

## **FORUM OF HEADS OF ACADEMIC/RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN REGION (FAR-WIO)**

*Providing leadership in informing decision-making processes*

### **Background**

The Forum of Heads of Academic/Research Institutions in the Western Indian Ocean region is an autonomous network established by the UNEP, as the Secretariat of the Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Eastern African region (Nairobi Convention) and the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA). It was established according to Decisions CP 4/9:3 and 4 of the Fourth Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Nairobi Convention, which was held in Madagascar in July 2004. The decision directed the Secretariat of the Nairobi Convention, in collaboration with other organizations, to facilitate the establishment of the Forum of Academic and Research Institutions in the region. More specifically the Forum was established to:

- i) Facilitate the sharing of information between these institutions and the Nairobi Convention as well as amongst themselves;
- ii) Enhance cooperation amongst universities and research institutions in the region;
- iii) Coordinate and facilitate identification of opportunities for collaborative research that are in line with the work programme of the Nairobi Convention.

This decision acknowledged the fact that the heads of academic and research institutions in the region have an important role to play spearheading not only research and related activities in the respective institutions and their countries but also they can provide a critical linkage between researchers and decision makers at different levels. This is due to the fact that as heads of institutions, they are well informed of what their researchers are doing and are familiar of the government's decision making processes because to their memberships to different government committees.

The Forum was established in recognition of the following limitations:

- *Absence of mechanism for linking research and academic institutions with decision-making processes at the regional level:* There are no formal avenues for channelling information to and from research and academic institutions to regional mechanisms such as the Nairobi Convention or Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC)'s Regional Committee for the Western Indian Ocean (IOC-WIO). This means results from research being conducted by the research institutions are not communicated directed to the decision-makers and consequently, not only leading to failure to influence decisions at that level but also not getting feed-back for their work as well as recognition for their work.

- *Inadequate visibility*: Many research institutions have been around for a number of years, however for various reasons, their strength, opportunities they offer, facilities they have and their staff profile, are not known outside their countries.
- *Inadequate sharing and exchange of information amongst institutions*: In comparison to the past few years, more research is being conducted in the region now than before however, most of the institutions in the region are now aware what other institutions in the same country are doing, let alone those from other countries in the region. Absence of networks to foster research or information sharing among institutions, is contributing to such a situation.
- *Inadequate involvement of regional institutions in regional Initiatives*: A number of regional programmes/projects have been or being initiated with limited involvement of regional organizations. Inadequate profiles of institutions, their expertise and facilities, are one of the main factors that have led to strengths and capability of regional institutions not to be known within and outside the region.

## **Terms of Reference**

The broad terms of reference of the Forum are:

*“To provide the National focal points of the Contracting Parties to the Nairobi Convention, with capacity for assessing and reporting on progress and gaps for research (assessment) and management of the coastal and marine environment”* and specifically to create mechanisms whereby heads of marine research institutes and university departments can report on, communicate and discuss topics of mutual interest specifically relating to scientific endeavour in terms of supporting the objectives of the Nairobi Convention.

It is envisaged that the Forum will provide a framework to:

- i) Facilitate the sharing of information between these institutions and the Nairobi Convention as well as amongst themselves;
- ii) Engage and facilitate opportunities for collaborative research that are relevant to the Nairobi Convention;
- iii) Provide strong linkage with the Focal Points of the Nairobi Convention;
- iv) Oversee the ethical execution and quality control of research activities;
- v) Serve as pressure point for enforcing sustainable utilization of living and non living marine resources.

## **Membership**

Membership is open to all heads of academic and research institutions from all the countries of the WIO region. All institutions (government-owned, NGOs and regional programs) with mandate to conduct research are welcome to join the Forum. Also institutions, which are involved in conducting or supporting research, are welcomed to join the Forum. There is no limitation on the number of institutions per country.

Membership is voluntary however once institutions joined the Forum, they are expected to adhere fully to the terms of reference and agreed activities.

Founding members of the Forum include: Department of Zoology, University of Nairobi and Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI); Faculty of Aquatic Sciences and Technology (FAST) and Institute of Marine Sciences both of University of Dar es Salaam and Oceanographic Research Institute of South Africa. Regional organizations which have also joined the Forum are: Nairobi Convention Secretariat; WWF-Eastern Africa Marine Ecoregion (EAME) Programme; Wildlife Conservation Society; Coral Reef Degradation in Indian Ocean (CORDIO); and the IOC's Regional Committee for the Western Indian Ocean. The Forum belongs to regional institutions and WIOMSA and UNEP are only facilitating its establishment as per the decision of the Parties to the Nairobi Convention. Procedures for becoming a member of the Forum can be obtained by contacting: [secretary@wiomsa.org](mailto:secretary@wiomsa.org)

### **Membership Benefits**

The Forum provides a number of benefits to the members as well as to other interested parties. These include providing:

- A framework for development of joint activities and sharing of expertise and facilities.
- A mechanism for ensuring research, assessment and monitoring activities undertaken by its institutional members are reported governance and management structures at different levels.
- A mechanism for assisting institutions/programmes/projects knowing and tapping expertise and resources available in these national and regional research institutions.
- A window for promotion of interactions among institutions in the region.
- An opportunity for the members to advertise widely about their institutions, expertise and facilities.

### **Priority Operational Themes**

Proposed activities to be implemented in the short-term timeframe are:

- i) Development of an inventory of the on-going and past research projects/programmes related to the protection of the Coastal and Marine Environment in the Western Indian Ocean region as undertaken by each member institution.
- ii) Documentation, in each University and Research institutes, the personnel involved with ongoing coastal marine research activities, time frame of the activities, sources of funding, equipment and other research facilities as well as the outline of the courses offered and their curriculum.

- iii) Documentation of the type and nature of linkages (partnerships) that exist between and among scientists within and amongst Universities nationally and regionally, within Research institutes and with Universities as well as with the Focal Point.
- iv) Posting of the above information into the WIOMSA website.
- v) Organization of the Leadership workshops.