



REGIONAL LESSONS LEARNED WEBINAR REPORT

DEVELOPMENT OF MINAMATA INITIAL ASSESSMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN -

Belize



DEVELOPMENT OF MINAMATA INITIAL ASSESSMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN

The Regional Lessons Learned Webinar for the project, GEF 9991 Development of Minamata Initial Assessment in the Caribbean - Belize (MIA Belize), commenced virtually on 27 May 2021 at 11:00 am- 12:30 pm (GMT-4).

The primary objective of the Regional Lessons Learned Webinar was to share the lessons learned from the MIA Belize Project with ongoing and past MIA Project Countries.

The webinar also sought to discuss the development of the communications strategy; and discuss regional mercury activities that can further the initiatives for mercury management in the Caribbean, particularly in relation to:

- The Global Environment Facility (GEF) Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS (ISLANDS) Programme
- Initiatives being conducted by the Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI)
- The Capacity building related to Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) in CARICOM ACP Countries Phase III project

OPENING REMARKS

Opening remarks were given by the following:

- Ms. Jewel Batchasingh, Director (Ag.), BCRC-Caribbean - Ms. Batchasingh welcomed participants from the region and noted that through the MIA Belize Project, Belize is the ninth country to conduct an MIA with the BCRC-Caribbean. It has benefited from the lessons learned from previous MIA countries and can provide even further lessons for the region through its findings.
- Mr. Ludovic Bernaudat, Senior Task Manager, Chemicals and Health Branch, UNEP - Mr. Bernaudat highlighted the good work of the BCRC-Caribbean and the national stakeholders of Belize in finalising the National MIA Report which received good reviews in the global technical review.
- Mr. Miguel van der Velden, Lead Consultant for GEF ISLANDS Programme, UNEP - Mr. van der Velden noted the importance of the MIA-Belize Project's findings as it provided the baseline for the development of the activities to be conducted under the GEF ISLANDS Programme provided that Belize becomes a party to the Minamata Convention on Mercury.
- Mr. Martin Alegria, Chief Environmental Officer, Department of the Environment (DOE), Belize - Mr. Alegria thanked the national stakeholders in Belize who provided support to the project and adapted to the changes that occurred due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

BACKGROUND ON MIA PROJECT

A brief introduction to the project was given highlighting the aim of the MIA Belize Project to enable the Government of Belize to become a Party to the Minamata Convention through scientific and technical assessments.

Through participating in an MIA Project, countries are provided with:

- A starting point for addressing the national mercury situation
- Opportunities for future work towards protecting human health and the environment in the Caribbean
- Increased data availability and the ability for country comparisons on a global scale
- Strengthened chemical management in the region
- National and regional knowledge sharing and awareness on issues with mercury
- Providing countries with confidence to ratify/accede to the Minamata Convention

PROJECT AGENCIES

FUNDED BY:



IMPLEMENTED BY:



EXECUTED BY:



NATIONAL EXECUTING PARTNER:



The MIA-Belize Project consists of three (3) components that ensure that the aims of the project are met. Component 1 involves the global technical support and capacity building for the development of the MIA provided by UNEP throughout the project. Component 3 refers to the monitoring and evaluation conducted regularly by the executing and implementing agencies in order to ensure the project is being managed effectively. The bulk of project activities and outcomes fell under Component 2 in which the following Project outcomes were achieved:

- Inventory of Mercury Releases
- Regulatory Assessment Conducted with a Provision of Recommendations for the Implementation of the Minamata Convention in National Framework
- Potential Mercury Hotspots Identified and Biomonitoring Activities Commenced for the Identification of Vulnerable Populations
- Communication Materials and Strategy for Mercury Awareness-raising
- National Working Group Formed and Priorities for Action for Mercury Management Highlighted for Consideration

To achieve these outcomes, support was received from the National Execution Partner: the Department of the Environment (DOE); the national stakeholders engaged in Belize as part of the National Working Group (NWG); and through coordination with other MIA Projects in the Caribbean.

Consultants were also recruited under the project to assist in carrying out key activities highlighted under Component 2.

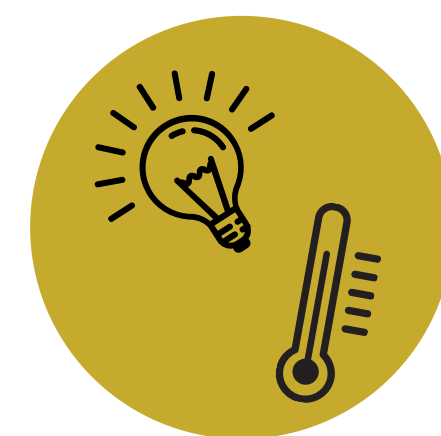
LESSONS LEARNED- TECHNICAL

Over the course of the MIA-Belize Project's execution, a number of challenges were encountered. Through working to find solutions, many key lessons were learned and implemented in the MIA Belize Project, while others will be instrumental in the success of future MIA efforts in the Caribbean as well as other regional projects.

The main lesson learned from the technical aspect of the Project was the *Contribution made by the Results to the Caribbean Dataset and the Ability to Further Validate Priorities*. As with the MIA Project, results are gathered using the UNEP Toolkit for Identification and Quantification of Mercury Releases allowing comparisons to be done at national, regional and global scales. Through this comparison, decision-makers are better equipped to prioritise responses at these levels to address mercury issues and monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of efforts to address the mercury issues.

The main mercury issues that were identified through the MIA-Belize Project included: the need to ensure the sound management of:

- *Imports of Mercury-Added Products (MAPs) and*
- *Mercury Waste including its Classification, Collection, Storage and Disposal.*



To address the main issues and ensure Best Environmental Practices (BEP), capacity building for the identification, detection and management of MAPs can be done with Customs and Excise while similar efforts can be directed to the relevant bodies responsible for mercury waste within Project countries.



LESSONS LEARNED- PROJECT EXECUTION

CHALLENGE:

Need for National Ownership and Capacity to Manage Daily Project Tasks

- The MIA Belize Project commenced at a time when the National Executing Partner had a number of other commitments and it was noted that their human resource capacity was under strain which caused some delays in the day-to-day monitoring and administration of the project.

SOLUTION:

Hiring of National Consultants to assist in Data Collection and Stakeholder Engagement



- Initially, a National Research Assistant was hired who was followed by a National MIA Report Consultant. This consultant was housed in the DOE allowing for efficient decision making. Further to this, the consultant had institutional knowledge of the stakeholders for engagement which greatly benefited the data collection and follow-ups needed for a project of this nature. Similar qualifications were sought in the Terms of Reference developed for the related MIA Bahamas Project.

CHALLENGE:

Changes in Project Roles and Consultants during Project Execution led to a Loss in Capacity Built

- Training on data collection for the development of the mercury inventory was focused on the National Research Assistant (December 2018 - June 2019) who left the project abruptly. This resulted in a loss in the capacity built which led to delays and the need for project re-organisation.

SOLUTIONS:

- Ensure Detailed Meeting Minutes/Reports are Kept

As a general rule, the importance of ensuring that detailed records of communication on administrative and technical aspects should be continuously highlighted to ensure that new stakeholders or replacement consultants are able to understand previous work.

- Provision of Training to National Stakeholders to Build National Capacity and Enhance Data Collection

The need to ensure that training (on mercury issues and the methodology of the inventory development) is available to all key stakeholders involved in the project and can be easily referenced throughout the project was noted. As part of the GEF 10585 MIA Bahamas Project, this aspect was incorporated. Stakeholders from across the region, including Belize, were invited to a training webinar series from February - March 2021. All material was made available for future reference by stakeholders.

CHALLENGE:

Lags in Project Timeline led to Slow Responses and Loss of Interest by National Stakeholder

- Beyond the commitments of the DOE, the National Stakeholders also had contrasting workload priorities. Other events such as the preparations needed for the national elections in Belize and the COVID-19 Pandemic caused pauses in project activities which resulted in a slowed stakeholder engagement process.

SOLUTION:

Regular Project Update Summary Reports/Brochures and Targeted Stakeholder Meetings

- To address the overwhelming nature of frequent meetings, Project Update Summary Reports and Brochures were developed for easy sharing and digestion by stakeholders to maintain their interest. Additionally, the National MIA Report Consultant conducted targeted stakeholder meetings, either as one-on-one or small group meetings, to facilitate in-depth discussion and ensure that stakeholders felt represented.

CHALLENGE:

Other Ongoing Projects/National Priorities led to Stakeholders Feeling Overwhelmed or Led to a Duplication of Efforts in Engagement.

- Several projects/initiatives relating to the chemicals and waste management agenda in Belize led to key stakeholders being engaged continuously for data collection, reviews and workshops. This led to some stakeholders feeling overwhelmed and in some cases, feeling like they were being asked for the same information multiple times.

SOLUTION:

Coordinate and Collaborate with Other Projects where possible

- Understanding the existing workload and commitments of the National Stakeholders and identifying opportunities to coordinate and collaborate should be a key step in the organisation process. Under the MIA Belize Project, the National MIA Report Consultant recognised opportunities to collaborate with another ongoing project that involved medical waste management training sessions at several locations across the country. The National MIA Report Consultant conducted awareness-raising on mercury issues during the training. This worked well in ensuring that efforts for engagement were not duplicated.
- The awareness raising material developed for the project was also linked to the campaigns being developed for Persistent Organic Pollutants in order to provide streamlined chemicals and waste management messaging.

CHALLENGE:

COVID-19 Pandemic

- The onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic caused periods of uncertainty for the completion of various aspects of the project. The preparation for the hosting of the Results Validation Workshop initially planned for April 2020 was halted and the plan for the implementation of awareness-raising activities through student seminars and other stakeholder engagement sessions in-country was postponed.
- Additionally, stakeholder availability to review project work was impacted by the restrictions and the adjustments needed by personnel to adapt to work-life changes.

SOLUTIONS:

Hosting of Multiple Short Webinars

- Multiple Short Webinars were hosted to cover the necessary material while ensuring that the exhaustion associated with longer virtual sessions was avoided. Webinars included:
 - Preliminary Findings of Mercury Inventory and Legal Assessment (22 September 2020)
 - Identification of Mercury Hotspots (25 September 2020)
 - Introduction to Inventory of National Hg Releases Development (a 4-part webinar series hosted under the GEF 10585 MIA Bahamas Project from 10 February - 3 March 2021)
 - Summary of MIA Report (18 May 2021)



Virtual Awareness Raising Strategies

The approach to the awareness-raising strategy was revised for a virtual modality include videos to be aired on television, flyers and other social media content to allow for easier dissemination.

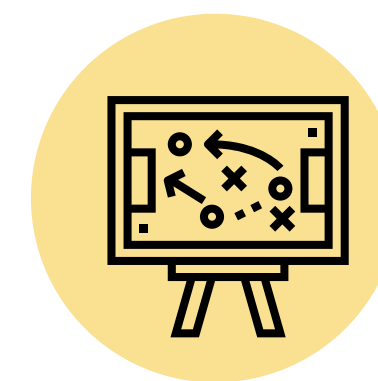


Project Timeline Extension

- To account for the adjustments and ensure efficient management of the project, the project was extended until June 2021.



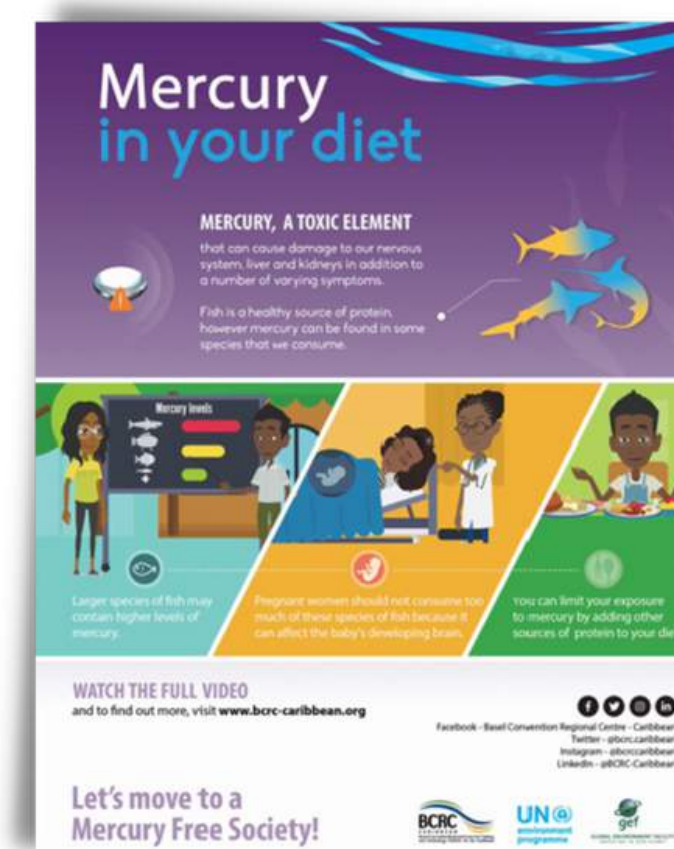
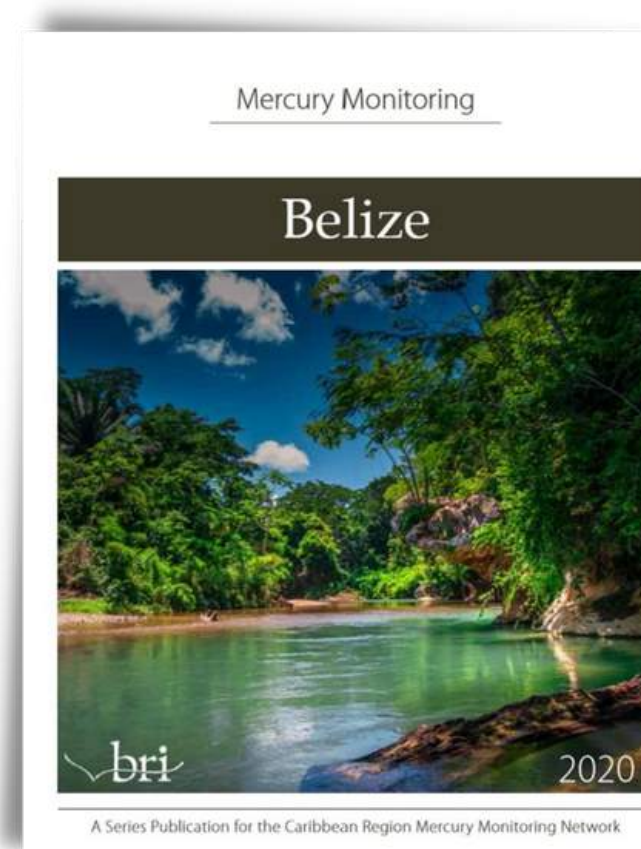
COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT



Under Component 2 of the Project, a *Communications Strategy* was developed, which included several awareness-raising materials and tools to aid in the dissemination of Project outcomes to stakeholders and the general public. Those developed under the MIA Belize Project were compiled with the materials under past MIA Projects to produce a single cohesive communications campaign. To effect this campaign, a *Communications Package* was shared with Belize containing the following materials:

- Introductory supporting document
- Information Dissemination Techniques
- Infographics/ Flyers/ Brochures
- Animated Videos and Complementary Flyers/Promos
- Technical Briefing Documents

The Communications Package contains documents to guide the person responsible for the communications roll-out to ensure that the information is disseminated in the best way to meet the needs of the various target audiences. The communications strategy developed provides material that can benefit persons seeking technical knowledge, the general public, using different media, as well as younger audiences in the form of animated videos. Used effectively, the communications material and strategy will help to raise awareness for mercury issues and solutions to avoid harm to persons and the environment.



To assist with the communications roll-out and the regional communications visions for mercury awareness, the following steps were discussed along with key questions to address at each step.

Communication Vision for Mercury Awareness in the Caribbean	
1. Define your campaign.	What is your national priority and expectations when sharing these messages?
2. Set responsibilities for a campaign initiator.	One person to lead the coordination of when, where and how the messages will be shared.
3. Engage collaborations.	Determine if there are any similar chemicals and waste awareness initiatives open for collaboration.
4. Determine timeline.	How long will the materials be shared and by what means?
5. Identify campaign design.	Will all the materials be shared at once or will they be staggered? Is there a priority list of materials to be shared?
6. Include sustainability measures.	Ensure that training measures are provided to schools, stakeholders and even the campaign initiator to ensure sustainability. Brainstorm realistic measures for future mercury-related awareness initiatives, once the materials have been exhausted. What happens next?

GEF IMPLEMENTING LOW AND NON-CHEMICAL DEVELOPMENT IN SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (ISLANDS) PROGRAMME



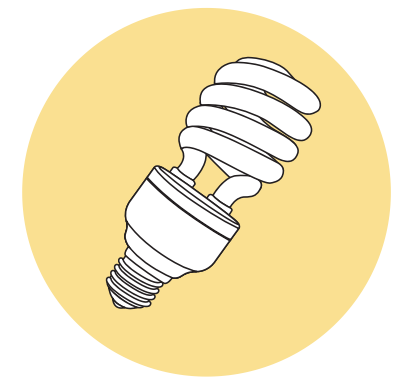
The GEF ISLANDS Programme aims to facilitate the entry of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) into a safe chemical development pathway while supporting countries with the implementation of the *Stockholm and Minamata Convention and the Strategic Approach to Integrated Chemicals Management (SAICM)*. The Programme comprises four (4) component and across the Caribbean, Pacific, Indian and Atlantic Ocean regions, a total of thirty-three (33) SIDS are now participating with a total of seven (7) Child Projects.

Within the Caribbean, there are three (3) Child Projects involving twelve (12) Caribbean countries. Nine (9) of the countries, including Belize, are involved in the two (2) Child Projects implemented by UNEP/Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), respectively. The third Caribbean Child Project, which was recently added to the Programme, involves The Bahamas, Cuba and Dominica.



The IDB Child Project aims to support countries, including Belize as an IDB country, financially with the bankability of public sector projects such as technical designs and feasibility studies as well as private sector through an incubator facility. Furthermore, a call for proposals will be done by the IDB upon project commencement for projects that address the reduction and elimination of mercury being eligible for funding.

The UNEP/FAO Child Project aims to support countries, inter alia, with the implementation of the Minamata Convention; however, countries must first be Party to the Convention to receive support with their implementation and fulfilling their obligations to the Convention. The MIAs will help to inform the assessment of suitable alternatives to mercury and mercury-added products and their subsequent phase-out.

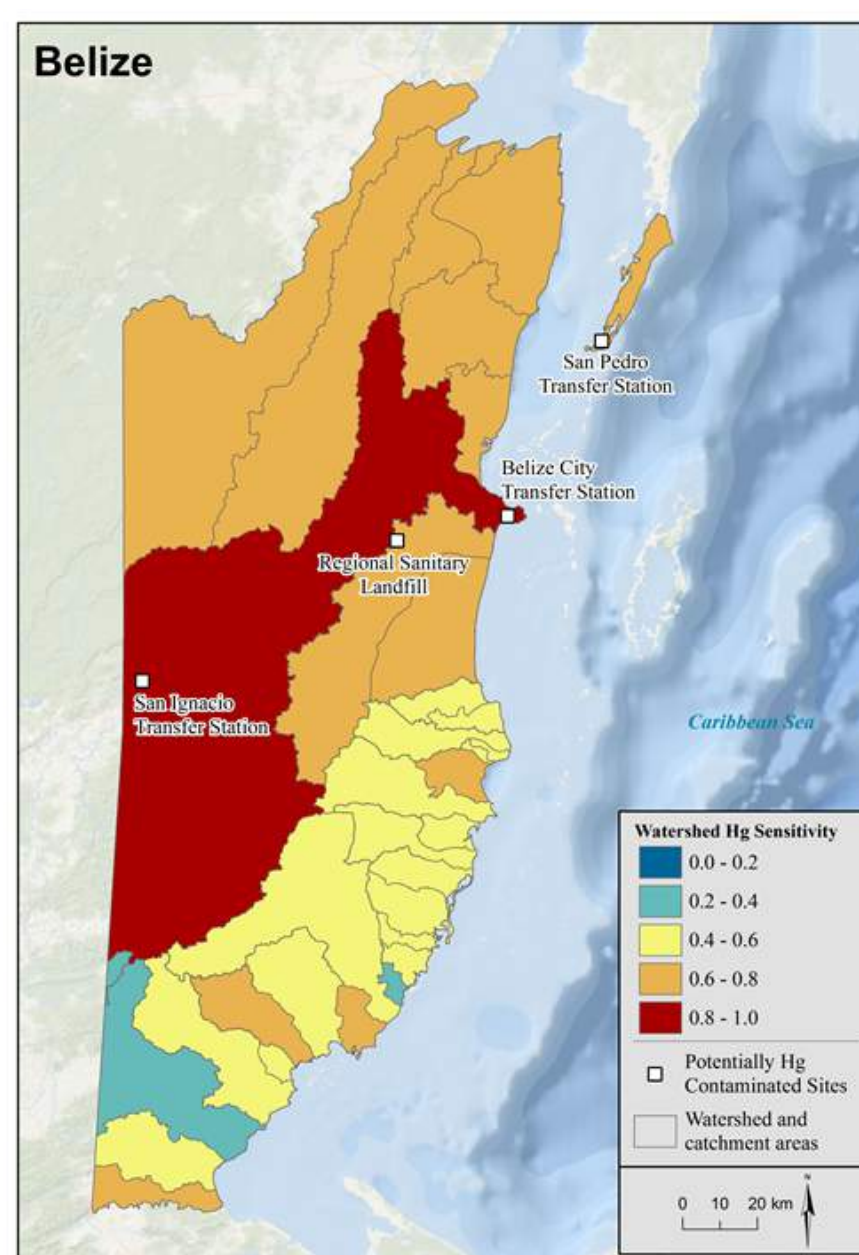


MERCURY ACTIVITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE BIODIVERSITY RESEARCH INSTITUTE



Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI) was the technical expert on the MIA Belize Project and have since continued work on mercury issues with the *Minamata Convention Global Mercury Monitoring*, which is being driven by Article 22, Effectiveness Evaluation, of the Convention and focuses on setting up a global network for three (3) matrices: air, biota and humans.

Furthermore, BRI is working on a *Caribbean Region Mercury Monitoring Network (CRMMN)* through the Specific International Programme (SIP), of which Belize is a member. The CRMMN aims to provide participating countries with the capacity to be a member of a regional effort building off of the effort of the MIA Projects with a data and coordinating platform.

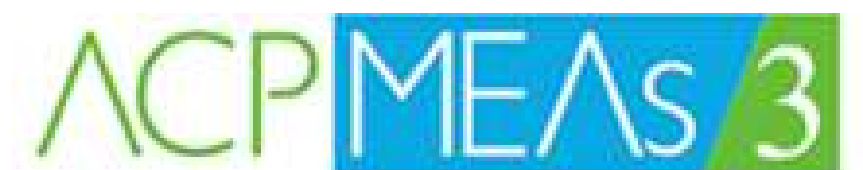


BRI also worked on the *Watershed Mercury Sensitivity in Belize* as part of the MIA Belize Project which identified areas of high and low sensitivity to mercury in Belize.

Under the CRMMN, fish sampling efforts in Belize that was commenced during the MIA Belize Project, can be continued to focus on fresh and saltwater species using the laboratory planned for development under the CRMMN in Antigua and Barbuda to ensure the sustainability of the project.

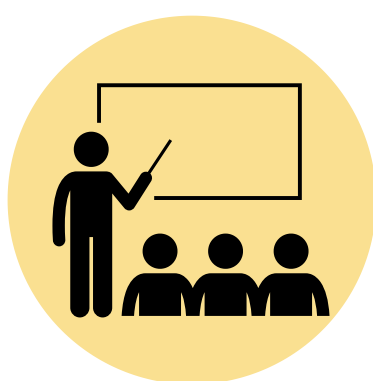
Further to fish sampling, sampling of bats and birds took place in Belize under the MIA Belize Project at the Runaway Creek Nature Reserve, Tropical Education Center and Belize Foundation for Research and Environmental Education (BFREE). This sampling targeted species with a high risk of mercury contamination with other potential species identified. The sampling of bats also helped to inform the ongoing effort for the *Neotropical Bat Risk Assessment*, which has also identified mercury as a risk in Belize.

CAPACITY BUILDING RELATED TO MEAs IN CARICOM ACP COUNTRIES PHASE III



Resulting from a partnership between the European Commission, the Secretariat for the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States and UNEP, this programme aims to empower stakeholders to address environmental challenges and receive the benefits from improved environmental management at the national and regional levels. Comprising three (3) Phases, Phase III is aimed at continuing to support countries to uptake the delivery of commitments under the chemicals and waste, and biodiversity MEAs.

The programme also seeks to promote the development of the enforcement measures that will support on the ground implementation of the Minamata Convention objectives and assess, identify and recommend mercury disposal arrangements to be set up in targeted countries for refurbishment arrangements facilities for interim storage. MAPs have been identified as a concern for the region based on MIA inventories and stakeholder consultation.



A *Training Action Plan* is being developed with six (6) modules to address areas of concern identified during a *Training Needs Analysis*. Planning for the sessions are ongoing and more information will become available as this progresses.

Results for this project are assessed based on three (3) categories: *Enforcement and Compliance, Development of National Frameworks, Legislation and Tools, and Improving Knowledge Sharing, Communications and Outreach* and thus far, significant work has occurred under each category. Moreover, the programme includes a *Communications and Visibility Plan* to achieve objectives relating to awareness-raising, engagement with multipliers and drivers of change in sustainable environmental management and appropriate communication and visibility activities



The presentation slides and recordings for the Regional Lessons Learned Webinar can be accessed here:

https://bcrc-caribbean.org-my.sharepoint.com/:f/g/person/tahlia_alishah_bcrc-caribbean_org/ErkD6iao_UtApWtadEi_LawBrpxpu-g4KhnfWGWaAPPQnA?e=reRqQg

If there are any issues accessing the link, please contact info@bcrc-caribbean.org



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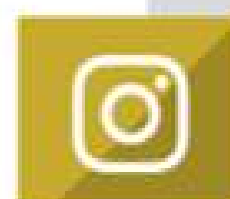
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