



# MARINE REGIONS FORUM 2023

Navigating ocean sustainability  
in the Western Indian Ocean  
and beyond

7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

## KEY MESSAGES

### At a glance:

1. Foster inclusivity for tackling the ocean's crises.
2. Mobilise resources and capacities for a healthy and sustainably managed ocean.
3. Advance innovations for conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.
4. Tackling the triple planetary crisis — collaboration is key.
5. Foster a sustainable blue economy.
6. Make the most of global goals at the regional level.
7. Catalyse implementation and action at the regional level — in the WIO and beyond.

The Marine Regions Forum is coordinated by:



The Marine Regions Forum is co-funded by:



The Marine Regions Forum 2023 Conference is co-hosted by:  
The United Republic of Tanzania in collaboration with the Republic of Seychelles





# KEY MESSAGES<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The Marine Regions Forum 2023 was held under the headline “*Navigating Ocean Sustainability in the Western Indian Ocean and Beyond*”, placing a focus on the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region and its challenges, and featuring many of the region’s ocean actors and experts. It provided an opportunity to reconnect in-person after the COVID-19 pandemic in a biodiversity-rich area that is particularly vulnerable to climate change, food insecurity and where a large proportion of the population is reliant on the coast for their livelihoods. But the WIO region is also pioneering a regional ocean governance strategy and is a hub of research, capacity development and science-to-policy engagement.

This conference provided a platform to share best practices from the WIO region with other marine regions and learn from experiences from other parts of the world. Further, the conference offered a space for on-going processes to receive input from stakeholders and advance work, such as for the regional ocean governance strategy for the WIO that is being developed through an extensive collaborative process and under the auspices of the Nairobi Convention Secretariat. And, at a time where it can feel like international relationships are breaking down, and nations are looking inwards more than out, it was encouraging to gather over 180 people in Dar es Salaam and be hosted by both the United Republic of Tanzania and Republic of Seychelles to look at ways to work together towards a common goal of improved ocean governance at national, regional, and global levels.

The conference programme of the Marine Regions Forum 2023 was developed together with partners from the WIO region and experts engaging in the region and built on a yearlong process of engagement and consultation. The coordinating team facilitated the overall co-design and co-delivery of the Marine Regions Forum conference. The shaping of the programme, fine-tuning of content, the selection of speakers and other contributors, and the moderation of sessions and discussions at the conference were a collaborative effort of the team, its partners, and the co-chairs of topical strands and sessions. This is reflected in the key messages of the Marine Regions Forum 2023 which have been compiled by the coordinating team from summary notes of plenaries and workshop sessions and developed jointly with the co-chairs. Although the four topical strands dealt with a broad range of issues, there were commonalities that spread across the discussions. These are summarised below as key messages that emerged and stood out from the three days of the conference.

[1] The “Key Messages” are part of the conference report of the Marine Regions Forum 2023 and should be cited as follows: “Hampton, S.L., Cremers, K., Müller, A., Neumann, B., Rochette, J., Sciacca, A., von Pogrell, L., and Weiland, L. (eds.), 2024. Marine Regions Forum 2023: Navigating ocean sustainability in the Western Indian Ocean and beyond. Conference report. — Marine Regions Forum 2023, 7–9 November 2023, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. DOI: 10.48481/rifs.2024.001” The conference report of the Marine Regions Forum 2023 is also available here: [www.prog-ocean.org/marine-regions-forum/resources/](http://www.prog-ocean.org/marine-regions-forum/resources/)

# Key messages from the Marine Regions Forum 2023

## (1) FOSTER INCLUSIVITY FOR TACKLING THE OCEAN'S CRISES.

The ocean is one ocean, and many of the marine challenges we are facing, including the triple planetary crisis, can only be solved through a united front, and regional or global collaboration. *Knowledge-based decision making* is required to tackle large and complex challenges the ocean and people are facing, and a *precautionary approach* should be adopted until adequate information and policy is in place, to make responsible, fair, and equitable decisions.

*Collaboration* is key to addressing transboundary and global challenges, and for implementing global goals at the regional level. Collaboration is particularly key in a context of limited human and financial resources for effective implementation, both in research and in policy and decision-making. A co-creation process is crucial, and successful collaboration requires that role assignments and responsibilities are clearly defined. There is a need to recognise that not all actors, including local communities or private sector entities, have the same concerns or priorities, but a common understanding of expectations and clear communication can increase buy-in and improve collaboration efforts.

Tackling the challenges also requires establishing *enabling conditions for effective implementation of policies such as* community involvement, or the use of the latest technology and methods for supporting knowledge-based decision making. Technological or methodological innovations are demanded to advance policy implementation. Clear *indicators* of effects and impacts are needed to measure the success of strategies and plans and determine action, such as upscaling of measures where positive impacts were achieved, or as incentive to motivate for resources. *Inclusivity* is key enabler for effective implementation of policies and goals. It is indispensable to include diverse voices in research, policy development and decision-making — from design to dissemination — and incorporate diverse forms of knowledge and understanding in the process. This includes women, youth, coastal communities, and the private sector.

However, it is not sufficient to just include these voices, it is equally important to recognise that different sectors and stakeholders have different perspectives and understandings of the issues being explored. *Safe spaces* and discussions based on *trust and openness* are needed, and sectors need to be empowered to contribute to discussions and decision making. There is value in an integrated approach, with collaboration between communities, businesses, and conservationists. A *participatory process* is important when developing e.g., ocean governance strategies, to ensure credibility, ownership, and contextual relevance. When engaging in multi-stakeholder processes, patience and time is an important factor, and collaboration methodologies, the type of engagement processes, and trusting relationships matter.

## (2) MOBILISE RESOURCES AND CAPACITIES FOR A HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLY MANAGED OCEAN.

*Innovations in financing mechanisms* are required for achieving a healthy and sustainably managed ocean. Challenges in blue finance include creating an enabling policy environment, community involvement, enhancing the role of commercial banks, and addressing sustainability and project impacts. Blending financing, ensuring ownership, and building capacity are also hurdles. Solutions involve engaging with financial facilities like the African Bank and the World Bank to support ocean conservation through *investable programmes*, which is not yet successfully adapted for smaller scale initiatives. A *blue taxonomy* can highlight where funding should be going. It can provide a structure to prioritise and guide sustainable investments (green taxonomy applied to the ocean).

It is recognised that large organisations have a different kind of access to funds because of their capacity to e.g., write proposals. It would *increase inclusivity* if such funding came with a requirement to include local or grassroots organisations, amongst others. Developing *specialised funding streams* catered to different types of actors could also support inclusivity and enhance diversity in processes. It is recommended to use *bottom-up and co-creative approaches* to incorporate multi-stakeholder perspectives in a project's design phase, to test approaches (proto-typing), and allow for changes according to feedback received from stakeholders.

*Capacity development* is required for community level governance to be effective, but communities also need to be *empowered* to be involved in both planning and implementation of ocean management measures. For example, a growing number of ecosystem restoration initiatives are currently underway in the WIO, and engaging local communities early in restoration efforts ensures community ownership, with special attention to gender considerations. Capacity development is also required to interact more effectively with the private sector including a better understanding of *entrepreneurial and investment opportunities* particularly for micro, small and medium enterprises. *Better understanding of private sector frameworks is required*, including environmental, social, and governance (ESG) reporting, International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) and International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).

The *private sector* can play a crucial role in advancing e.g., the tourism blue value chain, in supporting community empowerment, engaging in carbon dialogue, financing programs for protecting critical habitats, and contributing to innovative technologies for monitoring and surveillance. There are *innovative economic opportunities* that should be explored to access carbon credits, ecosystem restoration, waste-to-value treatment plants, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) co-management with revenue streams, and plastic waste recycling.

### **(3) ADVANCE INNOVATIONS FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF MARINE RESOURCES.**

Latest *innovations from diverse sectors* might have a decisive role in ocean management. Sectors should make the most of *new and emerging technology*, including artificial intelligence and machine learning. Novel technologies and methods can also make the field interesting and attractive to the youth. New methods should be explored to disseminate information to policy makers and the public. Innovative technology should be employed together with capacity development.

Innovations in *future scenario planning* and *high-resolution modelling* should inform decision making and governance. These can contribute to the understanding of species distributions considering climate change impacts or how to respond to climate change impacts on coastal ecosystems. For example, fisheries management, including enforcement, can benefit from the latest technology and models to combat illegal fishing, and from employing adaptive strategies such as area-based management. But such new models and information sources also need to be synthesised into information that is practical and can be incorporated into decision making and ocean literature.

Metrics and frameworks that *measure return on investment* against clear indicators need to be established and used effectively. For example, monitoring carbon, particularly through community-led blue carbon projects, provides a tangible metric for valuing and addressing the restoration or degradation of marine ecosystems. As valuing the ocean is inherently complex, emphasis on *integrating diverse approaches to valuing the ocean*, recognising the need to account for changes and prioritise relative values over absolute metrics is needed. Innovative metrics that show impact and benefits are crucial to make visible the links to the investment made. *Ocean accounts* can help standardise such reporting and tracking of impact.

*Regional collaboration efforts* will be enhanced if *sharing of information, lessons learned, and regional initiatives* can be accessible on a *regional platform, for example*. Networks for coordination of proposals and initiatives, including Marine Spatial Planning initiatives and MPA networks,

and dedicated science-to-policy platforms can avoid duplication of efforts, support collaboration efforts, enhance information sharing and improve communication among stakeholders. *Implementation and monitoring plans* to measure progress of regional ocean governance strategies and other regional and international instruments are helpful to ensure that all areas are implemented with clearly defined targets and indicators.

The *Nairobi Convention's Information Management Strategy* is an example of an innovative solution. It is a framework for an information system, not a data system, meaning that no raw data will be added, and it should provide information that is useful and accessible for effective decision making. It would contribute to informing the Regional Ocean Governance Strategy of the WIO by addressing the evolving dynamics of the human-ocean nexus. Information Management Strategies like this can help enhance the role of the ocean governance strategies in decision-making and can identify key areas of missing information and track progress through shared information.

#### **(4) TACKLING THE TRIPLE PLANETARY CRISIS — COLLABORATION IS KEY.**

Certain challenges, such as climate change and plastic pollution, can only be tackled through a *collaborative approach*, bringing together a diversity of stakeholders and actors for joint action. In the case of plastic, it requires the inclusion of the plastic industry, besides policy, society, and other private industry.

It must also be acknowledged that despite being a minor producer of plastic waste or carbon emissions, regions like the WIO are susceptible to the impacts of these, and in some cases disproportionately affected. The complexity and diversity of the situation calls for strengthened *regional cooperation* as well as *country-specific interventions*, such as through regional policy, improved national legislation, community actions, and a global shift towards a circular economy.

#### **(5) FOSTER A SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY.**

The ocean is also a source of opportunities, particularly in the WIO region where the blue economy is looked to as a source of economic growth. This comes with the need for *inclusive, equitable access*, and *enabling policy* and *legislative frameworks* in addition to *knowledge-based decision making* for a sustainable blue economy. Collaboration was identified as a key factor in accessing financial resources, sharing experience, prioritising, and upscaling actions, and to increase visibility of successful initiatives.

But there also needs to be political will to develop a sustainable blue economy and create *enabling legislation and policy framework* to remove barriers to investment. This could include supporting entrepreneurship including the support of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), introducing tax incentives, and involving savings and credit cooperative organisations and climate trust funds, promoting a blue/green transition, and supporting public private partnerships. Approaches could further include tailored grants and soft loans tailored to meet MSME's specific needs, establishing credit lines for MSMEs, including the implementation of microcredit initiatives, and involving Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCOs) and Climate Trust Funds (CTF). Blended finance mechanisms are recognised as strategic to drive inclusive sustainable blue economy solutions forward. Further recommendations for advancing the blue economy included tax reforms, financial support for reporting standards (ESG, IFRS, ISSB) and investments in waste collection and infrastructure.

*Innovative metrics and models* need to be used to assess the value of the ocean, including non-market values. Assessing the WIO's role in the blue economy calls for a shift from traditional GDP-centred models to new ocean wealth models, considering externalities, sustainability, and non-market values.

## (6) MAKE THE MOST OF GLOBAL GOALS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL.

Global discussions, treaties and agreements can generate positive change for sustainable ocean management — and catalyse regional and national action. For example, the recently signed *BBNJ Agreement*, developed under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ), is a positive development for biodiversity conservation in areas beyond national jurisdiction. And it is extremely important for the health of coastal waters and resources, including of the WIO states, that are connected to the high seas' ecosystems. The future plastics treaty that is currently negotiated as international legally binding agreement to combat plastic pollution can also be an effective tool — if it compels states to act while addressing equity issues and considering the needs of African countries.

*Regional consensus and ownership*, along with country participation, are enabling factors for mainstreaming global policy processes into national planning processes. International and regional agreements are a way to *spearhead strategic action* and incorporate considerations for equitable solutions. *Capacity development* is required for national and regional bodies to effectively implement global treaties and decisions.

The effective implementation of the BBNJ Agreement will require a *strong coordination between and among global and regional organisations*, and interregional collaboration will be crucial to identify best practices, foster partnerships, build capacity, and monitor progress. This will be true for the possible future plastics treaty too.

It should be recognised that international discussions and debates are not accessible to all levels of society or all stakeholders in ocean governance. For example, discussions at the *International Seabed Authority* cover a wide range of particularly complex issues (mining code, periodic review, 2-year rule), not all of which are understood by society at large, and a debate is needed on the possible impacts of deep seabed mining and the true benefits to society. *Transparency of discussions held in global fora* is indispensable and records of these should be available for all interested parties.

## (7) CATALYSE IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTION AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL — IN THE WIO AND BEYOND.

It is important to *align action with regional and continental visions*, such as the African Union's vision for a prosperous blue economy, to maximise both impact and potential for regional collaboration or regional data sharing. Effective implementation requires *clear mandates* across different agencies that remain consistent and cohesive. This needs to be supported by *political will, capacity building and financial support* to fulfil mandates. Building on existing frameworks and knowledge can help accelerate progress. To be truly effective, policies and plans need to take a *long-term vision* approach.

The *Marine Regions Forum* as an informal platform and forum for open exchange, networking and fostering of collaboration is an opportunity to catalyse regional action. However, it is crucial to go beyond discussions and prioritising solutions and focus on how interventions are implemented.

A *regional ocean governance strategy* (ROGS) such as the one currently developed by the Nairobi Convention is an innovative approach to enhancing regional ocean governance initiatives. It must be recognised as a continuous process that can include different methods of cooperation such as various sorts of task forces and working groups. It should not be seen as an instruction manual, but a facilitating document that provides a framework for discussion, collaboration, and joint implementation. It can guide stakeholders at intersections among sectors at the subregional and national level and should complement existing frameworks and strategies in the region. However, its development requires financial and technical resources as well as finding common areas of agreement, as the ocean is a shared resource. The Nairobi Convention's member states



need to be involved in developing the strategy’s contents and implementation. And as regional economic communities and Indian Ocean Commission are keen to play a role in the implementation of the ROGS, secretariats of regional bodies like these should be mobilised to access funding and capacity to support the countries.

## About the Marine Regions Forum 2023

The Marine Regions Forum 2023 built on the outcomes achieved and lessons learned from the first conference in 2019 in Berlin, Germany, which had established the Marine Regions Forum as an informal platform for exchange and joint learning on regional ocean governance, building collaborations and advancing practices and approaches. As the Marine Regions Forum is grounded in a triple scale approach — supporting progress within marine regions, advancing dialogue among marine regions, and giving regional ocean governance a voice in global processes — it was time to make a step forward from the 2019 global level exchange to where we believe change can be made to happen best: the regional level. And so, under the banner “Navigating Ocean Sustainability in the Western Indian Ocean and Beyond”, the Marine Regions Forum in 2023 held its second multi-stakeholder conference from 7–9 November 2023 in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania — and for the first time with a dedication to a particular marine region, the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region.

The conference was possible thanks to the hosts, the United Republic of Tanzania and Republic of Seychelles, financial support from the European Union, the German Government, and the Government of Sweden as well as significant financial and technical input from our partners, the Nairobi Convention Secretariat.

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Group photo of participants at the Marine Regions Forum 2023



# Imprint

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