



**THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN AND COASTAL RESILIENCE
(WIOCOR) PROJECT UNDER THE GREAT BLUE WALL INITIATIVE**

Background and context

The Great Blue Wall Initiative (GBW)

The Great Blue Wall is a Western Indian Ocean (WIO)-born, Africa-driven roadmap to achieve a nature positive world by 2030. It aims at unlocking unprecedented nature-based recovery efforts through the establishment of a transformational movement. Its goal is to dramatically accelerate and upscale ocean conservation actions while enhancing socio-ecological resilience and the development of a regenerative blue economy by catalysing political leadership and financial support.

This will be achieved by spearheading the establishment of a connected network of nature-people positive seascapes (or regenerative seascapes). This network of seascapes will be connected by a living blue wall that will act as a regional ecological corridor formed by conserved and restored critical blue ecosystems like mangroves, seagrasses and corals. While the Great Blue Wall will act as a bulwark against climate change impacts and biodiversity loss, it will also shelter coastal communities and create the enabling conditions and necessary mechanisms to empower local stakeholders to become stewards of the ocean while accelerating the development of a regenerative blue economy. The Great Blue Wall is an action-focused and action-driven regional response to three interconnected agendas, i.e. Biodiversity - Climate – Socio Economic Development with three clear objectives to be achieved by 2030:

- Effectively and equitably conserve at least 30% of the ocean by 2030;
- Conserve and restore critical blue ecosystems to achieve net-gain by 2030;
- Unlock the development of a regenerative blue economy that directly benefits coastal communities and encourages economic transformation, while also delivering conservation and climate positive outcomes.

The Great Blue Wall Initiative rests on four pillars as follows.

PILLAR 1: BLUE PLANET

Objective: 2 million square kilometres of conserved areas in the WIO

As the world embarks on an ambitious journey of conservation and protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030, it is of paramount importance to ensure that such target is not only achieved on paper but importantly on the ground by empowering local stakeholders to become stewards and managers of the ocean. This pillar focuses on this effort by supporting the establishment of relevant governance frameworks at seascape level and the necessary enabling policy frameworks at national, regional and international levels. This aligns directly with the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)** adopted under the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**, specifically **Target 22**, which calls for ensuring

the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in decision-making processes related to biodiversity. By empowering local stakeholders, this pillar contributes to achieving the GBF's goals of equitable governance and effective conservation of marine and coastal areas. It also focuses on increasing the effectiveness and equity of area-based conservation measures while also ensuring that these respond to local needs and realities. This resonates with **Target 3** of the GBF, which aims to ensure that at least 30% of areas of particular importance for biodiversity and its contributions to people are effectively conserved and managed. By promoting equity and responsiveness to local needs, this pillar contributes to ensuring that area-based conservation measures are both effective and socially just.

PILLAR 2: BLUE NATURE

Objective: 2 million hectares of restored and conserved critical ecosystems

Like any living organism, a seascape has critical features that need protection and restoration for overall health. This pillar focuses on securing the integrity of critical blue ecosystems in the Western Indian Ocean, such as coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds, which are vital for biodiversity and human well-being. It aims to accelerate and upscale their restoration and conservation through the implementation of Nature-based Solutions. This aligns with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), particularly Target 2, which emphasises the importance of maintaining and restoring ecosystems, including in marine environments. By focusing on the Western Indian Ocean's unique and critical habitats, this pillar contributes to achieving the GBF's goals of halting and reversing biodiversity loss and ensuring the sustainable use of marine resources.

PILLAR 3: BLUE PEOPLE

Objective: Up to 2 million blue jobs catalysed

For a large-scale seascape to thrive and be effectively managed, it is of paramount importance that stakeholders, especially local communities, directly benefit from these areas and from ocean conservation efforts. To achieve the scale of impact required, it is crucial that economic activities are not only sustainable and produce socio-economic benefits but also contribute to the regeneration of the ocean. This pillar therefore focuses on unlocking the potential of our blue natural capital by supporting the development of a regenerative blue economy. It seeks to foster blue businesses, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as well as building the capacity of both seascape-level actors, and countries, as custodians of rich biodiversity.

CROSS-CUTTING PILLAR: BLUE PARTNERSHIPS

Because overcoming today's challenges will require all parties to join forces, and for conservation efforts to be sustainable and impactful at scale, innovative and ambitious partnerships will be a critical piece of the solution. Setting-up such types of partnerships is enshrined in the DNA of the Great Blue Wall initiative, and, more broadly, IUCN. Areas of

work include innovative finance, technology and communication, broader ecosystem of partners, coalition building, and knowledge and experience sharing.

THE GREAT BLUE WALL FINANCING FACILITY

Recognising the multi-tiered needs of the region, the Great Blue Wall Initiative is in the process of developing a GBW Financing Facility which will facilitate structured support and technical assistance based on these needs and priorities.

IUCN uses grant-making to further the nature and people agenda. As part of its regional initiatives, IUCN secures funding from donors to provide grants and microgrants which are generally distributed through calls for proposals, aligned with the project objectives. These mechanisms are funded by a range of sources, including multilateral, bilateral, and philanthropic organisations. In this role, IUCN acts as a steward, managing and reallocating these funds to support conservation initiatives, while abiding by the requirements established by donors.

The Western Indian Ocean Coastal and Ocean Resilience Project (WIOCOR)

WIOCOR is one of the main projects underpinning the Great Blue Wall Initiative, focusing on seagrass ecosystems. Funded by the French Facility for Global Environment (FFEM) and coordinated by IUCN, WIOCOR targets five countries: Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar, Mozambique and Comoros, over a period of 3 years from 2023-2026.

The Western Indian Ocean Coastal and Ocean Resilience (WIOCOR) project focuses on enhancing the conservation and restoration of critical marine ecosystems, particularly seagrass habitats, in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region. This initiative is part of broader efforts to strengthen coastal and marine resilience, with a focus on improving socio-ecological systems and driving the development of a regenerative blue economy.

Seagrasses provide essential services like carbon sequestration, coastal protection, and habitat for marine life, which are vital for the livelihoods of coastal communities. The project aims to bridge the gap between conservation efforts and sustainable development by aligning the preservation of these ecosystems with blue economy opportunities that benefit local communities.

WIOCOR's key objectives are to promote and enhance the role of seagrass ecosystems in contributing to both biodiversity and socio-economic resilience by strengthening the governance frameworks necessary for their protection and management, increasing locally-led scientific knowledge about them supporting community-led actions for conservation and restoration, and advocating for the integration of seagrass into regional and national policies. By 2026, the project aims to improve the management of coastal biodiversity and ecosystem services in the WIO region, ultimately contributing to both environmental conservation and socio-economic development.

WIOCOR is structured around four core pillars:

1. **Governance:** This pillar focuses on improving and strengthening governance frameworks at both national and local levels. It aims to ensure that key stakeholders, especially local communities, are actively involved in managing seagrass habitats and marine resources. This includes efforts to incorporate seagrass conservation into broader coastal management strategies and frameworks.
2. **Knowledge:** To support informed decision-making, WIOCOR emphasises enhancing scientific knowledge and research on seagrass ecosystems. This includes capacity-building initiatives, data collection, and fostering knowledge exchange across the WIO region. By improving scientific understanding, the project seeks to guide conservation strategies and restoration efforts more effectively. IUCN is collaborating with the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA) to deliver this pillar.
3. **Action:** This pillar is focused on a regional network of practical, on-the-ground and locally-driven initiatives that contribute to the conservation and restoration of seagrass ecosystems. Local projects led by communities and institutions are central to this effort, promoting activities such as habitat restoration and sustainable economic ventures that support the regenerative blue economy.
4. **Advocacy:** Finally, WIOCOR aims to raise awareness and influence policy at both the national and regional levels. By advocating for the importance of seagrass ecosystems and their role in marine biodiversity, the project seeks to position the WIO region as a leader in global seagrass conservation strategies.

Through these pillars, WIOCOR aims to create lasting impacts in the WIO region by integrating seagrass conservation with socio-economic resilience, ensuring that the region's natural and human systems can thrive in the face of environmental challenges. The call for proposal is being opened in the context of Pillar 3 (Action) of WIOCOR.

IUCN-ESARO

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it. It is the lead organisation coordinating the implementation of the WIOCOR project. The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region harbours exceptional marine biodiversity, including a significant proportion of endemic species. It is equally home to some of Africa's most ocean-dependent coastal populations.

In service to the ecological importance and vulnerability of this region and its people, the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (IUCN-ESARO) is dedicated to fostering harmony between human activities and the natural environment. IUCN-ESARO collaborates with a diverse network of IUCN members, commissions, and strategic partners to define and implement programmatic priorities. These

initiatives encompass a wide range of interventions, from community-based conservation efforts to providing technical support towards regional policy on biodiversity and nature.

IUCN-ESARO's Coastal and Ocean Resilience (COR) Programme guides the organisation's efforts in addressing marine and coastal challenges. The programme's comprehensive scope includes biodiversity conservation, the establishment and management of marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), sustainable blue economy development, ecosystem-based fisheries management, high seas governance, blue carbon initiatives, marine spatial planning, marine pollution mitigation, integrated coastal management, climate change adaptation, and disaster risk reduction.

To drive progress toward coastal and ocean resilience by prioritising the well-being of the region's people and empowering local communities as blue guardians, IUCN has been instrumental in coordinating the development of the Great Blue Wall initiative in partnership with regional governments and stakeholders.

The COR program is guided by IUCN Eastern and Southern Africa's Blue Resilience Programme Framework, which comprises three fundamental pillars and one cross-cutting theme: Blue Planet, Blue Nature, Blue People, and Blue Partnerships. This framework serves to structure IUCN's interventions in the region, promoting resilience at the ocean and seascape levels. The framework can be elaborated as follows:

- **Blue Planet:** This pillar focuses on safeguarding critical marine habitats and ensuring the ecological integrity of the WIO's ecosystems. It entails supporting scientific research, monitoring environmental trends, and implementing effective conservation strategies to maintain and restore the region's natural capital.
- **Blue People:** Recognising the link between human well-being and a healthy ocean, this pillar aims to empower coastal communities to become active stewards of their marine resources. This involves promoting sustainable livelihoods, equitable access to marine resources, and community participation in conservation decision-making.
- **Blue Partnerships:** Acknowledging that conservation success hinges on collaborative action, this pillar emphasises the importance of fostering strong partnerships among diverse stakeholders. IUCN-ESARO actively engages with governments, NGOs, research institutions, and the private sector to leverage expertise, resources, and collective action towards shared conservation goals.

By adhering to the principles of the Blue Resilience Framework, IUCN-ESARO is driving positive change in the WIO region. The COR program's multifaceted approach not only contributes to biodiversity conservation but also fosters a more sustainable and resilient future for coastal communities and the broader marine environment.

THE FRENCH FACILITY FOR GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT (FFEM)

The French Facility for Global Environment (FFEM) is a financial institution created by the French government in 1994 to support sustainable development projects that address global environmental challenges. FFEM focuses on biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, international waters, land degradation, and pollution reduction and has been instrumental in promoting innovative, partnership-driven initiatives that contribute to both environmental protection and socio-economic development, particularly in developing countries. FFEM's approach combines funding, technical expertise, and capacity-building to enhance the long-term sustainability of projects across various sectors, including marine conservation, renewable energy, and ecosystem restoration.