Supporting The Development Of A Regional Marine Spatial Planning Strategy For The Western Indian Ocean: Findings From A Situational Analysis

Authors: Kaylee. P. Smit¹, Jai. K. Clifford-Holmes², Vera Horigue³, Amanda.T. Lombard⁴, Bernadette Snow⁵

¹Institute For Coastal And Marine Research, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa And, ²Institute For Coastal And Marine Research, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa And Institute For Water Research, Rhodes University, ³MacQuarie University, Sydney, Australia And Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association, ⁴Institute For Coastal And Marine Research, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa, ⁵Institute For Coastal And Marine Research, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa And University Of Strathclyde, Scotland, UK

E-mail Address: kayles.smit@gmail.com

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Background
Marine Spatial planning (MSP) is one of the priority areas of the Nairobi Convention Work Programme 2018-2022, and the need for a regional MSP strategy was emphasized by the Parties to the Convention and partners at a meeting to discuss MSP in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO), held in Dar es Salaam in March 2019. In 2020, the development of a regional MSP strategic framework was initiated (through a contract with the Institute for Coastal and Marine Research at the Nelson Mandela University) to support the MSP Technical Working Group (TWG), which was established to increase collaboration and coordination for national MSP in the region. A preliminary situational analysis was conducted to support the development of the framework, to determine current MSP practices, in the region and globally, and to identify challenges and gaps that need to be addressed by the strategy. Here we present the key findings from a detailed literature review and stakeholder engagement that provides a background to MSP in the WIO, upon which the regional MSP strategic framework was developed.

Method
An in-depth literature review was conducted using published scientific articles, reports, and grey literature related to MSP practices in the WIO region. Furthermore, we conducted limited stakeholder engagement, which was facilitated and supported by the MSP TWG, to identify (1) the status of national MSP of the nine member states, (2) challenges of MSP at a national and regional level, (3) supporting activities for MSP implementation and, (4) gaps, priorities and recommendations for regional MSP. The report included a non-exhaustive summary of the institutional arrangements in the WIO, projects involved in MSP in the region, and the availability of data, knowledge and literature that can support national MSP.

Results
While there has been large progress towards policy development and institutional structures available for MSP in the WIO, it appears that the countries of the WIO are still very much in different stages of MSP uptake and policy and legislative development. There is a need for institutional reform and policy amendment or development, particularly through the harmonisation of current frameworks and legislation among sectors and among WIO countries. Generally, national policies are not specific to MSP, but are broadly related to environmental policies or they are sector-specific, but they tend to be incorporating blue growth/development of the blue economy.

Aside from Seychelles, one of the most developed country’s regarding MSP activities and policy development, and South Africa, which passed the MSP bill and are implementing MSP at a local scale, recent policy amendments and MSP developments are prominent in Kenya, Mozambique, Mauritius and Tanzania. Most of the initial progress appears to be in coordinating government institutions and departments, establishing specific working groups, committees or offices related to the Blue Economy or MSP. Kenya, South Africa and Mauritius have (or are in the process) developed roadmaps which include detailed objectives for MSP implementation at a national level. Whilst many of these activities are limited to policies/agreements and institutional structures, there has also been encouraging progress of implementation at a local scale through data collection and online portal development (Mauritius, Madagascar and Tanzania) and case studies of MSP within countries for example, the Algoa Bay MSP in South Africa and the county-level (Lamu) spatial plans in Kenya. Projects linked to The Nature Conservancy and other donor organisations are also assisting with developing MSP projects, at a local scale, in Kenya, Tanzania and Mauritius. Despite this promising progress, there are still gaps where countries like Comoros and Somalia appear to be lagging.

The state of MSP “readiness” was also identified for each of the WIO member states, based on a set of seven indicators that were ranked based on data and information gathered from the situational assessment. MSP “readiness” considered the overall economic status of the country (based on various global, regional and national indicators), the environmental status, the extent of marine ecosystem protection, extent/intensity of resource depletion, efficiency/effectiveness of the governance structures in place and the level of involvement in regional projects related to MSP and latest MSP activities (e.g., MSP workshops or capacity building initiatives). Seychelles, Mauritius and South Africa scored the highest across all of the indicators.

Conclusion
Despite the progress observed in the WIO, there is an urgent need for improved capacity for MSP implementation in the region, but also for policy and legislation development related to national and regional MSP. Some capacity needs identified included knowledge/training on MSP implementation, data collection, innovative tools for MSP activities, frameworks for stakeholder engagement and conflict resolution, integration of different (existing) tools, frameworks and strategies (e.g. ICZM, EIA, MPAs & VMES) and availability of funds. Access to long-term funding through the identification of innovative financing mechanisms is imperative for effective and sustainable MSP in the WIO.

A detailed stakeholder mapping exercise was initiated for the development of the
regional MSP strategy and should be continued as MSP projects and activities continue to unfold. It is recommended that a stakeholder engagement framework be developed for the region. The MSP TWG will have to play a pivotal role in communicating with national stakeholders and coordinating activities not only in their respective countries but also within the region. It is important, as MSP initiatives continue, to share experiences (and data), to learn from other MSP projects and to engage with transboundary area management. The Nairobi Convention will also be vital in facilitating these processes and providing support for regional collaboration to advance MSP in the WIO.