

THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN GOVERNANCE EXCHANGE NETWORK KICK-OFF CONFERENCE *By Shannon Hampton*

The Western Indian Ocean Governance Exchange Network (WIOGEN) conference, co-hosted by WIOMSA, was attended by 40 delegates from South Africa, Madagascar, Tanzania, Kenya, Seychelles, Mauritius, Germany and Australia.



Group photo of the workshop participants

In keeping with the design of WIOGEN, the conference encouraged active participation from those in attendance. **The WIOGEN project aims to be inclusive and design all activities based on the needs of the region and the members who participate in its activities.** To this end, there were only a few keynote presentations – highlighting the need for collaborative, trans-disciplinary work that complements the activities in the region – and plenty of time for discussion and break away groups.

Julius Francis of WIOMSA, was able to place WIOGEN in the context of the other networks, platforms and work being done in the WIO

region. He highlighted the importance of WIOGEN being able to add meaningfully to the region and create a legacy that lasts beyond the funding period of the project.

Narnia Bohler-Muller from the Human Sciences Research Council is also Chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Academic Group. She highlighted the importance of looking holistically at ocean governance – the blue economy is one of the priorities of IORA and it is important to incorporate inclusive development for job creation, environmental protection and sustainability, social justice and human well-being with considering the blue economy. A panel

discussion looked into the challenges faced in getting science effectively into policy for improved governance. This discussion provided some insight into how WIOGEN can operate effectively in the region. Jared Bosire, Nairobi Convention, emphasised that we cannot continue with business as usual and we need to bend the downward curve of ecosystem health with large scale interventions. He reminded everyone that this will require a lot of effort and a lot of work and asked if our current work is at a scale that matters – that can make a meaningful difference. This large-scale work requires collaboration and working together across all sectors, including the private sector.



Professor Narnia Bohler-Muller giving a presentation at the WIOGEN meeting

WIOGEN is designed to be inclusive and dynamic, with ideas for publications, trainings and exchanges coming from its members and being put forward to the steering committee for funding. The work of WIOGEN is organised under three themes or working groups:

- 1) Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture;
- 2) Marine Spatial Planning and Coastal Management and
- 3) Biodiversity Conservation, Habitat Loss and Pollution.

Adnan Awad highlighted how the working groups would be a communication platform amongst members within thematic areas and would identify areas of focus, capacity and networking needs.

The working groups would be responsible for producing output in support of the gaps and needs that they identify and in turn be supported by WIOGEN through training workshops and scientific exchanges, as well as a science to policy event and closing conference.

WIOGEN welcomes anyone who would like to shape ocean governance in the WIO region to join by completing the survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BLQ95Q3>.

The link and all presentations from the Kick-Off Conference can also be found on www.wiogen.org.

We welcome input and suggestions from all WIOGEN members and all those active in the Western Indian Ocean region.