

The role of co-production in connecting normative science and policy with lived realities in the WIO region: A 15-year reflection

The 21st century has seen various shifts in discourses and epistemologies underpinning coastal and ocean governance at the global scale, and within the Western Indian Ocean region. However, ocean governance remains a wicked problem as various asymmetries exist between policy and scientific reforms at the meta-level and lived realities and processes on the ground.

This can be attributed to various factors, which include a) increasing contestations and power conflicts concerning ocean space and resources; b) poor respect for and inclusion of Indigenous, customary and local rights in decision-making processes, as well as; c) skewed benefit sharing processes within the blue economy, d) trade-offs between economic, social and environmental goals/outcomes in sectoral activities and processes, and e) knowledge hierarchies influencing ocean decision-making. Although efforts exist at global, regional and national levels to drive the sustainability agenda (especially given only five years left for Agenda 2030 and SDG14 implementation), transformative processes are needed so that use, access and governance of the oceans does not continue to result in winners and losers. This is more pertinent in an era where the respect for Indigenous knowledge and customary rights of those with long-standing relationships with the ocean is increasingly being highlighted at the global level.

There is now a need for practical approaches that demonstrate how plural knowledge about the ocean can work together in implementation processes that can translate justly into lived realities on the ground. This presentation therefore draws on 15 years of evidence from the WIO region and beyond to highlight transdisciplinary approaches needed for developing capacity at different scales and levels to enable meaningful co-production for transdisciplinary and transformative ocean governance processes and practices.