

Title: Gearing technical cooperation to the needs of the region – how GI WACAF support has evolved to enhance oil spill preparedness in West, Central and Southern Africa.

Abstract (500 words excluding title)

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the oil and gas industry have been supporting the development of oil spill preparedness and response for decades, particularly through the establishment of the Global Initiative (GI) programme. The Global Initiative for West, Central and Southern Africa (GI WACAF) is a collaborative project between IMO and IPIECA, aimed at enhancing oil spill preparedness and response capabilities in the 22 African countries of the continent's west coast.

Launched in 2006, the importance and pertinence of the GI WACAF project has been repeatedly demonstrated and recognized. Through time, it has needed to constantly adapt to integrate the various needs of the participating countries. To achieve this, the Project organizes activities which can take various forms: workshops, trainings, provision of technical advice to support to national response exercises, all of which through a similar operating mode: setting up and delivering short technical cooperation activities within the 22 benefiting countries.

However, with a view to constantly improve, accentuated by the questioning raised by the COVID Pandemic, the GI WACAF project has, over the past few years, been further evolving the format of the technical support proposed to the countries. Amidst colossal challenges and novel issues for countries around the world, the fight against COVID pandemic implied travel restrictions, which had deprived the GI WACAF of its main modus operandi: setting up in-country activities. The cooperation sector, of which GI WACAF is a part, needed to rapidly adapt to new restrictions in order to remain functional and beneficial for the countries involved.

In this context, the GI WACAF project's 2020-2022 biennium had to be focussed on remote assistance opportunities, offered by webinar platforms and remote communication tools, thus introducing a necessary new approach to its cooperation format. The effectiveness of remote assistance, in a time of global uncertainty and restricted use of traditional cooperation models, was considerable.

Post-pandemic, the GI WACAF project chose to maintain this remote approach, while being able to also travel in-country. In that sense, **the GI WACAF has recently developed new tools and adapted the format of its activities combining remote support and in-country activities**. This enables a long-term and sustained support to beneficiary countries, touching on more specific and in-depth topics. This new format includes:

- A first phase of remote communication to define the specific needs of the country and to frame the assistance required
- A second phase: an in-country national, sub-regional or regional workshop.
- Finally, the progress achieved during the in-country activity is enhanced by a follow-up which can lead up to several months, during which GI WACAF maintains contact with the country in case of questions, doubts, or requests, and to foster the continuation of efforts triggered by the in-country workshop.

This new approach to support beneficiary countries and its effectiveness will be illustrated in this paper through three case studies:

- Case Study #1 –Guinea Bissau: an eighteen months support to the national technical work group for the development of the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan;
- Case Study #2 – Legal assistance to four francophone countries combining a remote review of national implementation texts of these conventions by a legal expert and a subregional workshop on good practices relating to ratification, transposition into domestic law and effective implementation of relevant IMO conventions.
- Case Study #3 –Three steps approach to support countries with the development of dispersant use regulation (Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Namibia)