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**Sixth meeting of the Executive Board
of the Special Programme**
Online, 1-2 September 2021
Agenda Item 5

**RECOMMENDATION FOR THE ONE-TIME EXTENSION
OF THE SPECIAL PROGRAMME**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. As outlined in the [Global Chemicals Outlook II](#), the size of the global chemical industry exceeded USD 5 trillion in 2017 and is projected to double by 2030. Consumption and production of chemicals is rapidly increasing in emerging economies, and global supply chains, as well as the trade in chemicals and products, are becoming increasingly complex. With this increasing demand comes an increasing potential for hazardous chemicals and other pollutants to be released into the environment threatening a range of ecosystems and human health. The benefits of action to minimize adverse impacts have been estimated in the high tens of billions of dollars annually, with the World Health Organization estimating the burden of disease from selected chemicals at 1.6 million lives in 2016. One of the key findings of the Outlook was that addressing legislation and capacity gaps in developing countries and emerging economies remains a priority, and that resources have not matched needs.

2. The Special Programme was established under [UNEA resolution 1/5](#) as one of the mutually supportive elements of the Integrated approach welcomed in [UNEP/GC.27/12](#). The Integrated approach aims to address the long-term financing of the sound management of chemicals and wastes and is composed of three interlinked and mutually supportive components, which are: 1) mainstreaming; 2) industry involvement; and 3) dedicated external financing. The Special Programme is one of two key complementary elements of dedicated external financing under the integrated approach, with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) being the further element

3. The Special Programme aims to support developing countries and countries with economies in transition in strengthening institutional capacity for the implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions, the Minamata Convention and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM). The Special Programme supports country-driven institutional strengthening at the national level, to address the financing of the sound management of chemicals and wastes, taking into account the national development strategies, plans and priorities for each country, to increase sustainable public institutional capacity for the sound management of chemicals and wastes throughout their life cycle.

4. The expected outcome of the measures supported by the Special Programme is that governments of developing countries and countries with economies in transition are taking affirmative actions to implement the BRS Conventions, the Minamata Convention and SAICM. In practical terms, this means that strengthened national institutions in the area of chemicals and waste would have the capacity to develop and monitor the implementation of national policies, strategies, programmes and legislation for the sound management of chemicals and wastes, to promote the adoption, monitoring and enforcement of legislation and regulatory frameworks and to promote the mainstreaming of the sound management of chemicals and wastes into national development plans, national budgets, policies, legislation and implementation frameworks at all levels, amongst other things.

5. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the indispensable nature of the sound management of chemicals and waste to keep the environment clean and people healthy. However, the pandemic has also placed significant pressure on the systems that have been put in place by countries to address the sound management of chemicals and waste by exposing existing gaps and identifying areas where urgent action and continued investment may be needed to strengthen the relevant institutional structures.

6. This document aims to highlight the successes of the Special Programme to date and to address the expected impact and future added value of the Special Programme should an extension to its duration be granted in the context of paragraph 24 of the Terms of Reference for the Special Programme set out in Annex II to UNEA resolution 1/5, which provides that the Special Programme may be eligible for a one-time extension, not to exceed an additional five years. The document provides an overview of the effectiveness of the Programme to date and an assessment of the future added value of the Special Programme based on projected demand and impact of the Programme should its extension be approved.

II. SPECIAL PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

7. Since its establishment in September 2015, the Special Programme has conducted four rounds of applications for funding. As at the date of this document, 57 projects with budgets totaling USD 15.2 million were approved by the Executive Board of the Special Programme, as shown in figure 1 below. The projects are spread across the Africa, Asia-Pacific, Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean regions and include projects in small island developing states and least developed countries. The fifth round of applications for funding is currently under way, and the Executive Board will consider approving the applications at its upcoming meeting in early 2022.

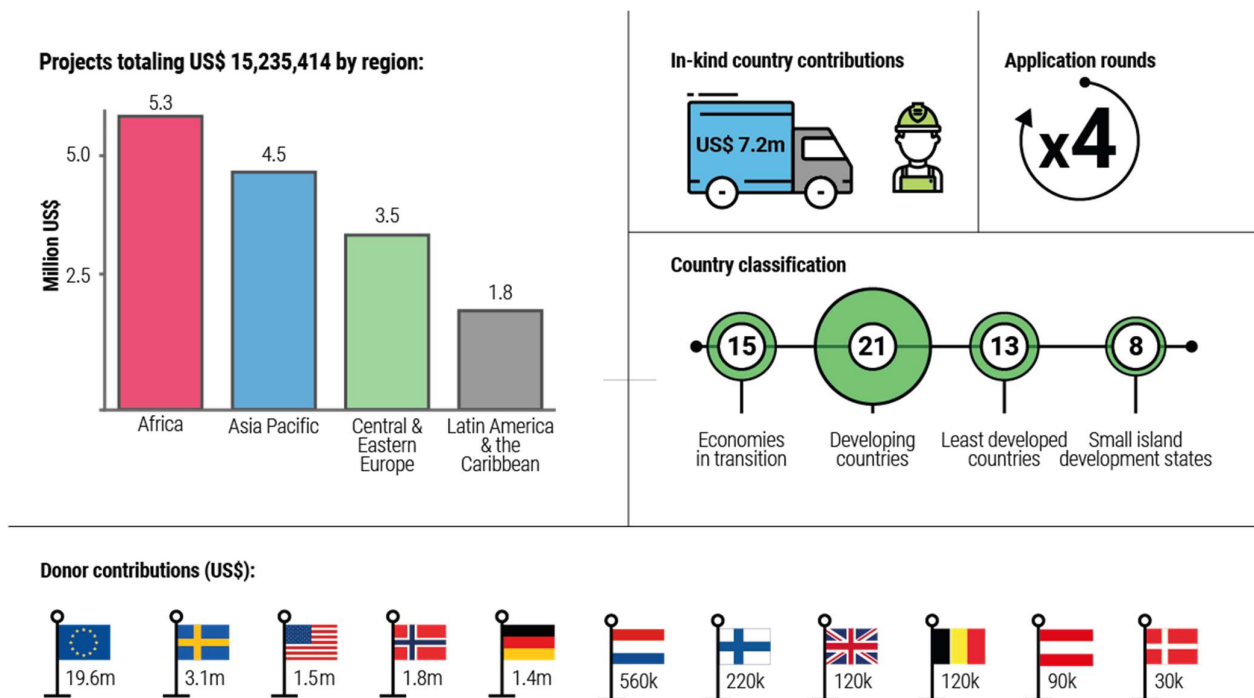


Figure 1: Overview of the Special Programme and the approved projects

8. To date all of the approved and ongoing Special Programme Projects outline activities that will facilitate institutional strengthening, which is defined as enhancing the sustainable institutional capacity of Governments to develop, adopt, monitor and enforce policy, legislation and regulation, as well as to gain access to financial and other resources for effective frameworks for the implementation of the instruments for the sound management of chemicals and wastes throughout their life cycle. Figure 2 provides a summary of the number

of projects that were approved under the first three rounds that describe specific activities that are being undertaken to contribute to institutional strengthening and fulfilment of obligations towards specific instruments. Furthermore, Figure 3 provides an overview of the range of topics that are being undertaken by the projects that contribute to institutional strengthening for the projects approved under the first 3 rounds.

9. As the implementation arrangements of the 15 projects that have been approved under the fourth round of applications are finalized, the Special Programme Secretariat will undertake an analysis of the projects to determine the scope of their activities, including which instruments they serve and the range of topics they cover.

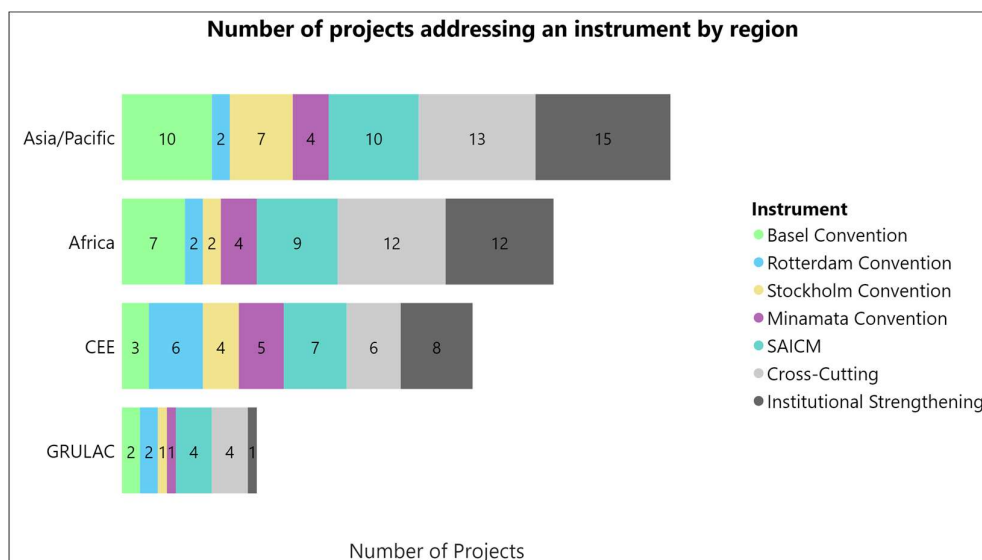


Figure 2: Number of projects from the first 3 rounds in each region that are implementing activities related to specific instruments, cross cutting issues and/or institutional strengthening (a single project may implement activities that address multiple instruments)

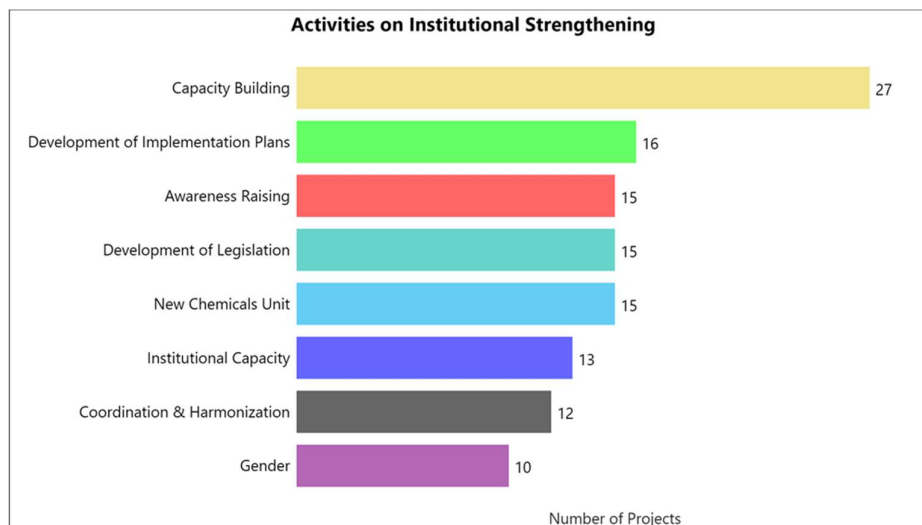


Figure 3: Number of projects from the first 3 rounds that outline activities on institutional strengthening by topic (a single project may implement activities that address multiple instruments)

10. The Special Programme has adopted a resource mobilization strategy and action plan and, thanks to the generosity of its donors, sufficient financial resources are available to support its projects and operations through to the end of its current term, noting that if more funding is made available then additional projects can be funded.

To date, the Programme has received contributions and pledges totaling USD 29,709,333. The implementation of the Special Programme's communication strategy, which is gaining momentum as described below, will support these resource mobilization efforts going forward.

11. A key lesson learned since the inception of the Special Programme is the importance of providing support to countries during the process of drafting project proposals. The Secretariat provides updated application guidelines and forms for each round of funding, based on experience drawn from both the applicants themselves, and the recommendations of the Executive Board and the internal task team comprising representatives of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the Minamata Convention and SAICM as well as the Global Environment Facility secretariat and the Special Programme secretariat itself. In addition, the Secretariat hosts live workshops and clinics to allow potential applicants the opportunity to pose question and get direct feedback and support in developing and improving their project applications, which has resulted in a marked improvement in applications submitted over time. Similarly, the Secretariat provides technical assistance to project implementers to support monitoring progress and reporting results, both financial and programmatic.

12. The Special Programme has undergone two evaluations to date: the European Commission (EC) Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM) Review and the UNEP mid-term evaluation, as described below, and is adjusting its operations in response to their recommendations.

13. The ROM review of the Special Programme was undertaken during the second quarter of 2019 as part of the European Commission's ongoing monitoring of projects which are managed by the EC Directorate General of International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO). The objective of a ROM Review is to provide an external opinion on Project implementation in order to support Project management by the EC HQ services and implementing organizations through advice and recommendations.

14. The ROM Review concluded that the Special Programme is relevant for addressing the institutional weaknesses of countries implementing the MEAs on chemicals and that it is likely that the outputs of the Special Programme will be delivered; noting that some of the targets set are already being exceeded. The review also provided recommendations for the improvement of the Programme, including, the need to implement a system for the effective monitoring of projects.

15. The mid-term evaluation of the Special Programme, an independent evaluation conducted by UNEP's Evaluation Office, was concluded in late 2019. The evaluation had two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote learning, feedback, and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP, the BRS Convention Secretariats, SAICM, the GEF, the Special Programme Secretariat, the Special Programme Executive Board and the participating countries. The [final report](#) has been made available on the Special Programme website.

16. Overall, the mid-term evaluation was positive, acknowledging that the Special Programme was properly designed, is currently on target in terms of delivery of outputs, with adequate mapping of stakeholders and satisfactory participation by them in its work, as well as high degrees of ownership and country driven-ness of projects in recipient countries. However, while the report indicated that national governments are very committed to soundly manage chemicals and wastes in order to protect the health of their populations and the environment, some weakness were observed in the sustainability of the project benefits given that many countries would require to establish cost-recovery mechanisms or need other form of financial assistance for continuation of project benefits.

17. The key lesson learned was that more appropriate outputs and indicators should be identified in the logical framework of the Special Programme to better capture changes at national level and all actions of implementing countries.

18. The report also provided a number of recommendations, including the revision of outcome indicators to capture financial and institutional changes at country level; the development of a selection mechanism for membership of the Executive Board; the revision of the timeframe for signature of agreements with recipient

countries; and provision of regular summaries of lessons learned, good practices and success stories. The Secretariat of the Special Programme has taken note of all the recommendations and has taken the necessary steps to address them.

19. The mid-term evaluation ultimately provided an overall project rating of “Satisfactory” for the Special Programme.

III. FUTURE ADDED VALUE

A. The Special Programme: country level support to achieve to achieve global impact

20. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2015, includes two specific targets related to the management of chemicals and waste (targets 3.9 and target 12.4). However, as noted by GCO II, the sound management of chemicals and waste is relevant to the achievement of a number of other SDGs, including halting biodiversity loss, clean water and sanitation, activating access to clean energy and climate action. The Outcome Document of the consultative approach to the strengthening the sound management of chemicals and waste in the long term¹ adopted the vision to achieve the sound management of chemicals throughout their life cycle and of hazardous wastes in ways that lead to the prevention or minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment, as an essential contribution to the three dimensions of sustainable development.

21. The Special Programme supports countries in establishing strong and sustainable institutions and human capacity, providing a platform from which they can take on the challenges that need to be addressed under the global pollution ambition. This will not only help countries in achieving target 12.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals for sustained and sustainable impact but will also directly and indirectly contribute to the achievement of several other targets under the Sustainable Development Goals. The Special Programme’s contribution to helping countries achieve the sound management of chemicals and waste therefore has extended value in supporting national SDG achievement and is, as a result, poised to make a significant and long-lasting contribution to sustainable development.

22. The continuing importance of the chemicals and waste agenda and the work of the Special Programme in providing support to address it, is reflected in the priorities that UNEA will discuss at its upcoming meeting, under the theme “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”. This is also evident from the UNEP 2022-2025 midterm strategy (MTS), which recognizes that eliminating pollution is central to improving human well-being and prosperity for all. The MTS further specifically aims to enhance capacity and leadership on the sound management of chemicals and waste with the view to minimizing risk posed to human health and environment. This expected outcome is directly supported by the work of the Special Programme.

23. The Outcome Document of the consultative process also made it clear that, while dedicated resources for the sound management of chemicals and wastes had expanded, including through the broadened Global Environment Facility focal area on chemicals and wastes, further resources were needed. It noted that the effective and efficient implementation of existing chemicals and waste-related obligations under multilateral environmental agreements and actions to implement voluntary frameworks, is essential. It also described an integrated approach to financing the sound management of chemicals and wastes, including through mainstreaming in national budgets and development assistance plans, industry involvement and dedicated external financing, as crucial to mobilizing financial resources in the long term. Sustainable, predictable, adequate and accessible long-term national funding at all levels, in addition to timely and appropriate technical assistance for activities in support of the sound management of chemicals and wastes, was identified as a key element, in particular in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

24. UNEA resolution 1/5, which adopted the Terms of Reference of the Special Programme, did so in the context of welcoming the integrated approach, as set out in the Outcome Document of the consultative process.

¹ UNEP/EA.1/5/Add.2

It underscored that the three components of the integrated approach, namely mainstreaming, industry involvement and dedicated external finance, are mutually reinforcing and are all important for the financing of the sound management of chemicals and waste at all levels. The Special Programme responds directly to one of the three pillars, namely external financing, but in doing so pays attention to the aspects of mainstreaming and industry involvement as well, in the context of supporting country-driven institutional strengthening at the national level, as spelled out in its terms of reference.

25. The Special Programme was specifically designed to facilitate and enable the implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the Minamata Convention and SAICM (the instruments) and funds only activities that fall outside of the mandate of the Global Environment Facility. It serves these instruments in a unique and cross cutting manner that seeks to address and ameliorate the foundational legislative and capacity issues. It is this overarching and mutually supportive mandate that sets it apart from other financing mechanisms that exist under the instruments, which provide more specific support related to their individual mandates. Promoting the cooperative and coordinated implementation of the instruments at the national level allows for strengths and gains to be leveraged and multiplied across the instruments, enhancing both impact and value for money. In addition, the relevance of funded proposals to the implementation of the relevant instruments is ensured by close cooperation with the secretariats of the instruments, through their active participation in the internal task team that appraises the proposals and in the information workshops for potential applicants as well as through their participation as observers in Executive Board meetings.

26. An analysis of the projects that were funded under the first three rounds of applications under the Special Programme bears out the cross-cutting nature of the Special Programme. While a number of projects do include activities aimed at facilitating implementation of specific individual instruments, the majority also incorporate measures that are cross cutting, as set out in Figure 4 below. Cross cutting activities include capacity building, enhancement of reporting mechanisms, development of databases or inventories, etc.

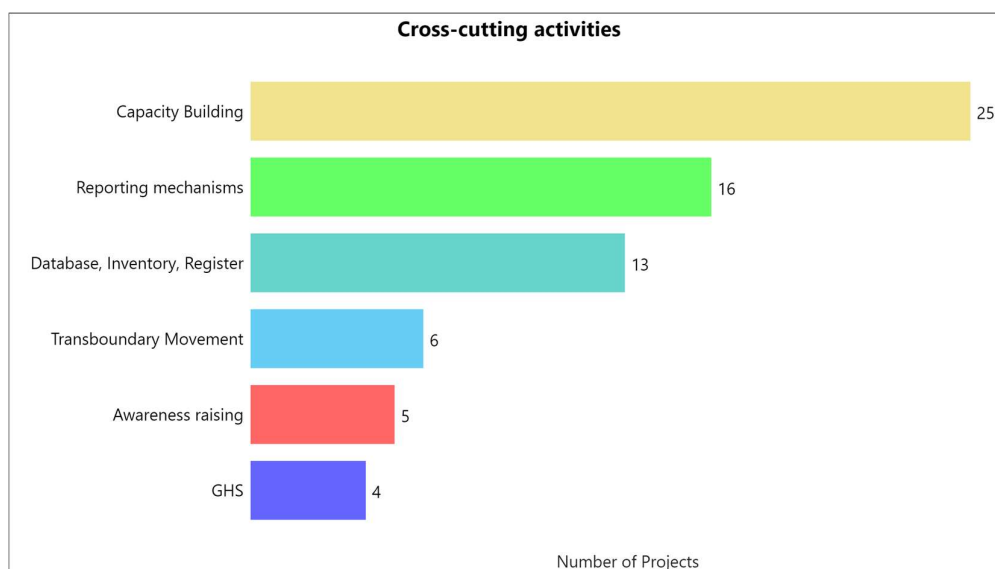


Figure 4: Number of projects that outline cross-cutting activities on relevant MEAs and SAICM by topic

27. Another key characteristic of the Special Programme is its emphasis on the country-driven nature of the interventions, not only allowing but encouraging applicant countries to build interventions responding to their national priorities and their needs. In addition, applications are submitted by the governments themselves, rather than through an executing or implementing entity, although they may seek support in doing so, whether from the Special Programme secretariat or elsewhere. These two elements help to promote country ownership, which in turn improves the likelihood of effective adoption of outputs and mainstreaming of the sound management of chemicals and waste.

28. A further strength of the Special Programme is its decision-making body, the Executive Board, which is mandated to take all operational decisions including approval of applications for funding and endorsement of procedures for application, assessment, reporting and evaluation. The composition of the Board reflects a balance between donors and recipients, including representatives from recipient countries in four of the United Nations regions as well as a rotating seat for least developed countries and small island developing states. This balance ensures an even playing field, allowing for discussion on matters of concern to the respective constituencies.

B. The Special Programme at country level: potential for growth and continued demand

29. The Special Programme has, thus far, completed four rounds of applications and approved 57 projects which were selected from amongst 164 applications submitted by 94 countries. The fifth round of applications is currently underway.

30. The need to address the strengthening of institutional capacity for the implementation of the BRS Conventions, the Minamata Convention and SAICM by the 39 countries whose applications were not approved during the previous rounds of applications, as well as other eligible countries that have not yet benefited from Special Programme funding, has yet to be met. It should also be noted that the number of applications submitted in response to the fourth call for applications for funding reflects the continued need for and interest in funding from the Special Programme. In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, which likely hindered several countries' capacities to submit an application for funding, the Secretariat nonetheless received the same number of applications as it has during the previous two rounds of applications.

31. In addition, as can be seen in figure 4 below, the rate of growth in the number of approved projects parallels the rate of growth observed with the Quick Start Programme (QSP). During its first four rounds of applications, the QSP approved 57 projects and continued to approve a total of 184 projects over 14 rounds of applications during its 13-year term.

32. The present term of the Special Programme allows enough time to conduct six rounds of applications. Based on the current growth rate, it is estimated that 95 projects will be approved during this time. The similarity to date between the growth rate of the QSP and the Special Programme points to a high probability of continued demand from Governments for reliable funding for the implementation of chemicals and waste-related projects. This is particularly pertinent in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the strain it has placed on countries to address gaps in the management of waste. Should the Special Programme be granted a one-time 5-year extension, this will allow enough time for an additional five rounds of applications to be held, meaning that an estimated 175 projects could potentially be implemented under the Special Programme.

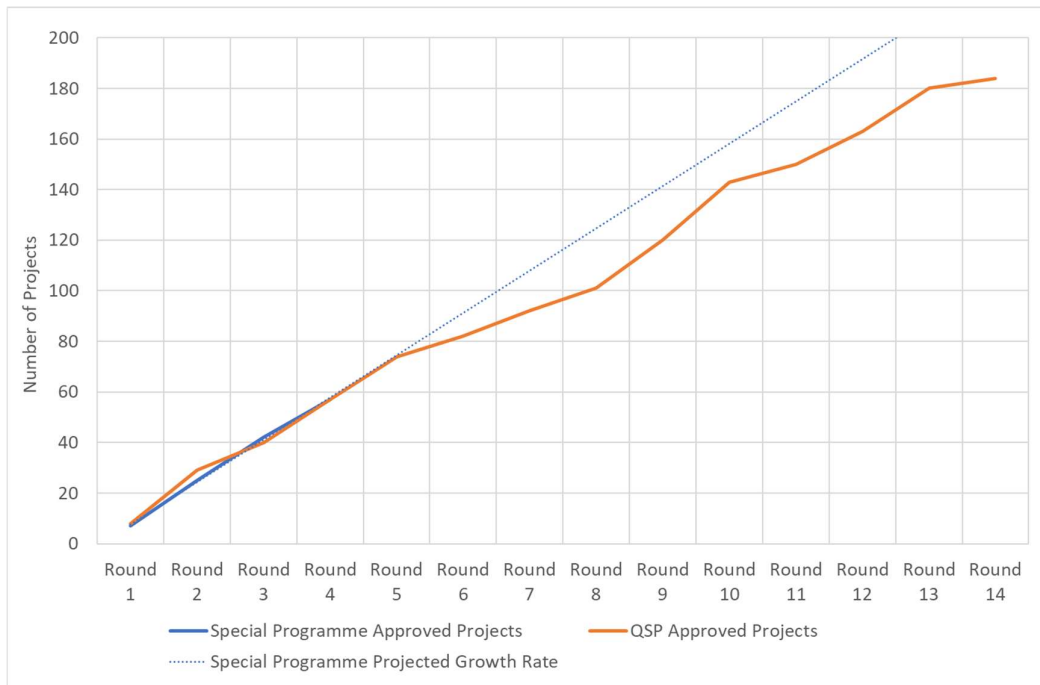


Figure 5: Rate of growth in the number of approved Special Programme projects in comparison to the rate of growth observed with the Quick Start Programme (QSP)

33. The fifth round of applications is currently under consideration. The Executive Board will consider eligible and complete applications submitted under the fifth round at its seventh meeting, which is scheduled for early 2022.

C. Implementation of the Special Programme: Strengthening Secretariat Services

34. In order to continue supporting its activities in an efficient and effective manner, the Secretariat of the Special Programme strives to provide the highest quality services and is working on implementing a number of forward planning measures that will facilitate effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Special Programme projects and the impacts of those projects.

Technical Assistance and Guidance

35. The Secretariat has been active in reaching out to relevant stakeholders through bilateral consultations and participation in relevant online meetings, side events, clinics and workshops in multiple official languages with a view to sharing information on the Special Programme and its objectives and to provide opportunities for capacity building and technical assistance related to the drafting of projects and understanding UNEP's approach to project management.

36. As a direct access funding mechanism, the outreach and technical assistance provided by the Secretariat to countries in submitting their applications and refining them in the process of negotiating the agreement also serves to build countries' capacity with respect to understanding chemicals and waste management and designing projects to address their needs.

37. The Secretariat has developed guidance documents and online learning tools that provide the foundations on which the outreach and technical assistance are built, aimed at reaching as large an audience as possible. The tools and guidance are developed based on needs expressed by the recipient countries and lessons learned by the Secretariat from evaluations of the Special Programme.

38. The Secretariat has also developed a set of Guidance and Guideline documents on the submission of applications for funding from the Special Programme to facilitate the submission of high-quality applications. These are updated following each round of applications, taking into account the lessons learned and comments from applicants.

Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Strategy

39. At its fourth teleconference, held in October 2020, the Executive Board endorsed the draft monitoring, evaluation and learning strategy and action plan and its related toolkit. The strategy was developed in response to the recommendations made during the mid-term evaluation of the Special Programme and will allow for better assessment of the sustainability of the outcomes of projects that have been funded by the Special Programme.

40. The goal of the Strategy is to provide a more consistent methodology of monitoring and reporting on operational progress, as well as identifying technical and strategic achievements of the Programme. This will be achieved by more thoroughly and accurately capturing the results and impacts of individual projects in beneficiary countries and by integrating relevant indicators of the Special Programme into country level monitoring, reporting, evaluation and learning systems.

41. The Secretariat is currently working with successful applicants under the fourth round of funding to incorporate key aspects of the monitoring, evaluation and learning strategy into their projects. A dedicated staff resource has been recruited to deliver targeted technical assistance and capacity building to help the recipient countries to implement the strategy at the project level.

Communications Strategy

42. At its third meeting, held in December 2017, the Executive Board endorsed the Communications Strategy, which was designed to be implemented in three phases, specifically:

- a) *Phase I “Building the Brand”* - focuses on the development of the Special Programme brand and leveraging key events to build brand visibility during the first 18 months.
- b) *Phase II “Expanding the Audience”* - aims to expand the Special Programme’s audiences and sub-audiences, over a period of 18 months, by focusing both on reaching more members of key audiences and also engaging with sub-audiences; and
- c) *Phase III “Replicating Success”* - will highlight the relationship between Special Programme projects and the successes on sound chemicals and waste management at the national level.

43. To date the Secretariat has successfully implemented Phase I of the Communications Strategy and has contracted the services of PCI Media Impact, Inc to develop an implementation plan for Phases II and III of the strategy and to develop a set of communications materials focusing on sectoral approaches and themes in the context of the Special Programme.

44. The development of targeted and effective communications products that showcase the work of the Special Programme and the projects it funds will not only reflect on the human face and impacts of the projects but also link these impacts back to the positive changes in institutional strengthening, policies and best practices that were put in place. These materials will also serve to inform and inspire recipient countries on the types of interventions that can be implemented in the context of their national priorities in order to facilitate the sound management of chemicals and waste. Furthermore, showcasing the achievements of the Special Programme can also facilitate the Secretariat’s efforts towards effective resource mobilization.

Knowledge Management

45. In order to facilitate the retrieval of detailed project information and progress tracking, the Secretariat has been working on the development of a user friendly knowledge management tool to support the organisation

and searching of project data in order to facilitate reporting on the impact of the Special Programme, and to support the development of communication products.

46. The Secretariat has successfully launched the first phase of the knowledge management tool, which provides an overview of the scope and expected impact of each of its ongoing projects. The Secretariat plans to further enhance this tool with the view to developing an efficient mechanism to manage and monitor progress towards project implementation including financial data and expenditure status. The tool provides important information to the Secretariat in its day to day oversight of the projects, as well as to donors and recipients alike.

Resource Mobilization

47. The Secretariat of the Special Programme has in place a Resource Mobilization Strategy and Action Plan which outlines a series of activities for implementation by the Secretariat through to 2021. The Strategy and Action plan will be updated, taking into account the Programme's needs through to the end of its current term as well as in the context of the possibility of the one-time extension of the Special Programme.

48. Current and future resource mobilization strategies will focus on expanding the Special Programme's donor base by reaching out to countries and regions that have not yet contributed to the Special Programme Trust Fund. Furthermore, the Secretariat will engage with UNEP's resource mobilization unit to support its efforts towards facilitating the mobilization of new donors.

49. Resource mobilization in the Special Programme will also be supported by the effective implementation of the communication strategy, which in turn will build on the implementation of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Strategy and action plan. Information gathered on the national-level impact of Special Programme funded projects will allow the Secretariat to develop impactful communications materials that showcase the achievements of the recipient countries in improving the sound management of chemicals and waste, which will contribute to effective engagement with potential donors.

50. The resource mobilization strategy and action plan also emphasize the role of the private sector when considering resource mobilization in the context of the Special Programme. The Special Programme recognizes the continued need to strengthen and increase its engagement with the private sector through financial and in-kind contributions as well as through direct involvement in facilitating the implementation of Special Programme projects at the national level. To facilitate such engagements, the Executive Board of the Special Programme requested the Secretariat to invite private sector representatives to participate in a dedicated meeting on private sector engagement, which is scheduled to take place in the first quarter of 2022. The discussions will focus on how the private sector could contribute substantively to the chemicals and waste agenda.

D. Conclusion

51. Since its establishment, the Special Programme has set up a functional and ever-improving infrastructure, aimed at attracting sound proposals for funding of effective, country driven projects to support institutional strengthening at the national level. Lessons learned are continuously incorporated into how the Special Programme operates. The Special Programme is well positioned to achieve its mandate under its existing term, which, based on current projections, will see around 95 country projects approved and implemented by the end of 2025. Ongoing initiatives under the Special Programme, such as the newly endorsed monitoring, evaluation and learning strategy, the knowledge management tool and the current work on communications, will allow for the actual outcomes and impacts of the individual projects, and of the Special Programme itself, to be measured and for best practices and lessons learned at country and global level to be communicated.

52. Demand for support through the Special Programme is likely to continue and supporting the establishment of long-term funding mechanisms at the national level to build national capacity should be of higher priority. As demonstrated above, a one-time extension of the Special Programme for an additional five years could almost double the number of projects funded. This would clearly allow for broader impact as more projects are implemented across the regions. It would also allow for deeper impact, as existing recipients build

on completed projects to ensure sustainable and mainstreamed project outcomes, bringing them ever closer to achieving the targets of the 2030 agenda.