

Africa Regional Meeting in preparation for the third session of the ad hoc open-ended working group (OEWG 3) on a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution.

29 – 30 May 2024

09:00 – 18:00 (GMT -3)

Accra, Ghana

Agenda item 1: Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda

1. Mr Cyrus Mageria (former OEWG Bureau Member replacing Ms Linda Kosgei, newly elected Bureau Member from Kenya, who was not available for this meeting) and Mr Oumar Cisse (Mali), OEWG Bureau members, co-chaired this meeting. They opened the meeting at 9.00 am on 29 May 2024. They welcomed the UNEP secretariat, SPP OEWG National Focal Points, other government representatives, and stakeholders to the regional meeting in preparation for OEWG 3.

(a) Opening remarks

2. Dr. Kwamena E. Quaison, Director of Science Technology and Innovation at the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation, expressed gratitude to UNEP for planning and funding the event. He highlighted that environmental risks from chemicals, waste, and pollution cause over 13 million deaths annually and account for a quarter of the global disease burden. He emphasized the need for greater efforts and innovations to prevent these impacts, address capacity gaps, and consider the specific concerns of developing countries. He suggested that the proposed science-policy panel could help implement evidence-based solutions more quickly. Dr. Quaison also stressed the importance of capacity building in Africa, including technology transfer, data generation, infrastructure, and human resource development for the effective functioning of the science-policy panel. He noted that the regional meeting aims to facilitate in-depth exchanges among African Member States and stakeholders, identifying major issues prior to the OEWG-3 session scheduled for 17-21 June 2024, in Geneva.
3. Mr Mohamed Atani, Director of the UNEP Subregional Office for West Africa, thanked the Government of Ghana for hosting the meeting, and highlighted the unprecedented momentum of the chemicals and waste agenda, as well as the relevance of establishing this Panel to reinforce the science-policy interface to address the triple planetary crises. He expressed confidence in the African region's leadership and active engagement ahead of the negotiations and praised its contribution to multilateral environmental processes. Mr Atani reaffirmed UNEP's support for ongoing dialogues at regional and national levels.
4. Mrs. Alkemade, Chair of the SPP OEWG Bureau, appreciated the active engagement of the Africa region in this process. She summarized the progress of the OEWG, outcomes of previous sessions, and expectations for OEWG 3.

(b) Adoption of the agenda

5. The co-chairs invited the participants to consider the meeting agenda. Participants adopted the provisional agenda without change.
6. One Member State suggested prioritizing sections of the documents that needed urgent input, given the agenda and tasks for the two-day meeting.

Agenda item 2: Recap of UNEA Resolution 5/8 and update on the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group process

7. The co-chairs invited the secretariat to give a brief recap of UNEA Resolution 5/8 and update on the OEWG process, including the intersessional work leading up to OEWG 3. Then, they opened the floor for discussion.
8. At OEWG 1, Member States decided to add a capacity-building function in addition to those already determined by the UNEA 5/8 resolution. Since then, the EU and the GRULAC-Africa Groups suggested two draft texts. During this meeting, one Member States presented key aspects of these proposals: to promote inclusion of fellowship programmes for early career scientists, geographical and gender balance, and local and indigenous knowledge; and stronger roles of national focal points to connect the science-policy panel at national, regional, and sub-regional levels to facilitate knowledge sharing for informed decision making. Another Member State called for more African support for the proposals.
9. The co-chairs suggested forming a group to work on a proposal for the capacity building function of the panel. Participants formed a six-member group consisting of Angola, Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia, Madagascar and Nigeria, and presented a merged proposal to the meeting.

Agenda item 3: Organizational matters for the third session of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group

10. The secretariat presented the OEWG 3 provisional agenda (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/1) and annotated provisional agenda (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/1/Add.1). The secretariat outlined the proposed contact groups and the modalities of work to be considered.

Agenda item 4: Preparation of proposals for the establishment of a science-policy panel

11. The co-chairs invited the secretariat to present the OEWG 3 working documents. The secretariat presented the working documents and explained the clustering and linkages between the working documents.

(a) Scope, objective and functions of the panel

12. The co-chairs reintroduced the capacity building discussion and invited the group established earlier in

the meeting to present its work.

13. The group noted that the two proposals were evidently different, however, there were some commonalities e.g. fellowship programs, strengthening the role of national focal points, connecting regional and subregional networks, promoting access to knowledge, data, best practices, and potential solutions, enhancing knowledge and skills that support country infrastructure and human capacity. The GRULAC-Africa proposal stressed the importance of including the facilitation of technology transfer, particularly to developing countries.
14. The group proposed to integrate the capacity building in all of the other functions of the panel and develop a capacity building program that will improve the science-policy interface at the international, regional and sub-regional levels, promote gender responsiveness, and inclusiveness, facilitate technology transfer to encourage access to high quality knowledge data and best practices including but not limited to fellowships, internship, and empowerment programs.
15. One Member State was concerned about coordination and accountability in some countries. The secretariat responded that the concerns raised would be considered.

(b) Operating Principles of the Panel

16. Member States asked whether the current operating principles were open to discussion as they covered gender and inclusivity, but not youth and children. They debated the inclusion of ‘intergenerational equity’, a term referring to fairness concerning youth groups. A suggestion was made to use the term ‘intergenerational fairness’ instead.

(c) Institutional arrangements for the panel

17. A Member State asked about the difference between plenary and the governing body. It was explained that Plenary refers to the meeting that includes government members of the Panel and stakeholders.

(d) Draft Financial Procedures

18. Member States questioned whether the financial procedures can be amended if conflicts of interest arise. The secretariat replied there are provisions to revise the financial procedures, and discussion will need to take place on the draft text which includes issues such as due diligence.

19. Member States asked to clarify what measures would prevent the private sector in-kind or cash contributions from influencing the panel. The secretariat replied that as in-kind contributions could be influential, the proposal in the draft text suggests that the Bureau would consider the submission.

(e) Draft rules of procedure (OEWG.3/2/Add.1)

20. A Member State suggested the panel should generate data under the capacity building function, as opposed to using existing sources.

21. Another Member State enquired if the documents can be critically examined and raised the need to consider indigenous knowledge as part of the document.

22. The co-chair nominated the representative from Burundi to co-ordinate the group section which was supported by attendees present.

(f) Draft process for determining the work program, including prioritization

23. Member States asked for clarity on the official languages of the governing body of the panel which, the secretariat informed them, are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. It was noted that all subsidiary body and Bureau meetings are in English.

(g) Draft conflict-of-interest policy

24. Member States compared the conflict-of-interest disclosure form from the WHO and IPCC with the one developed for the science-policy panel, stating it is robust and the content is an acceptable standard.

25. Member States asked that, on item 4 in the conflict-of-interest disclosure form indirect investments such as trust or holding companies be included.

26. Member State asked for item 15 to be deleted from the conflict-of-interest disclosure form since it was duplicated earlier in the form.

Agenda item 5: Recommendations to the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme for the preparation of the intergovernmental meeting to establish the science-policy panel

27. The co-chairs invited the secretariat to present the OEWG 3 working documents: OEWG.3/3: Proposals on the establishment of the Panel to be considered by the intergovernmental meeting; and OEWG.3/4: Proposals to give effect to arrangements to be considered by the intergovernmental meeting.

28. One Member State suggested including a draft glossary with definitions of terminology in all documents related to the panel. The secretariat responded that the rules of procedure already contain definitions for some of the terms used.

Agenda item 6: Logistical preparations for the third session of the Open-ended Working Group

29. The secretariat provided a brief introduction on the date and venue of OEWG 3, which will take place at the CICG in Geneva from 17 – 21 June 2024. There will be preparatory meetings including informal, regional and stakeholder consultations on 16 June 2024. To date a total of 733 registrations were received. The secretariat invited Member States and stakeholders to submit written comments on the working documents.

30. The co-chair identified countries that would follow the contact groups to work on various documents in preparation for the OEWG 3 meeting.

- a. Contact Group 1: Liberia (Lead), Ghana (co-lead), Egypt, Angola, Benin, Sudan, Madagascar, Cameroon, Guinea Bissau, Morocco, Mauritania, Sudan, Nigeria, Congo, and Experts.
- b. Contact Group 2: Malawi (Lead), Burundi (co-lead), Nigeria, South Africa, Botswana, Congo, Guinea, Djibouti, Lesotho, Rwanda, Liberia, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Tanzania, IPEN, and Expert.
- c. Contact Group 3: Uganda (Lead), South Africa (co-lead), Tunisia, Kenya, Egypt, Togo, Comoros, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Sudan, Somalia, Mauritius, Zimbabwe and Expert.

Agenda item 7: Other matters

31. No other matter was raised. The secretariat informed that meeting documents for the OEWG 3 will be posted on the meeting website in the six UN languages.

Agenda item 8: Closure of the meeting

32. The co-chairs noted that there was a consensus on the panel having a capacity-building function, but there were differing views on what this should entail, with two proposals on the table. They suggested reaching a consensus on one, or finding an alternative proposal. The co-chairs also emphasized the need to clarify the role of the policy committee to Member States.

33. The representative of the Government of Ghana, the co-chairs and the secretariat provided closing remarks. The representatives express their gratitude to the government of Ghana and the secretariat for organizing this meeting. The co-chairs concluded the meeting on 30 May 2024 at 17:00.