The InforMEA Knowledge Management Initiative
Report of the 8th Steering Committee Meeting

Montreux, Switzerland | 20-23 June 2017

OVERVIEW

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 8th Meeting of the InforMEA Initiative was underpinned by a joint spirit of purpose and achievement. It was noted that the different areas of the Initiative's work became more than the sum of its parts, which positively influences and mutually reinforces each part.

The meeting discussed building on the enhanced response and use of the E-learning section, expanding InforMEA to support work at the national level, further exploring a promising approach to auto-indexing of MEA documents, piloting UN-wide standards in document management, and showing the joint contribution of MEAs to internationally agreed goals, which are all the results of the Initiative's strong and unequivocal commitment to knowledge sharing and inter-operability.

I.   Background

InforMEA is a collaborative initiative between the MEAs and UN Environment, and since 2010 has been co-chaired by CITES and UN Environment. The Initiative currently brings together 55 global and regional legally binding treaties from 20 Secretariats that are hosted by four UN organizations and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).The InforMEA Initiative is also open to partners and observers including UNITAR, the European Environment Agency, UNEP-WCMC[1], the Legal Response Initiative, the Environmental Management Group and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD).

Since 2013, the Initiative has received financial support from the European Union. InforMEA Phase II project which started in 2016 builds on the MEA search engine search facility[2] that drills into COP decisions, national reports and implementation plans, and which is made possible through an interoperable and carefully negotiated information exchange system[3] involving the global MEA Secretariats of the Initiative.

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[1] UN Environment Programme - World Conservation Monitoring Center
[2] https://www.informea.org/en/search?search_api_views_fulltext=plastic+waste
[3] https://www.informea.org/en/about/api

During this second phase, InforMEA expanded by introducing a section showing the collective contribute of MEAs to the attainments of internationally agreed goals and targets (Sustainable Development Goals - example[4], Aichi Targets, Global Environmental Goals, etc); adding courses to the e-learning portal which currently offers 24 multilingual, introductory courses to MEAs and International Environmental Law to over 5000 registered users from 190 countries, and facilitating the implementation of the jointly negotiated Thesaurus on environmental law and conventions (LEO – Law and Environment Ontology) by participating MEA Secretariats.

The purpose of the meeting was to obtain the MEA members' guidance in the context of the further development of InforMEA and the implementation of the InforMEA Phase II project which started implementation since the last Steering Committee Meeting.

II.   Meeting Summary

The meeting was opened by Ms. Elizabeth Mrema, Director, UN Environment Law Division, and addressed by Mr. John E. Scanlon, Secretary General of CITES [5], Ms. Martha Rojas-Urrego, Secretary General Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and Mr. Carlos Martin-Novella, Deputy Executive Secretary, BRS Conventions[6].

After a tour-de-table among the almost 50 participants, the initial rationale for - and the contributions and benefits of MEA members participating in - the InforMEA Initiative on MEA Information and Knowledge was revisited through an interactive Knowledge Café session. Through interactive conversations on three different tables, the Ramsar Secretariat, the BRS Secretariat and the Climate Change Secretariat shared their experience and interaction with the Initiative over the years for the benefits of the many meeting participants who have more recently joined the past InforMEA Initiative.

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[4] https://www.informea.org/en/goal/151
[5] the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
[6] Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions

The UN Environment InforMEA team presented the main developments and achievements since June 2016 and at that occasion the new *Goals* Section of InforMEA, which provides an overview of SDG goals and targets and how they relate to MEA provisions, was officially launched. Subsequently the agenda of work was introduced before the day concluded with a group photo and joint dinner.

During the second and third day, the different areas of work were first introduced and subsequently discussed in smaller groups moderated by different MEA Secretariat representatives, starting with

1. the consideration of expanding the scope and level of information exchange (inter-operability) among MEA Secretariats and consideration of additional information exchange mechanisms, to the one chosen seven years ago, in light of recent technological developments (co-chaired by the BRS and CBD Secretariat);
2. the application of the LEO Thesaurus on environmental law and conventions, and the joint identification of best practices and guidelines in the context of the automated indexing of UN documents (chaired by the Ramsar Secretariat); and
3. the expansion and further evolution of the InforMEA E-learning tool (chaired by the Minamata Secretariat).
4. how to further accelerate the growth of InforMEA's user base through more strategic outreach (chaired by the CMS[7] Secretariat);
5. how to best draw collective intelligence from national reports and plans, building on a project concept developed as part of the InforMEA Phase II project (chaired by the CITES Secretariat);
6. and whether or not to pilot UN standards as developed by the UN-wide Working Group on Document Standards (chaired by the CBD[8] Secretariat).

The afternoon of the second day was dedicated to a second Knowledge Café session where project management teams presented the following MEA-related and knowledge relevant Projects to the meeting participants and shared their preferred area of collaboration with the InforMEA Initiative and MEAs represented therein.

- Biodiversity Synergies Project (Law Division of UN Environment)
- NBSAP Forum (United Nations Development Programme)
- MEA ACP Project (Law Division of UN Environment)
- Synergies and Biodiversity in Pan-Europe (Ecosystems Division of UN Environment)
- Indicator Reporting Information Systems (IRIS) (Science Division of UN Environment)

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[7] Convention on Migratory Species
[8] Convention on Biological Diversity

☐   "DAta Reporting Tool for MEAs - DART" Project Concept (proponents: Federal Government of Switzerland and European Commission)

This session concluded with the project managers sharing the feedback received from participants on their tables and highlighting at least two areas of potential follow-up collaboration.

Each of the components discussed led to a set of recommendations which were presented in bullet form on the morning of the last day and subsequently reviewed by participants as part of an interactive session. It was agreed that draft recommendations would be edited and once more reviewed by the group moderators before being re-circulated to all meeting participants.

III.   Outcomes

Recommendations are included in Annex I of this document. MEAs agreed to explore adjustment to the knowledge exchange system in light of new technological development, anticipate the pilot testing of the UN document standard 'Akoma Ntoso' as recently endorsed by the UN Chief Executive Board's High–Level Committee on Management and will embark upon using auto-indexing solutions available and presented at the meeting.

The meeting further endorsed the upgrade of the InforMEA E-learning Portal and its opening up for contributing Partners including UNITAR, committed to further work in the context of presenting the collective contribution of MEAs to the Sustainable Development Goals and continued prioritizing strategic outreach towards an expanding user base of InforMEA. Recommendations also reflect the endorsement of stronger collaboration with the projects that have been presented to the meeting.

IV.   Annexes

Annex I   –   Recommendations
Annex II   –   Agenda and Participants List
Annex III   –   Background Documents
Annex IV   –   Presentations and Photos