Brief background
Seagrasses are marine vascular plants that have adapted to a life in the sea. Historically less research has focused on the ecology and physiology of seagrasses compared to coral reefs and mangroves. Lately, however, this view has changed remarkable, and today, seagrasses have become one of the most discussed and noticeable ecological systems in the marine realm. Much of this change streams from climate change research, where it has been apparent that seagrass meadows possess a plethora of multifunctional ecosystem services. Today this has been acknowledged and numerous seagrass projects that are focusing on ecosystem services are currently operating in Europe, North America, Australia, the Persian Gulf (in relation to manatees) and Western Indian Ocean. This is also evident by the great amount of funding that is currently allocated to this research field. Seagrass meadows provide a suite of ecosystem-based services that are of great importance for human welfare. Not only are seagrass meadows functioning as habitat and nurseries for many valuable commercial fish species but have proved to be particularly efficient carbon sinks, as well as for coastal management. Seagrass management as an ecosystem adaptation can facilitate biodiversity and protect infrastructure, in line to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of Infrastructure (SDG 9) and Life below water (SDG 14), and to the Sustainable Development Goal Climate action (SDG 13). The impact of this mini-symposia will come from the opportunity to assembly and integrate researchers within seagrass ecology from various research avenues, which otherwise do not interact. Our aim is to promote new collaboration opportunities, not only for the future, but between ongoing projects in the region.

Mini-symposium structure
The event will include a number of talks followed by a panel discussion.

Expected outputs
The output will not only include discussions, but it will be exceptionally valuable to provide net-working among researchers from other labs to exchange experience, nurturing collaborations, but also to structure the research environment in the WIO region by avoiding overlapping research directions.

Schedule

Moderator: Blandina Lugendo
11.00 – 11.10 Introduction
11.10 – 11.30 Maricela de la Torre-Castro – Social-ecological analysis of seagrass ecosystems

11.30 – 11.50 Rushingisha George – Effects of global warming on seagrass ecosystem services in the Western Indian Ocean

11.50 – 12.10 Martin Gullström – The significance of a landscape approach to conserve seagrass ecosystem services

12.10 – 12.30 Salomao Bandeira – Seagrass threats in WIO - need for restoration and management strategies (Part 1)

12.30 – 12.50 Manuela Amone Mabuto – Seagrass threats in WIO - need for restoration and management strategies (Part 2)

12.50 – 13.50 LUNCH

13.50 – 14.10 Johan Hollander – Green infrastructure mitigations against coastal erosion

14.10 – 14.30 Sara Forsberg – Effects of marine protected areas on blue carbon storage in Tanzania and Mozambique

14.30 – 15.00 Panel discussion