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International environmental policy and governance issues

Progress in the implementation of resolution 6/3 on enhancing the role and viability of regional forums of ministers of the environment and United Nations Environment Programme regional offices in achieving multilateral cooperation in tackling environmental challenges

Report of the Executive Director

I. Introduction

1. The present report provides an update on progress in the implementation of resolution 6/3 of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on enhancing the role and viability of regional forums of environment ministers and UNEP regional offices in achieving multilateral cooperation in tackling environmental challenges. In paragraph 5 of the resolution, the Assembly requested the Executive Director of UNEP, subject to the availability of resources, to produce a report on the role and viability of the regional forums of ministers of the environment and environment authorities as catalytic platforms for international cooperation in tackling prevalent environmental challenges; to consult key partners and stakeholders, where relevant, in the preparation of the report; and to prepare a summary of the findings for consideration by the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment Programme and by the Assembly at its seventh session.

II. Progress in the implementation of resolution 6/3

2. UNEP allocated resources from the Environment Fund to respond to the above-mentioned requests and commissioned a report on the role and viability of the regional forums of ministers of the environment and environment authorities as catalytic platforms for international cooperation in tackling prevalent environmental challenges.

3. A consultant was engaged in January 2025 to conduct a desk review of documentation available on the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, the Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific and the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition, she conducted a series of interviews with relevant stakeholders, including representatives of chairs and former chairs of the regional forums, national

* UNEP/EA.7/1.

focal points for the forums, representatives of major groups and stakeholders, and relevant UNEP staff members.

4. A comprehensive analysis of the role of regional forums of ministers of the environment and environment authorities has been issued as an information document.¹ For each of the three forums, the report provides an overview of mandates, history, governance structure, types of contributions, types of formal outcomes from sessions, existing monitoring and reporting mechanisms, modes of engagement of major groups and stakeholders, and resource mobilization approaches.
5. The report contains a comparative analysis of the regional forums based on the information presented above and lists key success stories illustrating how the forums have contributed to tackling environmental challenges and to the implementation of the UNEP medium-term strategy and programme of work. The report also presents the challenges and opportunities associated with enhancing the role and viability of the forums.
6. The report highlights that each regional forum was established at a different time and operates under a distinct governance structure, with varying regional priorities, funding sources and contributions to environmental sustainability. Despite those differences, all forums serve as platforms for high-level political dialogue and the promotion and implementation of regional collaboration. They share common functions, including capacity-building, technical assistance, support for policy development, engagement with major groups and stakeholders, and facilitation of participation in negotiations and in the implementation of mandates related to the Environment Assembly and various multilateral environmental agreements.
7. The report highlights several regional success stories. In Africa, notable achievements include the Action Plan for the Environment Initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, the Amended Nairobi Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Western Indian Ocean, the revitalization of the Convention for Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West, Central and Southern Africa Region (Abidjan Convention), the launch of the African Green Stimulus Programme and the production of the *Africa Environment Outlook* reports. In the Asia-Pacific region, key successes include the promotion of renewable energy and sustainable finance, strengthened resilience and disaster preparedness through ecosystem-based adaptation and early warning systems, cross-sectoral efforts to address pollution and its health impacts, and enhanced regional cooperation in transboundary e-waste management and ocean governance. In Latin America and the Caribbean, achievements include the development of the *Common Framework of Sustainable Finance Taxonomies for Latin America and the Caribbean*, the establishment of 13 working groups addressing specific environmental challenges, the adoption of a regional action plan for ecosystem restoration, and support for the implementation of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement).
8. The report outlines how these and other regional activities align with, and actively contribute to, the implementation of the UNEP medium-term strategy and programme of work. It provides concrete examples demonstrating how the activities support specific pillars of the medium-term strategy across the three regions.
9. The report also highlights that the three regional forums have facilitated multiple interactions with high-level representatives of various multilateral environmental agreements, helping to ensure that their respective regions are well prepared for negotiations. Such interactions enhance regional contributions to decision-making under global multilateral environmental agreements and support the advancement of the global environmental agenda.
10. Key common challenges identified across the forums include funding constraints that limit the implementation of decisions and support for working groups; gaps between ministerial decisions and their implementation on the ground; limited capacity within forum secretariats, often characterized by small teams and a lack of dedicated staff resources; weak links to the Environment Assembly planning process; and insufficient stakeholder engagement.
11. The most significant opportunities include translating political commitments into tangible actions and impactful projects; strengthening formal connections with the Environment Assembly; enhancing resource mobilization through strategic partnerships; building the capacity of dedicated secretariats; increasing the engagement of major groups and stakeholders; fostering cross-regional collaboration; and organizing more regular meetings of focal points.

¹ UNEP/EA.7/INF/8.

12. In conclusion, the report affirms that the three regional forums are essential platforms for regional environmental governance. Each plays a unique role in advancing the environmental dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals and in contributing to work under global environmental frameworks, including multilateral environmental agreements, the UNEP medium-term strategy and programme of work, and the Environment Assembly. While they face shared challenges, the report emphasizes that addressing them – through political commitment, sustained funding and inclusive stakeholder engagement – is key to strengthening their impact and long-term viability.

III. Lessons learned

13. The contribution of the three regional forums to advancing environmental sustainability in the African, Asia-Pacific and Latin American and Caribbean regions was consistently recognized by all interviewees. The platforms have proved essential for facilitating political dialogue, strengthening regional cooperation and supporting the implementation of global environmental commitments at the regional and national levels. Their ability to bring together diverse stakeholders, from governments and civil society to academia and the private sector, has enhanced the legitimacy and inclusiveness of regional environmental governance.

14. While each regional forum operates in a unique context and with different governance models, thematic priorities and resource levels, there are valuable opportunities for cross-regional exchange and mutual learning. The three UNEP regional offices could benefit from more structured mechanisms for sharing best practices, challenges and innovations in forum design, stakeholder engagement and policy influence. For example, lessons from successful initiatives such as the working group model used in the Latin American and Caribbean region or the approach to aligning regional programmes with continental frameworks in Africa could inform and inspire similar efforts in other regions.

15. Coordination and collaboration between the regional offices could also help in identifying synergies, avoiding duplication and strengthening the overall coherence of UNEP regional programming. Regular dialogue between the forums can enhance understanding of what works in different contexts, facilitate the replication of successful models and support the adaptation of approaches to suit specific regional needs.

16. Lastly, the report underscores the importance of documenting and institutionalizing lessons learned from each forum's processes and outcomes. That includes not only successes, but also areas in which progress has been slower, in order to better inform future planning. Systematic knowledge-sharing and peer learning across the regions can be a powerful tool for building capacity and increasing the strategic impact of the regional forums.

IV. Recommendations and suggested actions

17. The Environment Assembly may wish to:

(a) Take note of the report on the implementation of United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 6/3, which provides insights into the achievements, challenges and strategic relevance of the regional forums in advancing environmental sustainability;

(b) Provide strategic guidance on measures to strengthen the substantive contribution of the regional forums to the implementation of the UNEP medium-term strategy and programme of work, including enhanced alignment with global priorities, more integrated programming and improved mechanisms for follow-up and impact assessment;

(c) Encourage and invite governments, the private sector, foundations and other relevant organizations to provide financial and in-kind support for the regional forums through voluntary contributions.

18. Such support is necessary for sustaining the forums' operations, expanding their outreach and effectiveness and enabling the implementation of decisions and recommendations at the regional level.