

Committee of Permanent Representatives
Subcommittee Meeting
Tuesday 24 March 2020
9:00 am - 12:00 and 13:30 – 16:30 pm
United Nations Office of Nairobi
Conference Room 4

Background Document for Agenda Item 3:

Implementation of UNEA resolution 4/9 entitled “Addressing single-use plastic products pollution”

This note serves as a background document for consideration under Agenda Item 3: Implementation of UNEA resolution 4/9 entitled “Addressing single-use plastic products pollution”.

The note recalls the relevant mandates from the resolution, outlines an implementation plan and financial indicators, and provides information on progress made in implementation of the resolution, with a focus on the initial findings of Life Cycle Assessment studies on single-use plastic products.

Member States are invited to provide further guidance to the Secretariat on the implementation of the resolution, and on challenges and opportunities for future work.

Progress in Implementation of UNEA resolution 4/9 entitled “Addressing single-use plastic products pollution”

Mandate:

The resolution encourages Member States to deal with the pollution generated by single-use plastic products, suggesting actions to develop, research and promote alternatives, address consumption and waste management, while considering all environmental impacts across the full life cycle of such products. It requests the Executive Director of the UNEP, in partnership with other UN agencies, funds and programmes, to (Operative Paragraph 8, OP8):

- (OP8a) Support Member States, upon their request, in the development and implementation of national or regional action plans to address the environmental impacts of single-use plastic products;
- (OP8b) Facilitate and/or coordinate technical and policy support to governments, especially of developing countries that so request, the scientific community, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and other stakeholders, regarding the environmental impact of single-use plastic products and the promotion of innovative and environmentally friendly solutions for their replacement, taking into account their full environmental impact;
- (OP8c) Make available existing information on actions member states have taken to address plastic pollution and the full life cycle environmental impacts of plastics to the full life cycle environmental impacts of other alternative materials and share this information in advance of UNEA 5.

Implementation Plan:

Support for UNEA4/9 is delivered across Divisions (Economy, Ecosystems, Law) and regional and country offices, and cuts across sub-programmes (SP4: Environmental Governance; SP5: Chemicals, Waste and Air Quality; SP6: Resource Efficiency). The work is delivered also in coordination with various partnerships and initiatives hosted in UNEP, such as the One Planet Network, the Life Cycle Initiative, the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, Regional Seas coordination bodies, etc. Support delivered includes

- guiding the science-based approaches to inform action plans, including on the link between single-use plastic products and marine litter;
- considering sustainable consumption and production and circular economy approaches in addressing pollution from single-use plastic products;
- reports and activities regarding the environmental impact of single-use plastic products and the promotion of innovative and environmentally friendly solutions for their replacement;
- legislative guidance on frameworks for single-use plastics to adopt a more sustainable approach;
- single-use plastic legislation toolkit to help countries create the necessary legal frameworks for effective implementation of single-use plastic legislation;
- training events to deliver knowledge materials;
- review of existing Life Cycle Assessment studies of single use plastic products (such as bags, take-away food containers; beverage bottles and cups; cutlery...).

Financial Implications:

This resolution links to many concepts and activities described in UNEP’s Programme of Work at a general level, and to a limited extent to activities already being undertaken with existing resources. The initial costing based on the approved resolution suggested additional resources would be required on staff (Divisions + Regional and country offices) corresponding to about six full time equivalents in total, across different offices; as well as activities costed to about 5.5 million USD in total (over 4 years) to provide basic support to country action plans and studies. To date, most of the support from UNEP has been delivered with resources already within the Programme of Work, and only about 210,000 USD have been specifically mobilised to support legislative guidance on single-use plastic products (OP8b) and the meta-analyses of Life Cycle Assessment studies of single-use plastic products (OP8c).

Progress update:

In terms of OP8a, UNEP supports, since 2008, the development and implementation of regional and national action plans for marine litter prevention in 13 out of 18 regional seas, which may inform actions on single use plastic products. More specifically, the Secretariat of the Cartagena Convention contributed to relevant reports on marine pollution, providing detailed analysis on the sources, quantities and impacts of solid waste and plastics in the wider Caribbean Region, and policy recommendations for improving solid waste and

plastics management. Similar support is being delivered via the Abidjan Convention Secretariat in the South-East Atlantic region, to deliver a study for Prevention and Management of Marine Litter in Western, Central and Southern Africa.

In India, projects funded by the Norwegian and Japanese governments are underway. One aim is to improve the management of marine plastic pollution and support India to engage globally on this issue. A second project in India aims to identify sources and pathways of major plastic leakages in rivers, and to conduct stakeholder engagement towards plastic waste leakage reduction.

The National Plastic Waste Reduction Plan for Indonesia was co-drafted by the UNEP International Environmental Technology Centre under the leadership of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry and the involvement of key stakeholders; it gives policy directions and specific targets to accelerate the reduction of plastic waste generation and increase plastic waste recycling based on circular economy.

The targeted technical assistance also assisted four local governments in the Lake Toba region in Indonesia to develop local solid waste management plans.

In the Mediterranean, two regional guidelines have been developed addressing phasing out of single-use plastic bags and reducing single use of plastic through public procurement. The guidelines on phasing out of single-use plastic bags were adopted by the Contracting Parties at COP 21, in Naples, Italy, December 2019. Specific support was delivered by UNEP/MAP to Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt and Morocco.

However, most work to date has a strong focus on the end of life of plastic products; additional resources are needed to support action further upstream in the life cycle, for the design of alternatives and prevention of waste. An example in this sense comes from the materials delivered via the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean with One Planet Network Sustainable Tourism Programme, to support tourism destinations and the hospitality sector in addressing problematic single-use plastics items ([posters, social media cards and videos](#)).

With regard to OP8b, ongoing activities include the finalisation of a legislative guidance tool to support States that are considering enacting, modifying, or strengthening their legislative frameworks for single-use plastics to adopt a more sustainable approach, expected to be launched in May 2020. In addition, UNEP is developing a single-use plastic legislation toolkit to help countries create the necessary legal frameworks for effective implementation of single-use plastic legislation, to be operational in 2020. While support is being delivered on the legislative guidance on a range of approaches to single-use plastic products, few resources are available to inform studies appraising the environmental impacts of single-use plastic products and environmentally friendly solutions.

On OP8c, in terms of making available information on actions by Member States to address plastic pollution, UNEP has published reviews of government actions including in the regular Waste Management Outlook series¹ and on legislative action on single use plastic products².

Also under OP8c, the Life Cycle Initiative (hosted by UNEP) coordinated in 2019 the review of existing [Life Cycle Assessment studies of single use plastic bags and their alternatives](#) (e.g., reusable plastic bags, paper bags, biodegradable plastic bags...). The meta-study shows most importantly that the number of times a bag is used directly influences its environmental impacts. Replacing a single-use plastic bag by a single-use bag made of another material (e.g. paper) is not necessarily better. Rather, reusable bags, designed for durability and adequately used enough times (ranging from 5-6 to over 100 times, depending on the material) are consistently better than single-use plastic bags. Other elements, including the technology and material / energy sources for the bags' production, as well as the waste management processes at the end of life, also determine whether a shift to alternatives to single-use plastic bags will lead to environmental improvements. Plastic bag bans may be adequate policy instruments in specific circumstances, e.g. where waste collection and management are non-existing or deficient; however, bans should be accompanied by other measures to

¹ E.g. [SIDS Waste Management Outlook](#) (2019)

² E.g. [Legal Limits on Single-Use Plastics and Microplastics](#) and [Status of Plastics and Styrofoam bans in the Wider Caribbean Region](#).

promote the best alternatives, which usually require consumer awareness and behaviour change (e.g. to reuse the alternative bags enough times, and/or dispose of waste bags adequately) to ensure the benefits from alternatives are maximised.

Two more studies on additional products (take-away food containers and beverage bottles) are on-going, and additional resource mobilisation is necessary to cover additional products and bring all studies together into a set of policy recommendations.

In response to Resolution 6 of the UNEA4, on marine litter and microplastics, (OP5) the One Planet network is preparing a guidance document on addressing plastic packaging in the different sectors and areas covered by its programmes, from a Sustainable Consumption and Production lens.

Opportunities:

The interest for sustainable consumption and production (including circular economy) to approach and tackle plastic consumption and pollution is growing. The One Planet network has adopted “plastics” as a cross-cutting theme for 2020-2021. Regional Seas conventions are increasingly considering sustainable consumption and production actions to address single-use plastics as one of the key sources of marine litter.

There is growing awareness on the plastic pollution problem, generated through campaigns, scientific / nature shows, and respected celebrities. UNEP is considered a trusted source of information and influence in this domain.

Challenges:

Upstream solutions are best to address pollution from single-use plastic products (REDUCE the amount of plastic waste, foster REUSE systems), but generally receive less attention and resources than waste management, collection and recycling (which are also crucial).

Focal point: Llorenç Milà i Canals, Economy Division (llorenc.milaicanals@un.org).

Additional information for 2019 is available in the reporting tool (<https://projects.unep.org/modules/unea>).