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THE AGULHAS SOMALI LARGE MARINE ECOSYSTEM PROJECT (ASCLME)

There has been growing acceptance of a paradigm shift away from protecting individual species to the management of whole ecosystems that support the entire life cycle of species.

This development is especially evident in the Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) approach where the world's oceans are divided into ecosystem-based units that can potentially represent a management unit.



Delegates pose for a group picture in front of the flags of the United Nations and the countries represented at the inaugural meeting of the ASCLME.

This approach has been adopted by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and includes five modules: productivity, fish and fisheries, ecosystem health, socio-economics and governance. Many of the world's ecosystems have already been studied, including the Benguela LME.

Over the past five years the Agulhas and Somali Large Marine Ecosystem has been the focus of attention, resulting in the development of three distinct GEF-funded projects that together will provide the scientific basis to develop a strategic action plan for wise use of resources in the region. Hence, the West Indian Ocean land-based sources of pollution (WIOLab), the South Western Indian Ocean Fisheries Project (SWIOFP) and the Agulhas Somali Large Marine Ecosystem Project (ASCLME) projects collectively create the LME project for the WIO region.

ORI has already been deeply involved in the development of SWIOFP and is on the verge of embarking on aspects of the ASCLME project, especially the small-scale fisheries component. As part of this programme, ORI was pleased to host the inaugural meeting of the ASCLME. Representatives from Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa and Tanzania met and discussed key issues during the Inception and first Steering Committee meetings.

The meeting highlighted the region's lack of collective resource management, despite great dependence on its marine resources. There was consensus that the nine countries shared collective responsibility for an ecosystem approach to resource management. Hence it was agreed that the five-year ASCLME project will see the nine countries working together to:

- gather new and important scientific information about the region's complex ocean currents and how they interact with, and influence, the climate, biodiversity and economies of the Western Indian Ocean region;
- document the environmental threats - such as marine pollution and declining fisheries - faced by the countries of the region;

- develop a strategic programme of action to deal with environmental threats;

- strengthen scientific and management expertise, with a view to introducing an ecosystem approach to managing the living marine resources of the Western Indian Ocean region.

Over the next five years, researchers affiliated to the ASCLME project will embark on a series of coordinated oceanographic research cruises in an attempt to gather information about the oceanography and living marine resources of the two LMEs. The coastal resources and their critical link to the well-being of coastal communities will also come under intense scrutiny.

"The Agulhas and Somali currents have a major influence on the societies and economies of the Western Indian Ocean region," said Dr David Vousden, Director of the ASCLME Project, "yet there are large gaps in our understanding of their oceanographic processes, biodiversity and other fundamentals."



Three close associates of several ORI initiatives (from left to right): Messrs Kaitera Katonda (Tanzania), Harrison Onganda (Kenya) and Magnus Ngoile (Tanzania).