

Capacity building related to multilateral environment agreements in Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific countries

A glimpse into Phase 2 of the ACP MEAs Programme

What do we do?

Build capacity in African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries so they can achieve their environmental goals.

We do this by supporting countries to implement multilateral environment agreements (MEAs) – legally binding commitments to tackle environmental issues – agreed by them, collectively. We assist in turning these international commitments into action on the ground.

Why does it matter?

Humans are utilizing an estimated 25% more natural resources than the planet can sustain, leading to a rapid loss of biological diversity (biodiversity). Aside from the impact on species and their habitat, loss of biodiversity has a direct and detrimental impact on human health and livelihood. Chemicals are another key area that impact human development and livelihood. Without sound management practices, chemicals can pose significant risks to the environment and human health, especially vulnerable populations.

As a solution, countries have agreed upon MEAs, global commitments such as Aichi targets, common objectives for the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, and more recently, universal goals and targets for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, transforming these into tangible change on the ground remains a challenge as many developing countries face a variety of obstacles, including constraints in human, financial, and technical resources.

Thus, through the programme, we support key areas of environmental governance:

- stopping biodiversity loss
- enabling the sound management of chemicals and waste

How do we do it?

In the past nine years, the programme has built a culture of institutionalizing MEAs at the regional and national level by enhancing capacities of regional institutions, national bodies, and most fundamentally, empowering the change makers of the field.

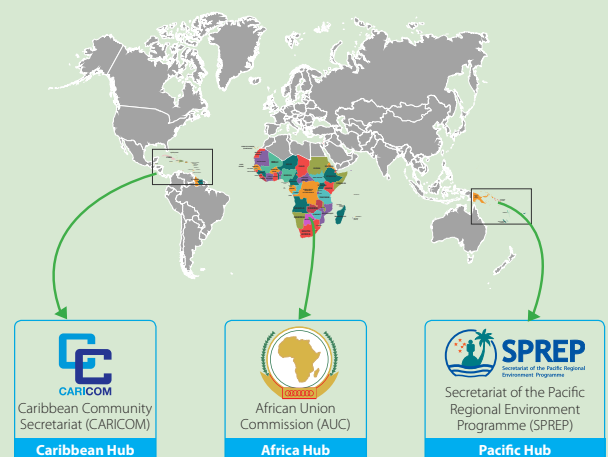


A mother working in a cassava field in Sierra Leone

For sustained impact, we focus on:

- **strengthening institutions** in the regions through regional hubs that support countries;
- **working at the national level** to build national capacity, endogenously;
- **bringing an integrated, cross-sectoral, and synergistic approach** in the implementation of multilateral environment agreements (MEAs).

Our regional partners:



Our global programme partner is the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.



On Biodiversity

From negotiation skills training to supporting the development of national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs), a range of activities are taking place throughout the regions in enhancing capacity for the implementation of the biodiversity cluster of MEAs, which include treaties such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), among others.

In the Caribbean, training biodiversity officers in improving their negotiation skills has been identified as a key area of priority. Moreover, having gained wide acceptance as highly relevant and integral, these trainings have been further refined over the years. **Positive feedback from project activities has shown that participants have directly applied and used the knowledge and skills obtained in their work.**

In a particularly innovative approach, the Caribbean Hub focused on an often neglected topic of **sustainable financing and resource mobilization for biodiversity** through a regional-level workshop held in St. John's, in Antigua and Barbuda in May 2015.

In Africa, there were a number of **key achievements in establishing guiding frameworks and providing the technical expertise and tools for greater biodiversity protection**. In mid-2016, a regional biosafety framework was successfully launched in collaboration with East African Community, the regional intergovernmental body for the East African region. This regional framework allows countries to work together more effectively in controlling the cross-border movement of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and living genetically modified organisms (LGMOs) while providing guidelines on safe health conditions.



It is my opinion that the support provided by CARICOM under the ACP MEAs at the CBD COP 13 in Mexico was significant in assisting member countries with making more meaningful interventions in plenary, working groups, committees and "friends of the chair" sessions. I believe these contributions to the negotiations process were invaluable and would very much appreciate if CARICOM countries could continue to receive this support in the future.

Helena Jeffery Brown, (far right) Technical Coordinator (Ag), Department of the Environment, Ministry of Health and the Environment, Antigua and Barbuda.



For the Pacific region – and Small Island Developing States, in general – one of the main challenges in participating at intergovernmental negotiations remains the small delegation and the wide range of issues that each country delegate has to cover.

Thus, participation in preparatory meetings ahead of the Convention of Parties for the various multilateral environment agreements has fundamentally helped in providing a platform where our countries can have a united regional position over a number of issues, which can be more effectively brought forth at the intergovernmental negotiations."

Gwendalyn Sisior, Senior Projects Manager,
Ministry of Natural Resources,
Environment & Tourism, Palau

Moreover, tools and guidelines developed with expert inputs for biodiversity integration into national planning processes – significant towards meeting target 2 of the Aichi biodiversity targets - were developed by the African Hub and are being promoted for adoption among the African Union member states.

Recognizing that agriculture greatly benefits from biodiversity and can also contribute to its protection, **mainstreaming biodiversity and ecosystem services into agriculture** has been a core area of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), as a programme partner in ACP MEAs. FAO has supported a cross-sectoral approach to the implementation of the CBD, specifically by introducing two technical guidance documents for East Africa and for the Pacific Islands region that collect context-specific knowledge and experience on ecosystem-based agriculture while providing policy entry points for mainstreaming at the national and regional levels. This body of knowledge has complemented national training workshops in Kenya and Samoa, and a round-table in Fiji targeting the revision and implementation of the NBSAPs and their integration with national agricultural policies to galvanize policy recommendations into actions.

On sound management of chemicals and waste

The chemicals and waste cluster focuses on building technical and institutional capacity at the national and regional level with a focus on key global multilateral environment agreements such as the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions, the World Health Organization/FAO International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management as well as the Minamata Convention on Mercury.



Human contact with pesticides can be harmful to health

On the issue of **e-waste – the discarding of electronic equipment, which can lead to adverse human health effects and environmental pollution** – the Africa Hub has led joint efforts with Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS), the Basel Convention Coordinating Center (BCCC), and the Secretariat of Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm conventions. For example, in October 2015, **a joint workshop held in Lagos, Nigeria, allowed stakeholders to identify common goals, interventions, and concrete recommendations on e-waste management in the continent.**

A similar approach has been undertaken on the issue of mercury, keeping in mind the overall objective of working towards better protection of the environment and public health. In August 2015 in Nairobi, Kenya, greater support to African countries in ratifying the Minamata Convention was **provided through the development of a platform for knowledge and information exchange on environmentally sound practices and techniques.** Similarly, the Caribbean Hub partnered with the Basel Convention Regional Centre for the Caribbean on several awareness-raising activities related to the Minamata Convention.

Agrochemicals misuse in agriculture – and the resulting human and environmental health impacts – is a common issue worldwide. **Many developing countries lack sustainable pest management strategies and proper pesticide control measures.** The majority of pesticide-related poisoning occurs in developing countries, while sizable portions of land are made unsuitable for agriculture by overuse of chemicals and soil contamination from poor disposal practices.

The ACP MEAs programme has focused on strengthening the technical and legal framework for harmonization of pesticide legislation and registration, developing tools and providing advanced trainings to enhance the capacity of national authorities to better manage pesticides and enforce the chemical conventions. One such intervention has been the regionally harmonized scheme for the Pacific developed with inputs from the

Pacific Islands Countries. Meanwhile, the East African Community (EAC) Secretariat and its member countries have opted for a gradual harmonization process beginning with the revision of their norms, procedures and protocols. Launched in 2016, the **Pesticide Registration Toolkit** is a key instrument to support the work and decision-making process of pesticide registrars worldwide that are tasked with evaluating and authorizing products. Since the launch, several Training of Trainers sessions have been organized to build capacity of a pool of experts that will then roll out the trainings at national and regional level in their respective regions.

On institutional strengthening in the regions

When the programme started in 2009, there was no institution in Africa which provided support to countries to implement MEAs. Since then, the African Hub – as the main body for such work – has become fully operational and incorporated into the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA) at the African Union Commission.

A number of firsts took place during the first phase of the project, including the 1st conference of Parties to the Bamako Convention, the introduction of biosafety laws in Malawi and Mauritania, Burundi and Uganda's development of regulatory frameworks on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), among many other milestones.

One particularly successful outcome was the African Colloquium of Parliamentarians in Entebbe, Uganda in June 2012, which culminated in the creation of the network of African Parliamentarians known as the **Green Birds Africa** to promote environmental sound management through legislative and national channels. This momentum was carried forward with greater participation of parliamentarians and stakeholders at the Parliamentarian Colloquium held in Addis Ababa in 2014. The outcome came in the form of a declaration by the Parliamentarians and important recommendations addressed to institutions including the African Union Commission, UN Environment, and member states. The Declaration included a commitment by the Parliamentarians to engage in MEAs implementation and environmental sustainability issues in their countries.



Black rhinoceros grazing - a critically endangered species

In the Caribbean, the programme has supported a culture of institutionalizing capacity building for MEAs. In 2015, the Ministers of Environment and Sustainable Development – based on recommendations from beneficiaries – officially requested the CARICOM Secretariat to play a key role in facilitating and coordinating various capacity development initiatives on access and benefit-sharing in the region. Endorsed through a decision at the Meeting of the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) – Environment and Sustainable Development in 2015, this move was emblematic of the institutional strengthening of MEAs support in the region as a result of CARICOM Secretariat’s role in hosting the Caribbean Hub.



A view of nature’s beauty from Comoros Islands - an ACP country

On national capacity building

In the Pacific, the Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) has been crucial in assisting Pacific Island countries in formulating their National Environment Management Strategies (NEMS) taking into account MEA considerations. SPREP has sought to prioritize an integrated approach for the implementation of various MEAs (NBSAPs, National Action Plans for climate change or National Adaptation Programme of Action) by creating a single national planning document – the NEMS. The process has been ongoing in Tuvalu, Fiji, and Vanuatu.

Fiji and Cook Islands also completed their respective State of Environment Reports. SPREP organized trainings for Pacific Island countries to support negotiations with users of genetic resources under the Nagoya Protocol. For example, access and benefit sharing workshops were held in Nadi and Sydney from August 5-8, 2014 to support Pacific Island Countries’ understanding and potentially becoming Parties to the Nagoya Protocol. Through such support, it is expected that at least four more Pacific ACP countries will soon become party to particular MEAs and benefit from SPREP’s advice on the same.



Girls in traditional grass skirts in Yap, Federated States of Micronesia

On synergies for effective implementation

Media plays an important role in civil society as influencers and facilitators of change. Thus, raising their awareness and sensitization on the environment and MEAs in the context of sustainable development is a crucial exercise. In partnership with the Environmental Compliance Institute (ECI) and Media for Environment, Science, Health and Agriculture (MESHA) – at least 30 African Journalists underwent training in environmental reporting in October 2015 in Nairobi, Kenya.

In the effort to promote the practical implementation of biodiversity policies, national focal points and experts of 13 countries from the global South were brought together to share their experiences. Held in March 2016 in Nairobi, Kenya, the meeting allowed participants to engage in issues related to capacity, institutional strengthening, legal preparedness and options for synergies among the global biodiversity MEAs.

As part of the multipronged approach of the programme, direct support was lent to increasing the uptake of some MEAs. For example, currently there are only two states in the Caribbean region that are party to the Convention on Migratory Species – an important, global MEA which provides a framework for the sustainable use and conservation of migratory species and their habitats. A workshop organized in Bridgetown, Barbados in August 2016, promoted the accession of CMS, focusing on capacity building, increasing technical awareness, while emphasizing the importance of the Caribbean region for conserving biodiversity and migratory wildlife. As a result of the workshop, participating countries developed a synergies road map at the national level to assess how acceding to the CMS would be beneficial in achieving other targets and MEA obligations. It is expected that with the support received, two Caribbean countries have initiated the process of ratification for the CMS, thus taking important steps to secure the future of the environment in a biodiversity hotspot such as the Caribbean.

The ACP MEAs is a joint European Commission-UN Environment partnership programme. This factsheet has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Commission. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views, policies or official opinion of the European Commission, UN Environment or contributory organizations. Most images are copyright-free, acquired from unsplash.com. To know more, visit our website www.acpmeas.info



An initiative of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States funded by the European Union

