

UNEP Nairobi Convention WIO Regional Science to Policy Meeting

23rd – 25th March 2021
Venue: Virtual on Teams

Theme: Transition to a Sustainable Western Indian Ocean Blue Economy: Addressing the challenges and seizing the opportunities

Concept Note

Resources of the WIO region

The western Indian Ocean (WIO) region, comprising the ten countries of Comoros, France (Réunion), Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa and Tanzania, has a total coastline of approximately 15,000 km and a continental shelf area of some 450,000 km², supporting an estimated population of 220 million people, of which over 60 million live within 100km of the shoreline. The annual “Gross Marine Product” (equivalent to the Gross Domestic Product of a country) of the WIO region is at least US\$ 20.8 billion, showing the substantial economic value of coastal and marine resources in the region.

However, the coastal and marine environment of the WIO region has started showing signs of degradation and loss of biodiversity. This trend can be attributed to global anthropogenic factors such as climate change, as well as more localised activities including coastal development, overfishing, sand mining, dredging and pollution from sea-based and land-based sources and activities. This situation is further exacerbated by the failure to fully incorporate scientific information about the status of the marine and coastal resources and impacts into policy and management strategies.

Given the growing threats to coastal and marine resources, sound scientific knowledge is required to assist policy-makers and resource manager in decision making. While acknowledging the important role that science plays in policy and decision making, it is also recognized that there are barriers between the two fields that limit the uptake of science into policy. These include the technical nature of scientific information provided to policy/decision-makers, which may not be easily understood by non-experts in the field, and inadequate communication of research needs and priorities to the scientific community to enable them to tailor research to address these needs and priorities. There is, therefore, a need for proper integration of scientific knowledge into language and format readily understood by policymakers and decision-makers to effectively influence policy and decision-making. Also important are mechanisms for providing information on research needs and priorities to the science community.

Background to Science Policy Dialogues in the WIO Region

At the fourth Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Western Indian Ocean Region (the Nairobi Convention) held in Antananarivo, Madagascar in July 2004, the Secretariat of the Convention (UNEP) was directed to facilitate the establishment of a network of academic and research institutions in the Convention area in collaboration with other organizations. The Network would be a “consultative, communication and advisory body accountable to the Contracting Parties of the Nairobi Convention in the assessment and science-based management of marine and coastal environment”. The decision was taken to address the challenges of the absence of a mechanism for linking research and academic institutions with decision-making processes at the regional level; the inadequate visibility of research institutions in the region; the inadequate sharing and exchange of information amongst academic and research institutions in the region; and the inadequate involvement of regional institutions in regional initiatives. The Nairobi Convention Secretariat was also directed to “take the offer made by the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA) to serve as the Secretariat of such a Network”, a role which WIOMSA has and continues to play in an exemplary manner.

Subsequently, the Contracting Parties to the Nairobi Convention have adopted various decisions at the Conference of Parties (COP) to strengthen the link between science, policy and action to enhance informed decision making for the management of coastal and marine resources in the WIO region. Some of the decisions include Decision CP 4/ parts 3 and 4 which directed the Secretariat of the Nairobi Convention, in collaboration with other organizations, to facilitate the establishment of the Network of academic and research institutions in the region; Decision CP 7/17, which requested the Secretariat to hold and encourage partners to support regular science to policy dialogues; Decision CP 8/12, which requested for the establishment of a dialogue platform, and Decision CP 9/12, which further requested the Secretariat to convene regular science-policy dialogues. This emphasizes the importance of the linkages between science and policy for the sound management of resources and the commitment of the Contracting Parties to ensure that decision making and policy formulation are evidence-based for the sustainable management of the marine and coastal resources of the WIO region.

To address the request from Contracting Parties, and in the absence of a technical and advisory body to provide advice relating to the implementation of the Convention or the work of partners to the Conference of Parties, the Convention established the Forum for Academic and Research Institutions (FARI) in 2004 with WIOMSA playing the Secretariat role of hosting the Forum. The Forum is comprised of experts from academic and research institutions in the region with a mandate in marine sciences. However, FARI does not include representation from governments to bridge the gap between science and policy. To enhance the Science to Policy process, the Convention has been inviting

government representatives and FARI members to support science-policy dialogues, with many recommendations from these dialogues informing COP Decisions. In the past, these Science to Policy dialogues have been *ad hoc* in nature and needed to be formalized and strengthened to adequately serve the purposes of linking science to policy in the region.

The Project 'Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the protection of the Western Indian Ocean from land-based sources and activities' (WIOSAP) seeks to support the establishment of a Science to Policy Forum. At the same time, the 'Western Indian Ocean Large Marine Ecosystem Strategic Action Programme Policy Harmonization and Institutional Reforms' (WIO LME SAPPHERE) Project proposed a Science and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) to serve a similar purpose. Since the proposed structures under the two projects were both meant to support evidence-based decision making, the joint PSCs for the two GEF-funded projects, held in June 2019, approved the establishment of a Science to Policy Platform (SPP) at the Convention level. It is important to note that, while the current and future projects executed by the Convention will support science and policy linkages, they will build on and strengthen the COP affirmed process, which have positively and significantly evolved as evidenced by various COP decisions which have been informed through previous Science to Policy dialogues.

The rationale for the Science to Policy Platform

The Science to Policy Platform (SPP) is "a multi-stakeholder platform comprising of representatives of formal and informal knowledge-generating institutions, practitioners, policymakers, communities and the private sector within the WIO region. It serves as an intermediary body to bridge the gaps between science and policy, and catalyze implementation. The SPP is intended to support the efforts of the Contracting Parties of the Nairobi Convention to integrate relevant scientific evidence and findings into their efforts to protect, manage and develop their coastal and marine environment sustainably. It is also expected to act as an intermediary or boundary agent between science and society and to facilitate and promote a better understanding of on-going and emerging regional environmental challenges and opportunities and of the strategies needed to address them.

The SPP is expected to provide the necessary information for evidence-based decision-making as it's primary role of knowledge generation and dissemination, as well as dialogue and consensus-building.

Operating principles of the Science to Policy Platform

- (i) Membership is open to relevant heads of academic and research institutions in the WIO region including thematic experts from these institutions,

- (ii) The SPP can seek advice from individual experts as may be required in an *ad-hoc* manner,
- (iii) NGOs and regional programmes with a mandate to research marine and coastal issues are eligible for membership of SPP,
- (iv) Focal Points to the Nairobi Convention and policy development representatives from regional countries are included in the SPP.

Objectives of the Science to Policy Platform

The Nairobi Convention provides a legal framework, a coordination mechanism and a forum for intergovernmental discussions on the protection, management and development of the coastal and marine environment in the WIO region. The Convention has a mandate to convene policy and decision-making authorities, the scientific community, and other relevant stakeholders and partners in the WIO region in meaningful interactions, and jointly develop strategies for the uptake of sound science knowledge to inform policy and decision making at national and regional levels.

The SPP fits under the mandate and legal framework of the Convention. The following are the objectives of the SPP:

- a) Enhance information sharing between academic and research institutions and the Nairobi Convention and other regional partners;
- b) Promote cooperation amongst universities, research institutions, government institutions, NGOs, and regional organizations/programmes in the WIO region;
- c) Facilitate identification of opportunities for collaborative regional research in line with the Nairobi Convention Work Programme;
- d) Provide critical linkage between research and decision-making processes; and
- e) Provide quality assurance for scientific research products by experts in the WIO region.

Upcoming Science to Policy Meeting

Pursuant to the foregoing and in response to the decisions of the Contracting Parties, the Nairobi Convention Secretariat and WIOMSA in collaboration with partners will convene a Science to Policy meeting in February 2021. The meeting will promote the link between science and policy for evidence-based decision making and provide the COP with timely technical advice and policy recommendations for consideration in the formulation of decisions during the upcoming Tenth COP of the Nairobi Convention scheduled for May 2021.

The Nairobi Convention will organize the meeting with support of the GEF-funded WIOSAP and SAPPHIRE projects; the "Partnership project for marine and coastal governance and fisheries management for sustainable blue growth (NC-SWIOFC); and

the EU Capacity Building Related To Multilateral Environmental Agreements (EU-MEAs) Project, in collaboration with WIOMSA.

Development of discussion papers for presentation at the Science to Policy meeting

In preparation for the Science to Policy meeting in February 2021, the Nairobi Convention in partnership with WIOMSA have called on partners in the WIO region to develop discussion papers on various coastal and marine issues affecting the WIO region that will be presented and discussed at the Science to Policy meeting. It is envisaged that these discussion papers will provide a scientific basis for decision making at the national and regional levels. It is expected that the papers will have regional relevance, applicability and alignment with WIO country priorities. The papers should also contribute to the preparation of potential policy decisions to be considered at the Tenth Conference of Parties to the Nairobi Convention to be held in May 2021.

The discussion papers received from stakeholders are based on the following criteria:

- 1) Alignment to the Nairobi Convention Work Programme 2018-2022, COP Decisions and Protocols.
- 2) Address emerging issues in the WIO region, for example, green ports development, extractives industries and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), among others.
- 3) Alignment to global strategies and processes such as the UN Decade of Ocean Science, UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) resolutions on marine and coastal issues, Paris 2015 Agreement, whose NDCs are currently under revision by countries etc.
- 4) The topics of the discussion papers should be of regional relevance rather than specific or limited to particular sites, countries or an institution's work or project's/programme's work.
- 5) Issue from the past COPs could be considered only if:
 - a. It can be shown that the status has changed based on new information generated after the decision had been adopted
 - b. The decision has been successfully implemented

Objectives of the meeting

The overall objective of the meeting is to promote the linkages between science and policy for evidence-based decision making and to provide the COP timely technical advice and policy recommendations for consideration in the development of decisions in the upcoming Tenth COP of the Nairobi Convention. It is important to note that this meeting is taking place at a defining moment when: discussions are going on around the New Deal for Nature/Beyond 2020 Biodiversity Framework; many SDG targets are reaching maturity and countries are documenting progress that they have made, revision of Paris 2015 commitments are ongoing; and the launch of several UN processes relevant to the mandate of the Convention, and the staging of UNEA 5 are underway.

Some key partners to the Convention have also expressed interest in supporting the Science to Policy Platform and their participation in the planning and execution of the next meeting will be conspicuous.

The specific objectives of the meeting include:

- 1) Review of the Discussion papers on topical emerging scientific findings with potential policy implications for the management of coastal and marine resources in the region.
- 2) Presentation of progress in the development of various regional strategies and frameworks under the Nairobi Convention for technical input.
- 3) Promote engagement and networking among various stakeholders engaged in the protection, management and development of marine and coastal resources in the WIO.

Expected outputs

- 1) Policy recommendations for consideration as Decisions at the 10th COP of the Nairobi Convention.
- 2) Validation of various strategies and frameworks under development for the WIO region.
- 3) Strengthened partnerships between technical experts and policymakers.