



Distr.: General
16 November 2020
Original: English



**United Nations
Environment Assembly of the
United Nations Environment
Programme**

**United Nations Environment Assembly of the
United Nations Environment Programme
Fifth session**

Nairobi (online), 22–26 February 2021*
Item 5 of the provisional agenda**

**International environmental policy and
governance issues**

**Progress in the implementation of resolution 3/6 on managing
soil pollution to achieve sustainable development**

Report of the Executive Director

Introduction

1. In its resolution 3/6, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) requested Member States, and invited relevant United Nations organizations, to address soil pollution on the global environmental, food security and agriculture, development and health agendas in an integrated manner, especially through preventive approaches and risk management using available science.
2. Further to the progress report submitted for consideration at the fourth session of the Environment Assembly (UNEP/EA.4/9), the present report contains an update on the steps taken to implement resolution 3/6, and in particular paragraph 7, in which the Environment Assembly requested the Executive Director of UNEP, within the scope of available resources, by the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, to invite, within their respective mandates, relevant United Nations organizations, including the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Global Soil Partnership for Food Security and Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation and its Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: (a) to prepare a report based on available scientific information and data on the extent and future trends of soil pollution, considering both point source contamination and diffuse pollution, and on the risks and impacts of soil pollution on health, the environment and food security, including land degradation and the burden of disease resulting from exposure to contaminated soil; and (b) to elaborate technical guidelines for the prevention and minimization of soil contamination as a contribution to support the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management, including nature-based solutions.

* In accordance with the decisions taken at the meeting of the Bureau of the United Nations Environment Assembly held on 8 October 2020 and at the joint meeting of the Bureaux of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the Committee of Permanent Representatives held on 1 December 2020, the fifth session of the Assembly is expected to adjourn on 23 February 2021 and resume as an in-person meeting in February 2022.

** UNEP/EA.5/1/Rev.1.

3. The present report also outlines how UNEP is collaborating with other United Nations organizations and national and international institutions that have been working on the issue of soil pollution, including in the framework of partnerships, in order to develop a joint agenda relating to the implementation of the actions requested by the Environment Assembly in paragraphs 6–9 of resolution 3/6.

I. Progress in the implementation of resolution 3/6

4. The recommendations emanating from the Global Symposium on Soil Pollution, held in May 2018, served as the first concrete contribution to, and endorsement of, the preparation of the global assessment of soil pollution report. Under the aegis of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Global Soil Partnership established an editorial board composed of representatives of the regional soil partnerships, members of the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils, recognized soil pollution experts, members of United Nations entities, and representatives of other stakeholders, mainly from the soil remediation sector and international networks and non-governmental organizations working on soil pollution issues.

5. Preparations for the report began in early 2019 through the transmission of a questionnaire addressed to Member States and other stakeholders. The survey was aimed at collecting information about topics such as national and regional legal frameworks; reference values for contaminants; major sources of soil pollution and associated contaminants; soil pollution monitoring systems; inventories and data; monitoring of health and environmental risks; the socioeconomic cost of soil pollution; management and remediation practices; case studies; major constraints in tackling soil pollution; and future planned actions.

6. The report is expected to be issued in early 2021 as a joint publication of the Global Soil Partnership, the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils and UNEP. The report and the summary for policymakers will be formally launched during the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. In addition, and given the overlap between that report and the report on the environmental and health impacts of pesticides and fertilizers, and ways of minimizing them, being prepared pursuant to Environment Assembly resolution 3/4, synergies have been established between the two writing teams.

7. Pursuant to paragraph 7 (b) of resolution 3/6, the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils, through its soil pollution working group, composed of international multidisciplinary experts, is developing several technical documents to provide contextualized measures for the prevention, minimization and remediation of soil pollution.

8. Furthermore, the Global Soil Partnership, through the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils and its soil pollution working group, is developing technical guidelines for government organizations on the assessment, mapping, monitoring and reporting of soil pollution. The guidelines are to support countries in developing risk analysis strategies, prioritizing actions for the quantification of soil contaminants in hotspots and making informed decisions regarding the management and remediation of soil pollution. The guidelines are expected to be published in the first half of 2021.

9. A financial commitment for the preparation of the global assessment of soil pollution report was made by the Global Soil Partnership, and additional financial support was provided by the Governments of France, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation and Switzerland and by the European Commission.

II. Lessons learned

10. The analysis of information provided by Member States and the review of related scientific literature have revealed two major gaps in this field of work. First, despite the serious risk that soil pollution poses to the environment and to human health and development, there is a generalized lack of consistent and harmonized global and national data on the presence of contaminants in soils. This is due to the technical complexity and cost of soil analysis and, in some cases, to the lack of capacities and institutions mandated to do such work. The lack of information on diffuse soil pollution, affecting mainly agricultural lands and hence threatening the production of safe food, is particularly concerning. Second, where data are available, there is limited understanding of the fate of contaminants under real conditions, where contaminants can interact with each other and cause additional synergistic or antagonistic effects. Given the difficulty of analysing contaminants in the soil matrix, the effects of mixtures of contaminants have been little studied. This limitation reduces the efficiency of risk assessment approaches and makes it challenging for effective decision-making processes to tackle soil pollution.

III. Recommendations and suggested actions

11. The Environment Assembly may wish to recognize and welcome the findings of the global assessment of soil pollution report.
-