENCE 2026

PHOTO BY RAHIM SAGGAF



A group of dolphins swimming in the ocean. The dolphins are dark grey with lighter underbellies, and they are swimming in a loose formation. The water is a deep blue, and the background shows the surface of the water with ripples. The text is white and positioned in the upper left quadrant of the image.

This manifesto is designed as a strategic regional declaration for the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region ahead of the 11th Our Ocean Conference (OOC11) in Mombasa, Kenya. It builds upon consultations, policy dialogues, regional governance discussions, and community engagement processes across the WIO region.



PHOTO BY MARK ZIEMICKI

PREAMBLE

We, the peoples, communities, scientists, practitioners, youth, women, fishers, civil society organisations, Indigenous and local knowledge holders, governments, and regional institutions of the Western Indian Ocean region, gather at a defining moment for our ocean and our future.

The Western Indian Ocean is one of the world's most ecologically and culturally significant ocean regions. Its coral reefs, mangroves, seagrasses, fisheries, coastal cities, islands, and communities sustain millions of people. Yet these systems are increasingly under pressure from climate change, biodiversity loss, unsustainable exploitation, marine pollution, maritime insecurity, weak governance, and fragmented financing.



PHOTO BY MARK ZIEMICKI



BY TANGUY NICOLAS

At the same time, the region is emerging as a source of innovation and resilience. Communities are rebuilding fisheries, restoring mangroves, strengthening local governance systems, and demonstrating that conservation and livelihoods can reinforce each other.

As Africa hosts the first-ever Our Ocean Conference on the continent, we recognise this moment not only as a conference, but as an opportunity to redefine what meaningful ocean action looks like.

This manifesto therefore calls for a transition from symbolic commitments to systems capable of delivering long-term stewardship, justice, resilience, and implementation.

THE REALITY WE FACE

The crisis facing the ocean is no longer a crisis of awareness. It is a crisis of implementation.

Across the world, marine commitments continue to expand while ecological decline accelerates. Conservation targets are announced faster than institutions are strengthened. Protected areas are declared faster than management systems are financed. Too often, success is measured by square kilometres on maps rather than ecological recovery, legitimacy, resilience, or long-term stewardship.

The Western Indian Ocean region understands these contradictions deeply. Across the region, marine conservation systems remain underfunded, fragmented, and overstretched, while the expectations placed upon them continue to grow. Coastal communities face increasing climate shocks, declining fisheries,



PHOTO BY PEXEL.COM

marine pollution, biodiversity loss, rising costs of living, insecure livelihoods, and growing pressure on natural resources. At the same time, many communities continue to experience limited participation in decision-making processes that directly affect their futures.

Despite these challenges, communities continue to act. Beach Management Units (BMUs), Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs), community conservation groups, women's associations, youth groups, fishers, scientists, and practitioners



PHOTO BY MANOTTE MAY



PHOTO BY EAWLS PHOTO LIBRARY

continue to sustain ocean stewardship often with limited financial, institutional, or political support. Across the Western Indian Ocean, local communities are restoring mangroves, rebuilding fisheries, monitoring ecosystems, strengthening co-management systems, and protecting critical marine habitats through locally grounded action and knowledge.

Yet too often, these efforts remain poorly recognised, weakly financed, and disconnected from national, regional, and global ocean governance systems.

This manifesto recognises that the future of the ocean depends not only on ambition, but on whether governance systems are trusted, adaptive, legitimate, equitable, and capable of functioning during times of uncertainty and stress. It recognises that resilient ocean systems are built not only through declarations and targets, but through long-term investment in people, institutions, science, community stewardship, and the relationships that connect them.



BY TANGUY NICOLAS

The future of the Western Indian Ocean will therefore depend on our collective ability to move beyond fragmented interventions and short-term commitments toward integrated systems that connect ecosystems, livelihoods, governance, finance, knowledge, and justice.

The ocean is sustained not only by biodiversity, but by the strength of the human systems that choose to protect it.



OUR VISION

We envision a Western Indian Ocean where healthy marine ecosystems sustain thriving coastal societies, and where ocean governance is grounded in resilience, equity, stewardship, and cooperation.

We envision a region where conservation and livelihoods reinforce rather than undermine each other; where coastal communities are recognised not as beneficiaries, but as legitimate governance partners and custodians of marine ecosystems. We envision a future where science, policy, traditional knowledge, and local experience work together to support adaptive and inclusive ocean governance systems capable of responding to uncertainty and change.

We further envision a Western Indian Ocean where regional solidarity strengthens collective resilience; where investments support long-term

stewardship rather than short-term interventions; and where ocean action is measured not only by ambition and area-based targets, but by effectiveness, ecological recovery, legitimacy, justice, and the wellbeing of present and future generations.

We therefore envision a Western Indian Ocean where:

- Healthy marine ecosystems sustain thriving coastal societies.
- Conservation and livelihoods reinforce each other.
- Communities are recognised as legitimate governance partners.
- Science, policy, and local knowledge work together.
- Regional cooperation strengthens resilience.
- Ocean action is measured by effectiveness, equity, and long-term stewardship.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. COMMUNITY LEGITIMACY

Communities must move from consultation to co-governance.

2. EFFECTIVENESS OVER SYMBOLISM

Conservation success must be measured by outcomes, not declarations.

3. INVEST IN PEOPLE

Marine conservation ultimately depends on people, institutions, leadership, and trust.

4. CONNECT CONSERVATION & LIVELIHOODS

Healthy ecosystems and resilient livelihoods are inseparable.

5. SCIENCE WITH SOCIETY

Knowledge systems must connect research, policy, and lived experience.

6. REGIONAL SOLIDARITY

The WIO is a connected ecological and governance system.

7. ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE

Ocean systems must become resilient to shocks, uncertainty, and change.

BY TANGUY NICOLAS

Planting mangrove saplings on suitable sites to boost ecological restoration, Tanga region.



PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

To secure a resilient and sustainable future for the Western Indian Ocean, we call for urgent, coordinated, and long-term action across the following priority areas:

- **Strengthen Community-Led Ocean Governance**

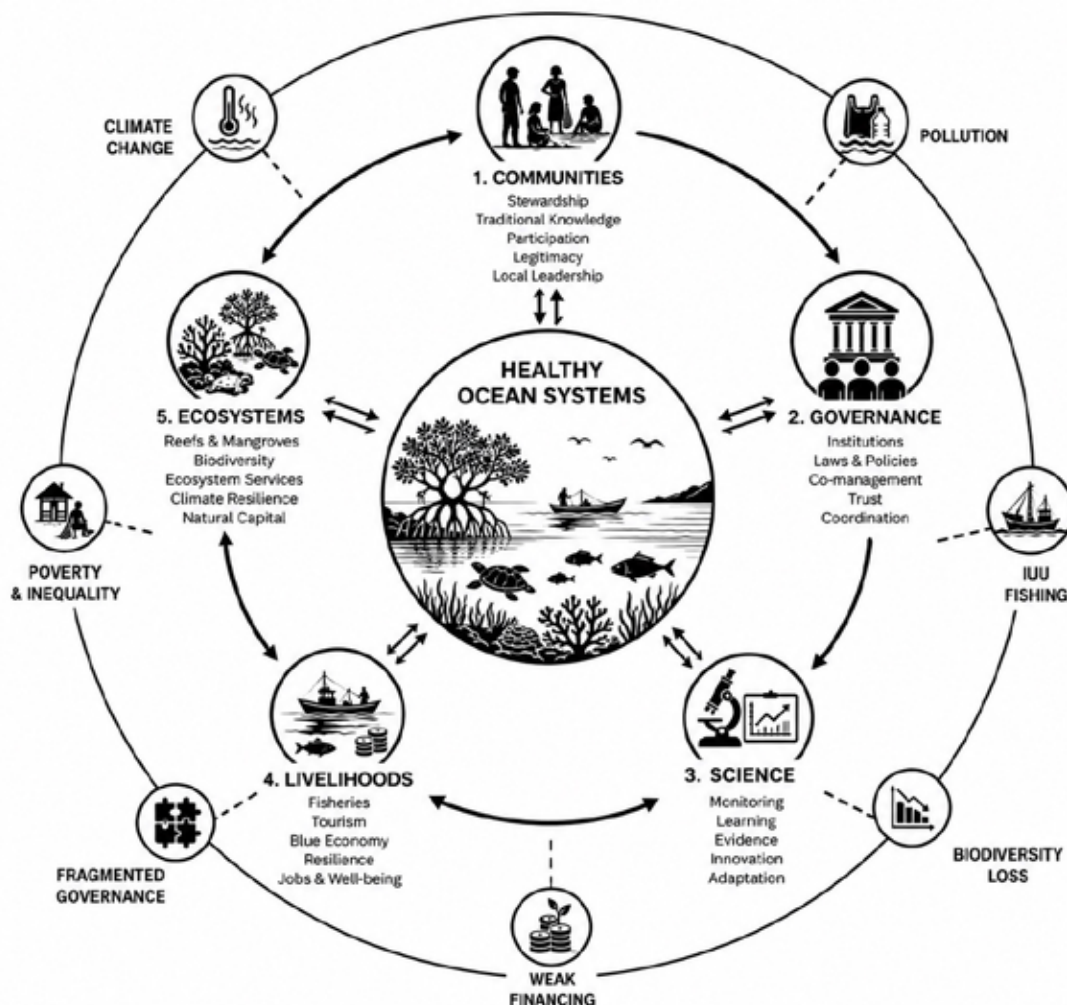
Support and formally recognise community stewardship systems including Beach Management Units (BMUs), Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs), Joint Community Management Areas, women's groups, youth networks, and Indigenous and local governance systems as essential pillars of ocean governance and conservation.

- **Move from Targets to Effective Management**

Shift the focus from declarations and area-based targets toward management effectiveness, ecological recovery, governance quality, equitable benefit-sharing, enforcement capacity, and long-term stewardship of marine and coastal ecosystems.

- **Secure Sustainable Fisheries and Coastal Livelihoods**

Strengthen sustainable small-scale fisheries governance, local value chains, food security systems, and diversified coastal livelihoods that support resilience, equity, and long-term economic wellbeing for coastal communities.



THE OCEAN IS SUSTAINED BY RELATIONSHIPS

*When one part weakens, the whole system becomes fragile.
When connections strengthen, resilience emerges.*

PHOTO BY ANTHONY OWINO



- **Build Climate Resilience Through Mangroves, Reefs, and Seagrasses**

Protect, restore, and sustainably manage blue carbon ecosystems and critical marine habitats that strengthen biodiversity, climate adaptation, coastal protection, fisheries productivity, and community resilience.

- **Combat Marine Pollution**

Strengthen waste management systems, wastewater infrastructure, regional coordination, circular economy approaches, and community awareness to address plastics, marine debris, and land-based sources of pollution threatening marine ecosystems and public health.

- **Invest in Workforce Development**

Support the next generation of ocean leaders, scientists, practitioners, managers, educators, and community stewards through sustained investment in training, mentorship, certification, technical capacity, and long-term institutional strengthening.

- **Strengthen Science-Policy-Society Interfaces**

Promote stronger connections between science, governance, communities, and decision-making processes through inclusive knowledge systems, participatory monitoring, regional research collaboration, and evidence-informed policy implementation.

- **Increase Long-Term Financing for Implementation**

Mobilise sustainable and equitable financing mechanisms that support long-term implementation, locally led stewardship, community resilience, management effectiveness, and adaptive governance systems across the Western Indian Ocean region.

The early fisherman catches the fish – the start of a new day at Unguja.



PHOTO BY JOYCE CHIMBI

Influencing Climate Change-related policy for Blue Carbon Ecosystem Conservation and Management in Kenya



CALL TO GOVERNMENTS, DONORS, AND PARTNERS

We call upon governments, development partners, philanthropies, financial institutions, regional bodies, and international organisations to move beyond fragmented interventions, short-term project cycles, and externally driven agendas that often fail to address the long-term realities facing coastal and marine systems in the Western Indian Ocean region.

The challenges confronting the region including climate change, biodiversity loss, marine pollution, declining fisheries, weak governance capacity, maritime insecurity, and growing socio-economic vulnerability require sustained, coordinated, and adaptive investment over the long term.

The region therefore requires increased investment in:

- governance systems and institutional strengthening;
- community stewardship and locally led conservation;
- management effectiveness and implementation capacity;
- science, monitoring, and knowledge systems;

- workforce development and leadership;
- sustainable livelihoods and coastal resilience;
- and adaptive management systems capable of responding to uncertainty, shocks, and change.

We further call for financing mechanisms that are accessible, equitable, flexible, and capable of supporting long-term stewardship rather than short-term outputs. Investments should strengthen existing local and regional systems, build trust, and support implementation at the scale required to secure resilient marine ecosystems and thriving coastal societies. We also call for equitable partnerships that recognise the Western Indian Ocean region not as a passive recipient of external agendas, but as a region rich in knowledge, innovation, leadership, community stewardship, and practical ocean solutions grounded in lived implementation experience.

The future of the ocean will depend not only on global ambition, but on whether international partnerships are capable of supporting locally legitimate, regionally coordinated, and long-term systems of stewardship.

We therefore call for a new generation of ocean partnerships built on trust, solidarity, co-creation, accountability, and shared responsibility for the future of our ocean and our communities.



PHOTO BY ANTHONY OWINO

CLOSING DECLARATION

The ocean is protected where people, ecosystems, science, and stewardship meet.

It is protected in fishing villages, in mangrove forests, on coral reefs, on patrol boats, in classrooms, through science, through trust, through governance, and through the daily work of communities, practitioners, and institutions working together across generations.

It is protected by fishers who choose stewardship over short-term gain.

By communities restoring mangroves and seagrasses.

By women sustaining coastal economies and food systems.

By youth demanding a different future.

By scientists generating knowledge.

By managers protecting ecosystems

under increasingly difficult conditions.

And by regional partnerships capable of turning commitments into lasting action.

The challenge before us is not simply to protect 30 percent of the ocean.

It is to build systems capable of caring for 100 percent of it systems that are legitimate, adaptive, equitable, resilient, and capable of sustaining both people and nature in times of uncertainty and change.

The future of the Western Indian Ocean will depend not only on what we declare, but on what we are willing to sustain.

This Manifesto is therefore both a call to action and a commitment to collective responsibility.

The ocean connects our countries, our communities, our economies, our cultures, and our future.

Its protection cannot be postponed. And the time to begin is now.

The early fisherman catches the fish_ the start of a new day at Unguja.

PHOTO BY EWOUT KNOESTER





This Manifesto is a collaborative regional initiative developed through the Western Indian Ocean Consortium (WIO-C), coordinated by WIOMSA in its role as Secretariat of WIO-C, and shaped through consultations, regional dialogues, and community engagement processes across the Western Indian Ocean region.

The Manifesto reflects the growing urgency to strengthen equitable, science-informed, and community-centred ocean governance systems capable of securing healthy marine ecosystems, resilient livelihoods, and sustainable futures for coastal communities across the region.

This Manifesto is endorsed and supported by the following organisations:

- **Consortium for the Conservation of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO-C);**
- **National Working Groups in Kenya (BCWG, KFWG, KWF)**
- **Ocean-affiliated private sector**
- **Coastal Community Forest Associations**
- **County and National government agencies**
- **Special Interest Groups- SWIOTUNA**
- **MIHARI Network**
- **WIO LMMA Alliance**
- **Community-Based Organisations (CBOs)**
- **Coastal Beach Management Units (BMUs)**
- **Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA) Networks**
- **Youth and Women's Coastal Networks**
- **Community Conservation Groups**
- **Regional Scientific and Research Institutions**
- **Coastal Civil Society Organisations across the Western Indian Ocean Region**