

## **SS033: Blue Values: Unlocking full potential of marine ecosystem services in the WIO**

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The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region hosts critical coastal marine ecosystems—including mangroves, seagrasses, and coral reefs—that contribute immensely to climate regulation, community livelihood, and biodiversity conservation. However, the region's blue economy remains underutilized due to an overly narrow focus on blue carbon markets. A transition toward a more holistic 'blue values' framework would illuminate the full nature and societal benefits of these ecosystems. Achieving conservation and development objectives would require cohesive policies, capital investment, stakeholder engagement, and the integration of advanced technologies in realizing the full blue nature based enterprises and solutions. The starting point would be embedding ecosystem service valuation into policy frameworks and leveraging financing mechanisms to enhance the region's conservation and economic opportunities. Incentive mechanisms such as Mikoko Pamoja, integrated mariculture, and a network of marine protected and conserved areas exemplify scalable models that would transition WIO region into sustainable blue growth.