
STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE AFRICAN GREAT LAKES ADVISORY GROUPS (2026–2030)

(Abridged Summary Edition)

African Centre for Aquatic Research and Education (ACARE)

Council of Advisory Groups (CoAG)

African Great Lakes Region

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This condensed Strategic Plan (2026–2030) presents a unified vision and framework for sustainable management of the African Great Lakes (AGL)—Albert, Edward, Kivu, Malawi/Niassa/Nyasa, Tanganyika, Turkana, and Victoria—under the coordination of the African Centre for Aquatic Research and Education (ACARE) and its Council of Advisory Groups (CoAG). This document consolidates insights from the six AGL Advisory Groups representing ten riparian countries, they are the:

- Lake Edward Albert Advisory Group (LEAAG)
- Lake Kivu Advisory Group (LKAG)
- Lake Malawi/Nyasa/Niassa Basin Fisheries and Aquaculture Network (LMNNBFAN)
- Lake Tanganyika Science Advisory Group (LT-SAG)
- Lake Turkana Advisory Group (LTuAG)
- Lake Victoria Advisory Group (LVAG)

The plan provides strategic direction for strengthening science-policy linkages, enhancing institutional capacity, and fostering inclusive partnerships to ensure sustainable livelihoods and ecological integrity across the lakes. It is a product of participatory consultation, evidence synthesis, and alignment with international, continental, and regional frameworks.

Acknowledgement is extended to the ACARE Secretariat, ACARE-Africa (Kisumu Office), and members of the Advisory Groups, and regional institutions, universities, and development partners who contributed to this plan. Their collaboration reflects a shared commitment to science-driven solutions and regional integration for the long-term sustainability of the AGL.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

The AGL cover vast areas across ten countries: Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. Together, they sustain over 65 million people and provide essential ecosystem services, including fisheries, water supply, transportation, energy, and biodiversity.

Despite their ecological and socio-economic importance, the lakes face increasing pressures from both anthropogenic and climatic sources: pollution, overfishing, habitat destruction, land-use change, and the introduction of invasive species. Weak governance, limited data sharing, and fragmented policy coordination across countries exacerbate these challenges.

ACARE, established in 2017, facilitates regional collaboration, research harmonization, and policy dialogue across the AGL. The Strategic Plan 2026–2030 provides a roadmap to operationalize the work of Advisory Groups, promoting scientific excellence, knowledge integration, and adaptive governance.

1.2 Purpose

The Strategic Plan serves as a guiding framework for the Council of Advisory Groups to prioritize actions, allocate resources, and align stakeholders around a common vision. It aims to strengthen evidence-based decision-making, enhance regional policy coordination, promote stakeholder capacity building, and secure sustainable financing mechanisms for lake ecosystem management. Further, it outlines the specific actions, approaches, and guidelines for each Advisory Group.

Vision:

A thriving AGL ecosystem, where sustainable management practices foster resilient biodiversity, equitable resource use and vibrant communities, serving as a global model of ecosystem stewardship

Mission:

To foster collaborative, transboundary scientific research and knowledge-sharing that informs policy, strengthens capacity, builds partnerships, and mobilizes resources to provide clean water, nutritious food, healthy biodiversity, and enhanced economic opportunities for local communities, while strengthening resilience in the face of climate change.

1.3 Core Values

Values that guide ethical conduct, equity, innovation and accountability in implementing the Strategic Plan.

PRISES

Partnerships and Collaborations
Resilience and Sustainability
Inclusivity and Equity
Scientific Rigor and Innovation
Environmental and Social Responsibility
Stewardship and Accountability

1.4 Scope

The plan covers ten riparian nations and all seven major lakes. The plan focuses on freshwater ecosystem health, biodiversity conservation, socio-economic resilience, and institutional coordination, ensuring coherence with national policies and regional development frameworks.

1.5 History of the Organization

ACARE's establishment was motivated by the need to coordinate fragmented freshwater research on these multi-jurisdictional resources and to build capacity among African scientists. The six Advisory Groups (AGs) were created in 2019, each representing specific lakes and riparian countries.

The **Council of Advisory Groups (CoAG)** was formally established in 2023 to harmonize actions across the lakes and connect scientists, policymakers, and communities. ACARE-Africa, registered in Kenya in 2025, serves as the operational arm for African-based activities.

1.5.1 ACARE Programmes

ACARE operates through five core programmes:

1. **Advisory Groups Programme:** Fostering collaboration among over 200 freshwater experts across the AGL region.
2. **African Women in Science (AWIS):** Building female leadership in freshwater sciences through training and mentorship.
3. **Monitoring Programme:** Establishing long-term lake data collection frameworks.
4. **Education & Training Programme:** Enhancing technical and academic capacity for research and management.
5. **Information & Data Programme:** Making freshwater data accessible through the African Lakes Hub (www.africanlakeshub.org).

1.5.2 Council of Advisory Groups

The CoAG coordinates horizontal collaboration across Advisory Groups and vertical communication between ACARE and the AGs. It facilitates harmonization of methods, knowledge sharing, and advocacy for transboundary policies.

1.5.3 Context of the Strategic Plan

The plan aligns with key global and regional frameworks:

1. **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly 1, 2, 3, 13, 14, and 17.
2. **African Union Agenda 2063** – promoting blue economy, food security, and climate resilience.
3. **EAC Vision 2050** and **SADC Vision 2050**, which emphasize sustainable natural resource use and regional integration.

1.6 Methods of Developing the Strategic Plan

The plan was developed through participatory and evidence-based methods:

1. Situational analyses (SWOT, PESTEL) for each lake.
2. Multi-stakeholder consultations and expert working groups.
3. Validation workshops across regions.
4. Approval and adoption by the ACARE Board and CoAG.

This process ensured inclusivity, scientific rigor, and alignment with global best practices.

CHAPTER TWO: STRATEGIC DIRECTION

2.1 Mandate of the Advisory Groups

The AGs serve as regional expert platforms driving science-based policy and management. Their mandate includes knowledge generation, policy guidance, capacity building, coordination, and resource mobilization for ecosystem sustainability and livelihood improvement.

2.2 Analysis of Mission Statements

The mission statements highlight collaboration, science-based management, and sustainability. They emphasize partnerships, innovation, and the integration of local and scientific knowledge in decision-making.

2.3 Analysis of Vision Statements

The vision statements focus on ecosystem resilience, social well-being, and cooperative governance. They envision healthy, thriving lakes supporting prosperous communities through sustainable management and innovation.

2.4 Strengths and Gaps

The missions' strengths include emphasis on science, inclusivity, and sustainability; however, gaps exist in addressing climate resilience and measurable outcomes. Harmonization across AGs is needed for coherence and effectiveness.

2.6 Strategic Goals

1. Generation and dissemination of scientific knowledge on freshwater ecosystems.
2. Building capacity and empowerment.
3. Resource mobilization and institutional building.
4. Enhancing ecosystem sustainability and climate resilience.
5. Strengthening collaboration and partnerships.

2.8 Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of implementing this strategic plan for each goal will be:

1. Strengthened evidence-based policy development and informed decision-making across the AGL region.
2. Enhanced institutional and community capacity for sustainable freshwater management and innovation.
3. Establishment of a sustainable endowment fund, and improved operational efficiency and accountability to ensure long-term institutional sustainability.
4. Contributing to improved ecosystem health, adaptive management, and resilience of the AGL.
5. Enhanced coordination, advocacy, and shared governance for the sustainable management of the AGL.

CHAPTER THREE: SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

3.1 Critical Challenges

The key challenges affecting the AGL include weak governance, limited funding, fragmented research, and overexploitation. Additional issues involve poor coordination among riparian states, weak law enforcement, and limited stakeholder engagement.

3.2 PESTEL Analysis

The PESTEL Analysis covers the following:

Political: Varying governance capacities across countries; need for harmonized regional policies.

Economic: Heavy dependence on fisheries and natural resources, with limited diversification.

Social: Gender inequalities, poverty, and youth unemployment pressure resources.

Technological: Limited adoption of monitoring tools; need for modern data systems.

Environmental: Pollution, invasive species, and climate change degrade ecosystems.

Legal: Weak enforcement of existing frameworks and limited transboundary cooperation.

3.3 SWOT Analysis

The SWOT Analysis covers the following:

Strengths: Strong scientific expertise, partnerships, and existing institutions.

Weaknesses: Limited financing, poor coordination, weak science–policy linkages.

Opportunities: International interest, technology, and regional integration frameworks.

Threats: Political instability, climate risks, and resource conflicts.

3.4 Sector Trends

The freshwater research landscape is evolving with varying regional and global networks of freshwater experts, including the International Association of Great Lakes Research (IAGLR), Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization (LVFO), and Aquatic Ecosystem Health and Management Society (AEHMS). ACARE's comparative advantage lies in its regional coordination and capacity development programmes, and links most of the large freshwater networks to Africa. Past performance reviews highlight ACARE's success in building networks but note challenges with visa barriers, funding, and sustained attendance at global conferences.

CHAPTER FOUR: STRATEGIC ISSUES, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

4.1 Strategic Issues

The plan identifies five key issues: knowledge gaps, weak institutional capacity, limited funding, ecosystem degradation, and fragmented governance.

4.2 Strategic Goals and 4.3 Objectives

Each goal is linked to actionable objectives:

1. **Scientific Knowledge & Innovation:** Strengthen data systems, research collaborations, and publications.
2. **Capacity & Empowerment:** Train scientists, promote gender equity, and establish leadership programmes.
3. **Resource Mobilization:** Build institutional sustainability and financial stability.
4. **Ecosystem & Climate Resilience:** Enhance restoration and adaptive management.
5. **Governance & Partnerships:** Strengthen collaboration across governments, academia, and private sectors.

CHAPTER FIVE: STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AND ACTION PLAN

5.1 Key Success Factors

The plan highlights regular advisory and stakeholder meetings, publications, expansion of the AWIS programme, staff growth, and institutional strengthening.

5.2 Corporate Strategy

ACARE's approach combines research, partnerships, innovation, and evidence-based advocacy. The strategy integrates multi-level collaboration and adaptive management.

5.3 Programmes and Implementation

Each strategic goal corresponds to a programme:

1. **Scientific Knowledge and Innovation Programme:** Harmonized data collection, publications, and dissemination.

2. **Capacity Development Programme:** Training, mentorship, and gender inclusion.
3. **Resource Mobilization Programme:** Donor engagement, Public-Private-Partnerships, and sustainable financing.
4. **Ecosystem and Climate Resilience Programme:** Restoration, monitoring, and adaptation.
5. **Governance and Partnerships Programme:** Cross-border coordination and stakeholder engagement.

A detailed M&E framework accompanies each programme with timelines and indicators.

CHAPTER SIX: IMPLEMENTATION AND COORDINATION FRAMEWORK

6.1 Coordination Framework and Functions

ACARE/ACARE Africa Boards

- i) Provides strategic direction, policy guidance, and oversight.
- ii) Reviews progress reports and approves major initiatives e.g., MOUs.
- iii) Advises on governance, partnerships, and funding mechanisms.

ACARE Secretariat

- i) Overall coordination and oversight of strategic plan implementation.
- ii) Ensures alignment of AG activities with regional priorities and transboundary issues.
- iii) Mobilization and management of financial and technical resources.
- iv) Convening of the Council & AGs meetings.
- v) Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of progress.
- vi) Facilitating partnerships at regional and global levels.

Council of Advisory Groups

- i) Translate strategic goals into coordinated annual work plans and budgets.
- ii) Monitor overall progress against KPIs and the strategic plan.
- iii) Facilitate resource mobilization and allocation across AGs.
- iv) Serve as the central hub for communication and problem-solving between AGs.
- v) Report progress and challenges to ACARE.

Advisory Groups (AGs)

- i) Conduct research, data collection, and innovation in thematic areas in the AGL.
- ii) Generate, package, and disseminate scientific knowledge for policy uptake.
- iii) Implement specific activities, training, and community engagement initiatives.
- iv) Report progress, challenges, and lessons learned to ACARE Secretariat.
- v) Foster collaborations with local stakeholders and communities.

6.2 Governance & Leadership

The governance structure emphasizes transparency and accountability through defined roles of ACARE Boards, AGs, and partners. These leadership functions are closely linked to the coordination framework and include:

- i) **Joint Annual Work Planning:** ACARE convenes annual stakeholder network meetings with the Council and AGs
- ii) **Regular Communication Channels:** Quarterly virtual meetings between ACARE Secretariat, Council leadership, and AG Chairs

- iii) **Monthly AG coordination calls to track progress on activities:** Dedicated online knowledge-sharing platform (dashboard, repository, or intranet) for real-time data and document sharing
- iv) **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting (MER):** ACARE Secretariat leads with inputs from AGs
- v) **Quarterly progress reports submitted by AGs to ACARE:** Semi-annual consolidated reports presented to ACARE by the Council
- vi) **Independent mid-term and end-term review:** To assess performance and outcomes
- vii) **Partnership and Resource Mobilization Coordination:** ACARE Secretariat coordinates donor engagement, ensuring AGs and Council are kept informed
- viii) **Joint proposals:** developed with AGs, endorsed by Council, submitted through ACARE.

6.3 Accountability and Transparency Measures

- i) **Defined Roles & ToRs:** Each body (ACARE, Council, AGs) has clear Terms of Reference.
- ii) **Performance Contracts:** AGs and Secretariat staff implement activities under measurable targets.
- iii) **Open Information Sharing:** All reports, budgets, and evaluations shared with stakeholders.
- iv) **Feedback Loops:** Community voices and stakeholder feedback integrated through AGs into decision-making.

6.4 Implementation Budget

A draft five-year budget has been created by the CoAG which supports the five thematic programmes, with allocations for infrastructure, capacity building, governance, and monitoring. Budget optimization prioritizes sustainability and measurable outcomes. The draft budget will be presented at the [Annual Meeting of the African Great Lakes Stakeholder Network](#) during February 4-6, 2026, Kigali, Rwanda.

6.5 Work Plan

A detailed work plan defines milestones, responsibilities, and outputs for 2026–2030, aligned with ACARE’s strategic pillars.

6.6 Risk Management Framework

Risks are categorized as financial, operational, political, or environmental. Mitigation strategies include diversification of funding, contingency planning, and adaptive learning.

Annual Workplan for 5 Years from 2026 - 2030 (white boxes indicate quarters in a year)

Goal	Key Activity	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Responsibility	Output/Indicator
Goal 1:	Operationalize regional research data hub	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■			ACARE Secretariat	Functional data repository
Goal 1:	Conduct annual research symposia	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	CoAG & AGs	5 annual conferences held
Goal 1:	Publish policy briefs & scientific reports	■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■		Advisory Groups	10 policy briefs published
Goal 1:	Develop harmonized monitoring protocols	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■				ACARE Secretariat	Protocols adopted/ 7 lakes
Goal 2:	Identify and nominate candidates for the African Women in Science (AWIS) programme	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	ACARE-Africa	60 women trained
Goal 2:	Train early-career scientists in blue economy	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■			Partner Universities	150 scientists trained
Goal 2:	Establish regional mentorship framework	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■		ACARE Secretariat	Framework operational
Goal 3:	Develop donor engagement strategy	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■				ACARE Board	Strategy approved
Goal 3:	Initiate public-private partnerships (PPPs)		■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■		CoAG/Governments	5 PPPs operational
Goal 4:	Implement lake ecosystem monitoring programmes	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	ACARE & AGs	Annual ecosystem reports
Goal 4:	Develop and implement climate adaptation pilots		■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■		Regional Partners	3 pilot projects implemented.
Goal 4:	Promote ecosystem restoration/invasive species control	■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■	AGs & Communities	Restored habitats
Goal 5:	Formalize cooperation agreements (MoUs)	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■				ACARE Secretariat	10 MoUs signed
Goal 5:	Enhance stakeholder engagement forums	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	CoAG/Governments	5 forums per year
Goal 5:	Establish (M&E) dashboards	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■		ACARE Secretariat	Dashboard operational

Risk Management Framework

S/N o	Risks	Description of the risk	Source of risk	Risk Likelihood	Severity (L/M/H)	Overall Risk Level	Mitigation Measures
Strategic Objective 1: Strengthen Institutional Coordination and Governance							
1.	Political	Cross border conflicts/disputes	External	High	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online platforms for effective comms and coordination
2.	Human	Lower levels of participation in meetings and collaborations Absence of key competences and capacity	Internal	Medium	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trainings/capacity building and skill Sensitization and lobbying for presences in organizations
3.	Pol. and reg.	Conflicting regulations	External	High	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate the harmonization of relevant policies
Objective 2: Enhance knowledge management and data sharing							
4.	Technical	Absence of data sharing platforms / mechanisms	Internal	Medium	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage on the existing data sharing platforms Development of partnerships for data sharing
		Conflicting property rights	Internal	Medium	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance IP Agreements
5.	Financial	Inadequate finance for implementation of proposed activities	External	High	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop resource mobilization strategies
6.	Climate	Climatic condition	External	High	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt climate smart approaches
7.	Cyber security	Loss of data	External	High	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of loss controls
Objective 3: Build capacity and stakeholder engagement							
8.	Financial	Inadequate finance for implementation of proposed activities	External	High	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop resource mobilization strategies
9.	Cultural	Conflict with cultural norms	External	High	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conforming to existing and acceptable culture
10.	Social	Low literacy	External	Medium	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and adopt appropriate communication
Objective 4: Promote sustainable Resource Management and Climate Resilience							
11.	Technical	Lack of supporting data/information	Internal	Medium	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data sharing platforms
12.	Policy	Conflicting resource allocations for implementation	External	Medium	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop policy briefs to sensitize Lobbying for sustainable management of resources
13.	Climate	Climatic change	External	High	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt climate smart approaches
Objective 5: Mobilize Resources and Partnerships							
14.	Financial	Competition for the same resource	External	high	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Donor mapping Lobby for government capitulation Create strategic/multiple partnerships
15.	Human	Capacity to mobilize the resources	Internal	High	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trainings/capacity building on resource mobilization
		Technology developments	Internal	High	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovative ways for resource mobilization

CHAPTER SEVEN: RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS AND MOBILIZATION

7.1 Financial Requirements

The indicative envelope supports implementation of all programs, with funding expected from governments, donors, and private sector partnerships.

7.2 Human Resources

AG-specific staffing plans cover scientific, administrative, and communications positions, emphasizing gender balance and regional representation.

7.3 Infrastructure and Technological Needs

Investments include laboratories, research vessels, and data platforms for monitoring and knowledge management.

7.4 Resource Mobilization Strategies

Funding streams include:

1. Donor engagement
2. Government contributions
3. Private sector CSR
4. Foundations and philanthropy
5. Innovative financing tools

7.5 Resource Management

ACARE adopts transparent and accountable mechanisms for financial, equipment, and data management, with periodic audits and reports.

CHAPTER EIGHT: SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALING STRATEGIES

8.1 Sustainability Dimensions

1. **Ecosystem Resilience:** Focus on restoration, invasive species control, and climate adaptation.
2. **Socio-Economic Transformation:** Blue economy development for livelihoods.
3. **Institutionalization:** Integration of AG frameworks into regional policies.
4. **Knowledge & Human Capital:** Scaling training and research networks.
5. **Technology & Innovation:** Expanding use of digital tools and renewable energy.
6. **Financial Sustainability:** Building endowments and blended financing.
7. **Regional Scaling:** Replicating successful models across African lakes.
8. **Environmental & Social Safeguards:** Upholding ethical, inclusive, and gender-responsive standards.

8.2 Long-Term Impact

The plan envisions resilient ecosystems, empowered communities, and institutionalized lake governance frameworks that endure beyond 2030.

CHAPTER NINE: MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND REPORTING FRAMEWORK

9.1 Monitoring and Evaluation

A comprehensive M&E framework measures progress against strategic goals. It includes periodic assessments, feedback loops, and adaptive revisions.

9.2 Key Performance Indicators

Indicators are aligned with:

1. **Scientific Knowledge and Innovation:** Indicators measure the number of funded research projects, technical reports, and policy briefs produced and adopted in policy decisions. They also track the development of open-access data repositories, deployment of drones and eDNA tools, and improvements in data quality and accessibility across the AGL region.
2. **Capacity Development and Empowerment:** KPIs assess completed training needs assessments, delivered courses, and mentorship programs, tracking the number of professionals trained, gender participation, and post-training outcomes. They also monitor laboratory upgrades, equipment value, and technical skills gained, ensuring enhanced institutional and community capacity for sustainable freshwater management and innovation.
3. **Resource Mobilization and Institutional Building:** Indicators evaluate ACARE's success in securing diverse funding streams, submitting winning proposals, and establishing a sustainable endowment fund. They also measure adoption of digital financial systems, timely audits, and compliance with donor standards, reflecting improved efficiency, accountability, and long-term institutional sustainability in program implementation.
4. **Ecosystem Sustainability and Climate Resilience:** KPIs track the production of ecosystem and climate reports, application of models, and establishment of adaptation and early warning systems. They also measure citizen science initiatives, local participation, and data integration into management plans, demonstrating improved ecosystem health, adaptive management, and climate resilience in lake basins.
5. **Governance, Collaboration, and Partnerships:** Indicators assess partnerships formed, MoUs implemented, and multi-stakeholder forums convened. They track African Lakes Hub functionality, institutional engagement, and advocacy campaigns launched. Collectively, these KPIs demonstrate enhanced regional coordination, policy influence, and shared governance, strengthening cooperation and sustainability across the AGL region.

9.3 Performance Standards

Performance standards ensure consistency, transparency, and accountability across all AG operations and projects.

9.4 Evaluation Framework

Evaluations are conducted mid-term and end-term, incorporating participatory approaches to ensure learning and adaptive management.

9.5 Reporting and Feedback Mechanisms

Structured reporting templates, digital dashboards, and periodic reviews facilitate communication between ACARE, CoAG, AGs and partners.