

# PATHWAYS FOR MARINE OECMs IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN

Guidance on Other Effective Area-based  
Conservation Measures to strengthen governance,  
local stewardship, and conservation outcomes





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About this report

This report examines the status, challenges, and opportunities for marine Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) – a tool for achieving the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework’s 30x30 target – in 10 Western Indian Ocean (WIO) countries. Drafted by a Working Group on OECMs convened by the Consortium for the Conservation of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO-C), the report clarifies what marine OECMs are and how they fit into the WIO regional context. It documents national progress towards OECMs and highlights regional opportunities for shared learning and coordinated action towards OECMs, with an emphasis on strengthening marine community-based management and conservation efforts.

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The country snapshots contained within the report were compiled by national teams of experts as listed per country.

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Cover image

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About WIO-C

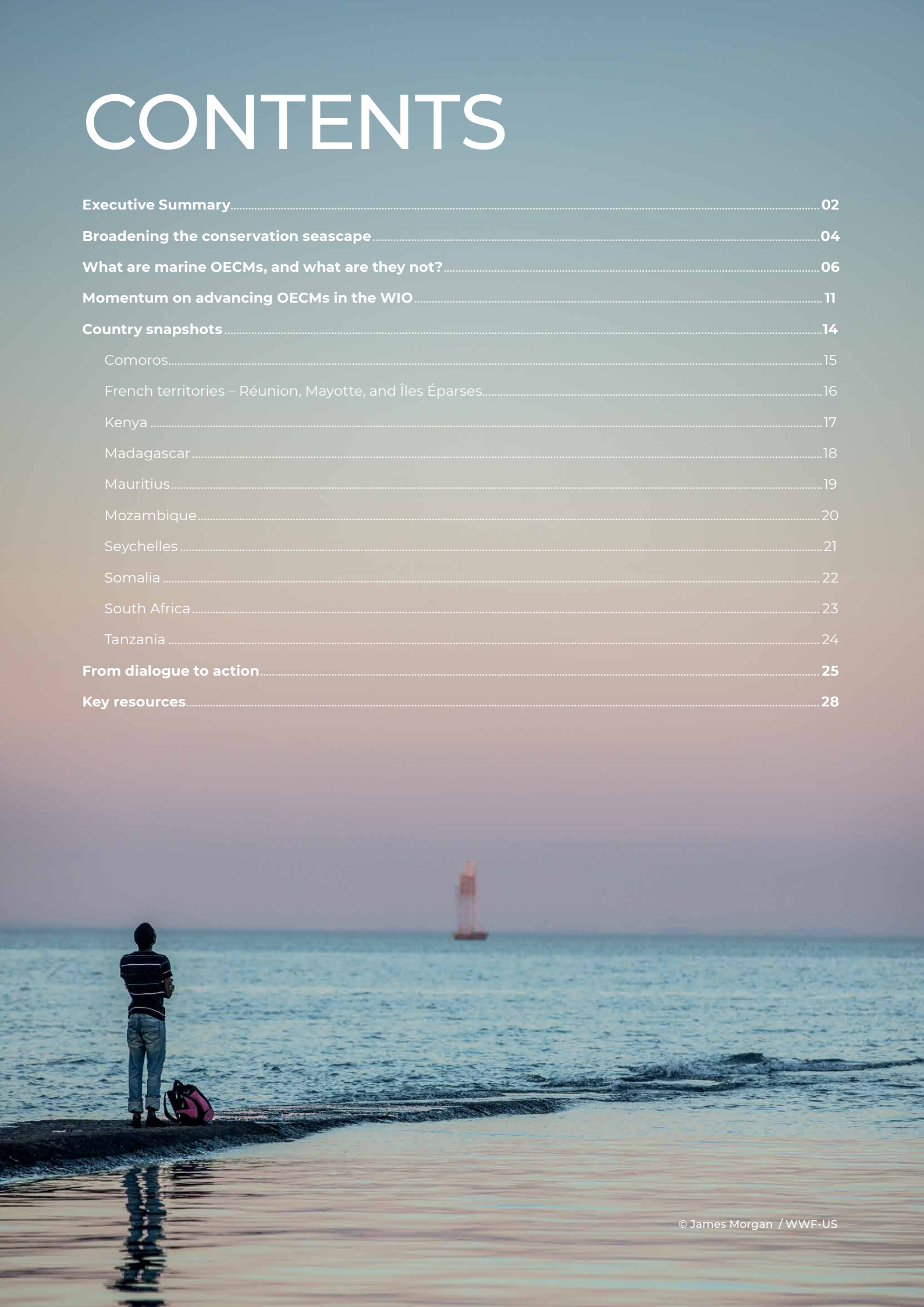
The WIO-C was officially launched at the Fifth Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Nairobi Convention in November 2007. WIO-C comprises a group of international and regional nongovernmental organisations in partnership with intergovernmental organisations that have presence and are active in regional marine and coastal ecosystem management in the Western Indian Ocean. In March 2025, the WIO-C members established a Working Group on OECMs. This group is led by WCS and other members interested in advancing the OECM agenda in the WIO, including WWF, IUCN, CORDIO East Africa, WIOMSA, TNC, Fauna & Flora, Wetlands International, and Rare.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the Nairobi Convention Integrated Regional Programme (2025–2035) has created renewed momentum to expand and diversify area-based marine conservation in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO). To this end, Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) have emerged as a complementary tool to marine protected areas (MPAs), enabling countries to recognise and report areas outside of formally designated protected areas that deliver positive biodiversity outcomes. Importantly, OECMs offer a mechanism to formalise and strengthen community-based management initiatives, while requiring demonstrated, effective, and sustained conservation outcomes.

Across the WIO, countries are making uneven but growing progress towards recognising OECMs. Yet no marine and coastal OECMs have been reported to date. While some countries have advanced in policy reform, site screening, and assessments, others remain at the early stages of awareness building. Common enabling conditions for formally recognising marine OECMs include strong community stewardship, evolving co-management frameworks, alignment with marine spatial planning (MSP), effective ecosystem-based fisheries management, and growing donor interest. The WIO therefore has a unique opportunity to scale marine conservation by recognising existing community-managed areas as OECMs.

At the same time, challenges persist. Many countries lack operational policy frameworks to secure community rights and capacity in community-based management, which limits alignment of community-managed areas with OECM criteria. This gap

is compounded by fragmented governance and mandates across sectors, limited funding, and uncertainty around monitoring, reporting, and socio-ecological benefits of OECMs. Without clear national pathways, OECMs risk remaining conceptual and failing to contribute to GBF Target 3. Advancing OECMs is therefore more a systems challenge than a technical task, requiring alignment across governance, financing, capacity, and knowledge systems.

This report synthesises the current status, challenges, and opportunities for marine OECMs in 10 WIO countries and provides practical guidance in support of the community-based marine OECM agenda. It clarifies what marine OECMs are and how they fit into the regional WIO context, and it documents national progress through country snapshots and a synthesis illustrating diverse national priorities. This comparative approach highlights opportunities for shared regional learning and coordinated action.

Building on this evidence base, the report presents a pathway for advancing the marine OECM agenda

in the WIO. Priority steps of this pathway include to (1) establish and maintain an enabling environment by building a common understanding and capacity for inclusive OECM processes, strengthening legal and policy frameworks and institutional coordination, and establishing sustainable financing pathways and incentives for local participation; (2) identify and pilot candidate sites based on a diverse range of available socio-ecological knowledge; (3) assess OECM effectiveness by strengthening monitoring and capacities on the ground; and (4) implement and scale OECMs by mobilising sustainable and equitable financing and by leveraging existing regional platforms for knowledge exchange.

National OECM frameworks should strengthen, not replace, existing systems, avoiding unnecessary regulatory burdens. By aligning national efforts with regional platforms such as the Nairobi Convention, the WIO region is well positioned to scale credible, context-appropriate OECMs that contribute to biodiversity conservation, livelihoods, and long-term ocean and coastal resilience.



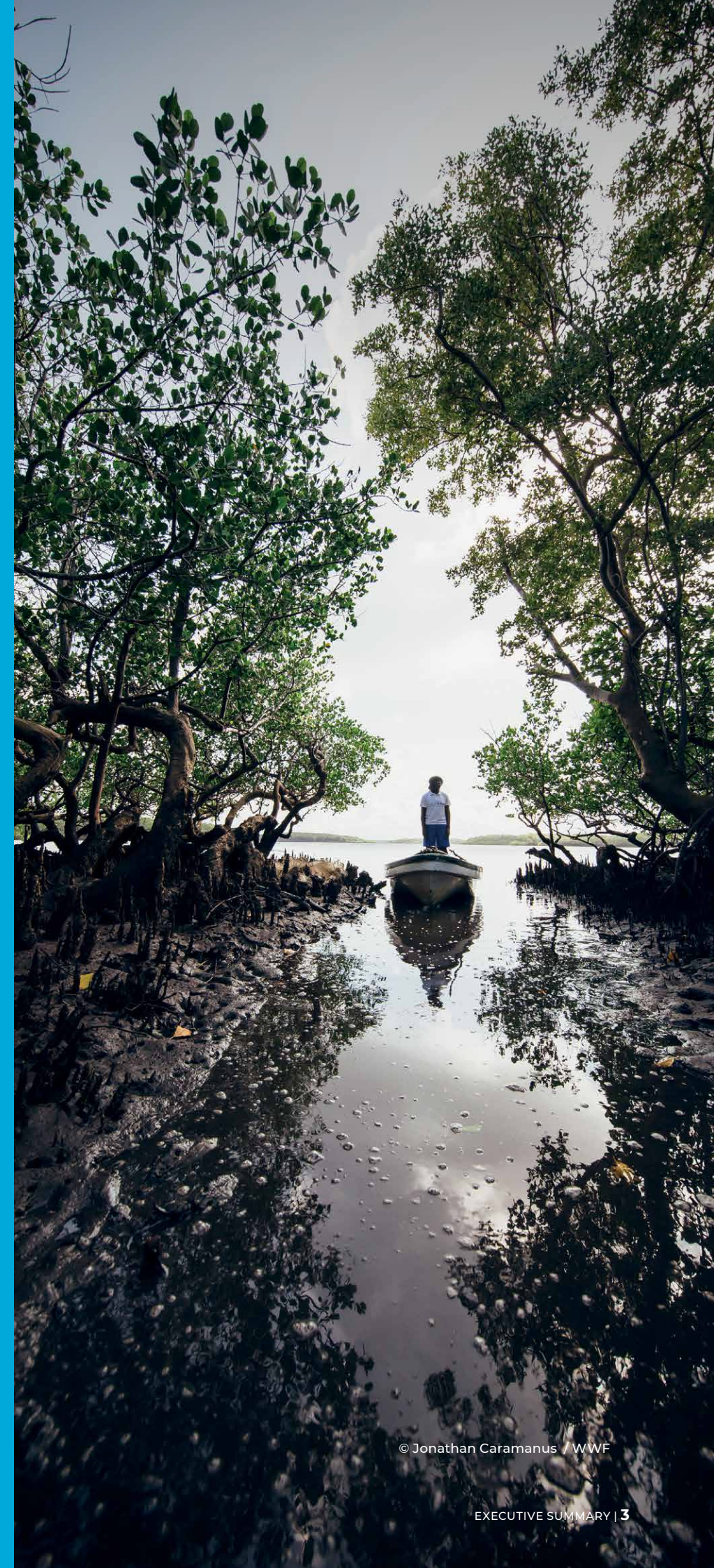
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## PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the Nairobi Convention Integrated Regional Programme 2025–2035 emphasises the urgent need to recognise and integrate a broader range of conservation mechanisms, including Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs), in achieving GBF Target 3 – commonly referred to as “30x30”.

Through the Consortium for the Conservation of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO-C), a Working Group on OECMs was formed to guide OECM processes in the WIO, including site identification, assessment, recognition, reporting, and the effective implementation of OECMs. This report was collaboratively developed with OECM practitioners and national expert teams to assist contracting parties to the Nairobi Convention in leveraging OECMs as a complementary tool to existing area-based conservation measures. By reviewing progress towards developing marine OECMs in 10 WIO countries, the report highlights opportunities for shared learning and coordinated action towards OECMs with a particular emphasis on strengthening marine community-based conservation efforts.



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# BROADENING THE CONSERVATION SEASCAPE

## The potential of OECMs to strengthen community stewardship and conservation outcomes

Across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO), cumulative pressures on coastal habitats, marine species, and fisheries are reshaping marine ecosystems and the livelihoods that depend on them. These trends underscore the urgency of strengthening inclusive coastal and marine conservation to safeguard ecosystems, secure livelihoods, and build resilience.

WIO countries have made significant strides in advancing marine protected areas (MPAs) and improving ocean governance; however, persistent challenges hinder MPA effectiveness, including limited funding, staffing, capacity, and equipment, as well as inconsistent monitoring and enforcement. At the same time, approaches that devolve rights to and engage with communities have shown that, with greater legal recognition and long-term support, communities could play a more prominent role in achieving national biodiversity goals. Together, these developments highlight the value of complementary approaches to support connected, equitable, and climate-resilient marine conservation areas.

The emergence of Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) as a conservation tool is timely. OECMs offer a flexible mechanism to recognise areas that achieve sustained biodiversity outcomes outside of formally designated MPAs, across diverse governance arrangements. By recognising areas of sustainable use, customary stewardship, and sector-led management, OECMs provide an additional pathway alongside MPAs

for countries to meet GBF Target 3. WIO countries have thus started to engage with OECMs to contribute to Target 3 and, in some cases, support ecosystem restoration under Target 2. OECMs are also being explored to recognise existing stewardship, strengthen governance equity, safeguard ecosystem services, and improve coherence across fragmented ocean governance frameworks.

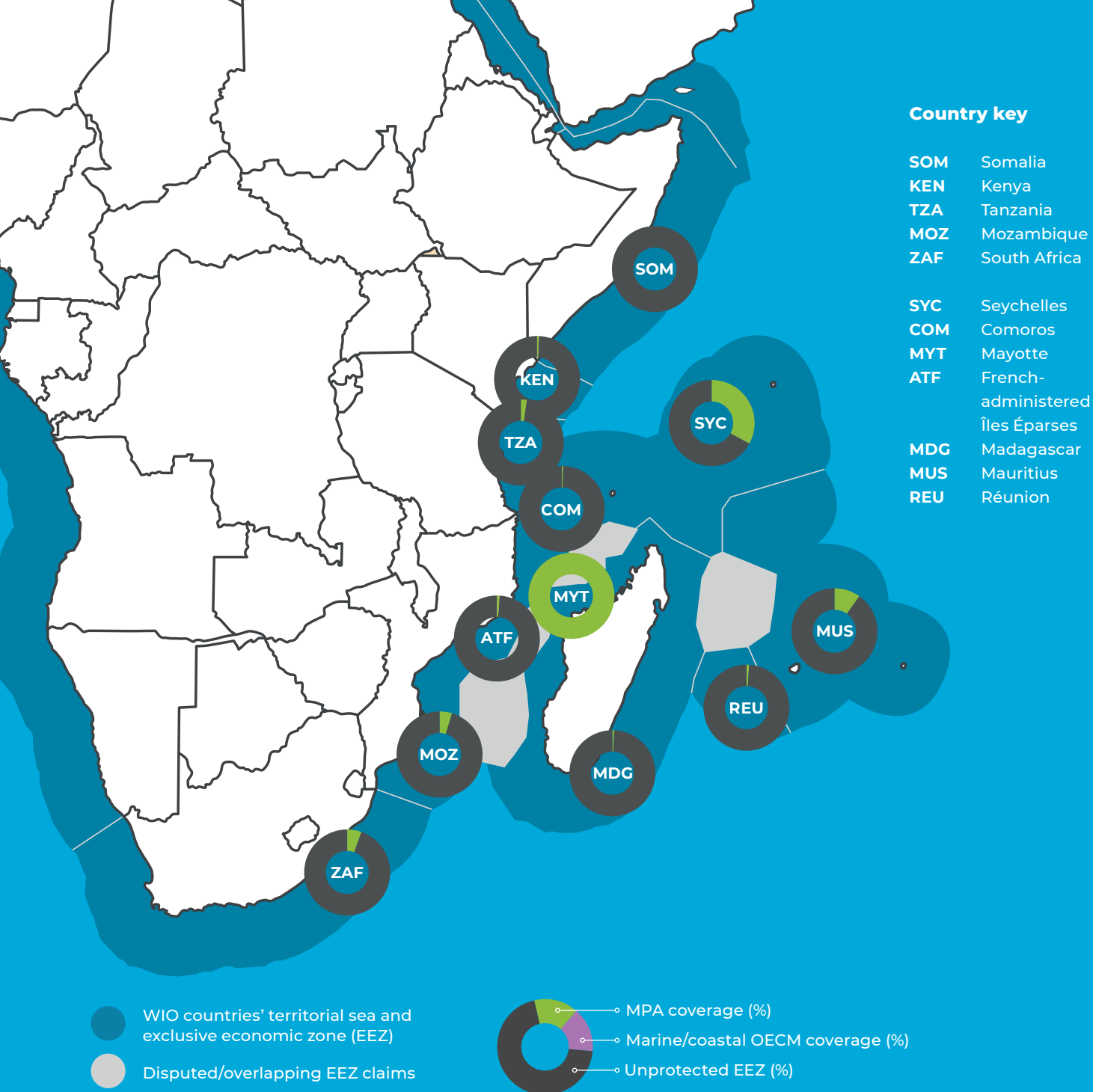
For governments, OECMs offer a pragmatic way to scale conservation coverage by recognising sustainable resource management by coastal communities and other sectors while potentially increasing the attractiveness of investment in conservation, management effectiveness, connectivity, and climate resilience. For communities, OECMs may foster formal recognition of stewardship, greater decision-making power, and improved livelihoods and food security through well-managed resources.

Momentum around marine and coastal OECMs is growing across the WIO, supported by policy reforms, donor interest, and pilot assessments. Countries are exploring how different governance arrangements – such as small-scale fishing zones, community-managed closures, co-management structures, and sector-based measures – could meet OECM criteria and contribute to national conservation commitments. Early screening exercises are helping to identify potential OECM sites, evidence requirements, and pathways for integrating OECMs into existing legal and institutional frameworks.

Despite this progress, uncertainties remain. Many countries still seek clarity on OECM identification and reporting processes and their practical requirements. These questions include defining conservation and social outcomes, methods for demonstrating these outcomes, incentives for participation of local actors, and access to sustained financing for effective governance and management. In several cases, progress is further constrained by the absence of explicit national policies, legislation, or regulatory provisions to formally recognise and integrate OECMs into existing governance frameworks.



### MOMENTUM AROUND MARINE AND COASTAL OECMS IS GROWING ACROSS THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN, SUPPORTED BY POLICY REFORMS, DONOR INTEREST, AND PILOT ASSESSMENTS



## MARINE PROTECTED AREAS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS THE GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK'S TARGET 3 IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN

The map illustrates the current extent (%) of nationally designated marine protected areas (MPAs) across the vast exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of Western Indian Ocean countries. While some countries have made

notable progress, most remain far from conserving 30% of marine areas through marine protected areas (MPAs), as required under the Global Biodiversity Framework's (GBF's) Target 3. To date, no marine or

coastal Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) have been formally identified or reported in the region, underscoring their potential to complement MPAs and accelerate progress towards Target 3.

**Source:** EXT\_MR\_EEZ-AND-TERRITORIAL-SEAS dataset (VLIZ Maritime Boundaries Geodatabase), accessed via Copernicus Marine Service Marine Data Store.

# WHAT ARE MARINE OECMs, AND WHAT ARE THEY NOT?

Established under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), OECMs are geographically defined areas outside of formally protected areas that contribute to Target 3 of the GBF, which calls for at least 30% of the earth’s surface to be effectively conserved and managed by 2030 through ecologically representative, well-connected, and equitably governed systems of protected areas and OECMs. OECMs may be governed by government agencies, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, private actors, sectoral authorities, or through co-management arrangements. To qualify, areas must be assessed against criteria demonstrating sustained ecological benefits, long-term governance, defined boundaries, and *in-situ* biodiversity conservation.

To ensure credibility and consistency, OECMs should be identified and assessed against internationally agreed standards. The CBD’s definition of OECMs is underpinned by the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN’s) guidance, which clarifies criteria and provides tools to assess governance, biodiversity outcomes, boundaries, and long-term security at site level. In the case of fisheries, complementary guidance by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) helps determine whether management measures deliver sustained *in-situ* conservation benefits. The forthcoming [Marine OECM Guide](#) by Oregon State University and the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity will be able to provide additional context on potential marine OECMs and insights from practice. While global guidance will be critical, OECMs must also be locally relevant and aligned with national legal systems, governance arrangements, and socio-

cultural contexts to ensure effective and equitable implementation.

### What makes marine OECMs unique?

While core criteria are consistent across both realms, notable differences exist between marine and terrestrial OECMs. Land tenure can be public, private, or collective, whereas marine areas are typically public, with the state holding primary rights and others holding limited, often time-bound use rights. As a result, marine OECMs rely less on tenure and more on effective (co-) governance arrangements that ensure meaningful participation of relevant actors, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), within state-led multi-use seascapes. Marine OECMs also operate in dynamic systems with mobile or far-dispersing species and multiple overlapping uses, making it more complex to demonstrate long-term *in-situ* outcomes than in terrestrial contexts.

These characteristics underscore the importance of context-specific governance approaches and highlight the role of OECMs in strengthening conservation within multi-use seascapes, where sustainable use and biodiversity outcomes must be balanced.



OECMs MUST ALSO BE LOCALLY RELEVANT AND ALIGNED WITH NATIONAL LEGAL SYSTEMS, GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS, AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXTS TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE AND EQUITABLE IMPLEMENTATION

## OECMs ARE A WAY TO RECOGNISE CONSERVATION OUTCOMES – NOT A NEW DESIGNATION

Importantly, OECMs are not a new conservation designation. Rather, they provide a way to recognise the contributions that existing management designations – such as locally managed marine areas, customary or sacred sites, long-standing fisheries closures, private reserves, mangrove and seagrass conservation sites, protected turtle nesting beaches, protected military zones, or tourism areas – make to biodiversity conservation that were previously not considered in conservation reporting. In most cases, recognition can occur within existing laws and governance systems and does not require creating a new legal category. However, what is required are clear national pathways for assessment, validation, and reporting to the CBD.

### Opportunities and risks

From a global perspective, marine OECMs present both opportunities and risks. They can be used to recognise the conservation outcomes from well-managed fisheries, customary stewardship, and other sectoral measures not traditionally counted as area-based conservation and help align biodiversity objectives with sustainable uses. They

can also address gaps where MPAs are politically, socially, or financially unfeasible, particularly where local livelihoods depend on natural resources.

At the same time, international experience highlights the risk of “blue-washing”, where weak, short-term, or poorly governed measures are labelled as OECMs without

demonstrating sustained biodiversity outcomes. Clear standards, robust governance, and transparent monitoring are therefore essential to ensure OECMs complement, rather than dilute, conservation ambition. OECM processes also risk becoming complex and resource-intensive, adding administrative burdens without delivering real conservation or social benefits.

| Marine and coastal OECMs are...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Marine and coastal OECMs are not...                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <b>A way to recognise existing area-based measures outside of protected areas that contribute to biodiversity conservation</b>                                                     | A new conservation designation for areas that require protection or management                                                                        |
|  <b>Area-based measures that deliver positive and sustained long-term biodiversity outcomes, even if conservation is not their primary purpose</b>                                  | Short-term or easily reversible measures                                                                                                              |
|  <b>Often implemented and recognised under existing legal and governance frameworks</b>                                                                                            | Dependent on the creation of entirely new laws or legal mechanisms                                                                                    |
|  <b>Compatible with public ownership of the ocean, with the state retaining custodianship while governance can be participatory and shared through co-management arrangements</b> | A transfer of ownership, privatisation of marine space, or loss of state authority                                                                    |
|  <b>Potentially applicable to well-managed, ecosystem-based fisheries areas that are long-term and demonstrably benefit biodiversity beyond target species</b>                    | Any fisheries closure by default, especially single-species or weakly enforced closures                                                               |
|  <b>Assessed case-by-case against CBD and IUCN site-level criteria</b>                                                                                                            | Automatically applied labels for broad zones, entire sectors, or governance mechanisms                                                                |
|  <b>Complementary to MPAs in multi-use seascapes, supporting implementation of GBF Target 3</b>                                                                                   | A substitute for protected areas, quick and easy way to reach 30x30, or a tool for “blue-washing”                                                     |
|  <b>For example, community-managed conservation areas, sustainably managed fishing zones, customary or sacred sites, military exclusion zones.</b>                                | For example, existing MPAs, temporary closures, areas with no effective management, or fishing areas that use destructive gears like bottom trawling. |

# COMMUNITY-LED MARINE MANAGEMENT AREAS RELEVANT TO OECMs IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN

Across the WIO, countries use different terms and legal instruments to describe and recognise community-based and co-management approaches to marine and coastal governance. While these systems vary in name, scope, and legal status, they often pursue similar objectives, such as sustainable use, local stewardship, and biodiversity conservation.

| Term                                                                          | Abbreviation | Countries           | Description                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Community-managed fishing area ( <i>Área de pesca de gestão comunitária</i> ) | APGC         | Mozambique          | Community-based fisheries management area with delegated authority for sustainable resource use.                                                                          |
| Resource recovering area ( <i>Área de recuperação de recursos</i> )           | ARR          | Mozambique          | Designated recovery area with restrictions to allow depleted fisheries resources to rebuild.                                                                              |
| Collaborative fisheries management area                                       | CFMA         | Tanzania (mainland) | Spatial area where communities and authorities jointly manage fisheries under a co-management framework.                                                                  |
| Community conservation area                                                   | CCA          | Mozambique, Kenya   | Locally governed area set aside for conservation and sustainable resource management.                                                                                     |
| Joint co-management area / Co-management area                                 | JCMA/CMA     | Comoros, Kenya      | Formally designated area where government and communities share management authority over fisheries or marine resources.                                                  |
| Locally managed marine area                                                   | LMMA         | Comoros, Madagascar | Community-led marine area or broader unit containing multiple areas managed for sustainable use and conservation, often recognised through local governance arrangements. |
| Small-scale fisheries zone                                                    | SSFZ         | South Africa        | Designated fisheries management area allowing preferential access to recognised small-scale fishing communities under co-management (none designated yet).                |
| Special management area                                                       | SMA          | South Africa        | Spatial area subject to specific coastal management measures to regulate resource use and coastal development or to protect biodiversity.                                 |
| Voluntary marine conservation area                                            | VMCA         | Mauritius           | Community-initiated marine area voluntarily set aside for conservation and sustainable use.                                                                               |



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# MOMENTUM ON ADVANCING OECMs IN THE WIO

In recent years, the WIO has seen growing political and institutional momentum around marine and coastal OECMs. Several countries have identified existing legal and policy mechanisms, such as locally managed marine areas (LMMAs), small-scale fishing zones, customary tenure systems, and community-based co-management agreements, that could serve as frameworks for OECM recognition. At the same time, perceptions of OECMs continue to evolve: while some stakeholders primarily view them as a promising tool for achieving conservation targets, others seek greater clarity on associated benefits and incentives for local communities, ecological effectiveness, reporting requirements, and access to funding. Initiatives such as Consortium for the Conservation of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO-C) Working Group on OECMs aim to respond to these needs by coordinating support and providing guidance on OECMs.

At the continental level, the African Union and the Southern African Development Community have begun integrating marine and coastal conservation more explicitly into their blue economy agendas, encouraging member states to strengthen area-based conservation, improve biodiversity reporting, and explore complementary conservation tools beyond conventional protected areas. There is growing interest in how OECM frameworks can support national reporting under the GBF and facilitate coherence across shared and transboundary seascapes. Reflecting this momentum, an Africa OECM Expert Working Group was established in 2024 as a regional arm

of the global IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) Specialist Group on OECMs, providing technical guidance and peer learning on definitions, assessment tools, and governance models.

Despite this growing momentum, progress across the WIO remains uneven, and countries are at different stages of engaging with the OECM concept. To provide an overview, the following section presents a regional synthesis of progress, highlighting key areas of advancement and gaps across enabling conditions, identification, and assessment processes. The accompanying heatmap illustrates these patterns, followed by country snapshots that offer more detailed insights into national contexts, pathways, and emerging priorities.

## Overview of progress across key OECM enabling workstreams in selected WIO countries

Across the WIO, countries progressed most strongly in developing participatory governance systems and knowledge integration, which reflects the region's well-established community-based management initiatives. Workstreams in which progress is lagging include establishing community awareness, sustainable financing, and formal legal recognition, the latter remaining limited or fragmented across most countries. Progress in strengthening monitoring and reporting, as well as in building institutional capacity, is emerging but uneven. A clear regional priority is to translate governance strengths into formally recognised, well-funded, and consistently monitored OECM systems.

## WHAT SUCCESS COULD LOOK LIKE BY 2030

-  **OECMs recognised and reported**  
First marine and coastal OECMs identified, assessed, and reported to the World Database for OECMs (WD-OECM).
-  **Stronger local governance**  
More inclusive and equitable participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in local governance.
-  **Strengthened legal frameworks**  
Clear national provisions securing community rights and enabling co-management and recognition of sites as OECMs.
-  **Demonstrated conservation outcomes**  
Long-term monitoring systems in place to demonstrate sustained *in-situ* biodiversity benefits and management effectiveness.
-  **Contribution to GBF Target 3**  
OECMs measurably expanding conserved area coverage alongside marine protected areas.
-  **Stronger financial support**  
Financial mechanisms that enable access to long-term financing to community-based organisations for effective and equitable governance of OECMs are in place or in development.

# OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS ACROSS KEY OECM ENABLING WORKSTREAMS IN SELECTED WIO COUNTRIES

The heatmap synthesises inputs from countries to illustrate where enabling conditions for marine and coastal OECMs are established, partial, emerging, or not yet in place, and to highlight shared strengths and priority gaps across the region. It reflects the maturity of national implementation pathways and enabling frameworks, not the effectiveness of individual sites.

**Key:**  
**dark green** = established  
**green** = developing/partial  
**yellow** = initial/emerging  
**grey** = limited/not yet in place

|                                                         |                                                                                     | Legal & policy alignment<br>Recognition, durability, and cross-sectoral alignment                                                                               | Governance systems & participation<br>Community, customary, and co-management systems                                                                                                     | Community awareness & understanding of OECMs<br>Understanding and shared perspectives on OECMs                           | Sustainable & equitable financing<br>Long-term funding and benefit-sharing                                | Institutional capacity & coordination<br>Human, institutional, and coordination capacity                                                   | Knowledge integration & learning<br>Science, local, and traditional knowledge integration            | Monitoring, reporting, & adaptive management<br>Indicators, reporting pathways, and feedback                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Comoros                                                 |    | Enabling laws exist; OECM recognition not yet explicit.                                                                                                         | Limited customary governance and co-management in practice.                                                                                                                               | Community awareness and understanding of OECM initiated in August 2024.                                                  | Donor-driven funding; fundraising is ongoing with partners such as UNDP/GEF.                              | Active institutions; OECM systems still emerging.                                                                                          | Local and traditional knowledge are well integrated.                                                 | Monitoring fragmented; no OECM reporting pathway.                                                                                      |
| French territories (Réunion, Mayotte, and Îles Éparses) |    | Conservation framework only focuses on statutory MPAs; no OECM legal basis. Mayotte declared 100% of EEZ as MPA, contributing significantly to Target 3 in WIO. | Conservation governance is state-led; community or hybrid models not recognised for conservation.                                                                                         | Local actors have little to no awareness of OECMs concepts, as these are not actively pursued.                           | Conservation finance tied to MPAs; no mechanisms for OECM-type approaches.                                | No institutional mandate, champions, or systems for OECMs.                                                                                 | Biodiversity knowledge limited to MPAs; no integration of local knowledge for OECMs.                 | Monitoring restricted to MPAs; no OECM assessment or reporting pathways.                                                               |
| Kenya                                                   |    | OECMs are referenced in strategies, but no dedicated national recognition framework yet.                                                                        | Strong community, co-management, and conservancy models actively practiced.                                                                                                               | Awareness-building initiatives are under way.                                                                            | NGO- and donor-supported financing; no dedicated long-term OECM funding mechanism.                        | Growing technical capacity and CSO support; national OECM system still under development.                                                  | Strong integration of community knowledge with scientific and governance tools.                      | Multiple assessment tools exist, but no formal OECM reporting yet.                                                                     |
| Madagascar                                              |   | OECM legal texts under adoption and embedded in national biodiversity frameworks.                                                                               | Strong recognition of community, private, and co-management systems in practice.                                                                                                          | Awareness building campaigns to publicise the OECM concept in local communities underway (23 of ca. 200 LMMAs informed). | GEF/GBFF-supported financing in place; long-term national mechanisms still emerging.                      | Dedicated ministry leadership and multi-ministerial OECM Working Group established.                                                        | Community knowledge integrated through LMMAs and national assessment methodologies.                  | Assessment tools operational, but ecological data gaps and reporting still incomplete.                                                 |
| Mauritius                                               |  | No legal definition or policy framework for OECMs; focus remains on statutory MPAs.                                                                             | Community-led VMCAs exist but lack formal recognition or co-management arrangements.                                                                                                      | Communities and local stakeholders are largely unaware of the OECM concept or its relevance.                             | Conservation finance is project-based, NGO-led, and not dedicated to OECMs.                               | Active NGOs and agencies, but no institutional OECM mandate or system in place; screening of VMCAs carried out by government agencies.     | Local stewardship and NGO monitoring exist but are not formally integrated into policy.              | Monitoring is ad hoc for most VMCAs and NGO-led; no OECM assessment or reporting pathways defined.                                     |
| Mozambique                                              |  | Enabling fisheries co-management and conservation laws exist, but no formal OECM recognition framework yet.                                                     | Community and co-management systems (CCPs, APGCs, ARRs) are established in law but lagging in practice.                                                                                   | Limited understanding of OECM concept, assessment, and recognition.                                                      | Sustainable finance mechanisms are emerging, but revenues and incentives are not yet fully operational.   | Strong momentum and partners, but significant capacity gaps remain at local and district levels.                                           | Community knowledge and pilot learning exist, but evidence on biodiversity outcomes remains limited. | Monitoring and reporting are fragmented; no national OECM system or reporting pathway in place.                                        |
| Seychelles                                              |  | Strong biodiversity laws exist, but OECMs are not recognised in legislation or policy.                                                                          | Co-management exists within MPAs but not recognised outside protected areas.                                                                                                              | Initial awareness raised among some local stakeholders in recent workshops.                                              | Conservation finance prioritises MPAs and MSP; no dedicated OECM financing.                               | High institutional capacity for MPAs/MSP, but no mandate or systems for OECMs.                                                             | Knowledge informs management at some sites; learning exchanges and networks exist.                   | Monitoring occurs at some locally managed sites using available tools or indicators; adaptive management is emerging but inconsistent. |
| Somalia                                                 |  | Enabling environmental and fisheries laws exist, but OECMs are not explicitly recognised.                                                                       | Community and customary stewardship are practiced but lack formal conservation recognition.                                                                                               | Communities and local stakeholders are largely unaware of the OECM concept or its relevance.                             | Early blue economy and climate finance pathways emerging; no dedicated OECM funding yet.                  | Growing institutional engagement, but mandates and capacity remain fragmented.                                                             | Strong analytical foundations exist but not yet applied to OECM identification.                      | No national monitoring, assessment, or reporting systems for OECMs in place.                                                           |
| South Africa                                            |  | OECMs recognised in policy, with National Norms and Standards under development.                                                                                | Participatory governance is advancing through stakeholder engagement and community-based monitoring, strengthening legitimacy, compliance, and integration of local ecological knowledge. | Some efforts by government and NGOs to socialise the OECM concept, particularly around pilot sites.                      | No dedicated or articulated finance mechanisms for marine OECMs.                                          | Strong institutional leadership, Task Team, and active pilot assessments; roadmap developed for whole OECM process, including recognition. | Strong scientific base; IPLC and local knowledge integration still emerging.                         | Monitoring and reporting frameworks in development but not operational yet.                                                            |
| Tanzania                                                |  | Enabling laws exist; national OECM framework and legal alignment under review.                                                                                  | Strong co-management via CFMAs and BMUs, with Free, Prior and Informed Consent commonly practiced.                                                                                        | In CFMAs, communities and local stakeholders are aware of the relevance of OECM-aligned values.                          | Consortium support mobilised; some finance at CFMA level, but no dedicated or sustained OECM finance yet. | National Working Group active; systems and mandates still being formalised.                                                                | Site assessments and community knowledge exist; national synthesis still limited.                    | Governance and ecological monitoring under way; OECM reporting systems partial.                                                        |

**Disclaimer:** The information presented in this heatmap is based on expert inputs provided by practitioners and stakeholders from across the WIO region. The findings represent a preliminary assessment of progress towards enabling conditions for marine and coastal OECMs and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of national governments.



# COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

Progress towards marine OECMs across the Western Indian Ocean

The following country snapshots provide an overview of the current status of marine OECMs across 10 Western Indian Ocean countries and territories.



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## COMOROS

### LEAD AGENCIES

Environment and Forestry Directorate; Fisheries Directorate; National Agency for Protected Areas; National LMMA Network; General Commissariat of Planning

### KEY PARTNERS

IUCN; World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF); Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS); WILDTRUST; Dahari; CORDIO East Africa; WIO Marine Science Association (WIOMSA)/WIO Marine Protected Areas Management Network (WIOMPAN)

### LOCAL ACTORS

AIDE; UMAMA-OPAS; Dahari; emerging small community associations (e.g., Maecha Bora and Wandzani wazi mbwedza)

### 1 Current state of OECM awareness, identification, and reporting

In Comoros, community-led fisheries and ecosystem management are embedded in local traditions and village governance, though not formally recognised as OECMs. Since 2013, co-management has been progressively formalised through United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-supported initiatives with environment and fisheries ministries, strengthening community organisations. A national co-management strategy for small-scale fisheries has since been developed. Since 2024, OECMs have been discussed through national and subnational platforms, including the IUCN Great Blue Wall initiative and LMMA networks. However, few LMMAs exist in practice (e.g., Anjouan). With less than 1% of the EEZ protected, OECMs offer strong potential to recognise local governance and support biodiversity goals.

use plans further support recognition of conservation areas. However, the absence of a clear legal distinction between sites inside and outside protected areas constrains formal OECM identification and reporting.

### 3 Progress towards identification: screening and assessment

Progress toward OECM identification is emerging through national dialogue and consultation workshops. In August 2024, a National LMMA Forum was held in Mwali to present the OECM concept and to hold initial discussions on potential marine OECMs. In April 2025, the Great Blue Wall Steering Committee met and identified potential OECM sites. These processes recommended establishing a national OECM mechanism to guide assessment, recognition, and reporting in support of GBF Target 3, building on existing co-management provisions and formalisation through a ministerial decree.

### 2 Governance systems and legal frameworks

Community-led management of natural resources is strongly embedded in environmental, fisheries, and protected area legislation and policy, enabling community-based and co-management governance models relevant to OECMs. Key legal and policy frameworks include the Environment Act, fisheries legislation, protected area laws, presidential decrees, and formal co-management agreements. Strategic instruments such as the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), the Protected Area Expansion Strategy, LMMA and OECM roadmaps, and land-

### 4 Monitoring of effectiveness, inclusion, and equitable governance

Efforts to generate evidence on biodiversity outcomes, governance performance, and participation of local communities and small-scale fishers are under way through project-based monitoring initiatives such as the National Protected Areas Network, the Strengthening Comoros Ocean Protection Programme, the IUCN's Regenerative Seascapes project, and national CBD reporting processes. The national nongovernmental organisation (NGO) Dahari has been supporting the building of community-led initiatives in

Anjouan, including women-led local fisheries management (e.g., Maecha Bora). However, to date, effectiveness assessments (i.e., via site-level assessment of governance and equity [SAGE] and the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool [METT]) have only been conducted at the MPA level.

### 5 Challenges and next steps

Comoros has demonstrated high-level political commitment to GBF Target 3 by joining the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People, publishing a national MSP roadmap (2024) led by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, and integrating MSP within MPAs. However, conservation efforts have historically focused almost exclusively on formal protected areas, and the OECM concept remains relatively new to authorities and the wider public, despite strong potential. Next steps include building awareness, developing national guidance for OECM recognition, and piloting OECMs alongside MSP and NBSAP implementation. Momentum has increased since the IUCN's establishment in Comoros, with the UNDP and the Ministry of Environment submitting a Global Environment Facility (GEF) proposal that includes OECM development, creating opportunities for technical support and regional learning.

**Compiled by** Said Ahamada (IUCN), Joshua Rambahinirison (CORDIO East Africa), and Housseni Houssouyini (WILDTRUST); March 2026.



# FRENCH TERRITORIES

## – RÉUNION, MAYOTTE, AND ÎLES ÉPARSES

### LEAD AGENCIES

French national environmental authorities and territorial administrations

### KEY PARTNERS

Protected area agencies; research institutes; conservation NGOs

### LOCAL ACTORS

Limited formal community governance structures except in Mayotte, where the MPA is co-managed by local actors (*conseil de gestion*)

## 1 Current state of OECM awareness, identification, and reporting

In the French overseas territories of Réunion, Mayotte, and Îles Éparses (Glorieuses, Tromelin, Bassas da India, Juan de Nova, Europa) (part of the French Southern and Antarctic Lands), OECMs are not yet considered in conservation strategies. Marine conservation is centred on formally designated MPAs under French and European Union (EU) frameworks, with no legal basis or reporting for OECMs. Despite large EEZs and identified key biodiversity areas (KBAs), OECMs are absent from national strategies and CBD reporting, and no institutional champions have emerged.

## 2 Governance systems and legal frameworks

Marine conservation is governed by French and EU environmental and fisheries legislation that prioritises state-led management through formally designated MPAs. While fisheries frameworks, such as the Fisheries Management and Development Act (2016), enable participatory fisheries governance and co-management arrangements (e.g., through local management bodies), they do not explicitly recognise LMMAs or OECMs as conservation instruments. As a result, community-based or hybrid governance models lack legal pathways for OECM recognition, constraining diversification of conservation approaches beyond MPAs. However, in the case of natural marine parks (like Mayotte), a large perimeter is implemented as an MPA (for Mayotte, the whole EEZ)

without regulations, and the *conseil de gestion*, which involves local actors, is supposed to propose the regulations.

## 3 Progress towards identification: screening and assessment

No progress has been made to date in identifying or assessing potential OECMs in the French territories of the WIO. There are no national or territorial processes, screening tools, pilot projects, or partnerships focused on OECM identification, and conservation efforts remain limited to formally designated MPAs under existing French and EU frameworks.

## 4 Monitoring of effectiveness, inclusion, and equitable governance

Biodiversity monitoring is limited to MPAs under the French and EU frameworks. No monitoring systems assess OECM effectiveness, governance, or equity, as OECMs are not recognised. Community and small-scale fisher participation occurs within fisheries management but is not tracked in relation to conservation outcomes beyond MPAs.

## 5 Challenges and next steps

Key barriers to OECM recognition in Réunion, Mayotte, and Îles Éparses include the current lack of a policy focus on OECMs, as well as a lack of a legal basis, policy guidance, or institutional mandate, within a conservation model centred primarily on MPAs. Advancing OECMs would require national guidance, legal clarification, and integration into MSP and protected area strategies. Opportunities exist for technical

support and regional learning through collaboration within the WIO region and alignment with emerging OECM practice in neighbouring countries.

**Compiled by** Karine Pothin (Agence Régionale de la Biodiversité de La Réunion); March 2026.



# KENYA

### LEAD AGENCIES

Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Forestry; State Department for Fisheries, Aquaculture and the Blue Economy

### KEY PARTNERS

Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRRI); IUCN; FAO; WIOMSA; CORDIO East Africa; WWF; Fauna & Flora; The Nature Conservancy (TNC); WCS

### LOCAL ACTORS

Coastal and Marine Resources Development (COMRED); Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT)-Coast; Oceans Alive; Bahari Hai; REEFolution

## 1 Current state of OECM awareness, identification, and reporting

Awareness of OECMs in Kenya is growing, particularly among government institutions at the CBD focal point level and through national and regional LMMA forums. The first National Dialogue on OECMs, held in Nairobi in November 2024, marked a key milestone in placing OECMs on the national policy agenda. Marine OECMs are yet to be reported to the World Database for OECMs (WD-OECM), although screening has been done for identified potential sites.

## 2 Governance systems and legal frameworks

Kenya's legal and policy framework offers entry points for identifying possible OECMs through existing, legally recognised community and co-management models, including beach management units (BMUs), joint co-management areas (JCMAs), and co-management areas (CMAs). The 2021–2030 Protected and Conserved Areas Strategy references OECMs in support of Target 3, with alignment under way with NBSAPs and MSP. However, the absence of a dedicated national OECM framework and fragmented sectoral mandates constrain formal recognition and reporting.

## 3 Progress towards identification: screening and assessment

Kenya has made tangible progress in identifying potential OECMs despite the absence of a formal national screening system. At least 21 marine sites have been identified, including co-managed areas such as JCMAs, CMAs, and closed fishing areas

(temporal and permanent). Mapping of optimal sites is complete, with pilots under consideration. Identification and assessment are supported by partnerships with IUCN, FAO, WIOMSA, CORDIO East Africa, WCS, Fauna & Flora, TNC, and national NGOs.

## 4 Monitoring of effectiveness, inclusion, and equitable governance

Multiple tools are used to monitor biodiversity outcomes, governance, and equity in potential OECM sites in Kenya. These include Elinor, SAGE, and SAGE-GT for governance and equity, Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool (IMET) for management effectiveness, and Elinor for social outcomes. Fisheries monitoring is supported through BMU catch systems and Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines, complemented by community conservancy monitoring, such as in the NRT–Coast model, providing a strong foundation for inclusive OECM monitoring.

## 5 Challenges and next steps

Kenya's progress on OECMs is constrained by the absence of a dedicated national OECM framework, fragmented mandates across conservation and fisheries institutions, and limited experience with formal OECM reporting. While multiple potential sites have been identified, consistent criteria, legal guidance, and reporting pathways are still under development. Priority next steps include finalising a national OECM framework, piloting recognition of screened marine sites, and integrating OECMs into NBSAP implementation and MSP. Strong opportunities exist for collaboration with NGOs, FAO, WIOMSA, and IUCN, as well as for regional learning through LMMA networks in the WIO.

**Compiled by** Geoffrey Odhiambo (CORDIO East Africa), Lenice Ojwang (Fauna & Flora), Nathan Majwa (IUCN), and Jesse Kosgei (WCS); March 2026.



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# MADAGASCAR

## LEAD AGENCIES

Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MEDD) through a multi-ministerial OECM Working Group

## KEY PARTNERS

WWF; WCS; Blue Ventures; IUCN; MIHARI LMMA network

## LOCAL ACTORS

LMMA managers; private sector (UNIMA); municipalities, districts, etc.

### 1 Current state of OECM awareness, identification, and reporting

Awareness and institutionalisation of OECMs in Madagascar are well advanced, led by the MEDD with support from GEF since 2020. A multi-ministerial OECM Working Group was formally established in 2024 under the Sydney Promise Steering Committee, with a mandate to recognise OECMs in accordance with an agreed methodology. More recently, OECMs have been internalised within national biodiversity frameworks, including the NBSAP and the 30x30 Biodiversity Action Plan, specifically addressing GBF Target 3 (adopted in January 2026). A national OECM steering committee and working group are operational. Legal texts supporting processes to identify and report OECMs were adopted in March 2026 (Decree N°4197 of 5 March 2026). In 2025, pre-screening begun for 23 marine and coastal sites managed by local communities and private actors, though no marine OECMs have yet been reported to the WD-OECM.

### 2 Governance systems and legal frameworks

Madagascar's existing governance framework offers strong entry points for OECM recognition through community, private, and co-management models. LMMAs governed by local bylaws (*dina*) and resource management transfer contracts for fisheries (TGRH) and for mangroves (TGRN) align with national fisheries and environmental laws, while private conservation initiatives also contribute to social and biodiversity outcomes. OECM legal texts were adopted in 2026. Key constraints include time-bound contracts that limit long-term

community rights, incomplete legal recognition of some LMMAs, land-tenure limitations, and ecological data gaps that hinder demonstrating long-term biodiversity outcomes.

### 3 Progress towards identification: screening and assessment

Madagascar has made significant progress in identifying and assessing potential OECMs through a nationally led process coordinated by MEDD with GEF support. A formal OECM methodology and site-level assessment process, aligned with CBD Decision 14/8, is in place and has received formal recognition, and pre-screening has been completed. To date, over 75,000 hectares (23 sites) of community-managed marine and coastal areas, including LMMAs and fisheries management zones – which may be recognised individually or as part of larger, connected seascapes – have been identified as potential OECMs. These will undergo full assessment based on IUCN criteria (including Free, Prior and Informed Consent) before formal designation of suitable sites is made, along with their reporting. Site-level evaluations are ongoing, with additional sites to be assessed under future Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF)-supported programmes.

### 4 Monitoring of effectiveness, inclusion, and equitable governance

Monitoring of potential OECMs in Madagascar builds on established community-based assessment systems. Governance performance and inclusion are assessed through LMMA effectiveness tools developed by the MIHARI network and evaluation handbooks linked to community

resource management transfer contracts for fisheries (TGRH) and for mangroves (TGRN). These frameworks support the participation of local communities and small-scale fishers. A subset of LMMAs has also been evaluated using other NGO-driven tools such as Elinor. Site-level OECM assessments apply the CBD Decision 14/8 criteria, though ecological data gaps remain a key challenge for demonstrating long-term biodiversity outcomes.

### 5 Challenges and next steps

Madagascar's main challenges for OECM recognition include incomplete legal recognition of some LMMAs, time-bound community management rights, land-tenure limitations, and data gaps to demonstrate long-term biodiversity outcomes. Priorities focus on implementing OECM legal texts, completing site-level assessments beyond pre-screening, and strengthening ecological monitoring. Next steps include continuing OECM evaluations through ongoing GEF and GBFF funding, expanding eligible sites, and integrating MPAs and OECMs more systematically into MSP. Strong opportunities exist for collaboration with MIHARI, WWF, WCS, and IUCN, and for regional learning within the WIO.

**Compiled by** Domoina Rakotomalala (WWF); March 2026.



# MAURITIUS

## LEAD AGENCIES

Ministry of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries (Blue Economy and Fisheries Division)

## KEY PARTNERS

Mauritius Oceanography Institute; Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change; Department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration; Reef Conservation; Eco-Sud; Coral Garden Conservation

## LOCAL ACTORS

Local community; fishers; private business owners; hotels; tour operators

### 1 Current state of OECM awareness, identification, and reporting

Awareness and formal recognition of OECMs in Mauritius remain limited. OECMs are not defined in national legislation, namely the Fisheries Act 2023, and are thus not widely understood by policymakers or the public at large. Some locally managed voluntary marine conservation areas (VMCAs) align with many OECM criteria but lack formal recognition and are not reported to the WD-OECM. While conservation efforts have focused on statutory protected areas and climate priorities, the Ministry of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries is considering a national VMCA framework and potential legal recognition through amendments or regulations.

### 2 Governance systems and legal frameworks

Legal frameworks in Mauritius support biodiversity conservation but do not provide for OECM recognition. The Environment Act (2024), Fisheries Act (2023), and Maritime Zones Act (2005) do not define OECMs or formally recognise VMCAs, with enforcement focused on statutory protected areas. In Rodrigues, South East Marine Protected Area Regulations (2011) enable co-management within MPAs but offer no legal pathway for recognising conservation measures beyond designated protected areas.

### 3 Progress towards identification: screening and assessment

Currently, the Blue Economy and Fisheries Division is responsible for the identification, designation, and proclamation of MPAs and Temporary MPAs under the Fisheries Act (2023). Identification of OECMs is primarily done by NGOs in collaboration with stakeholders such as the local community, fishers, and hotel and boat operators. Screening and assessment is done as part of the authorisation process, during which the request is thoroughly reviewed by the Marine Spatial Planning Coordination Committee of the Department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Office. So far, three OECMs termed as VMCAs have been identified as per this procedure.

### 4 Monitoring of effectiveness, inclusion, and equitable governance

Monitoring of VMCAs remains limited and largely project-driven, with biodiversity evidence generated mainly through NGO-led initiatives. Governance and equity aspects, including participation of local communities and small-scale fishers, are addressed informally through community engagement rather than structured frameworks. Monitoring approaches differ across VMCAs, such as the ecological indicators tracked, tools used, frequency of data collection, and the extent of community involvement. No national monitoring framework for OECMs exists, although lessons from VMCAs

are informing discussions on co-management and participatory governance. Planned initiatives aim to strengthen systematic data collection and integrate local knowledge into future conservation assessments and reporting.

### 5 Challenges and next steps

Recognition of OECMs in Mauritius is constrained by the absence of a legal definition, low policy awareness, and a conservation framework focused on statutory marine parks and reserves. Community-led initiatives such as VMCAs lack formal recognition, co-management arrangements, and systematic monitoring. Priority next steps include (1) developing a national VMCA/OECM policy and guidelines, which are currently being prepared by a legal specialist under the RECOS project managed by the Indian Ocean Commission; (2) strengthening biodiversity and governance monitoring; and (3) piloting VMCA recognition. Opportunities exist to collaborate with NGOs, research institutions, and regional networks such as WIOMPAN, and to integrate OECMs into MSP and the NBSAP.

**Compiled by** Ministry of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries (Blue Economy and Fisheries Division), Kathy Young (Reef Conservation), and Lisa Ah Shee Tee (Reef Conservation); May 2026.



# MOZAMBIQUE

## LEAD AGENCIES

Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries; Directorate for Environment and Climate Change

## KEY PARTNERS

IUCN; WWF; WCS; Rare; Fauna & Flora; Conservation International; FAO; ReGeCom; Likhulu Foundation; Associação do Meio Ambiente (AMA); Ocean Revolution; ZSL

## LOCAL ACTORS

Community fishing councils (CCPs); community-based organisations

### 1 Current state of OECM awareness, identification, and reporting

Awareness of OECMs has increased since 2024 through national dialogues; targeted workshops with key local actors, including community-based organisations; and ongoing development of an MPA expansion and OECM strategy. Government agencies recognise the value of OECMs for achieving the national target of protecting 10–12% of maritime space by 2030, and a national OECM Technical Working Group is being established to develop a recognition framework. While enabling policies and co-management measures exist, no OECMs have yet been formally recognised or reported to the WD-OECM.

### 2 Governance systems and legal frameworks

Mozambique's governance systems and legal framework provide emerging entry points for OECM recognition, particularly through fisheries co-management. The Marine Fisheries Regulations (2020) enable area-based management outside of MPAs through community-managed fishing areas (APGCs) and recovery areas (ARRs) within the first three nautical miles of the ocean, designated as exclusive zones for artisanal fishing, in alignment with community and co-management governance models. A legal framework for the establishment of APGCs was also approved in 2023. A strategy for expanding MPAs and OECMs, finalised in 2025 (pending official approval), explicitly envisages an OECM network.

### 3 Progress towards identification: screening and assessment

Progress toward identifying potential OECMs is advancing through targeted initiatives rather than a formal national screening system. At least 40 APGCs and ARRAs outside MPAs are under consideration as potential OECMs, comprising over 4,800 km<sup>2</sup> or 1.5% of the EEZ. Mapping exercises and pilot assessments have been supported by NGOs and partners, including IUCN, WWF, FAO, WCS, Rare, and Likhulu. While no national OECM screening tool is yet in place, the IUCN guidance is being tested to inform future assessments.

### 4 Monitoring of effectiveness, inclusion, and equitable governance

Monitoring of potential OECMs is emerging through fisheries co-management initiatives rather than dedicated OECM frameworks. The Management Oriented Monitoring System (MOMS), METT, Elinor, and other participatory tools and apps are being used or tested in APGCs and ARRAs (including inside MPAs) to assess management effectiveness and governance performance. CCPs play a central role in implementation, although capacity and inclusion challenges persist. Planned development of a national OECM framework and a domesticated site assessment tool is expected to strengthen systematic monitoring of biodiversity outcomes, governance, and equity.

### 5 Challenges and next steps

Barriers to OECM recognition include limited understanding of the OECM concept, slow legal designation

of co-management areas, weak financing and capacity of CCPs, lack of incentives, and uncertainty around suitable legal pathways for offshore areas. Fragmented implementation and delays in applying existing regulations further constrain progress. Priority next steps include approving the MPA expansion and OECM strategy, establishing the national OECM Technical Working Group, developing clear national guidelines and assessment criteria, and piloting recognition of qualifying APGCs and ARRAs. Strong opportunities exist for collaboration with NGOs and partners, and for regional learning within the WIO (through the WIO-C OECM Working Group).

**Compiled by** Atanasio Brito (Rare), Eduardo Videira (WWF), Denise Nicolau (IUCN), and Temóteo Mucavele (IUCN); March 2026.



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# SEYCHELLES

## LEAD AGENCIES

Ministry of Environment, Climate, Energy and Natural Resources

## KEY PARTNERS

Government entities; national NGOs; conservation foundations; research organisations

## LOCAL ACTORS

Island-based tour operators; private island conservation initiatives

### 1 Current state of OECM awareness, identification, and reporting

Awareness of marine OECMs in Seychelles remains limited, and formal recognition and reporting have not yet occurred. Although the concept is understood at the policy level, greater communication, education, and outreach are needed to build broader awareness and stakeholder support. This apparent shortfall may largely reflect the fact that Seychelles has, since 2014, been focused on delimiting and designating 30% of its marine waters under formal protection through the Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan (SMSP) Initiative – a target achieved in 2020, prior to the adoption of GBF Target 3. Before the SMSP, and dating back to the early 1970s, Seychelles had 10 formally designated MPAs. As such, biodiversity conservation within a spatially delineated area is generally associated with MPAs, and there is a lack of general understanding of the definition and potential applications of OECMs in Seychelles, despite numerous conservation projects operating outside of formally protected areas.

### 2 Governance systems and legal frameworks

While the legal framework in Seychelles relative to biodiversity conservation is quite extensive and includes the Nature Reserves and Conservancy Act (2022), the Environment Protection Act (2016), the Wild Animals and Birds Protection Act (1961), and the Fisheries and Aquaculture Act (2025), they do not recognise OECMs. Co-management is addressed in both the Nature Reserves and Conservancy Act (2022) and the Fisheries and Aquaculture

Act (2025), however, in the former, it pertains to the management of a protected area.

### 3 Progress towards identification: screening and assessment

Currently, Seychelles has no formal national screening or assessment process or guidelines for identifying OECMs. Nevertheless, several ongoing conservation initiatives align with key OECM elements. Under the national biodiversity targets – aligned with the GBF – a priority action is to review, develop, and enact legislative provisions to formally recognise and regulate OECMs within national environmental law, indicating emerging policy momentum.

### 4 Monitoring of effectiveness, inclusion, and equitable governance

Due to the lack of any national framework for OECMs, there is currently no monitoring of

effectiveness, inclusion, or equitable governance.

### 5 Challenges and next steps

Recognition of OECMs in Seychelles is currently constrained by the absence of a national framework and by the country's recent completion of an extensive process to designate 30% of its EEZ as MPAs. The current priority is therefore the effective implementation and management of these areas, which requires substantial resources. A potential next step could be a rapid assessment of ongoing conservation initiatives that align with OECM criteria to evaluate the added value of pursuing formal recognition.

**Compiled by** Rabia Somers (Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan Unit), Indira Gamatis (Seychelles CBD focal point), and Ministry of Environment, Climate, Energy and Natural Resources; March 2026.



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# SOMALIA

## LEAD AGENCIES

Ministry of Environment and Climate Change; Ministry of Fisheries and Blue Economy

## KEY PARTNERS

Universities; national NGOs; WIOMSA; Nairobi Convention; UN agencies (UNDP, FAO, UNEP)

## LOCAL ACTORS

Small-scale fisher groups; customary elders; youth networks and community-based organisations

### 1 Current state of OECM awareness, identification, and reporting

OECM awareness in Somalia is emerging through CBD processes, Nairobi Convention engagement, and the NBSAP revision (2025–2026). Awareness is limited at the community level, where practices such as seasonal closures, mangrove protection, and customary fisheries management exist but are not framed as OECMs. No OECMs have been reported. MSP and national marine ecosystem diagnostic analysis (MEDA) provide initial entry points for future identification.

### 2 Governance systems and legal frameworks

The Environmental Act (2024) and fisheries frameworks support area-based management but do not explicitly recognise OECMs. In practice, governance combines state systems with customary (*xeer*) rules regulating fishing and habitat use. Co-management is emerging through project-based initiatives but remains non-institutionalised. Institutional mandates are fragmented.

### 3 Progress towards identification: screening and assessment

No formal OECM screening exists. However, (1) the designation of KBAs, MEDA, and Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) provide ecological prioritisation; (2) MSP is being used to map zones for use and conservation; and (3) community practices (mangrove protection, seasonal closures, and local fishing areas) represent potential OECMs.

No sites have been formally assessed. Key constraints include a lack of

guidelines, limited technical capacity, and insufficient ecological data.

### 4 Monitoring of effectiveness, inclusion, and equitable governance

Monitoring is informal and project-based: (1) environmental impacts are tracked through environmental and social impact assessments/environmental and social management frameworks; (2) fisheries data are monitored through community knowledge and FAO support; (3) communities monitor resources such as fish stocks, mangroves, and illegal activities; and (4) baseline biodiversity data are provided by KBAs and EBSAs. These monitoring systems are fragmented and largely qualitative, with inconsistent community participation.



### 5 Challenges and next steps

Key challenges include the absence of OECM frameworks, fragmented mandates, limited capacity and data, and security constraints. Priorities include developing national OECM guidelines; integrating OECMs into the NBSAP and MSP; piloting community-based OECMs; strengthening participatory monitoring; improving coordination; and establishing links to climate and blue economy finance. Regional support (such as from WIOMSA and the Nairobi Convention) remains critical.

**Compiled by** Qamar Mohamed Osman and Mohamed Abdirahman (Climate Resilience and Adaptation Network); March 2026.

# SOUTH AFRICA

## LEAD AGENCIES

Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE); South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI)

## KEY PARTNERS

WWF South Africa; WILDTRUST; BirdLife South Africa; Conservation South Africa; IUCN

## LOCAL ACTORS

IPLCs; local government; youth organisations

### 1 Current state of OECM awareness, identification, and reporting

Awareness, understanding, and institutional engagement regarding marine and coastal OECMs have increased since 2023, following a dedicated marine, coastal, and estuarine OECM workshop and a national OECM bootcamp that strengthened conceptual coherence and cross-sectoral understanding. These efforts are reinforced by a national OECM Task Team meeting quarterly to coordinate initiatives and track progress. At the policy level, OECMs are recognised in the 2023 White Paper on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biodiversity, with national Norms and Standards for OECM recognition under development and expected in 2026.

### 2 Governance systems and legal frameworks

South Africa has multiple legal and policy instruments that could support marine and coastal OECMs across coastal management, fisheries, heritage, defence, biosphere reserves, and marine spatial planning. Most were not designed for biodiversity conservation and remain unimplemented or lack spatial clarity, long-term security, and site-specific evidence of effectiveness. While no community-managed marine areas are formally recognised, several frameworks enable community involvement or co-management, including small-scale fishing zones, special management areas, and World Heritage Sites.

### 3 Progress towards identification: screening and assessment

South Africa has made incremental

progress in identifying and assessing potential OECMs through targeted initiatives. The first national OECM project launched in 2018 explored the extent of OECMs and their alignment with the Biodiversity Stewardship framework. Since 2023, a Western Cape provincial project has applied the IUCN site-level screening tool to 19 sites, mainly terrestrial but including estuaries. In parallel, trial assessments of existing marine measures led to the development of a national marine OECM roadmap in June 2025 (Kowalski and Smith 2025), which identified 14 potential marine, coastal, and estuarine management measures in November 2025 (Kirkman et al. 2025).

### 4 Monitoring of effectiveness, inclusion, and equitable governance

Monitoring of OECM effectiveness, inclusion, and equitable governance in South Africa is still emerging. The National Norms and Standards for OECM recognition are expected to set requirements for reporting and monitoring biodiversity, as well as cultural, spiritual, and socio-economic values. Broader evidence on biodiversity trends is generated through the National Biodiversity Assessment, complemented by increasing engagement with Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and small-scale fishers, along with plans to pilot OECM demonstration projects to test monitoring approaches.

### 5 Challenges and next steps

Marine OECM recognition in South Africa is constrained by the public nature of the ocean, overlapping uses and rights, fragmented mandates, unresolved equity concerns, challenges to three-

dimensional demarcation, and the cost of *in-situ* biodiversity surveys. Priority steps include (1) broadening participation in OECM planning and recognition; (2) addressing equity and social justice concerns; (3) clarifying recognition thresholds, particularly longevity, through the emerging National Norms and Standards; (4) improving spatial biodiversity prioritisation and strategic assessments; (5) conducting site-level assessments; and (6) enabling a wider range of measures, including special management areas, MSP zones, fisheries management areas, and small-scale fishing zones. Stronger coherence across MSP, integrated coastal management, fisheries, MPAs, and OECM processes is essential.

**Compiled by** Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE): Oceans & Coasts (lead institution); DFFE: Biodiversity Conservation; and South African National Biodiversity Institute; March 2026.



# TANZANIA

## LEAD AGENCIES

Vice President's Office (VPO) – Division of Environment; Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries; Ministry of Blue Economy and Fisheries (Zanzibar)

## KEY PARTNERS

IUCN; WWF; WCS; Mwambao Coastal Community Network; Fauna & Flora; TNC; German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ); Wetland International; WIOMSA

## LOCAL ACTORS

Mwambao Coastal Community Network; SeaSense; Action for Ocean (AFO)

### 1 Current state of OECM awareness, identification, and reporting

Government actors in Tanzania are generally familiar with OECMs, with awareness raised through regional and national workshops. In July 2025, the VPO agreed to develop a national framework for OECM recognition and reporting to support GBF Target 3 and the NBSAP (2025–2030), which corresponded with the establishment of a National OECM Working Group supported by an NGO Consortium (IUCN, WWF, TNC, and Frankfurt Zoological Society). A National OECM Dialogue held in August 2025 produced a draft implementation roadmap. To date, no OECMs have been reported to WD-OECM.

### 2 Governance systems and legal frameworks

OECM recognition is being advanced through a National OECM Working Group led by the VPO, an NGO Consortium, and government stakeholders. The group aims to review policy and legislative alignment and develop a national OECM framework by December 2026, with technical support from the EU Blue Economy Programme. Potential terrestrial and marine OECMs are grounded in diverse environmental, fisheries, wildlife, land, and marine laws – including provisions in the Fisheries Act (2003; mainland Tanzania) – for area-based co-management agreements between the Director of Fisheries and BMUs. The current policy and legal review will assess whether nearshore fisheries co-management areas, such as collaborative fisheries management areas (CFMAs), offshore managed areas, or other restricted-use areas

(e.g., around oil and gas infrastructure) qualify for OECM recognition.

### 3 Progress towards identification: screening and assessment

OECM identification in Tanzania is expected to focus on community co-managed areas, particularly CFMAs in mainland Tanzania. The scope for marine OECMs in Zanzibar is limited, with most nearshore waters already designated as MPAs known as marine conservation areas. Some site assessments have been undertaken in Tanga and Kilwa as part of a larger study by CORDIO East Africa, and in the Mtwara and Zanzibar seascapes under IUCN's EU-funded Bahari Yetu Project. Stakeholders have been trained on the IUCN OECM Site Assessment Tool, with further assessments and capacity building planned for 2026, facilitated by NGO Consortium members alongside national and local government counterparts.

### 4 Monitoring of effectiveness, inclusion, and equitable governance

Governance monitoring in CFMAs is supported by several NGO initiatives, including WWF, WCS, Mwambao, SeaSense, AFO, and Fauna & Flora. Discussions initiated under the World Bank-supported SWIOFISH project (2016–2022) explored integrating CFMA governance modules into national fisheries information systems such as electronic catch assessment surveys (eCAS) in mainland Tanzania and SAMAKIS in Zanzibar. A new World Bank project (TASFAM) will support the integration of eCAS and SAMAKIS and provide further opportunity to incorporate

CFMA governance monitoring. National BMU Guidelines include a governance performance monitoring tool, while NGOs use various governance assessment tools to monitor governance effectiveness in CFMAs. Ecological monitoring is conducted by NGOs in some non-MPA reef sites, while the Tanzania Forest Services oversees mangroves and other protected plant species outside protected areas. Some privately managed protected areas also monitor terrestrial and marine habitats.

### 5 Challenges and next steps

Key barriers to OECM recognition include the absence of a consistent legal instrument and limited legal recognition of potential OECM types such as CFMAs or offshore areas. Further challenges are documented in CORDIO East Africa and Mwambao Coastal Community Network's assessments. Key priorities include (1) developing a national OECM framework through a policy and legal review led by VPO in 2026; (2) strengthening coordination through a second National Dialogue and site assessments; (3) improving CFMA data coordination; (4) building government capacity for reporting; and (5) strengthening ecological assessments to quantify conservation values and inform management.

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# FROM DIALOGUE TO ACTION

## Stepwise pathway for advancing OECMs in the WIO

The country snapshots highlight diverse national contexts, but they also reveal shared challenges and opportunities to advance marine and coastal OECMs across the WIO. While national pathways differ, several common priorities emerge, which points to the need for coordinated, stepwise approaches that move beyond dialogue towards implementation.

A practical pathway is therefore proposed to guide countries through the OECM agenda: from establishing enabling conditions to implementation and scaling.

**This pathway emphasises four interconnected stages:**

**1 Establish and maintain an enabling environment** by building shared understanding and capacity for inclusive OECM processes, strengthening legal and policy frameworks and institutional coordination, and

developing sustainable financing pathways and incentives that support local participation.

**2 Identify and pilot candidate sites** by drawing on existing prioritisation frameworks (e.g., KBAs, important bird and biodiversity areas [IBAs], and critical biodiversity areas [CBAs]) and available socio-ecological knowledge, while integrating scientific and local perspectives.

**3 Assess OECM effectiveness** by strengthening fit-for-purpose monitoring systems, harmonised indicators, and technical and local capacities to demonstrate sustained biodiversity outcomes and equitable governance.

**4 Implement and scale OECMs** through sustained and equitable financing mechanisms and by leveraging regional platforms for coordination, learning, and peer exchange.

Importantly, these steps are not strictly linear. Many enabling conditions, particularly governance, capacity, and financing, must be developed and sustained throughout the process.

Taken together, this pathway reinforces two key messages. First, advancing OECMs in the WIO is not primarily a technical exercise, but a systems process requiring alignment across governance, knowledge, and financing. Second, the region is well positioned to build on existing community-based management systems and regional collaboration platforms to accelerate progress. By aligning national efforts with this pathway and leveraging mechanisms such as the Nairobi Convention and WIO-C, countries can advance credible, context-appropriate OECMs that strengthen biodiversity conservation, support livelihoods, and enhance long-term ocean resilience.



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# ROADMAP FOR ADVANCING THE OECM AGENDA IN THE WIO – A CALL TO ACTION

1

## Establish and maintain an enabling environment

### Build common understanding, capacity, and inclusiveness

#### Challenges

- Limited understanding of OECMs and legal links
- Weak capacity
- Low IPLC recognition, incentives, and participation.

#### Opportunities

Awareness and participation strengthen stewardship, legitimacy, and collective buy-in.

#### Recommendations

- Simplify and tailor OECM messaging
- Build foundational capacity
- Engage stakeholders early
- Embed Free, Prior and Informed Consent and co-design
- Use NGOs and community champions for outreach.

### Strengthen legal frameworks and institutional coordination

#### Challenges

- Unclear legal basis
- Fragmented mandates across sectors
- Risk of reinforcing “silos”.

#### Opportunities

Existing co-governance frameworks can underpin OECMs and enable cross-sectoral alignment.

#### Recommendations

- Clarify roles and mandates across institutions
- Update policies to strengthen community rights and co-design
- Integrate OECMs into MSP/planning
- Establish clear interministerial coordination mechanisms.

### Establish financing pathways and incentives

#### Challenges

- Limited access to finance
- Unclear funding pathways and incentives
- Communities excluded from funding mechanisms.

#### Opportunities

Early financing pathways can enable OECM processes and incentivise participation

- Capacitate communities to generate own funding.

#### Recommendations

- Map financing needs across OECM stages
- Establish equitable incentives for participating local actors
- Simplify processes for communities to generate and use their own revenue
- Engage funding partners early on.



**Best practice example:** CORDIO East Africa, in collaboration with IUCN and funded by the Blue Nature Alliance, conducted a regional assessment of 69 community-managed areas across Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Comoros by applying the IUCN OECM site-level criteria. The assessment examined ecological integrity, governance effectiveness, equity dimensions, and community-derived benefits. Findings indicate that several sites align with key OECM requirements, including strong community participation, defined spatial boundaries, and long-term management objectives. These sites also demonstrate positive ecological and socio-economic outcomes, consistent with effective area-based conservation. Notably, improvements in fish stocks, reduced resource-use conflicts, and adoption of sustainable practices were evident, particularly in areas supported by structured monitoring and co-management systems.

2

## Identify and pilot candidate sites

### Identify, prioritise, and prepare candidate areas

#### Challenges

- Limited data and unclear selection criteria
- Gaps in socio-ecological baseline information.

#### Opportunities

Existing datasets and integrated scientific and local knowledge support strategic prioritisation and planning.

#### Recommendations

- Identify and prioritise candidate areas (e.g., LMMAs)
- Apply existing prioritisation tools (e.g., KBAs, IBAs, CBAs)
- Conduct socio-ecological situational analyses
- Integrate local and scientific knowledge.



**Best practice example:** South Africa has taken a structured, evidence-based approach to advancing marine OECMs. A national expert workshop convened government, researchers, and NGOs to identify and screen potential OECM measures, which helped establish a shared understanding of the concept and its application. This was followed by an in-depth study assessing the most promising measures against OECM criteria and identifying key data gaps, governance considerations, and readiness for recognition (Kirkman et al. 2025). Together, these steps informed the development of a national roadmap (Kowalski and Smith 2025), demonstrating how countries can move from concept clarification to prioritisation, assessment, and implementation planning in a coordinated and context-specific manner.

3

## Assess OECM effectiveness

### Strengthen assessment, monitoring, and capacity

#### Challenges

- No harmonised monitoring guidance or indicators
- Limited technical capacity for assessments and knowledge integration.

#### Opportunities

Harmonisation and capacity building improve credibility and accelerate OECM recognition.

#### Recommendations

- Develop and apply fit-for-purpose assessment and monitoring
- Harmonise indicators and data systems
- Strengthen technical, institutional, and local capacities
- Integrate local and traditional knowledge.



**Best practice example:** Harmonised approaches to monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) will be important to determine whether managed areas continue to meet the OECM criteria. Additionally, strengthening MEL systems to support on-the-ground adaptive management will be essential to support the long-term effectiveness of OECMs. In the Western Indian Ocean region, organisations have begun using the [ElinorData.org](https://elinordata.org) platform to assess the effective and equitable governance of area-based conservation. By linking a monitoring protocol designed to assess key attributes of both governance and management to an online data system, insights provided by Elinor are used at a site level and at larger scales to inform adaptive management and reporting on area-based conservation effectiveness (see note).

4

## Implement and scale OECMs

### Mobilise and sustain long-term and equitable financing

#### Challenges

- Limited sustainable finance, and limited capacity to secure and manage it
- Communities excluded from access to finance
- Unclear finance needs for OECMs progress.

#### Opportunities

OECMs can unlock sustainable finance (biodiversity, climate, or private)

- Ideally, communities are able to generate their own funding.

#### Recommendations

- Mobilise public, private, and blended finance
- Ensure equitable community access to long-term finance
- Ensure communities are able to self-generate revenue.

### Strengthen assessment, monitoring, and capacity

#### Challenges

- Uneven progress across countries
- National frameworks vary significantly.

#### Opportunities

Strong regional mechanisms and networks already exist

- Complementary experience across the WIO region.

#### Recommendations

Use WIO-C, Nairobi Convention, African OECM Expert Working Group, Bahari Learning Network, WIO LMMA Alliance, etc. to share tools, experiences, and lessons across different OECM stages.



**Best practice example:** Regional platforms are already enabling practical cross-border learning to support OECM identification and management. The Western Indian Ocean Marine Protected Area Network (WIOMPAN), hosted by WIOMSA, brings together ocean conservation practitioners from all Western Indian Ocean countries to share experience, test tools, and align approaches across contexts. Through WIOMPAN, the WIO-COMPAS certification programme has trained and certified more than 150 marine protected area professionals across the region, creating a shared standard for management competence. Building on this, the Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA) Competency Framework was adapted from WIO-COMPAS and piloted in Kenya, Mozambique, and Madagascar, with further refinement led nationally by national networks such as MIHARI in Madagascar. This process of regional development, national adaptation, and cross-country piloting demonstrates how platforms like WIOMPAN enable tools to be tested, improved, and applied across different governance contexts, directly supporting more consistent recognition and reporting of LMMAs as OECMs.

**Note:** In 2025, partner organisations published “[Stewards of the Coastline](#)”, the first report to synthesise insights on governance and management using Elinor assessment results from 52 locally managed marine areas in the South West Indian Ocean, demonstrating how harmonised MEL approaches can help generate useful insights on OECM effectiveness across scales.

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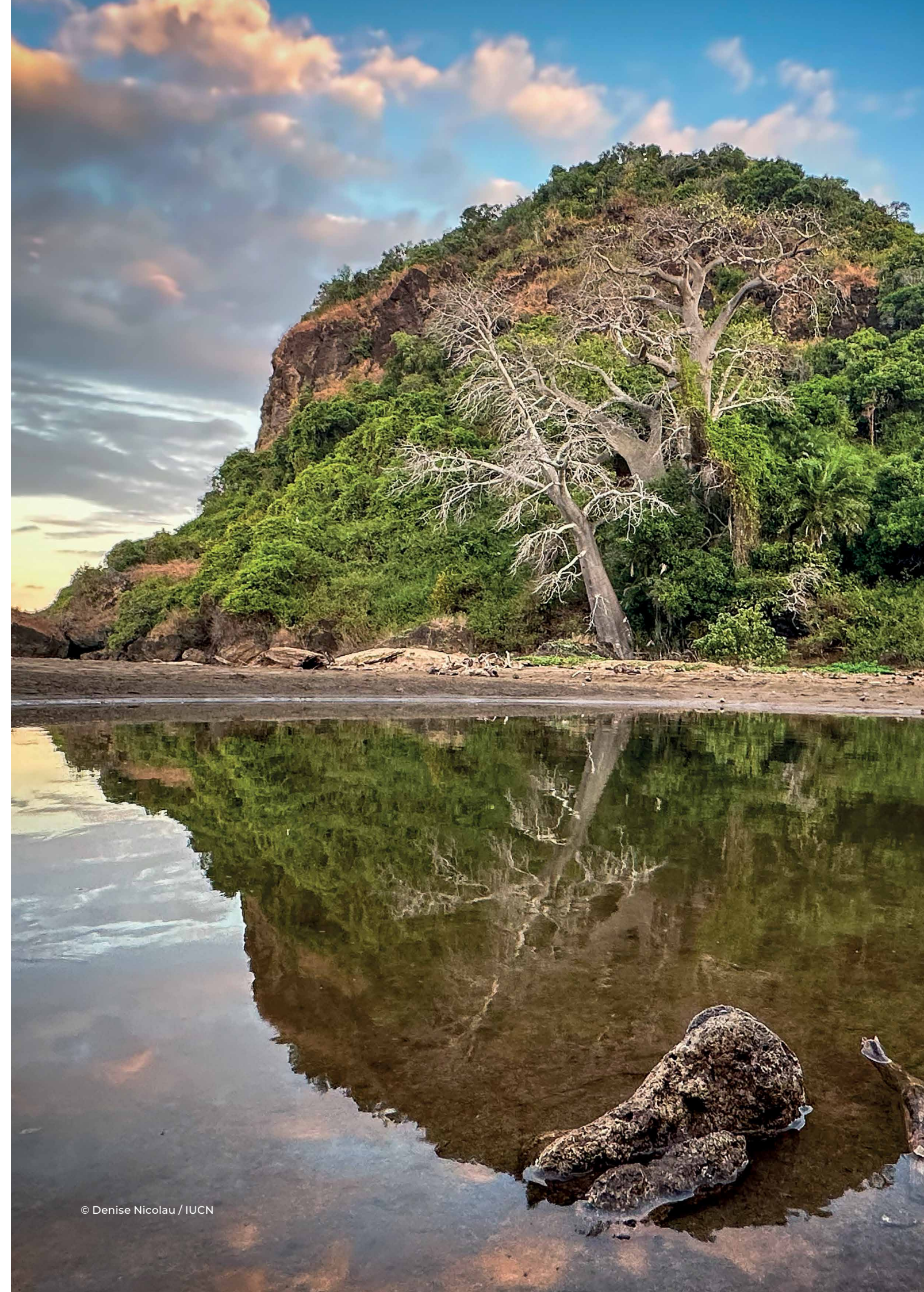
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# PATHWAYS FOR MARINE OECMs IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN

Guidance on Other Effective Area-based  
Conservation Measures to strengthen governance, local  
stewardship, and conservation outcomes