

Nairobi Convention Gets New Tools for Enhanced Performance

Regional Guidelines for Environmental Assessment in the West Indian Ocean and Clearinghouse and Information Sharing System Launched

Johannesburg / Nairobi, 8 November 2007 – Two important new tools for the implementation of the Nairobi Convention have been launched during the 5th Conference of Parties of the Convention held in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 7th and 8th November 2007. This concerns first of all the Regional Guidelines for Environmental Assessment in the West Indian Ocean, which provide specific guidance with regard to Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment studies, in particular as it concerns transboundary environmental issues such as oil and gas exploration.

The development of these Guidelines was led by a group of experts from countries in the region, supported by the Southern African Institute for Impact Assessment.



A second important tool that was launched during the Conference of Parties concerns a new Information sharing system on data and information related to the Coastal and Marine Environment of the Western Indian Ocean. The system, referred to as the Nairobi Convention Clearinghouse Mechanism, is destined to be a sustainable first port of call for information on the coastal and marine environment in the Western Indian Ocean region, providing accurate and relevant data and information for improved management and protection of the coastal and marine environment in the Region.

The main services of the Clearinghouse are acquisition of data and making it available over the internet, along with the mechanisms to search for data. The system connects National Clearinghouse nodes in the Nairobi Convention countries, as well as data and information systems from other regional and international organizations and institutions.

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Both new Management Tools are the product of a region-wide project executed by the Nairobi Convention Secretariat. The latter Project, entitled “Addressing land-based activities in the Western Indian Ocean” (shortly referred to as “WIO-LaB”), addresses some of the major environmental problems and issues related to the degradation of the marine and coastal environment due to land-based activities (LBA) in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region.

The Project is a deliberate and conscious effort of the people of the WIO region, taken in response to a call from the First Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Nairobi Convention in March 1997. The project is furthermore a direct follow-on to the outcomes of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and the related Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, which called for the “advanced implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA)”.

Considerable progress has been made in the implementation of the WIO-LaB Project. Various assessment studies have been conducted, the results of which are presented to the COP in the form of various

background documents. The studies furthermore form the basis for an updated Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis for the region, as well as a framework Strategic Action Programme (SAP). The latter SAP was presented to the COP, as the basis for the development and implementation of follow-up activities to the WIO-LaB Project, and for advancing the regional agenda for addressing the adverse impacts from LBA on the shared ecosystems of the WIO more in general.

Under the auspices of the project various activities have been undertaken to enhance the capacity of institutions to address LBA, through the establishment of various expert forums, as well as through targeted training programmes and equipment purchase. Furthermore, demonstration projects on various aspects of LBA management are being undertaken in all countries. The experiences from these demonstration projects will provide valuable examples of appropriate managerial and technological solutions for the problems at hand.

On the legal framework for addressing LBA, the project has established a regional Task Force to review the existing status with regard to policy, legal and institutional frameworks for dealing with land-based sources and activities. The same Task Force has also spearheaded the development of a new Protocol on Land-based Sources and Activities which is being put forward to the COP.

Note to editors

The WIO-LaB Project, which forms an integral part of the current Work Programme of the Nairobi Convention, was officially launched in Madagascar in July 2004 during the Fourth Meeting of the Contracting Parties of this Convention. The Project is executed jointly by the Nairobi Convention Secretariat and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and is financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Norwegian Government.

The underlying data portal technology of the Clearinghouse is an emerging concept based on standards which permit authorized users to directly use distributed information systems. At country level, applying this technology mainly implies implementing the web services to make available the data, accompanied by a standard metadata. In its implementation a collection of inter-operational Web based services is used, which permit an integration of spatial and non-spatial data distribution chains between independent organizations and their various Information Management Systems.

The Clearinghouse mechanism provides a shared-services platform of accessing resources while being responsive to users needs. It marks a drastic change from operating largely in isolation or in limited bilateral partnerships to one where Contracting Parties collaborate in an interactive network.

The main customer of these products and the beneficiaries of this clearinghouse are the country and local governments, which fulfill the duties, set forth for them by the law. It is hoped that the national clearinghouses will assume the role of the main access point to geospatial and non spatial data in each country. This is a very important national deliverable for the Nairobi Convention and partners such as the NEPAD, IOC/UNESCO ODINAFRICA programme, Indian Ocean Commission, a number of relevant regional programmes and projects including the African Environment Information Network (AEIN).

UNEP is supporting the implementation of national clearinghouses nodes in Seychelles, Mauritius, Comoros, Madagascar, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa.

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