

Summary of the Marine Regions Forum 2023 7-9 November 2023

Hosted in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region by the United Republic of Tanzania and the Republic of Seychelles, the Marine Regions Forum 2023 met under the theme, “Navigating ocean sustainability in the WIO and beyond.” This conference, designed as an interactive platform for active and open engagement, brought together experts from the WIO and other regions to share knowledge and exchange best practices on ways of enhancing cooperation and coordination to advance ocean governance in the WIO region and beyond.

The Marine Regions Forum 2023 was designed as an interactive conference to encourage active participation in addressing specific issues through plenary and workshop sessions within the meeting’s topical strands, brought together by three daily themes – Inclusivity, Innovation, and Implementation.

The inaugural day of the Marine Regions Forum 2023 commenced with discussions under the theme of “Inclusivity,” setting the stage for exploration of diverse perspectives, equality promotion, and creating an inclusive atmosphere.

The focus on day two shifted to the theme of “Innovation,” with parallel sessions and a plenary delving into ground-breaking ideas and technologies to address the triple planetary crisis, foster a sustainable blue economy, and implement global goals at the regional level.

On the final day, the Forum concluded with discussions under the theme of “Implementation,” emphasizing practical application and strategies to turn ideas into action. Participants shared insights on overcoming challenges and ensuring tangible outcomes, contributing to the translation of discussions into real-world results. Plenary sessions and dialogue workshops addressed specific issues guided by four topical strands, around the conference theme: Tackling the triple planetary crisis; Fostering a sustainable blue economy; Implementing global goals at the regional level; and Regional ocean governance.

Like strands woven into a strong rope, these topical strands were bound together by the daily themes—Inclusivity, Innovation, and Implementation—yielding significant insights and outcomes for robust and collaborative ocean governance in the WIO.

The topical strand, **Tackling the triple planetary crisis**, involved extensive discussions on the urgent need to collectively address climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution as interconnected environmental emergencies. Sessions highlighted among others:



A family photo of Marine Regions Forum 2023 participants

- the accelerated rate of warming of the WIO, with an emphasis on the impacts on marine species, ecosystems, and potential food webs;
- the potential of a circular economy to tackle marine plastics, and the need to involve the plastics industry in combating plastic pollution;

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- the importance of Locally Managed Marine Area Networks (LMMAs) for community involvement in sustainable resource management;
- nature-based solutions (NbS), such as constructed wetlands for wastewater treatment;
- technological advancements including artificial intelligence (AI) to improve maritime transparency and tackle illegal fishing; and
- the need for specific guidance on adapting the blue economy in the face of climate change.

The discussion on the topical strand, **Fostering a sustainable blue economy**, acknowledged the potential for economic growth and underscored the importance of sustainability, equity, and inclusivity in the blue economy. Among others, sessions reported the need for:

- responsible ocean resource utilization, with a focus on protecting vital ecosystems;
- a Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) strategic framework for developing blue economy strategies;
- international cooperation mechanisms, such as the [WIO Symphony](#); and
- the crucial role played by the private sector in catalyzing a sustainable blue economy, and their role in driving Africa's aspirations and benefiting communities.

The strand on **Implementing global goals at the regional level** focused on, among others, the importance of achieving global goals at the regional level. Discussions addressed the relevance of:

- the recently adopted Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF);
- the ongoing Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment;
- the agreement under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Treaty); and
- ongoing deep-sea mining negotiations of the International Seabed Authority (ISA).

The **Regional ocean governance** strand delved into the roles of diverse entities in WIO ocean governance, with an emphasis on the development of the Nairobi Convention's Regional Ocean Governance Strategy (ROGS). Participants discussed institutional setups, financing mechanisms, and lessons learned from the ROGS process. They, among others:

- emphasized the importance of a participatory process in developing ocean governance for credibility and ownership;
- outlined priorities for regional ocean governance, including: maritime security, blue economy, environment and natural resources, and knowledge management and science;
- proposed the institutionalization of an apex decision-making body in the WIO region; and
- stressed the need to draw lessons from the African Union (AU) multi-actor task force, and to share best practice and lessons from other regions.

The Marine Regions Forum 2023, which convened from 7-9 November 2023, brought together 160 participants from the WIO and other regions. The conference was co-funded by the



Barbara Neumann, Research Institute for Sustainability, Helmholtz Centre Potsdam (RIFS)

European Union (EU), the Swedish Ministry for Climate and Enterprise, the German Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection, and received support from the Nairobi Convention Secretariat. The Marine Regions Forum 2023 has been organised jointly by RIFS, IDDRI and TMG - ThinkTank for Sustainability and its regional partners, namely the Nairobi Convention Secretariat, CORDIO East Africa, and the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA) together with Empower Ltd.

This report provides an overview of plenary sessions and selected dialogue discussions.

A Brief History of the Marine Regions Forum

The Marine Regions Forum is an initiative of the Partnership for Regional Ocean Governance, a collaborative initiative initially between the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI), TMG - Think Tank for Sustainability, and the UN Environment Programme. The IASS has since changed its institutional affiliation and name to Research Institute for Sustainability - Helmholtz Centre Potsdam (RIFS).

The idea of the Marine Regions Forum stemmed from commitments made by Germany at the UN Ocean Conference (5-9 June 2017, New York) and by the EU at the Our Ocean Conference (5-6 October 2017, Malta), announcing their support for the establishing of a multi-stakeholder platform for regional ocean governance.

Marine Regions Forum 2019: The [first Marine Regions Forum](#) conference took place from 30 September – 2 October 2019, in Berlin, Germany, under the theme, “Achieving a healthy ocean – Regional ocean governance beyond 2020.” This first meeting provided an opportunity for informal exchange and dialogue among decision makers, scientists, and civil society from the world's marine regions. The aim was to catalyze the transformation of ocean governance through regional actions and initiatives, in support of the ocean dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), especially Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 (life below water). The

meeting outcomes were shared with the 2020 UN Ocean Conference (2-6 June 2020, Lisbon, Portugal).

This report provides an overview of plenary sessions and selected dialogue discussions.

Report of the Marine Regions Forum 2023

Opening Session

The opening session was convened by Thomas Chali, Senior Environmental Officer, Vice President's Office, the United Republic of Tanzania. Barbara Neumann, RIFS, opened the plenary session on Tuesday morning, remarking that this is the second conference of the Marine Regions Forum. Highlighting the inclusive and participatory nature of the dialogues, she urged participants to take off their institutional hats and exchange their expert knowledge freely to achieve progress in ocean sustainability.

Dixon Waruinge, Coordinator, Nairobi Convention Secretariat, stressed the importance of regional cooperation and engagement, saying post-COVID-19 recovery entails ensuring enhanced resilience of ecosystems. He underlined the unique characteristics of the conference in providing stakeholder engagement and expressed hope that the meeting outcomes would provide actionable ideas for a healthier and wealthier Ocean, in the short-term and for generations to come.

Emilio Rossetti, Deputy Head, EU Delegation to Tanzania, spoke on behalf of Charlotta-Ozaki Macias, Ambassador of Sweden to Tanzania. He highlighted positive achievements for international ocean governance including the GBF, the BBNJ Treaty, and the World Trade Organization Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies. Noting that science underpins sustainable development in the Ocean, he highlighted Sweden's long-standing commitment to strengthening knowledge and institutional capacities in the WIO region, including support for the WIO Marine Science Association (WIOMSA).

Charlina Vladimirova Vitcheva, Director General, Marine Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission (EC), referred to the Ocean as a global asset that requires a transboundary and global response, saying the ocean agenda is high in EU priorities and a beacon for international cooperation. She highlighted the EU's support for the Marine Regions Forum to promote collaboration between different marine regions, enable the WIO region to achieve sustainable fisheries and sustainable green energy, and combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Denis Matatiken, Permanent Secretary of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Climate Change and Environment, Seychelles, stated that though the WIO region is united by shared challenges, the Ocean stands strong against these constraints. He urged participants to take a broad perspective that transcends national boundaries, to address such issues as overfishing, IUU fishing, pollution, piracy, and climate change. He emphasized that with united efforts, a more sustainable Ocean is indeed possible.

Aboud Jumbe, Principal Secretary at the Ministry of Blue Economy and Fisheries, Zanzibar, in the United Republic of Tanzania, stated that after the global shocks of COVID-19, the meeting serves as a platform to inspire a blue recovery. He highlighted the unique opportunity to bring together collective



Mary Ngelela Maganga, Permanent Secretary of the Environment, Tanzania

experiences of participants to ensure that a blue economy becomes a reality for the WIO region and the global Ocean. He reminded participants that being pro-nature, pro-people, and pro-climate is possible with joined hands.

Mary Ngelela Maganga, Permanent Secretary of the Environment, Tanzania, underscored the importance of the Marine Regions Forum 2023, noting it aims to promote collective responsibility to catalyze conservation and sustainable use of the WIO. She called on participants to make use of the conference to share successes, challenges, and knowledge to further develop the WIO region governance strategy to combat the triple planetary crisis – climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

Plenary on Building a Shared Understanding

The first plenary convened on Tuesday, setting the tone of the meeting to facilitate a shared understanding among participants regarding the themes of the meeting and the four topical strands for the dialogue workshops. Miranda Naiman, Founding Partner, Empower, moderated.

Introducing the topical strand on **Tackling the triple planetary crisis**, David Obura, Founding Director, Coastal Oceans Research and Development in the Indian Ocean (CORDIO) East Africa, stated that planetary crises are the main culprits in the collapse of natural and altered ecosystems, which have major impacts on human health and the global economy. Presenting findings of a marine and coastal horizon scan, he reported that equatorial marine communities are becoming



David Obura, Founding Director, CORDIO East Africa

depauperate due to climate migration evidenced by: species moving poleward; no species replacement at the equator; increasing climate stressors such as temperature, acidification, and deoxygenation; and increasing pollution and exploitation levels.

Aboud Jumbe introduced the topical strand on **Fostering the sustainable blue economy**. Among others, he highlighted the importance of: engaging in developing the science-policy nexus for knowledge management in ocean governance; enhancing mechanisms to address common regional and national challenges; and cross-cutting themes such as social inclusion and women's empowerment. He also stressed the need for strong and concrete policies for dynamic ocean governance, MSP, and sustainable value chains across the region.

Noting that global problems require global solutions, Minna Epps, Director, Global Marine and Polar Programme, IUCN, discussed the topical strand on **Implementing global goals at the regional level**. She presented the BBNJ Treaty as an example of the multilateralism required to address issues in ocean governance, and stressed that the agreement will strengthen existing mechanisms. She called on the WIO region to lead the way in implementation of the BBNJ Treaty to foster regional collaborations and partnerships.

Dixon Waruinge when introducing the **Regional ocean governance** strand, expressed the importance of appreciating the value of marine natural capital and delivering on the promise to maintain these values. He highlighted the importance of partnerships and the Nairobi Convention's tools to support ocean governance such as the [Integrated Coastal Zone Management \(ICZM\) Protocol on the Nairobi Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the WIO](#), and [A regional Marine Spatial Planning Strategy in the Western Indian Ocean](#).

Plenary on Inclusivity and Innovation in Ocean Governance

The second plenary convened on Wednesday and delved into inclusivity and innovation in ocean governance, addressing challenges and opportunities in regional governance. Panelists highlighted diverse ways of advancing scientific knowledge, sustainability, and innovation in marine science and maritime sectors. The session aimed to explore strategies for fostering



Vatosoa Rakotondrazafy, IUCN Madagascar

gender equity, inclusivity, and collaborative environments in ocean governance.

Miranda Naiman, Founder, Empower, facilitated a panel discussion consisting of: Valerie Hickey, Global Director of Environment, Natural Resources and Blue Economy, World Bank; Lorna Veronica Inniss, Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO Sub-commission for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions (IOCARIBE); Samantha Petersen de Villiers, South West Indian Ocean Regional Seascape Leader, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF); Vatosoa Rakotondrazafy, IUCN Eastern and Southern Africa; and Jaqueline Nduku Uku, Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI).

Panelists discussed the importance of: engaging actors across all levels in discussions of ocean governance; ensuring that innovation is supported by science and policy; and including aspects of business and finance in various decision-making processes related to the Ocean.

On how to include the voices and needs of all stakeholders, panelists and participants discussed the importance of including different actors from diverse sectors. They noted that local communities should be part of the dialogue from the beginning. They also stressed the importance of empowering community projects, including through locally managed trust funds, and linking communities to investors; and the need for transparency on issues such as carbon markets to ensure inclusivity.

On engaging with youth, participants and panelists noted youth's concern regarding lack of their inclusion in ocean-related meetings and actions. They suggested that facilitation to scholarships may encourage more youth in marine science careers. The example of the Caribbean region's decision to include youth in all task forces on ocean issues and decision making was shared.

Discussing small-scale fishers, Vatosoa Rakotondrazafy stressed the importance of recognizing and valuing traditional knowledge, and providing scientific, technical, and policy support for sustainable fisheries. Participants were encouraged to consider a holistic approach to accelerating actions – from laws to institutions, infrastructures, and access to finance.

Tackling the Triple Planetary Crisis

This topical strand focused on the need to address the interconnected environmental emergencies of climate change,



Miranda Naiman, Founder, Empower



Jared Bosire, Nairobi Convention Secretariat

biodiversity loss, and pollution in a holistic manner. Discussions under this topic examined, among others, equitable conservation, cutting-edge innovative solutions, and transformative actions needed to effectively address the crisis in the WIO and regions beyond.

Addressing the triple planetary crisis in the local coastal context in East Africa: Fostering resilient communities and ecosystems: On Tuesday, David Obura, CORDIO East Africa, moderated the session. Mike Roberts, Nelson Mandela University, discussing the local realities of the climate emergency reported that the WIO is warming faster than in other areas of the Ocean. He illustrated the impacts of marine species and ecosystems loss, projecting a possible crush of the food webs, which would lead to an eventual ecological desert.

Jared Bosire, Nairobi Convention Secretariat, emphasized the importance of circular economy, highlighting the plastics evolution including community projects that cash in on plastics by innovative commercial ideas, such as plastic bricks, artwork, and others. He reported that the UNEA 5.2 is a landmark resolution to end plastic pollution, setting the stage to create a legally binding treaty. He reported that the established INC is, among others: addressing the full lifecycle of plastics; promoting sustainable production and consumption of plastics; and advancing circular economy approaches.

David Obura noted the need to present the various levels of ecosystem collapse from least concern to critically endangered to allow local level decision making. He stressed that WIO coastal communities require an understanding of the impacts of biodiversity loss, including loss of income, on diminished quality of life and on future resilience against the triple planetary crisis. He emphasized the importance of local solutions, which must include elements of justice and equity.

Vatsoa Rakotondrzafy, IUCN Eastern and Southern Africa, discussed LMMAs in Madagascar, noting their role in sustainable fisheries and mangrove restoration. She singled out the MIHARI (Mitantana Harena and Ranomasina avy eny Ifotony – which translates to marine resources management at the local level) Network as an example of a successful LMMA, which provides a voice to local communities to ensure sustainable management of marine resources. She also mentioned the Great Blue Wall

initiative, which aims among others, to establish connected seascapes, and to support LMMAs establish locally driven trust funds.

Participants noted the need for a hopeful lens to view the crises to provide solutions. Some cautioned against the obsession with optimization of data noting the need for intervention even in times of uncertainty. Participants also stressed the need to communicate urgency, and to visualize the future based on the choices made today.

The discussions thereafter took place in breakout groups, identifying local solutions with foundations in NbS principles and integrated pathways to address the crises.

During the report back from the roundtable discussions, participants took note of proposals for NbS at the local level including: mangrove restoration with co-benefits for biodiversity and blue carbon; wastewater recovery through constructed wetlands; and seagrass beds for improved water health.

Participants highlighted the need to link solutions to food security and livelihoods, and ensure inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups. They further highlighted the need for a rights-based approach, with some emphasizing the need to understand the diversity of user-groups, due to the different ways that the crises impact their activities.

Innovation to tackle the climate change-driven triple planetary crisis: On Wednesday, Mike Roberts moderated the session. Douw Steyn, Plastics Federation of South Africa, discussed plastic pollution in Sub-Saharan Africa, providing an analysis of the situation in several countries of the WIO region.

Participants noted, among others, the need to address solutions with producers and several other stakeholders. They also underscored the importance of the African Marine Waste Network in bringing together diverse stakeholders to address and mitigate marine pollution in Africa at its source — on land among other sources. Some remarked that consumers have no control over plastics and packaging materials available, and, thus, there is a need to ensure the plastics industry plays a key role in combatting the problem rather than passing down the cost to consumers. They noted that viable solutions are those that also safeguard jobs and support enforcement of plastics regulation legislation.



View of the room during the "Tackling the Triple Planetary Crisis" session



Louis Celliers, Climate Service Center Germany

Stephen Mwangi, KMFRI, presented on wastewater treatment and innovations to tackle nutrient pollution in the WIO. He demonstrated a case study of wastewater treatment from a prison using constructed wetlands, showing how such green infrastructure functions to boost water quality. Participants noted that this method qualifies as a NbS and discussed ways of replicating this at different scales to increase ecosystem resilience.

Discussing technologies to support monitoring and surveillance, Ted Schmitt, Senior Director Conservation, Allen Institute for Artificial Intelligence (AI2), presented the Skylight technology, an AI platform that helps improve maritime transparency and monitors, among others, IUU fishing by identifying suspicious vessel behavior and alerting authorities to investigate and take necessary action.

Coastal adaptation in the WIO: From theory to practice:

On Thursday, participants engaged in a dialogue on the role of coastal areas and the Ocean in adaptation measures under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Judy Beaumont, International Ocean Institute, South Africa, highlighted the sixth assessment report (AR6) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and discussed the chapter on Africa, highlighting: key risks from climate change; implications of sea level rise for growing African cities; and risks to marine fisheries in Africa. She stressed that while the scientific evidence and information is available, it needs to be collated and utilized for adaptation planning for coastal areas and the Ocean.

Louis Celliers, Climate Service Center Germany, explained the UNFCCC national adaptation plans (NAPs) process and underscored that the coast and Ocean is not a specific sector in NAPs due to a lack of technical guidelines for their inclusion. He identified complexities in the NAPs process, pointing to limitations for adapting blue economy strategies.

Potlako Khati, Coastal Spatial Planning, South Africa, shared the experiences of his country in coastal zone climate change adaptation for the blue economy. He elaborated on the vulnerability of key socio-economic sectors in South Africa to climate change, and the intricacies involved in bridging the

gap between coastal governance and national climate change legislation.

Participants then engaged in a discussion on the need for specific guidance on coasts and the Ocean in adaptation measures, with ways of making progress while taking into account uncertainty in the Ocean and ecosystem integrity and productivity. They stressed the need to translate data to meaningful information that can be used by stakeholders of all levels in ocean and coastal adaptation.

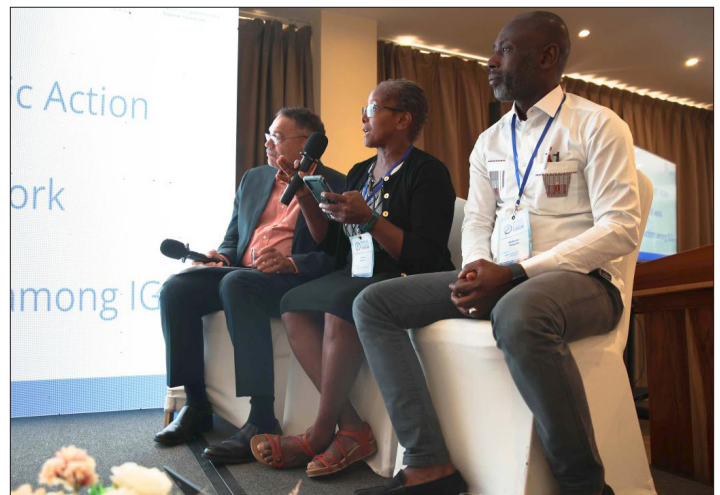
Fostering a Sustainable Blue Economy

The topical strand on fostering a sustainable blue economy focused on the Ocean's global impact on livelihoods, recognizing its potential for economic growth, and the need for sustainability, equity, and inclusivity in the blue economy. The strand explored responsible ocean resource utilization, emphasizing the protection of vital ecosystems.

Articulating MSP initiatives towards the co-creation of regional visions: This session convened on Wednesday and was co-chaired by Michele Quesada, UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC).

Harrison Ong'anda, KMFRI, presented the background of MSPs in the WIO and highlighted the importance of an MSP strategic framework. Noting the governance challenges and threats to MSPs, such as biodiversity loss and climate change, he explored different international cooperation mechanisms such as the [WIO Symphony](#), which is a tool developed with the purpose of supporting ecosystem-based MSP and marine management. He underscored the importance of dynamic stakeholder engagement and lively public interest in the various stages of the MSP processes.

Jaqueline Nduku Uku, KMFRI, discussed the role of MSP and the AU [Africa Blue Economy Strategy](#), stressing that the AU is in a good position to foster capacity building and support the harmonization of best practices in the African continent. She also highlighted the importance of: integrating culture, especially coastal cultures; safeguarding areas of traditional use and knowledge; validating data sets through stakeholder engagement; and investing in the MSP implementation process.



L-R: **Christopher John Corbin**, UNEP, **Lorna Veronica Inniss**, Head, IO-CARIBE, UNESCO, and **Abdoulaye Diagana**, Abidjan Convention, UNEP

Arthur Tuda, WIOMSA, explored ecosystems as the basis for a blue economy, highlighting the paradox that while resources are declining, economists are predicting continued growth of the blue economy. Presenting a donut model of the economy, he concluded that there should be a new way of thinking, with a regenerative approach to natural capital such as the ecosystem.

Stressing the importance of MSP collaboration, Abdoulaye Diagana, Convention for the Co-operation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region (Abidjan Convention), shared the challenges and benefits of a blue economy, highlighting the importance of resources and funding in developing MSP frameworks.

Stephen Patrick Kirkman, Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, South Africa, expounded on the outcomes and benefits of regional cross-border collaboration in MSP processes, using the potential workstreams for MSPs and Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs).

During a roundtable dialogue session, participants discussed among others: what is needed to move forward on a regional level; ways to overcome challenges of sector integration; and best ways to coordinate different initiatives. They also discussed ways to foster capacity building through education, highlighting the importance of building relationships with other sectors rather than focusing solely on data, and having a regional platform to share community of practice.

Advancing private sector involvement in ocean sustainability and governance in the WIO: On Thursday, Edward Kimakwa, Western Indian Ocean Governance Initiative (WIOGI) Coordinator, German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), chaired the session, noting the role played by the private sector in catalyzing sustainable blue economy.

Robin Farrington, WIOGI Project Manager GIZ, framed the session discussions saying that the private sector is the engine of the economy and has the biggest impact on the environment. He highlighted WIOGI's approach in enhancing collaboration with the private sector, through [Our Blue Future](#), a multi-stakeholder initiative for an inclusive and sustainable blue economy (ISBE) in the WIO region.

In opening remarks, Aboud Jumbe, Principal Secretary at the Ministry of Blue Economy and Fisheries, Zanzibar, in the United Republic of Tanzania, remarked that the private sector can play an important role in unlocking the WIO region's unique natural capital, and thus catalyze ISBE. He urged involving the sector in ICZM and MSP, adding that in the WIO both are two sides of the same coin.

Georges Mba-Asseko, Head, Blue Economy Division, AU, said the session is important in supporting the region to achieve the blue economy aspirations of the AU Agenda 2063, "The Africa We Want." He noted opportunities in strengthening small and medium enterprises (SMEs) for wealth generation in the WIO and urged creating enabling environments to attract private sector investment.

Discussions on how to make the contribution of the private sector in the blue economy more impactful was moderated by Sophie Masipa, World Ocean Council. In a case study on a blue



Edward Kimakwa, WIOGI Coordinator, GIZ, leading the celebration of partnerships for Our Blue Futures Transformation Network

tourism innovative initiative in the WIO, Sybille Riedmiller, Chumbe Island Coral Park, discussed the establishment of this marine park and forest reserve as the first privately managed one in the world. She discussed benefits for local communities, including job creation and increased awareness and actions to conserve coral reefs. She showed evidence of the effectiveness of the park as a marine protected area (MPA) in increasing fish biomass and causing spillover benefits to adjacent areas.

Presenting a second case study on addressing marine plastic pollution through circularity, Chris Whyte, Director, African Circular Economy Network (ACEN), noted the need to adopt circular economy approaches to tackle plastic pollution in the region. He equated recycling plastics to energy recycling, noting the need to scale technologies such as modular systems for biomass, plastics, and general waste recycling.

The breakout session facilitated by Mai El-Ashmawy, Collective Leadership Institute, focused on: ISBE solutions implemented by the private sector; ways of ensuring more impactful contributions of the private sector; and opportunities to scale up and strengthen partnerships for ISBE in the WIO region.

Discussions on the role of the private sector in financing ISBE transition in the WIO region, was moderated by Edward Kimakwa. Fahd Al-Guthmy, Wildlife Conservation Society, presented the Miamba Yetu Programme on Sustainable Reef Investments, funded by the Global Fund for Coral Reefs. He explained the use of blended finance integrated approaches, where donor funding is coupled with private financing to achieve positive benefits for the government, communities, and businesses.

Graham Haylor, Blue Planet Fund, discussed the £500 million Blue Planet Fund for developing countries to protect the marine environment and reduce poverty. He further highlighted the Ocean Community Empowerment and Nature (OCEAN) grants programme for local in-country projects aimed at delivering lasting change to the marine environment and coastal communities.

Following the presentations, participants met in two groups to discuss: inclusive access to SME financing in the WIO region; and an inclusive blue growth agenda in the financial sector.

Summarizing priority areas for action, Edward Kimakwa highlighted the need for, among others:

- a structured framework for collective and collaborative private sector engagement in the WIO region;
- taking stock of policy and legal frameworks, and assessing their implications on private sector investment in the area of ISBE;
- analysis of funding mechanisms and investment tools as enablers of private sector investment;
- evaluation of how different regional programmes and organizations prioritize the private sector in their portfolios; and
- lobbying and advocating for the private sector to apply the UNEP Sustainable Finance Initiative (SFI) principles.

He concluded the session by recommending the exploration of opportunities for strengthening private sector engagement through the Marine Regions Forum, Our Blue Future, and Wildlife Conservation Society, and others.

In closing, Georges Mba-Asseko, Head, Blue Economy Division, AU said the private sector will not only drive Africa's aspirations forward but also enable scaling down actions for the benefit of communities.

Implementing Global Goals at the Regional Level

Focused on the role of marine regions in attaining global goals and influencing international negotiations, this strand delved into how multilateralism is addressing challenging geopolitical scenarios and fostering global environmental commitments. Discussions assessed the relevance of the GBF, the BBNJ Treaty, ongoing negotiations for a plastics treaty, and discussions on deep-seabed mining on ocean governance in the WIO.

Negotiations on deep-sea mining: Where do we stand? Ben Boteler, RIFS, moderated this session on Tuesday, noting that the topic of deep-sea mining (DSM) has gained international traction in the past few years, involving a wide range of stakeholders including scientists, legal experts, and policymakers.

Kerry Sink, Principal Scientist, South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), shared the scientific rationale for the establishment of an MPA Network in relation to DSM in South Africa.

Kirsty McQuaid, University of Plymouth, presented on DSM habitats, elaborating on polymetallic nodule fields, polymetallic



Ben Boteler, RIFS

sulphides on hydrothermal vents, and ferromanganese crusts on seamounts.

Minna Epps, Director, Global Marine and Polar Programme, IUCN, presented a video showing increasing youth participation in DSM discussions. She facilitated discussions with participants on the different narratives surrounding DSM and the dual role of the ISA, which is aimed at regulating exploration for and exploitation of deep seabed minerals, and ensuring effective protection of marine environments.

Pradeep Singh, RIFS, presented a brief history of the ISA and the dynamics of regional negotiations at the ISA Assembly, particularly the ongoing debates on the call for a precautionary pause on DSM. Torsten Thiele, Founder, Global Ocean Trust, spoke on the need for fairness in DSM and the diverse interpretations of common heritage of humankind.

Robert Kiptoo Kibiwot, Deputy Director, Kenya International Boundaries Office, discussed the regional coordination of the African Group in the ISA Assembly, noting general agreement regarding a precautionary pause in DSM issues. Forbi Perise Eyong Nyosai, African Regional Representative, Sustainable Ocean Alliance, highlighted the involvement of young people from the African region, particularly in enriching academic knowledge for more reliable scientific evidence for decision making.

Participants engaged in an interactive debate on what DSM means for developed versus developing countries, and the perceived ecological impacts versus economic benefits. The future of the ISA and the interaction with the BBNJ Treaty was also discussed by participants.

Towards a healthy and clean WIO: Building on the region's successes to fight against plastic pollution: Ben Boteler introduced the session on Wednesday, mentioning the UNEA 5.2 resolution to end plastic pollution, as a major milestone for global action.

Luther Bois Anuker, Regional Office Eastern and Southern Africa, IUCN, co-chaired the session, remarking that plastics in the WIO are mostly imported, and thus require a global response to tackle. He drew attention to the [IUCN Circular Plastic Economy Innovation Lab](#) as a useful tool for the region to transition to a circular plastic economy.



Robert Kiptoo Kibiwot, Kenya International Boundaries Office

Minna Epps co-chaired the dialogue session and noted that the third session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment (INC-3), will convene in November 2023 to discuss the zero draft of the future plastics treaty. Zaynab Sadan, WWF South Africa, reported on WWF support to African negotiators and civil society organizations to prepare for INC negotiations. Cyrille Barnérias, French Biodiversity Agency, said the zero draft of the plastics treaty is a good basis for discussion on dealing with plastics.

Commenting on the zero draft, participants and discussants remarked that its current state reflects an “everything-on-the-table” approach, noting the need for more specificity to address concerns, such as: producer accountability policies; approaches to phase out the most high-risk and harmful plastics; tackling plastics leakage hotspots; and product refinement for recycling purposes.

Some participants called for the WIO to take the lead in pushing for a financial mechanism, and for the disclosure of dangerous contents in plastics. Several said means of implementation for the treaty should include a fit-for-purpose funding mechanism.

During an ensuing debate on data, participants highlighted data gaps on import, export, and leakage of plastics, and questioned whether data from industry is reliable, with some preferring data from science.

Debates on alternatives such as glass for drinking water ensued with some noting recycling glass bottles require large amounts of water for cleaning, which exacerbates water scarcity. Some also noted that the provision of clean tap water for all is a better option.

Providing insights from civil society organizations, Forbi Perise Eyong Nyosai discussed grassroots actions against plastic pollution, including community engagement, clean up exercises involving schools, and awareness-raising activities. Sarah Pima, Chief Executive Director, Human Dignity and Environment Care Foundation (HUDEFO) and Adaptation Hub reported support for waste pickers for targeted plastics removal from the environment.

Participants pointed out clean-up is ineffective in tackling the source of the problem due to continuous production of plastics. Some said clean up exercises promote the message about

willingness of consumers to clean and undermines the push for the industry to improve production design.

Chris Whyte, Founding Director, ACEN, said innovation is key to addressing the increasing cost of recycling, including in landfills. Paul de Bruyn, Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), reported efforts to tackle plastics from discarded fishing gear and devices.

Jared Bosire, Nairobi Convention, drew attention to resources such as the [Synthesis Report on Marine plastic litter in the WIO region: Status, implications on the environment, human populations and effectiveness of measures and opportunities](#).

Peter Manyara, IUCN, reported on among others, the [End Plastic Pollution International Collaborative \(EPPIC\)](#), which seeks to galvanize global action on plastic pollution by supporting projects to make the full lifecycle of plastic more sustainable, beginning with changing the design and use of plastic products.

Conservation and sustainable use of high seas biodiversity:

What’s at stake in the WIO? On Thursday, Kerry Sink highlighted the interconnectedness of the Ocean, pointing out that biodiversity within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of coastal states affect the biodiversity in the high seas. Identifying key areas to consider for offshore MPAs, she shared South Africa’s experience in systematic conservation approach by optimizing the areas for MPAs, which also takes into consideration industry partners.

Francis Marsac, French Institute of Research for Sustainable Development (IRD), presented on the challenges of tuna fisheries management in the WIO, given the economic importance of fisheries in the region. He noted the structural and active connectivity of the EEZ and areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) and explored impacts and mitigation undertaken by the IOTC.

Dixon Waruinge, Coordinator, Nairobi Convention Secretariat, highlighted the role the Nairobi Convention can play in the high seas, as the adjacency concept brings relevance to the EEZ in ABNJ discussions. He urged participants to be innovative and to use existing regional frameworks in the conservation and sustainable use of high seas biodiversity.

Minna Epps brought attention to the BBNJ Treaty and invited speakers to reflect on the importance of encouraging its ratification and implementation. Paul de Bruyn, IOCT, noted that the BBNJ Treaty has particular importance to regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) because the Treaty applies to the geographical area where they are conducting operations. He stressed that consultation with all stakeholders is a necessity, and thus the BBNJ Treaty presents an opportunity to strengthen and formalize collaborations.

Cyrille Barnérias shared the efforts of the [Sustainable Ocean Initiative](#) to identify best practices among stakeholders, create partnerships, and improve collaborations to bridge the gap between conservation and sustainable use.

Ted Schmitt, Senior Director, Conservation, AI2, presented ways in which AI can be used for MPAs in the high seas to focus and optimize resources.



Kerry Sink, South African National Biodiversity Institute

Torsten Thiele discussed funding opportunities for implementing the BBNJ Treaty and stressed that earlier investments will result in greater returns. He pointed to Article 52 of the BBNJ Treaty on financial resources and mechanisms, which reflects the requirements put forth by developing countries during the negotiations.

Chrissan Handy Barbe, Department of Blue Economy, Seychelles, stressed that lack of scientific and technical capacity, and financial resources can hinder Treaty ratification and implementation.

Regional Ocean Governance

This topical strand delved into the roles of diverse entities to regional ocean governance in the WIO. Discussions focused on among others, the Nairobi Convention's process of developing ROGS. Additionally, the sessions examined institutional setups and financing mechanisms for a WIO ROGS.

Sharing the ROGS process with the WIO and beyond:

On Wednesday, Tim Andrew, Nairobi Convention Secretariat, Christopher Corbin, Cartagena Convention Secretariat, and Claudette Briere Spiteri, UNESCO-IOC, co-chaired this session.

Dominic Stucker, Managing Partner, Collective Leadership Institute, explained steps undertaken in the WIO to develop ocean governance and information management strategies. He highlighted that the ROGS emerging from this process will have a high level of credibility and ownership because they are participatory in nature.

Kieran Kelleher, ROGS Adviser, Nairobi Convention, highlighted regional priorities identified during the ROGS development within four clusters of topics: maritime security, blue economy, environment and natural resources, and knowledge management and science. He stressed the importance of observing and learning from other regions to address challenges in a functional and efficient manner. He further mentioned discussions of institutionalization of an apex decision-making body in the WIO region.

Gina Bonne, Indian Ocean Commission, shared lessons learned during a multi-actor task force comprising of state and non-state country representatives and representatives of the

regional economic committees, the Indian Ocean Commission, the AU, and others to provide an inclusive forum for stakeholder dialogue and collaboration.

Claudette Briere Spiteri explored the role of large marine ecosystems (LMEs) in advancing regional ocean governance and building partnerships. She highlighted the importance of LMEs in fostering strategic collaborations. She elaborated on an assessment based on the five LME approach modules: pollution and ecosystem health; fish and fisheries; socioeconomics; productivity; and governance.

A roundtable discussion, chaired by Christopher Corbin, elaborated on ROGS, their challenges, best practices, lessons, and adaptations made in the WIO and other regions. The discussion involved five panelists: Thandiwe Gxaba, Benguela Current Commission; Aboubacar Sidibé, Canary Current Large Marine Ecosystem (CCLME); Abdoulaye Diagana, Abidjan Convention; Mahesh Pradhan, Coordinating Body of the Seas of East Asia; and Lorna Inniss, IOCARIBE.

They shared perspectives from different regions elaborating on successes, challenges, and lessons learned in MSP processes, strategic action programs, and joint actions or partnerships. Providing insights from the Benguela Current Commission, Gxaba shared steps taken in Angola, Namibia and South Africa, including the use of MSPs and engaging youth ambassadors for activities undertaken at the national level.

Participants debated on the best path forward, including the need to balance regional action with national sovereignty. Looking at examples from other regions, they discussed the viability of having an apex decision-making body in the WIO for better regional decision making.

Aboubacar Sidibé discussed the importance of an inclusive and participatory mechanism and a dynamic science-policy interface for decision makers and stakeholders and shared some lessons learned from ROGS co-development process in the CCLME area, including the establishment of the Ecosystem Working Group for the reinforcement of scientific knowledge and evidence. Panelists and participants agreed on the need to engage with more stakeholders, especially the private sector, and explored ways to include them in the process of developing



L-R: **Thandiwe Gxaba**, Benguela Current Convention; **Aboubacar Sidibé**, Canary Current Large Marine Ecosystem (CCLME); and **Mahesh Pradhan**, Coordinating Body of the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA)



Dixon Waruinge, Nairobi Convention Secretariat



Kareen Andriantsiferana, WWF

strategies. They spoke on the importance of political mandates and will in the process of ROGS, and the potential of regional mechanisms to cohesively bring together and complement the different national strategies.

Plenary on Shaping the Path Ahead

In the concluding plenary session on Thursday, representatives of the WIO region seized the opportunity to articulate their priorities and future actions in ocean governance. They offered perspectives on conference deliberations, presenting views for advancing ocean governance, and reflecting on regional and national requirements to bring about positive change.

Ella Naiman, Empower, opened the panel discussion, which also included: Dustan Shimbo, Vice President's Office, Tanzania; Denis Matatiken, Ministry of Agriculture, Climate Change and Environment, Seychelles; Kareen Andriantsiferana, WWF Madagascar; Dixon Waruinge, Nairobi Convention Secretariat; and Abdoulaye Diagana, Abidjan Convention.

Panelists reflected on the three days of the meeting and shared their highlights based on the daily themes of inclusion, innovation, and implementation. Dixon Waruinge said the application of new technologies and data for solutions in the marine space stood out. Kareen Andriantsiferana, sharing the perspectives of early career professionals, expressed the group's appreciation for the opportunity to learn and exchange ideas with more experienced experts. Dustan Shimbo remarked that the sessions broadened his understanding of the rich diversity of marine resources which strengthened his optimism for a sustainable blue economy.

Reflecting on the challenges in the region, panelists underscored that the many discussions in the three days revealed that there is a solution to the problems plaguing the WIO region. He added that these solutions are backed by an abundance of scientific data and technologies to translate the meeting outcomes into actionable policies.

On what happens next, Andriantsiferana highlighted the need to create a safe space for the voices of youth. Participants also highlighted the need to take ocean literacy forward into schools in a deliberate manner to achieve an intergenerational dialogue. Several panelists and participants highlighted the need for wider participation in the dialogues from the grassroots level to top

decision-makers. Some noted the need to consider business and industry players as part of the solution, and not just as sources of the problem.

Via video message, Paubert Mahatante, Minister for Fisheries and Blue Economy, Madagascar, highlighted the importance of addressing the triple planetary crisis, particularly for small island states, and expressed hope that the meeting outcomes will catalyze action for the sake of future generations.

In closing remarks, Barbara Neumann, Research Institute for Sustainability (RIFS) and co-lead of the Marine Regions Forum, remarked that the Forum has been a major milestone since its establishment in 2017, and the first conference, which was held in 2019. She reported that Forum has achieved the objective of providing a co-creative space, noting the participation of close to 160 experts from around the world. She highlighted the outcomes present several take home messages, adding that what stood out the most for her is the call to bring youth into the conversations on ocean governance.

Shannon Hampton, RIFS, received a standing ovation on behalf of the organizing team. In a vote of thanks, she expressed gratitude to the funders, partners, participants, and all who worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the meeting. She closed the meeting at 17:38pm EAT.

Upcoming Meetings

INC-3 on Plastic Pollution: INC-3 will focus on a zero draft of the instrument. **dates:** 13-17 November 2023 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** unep.org/about-un-environment/inc-plastic-pollution

Fourth Nature for Life Hub 2023: This event will showcase opportunities to accelerate action on the GBF and place nature at the heart of development. The Hub aims to bring together governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector to exchange knowledge and solutions, promote collaboration and partnerships, and raise awareness and countries' ambitions to deliver National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). **dates:** 7-9 November 2023 **location:** virtual **www:** learningfornature.org/en/nature-for-life-hub-2023

2023 UN Climate Change Conference: The Conference comprises: COP 28 to the UNFCCC; the fifth meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties (MOP) to the Paris Agreement (CMA 5); the 18th meeting of the COP serving as the MOP to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 18); and the 59th meetings of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI 59) and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA 59). Among other things, COP 28 will conclude the first Global Stocktake of implementation of the Paris Agreement. **dates:** 30 November - 12 December 2023 **location:** Dubai, United Arab Emirates **www:** cop28.com/en

23rd Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention: This meeting will address protection of the marine environment and the coastal region of the Mediterranean. It will convene under the theme "From decisions to actions." **dates:** 4-8 December 2023 **location:** Portorož, Slovenia **www:** unepmap/meetings/calendar

OEWG 2: The second session of the *ad hoc* open-ended working group on a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution (OEWG 2) will continue its work. **dates:** 11-15 December 2023 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** [unep.org/events/conference/oewg-2-science-policy-panel-contribute-further-sound-management-chemicals-and](https://www.unep.org/events/conference/oewg-2-science-policy-panel-contribute-further-sound-management-chemicals-and)

Sixth meeting of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6): UNEA-6 will convene under the theme “Effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.” **dates:** 26 February – 1 March 2024 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** [unep.org/environmentassembly/unea6](https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/unea6)

2024 UN Ocean Decade Conference: The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) will bring together ocean stakeholders to ensure ocean science supports countries in achieving SDG 14 (life below water). **dates:** 10-12 April 2024 **location:** Barcelona, Spain **www:** oceansdecade.org/news/barcelona-to-host-2024-un-ocean-decade-conference/

10th World Water Forum: The Forum is organized every three years and provides a unique platform where the water community and key decision makers can collaborate and make long-term progress on global water challenges. **dates:** 18-24 May 2024 **location:** Bali, Indonesia **www:** [worldwaterforum.org/wwf](https://www.worldwaterforum.org/wwf)

Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4): SIDS4 will bring together leaders to assess the ability of SIDS to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs and discuss a new programme of action for SIDS. The Conference will convene under the theme “Charting the Course Toward Resilient Prosperity.” **dates:** 27-30 May 2024 **location:** Saint John’s, Antigua and Barbuda **www:** sdgs.un.org/smallislands

Third UN Ocean Conference Stakeholder Meeting: A stakeholder meeting will convene in advance of the Third UN Ocean Conference, which will be held in June 2025. The meeting serves as a consultation with civil society and will include NGO participation. **dates:** June 2024 **location:** Costa Rica **www:** ocean-climate.org/en/unoc2025/

2024 UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF): The 2024 session of the HLPF will be the 12th session of the HLPF and will take place under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council under the theme “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: The effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions.” It will include an in-depth review of SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals). **dates:** 8-18 July 2024 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** hlpf.un.org/

The International Water Association (IWA) World Water Congress and Exhibition 2024: The IWA World Water Congress and Exhibition is the global event for water professionals covering the full water cycle. As the Congress rotates through

cities and countries, each event has an extra emphasis on issues of specific interest to the region. **dates:** 11-15 August 2024 **location:** Toronto, Canada **www:** [worldwatercongress.org/](https://www.worldwatercongress.org/)

Summit of the Future: The Summit aims to accelerate progress towards international commitments and take concrete action to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities, with an action-oriented outcome document called ‘The Pact for the Future.’ **dates:** 22-23 September 2024 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** [un.org/en/summit-of-the-future](https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future)

2024 Global Nature Positive Summit: The first Global Nature Positive Summit will bring together delegates from around the world including ministers, environment groups, First Nations Peoples, business representatives, scientists, and community leaders to consider how to supercharge investment in projects that repair nature. **dates:** October 2024 **location:** Sydney, Australia **www:** dcceew.gov.au/environment/international/nature-positive-summit

UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 16): COP 16 will convene in 2024 on a venue to be decided. **dates:** 21 October - 1 November 2024 **location:** TBC cbd.int/meetings

For additional upcoming events, see: sdg.iisd.org

Glossary

AU	African Union
BBNJ	Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction
CORDIO	Coastal Oceans Research and Development in the Indian Ocean
DSM	Deep seabed mining
GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
ICZM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
INC	Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ISA	International Seabed Authority
ISBE	Inclusive and Sustainable Blue Economy
IUU	Illegal, unreported and unregulated
KMFRI	Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute
LME	Large Marine Ecosystem
LMMA	Locally Managed Marine Area Networks
MPA	Marine protected area
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
NbS	Nature-based solutions
RIFS	Research Institute for Sustainability Helmholtz Centre Potsdam
ROGS	Regional Ocean Governance Strategy
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
WIO	Western Indian Ocean
WIOMSA	Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature