

From Regional Partnerships to Ocean Action: Advancing a Sustainable Blue Economy in the WIO

SWIOP participates at 12th Conference of the Parties (COP12) to the Nairobi Convention

7th October 2026, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) offers significant opportunities to support economic development, create livelihoods and sustain marine and coastal biodiversity. Realising this potential requires regional cooperation, effective ocean governance, sustainable investments in the blue economy and the protection of the ecosystems on which coastal communities and economies depend.



Panelists share insights on advancing a sustainable blue economy in the WIO during the SWIOP side event at COP12. Photo: DNG-Production

These priorities were at the centre of the official side event “*Advancing a Sustainable Blue Economy in the WIO: Regional Partnerships for Action*”, organised by the Sustainable Western Indian Ocean Programme (SWIOP) during the 12th Conference of the Parties (COP12) to the Nairobi Convention in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on 7 October 2026.

The discussion brought together regional partners and experts to explore how shared priorities can translate into practical action, from improving fisheries compliance and connecting businesses to finance to

strengthening marine conservation and ecosystem resilience.

A central message emerged: a sustainable blue economy depends on connecting effective governance, sustainable investments and healthy marine ecosystems.

Strengthening ocean governance through regional cooperation

Opening the session, Olivier Louis of the European Union Delegation to Tanzania highlighted the importance of strong ocean governance and engaging diverse stakeholders, including the private sector, to support economic growth and improved livelihoods.

Tim Andrew, Ocean Governance Consultant at the Nairobi Convention Secretariat, emphasised SWIOP’s alignment with the Convention’s regional priorities, including ocean governance, the blue economy and biodiversity. He highlighted the importance of country ownership, with governments integrating regional priorities into national initiatives and actively contributing to implementation.

The Regional Ocean Governance Strategy (ROGS) provides a framework for strengthening cooperation across the region. Advancing its implementation requires effective coordination, institutional capacity and sustained engagement by the Nairobi Convention’s Contracting Parties.

Coordinated action against illegal fishing

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing remains a shared regional challenge that requires cooperation beyond national borders.

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Neil Ansell, Senior Adviser at the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA), highlighted the need for targeted training, reliable intelligence, effective legal frameworks and appropriate enforcement. Regional cooperation is essential to identifying violations and ensuring that fisheries regulations are applied effectively.



Panelists share insights on advancing a sustainable blue economy in the WIO during the SWIOP side event at COP12. Photo: DNG-Production

Gilles Ribouet, Head of Communications at the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), emphasised the value of regional data-sharing in identifying vessels of interest and supporting coordinated patrols. He also highlighted the links between fisheries surveillance and wider maritime security.

Regional mechanisms, including the proposed Fisheries Monitoring, Control, Surveillance and Observation Coordination Centre (FMCSOCC), offer opportunities to strengthen operational coordination and information-sharing. Sustaining these efforts will require institutional commitment and investment by participating

countries.

Effective fisheries compliance can also create a fairer operating environment for businesses that follow the rules, helping protect marine resources and strengthen the foundations for sustainable investments in fisheries value chains.

Connecting blue economy enterprises to sustainable investments

Access to finance remains a challenge for many blue economy businesses. Entrepreneurs can struggle to prepare investment-ready opportunities, while financiers may find it difficult to identify enterprises that meet their requirements.

Ilham Talab, Project Lead for SWIOP-Invest at GIZ, outlined how the programme is working to bridge this gap. Support includes strengthening business models, improving financial management, providing technical and legal advice, and connecting enterprises with suitable financiers.

The Blue Investment Hub is being developed to connect businesses and project developers with investors, financial institutions and business support organisations. Its planned services include investment-readiness support, financial advisory and matchmaking.

The discussion highlighted the importance of closer dialogue between entrepreneurs, policymakers and financiers, alongside practical support that helps businesses communicate their opportunities and navigate the financing process.

Through SWIOP-Invest, the programme aims to strengthen the conditions for sustainable investments, support local entrepreneurship and help blue economy businesses access the expertise and finance needed to grow.

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Protecting marine ecosystems and building resilience

Healthy marine and coastal ecosystems underpin fisheries, livelihoods and other ocean-based economic activities. Protecting them requires scientific knowledge, effective management and cooperation across national boundaries.

Rodrigo Fernández, Programme Director for SWIOP's Component 1.2 and Pillar 3 at Expertise France, highlighted the different stages at which countries in the region are preparing for implementation of the Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ). He emphasised the need for scientific capacity and technical expertise to support this process.

Marine spatial planning, transboundary conservation and nature-based solutions were also identified as important areas for regional cooperation. These approaches can help countries improve marine and coastal management, protect biodiversity and safeguard resources that support local communities.

SWIOP's ecosystem resilience pillar supports improved management of transboundary areas and areas beyond national jurisdiction, nature-based solutions to prevent degradation and restore ecosystems, and stronger marine and coastal science.

The discussions reinforced the close connection between environmental sustainability and economic development: healthy ecosystems are essential to the long-term viability of the blue economy.

Turning regional priorities into collective action

The closing discussion highlighted the need for stronger engagement by the Nairobi Convention's Contracting Parties, closer collaboration among regional organisations and more open dialogue between policymakers, entrepreneurs and financiers.

Panellists also emphasised the importance of integrating SWIOP's three pillars so that ocean governance, investment in a sustainable blue economy, and ecosystem resilience reinforce one another.

Through its three pillars, ocean governance, investment in a sustainable blue economy, and ocean ecosystem resilience and blue carbon, SWIOP is working with regional partners to support sustainable, productive and climate-resilient governance and use of the WIO.



Tanzania's Vice President, Deogratius Ndejembli exchanges with SWIOP Secretariat on the programme at COP12. Photo: DNG-Production

The COP12 side event provided a platform to exchange perspectives and identify opportunities for stronger cooperation. Turning these shared priorities into lasting results will depend on sustained partnerships, country ownership and practical solutions that deliver for both people and nature.

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