



Mission Report

**Distribution:**

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WABICC
Experts and Staff of Abidjan Convention

Name(s) of Mission Participants:

About Bamba, Regional Coordinator
Sahr Abraham Grass-Sessay, Ocean Governance Officer
Jacques Abe, Thematic Coordinator, Biodiversity/Habitat/Water
Serge Logossou, Finance and Budget Management Officer

Period: 11th – 13th November 2015

Institution: Abidjan Convention Secretariat

Meeting: First Regional Expert Group Meeting on Sargassum Invasion in West Africa

Venue: Country Lodge Hotel in Freetown, Sierra Leone

Main Persons Contacted:

Marine Biologist, Environmentalists and Oceanographers – Dr. Yacouba Sankaré, Dr. Koffi Komoé, Dr. Bra Yvette Fofie N'Guessan, Mrs. Jewel Kudjawu, Mr. Sékou Camara, Mr. Sheck Abdul Sherif, Mr. Samsideen A. Oyebode, Mr. Mamadou Ndiaye, Dr. Gnanidi Kissao, Dr. Zacharie Sohoun, Dr. Salieu K. Sankoh; Mr. Vincent Sweeney/GPA Coordinator, and Mr. Tiega Anada/WABICC;

Environment Protection Agency-EPA/Sierra Leone – Mrs. Haddijatou Jallow/Executive Director, Mr. Bah, Mr. Paul Lamin, Mr. Samuel Kamara, Mr. Arouna Williams, Mr. Abdul Conteh, Mr. Sheku Kanneh, and Meeting Participants (**see attached List of Participants**)

Meeting Objectives:

1. Share information, build knowledge on Seaweed invasion in West Africa, and promote best management practices.
2. Formulate a draft common Regional Strategy on the collection of seaweeds and the creation of "Inclusive Green Jobs" in affected countries in the region.

Travel Requests: AB-28819, SAGS-29062, JA-26802, SL-26798

Classification
General

Signature

Supervisor's Signature

A. Background

In June 2011, a large mat of pelagic Sargassum Seaweed appeared on the shorelines of South of Casablanca (Morocco) spanning to the Gulf of Guinea. Since then the region has experienced annual recurring influx of brownish seaweed (technically referred to as pelagic Sargassum) infestation.

The recurring invasion of seaweed in West Africa has become a regional phenomenon, with ecological and socioeconomic impacts, affecting aquatic resources, fisheries, waterways, coastal habitats and the tourism sector in particular. Scientific research on the invasion of seaweed in West Africa suggests the following theories as potential causes:

- *Warming and changing of ocean temperature due to global climate change.*
- *Increased land based nutrients and pollutants (which include nitrogen-heavy fertilizers and sewage waters) washing into the ocean.*
- *Flow of nutrients from the Congo River, Amazon River, Northwest Africa iron-rich dust.*
- *Maritime traffic and off-shore oil exploration.*

In response to the prevailing influx of seaweed on the shores of the Gulf of Guinea, affected countries in the region (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo) requested the Abidjan Convention Secretariat and UNEP Headquarters to provide technical support for an effective management of the recurring seaweed infestation in the region.

B. Meeting Justification

Considering the transatlantic nature of Sargassum Seaweed infestation and its impacts in shores of the Gulf of Guinea, tackling this emerging environmental problem would require a transatlantic concerted effort and a regional coordinated action beyond national jurisdiction.

The focus is on effective management and value-adding of the seaweeds, thereby mitigating its negative impacts and preventing further damage to the region's native marine vegetation. This effort would require greater understanding of the seasonal landing of seaweeds, including their growth dynamics, and economic potential use.

Preventing the occurrence of marine bio-invasion is by far the best option to avoid a wider ecological damage and social effects. Given that the causes of seaweed invasion cannot be stopped, effective management in addressing both the ecological and socio-economic effects is therefore the optimal approach.

In the context of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals **13** (*combating climate change and its impacts*) and **14** (*conserving and sustainably use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*), and in the framework of the United Nations negotiations of a new global agreement for biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, the Executive Director of UNEP (Mr. Achim Steiner) instructed the Abidjan Convention Secretariat to provide the necessary technical assistance and play a lead role in responding to the seaweed infestation in West Africa.

In response to this environmental problem and instruction from UNEP Executive Director, the Abidjan Convention Secretariat in collaboration with the Environment Protection Agency of the Government of Sierra Leone partnered with UNEP Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities-GPA, and the USAID West Africa Biodiversity and Climate Change Project-WABiCC to convene the first Regional Expert Group Meeting on Seaweed Invasion in West Africa.

The Meeting in Sierra Leone also provided the opportunity to achieve the following:

- i.** Followed-up on report submitted to GPA and the Abidjan Convention on Waste and Marine Litter challenge in Sierra Leone by the Acting Chief Environment Officer, Mr. Vincent Sweeney (GPA Coordinator) and Mr. Sahr Abraham Grass-Sessay (Ocean Governance Officer UNEP-Abidjan Convention) met with representatives at the Ministry (Mr. Tamba Gbetuwa/Deputy Permanent Secretary, Mr. Edward Bendu/Acting Chief Environment Officer, Mr. Lahai Keita/Senior Environment Officer, Mrs. Zainab Bangura/Environment Officer, Mr. Jobo Samba/GIS Advisor, and Dr. Alphajor Cham/Planning Advisor). The intent of the meeting was to identify areas of collaboration to support the Government in developing and implementing a National Action Plan to manage the acute marine pollution in the country. Ensuing our meeting, a site visit was conducted to the Kroo-Bay and Kingtom community.
- ii.** The Abidjan Convention Regional Coordinator (Mr. Bamba) met with the head of the WABiCC Team based at the Mano River Union Secretariat (Mr. Anada Tiega). The aim of the meeting was to strengthen regional corporation in the implementation of WABiCC's Annual Work Plan (October 2015 – September 2016) to which the Abidjan Convention is a key regional partner.
- iii.** At the end of the Closing Ceremony of the Regional Expert Group Meeting in Freetown, Mr. Abou Bamba officially submitted Sierra Leone's 2015 State of the Marine-SoME Report to Dr. Monty Jones (Adviser to the President) who represented President Ernest Bai Koroma at the meeting.

Photo: Mr. Abou Bamba (UNEP/Abidjan Convention Regional Coordinator) launching Sierra Leone's 2015 State of the Marine-SoME Report of Sierra Leone. To his right is Prof. Victor Strasser-King (Senior Director/Policy and Strategy Planning Unit in the Office of the President) who served as the meeting Moderator.



The SoME Report provides a description of the coastal and marine environment of Sierra Leone as well as the oceanography of its coastal waters. The report further highlights the pressures and impacts of anthropogenic activities that directly affect the quality of the coastal and marine environment, such as fishing, shipping, ports and harbor development, submarine cable and pipelines, off shore. Its content includes data and relevant information on the marine ecosystem, marine diversity, habitats, species, physical, chemical, and ecological process, pests, introduced species, etc.

The Report presents a series of **7 main recommendations** to the Government of Sierra Leone on measures to address the following:

- i)** Physical lost of seabed/coastal habitats;
- ii)** Marine Litter;
- iii)** Contamination by hazardous substances;
- iv)** Nutrient and organic matter inputs;
- v)** Biological disturbances which can lead to deaths, injury, instability, etc.;
- vi)** Spatial protection measure; and
- vii)** Research improvement in reducing uncertainty in the marine and coastal environment

C. Summary of the Meeting: The first Regional Expert Group Meeting on Sargassum Invasion in West Africa brought together marine-biologists, oceanographers, policy experts from 9 affected countries in the region (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo), organizations (national and international) working on marine and coastal biodiversity management in the region. **Annexed is the Meeting Agenda and List of International Participants.** The 3 day Meeting was conducted in the following sequence:

- **Day 1 Wednesday 11th November 2015** – Pursuant the Opening Ceremony (see Agenda attached) the rest of the day as dedicated to information sharing on Sargassum invasion in affected countries. Technical Experts from affected countries made presentations underpinning the impact of seaweed in their respective countries



Photo: Cross section of local and international participants

- **Day 2 Thursday 12th November 2015** – Presentations on global and regional biodiversity initiatives from UNEP Global Programme of Action (Mr. Vincent Sweeney) and USAID West Africa Biodiversity and Climate Change Project (Mr. Anada Tiega) were made followed by 15minutes presentation (per country) of “best national management practices” of the invasive seaweed.



Photos from left to right: Mr. Vincent Sweeney (UNEP/GPA Coordinator), Mr. Anada Tiega (WABICC Climate Change Specialist) followed by a Field Visit to N° 2 River in the Freetown peninsular

The afternoon was devoted to Field Visit to affected coastal communities. Before then, the Chief Executive Officer FINIC (Mr. Foday Kamara) an indigenous Sierra Leonean company that is involved in transforming waste to wealth made a presentation on the value addition of Sargassum seaweed to kitchen fuel, house and oven heating. He also presented the potential use of seaweed for animal-sheep feed and the generation of gas for domestic and industrial use. The value addition use of seaweed will substitute the use of charcoal and thereby saving the forest from deforestation.



Photo: Mr. Foday Kamara (CEO of FINIC) during his presentation on value-addition and use of seaweed

- **Day 3 Friday 13th November 2015** – At the end of the three day meeting, a draft Regional Strategy and recommendations charting the way-forward for postscript activities for better manage of the invasive seaweeds in West Africa was presented. The Meeting was drawn to closure by Official Statements and a Keynote Address.



Photos from left to right: Mr. Sahr Abraham Grass-Sessay (UNEP/Abidjan Convention Ocean Governance Officer), Mr. Abou Bamba (UNEP/Abidjan Convention Regional Coordinator), Hon. Charles Rogers (Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Dr. Monty Jones (Adviser to the President), and Mrs. Haddijatou Jallow (Executive Chairperson of Sierra Leone’s Environment Protection Agency)

D. Major Finding/Summary of Draft Regional Strategy

At the end of the three-day Regional Expert Meeting, Environmentalists, Oceanographers, Marin-Biologist, Policy Analysts and Development Experts adopted a draft Regional Strategy to enhance better management of the recurring invasive seaweeds in the West Africa.

Photo: Mr. Sahr Abraham Grass-Sessay (UNEP/Abidjan Convention Ocean Governance Officer) presenting the draft regional strategy



The modus operandi for the operationalization of the daft Regional Strategy and recommendations is been developed by the Abidjan Convention Secretariat. Here is a highlight of some major observations of the proposed Regional Strategy:

1. Replicating the "Green Brigade" concept and the need for training in the collection of seaweeds.
2. Adopting the use of mechanized Sargator boats for sea and off shore seaweed collection.
3. Setting-up seaweeds farms in affected coastal communities which will serve as storage facilities and value-addition hubs.
4. Establishing an early warning mechanism through an effective use of satellite images.
5. Setting-up an information management, monitoring and surveillance mechanism for tracking purposes.
6. Sharing of expertise among affected communities and countries in the region.
7. Establishing a regional research centre for in-depth scientific analysis on seaweeds.

E. Key Recommendations/Follow-up Actions

The following recommendations would contribute the implementation of the draft strategy:

- Encourage affected countries to formulate and implement adaptive National Action Plans on better management of invasive seaweeds at national level.
- Promote South-South Corporation with Caribbean states to enhance information sharing on “best management practices” of seaweed.
- Support active participation of national governments and the private sector in the implementation of value addition demonstration projects in affected countries.
- Call on the Abidjan Convention Secretariat to formulate and encourage the ratification of a Protocol “the Freetown Protocol on Invasive Seaweeds/Sargassum”.
- Formulate a regional strategy and programme of action on invasive seaweeds and mobilize funding for the implementation of national and regional projects.
- Encourage multilateral dialogue by ensuring that Sargassum is discussed in the upcoming 2016 United Nations Environment Assembly, thereby bringing the menace and opportunity of Sargassum to the attention of the global environment community.
- Ensure that the 2015 Bureau Meeting of the Abidjan Convention emphasizes the need to organize a Pan-African summit on ocean governance under the auspices of the Africa Union to help develop Regional Corporation on contemporary and emerging ocean governance challenges.

F. Outcome of the Meeting

The Meeting concluded with two key results, namely:

- Demonstrated political and expert will to find an adaptive management approach in transforming an environment problem (the seaweed invasion) into economical viable products. This dual effort has the propensity to “unlock the economic potential of the African coasts” making it the new normal for wealth creation.
- And the formulation of a draft common Regional Strategy which will serve as a blueprint on the collection and management of seaweeds in the region. Its implementation will give way to the creation of “Inclusive Green Jobs”, thereby minimizing the environmental impacts and ensuring the livelihood of affected coastal communities and countries.

The outcome of the first Regional Expert Meeting on Seaweed Invasion in West Africa demonstrates the relevance of the Abidjan Convention as the regional instrument which is better placed to address our terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystem challenges. Hence the need to promote institutional governance mechanism and encourage cross-border partnership and corporation to preserve and protect coastal wetlands from loss and degradation due to invasive species and other factors linked to climate change, and address the root causes of the Sargassum seaweed in invasion cannot be overemphasized.

The Abidjan Convention which was established in 1981 seeks to protect, manage, develop and implement marine and coastal environmental initiatives for 22 coastal countries spanning from Mauritania to the western shores of South Africa. The Convention's Conference of Parties is its foremost decision-making body.

With the establishment of a technical working group on Sargassum in West Africa, coupled with a strong political will from affected countries, we remain optimistic that days are bound to come when seaweed will not only be considered as an emerging environment challenge, but as a “new normal” of green wealth creation opportunity.

G. Annexes

1) Meeting Agenda

Wednesday, 11 th November 2015	Time	Action Holder
Opening Ceremony <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcoming address by the Executive Chairperson of Sierra Leone's Environment Protection Agency - Remark by the Abidjan Convention Regional Coordinator - Review of Agenda, Meeting Objective and Expected Outcomes by Abidjan Convention Ocean Governance Consultant Chair/Moderator	8:30am – 9:30am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mrs. Haddijatou Jallow - Mr. Abou Bamba - Mr. Sahr Abraham Grass-Sessay - Prof. Victor Strasser-King
Coffee Break	9:30am – 10:00am	<i>All Participants</i>
Session 1a: Information sharing on Sargassum Seaweed invasion in affected countries in W/Africa <p>Benin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation on Sargassum invasion, effects and management by National Technical Expert <p>Côte d'Ivoire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation on Sargassum invasion, effects and management by National Technical Expert <p>Ghana</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation on Sargassum invasion, effects and management by National Technical Expert <p>Guinea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation on Sargassum invasion, effects and management by National Technical Expert Question and Answer	10:0am – 13:00pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Zacharie Sohou - Dr. Yacouba Sankaré Dr. Koffi Komoé Dr. Bra Yvette Fofie N'Guessan - Mrs. Jewel Kudjawu - Mr. Sékou Camara - Prof. Victor Strasser-King
Lunch Break	13:00pm – 14:00pm	<i>All Participants</i>
Session 1b: Information sharing on Sargassum/Seaweed invasion in affected countries in W/Africa <p>Liberia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation on Sargassum invasion, effects and management by National Technical Expert <p>Nigeria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation on Sargassum invasion, effects and management by National Technical Expert <p>Senegal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation on Sargassum invasion, effects and management by National Technical Expert <p>Togo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation on Sargassum invasion, effects and management by National Technical Expert <p>Sierra Leone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation on Sargassum invasion, effects and management by National Technical Experts Question and Answer	14:00pm – 17:30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Sheck Abdul Sherif - Mr. Samsideen A. Oyeboode - Captain. Mamadou Ndiaye - Dr. Ghandi Kissao - Mr. Paul Abu Lamin Dr. Salieu K. Sankoh - Prof. Victor Strasser-King
Summary of Day 1 – Insight on Day 2 and 3	17:30pm – 17:45pm	- Mr. Sahr Abraham Grass-Sessay

Thursday 12 th November 2015	Time	Action Holder
Session 2: Global and Regional Biodiversity Initiatives UNEP Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the marine Environment from Land-Based Activities – GPA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation by UNE/GPA Coordinator West Africa Biodiversity and Climate Change Project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation by WABiCC Team Leader in S/Leone Question and Answer	80:30am – 9:30am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Vincent Sweeney - Mrs. Tiega Anada - Prof. Victor Strasser-King
Coffee Break	9:30am – 10:00am	All Participants
Session 3: Presentation of National “Best Practices” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Benin, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, and Togo - Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, and Sierra Leone Question and Answer	10:00am – 14:00pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Country Rapporteurs - Country Rapporteurs - Prof. Victor Strasser-King
Lunch Break	14:00pm – 15:00pm	All Participants
Session 4: Field Visit to Lumley - Aberdeen Beach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assess effects of Sargassum invasion and major factors driving its spread in the region 	15:00am – 17:00pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Paul Abu Lamin - Dr. Salieu K. Sankoh
End of Day 2	17:00pm	All Participants

Friday 13 th November 2015	Time	Action Holder
Session 5: Group Work on Regional Management Strategy Group A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Benin, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, and Togo Group A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, and Sierra Leone Question and Answer	9:00am – 11:00am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designated Group Rapporteur - Designated Group Rapporteur - Prof. Victor Strasser-King
Lunch Break	11:00am – 12:00pm	All Participants
Session 6: Concluding Ceremony <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation of a draft Sargassum Regional Management Strategy and Recommendations - Statement/UNEP Abidjan Convention Secretariat - Statement/Minister of Fisheries & Marine Resources - Keynote Address - Vote of Thanks 	12:00pm – 15:00pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Sahr Abraham Grass-Sessay - Mr. Abou Bamba - Hon. Momodu Alieu Pat-Sowe - HE, President of Sierra Leone, Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma - Mrs. Haddijatou Jallow
End Regional Expert Group Meeting	15:00pm	All Participants

2) List of International Participants

N°	Name and Surname	Function/Contact	Country
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2.	- Mr. Abou Bamba	- Regional Coordinator UNEP Abidjan Convention Secretariat +225 58 55 15 51; Abou.Bamba@unep.org	- Côte d'Ivoire/ Abidjan
3.	- Mr. Sahr Abraham Grass-Sessay	- Ocean Governance Officer UNEP Abidjan Convention Secretariat +225 58 22 91 11; Abraham.Grass-Sessay@unep.com	- Côte d'Ivoire/ Abidjan
4.	- Dr. Jacques Abe	- Thematic Coordinator/CST Member UNEP Abidjan Convention Secretariat +225 07 08 58 00; Jacques.Abe@unep.org	- Côte d'Ivoire/ Abidjan
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8.	- Dr. Bra Yvette Fofie N'Guessan	- Assistant Pharmaceutical Professor Faculty of Bio-Pharmaceutical Sciences Félix Houphouët Boigny University +225 08 88 53 87; yvette.fofie08@yahoo.fr	- Côte d'Ivoire/ Abidjan
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15.	- Dr. Gnandi Kissao	- Lecturer/Professor (University of Lome) +228 90 36 69 68; kanandi@yahoo.fr	- Togo/Lome

3) Meeting Attendance List

Day-1

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