

Advancing regional leadership for ocean action in the Western Indian Ocean

From commitments to integrated and locally grounded Ocean Governance



KEY MESSAGES

- Healthy oceans are fundamental to livelihoods, food security, climate resilience, tourism, and economic stability across the Western Indian Ocean region.
- Effective implementation of 30x30 targets requires moving beyond protected area coverage toward equitable, connected, and effectively governed marine conservation systems.
- Communities, LMMAs, OECMs, and small-scale fisheries systems are central to resilient and locally grounded ocean governance.
- Sustainable ocean action requires stronger regional cooperation, science-policy coordination, long-term financing, and integrated governance systems.
- The WIO region is increasingly emerging as a leader in practical and collaborative implementation approaches.

INTRODUCTION

The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region is emerging as an increasingly important global ocean region at the intersection of biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, sustainable fisheries, blue economy development, and community livelihoods. The region hosts globally significant coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass ecosystems, fisheries resources, and coastal communities that are central to food security, economic development, and climate adaptation across Eastern and Southern Africa.

At the same time, the region faces growing pressures from biodiversity loss, climate change, marine pollution, unsustainable fisheries practices, habitat degradation, and increasing competition for ocean space and resources. While countries and regional actors are advancing ambitious agendas linked to 30x30 implementation, marine spatial planning, blue carbon ecosystems, sustainable fisheries, and

blue economy development, significant implementation gaps remain.

The 11th Our Ocean Conference (OOC11), hosted in Kenya in June 2026 under the theme 'Our Ocean, Our Heritage, Our Future,' provides a historic opportunity for Africa and the WIO region to strengthen regional leadership, consolidate shared priorities, and position locally grounded ocean solutions within global ocean governance discussions.

EMERGING REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Effective and Equitable 30x30 Implementation CSOs in the WIO region emphasise that achieving Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework requires strengthening MPAs, recognising OECMs, supporting community-led conservation systems, improving ecological connectivity, and enhancing governance and management effectiveness.

Community-Led Conservation and Livelihood Systems

Consultations with LMMA networks, fisheries groups, BMUs, and local conservation practitioners demonstrate growing recognition that community-led systems are not only conservation mechanisms, but also governance, food security, livelihood, and climate resilience systems.

Climate Resilience and Blue Carbon Ecosystems

Coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass ecosystems are consistently identified as critical natural infrastructure supporting biodiversity, fisheries productivity, coastal protection, carbon sequestration, and climate adaptation.

Fisheries Governance and Transparency

Regional discussions reinforce growing concern about IUU fishing, fisheries transparency, and weak enforcement systems, and emphasise the





need for stronger regional monitoring and enforcement cooperation.

Sustainable Ocean Financing

Stakeholders consistently highlight financing gaps as a major constraint to implementation across the region and emphasised the need for long-term ocean financing systems and investment in local implementation capacity.

POLICY DIRECTIONS

Integrated Ocean Governance

Strengthen implementation systems that connect biodiversity conservation, fisheries governance, climate resilience, marine spatial planning, financing systems, and coastal livelihoods.

Regional Cooperation

Enhance regional cooperation through the Nairobi Convention and WIO-C platforms to support coordinated implementation and transboundary ecosystem governance.

Science-Policy Integration

Strengthen science-policy coordination, biodiversity information systems, and decision support tools that support practical and locally grounded ocean governance.

Community Inclusion

Ensure that communities, women, youth, and local governance systems are integrated into ocean governance and conservation planning processes.

Sustainable Investment

Mobilize long-term financing, partnerships, and investment to strengthen ocean resilience, conservation effectiveness, and sustainable blue economy transitions.

CONCLUSION

The Western Indian Ocean region is entering an important new phase of regional ocean governance. Increasingly, stakeholders across the region are moving beyond fragmented and sectoral approaches toward integrated systems that connect conservation, livelihoods, climate resilience, governance, financing, and implementation.

OOC11 and the Nairobi Convention COP12 provide important opportunities to strengthen African ocean leadership, mobilize partnerships and investment, elevate community perspectives, and accelerate implementation of practical and locally grounded ocean solutions.

Prepared through regional consultations coordinated under WIO-C in preparation for OOC11 and Nairobi Convention COP12.

WIOMSA
Mizingani Street,
House No. 734, Zanzibar
P.O Box 3298, Zanzibar, Tanzania
Tel: + 255 24 2233472/2234597