

Target: Tertiary Educational Institutions

The Importance of the Rio Conventions to the Cooperative Republic of Guyana

What are the Rio Conventions?

The Rio Conventions are three international agreements initiated in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. These Conventions, United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), help Governments rethink economic development and find ways to prevent the destruction of irreplaceable natural resources and avoid global pollution.

As follow-up to the Summit and to declare its readiness to participate in the process to ensure that environmental considerations are factored into social and economic decisions, Guyana signed on to the Rio Conventions in 1992. The Government of Guyana ratified the UNCBD and the UNFCCC on August 29, 1994 and almost three years later, on June 26, 1997, endorsed the UNCCD.

United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD)

The United Nations Convention of Biological Diversity (UNCBD) is a framework convention that has three goals for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, while promoting economic development. The goals are:

- conservation of biological diversity for future generations;
- exploitation of biological diversity in a sustainable way; and
- sharing the benefits from the use of genetic resources in a fair and equitable manner.

The UNCBD is essential for food security, medicines, fresh air, water, shelter, and a clean and healthy environment in which to live. It supports efforts to provide knowledge and fill information gaps on the management of biodiversity. The UNCBD assists in building capacity for the integration of the three (3) goals within National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans; the development and dissemination of technical resources and learning tools; and the enhancement of awareness of the value of and trade-offs from linking biodiversity and adaptation. (Refer to <https://www.cbd.int/convention>).



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Guyana is endowed with rich biodiversity which includes the jaguar species. This animal is threatened with extinction due to destruction of its natural habitat by human activities.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international environmental treaty adopted by Parties as a response to the problem of climate change. Emerging from the UNFCCC are the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, in which Parties have committed to greenhouse gas emission reduction targets aimed at preventing dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.

The Convention underscores the importance of stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. It seeks to enhance implementation of the provisions of the Convention and to strengthen and support global response to the threat of climate change. The absence of full scientific certainty should not prevent Parties from taking action when there is a threat of serious or irreversible damage to the climate system. The Convention also emphasizes equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities for promoting global low emission and climate-resilient economies (For more information, go to <http://unfccc.int/2860.php>).



Photo courtesy of J. Cholmondeley (2017)

Sea level rise is one of the impacts of climate change likely to affect coastal Guyana. This event may increase instances of overtopping of the Georgetown seawall, as shown in the photograph.

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

The provisions of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) reflect a strong link between desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) and adaptation to climate change. The UNCCD focuses on the implementation of an integrated approach to address



Courtesy of L. Johnson-Bhola

Drought conditions experienced in Region 9, (2017). These conditions can cause severe water stress and affect agriculture and other economic activities.

desertification in all respects. It encourages the coordination of activities under the Convention as outlined in Article 4, paragraph 2(a) and Article 8, Paragraph 1 respectively. Article 10 provides for the formulation of national action programmes which address poverty reduction and vulnerability to climate change in affected developing countries (For additional information, see

<https://www.cbd.int/convention>.

Purpose of the Rio Conventions

The Rio Conventions came into existence to facilitate knowledge-sharing and learning, to strengthen technical and institutional capacities, and to enable access to financial and technological support for poverty reduction and economic and social development while protecting the natural environment.

The three conventions jointly as well as separately define various ways in which the Sustainable Development Goals, articulated in Agenda 2030, can be achieved. They provide support to Parties for undertaking the full adaptation cycle, commencing from the assessment of impacts, risks and vulnerability, to planning and implementation of adaptation and mitigation actions and monitoring and evaluation.

The underlying principle is that a well-coordinated approach to responding to climate change, desertification, and biodiversity loss can have multiplier effects and multiple benefits to the world. The Rio Conventions, therefore, can act as catalysts for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.



Source:

<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

The SDGs address the main causes of poverty and the need for economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

Why are the Rio Conventions Important to the Cooperative Republic of Guyana?

- ✓ The Rio Conventions offer a range of tools, services and expertise that can assist Guyana to effectively address climate change, land degradation and desertification, and biodiversity loss while achieving sustainable development.
- ✓ The Conventions set the platform for the country to take concerted actions aimed at assessing, planning, implementing and reviewing adaptation strategies.
- ✓ The Conventions promote a holistic approach for identifying and creating the necessary enabling environment for the achievement of the SDGs.
- ✓ They provide a framework for capacity building; legal assistance; participatory development; and progress on implementation, taking into account lessons learned from other regions to help build accountability and transparency.

Significant achievements made by the Cooperative Republic of Guyana

As a response to its obligations under the UNFCCC, the Government developed a National Climate Change Action Plan to complement the Initial National Communication. The National Climate Change Action Plan focuses on capacity enhancement to undertake national inventories of greenhouse gas emissions, to conduct vulnerability assessments, and to build the administrative framework embracing options for mitigation and/or adaptation and enhancing awareness on the objectives of the UNFCCC. To supplement the National Climate Change Action Plan, the Office of Climate Change (OCC) has prepared the National Climate Resilience Strategy and Action Plan which is a comprehensive framework for addressing climate change resilience and adaptation in the country. Guyana has submitted the Second National Communication to the UNFCCC and work has commenced on the Third National Communications and the first Biennial Update Report. In the context of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Guyana has submitted a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). Guyana has also made significant strides in REDD+ and has submitted a Forest Reference Level (FRL) to the Secretariat.

The country has also made great advances since the original effort at addressing biodiversity issues associated with the UNCBD's mandate. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Focal Point for the UNCBD, has adopted the global Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, which is a ten-year framework for action containing the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. The twenty (20) Aichi Targets focus on achieving five (5) goals for the conservation of biological diversity. These are:

- Causes of biodiversity loss and mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society;
- Reduction of pressures on biological diversity and promoting sustainable use;
- Improvement of the status of biological diversity;
- Enhancement of the benefits to all from biodiversity and ecosystem services; and
- Enhancement of implementation through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity building.

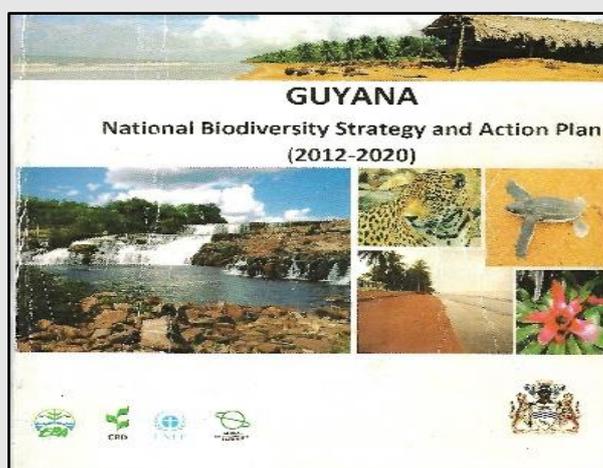
The country has been taking steps to implement ecosystem-based adaptation approaches and to integrate them into relevant strategies, plans, management options and objectives to assess the variety of services they provide and the potential tradeoffs that may result from them. One approach involved the development of specific and targeted planning tools for biodiversity and climate change and led to the development of some of the most recent plans.

The plans include the following:

- ✓ National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) (v.3) (2012-2020);
- ✓ Arapaima Management Plan (revised in 2014);
- ✓ National Mangrove Management Action Plan (2010); and
- ✓ North Rupununi Adaptive Management Plan (2006).

Another approach resulted in the establishment of four legal Protected Areas (Pas) thus far. These PAs are:

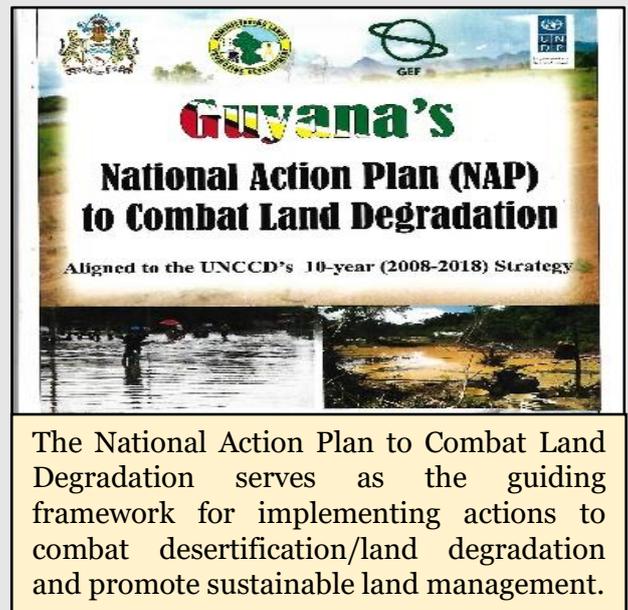
- ✓ Iwokrama Forest;
- ✓ Kaieteur National Park;



The NBSAP sets out the vision, roles, duties and obligations of the Guyana and its citizens and the actions to protect, conserve, use sustainably and share equitably the benefits arising from biodiversity.

- ✓ Shell Beach; and
- ✓ Kanuku Mountains

Regarding the UNCCD, a number of initiatives have been taken towards combating land degradation and desertification. Two national reports were prepared in 2000 and 2002 to assess land use and other critical aspects, followed by the National Action Programme to Combat Land Degradation (2006). The latter document prepared by the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission, which is the Focal Point for the UNCCD, contains greater detail on land degradation in the country and it recognizes the importance of sustainable land management. Guyana has also aligned its National Action Plan (NAP) to reduce Land Degradation for the period 2016-2030.



With direct relevance to the three Rio Conventions, Guyana has prepared important national assessment reports and strategies that reflect the country's progress to date and priorities to meeting global environmental outcomes. For example, the National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA) (2007), in which the country has committed to pursuing development in a sustainable manner, addresses legal and regulatory framework, the institutional and policy framework and other crosscutting issues, common to the three thematic areas of biodiversity, climate change and desertification. It places emphasis on cross-cutting capacity strengths, constraints and needs, as well as opportunities for linkages and synergies to provide a more efficient legal mechanism and supporting environment for the realization of cross-cutting and environmental priorities. The Strengthening Technical Capacities to Mainstream and Monitor Rio Convention Implementation through Policy Coordination Project currently being implemented was conceptualized from the NCSA to identify the priority cross-cutting capacity development needs of the country to meet and sustain its obligations under the Conventions.

Institutional Support for Rio Conventions Implementation

The Ministry of the Presidency and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are implementing a four-year project (2016-2020) amounting to US\$1.1 million from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in an effort to effectively manage and implement the guidelines of the three Rio Conventions. This project is providing support to various Ministries to improve capacity in their quest to establish the Environmental Information Monitoring and Management System (EIMMS) integrated database. The focus on capacity strengthening at the systems, institutional and individual levels is intended to improve collaboration among agencies and to ensure that activities are implemented through four interlinked components. These components are:

- ✓ Creating an integrated system to manage and monitor environmental information;
- ✓ Strengthening technical capacity of key stakeholders, technical staff and decision-makers;
- ✓ Improving awareness of global environmental values to promote greater appreciation for addressing global environmental obligations; and

- ✓ Updating National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA) to reflect post 2015 sustainable development goals and the governments' pursuit of green development while fulfilling the obligations of the Rio Conventions.

To date, the country has recorded benefits in the various areas aforementioned, as well as many others, from the support of the Rio Conventions mechanisms. The benefits are recognized in the form of new and revised laws and policies and the preparation and implementation of strategies, programmes and plans to safeguard the country's biodiversity and land resources, and to address climate change impacts. Overall, the three UN Conventions that help to define the value of our environment are used to shape our social and economic development policies, strategies, programmes and plans. The UNCBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD assist Guyana in defining national priorities and achieving its development goals. The Rio Conventions, therefore, act as catalysts for action at all levels.

