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**Nineteenth Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of  
Environment for Latin America and the Caribbean**

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**Strengthening regional networks and national  
capacities for environmental information:**

**Focus on Caribbean Small Island  
Developing States (SIDS)**



## **Strengthening regional networks and national capacities for environmental information: Focus on Caribbean small island developing States**

Hotel Radisson Summit, Panama City, Panama  
November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013, am

### **Draft summary**

- 1.** The meeting on “Strengthening regional networks and national capacities for environmental information: Focus on Caribbean small island developing States” was held in the morning of Friday, November the 15<sup>th</sup>, at the Radisson Summit Hotel in Panama City. Representatives of the governments of Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Cuba, Dominican Republic and Saint Lucia participated in the meeting. The Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM), the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNEP’s Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP) and the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) Project were also represented at the meeting.
- 2.** During the introductory session, welcome words were expressed to participants by Margarita Astrálaga, Regional Director and Representative of UNEP for Latin America and the Caribbean, by Garfield Barnwell, Director of Sustainable Development at the CARICOM Secretariat, Monika MacDevette, Chief of the Capacity Development Branch of UNEP’s Division of Early Warning and Assessment (DEWA), Chris Corbin, Programme Officer at the UNEP Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP) and the Chair of the meeting Mark Griffith, Programme Officer at UNEP’s Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC).
- 3.** As introduction, it was indicated that the meeting meant to represent a first consultative space and convey agreement about the needs of environmental information in the Caribbean. A draft “non paper” had been circulated to initiate the discussion. On this basis, a project proposal would be conveyed to governments for their endorsement, with a view (among other possible sources of funding) to submission to the Global Environment



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Facility (GEF) for funding consideration, under the cross-cutting capacity development portfolio of the GEF's 6<sup>th</sup> tranche.

4. UNEP made a briefing on the GEF cross-cutting capacity development portfolio, under which it was supporting a number of Caribbean countries with projects to strengthen environmental information. The fifth tranche of GEF-5 had just closed, but UNEP was advocating a further strengthening of the cross-cutting capacity building portfolio under GEF-6, due to start in mid 2014. UNEP would plan to submit a Caribbean initiative for funding under GEF-6, although it was possible that there could be some delays in the start-up process to GEF-6.
5. A presentation delivered by CARICOM and the following discussion gave further context on the environmental information needs in the Caribbean, including the following:
6. Green economy is seen as an option to respond to the consequences of the 2008-2009 economic crisis, with some study already carried further in Barbados. Production and consumption related issues also need to be looked at in a community-wide way. Some countries in the Caribbean have a tourism based economy while others base their economy on production, being the tourism based ones the more vulnerable economies due to the heavy impacts of natural disasters, particularly hurricanes, on touristic infrastructures. Therefore data on disasters and disaster impacts are highly needed. Additionally, these data have to be standardized in order to facilitate a better understanding of the role of disasters in the economy. Another important issue flagged in the presentation was climate change, particularly the aspect of sea level rise, due to the fact that, in the Caribbean SIDS, productive infrastructure is close to the sea. The costs of inaction with respect of climate change were stressed as causing a perpetual economic recession in the CARICOM Member states (as calculated by the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, CCCCC). It was also indicated the need to look for a new balance between States and market in the management of the natural resources which are indicated as being the economic basis of the region, particularly in the context of a green economy framework. The use of technology needs to be enhanced particularly to support sustainable development and green economy. It was also highlighted that, on the other hand, CARICOM states and CARICOM itself need to set up a monitoring and evaluation system of the results of the various actions. The enabling conditions for a green economy framework were also mentioned as being not only technology, but also in the convergence of public policies and business strategies. In order to get ready to implement the on-going Environment and Natural Resources Framework,



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a baseline of data and indicators is needed on biodiversity, energy, water and land, including valuation of these resources, and more clarity about the linkages between these thematic areas and resource efficiency.

7. During the following discussion it was suggested to choose an initial set of indicators to work on in the project that can serve for multiple purposes including valuation of natural capital.
8. The importance of a strong focus on building institutional capacity for environmental monitoring in the Caribbean was also emphasized during the discussion. Some participants noted that previous work in the Caribbean had over-emphasized workshops, although others noted that a focus on institutional capacity building should still be complemented under the present initiative by a strong component of workshops and technical training. In that regard, it was important to consider engagement with universities to develop systems for training rather than only ad hoc technical training.
9. During the discussion, it was also mentioned that a number of projects exist which the proposed project can build on. Those are an assessment of natural capital in Belize, the GEF Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) project, including a Caribbean Marine Atlas, and the work of the Regional Working Group on Environmental Statistics, coordinated by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)—a “regional public goods project”<sup>1</sup> conducting a stocktaking activity on the status of environmental statistics in the region, the results of which can be shared. Indicators and marine maps, already developed by the GEF *Integrating Watershed and Coastal Area Management (IWCAM) in the Small Island Development States* project, are also available, as well as on line training with universities (which sustainability can be strengthened by collaboration with other projects). UNEP CEP has also supported work on water data in Barbados and Grenada, as well as a GIS map for the maritime sector. Reference is made to the fact that the Caribbean Sea regional convention will prepare a report on the state of a number of issues in the Caribbean, therefore a good synergy can be built with the proposed project. It was also mentioned that the CEP is about to start supporting projects in Panama and Trinidad and Tobago on waste water and ecosystem services; those would be pilots to provide decision makers with a tool for evaluating different options when they need to do an investment in the waste water sector.
10. A GEF project in Belize aimed at improving environmental information is also about to start. Additionally it was indicated that the proposed project

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<sup>1</sup> Executed by ECLAC and the Mexican Institute of Geography and Statistics (INEGI).



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should use and build on (rather than just take into account) CARICOM's core set of indicators.

- 11.** The importance of strengthening the collection of data on sustainable development had been stressed in the preparatory process to the 2014 UN Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Reference was made to paragraphs 143-149 of the Inter-regional Preparatory Meeting held in Barbados, August 2013; for example, para. 144 stated:
- 12.** "We call for the strengthening of data systems and partnership initiatives where they exist and for the establishment of linkages and partnership to existing initiatives. Ownership of data and information collected and deposited will remain the property of SIDS governments within those regions".
- 13.** In this regard, participants noted that official data collection systems in the region often do not include significant components or resourcing to collect, manage, map, present and use environmental data in a significant manner, that many countries in the region are classed as middle-income, limiting assistance and that there are issues of ownership and willingness to publish certain data. On the other hand, it was noted that CARICOM and some governments are developing programmes on environment data. The present partnership initiative should aim to support the systematic positioning of environmental data at the same level as economic and social data in the Caribbean, and integration of data on the three issues, to ensure that environmental data impacts fundamental development planning in the region.
- 14.** It was also noted that the packaging of environmental information tailored for different audiences should also be looked at, particularly for decision makers who may not have an immediate understanding of what environmental information means, including in social and economical terms. In this regard, links with the media should be explored under the partnership initiative, as well as mechanisms to develop public awareness that would spur action from policy makers. Incorporating aspects of economic valuation could also be considered, since it is often difficult to convince decision makers to take action on environmental matters unless the impact was translated into economic terms.
- 15.** It was also recommended to consider links between the partnership initiative and results-based monitoring in the region, as well as links with development funding institutions, for which environmental data are fundamental in order to monitor and evaluate the impacts of their projects. In addition, it was noted that information on themes such as environmental footprints was starting to be considered by trading partners such as the



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European Commission, and development of capacities to collect this information would be of importance in countries with a high dependence on exports.

- 16.** The discussion also suggested a number of thematic areas that should be considered for inclusion in the proposed project: institutional capacity assessment; establishment of national stakeholders' platforms; national environmental information systems and training in data collection for officers—particularly based on exchange of good practices between different SIDS, GIS training and use of data as well as online indicators databases.
- 17.** It was proposed to structure the project so that, within the bigger project, there could be space and flexibility for smaller national projects in order to better meet different national needs and settings. In this regards, the exchange of information, experiences and lessons learnt from other countries was also mentioned as valuable to be supported by the project. It was also suggested to include a GEO report for the Caribbean islands as part of the project.
- 18.** A recommendation was made that the project should be executed as much as possible by national consultants from the Caribbean region, to help ensure the project contributed as much as possible to building capacity within the Caribbean region.
- 19.** It was stressed that the project should be open to all Caribbean SIDS, not just CARICOM members. In that regard, the representative of Cuba presented its Legal Decree and a strong national impetus for strengthening information and statistics on the environment. The Dominican Republic also emphasized the importance of its legal framework for environmental information in place for over 10 years, and its national environmental information platform, as well as expressing the importance of benefitting from lessons learnt in other countries. Since Cuba and the Dominican Republic were at a relatively advanced stage, their participation could provide a valuable resource in strengthening indicators and information on shared environmental challenges in the Caribbean.
- 20.** The need to link with other sources of co-financing, both in-cash and in-kind, was stressed. In this regard, participating organizations such as the Latin American Development Bank (CAF) were invited to send letters of interest in the project, outlining substantive links with ongoing initiatives and potential sources of co-financing.
- 21.** Participants were also invited to look into the possibility of funding from national governments, as well as funding from the European Development Fund (EDF)



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**22.** Written comments on the concept note that had been submitted by Barbados were also presented.

**23.** Final decisions and conclusions of the meeting are:

- Participating countries and organizations expressed their support for the proposed partnership initiative;
- Participants were invited to send, within a week, written comments on the concept note that had been circulated especially if they had additional comments to those raised at the meeting itself;
- The draft concept note would be revised based on feedback from the meeting, and additional written comments that were received;
- Once the proposal was revised, ROLAC would send it to all Caribbean SIDS, as well as the Secretary-General of CARICOM (with copy to the Chief, Sustainable Development). CARICOM would then send a communication to its Member States inviting them to participate. Use of the CARIFORUM mechanism would also be considered.
- Government representatives participating in the meeting would be considered a core group to take the project forward. A quick response in sending endorsement letters by participating countries would be key to ensuring the project could move forward quickly.
- The partnership initiative should be presented both to the CARICOM Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED), and also in the lead-up to and during the 2014 Conference on Small Island Developing States.
- Partners would therefore aim to stick to the draft schedule presented in the concept note, so that the initiative could be launched on 14 September 2014.



## Annex 1 – Agenda

# Strengthening regional networks and national capacities for environmental information: Focus on Caribbean small island developing States

Panama City, Panama  
15 November 2013

### Objective

To identify country priorities for work on this topic at the regional level among Caribbean small island developing States (SIDS).

### Participants

The meeting will include representatives from Caribbean SIDS that participate in the ILAC Technical Working Group on Indicators (ILAC = Latin America and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development). The meeting will also include representatives from international agencies and programmes (including CARICOM and the UN family) that support Caribbean SIDS with environmental information.

### Agenda

#### Round Table

- 8:30–  
10:00
- Implementing the SIDS agenda on environment and data: the context
  - Status of environmental data and regional priorities regarding environmental data and information to support decision making on sustainable development (CARICOM Secretariat, to be confirmed)
  - Access to environmental data and the national interest: risks and rewards in the context of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy
  - Opportunities and challenges to strengthen regional cooperation
- Discussion

#### Strategy

- 10:00–  
10:15 Presentation on the GEF cross-cutting capacity development portfolio and regional project concept
- 10:15–  
11:00 Discussion and revision of the draft project in plenary and break out groups
- *Country feedback and revision*
  - *International partnerships*

Coffee break



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11:30-

12:15

Discussion in plenary and break out groups (continued)

- *Other opportunities to advance work at the regional level*
- *Links between regional and national initiatives, policies and programmes*
- *Opportunities for co-financing*

12:15-

12:30

Summary and next steps



## Annex 2-List of participants

**Strengthening regional networks and national capacities for environmental information: Focus on Caribbean small island developing States Hotel Radisson Summit, Panama City, Panama November 15th, 2013, am**

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