BRIEF ON THE AFRICA REGIONAL CONSULTATION MEETING ON MARINE LITTER AND MICROPLASTICS HELD ON 7-8 SEPTEMBER

Due to a catastrophic effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, the fourth meeting of the Ad hoc Open-ended Expert Group (AHEG 4) initially scheduled in May 2020 was postponed. In light of this decision, and with a view to facilitate further progress and revision of the working documents ahead of the next expert group meeting, the UNEP Secretariat prepared, at the request of and in close consultation with the Bureau of the expert group, the scenario note with intersessional roadmap, and has organized virtual meetings and other activities.

Many countries of Africa region took part in the AHEG 3 (18-22 November 2019, held in Bangkok) and gained common understandings on issues, which are leading to greater engagement of the region in the intersessional work. This good momentum needed to be further strengthened and more countries must be encouraged to take part so that AHEG outcomes are of use and relevance to the region overall.
In light of the above, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (Kenya) and Kenya Mission to UNEP, as member of the Bureau of the AHEG as well as the representative of the Africa regional group, in collaboration with UNEP and regional office for Africa proposed to organize a virtual meeting of the AHEG for countries in Africa to:

1) Share information on the progress and ongoing work of the AHEG intersession work
2) Discuss possible regional coordination mechanisms and
3) Facilitate consultations of the Chair and Bureau with the regions.

The meeting was held on Monday 7th and Tuesday 8th September from 1pm to 5pm. The session had two co-chairs one from Kenya and Rwanda. The meeting was attended by;

- member states
- UNEP as AHEG global Secretariat
- UNEP Africa regional office
- Selected regional experts on marine litter and microplastics
- Major Groups and Stakeholders
- International organizations

More than half of the Africa countries were represented in the consultation meeting.

The meeting was opened by the acting chair of the AHEG bureau Mr. Satoru Iino from Japan who noted that African countries are making their own efforts, but no one country can solve the issue alone. This is a global challenge that requires global cooperation. He urged the region to cooperate and further address the issue more effectively.

The key topics discussed were:

1. Stocktaking of existing activities and action to reduce marine plastic litter and microplastics and inventory of technical and financial resources or mechanisms

Ms. Pahl (University of Plymouth) gave a slide presentation providing details of an online repository and an interactive dashboard developed by Akvo to enable access to the stocktake of global actions to reduce the flow of marine plastic and microplastic to the ocean: the online repository has an open-access interface, enabling users to gain access to source documents and additional information and it also contains customized filters, which make it possible to search for actions on a number of topics

Mr. Vrancken (Flemish Institute for Technological Research) delivered a slide presentation of findings with regard to the technical and financial resources and mechanisms available for supporting countries to address marine plastic litter and microplastics. The key findings and identified opportunities with regard to technical resources included:

- reviewed 138 technical resources and mechanisms, 25% of which were state of knowledge reports/policy recomms, 7% showcased best practices, 4% training materials, 11% calculation tools to quantify marine litter
- Identified need for detailed data on trajectory of plastic waste (from generation to disposal in marine enviro), role of littering, controlled dumping, release from disposal sites, and fate of plastics in lakes and rivers

Based on research, several actions have been identified for consideration, including:

- increase focus on leveraging public funding to create pipeline of bankable projects for private investment (blended finance can increase private investment by making less risky for private investors)
- reverse perverse incentives allowing new plastic to remain a cheaper source of raw material compared to recycled plastic
- foster more inclusive financing, little funding was found for community-based orgs and indigenous communities or with an explicit gender focus

- increase $ resources for strategic initiatives to remove most damaging plastic types from economy and bring about a circular approach for others
- need for long-term $ resources to target other phases of the plastic lifecycle, not just one, which is of course also important
- address funding gaps in certain sectors, Inc. textiles and agriculture

Some of the key challenges at the regional level:

- Problems viewed as political in nature are accorded higher priority - perhaps there is need to establish a link between the problem of marine plastic litter and political issues.
- Funding - need a vast amount of money. This is simply not available in many African countries.
- Technology – most African countries do not have the technology to address this problem.
- Knowledge and skills - we still lack knowledge of these issues.
- Illegal trade - there is a lot of such trade in Africa.
- Low enforcement of national legislation. One country passed a plastics law in 2011 that is still not operational.
- In many countries, marine plastic litter is not covered by environmental legislation, which thus needs to be reviewed.
- Plastic is the only material available for many people; there is no other option.

A lot of countries have similar problems. Geographical, political and socioeconomic conditions. It is therefore important to see how we can involve sub regional organizations that are present. For instance, in West Africa, they have the Abidjan Convention. In the southern part, they have the Nairobi Convention. These conventions can be an opportunity to support our countries and bring everyone together so that the mechanism set up is functional and there is better synergy. Partnerships may be important in facilitating the implementation of mechanisms.

There are many varieties of plastic polymers. Some of them are not recyclable, so we have the issue of life cycle. We are mainly presented with plastic polymers that are not recyclable. When Kenya banned plastic bags, we faced the challenge of finding alternatives.

2. Methodology for analysis of the effectiveness of potential and existing response options and activities

Ms. Raubenheimer (UNEP) delivered a slide presentation on analyzing the effectiveness of response options pursuant to UNEA resolution 4/6, paragraph 7 (d), in which she noted that:

- UNEP had developed a framework to measure the effectiveness of different response options
- the response options included existing activities (e.g. regional marine litter action plans) and hypothetical ones (e.g. a new international framework)
- at the national level, States might have implemented some actions, but after seeing the relationship with other actions, they may seek to extend activities
- two complementary approaches had been used to gauge the effectiveness of each response option: a bowtie analysis and an analysis of indicators developed in consultation with Member States, the Scientific Advisory Committee and major groups and stakeholders
- The two approaches had been applied to three pilots, concerning (1) regional marine litter action plans, (2) microplastics and (3) a potential new international framework.

Also important to consider land-based plastic waste as it is the source of marine litter. The topic seemed to be complex for many and it was not discussed much by the group probably due to many scientific terms that were used.

3. Response options

Ms. Zhu (UNEP) gave a slide presentation on the submissions provided by Member States and other stakeholders on potential response options, noting that:

- 14 submissions from Member States and specialized agencies, and 6 submissions from major groups and stakeholders had been received, all of which were available on the UNEP website
- The secretariat has tried to capture the key elements of those submissions, which included the following components:
- management across life cycle: life-cycle approach, producer responsibility, sustainable production and consumption (upstream), environmentally sound waste management (downstream)
- Coordination and cooperation: international coordination and cooperation, building on existing efforts, multi-stakeholder engagement (including industry)

- Scientific and technological knowledge: science-based action and strengthening scientific and technological knowledge.
- means of implementation: resource mobilization, capacity building, development/implementation of national action plans
- nature of actions recommended: global framework agreement, many support a legally binding instrument; others support voluntary measures

Mr. Iino (acting Chair of AHEG Bureau) shared a summary of a technical meeting on potential response options submitted by Member States that took place in July 2020. Some 10 member states and stakeholders made presentations on their proposed response options.

Two presentations were also made on global response options by WWF-Norway and Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA)) on potential response options on behalf of EIA, the Center for International Environmental Law and the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives

Mr. Sekomo Birame co-chair (University of Rwanda) gave a presentation outlining the African Group's submission on potential response options to combat marine plastic litter and microplastics, in which he noted that:

- marine litter and microplastics have serious economic, ecological and social consequences and risk derailing the African region's progress towards a sustainable development future
- at the seventeenth AMCEN, held in November 2019, African States committed to supporting global action to tackle plastic pollution, which included reinforcing existing agreements and the option of a new global agreement
- regional action to tackle plastic pollution included legislation prohibiting plastic bags; challenges included the influx of plastics from other regions, inadequate enforcement, the loss of jobs and the lack of a dedicated and coherent international framework
- plastic pollution was a transboundary issue requiring a global response, such as a global governance agreement containing:
    - shared vision: could be built on the zero-vision agreed in UNEA resolution 3/7
    - reduction targets: clear, measurable and time-bound targets translated into national reduction targets in an equitable manner

- national action plans: planning tools for achieving the national reduction targets and for adapting policy and other measures to the local and national context
- monitoring and reporting: agreed national and international measurements and reporting to measure progress on the circular economy and on eliminating leakage
- scientific body: established with a mandate to track the extent of the problem and collect knowledge to aid decision-making
- Implementation support: a system to support States in achieving their reduction targets, to include a financial mechanisms and technology and knowledge transfer
- Common rules and regulations: common calculation methods, definitions and standards as well as a platform for regulatory measures applicable to all states, especially on plastic products most prone to leakage.

The idea of drafting a new international legally binding instrument was discussed by the participants and some countries and major groups spoke of the need of a legally binding agreement, however, a participant from the major group felt that it is not necessary given that other instruments exist and are not implemented.

Some participants emphasized that Marine litter generally, and plastic waste in particular, is a global problem. Many countries are linked by the oceans, and waste can be found anywhere. The measures being taken at the international level need to strengthen national measures, for which we need a global instrument. There are already laws, but there is no harmonization, even at the regional level. A global framework is thus essential, as problems linked to plastic litter are becoming a headache for all. All international organizations are dealing with this issue individually and specific measures are required in order to provide a concrete response.

WAYFORWARD

The 4th AHEG meetings scheduled for 9-13th November will take place from 1 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. and the availability of time slots before and after for delegations to meet and coordinate. Once the Bureau has approved the agenda on 23 September, secretariat foresee two virtual preparatory meetings. The first, on 24 September, will be a two-hour meeting. The second, in mid-October, will be a simulation of the AHEG meeting, with interpretation into all six languages. This

will enable the secretariat to identify any technical challenges that delegations, regions and countries may have and to provide any necessary support.

According to the list of participants, quite a lot of countries registered; participation was low by comparison. We have had reports of problems receiving the link and password.

A coordination meeting for the region will be held the week of 26 October tentatively. More specific details will be communicated nearer the time.

Ms. Carvalho (UNEP) made closing remarks and noted that it is very important to ensure that regional issues are fed into the efforts on marine plastic litter ahead of AHEG-4 and UNEA-5. She assured the meeting that the regions contributions will be taken into account and looked forward to the regions continued engagement in the process.

KENYA MISSION TO UNON & UNEP
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