

Strengthening the WIO MPA Network and cooperative actions of governments and society

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Abstract

A global network of marine protected areas (MPAs) is key to sustaining marine biodiversity and fisheries, and to ensure the persistence of biodiversity in the face of climate change. One of the mandates of the UNEP – Nairobi Convention is to support nations in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) on biodiversity conservation and sustainable marine resource use in the region. This process includes tracking the progress of Contracting Parties' towards the achievement of global sustainable goals. Currently, there are 149 established MPAs in the region, which covers a total area of ~678 000km² or 8% of the combined EEZ of the WIO nations. The majority of these MPAs were established nearshore and covered coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass habitats, which also translates to protection of 17% of the combined East African coastline. Despite the different capacity among WIO states, the general policy and technical recommendations revolve around: i) improving the management and governance of existing MPAs; and, ii) increasing the area and quality of MPAs. Identifying and addressing gaps in MPA planning in the WIO to develop a functional marine protected areas network (MPAN) requires political will, multidisciplinary information, coordinated action and time. The Nairobi Convention already provides the institutional structure and arrangements for the development and establishment of a regional MPAN. The following is recommended;

- Strengthen existing partnerships (e.g., WIO MPA management network; country-level LMMA networks), and form new bilateral and multilateral agreements and institutional arrangements to support sharing of knowledge, resources, roles, and responsibilities to help increase MPAN management capacity
- Develop and adopt a national MPAN management and operational plan, which includes sustainability measures to ensure long-term financing, effective implementation, regular capacity building initiatives, and strong cooperation, coordination, and collaboration across all levels of organisation
- Develop and adopt a regional and systematic MPAN planning and implementation framework to support the development of national MPANs and formation of the corresponding institutional arrangements and structures
- Adopt a systematic conservation planning approach to ensure that the national MPAN plans adhere to ecological design principles and post-2020 CBD targets, and are attuned to social, economic, and political contexts
- Develop and adopt a national MPAN monitoring and evaluation framework, which includes regular capacity building initiatives, to ensure that individual MPAs are effectively managed and are contributing to maintaining ecological function of the MPAN