InforMEA

REPORT OF THE 14TH InforMEA STEERING COMMITTEE

In-Person | 11-13 June 2024

I. Executive Summary

The 14th InforMEA Steering Committee Meeting was held in Monteux, Switzerland on 11-13 June 2024. It was attended by the Executive Heads of the CITES, the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Convention, the International Whaling Commission, and remotely the Minamata Convention, Knowledge Management officers from 18 Secretariats of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), IPBES and key partners. Participants discussed technological innovations for environmental protection including technical and semantic interoperability, Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications, joint efforts on online learning and capacity building, new governance mechanisms as well as outreach and partnerships.

The Steering Committee Meeting participants reviewed the work anticipated in the 4th project phase and decided on recommendations and outcomes to guide the work over the next year.

Meeting Link: https://prezi.com/view/ruBDeIMCKb3W39osEgFZ/

The deliberations were held in two parallel working groups. One group led by representatives from the Secretariats of the Minamata, Ramsar, CMS, BRS Conventions and IPBES discussed experiences with generative AI; indexing documents; progress and maintenance of InforMEA's system of interoperability (API documentation, hosting issues, etc.); and continued implementation of UN Data Standards (AKN4UN, UN-approved maps, etc.). The second group, dedicated to joint issues, was moderated by representatives from Minamata Convention, BRS, and Escazu Secretariats, and discussed progress on the ever-evolving e-learning tool (including dedicated MEA sections); new arrangements for the MEA co-chair; the best way to approach the GEF for better knowledge-sharing on interoperability issues; and outreach and partnerships.

The Plenary on the third day endorsed the outcomes and as a result the 14th Meeting of the InforMEA Steering Committee:

- Recommended that MEAs strive to finalize their thesauri with the assistance of InforMEA and called on UNEP to ensure sustainability including through the procurement of expertise in this area.
- Decided on priorities and specifications in developing non-public-facing generative AI applications, and for applications using authoritative sets of documents, including information on country implementation. Committed to continuing close exchange with the Digital Transformation sub-programme in this regard.
- Decided on better documentation, monitoring, and security of the APIs that MEAs implement and maintain to aggregate information on InforMEA.
- Recommended the continued use of UN standards such as AKN4UN to better support monitoring and searching legislation and MEA information, with a view to supporting the science-policy tracker and enhanced retrievability through indexing and AI.
- Thanked BRS and CBD for hosting key components of InforMEA's infrastructure and invited UNEP to explore options to host InforMEA servers and applications, including costs, management, ownership, and maintenance implications (agility, reliability, etc.).
- Recommended a list of priority courses to be jointly developed, including on scientific bodies and MEAs; indigenous peoples; the Biodiversity Framework; GMOs; and MEA Secretariats.
- Recommended the amendment of the TORs of the InforMEA Initiative to accommodate a rotating MEA co-chair and the associated processes.
- Decided to prepare a business case and collectively approach the GEF with a request for improved access to relevant project data.
- Invited enhanced outreach and awareness-raising on InforMEA, and continued efforts on fruitful partnerships with academia, WTO, IISD, and others.

It was encouraging and delightful to see the strong determination by MEA colleagues to the discussions and working groups. The MEA heads and representatives expressed their deep appreciation for the InforMEA Initiative and the support provided by the UNEP Law Division over many years, thanked the European Commission for their support, and expressed their continued commitment to sharing information "inter-operably" with InforMEA and with each other.

II. Background

InforMEA is the United Nations (UN) Information Portal on Multilateral Environmental

Agreements, an online portal that provides information about the Multilateral Environmental Agreements to the public. The InforMEA Initiative and its Steering Committee guide its development and further evolution.

The InforMEA Initiatives goal is to develop harmonized and interoperable information systems for the benefit of parties and the environment community at large. It is facilitated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and is financially supported by the European Union. It is co-chaired by UNEP and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and currently brings together 60 global and regional legally binding treaties from 25 Secretariats, hosted by five UN organizations and IUCN, in addition to observers and partners.

The InforMEA Steering Committee meets annually and provides strategic direction while its intersessional working group meets periodically during the year and is responsible for the technical implementation of InforMEA recommendations.

III. Meeting Summary

Opening

1. The 14th InforMEA Steering Committee Meeting was opened by the co-chairs, Ms. Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Director, UNEP Law Division, and Ms. Ivonne Higuero, Secretary-General, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), who welcomed participants to the in-person meeting.

2. **Ms. Kameri-Mbote** thanked the Directorate for the Environment of the European Commission for generous funding support. As a result of this continued support, InforMEA

has refocused attention to MEA focal points and constituencies, while ensuring that key groups beyond the MEA world, such as the One UN process, are continually informed. She noted the steady and continuous progress on all fronts of the key InforMEA workstreams: E-Learning, Interoperability, Semantic Indexing and Outreach, mentioning the first instances of the new course pages and the MEA course sections. Ms. Mbote further pointed out how the mapping work between MEA strategies and their ontologies strategies could be harnessed for new applications, and how automatic indexing of documents through these mappings, results in easier and cost-effective indexing and document retrieval.

3. She affirmed UNEP's commitment to monitoring the interface between Science and Policy, and through the Law Division continues to monitor legislative developments against priority topics such as air pollution and single use plastics. The Law Division continues to develop legislation toolkits with the help of the InforMEA implementing partners and contractors on the UNEP Law and Environment Assistant Platform (UNEP-LEAP).

4. **Ms. Ivonne Higuero** reminded participants of the critical role that InforMEA plays in fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing among MEAs. The collective efforts to enhance environmental governance ensuring the effective implementation of environmental agreements are more important than ever. She added that the current environmental challenges ranging from biodiversity loss and climate change to pollution and habitat destruction all demand coordinated and innovative responses.

5. She re-emphasized that the goal of InforMEA is to strengthen environmental governance and to ensure that collective action leads to tangible, positive impacts on the ground. The recommendations and outcomes from the meeting will guide the team's work in the coming year, aligning the strategies and actions of the MEAs with the pressing needs of the planet.

Addresses by MEA Executive Heads and Observers

6. The meeting was attended by Executive Heads from Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions (BRS), Secretariat to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna & Flora (CITES), and International Whaling Commission (IWC). A statement from the acting Executive Head of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was read on his behalf. The Executive Heads welcomed the progress made by InforMEA and provided their ambition and vision in their subsequent interventions.

7. **Ms. Martha Rojas-Urrego, (Executive Secretary, International Whaling Commission)** attended the 14th InforMEA Steering Committee Meeting in her new capacity as Executive Secretary of the International Whaling Commission after completing two terms as Secretary

General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. She noted the significant role played by InforMEA in terms of knowledge exchange assisting MEAs addressing common challenges. InforMEA has provided a forum for MEAs to learn from each other while working collaboratively.

8. **Mr. Rolph Payet, (Executive Secretary, Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions-BRS),** congratulated the participants of the Steering Committee noting the growth in participation over the years. He appreciated the support received from the European Union which has been instrumental in the growth of InforMEA and reiterated the BRS Secretariat's continued commitment and support on hosting the Platform and its extended ecosystem. He mentioned the Negotiators Toolkit, which is the latest development in the InforMEA Portal. On E-Learning, he noted that diplomats, students, and National Focal Points are actively using InforMEA.

9. **Mr. David Cooper, (acting Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity – CBD),** in a statement delivered on his behalf, commended the continued dedication of the InforMEA group to enhance knowledge sharing and synergies among MEAs. For over a decade, InforMEA has served as an important forum for MEA Secretariats to discuss and collaborate on knowledge management, legal information systems, and data sharing. From the enhanced e-learning platform hosting multiple MEA courses, including several modules on the CBD and its Protocols, to the global MEA calendar, InforMEA is the embodiment of the vision that the Bern Process seeks to fulfil, with the vision being unison, harmony and cooperation among all biodiversity-related treaties.

10.   Mr. Cooper advised the Steering Committee that by acting on the recommendations of the meeting, InforMEA will strengthen the knowledge threads that hold the tapestry of MEAs together and make environmental multilateralism bloom. By working more closely with the Parties, InforMEA can also play a greater role in catalyzing the required synergies at the national level. Working with MEA National Focal Points can help to make this silo-breaking approach happen in practice. This is why it is important to open InforMEA technical working groups to greater participation by National Focal Points.

Dr. Rolph Payet; Ms. Patricia Kameri-Mbote and Ms. Ivonne Higuero

Ms. Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Ms. Ivonne Higuero and Ms. Martha Rojas

11.   In her closing remarks, **Minamata Convention Executive Secretary, Ms. Monika Stankiewicz**, praised the Minamata Convention partnership with InforMEA, noting the significant progress that has been made in knowledge management and data exchange. She added that the inspiring community of practice within InforMEA provides the Minamata Convention with great confidence when implementing new digital solutions. She reiterated their strong commitment to InforMEA and continued cooperation".

Endorsement of the Recommendations

The Meeting then formally endorsed the proposed recommendations by the Intersessional Working Group. The co-Chairs thanked participants and closed the meeting.

IV. 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.

V. Annexes

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Annex II-   [Agenda](#)
Annex III-   [List of Participants](#)
Annex IV-   [Background Documents](#)
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