

Title: ‘How to become a change agent in aquatic sciences’

Authors: Dr. Karolien Van Puyvelde (karolien.van.puyvelde@vub.be, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels, Belgium), Liesbeth Pinti (liesbeth.pinti@vub.be, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels, Belgium), Prof. dr. Ann Vanreusel (ann.vanreusel@ugent.be, Universiteit Gent, Ghent, Belgium), Prof. dr. Nico Koedam (nikoedam@vub.be, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels, Belgium)

Abstract:

The Oceans & Lakes programme (full name: Master of Science in Marine and Lacustrine Science and Management) and its root programmes have created nuclei of graduates (alumni) worldwide over 3 decades. Several alumni now have key positions in their home countries. For some countries (amongst which Kenya), there is an operational nucleus of trained scientists and a good network and collaboration between alumni working for different bodies which results in projects involving governmental, NGO, research institutes and universities. In Kenya alumni of ‘Oceans & Lakes’ and its root programmes FAME and ECOMAMA, with subsequent PhD training, constitute a network in international and government bodies and NGO (UNEP, KMFRI, KWS, WWF) and act here as ‘change agents’ in science and management of aquatic systems and resources, whether coastal or major freshwater catchments.

The programme now wishes to go even further and create a larger, robust and sustained network. With several alumni being examples of ‘change agents’ for their country or resp. region, the programme wishes to bring together alumni and other stakeholders to learn from local experiences in research, education, management and governance through peer inspiration. A major aim is to create and strengthen networks for research and education that enforce both the north-south and the south-south capacity building on environmental sustainability, and to generate continuous public support.

In this aim, the Oceans & Lakes programme organized a 5-day alumni networking event in Belgium, named ‘OORI’ – Oceans of Opportunities, Rivers of Ideas (<http://www.oceansandlakes.ugent.be/oori>).

The mini-symposium proposed by dr. Diana Di Nitto and dr. Jean Hugé: ‘How to become a change agent in marine conservation’, also builds upon the OORI event, and its aim of creating and strengthening networks for research and education, however with a more specific scope.

At the WIOMSA symposium, Oceans & Lakes wishes to bring together alumni and other stakeholders again, with the aim to continue enforcing their networks, and investing in capacity building.

Biographies

Dr. Karolien Van Puyvelde graduated with a MSc in Biology and a PhD in Sciences. She is currently the coordinator of the MSc programme in Marine and Lacustrine Science and Management (‘Oceans & Lakes’).

Liesbeth Pinti coordinates the secretariat of the MSc in Marine and Lacustrine Science and Management (‘Oceans & Lakes’), and is involved in the building and the maintaining of alumni and other networks. She co-organized the networking and capacity building event OORI – Oceans of Opportunities, Rivers of Ideas.

Prof. dr. Ann Vanreusel is head of the research group Marine Biology of Ghent University (Belgium) . Since her PhD (1984-1989) and post doc research (from 1990) , she became an expert in benthos research with a focus on meiofauna (nematodes) . Ann Vanreusel, since 2000 part of the academic staff (professor) , has focused her most recent research on the ecology of extreme marine environments including abyssal ecosystems including poly-metallic nodule areas, submarine canyons, cold water corals, cold seeps, polar deep-sea and Antarctic coastal systems.

Prof. dr. Nico Koedam is full professor at the Faculty of Sciences and Bio-engineering Sciences. Trained as a plant scientist (MSc and PhD) his initial doctoral and postdoctoral research in physio-ecology evolved to plant-microorganism interactions. When appointed in 1993 as the Head of the research group Plant Biology and Nature Management at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, research was oriented and widened, with ‘mangrove ecology and physiology’ as an overarching theme.