Thirteenth meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Cooperation for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine Environment and Coastal Areas of the Atlantic Coast of the West, Central and Southern African Region (Abidjan Convention)

Virtual Meeting, 13th to 15th December 2021

FINAL REPORT OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF COP12
Introduction

The second meeting of the Bureau of the Twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for Cooperation for the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of West, Central and Southern Africa (Abidjan Convention) was held in Abidjan-Republic of Côte d'Ivoire on 23 June 2020. Originally planned for Abidjan, it was organized virtually due to the COVID19 pandemic.

This meeting, organized by the Secretariat of the Abidjan Convention, had the following objectives:

▪ assess progress on the implementation of the decisions of CoP12 Post Plenipotentiary Conference held in July 2019 in Abidjan;
▪ to adopt a Programme of Work and an annual transitional budget from March 2020 to April 2021;
▪ to decide on a date and venue for CoP13 following the postponement imposed by the pandemic disease related to COVID 19;
▪ to approve the draft decisions to be submitted to COP13.

The meeting was divided into two parts: an expert segment and a ministerial segment.
First part: the expert segment

I. Opening ceremony and organizational aspects

In accordance with the meeting’s agenda, in particular the session relating to the opening ceremony, Côte d’Ivoire - host country of the second meeting of the Bureau - took the floor to make an opening statement. The Expert segment meeting was attended by five (5) of the six (6) Members of the Bureau (see appended List of Participants), namely:

1) Côte d’Ivoire, in its capacity as President of the Bureau;
2) Ghana, which holds the Vice-Presidency;
3) the Republic of the Congo (Rapporteur);
4) the Democratic Republic of Congo (Rapporteur) and
5) Sierra Leone (Rapporteur).

Namibia informed the Secretariat of its regrets that it was unable to attend the meeting. The quorum having been reached, the meeting was able to continue. It was agreed that the Rules of Procedure for Meetings and Conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention (UN Environment ABC-WACAF/Bureau meeting 2 CoP12/Ref.3) would govern the conduct of the proceedings of the meeting. The provisional agenda published under the symbol UN Environment ABC-WACAF/Bureau meeting 2 CoP12/1, was adopted. This was followed by several technical presentations and discussions at the second meeting of the Bureau of the twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention.

II. Activity report for the period of July 2019 to April 2020

1.1. Progress on the implementation of COP12 decisions

The Secretariat summarized the progress made in the implementation of CoP12 decisions with a particular focus on the post-plenipotentiary conference period. In this review presented by the Executive Secretary of the Abidjan Convention, it was noted with satisfaction that almost all the recommendations have been implemented. A copy of the report is shared with the participants under the UN Environment reference ABC-WACAF / Bureau meeting 2 CoP12/3.

1.2. Status of implementation of Projects and Programmes

The Secretariat reported on progress made in the implementation of projects and programmes on various topics such as mangrove restoration, establishment of marine protected areas, management of plastic waste and marine debris, and marine spatial planning (MSP) through information gathered from the Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) description and State of the Marine Environment (SoME) processes, the execution of the additional protocols and the preparation of the action plans for the implementation of the additional protocols, the policy for integrated ocean management in the Abidjan Convention area, as well as the developments noted in the development of the resource Centre. The Chair of the Convention’s Committee on Science and Technology presented the provisional version of the decisions to be submitted to CoP13.

1.3. Financial Report
As a reminder, the 12th Conference of the Parties marked the end of the process of revitalization of the Abidjan Convention initiated in 2010 and thus launched the active phase which made it possible to strengthen the central role of the Abidjan Convention at the regional level in the debates on seas and oceans. Unfortunately, these efforts are being undermined by the recurrence of unpaid contributions, which have reached a critical level of $3,277,882, dangerously impacting the existence and full functioning of the Abidjan Convention Secretariat. See UN Environment working document ABC-WACAF / Bureau meeting 2 COP12/4.

1.4. Status of implementation of the audit report

The Executive Secretary presented the report on the implementation of the 14 recommendations of the audit report. It appears that six (6) out of fourteen (14) recommendations have been implemented. The decision on governance mechanisms is in its implementation phase. One (1) related to the implementation of the CoP have not yet begun to be implemented while six (6) are in the process of being implemented. The Bureau requests to be informed of further developments and demands that the 15% rate of drawdown on the WCR as recommended by the audit report be applied instead of the current 30% rate.

**Discussions**

After reporting on progress related to the implementation of CoP12 decisions, the Republic of Congo, after congratulating the Abidjan Convention Secretariat, requested clarification on the follow-up to the National Consultations in Togo. The Abidjan Convention Secretariat confirmed the holding of the regional consultation in Gabon in September 2019, which was to serve as a basis for other countries, but due to Covid 19, the consultations could not be held specifically in Togo.

With regard to the progress in the implementation of the Projects and Programmes, the Session noted the concern of Sierra Leone on the challenges in finalizing the signature procedure with the MAVA project to benefit from the financial assistance of the partner and progress in the implementation of the project.

The session welcomed the proposal of the Democratic Republic of Congo to negotiate extensions of programmes and projects beyond 2020 due to Covid 19, which has crippled all activities worldwide. The Secretariat also indicated that discussions on the extension of projects (Mami Wata, MAVA and WABICC), with satisfactory progress, have already been initiated with both donors and beneficiary countries. In addition, the Abidjan Convention Secretariat has indicated that the Covid 19 period is also being used to update outstanding reports and a planning review.

Bureau members requested the Abidjan Convention Secretariat to reconsider the contribution recovery strategy and highlighted the need to implement paragraph f of the Contributions Procedures 4 (doc. ABC-WACAF/COP12/info.3). In addition, the session suggested that the payment requirement be included in the Bureau’s selection criteria and be put forward as a proposal to the next COP.

The Secretariat of the Abidjan Convention thanked the members of the Bureau for the pledges made to clear the debts but stressed that if the statutory and legal provisions were to be adhered to. This meeting should not take place, as no country was up to date with its financial contributions.
The Abidjan Convention Secretariat highlighted the case of the Republic of Congo, which has an obligation, as the host country of COP13, to pay its debt in full. In addition, the Secretariat indicated that from COP13 onwards, a State that is not up to date with its contributions would no longer be able to sit on the Bureau.

Finally, the Secretariat of the Abidjan Convention reassured the members of the Bureau that contrary to the concern of the Democratic Republic of Congo on the visibility of the Abidjan Convention in Central Africa, projects and programmes are being implemented in the countries of the Congo Basin. One prominent example is the naming of some of the Additional Protocols to the Abidjan Convention by the names of Central African cities (Malabo and Pointe Noire).

The Secretariat of the Abidjan Convention obtained from the Bureau that the "Capital reserve" be reduced to 15% instead of 30%.

III. Programme of work from March 2020 to April 2021

The Abidjan Convention Secretariat has made a great effort in seeking additional funds for the implementation of the current work programme, which has been carried out on the basis of the current level scenario in view of budgetary uncertainties. It has experienced a very interesting implementation rate thanks to the technical and financial support of partners such as the World Bank through the WACA Project, USAID through the WABiCC Programme, the MAVA Foundation and the German Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Construction and Nuclear Safety through GRID Arendal, the Swedish Ministry of Environment through its financing of the creation of Marine Protected Areas in Côte d’Ivoire.

For the transition phase leading up to the next CoP, the annual Programme of Work from March 2020 to April 2021 will focus on the continuation and finalization of a number of actions already under way. They relate inter alia to:

- The transposition of protocols into the national laws of the Contracting Parties;
- Support for the Contracting Parties to have their action plans for implementing the said protocols;
- Integrated oceans management policy;
- Marine spatial planning (MSP);
- Marine areas of ecological or biological importance (EBSAs);
- National Reports on the State of the Marine Environment;
- Biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdictions (ABNJ);
- The creation of marine protected areas;
- Management of plastics and marine debris;
- The Resource Center as a virtual platform for sharing and learning;
- The organization of CoP 13 of the Abidjan Convention.

Having ended the revitalization phase and initiated the start of an active phase, the implementation of the 2020-2021 work programme will only be based on scenarios. Despite the non-payment of trust fund contributions by many Contracting Parties and thanks to the support of technical and financial partners, the Secretariat has been able to secure resources for the implementation of the programme.
IV. Preparation for the next CoP13

The Executive Secretary of the Abidjan Convention made a presentation on the preparations for CoP13, the missions organized in the Republic of Congo as well as the documents sent including the framework cooperation agreement and the budget of CoP13. He also recalled the dates and venues of CoP13 as well as the theme of the meeting.

Discussions

The meeting did not record any questions on these points. It approved the proposals made by the Secretariat.

V. Draft Decisions of CoP13

The secretariat introduced the themes of the draft decisions taking into account cooperation agreements (the additional protocol related to marine protected areas; action plans for the implementation of the additional protocols, and ocean management policy), species and habitats and plastic waste management, strengthening partnership networks and information-sharing. A copy of the themes of the interim decisions is annexed to this report.

VI. Budgets

a. CoP13 budget

The Secretariat, through its Finance Officer, detailed the CoP13 budget. It amounts to US$235,500 and is expected to cover the following expenses: Airfare and subsistence costs for delegations, conference room rentals, Rapporteur and interpreter team, and media coverage.

b. Transitional budget of the Secretariat: from 1 July to 31 December 2020

173,000 is planned for the period from June to December 2020. This amount covers salaries and costs related to the support cost program.

The current budget approved by COP12 and revised by the Bureau, will expire on 31 December 2020. On the basis of the work programme submitted by the Secretariat, it is essential to provide the Secretariat with an Operating Budget at the “minimum”, including the 3 members of the Administrative Staff. This budget is 501,000 USD and will cover the following costs: staff, travel and missions, operating expenses as well as the support cost program.

Discussions

In view of the budget deficit and the weak financial capacity of the Convention, the Bureau invited the secretariat to focus on awareness-raising and advocacy for the recovery of outstanding payments.

The Secretariat of the Convention invites the Contracting Parties to step up their efforts in the payment of dues and arrears to encourage financial partners to support the Convention.
VII. Update on other matters

No AoB was discussed

VIII. Recommendations

The second meeting of the Expert of the twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention made the following recommendations:

1. With regard to programmes and financial aspects

   a) Adopts the work programme for the transitional phase from March 2020 to April 2021;
   
   b) Urgently calls on those Contracting Parties that are not up to date to pay their contributions and arrears on time, in order to enable the Secretariat to operate under the optimal scenario and to emerge from the critical situation in which it finds itself;
   
   c) Recommends that the Secretariat diversify its fund-raising mechanisms;
   
   d) in accordance with the last Bureau meeting, recommends to the Executive Secretary to carry out high level express missions to collect arrears and payment of contributions;
   
   e) urgently launches a final appeal to salvage the achievements of the Abidjan Convention and pledges to support the Secretariat in recovering outstanding contributions from not-up-to-date Members.
   
   f) Mandates the Convention Secretariat to apply the sanctions provided for in Procedures 4 (see doc. ABC-WACAF/COP12/.inf.3) against Members that fail to pay their contributions at the next COP 13
   
   g) adopts the operating budget of the Secretariat for the period April 2020 to March 2021
   
   h) adopts the budget of CoP13.

2. As regards the decisions of COP13:

   i) Recommends the continued implementation of ongoing decisions that do not require additional resources;
   
   j) Requests the CST of the Convention to work on the topic of the management of waste generated by Covid19 and its impact on marine and coastal ecosystems and to report thereon to COP13.
   
   k) Invites the CST to continue its research efforts on Sargassum and to report to CoP13.
   
   l) Recommend the secretariat to consolidate the draft decisions and submit them to the next CST meeting
3. Concerning the audit report

   m) Requests UNEP to provide financial resources to support the implementation of those recommendations that cannot be implemented without additional financial resources;
   n) Reduce the Capital Reserve Fund to 15% as requested in the audit report;

4. Concerning the MoU with the host country for CoP13

   o) Recognizes the impossibility to hold the CoP on the scheduled date following the pandemic related to VID 19 and confirms the holding of CoP13 in Pointe Noire, Republic of Congo in March 2021;
   p) In view of the electoral agenda of the Republic of Congo in the first quarter of 2021, the Bureau confirms the holding of the next CoP13 in Pointe-Noire in the second half of April 2021;
   q) Requests the Secretariat to initiate, as of now, the updating of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Republic of Congo and UNEP in the framework of the preparation of CoP13.

IX. Next Bureau meeting

The Bureau of the twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention recalled the need to meet again, particularly before COP 13 in the Republic of Congo.

X. Closing Ceremony

All the items on the agenda of the second meeting of the Bureau of the twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention were discussed and different solutions were also put forward. The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks from all experts segment present.
Part Two: The Ministers' Segment

I. Opening ceremony and organizational aspects

1. Speeches

In accordance with the agenda of the meeting, in particular the session relating to the opening ceremony, Côte d’Ivoire - host country and Chairperson of the second meeting of the Bureau - took the floor first to welcome all participants. He then delivered his official opening speech on the proceedings of the Bureau meeting.

The Director of the Integration of Ecosystems branch of UNEP Ms. Kerstin STENDAHL and Ms. Arlette SOUDAN NONAULT, Minister of Tourism and Environment of the Republic of Congo also made speeches.

Below is a summary of the three speeches.

• Summary of the speech by Ms. Kerstin STENDAHL Director of the Integration Branch of UNEP Ecosystems

Ms Kerstin STENDAHL welcomed the participants and expressed her joy in taking part in the second meeting of the Bureau.

She congratulated the Secretariat as well as the Bureau for the efforts made in revitalizing the Convention and raising funds initiated to support the activities of the Secretariat. However, the Director of the Branch expressed to the members of the Bureau her deep concern at the very high amount of arrears of the Contracting Parties to the Convention which amounted to approximately 3,277,882 US Dollars despite the various reminders and recovery missions. According to the Director, this deplorable situation which cannot continue to dangerously affect the functioning of the Secretariat of the Abidjan Convention and is not likely to reassure the financial partners.

The Director appealed to the duty of the Contracting Parties to replenish the Trust Fund to ensure the survival of the Abidjan Convention.

Nevertheless, the Director reaffirmed UNEP’s commitment to support the Abidjan Convention.

• Speech by the Minister of Tourism and Environment of the Republic of Congo

In her speech, H.E. Ms. Arlette SOUDAN NONAULT, Minister of Tourism and Environment, Republic of Congo, welcomed the holding of this Bureau meeting, which was largely concerned with the organization of COP13. She reaffirmed the Republic of Congo's firm will to organize the next COP of the Convention as soon as the health situation allows it, with a preference for the first quarter of 2021.

To that end, the Republic of the Congo has made the necessary arrangements for the immediate transfer of the sum of USD 105,963.03 to the United Nations account in New York. It urges other States Parties to the Convention to regularize their contributions to the Trust Fund.

Going back over the organizational issues of CoP13, H.E. the Minister informed the Bureau that a National Organizing Committee has been set up and is already at work to ensure the success of this event in the city of Pointe Noire. Her country supports the choice of “ocean governance” as the theme of COP13 because governance is the very foundation of our approach. It determines
the framework within which we achieve our management objectives. Finally, the Republic of Congo asks the STC of the Convention to work on the theme of the management of waste generated by the Covid19 and its impacts on marine and coastal ecosystems and to report to COP13.

The Republic of Congo will organize a meeting of the ministers present on the sidelines of COP13 to coordinate the participation of the Abidjan Convention countries in the next United Nations Summit on the Oceans, scheduled to take place next year in Lisbon, Portugal.

Ms. Arlette SOUDAN NONAULT, before closing her address, congratulated Côte d'Ivoire on the successful organization of this first virtual meeting of the Bureau of the Convention. She also congratulated the Secretariat of the Convention for its steadfast support to the efforts as part of the sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystems on the Atlantic shoreline of the continent.

- **Speech by the Minister of the Environment of Côte d'Ivoire, Host Country**

Prof. Joseph SEKA SEKA, Minister of the Environment and Sustainable Development of Côte d'Ivoire, in his speech, welcomed the members of the Bureau and recalled the importance of this meeting in the context of Covid19. The aim is to make appropriate recommendations in order to better organize CoP13. This will first of all involve the payment of contributions to the Trust Fund. To this end, Côte d'Ivoire has arranged for 83,771,600 dollars to be transferred to the United Nations account in New York.

Côte d'Ivoire congratulated the Republic of Sierra Leone for the regular payment of its contributions and the Republic of Congo for the arrangements made to clear its arrears and the ongoing preparations for the successful holding of CoP13. Côte d'Ivoire urges on other parties to pay their contributions, which would otherwise jeopardize the existence of the Secretariat and the Convention itself.

Côte d'Ivoire supports the theme of CoP13; invites the STC to continue its research efforts on Sargasso and report to CoP13.

With these words, Prof. Joseph SEKA SEKA, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development of Côte d'Ivoire and President of the Bureau of CoP12 of the Abidjan Convention declared the second meeting of the Bureau open.

She recalled the recommendations of the first meeting of the Bureau and highlighted the main item on the agenda, namely the choice of a date and venue for the next CoP12 which, in her view, will probably mark a decisive turning point in the process of revitalization of the Abidjan Convention initiated since 2007.

### 2. Organizational matters and adoption of the agenda

The CoP12 Bureau was renewed without change and is composed as follows:

1) Côte d'Ivoire, in its capacity as President of the Bureau;
2) Ghana, which holds the Vice-Presidency;
3) the Republic of the Congo (Rapporteur);
4) the Democratic Republic of Congo (Rapporteur) and
5) Sierra Leone (Rapporteur).
Namibia informed the Secretariat of its regrets that it was unable to attend the meeting. The quorum having been reached, the meeting was able to continue. It was agreed that the Rules of Procedure for Meetings and Conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention (UN Environment ABC-WACAF/Bureau meeting 2 CoP12/Ref.3) would govern the conduct of the proceedings of the meeting.

The provisional agenda published under the symbol UN Environment ABC-WACAF/Bureau meeting 2 CoP12/1, was adopted.

This was followed by several technical presentations and discussions at the second meeting of the Bureau of the twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention.

The Secretariat of the Abidjan Convention insisted on the case of the Republic of Congo, which has the obligation, as the organizing country of COP13, to fully pay its debt. In addition, the Secretariat indicated that from COP13, a State that is not up to date with its contributions will no longer be able to sit on the Bureau.

Finally, the Secretariat of the Abidjan Convention assured the members of the Bureau that, contrary to the concern raised by the Democratic Republic of the Congo over the visibility of the Abidjan Convention in Central Africa, projects and programs are being implemented in the Congo Basin countries. One of the palpable examples is the designation of certain additional protocols to the Abidjan Convention by the names of cities in Central Africa (Malabo and Pointe Noire).

Bureau decided that the "Capital reserve" should be reduced to 15% instead of 30%.

3. Adoption of the report of the expert meeting

The ministers’ segment of the second meeting of the Bureau of the Twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention unanimously adopted the report of the meeting of experts and all of the recommendations made by the Experts.

4. Preparation of the next CoP13

The Executive Secretary of the Abidjan Convention made a presentation on the preparations for CoP13, the missions organized in the Republic of Congo as well as the documents sent, notably the framework cooperation agreement and the budget for CoP13. He also recalled the dates and places of CoP13 as well as the theme, the draft decisions under preparation as well as the budget for said CoP13. The question of finances having been the nodal point of this meeting, a note of synthesis is presented to say more.

5. Budgets
   a. CoP13 budget

The Secretariat, through its Finance Officer, detailed the CoP13 budget. It amounts to US$235,500 and is expected to cover the following expenses: Airfare and subsistence costs for delegations, conference room rentals, Rapporteur and interpreter team, and media coverage.
b. Transitional budget of the Secretariat: from 1 July to 31 December 2020

173,000 is planned for the period from June to December 2020. This amount covers salaries and costs related to the support cost program.

The current budget approved by COP12 and revised by the Bureau, will expire on 31 December 2020. On the basis of the work programme submitted by the Secretariat, it is essential to provide the Secretariat with an Operating Budget at the "minimum", including the 3 members of the Administrative Staff. This budget is 501,000 USD and will cover the following costs: staff, travel and missions, operating expenses as well as the support cost program.

**Discussions**

In view of the budget deficit and the weak financial capacity of the Convention, the Bureau invited the secretariat to focus on awareness-raising and advocacy for the recovery of outstanding payments.

- The Minister of the Environment and Sustainable Development of Côte d'Ivoire reaffirmed that his country will immediately proceed to the payment of the 83,772 US Dollars to the trust fund;
- His counterpart from the Republic of Congo Mrs. Arlette SOUDAN NONAULT, follow by announcing an immediate payment of 105,963.03 US Dollars
- The Minister of Environment of Sierra Leone thanked the secretariat and announced the payment of its contribution of 23,694 US Dollars by October 2020 at the latest
- The Democratic Republic of Congo has also announced the payment of its arrears of contributions of 301,553 US Dollars as soon as possible
- Ghana also deplored the delay in the payment of its arrears of 96,927 US Dollars and promised a regularization as soon as possible.

The **Secretariat of the Convention** invites the Contracting Parties to step up their efforts in the payment of dues and arrears to encourage financial partners to support the Convention.

6. Next Bureau meeting

The next meeting of ministers of the Bureau of the Twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention is scheduled for the second half of April 2021 before COP 13 is held in the Republic of Congo.

7. Update on other matters

The meeting did not discuss any other business.

8. Closing Ceremony

The Minister of the Environment and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, Prof. Joseph SEKA SEKA, made a closing statement after having noted that all the items on the agenda of the second meeting of the Bureau of the Twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties
to the Abidjan Convention have been addressed and different solutions have been found. The meeting ended with a motion of thanks from all the members of the board present.

Done at Abidjan, 23 June 2020

The meeting of the Ministers of the Bureau of the twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention.