



Wetlands
INTERNATIONAL

**WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL
EASTERN AFRICA**

STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2030



Foreword

I am honoured to present the Wetlands International Eastern Africa Strategic Plan for 2024 to 2030. This plan is not only a reflection of our organization's commitment to the preservation and restoration of wetlands across Eastern Africa but also a testament to the collective efforts of our dedicated team, partners, and stakeholders.

Wetlands are vital to the ecological health of our region. They provide essential services such as water purification, flood regulation and habitat for diverse wildlife. However, these invaluable ecosystems face unprecedented threats from climate change, unsustainable development, and environmental degradation. Our strategic plan outlines a bold vision for addressing these challenges and advancing our mission to safeguard and restore wetlands for the benefit of communities and nature alike.

In developing this strategic plan, we have engaged in extensive consultations with experts, local communities, and partners. Their insights and feedback have been instrumental in shaping our goals and objectives. We have also carefully analyzed the current state of wetlands in Eastern Africa, identifying key landscapes where our efforts can have the greatest impact.

Our strategy focuses on 5 key Strategic Result Areas: i) enhanced wetland ecosystem integrity and resilience, ii) thriving communities and sustainable livelihoods, iii) strengthened policy and governance frameworks, iv) enhanced knowledge and capacity, and v) strengthened organisational capacity and sustainability. By aligning our actions with these priorities, we aim to foster a thriving and resilient wetland environment that supports both people and wildlife.

As the Board, we are committed to providing strong oversight and guidance to ensure the successful implementation of this plan. We recognize the importance of our role in risk management, strategic decision-making, and stakeholder communication. Our collective expertise and dedication will drive our efforts to overcome challenges and achieve our ambitious goals.

We are deeply grateful to our partners, donors, and supporters for their continued trust and investment in our mission. Your collaboration and support are crucial to our success. Together, we can make a significant difference in preserving the rich biodiversity and vital functions of wetlands in Eastern Africa.

This strategic plan represents a renewed commitment to our vision and a roadmap for our future endeavours. We invite you to join us on this journey and contribute to the protection and restoration of one of the world's most precious ecosystems.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to our mission.

Board Chairperson
Wetlands International Eastern Africa

Acknowledgement

It is with great appreciation and gratitude that I acknowledge the collective efforts and contributions that have made this Strategic Plan 2024 to 2030 for Wetlands International Eastern Africa possible. This plan is the culmination of rigorous research, thoughtful planning, and the unwavering commitment of many individuals and organizations.

First and foremost, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to our Board, whose vision, guidance, and support have been instrumental in shaping this strategic direction. Their leadership and dedication to our mission have provided a solid foundation for our planning process and have ensured that our goals align with the pressing needs of wetlands conservation in Eastern Africa.

I am also deeply grateful to our staff, whose expertise, passion, and tireless efforts have driven the development of this plan. Their commitment to excellence and their innovative approaches to wetlands management have been central to identifying our strategic priorities and formulating actionable objectives.

Our appreciation to our partners, donors, and stakeholders who have generously shared their knowledge, resources, and support. Your invaluable contributions have enriched our understanding of the challenges and opportunities we face and have helped us craft a plan that is both ambitious and achievable.

Special appreciation goes to the local communities and environmental experts who provided critical insights and feedback. Your firsthand experiences and knowledge have been essential in ensuring that our strategy is grounded in the realities of wetland ecosystems and the needs of those who depend on them.

The development of this Strategic Plan was a collaborative effort that brought together diverse perspectives and expertise. It reflects our shared commitment to preserving and restoring the wetlands of Eastern Africa, and it sets a clear course for our future endeavours.

As we move forward, we remain dedicated to implementing this plan with integrity, accountability, and a steadfast focus on our mission. We are confident that, with the continued support of all our partners and stakeholders, we will make meaningful progress in safeguarding these vital ecosystems for future generations.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this important work. Together, we will continue to advance our mission and achieve our vision of a thriving and resilient wetland environment in Eastern Africa.

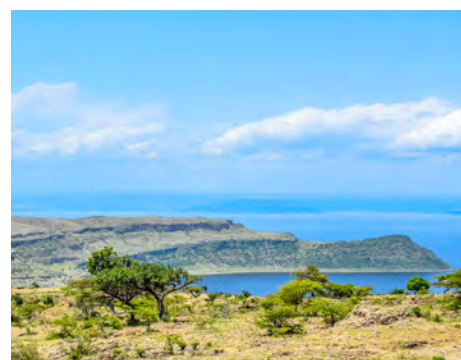
Director
Wetlands International Eastern Africa

Abbreviations

AU	African Union
AWB	Asian Wetland Bureau
BAF	Blue Action Fund Project
BASRB	Baro-Akobo-Sobat River Basin
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna
CMS	Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DEI	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
EAC	East African Community
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
GMW	Global Mangrove Watch
GNPA	Global Network Partnership Agreement
IDRM	Integrated Disaster Risk Management
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IWRB	International Waterfowl & Wetlands Research Bureau
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NBI	Nile River Basin Initiative
NEL	Nile Equatorial Lakes
OCA	Organizational Capacity Assessment
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
S2S	Source to Sea
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SOMN	Save Our Mangroves Now
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
WA	Wetlands for the Americas
WI	Wetlands International
WIEA	Wetlands International Eastern Africa
WIGO	Wetlands International Global Office
WIO	Western Indian Ocean
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

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1. Executive Summary

Wetlands International is the only global not-for-profit organization dedicated to the conservation and restoration of wetlands for people and nature. Wetlands International has been present in the Eastern Africa region since 2008. Operations officially started in the region with the registration of the Wetlands International Kenya Office (WIKO) in 2011. In 2017, the Wetlands International Eastern Africa (WIEA) regional office in Nairobi, Kenya, was officially mandated to operate as a regional office. Over the past ten years, operations in Eastern Africa have expanded from a single office in Kenya to additional offices in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda.

1.1 Vision and Mission

Wetlands International envisions a world where wetlands are treasured and nurtured for their beauty, the life they support, and the resources they provide. The mission is to inspire and mobilize society to safeguard and restore wetlands for people and nature.

1.2 Theory of Change

WIEA's Theory of Change aims to foster sustainable wetland management through a strategic sequence of inspiring, mobilizing, and upscaling actions. By first inspiring stakeholders through awareness campaigns and education, the organization seeks to build a shared vision and commitment to wetlands conservation. This leads to the mobilization of communities, partners, and policymakers, engaging them in active conservation efforts and strengthening their capacity to manage wetland resources effectively. The final phase focuses on upscaling successful practices by replicating and expanding them across broader regions, advocating for supportive policies, and securing additional resources. The result is "Vibrant Eastern African wetlands with enhanced biodiversity, effective management practices, engaged communities, and robust policy support for sustainability".



INSPIRE**Awareness Campaigns:**

Conduct targeted campaigns to highlight the value of wetlands and the benefits of conservation.

Education and Outreach:

Organize workshops and community events to educate all on wetlands and their significance.

Showcase Success Stories:

Highlight successful restoration and conservation projects to inspire action and show benefits of effective management.

MOBILISE**Community Engagement:**

Develop programs to involve local communities in conservation activities, decision-making, and management.

Partnership Building:

Forge partnerships with NGOs, government agencies, and private sector actors to pool resources and expertise.

Capacity Building:

Provide training and resources to local stakeholders to enhance their ability to participate in and support wetland management.

UPSCALE**Scale-Up Projects:**

Identify successful local projects and develop strategies for scaling them up to regional or national levels.

Policy Advocacy:

Work with policymakers to integrate successful practices into national and regional policies and strategies.

Resource Mobilization:

Secure additional funding and resources to support expanded conservation and restoration efforts.

**1.3 Strategic Result Areas**

This strategy has 5 distinct Strategic Result Areas which will drive the process of inspiring, mobilizing, and upscaling, which are central to the Theory of Change, leading to effective and sustainable wetland conservation outcomes.

Strategic Result Area 1: Enhanced Wetland Ecosystem Integrity and Resilience

Wetlands are vital for maintaining ecological balance, supporting biodiversity, and mitigating climate change. To ensure the long-term health and functionality of wetland ecosystems, WIEA will focus on restoring and maintaining the ecological integrity of key wetland areas. This involves rehabilitating degraded wetlands, enhancing critical habitats, and employing advanced technologies like satellite imaging to monitor changes and assess restoration effectiveness. By implementing these restoration efforts, WIEA aims to boost biodiversity, improve ecosystem connectivity, and enhance resilience to environmental threats.

<p>Enhanced Wetland Ecosystem Integrity and Resilience</p>	<p>Inspiring stakeholders raises awareness about wetland importance, while mobilizing efforts and upscaling practices forces on restoring and maintaining wetland ecosystems, enhancing biodiversity, and improving resilience.</p>
<p>Thriving Communities and Sustainable Livelihoods</p>	<p>Mobilizing actions engage communities in conservation, promoting sustainable livelihoods through eco-tourism and local participation. This aligns with WIEA's goal of strengthening local economics and fostering stewardship.</p>
<p>Strengthened Policy and Governance Frameworks</p>	<p>Upscaling practices includes advocating for policies and integrating successful interventions into formal policies, which supports the development of robust governance frameworks and effective regional collaboration.</p>
<p>Enhanced Knowledge and Capacity</p>	<p>Inspiring mobilizing stakeholders is complemented by efforts to enhance scientific understanding and build capacity through research, monitoring, and training, leading to better-informed decision-making.</p>
<p>Strengthen Capacity and Sustainability</p>	<p>The theory of change emphasizes adaptive management and strategic collaboration, aligning with the need to strengthen WIEA's governance, secure funding, and invest in staff development for long-term sustainability.</p>

Strategic Result Area 2: Thriving Communities and Sustainable Livelihoods

Sustainable livelihoods are essential for both community well-being and the conservation of wetland ecosystems. WIEA recognizes that local communities play a crucial role in wetland conservation and that sustainable economic activities can enhance their livelihoods while supporting conservation goals. To achieve this, WIEA will promote eco-tourism and other sustainable practices that provide financial benefits to local communities and encourage their active participation in conservation efforts. By developing community engagement programs, offering training, and raising awareness about the benefits of wetlands, WIEA aims to foster local stewardship and build resilience among communities dependent on wetlands. This focus will strengthen local economies, improve community engagement, and ensure that conservation efforts are supported by those who benefit most directly

Strategic Result Area 3: Strengthened Policy and Governance Frameworks

Effective wetland conservation requires strong policy and governance frameworks that promote sustainable resource use and climate resilience. WIEA will work to influence and improve these frameworks at local, national, and regional levels by advocating for the integration of wetland conservation into policy and promoting robust governance structures. This includes engaging with government bodies, developing policy recommendations, and monitoring policy implementation to ensure that conservation efforts are supported by effective regulations and practices. Through regional cooperation and policy development, WIEA aims to create guidelines that enhance sustainable practices and address both environmental and community needs. This approach will lead to improved policy frameworks, effective regional collaboration, and stronger support for wetland conservation.



Strategic Result Area 4: Enhanced Knowledge and Capacity

Understanding wetland ecosystems and building capacity among stakeholders are crucial for effective management and conservation. WIEA will enhance scientific understanding by conducting detailed wetland surveys, supporting research initiatives, and developing comprehensive data repositories. These efforts will be complemented by capacity-building programs designed to equip stakeholders with the skills needed for effective wetland management. By strengthening research, monitoring, and knowledge dissemination, WIEA aims to inform conservation practices and policy development, increase public support, and enhance technical expertise. This focus on knowledge and capacity will lead to better-informed decision-making and more effective conservation strategies.

Strategic Result Area 5: Strengthened Organisational Capacity and Sustainability

To successfully implement conservation projects and achieve long-term sustainability, WIEA must build and enhance its organizational capacity. This involves strengthening governance and management structures, securing diverse and stable funding sources, and investing in staff development. By revising governance frameworks, developing a comprehensive fundraising strategy, and establishing robust partnerships, WIEA will ensure that its conservation programs are well-supported and sustainable. Investing in staff training and professional growth will further enhance organizational effectiveness and resilience. This focus on organizational capacity will result in a more robust and sustainable conservation initiative, capable of addressing the challenges facing wetlands and supporting long-term environmental and community outcomes.

1.4 Anticipated Long Term Outcomes

The strategic plan aims to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Restored and resilient wetland ecosystems
2. Sustainable livelihoods and resilient communities
3. Effective policy and governance for sustainable wetland management
4. Widely adopted best practices and scientific knowledge
5. Sustainable and high-impact organisational framework

1.5 Geographical Focus

Stream	Ecoregions	Landscapes
Coasts and Deltas	East African Mangroves	Tana-Lamu, Kilifi, RUMAKI, Tanga-Vanga, Dar es Salaam, Lower Zambezi
Peatlands	Nile River Basin	Lower Nile, Lake Victoria Basin, Blue Nile River Basin, Baro Akobo – Sobat
Rivers and Lakes	Nile River Basin Rift Valley Lakes	Victoria Nile, Blue Nile, Baro Akobo – Sobat Blue Nile, Central Rift Valley, Omo-Turkana Basin and Southern Rift Valley

2. Overview of Wetlands International Eastern Africa

2.1 Our History

In 2011, Wetlands International established a country office in Nairobi, Kenya. In 2017, the Global Office designated this office as the regional hub for the Eastern Africa region. WIEA then developed its first strategic plan (2017-2027). Since then, WIEA has expanded its regional operations and worked to diversify its funding sources. MOUs have been signed with various organizations and government agencies. This has enabled WIEA to implement both country-specific and regional projects/ programs. Over the years, WIEA's staff has grown from under 20 in 2017 to over 40 by 2024.

Between 2013 and 2017, WIEA started work in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda. In 2016, WIEA opened a project office in Uganda. This was followed by the registration of legal entities in Ethiopia in 2019 and Tanzania in 2021. Field offices have also been established in Lamu and Lodwar (Kenya), Central Rift Valley (Ethiopia) and Nyamisati (Tanzania). In 2023, WIEA constituted its first Board and is now in the final stages of officially registering the Eastern Africa Regional Office to oversee operations across the entire region.

The revision of the strategic plan is necessary to effectively address emerging challenges and opportunities, integrate new priorities, and enhance the impact of our work across the Eastern Africa region. Revising the plan allows WIEA to stay relevant and responsive to changes while maintaining coherence with broader organisational objectives.



2.2 Vision

A world where wetlands are treasured and nurtured for their beauty, the life they support, and the resources they provide.

2.3 Mission

To inspire and mobilize society to safeguard and restore wetlands for people and nature

2.4 Core Values

- Our work is globally relevant
- Our work is based on sound science
- We work through partnerships and with a wide range of sectors
- We respect traditional values and Indigenous knowledge
- We respect human rights and aim to contribute to gender equality.
- We work in a transparent and accountable way.

2.5 Key Achievements (2017 – 2023)

Conservation and Restoration: WIEA has made significant strides in conserving and restoring critical wetland ecosystems. We restored 3,000 hectares of wetlands in the Ziway-Shalla and Omo-Turkana regions, contributing to ecosystem health and resilience. A buffer zone around Lake Ziway was successfully established to protect it from further degradation. Furthermore, we initiated restoration activities to improve ecosystem connectivity across the Tana-Lamu and Rufiji Delta landscapes, reinforcing the integrity of these vital habitats. In the Rufiji Delta, Tanzania, we directly restored 457 hectares of mangroves and indirectly restored an additional 66 hectares, bolstering coastal protection and biodiversity.

Community Engagement: We focused on empowering local communities to take charge of their environmental stewardship. Sustainable production systems, including beekeeping, were adopted by communities, enhancing livelihoods and promoting conservation. Over 1,000 community members were trained in sustainable resource management, equipping them with the skills needed for long-term environmental stewardship. Additionally, we facilitated community-based organizations (CBOs) to manage and protect wetland areas, fostering local ownership and ensuring the sustainability of conservation efforts.

Policy and Management Frameworks: Our efforts to strengthen policy and management frameworks have resulted in updated and new management plans for several critical wetland areas. These include the mangrove management plan for Rufiji in Tanzania, transboundary wetland sites in the Nile River Basin, and wetlands in Northern Kenya such as Suguta Mar Mar, Kisima, and Kelele. We also enhanced the Kimana Integrated Wetland Management Plan by incorporating a climate change adaptation framework and developed a comprehensive 15-year management plan for the Ethiopia Rift Valley Lakes Basin. Additionally, an integrated Catchment Management Plan was created for the Kinaite watershed in South Sudan, further supporting sustainable water resource management. However, the effectiveness of these frameworks depends on consistent implementation and enforcement, which is often hindered by limited resources and political will.



Policy Development and Integration: We supported the development of Uganda’s Wetlands Policy and Kenya’s Wetlands Regulations, which are critical to national wetland conservation efforts. Moreover, Integrated Risk Management (IRM) was successfully mainstreamed into national and subnational policies across Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda, ensuring that risk management is embedded within conservation and development initiatives.

Advocacy and Influencing: Our advocacy efforts have led to the formation of the African Mangrove Platform, a regional collaboration uniting stakeholders from the Western Indian Ocean and Southern Atlantic regions to advance mangrove conservation. We played a key role in lobbying the Federal Government of Ethiopia to ratify the Ramsar Convention, strengthening legal protections for wetlands. We also led efforts towards the designation of Sango Bay–Minziro as a Transboundary Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar site), and the endorsement of the National Wetlands Policy for Kenya.

Research, Knowledge, and Thought Leadership: We documented and published lessons learned to drive continuous improvement in conservation strategies and promoted landscape approaches at various levels. A comprehensive database of resource materials was developed to support the peatlands program design in Uganda, and we produced the first directory of Ethiopian Wetlands. We also collaborated on an Environmental Risk Assessment and Ecosystem Mapping in South Sudan and contributed to the “State of the Mangroves in the Western Indian Ocean” publication. A Biodiversity Monitoring Framework was developed to guide the tracking of species diversity, habitat conditions, and ecological processes within wetland ecosystems.

Institutional Development: We established a regional Board of Directors and initiated registration of the Eastern Africa entity, strengthening governance and presence. Country offices were opened in Ethiopia and Tanzania, with project offices in Uganda and field offices in the Central Rift Valley, Lodwar, Lamu, and Rufiji. To bolster internal capacities, we completed an internal capacity assessment, human

resource audits, and a salary survey, followed by the recruitment of key regional staff to handle key areas including Finance and Operations, GIS and Communications. Additionally, an advanced Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system was procured to integrate core management functions, enhancing operational efficiency across the organization.

2.5.1 Key Challenges

WIEA's efforts have been significantly challenged by the ongoing effects of climate change, including prolonged droughts and flooding, which have disrupted operations and hindered the achievement of conservation goals. Internal conflicts in some regional countries have further complicated the implementation of WIEA's initiatives, preventing the full realization of its objectives. Moreover, government policies and programs that are averse to wetlands conservation, combined with the complexity and fragmentation of environmental regulations across various countries, create substantial bureaucratic hurdles for WIEA. These regulatory challenges are compounded by competing land use pressures and rapid urbanization, which contribute to habitat loss and degradation. Together, these factors exacerbate the difficulties in achieving effective and sustained conservation efforts in the region.

2.5.2 Lessons Learnt

Strategic Approaches

- Effective program design and implementation are enhanced by leveraging strategic partnerships. Collaborating with a diverse range of stakeholders boosts overall impact and success. WIEA has leveraged strategic partnerships to enhance the impact of its projects, ensuring that diverse stakeholders are involved in wetland conservation and restoration efforts.
- Engaging stakeholders in the co-creation of programs fosters greater ownership and commitment, leading to more effective implementation and better results.
- Wetland conservation is most effective when approached from a landscape perspective, integrating practice and policy for sustainable land use.

Knowledge and Policy

- Combining scientific knowledge with practical field projects and policy advocacy has proven effective in stimulating policy development and implementation.

Financial and Resource Considerations

- Financial constraints of government institutions often hinder the achievement of conservation and restoration targets. Addressing these limitations is crucial for meeting conservation goals.
- Enhanced focus and resources for fundraising and resource mobilization are essential for supporting sustainable conservation efforts.

Community and Long-Term Engagement

- Empowering local communities and building their capacity is crucial for influencing policies and ensuring the sustainability of conservation efforts.
- Significant ecological restoration requires long-term commitment, with positive changes in large wetland systems often taking decades to materialize.

3. Situational Analysis

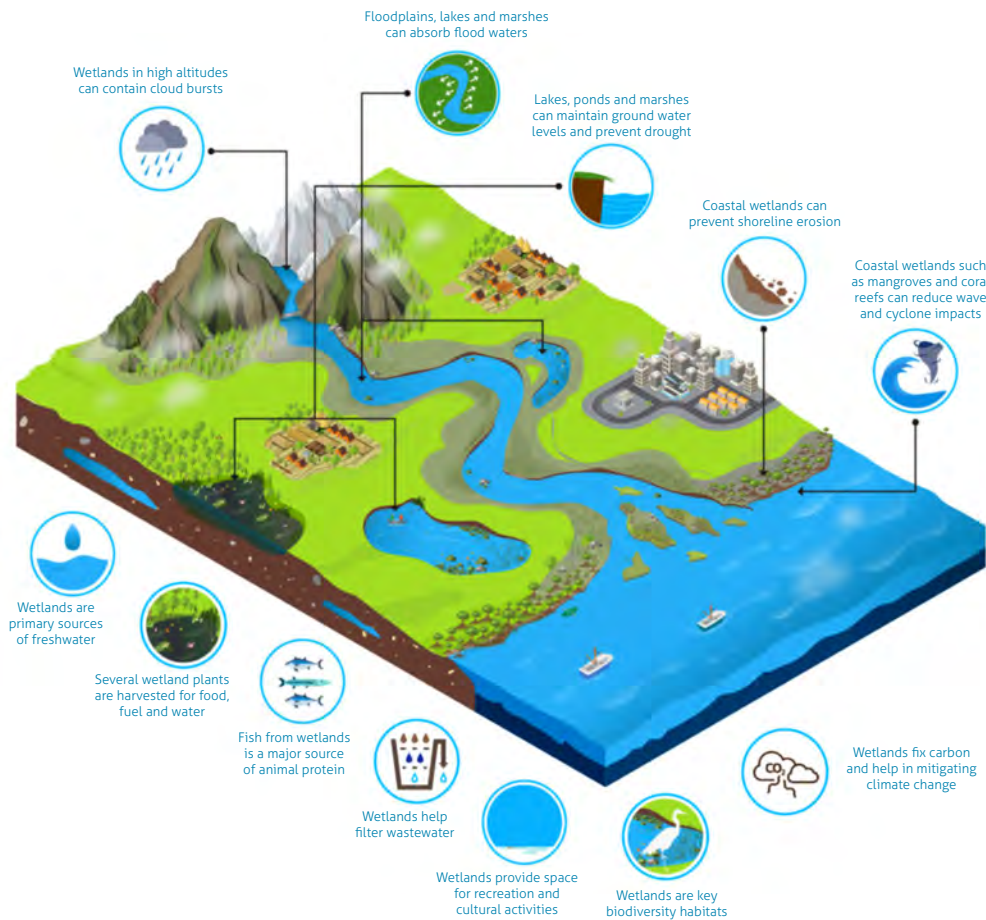
This context analysis examines the key factors that influence our work. By gaining insights into these factors, we can identify opportunities, address challenges, and ensure that our initiatives align with the needs and realities of the region.

3.1 Environmental Context

3.1.1 Why Wetlands Matter

Wetlands are ecosystems that occur wherever land and water meet. They exist in every country and every type of region-polar, tropical, wet, dry, high, and low altitude. Wetlands take various forms and are highly dynamic, connecting mountains to the sea. They are the most valuable ecosystem type for both society and the economy and provide various functions and services (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Functions and Services of Wetlands



Source: Wetlands International

3.1.2 Wetlands in Eastern Africa

Wetlands are extensively distributed in Eastern Africa (Figure 2) and develop in different formations due to the strong environmental gradient from sub-humid to semi-arid climatic regions that exist in the region. These variations in climate significantly influence the characteristics and functions of the wetlands.



Some wetlands in Eastern Africa are confined within specific countries, while others span borders or are situated in transboundary landscapes or river basins, such as The Great Rift Valley and the Nile River Basin, Lake Natron Basin (Tanzania and Kenya) and the Sango Bay-Musambwa Island-Kagera System (Uganda and Tanzania.)



Other key wetlands include the Sudd Wetland, (the largest tropical wetland in the world), Mara Wetlands, Rufiji Delta, Kilombero Valley, Lake Tana, Zambezi Delta, Limpopo River Floodplain and Mabamba Swamp.

3.1.3 Threats to Wetlands

Wetlands across Eastern Africa face mounting threats due to climate change, land use changes, pollution, overexploitation, and invasive species. Climate change poses a significant threat to these ecosystems by altering rainfall patterns, increasing temperatures and exacerbating extreme weather events like droughts and floods. This disrupts water levels and degrades ecosystems as seen in the Mabamba Swamp in Uganda, the Bale Mountains in Ethiopia and the Sudd Wetlands in South Sudan (Wasswa et al., 2018; Hagmann et al., 2016; Mastrotillo et al., 2016). Climate change also threatens wetlands' role as carbon sinks, which is critical for mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and buffering against climate impacts. Wetlands, such as those in Lamu, Rufiji Delta, and the Zambezi Delta, are vital for carbon sequestration and buffering extreme weather impacts, making their protection crucial for climate mitigation and adaptation. The Ramsar Convention and Paris Agreement, emphasize the importance of protecting wetlands to maintain their carbon storage and resilience

Land use changes including deforestation, agricultural expansion, and urbanization further degrade wetlands. In Mozambique and Kenya, deforestation leads to increased erosion and sedimentation, negatively impacting water quality and biodiversity (Pereira et al., 2020, Mwaura, 2012). Agricultural expansion in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda drains wetlands for cultivation, disrupting habitats and water regulation (Kairu et al., 2014, Speranza et al., 2015, Mwesigye et al., 2014). Urbanization encroaches on wetlands as seen in cities like Nairobi and Addis Ababa resulting in habitat loss and increased pollution (Mekonnen, 2022; Njenga et al., 2019). Urban development in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, has also significantly reduced the extent of mangrove forests and wetlands (Mgeni et al., 2006). Infrastructure developments including dam construction and road building, also alter natural water flows and disrupt wetland habitats, with examples including the Cahora Bassa Dam in Mozambique (MacDonald et al., 2005) and infrastructure projects in Kenya's Tana River Basin (Mwaura, 2012).

Pollution from agricultural runoff, industrial discharges, and untreated sewage further compromises wetland health. Lake Victoria in Kenya suffers from pollution leading to eutrophication and fish kills (Okello et al., 2016) while industrial activities in Maputo, Mozambique affect water quality (Nhantumbo et al., 2018). Plastic pollution adds to the problem, though wetlands can filter significant pollutants, including metals, sediment and nitrogen.

Overexploitation of fisheries and excessive water extraction strain wetland ecosystems. The Sudd Wetlands in South Sudan face pressure from overfishing and water resource extraction, threatening species like the Mongalla Gazelle (Nielsen et al., 2016). Similarly, overfishing in Lake Tanganyika disrupts the ecological balance and decreases endemic fish species (Cohen et al., 2015). Invasive species further disrupt wetland ecosystems by outcompeting native species and altering habitats. The spread of water hyacinth in Lake Victoria (Ochumba, 1990) and *Prosopis juliflora* in Ethiopia's Rift Valley (Getahun et al., 2019), exemplify these impacts.



Addressing these threats and multifaceted issues requires a coordinated approach that integrates scientific knowledge with practical conservation actions. Strengthening collaboration among stakeholders and leveraging scientific knowledge will be crucial in enhancing wetland resilience and preserving their vital functions.

3.2 PESTLE Analysis

3.2.1 Political

The political environment is crucial for wetlands conservation in Eastern Africa, with national and regional policies shaping the regulatory landscape (Annex1). While countries like Kenya, Uganda, and Mozambique have specific wetlands policies, others, such as South Sudan, lack comprehensive national policies but participate in regional efforts under the Nile Basin Initiative and Eastern Africa Community. These countries have also ratified key multilateral environmental agreements such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Convention on Biological Diversity, which provide a global framework for conservation and resource access. Transboundary wetlands in the region, such as those in the Omo-Turkana basin, increasingly intersect with peace and security issues due to competition over water and land, which can spark resource-based conflicts. Engaging in dialogue and peace-building efforts to address water-related conflicts can help mitigate tensions and promote cooperation. Integrating peace and security considerations into wetland management is therefore becoming more critical.

A comprehensive approach that includes strengthening implementation and monitoring of policies, community engagement, and conflict resolution mechanisms can boost efforts to manage wetlands sustainably. Implementing Integrated water resources management (IWRM) approaches which promote coordination across sectors and stakeholders and holistically management of resources is also vital for balancing environmental, social, and economic objectives. For transboundary wetlands, regional cooperation mechanisms supported by organizations like the African Union, IGAD, EAC, NBI, LVBC and SADC are key in fostering collaborative efforts. However, these regional initiatives must also be supported by robust national policies and active engagement from all stakeholders to achieve lasting environmental sustainability and regional stability.

3.2.2 Economic

Wetlands are integral to local economies in Eastern Africa, providing resources such as water, fish, and fertile soil for agriculture. However, agriculture and industry, significantly impact wetlands with agriculture, leading to land conversion and altered water use patterns which can degrade wetland ecosystems. In the Kilombero Valley, Sudd Wetland, Baro-Akobo Basin and Tana River Delta activities that include large-scale agricultural projects, upstream water extraction for irrigation, infrastructure development and oil exploration have altered water flow, threatening the wetland health and the communities depending on them. Wetlands also attract tourism, which can lead to environmental degradation if not managed sustainably e.g. Mabamba Bay in Uganda.

As economic growth and industrialization increase, the pressures on wetland ecosystems are expected to increase. Balancing economic development with wetland conservation requires integrated management plans, sustainable agricultural practices, and stronger regulations. Promoting eco-tourism,



raising awareness, and involving local communities in decision-making are crucial. Diversifying income sources and investing in wetland restoration projects can also support both economic growth and conservation efforts. The recognition of sustainable development and eco-tourism offers opportunities to integrate conservation with economic growth. Achieving this balance demands enforcing regulations, engaging stakeholders, and incentives for sustainable practices. This approach helps to protect wetlands' ecological integrity while promoting economic prosperity.

3.2.3 Environmental

Eastern Africa's diverse wetlands - lakes, rivers, swamps, and marshes - are vital for water purification, flood regulation, and wildlife habitat. Despite this, they face significant threats from pollution, invasive species, climate change, and unsustainable land use practices. The region is increasingly vulnerable to climate-induced disasters, such as floods and droughts which disproportionately affect nearby communities. Integrating Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) into wetland management is essential for enhancing resilience.

The region's wetlands support rich biodiversity including endangered species and migratory birds along the African-Eurasian Flyway. Key migratory paths include Uganda's Lake Victoria basin and Kenya's highlands, as well as along the coastlines of Kenya and Tanzania. Species such as the Barn Swallow, Willow Warbler and Red-backed Shrike travel through Uganda and the Lake Victoria basin. Others including the Marsh Warbler, Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* and Basra Reed-warbler take a route through the Kenyan highlands. Wetlands such as the Tana Delta and Rufiji Delta are vital for migratory birds, with the annual migration of shorebirds to mudflats in areas like Lamu and the Rufiji River being particularly at risk due to environmental changes (Patenaude et al., 2020). Efforts, such as the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) focus on habitat restoration and sustainable land use to protect migratory birds and critical ecological linkages. They encourage cross-border cooperation in the conservation of shared wetland ecosystems, which is also essential for migratory species and maintaining ecological connectivity.

The Rift Valley Lakes, such as Nakuru, Bogoria, and Naivasha in the Southern Rift, and Ziway, Abijatta, Shala, Langano, and Abaya in the Northern Rift, are known for fish populations, flamingos, and other bird species. Lake Tanganyika, the world's second-deepest freshwater lake is rich in endemic fish, molluscs, and crustaceans. The Omo-Turkana Basin supports a rich array of bird and fish species while the Sudd Wetlands are crucial for migratory birds and endemic mammals and Lake Victoria is a hot spot for fish diversity and varied birdlife. The Blue Nile River Basin also plays a key role in supporting migratory birds and unique biodiversity.

3.2.4 Technological

Technological advancements such as satellite imaging, remote sensing and innovations in water purification, pollution control, and sustainable agriculture offer significant potential for improving wetland management in Eastern Africa. They range from the use of drones for monitoring to GIS technology to map biodiversity hotspots, mobile apps, citizen science, monitoring water resources and the use of conservation finance platforms. Investment in these technologies is advancing efforts to protect and manage wetland ecosystems more effectively.

Wetlands International has been involved in the development of some tools. For instance, the Critical Site Network (CSN) Tool (<https://www.wetlands.org/knowledge-base/critical-site-network/>) was designed to identify and prioritize key areas for bird conservation. It integrates data on bird species, habitat conditions, and threats to highlight sites of global significance for birdlife, particularly migratory species. Global Mangrove Watch (GMW) (<https://www.globalmangrovetwatch.org/>) provides comprehensive data on mangrove forest cover and changes. It uses satellite imagery and remote sensing to monitor mangrove extent, health, and dynamics over time, supporting conservation and restoration efforts.



Some countries in the regions may struggle to fully benefit from these technologies due to challenges ranging from varying infrastructure levels and technical expertise. In addition, it is also important to consider the high cost of the technologies. To bridge this gap, investments in infrastructure and technical capacity building are essential. Strengthening local knowledge and skills will ensure effective implementation of conservation strategies and support sustainable wetland management.

3.2.5 Social

Eastern Africa is experiencing significant demographic shifts with rapid population growth and urbanization increasing pressure on natural resources like wetlands. Expanding cities and intensifying agriculture are leading to wetland encroachment and degradation. While urbanization and agriculture are crucial for economic growth, their impacts on wetlands must be managed to avoid long-term ecological damage.

Within Eastern Africa, the economic dependence of local communities on wetlands is profound. Wetlands provide vital resources supporting livelihoods across the region. This economic dependence means that conservation efforts must be carefully designed to avoid adverse effects on local livelihoods. Conservation initiatives that overlook the socio-economic needs of communities can face resistance and lack of support. Therefore, integrating economic considerations into conservation planning is essential for gaining community backing and achieving sustainable outcomes. Ensuring that conservation efforts do not undermine local activities is crucial for their success.

Effective conservation also involves engaging diverse community members, including women and youth, in decision-making processes. The challenge is to ensure that all community members have a voice and that their inputs are meaningfully integrated into conservation strategies. In Kenya, initiatives like the Community Forest Association (CFA) model involve local women and youth in forest management and conservation activities. This participatory approach has led to improved forest management and biodiversity conservation, showcasing the benefits of inclusive decision-making; it enhances sustainability outcomes and fosters long-term environmental stewardship. Engaging with local leaders and organizations also helps address varying community governance structures.

Local cultural practices linked to wetlands can both support and complicate conservation efforts. Designing conservation strategies that respect local traditions while promoting sustainable practices is key. This requires a nuanced approach that acknowledges the role of cultural practices in resource management and seeks to harmonize them with conservation objectives.

3.3 SWOT Analysis

See Annex 2

Strengths and Opportunities Analysis: WIEA possesses a strong foundation in wetlands conservation, backed by extensive expertise, regional presence, and a solid reputation in environmental advocacy. The organization's adaptive and effective programs, diverse project portfolio, and robust partnerships enhance its impact across the region. With highly qualified and passionate staff supported by the current infrastructure, the organization is well-positioned to capitalize on emerging opportunities. The



global focus on climate change presents a significant opportunity, as wetlands play a crucial role in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Leveraging this connection can attract climate finance and support greenhouse gas reduction efforts. Additionally, the supportive international frameworks and favourable regional and national government laws offer avenues for scaling conservation efforts and securing long-term commitments.

Weaknesses and Threats Analysis: However, the organization faces internal challenges that could hinder its growth and effectiveness. Limited fundraising capacity and gaps in knowledge management may restrict its ability to meet financial needs and make informed decisions. Issues with organizational structure, board oversight, and the lack of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system could further impact operational efficiency. Externally, political instability, climate change impacts, and rapid urbanization pose significant threats to wetland conservation. Pollution, insecurity, and large-scale infrastructure developments also threaten the health and stability of wetland ecosystems. Moreover, the transition of countries like Kenya and Tanzania to middle-income status makes it imperative for WIEA to diversify its funding sources and strengthen its strategic fundraising capabilities. Moreover, the organization must enhance its external communication and branding efforts to raise awareness and build broader support for wetlands conservation. By addressing these threats and leveraging its strengths more effectively, WIEA can ensure its continued impact in safeguarding the region's wetlands amidst evolving environmental and socio-political challenges.

3.4 Stakeholder Analysis

Primary stakeholder groups (Annex 3) include:

- **Local Communities:** Residents living in or around wetland areas and relying on them for their livelihoods. Their activities include fishing, agriculture, and water use, making their involvement crucial for ensuring conservation strategies are locally relevant and sustainable.
- **Government Agencies:** Various levels of government—local, national and regional—that are responsible for environmental regulation, land use planning, and natural resource management. Their policies and support are essential for implementing effective conservation measures. Political leaders and decision-makers at both local and national levels wield significant influence over policy implementation and funding. Engaging these stakeholders is crucial for garnering support and ensuring alignment with conservation goals.
- **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** Organizations working in environmental conservation, sustainable development, and related fields. These groups offer valuable expertise, advocacy, and potential for collaborative projects.
- **Donors and Funding Partners:** Institutions and individuals who provide financial resources; their funding is vital for sustaining conservation efforts and enabling the successful execution of strategic initiatives.
- **Academic and Research Institutions:** Entities that research wetlands ecology, conservation practices, and related topics. Their research provides valuable data and insights that inform strategies and enhance understanding of wetland ecosystems.
- **Private Sector:** Businesses and industries with interests or impacts on wetlands, such as those involved in agriculture, tourism, and resource extraction. Engaging with the private sector can lead to mutually beneficial partnerships and innovative solutions.
- **Media and Public Influencers:** Media outlets and public figures who can help raise awareness, shape public opinion, and advocate for wetlands conservation. Their role in influencing perceptions and mobilizing support is significant.
- **International Organizations:** Global and regional bodies that work on environmental issues and conservation, such as the Ramsar Convention, IUCN, and UNEP. Collaboration with these organizations can enhance global reach and impact.

Overall, these stakeholders have the opportunity to strengthen collaboration, mobilize resources, and enhance the effectiveness of wetland conservation efforts. These stakeholders have been mapped and engagement strategies will be developed to ensure that we build strong partnerships and enhance collaboration.

3.5.1 Beneficiaries

Our primary beneficiary groups include:

- **Local Communities:** Residents, including individuals, youth and households whose livelihoods are derived from wetland resources benefit from improved ecosystem services, such as clean water, fertile soil, and flood regulation. Communities are the centre of our strategic approaches to restoring the integrity of wetland ecosystems and sustainably managing wetlands
- **Indigenous Groups:** Indigenous communities with traditional knowledge and cultural ties to wetland areas benefit from the preservation of culturally significant sites and sustainable management practices that respect their traditions.
- **Smallholder Farmers:** Farmers rely on wetlands for irrigation and soil fertility, and they benefit from sustainable land and water management practices that enhance agricultural productivity and resilience.
- **Fisherfolk:** Individuals and communities engaged in fishing activities benefit from healthy wetland ecosystems that support fish populations and ensure the sustainability of their livelihoods.
- **Conservation Practitioners:** Professionals and organizations working in wetlands conservation and related fields benefit from collaborative opportunities, research findings, and capacity-building initiatives.



4. Strategic Focus



WIEA has made significant strides in conservation, community engagement, policy development, and institutional growth and the progress made so far is commendable. The challenge now lies in ensuring that these gains translate into sustainable, long-term impacts that can withstand the test of time and evolving challenges. The need to scale successful interventions is critical. The restoration of hundreds of hectares of wetlands and mangroves, for example, is a major accomplishment. However, these efforts can be expanded and replicated across a broader landscape to create a meaningful and lasting impact on ecosystem health and biodiversity. Scaling up requires not only additional resources but also the development of innovative, context-specific approaches to address diverse challenges effectively.

Moreover, it is essential to address the underlying systemic issues that continue to threaten the resilience of Eastern Africa's wetlands and the communities that depend on them. These issues include climate change, population growth, unsustainable land use practices, and weak governance structures. Without tackling these root causes, even the most successful conservation efforts may only offer temporary relief. For instance, while the establishment of buffer zones and the adoption of sustainable livelihoods by local communities are positive steps, they must be supported by broader efforts to reduce external pressures on wetlands, such as deforestation, agricultural expansion, and water mismanagement.

The path forward must be marked by a commitment to adaptive management. This means being flexible and responsive to new information, changing conditions, and emerging challenges. Conservation strategies must be continually reassessed and adjusted. This adaptive approach requires a culture of continuous learning, where lessons learned from both successes and failures are used to inform future actions. It also necessitates robust monitoring and evaluation systems that can provide timely data to guide decision-making.

Strategic collaboration across sectors and borders is equally important. Wetlands do not exist in isolation; they are part of larger ecological, social, and economic systems that transcend political boundaries. By fostering strong partnerships and leveraging adaptive management, WIEA can address both internal and external challenges, ensuring the continued protection and sustainable management of Eastern Africa's wetlands amidst a dynamic environmental and socio-political landscape. Transboundary cooperation is particularly crucial in regions like the Nile River Basin, where wetlands span multiple countries. By working together, stakeholders can share knowledge, pool resources, and coordinate actions to achieve greater impact.

In conclusion, WIEA's achievements provide a foundation upon which future success can be built. Ensuring sustained, long-term impacts will require scaling up interventions, addressing systemic challenges, embracing adaptive management, and fostering strategic collaboration. This journey is not without its obstacles, but with a clear vision, strong partnerships, and a commitment to continuous improvement, WIEA is well-positioned to make a lasting difference in the conservation and resilience of Eastern Africa's wetlands.

4.1 Theory of Change

WIEA's Theory of Change aims to foster sustainable wetland management through an approach of inspiring, mobilizing, and upscaling actions. The overarching goal is to foster effective conservation and long-term resilience of wetland ecosystems in Eastern Africa. By first **inspiring** stakeholders through targeted awareness campaigns and educational initiatives, the organization seeks to build a shared vision and commitment to wetlands conservation. Generating a strong foundation of understanding and urgency, sets the stage for the **mobilization** of communities, partners, and policymakers, engaging them in active conservation efforts and strengthening their capacity to manage wetland resources effectively. The final phase focuses on **upscaling** successful practices by replicating and expanding proven interventions across broader regions, advocating for supportive policies, and securing additional resources to sustain and grow conservation efforts.

The model operates under several key assumptions: stakeholders will respond positively to awareness efforts, success stories will inspire wider adoption of best practices, and motivated stakeholders will contribute resources. Additionally, partnerships will enhance the availability of resources and expertise, scaled-up practices will remain effective across diverse contexts, policymakers will integrate successful practices into formal policies, and sufficient funding will be available to support expansion.

4.2 Strategic Result Areas



SRA 1: Enhanced Wetland Ecosystem Integrity and Resilience

Restore degraded wetland areas and conserve critical habitats to enhance biodiversity, ecosystem health, and resilience to climate change impacts.

SRA 1 aims to restore and maintain the ecological integrity of key wetland ecosystems to enhance their resilience and health. This involves a multifaceted approach, including conducting comprehensive baseline assessments to establish the current state of wetland ecosystems and develop a robust understanding of their conditions. This will be complemented by detailed wetland inventories, which will inform targeted restoration efforts. The development and implementation of restoration plans will integrate landscape visioning and management strategies, ensuring alignment with national biodiversity strategies and climate commitments (NBSAPs and NDCs). These plans will also address critical flyways and urban wetlands, ensuring a holistic approach to ecosystem restoration. Advanced monitoring technologies will be deployed to track the health and progress of restoration efforts. This will include incorporating the Global Mangrove Watch and the biodiversity monitoring framework to measure the effectiveness of interventions. Regular evaluations and adjustments will ensure that restoration efforts are on track and yield the desired outcomes. Successful restoration projects will be scaled up based on proven success, with a focus on expanding these efforts to wider landscapes and integrating lessons learned to maximize impact.

Desired outcomes:

- **Restored and Healthy Wetland Ecosystems:** Wetlands are rehabilitated to a state where they function effectively, with improved ecological balance and vitality.
- **Increased Biodiversity:** A notable rise in the variety and number of species in the wetland areas, indicating healthier and more diverse ecosystems.
- **Enhanced Ecosystem Services:** Significant improvements in the provision of ecosystem services such as water purification, flood regulation, and carbon sequestration.

SRA 2: Thriving Communities and Sustainable Livelihoods

Promote sustainable economic activities that enhance community livelihoods, encourage active participation in conservation, and support local economies

SRA 2 focuses on supporting and enhancing sustainable livelihoods for local communities while fostering their active participation in wetland conservation. Community engagement programs will be launched to raise awareness about the benefits of wetlands and promote sustainable practices. These programs will be designed to deliver significant social and cultural returns, ensuring that local communities are actively involved in conservation efforts. Eco-tourism initiatives will be developed and piloted, aimed at boosting local economies while highlighting the value of wetland ecosystems. The initiatives will be designed to provide natural, social, financial, and cultural returns, in line with the 4 Returns Framework. Training and capacity-building programs will be implemented to equip local stakeholders with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate effectively in conservation activities. These efforts will be monitored and assessed to evaluate their economic impact and effectiveness, with successful programs scaled up to reach broader audiences.

Desired outcomes

- **Economic and Social Benefits for Communities:** Local communities experience increased income, job opportunities, and overall quality of life through sustainable practices and eco-tourism.
- **Active Community Participation:** Communities are actively involved in and contribute to conservation efforts, demonstrating strong engagement and ownership of conservation projects.
- **Resilient and Engaged Communities:** Communities show improved resilience to environmental changes and are actively supportive of and engaged in conservation initiatives.





SRA 3 Strengthen Policy and Governance Frameworks

Develop and implement policies and governance frameworks that ensure sustainable use and management of wetland resources, incorporating climate-resilient practice

SRA 3 seeks to enhance policy and governance frameworks to support effective wetland conservation and management. The first step involves conducting a comprehensive review of existing policies and regulations to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement. This has already been undertaken in some landscapes. The review will ensure alignment with NBSAPs and NDCs. Developing and advocating for policy changes will be a central component, focusing on formulating recommendations that improve wetland conservation and promote sustainable practices. Advocacy activities will be supported by stakeholder engagement to drive policy adoption and implementation. Regional cooperation will be facilitated to promote collaborative efforts on wetland management, including the protection of critical flyways and migratory routes. Monitoring the implementation of policies will ensure that they are effectively supporting conservation goals and making a tangible impact. Promoting the adoption of sustainable practices will be integral to this SRA, ensuring that conservation efforts are reinforced through supportive policies and practices.

Desired outcomes:

- **Effective and Integrated Policy Frameworks:** Comprehensive and cohesive policies are developed and implemented, effectively incorporating wetland conservation into broader resource management strategies.
- **Robust Governance Structures:** Strong, transparent, and effective governance systems are established to oversee and support wetland conservation efforts.
- **Enhanced Regional Cooperation:** Increased collaboration and coordination among countries and regions lead to more effective and unified wetland conservation efforts.



SRA 4 Enhanced Knowledge and Capacity

Strengthen research, monitoring, and capacity-building initiatives to improve understanding, management, and public awareness of wetland ecosystems

SRA 4 focuses on enhancing scientific understanding of wetland ecosystems and building capacity for effective management. Identifying knowledge gaps and developing a comprehensive research agenda has been crucial for addressing critical areas of uncertainty and improving conservation strategies. Further research and monitoring projects will be launched to gather data and enhance understanding of wetland ecosystems. These projects will include support for biodiversity monitoring frameworks and, where applicable, initiatives like the Global Mangrove Watch. Data repositories will be developed to store and manage research findings, ensuring they are accessible for future use. Capacity-building programs will be implemented to enhance the skills and expertise of stakeholders involved in wetland management. These programs will be complemented by efforts to disseminate research findings through workshops and publications, ensuring that knowledge is effectively shared and utilized. The effectiveness of capacity-building efforts will be evaluated and expanded as needed to address emerging needs and opportunities.

Desired outcomes

- **Advanced Scientific Knowledge:** Scientific understanding of wetland ecosystems is expanded through research and data collection, contributing to improved management and conservation practices.
- **Informed Stakeholder Decisions:** Stakeholders make better-informed decisions regarding wetland management and conservation, guided by the latest research and comprehensive data.
- **Strengthened Technical Expertise:** The capacity of individuals and organizations involved in wetland conservation is enhanced through training and skill development, leading to more effective management.

SRA 5 Strengthen Organisational Capacity and Sustainability

Establish a fully functional governance and management structure for effective wetland conservation, ensuring robust organizational capacity and diverse funding source

SRA 5 aims to build and enhance the organizational capacity of WIEA to ensure the effective implementation of conservation projects and long-term sustainability. It focuses on governance frameworks, management structures and systems, staff development, partnerships and fundraising as follows:

- i. **Improve governance and management structure:** Finalizing the registration processes for the Eastern Africa and Uganda offices to ensure full legal compliance will be key. A governance framework that clarifies roles and responsibilities for regional and country boards will be developed. By aligning our governance structures with global standards and operationalizing the expanded board, WIEA will establish a solid foundation for transparent and effective management, driving the organization toward its strategic goals with clear oversight and accountability. Monitoring the governance effectiveness regularly will be key to ensuring alignment with organizational goals. WIEA entails expanding the board to include diverse regional representatives, which will enhance the breadth of expertise and perspectives guiding the organization.
- ii. **Enhance organizational effectiveness and operational efficiency:** WIEA will continue to focus on integrated and efficient management systems that streamline operations across regional and country offices. This will involve fully automated and synchronized management functions, robust data and knowledge management systems, and effective monitoring and evaluation processes. The systems will support effective decision-making and allow for the adaptive scaling of best practices. Detailed diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies will also be developed to strengthen human resource management. By achieving these efficiencies, WIEA will enhance its overall operational performance and better support its conservation initiatives. Regular reviews of management systems will be undertaken to ensure they meet evolving organizational needs.
- iii. **Professional motivated and committed staff:** WIEA seeks to continue cultivating a professional, motivated, and committed staff that aligns with its vision, mission, and values. This will be realized through the alignment of staffing structures with organizational strategic priorities and the implementation of comprehensive training programs to enhance staff skills and expertise. By fostering a positive work environment and ensuring competitive and equitable remuneration, WIEA will support staff growth and retention. Regular performance assessments will be ensured for ongoing staff motivation and engagement. Investing in staff development will not only build a skilled and dedicated workforce but also reinforce the organization's capacity to achieve its conservation goals effectively.
- iv. **Diverse and efficient mutual partnerships:** The goal for networking and partnerships is to develop diverse and effective collaborations that enhance WIEA's conservation impact. This will entail the establishment of a dedicated unit for partnership management, which will focus on building and maintaining strategic relationships with a broad range of stakeholders, including local communities,

governments, and the private sector. By reviewing and updating partnership policies and investing in proactive engagement efforts, WIEA will strengthen its collaborative networks and expand its influence. Effective partnerships will enable WIEA to leverage additional resources and expertise, driving collective efforts toward successful conservation outcomes.

- v. **Increase financial stability and resource mobilisation:** WIEA aims to achieve a diverse and stable funding base to support its ongoing and future initiatives and ensure long-term sustainability. This will be accomplished through the development and implementation of a comprehensive fundraising strategy that targets a variety of funding sources and reduces reliance on a few main donors. By strengthening regional fundraising capabilities, nurturing existing donor relationships, and exploring new opportunities, including corporate engagement, WIEA will implement structured and effective fundraising efforts to increase unrestricted income and financial stability. Establishing a reserve fund will provide additional security. With a well-diversified funding base, WIEA will be better positioned to sustain its conservation efforts and achieve long-term success.

Desired outcomes

- Enhanced governance and management frameworks.
- Streamlined operational processes.
- Increased staff competency and satisfaction.
- Enhanced partnership impact.
- Secured and sustainable financial resources.



5 Geographic Focus

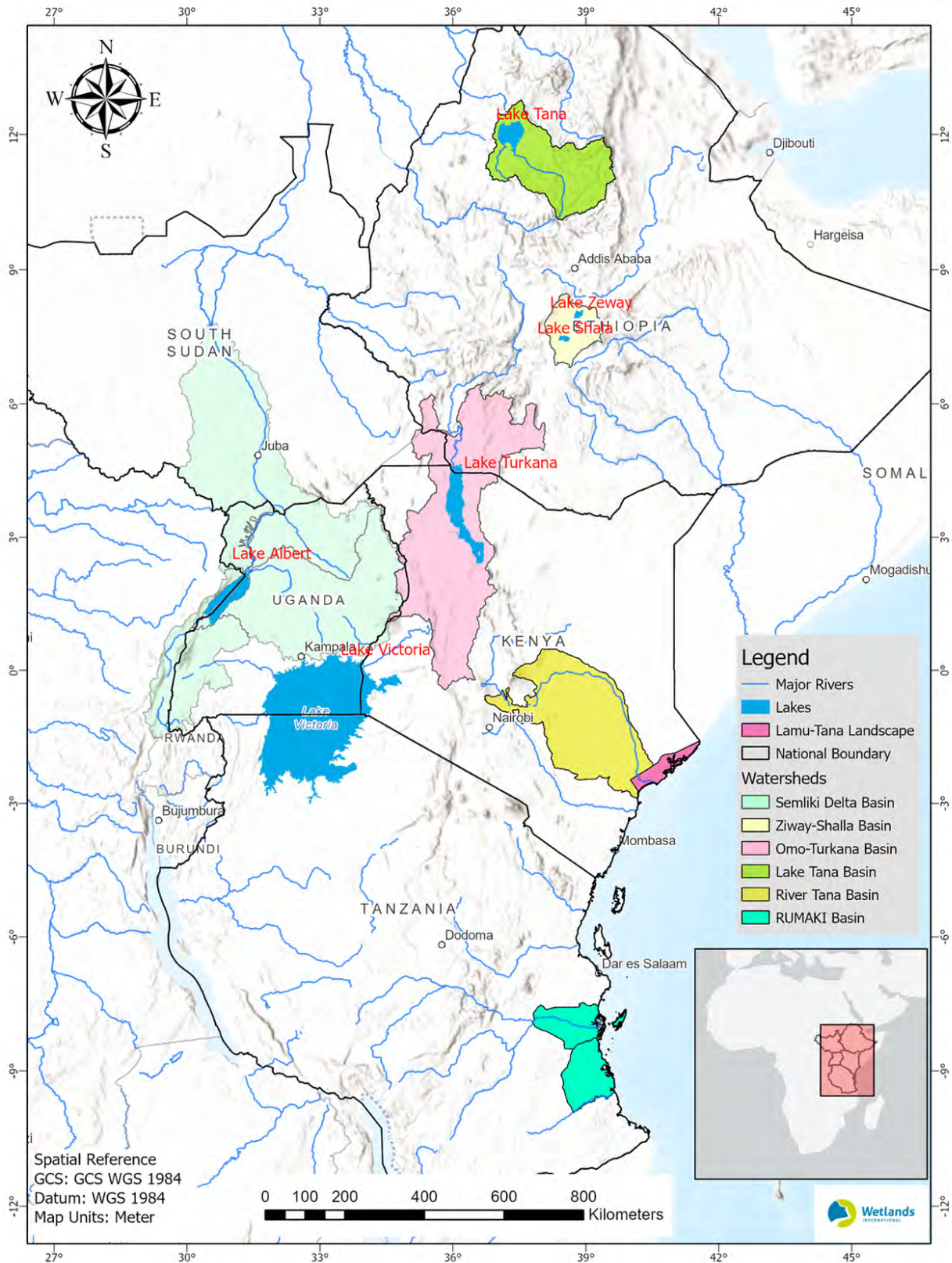


5.1 Coasts and Deltas

Goal: Sustainably managed coasts and deltas of the Western Indian Ocean region

During this planning period, WIEA will continue to focus on the Eastern Africa Mangrove Ecoregion (Figure 3). We will continue to work in the Tana-Lamu and Rufiji Delta landscapes and seascapes and focus on consolidating and upscaling our restoration and conservation efforts while strengthening community engagement and resilience against climate change. Additionally, we will explore opportunities in other regions of the Eastern Africa Mangrove ecoregion, including Mafia, Kilwa, Tanga-Vanga, Dar es Salaam, Kilifi, Lower Zambezi, and Maputo, conducting baseline studies, building local partnerships, and piloting small-scale projects to identify the potential for larger interventions.

Figure 2: Current Implementation Sites



The East African Mangrove Ecoregion (Figure 3), spanning 4,600 km from southern Somalia to South Africa, is home to 22 million people reliant on coastal resources for their livelihoods. This ecoregion features diverse habitats, including mangrove forests, seagrass beds, coral reefs, and open waters, collectively hosting over 11,000 plant and animal species. Coral reefs, in particular, are species-rich environments vital for maintaining ecological balance and supporting local economies through tourism and fishing. In the region, fringing coral reefs are prevalent, often forming continuous stretches of up to 100 km, making up the majority of the estimated 1,500 km of reefs along the shores. These reefs support a rich diversity of marine life and are critical to both ecological productivity and the economic well-being of coastal communities.

Beaches and coastal mudflats in this ecoregion serve as vital feeding and breeding grounds for around 35 species of resident and migratory seabirds. From October to March, hundreds of thousands of shorebirds migrate from northern Europe to feed on the mudflats of mangrove estuaries in Lamu, Kenya, the Rufiji Delta in Tanzania, and the Zambezi Delta in Mozambique. Offshore, seagrass beds, which include 12 species of flowering plants, provide shelter and food for a wide range of marine species, from small invertebrates to larger animals like dugongs and marine turtles.

The Rufiji, Tana, and Zambezi deltas are crucial ecological and socio-economic zones where rivers meet the sea, creating unique habitats essential for biodiversity, agriculture, and the livelihoods of local communities. These deltas also play a significant role in carbon storage, regulating water flow, and sediment deposition, which contributes to the formation of robust coastlines.



Mangrove forests, covering the largest area of coastal habitats in Eastern Africa, are home to ten species, some reaching up to 20 meters in height. These forests serve as feeding and nursery grounds for a variety of marine life and provide critical ecosystem services, such as coastal protection and carbon sequestration. In the region, Kenya has 54,430 ha of mangroves, Tanzania has 110,787 ha, and Mozambique has 302,735 ha. The potential for mangrove restoration is high, with at least 40,900 ha available. Restoring these areas could sequester up to 327,000 t C per year, protect coastal communities, and contribute significantly to the regional economy.

Key Issues: Habitat conversion and loss are driven by the expansion of agricultural, industrial, and urban areas, often accompanied by infrastructure projects like ports (Lamu Port and Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor in Kenya) and hydropower dams (Cabora Bassa Dam in Mozambique) that disrupt freshwater flows to coasts and deltas. Mining of sand, titanium, and bauxite is ongoing or proposed in areas such as the Tana Delta, Kwale, Mozambique. Pollution from untreated domestic and industrial waste, alongside pesticide runoff, further degrades these ecosystems. For example, in Maputo Bay, industrial pollution and urban runoff have degraded the water quality. The expansion of the port and related infrastructure has led to the loss of coastal habitats, including mangroves and seagrass beds, impacting the bay's biodiversity and the livelihoods of local communities.

Additionally, the unsustainable harvesting of resources, including fish, firewood, timber, and charcoal, exacerbates degradation. These challenges are compounded by weak and insufficient policy frameworks. For example,



addressing sensitivities around mining requires robust regulatory frameworks, effective enforcement, and meaningful community engagement to ensure that mining activities are conducted sustainably and do not undermine the ecological and socio-economic values of these critical areas. Stakeholder involvement, particularly among women, youth, and marginalized groups is also key for conservation efforts. Conservation projects have often been top-down, with insufficient input from those who rely on the resources for their livelihoods. This lack of involvement has hindered the success of conservation initiatives and led to ongoing unsustainable practices, such as illegal logging.

Moreover, extreme weather events, such as droughts, intense storms, and sea-level rise, along with rising sea temperatures and ocean acidification, pose significant threats. Scientific research is key to enabling an understanding of how climate change affects sea level rise, temperature changes, and storm intensity in coastal and delta regions. Scientific research can also provide crucial insights into the state of coasts and deltas and the impacts of human activities and help in the development of effective management strategies. However, challenges such as limited funding, political instability, and inadequate data collection can hinder effective research and management. Additionally, integrating scientific findings into policy and practice requires collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and local communities to ensure that conservation strategies are based on sound evidence and address both environmental and socio-economic concerns.





5.2 Rivers and Lakes

Goal: Sustainably managed river and lake ecosystems in Eastern Africa.

For WIEA, interventions were in the below freshwater ecoregions:

- **Lower Nile:** Lake Albert (Semliki), Victoria Nile (Kyoga), Lake Victoria (Sango Bay-Minziro and Sio Siteko), and Bahr el Jebel (Sudd and Kinaite)
- **Central Rift Valley:** Ziway-Shalla sub-basin
- **Southern Rift Valley**
- **Omo-Turkana:** Lake Turkana
- **Juba Shabelle:** Northern Ewaso Ngiro and Merti Aquifer

WIEA will continue to consolidate and upscale our efforts in these five major freshwater ecoregions. Specifically, in the Lower Nile, we will explore the possibility of working in the Bar-Akobo-Sobat and Blue Nile (Lake Tana) sub-basins. Other freshwater ecoregions of interest include the Lower Zambezi (Nyasa Basin), Kilombero, and Malagarasi-Muyovozi.

The entire **Nile Basin** (Figure 4) provides a range of ecological, economic, and cultural benefits. Also, key are the transboundary wetlands which are ecologically significant areas and include the Mara (Tanzania and Kenya), Lake Albert (Uganda and DRC) (also part of the Albertine Rift Valley), Lake Victoria Basin (Kenya Uganda and Tanzania), Bar-Akobo- Sobat (Ethiopia and South Sudan). The Lower Nile (A to D) a freshwater ecoregion, spans Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. This includes the Sudd wetlands, which are one of the world's largest wetlands and the largest freshwater wetland in the Nile Basin. The Sudd wetlands are characterised by diverse ecosystems, including open water, submerged vegetation and floating fringe vegetation, seasonally flooded grasslands, and floodplain woodlands.



The **Rift Valley** Freshwater ecoregion falls within the Great Eastern Africa Rift Valley and Western (Albertine) Rift Valley. The entire Rift Valley hosts some of the world's oldest, largest, and deepest lakes, providing vital ecosystem services and supporting millions of livelihoods.

i. **Central Rift Valley** (Ethiopia): The Ziway - Shalla is a closed sub-basin in Ethiopia's Rift Valley, covering 15,000 km²; it includes Ziway, Langano, Abijata, and Shalla catchments. These areas support local communities, diverse wildlife, and migratory birds, such as the Black Crowned Crane at Lake Ziway, the only freshwater lake.

ii. **Southern Rift Valley** (Kenya, Tanzania): It includes key lakes, such as Baringo, Bogoria, Elementaita, Natron, Malawi, and Tanganyika which are protected as Ramsar sites. Other key wetlands are the Mara Wetlands. This rift valley system stretches for over 700 km from central Kenya to northern Tanzania and covers an area of approximately 3,800 km² (Hughes & Hughes 1992).



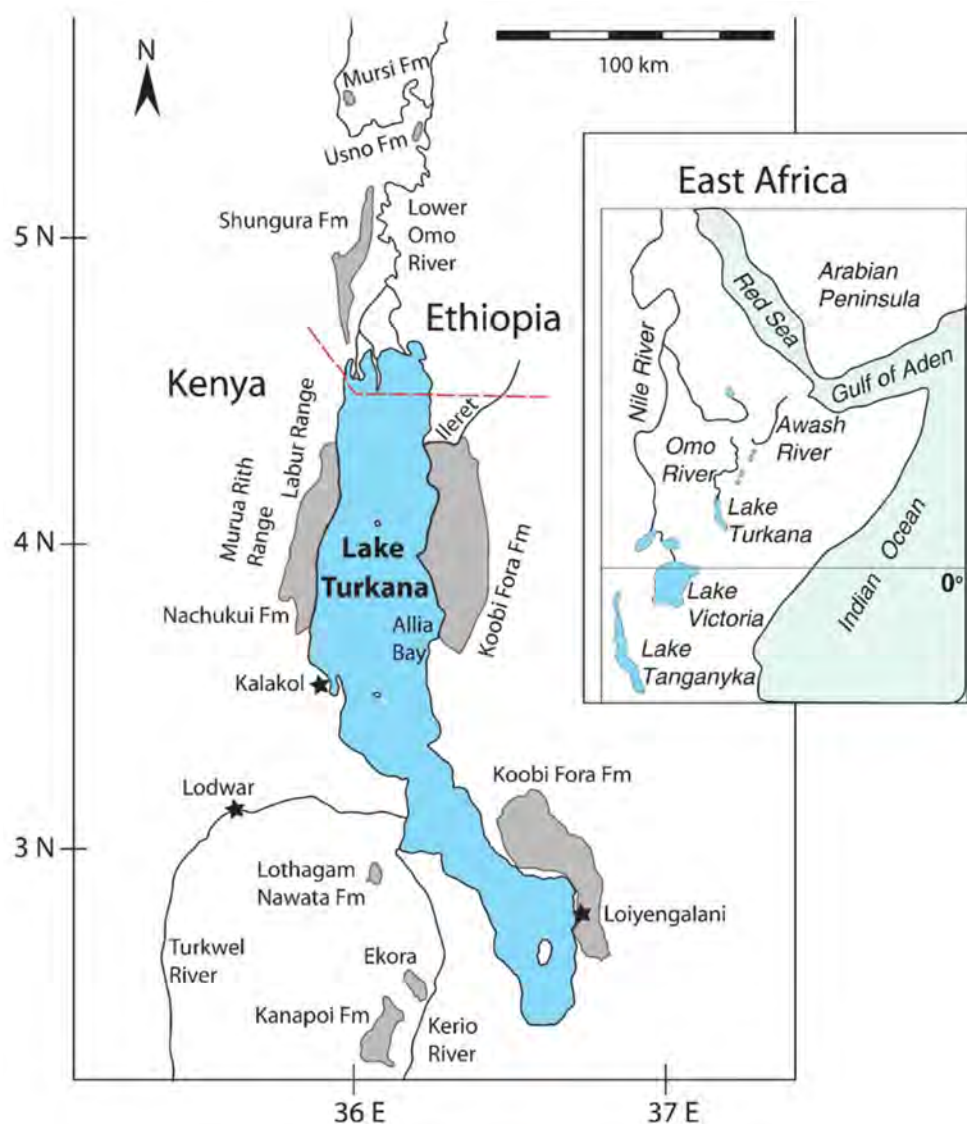
Figure 4: Nile River Basin



The Juba Shabelle freshwater ecoregion spans across Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. The Shabelle River originates in the Bale Mountains of the Ethiopian Highlands and usually reaches the Indian Ocean only during periods of heavy rainfall, after joining the Juba River near Kismayo City in Somalia. The Juba

River, also originating from the Ethiopian Highlands and known as the Genale Dawe River in Ethiopia, eventually flows into the Indian Ocean. The Northern Ewaso Ng'iro River in Kenya, which contributes to the Juba River, starts from the Aberdares and Mount Kenya, becomes an ephemeral stream in the Lorian swamp, and recharges the Merti Aquifer. This river system traverses diverse ecosystems, from mountainous regions to arid and semi-arid landscapes.

Figure 5: Omo-Turkana Basin



Source: Bobe and Leakey, 2009

The **Omo Turkana Basin** (Fig. 5) forms an ecosystem that supports the livelihoods of over 12 million people in Ethiopia and Kenya. The Omo River flows through the Ethiopian highlands into Lake Turkana, the world's largest permanent desert lake on the Kenyan side of the border. The lake swells during the rainy season, extending into the borderlands of Ethiopia.

In particular, the Omo Turkana and Juba Shabelle are in arid and semi-arid areas and are crucial “Blue Lifelines” for agricultural and pastoral communities that depend on them.

Key issues: Large-scale investments in hydropower and extensive irrigation projects disrupt river basins, while poor agricultural practices and inefficient irrigation exacerbate water wastage and soil degradation among smallholder farmers (e.g. Ziway-Shalla sub-basin, Tana River Basin and Rufiji River Basin). Inadequate watershed management leads to encroachment of buffer zones and thus increased erosion and sedimentation, further compromising water quality. This highlights the importance of integrated and community-based approaches to watershed management and focusing on restoration of riparian buffers.

Over-extraction of resources through deforestation, overgrazing, and overfishing depletes essential natural resources. In Lake Tanganyika, extensive fishing, particularly for commercial species like the Tanganyika sardine, has depleted fish stocks and affected the lake’s biodiversity. Pollution from industrial waste and agricultural chemicals such as from the flower farms on some of the Rift Valley Lakes has affected ecosystem health. At the same time, the spread of invasive species such as water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) continues to clog waterways and reduce oxygen levels in water bodies such as Lake Tana and Lake Victoria. It also impacts local fisheries and water transportation. Extreme weather events intensify these environmental challenges.

Governance issues, such as inadequate legal frameworks and weak enforcement hinder the effective management of water resources including Sudd Wetlands which leads to unsustainable practices. Other governance issues include corruption, mismanagement and inadequate data and monitoring. In particular, the lack of robust, enforceable agreements highlights the challenges of managing shared water resources in the absence of effective governance structures. Socio-economic factors, including the limited involvement of women, youth, and marginalized groups in decision-making, further complicate the situation. Resource-related conflicts, particularly those over water and pasture, are exacerbated by these pressures, highlighting the urgent need for integrated, inclusive, and effective conservation and management strategies.





5.3 Peatlands

Goal: Peatlands in the Eastern Africa region are conserved and restored

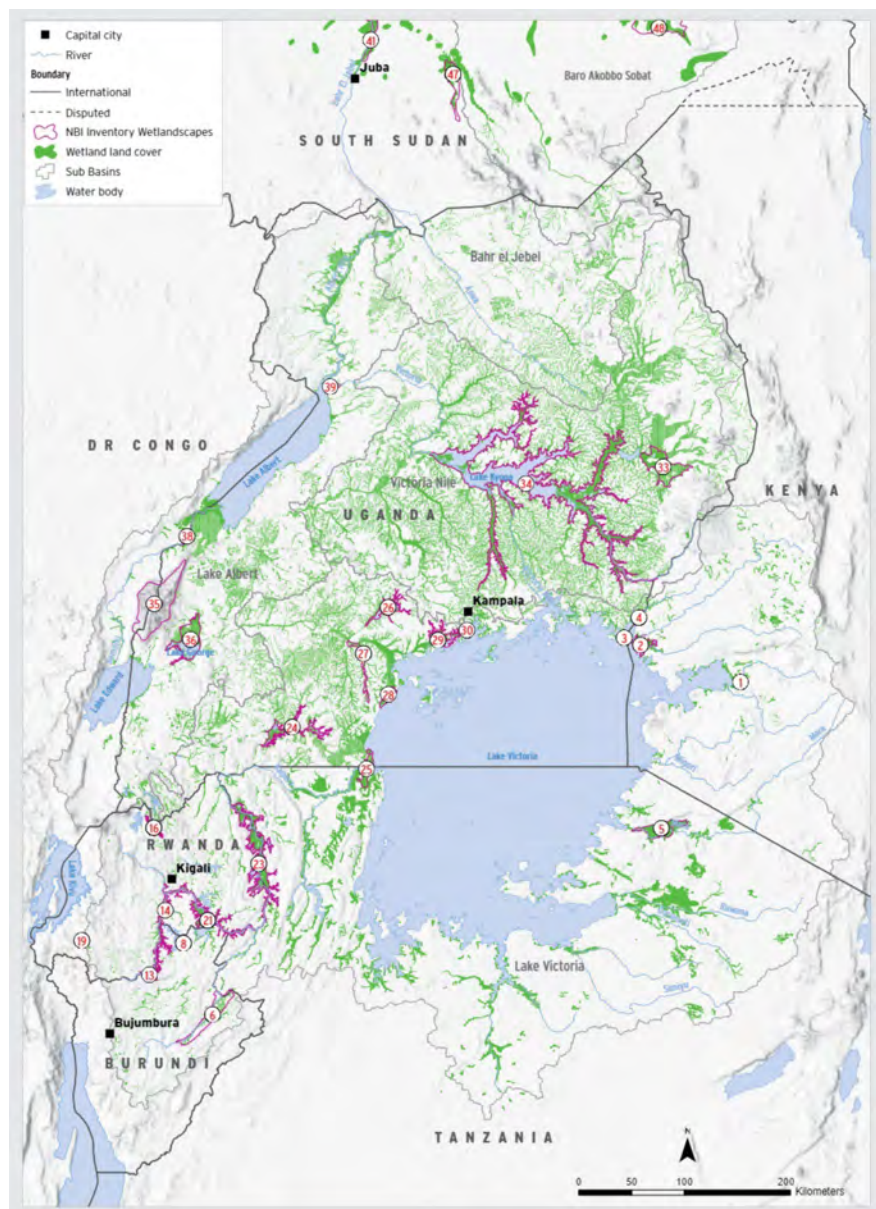
Landscapes: Lower Nile, Blue Nile, Bar-Akobo-Sobat

The initial focus of the Peatlands workstream is the Nile Equatorial Lakes (NEL) region, the Sudd wetlands, the Baro-Akobo-Sobat River basin and the Lake Tana sub-basin.

Peat is made from partially decayed plant material that collects under waterlogged conditions over time. Areas covered by peat are called peatlands. Peatlands are defined as having a layer of peat with a thickness of 30cm or more. Peatlands are crucial in carbon storage, holding twice as much carbon as the world's forests combined (UNEP, 2022). Peatlands only cover 3% of the world's land area but contain 500GT of carbon, twice the carbon stock in total global forest biomass. By absorbing significant amounts of carbon dioxide (CO²) from the atmosphere and storing it as carbon in the peat, they help mitigate climate change. However, peatlands release large amounts of CO₂ if disturbed or destroyed, exacerbating climate issues. Emissions from peatland drainage, degradation, and fires account for approximately 5% of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. Estimates of present-day global greenhouse gas emissions from degraded peatlands range between 1.30 and 1.91 Gt CO₂eq yr⁻¹, corresponding to 2.6%–3.8% of global anthropogenic GHG emissions. Emissions from peatlands are driven mainly by land use conversion, drainage for small-scale and commercial agriculture, infrastructure development, and peat extraction, as outlined by the (IPCC, 2018). Peatlands also regulate the water cycle by absorbing and gradually releasing water. They provide habitats for diverse plants and animals and support local livelihoods through fishing, agriculture, and tourism.

The Nile Equatorial Lakes Region (NEL) (Figure 6) is located in the eastern part of Africa and is characterized by diverse landscapes, intricate ecosystems, and a rich cultural heritage. It encompasses the headwaters of the Nile River, and its tributaries include Lake Victoria, Lake Albert, and Lake Edward. These lakes are surrounded by an array of ecosystems, which provide life-sustaining resources to the nations they traverse, including Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. In this region, peat deposits are primarily found in valleys, lake floodplains of lakes and riverbanks. Most of the peat carbon in the NEL region is concentrated in the sub-basins of Lake Victoria, Lake Albert, and the Victoria Nile, particularly in the Kagera subset, which contains roughly half of all peatlands in the region. The NEL region encompasses approximately 12,534 km² of peatlands and contributes 58.5% of the total carbon stock of the Nile Basin.

Figure 6: Nile Equatorial Lakes Region



Source: Nile River Basin Initiative, 2024



The [Sudd Wetland](#) in South Sudan is a designated Ramsar site. The Sudd Wetland covers approximately 57,000 km² and represents one of the largest freshwater ecosystems in the world. The extent of the Sudd wetlands is highly variable; it depends mainly on the seasons and years. During the wet season, the wetland's size increases to 90,000 km² and gradually decreases to about 42,000 km² depending on high seasonal floods. It is sustained by the White Nile (or Bahr el Jebel) flow from Lake Victoria in Uganda and rainfall runoff from its surrounding areas. The Sudd is an environmental and economic asset that supports livelihoods, South Sudan's economy, and ecosystem services, including climate change mitigation and hydrological functions in the more extensive Nile Basin area. The Sudd is internationally recognized for its unique ecological attributes, including various endangered wildlife species. The Sudd is an important wintering ground for some of the migratory birds such as the Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*), Black Crowned Crane (*Balearica pavonina*), White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) and Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*). It forms part of the East-Asian/East African flyway of Palearctic birds, linking breeding ranges in central Europe and Asia with winter ranges to the south. Peatlands in the Sudd are estimated to cover an area of 15,780 km² or about 50% of the total peatland area and 37% of the total carbon stock of the entire Nile basin, making it the most important concentration of peatlands in the Nile basin area (NBI, 2019).

The [Lake Tana Sub-Basin](#) is in the Amhara National Regional State and across four Zonal Administrations. The landscape drains four major rivers: Gilgel Abay, Reb, Gumara, and Megech. The lake is buffered by a large floodplain (wetland) in almost all directions. Lake Tana is a source of the great River Abbay (Blue Nile) and more than 40 streams, linking to the hydro politics of the Nile Basin. The lake is home to more than 20 famous monasteries of the 14th Century and a total of 37 islands, as well as more than 200 bird



species. Lake Tana Sub-Basin hosts many kinds of ecosystems, including varieties of aquatic, wetland, dry evergreen montane forest and evergreen scrub, montane grassland, sub-Afroalpine, and Afro-alpine nature. The diversity of ecosystems and factors such as rainfall pattern and altitudinal range make the landscape very important in congregating rich biodiversity (wildlife and domesticated), some endemic and some threatened.

The transboundary [Baro-Akobo-Sobat River Basin](#) (BAS) covers 186,275 km² and stretches from southwestern Ethiopia to southeastern and central South Sudan. About 80% of the sub-basin is in South Sudan, with the rest in Ethiopia. The basin is transboundary and highly important for Ethiopia and South Sudan. BAS is a target for several plans for large-scale water infrastructure development projects (dams, hydropower, and irrigated agriculture) in Ethiopia and South Sudan. Despite its high geopolitical and hydrologic importance, the BASRB is poorly documented in the published literature due to its remoteness and inadequate access.

Key issues:

Peatlands face several challenges that hinder their conservation and sustainable management. Firstly, there is limited knowledge and awareness, resulting in insufficient public understanding and a lack of policy prioritization for peatlands. Environmental threats, including drainage, land use conversion, degradation, and pollution, further exacerbate the situation. In addition, inadequate policy and management frameworks, characterized by poor regional coordination and conflicting resource use, contribute to unsustainable practices. Socio-economic challenges also play a role, with limited livelihood options and a lack of involvement from women, youth, and marginalized groups in management efforts. Lastly, financial shortfalls are a significant issue, as peatlands are underfunded, with insufficient resources and investment dedicated to their conservation.

6. Strategy Implementation

An implementation matrix and budget have been developed for this strategic plan (Annex 4). To ensure the effective execution of our strategic plan, we will adopt a systematic approach that will include the following.

6.1 Annual Operational Plans

We will create detailed annual operational plans to guide the implementation of this strategy which will include detailed actions, assigned responsibilities, timelines, required resources and performance targets. Project-specific work plans will detail the steps and resources required for individual projects that will be aligned with the annual operational plans. These plans will guide our efforts.

We will review the progress made on the implementation and update the operational plans annually. This will involve evaluating completed activities, measuring results against targets, and identifying any issues or adjustments needed. Based on the review, we will update the annual operational plans to reflect new insights, changes in priorities, or any unforeseen challenges. This ensures that the plans remain relevant and effective in guiding the strategy's implementation.

We will allocate the necessary resources—financial, human, and technological—to support the execution of our action plans. This involves careful budgeting, staffing, and acquisition of essential tools and technologies.

6.2 Communications and Reporting

Clear communication channels and coordination mechanisms will be established among stakeholders, including staff, partners, and beneficiaries. Regular meetings, progress reports, and updates will facilitate effective information sharing and issue resolution.

6.3 Capacity Building

We will invest in training and development programs to enhance the skills and knowledge of our team and partners, ensuring that all parties are well-prepared to carry out their roles effectively.

6.4 Implementation Approaches and Methodologies

WIEA employs several approaches to address the ecological, social, and economic aspects of wetlands ecosystems and will continue to use these. The Landscape Approach (and Integrated Coastal Zone Management Approach) considers wetlands within the larger landscapes or seascapes, integrating them with other land and water uses. This approach balances various functions of wetlands, such as biodiversity conservation, flood control, and economic activities. The landscape approach also emphasizes maintaining or restoring ecological connections between different parts of the landscape/seascape to support species movement and ecosystem health.

The **4 Returns Approach** is a practical application within the broader landscape approach framework. It is a framework designed to restore degraded landscapes, including wetlands, by focusing on achieving four key outcomes over 20 years: **natural capital** (ecosystem restoration), **social capital** (community strength), **financial capital** (sustainable economic opportunities), and **inspirational capital** (sense of purpose and well-being).

When focusing specifically on the management of water resources across sectors and scales, then **Integrated Water Resources Management** (IWRM) will continue to be key as it considers all aspects of the water cycle and its interactions with different sectors and addresses issues such as water quality, quantity and ecosystem health. The landscape approach and IWRM can be complementary, with IWRM providing a detailed focus on water management within the larger context of landscape management.

The **Ecosystem Approach**, endorsed by the Convention on Biological Diversity, is a comprehensive strategy for managing wetlands that focuses on the entire ecosystem rather than individual components. Conservation, sustainable use, and equitable sharing of benefits are promoted. The ecosystem approach ensures that management practices consider the full range of ecosystem functions and services, while **community-based management** ensures that these practices are grounded in local knowledge and supported by the community. Wetland resources are the backbone of local economies. From our experiences, community-based approaches supported by science and innovation bear more sustainable results due to enhanced ownership and leadership of conservation and management efforts.

Each of these approaches can be used alone or in combination to address the complex challenges of wetlands conservation and management. The choice of approach often depends on the specific context, goals, and stakeholders involved in the management of a particular wetland area. Integrating these approaches can enhance conservation and sustainability by combining scientific and traditional knowledge, strengthening governance, and promoting equity. This integration helps build resilient wetland ecosystems and supports sustainable community development.



7. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning



7.1 Monitoring

Effective monitoring is essential for tracking progress and ensuring that strategic objectives are being met. Our approach will include defining indicators for each outcome and collect both quantitative and qualitative data (Annex 5) Regular data collection will be facilitated through reporting systems, surveys, and field visits, to ensure accuracy and timeliness. Periodic progress reviews will assess performance against targets, identify deviations and enable timely adjustments and corrective actions. A structured reporting framework will also be developed to communicate progress to stakeholders, with reports highlighting achievements, challenges, and any strategic adjustments.



7.2 Evaluation

We will establish an evaluation framework to assess outcomes and impacts with mid-term and end-term evaluations by year 2027 and 2030, respectively. Impact assessments will gauge objective achievement and effects on target populations and environments. Lessons learned will be documented and analysed to guide further strategic decisions and ensure the strategy remains effective and relevant.

7.3 Learning

Learning is critical for refining and enhancing our strategic approach. The MEAL team will define the research and learning agenda based on our priorities and develop a structured approach to capture and share lessons learned, best practices and innovations. Our learning strategy will include knowledge sharing through workshops, seminars, and publications, with feedback mechanisms to gather stakeholder input. We will foster a culture of adaptive management by regular revisions based on learning and evaluation outcomes, ensuring viable insights are documented and used for future planning and implementation.



8. Risk Management

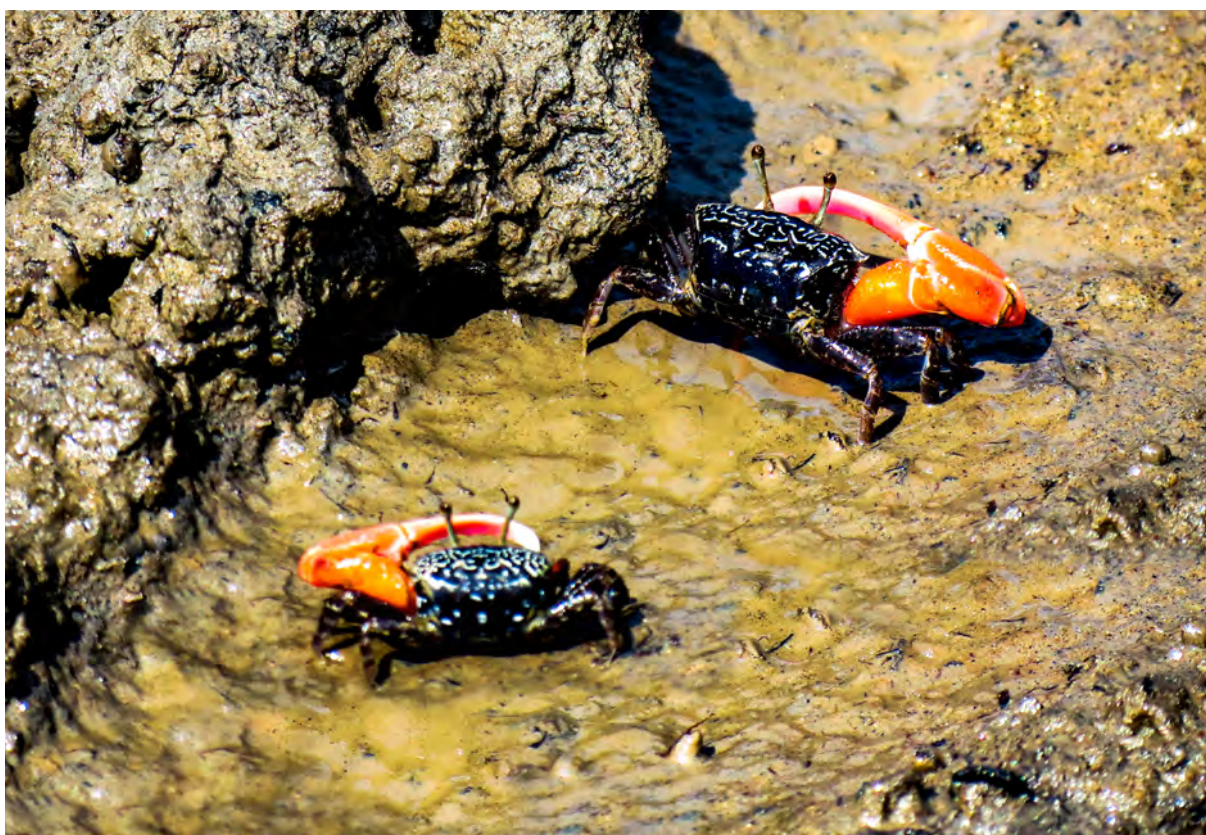
Effective risk management will be crucial for the successful execution of our strategic plan. By identifying, assessing, and addressing risks, we will minimize their impact and enhance our ability to achieve our goals. This chapter will outline our approach, including risk identification, assessment, mitigation strategies, and monitoring.

Risk Identification will involve recognizing potential risks from a variety of internal and external sources. These risks could include strategic risks (alignment with organizational goals), operational risks (day-to-day operations), financial risks (financial stability), compliance risks (legal and regulatory obligations), and reputational risks (public perception).

Risk Assessment will evaluate the potential impact and likelihood of each risk, prioritizing those that pose significant threats to our strategic objectives. We will use a risk map or matrix to visualize and prioritize risks, ensuring effective resource allocation.

Risk Mitigation Strategies will include tailored actions to address risks, such as risk avoidance (eliminating risks), risk reduction (minimizing impact), risk transfer (shifting responsibility to third parties), and risk acceptance (preparing to manage potential consequences).

Risk Monitoring and Review will ensure the ongoing effectiveness of our risk management strategies. This will involve regular monitoring for emerging risks, establishing performance metrics, conducting risk review meetings, and developing a reporting system to communicate risk management activities and outcomes to stakeholders.



9. Strategic Leadership and Operational Excellence

Effective governance and management are critical to achieving the strategic objectives outlined in this plan. Together, they ensure that Wetlands International Eastern Africa operates with a high level of accountability, transparency, and efficiency while maintaining the flexibility needed to respond to changing conditions and opportunities. This chapter outlines the structures and processes that will guide our governance and management approach over the strategy period.



9.1 Governance Framework

The WIEA governance framework will be structured to ensure strong leadership and effective oversight for the successful implementation of the strategic plan. The governance structure is led by the Eastern Africa Board, consisting of the Regional Board Chair and 2-3 Country Board Representatives, who provide essential country-specific perspectives. The Regional Office Director, serving as an Ex-Officio member, ensures seamless communication and coordination between the Regional Board and the regional office. The Eastern Africa Board will be responsible for setting the overall direction of the organization, approving the strategic plan, and ensuring that the organization complies with legal and regulatory requirements. It will also oversee the risk management framework, ensuring that risks are identified, assessed, and mitigated appropriately. Board committees, such as audit and governance committees, will provide specialized oversight and recommendations to the full board.

9.2 Regional and Country Leadership

The leadership of Wetlands International Eastern Africa is designed to ensure strong, effective management at both the regional and country levels. The Director, Eastern Africa is crucial in guiding the strategic direction and providing operational oversight of the region, ensuring alignment with organizational goals and coordinating with Country Directors. The Country Directors will be responsible for managing day-to-day operations and executing strategic initiatives within their countries. They will oversee program planning, supervise local staff, and ensure compliance with local regulations. This leadership model will allow for well-coordinated regional and country-level operations that are responsive to local needs while advancing the WIEA's overarching goals.

9.3 Regional Leadership Team

The Regional Leadership Team is composed of the Country Leads, Regional Program Manager, Regional Finance and Operations Manager, and Regional Communications, Partnerships and Fundraising Manager. This team is crucial in ensuring coordinated leadership across key functional areas, including program management, communications, partnerships, fundraising, finance, and operations.

Regular team meetings will continue to be held to review progress, address challenges, and align strategic priorities. The Regional Program Manager oversees program delivery and monitoring progress, while the Regional Finance and Operations Manager handles budgeting financial and operational management to ensure efficient resource allocation. The Regional Communications, Partnerships, and Fundraising Manager will manage both internal and external communications, develop strategic partnerships, and lead fundraising initiatives.

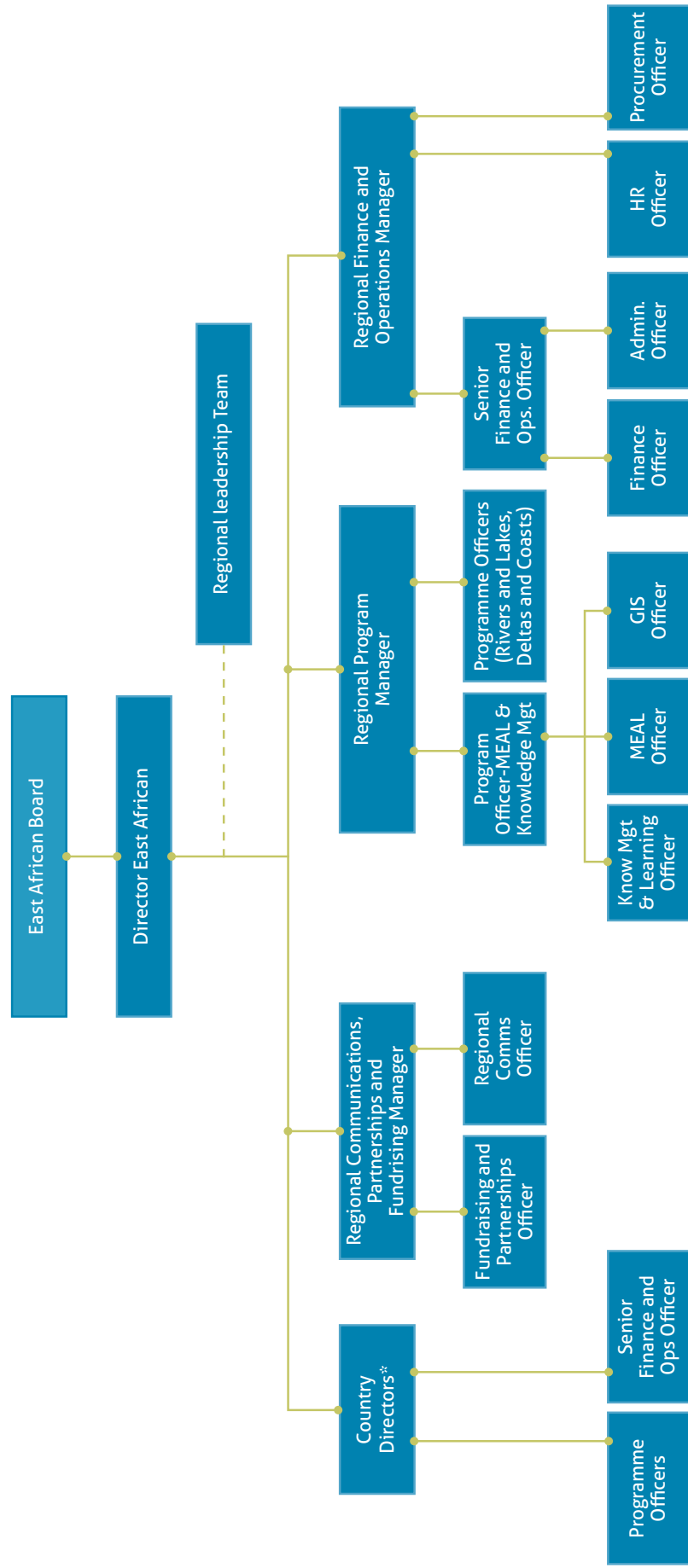
9.4 Communication and Coordination

Effective communication and coordination are essential to the successful implementation of our strategic plan. We will establish clear communication channels between the regional office, country offices, and the Eastern Africa Board to ensure that information flows smoothly and decisions are made promptly. Regular reporting, performance metrics, and dashboards will be used to provide real-time insights into our progress and ensure transparency.

By strengthening our governance and management practices, Wetlands International Eastern Africa will be better positioned to achieve our mission, adapt to emerging challenges, and capitalize on new opportunities, ensuring that we continue to make a meaningful impact on wetland conservation and sustainable development in the region.



9.5 Wetlands International Eastern Africa Organogram



*Country Directors (Ethiopia - 2025, Kenya-2026, Uganda and Tanzania-2027)

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Annexes

Annex 1: Relevant Policies and Frameworks

	Objective	Relevance	Status in Eastern Africa
International Policies and Frameworks			
Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (1971)	To ensure the conservation and wise use of wetlands through national action and international cooperation	Provides a global framework for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.	Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and South Sudan are signatories. Ethiopia is not yet a signatory
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	To conserve biological diversity, promote the sustainable use of its components, and ensure fair sharing of benefits from genetic resources.	Wetlands are critical habitats for biodiversity; the CBD supports wetland conservation as part of broader biodiversity goals.	All countries in the region, including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and South Sudan, are parties to the CBD.
Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) or Bonn Convention	Conserves habitats for migratory species, including those in wetlands.	Protects critical stopover and breeding sites in wetlands.	
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) (1973)	To ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival	Wetlands often serve as habitats for species protected under CITES.	Most countries in Eastern Africa are signatories, including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and South Sudan.
United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)	Addresses issues related to marine pollution, resource management, and environmental protection.	Provides guidelines for the sustainable use and conservation of coastal and marine environments, directly impacting wetlands conservation.	
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (1992)	To stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.	Wetlands play a significant role in carbon sequestration and climate regulation, making their conservation important under the UNFCCC	All countries in the region are parties to the UNFCCC.
African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) (1995)	To conserve migratory waterbirds and their habitats across Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, etc	Wetlands are key habitats for migratory waterbirds, and AEWA focuses on protecting these critical areas.	Countries like Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and South Sudan are signatories.

Annex 1: Relevant Policies and Frameworks

	Objective	Relevance	Status in Eastern Africa
Regional Environmental Policies and Frameworks			
Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Western Indian Ocean (Nairobi Convention).	Sustainable management of coastal and marine ecosystems.	Supports biodiversity conservation in coastal wetlands like mangroves and estuaries.	
East African Community (EAC) Protocol on Environment and Natural Resources Management (2006)	To promote cooperation among EAC member states (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, and South Sudan) in managing the environment and natural resources.	The protocol covers sustainable wetland management as part of broader environmental and natural resource governance.	All member states of the EAC are expected to align with this protocol.
Nile Basin Initiative (1999)	To achieve sustainable socio-economic development through equitable utilization and benefit-sharing of the Nile Basin's water resources.	Wetlands within the Nile Basin, such as the Sudd in South Sudan and Lake Victoria wetlands, are critical ecosystems that the NBI aims to protect and manage.	Countries like Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and South Sudan are members of the NBI.
Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Environment and Natural Resources Strategy (2016-2030)	To promote regional cooperation for sustainable development and environmental protection, including wetland conservation.	Supports wetland management as part of broader environmental and resource management strategies.	Countries in the IGAD region, including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and South Sudan, are expected to follow this strategy.
African Union Agenda 2063 and Biodiversity Strategy and Action plan	To achieve an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa through sustainable development, including environmental conservation.	Wetlands conservation is included as part of the broader environmental sustainability goals of the agenda.	All Eastern African countries, as members of the AU, are expected to align their policies with Agenda 2063.
African Union Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan	To guide African countries in conserving biodiversity, including terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, by providing a strategic framework for action. It aims to integrate biodiversity conservation into national and regional development plans and policies.	It provides a strategic framework for the protection and sustainable management of wetland ecosystems, promoting regional cooperation, institutional strengthening, and research.	All Eastern African countries, as members of the AU, are expected to align their policies with AU BSAP
Southern African Development Community (SADC) Regional Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2025 – 2035)	To guide and coordinate the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity within the SADC region.	It provides a framework for member states to harmonize their biodiversity policies and strategies, including those related to wetland ecosystems.	16 Member States, including Mozambique and United Republic of Tanzania

Annex 2: SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good expertise and an established authority in wetlands conservation and management across Eastern Africa • Currently operational in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Ethiopia providing broad reach and local insights • Credible and solid experience in environmental/wetlands advocacy and conservation • Diverse project portfolio including ecosystem restoration, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable resource management • Adaptive and effective programs that address evolving needs and enhance impact • Robust partnerships and collaborations • Highly qualified and passionate staff • Extensive organizational history • Adequate facilities in key countries support efficient operations • A supportive environment fostering teamwork and commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing climate change through wetlands can attract climate finance and support greenhouse gas reduction targets • Enhanced by funding agencies' focus on localization • Leveraging wetlands as carbon sinks to contribute to global climate goals • Support from pacts, treaties, and conventions enhances conservation efforts. International frameworks, such as the Ramsar Convention and Kunming Global Biodiversity Framework also support wetlands conservation • Favourable Regional and National Government Laws and agreements - East African governments' pledges, including transboundary wetland agreements by Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania
Weaknesses	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited fundraising capacity: reactive fundraising efforts may not meet the financial needs of diverse programs • Gaps in knowledge management may hinder decision-making and project execution • Unresolved legal status and registration issues • The organizational structure requires periodic updates to remain effective. • Strengthening the board's role in oversight management is needed • Lack of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework and policies • Limited external communication, branding, and publicity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional political changes affecting project implementation and effectiveness • Increasing severity of climate effects threatening wetland stability and health • Expanding infrastructure and agriculture lead to habitat loss and water pollution • Agricultural runoff and industrial discharges degrade water quality and wetland health • Regional and in-country disputes affecting operations • Huge Infrastructure Developments – New ports, dams, and pipelines impacting wetland ecosystems • Transition from low-income to middle-income status in Kenya and Tanzania decreasing donor funding and increasing competition

Annex 3: Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder Name	Interests	Existing Opportunities to Collaborate	Potential Opportunities
National Government Ministries and Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment: Preserve biodiversity and ecological balance. • Water Resources: Ensure sustainable water management. • Agriculture: Promote sustainable resource use. • Forestry and Natural Resources: Conserve forests and biodiversity. • Fisheries: Manage fisheries and protect ecosystems. • Tourism and Wildlife: Protect landscapes for eco-tourism. • Health: Protect health and water quality. • Finance: Allocate resources efficiently. • Planning and Development: Balance growth with conservation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updating legislation; strengthening laws for new threats and sustainability. • Improve funding via partnerships and grants. • Forming task forces - create committees for unified conservation strategies. • Building partnerships, engaging NGOs, the private sector, and the government. • Monitoring and Evaluation: Conduct assessments of conservation effectiveness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and advocate for wetlands protection policies. • Joint implementation: to restore wetlands and protect biodiversity • Join ministerial and stakeholder forums • Engage in global agreements for support • Partner on proposals and mobilize resources.
International, Regional, and Local NGOs in Conservation (WWF, IUCN, TNC, Birdlife, EAWLS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on global frameworks with an emphasis on large-scale conservation efforts • Protection, conservation, and management of wetlands • Resources for restoration, conservation, and protection of wetlands • Engage with communities to promote conservation, implement on-the-ground projects for wetlands conservation and management • Data, information, and knowledge on the management of wetlands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shape global, regional, and local wetlands policy. • Partner in fundraising and program implementation. • Build ties for best practice sharing. • Engage communities in wetland protection. • Capacity Building: Train stakeholders in wetland management. • Resource Mobilization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to cross-border wetlands policy and legislation. • Shape policy and regulations at national, regional, and international levels. • Collaborate on fundraising efforts. • Partner in designing and implementing wetlands programs, leveraging expertise.
Local Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation, protection, and sustainable utilization of natural resources • Increased revenue from wetlands resources for improved community livelihoods • Preserving wetlands for their cultural significance and recreational opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster conditions for effective wetlands program implementation. • Mobilize communities for wetland protection and restoration. • Train stakeholders in wetland management and conservation. • Provide financial and in-kind support for wetlands programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in creating local wetlands policies and legislation. • Network and collaborate on implementing wetlands programs. • Partner with WIEA, local governments, NGOs, and the private sector to tackle wetland management challenges.

Annex 3: Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder Name	Interests	Existing Opportunities to Collaborate	Potential Opportunities
Private Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to reduce their climate footprint and reduce water risks • Enhancing brand image and fulfilling CSR commitments by engaging in environmental stewardship and supporting conservation efforts • Protecting and restoring wetlands to support biodiversity, can benefit industries dependent on healthy ecosystems, such as tourism and fisheries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with companies to fund restoration projects and conservation campaigns. • Develop and implement sustainable practices to reduce environmental impact on wetlands. • Partner with eco-tourism companies to promote wetlands and generate conservation revenue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build partnerships and joint projects for wetland conservation. • Develop projects and branding opportunities with the private sector. • Partner on educational campaigns to raise awareness about wetlands and private sector roles.
Media Houses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information and data about the ecological importance and threats of wetlands • Raising public awareness about environmental issues, including the importance of wetlands and the need for their conservation and restoration. • Compelling human interest stories, including the impact on local communities, indigenous peoples, and unique biodiversity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and disseminate educational content and awareness campaigns about the importance of wetlands and sustainable practices. • Share and promote success stories and best practices in wetlands conservation to inspire and inform other communities and stakeholders • Organize media events, press releases, and site visits to highlight significant conservation efforts and research findings. • Utilize social media platforms for public engagement, interactive content, and advocacy campaigns, reaching a broad audience. • Include local community stories and expert opinions in media coverage to provide a comprehensive and relatable perspective on wetlands conservation issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with media professionals to create documentaries, and feature stories, that highlight stories that highlight stories about wetland conservation, challenges, and successes • Regularly offer expert commentary, opinion pieces, and interviews to media outlets to shape public discourse and provide authoritative insights on wetlands issues • Invest in training programs for journalists to enhance their understanding of environmental issues, focusing on the complexities and significance of wetland ecosystems



Annex 3: Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder Name	Interests	Existing Opportunities to Collaborate	Potential Opportunities
Academia and Research Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific research on wetlands and climate trends • Promoting sustainable management and habitat restoration • Providing evidence and advice for policy • Training in wetland science and management • Developing innovative technologies • Collaborative research and partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative research projects • Educational programs and training • Consultancy and advisory roles • Knowledge sharing and translating knowledge/research-to-action • Innovative technology development • Climate resilience projects • Cross-disciplinary research (ecology, hydrology, social sciences) to address complex issues • Leverage research findings for policy advocacy and influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence policy through collaborative scientific research. • Enhance the skills of conservation practitioners and policymakers. • Data Sharing • Collaborate on wetland restoration and habitat enhancement projects • Develop monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess conservation effectiveness. • Partnerships in resource mobilization
Regional Bodies (AU, IGAD, SADC, EAC, LVBC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote conservation within broader landscape management. • Develop and enforce policies and regional agreements. • Support research to understand wetlands' health and trends. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training and support for wetlands management. • Share data and research for informed decision-making. • Facilitate cooperation for transboundary wetlands management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement joint conservation projects • Develop and advocate protective wetland policies. • Research and Data Sharing • Mobilize and secure funding for projects. • Raise awareness and engage local communities. • Monitor and evaluate conservation efforts. • Cross-Border Initiatives • Integrate wetlands into regional strategies. • Build and strengthen conservation partnerships.



Annex 4: Implementation Matrix

Key Actions	Activities	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
5. Strengthened organizational capacity and sustainability									3,550,000
Improve governance and management structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the diversity and skills mix of the board to include regional representation • Assess and improve the organisation structure and support all strategic result areas • Update and implement governance policies and procedures • Finalise registration of the WI offices in Eastern Africa • Establish country offices with country directors • Develop a comprehensive risk management framework 								450,000.00
Enhance organizational effectiveness and operational efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise alignment of policies and procedures with the ERP • M&E Framework development and implementation • Develop systems for managing and disseminating organizational knowledge • Develop and implement DEI policies and procedures • Conduct regular reviews of management systems to ensure they remain effective and efficient. 								600,000.00
Professional motivated and committed staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise and align staffing structures • Implement staff training and development programme 								900,000.00
Diverse and efficient mutual partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership policies and guidelines developed • Partnership identification and cultivation • Communications and advocacy strategy development and execution 								600,000.00
Increase financial stability and resource mobilisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a comprehensive fundraising strategy • Enhance fundraising capacity • Execute fundraising activities and secure new funding sources • Build a reserve fund 								1,000,000.00



Annex 5: Outcome Indicators

Strategic Result Areas	Outcomes	Indicators
1. Enhanced Wetland Ecosystem Integrity and Resilience	1.1 Restored and Healthy Wetland Ecosystems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of wetland area restored to a healthy ecological state. • Changes in key ecological parameters (e.g., vegetation cover,) before and after restoration.
	1.2 Increased Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of restoration projects completed and their success rate. • Number of species (flora and fauna) observed in wetlands compared to baseline data. • Index of biodiversity or species richness and evenness in restored wetlands. • Presence of indicator species that reflect a healthy ecosystem.
	1.3 Enhanced ecosystem services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement in water quality metrics (e.g., reduced levels of pollutants, increased clarity). • Increase in wetland capacity for flood regulation (e.g., volume of water retained). • Rates of carbon sequestration and storage in restored wetlands.
2. Thriving communities and sustainable livelihoods	2.1 Economic and social benefits for communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in income from eco-tourism or other sustainable activities. • Number of jobs created or supported by wetland conservation activities. • Improvement in community well-being metrics (e.g., health, education, infrastructure).
	2.2 Active community participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of local community members actively involved in conservation activities. • The number of community-led conservation initiatives or projects. • Level of community knowledge and awareness about wetlands and conservation practices.
	3.3 Resilient and engaged communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of community adaptation to environmental changes (e.g., improved coping strategies). • Levels of community satisfaction with conservation outcomes and their involvement.
3. Strengthened policy and governance frameworks	Effective and integrated policy frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and quality of policies or regulations incorporating wetland conservation. • Degree of policy integration across different sectors (e.g., agriculture, water management). • Policy implementation rates and adherence by relevant authorities.

Annex 5: Outcome Indicators

Strategic Result Areas	Outcomes	Indicators
4. Enhanced knowledge and capacity	Robust Governance structures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence and functionality of governance bodies dedicated to wetland conservation. • Frequency and quality of governance meetings and decision-making processes. • Stakeholder satisfaction with governance structures and their effectiveness.
	3.3 Enhanced regional cooperation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of regional agreements or collaborations focused on wetland conservation. • Instances of cross-border conservation projects and their outcomes. • Level of participation and commitment from regional stakeholders in cooperative efforts.
	4.1 Advanced scientific knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of scientific publications or reports produced on wetland. • Quantity and quality of new data collected and integrated into wetland management practices • Findings from research contributing to improved wetland management strategies.
	4.2 Informed stakeholder decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of decisions or policies influenced by updated scientific knowledge. • Stakeholder feedback on the relevance and utility of scientific information provided. • Examples of decision-making improvements based on new data or research findings.
	4.3 Strengthened technical expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of training programs conducted, and participants trained in wetland management. • Improvement in skills and knowledge among stakeholders, assessed through pre- and post-training evaluations. • Number of technical experts or professionals engaged in wetland conservation efforts.



Annex 5: Outcome Indicators

Strategic Result Areas	Outcomes	Indicators
5. Strengthened organisational capacity and sustainability	5.1 Enhanced governance and management frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete operationalization of the new board and governance structures. • Complete implementation of the revised organizational structure.
	5.2 Streamlined operational processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of management systems fully integrated and operationalised • Complete integration of all management functions into the Microsoft Dynamics 365 ERP
	5.3 Increased staff competency and satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of positions in the new structures filled by appropriately skilled and qualified staff • Level of staff satisfaction • Number of professional development programs attended by staff • Number of staff achieving or exceeding performance targets
	5.4 Enhanced partnership impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of active strategic partnerships • Number of collaborative interventions implemented
	5.5 Secured and sustainable financial resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total amount of funds raised through various fundraising activities and donor contributions. • Number of new donors or funding sources acquired. • Growth of the reserve fund • Effectiveness of individual fundraising campaigns and outreach efforts.







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