

# Marine sciences in the Western Indian Ocean region: the story of WIOMSA

Uku Jacqueline

Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute, Mombasa, Kenya  
E-mail: [jacquiuku@gmail.com](mailto:jacquiuku@gmail.com)

In 1993, when WIOMSA was established, the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region was characterized by very few marine scientists, the majority of them being fisheries biologists; absence of research priority setting mechanisms at the regional level; poor dissemination and communication of research results to various stakeholders and interest groups; little exchange of information and research collaboration amongst scientists in the WIO; links to priority management issues were sporadic; and absence of a research grants programme that responds to priority needs of the region.

Two decades later, significant progress has been made, with the most notable one being the transformation of WIOMSA from a professional network with few activities, to a regional center of excellence, and a major catalyst in coastal and marine sciences in the WIO region.

This presentation reviews the development of marine sciences in the WIO region over the two decades by analysing the challenges faced, including: non-alignment of the research goals and societal and policy-relevant needs; inadequate multidisciplinary research; few social scientists involved in coastal and marine research, and fewer institutions and individuals with the means to undertake the regional research. Mechanisms/processes used by WIOMSA and other regional organizations are described as well as lessons learnt highlighted. Some priorities for future actions aiming at sustaining the achievement made in marine sciences in the region are described.