OCEANS OF OPPORTUNITIES, RIVERS OF IDEAS – REINFORCING ALUMNI NETWORKS IN THE WIO REGION

Date: 09 October 2022
Time: 09:00 – 12:30
Venue: Board Walk Convention Centre, Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth)

Organising team:
Prof. Dr. Ann Vanreusel (Universiteit Gent); Dr. Diana Di Nitto (Vrije Universiteit Brussel); Dr. Karolien Van Puyvelde (Vrije Universiteit Brussel); Liesbeth Pinti (Vrije Universiteit Brussel); Asst. Prof. Dr. Jean Hugé (Open University of the Netherlands), Dr. Judith Okello (Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute); Dr. Amina Juma Hamza (Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute); Dr. Amon Kimeli (Leibniz Center for Tropical Marine Research, Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute); Arida Fauziyah (doctoral student Institut Teknologi Bandung); Charles Lukas Makio (student MSc. in Marine and Lacustrine Science and Management); Joy Ruguru Ndwiga (student MSc. in Marine and Lacustrine Science and Management).

Background:
The interuniversity Master of Science in Marine and Lacustrine Science and Management (in short ‘Oceans & Lakes’ ) at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), University Ghent (UGent) and University Antwerpen (UAntwerpen) in Belgium and its root programmes FAME, MARELAC and ECOMAMA have created nuclei of graduates (alumni) over 3 decades. A multidisciplinary alumni network with a focus on aquatic systems and many alumni from the WIO region, has been formed. However, there is a need to reinforce this network, and to make it more visible. In December 2018, ‘Oceans & Lakes’ launched the overarching concept OORI - Oceans of Opportunities, Rivers of Ideas – and organised its first successful OORI alumni networking event at Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Universiteit Gent for aquatic scientists on change agent mechanisms and its implications. The theme of the event was: ‘How to influence policy while being a specialist: ‘change agent’?’

In this WIOMSA special session, we want to go one step further, and think about how this alumni network can respond to issues as they arise in the WIO region, and to develop a model that can be applied to other regions. Many ‘Oceans & Lakes’ alumni have key positions, already acting as ‘change agents’ both in science and management of aquatic systems and resources; and at different national and international organizations (governmental, NGO, industry, education). For example, the programme’s Kenyan alumni constitute a network in international and government bodies and NGOs like UNEP, KMFRI, KWS, WWF... By organizing this event, we want to offer the opportunity to learn from the experiences of our alumni worldwide, and to provide a platform to exchange good practices and ideas on how to consolidate integrated partnerships - from education, research, management to policy support in aquatic sciences - in the WIO region and beyond.

Theme: How to go beyond borders and influence international collaboration and knowledge exchange as a specialist: ‘change agent’?

Objectives:
- To enhance integrated partnerships in resource use and conservation in the WIO region
- To form a network for collaboration on policy development, policy implementation, resource governance, conservation of coastal resources, and ecosystem-based adaptation to changes in the WIO region
- To develop a model for a reinforced and efficient alumni network; applicable to other regions

Actors and targeted audiences:
Scientific community (Researchers) / Policy and governance (Governments) / Conservation oriented NGOs / Sensitized local communities
**Expected outputs:**
Both the pitch presentations and the interactive ‘OORI’s World Café / Opinion Poll’ (see below) will provide new insights on opportunities for international partnerships and benchmarking of other successful approaches. These insights will be drawn into an ‘Alumni OORI brief’ (also for WIOMSA dissemination purposes) and used as the next steppingstone to develop a model for a reinforced and efficient alumni network and to create a forum at local, national and regional level.

**Methods:**
Through a combination of pitch presentations by young scientists, and a group discussion approach we will identify the opportunities and gaps for international networking and collaboration on marine sciences. The programme is initiated by the oceans and Lakes alumni community but welcomes all potential stakeholders with interest in the initiative.

**Tentative programme:**
This special session will include a set of innovative approaches: 1) OORI pitch presentations incl. video streaming; 2) ‘OORI World Café’: discussions in group to create dialogue and exchange of knowledge incl. ‘OORI Opinion Poll’.

**Programme: 3-4 hours in total:**

- **1 hour: pitch talks**
  Specific titles of presentations to be completed in later phase, see already these examples:
  "How to go beyond borders as a specialist: to be a ‘change agent’ and consolidate (or influence) international collaboration (or capacity building, transboundary partnerships, decision-making,... ?”
  "Integrated research project of Oceans and Lakes and its partner universities (e.g. Indonesia: Universitas Hasanuddin)"
  "Cross-country collaborations – Using diversity to our advantage”
  "Community engagement and power building – strength in numbers”
  " Fresh graduates: Are they equipped enough for the scientific world?"

- **1,5 hour: “world café”:**
  Work in groups on questions (full overview to be completed in later phase); examples of questions:
  "Where are our interventions needed most?"
  "What are our strengths? Weaknesses? Opportunities? Threats? How can this awareness help us move our agenda to the next step?"
  "How to reinforce an alumni network in the frame of international collaboration?"
  "What are creative solutions for finding funding for the creation and maintenance of alumni networks?"
  "How can we incorporate/enhance mentorship into alumni networks"

- **1,5 hour: wrap-up**

Register to attend:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfXxl4KxL5tgVtOmzDbMqrUGwXXRzge7GYixuyw8hyb3ih1g/viewform?usp=sf_link