

Meeting Report of the Latin America and Caribbean States (GRULAC) Regional Consultation under United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics

29-30, September, 2020

Background and Intended Outcomes of the Meeting

The fourth meeting of the Ad hoc Open-ended Expert Group (AHEG 4) initially scheduled for May 2020, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of this decision, and with a view to facilitate further progress and revision of the working documents ahead of the next expert group meeting, the UNEP Secretariat prepared, at the request of and in close consultation with the Bureau of the expert group, the scenario note with intersessional roadmap, and organized virtual meetings and other activities.

Many countries of Latin America and Caribbean (GRULAC) region took part in the AHEG-3 (18-22 November 2019, Bangkok) and gained common understandings on issues, which are leading to greater engagement of the region in the intersessional work. This good momentum needs to be further strengthened and more countries must be encouraged to take part so that AHEG outcomes are of use and relevance to the region overall.

In light of the above, Guyana as GRULAC's representative on the Bureau of the AHEG in collaboration with the UNEP Secretariat organized a virtual meeting of the AHEG on marine plastic litter and microplastics for countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC) to: 1) Share information on the progress and ongoing work of the AHEG intersession work 2) Discuss possible regional coordination mechanisms and 3) Facilitate consultations of the Chair and Bureau with the regions.

Time and Venue

29-30 September 2020

Time: 9 am-12:30 pm

Venue: Interprefy

Participants

- Member states
- UNEP as AHEG global Secretariat
- Selected regional experts on marine litter and microplastics
- Major Groups and Stakeholders
- International organizations

There were 87 participants for these GRULAC Virtual Meetings

Agenda 1: Opening

The Co - chairperson of the meeting, Ms. Karen Watson, from the Environmental Protection Agency (Guyana) and GRULAC representative on the Bureau of AHEG introduced background information

and objectives of the meeting. Following this, Mr. Satoru Iino, Acting Chair of the AHEG Bureau, delivered welcome remarks. After which Ms. Watson provided a brief overview of the agenda items following which the agenda of the meeting was adopted.

Agenda 2: Presentation from international organizations

Mr. Carlos M. Alonso Hernandez, Research Scientist at REMARCO presented. REMARCO is a cooperation network that was created with support from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). It is a network of research Centres that work together. The presentation focused on the organisation's efforts and approach towards consolidating capacities for the prevention and reduction of marine pollution - including plastic marine debris - in the Latin America and Caribbean region. The main points of the presentation were the following:

- REMARCO has been working on building capacity to support countries in protecting coastal environments in Latin America and the Caribbean
- Some of its work draws on techniques using nuclear isotopes
- 18 Member States are participants in its projects; it monitors marine plastic litter in their coastal areas
- It has a budget of \$1,435,327, mobilized from the technical fund of IAEA
- Some of its outputs include monitoring of marine plastic litter in coastal areas; creating a classification system for the plastic waste types found on beaches and in the water; conducting workshops and technical meetings
- It is focused on assisting countries to report on indicator 14.2.2b of Sustainable Development Goal 14
- One of its focuses is to set up a regional partnership to deal with marine plastic litter
- More of its work can be accessed via www.remarco.cl

In response to questions posed about membership of the REMARCO group and the availability and access to data generated from the monitoring exercises, it was indicated that REMARCO is open for input from all institutions in Latin America taking part in the initiative. It should also be noted that a platform managed by Chile for the results obtained was set up. The platform is open to the public. There are maps, reports and other data available for all participating countries (18 at present). Efforts are also being made to include the small island States of the Caribbean, as there are currently resources for more capacity building for Small Island States that are not yet part of the network.

Agenda 3: Stocktaking of existing activities and action to reduce marine plastic litter and microplastics and inventory of technical and financial resources or mechanisms for supporting countries in addressing marine plastic litter and microplastics

Presentations were done by the Cartagena Convention Secretariat Regional office for LAC, Antigua and Barbuda, Costa Rica and the UNEP Secretariat (University of Plymouth). The Presenters highlighted various policies, actions and responses, regionally and globally towards the reduction of marine plastic litter.

➤ **Some key interventions and actions currently being undertaken through the Cartagena Convention Regional Secretariat within the GRULAC region include:**

1. An updated marine litter action plan under way for the Southeast Pacific, Belize, Brazil, the wider Caribbean area, the Northeast Pacific, Panama, and other regions
2. A regional node for marine litter management, hosted by the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute, a regional NGO, and the Cartagena Convention secretariat, and supports the global partnership on marine litter, for which UNEP is the secretariat through its global Programme of action
3. Plastic waste minimization (Jamaica).
4. Regulatory impact assessment developed on how to manage plastic waste, with a focus on cost-benefit analysis, hotspot analysis and identifying key regulatory and legislative interventions. Project on how to reduce single-use plastics in the tourism industry - in St. Lucia. Developed an 8-step pathway to action for hotels to phase out single-use plastics
5. Trash-free waters international initiative conducted in Jamaica and Panama
6. Fostering partnerships between Government, NGOs, civil society and the private sector, focusing activities at local level - focus on the 3 R's (reduce, reuse and recycle), upcycling plastic waste and promoting composting
7. Outreach work is done with the Caribbean Youth Environment Network, including through projects such as "Plastic-free July" and "Plastic-free Christmas".
8. Upcoming new project funded by EU on multilateral environmental agreements and national action plans; and on community-based projects
9. The Clean Seas Programme
10. A model law on single-use plastics and marine pollution
11. Regional Framework for Regulating Marine Plastic litter.
12. Protocol for the Protection of the Marine Environment against Pollution from Land-based Sources under the Cartagena Convention

➤ **Some key interventions and actions currently being undertaken by Costa Rica include:**

1. The adoption of a national strategy to replace the consumption of single-use plastics with renewable and compostable alternatives for the period 2017–2021
2. A National Policy for Integrated Waste Management covering the period 2010–2021
3. A Green Pavement Company Initiative utilizing wood-plastic composites to make benches to provide eco-friendly alternatives to traditional pavements, and to use plastic blocks in the construction of homes and community centers, among other buildings
4. Proposed Single-use Plastic ban by 2030
5. National Inventory on plastic wastes.

➤ **Some key findings of a stocktaking of global actions to reduce the flow of marine plastic and microplastics to the ocean presented by UNEP include:**

1. The preliminary results showed that actions most commonly involved (1) working with people (awareness raising, education, behaviour change) and (2) changing legislation, standards and rules
2. Most actions targeted the collection, sorting, clean-up, management and use of plastic. Few targeted the design manufacture and production stage
3. Most actions focused on macro plastics, not microplastics or additives, with specific items such as single-use plastic bags
4. Many submissions reported bans on single-use plastics
5. Circular economy and fiscal disincentives did feature in a number of submissions
6. An online repository and an interactive dashboard was developed to enable access to the Stocktake of global actions to reduce the flow of marine plastic and Microplastic to the ocean

➤ **The key findings and identified opportunities with regard to technical and financial resources included:**

1. Of the 138 technical resources and mechanisms reviewed, 25% were state of knowledge reports/policy recommendations, 7% showcased best practices, 4% training materials, 11% calculation tools to quantify marine litter.
2. There is need for detailed data on trajectory of plastic waste (from generation to disposal in marine environment), information on the role of littering, controlled dumping, release from disposal sites, and fate of plastics in lakes and rivers
3. Opportunity exists for innovative technology, such as earth observation to improve and develop existing models on plastics dispersion
4. There is need for strong emphasis on land-based activities, although waste management has received a lot of attention and funding.
5. Enforcement of waste legislation and prevention measures remain major barrier to tackling marine litter
6. Seventy four (74) core financial resources were identified, including the region they targeted
7. Asia-Pacific was the region most frequently targeted, and 69% funding was for initiatives in AP, which may suggest funders and donors are facing coordination challenges
8. 50 identified resources targeted waste management, the plastic life cycle phase most often targeted
9. public funding (outside MS own national budgets) accounted for 62% of total funding
10. Donors prioritized waste collection and management, including recycling (50 out of 74 included focus on waste management)
11. Several actions were considered including;
 - a. Increase focus on leveraging public funding to create pipeline of bankable projects for private investment (blended finance can increase private investment by making less risky for private investors)
 - b. Reverse perverse incentives allowing new plastic to remain a cheaper source of raw material compared to recycled plastic
 - c. Foster more inclusive financing, little funding was found for community-based orgs and indigenous communities or with an explicit gender focus

- d. Increase financial resources for strategic initiatives to remove most damaging plastic types from economy and bring about a circular approach for others
- e. Need for long-term financial resources to target other phases of the plastic life cycle, not just waste management, which is of course also important

➤ **Some key interventions and actions currently being undertaken by Antigua and Barbuda include:**

1. Antigua and Barbuda banned single-use plastics and Styrofoam in 2017
2. Local NGO's have developed a public awareness and sensitization program to educate citizens
3. Up-cycling of plastic wastes is an attraction for tourists visiting the island
4. A project is being developed for the recycling of plastic wastes on the island

During the Question and answer session, other member states also highlighted actions, activities and policies in place to address the issue of marine plastic litter and microplastics in their countries, including single-use plastic bans, national action plans to manage plastic wastes.

Agenda 4: Methodology for analysis of the effectiveness of potential and existing response options and activities (60 min)

The UNEP Secretariat introduced the framework of the analysis consisting of two approaches, namely Bowtie analysis and analysis of indicators.

- a. Bowtie analysis: considering what is, or could be done to prevent waste and microplastics leaking into the environment (analysis of effectiveness of operational controls).
- b. Analysis of indicators: considering the inclusion of management controls to ensure the success of the operational activities (analysis of effectiveness of management controls).

Also, the UNEP shared the results of the analysis of the effectiveness of the three pilot projects, which were regional marine litter action plans, microplastics and a new international framework through the above two approaches.

In the question and answer discussion, a participant enquired about the finalization of the report on the analysis of effectiveness given that the Cartagena Convention Secretariat is exploring possible activities that could be incorporated into project proposals currently being worked on. Consequently, information and recommendations contained in this report could be beneficial to the completion of these regional project proposals. UNEP indicated that the report is was completed and would be shared subsequently.

Agenda 6: Potential Response Options

Mr. Saturo Iino, gave a presentation on Response Options on behalf of UNEP. He made it clear that the work carried out to identify a range of potential response options does not constitute an endorsement of specific response options. Instead, the aim is to identify and evaluate the circumstances, necessary conditions and appropriate working environment in which each potential response option could be effective or not. Additionally, Ms. Dixon from the Environmental

Investigation Agency (EIA)) delivered a presentation on potential response options on behalf of EIA, the Centre for International Environmental Law and the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives.

The technical discussion on the effectiveness of response options identified five key issues:

1. The need to share a common long-term vision and objective;
2. The importance of taking a lifecycle approach in which numerous substantial countermeasures are adopted
3. The importance of developing a national action plan taking into account different national conditions and circumstances. International, including regional cooperation, can help facilitate national responses through financial and technological assistance, capacity-building and the sharing of experiences and scientific knowledge;
4. The importance of a multi-stakeholder partnership including the private sector, NGOs and international aid agencies. Since plastic is present at every stage of human life, it is important to get all stakeholders involved;
5. There are varieties of options for the structure that can be used to implement the four key aspects above.

The Potential Response Options to the above issues included:

1. The UNEA-3 resolution, SDG 14.1, G20 Osaka Blue Ocean Vision (numerous GRULAC countries are joining this Vision), etc.
2. Adoption of a lifecycle approach. To directly prevent additional discharge and flow of plastic waste into the oceans, sound waste management is vital. In order to promote a sustainable society, upstream, it is very important to build a circular economy, including sustainable consumption and production. Substantive countermeasures include the banning of single-use plastics, standardizing production designs, etc.
3. National action plans. These are key in responding to this issue. The national legal framework is the starting point. However, it was pointed out that countries with limited resources and capacities, have difficulties developing and implementing such plans, which is why international cooperation in this area is indispensable. This cooperation includes sharing experience and stocktaking, the provision of technological and financial assistance, capacity-building, technology transfer, establishing a scientific knowledge database and monitoring progress and the outcome.
4. Partnerships and coordination: having a multi-stakeholder platform is very important. Some Member States mentioned that such a platform was mandated under UNEA resolution 4/6.
5. Structure or form. How to strengthen the four action items above. There were strong voices endorsing and recommending a new global agreement/framework/legally binding agreement/global treaty. There is a need for careful consideration of what exactly a “new global agreement” would mean. At the same time, there was a view that new instruments are not necessarily an effective option. Given the inherently localized nature of waste management, there cannot necessarily be a global structure that fits local and national actions. Also, it was argued that new legal instruments take too long to be agreed upon.

Additionally, under Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), the four pillars of response options proposed included:

1. Monitoring and reporting. Standards to harmonize data, environmental monitoring on the presence of plastic pollution and data reporting tracking progress towards a circular economy and the reduction of leakage
2. Plastic pollution prevention. Preventing pollution before it becomes a hazard. National action plans will be informed and supplemented by initiatives to address specific issues. A series of control measures on virgin plastic production and use will be a key measure, as will clean-ups to help impacted communities
3. Coordination. The primary areas for cooperation would be: sea-based sources (including fishing gear), trade in plastic waste, chemicals and additives, biodiversity, climate change, agriculture and knowledge exchange
4. Technical and financial support. For policymakers and developing countries. Will need a scientific assessment panel, a socioeconomic assessment panel and implementing and bilateral agencies, among others

Agenda 7: Summarization of the meeting - Way forward for a future coordination of GRULAC region:

1. The question of funding is key for GRULAC countries. The few resources available could be optimized through regional cooperation mechanisms. There are various regional agreements, but there is no regional mechanism that takes into account our regional specificities, which require tailored measures. Cooperation efforts have failed to include all stakeholders from governments, civil society, the private sector and academia. This is critical. There is still a strong dissociation in Latin America between government measures and the actions of other stakeholders. We need to create synergies and partnerships in this regard.
2. It was also indicated that efforts should be made to increase the scale of actions taken regionally, and to identify prevention and mitigation measures. This will promote the development of the national plans.
3. Consideration should be given to addressing the supply chain and the implementation of a platform for the various interested parties. These initiatives should complement both existing actions and future actions being developed.
4. Focus should be placed on the entire lifecycle of plastics and measures should be taken that tackle it at the source, beginning with the design phase. Recycling efforts are key to preventing plastics from turning to waste. We should implement measures for effective waste management - not only plastic waste, but in general. As an example, 45-50% of waste in Peru is not being properly disposed of now.
5. We also need quality standards in this domain. Norms and standards are needed to enable governments to control what plastics are present during the production cycle, including the regional or even global standardization of labels. We also need to work on responsible

consumption of products through awareness-raising campaigns, capacity building and training. All of this must take into account the specific situation in each country.

6. It is also crucial to adopt a lifecycle approach so that we can address aspects of the circular economy. We agreed that it is a key issue that will have an impact on a number of proposed options.
7. GRULAC Member States who had not ratified the Escazu agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, were encouraged to do so. Plastics are an environmental hazard therefore there is need for wide access to information on plastics wastes, environmental education and legislation on our books so that everyone in society can work together to solve this problem.
8. The commitment to address marine plastic litter and microplastics was highlighted a political priority for the Latin America and the Caribbean region.

Agenda 8: Closing

UNEP Secretariat gave closing remarks, and the facilitator closed the meeting.