

INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION (IORA)

Third IORA Blue Economy Core Group on “Environmental sustainability and the Blue Economy in the Indian Ocean rim region”

10 – 11 April 2017

Mauritius

Background

The Blue Economy Core Group (BECG) was established with Secretariat funding in 2014. Since then support has been received from Australia, UAE, Oman and China. The first workshop hosted by the BECG, led by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) under the membership of South Africa, was held in Durban, South Africa from 4 - 5 May 2015. This focused on Promoting Fisheries & Aquaculture and Maritime Safety & Security Cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. The second workshop on Maritime Connectivity and Financing for Development in the Indian Ocean Rim, took place at Qingdao, China from July 13-14, 2016. Both of these workshops were well attended and have assisting in bringing to the fore important regional issues and initiatives related to these aspects of the Blue Economy in the Indian Ocean region. This is the third and final BECG workshop, which will focus on environmental sustainability in the region.

Introduction

The Blue Economy is gaining increasing importance globally with the wide range of opportunities that it offers that can contribute to boosting economic development and growth. However, ocean resources are not infinite and are being exploited at a significantly high rate, which impacts on the marine environment. Several mechanisms are now being considered to ensure the environmental sustainability of the Blue Economy, for example various countries are adopting ecosystem-based management approaches as a tool that take into consideration the complex ecological and socio-economic environments in which marine organisms live. This management system ensures a balance between ecological well-being with human and social well-being. The aim of such an approach is therefore to maintain ecosystems in healthy, productive and resilient conditions in order to provide services according to human wants and needs.

Apart from overexploitation of ocean resources, the impacts of climate change are putting increasing pressure on both marine and terrestrial environments, through more extreme weather conditions that also increase the likelihood of natural disasters. Climate change is predicted to result in the increase in global temperatures, sea level rise, ocean acidification, more intense tropical cyclones and increase in frequency, intensity or duration of extreme weather events. It is predicted that climate change-driven disturbances will have a negative effect on: water supply; food security; health, industry, settlement and society, especially for those located in coastal areas and river flood plains. In addition, climate change

would also impact on: natural systems and resources, infrastructure and labour productivity which may lead to reduced economic growth and increasing poverty and inequality.

Climate change will affect all countries in the world, but poor countries and poor people are at higher risk. For example, agricultural yields in some African countries is expected to reduce by as much as 50% by 2020; Asia would be facing fresh water availability issues by 2020, and its coastal regions would be more prone to increase flooding as a result of sea level rise and river flooding. By 2050 coastal regions in Australia are also projected to be threatened by the impacts of sea level rise and increased severity and frequency of storms and coastal flooding.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are most vulnerable to climate change-driven disturbances, with millions of people who could be affected by natural hazards such as flooding, storm surges, erosion, and other coastal hazards. It is also expected that climate change will reduce already low incomes and increase the frequency of illness and death rates in many developing countries. Therefore, there is a need for international assistance to these developing countries for implementation of climate change adaptation measures. These have already been recognised and acknowledged by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Disasters normally result from a combination of an exposed, vulnerable and unprepared community towards hazards. From 1991-2005, disasters impacted on 3,470 million people, of which 960,000 people died. Disaster risks are affected by climate change through increased frequency, intensity and duration of weather and climate hazards, as well as through the vulnerability of communities caused by the degradation of ecosystems and decrease in the availability and accessibility of water and food. Disaster risk reduction therefore would focus on addressing the risks related to all categories of hazards including geophysical hazards.

Therefore, adaption measures to the present and predicted climatic stimuli or effects, through for example disaster risk assessment, protection of the environment, development of early warning systems, sustainable and safe building settlements, among others, are pre-requisites to increasing the resilience of communities to all hazards. In addition, there is also a need for better disaster risk reduction measures and actions that would assist in analysing and managing the causes of disasters, which would improve preparedness for adverse events, reduce vulnerability of people and assets, improve land and environment management, among others.

Proposal

The proposed third workshop of the BECG will focus on measures and actions to be taken to deal with the issues of environmental sustainability, climate change adaption and disaster risk reduction. Several topics will be addressed, including *inter alia*: impacts of climate change on coastal environment and marine resources; approaches toward disaster risk prevention, reduction and management; collaboration to strengthen early warning systems and search and rescue through holistic approach by mainstreaming disaster risk management in educational programmes; community resilience and integration for disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response; post-disaster management, construction and rehabilitation; and public-private partnership for sustainable post-disaster construction.

Objectives:

- To enhance coordination and sharing of knowledge, information and best practices on Blue Economy, including disaster risk prevention, reduction and management, as well as Risk Transfer Mechanisms and community resilience in the IOR region;
- To enhance resilience of the communities to climate change-driven disasters and hazards;
- To increase public awareness on environmental sustainability and blue economy in the IOR region;
- To strengthen networking among institutions, experts and regional organisations in IOR region;
- To promote public-private partnership for the sustainable development of the Blue Economy;
- To identify potential projects of collaboration in developing the Blue Economy in the IOR

Time and Venue

The workshop would be held on 9- 11 April 2017 in Mauritius.

The Host

The Human Science Research Council (HSRC), under the membership of the Republic of South Africa, would be the lead coordinator of this project, in collaboration with the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation and the IORA Secretariat. The third Blue Economy Core Group workshop would benefit all IORA countries since they would be able to gain experience, share knowledge and best practices, as well as explore potentials for collaboration and cooperation to deal with the issues of Blue Economy, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

Implementation and funding

50% of the funding for the project is from the IORA Special Fund, and the remaining 50% is from the host Member State. Contributions from Member States or sponsorship by other stakeholders will be appreciated. The administrative, logistical and budgetary arrangements will be finalized by the IORA Secretariat in consultation with the Member States.