

**Title:**

*Fostering and replicating change: empowering Community Champions*

**WIOMSA topic theme (suggested):** *Capacity development and outreach*

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**Presentation:** Oral

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### Background

Our Sea Our Life is a collaborative project that works with vulnerable coastal communities to manage local fisheries in northern Mozambique. In our mission to improve the resilience of coastal ecosystems and community well-being, we have created Community Fisheries Councils (CCPs) for the management of 10km<sup>2</sup> of no take zones (NTZ) and 40km<sup>2</sup> of sustainably managed marine areas (Locally Managed Marine Areas- LMMAs).

### Methods

Key to the establishment of LMMAs are Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs)

VSLAs are an extremely successful element of Our Sea Our Life. Currently, over 466 households (of which more than 50% are women) are enrolled in 23 VSLAs, benefiting around 3,000 people in 6 communities. Whilst providing essential access to self-managed financial services, VSLA members have weekly meetings in small groups, providing a platform to foster big change and invest in themselves, their community and marine conservation. VSLAs are the birthplace of our Community Champions.

### Results

Through the regular contact that we have with our VSLAs, we have been able to develop targeted messaging that supports the implementation of our conservation work. Community

Champions emerged as people within the VSLAs passionate about driving change, and who have taken those messages to the rest of the community. Community Champions are typically male members of the VSLAs, aged around 40-60 years old, who are motivated by the appreciation and recognition they receive from the community members. They have supported the establishment of 5 VSLA groups so far, supporting the logistics and outreach elements of the VSLA process.

Beyond simply transmitting and receiving information, the field team gained an understanding of local values and practical experience, then used to develop the messaging behind all procedures, materials and communications ensuring it is reflective of this knowledge. We have consolidated this information into a Handbook for Community Champions that provides them with resources for spreading their messages. One of the key tools for Community Champions is to establish new VSLA groups that they train- subsequently creating their own Community Champions, and leading to a self-replicating system that spreads the benefits of access to financial services and further increases conservation constituency in an extremely cost-effective way for the supporting civil society groups.

### Conclusion

Supported by the community handbook, our Community Champions have become an important part of Our Sea Our Life's co-management plans. The Community Champions are the link between the VSLAs and co-management. These individuals also gain a social status within the communities, participating in the training of new VSLA groups and visiting other communities to exchange experience and good practice.

The Community Champions strengthen the work of the CCPs, through outreach and communication that is linked with better compliance with LMMA regulations, reinforcing the project's mission.

**Key words:** VSLA, community champion, handbook, behaviour change, financial services