



**United Nations Environment Programme
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean**

PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL MEDIO AMBIENTE
PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT
PROGRAMA DAS NAÇOES UNIDAS PARA O MEIO AMBIENTE

**Fourteenth Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of
the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean**

**Panama City, Panama
20 to 25 November 2003**

A. PREPARATORY MEETING OF EXPERTS
20TH TO 21ST NOVEMBER 2003

Distribution:

Limited

UNEP/LAC-IGWG.XIV/6

Tuesday 21, October 2003

Original: English

UNEP Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean (2003-2005)

I. Introduction

1. This document outlines a number of options which could form the basis of the new strategy for the work of UNEP in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The strategy will enable the UNEP Regional Office in LAC to take on the additional work and responsibilities resulting from UNEP GC decisions on regionalisation and regional implementation and to help implement the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development (ILAC).

II. The Regional Context and the Environment

2. Latin America and the Caribbean has experienced sluggish growth in the past few years and its GDP contracted by 1.3 percent in 2002 mostly due to deep recessions in Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela. Despite low interest rates in industrial countries, gross private capital flows to the region dropped by \$31 billion, down 40 percent from the previous year. Foreign direct investment fell from \$69 billion in 2001 to \$42 billion in 2002. External debt continues to burden the region and in 2002, despite Argentina's default, payment of interests was greater than foreign investments.

3. Poverty and inequity remain widespread both in rural and urban areas. The economic problems and crises experience by countries in the region have resulted in the termination or the slowing down in pace of environmental projects/activities. At present, the majority of governments see the establishment of international trade agreements as a means to reverse the economic situation.

4. Latin America and the Caribbean houses 524 million people. The region can be broken down into different sub-regions (e.g. Andes, Caribbean, Mesoamerica, and Southern Cone) all with their own special characteristics and rich diversity. The topography and ecosystems of the region range from tropical islands to high sierras and altiplanos, rainforests, deserts and plains. The region contains a wide variety of ecosystem types, many of the world's biologically richest ecoregions and several megadiverse countries. The tropical forests are of particular importance in this respect.

5. However, the region contains some of the most endangered forest habitats on Earth, as well as some of the most rapid rates of deforestation, underlining the need to make ecosystems conservation a top priority. The key environmental problems facing the coastal and marine areas are land-based pollution, the over-exploitation of fisheries, habitat conversion (including by tourism), oil and gas extraction, refining and transport.

6. Latin America and the Caribbean is the most urbanized region in the developing world with three-quarters of its people living in urban areas. In many urban areas, people suffer from inadequate water supply and sanitation, poor air quality, insufficient waste management and the health problems associated with these. Poor urban populations, often living on the margins of cities, are also the most vulnerable to natural hazards and environmental contamination.

III. Challenges

7. The challenge for the region is to address the growing levels of poverty and inequality, while at the same time integrating environmental and social concerns as described above into development policy in all sectors. If the countries are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including “environmental sustainability” by 2015, they need to reorient their economic, social and environmental policies as a matter of urgency. The issues of poverty and inequality lie at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals, and will be a key guide in UNEP/ROLAC’s work as it follows the motto Environment for Development.

8. Without more integrated policy responses, the current trend of worsening environmental conditions is likely to continue, contributing to increased human vulnerability to environmental change. Emerging issues related to trade and the environment, vulnerability and climate change, health and other topics will become increasingly important and countries must already position themselves to meet these emerging challenges.

IV. Environmental Institutional Framework in the Region

9. The Forum of Ministers for Environment of LAC exists with UNEP as its Secretariat, since 1982. The ministerial meetings and decisions have formed an important political platform enabling regional consensus on environmental policies and responses as well as providing a framework and reference for UNEP’s activities in LAC. There is a need however, within this framework, to better address the more specific needs of the different sub-regions.

10. As an initial step, UNEP/ROLAC has already established working relationships with several of the sub-regional ministerial forums as well as their secretariats. These include: Secretariat of the Andean Community of Nations; Caribbean Community Secretariat; and the Central American Commission for Environment and Development.

V. Programmatic Refocusing

11. To better address the needs of the countries of LAC, UNEP/ROLAC needs to streamline and refocus its work. The Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development will form the basis for this refocusing. However, care will be taken to ensure that of the many priorities identified in ILAC, only the ones in which UNEP could provide a clear value added are incorporated as elements of the UNEP/ROLAC strategy and subsequently its work programme. The Millennium Development Goals will further help to focus the strategy and work of UNEP/ROLAC. Finally, the latest decisions and guidance from the UNEP GC/GMEF must be taken into consideration.

12. Capacity building and technology transfer are at the core of all activities. Through these capacity building activities UNEP/ROLAC aims to continue to strengthen the technical and institutional capacities of governments and other partners at the regional, subregional and national levels.

13. Almost every aspect of UNEP/ROLAC's work is supported by its network of partners spread within and beyond Latin America and the Caribbean. These partners, including UN agencies, academic institutions and non governmental organisations, enable UNEP/ROLAC to increase its regional and national outreach and to build capacities throughout the region in the implementation of its work. Formal agreements have been signed or are under negotiation with a number of partners including the Pan American Health Organisation, HABITAT and IUCN for the joint implementation of programmes. Similar agreements (Type I and II partnerships, Memoranda of Understanding etc.) to promote joint programme implementation have been and will continue to be signed with a wide range of governmental and non governmental partners in the region. Particular attention will be given to Type II initiatives like the White Water to Blue Water between USA and the Caribbean countries and the Water for Life between the European Union and LAC countries.

14. The strategy has been designed to address the global priorities and mandates of UNEP while fully taking into account regional priorities and concerns as outlined by the Forum of Ministers of Environment of LAC and the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development. It will be implemented through partnerships with UN and other organisations and ensure a strong capacity building component.

15. UNEP/ROLAC will implement its new strategy through five key areas:

- A. Promote Intergovernmental policy dialogue
- B. Implement priority global, regional and national environmental programmes
- C. Promote the involvement of major civil society groups
- D. Strengthen targeted subregional implementation of activities
- E. Put in place a regionally distributed management system.

A. Promote intergovernmental policy dialogue and provide support to regional and subregional political bodies

a) Forum of Ministers

16. Strengthen the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean to enable it to better develop regional policy perspectives and positions to address global environmental issues and define regional environmental priorities. In addition, develop mechanisms to enable the Forum to present regional positions at global fora, better linking and coordinating regional and global policy dialogue. Finally the Forum's role in supporting the implementation of the ILAC will be strengthened through the establishment of more structured and formal mechanisms, including a Secretariat at UNEP/ROLAC.

b) WSSD-ILAC

17. Help generate political consensus on the regional delivery and follow up of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Implementation Plan and the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development, converting the ILAC into the focus of UNEP's work in the region. Within this context, UNEP/ROLAC will also promote the synergy between conventions and assist countries in their implementation.

c) Inter Ministerial Meetings

18. Promote and support inter-ministerial meetings such as health and environment, tourism and environment, energy and environment and others to help strengthen linkages between environment and development.

d) Global and Regional Political Processes

19. Promote the regional contributions to global political processes such as the Barbados Plan of Action for SIDS and to the process of the Mauritius Summit as well as processes linked to the CSD, UNEP GMEF etc. This could be achieved through the formation of a contact group within the auspices of the Forum of Ministers to help better link global and regional processes.

B. Assist the implementation of priority global, regional and national environmental programmes within the context of the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development (ILAC)

20. UNEP's support will be geared towards capacity building and technology transfer actions within the framework of the GC 22 approved Programme Budget and the priorities identified in the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development. These priorities will be discussed and confirmed at the Forum of Ministers of the Environment that will take place in Panama City in November 2003.

a) Ecosystem services

21. The aim of this programme is to help the region, especially the mega diverse countries, better value ecosystems and the services they provide and based on this develop integrated ecosystem and watershed management plans and policies. The programme will also support countries in the implementation of these integrated ecosystem and watershed management plans and policies especially with relation to protected areas, renewable energy, sustainable tourism, access to and benefit-sharing of genetic resources, desertification, land-based sources of pollution and physical alteration of coastal areas.

b) Integration of the principals of sustainable development into national policies

22. This programme will focus on achieving Millennium Development Goal 7 of integrating the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes to help reverse the loss of environmental resources. This will be achieved by promoting national environmental legislation; creating national capacities to implement multilateral environmental agreements; establishing links between economic and environmental policies; promotion of policy instruments that take into account the environment; supporting countries integrate environmental consideration in trade negotiations; and establishing the links between environment and poverty.

c) Urban environmental management

23. The urban programme will help municipal authorities and expert institutions improve urban environmental management. Capacity building support will be provided for undertaking environmental assessments, the development of policies and the implementation of concrete actions linked to cleaner production, sustainable consumption and production, and waste management. The urban programme will be implemented jointly with UN HABITAT and creating regional networks as the Network of Urban Environmental Authorities of Metropolitan Areas of LAC.

d) Environmental assessment and indicators

24. Set up regional centre to provide the information basis (assessment and indicators) to follow progress on sustainable development (national, sub-regional and regional) and to support management, decision making and policy setting. The programme will undertake environmental assessments and provide relevant information to support environmental management, decision-making and policy-setting. The focus of the programme will to undertake integrated environmental assessments (GEO) at the municipal, national, sub-regional, regional and global levels and help generate high quality data and indicators in priority areas for the region and the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean.

e) Emerging issues and early warning

25. Under this programme UNEP/ROLAC will help provide early warning through the timely identification and assessment of emerging environmental threats that may affect the long-term vulnerability of people, ecosystems and the services they provide. Initial areas of focus include: health and environment (in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organisation); measuring the impact of climate change (changing patterns of diseases, vulnerability etc.); biotechnology; trade and environment; APELL; and Chemicals. The programme will actively seek to "uncover" other emerging issues of relevance to the region. Particular attention will be given immediately to Trade and Environment, Fiscal Policies and Economic Instruments due to the intensive negotiations of free trade agreements in the Region at Regional and Sub-Regional levels.

C. Promote the involvement of major civil society groups in environmental action, encourage public education and increase environmental awareness**a) Civil Society**

26. Promote the participation of civil society in the main political process in the region including meetings of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment, Barbados+10 and ensure their inclusion in the implementation of programmes linked to ILAC. UNEP/ROLAC will focus on promoting the participation of civil society networks in order to have the greatest outreach possible.

b) Parliamentarians and Judges

27. Involve parliamentarians and judges in environmental processes and help raise their awareness with regard to environmental matters in order to enable them to position the environment in their daily work.

c) Education

28. Undertake environmental training and education through the development of materials for the formal and informal educational systems.

d) Public Awareness

29. Increase awareness of environmental issues through the organization of special environmental events (i.e. WED, exhibitions, festivals, fairs), press conferences, disseminating information to the media and other major stakeholders.

D. Strengthen targeted subregional implementation of activities

30. Support the regional delivery of UNEP Programmes based on national and sub-regional needs and strategic objectives and develop sub-regional plans of cooperation with subregional bodies. UNEP activities will be undertaken in collaboration with regional and subregional intergovernmental organisations, technical collaborating centres and national bodies.

a) Andean Region

Challenges: The Andean zone faces severe problems of degradation and desertification, especially in the fragile mountain ecosystems. At the same time, some 20% of the region's GDP comes from natural resource exploitation. The main challenge for the region is to address high levels of poverty and inequity, especially in the cities, through the sustainable use of its ecosystem services, especially its biodiversity, forests, lands and fisheries.

Priority activities:

- a) Assist in the implementation of the Andean Biodiversity Strategy;
- b) Support the Andean countries, as members of the Group of Like-Minded Megabiodiverse Countries, to carry out the relevant activities of the Group's Work Plan
- c) Support the development and implementation of a GEF project on access to and benefit sharing of genetic resources;
- d) Work with Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru on a project for the promotion and consolidation of an Andean Biological Corridor in the ambit of the Inca Trail;
- e) Help the Andean Community countries in the achievement of the commitments adopted at the WSSD on three thematic areas identified as priorities in the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development (i.e., climate change, biodiversity and water and sanitation) and included in the strategy designed by CAN to follow up on the WSSD.

b) Caribbean

Challenges: The Caribbean Region is characterized by its unique biodiversity, the fragility of its ecosystems and its vulnerability to natural hazards. Caribbean countries are highly dependant upon their marine and coastal resources, and the sustainable management of these resources is critical for long-term development in the region. The greatest environmental challenge in the Caribbean is the increasing vulnerability of its people and ecosystems resulting from the regional impacts of global climate change, including sea level rise and an increase in the frequency and intensity of natural disasters caused by hurricanes, droughts and floods. Other primary concerns are the sustainable management of marine and coastal resources (including fisheries), the increasing shortage of freshwater resources and the management of the waste generated by growing populations and tourism.

Priority activities:

- a) Promote the development and use of renewable energies;
- b) Help mitigate the impacts of climate change and address vulnerability of populations;

- c) Address water scarcity and integrated watershed management in the region;
- d) Support to institutional strengthening and development of legislation
- e) Support the development of the climate change centre in Belize as the first step in establishing a regional environment programme for the Caribbean in the mould of SPREP.
- f) Support the process for follow-up and implementation of the Barbados Plan of Action in preparation for the Mauritius Summit.

c) Central America

Challenges: In Mesoamerica, high levels of poverty combined with the increasing frequency and severity of natural hazards are taking a heavy toll on the region's vulnerable populations. The main challenge is to promote further regional integration while addressing the social and environmental needs. The proper integration of environmental concerns in economic and social policies is a high priority.

Priority activities:

- a) Help implement activities within the framework of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor Project (MBC) especially;
- b) The promotion of the sustainability of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor beyond the life of the project;
- c) Environmental accreditation and certification;
- d) Economic valuation and sustainability of forests;
- e) Capacity building in the emerging areas of trade and environment;
- f) Sustainable biotrade, agro-business and "green banking".

d) Southern Cone

Challenges: The Southern Cone has the lowest population density and highest urbanization rates in LAC. The subregion includes two of the biggest countries in LAC, Brazil and Argentina. Environmental degradation has intensified due to the economic dependence of the subregion on the intensive use of its natural resources. An initiative by Brazil and Argentina to give new impetus to the Mercosur provides an important opportunity to strengthen regional ministerial environmental dialogue and give political momentum to environmental activities.

Priority activities:

- a) In the Southern Cone region, no single sub regional organization exists with which to develop joint programmes. MERCOSUR is primarily a trade agreement of which Bolivia and Chile are associated members, although it does have a Working Group focused on the environment. UNEP/ROLAC will support the Working Group in the implementation of its priorities as follows:
 - i. Promote sustainable development based on agreed actions that guarantee the integration of the member States in the environment and economic-commercial relations;
 - ii. Avoid the creation of distortions or new restrictions to trade;

- iii. Carry out studies and propose actions and practices for the prevention of pollution and the degradation of the environment and for the improvement of the environment in member states;
 - iv. Promote effective environmental measures that are also economically efficient.
- b) In addition, UNEP/ROLAC proposes to strengthen ties with MERCOSUR to more effectively deal with the priorities of the other Southern Cone countries. Ties with the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Secretariat based in Brazil will also be strengthened. Support to MERCOSUR will focus on Environmental Emergencies, renewable energies, GPA, support for cleaner production and environmental assessment.

E. Management

In order to implement this strategy, ROLAC proposes a sub regional implementation structure for the work of UNEP based on incremental steps. More staff time will be devoted to sub-regional implementation of the programme through sub regional organizations. Similarly, greater staff time will be allocated to coordinate the work of the Secretariat of the Forum of Ministers and the implementation of ILAC key programmatic areas. Links with other UN and intergovernmental organizations will also be strengthened through strategic partnerships and joint programme implementation.

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