AFRICAN UNION
INTERAFRICAN BUREAU
FOR ANIMAL RESOURCES

Sweden
Sverige

CONSERVING AQUATIC BIODIVERSITY IN AFRICAN BLUE ECONOMY





Funded by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

THE PROJECT

Conserving Aquatic Biodiversity project was a continental project designed to contribute to the Sweden's Broader Development Agenda (2024–2028), as outlined in the OECD's profile, emphasizes on themes that are highly relevant to Africa which included poverty reduction, trade, gender equality, inclusive governance, enhancing resilience to climate change and strengthening regional institutional frameworks.

Project Beneficiaries:

1. AU Member States, RECs
2. Regional Sea Conventions
3. Regional Fisheries Bodies
4. Community Based Organizations
5. Communities at the aquatic ecosystem interface (including women and youth)

Project Collaborative Partners:

1. Regional Sea Conventions: Abidjan Convention and Nairobi Convention,
2. Regional fisheries Bodies: FCWC, COREP, LVFO
3. Non-Governmental Organizations, IUCN, Mabuyi Development Planners (and The Blue Wild Coast (BWC), a Non-Profit Organization
4. Research-based, Specialized Institutions, WIOMSA, KEMFRI
5. Regional Economic Communities: SADC, EAC, ECCAS

Project Funding Amount:	SEK 47 500 000 (Swedish kroner Forty-Seven Million Five Hundred Thousand)
Project Geographical Scope:	32 AU member states Coverage RECs/MS/Lakes/Oceans etc
Project Duration:	4 years 15th October 2021 – 14th December 2025

Project Target Group:

National government institutions with mandates in blue economy sectors, including fisheries, aquaculture, environment, aquatic biodiversity, gender and social welfare, mining and gas, water resources, shipping and transportation, and energy.

PROJECT IMPACT STATEMENT:

The long-term outcome of the project is contributing to ensuring aquatic ecosystems are conserved, restored, and sustainably managed to safeguard aquatic biodiversity, enhance ecosystem services, strengthen the resilience of communities, institutional capacities of AU member states and Regional institutions for effective, inclusive governance of the aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems, and increase fish food-source while attracting investments from private and public sectors.

In the medium-term outcome of the project quantitative evidence indicate improved policy influence and better governance, community empowerment and heightened conservation practices and increased public institutions commitment.

At the end of the project, the project demonstrated medium-term outcomes; contributed to the conservation of approximately **61,271 ha** in Kenya and **7,240 ha** in Ghana on Mangrove forests cover.

695

community members equipped with skills and knowledge on nature-based solutions in coastal areas in Kenya, Ghana, and Tanzania.

39

institutions strengthened across Africa in sustainable fisheries.

Strengthened **39 institutions; 12** National institutions in West Africa, **14** National institutions in Central Africa, and **11** National institutions in Southern Africa from Fisheries and Environment Ministries where **43** personnel enhanced their skills and knowledge in MCS measures to combat IUU fishing towards sustainable fisheries. **3** regional institutions strengthened effective MCS measures to combat IUU fishing and protect aquatic biodiversity and environment, hence contributing vitally to adopting sustainable fishing practices and sustainable fisheries.

On ecosystems restoration, protection of critical habitats of commercially important fish species, the capacity of **695 community members** was enhanced on nature-based in coastal areas in Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania, this led to restoration of degraded habitats and ecosystems (mangroves) and on the carbon sink functions of seaweeds.

Out of the stated community members trained **416** were female gender and **279** were male gender.



AGENDA 2063 – AFRICA'S TRANSFORMATIVE VISION

Agenda 2063 is Africa's blueprint for inclusive and sustainable development, driving unity, self-determination, and prosperity.

Project Contribution:
The aquatic biodiversity project advances the Blue Economy through sustainable resource management, regional collaboration, and climate-resilient practices. Achievements align with:

- **Aspiration 1:** Inclusive, sustainable growth and biodiversity conservation.
- **Aspiration 3:** A strong, united, and influential Africa.
- **Aspiration 4:** People-driven development, empowering women, youth, and children.

KEY PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The **overall objective** of the project is to enhance the policy environment, regulatory frameworks and institutional capacities of AU member states and regional economic communities to sustainably utilize and conserve aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems.

- Ratify and align relevant International/regional Instruments related to Blue Economy themes (with specific reference to protecting and conserving biodiversity).
- Optimize conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity while minimizing conflicts among blue economy resource users.
- Mitigate negative impacts of coastal and marine tourism, oil, gas, deep-sea mining, and climate change on aquatic biodiversity.
- Strengthen gender inclusivity in aquatic biodiversity conservation and environmental management.

PROJECT DELIVERY MODEL /APPROACHES

1. High-Level Buy-In and Political Commitment
2. Partnership and collaboration
3. Coordination
4. Policy and Governance Framework
5. Multi-Stakeholder Engagement
6. Community Engagement (participation and involvement)
7. Projects' Strategy on Communication, Visibility and Knowledge Management
8. Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening
9. Monitoring and Evaluation
10. Sustainability and Exit Strategy

PROJECT CONTRIBUTIONS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

1 NO POVERTY
Capacity building for **520** community members in Kenya and Tanzania, promoting alternative livelihoods like ecotourism, beekeeping, and aquaculture.

2 ZERO HUNGER
Mangrove conservation restored critical habitats, increasing fish production and improving food security.

5 GENDER EQUALITY
Developed and promoted gender sensitive strategies, and empowered women in aquatic biodiversity conservation, including strengthening gender integration in coastal governance.

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES
Promoted inclusive participation by empowering women and youth in aquatic biodiversity conservation and supporting equitable livelihood opportunities, training **422** women and **301** men.

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
The project strengthened capacities to combat illegal fishing and protect aquatic biodiversity, promoting sustainable fisheries, improved fish stocks, food security, and livelihoods across transboundary marine areas.

13 CLIMATE ACTION
Promoted mangrove planting and seaweed farming to mitigate climate change impacts and environmental factors of the specific region coastal line.

14 LIFE BELOW WATER
Established Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Marine Spatial Plans (MSPs), strengthened governance frameworks, reduced illegal fishing, and enhanced transboundary collaboration for sustainable, gender-inclusive fisheries, conservation, and regional capacity-building.

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS
Collaborated with UNESCO, WWF, IUCN, and regional bodies to advance conservation efforts.



AU HIGH-LEVEL POLICY ORGAN ENDORSED PROJECT OUTPUTS

1. A Continental Strategy for Gender Mainstreaming in Aquatic Biodiversity Conservation and Environmental Management in Africa.
2. Mechanisms for Enhancing Effective Role and Participation of AU MSs in Regional, Continental, and Global Aquatic Biodiversity Conservation and Environmental Management related fora or regime.
3. Three (3) Institutions endorsed as African Union Centres of Excellence for Training and Research in Conservation of Aquatic Biodiversity and Ecosystems Management.
4. Continental Strategy on Nature-Based Solutions for Conservation, Restoration and Sustainable Use of Aquatic Ecosystems and Fish Stocks.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

OUTCOME RESULTS

Outcome 1:

Policy and Regulation:

- Supported **10** AU Member States (e.g., Ghana, Uganda, Egypt) to review and align national policies with global instruments like MARPOL, CBD, UNFSA and UNFCCC.
- Developed two assessment reports on the status of ratification and implementation of **42** global and **12** continental instruments.
- Developed AU Policy organ endorsed mechanism to support effective participation of AU stakeholders in global fora
- Trained **13** experts as resources persons to support effective participation of AU member states in Global fora on aquatic biodiversity and environment

Outcome 2:

Strengthened Institutions and stakeholders:

- Improved capacities of **18 Member states** for sustainable management, utilization, protection, and conservation of living aquatic resources and related ecosystems.
- **4** AU Member States (Tanzania, Kenya, DR Congo and Congo) had MoU developed on co-management and conservation of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems.
- **7** AU Member States (Tanzania, Kenya, Congo, Gabon, Madagascar, Senegal and Gabon) established and incorporated governance approaches of transboundary and national MPA process, which included an ecosystem approach.
- **6** AU Member States (Togo, Benin, Tanzania, Comoros, Mozambique, Madagascar) had transboundary MSP processes incorporated into the Ecosystem in advancing MSP processes.
- LVFO and COREP regional partnerships harmonized framework for the transboundary management of shared freshwater and marine ecosystems respectively.

Outcome 3:

Collaborated to mitigate climate change impacts:

- Trained **695** community members (416 women, 279 men) in Kenya, Tanzania, and Ghana on ecosystem restoration, mitigating climate change, through nature-based solutions, and on alternative livelihoods.
- **4** AU MS - (Tanzania), Kenya (Gazi bay), Ghana (Keta region), South Africa community groups trained and applied practical skills on mitigating the impact of Climate Change on ecosystem restoration on Coastal Region

Outcome 4:

Gender Inclusivity:

- Improved participation and engagement of women and youth in aquatic biodiversity conservation and environmental management.
- Developed, AU Policy Organ endorsed continental strategy for gender mainstreaming in aquatic biodiversity conservation
- **5** AU-MS of Malawi and Ethiopia, Cote D'Ivoire, Egypt, Cameroon, Ghana. developed gender-sensitive strategies for aquatic biodiversity conservation and environmental management.
- **2** sensitive policies and management plans for 2 community-based organizations working at the interface of coastal locations and small-scale fisheries in Ghana and South Africa respectively.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SUSTAINABLE AQUATIC BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN AFRICA

Identified three institutions as AU Centres of excellence for aquatic biodiversity conservation and ecosystems management: PWANI University (Kenya), University of Ghana (Ghana) and Nairobi University (Kenya)

OUTPUTS RESULTS

Transboundary Governance

1.The governance framework of transboundary Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) between Congo and DR Congo was strengthened to adequately conserve the aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems for the benefits of citizens of the two countries and future generation.

2.The transboundary Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) continuous process in Northern Mozambique Channel was enhanced resulting in agreed technical guidelines for successful implementation aligned with the continental MSP guidelines developed by the project, strengthening of institutional modalities (e.g. technical working groups involving the four countries: resulting in increased prospects of political buy-in and sustainability.

3.**2** Frameworks (freshwater; and marine ecosystems) for establishing harmonized management of transboundary aquatic systems were developed. Based on these frameworks, 5 AU MSs were supported to develop harmonized strategies for joint management of transboundary aquatic ecosystems for their rational management for effective conservation aquatic biodiversity in Lake Victoria countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda), and in the Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystems shared between DRC Congo and the Congo 4.5 AU MSs effectively participated in relevant aquatic biodiversity and environmental fora to support coordinated African positions.

Policy and regulatory Framework

4.**5 AU MSs** effectively participated in relevant aquatic biodiversity and environmental fora and reviewed national policies, regulations and aligned national instruments with relevant regional and global biodiversity and environmental instruments.

5.**10 AU member states** reviewed their national policies and regulations; and aligned their national instruments with relevant regional and global biodiversity and environmental instruments.

6.**2 Enforceable Regulatory frameworks** (for South-Eastern regions of Africa; and West-Central and Northern Africa) for effective and sustainable regional MCS systems were developed to combat illegal fishing and protect fish stocks as well as environment for perpetuity in the fish populations, other living resources and health ecosystems.

7.**5 AU MSs** developed masterplans to strengthen regulatory frameworks for sustainable coastal and marine tourisms, oil, gas and mining activities for biodiversity conservation and environmental protection.







OUTPUTS RESULTS

Strengthening Institutions, community groups and Fisheries for aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems management

8. A mechanism for minimizing the negative impacts of Climate Change, as enshrined in the Africa Blue Economy Strategy (an AU endorsed continental strategy), on aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems management was developed. The Climate Change Continental Strategy guided the projects' interventions that supported five AU members to develop gender sensitive strategies as well as training of communities on nature-based solutions on mitigating climate change.

9. **695 (416 female, 279 male)** community members strengthened through trainings in three (3) MSs (Gazi bay communities in Kenya, Zanzibar seaweed farming community in Tanzania, and Dusornu community along Keta Lagoon Complex Ramsar site, Ghana) on nature-based solutions for climate change mitigation, diversification, gender mainstreaming in aquatic biodiversity conservation and environmental management.

10. **Three (3) institutions of higher learning** (University of Ghana, Pwani University and Nairobi University) assessed, recommended by the 2nd Extra-ordinary STC-ARDWE session for Summit endorsement as AU Centres of Excellence in aquatic biodiversity conservation and ecosystems management.They were endorsed by the 2nd Extra-ordinary STC-ARDWE Summit.

Stakeholder inclusion

11. **Five (5) AU MSs** developed gender sensitive strategies for aquatic biodiversity conservation and environmental management, and **two (2)** environmental based-NGOs focusing on conserving biodiversity and environment protection streamlined gender dimensions in governance frameworks of coastal communities.

Global influence

12. **AU-IBAR was given Observer status** at the Basel Convention committee. The benefit gained was AU-IBAR has strategic visibility and influence, allowing it to shape global policies, form partnerships, and bring African perspectives to international environmental governance.

CROSS CUTTING AREAS

- **Integrated gender and social inclusion across all three specific objectives**. This ensured at least two-thirds representation of men, women, and youth in workshops and meetings were in attendance and embedding gender considerations in all project documents including reports.
- **Climate change - climate change mitigation under specific objective 3.** However, it's focused on conserving aquatic biodiversity and environmental management, training local communities on alternative livelihoods, tree planting assisted in blue ecosystem protection. Development of strategies, frameworks, management plans, and tools like MPAs and MSPs enhanced biodiversity conservation. Application of global best practices and lessons learned and engagement in global ocean forums also contributed to mitigating impacts of climate change that is SDG 13 (climate action).

LESSONS LEARNED & BEST PRACTICES

Strengthen Strategic Partnerships: Collaborating with regional and global partners enhances continuity and sustainability, especially for transboundary initiatives. Successful examples include joint marine conservation efforts with WIOMSA (Kenya–Tanzania), the MSP initiative in the Northern Mozambique Channel with WWF and the Nairobi Convention, and work with SADC on operationalizing the Regional MCS Coordinating Centre.

Resource Optimization: Building on partners' ongoing activities improves cost-effectiveness and ensures strategic use of resources.

Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement: Involving public/private sectors, CSOs, women, and youth boosts visibility and legitimacy.

High-Level Political Involvement: Engagement with Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and senior government officials, including ministers, in AU MSs, increases relevance and ownership of outcomes.

Awareness and Sensitization : Promoting integrated aquatic biodiversity management sparked strong interest, especially among fisheries ministries.

Phased Implementation: Given budget constraints in Phase I, piloting study recommendations in select AU Member States—while ensuring regional representation—proved to be a cost-effective and impactful strategy.

The sensitization of AU Member States on integrated management of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems generated lots of interests especially among the Ministries in charge of fisheries.

Reaching out to the Global (UN) Organizations/Institutions with mandates of SDGs that are impact the Marine and aquatic space forged collaboration and partnership.





CHALLENGES FACED IN THE PROJECT AND MITIGATION MEASURES.

- **Limited scope** limited broader implementation across all AU Member States.
- Gaps in regional MCS capacity, effective gender integration, and fostering integrated approach in aquatic biodiversity conservation required more time and dedicated support to effectively and sustainably address.
- **Overlapping institutional mandates i**n some countries created challenges in project implementation.
- **Delays in recruitment of experts** led to some activities spilling into the no-cost extension phase.
- **Limited regional capacity** in MCS, gender integration, and environmental management required more time and support.
- Incomplete support to **domestication of global instruments** and coordinated African positions due to time limitations

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support member states **shift from single-species management to integrated ecosystem-based fisheries management (EBFM)** wherein the aquatic space, the impact and interconnectedness or linkages of other Blue Economy related activities, the wider ecosystems, socio-economic issues are taken into consideration
- **Upscale the project to deepen outputs** and immediate outcomes created for sustained growth.
- Enhance **nature-based solutions** for conservation and sustainable use of aquatic ecosystems and fish stocks including socio-economic impact to the community.
- Enhance **data identification, collection, analysis, interpretation and use** to promote sustainable practices, policy and informed decision making.
- Strengthen **institutional capacity at national and regional levels** for effective biodiversity conservation.
- Enhance institutional capacities, including community-based organizations, private sector, women and youth, in mitigating climate change and pollution (chemical and plastics) utilizing nature-based solutions to conserve, restore and suitably use aquatic ecosystems and fish stocks
- Operationalize the **AU-endorsed Centres of Excellence** to strengthen institutional capacities, enhance access to quality information, and provide evidence to support policy and decision-making.
- Strengthen **regional approach to enhance Marine Control Surveillance (MCS), MSP, MPA** and transboundary conservation and management of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystem.
- Promote **partnerships to leverage on ongoing existing initiatives,** an important strategy that will contribute immensely to the success of the project and increase prospects of sustainability of projects' outcomes



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