

59th Working Group Meeting of the MEA IKM Initiative

Tuesday, March 24, 2020 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM CET

Audio Conference – Geneva, Montreal, Bonn, Nairobi, Rome, Singapore

Report

Meeting Participants

BRS – Julien HORTONEDA
CBD – Kata KOPPEL, Frederic VOGEL
CITES – Haruko OKUSU
CMS – Aydin BAHRAMLOUIAN
ECLAC – David Barrio LAMARCHE
IPPC – Paola Sentinelli
ITPGRFA – Francisco LOPEZ
Ozone Secretariat – Gerald MUTISYA
Ramsar – Manuel KERN
SAICM – Eduardo Caldera-PETIT
UNCCD – Jeroen Van DALEN
UNEP MAP – Maria Luisa Rodriguez LUCAS
UNFCCC – Jingwen YANG

KM Team

UNEP – Eva DUER, Kelly KABIRU, Iddah KAMAU, Lillian ONYANGO, Peter SPEELMAN

Meeting Summary

Ms. Duer welcomed participants to the meeting, the first Working Group meeting in 2020.

I. Update on InforMEA Phase II budget; project development process for InforMEA Phase III; current situation with the Steering Committee Meeting

Providing a brief update, Ms. Duer informed the Working Group that there was a GPGC Programme Steering Committee Meeting on 29 January 2020, which she attended to pitch the InforMEA Phase III concept note. Everything was approved. The team is now in the process of finalizing the concept note to operationalize InforMEA Phase III as quickly as possible. The Working Group was requested to look at the concept once again note and give feedback, if any. Archiving was introduced into the concept note and the InforMEA Project document, while keeping the desired framework very targeted.

The team is now in the process of concluding InforMEA Phase II, a process that needs to be finalized by June 2020, due to a No-Cost Extension negotiated between Phase II and III. There is now some uncertainty regarding the InforMEA Steering Committee Meeting scheduled for the 2nd week of June 2020. A “Plan B” is needed, which might mean pushing the meeting to the second half of 2020. The team is currently brainstorming options should the meeting not be able to go ahead, while keeping with the identified dates until further notice.

II. Progress reports

(a) Archiving (lead and proposed by UNFCCC)

Ms. Yang (UNFCCC) explained the archiving proposal. A website is part of the official public record of an organization, and much of the information contained therein does not exist anywhere else. Web content is constantly changing, the average life span of a web page being only 44-100 days. Web archiving is a process to capture the ever-changing content of a website to ensure it is preserved and accessible to public researchers and historians. An archiving approach has been widely adopted by many organizations, for instance the EU is archiving government websites.

Ms. Yang suggested InforMEA take the lead in capturing the web archives of all the MEA agencies. UNHQ also wants to do this, but has not yet started, and it is not known when they will start. Some UN organizations are already doing their own web archiving, including UNESCO and UNHCR. Web archiving technology makes it possible to harvest information “as is” from websites and make it available in a central place. The group could start at once or twice a year, with more frequent archiving possible if there is a need; pricing would be based on frequency. The project could use commercial technology already used by other UN organizations and the EU, such as WebEx or Mirrorweb. As a pilot, Ms. Yang recommended that the InforMEA and UNFCCC websites be archived. Once this is successful, the project could be expanded to the other organizations. The frequency of the crawling, administrative support costs, number of pages to be archived, technical issues, etc., all contribute to the total cost. Using a commercial company, it could cost USD \$100,000 for the initial phase.

(b) PoolParty sub-group

i) Sub-group overview and presentation by BRS

Mr. Kabiru reminded the Working Group that for a long time they have been discussing the installation of a system that will help with auto-tagging. This was one of the founding reasons for InforMEA, to enable crawling through websites to get relevant information, remove noise and present subject matter content in a way that is already filtered and has been prepared and processed by the MEAs, and that has been semantically interpreted by another MEA in a way that makes sense. In 2017, the group identified PoolParty, which is a UN standard, and acquired and installed it at the beginning of 2019. Since then, the group has been teaching ourselves how best to use it. BRS installed it and has been running tests and a couple pilots with InforMEA.

Recently, a small sub-group was formed to look at on-going PoolParty pilots and developments on a weekly basis. The group includes the InforMEA team, BRS, IPBES, and CITES. The PoolParty sub-group picked up from where the initiative had left off with the last pilot, the Climate Tagger. Ms. Alexandra Fante, a former Consultant with InforMEA, was looking at the further development and clean-up of the LEO Thesaurus. The team has yet to go through the entire mapping exercise as they are still testing it, however the project has been put in PoolParty. The response has been positive, and to some extent the team has been able to replicate what was done with the Climate Tagger. Mr. Kabiru invited more members to join the sub-group.

Since installing PoolParty, InforMEA and BRS identified the need to upgrade the InforMEA servers. Receiving and installing the server could be a challenge with COVID-19. BRS has kindly extended the testing of the PoolParty system from development to the production stage. From there, we can begin to see how far we can take auto-tagging, hopefully with a small pilot to show at the next Steering Committee Meeting.

Mr. Hortonedá (BRS) informed the Working Group that BRS has learned several things about PoolParty with the support of a Consultant, Mr. Santiago Riera. They have been able to import and refine their own Thesaurus and begin to understand better how the system works from two angles: normal Thesaurus management and tagging suggestions. All this has been captured in a living document, reviewed by IPBES. This document will be a good base to capture the lessons learned and show all the steps that need to be followed, what needs to be done, and what to avoid. BRS already has a simple web application to retrieve suggestions from PoolParty. This system can retrieve suggestions against the LEO Thesaurus or any other MEA Thesaurus. For the same document, one can have different suggestions and concepts. The team is now trying to understand what happens to the suggestions when the PoolParty configuration is changed, or when different corpora are used. The tool also has different interfaces, now a web app which can work for anyone who is not integrated within an organization's system. It can give suggestions for a document or a web page. In the context of the Judicial Portal, the team has been able to check its integration with Drupal websites.

ii) Presentation by CITES

Ms. Okusu (CITES) explained that CITES had contacted Semantic Web for the development of their document tagging tool for the particular purpose of developing a database to keep track of certain compliance-related procedures that can take years across different committees and in different documents. They started by developing a CITES Thesaurus and putting it into PoolParty. This was complicated by the need to link the Thesaurus to the species database managed by WCMC. CITES hopes to continue working with Semantic Web to continue with the InforMEA server. A future challenge already identified is that the PoolParty tagger has some challenges when it comes to tagging PDF tables.

(c) LEAP website; Judicial Portal; Environmental Defenders Database; E-learning courses (BBNJ and SDG16), platform enhancements, and translation; outreach planning; meeting with WTO

Mr. Speelman updated the meeting on the Judicial Portal, developed with Eau de Web, which contains a feature suggesting terms from a specific glossary. There are still some issues with synchronization between the Portal and PoolParty, but it still gives suggested tags. Regarding the Montevideo V Programme, progress is being made on a new LEAP platform coming out of this initiative, which will be interoperable with InforMEA, and which will pool existing information. On the revised E-learning website, the team is currently working to promote E-learning and upgrade the platform to address some ongoing issues, such as translations. InforMEA hopes to soon launch a course on SDG 16 together with ECLAC and UNECE. There is also ongoing planning related to outreach and engagement with the WTO on developing an online Trade and Environment Matrix. Ms. Kamau is also working on an initial concept for a GEF project database, which could eventually be displayed on country profiles.

III. Round of MEA updates

Ms. Yang (UNFCCC) informed the Working Group that she received positive feedback from several colleagues at UNFCCC on InforMEA's search functionality. UNFCCC launched their new website in 2019 and they are now working on improvements. UNFCCC colleagues may contact the PoolParty sub-group team to benefit from the team's experience and knowledge.

Ms. Sentinelli (IPPC) also expressed keen interest in PoolParty and will begin to raise it with the IPPC team as well.

Ms. Lucas (UNEP MAP) sought clarification on whether the Montevideo Programme project is a parallel development or part of the InforMEA website. Ms. Duer explained that it is on the InforMEA server, led by the Law Division, which in turn is led by the inter-governmental process behind the Montevideo V Programme. The Programme involves MEA information to such an extent that it made sense to use and re-use some of the data already collected on InforMEA, complimented with other information and E-learning from the countries. The key functions of the LEAP website will be to inform on the Montevideo process, and for countries to log requests for technical assistance to UNEP, which will be channeled to appropriate partners, including the MEA Secretariats, who are represented by their Legal Officers in this process. Behind the scenes, the Montevideo process is following the same format and standards the InforMEA initiative has set, and so this is how the two processes are linked.

Mr. Kern (Ramsar) informed the group of a new document drafted by Ed Jennings, "Enhancing Website Access to Documents," focused on the general cleaning and categorization of Ramsar document types. The API was adapted so that they could benefit directly from this cleaning on the InforMEA platform. The views have been adapted accordingly to their new categorization, with the number of documents remaining almost the same. This is something that InforMEA will greatly benefit from the next time harvesting is done. Ramsar has also been tweaking the search engine on their own websites to prioritize the most relevant documents, with the help of an expert.

Mr. Lopez (ITPGRFA FAO) informed the group that they recently started to improve their collection of terms and concepts, starting, with the support of FAO, to map the terms against AGROVOC. It is hoped this will improve the way their content is tagged and allow better mapping between LEO and AGROVOC.

Ms. Okusu (CITES) explained that CITES has now secured sufficient funds to hopefully join the enterprise PoolParty server and continue document tagging. The team hopes to start a new project of an app tracking compliance-related issues, and are looking to compile compliance-related issues on new country overview pages showing legal status, compliance status, and all the reports submitted in different CITES-related processes. Tagging is expected to help with this process. Ms. Okusu added that compiling compliance-related issues in one place might later be an interesting case study for InforMEA. CITES has started moving their server to a cloud-based service to be able to deal with the challenge they had of InforMEA being unable to mine information from their website.

Mr. Mutisya (Ozone) explained that the Ozone Secretariat has been using the InforMEA systems contract to do lot of work on their website. In 2020, they hope to link some of that work through feeds to InforMEA, and to provide some information that they were previously unable, for instance Focal

Point and Contact information, and recommendations from the non-compliance committee. Ozone also plans to update their E-learning course on InforMEA, which is significantly outdated. To this end they have developed the terms of reference for a Consultant, which they plan to share with InforMEA.

Mr. Bahramlouian (CMS) told the group that CMS recently finished their COP and plan to revamp all their websites, including updating to Drupal 8, which will be a major project for the next few years. They are looking at how to link the Drupal module to PoolParty. They are also using the InforMEA systems contract for some of this.

Ms. Kamau invited anyone to contact her for a username and account for PoolParty. She informed the group about the Environmental Rights Initiative website, an online database of contacts for environmental defenders, that InforMEA is working on with the Law Division. This work has already begun, and a skeleton of the website has been approved. On PoolParty, there are several projects ongoing, a few of which have already been uploaded. Together with Ms. Fante, InforMEA has done some mapping and collection. Currently, a relatively good master for the LEO Thesaurus is available. Regarding UNFCCC, Ms. Kamau reported that the almost-complete Taxonomy done in collaboration with Ms. Rita Benitez (UNFCCC) is now available, with some additional work still ongoing. She urged the MEAs working with the Taxonomy to test it.

IV. AOB

Ms. Duer invited interested participants to join in the PoolParty meeting that takes place on Thursdays. She thanked all the participants for their contributions and noted that the next working group meeting will be held soon.