



# Regional coordination for a healthy Western Indian Ocean

## THE SOURCE-TO-SEA CHALLENGE

The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region includes 10 countries: Comoros, France (Réunion), Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, and Tanzania. The WIO, one of the least ecologically disturbed areas globally, is under threat due to increasing anthropogenic pressures. Over 60 million people inhabit the region and are mostly dependent on coastal and marine resources with an estimated value of over 25 billion USD annually. However, rapid population growth and land-based activities are causing environmental degradation through

pollution, habitat destruction, and changes in freshwater flows and sediment loads. Pollutants flowing into the ocean include household and industrial sewage, solid waste, and nutrients. Physical alteration and loss of critical habitats, such as mangroves, seagrass beds, and coral reefs, are also major concerns. Climate change exacerbates these threats due to abnormal rainfall patterns, droughts, floods, and sea level changes. The countries in the region, many with high poverty levels, need urgent measures to reverse the rapid degradation of coastal and marine ecosystems.

## PROJECT PARTNERS

Nairobi Convention  
Global Environment Facility (GEF)  
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

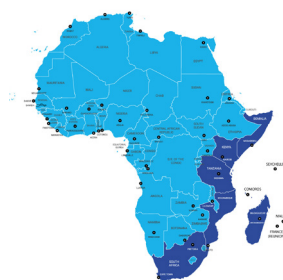
## ADDRESSING THE S2S CHALLENGE

The Nairobi Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Southern and Eastern African Region was created in 1985 by the 10 WIO countries to restore and protect the coastal and marine ecosystems in the region. The Convention is a regional mechanism that enables coordination and collaborative actions between different stakeholders including governments, NGOs, research institutes, and local communities. This has been pivotal in improving the sustainable management of coastal and marine ecosystems in the WIO.

One landmark programme that the Nairobi Convention is implementing to advance its goals is the Strategic Action Programme for the Protection of the Western Indian Ocean

from Land-Based Sources and Activities (WIOSAP). This programme is implemented with the support of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Building on the findings and activities of previous projects, the WIOSAP aims to reduce land-based stressors of coastal and marine ecosystems by protecting critical habitats, improving water quality, managing river flows, and promoting regional collaboration and governance frameworks that prevent ecosystem degradation.

Some of the activities that have taken place under the WIOSAP are publishing the Marine Protected Areas and Critical Habitats Outlook, developing guidelines and toolkits for ecosystem restoration and environmental flow assessments,



revitalizing the Clearing House Mechanism to facilitate data sharing in the region, convening science-policy forums, and hosting workshops on Marine Spatial Planning. It has also funded pilot projects at the national level on critical habitat management, improving water quality, and sustainable river flow management. As of 2024 there are around 20 projects in

different stages of implementation. To ensure coordination at the regional level, to share learning, and control the quality of project products, the programme created three Regional Tasks Forces on sustainable management of critical habitats, water quality, and river flows that are comprised of experts named by the governments.

## BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED AND SOLUTIONS

One of the main barriers that delayed the activities of the WIOSAP were the different administrative frameworks of each country related to the programme activities. These frameworks were sometimes excessively complicated and hindered the efforts of the public officials that were tasked as focal points for each country to lead the implementation of the activities. To overcome this barrier, the programme set up national task forces that built a relationship with the focal points and supported them in navigating through the different bureaucratic processes required to advance with the activities. Additionally, the WIOSAP created an informal community of practice by facilitating knowledge exchange

opportunities between the focal points from each country. In these sessions the participants were able to share the challenges and the solutions they implemented or discuss alternatives according to each context.

Another issue faced by the WIOSAP was to address the diverse capacity development needs across the vast range of stakeholders involved in the programme activities. To resolve this, the WIOSAP mapped the different needs by country and stakeholder and proceeded to develop tailored programmes that supported a better implementation of the WIOSAP activities.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Project website:

[WIOSAP Project | Nairobi Convention Secretariat](#)

[WIO-C](#)

[WIOMSA](#)

[FARI](#)

## MAIN LESSONS LEARNED

The WIOSAP highlights the importance of building trust and empowering local actors such as the focal points of each country, while understanding the issues they face and the best ways to collaborate with them. In this case it was vital to offer support to the focal points in navigating the relevant administrative frameworks in their country to be able to progress with the programme activities. Additionally, facilitating knowledge exchange opportunities between the focal points created an informal community of practice where challenges and solutions could be discussed.

Related to skills improvement, it was very important to understand the needs of the different stakeholders involved in the diverse activities taking place in each country and adjust the capacity development efforts accordingly to ensure a better implementation of programme activities.

Furthermore, it was crucial for the WIOSAP programme to build on existing frameworks like the Nairobi Convention as a basis to develop its activities. This ensured coordination on transboundary issues and the political commitment of the members of the Convention. The programme also benefitted from existing regional mechanisms to engage non-state actors such as NGOs (e.g. WIO-C) and research institutions (e.g. WIOMSA and FARI) and build on previous projects such as the WIO-LaB.

More information:  
[siwi.org/source-to-sea-platform](https://siwi.org/source-to-sea-platform)