Special Session Title: Fostering Regional Engagement through Transdisciplinary Research

Contact person: Ms Nicole du Plessis
Email: iora.ag.sa@gmail.com

Organisers: Secretariat of the South African Chapter of the Indian Ocean Rim Association Academic Group (SA IORAG) and the Western Indian Ocean Early Career Scientists Network (WIO-ECSN)

Background

The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) was launched in 1997 with the broad objective to promote the sustained growth and balanced development of the Region. The Association is an economic cooperative community of littoral and island States whose shores are washed by the Indian Ocean, comprising twenty two Member States and nine Dialogue Partners1.

South Africa assumed the Chair of IORA in October 2017 until October/November 2019. For the same period, South Africa will also be chairing the IORA Academic Group (IORAG) and has established a South African Chapter of the IORAG (SA IORAG) along with national working groups which focus on research themes in the IORA priority areas of: Maritime Safety and Security; Trade and Investment Facilitation; Fisheries Management; Disaster and Risk Management; Academic Cooperation, Science and Technology; Tourism and Cultural Exchanges; Transformation and Gender Equality (cross-cutting theme); and Blue Economy (cross-cutting theme). The IORAG constitutes the academic arm of the IORA and its role is to be both advisory and catalytic.

South Africa seeks to engage with other African Member States to create partnerships within IORA, focusing on topics relevant to African Member States. Human capacity building and youth engagement are priorities within many of the member countries. The SA IORAG has engaged with the Western Indian Ocean Early Career Scientist Network (WIO-ECSN) to develop a session around a topic of interest to young researchers - Transdisciplinary research.

Transdisciplinary Research is defined as ‘research efforts conducted by investigators from different disciplines working jointly to create new conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and translational innovations that integrate and move beyond discipline-specific approaches to address a common problem’. Transdisciplinarity is envisioned as a complement to ongoing discipline-based scientific inquiry that might lead to a different, higher, plane of inquiry, and enable different questions to be asked.

Session Objectives and Outputs

Transdisciplinary research has become a field of research of interest to many young scientists as it allows the combining of various disciplines (e.g., environmental, engineering and social sciences, etc.) to tackle the global challenges of today. There is however a lack of information on how to undertake research of this nature when most graduate and postgraduate studies, funding opportunities and scientific journals, are geared towards single disciplinary research topics.

1 Member States: South Africa, India, Australia, Mauritius, Indonesia, Comoros, Iran, Madagascar, Oman, Tanzania, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Bangladesh, Seychelles, Malaysia, Maldives, Mozambique, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Yemen, Somalia. Dialogue Partners: China, Egypt, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, Turkey, UK, USA.
This session will seek to address these challenges by engaging with the regional platforms such as WIOMSA and IORA which are focused on various topics of regional and international importance and would benefit from transdisciplinary research initiatives.

The special session will aim to introduce participants to the IORA; strengthen researcher/academic networking in the region; discuss capacity building opportunities within the region and address young researcher’s questions on undertaking research of a transdisciplinary nature.

A report will be made available to all session participants and the greater WIOMSA and IORA communities.

Target Audience

Early career scientists; all participants working within the IORA priority areas listed above.

Tentative Special Session Programme (5 July 2019 @ 11:30 – 13:00)

1. Welcome and Opening/ Introduction to IORA and the IORAG (10mins) – Juliet Hermes

2. Undertaking transdisciplinary research as a young researcher (10 mins) – Riaan Cedras, WIO-ECSN President

3. Transdisciplinary Research Case Study: Benefits and Challenges (15 mins) – TBC

4. Panel Discussion (2 early career scientists, 3 experts) (45 mins) – Moderator, Nicole du Plessis
   - Questions from early career scientists
   - Questions from audience
   - How to improve interactions with and make use of existing organisations and programmes such as WIOMSA, IIOE2 and IORA for capacity building, funding and networking
   - Transdisciplinary project topic proposal for development as an IORA project (submissions for a topic requested by early career scientists and IORA Secretariat)

5. Closing/Wrap-up (10 mins)