

Strategic Roadmap of the Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activities (CGIMA) (2025-2026)

1. Introduction

The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) continues to serve as a geostrategic maritime corridor linking the African continent with the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. Its sea lanes support vital trade routes and underpin the economic and food security of both coastal and inland states. However, the region remains vulnerable to a spectrum of maritime security threats, including piracy resurgence, illicit trafficking, IUU fishing, and environmental degradation. These threats have become more sophisticated and interlinked, intensified by regional instability, geostrategic rivalry in the Indo-Pacific, and fiscal constraints affecting regional enforcement capacities.

In response, the Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activities (CGIMA) was established as a regional mechanism for fostering dialogues, promoting collaboration, and coordination efforts to address these pressing concerns. Building on the legacy of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), CGIMA provides a platform through which regional and international stakeholders can collectively engage, exchange information, and adopt coordinating measures.

The Republic of Seychelles took on the Chairmanship of CGIMA following a decision of the 2nd CGIMA meeting held on the 5th September 2024. The handing over ceremony between the Republic of Kenya and the Republic of Seychelles was done on the 18th February 2025. . This change in leadership arrives at a pivotal moment. The maritime threat landscape in the WIO has grown increasingly complex and multifaceted. While piracy has resurfaced off the Somali coast, evident in renewed attacks during late 2023 and again suppressed by 2nd quarter of 2024, various illicit maritime activities, including maritime smuggling and environmental offences are gaining prominence according to reports from the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre. These developments have been further complicated by shifting naval deployments due to geopolitical unrest in other parts of the Indo-Pacific, particularly the Red Sea, and Gulf of Aden. Additionally, fiscal pressures on traditional donor partners risk diminishing critical capacity-building support across the region.

In this evolving context, the Chairmanship begins with a well-defined purpose and opportunity. Drawing on long-standing maritime engagement, multilateral principles, and an inclusive approach to diplomacy, the Chair is well positioned to guide CGIMA through a period of strategic renewal.

This Strategic Roadmap outlines the Chair's vision and priorities for the 2025–2026 period fully in line his intervention during the CGIMA presidency handing over ceremony in February 2025. It lays out a practical framework aimed at enhancing CGIMA's relevance, reinforcing institutional linkages, and fostering collective ownership among regional stakeholders. Developed through consultations, this Roadmap seeks to reposition CGIMA as an essential pillar of the WIO's maritime security architecture.

2. Chairs' Vision and Guiding Principles

2.1. Vision Statement

Under the current Chairmanship, the Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activities (CGIMA) is envisioned as a trusted and effective dialogue platform, rooted in regional ownership and strengthened by international partnerships. It serves as a voluntary, inclusive, and non-operational mechanism for dialogue, fostering coordination and shared understanding among maritime actors across the Western Indian Ocean.

The Chair seeks to advance a CGIMA that provides added value through proactive discussions on existing and emerging threats, that supports strategic convergence among various stakeholders and frameworks, and that facilitates mutual learning, transparency, and informal cooperation across the region. CGIMA's strength lies in its ability to convene a diverse range of actors including governmental, interagency, maritime industry, and academic, to exchange perspectives, share non-sensitive information, and encourage synergy of efforts for action.

The vision for CGIMA is to remain adaptive to the region's dynamic security environment, strategically focused on matters where open dialogue is most needed, and diplomatically positioned to enhance regional coherence without duplicating the roles of existing operational structures. In doing so, CGIMA contributes to a collective commitment to safe, secure, and sustainable maritime spaces in the Western Indian Ocean.

3. Guiding Principles

The Seychelles Chairmanship will be anchored in the following core principles, which will support all activities undertaken by CGIMA during the 2025-2026 period and guide the direction of its engagement.

3.1. Regional ownership and leadership

The effectiveness and legitimacy of CGIMA depend on its ability to reflect the priorities and aspirations of its regional members. Seychelles will place particular emphasis on strengthening the leadership and engagement of WIO states, advancing a sense of shared responsibility, and promoting participatory approaches. By encouraging bottom-up contributions, the Chairmanship seeks to reinforce a culture of accountability, trust, and collective action.

3.2. Diplomatic coherence and complementarity

The WIO is host to several well-established maritime security mechanisms, including the Djibouti Code of Conduct – Jeddah Amendment (DCoC/JA), the Indian Ocean Commission's (IOC) led Regional Maritime Security Architecture (RMSA), the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction Mechanism (SHADE), the EU Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) and Combined Maritime Forces (CMF). The Seychelles Chairmanship will prioritise synergy and complementarity, ensuring coherence across these platforms without duplicating efforts.

3.3. Consultation, inclusivity and representation

The Chair is committed to ensuring CGIMA remains an inclusive platform. This includes meaningful representation of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), coastal and land-linked states. The Chair will also promote the active involvement of both traditional and non-traditional actors, including line ministries, shipping sector partners, port authorities, interagency representatives, academia, and the private sector. Open and inclusive consultations will be encouraged to ensure that CGIMA's agenda and outputs continue to reflect a broad representation and regional perspectives.

3.4. Strategic focus and deliverability

To maintain its credibility, CGIMA must deliver results. The Seychelles Chairmanship will undertake a pragmatic, impact-oriented approach, prioritising actions that can generate measurable value while recognizing the resources and capacities of individual Member States. The focus will be on initiatives that are achievable, scalable, and embedded within existing regional frameworks.

3.5. Elevated visibility and global relevance

As maritime security dynamics shift global, it is crucial that the WIO's voice remains visible on the international stage. Seychelles will leverage relevant multilateral forums- including the UN General Assembly, UN Security Council briefings, African Union Summits, and IORA ministerial meetings, to advocate for sustained international focus and investment in the region. Efforts will also be made to strengthen relationships with donor governments, regional bodies, and private sector actors to support CGIMA's priorities.

4. Strategic Objectives

The following strategic objectives articulate Seychelles' core priorities for its 2025-2026 tenure as Chair of CGIMA. These objectives are informed by the shifting maritime security environment in the WIO, and the broader aspiration to reposition CGIMA as a central, responsive, and effective component of the region's maritime security architecture. These objectives seek to maximise CGIMA's added value by focusing on its strengths-consultation, coordination, complementarity, and trust-building-while remaining within the bounds of its voluntary, non-binding, and non-operational mandate.

4.1. Objective 1: Consolidate CGIMA's convening role in the Maritime Security Architecture

- Align CGIMA's work and calendar with relevant global and regional forums (e.g. SHADE, RMSA meetings, UNODC IOFMC initiatives and AU) to ensure synergy and avoid duplication.
- Convene at least 1 plenary session per year complemented.
 - **Timeline:** First plenary (Q4 2025, aligned with SHADE/RMSA).
- Disseminate summaries, and communiqués after each event to reinforce visibility and track follow-up.

4.2. Objective 2: Facilitate informed dialogue on complex and evolving maritime threats

- Convene thematic reflections during CGIMA plenary, informed by briefings from relevant regional mechanisms (e.g., DCoC/JA WG, IOC/RMSA, CMF SHADE, AU) on piracy resurgence, trafficking routes, IUU fishing, and other concerns.
- Encourage Member States or partners to lead short scenario-based reflections to strengthen cross-sector planning.
 - **Timeline:** Q4 2025 – Single consolidated thematic session addressing piracy resurgence, trafficking trends, IUU fishing, and maritime cyber risks.

4.3. Objective 3: Promote synergies among regional mechanisms and maritime stakeholders

- Develop a CGIMA-led “Synergies and Gaps” paper as a reference tool for members and partners, drawing on inputs from DCoC/JA, CMF, SHADE, and IOC/RMSA secretariats.
 - **Timeline:** Q1 2026 – Publication of the “Synergies and Gaps” paper.
- Encourage multi-platform attendance at CGIMA events and cross-pollination of expertise.

4.4. Objective 4: Deepen understanding of maritime governance, Rule of Law, and legal finish

- Promote awareness of ongoing initiatives by COMESA, UNODC, and in line with the African Union's maritime security architecture, including the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (2050 AIMS) and the Lomé Charter, to ensure coherence and continental alignment.
- Encourage collaboration with legal experts and judicial officers to share experiences and recommendations for strengthening maritime law enforcement.

4.5. Objective 5: Increase CGIMA's strategic visibility and influence

- Promote CGIMA at major regional and international events (e.g. IORA, AU Summits, IMO, UNGA, UNSC).
- Ensure timely publication and dissemination of communiqués and summaries.
- Use virtual and hybrid formats to maximise participation, particularly from resource-constrained members.
- Strengthen partnerships with maritime think tanks and media to disseminate CGIMA outputs.

5. Expected outcomes

CGIMA's effectiveness as a platform for regional maritime cooperation depends on its capacity to achieve results that are practical and in line with its voluntary, non-operational nature. The following expected outcomes and implementation modalities provide a framework for ensuring focus, inclusivity, and accountability throughout the 2025–2026 period.

- Broader and deeper engagement from regional and international maritime security stakeholders through CGIMA's Working Groups, Friends of the Chair, and open plenary sessions.
- Improved frequency and consistency of non-sensitive information exchange, joint meeting summaries, and briefings across CGIMA activities.
- Deeper alignment with regional mechanisms such as DCoC/JA, RMSA, CMF, and IOC through side events, joint communiqués, and shared programming.
- Recognition of CGIMA's role as a facilitator of anticipatory dialogue and complementarity in the wider maritime security architecture.
- Regularly convened thematic Working Groups producing actionable summaries and recommendations for plenary reflection and uptake.
- Friends of the Chair group supporting high-level guidance, agenda setting, and mid-cycle progress reviews.
- Representation and recognition of CGIMA at major multilateral maritime and security fora, reinforcing legitimacy and international interest.

6. Implementation Framework

The Chair will work through a dedicated coordination team supported by the CGIMA Secretariat and focal points across CGIMA structures. This includes maintaining active liaison with Working Group leads and Friends of the Chair representatives.

- A results-tracking framework will be established, noting milestones under each objective. Mid-term stocktaking will assist in re-assessing focus if needed.
- The Contact Group will convene at least twice yearly to review roadmap implementation, advise on strategic direction, and foster buy-in among members and observers.
- Communiqués, summaries, and briefs will be produced after each meeting and disseminated promptly to all participants and stakeholders.
- Outreach materials, annual bulletins, and CGIMA highlights will be developed and shared at key events and through partner platforms. In light of the dynamic security landscape, the implementation framework will remain adaptive to shifting priorities and emerging concerns, in consultation with stakeholders.