



SP/EB.6/8
31 March 2021

English only

REPORT OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE SIXTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE SPECIAL PROGRAMME

ITEM 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

1. The sixth meeting of the Executive Board of the Special Programme to support institutional strengthening at the national level for the implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) conventions, the Minamata Convention and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) was opened by Mr. Reggie Hernaus (Netherlands), co-chair of the Executive Board, at 14:00 (CEST) on 27 October 2020. Mr. Hernaus welcomed the participants and thanked them for their understanding of the need to hold an online meeting, given the travel restrictions in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. He then invited Ms. Monika MacDevette, Chief of the Chemicals and Health Branch of UNEP's Economy Division, to make some opening remarks

2. In her opening remarks, Ms. MacDevette welcomed the participants and noted the wide range of observers from UNEP's member states who had expressed interest in the meeting, in addition to representatives of the Basel and Stockholm Convention bureaux and the Internal Task Team, comprising representatives of the secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the Minamata Conventions, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and the Global Environment Facility. She noted that the meeting was taking place a few days after the successful conclusion of UNEA5.1, at which UNEP's medium-term strategy for 2022-2025, which focuses on addressing the three planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, was adopted. Ms. MacDevette noted that the Special Programme encourages the very solutions that are described in both the Message adopted by the United Nations Environment Assembly during its meeting and the report launched in February 2021 by the United Nations Secretary-General and the Executive Director of UNEP entitled *Making Peace with Nature*, as well as the medium term strategy itself: including the centrality of a sustainable approach to consumption and production in addressing the planetary crises; the importance of engagement across sectors of society with a wide range of stakeholders; and the need for clear commitments to implement the conventions, with goals and targets to ensure accountability and impact. She noted that the Special Programme provides practical and targeted support based on a country-driven approach, taking into account national needs and priorities in strengthening national institutions, to ensure that support goes where it is needed, to address real issues experienced by the countries concerned. Adding that this meeting would consider applications under the fourth round of funding, in order to expand and enhance the support that is already being provided, and would build upon that even further in its consideration of the preparations for the launch of the fifth round of funding, she concluded by thanking the participants for their interest and engagement in the agenda of the meeting and wished the Executive Board well in their important deliberations this week.

3. Following the opening remarks, Mr. Hernaus invited the members of the Executive Board to introduce themselves briefly.

4. The meeting was attended by nine of the ten Executive Board members and represented quorum for decision making in accordance with Rule 17 of the Rules of Procedure for the Executive Board of the Special Programme.

ITEM 2. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

2.1 Adoption of agenda and organization of work

5. The co-chair invited the Board members to consider and adopt the provisional agenda and proposed organization of work as set out in documents SP/EB/6.1/ and SP/EB/6.1/Add.1 respectively.
6. In presenting the proposed organization of work, the co-chair referred to the following provisions of the Rules of Procedure of the Special Programme:
- a. The meeting would be conducted in English only;
 - b. In line with Rule 18, the co-chairs would grant permission to the representatives and observers to speak during the course of the meeting in the order in which they signified their desire to speak, taking into account that observers should normally speak after representatives, unless otherwise decided by the co-chairs;
 - c. With particular reference to agenda item 4 *Consideration of eligible and complete applications for the fourth round of applications*, Rule 25 of the Rules of Procedure provide that “In cases where a recipient country that is represented in the Executive Board is involved in a project submitted to the Executive Board for its consideration, the representative of that country shall be excused from decision-making by the Executive Board in relation to the project in question”. The Secretariat would therefore move the Board member(s) concerned into the virtual lobby before the presentation of their respective project and bring them back into the meeting afterwards. The same approach would be used for any observers whose applications would be considered during the meeting, in order to ensure free and open discussion among the Board members on the merits of all the applications; and
 - d. Under Rule 26, the Executive Board shall make every effort to take its decisions by consensus.
7. The agenda and organization of work were adopted as presented, without the addition of any items under Agenda Item 8, *Any Other Business*.

ITEM 3. APPROVAL OF THE REPORT OF THE FOURTH TELECONFERENCE OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

8. The Executive Board was invited to consider and approve the report of the fourth teleconference of the Executive Board meeting, held online from 27-28 October 2020, as contained in document SP/EB.6/2. The report, which had been circulated for comment by the Board members after the teleconference, was approved without any modifications.

ITEM 4. CONSIDERATION OF ELIGIBLE AND COMPLETE APPLICATIONS FOR THE FOURTH ROUND OF FUNDING UNDER THE SPECIAL PROGRAMME

9. The co-chair noted that, while the role of the co-chairs had been defined in the rules of procedure for the Executive Board, the co-chairs would also act in their capacity as Executive Board members to represent their constituency in the discussion and would announce to the meeting in the event that they took the floor in their capacity as Board members. The co-chair also noted that all decisions taken by the meeting would be made only by the Executive Board members.
10. The co-chair then invited the Special Programme Secretariat to present an overview of the applications submitted in response to the call for applications under the fourth round of funding.
11. The Secretariat reminded the Board of the calendar of activities relating to the fourth round of applications, launched in November 2019, the closing date for which had been extended to September 2020 because of the impact of the pandemic. She briefly outlined the appraisal methodology undertaken in reviewing the applications received. This methodology, involving an eligibility and completeness screening followed by a technical review of the activities planned and an assessment of the budget, had been approved by the Board in earlier rounds and adapted by the Secretariat to take into account modifications to the guidelines and forms

for the fourth round of funding. She then briefly discussed the eligibility criteria, factors relating to an assessment of the budget, and the appraisal criteria, as set out in the appraisal documents prepared for the Executive Board, including the additional criteria for high value projects requesting a budget of more than US \$250,000.

12. Turning to the applications received under the fourth round, the Secretariat reminded the board that, as reported at the teleconference in October 2020, a total of 38 applications had been received from 37 countries. Four of those had been found to be ineligible or incomplete, leaving 34 that were underwent an initial review by the Internal Task Team in October 2020. During that review, five projects (from Burkina Faso, Panama, Sao Tome and Principe, Togo and Tuvalu) were found to fall under the mandate of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), meaning that they were not eligible for funding under the Special Programme. Those applicants were informed and invited to submit revised applications. Detailed feedback was provided by the Secretariat, including feedback from the Internal Task Team, on the remaining 29 applications, and the applicants were invited to revise and resubmit their applications. Viet Nam, which had submitted two separate projects under the fourth round, was requested to consider consolidating the projects into one single project.

13. In November 2020, 27 revised applications were received, including from Panama and Sao Tome and Principe. These underwent a second review by the Internal Task Team in December 2020, during which three projects, from Indonesia, Panama and Viet Nam, were identified as falling under the mandate of the GEF, meaning they were not eligible for funding under the Special Programme. The remaining 24 applications were appraised and prepared for consideration by the Executive Board. These comprised 11 applications from the African region, two applications from the Asia-Pacific region, nine applications from Central and Eastern Europe and two applications from Latin America and the Caribbean.

14. Nine of the applications submitted to the Executive Board (namely Afghanistan, Albania, Burundi, Cameroon, Malawi, Mexico, Sao Tome and Principe, Tanzania and Zambia) were high value projects, requesting funding between US \$250,000 and US \$500,000. Eight of the 24 countries had already had projects approved under earlier rounds of funding for the Special Programme, with implementation either completed or still ongoing. In this regard, the Secretariat referred to paragraph 20 of the Special Programme Terms of Reference, which provided that “Cumulative allocations to a country should be decided by the Executive Board based on the contributions received and the needs expressed in the applications submitted”.

15. The total funding requested in the 24 projects presented to the Executive Board amounted to US \$6,925,899, while the funding available for the fourth round stood at US \$4,685,750. Looking at the geographic breakdown of the applications to be considered, 46% of the funding was requested by countries in Africa, followed by 32% by countries in Central and Eastern Europe and 11% each by countries in Asia-Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean.

16. During the Board’s discussion on the presentation, it was noted that this would be the first time that cumulative applications, by countries which already had a project approved under the Special Programme, would be considered for approval. It was noted that, while paragraph 20 of the Terms of Reference allowed for the possibility of cumulative applications, it did not set any criteria or limits on such applications, but provided only that the Board would decide on such applications, based on the contributions received and the needs expressed in the applications submitted.

17. The co-chair indicated that the Board would approve a number of projects for this fourth round and would provide guidance and recommendations for improvement for those projects not approved under this round. He noted that, to facilitate the review process, the Secretariat had, in consultation with the Internal Task Team, appraised each application using the methodology described.

18. The Board decided, based on the co-chairs proposal and in order to make the best use of time, that it would consider each of the applications individually, in the order in which the Secretariat presented them, with a round-table discussion on the merits of each one. This first review would separate the projects into three groups: first, approved, with or without recommendations for improvement and subject to the availability of funds; secondly, requiring further discussion, and thirdly, not approved, with recommendations for improvement. Thereafter, a second round of discussions would look more closely at those applications that were

identified as requiring further discussion. If needed, this could be followed by a third round of discussions. The end result would be two groups of projects: those approved by the Executive Board, with or without recommendations for improvement, and those not approved, with recommendations for improvement.

19. The Secretariat presented to the Executive Board the appraisals of each of the 24 applications listed in Annex II. The Board deliberated the merits of each project and provided comments on the applications to further strengthen those that were approved for funding, as well as providing feedback to countries whose projects had not been approved with a view to encouraging them to resubmit improved applications in the future.

20. During the course of its discussion on the merits of the applications the Executive Board:

- a. Noted that it was not required to commit the entire budget available under the fourth round, and that projects would be approved on their merits;
- b. Requested clarification on particular projects in order to avoid possible overlaps with projects under the Specific International Programme, the Basel Convention, the GEF as well as the Quick Start Programme;
- c. Noted that, while awareness raising in Special Programme projects plays an important role and contributes to institutional strengthening within the scope of the definition provided in the Terms of Reference of the Special Programme, this should not be at the expense or to the exclusion of other possible proposed measures;
- d. Decided to consider each cumulative application on its merits on a case by case basis, taking into account the relation to and the progress made in the earlier projects as well as the results achieved, noting that projects which build on previous projects may bring extra value;
- e. Took into account the fact that any activity that is eligible for funding under the GEF, whether or not it will actually be funded by the GEF, is not eligible under the Special Programme. The Board noted that it was necessary to clarify what aspects of a project fall within the GEF mandate and requested that future appraisals provide an assessment, where relevant, of the viability and potential impact of projects once any GEF-eligible elements were removed. The level of effort required from the Secretariat in order to revise a project to remove the GEF-eligible components should be taken into account in deciding whether to approve such a project;
- f. Briefly discussed the role of implementing agencies, in the context of ensuring that projects are sustainable, and noted that there is a distinction between instances where the agency provides administrative support, or acts as a conduit for the funding, and cases where the project is actually being implemented by the agency;
- g. Reaffirmed, for projects with proposed budgets above the usual maximum of US \$ 250,000, the need to consider the additional criteria for high value projects carefully, particularly if it appeared that there may not be sufficient resources to meet all funding requests under the round.

21. Following its discussion, the Executive Board approved 15 projects amounting to US\$ 3,768,824. The approved projects were selected on the basis of the projects' merits, with consideration given to regional balance and priority to countries with least capacity, taking into account the special needs of least developed countries and small island developing states, as set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Projects approved under the fourth round of funding

	Country	Project Title
Africa		
1	Burundi	Strengthening chemicals and waste management within a circular economy framework in Burundi
2	Malawi	Strengthening institutional capacity to plan, monitor and coordinate the implementation of policies, strategies and national programmes for the sound management of chemicals and waste
3	Morocco	Strengthening institutional national capacities for the sound management of chemicals, especially the pesticides used in hygiene and public health
4	Rwanda	Strengthening the institutional capacity for sound management of chemicals and hazardous wastes
5	Sao Tome and Principe	Strengthening São Tomé and Príncipe's National Chemicals and Waste Management Programme by establishing sustainable, integrated, and coherent national structure using plastic waste management pilot to demonstrate private sector and community participation.
6	Sierra Leone	Institutional strengthening for the environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste within the framework of Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata Conventions and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) in Sierra Leone.
7	Sudan	Enhancing the institutional capacities for sound and synergistic management of chemicals and waste in Sudan
Asia-Pacific		
8	Mongolia	Improvement of human resource and analytical capacity for enforcement of hazardous waste management legislations in Mongolia
Central and Eastern Europe		
9	Armenia	Strengthening National Capacity of the Republic of Armenia in Sound Chemicals and Waste Management for Implementation of the Stockholm, Basel, Rotterdam, Minamata Conventions and SAICM
10	Belarus	National capacity strengthening for the sound management of chemicals by sustainable implementation of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals in the Republic of Belarus (GHS)
11	Georgia	Enhancing national capacities, reporting and synergies between Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata Conventions and SAICM for the sound management of chemicals and waste in Georgia
12	Moldova	Promoting good governance and building platforms on better coordination on sound management of chemicals and waste in the line with SAICM beyond 2020 in Moldova
13	Montenegro	Strengthening synergies between the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata conventions
14	Uzbekistan	Strengthening the institutional capacity of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the implementation of the Basel and the Stockholm conventions and GHS, as well as facilitate the accession to the Rotterdam and the Minamata conventions
Latin America and the Caribbean		
15	Peru	Strengthening national capacities for the integral management of chemicals in Peru

ITEM 5. PREPARATIONS FOR THE LAUNCHING OF THE FIFTH ROUND OF APPLICATIONS

Item 5.1 Presentations from the Secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the Minamata Convention and SAICM

22. Representatives from each of the Secretariats of the chemicals and waste related instruments and the GEF were invited by the co-chairs to provide the Executive Board with an overview of the outcomes and/or expected outcomes of relevant meetings held by their respective Governing Bodies.

23. In a joint statement on behalf of the Internal Task Team, Ms. Marianne Bailey noted the importance of the Special Programme as a mechanism to support the implementation of obligations and objectives towards the various instruments and emphasized the need for institutional strengthening at the national level given the implementation challenges for many countries particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Bailey also noted that in order to facilitate the provision of continued support to countries that may apply for funding from the Special Programme in the future, the Board may wish to consider lifting the budget caps on staffing, personnel and contractual costs, considering that the caps may lead countries to devote more funding to equipment and/or travel, which may not be relevant in a post COVID-19 environment. Furthermore, Ms. Bailey informed the Executive Board that the trend towards thematic projects under the Special Programme may also not be relevant in a post COVID-19 environment and that the Board may wish to consider focusing on “back to basics” foundational institutional work and, where necessary, regulatory work, for strengthening of capacities across instruments during future rounds of applications.

24. Ms. Nalini Sharma expressed her support on behalf of the SAICM Secretariat of the joint statement provided by Ms. Bailey and informed the Executive Board of the postponement of the fourth meeting of the Intersessional Process (IP4) and fifth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM-5), noting that the SAICM Bureau would continue to discuss options for convening these meetings. Ms. Sharma also provided a summary of the activities that have been undertaken by the SAICM Secretariat, including the hosting of a series of virtual working groups which allowed the SAICM stakeholders to maintain momentum with the discussions on the post 2020 framework. Ms. Sharma noted that the SAICM Secretariat was reflecting positively on the outcomes of the virtual working groups and was making every effort to ensure that when face-to-face meetings are possible a new ambitious instrument for sound management of chemicals and waste will be drafted. Finally, Ms. Sharma expressed the continued support of the SAICM Secretariat to the work of the Special Programme.

25. Ms. Evelyn Swain provided the Executive Board with a summary of the outcomes of the GEF 59th Council meeting, which was held in December 2020. Ms. Swain indicated that the Council approved 55 million USD to be allocated to chemicals and waste projects including seven single focal area projects and 2 multi focal area projects. The Council also launched the GEF 8 replenishment process. The process would work over the next 18 months to develop the GEF 8 programming directions, with the first draft to be finalized in early April. Finally, Ms. Swain announced that the 60th GEF Council meeting would take place virtually in June 2021.

26. In providing comments on behalf of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions, Mr. Frank Moser commended the work of the Special Programme to date and indicated the Secretariat of the Conventions remains dedicated, through the provision of staff time, to appraise projects through multiple lenses. Mr. Moser also noted that through the implementation of approved projects, countries can leverage additional funding at the national level and make better use of existing resources to increase their capacity to mainstream chemicals and waste-related issues and to avoid duplication of efforts through the implementation of mutually supportive activities under various bodies, such as the Implementation and Compliance Committee under the Basel Convention.

27. Ms. Bailey, speaking on behalf of the Secretariat of the Minamata Convention, provided an overview of the control measures that had been put in place under the Minamata Convention to manage the supply of mercury in circulation and in commerce, as well as measures to reduce the use of mercury and measures to reduce the emissions of mercury to the environment. This included a timeline on when the measures were marked for implementation. Ms. Bailey also provided the Executive Board with an analysis of the relationship

between the different funding mechanisms that were in place to facilitate the implementation of the Minamata Convention, specifically, the Special Programme, the Specific International Programme and the GEF. Her analysis summarised how the funding mechanisms could work in concert and avoid duplication of efforts.

28. Following the presentations, the Executive Board expressed their appreciation to the representatives of the Secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the Minamata Convention, SAICM and the GEF for sharing relevant information with the Board and reflected on how the Special Programme could continue to facilitate the implementation of the chemicals and waste-related instruments in an effective manner. Furthermore, the members of the Executive Board requested that such presentations be included as a standing agenda item at subsequent Executive Board meetings.

Item 5.2 Approval of revised application guidelines and forms

29. The co-chairs of the Executive Board invited the Special Programme Secretariat to present an overview of the updated application guidelines and forms, as outlined in documents SP/EB.6/4/Add.1, SP/EB. 6/4/Add.2 and SP/EB.6/4/Add.3.

30. The Executive Board welcomed the updates made to the documents and discussed the issues raised during the presentations of the representatives from each of the Secretariats of the chemicals and waste related instruments, the GEF and the Secretariat of the Special Programme. In considering the merits of recommended changes to the application guidelines and forms, the Executive Board requested the Secretariat to further update the Guidance and Guideline documents to include:

- a. To include a section in the Annex of the Guidance that specifies the types of projects that could contribute to institutional strengthening in the context of the chemicals and waste related instruments as well as a summary of the types of activities falling under the mandate of the GEF;
- b. To update the case studies in the application Guidance to including projects that had been approved during the fourth round of applications as well as information on projects that had been successfully completed;
- c. To ensure that the section on monitoring and evaluation, which had been inserted under “Additional Information”, was given more prominence in the document;
- d. To include the text of the Governing Council decision on the integrated approach as an annex to the document;
- e. To relax the caps on the budget categories by indicating that the percentages listed in the guidance documents are recommendations rather than firm limits;
- f. To include information on the inclusion of activities related to post COVID-19 recovery;
- g. To make a number of other editorial changes, such as updates to the gender mainstreaming section to ensure it is more gender inclusive, amongst other things.

31. The Executive Board endorsed the full application package, consisting of the application guidance, guidelines and forms, with the proposed improvements.

32. With regards to the e-learning course, the members of the Executive Board reflected positively on the status of implementation of the e-learning course and endorsed its update and launching in French and Spanish time for the fifth round of applications.

Item 5.3 Timeline for review and appraisal of applications

33. The co-chairs invited the Secretariat to present the proposed timeline for the submission, appraisal and review of the applications as outlined in document SP/EB.6/3 to assist the Board in its deliberations on this agenda item.

34. Following its deliberations, the Executive Board endorsed the timeline for processing the fifth round of applications, as set out in Annex III, while noting that reasonable flexibility may be exercised by the Secretariat with regards to the launch date given the large number of edits to be made to the Guidance and Guideline documents, in line with the comments made by the Executive Board.

ITEM 6. UPDATE ON THE OPERATIONS OF THE SPECIAL PROGRAMME

6.1 Update on Secretariat activities

Update on the Executive Board

35. Following an invitation from the co-chair to present an update on the operations of the Secretariat, the representative of the Secretariat recalled that the outcomes of the October teleconference of the Executive Board were available in the meeting report adopted earlier this week as well as meeting document SP/EB.6/5 and so would not be discussed in detail at this meeting. However, she pointed out two items discussed during the teleconference for which the Secretariat had been asked to provide inputs. For the issue of Executive Board membership, and in particular the difficulties encountered in finalizing the nominations process during the last round, the Secretariat had provided an inventory of governance arrangements in similar mechanisms as document SP/EB.6/6. With respect to the discussions on the possible recommendation for extension of duration of the Special Programme, the Secretariat had provided a document on the future added value of the Special Programme as document SP/EB.6/7. Both of these agenda items would be taken up again during the resumed session of the sixth Executive Board meeting, to be held later in the year.

Project implementation status

36. Turning to the status of project implementation, the representative of the Secretariat noted that a detailed update on each project had been given during the October teleconference. Progress reports from the projects for 2020 were in the process of being finalized, and the Secretariat would again provide a detailed update at the resumed session later in the year. The Secretariat highlighted a few key issues for the Board's consideration at this meeting, as follows.

a. The Secretariat had received requests to restructure project budgets across budget categories, given the impact of COVID-19, and in particular the resulting restrictions on travel. She noted that, under the terms of the UNEP standard project cooperation agreement, which the Special Programme uses, flexibility of up to 10% per budget line was allowed at the discretion of the implementing partner. Any changes exceeding 10% required approval from UNEP and should obviously make sense in the context of the project. The Executive Board's guidance was requested where the change would result in the Special Programme budget cap being exceeded; specifically, whether the Executive Board would allow for flexibility across budget categories for existing projects, and if so, whether such requests could be approved by the Secretariat directly, or by the co-chairs, on a case by case basis.

b. The Secretariat provided an update on projects which had requested no-cost extensions since the last report to the Executive Board in October 2020, namely Iran, Nigeria, State of Palestine, Uganda and Viet Nam. Where the request would extend the project beyond the usual maximum duration of 36 months, the Secretariat had engaged with the co-chairs for approval, in line with the guidance given by the Board during the teleconference.

c. With respect to the project in Albania, the Secretariat reported that, after extensive delays that had been reported to the board in previous meetings, the agreement had been signed and implementation had started.

d. The project agreement for Bolivia had still not been signed; while some progress had been made, it had been difficult to sustain communication with the project focal point. The Secretariat expressed its appreciation to the UNEP regional office for assistance in this regard.

e. After the Executive Board's approval of the revised project in Brazil during the teleconference in October 2020, the Secretariat was working with the partner to finalise the agreement.

f. In spite of COVID-19 and a series of natural disasters, El Salvador had managed to undertake some implementation of the project. It had requested a change to the project at no additional cost to include an additional activity, to be funded through savings on travel and on another activity that was implemented through an in-kind contribution. This request had been approved by the co-chairs and the amendment to the project agreement was in progress.

g. The project in Ukraine had finally been terminated, after its suspension by the Board.

h. For the project in Viet Nam, the Secretariat had received a request to change implementing partners for reasons related to changes in domestic law that affected who could receive overseas development assistance funds. The request was approved by the co-chairs and the amendment to the project agreement was in progress.

37. In response to the Secretariat's request for guidance on flexibility across budget categories where the change would result in the budget cap being exceeded, the Executive Board agreed that, given the extraordinary situation arising from the pandemic, a flexible approach was warranted. It was further agreed that it would be left to the discretion of the Secretariat as to whether the co-chairs should be consulted on each such request.

38. With respect to the requests for no-cost extensions, the representative from Africa indicated that Ghana, which had also made such a request, had not been mentioned. This was noted.

Implementation of the Special Programme Communications Strategy

39. The co-chairs of the Executive Board invited the Special Programme Secretariat to provide an overview of the status of the implementation of the workplan that has been put in place in collaboration with PCI Media with the view to implementing Phase II of the communications strategy, as outlined in document SP/EB.6/5.

40. The Executive Board took note of the changes in the workplan deliverables and reflected positively on the status of implementation of Phase II of the communications strategy. The Board also welcomed outputs that had been produced to date and expressed their anticipation of the upcoming communications products.

Monitoring and evaluation

41. The representative of the Secretariat noted that following their endorsement by the Executive Board during the October teleconference the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Strategy an Action Plan and related Toolkit had been designed and laid out, and made available in the information documents for this meeting. The documents were ready to be launched following the approval of the fourth round projects.

42. In addition, the Secretariat had prepared guidelines on reporting under the Special Programme. This involved a review of all reports submitted to date to identify where difficulties had been encountered. The guidelines would be rolled out to all new and existing projects after this meeting. The Secretariat had also refined the reporting templates to facilitate reporting on the projects.

Staffing

43. The representative of the Secretariat announced that the long-vacant P3 Programme Management Officer position had been filled with effect from December 2020 through the well-deserved promotion of Ms. Dina Abdelhakim. The recruitment process for the position vacated by Ms. Abdelhakim, that of P2 Programme Management Officer, had been completed and the new staff member would take up her duties with effect from 1 May 2021. The P3 post that had been approved by the Executive Board during the October teleconference to focus on the rollout of the monitoring, evaluation and learning strategy was about to be advertised.

44. In addition, the representative of the Secretariat noted that under the staffing table of UNEP, the Secretariat had a vacant G4 Team Assistant post assigned to it. The Secretariat was requesting the Executive Board's approval to fill this position. This would be helpful in light of the fact that the portfolio of approved projects has just increased by 15. The Team Assistant would help with preparation of documents for the agreements, reviewing progress reports from countries and also assisting with the processing of the new funding rounds. It was noted that there were no budgetary implications for 2021, as the position could be funded from savings from vacant positions.

6.2 Proposed approach to dealing with protracted delays in finalising project implementation arrangements

45. Responding to the co-chair's invitation to present the agenda item, the representative of the Secretariat recalled that the Executive Board at its fifth meeting had asked the Secretariat to prepare guidance on how to deal with protracted delays in finalizing implementation arrangements. This resulting proposal had been included as part of meeting document SP/EB.6/5.

46. In approaching this task, the Secretariat undertook an analysis of the existing portfolio of 42 projects. In summary, the shortest time taken to sign an agreement was a little over five months. Of the 42 projects, 52% were signed within nine months of approval by the Executive Board, while 35% took more than one year to sign. The average time taken to sign agreements for projects in the first round was nine months; the average time for the second and third round projects was 11 months.

47. Reasons for the delay included (in no particular order) changes in implementing entity, changes in government, revision of the project in response to Executive Board comments, impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, delays arising from the security or political situation in the country, delays on the side of the Secretariat arising from issues with the receipt of donor funds and from capacity issues within the team.

48. The Secretariat indicated that it was important to note that some degree of delay in finalizing agreements could be considered natural, given that these were projects aimed at building institutions and capacity, and most projects did require at least some level of revision before they could be codified into a formal agreement that the country would then be legally obligated to implement. Depending on the changes needed, this could involve some back and forth between the Secretariat and the country.

49. The representative of the Secretariat noted also that the Secretariat had been understaffed for some time and that the draft guidance assumed that, once it was up to its full capacity, a reasonable time frame for signature would be between six and nine months, although exceptional circumstances in the countries or the projects might give rise to longer delays.

50. The representative of the Secretariat then explained the proposed approach for the consideration of the Executive Board, noting that each case should be considered individually, depending on the circumstances in the country concerned:

- a) All newly approved projects should aim to have the appropriate project agreements signed within nine months of approval by the Board.
- b) In cases where the signature of the agreement was delayed beyond nine months, the Secretariat would report to the co-chairs, identifying the reasons for the delay if known. The Secretariat would continue

to work towards signature of the agreement, while providing appropriate support and taking into account the capacity available within the recipient country.

- c) Where more than 12 months had passed from approval by the Board without the implementation arrangements being finalized:
 - i) The Secretariat would inform the recipient government and/or implementing entity that failure to finalize the implementation arrangements within a reasonable period of time (ideally no longer than three months from the date of the notification) placed the project at risk of being cancelled.
 - ii) The Secretariat would inform the co-chairs of the delay and of the reasons for the delay, if known.
- d) If it appeared that the delay was outside of the control of the recipient country or was unavoidable (e.g. force majeure), the co-chairs might instruct the Secretariat to continue working with the country to finalize the arrangements. Depending on the situation, it might be necessary to revisit the implementation arrangements to ensure that the project could indeed be implemented successfully; this might require approval of the Executive Board (e.g. for changes to implementing entities or approved activities). In such cases, the Executive Board might wish to make use of a silence procedure¹ during the inter-sessional period, which would allow for proposed decisions to be circulated electronically and adopted on a no-objection basis.
- e) Where it appeared that the delay was avoidable or where the recipient country or applicant had not been responsive on the matter, the Executive Board might, either at its next meeting or through the silence procedure, take a decision to cancel the project. The funds earmarked for the project would then become available to support future applications under the Special Programme.

51. The representative of the Secretariat noted that the approach adopted by the Executive Board would be spelled out clearly in the communication sent to applicant countries informing them of the approval of the projects by the Executive Board. The Secretariat also proposed to highlight this policy to the two projects for which agreements had not yet been signed, namely Bolivia and Brazil. The Secretariat would monitor progress on this issue going forward and provide updates to the Board at future meetings and would engage as needed with the co-chairs on each specific case.

52. In its discussion, the Executive Board noted that the proposal was well balanced and took into account the experience gained to date, as well as the need for flexibility, while also providing for funds that had not been used in a timely manner to be made available again for future projects. The Board agreed to adopt the proposed approach.

6.3 Proposed revised Special Programme budget for 2021

53. Following the co-chair's invitation to present this agenda item, the Secretariat provided an update on contributions, noting that, thanks to generous pledges received from Germany and Norway since the last teleconference, the total contributions to date stood at \$28,603,493.

54. The Secretariat recalled the indicative budget for 2021 adopted by the Executive Board during the October 2020 teleconference, the total amount of which was \$5,9 million. The proposed revision to the budget took into account:

- a. The additional contributions from Norway and Germany (a total increase of \$911,777);

¹ In line with the United Nations procedure adopted to allow for decision-making by the General Assembly during the pandemic: <https://www.un.org/pga/74/covid-19/v3-procedure-for-decision-via-silence-procedure-3/>

- b. The approval of 15 applications under the fourth round of funding (amounting to \$3,768,824);
- c. A significant reduction in travel costs owing to the ongoing effects of the pandemic on travel;
- d. Changes to costs for contractual services to reduce costs related to Executive Board meetings, since this meeting had taken place online rather than in person, as well as including provision for translation of the fifth round guidance and guidelines documents into four languages (estimated at \$18,000), the e-learning module into two languages (estimated at \$20,000) and the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Strategy and Toolkit into four 4 languages (estimated at \$20,000).
- e. An increase in staff and personnel to include a consultant to update the e-learning course and programme 2 new languages (estimated at \$10,000) and a consultant to produce stories on newly approved projects (estimated at \$5,000).

55. The total proposed revised budget amounted to \$5,558,174, which was \$345,210 lower than what had been approved in October.

56. The representative of the Secretariat noted that the request for approval of the G4 Team Assistant had no cost implications for 2021 as it could be funded from savings on the vacant posts. It would have implications from 2022 onwards, estimated at USD100,000 per year.

57. Looking at the funds available for the fifth round of applications, the Secretariat noted that taking into account the unallocated amount from the fourth round, the amount available for the fifth round as at March 2021 was \$3,738,854.

58. The Executive Board was requested to consider approving the proposed revised budget for 2021 and the filling of the G4 Team Assistant post.

59. The implications of approving the G4 Team Assistant position was discussed and it was noted that, while the Executive Board approved the Special Programme budget on a yearly basis, once the position was filled the staff member would be part of the Secretariat. The Executive Board adopted the revised 2021 budget as presented in Table 2 below and also approved the filling of the G4 Team Assistant post.

Table 2: Approved revised budget for 2021 (all amounts in US\$)

	Staff Costs	Contractual Services	Travel	IP-Direct	Operating Costs	TOTAL
Output 1: Management of the Special Programme	-	35,000	17,078	-	13,274	45,352
Output 2: Technical assistance	-	-	-	3,768,824	-	3,768,824
Output 3: Communications	15,000	294,403	-	20,000	-	329,403
Output 4: Monitoring	-	44,736	-	-	-	44,736
Evaluation	-	-	-	-	-	-
Staff costs	909,232	-	-	-	-	909,232
SUB TOTALS	924,232	354,139	17,078	3,788,824	13,274	5,097,547
PSC (EC 7%; OTHERS 13%)	76,701	39,260	1,195	341,745	1,726	460,627

TOTAL	1,000,933	393,399	18,273	4,130,569	15,000	5,558,174
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ITEM 7. DATE AND VENUE OF THE NEXT SESSIONS OF THE SIXTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

60. To facilitate the Executive Board's deliberations under this agenda item, the Secretariat made a brief presentation outlining the tentative agenda items that the Board might wish to consider at the resumed session of the sixth meeting of the Executive Board as well as a brief overview of the proposed session on Private Sector Engagement.

61. In light of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic limiting the capacity to travel, the Executive Board agreed that the resumed session would take place online during an appropriate time in September 2021. The Board noted that many meetings were expected to take place during the proposed time period and requested the Secretariat to ensure the meeting was scheduled with an effort to reduce conflicts. The Board also agreed to the proposed tentative agenda items provided by the Secretariat.

62. With regards to the session on private sector engagement, the Executive Board noted that it would be useful to have a preparatory discussion on this issue during the resumed session of the sixth meeting of the Executive Board. The Board also noted that the session could be held in the margins of a SAICM related meeting, such as ICCM-5, if possible. The Board further emphasized the importance of including private sector stakeholders that focus on waste issues.

ITEM 8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

63. As no matters had been added under this agenda item during the adoption of the agenda, the co-chair closed the agenda item.

ITEM 9. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

64. Noting that the Secretariat would, as per its usual practice, circulate a draft meeting report for review by the members of the Executive Board, the co-chair reflected that the Board had taken some important decisions during the week, with the approval of 15 new Special Programme projects. Projects that had not been approved for funding under this round should be encouraged to reapply in future rounds, taking into account the feedback provided by the Board. The co-chair thanked the Secretariat for its organization of the meeting, and also extended words of thanks to the representatives from the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Secretariats, the Minamata Secretariat, the SAICM Secretariat and the GEF Secretariat as well as the observers who had participated in the meeting.

65. The representative from the European Union thanked the Board for a very productive meeting and noted that the ongoing work by the European Union on its zero pollution action plan, to be published in June 2021, was very relevant to the matters that had been discussed at this meeting. The European Union representative was pleased to announce the organization of a dedicated session on the Special Programme during the online EU Green Week 2021, which is open to the public, to be held in the first week of June.

66. On behalf of UNEP, Ms. MacDevette added her thanks for the dedication and commitment of all the participants to the work of the Special Programme.

67. The meeting was closed at 4pm on Friday 5 March 2021.

68. In line with established practice, a draft report was circulated online among the members of the Executive Board for their comments over a period of two weeks. The Secretariat made the necessary amendments to finalize the present report.

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ANNEX II

LIST OF ELIGIBLE AND COMPLETE APPLICATIONS UNDER THE FOURTH ROUND OF FUNDING CONSIDERED BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

	Country	Country Status	Project Title
1	Burundi	Least Developed Country	Strengthening chemicals and waste management within a circular economy framework in Burundi
2	Cameroon	Developing Country	Developing a sustainable, integrated, and coherent national programme for the sound management of chemicals and wastes in Cameroon
3	Malawi	Least Developed Country	Strengthening institutional capacity to plan, monitor and coordinate the implementation of policies, strategies and national programmes for the sound management of chemicals and waste
4	Morocco	Developing Country	Strengthening institutional national capacities for the sound management of chemicals, especially the pesticides used in hygiene and public health
5	Rwanda	Least Developed Country	Strengthening the institutional capacity for sound management of chemicals and hazardous wastes
6	Sao Tome and Principe	Least Developed Country/Small island developing State	Strengthening São Tomé and Príncipe's National Chemicals and Waste Management Programme by establishing sustainable, integrated, and coherent national structure using plastic waste management pilot to demonstrate private sector and community participation.
7	Sierra Leone	Least Developed Country	Institutional strengthening for the environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste within the framework of Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata Conventions and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) in Sierra Leone.
8	South Africa	Developing Country	Implementation of Chemical Awareness Raising Strategy
9	Sudan	Least Developed Country	Enhancing the institutional capacities for sound and synergistic management of chemicals and waste in Sudan
10	Tanzania	Least Developed Country	Strengthening institutional capacity on implementation of existing legal and institutional framework for sound management of chemicals and wastes.
11	Zambia	Least Developed Country	Strengthening the national implementation of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme and the foundations of Circular Economy for waste management
12	Afghanistan	Developing Country	Institutional Strengthening for Sustainable Chemicals and Waste Management in Afghanistan
13	Mongolia	Developing Country	Improvement of human resource and analytical capacity for enforcement of hazardous waste management legislations in Mongolia
14	Albania	Country with economy in transition	Institutional strengthening on establishing compliant and functional system for the management of the batteries in Albania
15	Armenia	Country with economy in transition	Strengthening National Capacity of the Republic of Armenia in Sound Chemicals and Waste Management for Implementation of the Stockholm, Basel, Rotterdam, Minamata Conventions and SAICM

16	Belarus	Country with economy in transition	National capacity strengthening for the sound management of chemicals by sustainable implementation of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals in the Republic of Belarus (GHS)
17	Georgia	Country with economy in transition	Enhancing national capacities, reporting and synergies between Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata Conventions and SAICM for the sound management of chemicals and waste in Georgia
18	Kyrgyzstan	Developing country	Strengthening capacity for the proper management of chemicals and waste
19	Moldova	Country with economy in transition	Promoting good governance and building platforms on better coordination on sound management of chemicals and waste in the line with SAICM beyond 2020 in Moldova
20	Montenegro	Country with economy in transition	Strengthening synergies between the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata conventions
21	Serbia	Country with economy in transition	Smart Management of Chemicals and Wastes for Circular Economy in Serbia
22	Uzbekistan	Country with economy in transition	Strengthening the institutional capacity of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the implementation of the Basel and the Stockholm conventions and GHS, as well as facilitate the accession to the Rotterdam and the Minamata conventions
23	Mexico	Developing country	Strengthening national capacity for the comprehensive management of hazardous chemicals and wastes in Mexico by establishing the necessary structure for the implementation of the Basel, Stockholm, Rotterdam and Minamata Conventions, and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)
24	Peru	Developing country	Strengthening national capacities for the integral management of chemicals in Peru

ANNEX III

**CALENDAR OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE PROPOSED ORGANISATION OF WORK AND
TIMELINES FOR THE LAUNCH AND APPRAISAL OF THE FIFTH ROUND OF
APPLICATIONS**

Activity	Main Actors	Timeframe
Launch of the call for applications for funding from the Special Programme	Special Programme Secretariat	7 April 2021
Application Deadline for the submission of Project Proposals	Countries	7 August 2021
Acknowledgement of application receipt and information on eligibility and completeness	Special Programme Secretariat	7-14 August 2021
First Meeting of the Internal Task Team	Special Programme Secretariat and Internal Task Team	13-14 September 2021
Applications with comments and suggestions for improvement sent back to countries for their review	Special Programme Secretariat	1-5 October 2021
Deadline for the resubmission of final applications taking into account the comments made by the Secretariat and the Internal Task Team	Countries	29 October 2021
Second Meeting of the internal Task Team	Special Programme Secretariat and Internal Task Team	22-23 November 2021
Documents submitted to the Executive Board for their consideration	Special Programme Secretariat	Mid-January 2022
Seventh Meeting of the Executive Board is convened	Members of the Executive Board	Mid-February 2022
Decisions of the Executive Board on approved applications are communicated to countries	Special Programme Secretariat	February 2022