



WWF COASTAL COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2026

INTRODUCTION

The Coastal Communities Initiative, is a call to action. It arises from the reality that to safeguard our coastal ecosystems and chart a course towards a sustainable future, coastal communities must become architects of transformation, at the heart of a global movement that bends the curve on biodiversity loss and catalyses a new era of community-led conservation.

Often marginalized and underrepresented in policy decisions, coastal communities face the consequences of environmental degradation every day. Rising sea levels, depleted fisheries and the loss of vital habitats and resources threaten their very existence. Yet their resilience and resourcefulness in the face of adversity can inspire us all, and their stewardship can hold the key to a better future.

WWF is committed to working with these communities, recognizing their rights and knowledge and integrating them into the fabric of marine conservation efforts around the world, using our convening power to drive innovation and collaboration on an unprecedented level – then scaling locally led solutions to create lasting global change.

CONTEXT: A COMPELLING CASE

Coastal communities – Indigenous People, local communities and small-scale fishers – have historically been custodians of the coastal ecosystems on which they depend for sustenance, livelihoods and cultural identity.

But as the global ocean economy accelerates they face mounting threats from a range of industrial sectors beyond their control, compounded by the effects of climate change, and bear the worst of the impacts as they grapple with the degradation of their surroundings.

Not only are the impacts from these industries connected with poverty, reduced well-being and loss of cultural traditions, but they directly threaten the viability of the sectors most likely to deliver food security, nutrition and livelihood benefits to coastal communities in future: small-scale fisheries, coastal aquaculture and seaweed farming, along with ecotourism.



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WWF'S INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION VISION STATEMENT

WWF's vision is to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature. We believe that inclusive conservation approaches are critical to deliver wellbeing and equitable outcomes for people as well as restore and regenerate nature. The crises of biodiversity loss, climate change and inequality require systemic responses, and they challenge us to confront the structures and power dynamics that perpetuate inequalities inhibiting conservation.

Inclusive conservation consists of a variety of approaches that embrace diverse values and visions for how nature should be conserved while providing benefits for both people and nature. WWF strives to holistically understand the contexts in which we work and the dynamics between diverse actors and rights-holders. WWF recognizes and promotes the agency and leadership of local communities, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, and other groups experiencing marginalization. In addition to rights-holders, WWF engages government, civil society, and private sector actors for collective action that contributes to systems transformation at multiple levels.

WWF embraces a human rights-based approach mandated across all our work by our core standards - the Statements of Principles on Human Rights, Gender Equality, and Indigenous Peoples and the Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework. The Inclusive Conservation Guidance supports this work across the network, offering pathways of change to realize our vision.

January 2024

Coastal communities usually have little influence over the planning, management and enforcement of activities taking place in the marine territories where they reside. They're frequently subjected to human rights violations, and they're often ignored in decision-making processes. Women, youth and other minorities are particularly marginalized. This must change – but despite investments in capacity-building, progress has been slow, and systemic barriers leave vulnerable communities underserved and underrepresented.

Inclusive conservation is central to the work that's needed. Addressing historical power imbalances, promoting community self-empowerment, and advocating for more inclusive and equitable practices in marine habitat and species conservation, fisheries management, and coastal

climate adaptation is key to bringing about lasting change on the ground. For decades that's what WWF has been doing, collaborating with coastal communities and their extensive networks across 29 countries to strengthen local governance, amplify community voices, enhance resource access, support sustainable management and conservation, and integrate local solutions into local, national and regional policies.

But despite significant successes working at the local level, progress has been incremental, one community at a time. That's why we've brought our grassroots projects together, to scale and accelerate them through the Coastal Communities Initiative (CCI). After running for 3 years, the CCI is entering its 2nd phase of delivery, presented in this strategic plan.

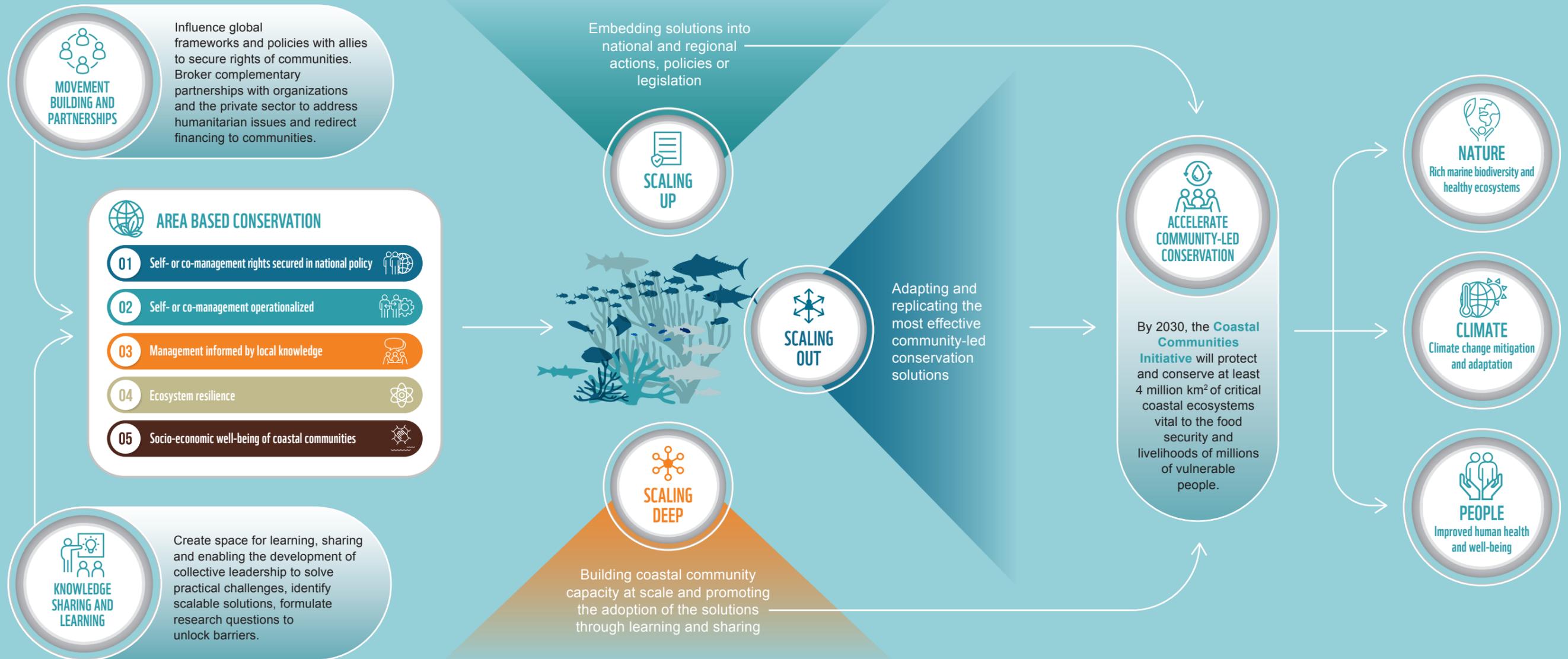
OUR RESPONSE: SCALING COASTAL COMMUNITY-LED CONSERVATION

The CCI is driven by a twofold Theory of Change. Our work on the ground follows a 5-point plan to support sustainable and inclusive natural resource management. Our scaling model directs how to accelerate the implementation of successful approaches across six marine regions. The CCI goal contributes to [WWF's Ocean Practice Vision](#) of Productive and resilient ocean ecosystems, sustaining people and nature.

ASSESSING OUR IMPACT

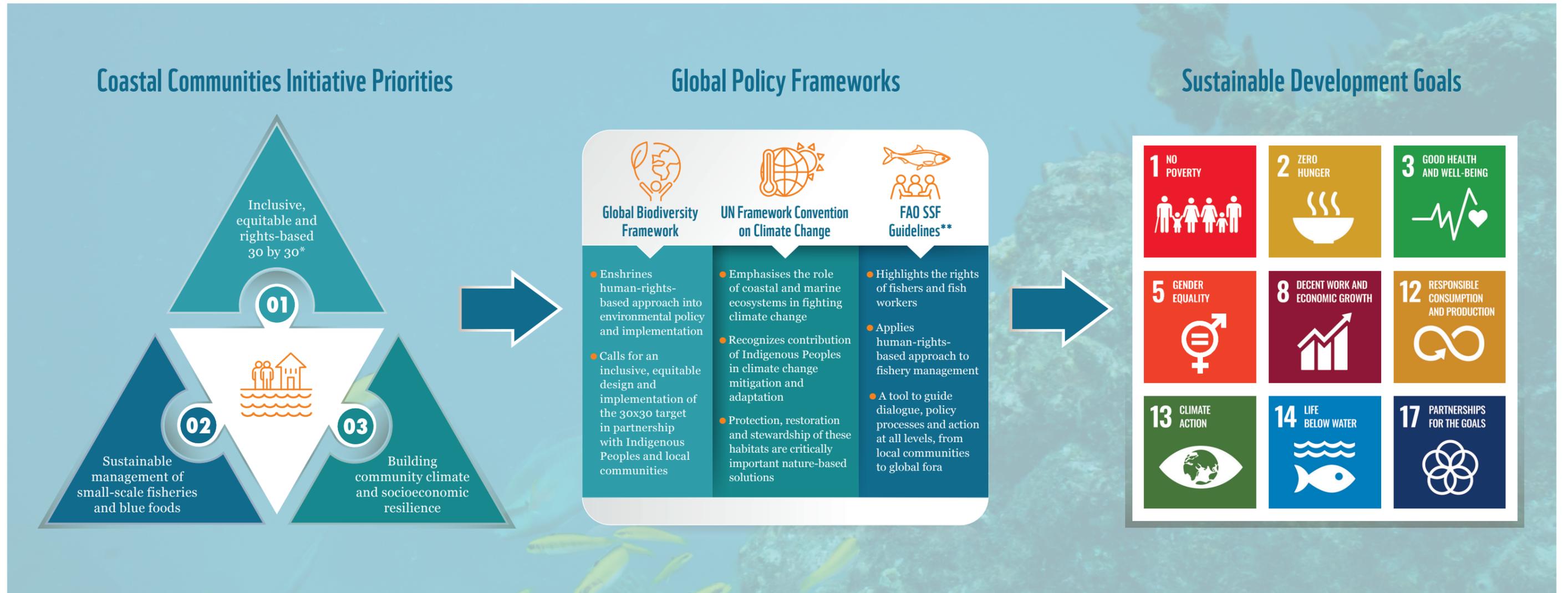
We track progress, impact and scaling across all local sites, countries and regional seascapes using a bespoke [online mapping, monitoring and evaluation platform](#) geared to our Theory of Change.

THEORY OF CHANGE



A TIMELY INITIATIVE – DELIVERING ON GLOBAL POLICY FRAMEWORKS

From the local to the global spheres the CCI aligns with and directly contributes to key international frameworks, as well as the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



*Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework contains the commitment to conserve at least 30% of our ocean by 2030.

**FAO SSF Guidelines - Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication

IMPLEMENTATION

Focused in six marine regions, the CCI is being delivered through a distributed leadership model, and is built on strong bottom-up engagement from WWF country offices, field staff, communities and local partners. A central coordination team works with country offices to scale their impact, develop new partnerships, share knowledge, and strengthen local to global wins.

Local partners are our primary channels for delivery on the ground, as they're uniquely positioned to collaborate with communities, taking actions that truly align with their needs and aspirations: we've established partnerships with more than 500 local organizations to date. But it's through our national, regional and global partnerships that WWF achieves scale on all levels.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL COLLABORATIONS



- Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security
- ICCA consortium regional hubs
- Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee
- Locally Managed Marine Area Network
- Mediterranean Friends of SSF
- Nairobi Convention
- Oceania First Peoples Forum
- Pacific Regional Environment Programme Secretariat
- Regional fisheries management organizations
- RIPAPE
- Small Island Developing States
- SWIOTUNA

GLOBAL COLLABORATIONS



- ABALOBI
- Aquatic Blue Food Coalition
- CARE International
- Duke University
- Environmental Defence Fund
- Environmental Finance
- Finance Earth
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
- Ocean Hub Africa
- Open Capital
- Oxfam
- Rise Up Call to Action for Oceans
- Save the Children
- Small Scale Fisheries Hub & Network
- Technoserve
- University of Queensland
- WorldFish

THE COASTAL COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE WORKS IN 6 REGIONS ACROSS 29 COUNTRIES AND 128 SITES



The map highlights six marine regions with callout images: Mediterranean and NE Atlantic (fishermen), Northern Indian Ocean (fisherman), Pacific (diver), Latin America and Caribbean (fishermen), South West Indian Ocean (fisherman), and Coral Triangle (diver).

1. © Carlo Gianferro / WWF Mediterranean / FISHMPABLUE, 2. © Troy Enekvist / WWF-Sweden, 3. © James Morgan / WWF, 4. © Meridith Kohut / WWF-US, 5. © Brent Stirton / Getty Images / WWF-UK, 6. © WWF-Malaysia / Eric Madej

OUR IMPACT: 2020-2023



CASE STUDY: BRINGING SMALL-SCALE FISHERS ON BOARD IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Woman fishing blue crab with traps in Ghar el Melh Lagoon in Tunisia
© Marion Payr/WWF-Austria

[READ FULL STORY HERE](#)



Most small-scale fishers work outside organized structures, so they've had little support in dealing with the growing challenges they've faced in recent years, from disappearing fish stocks and new invasive species, to COVID-19 and the fuel crisis. This is a key focus for the CCI, which is working in nine Mediterranean countries to transform small-scale fisheries management and governance, putting the fishers themselves at the heart of the structure to play an active role in decision-making.

There's no one-size-fits-all co-management model – different sites have different needs and characteristics, and require a different balance of representatives. The jurisdictional context varies too – some committee structures are codified by law, while others are more informal, with collective decisions agreed over a beer. But small-scale fishers all over the Mediterranean are seeing the possibilities co-management can offer, and getting more interested in the idea – encouraged and supported by WWF.

We're already seeing the results, in fishing communities around the Mediterranean and in terms of broader sector

visibility. Twenty-nine co-management units have been established, and 10 more are under development. A [regional platform](#) has been established to bring small-scale fishers and fish workers together to exchange their experiences and share best practices. The sector is being taken more seriously by managers and politicians, too: increasing amounts of SSF data are now being gathered and analysed, and socio-economic data is being monitored for the first time. Increasing amounts of funding are being unlocked. Most importantly, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean and the EU now include small-scale fishers in their management planning to improve the status of SSF.

"We always used to complain about things down at the harbour, but we never got anywhere," says Gianni Colelli, a fisher from Porto Cesareo, Italy. "Now though we can talk about these issues with people who can lend us a hand to solve them. It brings institutions together." Indeed, finding solutions together is what co-management is all about – and the same principle drives the work of the CCI.

CASE STUDY: A WEALTH OF INDIGENOUS WISDOM IN WAKATOBI

[READ FULL STORY HERE](#)



Established in 1996, the Wakatobi National Park is the third-largest marine park in Indonesia, encompassing 1.4 million hectares and providing a home for 942 fish species and 750 types of corals. It includes the largest barrier reef in Indonesia and has been designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

WWF and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) set up a joint programme to support the government in strengthening the management effectiveness of Wakatobi National Park. The programme included a focus on creating alternative sources of income for local communities, implementing seaweed farming development projects and launching marine ecotourism activities. It also developed a conservation capacity building programme which involved training, learning exchanges, coaching and mentoring.

One of many instrumental partners in the programme is [Forum Kahedupa Toudani](#) (FORKANI), an organization set up to support Indigenous People and local communities in managing natural resources sustainably, in harmony with their traditional beliefs. Together with WWF and TNC, FORKANI leveraged a wealth of

local experience to design activities and interventions that were responsive to the needs of communities in Wakatobi. "We put the Indigenous People on the frontline of fisheries management," explains Nusi Mursiati, the programme manager at FORKANI. She and her team supported local wisdom with in-depth fisheries data, engaging villagers in participatory fisheries monitoring activities and decision-making processes, building stewardship and accountability, and allowing local knowledge to drive development.

WWF is scaling its positive influence in Wakatobi with a new Marine Centre of Excellence and a Community Learning & Innovation Hub, developed in partnership with local community-based organizations. The work has been guided by the wisdom and experience of the Bajau people, a group whose connection to the sea offers hope for its future and a blueprint for collaborative marine conservation. Indeed, local leadership has been instrumental to success in the Wakatobi National Park, along with the government's willingness to collaborate with these communities. There's a collective determination to further scale this model out, and develop more coastal community-based learning centres throughout Indonesia.

OUR GOALS: 2024-2026

The second phase of the CCI is guided by three scaling objectives leading to defined, ambitious and achievable strategic interventions. By 2026, we aim for the CCI to safeguard and conserve at least 1 million km² of essential coastal and marine ecosystems vital to the food security and livelihoods of millions of vulnerable individuals.

OBJECTIVE 1	 SCALING UP
Strategic interventions	
By 2026, strengthen three global coalitions fostering agency for Indigenous Peoples, local communities and civil society and, at national level, ensure at least five national policies recognize the role and rights of these groups in the management of coastal and marine resources, incorporate a human-rights-based approach, and promote equitable access to resources and finance in priority regions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Strengthen global coalitions like the Small-Scale Fisheries Hub, Aquatic Blue Food Coalition, and Rise Up for the Oceans to promote the representation of coastal communities in relevant policy frameworks, including GBF & 30x30, UNFSS, UNFCCC, and FAO SSF Guidelines. ■ Coordinate advocacy efforts to amplify local voices at major international UN events, such as UNFSS, UNFCCC COP, COFI, SSF Summits, UN Ocean Conference 2025, IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, IUCN World Park Congress 2025, and International Marine Protected Areas Congress 2026. ■ Facilitate community and civil society empowerment and enablement through strengthening networks like SWIOTUNA, ICCA Consortium, RIPAPE, Oceania First Voices, LMMA Network, and Friends of SSF. ■ Shift national regulations that recognize collaborative governance, including by supporting processes for the identification of OECMs. Examples include one National Decree in EU countries and one fleet-level agreement in non-EU countries in the Mediterranean. In the Coral Triangle, recognize ICCAs sites as OECMs. In SWIO, three national level policy changes to recognize 200 LMMAs as OECMs. ■ Establish at least 10 investment-ready community enterprises focused on nature-based solutions (NbS), with a minimum of 50% ownership by women and youth. ■ Unlock micro-finance for 50,000 people and secure US\$30 million for NbS and localization of finance.
OBJECTIVE 2	 SCALING OUT
Strategic interventions	
By 2026, implement the 5-point plan in a minimum of 40 new sites, introducing novel or replicating and adapting proven community-led conservation solutions...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establish effective self- or co-management governance which includes an operational framework, fair decision-making mechanisms, inclusive benefit-sharing arrangements for marginalized groups, and a mechanism to address human rights violations.

OBJECTIVE 3	 SCALING DEEP
Strategic interventions	
By 2026, build coastal community capacity at scale and facilitate the widespread adoption of community-led conservation solutions. Achieve this through large-scale learning initiatives, peer-to-peer sharing, and the establishment of nine learning hubs aimed at training a minimum of 150,000 individuals. Simultaneously, enhance the capacity of WWF and its partners in adopting a human-rights-based approach and fostering inclusive conservation practices.	<p>...This includes enhancing governance models for equitable decision-making and benefit sharing, sustainable resource management, conservation and restoration, and addressing socioeconomic well-being and resilience to effectively manage and conserve 1 million km² of critical coastal habitats (baseline 2019: 62 sites).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Operationalize self- or co-management with community-led monitoring, local knowledge application, low-cost data collection, data-based harvest control rules, and the elimination of destructive fishing methods, especially those impacting endangered species. ■ Reduce overexploitation trends in at least 25 commercially valuable small-scale coastal fish stocks in at least 30 sites within priority regions. Reduce the exploitation of endangered species in at least four countries across priority regions. ■ Strengthen global partnerships to collaborate on human rights and socioeconomic development by supporting diversified livelihoods, gender empowerment, business skills development, financial literacy, disaster risk reduction, and access to finance. ■ Operationalization of a human-rights-based approach including capacity building efforts, mechanisms to address human rights violations, and ensuring the protection of ocean defenders.
OBJECTIVE 3	 SCALING DEEP
Strategic interventions	
By 2026, build coastal community capacity at scale and facilitate the widespread adoption of community-led conservation solutions. Achieve this through large-scale learning initiatives, peer-to-peer sharing, and the establishment of nine learning hubs aimed at training a minimum of 150,000 individuals. Simultaneously, enhance the capacity of WWF and its partners in adopting a human-rights-based approach and fostering inclusive conservation practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Facilitate community self-empowerment through establishment of capacity-building networks and community learning hubs at local, national, regional and international scales. ■ In 29 countries, train coastal communities in sustainable fisheries management, community-based natural resource and species management, habitat protection and restoration, financial literacy, business development, gender empowerment and social inclusion, and to use new technologies, including digital technology for monitoring and compliance. ■ Foster the development of 50+ new community facilitators, strengthening the role of women and youth leaders. ■ Compile evidence on the effectiveness, opportunities and challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples and local communities in protecting marine environments, supporting robust advocacy actions at national, regional, and global levels. ■ Facilitate cross-country and cross-regional collaboration and learning through knowledge exchanges. ■ Strengthen or establish accountability and tracking mechanisms for WWF's regional and country-level work with coastal communities through the CCI MEL framework. Build capacity to support improved monitoring of fisheries outcomes, food security, and climate resilience of communities.

THE FULL 2024-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN IS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

JOIN US:

Maximizing the global reach and impact of the Coastal Communities Initiative depends on its continued growth. If you're a coastal community leader, marine conservation practitioner, government official or development funder, then you can play a part in driving community-led conservation forward – and we can help you do it. To find out more, please get in touch.

Over and under the sea near the shore, Huahine island, Pacific ocean, French Polynesia © Shutterstock / Damsea / WWF

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CCI	Coastal Communities Initiative
COFI	FAO Committee on Fisheries
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FORKANI	Forum Kahedupa Tuhani
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework
ICCA	International Congress and Convention Association
LMMA	Locally managed marine area
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning

NbS	Nature-based solution
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECM	Other effective area-based conservation measures
RIPAPE	Ibero-American Artisanal Fishing Network
SSF	Small-scale fisheries
SWIOTUNA	South West Indian Ocean Tuna Forum
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change



Working to sustain the natural world for the benefit of people and wildlife.

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For more information and the full version of the Strategy, please contact Maria Honig, Coastal Communities Initiative lead, at mhonig@wwfmedpo.org.

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