

## **TOWARDS A REGIONAL MANGROVE VISION**

Theme e: Regional priorities towards the Decade on Ocean Science (and to varying degrees also themes b, d, g, i, k, and others) - Submission by: Save Our Mangroves Now! (BMZ, WWF, IUCN, Wetlands International) - Contact: Harifidy Ralison [HORalison@wwf.mg](mailto:HORalison@wwf.mg)

### **1. Background and rationale**

At the global level, mangroves deliver substantial ecosystem services that play a critical role in supporting human well-being through climate regulation, disaster risk reduction, food security and poverty reduction for more than 120 million people globally living in tropical coastal areas. The critical need to conserve, manage, and restore functioning mangrove forests and related coastal ecosystems are recognized in multiple international treaties including: the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, 1971; the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), 1992; the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 1992; the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982; and the United Nations Watercourses Convention, 1997 as well as in global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the potential of mangrove conservation in contributing towards serving such multiple international commitments is still only marginally realized and utilized.

Beside climate change, the main drivers of environmental and ecosystem degradation at the global level are mainly the increasing human demand of natural resources (land, food, energy etc.), pollution and unsustainable practices<sup>i</sup>. They are exacerbated by weak governance frameworks for nature, and particularly for mangrove habitats, hence the high importance of global policy action. Nature-based solutions (NbS)<sup>ii</sup>, and mangrove conservation in particular, have been praised to be able to rise to the challenge and be the foundation of sustainable development along global coastlines, addressing multiple societal challenges by simultaneously securing human well-being and biodiversity benefits. The 2019 Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Manifesto<sup>iii</sup> underscores the need for a shift in international governance to value nature and realize the potential of NbS.

The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region is characterised by high coastal and marine biodiversity, both in terms of species and ecosystems, which places it as one of the richest and most interesting ocean regions of the world. However, the persistent poverty situation of a large fraction of its population leads to a high human dependence on and often overexploitation of coastal and marine resources and ecosystem services. Mangrove habitats in the WIO region (ca. 1 million ha<sup>iv</sup>) are one of such ecosystems that have very important life-sustaining ecosystem functions, but are critically exposed to the degradation and loss from the anthropogenic pressures, exacerbated further by global pressures as climate change. Mangrove loss rates vary immensely between regions and, particularly when their distribution and health are non-linear at national and local levels, that isn't surprising in the WIO region where four countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and Madagascar) hold ca. 99% of its mangrove cover<sup>v</sup>. The coastal areas of the

WIO region have experienced increasing loss rates over the past decades, a change in that trend started only to manifest in recent years<sup>v</sup>.

Strong governance of natural resources in general and adequate implementation of environmental policies and laws, as well as good coordination and coherence at the institutional level, coupled with financial and technical capacities contribute to improving mangroves' situation – and that of the people relying on them for their livelihoods. While significant advances have been made at national level (e.g. national mangrove strategies in place in Kenya and recently in Mozambique, and such strategies being elaborated and updated in Madagascar and Tanzania, respectively) **it has been expressed by key WIO actors that a regional dialogue for a joint mangrove vision may be instrumental to support coordinated action for securing mangroves in the WIO region as a whole, thereby also aiding implementation of Nairobi Convention Conference of Parties (COP) Decision CP9/11**, requesting development of marine protected areas and critical habitats outlooks. Creating awareness and strengthening governance capacities at the regional, national and local levels and exchange of data and information between the scientific community and policy makers can help ensure a coordinated and cooperative protection of mangroves that is grounded in science and takes transboundary conservation needs into account. A dialogue is vital not only between science and decision makers, **but also at the institutional level between different Ministries** (Environment, Fisheries, Sea, Water, Agriculture, etc.<sup>vi</sup>, see also Fig. 1) **to produce coherent policies and design a common vision** (which should happen at national as well as regional level). However, cooperation and development of joint visions would not occur without political will and buy-in.



*Figure 1: Mangroves at the intersection of ecosystems and legal frameworks<sup>vi</sup>*

## 2. Linkage to regional and global processes

While the endeavour proposed by this discussion paper focuses on mangrove ecosystems, **the interactions between the broader coastal systems are of importance and need to be reflected both in international, regional as well as national policy-making.** Especially at the global policy level, pushing jointly for increased conservation of mangroves and associated ecosystems such as coral reefs and seagrass meadows under the umbrella term of ‘nature-based solutions’ will increase effectiveness, particularly with regard to the climate change debate.

The “Super Year 2020” (now shifted to 2021 due to Covid-19) provides an opportunity to have a common vision and synergistic agenda between the various Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs, e.g. new CBD targets and revised UNFCCC Nationally Determined Contributions). Such synergy will not only align, but accelerate action on the ground (both in

terms of political commitment overall, but also smart planning and implementation processes, including finance). The WIO region would highly benefit from such opportunity if its key governments, institutions, partners and stakeholders can establish platforms of dialogue, discussions and adopt a joint approach, vision and strategies and speak with one voice at international stage. **The Nairobi Convention COPs offer a key opportunity to rally the regional actors around the need to have a joint regional approach and voice with regard to our common mangroves.** The joint development of a regional mangrove vision could help making conservation of coastal ecosystems, such as mangroves, a priority in policy-making and to increase the acknowledgement of marine and coastal nature-based solutions in national and regional land-use planning, disaster risk management, climate change and sustainable development policies in the WIO region.

Additionally, after hosting the first global Blue Economy Conference in 2018, the Western Indian Ocean region is now fully engaged on the road of unlocking the potential of its blue economy. Such economy represents great promises for the region in terms of economic benefits, but it is of paramount importance that it is developed on sustainable premises that ultimately enable the conservation of the blue natural capital of the region as well as provide direct benefits to local communities. In that regard, the role of mangroves in fisheries enhancement, coastal protection, local livelihoods as well as its potential to develop innovative financing mechanisms (including related to the carbon finance sector) is critical and is therefore an important nature-based solution to the successful development of the blue economy. As such, efforts contributing to sustainable mangrove conservation and restoration in the region will also be a direct contribution to development of sustainable, inclusive and resilient blue economy.

**A regional mangrove vision would not only create synergy with the MEAs in addressing mangrove ecosystem conservation and restoration priorities within the WIO, but also foster development of more specific agreements and regional commitments on mangrove conservation.** Such agreements could take the form of specific policy frameworks for mangrove conservation at national and regional level such as a Cooperative Agreement on the Conservation of Mangrove Ecosystems within the Western Indian Ocean. Finally, it is noteworthy that the vision may be anchored to the protection of rivers, land-based and coastal ecosystems that are associated with mangroves within regional and sub regional institutions, including River Basin Organisations and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), which might serve as platforms for dialogue and promotion of environmental goals.

### **3. The subject matter to be addressed**

In the WIO region, dealing with mangroves at a regional level is essential since the countries hosting this type of ecosystem share similar challenges at various levels (ecological, socio-economic, governance, etc.<sup>v</sup>). In that regards, dialogues and efforts to cooperate should aim at designing common policy and legislative frameworks, to manage and govern these resources in a coordinated and effective manner. For that reason, we suggest to foster the joint development of a regional mangrove vision that will pave the way towards the above-mentioned frameworks. Moreover, the support of the international policy and donors' communities to a given region will be eased and most efficient when a region coalesces around a common vision. Such joint vision development is a prerequisite to regional integration and cohesion, which is important to inform and foster the development of global international policy processes. At the same time,

international processes are essential to inform and guide the development of regional and national instruments and actions.

**In that case, it appears that developing a regional mangrove vision and support needs is a responsibility that all levels of governance within the WIO region should take on, while at the same time it is vital for a better recognition of the WIO region at global policy and donors level.** In doing so, the region should simultaneously take the advantage to build a strong case for enhanced mangrove conservation goals – included in a common vision and/or an agreement with clear targets and indicators – in space of the international community. It is worth to highlight that the development of such regional vision should strongly correlate with national policy-making and shall lead to increased government commitments (which preferably take account of aspirations of non-state actors and local communities) under existing mechanisms like SDG14, GLISPA or Bonn Challenge, and the identification of related implementation and funding needs while ensuring harmonisation, i.e. filling gaps synergistically and avoiding double efforts.

In its efforts to upscale and focus global efforts to stop and reverse the decrease and degradation of mangrove habitats, the international mangrove initiative “Save Our Mangroves Now!” (SOMN), founded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and joined by Wetlands International in the second phase (2020-2022), **offers its capacity to support upscaling the mangrove momentum through fostering a regional policy dialogue with the aim to nurture a WIO-wide collective effort for developing a regional mangrove vision** (see. Fig. 2). Such vision would be most powerful if it encapsulates the region’s commitments and priority needs. With the support of the Nairobi Convention Secretariat, Parties and projects (e.g. WIOSAP, SAPPHERE), as well as SOMN and other stakeholders, the WIO region shall become an internationally recognized good example (“champion”) in mangrove conservation, opening the door to further successes within our region, which would culminate to enhanced conservation and sustainable use of mangroves. The successful conservation of mangroves in the WIO can inform other regions and promote replication of conservation approaches.

The approach described above would only be possible if an intensified and strengthened partnership is in place among actors in the WIO, e.g. through a **Regional Advisory Group** that would support synergies between mangrove-related initiatives, provide strategic guidance and support a regional policy dialogue between WIO countries within the framework of the Nairobi Convention process. A set of activities are underway in SOMN’s four target countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and Madagascar) to support the proposed regional policy dialogues. The SOMN project is already providing support for institutional capacity **development of the WIO Mangrove Network** (WIOMN) through a legal registration process. Nevertheless, the Network has already been pooling regional mangrove stakeholders<sup>v, vii</sup> and can thus become an umbrella body to host such a Regional Advisory Group as one of its subsidiary bodies as provided for by the Network Constitution.

Institutional strengthening of the WIOMN through such an advisory group will enhance its role as a provider of policy options (which will among others come from SOMN’s ongoing activities to develop mangrove socio-economic profiles and a regional mangrove mapping, tailored to serve national and specifically coastal development planning).

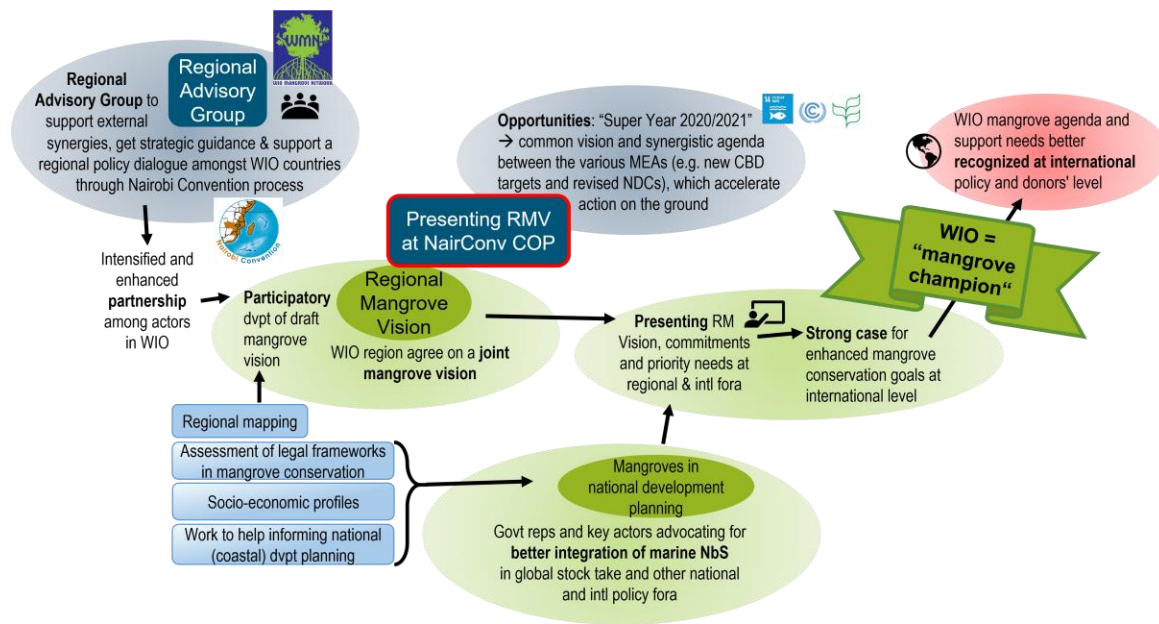


Figure 2: Suggested theory of change towards a regional mangrove vision and better recognition of the WIO region at international level (abbreviations: WMN: Western Indian Ocean Mangrove Network, RMV: regional mangrove vision)

A strong common WIO mangrove vision, adopted by governments and key actors at regional and international policy fora and backed by commitments, can **make the WIO region an internationally recognised “mangrove champion” and earn attention for priority needs.**

#### 4. Policy Recommendations

- I. Call on the Nairobi Convention Parties to develop a regional mangrove vision (and related strategy framework as needed) that encapsulates the region’s commitments and priority needs.
- II. Call on the Nairobi Convention Parties to facilitate the mainstreaming of mangroves in national development planning, e.g. Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- III. Call on the Nairobi Convention Secretariat and Parties, and the WIO Mangrove Network, to establish the relevant institutional structures such as the proposed Regional Advisory Group for supporting synergies between mangrove-related initiatives, crafting the elements of the regional mangrove vision, and supporting a regional policy dialogue on mangroves.
- IV. Urge the Nairobi Convention Secretariat, Parties and partners to create a strong case for the regional mangrove vision through regional and global dialogues (beyond the dialogues in the proposed Regional Advisory Group) to enhance mangrove conservation goals, commitments and priority needs at regional and international level. This will help profile the WIO region as a “mangrove champion” in the global sphere.

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- <sup>i</sup> Goldberg, L., Lagomasino, D., Thomas, N., & Fatoyinbo, T. (2020). Global declines in human-driven mangrove loss. *Global Change Biology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.15275>, Thomas, N., Lucas, R., Bunting, P., Hardy, A., Rosenqvist, A., & Simard, M. (2017). Distribution and drivers of global mangrove forest change, 1996-2010. *PLoS ONE*, 12(6), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0179302>
- <sup>ii</sup> IUCN (2020). [Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions](#). A user-friendly framework for the verification, design and scaling up of Nbs. First edition. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN
- <sup>iii</sup> NBS Coalition (2019) [Nature-Based Solutions for Climate](#). UNEP - UN Environment Programme
- <sup>iv</sup> Spalding, M.D., Blasco, F. and Field, C.D. (eds.) (1997). [World Mangrove Atlas](#). The International Society for Mangrove Ecosystems, Okinawa, Japan
- <sup>v</sup> UNEP-Nairobi Convention and WIOMSA (2015). [The Regional State of the Coast Report: Western Indian Ocean](#). UNEP and WIOMSA, Nairobi, Kenya, 546 pp., Bosire, J. O., Mangora, M. M., Bandeira, S., Rajkaran, A., Ratsimbazafy, R., Appadoo, C., & Kairo, J. G. (2016). [Mangroves of the Western Indian Ocean: Status and Management](#).
- <sup>vi</sup> Slobodian, L. N., Badoz, L., eds. (2019). [Tangled roots and changing tides: mangrove governance for conservation and sustainable use](#). WWF Germany, Berlin, Germany and IUCN, Gland, Switzerland. xii+280pp.
- <sup>vii</sup> UNEP-Nairobi Convention/USAID/WIOMSA (2020). [Guidelines on Mangrove Ecosystem Restoration for the Western Indian Ocean Region](#). UNEP, Nairobi, 71 pp.