



Concept note

BLUE FUTURE CONFERENCE

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE BLUE ECONOMY AND CLIMATE ACTION IN AFRICA: ISLAND AND COASTAL STATES AT THE FOREFRONT

12-14 June 2023 | Moroni, Union of Comoros

1. BACKGROUND

In February 2023, the Union of the Comoros took over the chairpersonship of the African Union (AU), the first time since the creation of the AU that an island state has held the chairpersonship. In his inaugural speech, President Azali Assoumani announced that the blue economy, climate action and defending the interests of island states would be among his priorities.

The African Union has recognised the key role that the blue economy can play in the African continent's contribution to climate action, economic transformation, innovation and socio-economic development. In the context of the global climate crisis, island and coastal states have a key role to play at the African level to launch flagship initiatives for biodiversity and climate resilience and to harness the full potential of the blue economy in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area. It is in this sense that the current Comorian chairpersonship of the AU wished to set a milestone for African climate action through a strong political commitment and a clear operational plan by African island and coastal states for the ocean, marine and coastal ecosystems and coastal resilience. In doing so, the Comorian chairpersonship of the AU intends to highlight the potential of the blue economy in the African continent, and the specificities of island states on the continental stage.

The African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are jointly organising a three-day ministerial conference under the aegis of the Comorian presidency of the African Union on "**The Blue Economy and Climate Action in Africa: Island and Coastal States at the Forefront**" with a focus on the Great Blue Wall initiative. This conference, which integrates expert sessions and a high-level segment, will be held from 12 to 14 June 2023 in Moroni, Union of the Comoros.

The conference will bring together seven African island states and five coastal countries of the Western Indian Ocean¹, and will be structured as follows:

1. **A technical sequence** on 12 and 13 June, including
 - a. **Sessions on accelerating the Great Blue Wall initiative** (1 ½ days); and,
 - b. **Round table on the specificities and opportunities for African island states**² (½ day).

This technical sequence aims to facilitate the production of a concrete and action-oriented work programme and investment plan to guide fundraising efforts and accelerate the implementation of

¹ South Africa, Union of the Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau and Sao Tome and Principe

² Blue and circular economy, African Continental Free Trade Area, climate diplomacy and risk management, among others.

the Great Blue Wall initiative in a way that addresses the needs and priorities identified by the stakeholder countries.

The roundtable sessions on the specificities and opportunities of African island states will notably highlight the intrinsic vulnerabilities of island environments in order to advocate for a systematic consideration of their particular needs but also to identify development opportunities through the blue and circular economy, better integration into the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the possibility of pioneering climate diplomacy and ambitious initiatives for climate, resilience, marine and coastal biodiversity and, ultimately, the development of the blue economy.

2. A high-level segment on the blue economy and the specificities of African island states with political leaders of African island and coastal states on 14 June 2023.

The technical segments of the first two days will prepare the high-level dialogue with representatives of African island and coastal states. This high-level segment (14 June) will bring together political leaders around the President of the Union of the Comoros and Chairperson of the AU to discuss the results of the expert group meeting on the Great Blue Wall initiative and to **agree on a Moroni Declaration** that will, on the one hand, underline the leadership of African island states on African ocean action for climate and blue economy development, and on the other hand, confirm political support for the Great Blue Wall initiative and its operational roadmap.

2. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

The conference will

- i. Highlight / Realise the commitment of African Island States in leading a movement for the blue economy and ocean and climate resilience.
- ii. Affirm the political commitment of island and coastal states to the Great Blue Wall and accelerate its implementation as a collective, unifying and transformative initiative for ocean and climate resilience and the development of a truly sustainable, inclusive and innovative blue economy.
- iii. Facilitate synergies between governments, continental/regional organisations and development partners, the private sector, civil society and academia in the implementation of the Great Blue Wall initiative;
- iv. Strengthen cooperation on the blue economy in the region
- v. Examine the development challenges faced by African island states and identify opportunities for taking into account island specificities at the continental level and for accelerating the development of the blue economy and the circular economy, notably through trade in goods and services, based on the modalities of the AfCFTA.

3. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

More specifically, the conference will aim to

- i. Discuss and finalise a Moroni Declaration on Blue Economy, the Great Blue Wall initiative and the specificities of African Island States

A. On the Great Blue Wall :

- ii. To inform participants on the development and progress of the Great Blue Wall initiative, including the proposed pathway to formalise the governance of the initiative as requested by the governments of the Indian Ocean countries in 2022;
- iii. Collecting contributions from participating countries;
- iv. Identify information/data and capacity needs for policies, legislative frameworks and strategies;
- v. Identify national priorities for climate change, marine conservation, blue economy investment frameworks and discuss how best to proceed in developing national roadmaps for marine environmental protection;
- vi. Develop a theory of change in response to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) Blue Co programme, which specifically addresses the needs and opportunities of African island states while advancing climate logic, innovation, paradigm shift and national strategies of Great Blue Wall countries more broadly;
- vii. Develop a draft concept note to access GCF funding for the implementation of the Great Blue Wall.

B. On the specificities of African island states:

- viii. Identify specific needs and investment opportunities related to African island states.
- ix. Identify opportunities for island advocacy at the continental level and with development partners to mobilise resources and position African island states as key players in continental climate and ocean resilience and in the development of the blue and circular economy;
- x. Identify opportunities to leverage the AfCFTA to accelerate the development of regional blue value chains
- xi. Confirm the leading role of African island states in accelerating the achievement of the Great Blue Wall objectives.

C. In the high level segment :

- xii. Revise and endorse the Moroni Declaration which will initiate a process for the recognition and inclusion of island specificities in continental and regional fora, policies, frameworks and strategies and adopt the Great Blue Wall as a unifying and emblematic initiative of the commitment of African island and coastal states to climate and ocean resilience;
- xiii. Agree on a timetable of opportunities to carry forward the advocacy of African island and coastal states and implement the Moroni process, including through the preparation and proposal of a possible Heads of State and Government declaration informed by the Moroni Declaration at the African Climate Action Summit in September in Nairobi, Kenya, and ultimately presented at COP28 at a high-level event as well as to the decision-making bodies of the African Union

3. EXPECTED RESULTS

The Ministerial Conference should produce the following results

- i. A better understanding of the current state of the blue economy in the Western Indian Ocean and the main challenges and opportunities for sustainable development and management of ocean resources, and how the Great Blue Wall initiative has been designed to address these challenges and opportunities;
- ii. Improving and broadening knowledge sharing and collaboration among stakeholders on best practices and innovative approaches for sustainable and inclusive development of the blue economy that integrates robust climate responses;
- iii. A set of recommendations for action, including policy and investment priorities and concrete measures to support a sustainable, resilient and inclusive blue economy in the region, which will also serve as a model for the rest of the continent;
- iv. A strengthened commitment by stakeholders, and in particular African island states, to work together for a sustainable, resilient and inclusive blue economy in the Western Indian Ocean and across Africa.
- v. A high-level Moroni Declaration in support of the Great Blue Wall initiative and African island specificities that will highlight the leadership of African island states in the development of the initiative and pave the way for the elaboration of a Heads of State Declaration to be provisionally signed in Nairobi at the African Climate Action Summit and the proposal of resolutions/decisions for adoption at a session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government.

At the end of the Moroni conference, the participants:

- i. Are informed of the status of the Great Blue Wall initiative and its endorsement by the African Island Climate Commission;
- ii. Appreciate the need for information/data and the availability/gaps in policies, legislative frameworks, strategies, etc. ;
- iii. Have a better understanding of the national and regional priorities necessary for the development of the Great Blue Wall initiative's work programme and investment plan;
- iv. Agree on a roadmap/work plan for the development of the Great Blue Wall concept note to be submitted to the GCF and take ownership of the process including the adoption of a draft theory of change, governance structure and financial flow mechanism for the Great Blue Wall.
- v. Adopt positions and agree on the mobilisation of continental bodies, regional organisations and partners for a better integration of African island specificities and opportunities for climate action, resilience and blue economy development in regional and continental policies, frameworks and strategies.

All in all, the ministerial conference on "The Blue Economy and Climate Action in Africa: Island and Coastal States at the Forefront" will make it possible to inaugurate a "Moroni process" centred on island advocacy and the mobilisation of island and coastal States in favour of climate and ocean

resilience and the development of the blue economy. This Moroni process is thus called upon to irrigate :

- i. A work/investment plan and concept note to be submitted to the GCF on behalf of the stakeholders for funding, and possibly to other partners;
- ii. The African Climate Summit to be held in September 2023 in Kenya;
- iii. The work of the African Islands Climate Commission, which recognises the Great Blue Wall as an emblematic initiative for African climate action, particularly from African islands;
- iv. Feed into the governance and implementation mechanisms of the Great Blue Wall initiative as well as the consideration of the specificities of African island states in continental blue economy initiatives under the aegis of the African Union Commission and UNECA and regional economic communities/intergovernmental organisations;
- v. Preparations for UNFCCC COP28 in December 2023, including a high-level session built around the outcomes of the Moroni Ministerial Conference and the Kenya Climate Summit.
- vi. A diplomatic and political dynamic with a view, in particular, to a Summit of African Island States, the United Nations Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in 2024, as well as preparations towards the United Nations Conference on the Oceans 2025, and a systematic consideration of island needs, interests, and specificities in regional, continental and international meetings.

4. CONTEXT

4.1. *The blue economy in Africa*

The African continent can, to a large extent, be considered a "blue" continent, as two-thirds of the African Union can be considered coastal or island states. With a coastline of over 47,000 km, the continent's network of rich marine ecosystems has both continental and global importance. Africa's seas and oceans provide the basis for climate services, food security, ocean-based innovation and blue-collar jobs that have the potential to transform the continent.

African Union leaders have called the blue economy the "next frontier of the African renaissance" in recognition of this potential, triggering the development of multiple frameworks and initiatives within the African Union to address Africa's transformation through the blue economy, such as the development of the Integrated Maritime Strategy for Africa 2050 and the Blue Economy Strategy for Africa. Since receiving the mandate of the blue economy, the African Union Commission has embarked on a process of supporting African Union member states, Regional Economic Communities and stakeholders in developing blue economy strategies anchored on principles of sustainability, inclusiveness and innovation. The UN Economic Commission for Africa's Blue Economy Assessment also highlighted the quantified and unquantified benefits of our oceans.

However, pressures from increasing coastal density, climate change, overfishing, extractive industries, habitat destruction and pollution in Africa are causing irreversible damage to these ecosystems, threatening not only Africa's ability to develop a sustainable blue economy, but also livelihoods. There is therefore an urgent need to take accelerated action to mitigate these impacts by adopting responses based on the principles of equity, resilience and environmental stewardship.

4.2. The Western Indian Ocean region

Over the past decade, the deterioration of marine ecosystems in the Indian Ocean has accelerated at an unprecedented rate. This is having a dramatic impact on human societies, particularly coastal communities, including food insecurity, sea level rise and storm surges. The threats are mainly due to uncontrolled human activities such as coastal development, mangrove deforestation, illegal exploitation of marine resources, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU), increased maritime traffic, overexploitation of resources, destructive fishing practices, unregulated tourism activities, intense oil and gas exploration and heavy sand extraction. These increasing pressures have already resulted in the loss of coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds and unprotected fish stocks, which continues to undermine local livelihoods, their support base and the erosion of the potential of the Indian Ocean blue economy.

The Indian Ocean provides food security, supports economic growth, regulates the climate and provides livelihoods for coastal communities in ten countries: Comoros, France, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa and Tanzania. The region is home to pristine coral reefs, carbon-rich mangrove forests and sheltered seagrass beds, which support an abundance of marine life, including important fish species, sharks and rays, turtles, seabirds and marine mammals. With more than 70 million people living along the coasts, artisanal and commercial fishing is essential for food security and the economy, contributing to 4.8% of the world's fish catch, which is equivalent to about 4.5 million tonnes of fish per year. The Indian Ocean's marine resources are conservatively valued at US\$333 billion and provide at least US\$21 billion annually to the regional economy through marine and coastal tourism, carbon sequestration and fishing. The importance of the ocean to the people of the Indian Ocean cannot be overstated. Today, a healthy ocean and resilient coastal ecosystems underpin the region's economy and offer considerable potential for sustainable development.

It is in this context that the AUC, IUCN and UNECA, in collaboration with the governments of the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) countries and the GCF, have conceptualised climate-relevant adaptation and mitigation actions, thereby initiating and advancing a discussion to undertake an innovative and paradigm-shifting multi-country project. This approach aims to address existing impacts and prevent the projected increase in intensity of climate change induced calamities/disasters in the region by launching a "Great Blue Wall (GBW) Project" to be considered for funding by the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

4.3. The specificities of African island states.

Whether it is climate change and the erosion of biodiversity, fluctuations in the world price of raw materials, particularly energy, economic slowdowns or even recessions on international markets, or health risks such as the Covid-19 pandemic, it is clear that insularity, remoteness, the narrowness of markets and strong external dependence determine a series of fragilities intrinsic to the island territories of Africa.

There are many different issues at stake:

- **Economic:** regional integration; economic growth and diversification; regional connectivity and mobility; regional value chains and productivity, including agriculture; energy transition, blue economy; circular economy, innovation and entrepreneurship...
- **Climate and environmental:** preservation and restoration of ecosystems; enhancement of ecosystem services; prevention and management of natural disaster risks; adaptation to and mitigation of the effects of climate change; reduction of pollution risks...

- **Security:** peace and stability; entrenching the rule of law; security and safety at sea; hybrid threats; food, health and energy security...
- **Socio-cultural:** inter-island exchanges; cultural diversity and regional identity; social inclusion; education, training and employability; youth engagement in regional construction; gender equality...

In addition, of the five African countries with the largest EEZs, three are islands and members of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC). Indeed, Mauritius, Seychelles and Madagascar, respectively occupy the 2nd, 3rd and 4th places of the African countries with the largest EEZs. Cape Verde follows in 6th place in Africa, Comoros in 18th place and Sao Tome and Principe in 19th. This represents a surface area of more than 5 million km². These vast ocean areas represent a new development horizon for African island and coastal states.

The continent, particularly through the African Union, has the opportunity to amplify a diversified and promising dynamic for the blue economy by capitalising on the experiences and investment opportunities in the island states, particularly with a view to climate action and the preservation of ecosystems. From an institutional point of view, this could involve recognition of the specific characteristics of islands and the need for differentiated treatment, particularly with regard to taking into account their particular needs in terms of financing, connectivity, regional integration, etc. Thus, the June 2023 meeting in Moroni could prove to be decisive for the advocacy of African island states by moving from a discourse of "vulnerabilities" to one of "opportunities" by positioning African islands as ocean states, pioneers of the blue economy in Africa.

4.4 The Great Blue Wall initiative

The Great Blue Wall project aims to consolidate, accelerate and expand the major ongoing efforts and initiatives based on the marine blue economy and working towards the realisation of a shared nature-positive ocean vision by supporting the development of a connected network of nature-, climate- and people-positive seascapes, commonly referred to as regenerative and inclusive productive seascapes (RIPS). The three pillars of the initiative are:

- (i) Inclusive Governance and Ocean Equity (INGOE) - to support the development of a model for an equitable and inclusive governance system at the seascape level that will contribute to achieving the goal of conserving 30% of the oceans by 2030 while enabling local communities to secure their rights to access and benefit from blue natural resources;
- (ii) Strengthen the operationalisation of Blue Nature Solutions (BNS) - This will contribute to the achievement of an equitable net gain of essential marine and coastal ecosystems for all and to the establishment of a Blue Wall ecological corridor - by accelerating the implementation of conservation and restoration measures.
- (iv) Develop a regenerative blue economy - unlocking and accelerating the development of blue entrepreneurship opportunities that benefit people, climate and nature.

These regenerative seascapes will be classified as Category VI Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the IUCN Protected Area Categories (PACs), or as Other Effective Area Conservation Measures (OECMs). They will form a network of large-scale, inclusive, equitable and productive (i.e. multiple-use and sustainable) marine conserved areas that will deliver socio-economic and conservation benefits by promoting regenerative practices and sustainable use of natural resources that benefit local livelihoods.

Seascapes will be connected at the regional level by an ecological corridor formed by conserved and restored marine and coastal ecosystems, such as mangrove forests, seagrass beds, coral reefs, coastal forests and parabolic dunes. Local stakeholders, primarily indigenous peoples and local communities, are expected to play a key role in the planning/zoning and effective management of the connected seascape network and will be supported in their efforts to sustainably use and benefit from natural resources. The establishment of a connected network of productive, regenerative and inclusive seascapes is an action-oriented effort that will concurrently support countries' commitments under three key international frameworks, namely the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Paris Agreement (PA) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as country-specific commitments in nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans, nationally appropriate mitigation actions, national climate change action plans, national climate change strategies, national biodiversity strategies and action plans, among others.

In order to strengthen stakeholder engagement and ownership at national and local levels, IUCN brought together high-level government officials from the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) countries, International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) CEOs, the COP26 high-level climate champions and the Government of France in September 2021 in Marseille at the World Conservation Congress. The Great Blue Wall (GBW) initiative was included in the World Conservation Congress Marseille Manifesto as one of its 10 key action commitments, endorsed by all Congress parties, and was subsequently presented at a high-level event at COP26 in Glasgow. In 2023, several important commitments and announcements were made by IOA countries and partners of the initiative at the UN Conference on the Oceans in Lisbon, Portugal, and then at a Heads of State event, hosted by President Wavel Ramkalawan of the Republic of Seychelles, at COP27 of the UNFCCC.

4.5 Accelerating the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area in Africa's Island States through the blue economy

This year, for the first time, the chairpersonship of the African Union is held by a small island developing state, namely the Comoros, under the leadership of President Azali Assoumani. The theme of the year of the African Union is "Accelerating the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)". Political institutions at the continental and regional levels, as well as national governments, are stepping up efforts to conclude policy and regulatory instruments to enable trade under the preferential terms of the AfCFTA.

Increasing levels of intra-African trade in goods and services through the AfCFTA offers enormous opportunities for island states, through the possibility of increasing trade volumes and diversifying trade baskets and trading partners, particularly in, and through, the blue economy. Furthermore, the AfCFTA has the potential to directly generate tangible opportunities for women and youth, who constitute the majority of African private sector actors, entrepreneurs, workers and key players in the blue economy. However, it is imperative to radically transform the trade dynamics through the AfCFTA. All African island states have higher levels of trade with third parties in other regions than with African countries, despite their participation in various regional economic communities (RECs). Nevertheless, there is an opportunity to strategically consider their competitive advantage in blue and circular economy value chains for the production and trade of goods within the AfCFTA region.



5. PARTICIPANTS

The conference will bring together a diverse group of stakeholders, including ministerial-level government officials from African island and coastal states, experts, practitioners, civil society organisations, private sector representatives and development partners. The conference will provide in-depth analysis and insights on specific topics related to the blue economy, climate action and the specificities of African island states.

6. FORMAT

Some 50 to 100 participants are expected to attend face-to-face. The sessions can also be followed remotely, by videoconference.

The proceedings will be held in French and English. Interpretation will be available.

7. VENUE

The ministerial conference will be held in Moroni, Union of the Comoros.

- The technical sessions will be held at the Hotel Retaj, Moroni.
- The high-level segment, under the high patronage of the President of the Union of the Comoros and current Chairperson of the African Union, will take place at the Palais du Peuple, Moroni.