COVID-19 and the future of Ocean Sustainability – supporting adaptation to post-COVID changes in the Western Indian Ocean

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Abstract

This Sustainable Oceans Lab event was convened as a first step, to bring together 25 diverse stakeholders from across the globe in a rapid on-line process to engage together to develop a systems-level analysis of the short and long-term implications of the COVID-19 crisis. Learning from the findings we may identify mechanisms for regionally focused events to do the same, to support building back better from COVID-19 in relation to Western Indian Ocean sustainability. The paper explores how COVID-19 has changed the landscape of strategic interventions and how this can help to advance ocean sustainability and achieve SDG 14. Further, actions to achieve sustainability and SDG 14 can play a key role in supporting recovery and rebuilding from COVID-19. The process identified six major areas for strategic action, that would help actors on the ground (communities, governments, businesses, NGOs, researchers, others), particularly when working together across their diverse perspectives, backgrounds and interests, identify how to turn negatives into positives – to avoid and transform the 'bad' scenarios' and create 'good' scenarios and pathways in the specific context they may be in. Learning from the 'COVID-19 and the future of Ocean Sustainability' process provides tangible guidance to 'build back better' from the challenges of the pandemic, and across other major threats and challenges. This is a particular challenge when projects may already have predetermined actions and log frames that may not be able to address new realities post-COVID. The following specific approaches or actions can be adopted to alleviate this, which we class as technical recommendations in view of their practical application in project and discussion processes. The paper calls on the Nairobi Convention Secretariat, Parties to the convention and partners, to:

a) Incorporate scenario or 'future thinking' approaches into project development and adapting to COVID-19. Identify how one or more of the strategic interventions can be mainstreamed into COVID-recovery and other projects and processes: Ensure inclusive, blue, sustainable approaches, Build resilience of people and ecosystems to withstand future shocks, Embrace interconnectivity and complexity, Leverage digitalization to enhance activities, outputs and outcomes, Reduce ecosystem pressures and threats and, Support shifts in mindsets, to promote positive and reduce negative scenarios.

b) Support dialogues and consultations at relevant levels (local, national, regional) for WIO participants to explore and define their experience of COVID-19 and its implications for their lives and work.