

Executive summary: FUTURO – Future West African Marine Ecosystem

Strategic priorities for the 2025–2033 project phase

1. Vision and strategic justification: FUTURO is a transdisciplinary research initiative endorsed by the **UN Ocean Decade**, focusing on the West African Marine Ecosystem. This region provides food and income for over 200 million people but is currently threatened by multiple anthropogenic forces including the "triple stressor" of warming, acidification, and deoxygenation.

A co-design workshop with project partners from West Africa and Europe, held in November 2025, confirmed that FUTURO could form an essential platform to bridge the gap between scientific understanding and actionable policy in West Africa.

2. Key outcomes of the co-design process

- **Regional endorsement:** 69 participants from 9 African countries jointly endorsed a common vision, including an integrated regional observation system.
- **Thematic action plans:** Eight specialised groups developed roadmaps for priorities including fisheries management, climate resilience, and marine pollution.
- **Commitment to action:** Participants signed a "Call to Action," representing a collective pledge to institutional and personal engagement in the project.

3. Core strategic pillars for 2026–2030

- **African-led governance:** Stakeholders demand a transition from international management to regional leadership, ensuring that West African institutions (e.g., CRODT, IMROP, CAOPA, ECOWAS, ...) drive the decision-making process.
- **Capacity development:** Moving beyond academic training to include technical skills for local technicians, small-scale fishers, and community monitors to ensure long-term sustainability.
- **Evidence-based policy (science-to-policy):** Creating direct links between scientific data (e.g., pollution drift models) and national regulatory frameworks to combat threats like IUU fishing or coastal erosion and enable sustainable management of natural resources.
- **Inclusive engagement:** Emphasising the role of women, youth, young scientists, and traditional knowledge to ensure the "blue economy" benefits local livelihoods.

4. Roadmap forward

- **2026–2027 (FUTURO^{pre}: Consolidation):** Refining the governance structure, securing multi-donor funding, and launching initial thematic pilot projects.
- **2028–2030 (FUTURO^{core}: Campaign phase):** Executing an international, inter-disciplinary concerted research effort from the coast to the open ocean (including yearlong, multi-ship observational campaign with RV METEOR IV) to provide the first comprehensive and seasonally resolved annual data baseline for the region and initialise a long-term observation & monitoring network.
- **2031–2033 (FUTURO^{syn}: Synthesis and legacy):** Finalising the permanent regional monitoring network and transferring the gained knowledge and developed tools to national and regional authorities. Implementing FUTURO as a long-term African-led programme

Conclusion FUTURO is going beyond the scope of a scientific project; it is developing into a shared regional framework. The success of the next phase depends on maintaining the momentum of the co-design process, enhancing African participation, securing transparent funding pathways, and ensuring that West African leadership becomes the heart of the initiative.