InforMEA
Report of the 12th Steering Committee Meeting
Virtual | 16 November 2021

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The 12th InforMEA Steering Committee Meeting was again held virtually in view of the continued COVID-19 situation. The virtual format allowed for the preparatory workstream meetings to be spread out over the preceding weeks, while in the Steering Committee Meeting participants overviewed the work of the last year and decided on outcomes and recommendations to guide the work over the next year.

The meeting was structured around 4 workstreams: (1) Technical, discussing implementation and use cases of the Akoma Ntoso (AKN4UN) UN document standard, semantic indexing, web archiving, and other technical matters; (2) Learning, including new and updated online courses, enhancements to the e-learning platform, and integrated approaches to course libraries; (3) Data and Content, discussing progress on indexing documents and finalizing glossaries, thesauri, and taxonomies, as well as data mining national reports; and (4) Uptake, Context, and Partners, including shared infrastructure with platforms like the Judicial Portal and UNEP-LEAP, classical outreach, and the development of a joint calendar to improve online scheduling in light of COVID-19.
The MEA-IKM Program | 12th InforMEA Steering Committee Meeting
Virtual | 16 November 2021
Meeting Report

I. Background

UN Environment has supported the InforMEA Program since 2010. InforMEA currently brings together 60 global and regional legally binding treaties from 25 Secretariats, hosted by five UN organizations and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). InforMEA is also open to partners and observers.¹

The InforMEA Program is committed to knowledge sharing and harnessing technological advances to support MEAs and their Parties. It has been supported by the European Union since 2014, and benefits from an ever-growing membership. The purpose of the meeting was to obtain the MEA members’ guidance on the program’s priorities and further development.

II. Meeting Summary

Opening

1. The 12th InforMEA Steering Committee Meeting was opened by the co-chairs, Ms. Ivonne Higuero (Secretary-General, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)), and Ms. Patricia Kameri-Mbote (Director, UNEP Law Division), who welcomed participants and thanked the European Union for their support. Ms. Kameri-Mbote emphasized the importance of access to information and documents, and the role InforMEA plays in facilitating this access to a broad range of stakeholders, from negotiators to delegates, academics, and prosecutors. Ms. Kameri-Mbote affirmed the Law Division’s support and welcomed the perspectives of the Executive Heads for inspiration and guidance on where the Initiative’s work will go from here.

The Intersessional Working Group supported by the InforMEA team then provided the annual progress report. Representatives from MEAs including BRS, CBD, Ozone Secretariat, and IPBES provided an overview of the discussions on the four main workstreams and their sub-groups. The key milestones presented included great progress on indexing and thesaurus development, the development of a joint UNEP-MEA online calendar, and an IT upgrade of the Portal. Recommendations on the future direction included continued work on indexing at the MEA and InforMEA level, the piloting of MEA-specific course groups within the e-learning tool, further work on visualization and dashboards, the joint application of UN-wide standards and best practices, and the sustained evolution of services, outreach, and engagement with

¹ Observers include the IMF, UNDP, UNITAR, the European Environment Agency, UNEP-WCMC, the Environmental Management Group, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Whaling Commission (IWC).
stakeholders’ groups.

Addresses by MEA Executive Heads and Observers

The Executive Heads attending the meeting, including from Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions (BRS), Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Secretariat to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna & Flora (CITES), Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, UNEP-(Mediterranean Action Plan) MAP, International Whaling Commission (IWC), and Ramsar Convention welcomed the progress made and provided their ambition and vision in their subsequent interventions.

2. Ms. Rebecca Lent, (Executive Secretary, IWC), expressed that IWC is happy to be part of InforMEA. IWC has made tremendous progress since joining in November 2020 and is glad to provide a challenging test case study with its 75-year-old treaty, which will celebrate its anniversary in a couple of weeks. IWC looks forward to the next year and steps.

3. Ms. Elizabeth Mrema, (Executive Secretary, CBD), thanked the co-chairs for their leadership on InforMEA, where Secretariats could work together on common issues, like training, or the joint calendar. Over the years, InforMEA continued to grow in importance and became a key tool for the work of the Secretariats and focal points. CBD would continue to fully support InforMEA in its efforts to meet the needs of its stakeholders through harmonization. As seen at the recent Glasgow COP, there were no boundaries between environmental issues. This is where InforMEA could continue to demonstrate its value.

4. Ms. Monika Stankiewicz (Executive Secretary, Minamata Convention) updated the Committee on the recently concluded first segment of the Minamata’s 4th Conference of the Parties (COP). It focused on adopting a Programme of Work and Budget for 2022, under which a new activity line on digital strategy was approved. This was a way to improve Minamata’s knowledge management capacities and support activities linked to the UN Secretary General’s Data Strategy and UNEPs Digital Transformation Sub-Programme. In addition to a new website, Minamata had set out to create a digital repository of scientific information, to explore its capabilities as a data center including interoperable standards and dashboards, and to keep preparing e-learning solutions. All these activities went hand in hand with InforMEA, but it would take more than one COP for Parties to fully realize the benefits and opportunities of going digital.
To facilitate the virtual COP, Minamata created a dedicated digital ecosystem to give Parties access, guarantee their security, and ensure efficient meeting management. Ms. Stankiewicz expressed her appreciation to other Secretariats for their support and shared experiences holding virtual meetings, including the help of the CBD Secretariat in using the same participant registration and management system, the support of the BRS Secretariat in developing a dedicated intranet for meeting documents, and the advice of the Ozone Secretariat in creating a Budget Forum.

5. Ms. Martha Rojas Urrego (Secretary-General, Ramsar Convention) emphasized Ramsar’s continued participation in InforMEA. Ramsar was committed to the Global Biodiversity Framework and valued the collaboration and connection between environmental agreements. This link was natural to Ramsar, given how extremely rich in biodiversity wetlands were, as were the threats to them. As the custodian of SDG 6.6.1 Ramsar looked at creating a strong synergy between its work and the work of its Parties on biodiversity.

Ms. Rojas Urrego underlined the importance of the recently concluded climate COP and its relevance for all MEAs given that nature became a key part of the agenda. For Ramsar, the linkage with water remained critical; countries could not meet water security or mitigation targets without ecosystems like as peatlands. Ramsar saw InforMEA as one of the tools needed to facilitate these connections and synergies and was encouraged by its continued growth. The data search by theme allowed Parties to see how other conventions are working, and the joint MEA calendar helped to coordinate. She also acknowledged that about 2,000 new users in the last year came through InforMEA. The user needs should remain the priority focus, and InforMEA should continue to focus on where it could add the biggest value.

6. Mr. Rolph Payet, (Executive Secretary, BRS), affirmed that BRS remained committed to support InforMEA, as they had been from the very beginning. The use of common standards and best practices continued to be the defining drive of this work. The growth of e-learning was highly welcome, and BRS was currently working with InforMEA to host a training course on procedures and processes for meeting Chairs. Many countries had expressed their appreciation for such trainings, empowering them to participate in negotiations. Mr. Payet also welcomed the move of InforMEA into a new taxonomy-based system, whereby Parties can tag their documents, web pages, and other content to keywords and concepts. The new system would facilitate data searches and analysis, and provide great value to researchers, negotiators, and other users of the portal. Data mining was another excellent development, because of its importance for national reports and getting a picture of how countries are implementing the conventions.
7. Ms. Amy Fraenkel, (Executive Secretary, CMS) expressed her appreciation for InforMEA putting real synergies in action. The value of online platforms has never been more recognized, and InforMEA had a head start. All the CMS websites and IT infrastructure were currently undergoing an upgrade which would eventually allow full participation in several emerging InforMEA projects, such as the data mining of national reports. CMS was also expanding its e-learning courses on the InforMEA platform. One important area for future collaboration could include ongoing work on national legislation implementing CMS. Regarding the Global Biodiversity Framework, InforMEA could also serve as a platform for integrated reporting around National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs).

8. Ms. Tatjana Hema (Coordinator, UNEP-MAP) affirmed UNEP-MAP’s commitment to InforMEA, which had shown significant progress. UNEP-MAP was interested in making use of and uploading additional training courses to the InforMEA e-learning platform and exploring how to benefit from the work done on SDGs. UNEP-MAP expected to approve a new 6-year mid-term strategy at the next Meeting of Contracting Parties, which included a very important component on knowledge management. UNEP-MAP was committed in these efforts to keep abreast of what InforMEA is doing to take maximum advantage of synergies and avoid overlapping and unnecessary efforts.

9. Ms. Ivonne Higuero, (Secretary-General, CITES) remarked that at its core, InforMEA had always been a community of practice – facilitating access to shared resources, such as systems contracts and services, but also allowing MEAs to identify concrete synergies and find innovative solutions to similar challenges. Participation in InforMEA had been helpful to CITES in a very practical way. Concerning its ongoing work on online document tagging, collaboration with InforMEA had allowed CITES to manage its thesaurus in a comprehensive management system, learning best practices and current standards from other MEAs undertaking similar exercises. This is part of a broader effort to align taxonomies between InforMEA and the MEAs to facilitate cross-cutting search queries that can benefit both Parties and at the broader level public access to information. Work on online courses had also continued since the last Steering Committee meeting with an introductory course hosted on InforMEA’s e-learning platform. Ms. Higuero noted that the reality of online meetings given the COVID pandemic could also yield opportunities. Ms. Higuero thanked the participants for their observations and invited observers to comment.

10. Mr. Sajal Mathur, Counsellor, World Trade Organization (WTO) thanked participants for the impressive work conducted through InforMEA. WTO has been an observer to InforMEA for the last two years and was a use cases for work on trade and environment synergies. In
March 2021, WTO had a specific discussion in their Committee on Trade and Environment, where InforMEA presented ongoing work on a platform to digitize an existing matrix of MEA trade-related measures. Mr. Mathur welcomed the progress on this work.

**Endorsement of the Recommendations**

The Meeting then formally endorsed the proposed recommendations by the Intersessional Working Group, and a Group Photos was taken before the Co-chairs thanked participants and closed the meeting.

**III. Outcomes**

Each of the workstreams drafted a set of recommendations which were then endorsed by the Steering Committee meeting. They are included in Annex I of this document.

**IV. Annexes**

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³ [https://bit.ly/3yL0Si1](https://bit.ly/3yL0Si1)
⁵ [https://bit.ly/3mm1gvn](https://bit.ly/3mm1gvn)
⁶ [https://prezi.com/view/g0p3TGwea6KZh9FUketp/](https://prezi.com/view/g0p3TGwea6KZh9FUketp/)