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International environmental policy and governance issues

Progress in the implementation of resolution 6/1 on circularity of a resilient, low-carbon sugar cane agro-industry

Report of the Executive Director

I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 4 of resolution 6/1 on circularity of a resilient, low-carbon sugar cane agro-industry, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) requested the Executive Director of UNEP, in consultation with Member States, members of specialized agencies and relevant stakeholders, in particular the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), subject to the availability of resources, to continue to collect information and conduct further analysis on circular economy approaches in the agro-industry of sugar cane, among other crops.
2. In paragraph 5 of the resolution, the Environment Assembly requested the Executive Director to report to the Assembly at its seventh session on the implementation of the resolution.
3. The present report provides an update on progress made in the implementation of resolution 6/1 with regard to the request in paragraph 4.

II. Progress in the implementation of resolution 6/1

4. In accordance with the request in paragraph 4 of resolution 6/1, UNEP prepared an implementation plan that provided for the convening of a circularity expert group and the development of a report analysing or identifying key hotspots for sustainability in the value chain for sugar cane and other crops. The implementation plan was revised between July and December 2024, owing to insufficient extrabudgetary financial resources. Instead of the previously envisaged expert group and report, the new plan included a proposal for UNEP to run a series of webinars and build a repository of resources and case studies related to circular economy approaches in the agro-industry of sugar cane, among other crops.

* UNEP/EA.7/1.

A. Fostering discussion on advancing circular, regenerative and bioeconomy approaches in the industry of sugar cane, among other crops

5. Following the revision of the implementation plan, the 10YFP secretariat, hosted by UNEP, organized a series of webinars on advancing the transition to a pollution-free agrifood industry through circular, regenerative and bioeconomy approaches, in collaboration with the UNEP International Ecosystem Management Partnership and the Financing Agrochemical Reduction and Management (FARM) Programme of the Global Environment Facility. The webinars made it possible to share knowledge and practical examples on how circular, regenerative and bioeconomy approaches can be applied in the agrifood industry. Those discussions were hosted on Green Growth Knowledge Partnership platforms and gave visibility to the following approaches: advancing sustainable consumption, reducing the use of harmful agrochemicals and pesticides, strengthening community-led value chains, using gender-disaggregated data for agrifood systems, and promoting the efficient and circular use of biological resources. The series also emphasized the importance of an inclusive and just transition that prioritizes social equity and inclusion with a view to ensuring that no one is left behind in the shift towards circularity.

6. Three webinars were held, on the following topics:

(a) *Advancing circular, regenerative and bioeconomy approaches in agricultural value chains*. The webinar was held on 6 May 2025 and attended by 52 participants. Speakers included representatives from the UNEP Ecosystems Division and experts from academia and the agrifood sector;¹

(b) *Unlocking sustainability in the sugar cane value chain: circular and regenerative pathways*. The webinar was held on 3 June 2025 and attended by 54 participants. Speakers included national experts from Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and France and were identified with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil and the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment of Cuba;²

(c) *Tackling agricultural plastics for a circular future*. The webinar was held on 17 June 2025 and attended by 123 participants. Speakers included experts from FAO and academia.³

7. Key insights from the discussions include the following:

(a) A transition to sustainable agrifood production, including in the sugar cane value chain, requires a science-based policy approach supported by research tailored to local contexts. Methodologies such as life cycle assessments can help in evaluating trade-offs and in preventing negative environmental and social impacts when transitioning to circularity and bioeconomy.

(b) Increasing global demand for food crops, including sugar cane and other crops, makes it essential to ensure the sustainable development of the sector, in particular given the carbon footprint of production, the rising costs of labour and energy, the increasing use of fertilizers and the challenge of maintaining crop yields amid increasingly volatile climatic conditions.

(c) Applying a gender lens in circular agriculture is crucial to ensuring equitable participation in the design and implementation of circular food systems, equitable sharing of benefits, and that no one is left behind, especially women, Indigenous groups and young people. If gender and vulnerable groups are not considered, circular solutions risk reinforcing existing inequalities, thus limiting the effectiveness and sustainability of those solutions.

(d) Shifting to a circular global food system requires coordinated action by all actors along the value chain, including producers, transporters, retailers, food service providers and consumers (including governments, businesses and individuals).

B. Facilitating sharing of knowledge regarding the application of circular economy approaches in the sugar cane industry, among other crops

8. The 10YFP secretariat invited Member States and sector experts to submit case studies on the application of circular economy approaches in the agro-industry of sugar cane and other crops with

¹ A recording of the first webinar is available at https://youtu.be/_x7r4xZTGzU.

² A recording of the second webinar is available at <https://youtu.be/80DVE1aO9Jc>.

³ A recording of the third webinar is available at <https://thegreenforum.org/post/tackling-agricultural-plastics-circular-future-webinar-slides-and-recording-thank-you-all>.

high environmental impact and built a knowledge resource repository to store information on relevant initiatives and case studies.

9. Until the seventh session of the Environment Assembly, the 10YFP secretariat will continue to collect information on relevant initiatives and case studies to facilitate knowledge-sharing on the topic of circularity in the agrifood industry.

C. Broader activities of the United Nations Environment Programme to advance circularity in the agrifood industry

10. Since the adoption of resolution 6/1, UNEP has carried out the following activities that have contributed indirectly to the implementation of the resolution:

(a) A United Nations country team starter pack on sustainable food systems was developed with a view to sharing knowledge with country team focal points on the need to transition to more circular, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems in order to advance environmental agendas and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

(b) Circular food systems were integrated as a core work area in the recently approved UNEP sustainable food systems project on accelerating the transition towards sustainable food systems and in the “One UNEP” strategy for sustainable food systems. Activities focusing on sugar cane and other high-impact crops have been included in the approved project document, and a resource mobilization strategy has also been defined for the project.

(c) UNEP hosted a plenary session on advancing bioeconomy as an enabler of sustainable consumption and production at the One Planet network forum, held in Brazil in September 2024. The session highlighted the importance of the value chains for sugar cane and other agricultural products for achieving environmental protection alongside economic growth and social well-being in the region, and how bioeconomy could accelerate innovation and progress towards greater resource efficiency, social equality and market competitiveness.

(d) Through the United Nations Development Account project entitled “Strengthening policies and capacities for green jobs for youth”, Cuba was identified as one of the beneficiary countries, which led to the inclusion of a dedicated focus on the sugar cane value chain.

III. Lessons learned

11. The lessons learned in the implementation of resolution 6/1 include the following:

(a) Mobilizing technical expertise to implement activities mandated by resolutions requires substantial financial resources. UNEP allocated \$37,000 from the Environment Fund to support the implementation of resolution 6/1, as well as in-kind contributions in the form of staff time. As additional resources were not secured for the implementation of activities under the resolution, the original implementation plan was revised to narrow the scope of activities.

(b) With regard to the submission of case studies, greater engagement from Member States is necessary. The collection of case studies continues, but there has been limited interest among Member States in submitting relevant resources.

IV. Recommendations and suggested actions

12. The Environment Assembly may wish to:

(a) Invite Member States and relevant stakeholders to continue to submit case studies to the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns in order to continue to build a repository of resources on the topic of applying circular approaches in the agro-industry of sugar cane, among other crops;

(b) Invite Member States to dedicate resources to the analysis of environmental impacts of the agrifood industry in relation to high-impact crops, using methodologies such as life cycle assessments and the evaluation of payments for ecosystem services, in order to evaluate appropriate policy interventions to incentivize the sector to move towards more sustainable practices.