

13th WIOMSA Scientific Symposium — Key Takeaways

Enhancing Food and Nutrition Security in the WIO Region: Regional Collaboration for High-Quality Nutrient and Contaminant Data in Aquatic Foods

Date & Venue: 29 September 2025, Pride Inn Hotels, Mombasa, Kenya

Overview

The symposium gathered scientists and practitioners from across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) to explore how regional collaboration and improved analytical data can strengthen food and nutrition security. Participants agreed that better evidence and coordination are essential to integrate nutrition and food safety into fisheries management and policy.

1. Regional and cross-country coordination is essential

Fragmented datasets and uneven analytical capacity limit evidence-based policymaking. Participants called for a regional Community of Practice to harmonize methods, align sampling efforts, and share laboratory resources, ensuring comparable and reliable data across the WIO.

2. High-quality, context-specific data is foundational

Many locally consumed species remain poorly characterized for nutrients and contaminants. Integrating this data with fisheries statistics will make evidence more policy-relevant and support informed decisions on dietary guidance and resource management.

3. Capacity building and institutional investment are critical

Limited infrastructure and technical skills hinder consistent data generation. Strengthening laboratory capacity, training programs, and regional partnerships was emphasized as key to building a sustainable analytical ecosystem.

4. Aquatic foods must be elevated in nutrition and food systems policy

Nutrient-rich, afford and available small pelagic fish from freshwater and marine systems (locally called dagaa, omena, kimarawali and katashingo) are often overlooked. Embedding aquatic food data into dietary guidelines, school meals, and fisheries policies can deliver major public health benefits and support sustainable food systems.

5. The EAF-Nansen Programme is a strategic platform for integration

The programme provides a strong foundation for embedding nutrition and safety objectives into regional marine research. Co-designed sampling protocols, shared data, and collaboration with local institutions can ensure outputs meet national priorities.

Regional collaboration, shared investment, and evidence-based policy were recognized as key to unlocking the full potential of aquatic foods for healthier diets, resilient livelihoods, and sustainable blue economies in the WIO region