



CONSERVING AQUATIC BIODIVERSITY IN AFRICA BLUE ECONOMY PROJECT

SUMMARY

Project Start-up

Implementation of the Conserving Aquatic Biodiversity in Africa Blue Economy project effectively commenced on 15th October 2021, following signature of the Project Agreement by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the African Union (AU).

Progress and Achievements To-Date

Project milestones have been successfully achieved as follows:



Inception Workshop

From 8th – 10th December 2021, an inception workshop targeting project stakeholders and beneficiaries was organized in Naivasha, Kenya. The workshop sought to provide an opportunity for stakeholders and beneficiaries to review and further refine project objectives, activities, and implementation mechanisms and also to generally create awareness of the project. The workshop was attended by over 65 participants drawn from the following stakeholder groups:

- AU Member States (principally representatives from departments in charge of environment, biodiversity, fisheries, aquaculture).
- Regional organizations from across the continent (Regional Economic Communities,

Regional Fisheries Bodies, UNEP Regional Seas Convention Secretariats Water Basin Authorities).

- Universities, research organization and other branches of academia
- Non-State actors and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) women and youth organizations.
- Blue Economy private sector representatives (principally fisheries, mining, oil and gas, tourism)

The workshop was particularly successful in providing specific recommendations on the analytical framework as well as methods for implementing the project.



Group Photo of Project Inception workshop in December 2021



Hon. Lawrence Omuhaka, Chief Administration Secretary (Deputy Cabinet Secretary in charge of Agriculture, fisheries, and blue economy in Kenya



The Ag. Director of AU-IBAR, Dr. Nick Nwankpa welcoming participants



Working Group Discussions in progress; soliciting views and perspective from stakeholders on proposed project activities and implementation mechanisms

Online Baseline Survey

The project launched an online baseline survey in June 2022. The survey mainly targets national departments in charge of blue economy, environment, regional institutions (RECs and specialized regional institutions) and regional projects. It has provided a lot of useful information.

Expert Studies

Expert studies to provide a baseline assessment of the current situation across the continent have been initiated, as well as lay the groundwork for rational intervention by the project, as follows:

Project Output	Experts Engaged	Activity	Status of Engagement
Output 1.2 - Ratification and implementation of conventions and agreements related to conservation of aquatic biodiversity from perspectives of ABES thematic areas in AU MSs and RECs supported	Prof. Frambo Martin Tambinyuo	Conduct a review and assessment of relevant continental and global biodiversity and environmental instruments to develop priority actions for enhanced ratifications of these instruments by AU Member States and regional institutions in the West, Central and Northern Regions of Africa.	Consultant fully engaged; Studies ongoing

Project Output	Experts Engaged	Activity	Status of Engagement
	Prof. Wilson Waiswa Mwanja	Conduct a review and assessment of relevant continental and global biodiversity and environmental instruments to develop priority actions for enhanced ratifications of these instruments by AU Member States and regional institutions in the South and Eastern regions of Africa	Consultant engaged; Studies ongoing
Output 2.2 - A framework for establishing national, regional and transboundary cooperation on Africa Blue Economy Strategy Thematic Areas established	Dr. Ruby Asmah	Conduct assessment of freshwater ecosystems and develop a proposal for establishing regional cooperation across transboundary freshwater ecosystems	Consultant fully engaged; Studies ongoing
	Dr. Joseph Ansong	Conduct assessment to map Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) activities in West, Central and Northern Africa, document lessons, best practices and develop guidelines for their institutionalization at national and regional levels.	Consultant fully engaged.
	Dr. Chrisphine Nyamwera	Conduct assessment to map Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) in South and Eastern regions of Africa, document lessons, best practices and develop guidelines for their institutionalization at national and regional levels.	Consultant formally engaged and studies ongoing
Output 2.3 - Capacities for restoring and conserving threatened aquatic biodiversity and environment strengthened	Ms. Nathalie Maissonneuve	Conduct a review of existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), document lessons, best practices and formulate guidelines for their sustainable implementation and governance in the South-Eastern regions of Africa	Consultant engaged; Inception report produced by consultant; studies ongoing
Output 3.1 - Measures for minimizing the negative impacts of climate change on biodiversity and environment strengthened and implemented	Mr. Giorgio Brandolini	Conduct studies on the impact of climate change on aquatic biodiversity and environment and to recommend mitigation strategies.	Consultant engaged; Studies ongoing; Consultant currently visiting selected African countries to collate information relevant to the studies
Output 3.2 - Strategies for an integrated strategic framework for sustainable coastal and marine tourism and mining developed.	Dr. Adetola Jenyo-Oni	Conduct studies to identify priority issues and actions for sustainable coastal, marine tourism and mining activities for aquatic biodiversity conservation and environment protection.	Consultant engaged; Inception report produced and studies ongoing

The following studies are pending. They have been delayed due to challenge in identification of appropriate experts.

Project Output	Experts Engaged	Activity	Status of Engagement
Output 1.1 Mechanisms for active participation of MSs in regional and global initiatives related to aquatic biodiversity and environmental regimes (ABNJ, CITES, COP meeting relating to CC, BRS, etc.) developed.	Expert to be recruited	Undertake studies and develop a mechanism for enhancing effective role and participation in regional and global biodiversity and environmental related regimes.	
Output 2.1: Enforceable Regulatory frameworks for effective and sustainable regional MCS (monitoring, Control and Surveillance) systems developed.	Expert to be recruited	Conduct a study to assess the status of MCS for combating unsustainable practices of fishing and other blue economy resources in AU member states and regional economic communities and develop mechanism to strengthen MCS;	
Output 2.2 - A framework for establishing national, regional and transboundary cooperation on Africa Blue Economy Strategy Thematic Areas established	Expert to be recruited	Conduct assessment of freshwater ecosystems and develop a proposal for establishing regional cooperation across transboundary Marine ecosystems	
Output 2.3 - Capacities for restoring and conserving threatened aquatic biodiversity and environment strengthened	Expert to be recruited	Conduct a review of existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), document lessons, best practices and formulate guidelines for their sustainable implementation and governance in the West, Central and Northern regions of Africa	

Project Missions

The project staff conducted scoping missions to Seychelles, Uganda and South Africa for discussion on the status of Monitoring Control and Surveillance (MCS), Marine Protected Areas (MPA), Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and factors affecting aquatic biodiversity and the environment.

The project staff also participated in the United Nations Ocean Conference in Lisbon, Portugal on June 27 to 1 July 2022 to support AU Member States for common positions on issues relating to aquatic biodiversity. The project staff

interacted with Member States during various side-events relevant to the project and provided technical guidance, directions and suggestions on issues such as marine and aquatic biodiversity, blue economy, environment and climate change



Lisbon: members of the Biodiversity project team cluster with delegates from the African Union Commission, AU-IBAR and AUDA-NEPAD around an Aquatic Biodiversity project banner



The project team with H.E. Amb. Josefa Sacko Commissioner for ARBE and AUC Staff at the Lisbon Ocean conference

Synergies and Collaboration

Since the inception of the project and commencement of full implementation, the project has forged collaboration with the following organizations and regional projects:

- a. The Abidjan Convention
- b. The Canary Current Large marine ecosystems project
- c. The Benguela Current Commission
- d. Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO
- e. The Swedish Agency for Water and Marine Management
- f. The African Centre for Coastal management of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana
- g. African Marine Environment Sustainability Initiative (AFMESI)

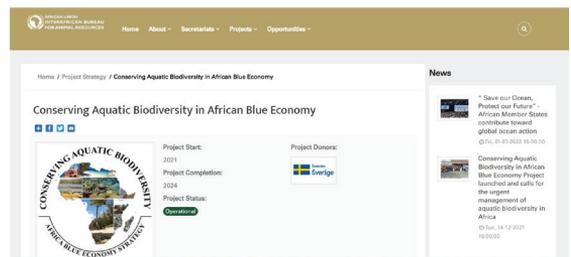
Communication and Visibility:

Implementation Status: December 2021 - June 2022

The communication and visibility component of the Conserving Aquatic Biodiversity project is anchored on the communications strategy. Activities undertaken so far have been:

- Media coverage to create awareness of the project. The coverage was on national television, and radio. Interviews of key stakeholders were also captured further disseminated on YouTube, Twitter and Facebook for greater audience outreach.

- Several memorabilia and visibility materials have been bought/developed (notebooks; bottles; memory sticks; folders; and banners). There is need to replenish the items and maintain distribution list for event distribution.
- A micro-site on the project is maintained to provide visibility on project outputs and outcomes. There is need to update, based on recent events. The URL <https://www.au-ibar.org/au-ibar-projects/conserving-aquatic-biodiversity-african-blue-economy>
- An online platform has been developed to promote knowledge sharing and engagement on issues surrounding bio-diversity, and capture events being held by stakeholders and AU-IBAR. The platform also acts as a mailing list to capture details of key stakeholders. The platform currently has 90 registered members.
- A document repository is in place to store all project documents and research outputs. It is available via: <http://repository.au-ibar.org/handle/123456789/1130>



Above: Snapshot of project microsite: <https://www.au-ibar.org/au-ibar-projects/conserving-aquatic-biodiversity-african-blue-economy>



Above: Snapshot of Conserving Aquatic Biodiversity Community Platform: <https://networks.au-ibar.org/show/conserving-aquatic-biodiversity-in-african-blue-economy/wiki>

Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

During the period under review, the project work plan covering the entire project period as well as the detailed annual work plan for the first year of the project were developed. These work plans were presented to the inception meeting participants who adopted them. Project implementation commenced with procurement of consultants and experts to coordinate project roles, develop frameworks and conduct various studies and assessments; as per approved annual workplan. As project implementation progresses, there will be need to review and update baselines and targets to provide a better basis of measuring progress towards achievement of project milestones.

The project has also launched a baseline survey aimed at obtaining useful information, which will guide the implementation of activities and form the basis for measuring the progress of implementation of the project. This questionnaire is intended to collect information on the current status with regards to protection and conservation of aquatic biodiversity at national and regional levels of the African continent. The baseline information will be critical for tracking the impact of the protection and conservation of aquatic biodiversity project implemented by AU-IBAR and funded by SIDA.

Complexities with Project Staffing and Impact on the Project

This was an area of some initial difficulty. It is now under control. Essentially, matters to do with staff recruitment within the African Union system have been rather complex and uncertain and this initially affected the progress of the project. The basic recruitment rule is that although the project is based in Nairobi and is managed by AU-IBAR (a specialized agency of the African Union Commission) recruitment of project fixed term staff is undertaken by the Human Resources Management Directorate at the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This is done after terms of reference for project technical and administrative staff have been submitted to AUC Headquarters. In addition, given that there is a general freeze on recruitment of permanent, fixed or long-term staff, recruitment of fixed term staff must be specifically authorized by the Chairperson of the African Union Commission. Finally, in recent times, project staffing has also been subjected to considerable delay due to ongoing and rolling reforms within the staffing structure of the African Union itself.

It is in this context and to better manage the situation, that the Ag. Director of AU-IBAR requested a waiver from the AUC Chairperson.

Once this situation became obvious, and in order to mitigate the impact of these delays on the project, permission was sought from the Swedish Embassy to the African Union to recruit the technical staff as short-term consultants. Approval was granted and the project has operated smoothly since then. Staff recruited on short-term bases using rolling contracts are :

1. **Dr. Mohamed Seisay** – Aquatic Ecosystem Management Expert and acting as Project Coordinator
2. **Mr. Eric Nadiope** – Legal and Institutional Expert – Natural Resources;
3. **Mr. Joel Mokenye** – Aquatic Biodiversity Specialist; and
4. **Dr. Alberta Sagoe** – Gender Policy and Strategy Expert.

The project has also recruited an administrative support person (Ms. Mercy Mango) who is performing the functions of Administrative Assistant on the project. Furthermore, the AU-IBAR fixed-term Planning Officer is assigned to the project to provide support. Similarly, the AU-IBAR fixed-term Finance Officer and Knowledge Management Expert are supporting the project in the areas of finance and project communication and visibility aspects.



Technical and Strategic Challenges

As indicated above, the project is designed to conduct studies mainly in the first year of implementation. However, the implementation of the project started slowly due in part to the delay in procurement of appropriate experienced and competent experts to commence the various studies. Also, the recruitment of the project fixed-term staff was initiated early, the process continuously remains a challenge and still ongoing at the AUC.

The identification and engagement of appropriate experts in tools such as MCS, MSP and MPA has also proved challenging. Adverts seeking for qualified and experienced persons have had to be relaunched twice or thrice. To overcome these challenges, the project embarked on short-term (three months renewable) contractual arrangements with various experts to operationalize certain components of the project, including conducting scoping studies to assess ongoing initiatives on

MCS, MPAs and MSPs.

Conclusion and Wayforward

The project is, in no doubt, on the path to success. The project is designed purposely to undertake studies in Year 1 to be followed by evidence-based implementation in Years 2 and 3. Key areas of focus which would distinguish the project from others are:

- i. Strengthening identified regional MCS Systems for aquatic biodiversity conservation
- ii. Strengthening selected transboundary initiatives on MPAs and MSPs
- iii. Supporting identified initiatives on climate change mitigation
- iv. Integrating aquatic biodiversity conservation and protection into coastal marine and inland tourism environmental management in aquatic ecosystems
- v. Mainstreaming women, gender and youth into aquatic biodiversity protection initiatives.