

Regional Workshop
on Promoting a Better Understanding of the BBNJ Agreement for African States
on the coasts of the Indian Ocean, Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, and landlocked
States in these regions, as well as States of the Benguela Current Convention

1-5 December 2025
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Concept Note

After nearly 20 years of work, the *Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction* (BBNJ Agreement) was adopted on 19 June 2023 and opened for signature on 20 September 2023. As of 19 September 2025, the BBNJ Agreement has 145 signatories, including 14 States from among the 24 States targeted by this Regional Workshop. On the same date, the threshold of 60 instruments of ratification, approval, acceptance or accession required for the entry into force of the Agreement was reached. Among the 60 States that have ratified the Agreement, alongside the European Union, are three States from the target region. The Agreement will enter into force on 17 January 2026, in accordance with article 68(1).

Under the overall objective of ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, for the present and in the long-term, through effective implementation of the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (the Convention) and further international cooperation and coordination, the BBNJ Agreement addresses four main elements: marine genetic resources, including the fair and equitable sharing of benefits; measures such as area-based management tools, including marine protected areas; environmental impact assessments; and capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology. The Agreement also addresses a number of “cross-cutting issues”, including the establishment of a funding mechanism and institutional arrangements. Building on the Convention, this historic Agreement is critical for the health and resilience of the ocean, particularly for its role in contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity. Its effective and timely implementation can make significant contributions to tackling the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, and in achieving the ocean-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

The BBNJ Agreement recognizes the special requirements of developing States Parties, including coastal African States and landlocked developing countries, and the special circumstances of small island developing States and of least developed countries, and requires that these be taken into account, including in the context of eligibility for access to funding under the Agreement. Furthermore, the BBNJ Agreement includes provisions on capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology to support developing States in benefitting from and implementing the Agreement.

The Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations (the Division), in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), is offering a Regional Workshop for African States on the coasts of the Indian Ocean, Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, and landlocked States in these regions, as well as member States of the Benguela Current Convention, on the BBNJ Agreement with a view to supporting the efforts of States towards becoming parties to the Agreement and preparing for its implementation.

The Workshop will be hosted by ECA from 1 to 5 December 2025 at the United Nations Conference Centre in Addis Ababa (UNCC-AA), Ethiopia, and will be delivered in two segments: the first segment, delivered by the Division, will provide an overview of the BBNJ Agreement, covering all main elements of the Agreement as well as cross-cutting issues. The second segment, delivered by IUCN, will provide an opportunity for in-depth learning about a number of aspects pertaining to area-based management tools, including marine protected areas, as well as the necessary means of implementation.

The Workshop

First Segment: Overview of the BBNJ Agreement (1-3 December 2025)

The objective of this segment is to increase knowledge and understanding of the BBNJ Agreement, including the rights and obligations set out therein, among States and other stakeholders, with a view to supporting the efforts of States towards becoming parties to the Agreement and for its implementation.

The segment will include multiple modules, including on:

- the background to the BBNJ Agreement;
- an overview of the Agreement and its importance and the implications of becoming Parties;
- the substantive and cross-cutting elements of the Agreement, including the related rights and obligations set out therein;
- relevant legal instruments and frameworks and relevant global, regional, subregional and sectoral bodies (IFBs), including the relationship between the Agreement and those IFBs;
- procedural steps towards becoming party to the BBNJ Agreement;
- the work of the BBNJ Preparatory Commission; and
- supporting activities for becoming parties and for implementation.

A particular focus in discussions and breakout groups will be placed on the technical needs and requirements in preparation for implementation, including needs identification and gap analysis for legal and policy frameworks.

This three-day segment will be delivered by the Division, with the support of regional and subject matter specialists, alongside contributors from across the United Nations system and other global, regional and subregional organizations. It will include presentations, breakout group discussions and plenary discussions.

This segment is being offered by the Division as part of its programme of activities undertaken in response to General Assembly resolution 77/321 to promote a better understanding of the BBNJ Agreement and to prepare for its entry into force, with additional support received from the European Union in the context of the project “Promotion of a better understanding of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), including the strengthening of capacities of developing States towards becoming parties to the Agreement and implementing it”, implemented by the Division and funded by the European Union.

Expected outcomes of this segment are as follows:

- Improved understanding of the BBNJ Agreement for participants playing or expected to play a role in the national process towards becoming a party to the Agreement and its implementation;
- Enhanced preparedness for entry into force of the Agreement; and
- Improved coordination between participating States concerning plans and support for becoming parties to and implementing the BBNJ Agreement at regional and subregional levels.

Second Segment: Area-based management tools and the necessary means of implementation (4-5 December 2025)

The objective of this segment is to focus on the opportunities and challenges of establishing and maintaining area-based management tools (ABMTs), including marine protected areas (MPAs), adjacent to African States. In doing so, participants will also have a chance to unpack the means of implementation, capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology (CBTMT) as well as financial resources their particular States and regions may require to implement Part III of the BBNJ Agreement.

Building on the workshop’s first segment which introduces participants to the provisions of the BBNJ Agreement, this segment will help participants expound on the practical steps needed for Africa to create and maintain ABMTs, including MPAs, in areas beyond national jurisdiction. Particular emphasis will be given to the monitoring, control and surveillance measures needed to implement and enforce ABMTs, including MPAs, Africa’s diverse and tailored CBTMT and financial resources needs, as well as the positive spill-over effects that compliance with the Agreement can have in areas within national jurisdiction. The workshop will also strengthen the science–policy interface, equipping participants to translate data, research and traditional knowledge into evidence-based decision-making for the establishment of ABMTs, including MPAs, in areas beyond national jurisdiction, benefit from CBTMT and to access the BBNJ Agreement financial mechanism. In doing so, it will enable States to plan beyond ratification toward coordinated, well-prepared action, ensuring that African States can meaningfully contribute to the relevant decisions under the Agreement.

The segment will include multiple sessions, including on:

- Ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), vulnerable marine ecosystems, and bioregionalization as the basis for ABMTs, including MPAs, in areas beyond national jurisdiction;
- Science–policy interface for translating ecological knowledge into management measures and decision-making;
- Practical approaches for designing, establishing and managing ABMTs, including MPAs, in areas beyond national jurisdiction, including monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) for effective compliance;
- Operationalizing CBTMT through centres of excellence, regional hubs and partnerships, and identifying interoperable capabilities;
- Breakout discussions on key issues including perspectives on ABMTs, including MPAs, in areas beyond national jurisdiction, and establishing BBNJ centres of excellence;
- Financing the BBNJ Agreement, including innovative and sustainable finance for ABMTs, including MPAs, and beyond;
- Unpacking cross-cutting and cooperation issues through discussions on the provisions of the Agreement related to "not undermining" and their implications for cooperation with IFBs, international cooperation and next steps towards effective early implementation by African States;
- Indigenous Peoples and local communities and other relevant stakeholders; and
- Next steps towards third session of the BBNJ Preparatory Commission and first meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

This two-day segment will be delivered by IUCN with a range of regional and international partners.

Participation, funding and nominations

Participation in the Workshop is open to 24 African States on the coasts of the Indian Ocean, Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, and landlocked States in these regions, as well as States of the Benguela Current Convention,¹ relevant intergovernmental organizations and other relevant entities.

Eligible participants include those who are playing or are expected to play a leading role in the national process towards becoming a party to the BBNJ Agreement and implementing it, which may include governmental officials, such as national BBNJ focal points, and/or parliamentarians. In light of the role of members of parliament in the national processes of States towards becoming party to the BBNJ Agreement, the participation of parliamentarians is particularly encouraged.

¹ Angola, Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe

Nominations are invited for up to two nominees per eligible State, preferably from different agencies of government and/or the legislature. Additional nominees may be accepted, if self-funded, depending on the venue capacity. The Division and IUCN will cover the costs of travel and daily subsistence allowance for up to two nominees from each eligible State. Priority will be given to those nominees who have not previously benefitted from training on the BBNJ Agreement.

IUCN will additionally support 11 participants (one per State) who attended the *Western Indian Ocean, Eastern and Southern Africa Region Workshop on the Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction* from 4 - 6 March 2025 in Mombasa, Kenya.² IUCN will cover the costs of travel and daily subsistence allowance for these participants.

Intergovernmental organizations, civil society and other relevant entities may nominate one participant at their own cost.

In line with international commitments to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life, nominations should pay due consideration to the importance of gender balance.

The Workshop will be delivered in English with interpretation to/from French, depending on the needs of participants.

Background

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, a treaty with near universal participation, sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out and is of strategic importance as the basis for national, regional and global action and cooperation in the marine sector, as recognized annually by the General Assembly of the United Nations and also by successive United Nations Conferences on Sustainable Development. The Convention has three implementing agreements, namely the Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of the Convention (Part XI Agreement), the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the Convention relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (UNFSA), and the BBNJ Agreement.

The Convention sets out the rights and obligations of States in the maritime zones both under national jurisdiction and beyond. It provides for navigational rights and duties, the conservation and management of living and non-living resources, the protection and preservation of the marine environment, marine scientific research, and the development and transfer of marine technology. In addition, the Convention provides for the compulsory settlement of disputes concerning the interpretation and application of its provisions.

² Angola, Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa and United Republic of Tanzania

The Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, Office of Legal Affairs, United Nations

The Division has been supporting the intergovernmental process relating to marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction since its inception in the early 2000's. In accordance with resolution 77/321, the Division currently performs the secretariat functions in relation to the BBNJ Agreement until such time as the secretariat to be established under the Agreement commences its functions.

The Division also acts as the secretariat for the Convention and UNFSA, and discharges the functions of the Secretary-General both under the Convention and in relation to General Assembly resolutions on oceans and the law of the sea, and sustainable fisheries. Additionally, it serves as the secretariat of the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, which produces the World Ocean Assessments.

The Division is mandated to promote a better understanding and wider appreciation of the Convention, the Part XI Agreement and UNFSA, and assist with their uniform and consistent application and implementation through the provision of information, advice, and assistance to States and intergovernmental organizations.

In this context, it provides capacity-building and other assistance to developing States in the field of ocean affairs and the law of the sea, through training, fellowships and technical assistance, as well as through financial support from voluntary trust funds managed by the Division and aimed at assisting States, particularly developing States, in the implementation of the Convention and facilitating their participation in ocean-related work of the General Assembly.

The Division also provides support for the implementation by Member States of the ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 Agenda.

Furthermore, it supports the United Nations Legal Counsel in the discharge of the focal point responsibilities related to UN-Oceans, the inter-agency coordination mechanism on the ocean and coastal issues within the United Nations system.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was established by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in 1958 as one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations. ECA's mandate is to promote the economic and social development of its member States, foster intra-regional integration, and promote international cooperation for Africa's development.

Over the past decades, ECA has advanced Africa's Blue Economy agenda through political governance frameworks and practical tools. ECA has supported the development of regional and continental strategies — such as the African Union Blue Economy Strategy, The Great Blue Wall Initiative, and Circular Economy Action Plan for the Indian Ocean and African Island States — to provide technical guidance for integrating aquatic resources into sustainable development plans, create a regional ecological corridor for conservation and the acceleration of a regenerative blue economy, and design financing mechanism for blue and

circular economy. It has also developed tools like the Blue Economy Valuation Toolkit and Blue Economy Policy Handbook for Africa, to help governments quantify the economic, social, and environmental value of blue ecosystems, enabling evidence-based policy decisions and investment planning, as well as developing strategic policy frameworks for the sustainable use and management of aquatic resources. Through high-level dialogues and ministerial platforms, ECA has positioned the Blue Economy as a core driver of economic transformation, food security, and climate resilience across Africa. Notably, through the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, ECA has mobilised African countries to review progress and advance policy solutions and action to accelerate the implementation of SDG 14.

ECA is supporting African member States to address capacity and technical gaps when engaging in ocean governance negotiations, including those under the BBNJ Agreement. By providing technical analysis, convening high-level political dialogues, and strengthening negotiation capacity, ECA helps support Africa's engagement in those negotiations, the development of regional priorities on marine genetic resources, including the fair and equitable sharing of benefits, area-based management tools, capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology, as well as ensure that Member States can leverage emerging global ocean governance frameworks to advance sustainable blue economy development.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is a membership Union that brings together governments, civil society, Indigenous Peoples' organisations, scientists, and businesses to forge solutions to today's environmental challenges. Founded in 1948, IUCN is the world's largest and most diverse environmental network, uniting more than 1,400 Members and 15,000 experts. It is a leading source of conservation data and standards, providing a trusted and neutral platform where knowledge, science, and traditional practices come together to guide policy, action, and innovation in conservation and sustainable development.

IUCN has been engaged in the process leading to the BBNJ Agreement for over two decades, calling for improved conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction as early as 2000. As an intergovernmental observer organisation, IUCN and its expert Commissions have provided independent legal and scientific advice throughout the Intergovernmental Conferences, producing commentaries on draft texts, technical briefings, and convening targeted workshops. By mobilising its World Commission on Environmental Law, the World Commission on Protected Areas, and experts across its global membership, IUCN has provided technical backstopping to the process as well as delegations on the Agreement, as well as its specific provisions on marine genetic resources, area-based management tools, environmental impact assessments, and capacity-building, finance and interactions with IFBs, where requested. Guided by its World Conservation Congress of 2020, Resolution 128, IUCN's primary objective is to contribute to an ambitious and effective implementation framework that ensures the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.