

Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) - UPSC Notes

The Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) is an intergovernmental organization of five African island nations. It is a significant body especially in light of India becoming an observer country to the IOC in March 2020. In this article, you can read all about the IOC, India's relations with it and the advantages for India in this respect, for the [UPSC exam](#) International Relations segment.

Indian Ocean Commission

The Indian Ocean Commission is called the Commission de l'Océan Indien in French and is also referred to as COI.

- It is important as it is the only intergovernmental body in Africa composed of island nations alone.
- The nations belong to the African/Western Indian Ocean.
- The IOC was formed in 1982 in Port Louis in Mauritius, where its secretariat is also based.
- The chief objective of the Commission is to foster ties of friendship among the member countries and also spread solidarity among the populations of the entire island countries of the African Indian Ocean.
- Originally, the IOC's functioning included the areas of trade and tourism. Now it has diversified its mandate.
- The IOC defends the members nations' interests in Africa and also in international fora.
- It has many projects in arenas such as sustainable management of natural resources, ecosystem preservation, maritime security, entrepreneurship, public health, culture and renewable energies.

IOC Members

The IOC has five member countries. They are:

1. Comoros
2. Madagascar
3. Mauritius
4. Réunion (an overseas region of France)
5. Seychelles

The IOC has seven observers. They are:

1. India
2. China
3. Japan
4. European Union
5. Sovereign Order of Malta
6. International Organisation of La Francophonie
7. United Nations

India became an observer of the IOC in March 2020.

MASE Program

The MASE Program is an EU-funded program to augment Maritime Security in Eastern and Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean. It was launched in 2012.

- Under this program, the IOC has set up a mechanism for the control and surveillance of the western Indian Ocean region.
- It has two regional centres:
 - Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) - Madagascar
 - Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCOC) - Seychelles
- The system is designed to increase maritime domain awareness by monitoring maritime activities and boosting the sharing & exchange of information. Based on the information available, the stakeholders would take joint or jointly-coordinated interventions at sea.
- The RCOC would take action based on information gathered from the RMIFC.
- These initiatives were taken to control and take action against maritime crimes that creates a lot of trouble in the region, especially piracy.
- Many international powers have expressed interest in availing information from the RMIFC.

India and IOC

As mentioned earlier, India acquired 'observer' status in the IOC in March 2020. Experts view this is a mutually beneficial relationship for the parties concerned.

Benefits for India

- **Maritime security**
 - India is a major stakeholder in the Indian Ocean and maritime security is a high priority agenda.
 - India could make good use of the information from the RMIFC to bolster its own maritime awareness in the region.
 - This can supplement Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram, which was established in 2018 to monitor maritime movements in the Indian Ocean region.
 - The maritime security architecture that the IOC propounds offers sustainable and workable solutions to better maritime control & surveillance. The regional coordination and local successes at checking maritime threats will have broader security dividends for the Indian Ocean region.
- **Regional diplomacy**
 - The IOC is an opportunity for India to engage positively with the island nations.
 - With this, India can boost its influence and relations in the strategic Indian Ocean region.
 - With this, India also gets an official presence in a major regional organisation in the Western Indian Ocean region.
 - The decision to join the IOC marks a part of the government's push for greater prominence in the whole Indian Ocean Region (IOR), including in the Western or African Indian Ocean.
- **Mozambique channel**
 - The Mozambique Channel is the part of the Indian Ocean between Madagascar and Mozambique (present in the African continent).
 - Sometimes considered a choke point in the Indian Ocean, this channel is likely to regain its significance if the tensions in the Strait of Hormuz area soar.
- **China's influence**
 - This move will help India counter China's growing influence in the region.

- **SAGAR Policy**

- India has stated its strategic vision for the Indian Ocean based on Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) approach.
- The SAGAR vision is intended to be more consultative, democratic and equitable in dealing with smaller but equally significant countries in the region.
- SAGAR seeks to differentiate India's leadership from the modus operandi of other regionally active major powers focussing on creating spheres of influence in the region.

Benefits for IOC

The IOC can benefit from India's support especially through her extensive satellite infrastructure for improved maritime security and monitoring in the region. The IOC members can also engage in counter-piracy operations and patrolling with the Indian Navy.

Other areas of cooperation include climate change, sustainable development, telecommunication, healthcare, etc.