For reasons of economy, this document is printed in a limited number. Delegates are kindly requested to bring their copies to meetings and not to request additional copies.
I. Introduction

1. The Convention for Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West, Central and Southern Africa Region (Abidjan Convention) is one of the 18 regional seas conventions and action plans in the Regional Seas Programme of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The Abidjan Convention and its Protocol Concerning Cooperation in Combating Pollution in Cases of Emergency were adopted in 1981 and came into force in 1984 after ratification by 11 Contracting Parties. Since its adoption, four additional protocols to the Convention have been concluded:

   a. Concerning Cooperation in the Protection and Development of Marine and Coastal Environment from Land-Based Sources and Activities in the Western, Central and Southern African region, signed in July 2012 in Grand-Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire.

   b. Protocol on Sustainable Mangrove Management, also known as the Calabar Protocol, signed on 3 July 2019 in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire;

   c. Protocol on Environmental Norms and Standards for Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration and Exploitation Activities, also known as the Malabo Protocol, signed on 3 July 2019, Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire;

   d. Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management, also known as the Pointe-Noire Protocol, signed on 3 July 2019 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

The ratification process of these additional protocols is underway.

List of countries that have ratified the Abidjan Convention

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2. The Contracting Parties designated UNEP as the Secretariat of the Convention, in accordance with Article 16 of the Convention, and the Government of Côte d'Ivoire as the depository.

3. The Bureau of the Conference of the Parties is elected at every meeting of the Contracting Parties. Bureau members of the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties were elected from the following countries: Côte d'Ivoire for President, Ghana and Sierra Leone for Vice-presidents, and Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Namibia for rapporteurs.

4. The Abidjan Convention secretariat provides the administrative functions to the Convention and its Protocols. Its activities are funded by the Trust Fund for the Convention for Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West, Central and Southern Africa Region. Table 1 below indicates the status of the trust fund contributions and unpaid pledges since 2010.
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Table 1: Status of unpaid contributions to the Trust Fund for the Convention for Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West, Central and Southern Africa Region from 2010 to 2021

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5. At the First Extraordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention, held in Johannesburg in June 2008, the Contracting Parties decided to amend the title of the Convention (to include 'Management') and its geographic coverage (to include the Southern African Region). It also decided to (i) amend the text of the Convention to take into account the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other international conventions; and (ii) request the Secretariat to submit the revised text of the Convention to the Parties. The amendment process, which is still underway, is covered in this report and will be presented at the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Abidjan Convention (COP 13).

6. Concerned about the lack of progress in implementing the Convention and noting the significant advantages inherent in having a strong and vibrant Regional Seas Programme, the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention adopted decision CP8/8 in 2007 on the revitalization of the Convention to ensure its effective implementation and to review its instruments for the promotion of sustainable development in the region within the global context. This was followed up with a request to the Executive Director of UNEP to support the revitalization of the Convention by carrying out a number of activities, including studies and consultations to facilitate the revitalization process.

7. Further to that decision, a collaborative programme between UNEP and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) was set up to support and coordinate the activities for the revitalization of the Abidjan Convention. One of the activities of UNEP and IUCN in carrying out their mandate was the engagement of a group of consultants to develop a workable roadmap for revitalizing the Convention.

8. The roadmap was organized around four points: (i) transfer of the secretariat from Nairobi to Abidjan; (ii) funding mechanisms; (iii) strategy for ratification; and (iv) review of the original mandate of the Abidjan Convention.

9. In addition to the collaboration with the IUCN, the secretariat of the Abidjan Convention and UNEP have worked with a series of partners to revitalize both the Convention and its Secretariat over the last eight years. The Convention has made significant progress over this period to become today the main stakeholder in the ocean debate in the Abidjan Convention area.

10. As of today, the revitalization plan has been successfully implemented with the effective transfer of the secretariat from Nairobi to Abidjan taking place in March 2010. The Secretariat collaborated with partners and funding agencies to elaborate and implement a series of projects which are funded outside the Convention's trust funds. The mandate of the Convention was revisited at COP 11 and now captures the emerging issues relating to the sustainable management of the marine and coastal resources in the region.

11. However, the Convention and its activities are put as serious risk because of the continuing financial deficit in the Trust Fund. It is urgent and of utmost importance that the Contracting Parties pay their assessed contributions to the Convention without delay.
12. The present report provides information on progress made in implementing the COP 12 decisions and proposes a series of recommendations to position the Convention as the main actor in the ocean debate in West, Central and Southern Africa.

II. Progress in the implementation of the decisions of the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties

Decision CP.12/1: Work Programme for 2017–2020

13. For the period under review, the Abidjan Convention secretariat has implemented a series of activities articulated around the five pillars of the Work Programme for 2017–2020. Due to COVID-19 situation, the 2017–2020 work programme was extended until 2021. The implementation of these activities, which are strongly related to the decisions approved at COP 12, is described in this report.

14. However, it is worth noting that the implementation of the activities under the 2017–2020 work programme would not have been possible without the technical and financial support of our partners, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), Government of Germany, the Government of Sweden, Grid-Arendal, IUCN, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the West Africa Marine and Coastal Program and the World Bank, etc., which have granted the Abidjan Convention with the resources needed for the 2017–2020 work programme as well as the implementation of COP 12 decisions.

15. The 2022–2024 work programme, which has been drafted and will be submitted to the Parties for adoption at COP 13, is a continuation of the previous planning cycle. It takes stock of the achievements made in the implementation of the five components over the last 10 years as well as the COVID-19 sanitary situation, marks the end of the revitalization process of the Abidjan Convention, and signals the beginning of a new phase in the implementation of the Convention.

Decision CP12/2: Financial matters

Table 2: Statement of changes in net assets for the years ended 31 December 2017 to 31 December 2020
(United States dollars)

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<td>Transfer to reserves</td>
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<td>Surplus/(deficit) for the period</td>
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<td>2,499,158</td>
<td>(130,684)</td>
<td>(595,600)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total net assets at the end of the period</td>
<td>324,217</td>
<td>2,823,375</td>
<td>2,692,692</td>
<td>2,158,592</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. The total net assets as at 31 October 2021 is USD 3,759,122, which mainly comprises assessed contributions from Contracting Parties totalling USD 3,467,908. Table 2 above also shows that total net assets at the end of the period increased from USD 324,217 in 2017 to USD 2,158,592 in 2020. The Convention is to continue its efforts to collect contributions and to explore financial mechanisms with Contracting Parties to facilitate payment of their arrears. This include discussing and agreeing payment plans of arrears with Contracting Parties.
Decision CP12/3: Amendment of the text of the Abidjan Convention

17. At its twelfth meeting, the COP commended the secretariat on the successful organization of national and regional consultations on the amendment of the text of the Abidjan Convention. It also validated the final version of the amended text, as set out in annex I to the COP working documents, and encouraged governments to request the secretariat to convene, at the earliest possible juncture, a meeting of plenipotentiaries for the adoption and signature of the aforesaid text. The COVID-19 situation as well as the dire situation of the Abidjan Convention Trust Fund did not allow for the organization of this meeting. It is proposed that a decision on the subject be tabled at COP 13 so that the meeting of the plenipotentiaries is convened, financial resources and COVID-19 permitting.

Decisions CP.12/4: Work by the Convention on the Interface between freshwater, marine and coastal ecosystems, CP.12/5: Sustainable management of mangrove ecosystems and CP.12/6: environmental standards for oil and gas

18. These three decisions were implemented together. At its twelfth meeting, the COP commended the secretariat on the organization of the national consultations on the additional protocols to the Abidjan Convention on (i) integrated coastal zone management; (ii) sustainable management of mangrove ecosystems in the Abidjan Convention area; and (iii) environmental standards and norms for offshore oil and gas activities. It also validated the final versions of the Protocols and requested the Secretariat to continue the process of drawing up the action plan for the implementation of each protocol. Finally, it encouraged governments specifically to request the secretariat to convene, at the earliest possible juncture, a meeting of plenipotentiaries for the adoption and signature of the Protocols.

18. We are pleased to report that the secretariat successfully organized the Conference of Plenipotentiaries in Abidjan on 2 and 3 July 2019. Fourteen of the 19 Contracting Parties signed the following additional Protocols:

a) Protocol for the Protection of the Coastal and Marine Environment of the Western Indian Ocean from Land-Based Sources and Activities – the Bassam Protocol;
b) Protocol on Environmental Norms and Standards for Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration and Exploitation Activities – the Malabo Protocol;
c) Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management – the Pointe-Noire Protocol;

19. In addition, the Abidjan Convention initiated the development of action plans for each protocol to define a post-signature road map for the implementation of the additional protocols to the Abidjan Convention. The action plans, developed at several workshops, present a comprehensive list of activities to be implemented at regional and national levels to ensure the proper operationalization of the protocols.

20. During these workshops, participants approved the proposed plans of action to implement the four additional protocols of the Abidjan Convention providing that their recommendations and comments are integrated in the final version.

21. Following the workshops, the group of thematic experts in charge of developing the action plans worked to update them by integrating all the comments shared during the national consultations. The group of experts met in Accra, Ghana, from 10 to 12 October 2020 to ensure that all the recom
Recommendations were integrated and to harmonize the action plans through the development of a common implementation framework. By the end of the session, the action plans were finalized, harmonized and subsequently shared with the Parties.

22. To ensure the integration of all national concerns and priorities and harmonization with various national plans and strategies, the Convention secretariat organized again a series of national consultations. These were conducted independently in 19 countries that are Contracting Parties to the Convention through a series of participatory workshops to which governments, national authorities, national experts, researchers, non-governmental organizations and civil society representatives were invited. Feedback was compiled and integrated into the final actions plans and technically validated during a regional workshop. These finalized action plans will be presented to the Parties during COP 13 for adoption.

Decision CP.12/7: Integrated Coastal and Ocean Management Policy

23. The secretariat is pleased to report that national consultations were conducted in Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Each of these countries has defined the strategic axes of its national ocean management policy. These axes have focused on national priorities and the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.

24. The consultations allowed the secretariat, together with its partners, to craft the following regional ocean policy vision: “A clean and healthy ocean for the benefit of present and future generations in the Abidjan Convention region”. This vision has the following objectives: (i) strengthening scientific and endogenous knowledge on ocean biodiversity and associated ecosystem services and their use to support stakeholder accountability and decision-making; (ii) promoting a harmonious legal and institutional framework for the implementation of ocean environmental policy; and (iii) enhancing the economic potential of the Atlantic Coast through sustainable and equitable management of resources while maintaining healthy ecosystems.

25. The draft regional ocean policy framework will be submitted to the Parties during COP 13 for adoption.

26. The Centre for Maritime Law and Security, the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations, the MAVA Foundation and the World Bank’s WACA project played a crucial role in the development of the regional ocean policy framework.

Decision CP.12/8: Establishment of the Guinea Current Commission by means of a Protocol to the Abidjan Convention

27. Decision CP.12/8 requested that the Guinea Current Commission be operational by 2020. Unfortunately, some delays were observed in securing the co-financing letters from a few countries due to communication issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic and comments received from the GEF Secretariat with regard to the Strategic Action Plan of the Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystem (GCLME) project. This has significantly slowed down the implementation of this decision, which could only be done with the financial support of the GEF-funded GCLME project.
28. After discussions among the executing agencies, it was agreed that UNEP be tasked with leading and coordinating the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in addressing urgent GEF comments (sent in June 2021) to ensure the endorsement of this GEF-6\textsuperscript{1}-earmarked, USD 4,416,210 million programme for the 16 riparian GCLME countries.

29. Resources were secured to recruit a consultant to assist UNEP as the lead implementing agency of the GEF to ensure the collection, response to and integration of GEF comments; such comments should be incorporated into the and the CEO endorsement letter. This consultancy included the preparation of, participation in and follow-up to inter-agency coordination to ensure approval of the CEO endorsement letter of the GCLME project.

30. The Secretariat is pleased to report that the preliminary phase of the project submission process was approved by the CEO of the GEF, and we are now ready to submit a full-fledged project of USD 21 million for which the Abidjan Convention secretariat will be the implementing agency for FAO, UNEP and UNIDO. The project is expected to start in early 2022.

### Decision CP.12/9: Revitalization of the Action Plan for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment and Coastal Areas of the South-Eastern Atlantic

31. The Secretariat is pleased to report that a draft report is ready and includes, among other things, marine and coastal environmental issues (for example, climate change, marine areas of ecological or biological significance, marine spatial planning, blue economy) that were not included in the ocean debate in the mid-1980s when the Abidjan Convention and Action Plan were drawn up. The draft updated Action Plan for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment and Coastal Areas of the West and Central Africa Region will be submitted to the COP for its consideration at its thirteenth meeting.

### Decision CP.12/10: Coastal erosion in the context of climate change

32. The secretariat was chosen as one the three regional organizations to implement the World Bank West African Coastal Area Resilience Investment Project. The project will boost regional cooperation to address coastal erosion by working with four regional institutions: the Abidjan Convention, the Centre for Ecological Monitoring in Dakar, IUCN and the West African Economic and Monetary Union.

33. The Abidjan Convention will be responsible for the regional integration component of the project and has advocated to extend the scope of the project in its phase II to include the Gambia, Ghana and Nigeria.

34. A package of USD 210 million was approved in financing for this regional project to build the resilience of coastal communities in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal and Togo. All except Sao Tome and Principe are parties to the Abidjan Convention.

35. The West African Coastal Area Resilience Investment Project, led by West African governments, will protect against coastal erosion through a range of activities. These include fixing dunes, restoring

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\textsuperscript{1} Sixth replenishment of the GEF.
wetlands and mangroves, replenishing beaches, and building seawalls and dikes. The project will reduce flooding by rehabilitating lagoons and drainage systems and by improving watershed management. Interventions will also support pollution control through better treatment of marine litter, oil spills and industrial and municipal waste.

36. More partners are expected to join the effort through a new platform that will boost the transfer of knowledge, mobilize additional finance and foster political dialogue among countries, expanding the scope of the project as well as protecting the West African coast.

**Decision CP.12/11: Ecologically or biologically significant marine areas**

37. The secretariat is pleased to report that, in collaboration with the CBD, its commitment to describe marine Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) through the organization of a series of workshops has resulted in the collation and synthesis of relevant physical and biological data sets on the subject. The results, which were then subject to consideration by the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, described areas meeting scientific criteria for EBSAs that may require enhanced conservation and management measures. For the South-East Atlantic (West Africa), such regional workshops which took place in the subregion and, after validation by CBD scientific subsidiary body, the Conference of the Parties to the CBD were presented with a suite of descriptions of 45 areas meeting EBSA criteria in this region at the last Conference of the Parties to the CBD.

38. The EBSAs’ identification process in West Africa was a unique opportunity for diverse stakeholders to jointly recognize and describe those critical ecological areas that are valuable for marine biodiversity conservation and the thriving productivity of the sea in the region. Today, the results from that tremendous work are a valuable reference and transform regional ocean governance measures, including marine spatial planning and the blue economy as well as the establishment of new marine protected areas in several countries.

39. It is recommended that the implementation of this decision continue until COP 14.

**Decision CP.12/12: Conservation and sustainable use of the marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ)**

40. In recognition of the need and opportunity to increase coordination between the regional and global levels of ocean governance through a new global marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) agreement, the Abidjan Convention set up an ad hoc working group to study all aspects of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in ABNJ (decision CP.11.10; referred to as “ABNJ Working Group”).

41. The ABNJ Working Group has met twice physically (in 2018 and 2019) and online (in 2020), and maintains links with the STRONG High Seas Project. It is exploring opportunities for enhanced regional dialogue and stronger engagement of the region in issues related to ABNJ, including during the BBNJ negotiations. Besides the ABNJ Working Group, it is important for relevant national and regional bodies to strengthen research capacities and for scientific knowledge to be included in decision-making processes in an effort to conserve and manage marine biological diversity in ABNJ as well as support the implementation of a future BBNJ agreement.
42. Most of the secretariat’s achievements in the implementation of decision CP.12/12 were in the framework of the STRONG High Seas project in collaboration with the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies of Potsdam, Germany, with funding from the German Federal Ministry of Environment.

43. The STRONG High Seas project is part of the International Climate Initiative (www.international-climate-initiative.com/en/). The German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) supports this initiative on the basis of a decision adopted by the German Bundestag.

44. The STRONG High Seas project contributes to the work of the Partnership for Regional Ocean Governance, a partnership hosted by the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations, TMG – the Think Tank for Sustainability and UNEP.

45. To date, the project has successfully been able to run all planned activities in the two focal regions (South-East Pacific and South-East Atlantic) and has worked towards creating more links and exchanges between marine regions, though this work has stalled slightly due to the pandemic. The slower pace that the pandemic has dictated on global policy processes and particularly the BBNJ negotiations has also led to the delay in the organization of some events and capacity-development workshops planned during the 4th Intergovernmental Conference (IGC 4). Despite these challenging times, we have continued organizing project events online, which has given us the opportunity to reach out to a wider audience and ensure that all interested participants can attend the workshops and meetings. Of particular relevance for the period under review are the following events:

- The third Dialogue Workshop for the Southeast Atlantic region discussed enhancing the knowledge base for cross-sectoral management and ocean governance, took place in February 2021 and brought together more than 40 participants from Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention as well as global and regional organizations and scientific institutions.
- Two technical expert workshops were also organized in January and March 2020 to provide a platform for discussion among experts from the South-East Pacific region on possible measures to conserve and sustainably manage biodiversity in ABNJ of this region. These workshops will directly contribute to a report currently being co-developed within the project to support efforts to enhance conservation in the focus regions.
- An expert workshop for Africa on monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS); an interregional exchange workshops to discuss and share lessons learned between the South-East Pacific and South-West Pacific regions; as well as the South-East Atlantic and Western Indian Ocean regions. These workshops will contribute to ongoing assessments within the project on MCS and interregional exchange.
- A capacity-development workshop series comprised of several modules on ABNJ governance and BBNJ conservation in the South-East Atlantic region, e.g.: (i) an introduction to the United Nations Law of the Sea and Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction negotiations (held on 17 and 18 June 2021); (ii) Understanding the Ecology and Human Pressures in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction and Area-based Management Tools (including Marine Protected Areas) (25 August 2021); and (iii) The Socioeconomic Importance of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) in the context of ABNJ (6–7 October 2021).
The report intends to support decision makers, including government officials, the private sector and other stakeholders, to make informed decisions about ABNJ and weigh environmental, social and economic objectives, in the context of the proposed BBNJ agreement.

- Region-specific websites to increase the visibility of ABNJ and particularly the BBNJ conservation in the South-East Atlantic and South-East Pacific regions.
- Technical and financial support to countries of the Abidjan Convention to participate successfully in the New York-based consultations on the work of the ad hoc open-ended informal working group to study issues related to the conservation and sustainable use of the marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.

46. Today, we are pleased to report that there is an active Africa Group on BBNJ in which several countries of the Abidjan Convention provide their inputs to in order to reach an agreement on the development of an international legally binding instrument under United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to manage the marine resources located beyond national jurisdiction.

47. Finally, a draft decision on the conservation and sustainable use of the marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction will be submitted to the COP at its thirteenth session for its consideration.

Decision CP.12/13: Combating marine and coastal invasive species

48. During the period under review, the Secretariat’s activities to implement decision CP.12/13 focused on the response to the sargassum seaweed invasion in the region.

49. The Abidjan Convention Working Group on Sargassum analysed the challenges of dealing with the massive sargassum landings. It came to the conclusion that to better handle the complexity of the massive sargassum landings, the response must be articulated at three levels:

- **Forecast**
  
The long-term prediction is one of the main concerns to determine the perennial aspect of the phenomenon and also to better guide the budget to be prepared from year to year. The short-term prediction to alert stakeholders about landings within a short period (of less than a week) will improve response and actions for the collection, transport and reuse of the sargassum.

- **Collection**
  
Managing sargassum is a financial challenge; specific equipment and infrastructure are needed to collect, transport and store the seaweed.

- **Reuse**
  
To date, many tests have been done to recycle sargassum for different purposes (fertilizer, chemical compounds, biofuel/biogas, etc.), and there is a need to manage the seaweed sustainably. However, more research and market studies are needed to commercialize the product beyond the local scale,
knowing the uncertain availability of the raw material. Moreover, due to the biosorbent properties of the sargassum (including for heavy metals such as arsenic), biochemical analyses are necessary before any product development.

50. In addition to these three angles and due to the transboundary nature of the issue, the experts recommended the establishment of some collaborating mechanisms among regions which are affected by the phenomenon.

51. In this regard, the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities (GPA) has been helping raise the issue and expand the approach to the global scale, focusing on the wider Caribbean and West Africa regions. Several consultations were organized between the two subregions under the auspices of UNEP/GPA. The group came to the conclusion that given the transatlantic and regional scales of this issue, development of a multilateral coordinated action plan was needed to better cope with the landings and understand the phenomenon.

52. Moreover, given the impacts of sargassum on the coastlines in the Caribbean and West Africa, addressing the problem would therefore require regional and global coordinated action beyond national jurisdictions. Implementing regional adaptive strategies will require greater understanding of the seasonal landing of seaweeds, including their growth dynamics, economic use potential, and experimented use of the seaweed as biofuel, soil ameliorants, fertilizers and livestock feed.

53. The next step was the Regional Expert Group Meeting on the influx of sargassum in West Africa. This was convened by the Abidjan Convention secretariat with support from the USAID/West Africa Biodiversity and Climate Change (WABiCC) Programme. The meeting has developed and validated a regional strategy document that goes beyond the management of sargassum; it includes a comprehensive strategic framework for the management of other marine and coastal invasive plant and animal species, among them sargassum, the nypa palm and the lionfish.

54. Based on actions developed in West Africa on 22 September 2020, UNEP’s Science Division and UNEP’s Global Partnership on Nutrients Management, in collaboration with UNEP’s Abidjan Convention and IOC-UNESCO, organized the third sargassum webinar, titled “Sargassum challenges, responses, and collaboration in West Africa”. In West Africa, sargassum is becoming an increasingly regional phenomenon, negatively impacting aquatic resources, fisheries, waterways and shorelines. This webinar featured an overview of Sargassum challenges in West Africa from the Abidjan Convention secretariat. This was followed by presentations by leading experts from some of the affected countries in West Africa: Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. The webinar provided a platform to share information, build knowledge, promote best practices and develop ocean governance collaboration in combating the sargassum challenge in West Africa, taking into account the upcoming COP 13 and the Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEAS5).

55. While the implementation of decision CP.12/13 is still underway, Parties to the Abidjan Convention are kindly encouraged to support the following decision: “Prevention and Early Warning of Harmful Algal Blooms, including the Sargassum influx” to be tabled at UNEA5.
Decision CP.12/14: Illegal trade, illicit trafficking, consumption and other uses of protected, endangered and/or vulnerable marine and coastal fauna and flora

56. After COP 12, the secretariat observed that access to traditional ocean resources declined, wetlands became increasingly threatened, and coastal and wetland communities were becoming increasingly marginalized through increased urbanization and industrialization. These factors exacerbate a growing reliance on unsustainable sources of food and livelihoods for people already vulnerable to climate and economic insecurity. Advances in transport, communication and fishing technology have at the same time made it possible to capture larger quantities of aquatic resources and facilitate storage and movement of illegal, unreported and unregulated products. Coupled with inadequate policies and enforcement measures, this situation results in greater threats to aquatic wildlife, including many species of migratory and resident birds, reptiles, chondrichthyans (cartilaginous fish species) and mammals.

57. To combat this growing threat, an alliance known as the Abidjan Aquatic Wildlife Partnership (AAWP) was formed following concern raised on this issue at COP 12 in March 2017 and launched at the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) COP 12 in October 2017. Various consultations took place over time, including side events at the Abidjan Convention COP 12, Ramsar Convention COP13, and CITES COP18, to define the nature of the partnership and to establish an action plan to be submitted for adoption by the Abidjan Convention COP 13 in 2021.

58. The consultations and partnership development processes initiated by the Abidjan Convention have been supported by various partners, including the USAID-funded West Africa Biodiversity and Climate Change (WABiCC) Programme, the World Bank, and OceanCare. One key outcome of the support provided has been studies on the threats and conservation status of aquatic species and the links between bycatch and the status of aquatic wildlife, as well as more specific studies on sea turtle conservation in certain parts of Africa. These have provided a baseline for informed decision-making and the development of an action plan for AAWP.

59. This proposed action plan will run from 2020 to 2024 and enable critical stakeholders to implement action at local, regional and international levels to achieve a significant reduction in the illegal and unregulated trade, capture, bycatch, consumption and other uses of coastal and marine species, including Aquatic, Threatened or Protected Species, across West, Central and Southern Africa. Four strategic approaches have been identified: (1) empowering stakeholders with knowledge; (2) addressing key driving factors; (3) building local capacity; and (4) defining and advocating for policy.

60. It is critical that all stakeholders and members of the Abidjan Convention and its partner institutions recognize the urgency of adopting and implementing this action plan to address the currently unsustainable harvest for trade, consumption and other uses of aquatic wildlife species. The effectiveness of this initiative is, however, dependent on the ability of these partners to establish an appropriate funding mechanism for priority interventions and a system for monitoring and communicating progress and lessons learned. Establishing working groups to address these requirements will be priorities for the partnership in 2021 and beyond.

61. The secretariat is expected to continue the implementation of this decision during the next triennium.
Decision CP.12/15: Sustainable management of lagoons

62. The implementation of this decision started with the Ébrié Lagoon in Côte d’Ivoire, where the secretariat, together with the UNEP Post-Conflict Branch, conducted an assessment of this ecosystem.

63. The major finding and observations showed that the Ébrié Lagoon, the biggest lagoon system in West Africa and an important cultural and economic feature of Côte d’Ivoire, is heavily polluted. Evidence collated from the remote sensing assessment indicates that not only has the city of Abidjan expanded around the lagoon, but the lagoon has expanded into the city. Like the other lagoons in the region, the Ébrié has been the recipient of solid, liquid, and industrial waste from Abidjan. With the rapid expansion of the city and closure of the sewage treatment facilities, the waste load into the lagoon has exceeded its own self-cleansing capacity, leading to the current situation. In addition to urban waste, the lagoon receives discharge through rivers from inland agricultural activity, such as chemicals and pesticides.

64. Remote-sensing observations indicated that most anthropogenic activities in the lagoon were concentrated around Abidjan, so the water quality assessment focused on this area. However, samples were also collected from places some distance from Abidjan, where the water quality is more sheltered from anthropogenic activities. The ecological situation of Ébrié is symptomatic of the other lagoons in the subregion.

65. This study will be extended to the other lagoons in the subregion when resources are available so that we can have an overview of the situation in respect of the geographic scope of the Abidjan Convention.

66. Along the same lines, the secretariat received complaints from several non-governmental and civil society organizations about major ongoing land reclamation activities in eight of the nine bays of the Abidjan Lagoon. The Convention has offered technical assistance to assess the consequences of these activities on the ecosystems.

67. The secretariat is expected to continue the implementation of this decision during the next triennium.

Decision CP.12/16: Marine waste

68. Marine litter is found in all the world’s oceans, including along the coast of the area covered by the Abidjan Convention, where it poses an increasing risk to ecosystems, wildlife, human health, tourism and fisheries. Sources of marine litter and plastics are many and varied, but the actual flows, distribution, fate and impacts of these wastes reaching the oceans remain largely unknown, constituting a significant knowledge gap also in the Abidjan Convention area.

69. It is against this background and in the framework of the implementation of decision CP.12/16 that UNEP, through the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities and the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, has initiated a project to support the development of a regional assessment and action plan on marine litter in the Abidjan Convention geographic area.
70. The project also aims to identify and fill knowledge gaps and provide recommendations to feed into the development of a regional action plan on marine litter prevention for the Abidjan Convention. The assessment is expected to strengthen the evidence base for action and empower decision makers to take effective action to lessen the impacts of marine litter on people and the planet.

71. The project has led to the production of a desktop study on “Prevention and Management of Marine Litter in Western, Central and Southern Africa”, which is now available and serves the purposes of the Abidjan Convention to:

- Strengthen the knowledge base about plastic sources, pathways and accumulation spots in Western, Central and Southern Africa.
- Enhance understanding of the sources, pathways and state of marine plastic in Western, Central and Southern Africa;
- Identify information gaps and raise awareness about marine litter challenges in Western Africa;
- Increase understanding and information sharing on marine litter in the environment and relevant information regarding stakeholders, initiatives, projects and financing;
- Compile knowledge on which to base the development of a regional action plan on marine litter in Western, Central and Southern Africa.

72. This very comprehensive study, which drew considerably from expert knowledge in the subregion, will be officially launched at COP 13.

73. Along the same lines, it is worth noting that the Abidjan Convention also launched the African Network on Marine Litter (ANML). This is an active platform for collaboration, resources and knowledge-sharing within African countries and across borders aimed at finding solutions to the problem of marine litter in Africa. Among the solutions is to support the development of action plans to (i) combat marine litter and microplastics; and (ii) support recycling efforts in the signatory countries of the Abidjan Convention in partnership with private actors. This partnership with ANML is a perfect illustration of functioning South–South collaboration as partners have been instrumental in conducting the assessment.

74. The secretariat and African Marine Waste Network (AMWN) are working on the production of a booklet of best practices in the fight against plastic pollution. The document is the result of a series of webinars organized by the secretariat and AMWN between March and June 2021. Together, and as a follow-up to these webinars, the Secretariat and AMWN, in partnership with other structures, will produce a regional framework for combating plastic pollution. The partners will also support the Contracting Parties to develop national action plans to combat plastic pollution.

75. The implementation of decision CP12/16 will continue in the coming years in the framework of the European Union-funded project called “Capacity Building Related to Multilateral Environmental Agreements in ACP Countries – Phase III” for which the Abidjan Convention is one of the beneficiaries. The project shall lead to the development of a regional framework to address marine litter and microplastics through the scope of the Abidjan Convention based on SDG 14. The project, together with its marine litter components as well as the criteria for selecting beneficiary countries, will be presented to the Parties at COP 13.
Decision CP.12/17: Management of coastal cities

76. On the basis of this decision, the governments of Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana have requested UN-Habitat to support coastal (and riverine/delta) cities and communities to better adapt to climate change, enhance urban planning, and build resilience to coastal erosion and related climate change impacts and risks.

77. In response to their request, UN-Habitat and the Abidjan Convention developed a USD 14 million project proposal titled “Improved Resilience of Coastal Communities in Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana”. The project falls under the disaster risk reduction and early warning systems thematic focal area of the Adaptation Fund.

78. Related to above request, previous work conducted by UN-Habitat in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire forms the base of this project. In Ghana, the ongoing National Priority Planned City Extension in the Greater Accra Region has managed to mobilize national and local governments as well as the private sector and communities. UN-Habitat, in a partnership with the Creative Industries Fund of the Netherlands, developed a plan for the coastal area of the Ningo-Prampram District. The plan includes initial adaptation strategies related to sea-level rise, temperature increase, floods and droughts, and environmental preservation. In Côte d’Ivoire, initial consultations and a first site visit for the participatory process took place following government requests during the years under review. Meetings were held with different ministries, municipalities, communities and international organizations to define the scope of the intervention to promote participative urban planning and environmental protection in coastal cities.

79. The project, which has been submitted to the Adaptation Fund, has the following five components: (i) coastal management and spatial as well as land-use planning strategies at district level, feeding into national and regional coastal management strategies; (ii) resilience planning at the community level; (iii) transformative concrete coastal resilience-building interventions at inter-district level, taking into account national and local needs and impacts; (iv) catalytic concrete interventions at community level taking into account local needs and impacts as well as livelihood opportunities; and, (v) knowledge management, communication and institutional and regulatory frameworks at the regional, national and local level.

80. Once funding is secured, it has been agreed that the secretariat will be in charge of the implementation of component 5 on knowledge management.

81. The Secretariat is expected to continue the implementation of this decision during the next triennium.

Decision CP.12/18: Ocean energy

82. The secretariat evaluated UNEP’s Regional Seas Reports and Studies n°30 written in 1993 and titled “Ocean Energy Potential of the West Africa Region.” The evaluation was done in order to decide the various phases around which the action plan for the production and distribution of clean energy from marine and coastal ecosystems will be elaborated.

83. It is against this background that some terms of reference were drafted to retain a consultant to write an updated report in accordance with item 2 listed above (to undertake a comprehensive study of the economic potential of oceans, with particular emphasis on the energy potential associated with coastal and marine ecosystems in the Abidjan Convention area) and provide recommendations as to how the 22 countries which comprise the Contracting Parties can unlock and harness the economic potential of clean energy production in their marine and coastal areas. The objective is to produce a report for presentation at the next COP.
84. It is anticipated that the core phase of production of the report will require 15–20 days of work, at a rate of USD 800.00 per day (a total of USD 12,000 to USD 16,000). Editing and further refining the report based on feedback received from the Contracting Parties (the follow-up phase) could potentially require an additional 5–10 days of work at a rate of EUR 800.00 per day (a total of USD 4,000 to USD 8,000). The total budget for this activity is around USD 20,000 and will be submitted to the Parties at COP 13 for approval.

85. The secretariat is expected to continue the implementation of this decision during the next triennium if the financial resources are available.

**Decision CP.12/19: Alliance of Parliamentarians and Local Elected Officials in Support of the Abidjan Convention**

86. Following COP12, the Alliance of Parliamentarians and Local Elected Representatives in Support of the Abidjan Convention (or APPELCA) was created. It brings together parliamentarians of the Abidjan Convention countries who are involved in the activities of the environmental commission of their respective parliaments.

87. While it remains an informal structure, the alliance has been very instrumental in the domestication process of the additional protocols into national legislation of the Contracting Parties the Abidjan Convention during the period under review. The alliance is very active in West Africa but needs to be strengthened in Central and Southern Africa. The alliance is mainly supported by the Regional Marine and Coastal Programme, which is convening in the weeks to come, together with the secretariat, a workshop to formalize the alliance. The objectives of the upcoming workshop are to: (i) inform and exchange with parliamentarians and local elected officials on the need to formalize the alliance; (ii) identify and discuss potential levers for effective and efficient collaboration between parliamentarians and local elected officials; and (iii) present cooperation frameworks for coastal and marine conservation at the regional level.

88. As it stands now, the alliance is not a viable structure; it needs to be formally created with statutes, by-laws, a governing body and a regular programme of work. This will, of course, require some financial resources, which are not yet available. The secretariat will present a road map as well as the necessary budget that should lead to the formal creation of the alliance for approval at COP 13.

89. The secretariat is expected to continue the implementation of this decision during the next triennium if the financial resources are available.

**Decision CP.12/20: Transatlantic cooperation**

90. The secretariat has liaised with several organizations, such as the OSPAR Convention (Oslo Paris Convention) (Northern Atlantic), Barcelona Convention (North-East Atlantic), Cartagena Convention (North-West Atlantic) and well as the Government of Brazil, to initiate the discussions on the implementation of this decision.

91. The baseline of the discussions is to undertake an ocean-wide approach to understanding the factors that control the distribution, stability and vulnerability of deep-sea ecosystems. The proposed work spans are the full scale of the Atlantic basin, from the tip of Argentina in the south to Iceland in the north, and from the east coasts of Brazil and the United States of America to the western margins of Africa and Europe.
92. Central to the initiative’s success is the international collaboration between scientists throughout the Atlantic region, with sharing of expertise, equipment, infrastructure, data and personnel placed at the forefront of the implementation of decision CP.12/20.

93. It goes without saying that the governmental organizations will play a pivotal role in the definition of the scope of subjects that the initiative will cover. It may range from environmental issues connected to socioeconomic activities. The focus for countries in the southern hemisphere of the Atlantic will be on blue economy activities for the benefit of their people.

94. While the discussions continue with the relevant stakeholders, a draft framework for transatlantic cooperation will be presented at COP 13 for consideration by the Contracting Parties as well as partners of the Abidjan Convention.

**Decision CP.12/21: African forum on oceans**

95. Extensive discussions took place within the secretariat on the format of such a forum. The Secretariat came to the conclusion that the proposed African Marine Forum should be the leading African think tank in marine science policy. It shall be a unique strategic Pan-African Forum for seas and ocean research and technology. Moreover, it shall provide a strategic platform to develop marine research foresight, initiate state-of-the-art analyses and translate these into clear policy recommendations to African institutions as well as national governments.

96. As an independent, self-sustaining, non-governmental advisory body, the African Marine Forum will transfer knowledge between the scientific community and decision-makers, promoting Africa’s leadership in marine research and technology. It shall bridge the gap between science and policy using different approaches, such as the following:

- **Strategy** – identifying scientific challenges and opportunities through foresight activities, analysis and studies, and providing high-level recommendations;
- **Forum** – bringing together African marine research stakeholders to share knowledge, identify common priorities, develop common positions and collaborate;
- **Voice** – expressing a collective vision of African marine research priorities to meet future science and societal challenges and opportunities.

97. Finally, the African Marine Forum will have an outstanding reputation as a provider of high-quality science-policy advice. Its publications will be designed for a non-technical audience, providing recommendations for future research and capacity-building that can be addressed by African and international funding mechanisms.

98. These findings and observations of the secretariat brainstorming will be presented at COP 13 for further guidance and recommendations with regard to the way forward in establishing the African Marine Forum.

**III. Conclusion**

99. In spite of the COVID-19 sanitary situation, the 68-month period (rather than the usual 36 months between COPs) as covered by the report shows significant achievements with regard to the implementation of not only the COP 12 decisions but also the strategic positioning of the Abidjan
Convention as the main actor in the ocean debate in West, Central and Southern Africa region. One can see from the report that the secretariat has been able to deliver a wide range of services to the Contracting Parties at the national and regional levels. Most if not all of the ocean-related emerging issues have been covered during the period under review to the satisfaction of our Contracting Parties.

However, the strength of the Convention, which used to rely on the strategic partnerships developed with key actors in the ocean debate in the Convention area and on the growing feeling of ownership among the Parties, has started declining because of the large number of debts and arrears owed by the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention Trust Fund.

COP 12 marked the end of the revitalization process of the Abidjan Convention initiated in 2010 and launched the active phase, which highlighted the central role of the Abidjan Convention at the regional level in the ocean debate. However, these efforts are hampered by the recurrence of unpaid contributions, which have now reached the critical threshold of USD 3,487,293 (five years of accumulated outstanding debts).

An urgent appeal was launched at COP 12 held from 27 to 31 March 2017 in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, and various reminders were sent out to Contracting Parties regarding the payment of their annual contributions as well as the arrears owned to the Abidjan Convention Trust Fund.

Unfortunately, the difficulties in collecting the debt and arrears of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention Trust Fund have been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, notwithstanding the fact that some member countries are underdeveloped and facing a multitude of economic difficulties. This situation is jeopardizing the existence, integrity and full operation of the secretariat.

The Secretariat reiterates this urgent call to the Contracting Parties to support the Abidjan Convention by taking urgent measures that will result in the prompt payment of arrears as well as contributions for the year 2021. The survival of the Abidjan Convention is contingent on it.

As indicated above, the Convention is now engaged in several regional and global initiatives related to the ocean and coasts, which range from the blue economy and integrated coastal zone management to marine spatial planning and coastal resiliency. There are increasingly more projects under discussion with partners such as the GEF and the World Bank.

The Convention has shifted from marine pollution to other specific issues such as coastal erosion, which is seriously affecting the region and immediate action must be taken. Once adopted, the new programme of work will increase the visibility of the Convention, mark the end of the revitalization process and signal the beginning of a new era for the implementation of the Abidjan Convention and its protocols as well as for its Parties.

However, this will not be possible if the Parties do not fulfil their commitments to the Abidjan Convention Trust Fund by regularly honouring their obligation to contribute and pay their arrears so that the Secretariat can be self-sustained. It will also be difficult to achieve the new goals if Contracting Parties fail to demonstrate their firm intention to consolidate the momentum gained over the past eight years.

The role of UNEP as host of the secretariat has changed in line with the Convention’s expanding needs. In particular, there is now a significant increase in the scope and nature of services that the secretariat requires from UNEP in terms of financial services, human resources management, funding, travel and project support.

In the next triennium, the Abidjan Convention will need to establish itself as a financially strong mechanism capable of maintaining its own structure in a sustainable way. The 2022–2024 Programme of Work and Budget submitted to the COP at its thirteenth session are built along these
lines, and they charge 100 per cent of the Coordinator costs to the Trust Fund, as has been the case for almost five years now.

110. UNEP is proud to have provided the required secretariat services and made the above-mentioned achievements possible. It stands ready to provide its technical and administrative support for a more independent and sustainable Abidjan Convention in the years to come.