



# 1. INTRODUCTION

The West African ecoregion is rich in biodiversity and provides numerous ecosystem services. But it is also a region that is environmentally sensitive. The discovery of significant hydrocarbon reserves off the West African coast, particularly in Senegal and Mauritania, and ongoing oil and gas exploration in Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone, offer new development opportunities but also pose additional risks for local people and economies, and for marine and coastal ecosystems if they are not properly managed.

In this context, protection of marine and coastal environments and biodiversity conservation are fast becoming priorities for West Africa. That is why we launched COBIA<sup>1</sup>, a multistakeholder project designed to mitigate the environmental impacts and support the sustainable management of oil and gas activities in the West African region.

## OBJECTIVES:

The COBIA project aims to improve the management of environmental risks related to offshore oil and gas activities in West Africa by:

- improving scientific knowledge on the state of the marine environment and on vulnerable areas;
- strengthening the involvement of local communities in monitoring and warning systems;
- engaging and mobilizing public and private stakeholders affected by the impacts of oil and gas activities;
- developing and strengthening national oil spill response plans;
- ratifying and implementing the Additional Protocol to the Abidjan Convention on Environmental Norms and Standards for Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration and Production;
- initiating a dynamic national and sub-regional partnership for the sustainable management of oil and gas resources.

### BUDGET ENGAGED

€ 3,250,000

### BUDGET PER STRATEGY

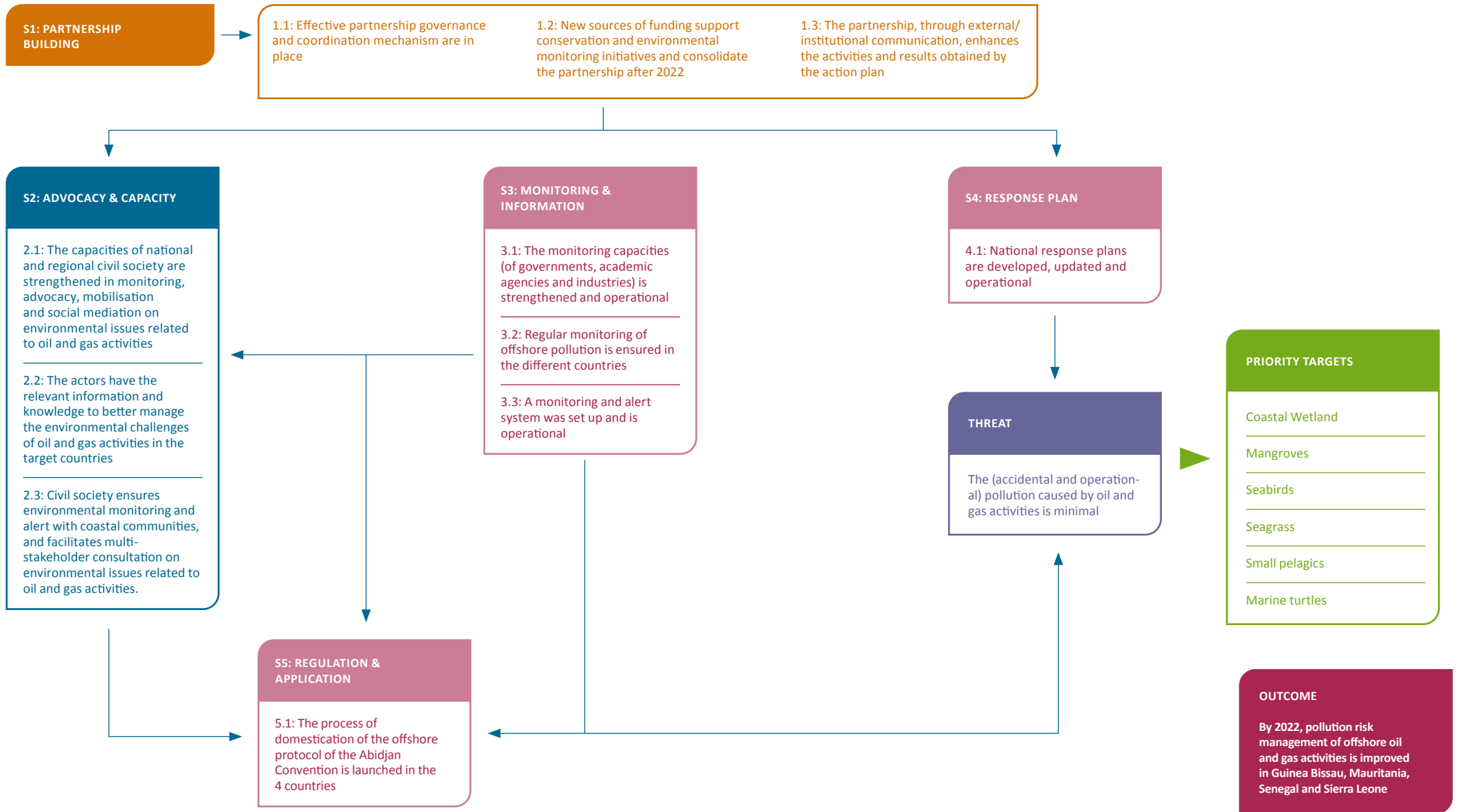
- Strengthening the partnership 3.5%
- Improving knowledge and capacities for citizen mobilisation and decision-makers commitment 29.6%
- Pollution monitoring and information system 23.5%
- Preparation and updating of national contingency plans 23.1%
- Strengthening and implementation of regulations 20.3%



## THE PARTNERSHIP



<sup>1</sup> COBIA: Conservation of Offshore Biodiversity in Africa



● Main stakeholders = non-governmental    ● Main stakeholders = governments and institutions



## 2. PROGRESS AND ACTIVITIES

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Working together through the COBIA project allowed us to strengthen collaboration and action through an innovative, participatory, inclusive, and interactive approach. Indeed, the inclusive and participatory process of designating national coordinating institutions was instrumental in strengthening our partnership.

The development and delivery of advocacy, awareness-raising, communication, and training tools focused specifically on strengthening the environmental management of oil and gas activities was a first for the West African region and contributed significantly to stakeholder engagement.

Similarly, local monitoring and alert committees that were set up in project countries gave citizens a mandate to promptly identify and report oil spill incidents to the competent authorities.

And the development of the onshore POLMAR Plan<sup>2</sup> in Senegal is innovative in that it has integrated management of marine pollution resulting from accidental oil spills affecting the coastal zone.

### STRATEGY 1: STRENGTHENING THE PARTNERSHIP

This strategy aims to strengthen collaboration and synergies between stakeholders in different countries and resource mobilisation through:

- Establishing a national and regional framework for leadership and coordination;
- Mobilising additional funds;
- Exchanging and sharing experiences;
- Maintaining, strengthening activities and ensuring the sustainability of COBIA achievements.

### STRATEGY 2: IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY FOR CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

The aim is to inform and train civil society organisations, coastal communities, and local elected officials about the problems and challenges of managing the risks associated with offshore oil and gas activities in target countries through:

- Establishing surveillance and alert committees in sensitive areas;
- Strengthen capacity and knowledge of stakeholders (via training leading to a diploma, continuing education, online training, etc.);
- Producing advocacy, communication, and awareness-raising tools.

<sup>2</sup> POLMAR Plan: National Plan for the Prevention and Control of Marine Pollution by Hydrocarbons impacting land areas.

### STRATEGY 3: SETTING UP INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND MONITORING POLLUTION

In this strategy, the aim is to enhance the scientific knowledge related to the marine and coastal environment with a focus on vulnerable areas through:

- Building the capacity of research institutions in charge of environmental monitoring;
- Empowering civil society, coastal communities, and the private and public sectors;
- Implementing a pollution monitoring system;
- Operationalising environmental monitoring and warning systems.

### STRATEGY 4: PREPARING AND UPDATING NATIONAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANS

It aims to update and/or create national response plans in the event of a major accident through:

- Developing the onshore POLMAR Plan for Senegal;
- Developing the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan in Guinea Bissau;
- Delivering a diagnostic study on the operationalisation of the Oil spill contingency Plans<sup>3</sup> in Mauritania and Sierra Leone.

### STRATEGY 5: STRENGTHENING AND IMPLEMENTING REGULATIONS

This strategy aims to strengthen legal frameworks designed to improve environmental management of oil and gas activities through:

- The ratification of the Additional Protocol to the Abidjan Convention on Environmental Norms and Standards for Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration and Production;
- Implementing the Additional Protocol of the Abidjan Convention through the adoption of regulatory texts at State level.

<sup>3</sup> MARPOL: National Plan for the Prevention and Control of Marine Pollution by Hydrocarbons.

## LESSONS

COBIA created an opportunity for sub-regional stakeholder collaboration for the sustainable management of oil and gas activities and its implementation has offered several lessons.

1. Establishment of the partnership framework delivered improved collaboration, knowledge exchange, and sharing of experiences amongst stakeholders.
2. Production and dissemination of communication, awareness, and advocacy tools at regional and national levels contributed to stakeholders awareness.
3. Training (diploma, continuing education, online) helped increase the number experts in environmental management of oil and gas activities.
4. Environmental monitoring requires greater technical and financial resources and must cover both offshore and coastal areas.
5. Ratification and domestication of the Additional Protocol to the Abidjan Convention are complex processes outside COBIA's technical mandate and sphere of influence and require action from other national institutions (ministries, parliaments).
6. The implementation of the regional task force requires regional collaboration, national institutional support, and substantial financial resource.

### 3. RESULTS AND IMPACTS

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The implementation of the COBIA project achieved several key results.

Regarding the operational systems for the monitoring of marine pollution, a manual of harmonized procedures has been developed, including the monitoring of micro contaminants, turtle strandings and marine mammals.

The knowledge on oil and gas environmental issues was improved through collaboration with research and training institutions. A series of training courses (diploma, continuing education, online) were carried out through the GAED and GIDEL Masters programs, and a MOOC<sup>4</sup>. In addition, local capacity has been improved and contributed to establish community surveillance and alert committees in the four project countries.

The emergency oil spill response mechanism in the subregion has been strengthened. Mauritania and Sierra Leone updated their emergency plans. Senegal updated its National Oil Spill Contingency Plan to include the coastal zones. And Guinea Bissau is in the process of finalising its national contingency plan (PNIU-GB).

Fundraising initiatives helped mobilise funding in order to continue activities and consolidate the partnership (e.g., MAVA, GRID ARENDAL, OAK Foundation, and WACA<sup>5</sup>). In addition, other initiatives are under way that will fund complementary activities in project countries (e.g., SECOMA<sup>6</sup> and PREMAC<sup>7</sup>).

Further results are expected beyond the end of COBIA Phase 2. These include the ratification of the Additional Protocol to the Abidjan Convention on Environmental Norms and Standards for Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration and Production by countries other than Sierra Leone, and the operationalisation of the emergency response plan in Guinea Bissau.

<sup>4</sup> MOOC : Massive Open Online Courses

<sup>5</sup> West African Coastal Management Programme

<sup>6</sup> Coastal and Marine Environment Monitoring Project in Mauritania

<sup>7</sup> Research Programme on the Marine and Coastal Environment of Senegal

## CASE STUDY 1: ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING PROTOCOL FOR MARINE AND COASTAL ENVIRONMENTS

Mauritania's experience in monitoring the marine and coastal environment in relation to oil and gas activities, piloted by national research institutions, notably IMROP<sup>8</sup> and ONISPA<sup>9</sup>, has been shared and replicated at the sub-regional level as part of the COBIA Initiative. And IMROP produced and shared a procedures manual on environmental monitoring for the analysis of pollutants and the monitoring of strandings of turtles and marine mammals along the coastline.

A number of different research centres (IMROP, CRODT<sup>10</sup>, CIPA<sup>11</sup>, IMBO<sup>12</sup>) initiated a protocol for the harmonization of environmental monitoring, and also supported exchange visits for researchers and technicians (CRODT and CIPA). Following these, CRODT set up an operational environmental monitoring system.



Collection of sediment samples and surveys of environmental parameters and water transparency at the Grande côte, off Lompoul-Senegal

<sup>8</sup> Mauritanian Institute of Oceanographic Research and Fisheries (Mauritania)

<sup>9</sup> National Office for Sanitary Enforcement of Fisheries and Aquaculture products (Mauritania)

<sup>10</sup> Centre for Oceanographic Research Dakar-Thiaroye (Senegal)

<sup>11</sup> Centre for Applied Fisheries Research (Guinea-Bissau)

<sup>12</sup> Institute of Marine Biology and Oceanography (Sierra Leone)



## CASE STUDY 2: DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS AND EXPERTISE

Strengthening skills allowed to develop a critical mass of expertise on environmental issues associated with oil and gas exploration. This included the introduction of 12 modules in the GIDEL<sup>13</sup> Master's Program and the creation of a professionalisation course on oil and gas management.

A total of 45 Master's dissertations have now been produced, 32 at GAED<sup>14</sup> and 13 at GIDEL with positive feedback regarding the contribution of graduates who have joined professional administrative bodies in the public and private sectors, and also civil society organizations.

On the continuing education front, 1,777 people participated in three MOOC sessions on the environmental management of oil and gas activities. And about 1,000 people participated in learning activities such as national and international seminars (scientific days<sup>15</sup>, round tables<sup>16</sup>) and field visits to coastal communities.



Gas exploitation site in Ngadiaga (Thiès-Senegal): students meet engineers to understand the gas exploitation process.

<sup>13</sup> GIDEL: Integrated Management and Sustainable Development of the West African Coast (Cheikh Anta Diop University)

<sup>14</sup> GAED : Management of Extractive Activities and Sustainable Development (Nouakchott University Al-Asriya and University Gaston Berger de Saint Louis)

<sup>15</sup> 4th edition of the Coastal Science Days organised by the Master Chaire Unesco GIDEL on 'Oil and gas exploitation: what are the stakes for Senegal and the coastal countries of West Africa' (3 to 5 November 2020 at Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar)

<sup>16</sup> Round tables organised by the Master Chaire Unesco GIDEL on "Hydrocarbons and sustainable/sustainable development" (4 and 5 October 2022; Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar)

## KEY IMPACTS

The five strategies implemented by COBIA in the four project countries had the following principal impacts:

1. Generation of scientific data improved knowledge of vulnerable and sensitive areas in the marine and coastal environment.
2. Capacity building of research institutions led to the establishment of a marine and coastal environmental monitoring system.
3. The commitment of the civil society and local communities helped to establish and operationalise surveillance and alert committees in oil and gas exploitation areas (Kayar, Saint Louis, Sangomar), and supported their integration into local monitoring and governance mechanisms.
4. Analysis of baseline data on the marine environment produced by CRODT led to the development of an oil spill coastal sensitivity map for the Senegal coastline.
5. Engaging new partners (WACA, Grid Arendal) for co-financing the project has guaranteed the continuation of some project activities.
6. Knowledge and experience sharing between project countries, especially between civil society actors and oceanographic research institutions, has facilitated efficient replication of good practices.

## 4. WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT

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COBIA has achieved a number of successes, but many challenges remain. To meet these challenges, it is essential to broaden the partnership at national and regional levels and to consider them as a priority for the continuation of COBIA. This includes continuing to build and boost the partnership at national and regional levels.

Furthermore, it is necessary to continue strengthening training and scientific research, acquiring equipment, harmonising the environmental monitoring protocol at the regional level, and developing national emergency response plans for the coastal zone. In terms of training, the aim is to maintain the capacity-building dynamic by relying on expertise and the production of knowledge.

On the legal front, the process of ratification and domestication of the Additional Protocol to the Abidjan Convention on Environmental Norms and Standards for Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration and Production should be continued. Finally, national contingency plans need to be finalised and extended to the coastal zone.

Concerning advocacy and awareness-raising, it is important to mobilise the various actors for the creation of a coalition of CSOs and to operationalise the watch and warning committees. Finally, the mobilisation of funds for the continuation of COBIA remains fundamental.

*“In the context of oil and gas exploration and extraction, COBIA is the cradle of initiatives for marine and coastal environmental conservation.”*

Dr Saliou FAYE-Centre de Recherches Océanographiques  
Dakar-Thiaroye (CRODT)

*“Scientific knowledge must be a key tool for decision support, if our decision-makers want to protect our ecosystems from this new threat..”*

Dr WAGNE Moulaye-Institut Mauritanien de Recherches  
Océanographiques et de Pêches (IMROP)



