



## Indian Ocean Rim Association

**For Prelims:** [IORA](#), TROIKA, **Nelson Mandela**, [Indian Ocean Region](#), **Fisheries Support Unit**, [IORA Action Plan](#), [Small Island Developing States \(SIDS\)](#), [Belt and Road Initiative](#), [Blue Economy](#), [SAARC](#), [BIMSTEC](#), [QUAD \(Quadrilateral Security Dialogue\)](#), Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT)

**For Mains:** IORA, IORA Members, Objectives, Institutional Mechanisms, Priorities and Focus Areas of Cooperation of IORA, Flagship Projects of IORA, Challenges Faced by IORA, Essential Steps Ahead for IORA to Fulfill its Potential.

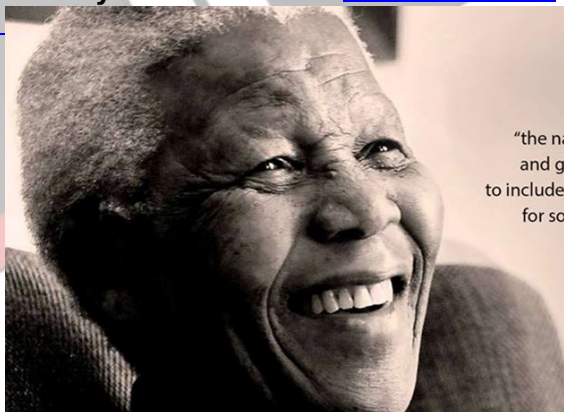
### What is Indian Ocean Rim Association?

#### ▪ About:

- [Indian Ocean Rim Association \(IORA\)](#) is an intergovernmental organisation established to promote economic cooperation and regional integration among countries bordering the [Indian Ocean](#).
- IORA member states **work on various initiatives related to trade, investment, and sustainable development** in the Indian Ocean region (IOR).

#### ▪ Background:

- The Indian Ocean Rim Association **was established on 7 March 1997**. The vision for IORA originated **during a visit by late President Nelson Mandela** of South Africa to India in 1995, where he said: [//](#)



NELSON MANDELA in 1995  
(1918-2013)

“the natural urge of the facts of history and geography should broaden itself to include the concept of an Indian Ocean Rim for socio-economic co-operation ....”

- This sentiment and rationale underpinned the Indian Ocean Rim Initiative (IORI) in March 1995, and the creation in March 1997 of the **Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC)**, as IORA was then called.

### Who are the Members of IORA ?

- Membership is **open to all sovereign states of the Indian Ocean Rim willing to subscribe to the principles and objectives of the Charter**.
  - **Current 23 Member States:**
    - Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, France/Reunion, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya,

Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

- **Dialogue Partners:**
  - China, Egypt, Germany, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Russia, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.
- **Specialized Agencies:**
  - The **Regional Centre for Science and Technology Transfer (RCSTT)** based in Tehran, Iran.
  - The **Fisheries Support Unit (FSU)** based in **Muscat, Oman**.
- **Two Observers:**
  - The **Indian Ocean Research Group (IORG)**
  - The **Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA)**



## What are the Major Objectives of IORA ?

- The objectives of the Association are **underpinned by the principle of open regionalism** as below:
  - To promote sustainable growth and balanced development of the region and Member States.
  - To focus on those areas of economic co-operation which provide maximum opportunities for development, shared interest and mutual benefits.
  - To promote liberalization, remove impediments and lower barriers towards a freer and enhanced flow of goods, services, investment, and technology within the Indian Ocean Rim.

## What is the Institutional Mechanism of IORA?

- **Council of Ministers (COM):** IORA's apex body is the [Council of \(Foreign\) Ministers \(COM\)](#) that meets annually.
- **Committee of Senior Officials (CSO):** CSO of the Association composed of senior government officials of Member States. It meets bi-annually to review and prioritize **IORA's** activities.

- **TROIKA:** A “**TROIKA**” consists of the Chair, the Vice-Chair and the previous Chair will apply to the **COM** and the **CSO**.
  - It meets in the period between the meetings of the **COM** and **CSO** to review progress, establishment of additional mechanisms and policy direction to IORA institutions.
- **Secretariat:** The Secretariat is hosted by the Government of the Republic of Mauritius which is based in **Cyber City, Ebène, Mauritius**.
  - It manages, coordinates, services and monitors the implementation of policy decisions, work programmes and projects adopted by the Council of Ministers.
- **Functional Bodies:** To strengthen and promote activities in the Association, the COM established Functional Bodies such as Working Groups, Sub-Working Groups, Sectoral/Cluster Core Groups, and Dialogue Forums. For example:
  - **Indian Ocean Rim Academic Group (IORAG)**
  - **Working Group on Trade and Investment (WGTI)**
- **Specialized Agencies:** Specialized Agencies established by a decision of the Member States, as adopted by the COM, to promote activities in cooperation with IORA.
- **Budget:** The annual budget of the Secretariat is based on annual membership contributions by the Member States.
- **Special Fund:** It was established by the **Council of Ministers** in its meeting held in **Colombo, Sri Lanka** in **2004**. It is a financial mechanism for supporting and complementing the funding of projects and programmes adopted by the Association.

## What are the Priorities and Focus Areas of Cooperation of IORA ?

### The Priority Areas of the Indian Ocean Rim Association:

- **Maritime Safety and Security:** IORA plays a pivotal role as the primary line of defense, leveraging existing national, regional, and global initiatives to bolster coordination and facilitate unified international collaboration in [Maritime Safety and Security \(MSS\)](#).
  - IORA has also devised flagship initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Dialogue, to discuss pertinent issues including MSS.
- **Trade and Investment Facilitation:** IORA Member States have committed to pursue trade liberalization and lower barriers to promote freer flows of goods, services, investment, and technology.
  - The IORA Action Plan 2017-2021 sets seven ambitious targets for Trade and Investment Facilitation summarized as:
    - Conduct capacity building on reducing barriers to trade;
    - Cooperate to promote Small and Midsize Enterprises;
    - Establish an online IORA Trade Repository to assist businesses find trade information; and
    - Establish an Investment Guide to promote investment;
    - Revitalize IORA’s private sector arm, the **Indian Ocean Rim Business Forum (IORBF)**; and
    - Cooperate to promote financial services
    - Make business travel easier.
- **Fisheries Management:** IORA is attributing high importance in strengthening cooperation in both the Fisheries Management Sector, as well as the [Blue Economy](#), as reflected in the IORA Action Plan 2017-2021.
  - The IORA Fisheries Support Unit (FSU), manages and spearheads IORA efforts to identify and discuss key fisheries-related issues mentioned in the action plan.
- **Disaster Risk Management(DRM):** The IOR is sometimes called the “World’s Hazard Belt” as it is prone to disasters, both natural and man-made. IORA recognizes DRM to be a multidisciplinary concept as it involves the participation of a multitude of stakeholders, including national governments, [Non-governmental organizations \(NGOs\)](#), regional and international partners, donors, civil society and the private sector.
  - In September 2019, **IORA** in collaboration with the **IOC-UNESCO** held the **International Symposium on Tsunami Early Warning Systems**.
  - The **Core Group** (Indonesia, Mauritius, Mozambique and Sri Lanka) along with **Member States**, are currently in the process of finalizing the regional **Work Plan and the IORA Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)**.

- **Academic, Science and Technology Cooperation:** The **Jakarta Concord** adopted by the IORA Heads of State and Government in March 2017 commits to strengthening academic, science and technology cooperation by:
  - Increasing scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, among research and development institutions and academics;
  - **Increasing opportunities for accessible and affordable scholarships** and capacity-building to further human development, with a particular focus on the challenges of [Least Developed Countries \(LDCs\)](#) and [Small Island Developing States \(SIDS\)](#)
  - Promoting sharing and collaboration in technology and innovation and in the implementation of [e-Governance](#) and other [Information, Communication, and Technology \(ICT\)](#) solutions in the region; and
  - Strengthening the specialized agencies to better perform their mandates.
- **Tourism and Cultural Exchanges: Indian Ocean region** is also home to 2.5 billion beautiful people, one-third of the world's population, of diverse origins, cultures, languages and religions.
  - IORA **promotes tourism and cultural exchanges by setting proposed policy directions** for government cooperation and providing platforms for dialogue in promoting tourism amongst Member States, Dialogue Partners, and other international bodies.

## The Focus Areas of the Indian Ocean Rim Association

- **Blue Economy:** On the basis of the strategic location of the **Indian Ocean region**, IORA has emphasized on growing the Blue Economy in a sustainable, inclusive and people centered manner.
  - The IORA Secretariat has identified the following six priority pillars in the blue economy:
    - Fisheries and Aquaculture
    - Renewable Ocean Energy
    - Seaports and Shipping
    - Offshore Hydrocarbons and Seabed Minerals
    - Marine Biotechnology, Research and Development
    - Tourism
- **Women's Economic Empowerment:** IORA is committed to gender equality and women's economic empowerment.
  - IORA established Women's Economic Empowerment as a special area of focus at the 13<sup>th</sup> Council of Ministers Meeting in Perth, Australia on 1 November 2013.
  - On [International Women's Day](#) 2022, IORA released the **IORA Gender Pledge**.

## What are the Flagship Projects of IORA ?

- **Indian Ocean Dialogue (IOD):** IOD is established in its role as a stand-alone **Track 1.5 discussion** (informal dialogue of top level political decision makers), encouraging an open and free flowing dialogue by key representatives of IORA Member states such as scholars, experts, analysts, and policy makers from governments, think tanks and civil societies on a number of crucial strategic issues of the Indian Ocean Region.
- **Somalia-Yemen Development Program:** It brought together experts and officials with a view to promote the sharing of knowledge and best practices of IORA Member States to enhance the capacity for human development in Somalia/Yemen.
- **The IORA Sustainable Development Program (ISDP):** The **ISDP** was introduced in 2014 dedicated for the **LDCs** that require assistance and support to conduct projects, and with the main purpose to promote sharing experiences and best practices among IORA Member States.
- **The IORA-Nelson Mandela Be the Legacy Internship Programme:** It aims to create a strong and growing base of young people in the **Indian Ocean Region** that understand and support the need to safeguard an Indian Ocean that is safe, secure and develops sustainably.
- **IORA-UN Women Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment in the Indian Ocean Rim Project:** IORA has collaborated with [UN Women](#) to strengthen research on women's economic empowerment, and promote the Women's Empowerment Principles in the region, supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

## How is the Indian Ocean Rim Association a Key Bloc for India?

- **Demographic and Economic Significance:**
  - IOR is home to one-third of the world's population. It plays a vital role in global trade, with 80% of oil trade, 50% of containerized cargo, and 33% of bulk cargo passing through its waters.
  - The region collectively generates approximately USD 1 trillion in goods and services, and intra-Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) trade is valued at around USD 800 billion.
- **Challenges in Other Regional Organizations:**
  - Existing regional organizations like [South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation \(SAARC\)](#) and [Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation \(BIMSTEC\)](#) face their unique challenges and may not fully address the geopolitical and economic needs of the IOR countries.
- **QUAD and Chinese Initiatives:**
  - The [QUAD \(Quadrilateral Security Dialogue\)](#) has made progress, but it remains US.-led in nature. Meanwhile, China is actively pursuing regional engagement through initiatives like the [Belt and Road Initiative \(BRI\)](#), excluding India from some key groupings.
- **IORA as a "Safe Space":**
  - **IORA** offers a diplomatic and economic "**safe space**" for India and other regional countries by avoiding direct big-power rivalries.
  - Membership in IORA is based on consensus, reducing contentions. Pakistan has not been admitted to the group, partially due to its lack of extending **Most Favored Nation** status to India.
- **IORA's Priority Areas:**
  - IORA focuses on seven priority areas, including maritime safety and security, trade and investment facilitation, fisheries management, disaster risk management, academic and scientific cooperation, tourism, cultural exchanges, and gender empowerment.
- **Strategic Significance:**
  - The discussions within **IORA** have evolved to include strategic concerns, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a free and open **Indian Ocean**.
  - This involves safeguarding against piracy and ensuring the region remains a safe and inclusive space, respecting international conventions and norms, such as the [UNCLOS](#).
- **Reinforced Identity:**
  - At a recent IORA Council of Ministers meeting, the theme of "**Reinforcing Indian Ocean Identity**" was highlighted.
  - This underlines the organization's commitment to strengthening the unity and identity of Indian Ocean nations.

## What are the Challenges Faced by IORA ?

- **Diverse Membership Objectives:**
  - IORA's broad membership includes countries with widely varying objectives, particularly in the context of maritime security cooperation.
  - While the organization benefits from diverse perspectives, it also faces challenges due to these differences, leading to disagreements on what successful cooperation in maritime security should entail.
- **Economic Disparities:**
  - IORA brings together some of the world's wealthiest nations, such as the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, and Australia, along with some of the poorest, like Mozambique and small island nations with low [Gross Domestic Products](#).
  - These economic disparities can result in uneven benefits from participating in IORA projects, potentially leading to economic competition and resentment among member states.
- **Competition with Other Organizations:**
  - IORA competes with numerous other regional and international organizations for the attention and investments of member states.
  - In fact, 14 such bodies count IORA member states among their memberships, creating a challenge for IORA in maintaining its relevance.
- **Geopolitical Disputes:**
  - Geopolitical conflicts and disputes have hindered IORA's growth and effectiveness. India's exclusion of Pakistan from IORA membership, in particular, reflects ongoing tensions

between these two nations.

- This dispute has manifested not only in terrestrial conflicts but also in the maritime realm and has impacted other regional maritime organizations.

▪ **Chinese Involvement:**

- India cannot trust China's involvement in the Indian Ocean Region, primarily through the BRI.
- While experts argue that Chinese engagement could benefit IORA proposals, especially those related to the **Blue Economy**, India perceives it as an attempt to shift power from India to China in the region.

▪ **Coordination and Collaboration:**

- Ensuring effective coordination and collaboration among member states is crucial for IORA's success, but it can be challenging due to differing political agendas.

## What are the Essential Steps Ahead for IORA ?

- **Foster Consensus and Unity:** IORA member states should work on building consensus and unity on key regional issues. This includes addressing geopolitical conflicts within the region to create a more harmonious environment for cooperation.
- **Enhance Economic Integration:** Member states should encourage deeper economic integration and cooperation among member states, focusing on trade liberalization, investment promotion, and the development of regional value chains.
- **Strong Secretariat and Streamlined Bureaucracy:** IORA member states should strengthen the IORA Secretariat to provide effective support and coordination for member states' initiatives. In addition, bureaucracy should be streamlined within IORA to make the organization more efficient and responsive to the needs of its members.
- **Concrete Actions on Priority Areas:** IORA member states should strengthen concrete actions on Maritime Security, Fisheries management, Disaster Risk management, academics and science and technology cooperation.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Association should emphasize sustainability and environmental protection, particularly in the context of the Blue Economy, by promoting sustainable fishing, conservation, and climate resilience initiatives.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Member states should foster partnerships between public and private sectors to encourage investment and innovation in the region. Association should promote awareness and outreach to engage civil society, academia, and the private sector.
- **Strategic Engagement with Dialogue Partners:** IORA can actively engage with dialogue partners, including those outside the region, who can contribute to the region's development and security.

## Conclusion

**IORA** has the potential to be a significant regional organization, but achieving this potential requires **persistent efforts, diplomacy**, and a **commitment** to addressing the region's diverse challenges and opportunities.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

**Q. With reference to 'Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), consider the following statements: (2015)**

1. It was established very recently in response to incidents of piracy and accidents of oil spills.
2. It is an alliance meant for maritime security only.

**Which of the statements given above is/ are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (d)

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/indian-ocean-rim-association-1>

