UN environment programme

Case Study

From Paper to Practice:

How Caribbean SIDS Are Transforming Environmental Agreements into Action

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CARICOM ACP MEAs 3

CARICOM Secretary-General, Dr. Carla Barnett (4th from right), alongside Mr. Joan Nadal Sastre (2nd from right), Head of Cooperation at the Delegation of the European Union to Guyana; Dr. Wendell Samuel (3rd from right), Senior Economic Adviser to the Secretary-General and Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Integration, Innovation, and Development; Amrikha Singh (3rd from left), Programme Manager for Sustainable Development; and ACP-MEAs team members.

Photo: Caricom Secretariat

Background

Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face acute environmental threats—from biodiversity loss to pollution and climate-induced disasters. These vulnerabilities undermine vital sectors such as tourism, fisheries, and public health, making robust environmental governance not just a priority, but a necessity.

Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and chemicals and waste-related conventions like Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm, and Minamata, offer globally endorsed frameworks to tackle these challenges. However, implementation across Caribbean SIDS has been inconsistent, hampered by fragmented data systems, institutional silos, and limited technical capacity.

Recognizing this, the CARICOM Secretariat, in collaboration with UN DESA, initiated a region-wide project under the ACP-MEAs III and SIDS-SIDS Cooperation on Data Solutions for Nature initiatives. The goal was to evaluate MEA implementation, identify key data and capacity gaps, and develop a harmonized monitoring framework for improved environmental reporting and compliance.

This case study seeks to document the region-wide efforts to strengthen MEA implementation and monitoring in Caribbean SIDS, highlighting the challenges encountered, solutions developed, and lessons that can inform future environmental governance and policy coordination across similar contexts.

90%

The estimated rate of implementation of the ACP-MEAs 3 in the Caribbean by the time of closeout

"For CARICOM, this close-out of an important and invaluable project will not be the end. Rather, we are focused on implementation, innovation, and inclusive growth that places environmental integrity at the heart of efforts to secure a sustainable future for our Region"

CARICOM Secretary General, Dr Carla Barnett, during the closing ceremony of the ACP-MEAs Programme in the Caribbean on May 23, 2025.

Objectives

This project was guided by four strategic objectives:

1. **Enhance compliance and enforcement** of biodiversity and chemicals and waste-related MEAs.
2. **Strengthen national legislative and institutional frameworks** for effective MEA implementation.
3. **Foster knowledge exchange and support evidence-based decision-making** through accessible data systems.
4. **Increase political buy-in and public awareness** through strategic communication and outreach.

Methodology

The project employed a participatory, multi-stakeholder methodology:

- **Baseline assessments** were conducted across 14 Caribbean SIDS to determine the status of MEA implementation and data readiness.
- A **regional workshop** (April 30–May 2, 2024, Belize City) brought together government officials, technical experts, and development partners to co-develop solutions.
- **Technical reviews** of legislation and institutional arrangements were supported by the Basel Convention Regional Centre (BCRC).
- Knowledge exchange platforms were established to support **South-South learning** and **peer mentoring**.
- A **proposed monitoring dashboard** with panel data indicators was developed to align national reporting with SDGs and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Key findings

These findings reveal both progress and persistent structural gaps:

1. MEAs implementation is progressing but uneven across countries and conventions.
2. Data management is fragmented, with varying methodologies and limited interoperability between institutions.
3. Many countries lack the technical capacity and infrastructure (especially labs) to meet monitoring and reporting obligations for chemicals MEAs.
4. There is strong regional appetite for collaboration, but this needs to be backed by sustained resources and harmonized tools.

Achievements

Despite structural challenges, the initiative delivered a series of significant milestones that advanced environmental governance and compliance in the region. These include:

- CARICOM State of MEAs Report published, providing a detailed regional overview of implementation status.
- **14 ACP national reports** now track hazardous waste and persistent organic pollutants (POPs).
- **National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) for 15 countries reviewed** and the Draft Caribbean Biodiversity Strategy to the Global Biodiversity Framework updated.
- **CITES legal frameworks** updated in Grenada and Dominica, supporting stronger enforcement.
- A **Plastics Handbook** developed to guide circular economy planning.
- A **regional monitoring framework** designed to align MEAs reporting with global indicators.
- **Communication campaigns**, newsletters, and side events (e.g., COP16) raised visibility and galvanized political support.
- **Compendium of Guidelines and Guidance Documents** compiled for conducting risk evaluations and assessments of industrial chemicals and pesticides.
- **A Regional Mapping Report** produced detailing current practices in the Caribbean for risk assessments and evaluations of industrial chemicals and pesticides.
- **A hybrid training workshop** conducted on developing assessment schemes for introducing new chemicals for Final Regulatory Actions (FRA) under the Rotterdam Convention.
- **Two National Legal Assessments** (Grenada and Jamaica) to identify legal and regulatory gaps and barriers in chemicals and waste management completed.
- **Model legal tools developed** to support the drafting and implementation of chemicals and waste management legislation.
- **A hybrid training workshop** convened on legal drafting, updating national regulatory frameworks, and preparing National Implementation Plans (NIPs) aligned with the Stockholm Convention, including sub-regional approaches.
- **Capacity building webinar** delivered on updating NIPs using a sectoral approach, with a focus on the Caribbean Regional Manual and guidance under Article 7 of the Stockholm Convention.

Challenges and mitigation strategies

Challenge	Description	Response/Mitigation
Limited technical capacity and budget	Environmental agencies often lacked staff and funds to enforce MEAs	Capacity-building workshops and peer learning exchanges were rolled out
Fragmented data systems	Absence of a unified platform; inconsistent methodologies across countries	A harmonized dashboard with standard protocols was proposed for regional use
Weak laboratory infrastructure	Poor performance in inter-laboratory assessments, especially for chemicals MEAs	Recommended sustained GEF investment in labs, with coordinated regional upgrades

ACP MEAs Project Hubs members and partners at COP 16 in Cali, Colombia, October 2024, advancing environmental governance and collaboration.
Photo: Caricom Secretariat

Lessons Learnt

From implementation to regional coordination, the project yielded key take-aways that can inform future efforts across similar contexts:

- **Regional collaboration works**: Joint problem-solving fosters ownership and accelerates adoption of shared tools.
- **Data is power—but only if harmonized**: Fragmented data limits MEA effectiveness; structured, interoperable systems are vital.
- **Legislative alignment is key**: MEA compliance hinges on up-to-date laws and active enforcement agencies.
- **Peer learning accelerates capacity-building**: South-South cooperation helped overcome resource and skills gaps more rapidly.

Recommendations

To build on progress and institutionalize reforms, the following actionable recommendations are proposed

- **Institutionalize the monitoring dashboard** across ministries to standardize data collection and reporting.
- **Invest in lab capacity and data systems**, particularly for chemicals and waste MEAs, through targeted GEF and partner support.
- **Enhance legal harmonization** across the region to ensure MEAs are enforceable and aligned with national policies.
- **Sustain political momentum** through consistent communications, side events, and ministerial briefings.
- **Scale South-South mentoring models** to support technical capacity across SIDS with similar constraints.

Conclusion

As climate disasters intensify and biodiversity declines at alarming rates, the Caribbean's work on MEAs has shifted from box-ticking compliance to strategic, data-powered action. The region is setting the standard for how vulnerable nations can turn environmental treaties into real-world resilience by pioneering tools like the regional MEA dashboard and eCITES integration. This case study illustrates that with the right mix of technical support, regional coordination, inclusive partnerships, and smart innovation, Caribbean SIDS can break through decades of stalled progress on environmental agreements. The CARICOM State of MEAs Report is not just another assessment—it's a game-changer, proving that small island developing states can punch above their weight in global sustainability efforts. For more information, visit https://www.unep.org/cep/multilateral-environmental-agreements-acp-countries-phase-iii-acp-meas-3