



West Africa Coastal Areas
Management Program

Regional Integration

IMPACT STORIES



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West Africa’s coastal ecosystems and their vital services face multiple challenges. Population growth and urbanization are pressuring the area’s natural assets, while sand extraction is eroding the shoreline, with some zones receding by up to 10 meters annually.

Compounded by climate change and increasing disaster risks, these challenges threaten the safety and livelihoods of coastal citizens while jeopardizing their countries’ infrastructure. The effects transcend national borders and require a long-term commitment to multilevel, collaborative interventions.



About the West Africa Coastal Areas Management Program

The World Bank’s West Africa Coastal Areas Management Program (WACA) was launched in 2018 to enhance coastal resilience. The \$630 million program works with countries to better manage shared resources by fighting erosion, flooding, and pollution. The program is currently in nine countries—Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, and Togo—although its regional engagements extend to all 17 countries in the region.

WACA is a collaborative effort that would not have been possible without the support of its financial, implementation, and programmatic partners. Our 11 regional institutions are coordinated by the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) to ensure that the work is harmonized and owned by the beneficiary countries. The World Bank and its partners are now exploring ways to scale WACA’s results by boosting Africa’s Blue Economy to generate blue foods and blue jobs, and to protect ecosystems for resilience.

About this Series

This series of stories, which was funded by the Nordic Development Fund, PROBLUE, and the World Bank, showcases WACA’s most impactful flagship projects in the

region to date from various perspectives. This publication focuses on examples of where WACA is working across borders to improve coastal protection.

Publications in the Series

[1. Regional Integration](#)

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Why WACA Focuses on Regional Integration

The WACA program’s focus on regional integration is driven by the scale and nature of the social and environmental challenges faced by West Africa’s coastal countries. These challenges cut across multiple sectors, are technically complex, and will be costly to address. Moreover, they require long-term, cross-border commitment that will endure beyond potential shifts in governance structures and the individuals within them.

This publication focuses on WACA’s efforts to enhance regional integration. These include harmonizing policies across borders, developing support tools and strategic partnerships to sustain and upscale solutions, and directly strengthening collaboration between regional institutions to accelerate action. Some situations require cross-border, shared solutions, as is the case with [Togo and Benin](#).

Flagship Activity

The West African Coastal Observatory

Monitoring the state and trends of the coastal environment and the effects of management actions

The West African Coastal Observatory, hosted by the Ecological Monitoring Center of Dakar (or CSE, after the French *Centre de Suivi Ecologique* of Dakar), has mapped every segment of the coast from Mauritania to Benin, characterized the biophysical environment, and suggests coastal zone management actions required to keep the coast healthy and productive.

Coastal zones are dynamic, complex environments where the effects of ocean currents, sediment transport, ecological changes, and human activities meet. Robust scientific understanding is crucial for sustainable integrated coastal zone management in that it allows decision-makers to assess current conditions, model future changes, and evaluate the potential impacts of different management actions. Scientific data also helps to identify at-risk areas that need mitigation strategies and to ensure the sustainable use of coastal resources.

Comprehensive data, produced by observation and monitoring, is the cornerstones of such scientific understanding and essential for addressing critical challenges in the region. These challenges include rapid coastal erosion, which exceeds 10 meters per year in some areas; the depletion of fisheries, many of which are fully or overexploited; inadequate sanitation infrastructure, with most urban areas lacking sewerage services; and significant mangrove loss, with about a quarter of the region’s vital ecosystems degraded or destroyed over the past two to three decades.



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How the WACA Program contributes to solutions

Recognizing the need for a coordinated, evidence-based approach, WAEMU, in partnership with ECOWAS and the IUCN, established a coastal resilience initiative in 2007. In 2011, this initiative produced the West Africa Regional Coastal Master Plan (SDLAO) and formed the West African Coastal Observation Mission (MOLOA), which encompasses 11 countries from Mauritania to Benin. Environmental ministers from these nations pledged to enhance their understanding of the scientific and biophysical processes affecting coastal zones, and started advocating for the establishment of a West African Coastal Observatory (ORLOA). To keep pace with the dynamic nature of coastal zones, WAEMU also committed to periodically updating the SDLAO with State of the Coast reports.

Today, the [ORLOA](#) and the [West Africa State of the Coast report](#) provide the foundations for a coordinated regional approach to coastal management in West Africa. Both instruments are implemented by the CSE.

ORLOA, the West Africa Regional Coastal Observatory

The developing ORLOA builds on the existing MOLOA. With continued support from WACA—which catalyzed its expansion to new countries and institutionalized the initiative—the ORLOA is expected to be granted legal status and institutional anchoring within the WAEMU. Looking ahead, the observatory will grow from its current 12 countries (those under MOLOA plus São Tomé and Príncipe) to 17 countries, including Gabon.

ORLOA's mission is captured in the phrase “observe for better understanding, understand for better decisions”. This includes generating reliable data and information on the dynamics of marine and coastal areas; promoting scientific and technical knowledge of the coast; strengthening the capacities of regional and national stakeholders; and disseminating harmonized information and knowledge on the coast to all stakeholders. To date, ORLOA's key achievement include:

- **Developing and implementing three out of seven regional indicators** while using Earth observation data to ensure uniformity across countries, given that meteorological data measurement systems vary between nations. The three regional indicators captured are erosion (coastline monitoring); shoreline artificialization (mapping of protection structures); and pollution (mapping of potentially polluting industries).
- **Establishing a community of practice for coastal observation participants from 12 WACA countries**, as well as capacity-building activities with a focus on monitoring national indicators and a [data-sharing platform](#).
- **Establishing the West African Coastal Regional Alert Network** which has started to integrate national early warning systems, identifying countries' respective needs, and monitoring the implementation of related activities.

The West Africa State of the Coast Report

WACA supports the periodic update of the West Africa State of the Coast report. This report examines coastal changes in relation to socioeconomic developments and natural hazards, enabling the identification of primary coastal issues by sector and priority area for intervention or action.

The 2020 edition of the West Africa State of the Coast report has been validated and the 2024 edition is currently being produced. These reports lay the scientific groundwork for understanding the state of West Africa's coastline and for guiding regional policy, planning, and management decisions to address coastal challenges. Target audiences include land managers, decision-makers, and donors.

More than 144 experts were engaged in the 2020 update of the report. This significant endeavour was made possible by the dedication and mobilization of institutions and stakeholders at both the national and the regional levels, together with the support of the WACA Platform for mobilizing international expertise. The 2020 West Africa State of the Coast Report for West Africa includes:

- **A general document** that offers a regional overview of the West African coastline and discusses coastal hazards and the responses to them. This document compiles the latest scientific research on the West African coastal zone.
- **A detailed assessment of country-specific coastal sectors** that compares the current state of assets and hazards to the reference situation in 2010 and, based on that, provides management and monitoring recommendations. This assessment was developed in close collaboration with the administrations of each country, coordinated by their respective Ministries of the Environment and the CSE.

A cartography section with detailed maps that illustrate the biophysical and socioeconomic conditions, hazards, and issues affecting the coastline. Cartographic data are available online at the Regional Partnership for the Conservation of the Coastal and Marine Zone's (PRCM's) [web GIS platform](#).



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Next steps

The regional observatory will be supported by national observation systems and will enhance access to the marine and coastal data needed to prevent and manage coastal hazards, in this way informing the regular update of the State of the Coast report.

Future efforts will strengthen, monitor, and promote the developing observation network and scale the centralization and exchange of public data to improve understanding of coastal dynamics and pressures. This long-term process will require strong coordination and dialogue across all national observation systems, as well as increased technical capacities within countries and at the regional level.

Flagship Activity

The WACA Regional Steering Committee

WACA's regional steering committee champions integration

Effective coastal ecosystem management—the foundation of coastal resilience—is a complex task that requires regionally coordinated and integrated planning. However, current regional policy, regulatory, and institutional frameworks are insufficiently developed to achieve such integration and coordination, leaving West Africa vulnerable to environmental challenges such as coastal erosion and pollution.

How the WACA Program contributes to solutions

WACA's Regional Steering Committee, the entity that steers WACA's overall strategy, convenes high-level officials from West African countries and key players from regional entities—including the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Abidjan Convention (ABC), the PRCM, the CSE, the Regional Network of Marine Protected Areas in West Africa (RAMPAO), the Africa Center of Excellence in Coastal Resilience (ACECoR), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)—to advise on cross-boundary interventions, support policy dialogue between countries, and facilitate resource mobilization.

The members of the Regional Steering Committee, who can best be described as champions of the region's coastal resilience in their countries and the region, advocate for WACA's objectives at the highest levels across the region, so streamlining the scaling of WACA by facilitating the integration of new countries and partners. The Regional Steering Committee also plays a key role in coordinating activities with other partners and stakeholders in the region. This is discussed in greater detail in the publication on [partnerships](#).

In addition to actively championing coastal resilience, the Regional Steering Committee assesses WACA's regional results and impacts, meeting every six months to monitor impacts and provide strategic guidance to ensure that WACA's work targets the most vulnerable geographies and sectors in a coordinated manner.

When needed, CSOs and researchers are invited to attend these meetings to provide additional context and technical inputs or simply share experiences, so strengthening the capacities and leadership skills of steering committee members while ensuring that WACA's activities are evidence-led and aligned with the needs of the beneficiaries on the ground.

Enhancing the technical capacities of Regional Steering Committee members is an important part of WACA's approach to building local expertise. For example, to enhance WAEMU's technical capacity, WACA supported the development of a regional strategic investment action plan (RSIAP), which helps to identify promising investments and sets out the necessary investment planning processes to secure them. The strategy is validated by the WACA Ministerial Meeting and, includes a review of multisectoral investment processes; an assessment of the state of play of the implementation of countries' multisector investment plans; a methodology and a model for planning processes; a description of the role of regional initiatives; and a regional action plan. This activity is a first planning effort; the next step will be to detail the investment options and cost for each of the 180 segments of the coast planned in the SDLAO.

The WACA Regional Steering Committee is supported by the WACA Platform, which is a World Bank-managed technical assistance activity. The WACA Platform: (i) facilitates provision of knowledge, expertise, global good practices, and technical assistance; (ii) simplifies access to financing for coastal resilience investments; and (iii) supports dialogue and engagement with key partners, including the private sector and civil society.

Next steps

WACA's Regional Steering Committee will continue engaging at the highest levels across the region to raise awareness about the complex, multisectoral challenges facing the region and how WACA can enable the level of integration that will be needed to address these challenges over the long term.

Beyond these engagements, WACA will continue working towards enhancing local technical capacities and transferring the work of convening and growing the WACA Platform to local institutions.

“WACA is a very good example of countries coming together to address common problems that go beyond borders. By regularly convening high-level officials from countries and major institutions, WACA has set up a good path to synchronizing policies for successful implementation of cross-boundary interventions and enhance coastal resilience in a sustainable manner.”

– *Boutheina Guermazi,*
World Bank Director for Regional Integration for Africa and the Middle East

Other Showcase Initiatives



1 Nurturing champions for coastal resilience

The challenge To successfully enhance coastal resilience in the region, WACA projects need to mobilize a capacitated coalition of national and regional institutions that is able to coordinate efforts across all stakeholders and citizens. WACA's Regional Steering Committee and National Steering Committees are well placed to play this mobilizing role and advocate for coastal resilience.

The solution WACA's Regional Steering Committee received “bootcamp” training to equip members with leadership tools and approaches to mobilize for change and position members as champions for coastal resilience. These bootcamps encouraged committee members to develop joint and personal action plans, and provided support for these plans through monthly team coaching sessions.

At the national level, project implementation units and local stakeholders also received tailored training in collaboration and technical skills, including project management, planning, and negotiations. The participants received support from local and international coaches to help them fulfil their action plans.



2 Strengthening coastal policies and law

The challenge Across West African countries, coastal laws and policies suffer from fragmentation, duplication, inconsistencies, and occasional obsolescence. With gaps in climate and environmental change policies, weak enforcement mechanisms and institutions, and unclear rules for property and land use rights, the existing legal basis prevents West African countries from effectively addressing coastal degradation, despite a willingness to do so. Ultimately, West African countries need robust governance systems that allow effective decision-making and planning relating to the use of coastal areas.

The solution The *Atlases for Marine and Coastal Law* are interactive tools that provide comprehensive overviews of the status of environmental, marine, and coastal laws across WACA countries. The atlases map all the geographical information embedded within existing laws and policies, creating an accessible and comprehensive representation of each country's legal framework. The atlases include information such as maritime borders, protected areas, and regulations for industrial exploitation (such as oil and gas, shipping, fisheries, and so on).

A second product, a Good Practice Note, reflects international best practices and facilitates deeper understanding and integration of legal and policy progressions relating to emerging challenges such as climate change and rising sea levels.

Thanks to the atlases, it is possible to provide a first overview of human activities on the coastal and marine space, and to assess compliance and applicability of regulations, which is one of the first steps for Marine Spatial Planning.

Outlook

Sustaining and Expanding Impact

Regional integration is a long-term investment that is essential for sustained coastal resilience. It requires concerted engagement, planning, and distribution of resources and capacities across many stakeholders.

Building on the example of the São Tomé and Príncipe WACA+, where the focus has been on resilience as a foundation for the blue economy, regional integration is an imperative for accompanying countries and regional institutions in developing strategic activities that will have the desired positive impacts on environmental, social, and economic welfare in the region.



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