
Committee of Permanent Representatives
Subcommittee Meeting
Tuesday 24 March 2020
9:00 am - 12:00 pm, 1:30 pm – 4:30 pm
Online meeting

MEETING SUMMARY

All meeting documentation is available on the [meeting portal](#).

Agenda Item 1: Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda.

1. H.E. Mr. Fernando Coimbra, Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representative, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Brazil, opened the meeting in virtual format.
2. The meeting [agenda](#) was adopted.
3. Before addressing the agenda items, the Chair invited the Executive Director to provide a [briefing](#) on UNEP’s engagement with the UN system and its response to the COVID-19 situation. In doing so, the Executive Director referred to building blocks: (i) Collective leadership, (ii) Operational response and (iii) Strategic response. She highlighted the challenges, linkages and opportunities that have emerged at this time, informed about measures taken by UNEA to ensure continuity of work, and underlined the crucial importance of a green recovery post-COVID19. She explained that while the current political debate is, understandably, focusing on human health, the environment and planetary health are still an integral part of the UN’s response and strategy for COVID.
4. Delegations who intervened welcomed the update by the Executive Director, underlined the importance of applying a clear environment dimension to the UN’s overall response to COVID-19, and noted that UNEA-5 may emerge as the first major global environmental meeting after the pandemic and that this may be an opportunity to contribute to the debate on how to promote a green recovery post-COVID19.
5. The Chair also invited the representative of the President of UNEA to provide a brief account of the main outcomes of the meeting of the UNEA Bureau on 1 April, including with regard to the implementation of General Assembly Resolution 73/333, and the process to prepare a ministerial declaration for UNEA-5. A summary of the discussions at the Bureau meeting will be made available [here](#).

Agenda Item 2: Implementation of UNEA decision 4/2, paragraph 14.

6. The Secretariat provided a short [update](#) on the ongoing process to develop an “action plan” for the implementation of paragraph 88 of the Rio+20 outcome document, “The future we want” in accordance with UNEA decision 4/2, and on feedback received at the meetings of the subcommittee on 23 January and 5 March 2020.
7. The Chair invited the Committee to consider the four remaining subparagraphs in the [Secretariat synthesis report](#).

8. In summary, delegations who took the floor provided the following guidance on the four subparagraphs:

(b) Have secure, stable, adequate and increased financial resources from the regular budget of the UN and voluntary contributions to fulfil its mandate;

- Noted with concern that the UNEP continues to face insufficient and unbalanced funding, whereby only about half of the agreed budget to the Environment Fund is replenished annually, undermining the implementation of the Programme of Work, and that only about half of its 193 member States contribute to the Environment Fund at all, only about 15-20% of Member States contribute in line with the voluntary indicative scale of contributions (VISC) endorsed by Member States, and over 90% of the contributions to the Environment Fund comes from only 15 member States.
- Noted also that increasingly earmarked contributions have resulted in an imbalance in the allocation of financial resources to subprogrammes, resulting in the critical underfunding of certain foundational activities, such as those within the environment under review subprogramme, while certain activities in which UNEP is expected to perform a complementary role to other UN entities are adequately funded. It was further noted that the asymmetry in the distribution of financial resources could lead to fragmentation of the work the Secretariat, reducing its ability to “deliver as one”.
- Considered that additional efforts are needed to further implement this subparagraph, and put forward the following remarks and suggestions:
 - The Secretariat should clearly demonstrate the effects of the insufficient funding of the Environment Fund on the implementation of the Programme of Work;
 - The Secretariat should analyze the underlying reasons for the different funding approaches taken by Member States, including regarding earmarking, and increase the visibility of those member states that contribute financially and reach their VISC;
 - The Secretariat should also share and apply lessons-learned from the existing resource mobilization strategy and consider how to take this into account in the preparation of a new Medium-Term Strategy.
- In response to questions from delegations on the status of the 2020 and 2021 regular budget as well as the potential impact of COVID-19 on the 2020 Environment Fund budget, the Secretariat provided the following information:
 - **2020 Regular Budget:** According to the memorandum received from the Under-Secretary-General for Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance at UN Headquarters on 1 April 2020, the UN Secretariat Regular Budget (including for Special Political Missions) still faces significant liquidity challenges, as member States’ contributions stand at 42% compared to 50% by this time in earlier years. This results in a collective gap of more than \$220 million. Measures to address this shortfall include (i) temporarily suspending all hiring of regular budget vacancies, including temporary job openings, and (ii) limiting all non-post expenses and postpone all discretionary spending. UNEP is already complying

with these new instructions. For the 2020 released allotment representing approximately 40% of the full appropriation, funding of the Global Environment Outlook requirements, as well as fixed costs associated with regular budget positions such as operational costs, have been prioritized.

- **2021 Regular Budget:** UNEP has finalized its proposal and submitted it to UNHQ for review and consolidation. The budget proposal assumes the same level of resources in 2020 as in 2019, with the important exception of an additional \$401,000 requested to cover for the anticipated expenses related to UNEA-5 in 2021. This was done on the basis of General Assembly resolution 73/260 of 21 January 2019 on the report of the UN Environment Assembly of the UNEP, in which the General Assembly expressed concern about the sustainability, predictability and stability of the funding of the UNEP governing body. The additional requirement consists of conference servicing, hospitality, additional staff costs, and general operating expenses. The budget proposals will be submitted by the Secretary-General to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) for further deliberations and recommendations, scheduled to take place between mid-May and end of July 2020. In addition, the Committee for Programme and Coordination is scheduled to convene in June 2020. CPR members were invited to consider the request for additional resources for UNEA-5 including through their capitals and delegations to the General Assembly's 5th Committee.
- **COVID-19 impact on the 2020 Environment Fund Budget:** In order to mitigate the risk of COVID-19's potential impact on Environment Fund contributions, UNEP plans to suspend recruitment of non-critical EF vacant positions along with parallel measures on discretionary spending. In addition, funding will be prioritized to cover logistical requirements related to telecommuting and sustaining UNEP's business continuity.

(d) Promote a strong science-policy interface, building on existing international instruments, assessments, panels and information networks, including the Global Environment Outlook, as one of the processes aimed at bringing together information and assessment to support informed decision-making;

- Considered that promotion of a strong science-policy interface is one of the core mandates of UNEP, that this requires sufficient funding; and that additional efforts are warranted to make this area more attractive to donors.
- Underlined the importance of involving scientists and research institutes from around the world, addressing the current under-participation of those from developing countries, which also serves as a vehicle for capacity building (subparagraph f).
- Encouraged the secretariat to continue the process on the [“Future of the Global Environment Outlook \(GEO\)”](#) by virtual means to ensure tangible results by the 7th annual subcommittee meeting (12–16 October 2020), and requested an updated timeline for this work. The Secretariat confirmed that the work will proceed by virtual means and that all GEO deliverables will be finalized without delay.

- To promote stronger science-policy interface, delegations made the following additional suggestions:
 - Ensure greater incorporation of science into the Programme of Work and Budget;
 - Make scientific publications available well in advance of relevant policymaking meetings, including UNEA;
 - Promote the inclusion of policy recommendations into scientific assessments;
 - Strengthen science by networking with other science-based institutions;

(e) Disseminate and share evidence-based environmental information, and raise public awareness on critical, as well as emerging, environmental issues;

- Commended the improved communication by the Secretariat in recent years, and suggested:
 - That the Secretariat shares additional information on how UNEP monitors and measures the impact of its communication efforts;
 - That the Secretariat provides progress updates on the development of a long-term data strategy, as mandate at UNEA-4.
 - That the Secretariat improves further its capacity to communicate beyond government constituencies to reach out to individuals, with a view to contributing to their behavioral change on, for example, sustainable consumption and production
 - That the Secretariat takes into full consideration the priorities and policy guidance emanating from UNEA, including by avoiding the resort, in its communication campaigns, to concepts and expressions that do not yet enjoy consensus among Member States.

(f) Provide capacity-building to countries, as well as support, and facilitate access to technology;

- Called for improved assistance to member States, upon request, in particular developing countries, in the implementation of their environmental policies by providing capacity building and facilitating access to technology, which could require increased availability of means of implementation.
- Underlined the importance of bringing together various processes underway for enhanced capacity building, such as the [Fifth Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environment Law](#) and the UN development system reform.

9. The Secretariat took note of the views expressed by delegations, and committed to develop a “gap report” which will inform the further development of an action to implement paragraph 88, which will be submitted in draft format to the 7th meeting of the annual subcommittee, and subsequently to UNEA-5.

Agenda Item 3: Contribution of the UN Environment Assembly to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

10. The Secretariat provided a brief overview of a revised version of the [background document](#) entitled Contribution of the UN Environment Assembly to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (Version III), based on the discussion on subcommittee meeting on 17 March 2020 and written inputs received from Member States and stakeholders.
11. Member States thanked the Secretariat for the development of the document, noted the improvement of the new version, and provided the following comments and guidance:
 - Reiterated the need for the language used in the document to be in line with previously agreed language and noted that there are still references to the term “nature-based solutions”. One member State requested that the term either be deleted or be referred to as “ecosystem-based approaches”
 - One delegation requested that the language used be in present tense, that the title be revised using agreed language and further noted that there is a difference between nature-based solutions and nature-based approaches/ecosystem-based approaches, suggesting that there is a need for further discussion on the definition of these concepts and that they may be addressed in a footnote.
 - Several delegations requested that future submissions are be timed and structured in a manner that allows for the CPR to provide substantive inputs in good time, possibly using a pre-prepared template, with consideration initiated in advance of the letter from the ECOSOC President.
 - Some delegations also suggested that future inputs should better reflect the implementation of UNEA resolutions and the ministerial declaration, and that the submission should be more concise and succinct.
 - Several delegations supported a proposal that the information provided by the Executive Director on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic be reflected in the submission.
 - One delegation requested that future submissions should reflect specific challenges encountered by developing countries in the efforts made to achieve sustainable development.
 - One delegation requested the Secretariat to include a reference to the marine and coastal strategy using the language from the ministerial declaration, which highlights the importance of actions to protect and restore marine ecosystems.
 - One accredited stakeholder stressed the need to assess and reevaluate the relationship between humans, nature and animals.
12. The Secretariat took note of the comments and the meeting agreed that the Secretariat will revise the document taking into account comments received, and to share a final draft by silent procedure before submission to the High-Level Political Forum.

Agenda Item 4: Presentation of the 2018-19 Biennial Evaluation Synthesis Report.

13. The Secretariat presented an [overview](#) of the findings in the 2018-19 [Biennial Evaluation Synthesis Report](#) and project performance drawn from an independent evaluation of 61 projects and other higher-level evaluations completed during the biennium, as well as an analysis of compliance of project and programme managers with evaluation recommendations. Aspects of good performance against the evaluation criteria were highlighted, as well as areas for management attention. The compliance of project and programme managers with evaluation recommendations was also presented.
14. Delegations broadly welcomed the presentation, recognized UNEP’s good overall performance, and provided the following feedback and guidance on the report and its main findings:

- Recognized the strong results at output level as well as high levels of performance against strategic relevance and financial management; however, it was noted that the performance across the cohort on gender and human rights, project sustainability, financial reporting and monitoring criteria could be further improved and requested that the corresponding recommendations be fully taken up in that regard.
 - Expressed concern that similar areas of concern seem to be highlighted in previous evaluation synthesis reports.
 - Noted that the evaluation synthesis report, while detailed, is lengthy and suggested that the report and the presentation focus more on key main messages and how they have been taken up by senior management, how lessons learned will be incorporated in the Medium-Term Strategy, and more clearly identifies the areas where UNEP has been performing well, as well as underperforming.
 - Requested clarification on the distribution of evaluations across the sub-programmes and noted that the Chemicals and Waste and Environment under Review sub-programmes were underrepresented.
 - Suggested that timing of the evaluation reports could be better aligned with the annual subcommittee meeting, they may provide timely inputs to the development of the new Medium-Term Strategy.
 - Underlined the need for an action plan in response to the biennial evaluation synthesis report as well as regular updates from UNEP management on progress in implementation.
15. The Secretariat took note of comments received, including the request to share evaluation findings at future annual subcommittee meetings, and explained that the relative numbers of projects evaluated by sub-programme depends on the number of projects reaching the evaluation phase in the biennium and on the numbers of projects in each sub-programme, noting that some sub-programmes have far fewer projects than others, and thus have lower numbers of evaluations. The Secretariat also informed the meeting that while the Executive Director's report should suffice, it was ready to prepare different derivatives from the report to provide the management's response.
16. The Chair thanked the meeting for the comments and noted the proposal to consider the Biennial Evaluation Synthesis report in conjunction with the Annual Subcommittee meetings.

Agenda Item 5: Implementation of UNEA resolution 4/9 entitled “Addressing single-use plastic products pollution”.

17. The Secretariat provided an [overview](#) on the progress achieved with regard to the implementation of UNEA resolution 4/9 entitled “Addressing single-use plastic products pollution”, with a focus on the initial findings of Life Cycle Assessment studies of single-use plastic products. A background document is available [here](#).
18. Delegations welcomed the presentation and the progress made on the implementation of the resolution, and made several comments which are summarized as follows:
- Stressed the key importance of a science-based comparative analysis across the full life cycle of all solutions in the market, including biodegradable plastics.
 - Suggested that paragraph 8a) and 8b) in the resolution could be considered within the context of the Montevideo Programme V.

- Welcomed the coordination with various initiatives such as the One Planet network, the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, and requested strong linkages to the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics (AHEG), especially for the information gathering of member States' actions on single-use plastic products under paragraph 8c), and the Basel Convention's Plastic Waste Partnership.
 - Highlighted the importance of having a comprehensive approach to plastics including by looking into possible trade-offs of various alternatives, and to understand the full impacts of policy interventions such as bans, as shown by the study on plastic bags;
 - Underlined the importance of disseminating information on country support and the reports in response to the resolution to key target audiences;
 - One delegation highlighted some of the actions they are taking on single-use plastic within their region.
 - One delegation requested clarification on whether UNEP would be able to provide scientific analysis on the current industrial solutions.
 - One accredited stakeholder suggested to also consider studies on disposable diapers among single-use plastic product types.
19. The Secretariat confirmed that the findings of the stocktaking under AHEG on actions by member States on single-use plastic products are integrated and announced that additional consultation opportunities will be explored with the on-going Life Cycle Assessment meta-studies. The Secretariat also welcomed the suggestion to link more strongly to the Montevideo Programme V and committed to further pursue these linkages together with interested Member States; draft guidance on legislative frameworks for single-use plastics has already been shared with Montevideo V focal points for their input. Biodegradable plastic products are already in the scope of the LCA meta-studies and will be covered to some extent in the Assessment on sources, pathways and hazards of marine litter and microplastics being developed in response to UNEA Resolution 4/6 on Marine plastic litter and microplastics.

Agenda Item 6: Other matters.

20. The Executive Director provided a briefing on UNEP's engagement with the UN system and its response to the COVID-19 situation at the outset of the meeting, followed by an exchange of views with member States (see above).
21. The Chair informed delegations that he will work with the Secretariat to consider further how to prepare for and structure upcoming virtual meetings of the Committee, including the 150th meeting of the CPR scheduled for 30 April 2020.
22. No other matters were raised.

Agenda Item 7: Closing of the meeting

23. The meeting closed at 1:20 pm.