



# WEST AFRICA PROGRAMME

# 1994-2022



# 7 COUNTRIES

**140**  
CONTRACT  
PARTNERS

**235**  
PROJECTS

**150€**  
MILLION  
BUDGET

MAURITANIA  
SENEGAL  
THE GAMBIA  
GUINEA  
BISSAU-GUINEA  
SIERRA LEONE  
CABO VERDE

MAVA's engagement in West Africa was preceded by the commitment of its founder, Dr. Luc Hoffmann, in the early 1980s, to one of the most emblematic sites in the sub-region: the Banc d'Arguin National Park . This support materialised in particular by the creation, in 1986, of the International Foundation of the Banc d'Arguin (FIBA, for its acronym in French) for the conservation of this wetland of global importance. Since 1994, MAVA has been active in the West African region, focusing on seven coastal countries: Cabo Verde, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal and Sierra Leone. These countries share ecological processes, natural resources and socio-cultural features as well as political processes.

Coastal West Africa is characterised by a rich biodiversity that provides remarkable goods and services. The sub-region is home to one of the four main upwelling areas in the world, resulting in high fish productivity. Some estuarine areas are of global significance and constitute critical sites for migratory water birds along the Eastern Atlantic flyway. The sub-region is also home to important breeding and/or feeding areas for many seabird, sea turtle and marine mammal species. A large proportion of local communities live in and/or depend directly on the natural resources and services provided by coastal and marine ecosystems. However, many pressures threaten the healthy functioning of these ecosystems, including habitat destruction, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, poaching, uncontrolled development of coastal infrastructure, mass tourism, extractive industries...

After starting its engagement in West Africa by supporting emblematic sites, first in the Banc d'Arguin and then in the Bijagos archipelago, MAVA has, in the early 2000s, extended its commitment to the entire ecoregion in a more integrated approach. At the same time, the Foundation's funding evolved from supporting individual projects to promoting thematic networks such as [PRCM](#) and [RAMPAO](#).

MAVA's merger with FIBA in 2015 gave rise to a programme that, with strong credibility and trust from key players in the sub-region, further strengthened actions on the ground. As part of the last strategic cycle 2016-2022, and in order to consolidate our achievements with a view to sustainability, MAVA's engagement has favoured a multi-stakeholder approach focussing on thematic strategic partnerships.

As part of the 2016-2022 strategy, MAVA's West Africa Programme set itself the objective of reducing six major and interrelated threats to biodiversity: anthropogenic disturbance of key habitats for sea turtles, water birds and seabirds; pollution from oil and gas activities; impact of infrastructure; lack of data on seagrass beds; **bycatch** of seabirds and turtles in industrial fisheries; and overfishing of small pelagics. By reducing these threats, the end result was to improve the conservation of six priority species and habitats: sea turtles, coastal wetlands, seabirds, mangroves, seagrass beds and small pelagics.

Since the beginning of its engagement in West Africa, MAVA has been the main private donor to conservation. Very few foundations were present in the region until 2020. This situation has evolved in recent years, particularly as a result of the efforts by the Foundation and West African partners to mobilize other donors. Several new initiatives funded by private foundations and institutional donors have emerged in the region, with which collaborations have been forged.

MAVA's intervention relied on long-standing partners, including international NGOs (FIBA, BirdLife, IUCN, Wetlands International, WWF), regional networks, national NGOs but also national protected areas and other priority sites management structures (PNBA, IBAP, DNA, DPN, DAMCP...). Partnerships were also established with national and international research institutions as well as with other national and international structures with relevant expertise.



## APPROACH AND ACHIEVEMENTS

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Conserving marine and coastal biodiversity, sustainably managing and using natural resources and strengthening the conservation community were the main focus of MAVA's engagement in West Africa.

### Strategic approach

When supporting projects, the programme focused on the following strategies:



**Protecting key sites and threatened species** by supporting the creation, management and governance of marine protected areas and other conserved areas on the one hand, but also developing and implementing species national action plans;



**Supporting scientific research on** species ecology and their interactions with the environment, threats and impacts at priority sites;



**Building the capacity** of partners through training, provision of specific equipment, experience sharing and the provision of numerous decision-making tools, key methodological guides and best practices guidelines for environmental management;



Strengthening the **regulatory framework** through supporting the creation and revision of legislations, as well as initiating the processes of ratification and **transposition** of relevant protocols into national domestic law;



**Awareness-raising** through innovative actions of information, communication and environmental education of various stakeholders categories (schools, MPs...);



**Advocacy** actions, mainly through national CSOs, by promoting national and regional coalitions; and



Developing **multi-stakeholder networks and partnerships** in order to improve governance, collaboration and communication, and amplify conservation impacts.

The programme also promoted **flagship initiatives**, potentially high-impact **pilot actions** and **innovative experiences** while retaining the flexibility to respond to emergency situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beyond the technical aspects, project funding has been associated with targeted **institutional support** to key civil society partners through the Impact and Sustainability Unit, with specific support for organizational development, leadership training and/or fundraising. This has led to the **emergence** of a significant number of strong, credible and professional organizations, recognised as key players in marine and coastal conservation in priority countries. This is the case, for example, in Cabo-Verde (Biosfera, Turtle Foundation and Fundação Tartaruga, Associação Projecto Vito), Guinea-Bissau (Tiniguena) and Mauritania (Nature Mauritania).

## Main results and impacts

Key results were achieved in five of MAVA's main thematic areas: wetlands and freshwater, birds, marine and coastal environments, economy and finance for nature, nature and culture. These main results are broadly divided into:

- Improved knowledge (sites, species, threats, connectivity, etc.);
- Regulatory, planning, management and policy decision tools implemented;
- Enhanced protection of sites and species;
- Strengthened regional expertise in different fields;
- An engaged civil society, capable of informing the public and influencing policy;
- Improved financial sustainability for iconic sites.

### WETLANDS

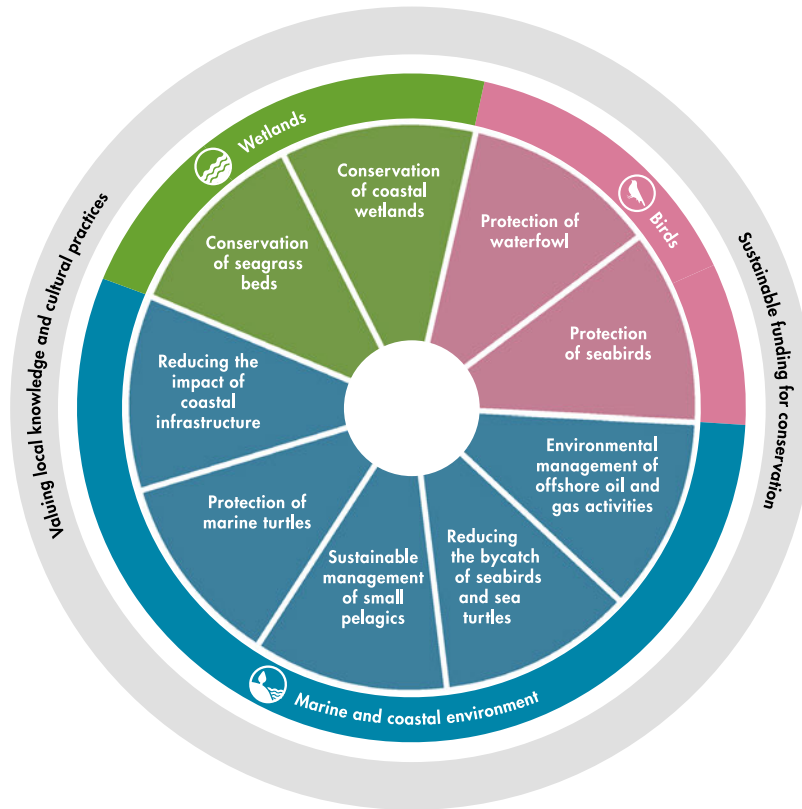
One of the main outcomes of the programme is the significantly improved knowledge of wetland ecosystems and their functioning, including mangroves and seagrass beds, and their [distribution](#) and linkages with other ecosystem components. [Policy decisions](#) have been taken and important tools have been adopted to better protect wetlands and improve their management, including the creation of new protected areas and the updating of MPA management plans. Priority sites such as the Banc d'Arguin, the Senegal River Delta, the Saloum River Delta and the Bijagos Archipelago are now better protected in 4 countries. The linkages between these sites are better taken into account in conservation actions and collaboration between managers is more effective. At the local level, more and more community-led wetland conservation initiatives are being instigated, such as mangrove restoration in the Saloum Delta.

### BIRDS

Significant investments in capacity building and research on [water birds](#) and seabirds have led to a better understanding of population dynamics, threats, ranges and feeding grounds. New colonies of previously unknown seabirds have, for example, been identified on most of the islands and islets of Cabo Verde for many species, and in particular for endemic species such as the Cabo Verde shearwater and storm-petrel. This has enabled the development of more adapted management tools. Local stakeholders involved in the monitoring and conservation of birds in West Africa now have more autonomy and better practical skills to undertake conservation actions for these species. More than 100 technicians have been trained, 4 masters (MSc) and 2 doctorates (PhD) have been awarded.

### MARINE AND COASTAL ENVIRONMENTS

**Coastal and marine endangered species and key sites** are now enjoying enhanced protection in the region. The main sites of global importance for green turtles (Bijagos) and loggerhead turtles (Boa Vista and Maio islands) are effectively protected and turtle poaching rates have been significantly reduced. New knowledge revealed the overall importance of the Banc d'Arguin as a feeding ground for green turtles, leading to its integration into the regional initiative for the protection of this species. The population of [monk seals](#), one of the most endangered mammal species, has been replenished at Cap Blanc, under the leadership of CBD Habitat, from 100 individuals in 1998 to 350 to date. This makes of this site the world largest breeding colony of the species.



New knowledge and partners' enhanced capacity in the field of species and habitat conservation, as well as a strengthened collaboration through strategic partnerships, are important for valuing the ecosystem approach. This will enable a more effective protection of priority sites, and more particularly the Banc d'Arguin, the Saloum Delta, the lower Senegal River Delta, the Bijagos Islands and the Cabo Verde Islands. This enhanced protection will also contribute to better taking into account marine and coastal species and habitats in legislation and other relevant environmental management measures in the development sectors.

This is the case, for example, with the **environmental management of offshore oil and gas activities**, a rapidly expanding sector in West Africa. The **areas most vulnerable** to these activities have been identified, operational oil pollution monitoring systems have been put in place, and national emergency response systems have been developed in the countries. The integration, for the first time, of the topic of environmental management of offshore oil and gas activities at Master's degree (MSc) level education in two countries (GIDEL/Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar and GAED/University of Nouakchott and Gaston Berger University of St-Louis) as well as through online courses (**MOOC**) is a positive development.

As part of the efforts to reduce the impact of **coastal infrastructure**, several regulatory, planning and management tools for coastal environments have been put in place, such as the Coastal and Adjacent Marine Area Management Plan (**POOC-M, for its acronym in Portuguese**) of **Boa Vista Island** in Cabo Verde, or the identification of Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) vulnerable to coastal infrastructure in three countries (Mauritania, Senegal and Cabo Verde). In these two areas (oil and infrastructure), the involvement of civil society organisations has been decisive in raising awareness. It has also led to the creation of local multi-stakeholder watch and alert committees in areas vulnerable to these sectoral activities. Capitalizing on the achievements has resulted in the replication of best practices in these two fields in the countries concerned.

Important results have been obtained in order to reduce bycatch of **seabirds (SB) and sea turtles (ST)**: overlap areas for fishing activities and populations of SB and ST have been identified, national legislation has been reviewed in Mauritania and Senegal to better take into account bycatch of these species, and local expertise has been enhanced at the national and regional level.

As for the **sustainable management of small pelagics (SP)**, socioeconomic and environmental challenges are significant. Substantial results have been achieved in developing adequate management tools, thus creating the conditions for a concerted and more effective management of these shared resources. Among others, **critical SP sites** were identified and characterised in 4 countries (Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia and Guinea-Bissau) in the form of an atlas; the fisheries data collection system was digitised and harmonised in five of the countries concerned; and participatory monitoring was strengthened in MPAs hosting critical sites. In terms of governance, transparency on fishing activities can encourage best practices; the continued presence of Mauritania in the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) has encouraged other countries to join this initiative

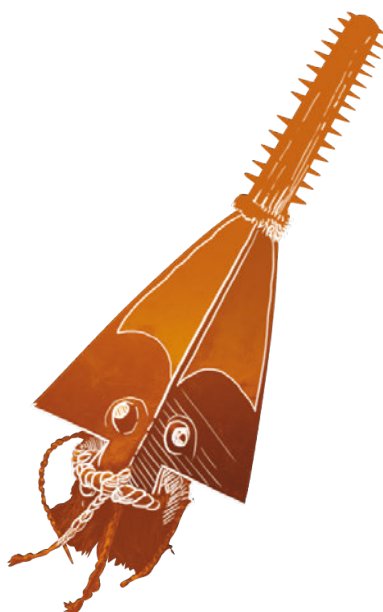
## CULTURE

The importance of traditional knowledge and community-managed areas, including sacred natural sites and other ancestral cultural practices, in the management of natural resources and the conservation of biodiversity is now better known. Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) are increasingly being taken into account in management and conservation decisions and actions, as well as in legal frameworks, with the support of civil society organizations, including **Tinguena** and **Natural Justice**. Strengthened governance structures and bodies, and better collaboration between Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas in three countries (Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Guinea) are additional significant achievements of the Programme. This has resulted in the replication of best practices developed on either side, and in networking between ICCAs at the national and continental levels.

## CONSERVATION FINANCE

Ensuring the sustainable financing of conservation actions is a major challenge at the global level and more particularly in West Africa. One of the key results of the programme was the establishment, in collaboration with other donors, of sustainable financing mechanisms in Mauritania (Banc d'Arguin and Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Trust Fund (**BACoMAB**)) and Guinea-Bissau (**BioGuiné** Foundation). These two mechanisms will ensure the sustainability of conservation actions in two MAVA iconic sites (Banc d'Arguin and Bijagos) and beyond. In addition, West African partners are now trained and aware of the importance and need for sustainable MPA and conservation financing, and are increasingly developing MPA business plans.

In addition, with the support of the Impact and Sustainability Unit, a REDD+ initiative (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) was successfully implemented in two national parks in Guinea-Bissau (Cacheu and Cantanhez), generating more than USD 4 million for conservation activities.



## LOOKING FORWARD

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### What remains to be done?

In order to scale up the results achieved so far, it is important to further collaborations in the field of scientific research with a view to improving knowledge about the Eastern Atlantic Flyway and the functioning of marine and coastal ecosystems. Continued support to coordinated actions and the revival of existing regional networks will also be needed for a better management of certain shared resources, such as small pelagics and migratory species. Building a regional coalition of CSOs, committed to these environmental issues, will also be essential.

At the institutional, policy and regulatory levels, it will be essential to ratify and transpose into domestic law the various additional protocols to the Abidjan Convention. In addition, initiatives to obtain RAMSAR or UNESCO World Heritage Site labels for coastal wetlands in the region should continue to be supported. Finally, the various action plans and strategies developed through the projects must be effectively implemented.



However, some challenges remain to be addressed and others are emerging, including the translation of scientific research results into conservation actions and/or management measures, the valorisation of the databases developed through the projects, improved collaboration between national institutions, the issue of climate change and the implementation of marine spatial planning. It would be important to use the results achieved for the conservation of seagrass beds and mangroves to encourage/develop initiatives on blue carbon, to sustainably preserve the marine and coastal ecosystems of the countries. Finally, it will be essential to achieve effective legal recognition of ICCAs in those countries.

All these conservation challenges require concrete funding actions by the States. Sustainable financing mechanisms will need to be developed for MPAs and all other areas to be protected, linked to ecosystem services such as carbon credit, tourism or fisheries.

### CHALLENGES

- Sustainable financing of conservation (adapted mechanisms, national budgets, etc.) in all priority sites;
- Effective implementation of the legal frameworks and completion of ongoing legal processes (approval or revision of legislation, transposition of tools and other relevant protocols into national law );
- Effective legal recognition of traditional/cultural practices in national legislation;
- Effective collaboration between countries for the collaborative management of shared fisheries resources and the integrated protection of migratory species;
- Development of an ecosystem approach to marine and coastal conservation through the implementation of marine spatial planning at regional level.



## OPPORTUNITIES

- The emergence in the region of new donors (private philanthropic foundations and public donors) and initiatives supporting existing partnerships and similar issues;
- The growing engagement of the private sector in conservation, particularly in terms of collaboration and funding;
- The existence of a strong and dynamic organised civil society, committed to mobilising stakeholders;
- The international recognition of the importance of several of our priority sites through the RAMSAR and UNESCO World Heritage labels;
- The existence of a considerable amount of information and outputs (scientific results, databases, studies, atlases, maps, etc.) available as decision support tools and for marine spatial planning;
- The adoption by countries of binding legal tools such as additional protocols on [integrated coastal zone management](#), [sustainable mangrove management](#), [environmental norms and standards](#) for offshore oil and gas activities...
- The global recognition of the role of wetlands and natural ecosystems as effective natural solutions to combat climate change and its impacts on coastal areas;
- The recognition, since 2018, under the Convention on Biological Diversity, of the importance of Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs), which include community-led traditional practices and conservation measures.

## How is Phase 3 shaping up?

It is very gratifying and reassuring to note that most of the action plans funded over the last six years in West Africa will continue, with several donors now engaging in the region to support post-MAVA actions. Out of eight action plans, five have already secured some or all funding needed to continue their activities, and efforts to raise funds are ongoing for the others.

In some cases, such as turtle conservation, partners will broaden their geographical scope for a more effective ecosystem approach. In others, such as the conservation of wetlands and coastal birds, the thematic focus will be broadened to better integrate emerging issues such as climate change.

Cross-cutting collaborations are also being established in the countries, such as the grouping of all NGOs working on biodiversity conservation issues in Cabo Verde. In all these action plans, the continuation and consolidation of existing strategic partnerships are considered essential. All the final evaluation reports of these action plans can be consulted [here](#).

## Learnings and recommendations

In view of our experience and interventions in the sub-region after several decades, the main lessons learned include:

- The proximity of the MAVA team with partners, their knowledge of environmental issues and the trust built over the years have been key factors in the success of our engagement in the region;
- West Africa can count on the experience and expertise of some regional players to manage and coordinate large-scale, multi-stakeholder projects;
- Flexibility in supporting partners did not prevent difficult decisions from being taken, when required for the success of the projects;
- Individual and/or organizational leadership has been instrumental in achieving results and impacts in some cases.

Recommendations mainly relate to the following:

- The definition of research programmes must clearly meet the conservation objectives of the region. The contribution and expertise of local stakeholders in research programmes must also be valued.
- The promotion of collaboration and regional consultation frameworks is essential for the sustainable management of shared resources and the protection of migratory species in an ecosystem approach.
- A regional coalition of civil society is essential for having more influence in advocacy, awareness raising and influencing policy decisions in favour of marine and coastal conservation.
- Particular attention should be paid to the political and institutional context of the countries, in connection with the implementation of regulatory frameworks, which often involves lengthy processes beyond project lifetimes.

The achievements of MAVA's almost 30-year engagement in West Africa have had, and will continue to have, impacts at site, species, ecosystem, individual and institutional levels. These results were achieved thanks to the commitment and determination of the programme partners. The sustainability and scaling-up of these achievements after the closure of MAVA are in their hands, both individually and within the thematic partnerships developed in recent years. Significant challenges remain, but the perseverance and resilience of the conservation community in West Africa no longer need to be proven. And as a partner of the West Africa programme so aptly put it: *"We are the legacy of MAVA!"*

