

Sharing good practices for the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements

Regional workshop on progress and challenges in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement
in Latin America and the Caribbean: towards an early entry into force
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Saint Lucia like the rest of Latin America and Caribbean has a rich animal and plant life. 7% of its birds and 53% of the reptiles are endemic, resulting in over 200 species that are found nowhere else in the world. But, like the rest of its Caribbean neighbors, Saint Lucia struggles with environmental issues such as endangered wildlife, invasive species, climate change and desertification. The island has responded to the situation through public institutions established with the mandate to manage its natural resources and environment.

In many instances these have provided a valuable service for the effective management of these resources and strides have been made in promoting the appropriate national legislative and policy framework for natural resource management. Policy framework includes the government's ratifying many important multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) that govern the management of biological resources on a global scale.

Like many other Small Island Developing countries, Saint Lucia also recognised the need to support the regional and global efforts to conserve natural resources and to seek regional and international support in its efforts to sustainably manage its own threatened natural resources. In some instances, the resources may be shared with neighboring islands such as with marine and avian species. In this endeavour, Saint Lucia has acceded to and ratified a number of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

Saint Lucia is party to at least 20 international agreements including MEAs, and quite often reporting for specific indicators for the different MEAs will require data from different agencies or organizations to be accessed, collected and then combined to create a value-added data product.

As foundational to how sustainable development may be achieved, three Multi-lateral Environment Agreements (MEAs): United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, United Nations Convention on Biodiversity and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification; have been examined under a project being executed by the Department of Sustainable Development. Enhanced compliance to obligations under MEAs will contribute to the full integration of MEAs and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the national development agenda.

However, there are still several barriers that need to be overcome in order to integrate the MEAs and their mandates into the national planning of Saint Lucia. Currently, several governmental agencies generate data regularly, sometimes daily, on the state of the environment in St Lucia, however, this data was often inaccessible due to the limitations of existing mechanisms in place to share data among agencies to facilitate easier reporting and better evidence-based decision-making.

Missing from several Latin American and the Caribbean entities is data coordination between its institutions, Historically, it was difficult, for agencies to access each other's information despite the requirements for reporting on the countries' obligations to Multilateral Environment Agreement. In order to prepare these reports, it is often necessary to call several ministries and agencies to consultations and meetings. Not only this but often data is not seen as something to be shared across agencies, and many require onerous processes in order to share much needed data. Capacity limitations to provide evidence-based information and other environmental initiatives critical to the island's sustainable development was underscored.

With the introduction of GEF Cross-cutting Capacity Development projects, countries like Saint Lucia has strengthened the way we report on the state of the environment. One of the game changing tools that has been introduced is a National Environmental Information System (www.neis.govt.lc) launched in 2018 which provides open sharing of critical environmental data, accessibility to this platform by the general public including non-government and civil society organisations, along with its associated capacity building opportunities that will take information sharing to a new level in Saint Lucia.

The NEIS is a web-based platform (<https://www.neis.govt.lc/>) providing the public with access to information on Multilateral Environmental Agreements indicators that fetches raw data from a Common Data Storage Facility (CDSF). The system stores, gathers and records data centrally, and as required the general public is able to produce current information relating to the environment and are able to

present it in easy to read formats. This tool can undoubtedly be used to support the effective implementation of the Escazu Agreement which has as its first principle the provision of access to information.

Additionally, administrative, operational and management staff levels were made more aware of the importance of collecting data relating to the environment. Training workshops were targeted specifically at addressing capacity limitations at the systemic, institutional and individual levels to achieve effective implementation of MEAs and environmental management initiatives.

This was aligned to the Government's efforts to allow decision makers to have access to environmental information based on valid data, in order to inform decision-making. Through this effort, over 150 persons from sixty-two (62) agencies, inclusive of the public, private sectors and civil society organizations have received certified training at the basic, intermediate and advance levels in data analysis, monitoring and evaluation, understanding convention methodologies, communicating environmental information and risks, information management, conducting vulnerability assessments and development of environmental indicators.

As a result of these interventions, institutions are showing a willingness to cooperate and share their data. This is as a result of the establishment of systematic groups, where we have established train the trainer's networks so that trained personnel take back information to their local agencies and offer internal agency training and support.

Another major accomplishment for the environmental information management field will be the ratification of the Escazu Agreement. The Escazu Agreement provides the legislative framework critical to MEAs implementation to strengthen capacities for policy and legislation development for achieving global benefits. The Agreement and its provisions have outlined the many measures which can be taken to put its objectives into effect, especially those on environmental information and data collection systems, as well as the critical role that civil society and non-governmental organizations play in the process and the need to create spaces to facilitate their meaningful participation in decision making processes.

The next steps are to increase public awareness and outreach. Community engagement has begun as we continue to sensitize the general public on the Escazu Agreement through various media on the need for its ratification and entry into force. We are working closely with the Saint Lucia National Trust as the Civil society representative conducting community discussions on the Agreement. More town hall meetings will be held to discuss the provisions of the agreement and what it means for our people.

Finally, a culture of information management and use is being created. Inter-agency agreements facilitate formal collaborations and public and private sector access and interest in data for use in development planning breaks the silos that have characterized the public service system. The open sharing of critical environmental data, accessibility to the NEIS, Saint Lucia's Open Data platform and other platforms by the general public are elements that will take information

sharing to a new level in Saint Lucia and make ratification and the effective implementation of the Escazu agreement even more essential.