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**CAPACITY FOR IMPLEMENTING THE AGREEMENT – IDENTIFYING NEXT
PRIORITIES AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL**

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Summary

Through the Strategic Plan 2019-2027, AEWA Parties have committed to strengthening the capacity available for implementing the Agreement. Capacity is already supported by a range of resources and activities, notably the Agreement's *African Initiative*, but significant gaps remain. Actions specified in the Plan include the identification of these gaps and the undertaking of initiatives to address those deemed to be the highest priorities.

This report accordingly presents a review of identified gaps and priorities and recommends a number of areas for action. It is based largely on a survey and consultations undertaken in late 2021, concentrating on perspectives at the international level. "Capacity" is interpreted broadly, but for the purposes of this report it excludes matters of financial resourcing.

The report is a condensed summary of a large volume of survey response material submitted by 27 (one-third) of the current AEWA Parties and a range of 41 organisations and individuals, all of whom are warmly thanked for their inputs. The individual responses will continue to inform future efforts in this area.

The most frequently cited key current weaknesses in capacity concerned awareness, knowledge and general understanding about migratory waterbirds and their conservation, mechanisms for international cooperative action, and continuity of engagement by the individuals and institutions involved in implementing the Agreement. In some instances, lack of political will was also cited as a factor.

The reported consequences of these weaknesses include AEWA objectives failing to impact sufficiently on policy making and decision making, actions remaining nationally focused rather than delivering a shared international agenda, and waterbird conservation generally being eclipsed by the priorities of other sectors.

Asked to identify the most important areas of capacity strengthening support to be developed further at the international level in the period leading to 2027, respondents gave particular prominence to scientific project collaborations on research and monitoring, and provision of guidance and structured training. Suggestions for practical opportunities for pursuing the identified priorities include incorporating relevant provisions in existing multinational initiatives, conducting assessments to target efforts towards the issues/areas of greatest need, and making better use of MOP preparatory meetings ("pre-MOPs") as a valuable platform for training.

Following a section discussing potential criteria, indicators and methods of assessing capacity gaps and options for improvements in capacity, the report concludes with eight key recommendations, covering:

- launching initiatives at regional level, particularly in Africa;
- undertaking national capacity needs assessments, and developing and implementing action plans to fill significant gaps;
- making further use of the data gathered in the 2021 survey;
- developing a portfolio of project concepts relating to capacity strengthening, for use *inter alia* in fundraising;
- enhancing the role of pre-MOP preparatory meetings for capacity enhancement;
- cooperating with relevant existing projects and programmes in Africa;
- enhancing information provided via Party national reports;
- promoting succession planning to ensure continuity of implementation responsibilities.

Background; Purpose and Scope of this Report

The five objectives in the AEWA Strategic Plan 2019-2027 include (as No. 5) an "enabling objective", as follows: "*To secure and strengthen the knowledge, capacity, recognition, awareness and resources required for the Agreement to achieve its conservation objectives*".

Target 5.3 in the Plan foresees that "*Initiatives are in place to address at least two-thirds of the priority capacity gaps restricting implementation of AEWA*". Many of these capacity gaps, and actions to address

them, lie at national and sub-national levels of implementation. There is however also a need for action on this at the *international* level; in part to address those issues that are inherently transboundary or multilateral in character, and in part to respond to the fact, as noted in the Plan, that capacity for implementation (and therefore the pattern of gaps in capacity) varies widely across the Agreement Area (implying therefore that it should be more consistent, with weak areas being assisted to become stronger).

Action 5.3 (a) in the Plan focuses on this aspect. It specifies: “By MOP8, identify and prioritise gaps at international level in capacity for the implementation of the Agreement, taking account of regional specificities, as well as consideration of possible joint action with other MEAs and the potential for site-based twinning arrangements (or similar exchange mechanisms)”.

Capacity is an “umbrella” term that encompasses human, scientific, technological, material, organisational and institutional capabilities. All of these are relevant to the successful implementation of AEWA. The challenges and solutions of course are different for each of them, and this study helps to distinguish more clearly the priorities for actions that can be taken. The Strategic Plan refers to strengthening “institutional, technical and resource capacity”, and while “resources” can be a similarly all-embracing term, the specific question of *financial* resources is *outside* the scope of the present exercise, and it is being addressed in a separate strand of work.

This report presents an identification of the gaps referred to in Strategic Plan action 5.3(a), based largely on a survey and consultations undertaken in late 2021. It concludes with some Recommendations for consideration by the MOP.

The survey was conducted by means of a short questionnaire issued in early October 2021 to AEWA Parties, non-Party Range States, organisations and other stakeholders.

The aim of the survey was to synthesise informed opinions about **gaps and priorities for action**. It is *not* a study of what is already working well. Capacity is already supported by an array of guidance manuals and communication and outreach materials produced in the framework of AEWA itself, in the framework of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and by other organisations and initiatives. AEWA also supports its Parties through ongoing advice from the Technical Committee, case-specific advice through the Implementation Review Process, and an online video as part of the Introductory Course on the Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements hosted by the Center for Governance and Sustainability at the University of Massachusetts (Boston) and the UN Environment Programme.

Most significantly perhaps, AEWA’s flagship *African Initiative* recognises that inadequate capacity in developing countries and countries with economies in transition puts them at a continued disadvantage and prevents them from reaping the environmental, social and economic benefits offered by full compliance with Agreements such as AEWA. The African Initiative has provided a range of technical and institutional training opportunities on issues tailored to the needs of the Agreement and the region more widely (including through a “training of trainers” programme on flyway conservation); and preparatory meetings convened in advance of AEWA MOPs have also helped to strengthen the capacity of African Parties to participate in the MOP process and to engage with the Agreement in general.

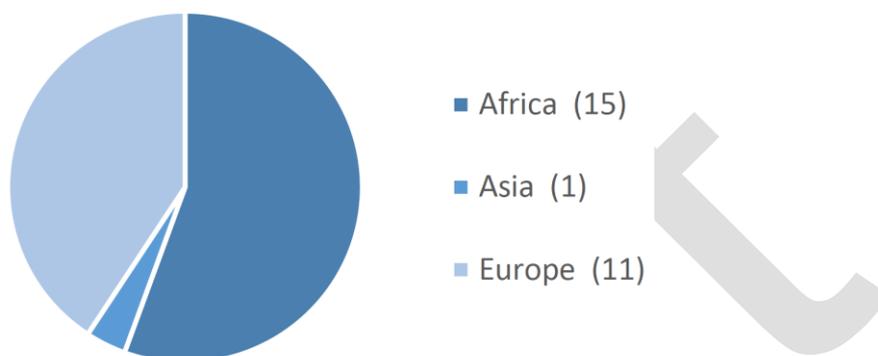
The questionnaire invited views on any of these existing provisions that may be a priority for future improvement or gap-filling; but it also encouraged respondents to suggest anything that is *currently missing* from (international) efforts to strengthen capacity, and which could be important to address in future.

The findings presented here are complementary to other work undertaken through the Technical Committee on identifying gaps in knowledge and information (document AEWA/MOP 8.30).

The Survey Findings

A total of 68 responses was received (see Annex 1). The 27 responses received from Contracting Parties represents 33% of the 82 Parties that existed at the time of the survey (including the European Union as one of those Parties). The numbers of responses from African and European Parties were broadly comparable (slightly more from Africa), while just one response came from the Asian region (see Figure 1 below). No response was received from any of the 37 Non-Party Range States.

Figure 1: The numbers of responses received from AEWA Parties in each region



The “organisation and other stakeholder” respondents included individuals responding in their own right, representatives of organisations, and members of the AEWA Technical Committee. In a number of cases a given respondent fulfilled more than one of these roles simultaneously, while some were specific to a given country or region and others were more international in nature. For these reasons therefore the list of organisation/stakeholder respondents has not been segregated into categories or regions.

The survey sections first collated perceptions about the areas/issues in which capacity is weakest (at international level) for helping to implement AEWA, and views about the specific ways in which these weaknesses are affecting implementation. They then invited suggestions about the types of international capacity strengthening support (other than funding) that would be the most important to develop further in the period to 2027 (i.e. the period covered by the AEWA Strategic Plan), what specific opportunities exist for pursuing these, and how efforts should be most efficiently targeted to areas of greatest need. A final section gave an opportunity to suggest any other actions for improving capacity at international level for the effective implementation of the Agreement.

Asking for different challenges and solutions to be ranked in priority order creates some artificial distinctions between issues that in reality are interconnected or even interdependent. Some aspects (such as levels of awareness) might be relevant across all the others, to some extent. This is well recognised - the prioritisation approach is useful as a device for seeing where emphasis should lie, and for making wise resource allocation decisions; but any eventual action agenda would in practice be more multi-faceted than the lists of single items here might suggest.

The results of each of these sections of the survey are presented in turn in the summaries that follow below. This is a highly condensed synthesis of a large volume of response material, and the underlying data are a rich resource that should have additional uses beyond this summary report, for example in further informing the more detailed development of activity in particular areas or on specific topics.

Not all of the respondents answered every question (organisations/stakeholders did so more completely than Parties), and the figures for the individual questions are given separately in each section that follows. An appreciable number of responses did not address the “international level” scope of the exercise, but clearly it is not always easy to make a hard distinction between what is “international” (as a challenge or a solution) and what is not, so reasonable latitude has been allowed in deciding what to include in these results.

No very marked differences were apparent between the preoccupations of Parties in the different regions, as revealed by the quantified scoring questions or by most of the qualitative comment sections. Given also the

small Asian representation, there has been no attempt to disaggregate the findings by region. It is nevertheless worth noting the emphasis placed in some of the African responses on issues such as general levels of awareness of the issues, the geographical scale of the challenge in Africa, continuity of engagement, and the importance of sharing of experience and other cooperation between neighbouring countries. Other (development) priorities are often likely to be given more attention in the continent. African Party respondents made more reference than those in Europe to the opportunities provided by pre-MOP meetings and associated training opportunities and emphasised the value of an overall strategic and systematic approach to capacity strengthening.

➤ Perceived current weaknesses in international capacity

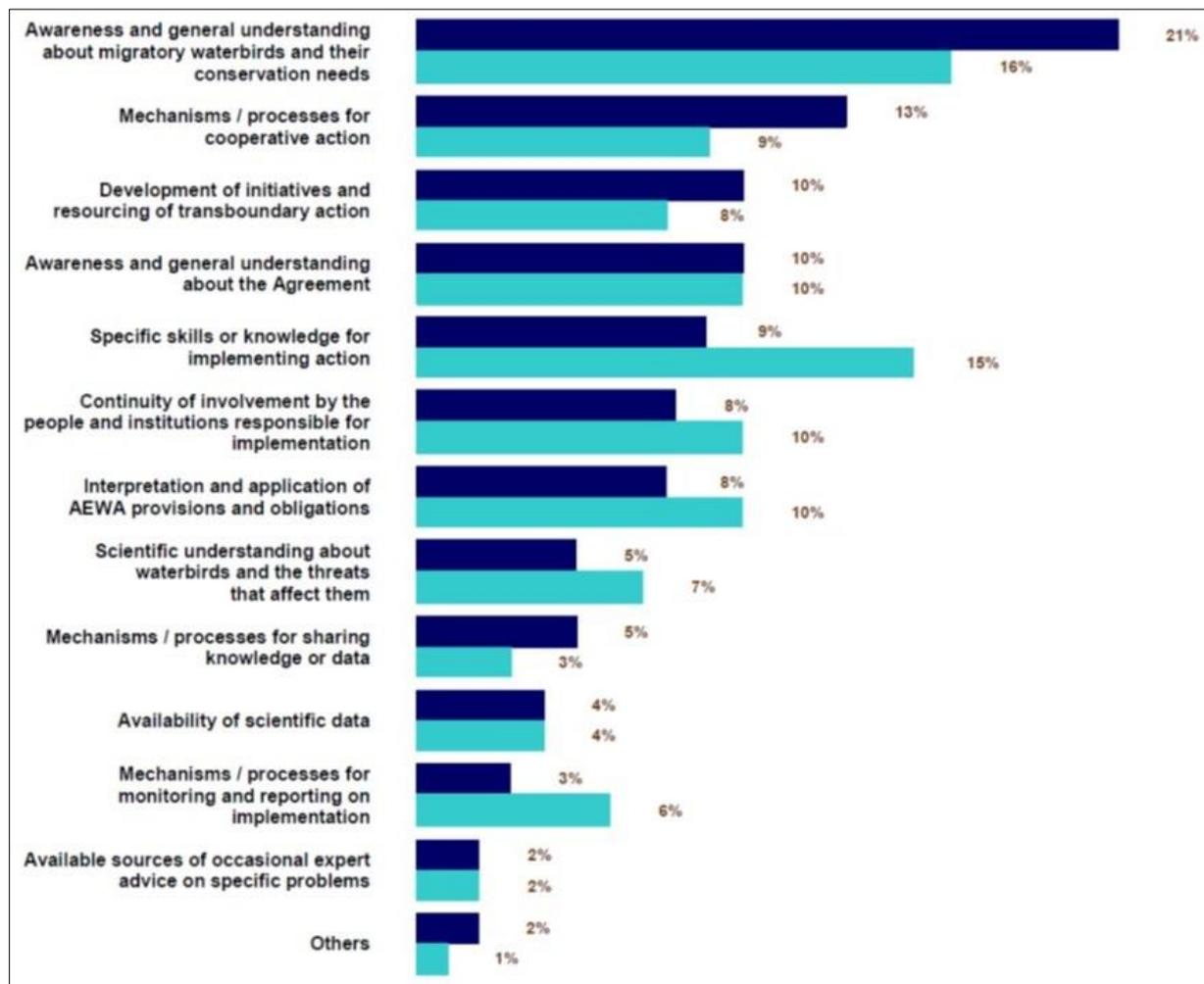
Survey respondents were asked to give their opinion on **the areas in which capacity is weakest (at international level) for helping to implement AEWA**, by choosing a maximum of three issues from a list provided in the questionnaire and ranking them in order of priority.

“Availability of funds” was deliberately excluded from the list, because it can more or less be assumed to be a concern in most places and choosing it as a response would “use up” a “vote” that could be deployed instead to give more valuable insights on other issues (understanding of course that finance may be an underlying factor in some of those). As mentioned earlier above, matters of finance are anyway outside the scope of the present exercise. A category of “other” was also offered to record anything important falling outside the list, and those choosing this as one of their three priorities were asked to specify the issue(s) they wished to highlight.

The results of the priority selections and rankings are shown in Figure 2 below. The total score for each listed item was calculated by adding together the number of respondents who chose it as the top priority, multiplied by a “weighting” of 3; plus the number of respondents who chose it as the second priority, multiplied by 2; plus the number of respondents who chose it as a third priority, multiplied by 1. Some respondents followed the instruction to include any nomination of the field “other” as part of their three ranked priorities, but others treated it as additional - there was therefore no consistent way of scoring this field, and so any votes for it were simply scored “1” for each occurrence.

Since the numbers of respondents in the two categories (i.e. Parties and organisations/stakeholders) were different, in order to make the results comparable, the scores for each item were then converted into percentages of the total scores allocated by each respondent group for the list as a whole.

Figure 2: Areas of weakest international capacity for implementing AEWA



Key:

Parties: ■
 Organisations/stakeholders: ■

Total Parties responding = 23 (85% of the 27 responding to the questionnaire).

Total organisations/stakeholders responding = 41 (100% of the 41 responding to the questionnaire).

“Awareness and general understanding about migratory waterbirds and their conservation needs” was overall the most strongly cited international weakness in international capacity. “Scientific understanding” and availability of scientific data however were ranked among the least problematic issues, suggesting that the greatest gap lies with decision-makers and the wider public rather than the waterbird conservation world itself. Awareness about the Agreement itself was seen as less of a problem, although still an appreciable one.

Capacity for developing and operating mechanisms and initiatives for international cooperative action also featured strongly as an area of capacity weakness, among Parties in particular. The emphasis on action here is distinct from processes merely for sharing knowledge or data, which appear to be less of a concern, although not a trivial one.

Continuity of involvement by relevant people and institutions implementing the Agreement was fairly frequently cited as a weakness. Career mobility of staff is not something that can or should be resisted, but this finding suggests that processes such as succession planning and visible “audit trails” of commitments, action and guidance materials are perhaps not as good as they could be.

Overall, there was a degree of concordance between the views of Parties and those reported by organisations and stakeholders. The latter however had a particularly marked greater concern (their second highest scoring category of weakness) about specific skills or knowledge for implementing action, and the specifics of this

might usefully be investigated further in future. Organisations were also more concerned about *mechanisms for monitoring* than the Parties responding appeared to be.

Among the Parties, no particular trends of different priorities between regions were revealed by responses to this question; although the overall numbers responding are in any event too small to draw conclusions of this kind.

Two Parties and two other respondents made use of the “other issues” category, citing variously:

- Secretariat capacity to assist with species-specific workshops;
- advocacy in other international fora;
- understanding of the Agreement’s procedures (for example concerning deadlines for input to meetings); and
- general levels of interest among implementing institutions.

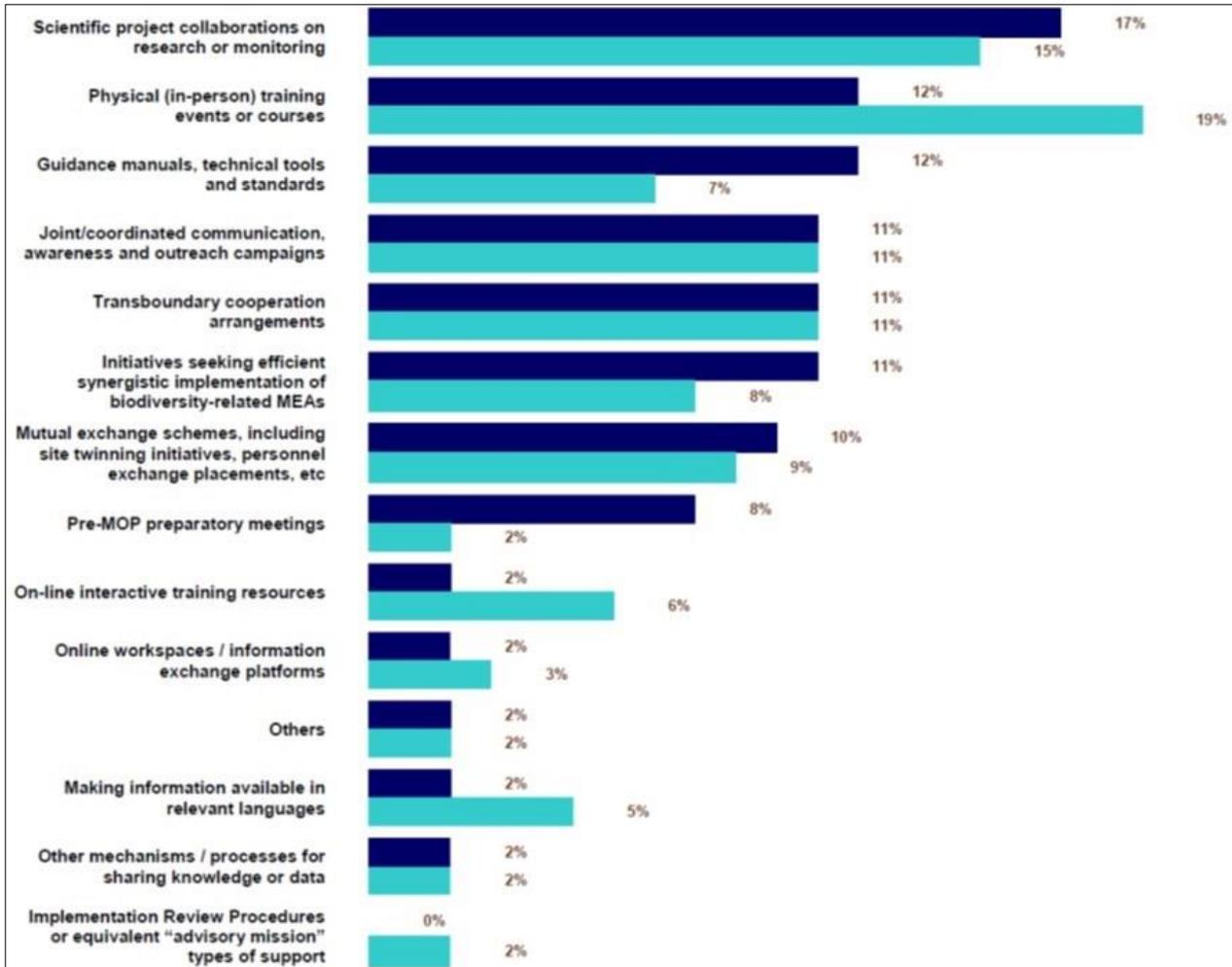
Respondents were then asked to **explain more specifically the problem(s) they had identified** in relation to the first question above, and finally to describe the particular **ways in which the problems they had identified were affecting the implementation of the Agreement**. Issues included in the responses to this (summarised and paraphrased here from the extensive texts provided) are listed in Table 1 below. In many cases the items in the second column are presented as a necessary interpretation of the “cause-effect” relationship that was being implied by respondents but not stated. Items marked with an asterisk (*) were identified or implied in a similar way in responses by both Parties and organisations/stakeholders.

➤ Options for strengthening international capacity, and efficient targeting

Survey respondents were asked to give their opinion on **the areas of international capacity strengthening support that are the most important to develop further in the period to 2027**, by choosing maximum of three issues from a list provided in the questionnaire and ranking them in order of priority. A category of “other” was also offered to record anything important falling outside the list. The items chosen by each respondent were intended to respond to the priority weaknesses they had identified in the preceding section of the questionnaire.

The results are shown in Figure 3 below. Scores were calculated in the same way as explained for Figure 2 above. A few of the organisation/stakeholder respondents nominated more than three items each or did not follow the ranking guidance, so these instances were adapted for incorporation in the analysis where possible on a case-by-case basis.

Figure 3: Priority actions for strengthening capacity, 2022-2027



Key:

Parties: ■
 Organisations/stakeholders: ■

Total Parties responding = 23 (85% of the 27 responding to the questionnaire).

Total organisations/stakeholders responding = 41 (100% of the 41 responding to the questionnaire).

Scientific project collaborations on research or monitoring was most important item cited by Parties, and it was the second highest item cited by organisations and stakeholders.

Structured *training* and *guidance materials* also scored high, with Parties seeing both of these as equally important, but organisations putting significantly more emphasis on in-person training courses and events. (Online training was a distinctly lower scoring item).

Awareness building, and *support for cooperation* between multilateral instruments and between countries (including e.g. by site twinning) were all ranked fairly highly.

Mechanisms for sharing information and data were rated as a relatively low priority. This may be surprising if it means that respondents do not feel it is important; but it is perhaps more likely that this instead simply reflects the indication from the preceding section of the survey that such mechanisms are not currently seen as a major area of capacity weakness. If that is a correct interpretation, in this sense it could be read as a positive finding.

No Party respondents nominated *Implementation Review Procedures/advisory missions* as a priority. Given the investment that these sometimes entail, the reasons for this result may be worth investigating further; but again, it is possible that this is simply a reflection of the lack of a need for *capacity support* in this area, rather

than a low value being put on the processes as such. (Occasional expert advice and monitoring of implementation ranked low also among the perceived weaknesses – see Figure 2 above).

On many issues there is a reasonable concordance between the rankings given by Parties and those given by organisations and stakeholders, although organisations gave significantly higher scores for the training-related items. One other exception is the greater priority given by Parties to *pre-MOP preparatory meetings* as a form of capacity support. This is perhaps to be expected, since Parties should gain more than organisations from assistance in preparing for formal matters of governance and negotiation. It is a useful finding, since there would need to be good confidence that the investment involved in holding such meetings is worthwhile.

Three Parties and six other respondents made use of the “other issues” category, although in some cases their comments related to one of the existing categories. Issues cited by the remainder included:

- “Institutional strengthening”;
- Support for preparation of funding bids;
- Secretariat support for working groups, and establishment of additional groups; and
- Streamlining of reporting requirements, including harmonisation with other MEAs (i.e. to free up capacity for other work);

Respondents were then asked to identify **the main opportunities that exist for improving the items chosen as priority actions** in the preceding question.

A majority of the answers to this question focused on repeating or amplifying ideas for recommended actions, or the hoped-for resulting benefits, rather than identifying opportunities; and some were not relevant to capacity. The more relevant answers are summarised and paraphrased in the first column of Table 2 below. (In some cases, the emphasis has been adapted to interpret the opportunity that appears to be implied). Items marked with an asterisk (*) were identified or implied in a similar way in responses by both Parties and organisations/stakeholders.

A further question asked about suggestions for **how AEWA capacity strengthening efforts should be most efficiently targeted to areas of greatest need**.

Total Parties responding = 20 (74% of the 27 responding to the questionnaire).

Total organisations/stakeholders responding = 40 (98% of the 41 responding to the questionnaire).

Although some respondents found this question difficult to address, answers from others were among their most incisive contributions to the survey. The main points that emerged are summarised and paraphrased (with some interpretation) in the second column of Table 2 below. Items marked with an asterisk (*) were suggested or implied in a similar way in responses by both Parties and organisations/stakeholders.

Table 2: Opportunities for strengthening international capacity, and efficient targeting

Opportunities identified	Ways of targeting the greatest needs
<i>SUGGESTED BY PARTIES</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parts of the EU’s new <i>NaturAfrica</i> initiative (supporting biodiversity conservation in Africa)¹ could be used to support AEWA implementation. • Measures under other Conventions can contribute to achieving AEWA objectives, and hence provide opportunities for shared capacity*. • Pre-MOP regional coordination meetings would be a vehicle for offering relevant opportunities*. • Transboundary cooperation agreements already exist in several countries and could support relevant cross-border cooperation initiatives. • Online methods can be a low-cost way of delivering training*. (This however was not rated highly among the priorities suggested by Parties – see Figure 3 above). • The enthusiasm of youth groups offers potential. • Scope for twinning/mentoring links between Parties. • Scope for more jointly conducted research initiatives between different universities. • Training courses can be organised with managers of relevant protected areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake country-by-country needs assessments. • Operate a strategic programme for capacity building. • Work through the AEWA African Initiative. • Use approaches that are a mix of bottom up (stakeholder interests and engagement) and top down (Secretariat/Technical Committee perspectives on priorities). • Make the purpose highly visible and be steered by broad engagement of stakeholders. • Focus training etc. on examples of “real life” problems rather than generic principles. • Target the most vulnerable/most important areas*. • Target the countries with weakest current implementation of/compliance with the Agreement. • Give emphasis to migratory soaring birds. • Link to areas of associated tangible human benefit, e.g. ecotourism. • Seed-funding to ensure activity goes to areas of greatest need rather than areas already well resourced. • Engage younger generations who can ensure continuity/legacy of impact*.
<i>SUGGESTED BY ORGANISATIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The FFEM/EU-funded project “<i>Strengthening expertise in sub-Saharan Africa on birds and their rational use for communities and their environment</i>” (RESSOURCE)² offers scope for developing training courses of relevance to waterbird conservation in Chad, Egypt, Mali, Senegal and Sudan. • The new post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework may provide a context/impetus for boosting relevant capacity strengthening activity. • Measures under other Conventions can contribute to achieving AEWA objectives and hence provide opportunities for shared capacity*. • Lesson-learning from the experience of other MEAs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide efforts with national strategies and action plans. • More analysis of the barriers to progress would help targeting. • Use AEWA Party national reports to identify priorities. • Feed back lessons from evaluation of previous efforts. • Target effort according to evidenced implementation gaps rather than the most popularly stated capacity desires. • Take a broad perspective from stakeholders on priorities, rather than relying (e.g.) only on official focal point views. • Consider the longevity of impact in selecting capacity building beneficiaries (e.g. likely career trajectory) and delivery methods (e.g.

¹ See <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/46d59486-093d-11ec-b5d3-01aa75ed71a1> .

² See <https://www.fao.org/publications/card/en/c/CA8998EN/> .

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings/workshops of other MEAs and other organisations can be used as opportunities for (joint) capacity building activities for AEWA. • Pre-MOP regional preparatory meetings could include more of a training component*. • Lesson-learning from the AEWA Implementation Review Process; using the IRP as a source of instructional case studies. 	<p>transferable guidance materials rather than personal encounters).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the needs of sectors other than nature conservation. • Work in partnership with others, to share the load and work to shared priorities. • Concentrate on the international/flyway level, to play to AEWA's strengths and to complement efforts by others at national and site-based levels. • Target the most vulnerable/most important areas*. • Focus on particular threats & pressures. • Engage younger generations who can ensure continuity/legacy of impact*.
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➤ Other suggestions

The final section of the survey offered respondents an opportunity to make **any other suggestions for improving capacity at international level** for the effective implementation of AEWA. The question mentioned that this could relate to either the short term or the longer term: it is presumed that the responses are a mixture in this respect, although most of them did not specify a timeframe.

Total Parties responding = 15 (56% of the 27 responding to the questionnaire).

Total organisations/stakeholders responding = 34 (83% of the 41 responding to the questionnaire).

Fewer respondents than in the other sections felt the need to add anything here, and several of those who did simply repeated points already made. The main additional or amplified ideas put forward are summarised and paraphrased (with some interpretation) below. Items marked with an asterisk (*) were suggested or implied in a similar way by both groups of respondents.

Suggested by Parties:

- Organise international knowledge and experience-sharing events/initiatives*. (Suggested by several respondents).
- Develop a country-by-country capacity building needs assessment.
- Develop a capacity building strategy/programme.
- Engage younger generations (e.g. students, early-career scientists), including through training, placement opportunities, etc.
- Give more attention to the capacity implications (e.g. reporting burdens) when drafting/adopting MOP decisions.
- Strive for even greater synergies with other MEAs*.

Suggested by organisations and stakeholders:

- Build regional and international networks of scientists, managers, communities, youth groups, etc. (Suggested by several respondents).
- Build the profile of capacity building, including by a programme of more regular training events.
- Analyse capacity development *results* at international level.
- Organise international knowledge & experience-sharing events/initiatives*.
- “Training of trainers” processes focused on specific flyways/ecosystem types; and organise capacity building in general according to flyways rather than regions.
- Use of case studies for training/lesson-learning purposes.
- Twinning/exchange visits between individual African countries and individual European ones.
- Deploy international teams to cover field survey and monitoring work in countries that have large areas to cover and/or limited capacity.
- Convert existing AEWA guidance materials into tools that are more directed to training purposes.
- Engage more inclusive collaborations between groups of stakeholders including different land use sectors, hunters, Indigenous peoples and local communities.
- Engage other sectors in supporting implementation through their own work.
- Enlist support from regional organisations such as the African Union, SADC, ECOWAS, etc.
- Engage scientists, NGOs and other stakeholders to supplement government efforts in e.g. implementation assessment and reporting (IKB Scoreboard cited as an example)³.
- Include adequate provision for coordination in projects relating to e.g. species action plans.
- Awards and incentive schemes.
- Strive for even greater synergies with other MEAs*.

Summary of Key Capacity Gaps at International Level Revealed by the Survey

The synthesis report above has distilled some thirty main issues from among the several hundred items cited by survey respondents as areas of current weakness or gaps in capacity at international level for implementing AEWA. These can perhaps be further summarised in terms of the following three fields of attention:

- a) Implementation of the Agreement is hampered by insufficient levels of general awareness and understanding about its requirements and the issues it addresses, and in places there is a lack of political will to give attention to this.**

The survey results indicate, for example, that:

- The greatest capacity gaps in this respect lie with decision-makers and the wider public rather than the waterbird conservation world itself - general awareness and political support are more of a problem than (for example) lack of scientific data.
- Understanding about the importance of conserving waterbirds and their habitats, and the “rationale for action” (including the contribution such action can make to achieving other public policy objectives and commitments), does not penetrate far beyond the conservation sector itself, meaning that there is weak support from other sectors that could contribute, and at the “whole of government” level.
- There is in any event also a significant capacity gap among those directly responsible for the Agreement. Many of them need greater knowledge and familiarity with AEWA’s provisions and processes, exposure to the range of relevant experience across the Agreement area, and greater confidence in applying the measures required. Even where there is dedicated in-country capacity, weakness at this flyway scale may mean that actions remain limited to narrow national priorities, rather than a shared international agenda.

³ See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/ikb-scoreboard-assessment-table> .

- b) There are significant weaknesses in the areas of governance and administration, and in relation to mechanisms for international cooperation.

The survey results indicate, for example, that:

- Individuals and institutions responsible for implementing the Agreement have frequent gaps in continuity, implying insufficient attention to succession planning when people move or when administrations are reorganised. This can cause gaps in delivery, and cost-inefficiencies as a result of lost “audit trails”, periodic re-starting of activity programmes and/or re-learning of skills.
- Species Action Plans and similar frameworks are inadequately implemented because of a lack of dedicated coordination capacity, and insufficient support for associated working groups, etc.
- AEWA’s overall capability for impact is restricted by the fact that many Range States are not yet Parties.
- Capacity for developing and operating initiatives for international cooperation is widely viewed as inadequate to meet the need. The emphasis here is on mechanisms for cooperative *action* - processes merely for sharing knowledge or data are less of a concern, although not a trivial one.
- Networking and connecting of waterbird specialists across different countries could nevertheless also be much improved. There are risks that waterbird conservation efforts across borders/between countries may be less coherent, coordinated, efficient and effective than they should be.
- Insufficient capacity for AEWA to engage in more joint work with other biodiversity-related Multilateral Environmental Agreements means that opportunities for efficient synergies and greater combined leverage are potentially being lost.

- c) Specific technical capacity weaknesses exist in relation to knowledge and skills, documenting and sharing scientific data, understanding waterbird movements, utilising existing guidance, and maintaining regimes for monitoring and reporting.

The survey results indicate, for example, that:

- There are significant gaps in scientific data on waterbirds and their conservation needs, with an implication that this may be particularly the case in Africa. Understanding remains limited concerning aspects of waterbird ecology and migration patterns more generally. Field research and monitoring cannot achieve the coverage that is necessary because of lack of human capacity and technical support. Policies, decisions and management choices may therefore not be being made on a basis of the best science.
- Skills in waterbird conservation, monitoring and data handling need greater development in many areas.
- Knowledge-sharing platforms and processes for scientific exchange would benefit from enhancement/expansion.
- There is limited awareness of the guidance resources available under the Agreement, which are therefore underutilised.

Towards Criteria / Indicators for Assessing Capacity / Improvements in Capacity

Objective 5 and Target 5.3 in the AEWA Strategic Plan define several capacity-related outcomes to be achieved by 2027, namely:

- (i) (To a level sufficient “for the Agreement to achieve its conservation objectives”),
- The *knowledge* required is *secured*.
 - The *knowledge* required is *strengthened*.

- The *capacity* required is *secured*.
- The *capacity* required is *strengthened*.
- The *recognition* required is *secured*.
- The *recognition* required is *strengthened*.
- The *awareness* required is *secured*.
- The *awareness* required is *strengthened*.
- The *resources* required are *secured*.
- The *resources* required are *strengthened*.

(ii) Initiatives are in place to address at least two-thirds of the priority capacity gaps restricting implementation of AEWAs.

Verification of the achievement of these outcome elements would in principle imply the need for a method of measurement for each of them. Leaving to one side the question of how feasible it might be, in theory this would include:

- (a) For (i), a definition of what constitutes “securing” of knowledge, capacity, recognition, awareness and resources in this context (potentially involving different definitions for each element).
- (b) For (i), methods of measuring levels of knowledge, capacity, recognition, awareness and resources that are capable of demonstrating a change in the “strength” of each of these.
- (c) For (ii), a list of the priority capacity gaps that are restricting implementation of the Agreement.
- (d) For (ii), a method of identifying relevant initiatives that are in place and are addressing the priority gaps listed in (c) above.

Clearly not all of these ingredients are in place at the present time, and some may prove conceptually or practically challenging to achieve. Consideration at international level of the resources required “for the Agreement to achieve its conservation objectives”, in the sense of financial resources, will form part of the context for the setting of budgets by the AEWAs MOP. Desired levels of recognition and awareness (if not necessarily “sufficient” levels) at international level might be expressed in the context of publicity campaigns and strategies for promotional use of the website and social media etc, and the results of this could be assessed by sample surveys.

One option for generating some assessment of progress in relation to Objective 5 of the Strategic Plan might be to consider running a future questionnaire survey as a repeat of the one reported here, following the same format, so that comparisons could be made between the respective time periods. This option however demands a significant investment of time and effort, both for the compilation of individual respondents’ submissions and for central analysis of the resulting dataset. Its “outcome”-oriented elements (increased knowledge and capacity), while important to discover, also inevitably take time to emerge as a consequence of the actions that produce them. As such, changes in those could only be assessed meaningfully after an appreciable interval of some years (longer for example than a single MOP triennium).

The existence or implementation of “initiatives” (see (ii) above) would be a reflection only of “inputs” or activities rather than actual capacity “outcomes” resulting from these; but it would be an inherently more straightforward dimension to measure than the “outcomes” dimension and would therefore perhaps be a preferable focus in terms of practicality.

If the most profitable way forward on this basis is to assess (ii) above (whether initiatives are in place to address at least two-thirds of the priority capacity gaps restricting implementation of AEWAs), a starting point for a list of “priority capacity gaps” has been provided by section 3 of the present report above. Whether “initiatives are in place” could be addressed at the national level by including a question in the National Report format for Parties to provide information to each MOP on any initiatives that have taken place in their country in the reporting period that were designed to address any of the issues that are currently identified as priority gaps in capacity for implementing the Agreement.

The question could provide a list of priority gaps as possibilities for this, derived from the three summary categories (summarising some 30 issues) given in section 3 above, as follows:

- *Insufficient levels of general awareness and understanding about the Agreement's requirements and the issues it addresses.*
- *Level of political will to give attention to the Agreement's requirements and the issues it addresses.*
- *Weaknesses in the areas of governance and administration.*
- *Weaknesses in relation to mechanisms for international cooperation.*
- *Specific technical capacity weaknesses in relation to knowledge and skills, documenting and sharing scientific data, understanding waterbird movements, and maintaining regimes for monitoring and reporting.*
- *Specific technical capacity weaknesses in relation to utilising existing guidance.*

Providing these categories as a list of six will support analysis according to the “two thirds” target in the Strategic Plan, which can be interpretable both at the national level and (aggregated) at the Agreement level. (The report format could offer to provide more explanation of these six “gap areas” in accompanying guidance).

Beyond recording relevant initiatives and activities, defining and measuring levels of resulting “knowledge” and “capacity” are more challenging areas to consider; as is gaining a picture of any of these elements at levels below the international level. There might nevertheless be scope to incorporate an element of this in Party national reports too, for example by requesting a simple form of “traffic light”-coded qualitative self-assessment of the perceived general status of these issues.

This same “traffic light” assessment approach could also be used for a further question asking about levels of available implementation capacity at national level. Aggregating the responses from geographically related countries could then be the basis of the “sub-regional traffic-light assessment of implementation capacity” which is one of the indicators defined for Target 5.3 in the AEWA Strategic Plan.

A further National Report question could ask whether a national assessment of capacity needs has been undertaken and priorities for filling gaps have been set (and whether they differ from the international ones defined above). Responses to this would inform the additional indicator defined for Target 5.3 as “Number of Contracting Parties that have identified and prioritised capacity gaps for implementation of the Agreement”. If a second part of the question, then asked what these priorities are, this would inform a “needs” dimension of the sub-regional assessment mentioned above.

Recommendations

The following eight recommendations arise from the findings in this report:

Recommendation 1: *The Parties*, in fulfilment of AEWA Strategic Plan Action 5.3 (c), to cooperate in launching initiatives at regional level, particularly in Africa, to address the implementation capacity priorities and suggestions identified in this report, linking to the African Initiative, including a “younger generations” component, and including provision for actions to be further informed by undertaking country-by-country needs assessments.

Recommendation 2: *The Parties*, in fulfilment of AEWA Strategic Plan Action 5.3 (e), to undertake national assessments of capacity needs for implementing the Agreement, develop action plans to address significant identified capacity gaps, and put these plans into operation.

Recommendation 3: *The Secretariat, together with the Technical Committee and partner organisations*, to make good use of the raw data collated from the 2021 capacity survey as appropriate when considering the support or other inputs they can offer to capacity-strengthening efforts at international, regional or flyway level.

Recommendation 4: *The Secretariat, assisted by Parties, partner organisations and other stakeholders, and subject to receiving financial support for this purpose, to compile a simple portfolio of project concepts or other initiatives that address the capacity gaps and needs identified in this report, to be maintained and/or updated as appropriate on an ongoing basis, and which will serve as a tool to assist in seeking external financial and other resources/ support for improving capacity for implementation of the Agreement, in the African region in particular.*

Recommendation 5: *The Meeting of Parties to make provision in the core budget for holding regional or sub-regional preparatory meetings prior to each MOP, catering in particular for African Range States, and for these meetings to include an enhanced capacity-building component that targets priority needs identified by the Parties concerned.*

Recommendation 6: *AEWA National Focal Points in the European Union to cooperate with African National Focal Points, partner organisations and other stakeholders to explore opportunities for incorporating aspects of AEWA implementation capacity support in relevant existing projects and programmes in Africa, including the EU-funded *NaturAfrica* initiative and the FFEM/EU-funded *RESSOURCE* sub-Saharan Africa project.*

Recommendation 7: *The Technical Committee to review the questions in the current format for National Reports on the implementation of AEWA that address priority capacity gaps and capacity needs; to propose potential enhancements of those questions to generate information that will specifically address the international priorities identified in the present report, including information on initiatives that are addressing these priorities, as well as information on national-level assessments of gaps and needs; and to consider options for a simple form of “traffic light”-coded qualitative self-assessment by Parties of perceived general levels of relevant knowledge and capacity.*

Recommendation 8: *Parties to establish procedures for ensuring continuity of succession and transfer of knowledge and skills, in the event of changes in personnel responsible for AEWA implementation at national level.*

Annex - List of Respondents

AEWA Parties (27)

Africa (15):

· Algeria	· Mauritania
· Botswana	· Morocco
· Burundi	· Niger
· Chad	· Nigeria
· Côte d'Ivoire	· South Africa
· Ethiopia	· Tanzania
· Gambia	· Togo
· Ghana	

Europe (11):

· Belgium	· Italy
· Cyprus	· Netherlands
· European Union	· North Macedonia
· France	· Switzerland
· Georgia	· Ukraine
· Germany	

Asia: (1)

· Lebanon

Non-Party Range States (0)

(None).

Organisations and other stakeholders (41)

(Note: Respondents here included individuals responding in their own right, individual members of the Standing Committee and Technical Committee, representatives of organisations, and organisation members of the Technical Committee. In a number of cases a given respondent fulfilled more than one of these roles simultaneously. Some roles/organisations are specific to a given country or region, while others are more international in nature. For these reasons, this list has not been divided into categories or regions. The affiliations/roles listed below are as identified by the respondents).

· Vitalie Ajder	· Society for Bird and Nature Protection, Moldova
· Czajkowski Alexandre	· OMPO, and Technical Committee member
· Mohamed elmekki Ali Elbadawi hussien	· University of Sinnar, Sudan
· Imad Atrash	· Palestine Wildlife Society
· Olivier Biber	· Chair of the CMS African-Eurasian Migratory Landbirds Working Group
· Joseph Bizimungu	· Association Burundaise pour la protection de la Nature
· Ruth Cromie	· Chair, AEWA Technical Committee
· Sébastien Dalloyau	· Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux, France
· Laura Dami	· Tour du Valat wetland conservation research institute
· Pierre Defos du Rau	· Technical Committee member
· Clémence Deschamps	· Technical Support Unit for the AEWA African initiative
· Yvette Diallo Aissatou	· Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Senegal

· Tim Dodman	· (Individual, UK)
· Togarasei Fakarayi	· BirdLife Zimbabwe
· Eric Fongoh	· International Centre for Environmental Education and Community Development, Cameroon
· Jaime García-Moreno	· BirdLife Netherlands
· Cy Griffin	· FACE
· Khady Gueye	· Technical Committee member
· Richard Hearn	· Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, and Technical Committee member
· Iben Hove Sorensen	· CIC, Technical Committee member, Greylag Goose Task Force coordinator and EGM IWG member
· Arif Jaber	· CMS Focal Point, Iraq
· Fred Johnson	· European Goose Management Platform Data Centre
· Emmanuel Kasimbazi	· Technical Committee member
· Bassima Khatib	· Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon
· Melissa Lewis	· BirdLife South Africa
· Paul Matiku	· Nature Kenya
· Haitham Mossad	· Nature Conservation Egypt
· Szabolcs Nagy	· Wetlands International, and Technical Committee member
· Dianah Nalwanga	· Nature Uganda
· Ally Nkwabi	· Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute
· Joseph Onoja and Mohammed Garba Boyi	· Nigerian Conservation Foundation
· Theunis Piersma	· Global Flyway Network
· Noé Pinto	· National Institute of Biodiversity and Conservation, Angola
· Tareq Qaneer	· BirdLife Jordan
· Mudhafar A. Salim	· (Iraq)
· Fabio Saporetti	· Gruppo Insubrico di Ornitologia
· Nermina Sarajlić	· Ornithological Society "Naše ptice", Bosnia Herzegovina
· Ivana Šarić Kapelj	· BirdLife Croatia
· Werner Schröder	· NABU
· Marco Šćiban	· BirdLife Serbia
· Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife	· Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife