



## **Report of the Capacity Building Workshop for African Journalists on Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)**

**15-16 October, 2015, Laico Regency Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya**



**Environmental Compliance Institute (ECI)**  
<http://www.eci-africa.org>

## **I. Background**

Africa, like the rest of the world, is faced with various environmental challenges that have both direct and indirect socio-political and economic impacts. The challenges include unsustainable exploitation of biodiversity and other natural resources, invasive and alien species, illegal trade in endangered plant and animal species, indoor and outdoor air pollution, improper waste disposal, exposure to chemicals and other hazardous materials, illegal trans-boundary movement of hazardous wastes and materials, and climate change<sup>1</sup>. These challenges pose a grave threat to the region's sustainable development and green economy prospects, and call for innovative response mechanisms.

Over the years hundreds of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) have come into force with the aim of addressing the above challenges by improving global, regional and local environmental governance. The majority of African states are now parties to many of these MEAs. The achievement of the objectives of MEAs by African states largely depends on the extent to which their general public and decision-makers are aware and understand the content of the various conventions and their respective national obligations.

The media plays a critical role in influencing human behaviour through provision of relevant information. Unfortunately, this tool has not been effectively exploited in enhancing awareness towards better environmental governance in the African continent. This is largely attributable to the fact that most journalists are not fully aware of environmental challenges facing the African continent, the Multilateral Environmental Agreements that govern these challenges and national mechanisms formulated for their implementation.

This workshop was organized by the Environmental Compliance Institute (ECI) in collaboration with Media for Environment, Science, Health and Agriculture (MESHA), and with the financial support of UNEP's Division of Environmental Law and Conventions.

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<sup>1</sup> UNEP (2013) Africa Environment Outlook 3: Summary for Policy Makers

## **2. Objectives of the Workshop**

- i. Raise awareness of African journalists on the environmental challenges facing the African continent, the existing and emerging response mechanisms under global and regional MEAs, and the national implementation mechanisms for the MEAs;
- ii. Disseminate the Handbook on MEAs for African Journalists; and
- iii. Share best practices on effective reporting strategies for Africa's priority environmental issues, MEAs and their national implementation mechanisms.

## **3. Composition of Workshop Participants**

The forum brought together 40 journalists from the four African sub-regions (Eastern, Northern, Southern and Western Africa). Facilitators and resource persons included established environmental journalists, environmental lawyers, representatives from civil society, government implementing agencies and institution of higher learning.

## **4. Agenda**

The agenda for the two day workshop was as per the workshop program attached to this report.

## **5. Opening Session**

### ***i. Opening Remarks by Violet Otindo - MESHHA***

The opening remarks were delivered by Ms. Violet Otindo, Chairperson of MESHHA. She gave a brief overview of MESHHA and outlined the association's objectives as including: mentorship of junior science journalists, collaboration with relevant stakeholders in promoting the science and environmental agenda and promoting science based environmental reporting. She pointed out that most African governments have ratified MEAs but have a challenge of poor implementation. She acknowledged that although handling environmental issues require concerted efforts among all stakeholders, there is great need to build capacity of these stakeholders, especially journalists, in understanding Multilateral Environmental Agreements and their influence in environmental governance. This would enhance their capacity to report on priority environmental issues.

**ii. Remarks by G. Opondo - ECI**

Mr. Gerphas Opondo, the Executive Director of ECI gave an overview of the Environmental Compliance Institute and outlined ECI's mission as being to promote sustainable societies in Africa by advancing good environmental governance and rule of law. He proceeded to give a background of the project whose culmination was the workshop. He outlined the objectives of the workshop and acknowledged the invaluable contribution of UNEP/DELIC in facilitating the project. He noted that journalists play a key role in disseminating information hence the need to build their capacity on environmental issues including MEAs. He pointed out that environmental news have been given lesser attention compared to other news categories and urged the journalists present to help change the narrative.

**iii. Remarks by Aghan Daniel –MESHA;**

Mr. Aghan, Secretary of MESHA posed the following questions to the forum;

- Do the local policies conform to multi-lateral environmental agreements
- How are the MEAs applicable to the people at grass root level?
- Who are the direct beneficiaries or consumers of the MEAs and are the MEAs really important?

He reminded the journalists of their role as watchdogs in helping implement the MEAs.

**6. Presentations**

(NB: The full texts of all the presentations in PowerPoint are available separately)

**Day I**

**i. Africa's Environmental Challenges and Existing Response Platforms - by Selelah Okoth (NEMA)**

The key elements of the presentation were:

- Africa's key environmental challenges (climate change, unclean energy sources, declining biodiversity, and deterioration in air quality, hazardous chemicals and poor waste management).
- Factors predisposing environmental degradation (poor governance, population growth and resource constraints)
- Response Platforms (environmental compliance and enforcement, environmental audit, public participation in decision making, economic incentives, partnerships and collaborative engagements, institutional arrangements)

**ii. *Multilateral Environmental Agreements: Negotiation Processes and Implementation Mechanisms - by Gerry Opondo (ECI)***

The key elements of this presentation were the following:

- Background information (What are Multilateral Environmental Agreements and why do we need them?; historical development of MEAs?)
- Main clusters of MEAs (What topics do MEAs cover?)
- Development of MEAs (How are MEAs come about?)
- Implementation (How are MEAs Implemented?)

**iii. *Overview of the Handbook for African Journalists on Multilateral Environmental Agreements - by Ben Opa (ECI)***

The presentation highlighted the key issues in the different chapters of the handbook including detailed descriptions of the MEAs in the different clusters. The presenter stated that the rationale for developing the handbook is to build the capacity of African journalists on environmental reporting and address challenge of information gap in implementation of MEAs as well as enhance awareness on the same. He further informed the participants that the friendly handbook is intended to be a user friendly tool that provides a quick reference material to journalists on MEAs with a view to setting a basis for better environmental reporting and informed decision making. The handbook is available separately.

**iv. Domestic Implementation of MEAs: The Role of Compliance & Enforcement – by Robert Orina (NEMA)**

The key elements of this presentation were the following:

- Role of compliance and enforcement
- Role of non-governmental actors in compliance and enforcement
- Case studies on domestic compliance and enforcement of MEAs **Response/ 5.8** The state of Environmental Journalism in Africa; Experiences from practitioners

**v. Open discussion by all participants on the state of environmental journalism in Africa**

In this session participants shared experiences from the respective countries represented. The key issues coming out of this session were:

- Science/ Environmental journalism is not very well developed in most African countries
- Most media houses do not adequately cover environmental issues
- Many journalists in Africa lack capacity on environmental reporting. Intensive capacity building and trainings on environmental reporting should be encouraged and supported.
- Environmental media coverage is likely to improve as many journalists are gaining more interest in environmental reporting.
- Science/environmental journalists associations exist in some countries with varied degrees of effectiveness while in some countries they are dismal totally non-existent
- Journalists in most African countries presently do not specialize on science/environmental reporting.
- Environmental crimes such as wildlife poaching of various environmental media are on the rise in most parts of Africa
- Political interference in media coverage is still a challenge to effective journalism
- Environmental reporting can sometimes be risky

## **DAY 2**

### **vi. *Approaches and Strategies for Effective Environmental Journalism – by Joe Ageyo (KTN)***

The key issues from this presentation were as follows:

- For environmental stories to sell they should be have a human touch and connected to a trending issue/problem.
- Journalists should provide balanced information on environmental issues.
- There should be consistency in environmental reporting and capacity building to help the participants interact more with the key issues.

### **vii. *Perspectives on Environmental Communication – by David Ongare (NEMA)***

The key issues discussed by the presenter include the following:

- Scientific uncertainty can make policy-makers slow in implementing certain policies
- Many environmental problems are trans-boundary in nature, therefore they require international cooperation
- Environmental issues tend to have complex causes and spill across many different areas of human activity
- Environmental communication is the missing link between the subject matter of environment and the related socio-political processes of policy-making and public participation.
- The media is a potentially powerful voice and ally in environmental management; can generate legitimacy for collective action
- Research has highlighted the tendency for the media to distort environmental related issues by poor reporting strategies

## **6. Beyond the workshop: Sustaining the environment agenda through journalism (Recommendations)**

- Journalists should strive to capture economic and social impacts of environmental matters in order to make the stories more attractive and easy to sell.
- Continuous capacity building on environmental reporting with a view to tapping a critical mass of journalists interested in environmental matters is essential in public awareness and improving environmental compliance.
- The environmental reporting strategies learnt during the workshop are very useful and the participating journalists should strive to apply the same in their day to day work.
- It is necessary to monitor the impact of the workshop through follow meetings and other engagements.
- ECI should consider organizing forums to create public awareness on environmental issues affecting Africa.
- There is need to promote an open civil society which can provide necessary support to environmental journalism by assisting with information sources and resources for environmental and science journalists.
- The participants, Journalists, should promote awareness on environmental challenges and related MEAs by sharing stories from their countries including covering cross-border environmental issues.
- Multi-media projects need to be embraced to help cover cross-boundary environmental concerns through partnerships.
- The Handbook on MEAs is a very useful tool and ECI/UNEP should consider translating it in more languages for wider usage in Africa.



## Annex I: Programme/Agenda

<b>DAY I - 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2015</b>		
<b>TIME</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE</b>
0800 – 0900	Arrival and Registration	ECI and MESHA
0900 – 0930	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome and Introductions</li> <li>• Objectives of the Workshop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• D. Aghan – MESHA</li> <li>• G. Opondo – ECI</li> </ul>
0930 – 0945	Opening Remarks	Mamadou Kane - UNEP/DELIC
0945 – 1015	Africa's Environmental Challenges and Existing Response Platforms	Selelah Okoth – NEMA
1015 – 1030	Plenary	ECI and MESHA
<b>1030 – 1100</b>	<b>TEA/COFFEE BREAK</b>	
1100 – 1145	Multilateral Environmental Agreements: Negotiation Processes and Implementation Mechanisms	G. Opondo - ECI
1145 – 1200	Plenary	ECI and MESHA
1200 – 1245	Overview of the Handbook on Multilateral Environmental Agreements for African Journalists	Ben Opa - NLC
1245–1300	Plenary	ECI and MESHA
<b>1300 – 1400</b>	<b>LUNCH BREAK</b>	
1400 – 1430	Domestic Level Implementation of MEAs: The Role Compliance & Enforcement	Robert Orina – NEMA

1430 – 1445	Plenary	ECI and MESHA
1445 – 1530	The State of Environmental Journalism in Africa: Experiences from Practitioners ( <i>Open discussion by all the participants</i> )	D. Aghan - MESHA
1530 – 1600	Summing up of Day 1	Godwin Opinde–ECI
<b>1600</b>	<b>TEA/COFFEE/ADJOURN</b>	
<b>DAY 2 - 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2015</b>		
0800 – 0900	Arrival	All
0900–0915	Welcome	G. Opondo – ECI
0915–1000	Approaches and Strategies for Effective Environmental Journalism	Joe Ageyo – KTN
1000–1030	Plenary	ECI and MESHA
<b>1030–1100</b>	<b>TEA/COFFEE BREAK</b>	
1100–1145	Perspectives on Environmental Communication	David Ongare – NEMA
1145 – 1200	Plenary	ECI and MESHA
1200–1245	Beyond the Workshop: Sustaining the Environment Agenda through Journalism	D. Aghan–MESHA
1230–1300	Way Forward & Vote of Thanks	G. Opondo – ECI
<b>1300–1400</b>	<b>LUNCH (END)</b>	