

Reflections on the 25-year history of WIOMSA and some ideas about possible future directions

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WIOMSA started as a small organisation in 1992/1993, on the initiative of a group of young and enthusiastic scientists from the eastern African region and western Indian Ocean islands, who had met in 1989 and agreed that there was an urgent need for greater sharing of knowledge and cooperation in research efforts among scientists in neighbouring countries.

Sida/SAREC generously funded WIOMSA from the outset, and Swedish scientists played important roles in assisting the development of this small regional scientific organisation.

The initial emphasis of WIOMSA was on biological and ecological gaps in knowledge, and the need to develop research competence and capacity of individual scientists, who in turn were key to the development of their respective institutions within each country in the WIO region. These institutions then aspired to share information and cooperate more effectively towards addressing important gaps in knowledge about coastal and marine environments.

It was soon realised that it was also important to develop competence in the social sciences, and that there was a need for close integration between natural and social research efforts to be able to provide scientific advice for improved management of coastal and marine resources. Various funding mechanisms for building the competence of scientists embedded in the institutions of the WIO region were designed, and guidelines established for research on prioritised topics.

WIOMSA has developed considerably as an organisation, the membership has steadily increased, and the quality of research and resulting publications in various forms, have been impressive. But there are still gaps to be addressed and new challenges emerging.

At the grand age of 25 years, it seems to be an appropriate moment for us to reflect critically and constructively upon lessons learned from our past experiences, and to explore and scrutinise potential ideas and choices of direction for the challenging years ahead of us.