AfrOBIS, the sub-Saharan African node of OBIS

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AfrOBIS, the sub-Saharan African node of the Ocean Biogeographic Information System, established in 2006 and one of 21 regional nodes of OBIS, aims to make distribution information on African marine species available to the wider scientific community. AfrOBIS has submitted 42 datasets from 27 institutes, representing 3,544,215 distribution records. The data emanates from short-term research projects, long-term monitoring projects, literature, museum collections and citizen scientists. The main focus is on what-where-when; which taxon was found at what location (latitude-longitude) at what moment in time. The taxonomic names in AfrOBIS are matched with the African Register of Marine Species (AfReMaS, www.marinespecies.org/afremas), a regional view on the World Register of Marine Species (WoRMS, www.marinespecies.org – the taxonomic backbone for international OBIS). A check with AfReMaS allows for verification that species are known from the African marine waters, thereby excluding possible misidentification. Although the preferred way to submit data to AfrOBIS is through IPT (Integrated Publishing Toolkit), it accepts data in any available format, and quality controls and reformats the data to the standards used by the OBIS community. Every 3-4 months, AfrOBIS submits data to OBIS, where they are integrated with the data from the other OBIS nodes. This global integration of data, processed according to the same standards throughout the OBIS community, greatly simplifies the work of researchers making global comparisons. Like all large-scale data systems, AfrOBIS is only as strong as the data in it. Many African regions are undocumented within (Afr)OBIS, making it difficult to create good overviews of the species diversity and richness. AfrOBIS is launching a call for new contributions, however small, to help improve the coverage. Also offered is the opportunity to assign a DOI – Digital Object Identifier – to datasets, thereby increasing the visibility, citability and traceability of the use of scientist’s data.