

The Hifadhi Blu Programme Gender Action Plan

For Ocean Conservation
Areas in the Western
Indian Ocean 2025–2029

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Acknowledgement of Existing Frameworks

This Gender Action Plan builds upon and aligns with existing institutional commitments, including WIOMSA’s Gender Policy (2021) and related strategic frameworks. By anchoring this Gender Action Plan within these foundational documents, we ensure coherence, continuity and strengthened impact in developing gender equality and social inclusion across all initiatives under the Hifadhi Blu Programme. This approach promotes synergy, avoids duplication, and reinforces accountability within WIOMSA’s broader efforts to mainstream gender in marine science and conservation.

Cover:
Sada Abu, a KICOWA ranger, radio operator and dedicated turtle guardians, assisting a juvenile turtle at Mongo Shariff, Kenya.
Photo credit: Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS).

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Acronyms

HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MPAs	Marine Protected Areas
OCA	Ocean Conservation Areas
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge
WIOMSA	Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association

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Executive Summary

The Gender Action Plan for the Hifadhi Blu Programme (2025–2029) presents a strategic framework to improve gender equity and social inclusion across Ocean Conservation Areas (OCAs) in the Western Indian Ocean region. Informed by the 2025 Gender Analysis Study and grounded in WIOMSA’s Gender Policy (2021) and strategic frameworks, the Gender Action Plan adopts a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) that centres the rights, voices, and leadership of marginalised groups, particularly women, gender-diverse persons, and other underrepresented communities, in marine conservation efforts. The Gender Action Plan supports the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and Targets 22 and 23 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework by embedding gender-responsive, inclusive, and community-rooted practices that contribute to more just and sustainable ocean governance.

The HRBA underpinning the Gender Action Plan reframes gender equity as a matter of justice, accountability, and structural transformation. It demands that marine conservation initiatives actively address the root causes of exclusion and ensure the full participation, empowerment, and leadership of all, particularly those historically marginalised. This approach promotes inclusive decision-making, non-discrimination, and institutional accountability, while strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of ocean governance across the Western Indian Ocean region. The Gender Action Plan’s Theory of Change sets out a clear and practical pathway for mainstreaming gender into marine conservation. It posits that if OCAs establish gender-responsive institutions, develop and implement gender-specific policies, build capacity, promote women’s leadership, engage communities to shift harmful socio-cultural norms, integrate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), ensure gender-responsive financing, and implement strong monitoring and evaluation systems, then these efforts will lead to greater awareness, institutional commitment, and inclusive participation. Over time, this will result in gender equality, more effective marine conservation outcomes, and ecologically resilient, socially just governance systems rooted in community leadership. The Theory of Change is grounded in key assumptions such as political will and institutional capacity, and acknowledges both enabling conditions (e.g., strong networks, WIOMSA’s legitimacy) and potential risks (e.g. tokenism, backlash from entrenched norms).

The Gender Action Plan has three core objectives:

1. To provide WIOMSA and its grantees, including Hifadhi Blu grantees and other stakeholders in the Western Indian Ocean region, with clear guidance to advance gender equality and inclusion within OCAs¹
2. To serve as a practical tool for WIOMSA and its grantees in mainstreaming gender across the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of conservation initiatives
3. To support OCA sites in integrating gender and human-rights considerations into their marine conservation projects, ensuring inclusive and equitable participation.

These objectives are underpinned by core guiding principles:

1. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
2. Rights-Based and Justice-Oriented Approach
3. Meaningful Participation and Representation
4. Do No Harm
5. Intersectionality
6. Accountability and Learning
7. Transparency and Sustainability
8. Locally Led and Culturally Grounded

These principles guide the Gender Action Plan’s implementation approach and ensure it remains ethical, inclusive, and responsive to local contexts.

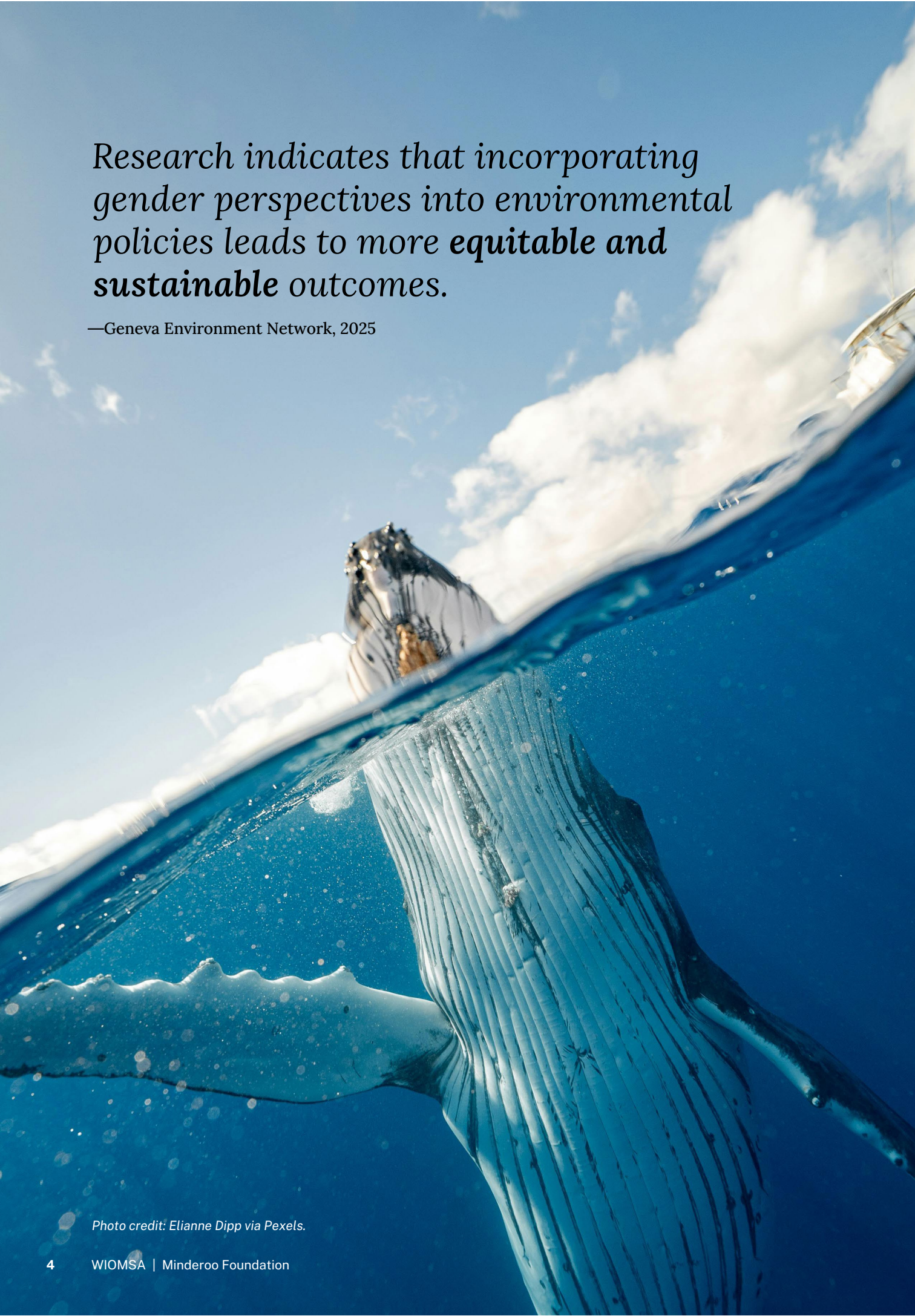
The Gender Action Plan’s Results Framework is operationalised through eight key focus areas:

1. Addressing gender-blind institutions
2. Developing gender-specific policies
3. Building capacity for advocacy and training
4. Improving women’s representation
5. Challenging socio-cultural barriers
6. Integrating TEK
7. Promoting gender-responsive financing
8. Strengthening monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems.

Each focus area is structured around a guiding principle, a set of objectives, targeted activities, and measurable indicators to ensure implementation is accountable, impactful, and adaptive. The Gender Action Plan is ultimately a roadmap for embedding gender equity and social justice into marine conservation. It empowers communities, strengthens local governance, and ensures that ocean ecosystems are safeguarded through inclusive and sustainable stewardship now and for generations to come.

Photo credit: Aroon Phukey via Getty Images.

¹ Ocean Conservation Areas includes formal Marine Protected Areas, Co-Managed Areas, and Community Managed Areas or Locally Managed Marine Areas.



Research indicates that incorporating gender perspectives into environmental policies leads to more **equitable and sustainable** outcomes.

—Geneva Environment Network, 2025

Photo credit: Elianne Dipp via Pexels.

Background Context

The Gender Action Plan for OCAs, in the Western Indian Ocean region, is a strategic initiative under the Hifadhi Blu Programme that aims to integrate gender equity into marine conservation efforts. It recognises that sustainable management of ocean resources is contingent upon the equal participation of gender-diverse individuals and marginalised identities. By embedding gender considerations in all aspects of marine conservation, the Gender Action Plan strives to empower, particularly women, improve community resilience, and promote inclusive governance, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable conservation outcomes.

The WIOMSA Strategic Plan (2021-2025) underscores the necessity of collaborative approaches to address the region’s pressing environmental challenges, emphasising the role of local communities in the stewardship of marine resources (WIOMSA, 2021). This strategy aligns with broader international frameworks, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which advocates for the integration of gender perspectives into environmental governance. The Gender Action Plan builds upon these by adopting a Human Rights-Based Approach, ensuring that the rights and voices of marginalised groups, particularly women and gender-diverse people, are central to marine conservation initiatives. This approach not only reinforces the importance of gender equality as a fundamental human right but also enhances the effectiveness of conservation strategies by leveraging diverse perspectives and knowledge systems.

The Western Indian Ocean region has a rich biodiversity and unique marine ecosystems that support millions of livelihoods. However, these ecosystems face significant threats from overfishing, climate change, pollution, and habitat degradation. Integrating gender considerations into resource management and conservation becomes critical. Women, often the primary caregivers and resource managers in their communities, possess essential knowledge and skills for sustainable marine practices (UKRI, 2022). Yet, they frequently encounter systemic barriers that hinder their participation in decision-making processes and limit their access to resources. Gender disparities in the Western Indian Ocean region manifest as restricted access to education, economic opportunities, and leadership roles, undermining women’s contributions to marine conservation (Nairobi Convention, 2025). Research indicates that incorporating gender perspectives into environmental policies leads to more equitable and sustainable outcomes. Diverse voices contribute to better-informed decision-making, enhancing overall conservation efforts (Geneva Environment Network, 2025).

The development of this Gender Action Plan is informed by a Western Indian Ocean Gender Analysis Report (2025), and it is anchored on the WIOMSA Gender Policy (2021), which seeks to mainstream gender equity in marine science and conservation by promoting inclusive participation and ensuring equitable access to resources and decision-making. The 2025 Gender Analysis Study undertaken in Western Indian Ocean OCAs highlights persistent gender disparities that undermine conservation outcomes. For example, the study shows that women are underrepresented as they constitute 34% of the OCA workforce (compared to 66% of men), hold less than 5% of leadership roles and face systemic barriers. Also, the study found that traditional beliefs such as restrictions on women’s mobility, conflicts between religious dress codes and conservation roles requiring attire like diving gear, and the militarised nature of ranger training pose significant barriers to women’s participation in marine conservation activities (see Figure 1).

Gender-related barriers to inclusive participation in OCAs in the Western Indian Ocean region	Cultural and religious norms • Restrictions on women’s mobility (e.g., travel for training or patrols). • Dress codes incompatible with diving gear or marine uniforms. • Gendered expectations that discourage women from marine roles.
	Access to resources and training • Limited access to financial capital and credit. • Inadequate access to fishing gear, boats or marine technology. • Limited training opportunities, especially in deep-sea diving, navigation and enforcement.
	Overlooked TEK • Women’s ecological knowledge sidelined in marine planning. • Preference for Western-centric conservation models that exclude local and Indigenous practices.
	Lack of gender policies in OCAs • Absence of sector-specific gender-responsive policies. • Most national and international frameworks do not address the unique gender challenges in OCAs.
	Exclusion from governance structures • Underrepresentation of women in marine decision-making bodies. • Limited voice in OCA design, implementation and monitoring.
	Institutional bias and intersectional challenges • Gender-blind policies and programming. • Disproportionate barriers for rural, Indigenous or disabled women.
	Sexual harassment and gender-biased work environments • Unsafe environments during patrols, trainings or fieldwork. • Lack of gender-sensitive grievance mechanisms.

Figure 1: Key Findings of the 2025 Gender Analysis Study.

This Gender Action Plan adopts a HRBA, guided by the principles of:

- Participation:** Ensuring women and marginalised groups actively engage in OCA governance.
- Non-Discrimination:** Addressing gender, disability, and social inequities in conservation.
- Accountability:** Holding grantees accountable for gender-responsive practices.
- Empowerment:** Building women’s capacity to lead and advocate.
- Legality:** Aligning with human rights standards, including SDG 5 and national gender policies, including the WIOMSA Gender Policy (2021).

Complemented by Gender Equity, Disability, and Social Inclusion principles, the HRBA addresses intersectional barriers faced by women, Indigenous groups, and other marginalised communities. The Gender Action Plan aims to empower women, foster inclusive governance, and achieve sustainable conservation outcomes by promoting gender-responsive policies, capacity building, and TEK integration. It builds on the study’s recommendations, including gender budgeting, capacity building, and risk mitigation (e.g., addressing gender-based violence and financial mismanagement), to guide WIOMSA, Hifadhi Blu grantees and other conservation practitioners in the Western Indian Ocean region in implementing equitable strategies.



The Hifadhi Blu Programme

Launched in 2024, the Hifadhi Blu Programme is a transformative initiative designed to improve the management effectiveness of OCAs across the Western Indian Ocean region. The programme specifically targets the 10 signatory countries of the Nairobi Convention, namely: Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Réunion (France), Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, and Tanzania, which collectively steward a rich mosaic of marine biodiversity and socio-ecological systems. The Hifadhi Blu Programme is structured as a four-year, region-wide intervention that seeks to improve management outcomes at the institutional level, with particular emphasis on site engagement through OCA management staff. The programme takes an inclusive approach to OCAs, being agnostic to the type of conservation area, whether nationally designated MPAs, community-managed marine areas (CMMAs), co-managed areas (CMAs), or Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs). This allows the programme to tailor its support to context-specific needs while promoting shared learning across diverse governance arrangements.

At its core, the programme aims to strengthen the capacity, resources, and institutional infrastructure required for effective and equitable management of coastal and marine systems. It focuses on cost-effective, high-impact interventions that are aligned with internationally recognised frameworks for assessing and improving management effectiveness. Through its work, the programme contributes to building more resilient ecosystems and coastal communities in the Western Indian Ocean region.

Photo credit:
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The programme was co-developed by Advanced Conservation Strategies, Minderoo Foundation, and WIOMSA, the latter serving as the principal implementing partner. WIOMSA leads the coordination and grant administration processes, working closely with country-based organisations and conservation practitioners. A hallmark of the Hifadhi Blu Programme is its strong commitment to adaptive management, anchored in an Impact Measurement and Learning Plan. This approach ensures that all grant-making, grantee engagement, and strategy refinement processes are informed by evidence, learning, and local context. Hifadhi Blu Programme enhances accountability, innovation, and long-term impact by embedding monitoring and learning throughout the programme cycle.

The programme’s gender-responsive lens is particularly significant. As part of its strategic orientation, Hifadhi Blu Programme recognises that inclusive and equitable conservation cannot be achieved without addressing the gendered dimensions of marine governance. The Gender Action Plan, developed through a Gender Analysis Study in the Western Indian Ocean region, consultation with WIOMSA and Minderoo Foundation, is therefore both a complement to and a critical enabler of the programme’s long-term success. Furthermore, it is a cornerstone of Hifadhi Blu Programme’s inclusive conservation mandate. It aligns with the programme’s emphasis on locally grounded solutions by promoting gender-responsive strategies that improve equity, participation, and leadership within OCA governance structures. Through the Gender Action Plan, Hifadhi Blu Programme seeks to ensure that gender equity is not treated as an add-on, but as a core principle that improves the sustainability and effectiveness of marine conservation outcomes across the Western Indian Ocean region.

What sets this Gender Action Plan apart from existing national gender policies or OCA strategies is its operational focus on the intersection of gender, biodiversity, and community-based marine conservation within the specific context of the Western Indian Ocean.

*Photo credit:
Graziella Zago via Getty Images.*

Underlying Rationale

Despite growing recognition of the importance of inclusive ocean governance, women and marginalised groups remain significantly underrepresented in the planning, decision-making, and management of OCAs across the Western Indian Ocean region. Systemic barriers, including entrenched gender norms, unequal access to marine resources, exclusion from leadership roles, and limited capacity-building opportunities, continue to impede their meaningful participation. These gendered inequalities perpetuate social injustice and diminish the overall resilience and effectiveness of marine conservation efforts in the region.

This Gender Action Plan is both urgent and essential. It addresses a critical implementation barrier by advancing gender-responsive and community-rooted marine conservation aligned with global frameworks, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, particularly Target 22, which calls for inclusive, equitable participation in biodiversity governance, and Target 23, which urges the integration of gender equality in all biodiversity-related policies and actions. This Gender Action Plan provides a practical roadmap for transforming high-level commitments into local action, supporting Hifadhi Blu Programme grantees to systematically embed gender equality in all stages of OCA planning and implementation.

What sets this Gender Action Plan apart from existing national gender policies or OCA strategies is its operational focus on the intersection of gender, biodiversity, and community-based marine conservation within the specific context of the Western Indian Ocean. It offers measurable targets, best-practice benchmarks, and a collaborative systems approach that engages WIOMSA, grantees, governments, civil society, and coastal communities. In doing so, the Gender Action Plan bridges the persistent divide between policy and practice, ensuring that gender equity is a guiding principle and a lived reality in the governance and stewardship of ocean spaces.



*Regional Exchange hosted by SPGA, Mangrove Monitoring.
Photo credit: WIOMPAN.*

Theory of Change: Gender Action Plan – Hifadhi Blu Programme



This pathway is grounded in the assumption that institutions, despite being historically gender-blind or male-dominated, can evolve, especially when driven by a combination of political will, resourcing, and local leadership. It also assumes that women are eager to lead but are often constrained by systemic, cultural, and financial barriers. Critical enablers along the way include supportive national laws and policies, active women's networks, and champions within institutions willing to advocate for change. At the same time, potential risks such as tokenism, elite capture, institutional resistance, and gender fatigue must be proactively identified and addressed to ensure that the process does not stall or exclude those most affected.

Aim

WIOMSA has committed itself to advancing gender equity as a fundamental pillar of marine conservation in the Western Indian Ocean region. Recognising that sustainable management of ocean resources is intrinsically linked to the active participation of women, men, gender-diverse individuals, and marginalised identities, the Gender Action Plan seeks to dismantle systemic barriers that hinder women's engagement in conservation efforts.

Within this framework, the Gender Action Plan seeks to increase the active involvement of women in decision-making processes, leadership roles, and community-driven initiatives related to OCAs. By implementing targeted capacity-building programs, fostering inclusive governance, and promoting gender-responsive policies, the Gender Action Plan aims to empower women and marginalised groups, ensuring their voices are integral to the marine conservation dialogue. This commitment not only improves the effectiveness of marine conservation strategies but also promotes social equity, ultimately leading to healthier ecosystems and resilient communities throughout the Western Indian Ocean region.

Key Objectives of the Gender Action Plan

The objectives of the Gender Action Plan are to:

1. Provide WIOMSA and its grantees, including Hifadhi Blu grantees and other stakeholders in the Western Indian Ocean region, with clear guidance to advance gender equality and inclusion within Ocean Conservation Areas
2. Serve as a practical tool for WIOMSA and its grantees in mainstreaming gender across the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of conservation initiatives
3. Support OCA sites in integrating gender considerations into their marine conservation projects, ensuring inclusive and equitable participation.

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Maryna Patzen via Getty Images.

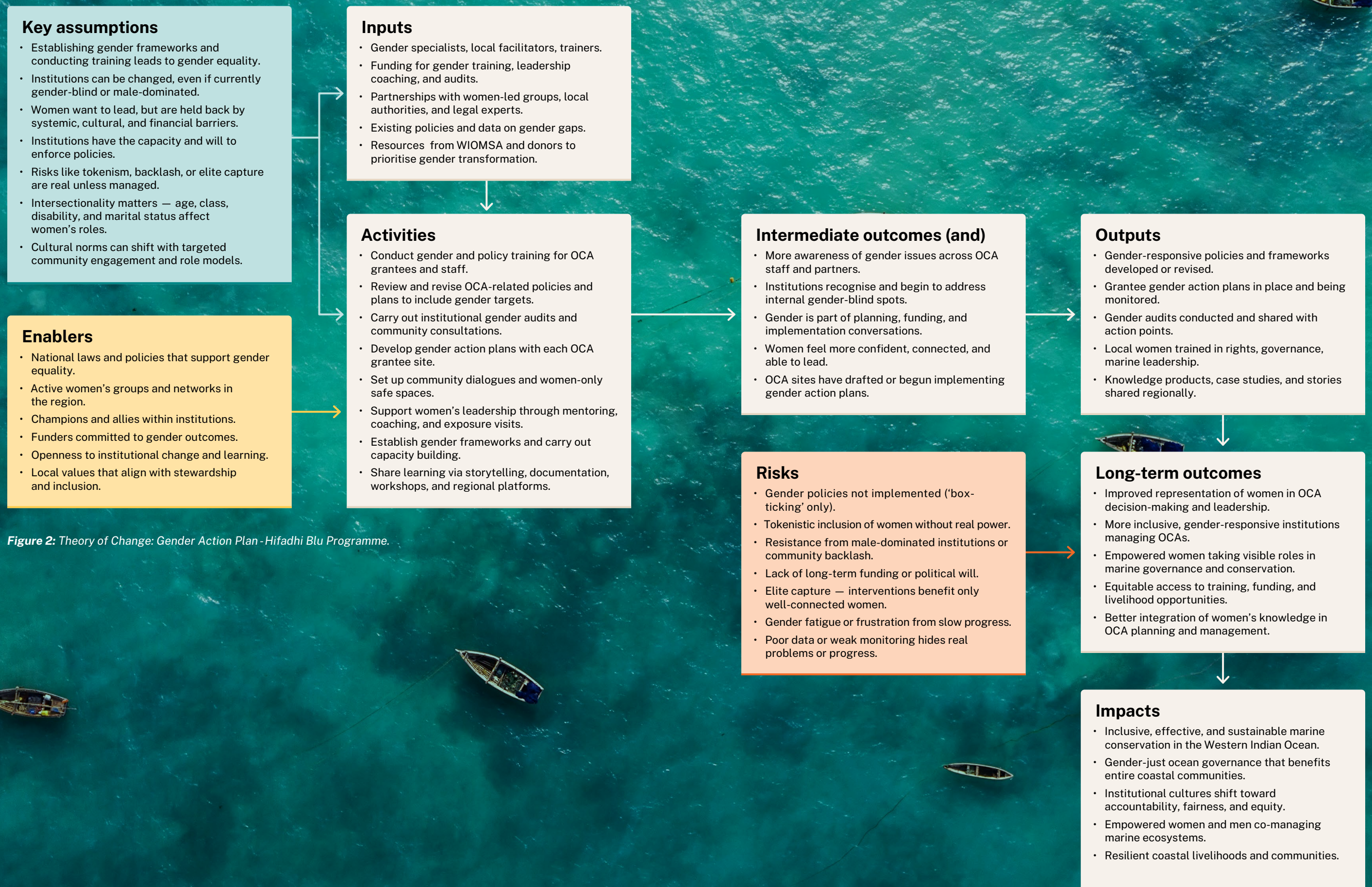


Figure 2: Theory of Change: Gender Action Plan - Hifadhi Blu Programme.

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Guiding principles for the Gender Action Plan

The success of the Gender Action Plan, under the Hifadhi Blu Programme is rooted in a clear and coherent set of guiding principles that shape its design, implementation, and monitoring. Aligned with WIOMSA’s Gender Policy (2021), the Gender Action Plan affirms that gender equality is a fundamental human right and a collective responsibility requiring intentional commitment, resources, and inclusive leadership.

It advances a transformative, justice-driven agenda through eight core principles:

- 1. Promoting **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion**
- 2. Adopting a **Rights-Based and Justice-Oriented Approach**
- 3. Ensuring **Meaningful Participation and Representation**
- 4. Applying a **Do No Harm** lens
- 5. Embracing **Intersectionality**
- 6. Fostering **Accountability and Learning**
- 7. Ensuring **Transparency and Sustainability**
- 8. and supporting **Locally Led and Culturally Grounded** conservation.

These principles collectively ensure that marine governance in the Western Indian Ocean is equitable, inclusive, and sustainable.

Photo credit: Cyrielle Beaubois via Getty Images.

The Gender Action Plan results framework

Overall purpose
To influence and strengthen gender-equitable marine conservation practices, decision-making, and resource allocation through inclusive, locally grounded, and evidence-based interventions that support sustainable ocean governance in the Western Indian Ocean region.

Focus Area 1	Addressing gender-blind institutions
Objective	Strengthen institutional awareness and practices on gender equity among OCA grantees.
Proposed activities	SUPPORT gender self-assessments by grantees. DELIVER gender equity training workshops. REVIEW institutional practices for gender responsiveness. DESIGNATE internal gender champions/focal points.
Indicators	• Number of gender self-assessments supported and percentage of grantees acting on findings. • Number of gender equity training sessions conducted. • Percentage of staff reporting improved understanding of gender-responsive practices. • Number of gender champions/focal points designated and active. • Stakeholder perceptions of improvements in institutional gender responsiveness.

Focus Area 2	Promote gender-responsive practices in marine conservation through consultative processes and best-practice guidelines
Objective	To encourage OCA grantees to develop and implement sector-specific gender policies
Proposed activities	FACILITATE stakeholder dialogues on gender issues. DEVELOP gender-responsive practice guidelines. PROMOTE awareness and uptake of gender-responsive practices. DOCUMENT and DISSEMINATE promising practices.
Indicators	• Number of stakeholder consultations conducted. • Number of gender-responsive guidelines produced and disseminated. • Percentage of grantees adopting at least one recommended practice. • Number of awareness campaigns conducted. • Number of documented case studies influencing policy discussions.

Focus Area 3

Capacity building for gender advocacy

Objective	Strengthen local gender advocacy and leadership skills, particularly among women and gender diverse groups.
Proposed Activities	DEVELOP and DELIVER community-based training on gender rights and advocacy tailored to local needs. FACILITATE peer learning and mentorship. CREATE gender advocacy toolkits with user-friendly resources that can be adapted and reused by communities and grantees. HOST inclusive forums and advocacy dialogues.
Indicators	• Number of community trainings delivered on gender advocacy. • Percentage of participants reporting enhanced advocacy confidence and skills. • Number of toolkits created and distributed. • Number of mentorship relationships established. • Number of advocacy dialogues held with documented outcomes.

Focus Area 4

Improving women’s representation and leadership in the OCA sector

Objective	Increase women’s representation in leadership and decision-making roles in OCAs through training, mentorship, and visibility.
Proposed Activities	ESTABLISH mentorship networks. DELIVER specialised leadership training. PROVIDE seed grants for women-led projects. SHOWCASE women’s leadership through storytelling, visibility campaigns, and institutional recognition.
Indicators	• Number of mentorship networks operational. • Number of leadership trainings conducted. • Percentage of women trained reporting increased readiness for leadership roles. • Number of women-led projects funded. • Number of public campaigns conducted and reach. • Change in women’s representation in leadership roles over time.

Focus Area 5

Addressing socio-cultural barriers

Objective	Shift socio-cultural norms that limit women’s participation by engaging communities through inclusive dialogues and awareness campaigns.
Proposed Activities	IMPLEMENT context-sensitive behaviour change campaigns. ORGANISE gender dialogues with communities, involving both men and women, to explore gender roles and shared responsibilities. TRAIN community leaders as equity champions. BUILD allyship with male champions, including traditional leaders, to foster inclusive change.
Indicators	• Number of campaigns implemented targeting gender norms. • Number of gender dialogues conducted. • Number of trained local leaders supporting inclusion. • Number of male allyship initiatives launched. • Reported attitude change in communities (disaggregated by gender).

Focus Area 6

Integrating TEK

Objective	Recognise and integrate gender-sensitive traditional ecological knowledge into conservation practices through participatory approaches.
Proposed Activities	ORGANISE collaborative learning exchanges where women TEK holders and scientists co-produce knowledge. SUPPORT documentation efforts that preserve and validate women’s traditional marine knowledge. INITIATE pilot projects that integrate TEK into conservation strategies, with a gender lens. OFFER communications training to increase opportunities for TEK holders in policy advocacy and community dialogues.
Indicators	• Number of TEK workshops conducted. • Number of initiatives documenting gender-sensitive TEK. • Number of research projects integrating TEK. • Number of TEK holders (esp. women) trained in advocacy. • Reported influence of TEK on marine conservation practices.

Focus Area 7

Promoting gender-responsive funding mechanisms

Objective	To promote gender equity through funding mechanisms that incentivise gender-responsive design, budgeting, and reporting among grantees.
Proposed Activities	DEVELOP gender-responsive budgeting guidance to support grantees in integrating equity considerations into proposals. PROVIDE training on preparing inclusive project proposals that embed gender objectives. IDENTIFY and SUPPORT small grants for women-led or gender-focused initiatives. MONITOR gender outcomes of funded projects and integrate lessons into future grant design.
Indicators	• Number of gender-responsive budgeting guidance developed. • Number of training sessions on gender inclusive project proposals facilitated. • Number of small grants for women-led or gender-focused initiatives identified and supported. • Number of funded projects monitored and lessons integrated into grant designing.

Focus Area 8

Monitoring and evaluation for gender integration

Objective	Implement a gender-sensitive M&E system that tracks gender outcomes and supports adaptive learning.
Proposed Activities	CO-DEVELOP gender indicators for grantees to assess equity outcomes across OCA initiatives. CONDUCT gender integration assessments. TRAIN grantees on gender M&E methodologies that capture disaggregated data and qualitative change. DEVELOP a gender-sensitive M&E framework with built-in feedback loops and learning touchpoints.
Indicators	• Number of gender indicators co-developed and adopted. • Number of gender integration assessments completed. • Number of M&E training sessions delivered. • Percentage of grantees implementing gender-responsive M&E. • Completion of midline and endline gender impact evaluations. • Use of M&E data to adapt programming across all eight focus areas.

Conclusion and way forward

The Gender Action Plan for the Hifadhi Blu Programme marks a critical step toward achieving inclusive, equitable, and sustainable ocean governance across the Western Indian Ocean region. By aligning with WIOMSA’s Gender Policy and global biodiversity and development frameworks, the Gender Action Plan provides a clear, actionable roadmap for advancing gender equity in marine conservation.

Through its comprehensive focus areas, the Gender Action Plan addresses structural, institutional, and socio-cultural barriers that limit women’s participation and leadership in OCAs. It offers practical guidance and measurable indicators to support WIOMSA, grantees, partners, and community stakeholders in embedding gender considerations into their daily work, policies, and conservation outcomes.

Successful implementation of this Gender Action Plan will require:

- Sustained commitment from WIOMSA and its partners
- Dedicated technical and financial resources
- Ongoing capacity strengthening at all levels
- Strong accountability, monitoring, and learning systems
- Meaningful engagement of women, men, and gender-diverse individuals across all contexts.

The Gender Action Plan is a living framework. As the Hifadhi Blu Programme evolves and learns from practice, this Action Plan should be regularly reviewed and adapted to ensure it remains relevant, effective, and responsive to emerging needs.

Ultimately, gender equity is not a stand-alone goal but a necessary condition for effective management strategies and marine conservation. Through this Gender Action Plan, WIOMSA, Minderoo Foundation and partners reaffirm their collective commitment to ensuring that the stewardship of our ocean spaces is inclusive, just, and sustainable - now and for generations to come.

Glossary

Capacity Building: Efforts aimed at imparting knowledge, enhancing skills and strengthening institutional structures that support gender-inclusivity and effective marine conservation (Kruft et al.,2025).

Collaborative Systems Approach: An inclusive framework that engages multiple stakeholders, including local communities, governments and civil society in the co-management and stewardship of marine resources (Lukambagire et al., 2024).

Community Resilience: The ability of communities to adapt to environmental, social and economic changes or shocks, through equitable conservation and gender-sensitive strategies (Camacho et al., 2023).

Gender Action Plan: A strategic framework designed to integrate gender equality into marine conservation efforts, ensuring inclusive participation and benefits for all genders (Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2022).

Gender-Blind Institutions: Organisations or systems that fail to consider gender differences in their policies, operations and decision-making, potentially reinforcing existing inequalities by neglecting the unique needs and contributions of diverse genders (Forman-Rabinovici and Mandel, H., 2023).

Gender Disparities: Inequities between different genders, often manifesting in access to education, resources and leadership roles, which the Gender Action Plan seeks to address (Österblom et al., 2023).

Gender Equality: The state in which access to rights or opportunities is unaffected by gender, a core principle of the Gender Action Plan to ensure equitable outcomes in conservation (Adeniyi et al., 2024).

Gender Mainstreaming: The integration of gender perspectives into all policies, programmes, and actions to ensure that people of all gender identities can equally participate in, influence, and benefit from marine conservation. It is a key component of a human rights-based approach and essential for achieving sustainable and equitable outcomes in marine and coastal governance.

Gender-Responsive Monitoring and Evaluation: A method of tracking progress in conservation initiatives that includes gender-disaggregated data and assesses how actions affect women, men and other genders differently (Lubowa and Mwangi, 2023).

Gender-responsive: Considering the different needs and experiences of women, men, gender-diverse individuals, and marginalised identities in policies and programs (Cortoni, 2024).

Hifadhi Blu Programme: A regional initiative for sustainable marine conservation and community empowerment in the Western Indian Ocean region led by WIOMSA in collaboration with partner organisations (WIOMSA, 2024).

Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA): A method of programming and policy-making that ensures human rights principles, participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment, and legality are at the centre of conservation efforts (Patterson, 2024).

Impact, Monitoring and Learning (IML): A framework integrating assessment, tracking, and learning to inform adaptive management and decision-making (Mahmoud Saleh et al., 2024).

Inclusive Governance: A decision-making process that ensures the representation and meaningful participation of all societal groups, particularly marginalised populations such as women and Indigenous communities (Annahar et al., 2023).

Intersectionality: A framework that recognises how various forms of social stratification, such as race, gender, class and disability, intersect and impact individual experiences and opportunities (Losleben and Musubika, 2023).

Locally led and culturally grounded: Approaches valuing local knowledge, culture, and leadership in conservation (Robinson et al., 2022).

Marginalised Groups: Communities or individuals excluded from mainstream social, economic or political life, such as women, Indigenous peoples or the youth, whose inclusion is important for effective conservation outcomes (Torrance et al., 2023).

Marine Ecosystems: Complex habitats in the ocean that include coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds, which are important for biodiversity and human livelihoods (Grassle, 2013).

Ocean Conservation Areas (OCAs): Specific marine and coastal zones designated for protection and sustainable management to conserve biodiversity and support livelihoods (Gill et al., 2024).

Sustainable Conservation Outcomes: Conservation results that are not only ecologically sound but also socially just and economically viable over the long term.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK): Indigenous and local knowledge systems developed through experience and passed down through generations, often held by women and crucial for sustainable marine resource management (Shackleton et al., 2023).

Transformative Change: Fundamental shifts in policies, norms and behaviours that challenge and change existing power relations, particularly those reinforcing gender inequality in conservation (Visseren-Hamakers et al., 2021).

Western Indian Ocean (WIO) Region: A geographic area encompassing countries along the Western Indian Ocean, noted for its marine biodiversity and the socioeconomic reliance of communities on marine resources (Chevallier, 2022).

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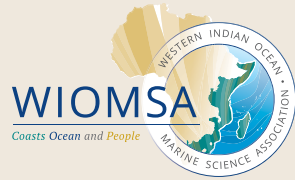
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