

The Great Blue Wall

Accelerating and Scaling Up Ocean Action in the Western Indian Ocean

Date: 7th November 2022, 17:30 – 19:00
Venue: Africa Pavilion, Blue Zone
Hosted by: Government of Seychelles
Co-hosted by: IUCN, UNECA, High Level Climate Champions

Background

The Great Blue Wall Initiative: At the nexus of climate change, nature conservation, and the blue economy.

The marine and coastal areas along the eastern shores of Africa contain rich, biodiverse, and under-threat flora and fauna unique for its biodiversity. The region hosts pristine coral reefs, carbon-rich mangrove forests and sheltered seagrass beds, which support an abundance of marine life including important fish species, sharks and rays, turtles, sea birds, and marine mammals. Moreover, all along the coasts of the West Indian Ocean region (WIO), coastal communities derive their socioeconomic livelihoods from the sea and its products. Artisanal and commercial fishing is critical for food security and the economy of the over 70 million people living along the coast, as the region's fishing contributes to [4.8 percent of the global fish catch, equivalent to about 4.5 million tons of fish per year](#). Marine assets in the WIO are valued conservatively at [\\$333 billion and provide at least \\$21 billion every year](#) to the regional economy from marine and coastal tourism, carbon sequestration and fisheries.

Unfortunately, due to climate change, the deterioration of the WIO ecosystem is accelerating, creating dramatic impacts for biodiversity as well as human societies, particularly coastal communities, through food insecurity, sea level rise, and storm surges. Threats are mounting from unchecked coastal development; mangrove deforestation; illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing; shipping traffic; resource overexploitation; destructive fishing practices; unregulated tourism; oil and gas exploration; and heavy-sands mining. Combined, these mounting pressures have already led to the loss of unprotected coral reefs, mangroves, seagrasses, and fish stocks, which, in turn, will continue to cripple local livelihoods and erode the WIO's blue economy.

Of course, the deterioration has broader global impacts too: The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimates that, at the global level, when coastal ecosystems like mangroves, salt marshes and seagrasses are degraded, lost or converted, massive amounts of CO₂—an estimated 0.15-1.02 billion tons every year—are released into the atmosphere or ocean, equivalent to up to 19 percent of global carbon emissions from deforestation.

The "[Great Blue Wall](#)" (GBW) initiative, which was endorsed by the World Conservation Congress in 2021, then subsequently launched at UNFCCC COP26 in Glasgow and more recently touted at the [2022 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development](#) earlier this year is a major Africa-led effort toward a [nature-positive world](#)—one that enhances the resilience of the planet and societies to halt and reverse nature loss—by 2030 is the **Great Blue Wall**. GBW proponents aim to create interconnected protected and conserved marine areas ("seascapes") to counteract the effects of climate change and global warming in the WIO region while unlocking the potential of the blue economy to become to driver of nature conservation and sustainable development outcomes.

These seascapes will form a regional network of inclusive, fair, and productive large-scale marine conserved areas that will deliver both socio-economic and conservation outcomes by promoting regenerative practices and sustainable use of natural resources that benefit local livelihoods. Local stakeholders, first of which are indigenous people and local communities, will play a central role in the effective management of the connected network and will be supported in their efforts to sustainably use and

benefit from natural resources. In term of figures, the Great Blue Wall ambition is to protect 2 million km² of marine areas, restore 2 million hectares of critical coastal and marine ecosystems and thus help sequester 100 million tons of CO₂ and create 1 million blue jobs by 2030.

The overall goal is to accelerate and upscale ocean conservation actions while building socio-ecological resilience and supporting local livelihoods. This regional ecological corridor, formed by conserved and restored critical blue ecosystems such as mangroves, seagrass beds, and corals, is intended to serve as a bulwark against the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as shelter coastal communities, and create the conditions and mechanisms necessary to accelerate the development of regenerative ocean projects.

Its three key pillars include:

- (i) Support the establishment of fair, inclusive and participatory governance mechanisms at seascape level that will contribute to reach the objective of protection of 30 percent of the oceans by 2030 while empowering local communities to secure rights to access and benefit from natural resources;
- (ii) Scale up the operationalization of nature-based solutions (such as conservation and restoration of ecosystems) that will contribute to achieving a net gain of critical marine and coastal ecosystems;
- (iii) Unlock the development of a regenerative blue economy by accelerating the development of blue entrepreneurship opportunities that benefit the people and nature.

A regional response to climate change challenges...

Beyond its contribution to local economies in the form of sustainable, blue entrepreneurship, the GBW can contribute to conserving and restoring critical marine and coastal ecosystems through mobilization of impact investors for large scale corridors and networks of projects.

To guide this effort, the GBW initiative intends to support the development of regional critical ecosystem conservation and restoration strategies and action plans in order to enhance actions and impact on the ground as well as enable the region to sequester 100 millions of tons of (blue) carbon while building ecosystem-based adaptation and socio-ecological resilience.

For the Great Blue Wall to deliver on its potential in such a short amount of time (8 years, by 2030), it will require the highest level of leadership and support, both from proponent countries as well as from potential supporting countries. Indeed, to achieve such level of transformation, world leaders need to seize this opportunity and transform it into a global flagship initiative that will not only benefit the WIO region but also potentially pave the way for other region in the world to adopt and adapt a similar approach. Unprecedented levels of funding will have to be catalyzed and mobilized to support actions on the ground and deliver the level of impact required achieve the Great Blue Wall objectives.

Ultimately, the Great Blue Wall is here to tell a story. A story of countries rising up to unprecedented challenges and building an unprecedented solution. A story of local people, waking up every day to fight the good fight and implement the solutions we so desperately need. And they've been doing it for so long with such a limited level of support and virtually no recognition. The Great Blue Wall is here to tell their story, to give a voice to the unheard, to shade a light on the unseen, to bring awareness about the unknown, and unlock a tsunami of support.

Objectives of the event

- Demonstrate leadership at the highest level on the climate-ocean nexus by presenting a first of its kind impact driven regional initiative to scale up and accelerate ocean-climate action in Africa
- Provide the perspective of key international events as stepping stones towards achieving GBW objectives, in particular COP28, UNOC 2025, and OOC 2025.
- Call parties and partners for support and partnerships

AGENDA

Facilitated by Jean-Paul Adam, Director, UNECA

1. Opening segment - 17:30 ~ 17:50

Welcome remarks:

- Razan al Mubarak, IUCN's President
- Mahmoud Mohieldin, UNFCCC High Level Climate Champion
- Ambassador Peter Thomson, UNSG's Special Envoy for the Oceans

Keynote: H.E. Wavel Ramkalawan, President of the Republic of Seychelles

2. WIO's leadership and commitments towards achieving Biodiversity-Climate-Socioeconomic outcomes - 17:50 ~ 18:10

Moderator: Nigel Topping, UNFCCC High Level Climate Champion

Speakers:

- H.E. William Ruto, President of the Republic of Kenya
- H.E. Samia Suluhu, President of the Republic of Tanzania
- H.E. Filipe Nyusi, President of the Republic of Mozambique

3. Panel discussion – How to leverage international forums to accelerate the GBW initiative and other ocean actions - 18:10 ~ 18:30

Moderator: Barbara Pompili, France's National Assembly, Member of Foreign Affairs Commission

Panelists:

- H.E. Macky Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal and President of the African Union Commission
- H.E. Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic of France
- Børge Brende, President, World Economic Forum

4. Panel discussion: One Planet, One Ocean – How partner countries can support the WIO in achieving its GBW goal and objectives? 18:30 ~ 18:50

Moderator: Stewart Maginnis, Deputy Director General, IUCN

Panelists:

- H.E. Micheál Martin, Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland
- H.E. Joe Biden, President of the Federal Republic of the United States of America
- H.E. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of the Republic of Canada

5. Closing remarks – 18:50 ~ 19:00

- H.E. Mariam Almheiri, Minister of Climate Change and Environment, United Arab Emirates and COP28 Presidency
- Antonio Pedro, UNECA's Executive Secretary