

The Great Blue Wall Fellowship 2025-26

Nurturing Champions for Seagrass and Coastal Regeneration



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A person is surfing on a wave at sunset. The surfer is in a crouched position, riding the face of the wave. The water is dark blue, and the sky is a mix of orange and yellow from the setting sun. The overall mood is dynamic and adventurous.

About the Fellowship

This Fellowship is a programme under the Great Blue Wall Initiative, designed to **support changemakers** from the Great Blue Wall seascapes with leadership, advocacy, and storytelling skills to champion Africa's natural capital and critical ecosystems, with a focus on seagrass ecosystems, across the Western Indian Ocean.

At a time when the world faces intertwined crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and inequality, **Africa's ecosystems, and the communities and local experts who protect them, are already making vital contributions to global resilience and regeneration.** The Fellowship is designed to amplify local voices and impact, strengthen leadership and advocacy capacities, and enhance the global visibility of the vital contributions that Africa's ecosystems and communities are making to the world.

The Fellowship will establish a cohort of local leaders and advocates working at the frontlines of ocean conservation and regenerative blue economy transformation in the Western Indian Ocean, with a special focus on seagrass ecosystems and seagrass-anchored communities across the Western Indian Ocean.



Rationale

Africa's ocean and coastal ecosystems are not only rich in biodiversity, they are critical to global resilience against climate change, biodiversity loss, and economic inequity. The Western Indian Ocean region alone sustains over 60 million people, harbours more than 2,200 species of fish, and holds some of the world's last remaining populations of dugongs and five species of marine turtles. Its marine assets are conservatively valued at over USD 333 billion, contributing at least USD 21 billion annually to regional economies through fisheries, marine tourism, and carbon sequestration.

Seagrass beds, coral reefs, mangroves, and coastal ecosystems form a global frontline of defence against climate change, with seagrass ecosystems alone playing a crucial role in carbon sequestration, coastal protection, and food security. Yet these ecosystems, and the communities that steward them, are under growing threat from climate change, unsustainable exploitation, and ecosystem degradation.

At the same time, Africa is demonstrating global leadership in offering solutions: Africa is not only a custodian of this natural capital: it is a source of leadership, knowledge, and innovation.

- Its **local communities and Indigenous Peoples are leading regenerative conservation efforts**, restoring seagrass beds, protecting coral reefs, and innovating sustainable blue economy models and businesses.
- Across the continent, **Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs)** are being pioneered as models of participatory ocean governance, demonstrating that conservation led by communities delivers stronger, more equitable outcomes.
- African scientists, researchers and practitioners are advancing world-class science, innovation, and governance approaches uniquely adapted to the realities of the region's seascapes whilst **advancing knowledge on ecosystems and resilience**.
- Local entrepreneurs and venture builders are **driving innovative solutions** that not only contribute to the local economy, but could be models for other parts of the world.

Despite these efforts, African voices, innovations, and success stories are too often absent from global dialogues. The Great Blue Wall Fellowship seeks to contribute to empowering a **generation of ocean leaders to amplify community-driven change and Africa's critical contribution to a thriving, resilient planet**.

Through leadership development, strategic advocacy, and storytelling support, Fellows will be empowered to demonstrate that Africa's ecosystems are not only vital for local livelihoods, but essential for the health, resilience, and future of the world.



Why seagrass and natural capital?

Seagrass meadows are one of the planet's most productive yet undervalued ecosystems, covering only about 0.1% of the ocean floor but storing up to 18% of the ocean's carbon. In the Western Indian Ocean (WIO), they underpin food security, support fisheries that feed millions, protect coastlines from erosion, and provide vital nursery habitats for commercially important species and endangered fauna such as dugongs and green turtles. Despite their importance, seagrasses in the WIO are disappearing at an estimated 7% per year due to coastal development, destructive fishing, pollution, and climate change.

About the Great Blue Wall Initiative

The Great Blue Wall is an Africa-led movement to protect, restore, and sustainably manage the Western Indian Ocean through three interconnected pillars: Blue Nature (nature based solutions), Blue People (focusing on a regenerative blue economy and sustainable livelihoods), and Blue Planet (focusing on advancing inclusive conservation measures).

This pilot Fellowship falls under the Blue Nature Pillar, strengthening local capacity to lead on seagrass conservation and other nature-based solutions for resilient coastal ecosystems.

The Fellowship is supported by the Western Indian Ocean Coastal and Ocean Resilience (WIOCOR) project, with the support of the French Fund for Global Environment (FFEM).

The WIOCOR project recognises seagrass meadows as a cornerstone of socio-ecological resilience, working with local communities, scientists, and policymakers to map, protect, and restore them across five countries. By embedding seagrass action within the Fellowship, we not only protect biodiversity and climate regulation services but also amplify the voices of the coastal stewards whose livelihoods, culture, and identity are deeply tied to these ecosystems.



Fellowship objectives

The Fellowship aims to:

- Connect a new generation of African leaders to drive community-led conservation, ecosystem regeneration, and sustainable blue economy action, with a special focus on seagrass ecosystems and natural capital.
- Strengthen the **advocacy, leadership, and storytelling capacities** of fellows to amplify the voices, knowledge, and solutions of their seascapes at local, regional, and global levels.
- Elevate the **value and visibility of Africa's critical coastal and marine ecosystems**, particularly seagrass meadows, as essential contributors to global biodiversity, climate resilience, and human well-being.
- Foster a **connected network of changemakers across the Western Indian Ocean, building solidarity, collaboration, and shared leadership** in advancing the regenerative blue economy.
- Demonstrate **Africa's global leadership in ecosystem stewardship by showcasing locally driven and locally anchored innovations**, regenerative practices, and the powerful role of natural capital in securing a thriving future for people and planet.

Fellowship Structure

The Great Blue Wall Fellowship is a non-residential programme designed to complement fellows' existing commitments while building leadership, advocacy, and storytelling capacities. This flexible structure ensures that fellows can remain embedded in their seascapes while building the skills, visibility, and networks to drive transformative change.

Over twelve months, fellows will engage in:

- **Monthly Virtual Sessions:** Two-hour online meetings focused on leadership development, ecosystem advocacy, and storytelling for impact.
- **Mentorship:** Guidance and/or mentoring sessions with experienced practitioners in ocean conservation, policy engagement, and community leadership.
- **Project and best practices compilation:** Fellows will be guided in developing a final project in the form of compiling a written opinion piece amplifying the value of seagrass ecosystems, community action, or regenerative blue economy solutions.
- **Policy Dialogue:** A dedicated engagement session connecting fellows with regional policymakers and partners to elevate community-driven ocean and ecosystem leadership.
- **Joint project:** Co-designing a project, article or campaign to apply the methodology and create a strengthened



Who we are looking for

We are seeking local leaders, scientists, entrepreneurs, advocates, and innovators from across the five seascapes of the Great Blue Wall:

- Kenya (Kilifi, Shimoni-Vanga)
- Madagascar (Diana-Sava region)
- Tanzania (Tanga-Pemba Seascape)
- Mozambique (Inhambane Seascape)
- Comoros (all islands).

We are seeking leaders who are keen to champions change that extends beyond themselves, uplifting communities and ecosystems, and believe in amplifying the voices and well-being of others through their own journey.

The ideal candidates are:

- Passionate about ocean conservation, seagrass and/ or the regenerative blue economy
- Actively working with or within local communities or driving local impact in the target seascapes
- Demonstrates a commitment to serving a broader community beyond personal gain.
- Oriented toward collective impact rather than personal advancement.
- Committed to consult and engage with local stakeholders
- Eager to engage in leadership, advocacy, and storytelling
- Ready to dedicate time over a 1-year period to Fellowship activities

Eligibility

- Be from one of the five Great Blue Wall seascapes listed above.
- Be engaged in ocean conservation or regenerative blue economy initiatives.
- Have experience and a proven track record in community engagement, advocacy, or local science, especially if concerns seagrass ecosystems.
- Commit time to Fellowship activities over a 12-month period.
- **Not hold active political office, nor engage in activities promoting political agendas, religious proselytising, discrimination of any kind, or business practices contrary to the mission of the Fellowship.**

We strongly encourage applications from youth, women, elders, Indigenous Peoples, and Local Communities.

How to apply

Applications are open until 30 August 2025, 23.59 East Africa Time (UTC+3). Fill the application form by the deadline for consideration.

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