# Ocean Country Partnership Programme

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# Building a regional Alliance for LMMAs in the WIO - Special Session Report

## 13th WIOMSA Scientific Symposium

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# 1. Session Aims

The session aimed to enhance the establishment of a Western Indian Ocean (WIO) LMMA Alliance (please note the official name of the Alliance is to be confirmed), advancing locally led marine conservation and governance in line with regional and global commitments such as the 30x30 target and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By convening practitioners, policymakers, and researchers, this side session transformed community experience into coordinated policy dialogue to strengthen locally managed marine areas (LMMAs) across the WIO. It promoted inclusive ocean governance by bridging traditional knowledge and scientific evidence, while identifying mechanisms for capacity building, sustainable financing and legal recognition. Ultimately, the session positioned the WIO LMMA Alliance as a key step toward achieving resilient coastal ecosystems, empowered communities, and equitable blue economies in the region.

# 2. Evidence

The session presented a strong body of evidence demonstrating the growing impact, innovation, and challenges of Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs) in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO). Through panel discussions, case studies, and breakout group conversations, participants explored lessons from existing community-led conservation networks in different WIO countries and identified pathways for effectively scaling up a network of LMMAs across the region. Evidence presented at the session highlighted key findings and local experiences that can help to inform policy, practice, and the future structure of the WIO LMMA Alliance.

## 2.1. Session Findings

- Recent analyses from discussions at the WIO LMMA Forum (September 2024) confirmed that community-led management models are already delivering measurable ecological and socio-economic benefits, including improved fish biomass, coral recovery, and enhanced local livelihoods.
- Presentations underlined growing recognition of LMMAs as potential Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs), contributing directly to national commitments under the Global Biodiversity Framework's 30x30 target.
- Emerging research from the WIOCOR Project demonstrated that integrating seagrass ecosystems within LMMA frameworks strengthens blue carbon potential and ecosystem resilience.
- The Bahari LearNet initiative provided data on the role of digital learning and peer-to-peer training in accelerating capacity development and knowledge retention among community practitioners.
- Discussions also drew from gender research, with evidence showing that inclusive and gender-responsive LMMA governance structures improve compliance, decision-making quality, and long-term sustainability of marine management.

## 2.2. Case Study Insights

- MIHARI Network (Madagascar): Shared a decade of experience building national LMMA networks, demonstrating how local stewardship can lead to national policy recognition. MIHARI's model illustrated the value of combining traditional practices with scientific monitoring to sustain fisheries and biodiversity.
- Beach Management Unit (BMU) Network (Kenya & Tanzania): Showed how alternative community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) systems can complement LMMA approaches, reinforcing the need for an inclusive regional framework that embraces diverse local governance models.
- WWF Bahari LearNet: Provided a capacity-building case study showing the value of regional learning networks for community conservation, while underscoring persistent capacity gaps at local levels.
- WIOMPAN: Offered lessons from a network of protected area managers, stressing the need for the LMMA Alliance to fill coordination gaps by linking community-led and government-managed areas under a shared ocean governance vision.
- CORDIO: Offered an insight on the strategy to expand LMMAs across the WIO.
- Gender and Inclusion Strategy: Highlighted that equitable participation of women and marginalised groups enhances social cohesion and the effectiveness of conservation measures.

## 2.3. Knowledge Gaps and Uncertainties

- Alliance identity and terminology: The session highlighted that the name and framing of the proposed Alliance remain under discussion, as "LMMAs" are not yet uniformly recognised or adopted across all WIO countries.
- Fragmentation of LMMA terminology and data: There remains no standardised regional database or monitoring system for LMMAs in the WIO, leading to inconsistent reporting and limited visibility at national and global scales.
- Legal recognition: Despite progress, many LMMAs still lack formal recognition in national policy frameworks, creating uncertainty for community rights, access, and long-term management authority.
- Sustainable financing: Participants identified the absence of stable and diversified funding streams for community conservation as a major constraint to scaling up LMMAs regionally.
- Integration of traditional and scientific knowledge: While both are acknowledged as vital, practical mechanisms to bridge local ecological knowledge with scientific monitoring remain underdeveloped.
- Gender and social inclusion: Although progress has been made, gender equality and youth engagement remain uneven across networks, requiring more systematic approaches.
- Climate resilience and adaptation: Limited longitudinal data exist on how LMMAs contribute to climate change adaptation, especially in relation to blue carbon, coastal protection, and food security.
- Coordination among networks: Overlaps between existing regional networks (e.g., WIOMPAN, MIHARI, BMU) highlight the need for clearer roles, information-sharing mechanisms, and collaborative frameworks to avoid duplication.

# 3. Recommendations

## 3.1. Technical Recommendations

### 3.1.1. Governance & Coordination
- Establish a regional coordination mechanism for the WIO LMMA Alliance to harmonise approaches, share lessons, and avoid duplication among national networks.
- Finalise the name and identity of the Alliance through a participatory process, ensuring inclusivity and regional ownership.

### 3.1.2. Science, Data & Monitoring
- Creation of regional LMMA data portal to document LMMAs and other community-led conservation initiatives, enabling shared monitoring and reporting toward 30x30 targets.
- Promote research and innovation within LMMAs, including the recognition and valuation of traditional knowledge systems.

### 3.1.3. Capacity Development & Knowledge Sharing
- Creation of a regional knowledge exchange platform to facilitate peer learning, following a similar model to the Bahri LearNet case study.
- Provide tailored LMMA training, using standardised materials from across the WIO region and promoting further peer learning opportunities (e.g. through exchange programmes).
- Enhance the visibility of LMMAs through outreach, communication, and storytelling initiatives.

### 3.1.4. Finance & Investment
- Engage with the identified potential priority donors and financial mechanisms (e.g., philanthropic, public-private partnerships) to support long-term sustainability of the Alliance.
- Creation of a steering committee and finance working group to help set a clear direction for the alliance and attract funding.
- Pilot community-led financing model, such as WIO LMMA Trust Fund, conservation credits, or small grants, to ensure financial autonomy and local benefit-sharing.
- Develop an LMMA investment and business plan for the Alliance.

## 3.2. Policy recommendations

### 3.2.1. Legal & Institutional Recognition
- Advocate for formal recognition of LMMAs and other community-led conservation initiatives, within national marine and coastal governance frameworks, including their potential designation as OECMs.
- Support regional policy alignment through IUCN, WIOMPAN, and national ministries to embed LMMA principles in marine spatial planning and protected area strategies.

### 3.2.2. Equity & Inclusion

- Mainstream gender and social inclusion principles across all Alliance activities, ensuring equitable participation in governance, decision-making, and benefit-sharing.
- Promote youth engagement and intergenerational knowledge exchange as core values of the Alliance.

### 3.2.3. Regional and Global Engagement

- Advocate in the African Union, WIOMSA, and WIO regional policy platforms to ensure long-term political support.

# 4. Linkages to COP 12 and Global Agendas

## 4.1. Technical Recommendations

A. To request the contracting parties to develop country level OECM glossary to define all the names and acronyms used across the WIO, to understand the similarities and differences compared to the LMMA philosophy, and to support their integration toward the creation of a common coalition.
B. To request the Nairobi Convention to take the lead in sharing lessons learned and the history of the creation of LMMAs, from the Pacific to Madagascar to the WIO, as well as to provide guidance on the creation, establishment, and expansion of LMMAs.
C. To request the Nairobi Convention to create awareness on the WIO LMMA Alliance in the region.

## 4.2. Policy Recommendations

A. To urge the contacting parties to recognize the efforts made in the conservation and management of marine and coastal ecosystems by the local communities.
B. To request the contacting parties to assess the LMMAs in their countries using the IUCN and FAO developed toolkits and start reporting the areas on the World Database on Protected Areas.
C. To urge the contracting parties to contribute to financing the local communities' efforts at the national level through the LMMA alliance.

# 5. Outputs and Follow-up

This session was part of ongoing work to develop the WIO LMMA Alliance, and the following outputs are in development:

- LMMA investment and business plan for the region and a design for a WIO LMMA Trust Fund
- Regional LMMA data portal and knowledge exchange platform

- Documents formalising the creation of the WIO LMMA Alliance, including the Steering Committee Terms of Reference, confirmed membership, Alliance Strategy and workplan
- WIO LMMA Toolkit, including the definition, steps to establish LMMAs, challenges, opportunities etc.

The WIO LMMA Alliance will be officially launched at COP 30 Brazil.

# Ocean Country Partnership Programme

The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) is a bilateral technical assistance and capacity building programme that provides tailored support to countries to manage the marine environment more sustainably, including by strengthening marine science expertise, developing science-based policy and management tools and creating educational resources for coastal communities. The OCPP delivers work under three thematic areas: biodiversity, marine pollution, and sustainable seafood. Funding is provided through the overarching Blue Planet Fund (BPF) by the UK Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).