UNITED
NATIONS

EP

UNEP(Economy Division)
/Hg/PAG.9/6

Distr.: Limited
22 March 2019

English only

United Nations
Environment
Programme

UN Environment Global Mercury Partnership
Partnership Advisory Group, Ninth Meeting
Geneva, Switzerland, 18 November 2018

Report of the Ninth Meeting of the Global Mercury Partnership Advisory Group

1. Opening of the meeting

1. The ninth meeting of the Global Mercury Partnership Advisory Group (PAG) was held at the Centre Internationale de Conférence, Geneva, Switzerland, on Sunday 18 November 2018. The meeting was opened at 2 p.m. by Ms. Jacqueline Alvarez, Chemicals and Health Branch, UN Environment.

2. Speaking on behalf of Mr Jacob Duer, Director of the Chemicals and Health Branch that hosts the partnership, she drew attention to the partnership's more than 180 members. She said the partnership was working on all major aspects of mercury pollution and had gathered together a wealth of relevant information. The PAG had been instrumental in the success of the partnership having lead efforts for so many years, including working with more than 20 countries to develop National Action Plans on Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining. Yet, there was more work, and the momentum should be maintained to ensure the partnership's continued success.

3. The chair of the PAG, Ms. Marianne Bailey, welcomed the participants to the 9th meeting, in particular the leads and nominees for the different sectors. She noted that the first Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention had taken place a year previously and had been a cause for celebration given the hard work the partnership had undertaken in the run up to and during the negotiations. Much work had been done to advance implementation of the Convention but there was a need to keep working on reducing mercury pollution, to keep up the spirit and to discuss ways in which the partnership could evolve.

4. She noted that she had prepared a thought starter laying out the current structure and organization of the partnership and how to meet its objectives that could serve as a basis for discussions on how the partnership might evolve. The partnership would continue to have an active role in reducing mercury in the environment, and in networking and raising awareness on the issue.

2. Organizational matters

(a) Adoption of the agenda

5. The meeting agreed to adopt the agenda as set out in document UNEP (Economy Division)/Hg/PAG.9/1.

(b) Organization of work

6. The meeting agreed to conduct its business from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Sunday, 18 November 2018.

3. Update on activities

7. Introducing the agenda item, the chair drew attention to document PAG.9/3, Report on activities undertaken within the UN Environment Global Mercury Partnership (July 2017 – August 2018). She invited area leads to briefly describe highlights of their activities as well as to note any information that would constitute a basis for future work.

(a) Fate and transport

8. Mr. Nicola Pirrone, area co-lead for fate and transport, noted contributions to support the preparation of the Global Mercury Assessment report, mainly to chapters 4 and 7, levels in air and in biota. Several partners were working together to link the activities under fate and transport to other activities such as earth observation activities and also assisting in monitoring and assessment activities to help countries to implement the Minamata Convention. He noted that a workshop had been held on a UNEP/WHO pilot project to shape and test the Global Monitoring Plan for mercury regarding concentrations of mercury in ambient air and humans in several Central and Eastern European countries, which also fell within the framework of the network of the Global Observation System for Mercury (GOS4M).

9. Mr. David Evers, co-lead for the area, highlighted the contributions from many members of the fate and transport area to the chapter on biota, noting that it was the first time there had been such a chapter and praising the efforts of those members. Samples had been taken from human hair, fish and cosmetics through the mercury initial assessment project and with cooperation from the Zero-Mercury Working Group and IPEN. Most of the samples had been taken from countries in the Caribbean region and there was further interest in assisting the Basel Convention Regional Centre in that area to undertake additional mercury monitoring.

(b) Supply and storage

10. Ms. Ana Garcia Gonzalez, co-lead for supply and storage, spoke also on behalf of her co-lead, Ms. Judith Torres, who was unable to attend the PAG meeting. She recognized the ongoing fruitful collaboration between Spain and Uruguay. She mentioned a training workshop held in Montevideo, Uruguay with the support of the Centre for Simulation and Technological Innovation (CMAT Spain) for participants from 9 countries from Latin America. The workshop covered pollution and degradation of soil and technologies for recovery, soil sampling, a technical visit to a laboratory, ecological and risk assessment and environmental impact assessment as well as CMAT experience on mining areas. Training workshops were also held on managing

contaminated sites from dismantled chlor-alkali plants, a collaboration between Spain and Uruguay.

11. The partnership area produced a report from a chlor-alkali plant in Spain that has much experience and knowledge on dismantling of such plants and practical information on safe action and risk prevention. She provided information on her participation in a UNIDO workshop on stabilization and solidification.

12. She mentioned two potential supply sources that the Partnership might consider addressing: mercury supply as a by-product of non-ferrous mining and smelting and mercury from cleaning of natural gas. While the Convention recognizes atmospheric emissions from the first sector, there can be additional concerns related to mining waste and releases to soil and water, a source that was important to take into consideration. At a recent global transport meeting, an international society had highlighted the issue of mercury in natural gas and the potential for human health effects from mercury in the gas and when deposited in valves.

(c) Products

13. Mr. Thomas Groenenveld, lead for the products area, brought two projects to the attention of the meeting. The first was a country level survey on the WCO Harmonized System that was initiated to respond to an interest on globally coordinated trade codes. The survey was sent to governments present at the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention and 40 countries has already responded. While the codes were effective in tracking movement of goods, they did not allow to discern those containing mercury. It was noted that, given countries could add digits to the code, coordinating such additions could be a useful system to track mercury-containing products in commerce.

14. The second project, which ended in December 2017, provided countries with assistance in the implementation of the Convention and specifically to develop a product phase-out road map. Nigeria and Mauritius used guidance prepared by the Zero Mercury Waste Group and the European Environmental Bureau to develop such a road map and to identify gaps to be addressed.

15. He added that the US Environmental Protection Agency had put in place a regulation that would require those importing and manufacturing mercury, as well as those using it intentionally, to report to the USEPA. The purpose of this was to create a national inventory, through an electronic reporting application. This would be done every three years with the first expected in April 2020.

(d) Chlor-alkali

16. Mr. Rodges Ankrah, co-lead for the chlor-alkali area, stated that efforts were continuing to facilitate the move to non-mercury use for remaining chlor-alkali plants. The work was mainly being undertaken in South America, specifically Peru and Argentina, using financial tools and entities available and focusing on needs. There was discussion ongoing with GEF and the Inter-American Development Bank on their interest in facilitating this sector. UNIDO, as co-lead of the area, had been instrumental in furthering discussions on wastes from chlor-alkali and other facilities. The foremost success had been positive cooperation, bringing together governments and the private sector. He said that work was underway between USEPA and Japan to increase outreach. A clear focus was in place to work on the remaining facilities, while in the previous year there had been a *de facto* phase-out of the remaining facilities in Europe. Subsequently there would be a move to manage stocks from those facilities.

(e) Waste

17. Ms. Mai Kobayashi presented on behalf of the lead for the area. She highlighted the key activities under this sector including the convening of a core meeting in the margins of a UNIDO meeting, which had as its objective a review and evaluation of each activity; the development of an action plan based on current status; and a discussion on priority actions and future direction. The United States and Japan undertook a survey on technical requirements in Uruguay, identifying needs and challenges faced by a local producer and the government in order to finance and address the management and disposal of mercury waste.

18. In terms of future actions, she noted that it is important to encourage partners to share information as well as to encourage especially those from the private sector to be in the list of resource persons. Consideration was being given to developing a catalogue compiling technical information, for example with an overview of relevant information and a link to company websites. Opportunities for increased collaboration should be explored as well as how to address other efforts, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

(f) Artisanal and small-scale gold mining

19. Ms. Susan Keane, co-lead for the area, informed the meeting that there had been an acceleration in the work under this sector in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Much of the work had been spearheaded by UNIDO and UNEP in conjunction with the Minamata Convention. Hearing the needs of countries, tools, such as a baseline toolkit, had been developed that provided a concrete way and common methodology for mercury baselines and formulation activities.

20. A wide range of activities had taken place on technology transfer and available technology transferred from Brazil to Mozambique, focusing on mercury free technologies. The sector had expanded the range of subjects for which training was being provided also including business training for small-scale miners, gender-based training and health training. Linking between mercury and the gold supply chain, many international initiatives had taken place, for example on conflict minerals, improving traceability and trackability. New projects were underway on the links between the supply chains.

21. She noted that a few partners were working on supply and storage related to ASGM. A government funded project in Peru, and a similar one in Indonesia were examining what to do with unused mercury.

(g) Coal

22. Ms. Lesley Sloss, co-lead for the sector, noted that with funding from the European Commission and Canada projects in seven countries were now completed and details of each project area published on the Partnership web site. The purpose was to propose legislation fitting for the area. To increase financial resources, private partners were being sought. Mr. Peter Nelson, co-lead, added that work was underway with UNEP on a GEF project that combined mercury in coal activities with activities on the release of persistent organic pollutants in the sector.

(h) General discussion

23. In the ensuing discussion, participants discussed the possible need for increased attention to the issue of mercury in natural gas, noting new information from industry regarding technology developments and tracking systems. Participants noted recent relevant meetings where air pollution was receiving more attention, and the possibility therefore to reach all sectors and look for areas of collaboration and means to pool resources and to collect new data as well as to make mercury air emissions more visible to the broader global community, health practitioners and international scientific bodies. Other participants concurred, adding that multi-pollution control was crucial. Several other participants noted other potential new sources of mercury in the atmosphere, including from fuel used for satellite propulsion, from coal seam emissions and production, and catalysts containing mercury extracted from natural gas. Participants also discussed geothermal exploration and its potential for mercury releases, however there was currently very little information on the issue. Participants also held an extensive discussion on the oil and gas sector, noting that it was an area that had not been specifically included in the list of air emissions sectors in Annex D of the Convention.

24. Participants noted that some facilities were said to be purchasing mercury supplies obtained from non-ferrous mining wastes. The price of mercury was increasing therefore some private sector stakeholders were turning to those supplies as an alternative. Several participants informed the meeting of examples of potential mercury supply sources from storage and from waste including waste sludge. The difficulties faced by small-and medium-size facilities to deal with their waste and have appropriate storage was also a concern. Since the issue was related to waste management and supply, storage and increased stocks, also in the chlor-alkali and ASGM sectors, participants agreed that it would be useful to explore these issues as cross-cutting issues for possible attention by the partnership.

25. . Participants considered it important to have additional information on these issues, including from the private sector, to map out the current situation. Participants agreed to share data and information, including on supply of mercury from non-ferrous mining and smelting and from natural gas activities and to consider possible partnership work that could be undertaken as cross-cutting issues with existing partnership areas.

(i) Global Environment Facility

26. The representative of GEF drew attention to an information document to be presented to the Conference of the Parties of the Minamata Convention at its 2nd session, which provided information and an update of activities undertaken during GEF6. 141 million US $ had been allocated at GEF6, all of which had been spent, 25 percent to enabling activities and to 32 countries for the development of national action plans. GEF had provided support to countries in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector. GEF GOLD was a new undertaking lead by UNEP, collaborating with UNDP, UNIDO and Conservation International, for which the first steering committee had been held. GEF GOLD was now in its implementation phase and would assist 8 countries to address the use of mercury in ASGM with the objective to phase out 23 tons of mercury and address barriers to access to finance for small-scale miners.

27. GEF had concluded its 7th replenishment, which would continue to June 2022, following discussions with 20 donors and for which 207 million dollars had been set aside [for work on mercury]. There had been agreement on an indicative list of priorities for which GEF would have financial responsibility. The actual projects or activities to be implemented would depend on country priorities and completion of mercury initial assessment reports.

28. In response to queries from the participants the GEF secretariat said ASGM was likely to remain a priority but that activities would also address emissions, the chlor-alkali sector, the coal sector and in general, the types of interventions that would most benefit countries to meet their obligations under the Convention. It was suggested that interaction with the partnership, for example on knowledge management would be useful.

29. The GEF secretariat noted that when GEF GOLD was developed there had been a reliance on the partnership to bring together different partners and to build the baseline necessary to identify solutions. He suggested that all GEF agencies become members of the partnership in order to tap into all its available resources and develop more mercury related projects.

(j) Minamata Convention Secretariat

30. The secretariat of the Minamata Convention expressed sincere appreciation for the work of the partnership that had played and continued to play a crucial role in the development and implementation of the Convention, being as it was the guiding hand to the technical stream of the Conferences of the Parties both in-session and intersessionally. The partnerships had provided guidance for the development of ASGM national action plans and on best available techniques and best environmental practices for emissions. Technical work had also been undertaken and would continue on waste issues and on contaminated sites.

31. Regarding financial issues, GEF GOLD had been initiated based on partnership activities. He said there were further opportunities for developing products under the GEF. The Specific International Programme (SIP) Governing Board had adopted 5 SIP country-led projects of between 50,000 and 250,000 dollars each. The partnership areas may wish to work with countries to develop future SIP proposals.

4. Optimizing the structure and organization of the Partnership

32. The chair introduced a thought starter, document PAG.9/5, on optimizing the structure and organization of the Global Mercury Partnership. The purpose of the agenda item was to attempt to get ideas flowing on how to work more collaboratively across partnership areas and on new ideas that might not fall solely within the confines of one partnership area. At PAG8 there had been a discussion on the role and potential strategy of the partnership following entry into force of the Minamata Convention. The concept of clusters had been introduced, and four had been identified covering ASGM; mercury emissions and releases; products, processes and waste management; and research, development and monitoring. The cluster model had been used in the development of several projects, concepts and initiatives.

33. Based on the success of those clusters a concept of cross-cutting issues could be considered where collaboration of multiple partnerships areas would facilitate the development of information, interventions and projects, also through communication systems, face-to-face meetings or other means. Suggestions for such cross-cutting issues were laid out in the meeting document. These could include issues not clearly covered under the Convention that address country concerns. Work on such issues could take the form of initial consultations, needs assessments via teleconference, establishment of working groups consisting of members of relevant Partnership areas, development of white papers or issue summaries, development of project concepts, and other activities. She said any suggestions from the PAG for restructuring the partnership areas or the partnership itself would be welcome as well.

34. She added that there was also a need to discuss financing and to recognize the work of the partnership area leads and the secretariat. There was a need to mobilize resources and that partners could seek to advance work through the funding mechanisms of the Convention. The use of the partnership networks, she said, could be advantageous as countries could receive support through both parts of the Convention financial mechanism. At the same time, additional resources were important to ensure adequate staffing of the secretariat and smooth functioning of the partnership activities.

35. In terms of how the partnerships structure and organization could be optimized, in the ensuing discussion it was suggested that recombining some partnership areas would be an advantage for development of and support to some of the sectors. There were also possibilities to add new partnership areas, provided the issue was of global or regional relevance, noting that local situations needed a local approach and solutions that were not always commensurate with the work of a partnership.

36. It was suggested that issues of potential interest could be examined and an analysis of the level of concern, what data was available and what a partnership could do to address the issue be made. Mr. Rodges Ankrah and Mr. Jacob Maag agreed to spearhead a group of volunteers examining, as a first step, the oil and gas sector and the non-ferrous sector.

37. Participants discussed the Minamata initial assessments and noted that certain issues were emerging as issues of concern. Prioritization was therefore key and the partnership and the Global Mercury Assessment would draw attention to emerging issues of concern.

38. Some participants flagged the heavy workload that was the result of volunteering to be the lead or co-lead of a partnership area. Many leads and co-leads were keen to further collaborate with other partnerships but with limited resources it was sometimes difficult to add more work to that of existing workloads. Participants from civil society organizations volunteered to assist with connecting to key actors in each sector, including government, workers and the broader community. That would also provide an opportunity to note the usefulness of the work done.

39. Regarding outreach, it was suggested that each partnership area could prepare a short outreach paper on each sector to publicize the work of the partnership. Further efforts could also be made to engage the media and raise awareness on the work being done. The work of the partnership should also be brought more vigorously to the attention of participants at regional meetings.

5. Identifying gaps and challenges including the need for strengthening awareness-raising and communication

40. The secretariat made a presentation on communications and outreach, including the new and updated partnership website. Several face-to-face meetings had been held in the margins of other international meetings, as had virtual meetings. He invited the PAG to call on the secretariat for assistance in the organization of any other meeting virtual or otherwise.

41. Regarding the visual identity, he drew attention to the partnership's new branding, which could be used when use of the UNEP logo was not appropriate or desired. Guidelines for its use were provided in meeting document PAG.9/4.

42. The secretariat introduced the new website that still required some finalization, and which was a "child site" of the UNEP website. In response to a query regarding

who was accessing the website, he said that while statistics would normally only be collected once the site had been active for a year, efforts would be made to obtain intermediary statistics.

43. The chair invited the meeting to reflect on whether sufficient information was being received and disseminated by the partnership areas. It was suggested that information from the partnership should be sent out to the general scientific community, for example the International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant and that the secretariat could explore ways to present the partnerships and their work to such meetings. It was noted that while some areas were already making efforts to disseminate information, it was not yet being done in a coordinated manner

44. It was suggested that while there were strong links between the partnership and the Minamata Convention, means should be sought to have a closer relationship or more prominent way to connect to the Convention parties. The secretariat mentioned that it would be working with the secretariat of the Convention to ensure further information sharing, including through participation at or presentations to regional meetings and awareness raising through the website.

45. The meeting also discussed options for informing different partnership areas about ongoing work, for dissemination of information from partnership leads to others in the same sector and for sending information out to the broader community. Technical means to create mail alerts on new publications would be explored.

46. Several participants suggested further communication and awareness raising on ongoing work could be delivered through relevant regional centres including and especially those of the different multilateral environmental agreements. At the same time, regional centres should be encouraged to become partners, as this could help to advance the goals of the partnership at regional and country levels. It was recognized that there was a need to improve communication in general, including to work on an outreach strategy to inform all relevant stakeholders on the activities of the partnership, including within partnership areas.

6. Other matters

47. No other matters were raised.

7. Closure of the meeting

48. Following the customary exchange of courtesies, the meeting was closed at 6.00 p.m.

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