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Gender and Transformation Working Group: IORAG-SA

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Human Sciences Research Council

1

The Evolution of Gender in IORA

Laying the Foundations

IORA's journey on gender equality began with a recognition of the vital role women play in building inclusive, prosperous and resilient societies.



2

From Commitment to Action

Mainstreaming Gender Across IORA

IORA has progressively mainstreamed gender perspectives across its frameworks, initiatives and collaborations.



Ensuring that no one is left behind in our shared journey of prosperity and sustainable development.

3

Towards an Inclusive Future

Accelerating Gender Equality in IORA

IORA remains committed to building a region where women and girls have equal opportunities, leadership and voice in shaping our common future.



OUR WAY FORWARD



Equal Seas.
Equal Opportunities.
Stronger Together.



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Foundations of Gender in IORA

- Gender equality recognised as a core pillar of sustainable development and regional prosperity
- Formal commitments strengthened through Ministerial Declarations and Action Plans (2013–2017)
- Adoption of the Declaration on Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment (2016) as a landmark policy step
- Gender positioned as a cross-cutting priority across all IORA focus areas, including the Blue Economy

IORA Working Group on Women's Economic Empowerment

The Evolution of Gender in IORA



KEY MESSAGES



IORA's journey reflects a clear progression—from commitment to meaningful action—advancing gender equality for a more inclusive and prosperous region.



01 STRONG FOUNDATIONS

IORA has built a solid foundation through commitments, policies and declarations that recognize the vital role of women in inclusive and sustainable development.



02 FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION

Gender perspectives are mainstreamed across IORA's work through policy integration, capacity building, partnerships, support for women's economic empowerment, and use of data and knowledge.



03 COLLABORATION DRIVES IMPACT

Working with Member States, partners and stakeholders amplifies efforts and accelerates progress towards gender equality across the region.



04 EMPOWERING WOMEN, STRENGTHENING ECONOMIES

Investing in women entrepreneurs, leaders and innovators boosts inclusive economic growth and resilient communities.



05 INCLUSION FOR A BETTER FUTURE

Gender equality is essential to peace, social protection, climate resilience and sustainable development in the Indian Ocean region.



06 EQUAL SEAS. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES. STRONGER TOGETHER.

IORA remains committed to ensuring that no one is left behind in our shared journey of prosperity and sustainable development.



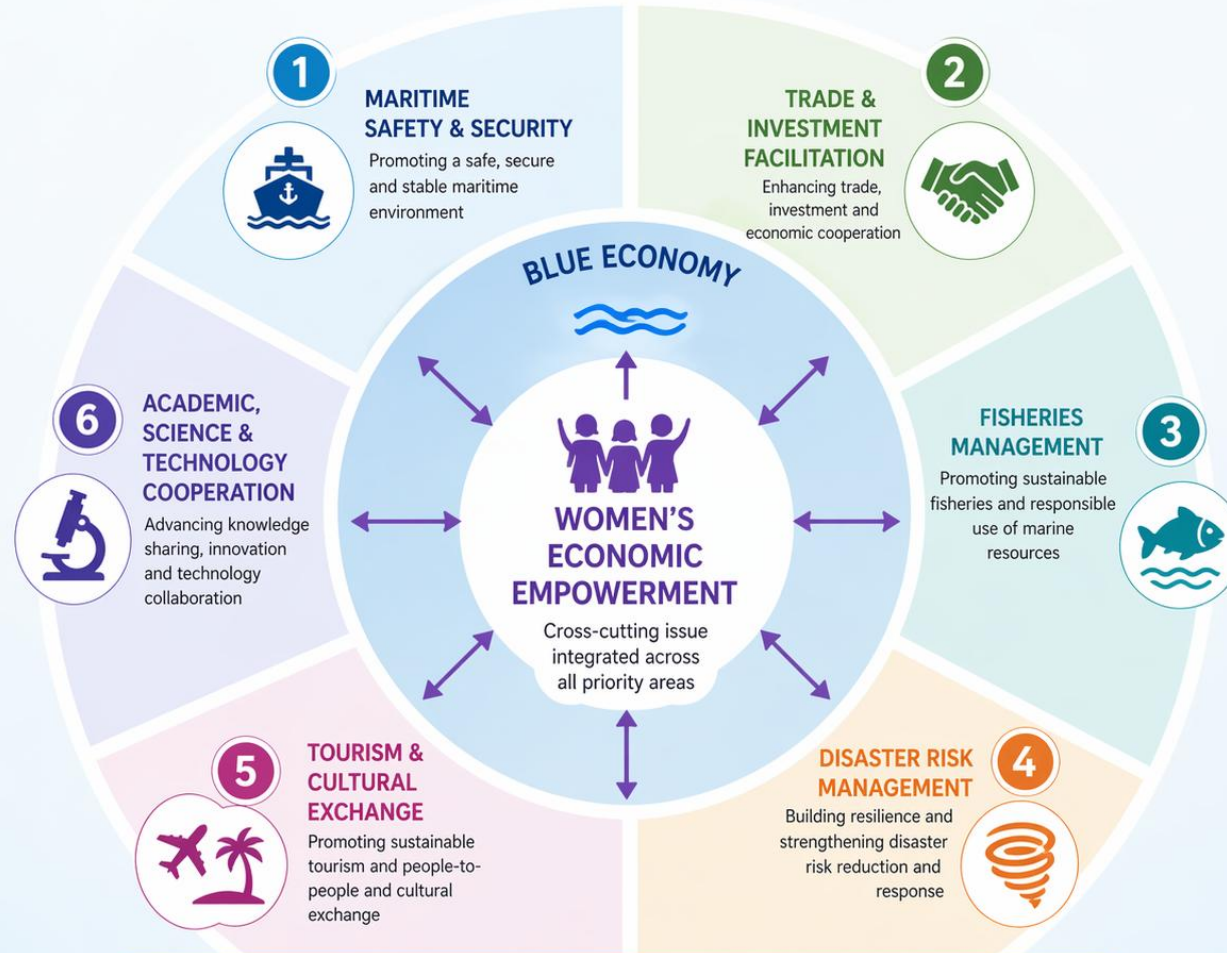
Ensuring that no one is left behind in our shared journey of prosperity and sustainable development.

“Equal seas. Equal opportunities. Stronger together.”

- Establishment of the Working Group on Women’s Economic Empowerment (WGWEE) to operationalise gender commitments
 - Focus on mainstreaming gender across policies, programmes and partnerships
 - Key actions include:
 - Capacity building and training for women
 - Strengthening women’s participation in business and leadership
 - Promoting gender-disaggregated data and research
 - Building partnerships with organisations like UN Women and ILO
- Emphasis on creating an enabling environment for women’s economic participation

IORA PRIORITY AREAS

WITH WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AS A CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE



 Women's Economic Empowerment drives inclusive growth, sustainable development and resilient communities across the Indian Ocean region.



IORAG-SA

Women's Economic Empowerment as a cross-cutting issue in IORA

- BALACLAVA DECLARATION ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY AS A PRE-REQUISITE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (2018)
- **Recognise** that women's economic empowerment is an important cross cutting issue and relevant to all IORA priority areas and the cross-cutting focus area of the Blue Economy, and that the full potential of women's contribution to the Indian Ocean Rim remains untapped.
- **Welcome** that the Blue Economy is a major contributor to regional transformation and growth and provides important opportunities for women to fully participate in and contribute to their own development and success. Women can be encouraged to reach their full potential in a variety of occupations and inclusion throughout Blue Economy value chains, such as in shipping and maritime transport, offshore mining and coastal tourism through better access to education, training, technology and finance.



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IORA's Approach to gender equality and empowerment

- IORA states reaffirmed their commitment to gender equality in 2016
 - Prioritise efforts to promote equal opportunity in employment and non-discrimination in formal and informal sectors through laws, policies, and practices
 - Prioritise efforts towards the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls
 - Promote an enabling environment in which women and children can reach their full economic potential through increasing social awareness and providing economic opportunities.



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Who we are

- A strategic platform advancing gender equality and transformation within South Africa's engagement in the Indian Ocean Rim
- Positioned within the broader framework of the Indian Ocean Rim Association
- Aligns with regional priorities on inclusive development and women's economic empowerment

Our mandate

- Integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue across IORA priority areas
- Support implementation of the Working Group on Women's Economic Empowerment (WGWEE)
- Promote:
 - Gender-responsive policy and governance
 - Women's participation and leadership
 - Inclusive economic opportunities, especially in the Blue Economy



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What we do

- Facilitate research, policy dialogue and stakeholder engagement on women's economic empower and gender and transformation in IORA
- Strengthen capacity building and knowledge exchange around women's empowerment in IORA
- Advance gender-disaggregated data systems for evidence-based decision-making
- Build partnerships across:
 - Government
 - Academia
 - Civil society
 - Regional and international organisations



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Our strategic contribution

- Positions gender equality as a driver of sustainable development
- Supports inclusive and sustainable ocean governance
- Enhances regional cooperation and policy coherence
- Contributes to achieving SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and broader development goals



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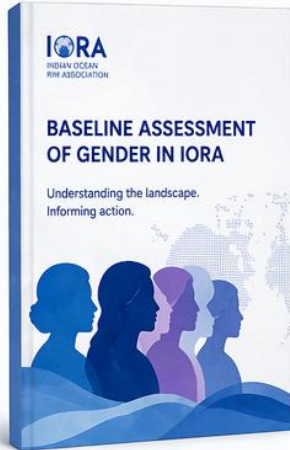
— OUR PREVIOUS WORK —

Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment in the IORA Region

Evidence. Dialogue. Impact. Our work contributes to building an inclusive IORA where gender equality drives sustainable development and resilient communities.



1 Baseline Assessment of Gender in IORA



Evidence Generation



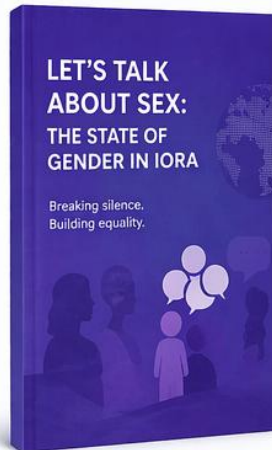
Data & Policy Analysis



Regional Benchmarking

A comprehensive baseline assessment to understand the status of gender equality and women's economic participation across IORA Member States.

2 Let's Talk About Sex: The State of Gender in IORA



Breaking Silence



Gender Dialogue



Informed Action

An evidence-based report that opens critical conversations on gender norms, gaps and opportunities across the IORA region.

3 Technical Report: A Blue Economy for Women's Economic Empowerment



Blue Economy Lens



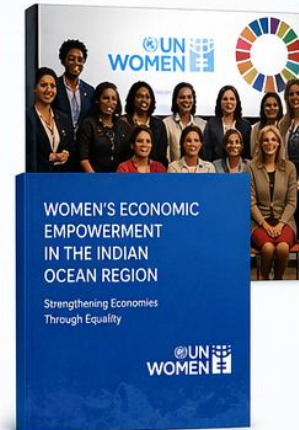
Women-Centred Solutions



Technical Insights

A technical report exploring how the blue economy can be a catalyst for women's economic empowerment across the Indian Ocean region.

4 Technical Advisors to UN Women's Report (2018) Durban, South Africa



Technical Advisory Role



Evidence & Expertise



Collaborative Partnership

Provided technical expertise and advisory input to UN Women's flagship report on Women's Economic Empowerment in the Indian Ocean region, launched in 2018 in Durban, South Africa.



OUR COMMITMENT, OUR IMPACT

From evidence to action – driving gender-responsive policies, inclusive economies and sustainable ocean futures.



Building knowledge that informs policy and practice



Advancing women's leadership and economic inclusion



Strengthening the blue economy for people and planet



Working together for an equal, inclusive and prosperous IORA

Research Sneak Peek



Sneak Peek at Some of Our Findings

Evidence. Insights. Action.

Our research across the IORA region provides critical evidence on gender equality and women's economic empowerment — highlighting progress, persistent gaps and opportunities for transformation.



Evidence-based analysis



Covering 22 IORA Member States



Driving gender equality and inclusion



Informing policy and action

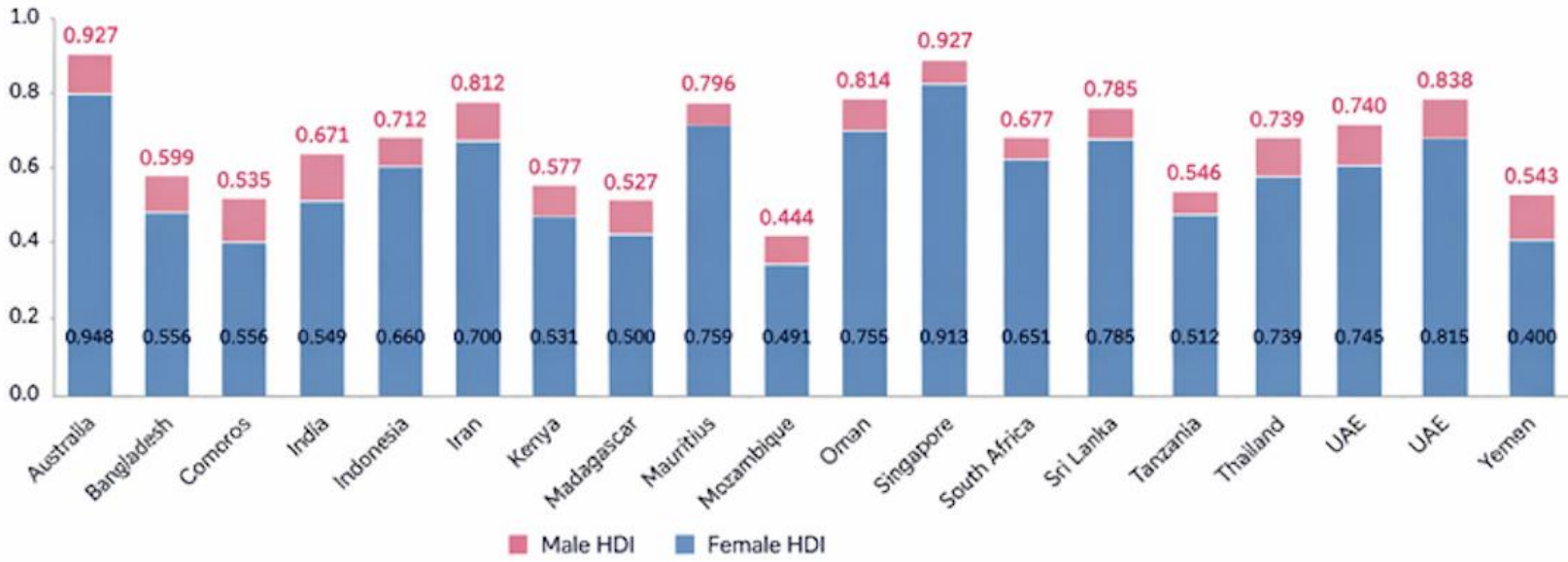


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Research Sneak Peek

1 GENDER DISPARITIES IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT HDI Scores: Male vs Female

In all IORA Member States, female HDI scores are lower than male scores, with the widest gaps in several countries.





KEY TAKEAWAY:
Gender gaps in human development remain a regional challenge — calling for targeted investment in women and girls.

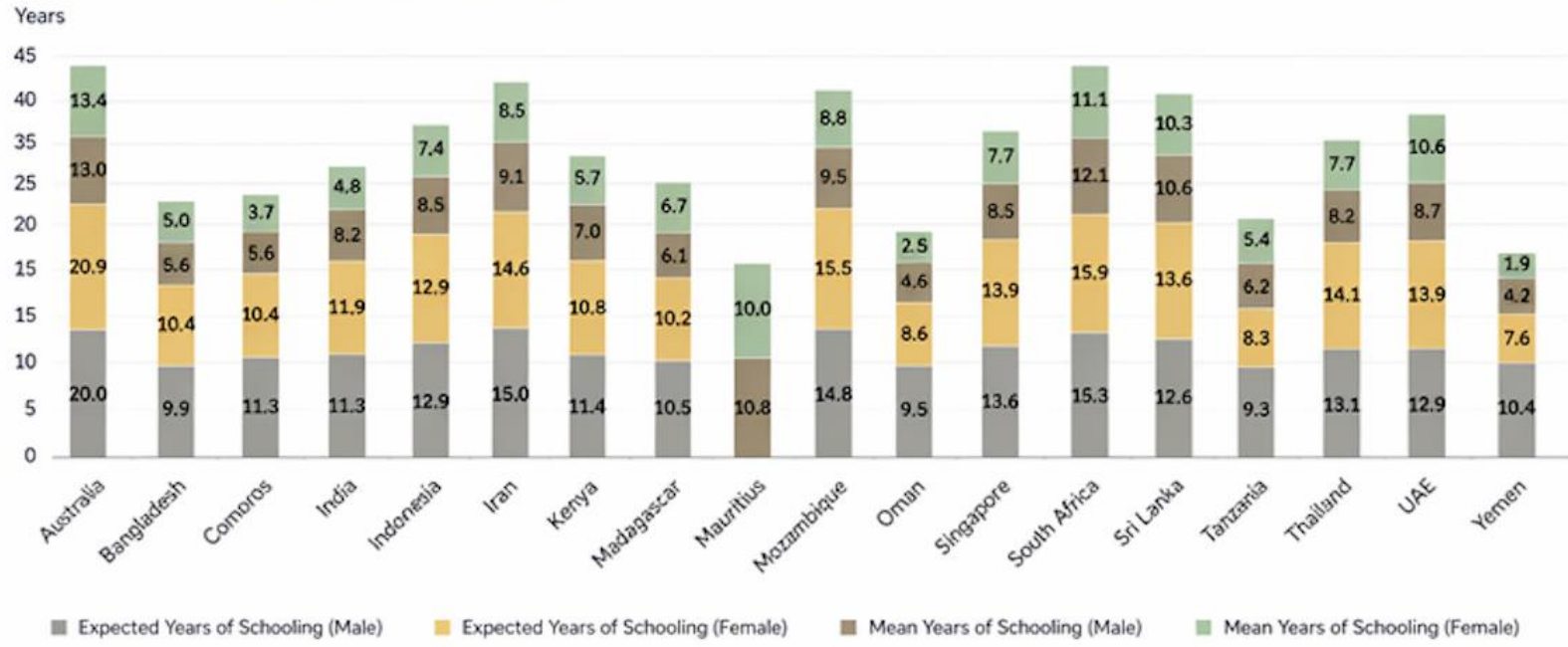




Research Sneak Peek

2 EDUCATION: YEARS OF SCHOOLING Expected and Mean Years of Schooling: Male and Female

Women have fewer expected and mean years of schooling across most IORA countries, limiting their opportunities and economic potential.





KEY TAKEAWAY:
Closing the education gap is essential to building a more inclusive and productive IORA region.

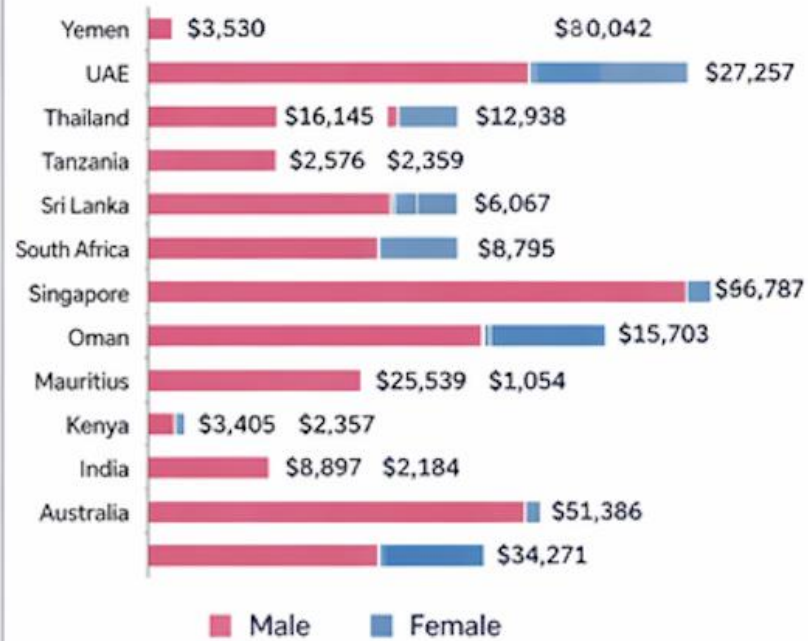


Research Sneak Peek

3 ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Estimated Gross National Income per Capita (\$)

Women earn significantly less than men across all IORA Member States.



KEY TAKEAWAY:

Economic inequality persists – strengthening women's economic participation is key to inclusive growth.



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Research Sneak Peek

4 POLICY AND LEGAL ENVIRONMENT Key Gender Equality Indicators

Laws and policies vary across the region,
with important gaps remaining.

Country	Is discrimination in access to credit prohibited based on:		Do sons and daughters have equal inheritance rights?	Is there domestic violence legislation?
	Marital Status	Gender		
Australia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bangladesh	No	No	No	Yes
India	No	No	Yes	Yes
Indonesia	No	No	No	Yes
Kenya	No	No	Yes	No
Mauritius	No	No	Yes	Yes
Mozambique	No	No	Yes	Yes
Seychelles	No	No	Yes	Yes
Singapore	No	No	Yes	Yes
South Africa	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tanzania	No	No	No	No
UAE	No	No	No	No
Yemen	No	No	No	No



KEY TAKEAWAY:

Stronger legal frameworks and enforcement are critical to advancing gender equality in the region.





What we measure shapes
what we value, and who
counts in the ocean
economy.

Joleen Steyn Kotze, 2026

OUR CURRENT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Advancing gender-responsive ocean accounting and governance

Building evidence, tools and collaborations to make women's contributions visible, valued and counted in ocean development.



GLOBAL OCEAN ACCOUNTING PARTNERSHIP (GOAP)

Contributing to global efforts to advance the implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting – Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA EA) for ocean assets.

- ✓ Aligning with the Ocean Accounts Global Framework
- ✓ Advancing integration of social dimensions, including gender
- ✓ Supporting capacity development and knowledge exchange across countries



SOCIAL ACCOUNTS GESI CIRCULAR DEVELOPMENT

Designing a circular process for co-creating gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) indicators and social accounts for the ocean.

- ✓ Identify priority GESI indicators
- ✓ Co-create and test with stakeholders and communities
- ✓ Refine, validate and integrate into ocean accounts
- ✓ Ensure relevance, comparability and usability



A COLLABORATIVE PATHWAY

Working together across initiatives to develop robust data, indicators and social accounting systems that integrate gender and social inclusion in ocean governance.



Our goal: To develop a robust framework and indicators to “count women” in ocean development and governance.



VOICES FROM THE DEPTH: GENDER AND THE OCEANS EXPERT SURVEY

Capturing expert insights on women's roles, barriers and opportunities across ocean sectors and governance levels.

- ✓ Global survey of experts and practitioners
- ✓ Evidence on inclusion, participation, leadership and decision-making
- ✓ Informing indicator development and policy recommendations



SOCIAL ACCOUNTS WORKING GROUP FOR RESEARCH COLLABORATION AND FACILITATION

Strengthening collaboration, learning and knowledge sharing to accelerate progress.

- ✓ Bringing together researchers, institutions and partners
- ✓ Facilitating methodological development and data innovation
- ✓ Building a community of practice for impact

WHY IT MATTERS



Better data for better decisions



Visibility and value of women's contributions



Inclusive governance and equitable ocean futures



Stronger, sustainable ocean economies for all



Collaborative action for lasting impact

THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE

Advancing gender equality for inclusive and sustainable oceans



1 UPDATED BASELINE ASSESSMENT OF GENDER IN IORA

Strengthen and update the baseline assessment to reflect the latest data and policy developments.

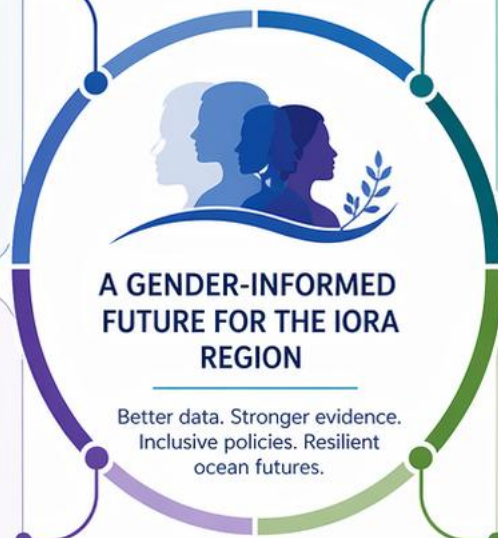
- Enhance gender-disaggregated data across IORA member states
- Enable robust comparative analysis over time and across countries
- Identify trends, gaps and opportunities to inform action



3 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH GENDER EXPERTS

Center expert voices to deepen understanding of gender and the ocean nexus.

- Explore women's empowerment in ocean sectors
- Identify barriers, enablers and solutions
- Generate insights to strengthen indicator development and policy design



2 RESEARCH COLLABORATION AND PILOTS TO TEST GESI INDICATORS

Collaborate across institutions and countries to pilot and refine GESI indicators.

- Co-design indicators with diverse stakeholders
- Pilot in selected countries and sectors
- Test feasibility, relevance and comparability



4 GENDERED VULNERABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE AS AN EMERGING PRIORITY

Integrate gendered vulnerability into ocean and climate agendas.

- Assess differential impacts of climate change on women and men
- Highlight adaptive capacities and resilience
- Inform gender-responsive climate and ocean governance



OUR COLLECTIVE IMPACT



Stronger evidence for better decisions



Inclusive policies and equitable outcomes



Sustainable oceans for all



Collaborative action for lasting change

COUNT WOMEN. VALUE WOMEN. EMPOWER WOMEN. TRANSFORM OUR OCEANS.

KEY MESSAGES

from “Counting women? Gendered sustainability and inclusivity for an ocean accounting framework”

Joleen Steyn Kotze & Narnia Bohler-Muller (2024), *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*

“ The oceans are the foundation of social and economic development... Oceans make major contributions, many irreplaceable, to human well-being and development.

– Ocean Account Global Framework (2020)



Our research highlights why gendered sustainability and inclusivity must be at the core of ocean accounting and governance.

1



OCEANS ARE CENTRAL TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- Oceans underpin economic prosperity, social well-being and human development.
- Effective decisions about oceans are critical to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2



A KNOWLEDGE GAP HINDERS INCLUSIVE OCEAN GOVERNANCE

- A lack of gendered data and analysis limits governments' ability to make effective and inclusive decisions.
- This gap undermines long-term commitments to sustainability and equality.

3



WOMEN ARE ESSENTIAL TO OCEAN ECONOMIES BUT OFTEN INVISIBLE

- Women make significant contributions to fisheries, aquaculture, coastal tourism and related livelihoods.
- Their work is undervalued, undercounted and rarely reflected in economic accounts.

4



GENDER INEQUALITIES ARE STRUCTURAL AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL

- Rooted in gender norms, unequal access to resources, assets, finance, technology and decision-making.
- These inequalities limit women's agency, economic benefits and resilience in ocean-dependent communities.

5



INTEGRATING GENDER INTO OCEAN ACCOUNTING IS ESSENTIAL

- Ocean accounts must capture gendered contributions, impacts and benefits.
- Gender-sensitive indicators and data improve visibility, inform policy and promote equitable outcomes.

6



TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIVE AND INCLUSIVE OCEAN GOVERNANCE

- Gender mainstreaming must go beyond tokenism to drive transformative change.
- Inclusive ocean governance requires the meaningful participation and leadership of women at all levels.



THE BIGGER PICTURE:

Gender equality in ocean governance is not just a fairness issue — it is a prerequisite for sustainable, inclusive and resilient blue economies.

- ✓ Count women.
- ✓ Value women.
- ✓ Include women.
- ✓ Transform oceans.



RESEARCH LENS: This study applies a political economy lens, informed by environmental and gender political economy analyses, to advance a more inclusive and gendered ocean accounting framework.

Go read our work!

