



SP/EB.9/7
5 July 2024

English only

REPORT OF THE NINTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE SPECIAL PROGRAMME

ITEM 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

1. The ninth 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, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) and the Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC), which took place in hybrid format in Geneva, Switzerland, was opened by Ms Jacqueline Alvarez, Chief of Chemicals and Health Branch of UNEP's Industry and Economy Division at 09:00 (CEST) on 8 April 2024.
2. Ms Alvarez welcomed the participants, both those in person and those online. She noted that the Executive Board was newly constituted and welcomed the new members, reminding the meeting of the Special Programme's tradition of collegial discussion and engagement. She then referred to the resolution adopted by UNEA-6 in March 2024 which requested the Executive Director of UNEP to facilitate coordination between the Global Framework on Chemicals Fund, the Specific International Programme under the Minamata Convention and the Special Programme within their respective mandates, in order to enhance complementarity and avoid duplication, noting that the resolution also amended the Special Programme's Terms of Reference to specifically include the new Global Framework on Chemicals in its mandate. Finally, she informed the meeting that, with that in mind, an informal information meeting between the two Executive Boards with the participation of the Minamata Secretariat on behalf of the Specific International Programme had been arranged for the following morning.
3. The meeting was attended by members and/or alternates from all Executive Board constituencies 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 Election of co-chairs

4. Ms Alvarez noted that the Terms of Reference of the Special Programme provided that the Executive Board would have two co-chairs, one from recipient countries and one from donor countries, and requested that the donor and recipient countries put forward their nominees for co-chair respectively.
5. The Executive Board elected Ms Anna Fransson (Sweden) and Mr Helges Bandeira (Brazil) as the co-chairs for the 2024-2026 term. The meeting was adjourned briefly to allow the new co-chairs to be briefed by the Secretariat.
6. Upon the resumption of the meeting the co-chairs made brief opening remarks and invited the participants to introduce themselves briefly.

2.2 Adoption of agenda and organization of work

7. In introducing the proposed organization of work, the co-chair noted that the informal meeting that Ms Alvarez had referred to, for sharing of information with the Executive Board of the Global Framework on Chemicals Fund, would take place the following day from 9am and would not be open to observers.
8. The co-chair also described relevant provisions of the Executive Board's Rules of Procedure governing the conduct of the meeting, emphasizing Rule 25 of the Rules of Procedure, which provides 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" as well as Rule 26 of the Rules of Procedure, which provides that the Executive Board shall make every effort to take its decisions by consensus.
9. The agenda and organization of work were adopted, with the inclusion of two matters under item 10 Any Other Business, namely the discussion of any points arising from Tuesday's informal meeting that might require further consideration by the Executive Board, and the Special Programme photo awards.

ITEM 3. APPROVAL OF THE REPORT OF THE EIGHTH MEETING

10. The Executive Board was invited to consider and approve the report of the eighth meeting of the Executive Board meeting, held in hybrid format from 15-17 February 2023, as contained in document SP/EB.9/2/Rev.1. The report was approved with an editorial change requested by one of the Board members.

ITEM 4. UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COUNTRY PROJECTS

11. The Secretariat provided a report back on the status of implementation of the approved country projects and highlighted five projects for particular consideration and guidance by the Executive Board. Following a number of questions and answers on the specific situations, the Executive Board provided guidance on a number of projects as set out below:
 - a. **Benin:** The Executive Board requested the Secretariat to reach out again to the Ministry of Living Environment and Sustainable Development of Benin requesting to take an urgent action to finalise the reports and to return the unspent balance of funds so that the project could be formally closed. The Executive Board suggested that, if possible, a local consultant could be hired to assist the project partner in this regard. This consultant should be paid from the unspent funds of the project.
 - b. **Ethiopia:** The Executive Board instructed the Secretariat to make an additional attempt to contact the Ethiopian Environmental Protection Agency to request that the Implementing Partner take urgent action to finalize their project reporting to facilitate the closure of their third-round project in accordance with UNEP's financial procedures, and to enable future project applications from the country to be considered for funding by the Executive Board.
 - c. **Zambia:** The Executive Board considered the delays signing the Project Cooperation Agreement and requested the Secretariat to draft and send a formal letter to the Zambia Environmental Management Agency, stipulating a firm deadline of at most two months for signature of the project cooperation agreement. The Board emphasized that failure to meet this deadline would result in the cancellation of the project approval, with the allocated funds being redirected to other project applications.
12. With respect to the project in Nauru, the Executive Board adopted a decision as follows:
 - a. Expressing concern about the lack of evidence of progress on the project in Nauru and the continued lack of engagement from the country partner;
 - b. Requesting the partner to provide the outstanding progress and financial reports as a matter of urgency and if necessary to make arrangements to return any unspent balance of funds to UNEP;

c. Noting that in the absence of demonstrated project progress through the required reports, no further requests for no-cost extensions to the project may be entertained and the project should undergo the necessary project closure processes;

d. Requesting the Secretariat to bring the decision of the Executive Board to the attention of the Secretary of the Department of Environment Management and Agriculture.

13. In response to a question from the Board, the Secretariat clarified that three other projects discussed in the meeting documents, namely Bolivia, Burkina Faso, and Mali, had made progress in the intervening weeks and no longer required specific guidance from the Executive Board at this time. The Secretariat provided a brief update on the progress made in these three projects.

ITEM 5. CONSIDERATION OF ELIGIBLE AND COMPLETE APPLICATIONS FOR THE SEVENTH ROUND OF FUNDING UNDER THE SPECIAL PROGRAMME

14. Under this agenda item the Executive Board was invited to review and consider the eligible and complete applications submitted under the seventh round of funding, with a view to approving projects that would receive funding.
15. To facilitate the work of the Executive Board, the Secretariat had made available the full application packages submitted by each country, which included application forms, signed endorsement letters, letters of support and additional information, as well as the appraisals undertaken by the Secretariat and the internal task team.
16. The Special Programme Secretariat provided an overview of the launch and review process for the seventh round of applications and introduced the background documents (SP/EB.9/3 and its addenda SP/EB.9/3/Add.1, SP/EB.9/3/Add.2, SP/EB.9/3/Add.3, SP/EB.9/3/Add.4 and SP/EB.9/3/Add.5) to assist the Board in its deliberations on this agenda item..
17. Considering the funds available for approved projects under the seventh round, the Secretariat clarified that while the meeting document had correctly set out the amount of cash on hand, an additional parameter had to be taken into account, namely the period of validity of the underlying grants. Noting that three multi-year grants were set to expire by 31 December 2025, these could not be used for payments that would be made after that date. This was important because Special Programme projects typically have a 36-month implementation period, with disbursements staggered based on implementation progress, rather than disbursement of the full amount up front. The Board discussed the matter and expressed its concern about the issue. It requested the Secretariat to look at how the grants concerned could be fully consumed by the date of their expiry, including exploring whether funds could be reallocated among existing projects to increase the consumption of these grants, and to explore with the donors concerned the possibility of a no-cost extension for the grants.
18. The Secretariat then presented for the Board's consideration its appraisal of each of the 15 complete and eligible applications submitted under the seventh round of funding, which included for the first time regional/multi-country applications. The presentation included observations from the Internal Task Team about the three regional/multi-country applications.
19. The Board discussed the merits of each project in light of the appraisal criteria set out in the application package, in particular the Guidance on the Scope of the Special Programme, and provided comments on each application to further strengthen the applications that were approved for funding as well as to provide feedback and guidance to countries whose projects were not approved, with a view to encouraging them to resubmit revised applications in the future.
20. Following its discussion, the Executive Board approved eight projects with budgets amounting to up to US \$1,899,619. The approved projects were selected taking into account the projects' merits, regional balance and capacity, taking into account the special needs of least developed countries and small island developing states, as follows:

21.

Table 1. Projects approved under the seventh round of funding

Africa

Country	Project Title
Angola	Supporting the strengthening of Angola’s National capacity to implement the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata Conventions including SAICM.
Eritrea	Country Driven Institutional Strengthening for Promoting an Integrated Approach to Address the Sound Management of Chemicals and Wastes.
Guinea	Institutional capacity building for the improvement and implementation of the synergy between the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm, Minamata conventions and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) in the Republic of Guinea.
Nigeria	Strengthening National Infrastructural and Human Capacity for Sound Chemicals and Waste Management in Nigeria.

Asia Pacific

Country	Project Title
Sri Lanka	Institutional Strengthening for proper management of chemicals and waste and their waste.

Central and Eastern Europe

Country	Project Title
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Strengthening the synergies between the Basel, Rotterdam Stockholm Conventions and SAICM in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
Moldova	Scaling up sustainable management of chemicals and waste in Moldova to accelerate transition to a toxic free environment.

Latin American and the Caribbean

Country	Project Title
St Lucia	Building the foundation for a Comprehensive Framework for Sound Chemicals and Waste Management in Saint Lucia

ITEM 6. ADOPTION OF A RISK MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

22. The Secretariat was invited to make a presentation on the proposed risk management framework for consideration by the Executive Board. In doing so the Secretariat referred to the meeting document SP/EB.9/6 *Report on proposed risk management strategy including mechanisms to manage the risk of fraud and corruption in Special Programme projects*. That document looked at issues identified in implementation of Special Programme country projects so far; described how risk is managed under the UN risk management framework and in UNEP, zoomed in on the UN framework for management of fraud and corruption and UNEP’s measures in this regard. It then described Special Programme’s existing arrangements for management of risk (including fraud and corruption) and proposed a specific risk management framework for the SP. The annex to the document included three draft tools: a light risk assessment tool for existing country projects; a detailed risk assessment tool, designed to be used for new country projects and any existing country projects that may be identified through the light assessment tool as higher risk; and a tool to assess programme-level risks.
23. The Secretariat’s presentation noted that issues (or materialized risks) arising in country project implementation could impact not only the implementation and ultimate success of the country projects themselves but also the programme as a whole. Such issues included socio-political changes at country level, administrative changes at country level, issues with implementation arrangements such as turnover of human resources, financing delays, lack of engagement of implementing partners and of course natural disasters such as COVID-19.

24. The proposed risk management framework was introduced, with the note that it was grounded in the UN Secretariat's risk management approach and as such focused on identifying and managing risk rather than avoiding it. It was also aligned with UNEP's stepwise approach to adopting and implementing risk management strategies for UNEP projects.
25. In describing the existing risk management arrangements in place for the Special Programme the Secretariat highlighted the provisions of the legal agreements (project cooperation agreements) with partners, and the importance of periodic reporting on progress and expenditure. On the latter point, the Secretariat pointed out that the Special Programme Terms of Reference provided for annual reporting, whereas UNEP's project management procedures required more frequent reporting. To date Special Programme project agreements had aligned with the Terms of Reference.
26. After discussion, the Executive Board approved the Special Programme risk management framework, as set out meeting document SP/EB.9/6 and its annexes, with some additions made by the Executive Board. The approved risk management framework included the following specific elements:
 - a. Inclusion of additional questions in the funding application form relating to risk and the capacity of the proposed implementing partner.
 - b. Adoption of risk assessment tools set out in the annexes to the meeting document (with inclusion of additional requirements as requested by the Board) which incorporate risk mitigation measures and proposed interventions based on the resulting risk score for each project.
 - c. Inclusion of a requirement for inception workshop for each approved project. For the four seventh-round approved projects which had not already included provision for such a workshop, the Executive Board requested the Secretariat to confirm whether such a workshop was already foreseen with the beneficiary contribution and, where this was not the case, approved up to \$20,000 for each of the four projects to conduct such a workshop. Inception workshops should ideally be attended in person by the Secretariat (with an approved allocation in the Special Programme budget, separate from the country project budget).
 - d. A requirement for progress and expenditure reporting, using the simple reporting templates of the Special Programme, on a six-monthly basis for all new projects. However, reporting against the core indicator scorecards would continue to be done annually.
 - e. Any situation which might require a decision to suspend or terminate a project in line with the provisions of the Project Cooperation Agreement could be brought to the attention of the Board intersessionally, with the agreement of the co-chairs, through a silence procedure.
 - f. Where justified by the risk assessment and subject to the approval of the co-chairs, as well as to human and financial resources, in-country visits, audits and spot checks could be undertaken to address issues arising in country projects.
 - g. Provision for regional meetings to bring together project focal points to exchange experiences and benefit from Special Programme training was agreed by the Executive Board. In doing so the Board stressed that such meetings should ideally, wherever possible, take place in the margins of other relevant meetings, in order to reduce costs and travel time for participants.
 - h. Development of a fraud awareness pack to help project partners.
 - i. For projects that had delays in project closure the Executive Board approved an approach that would allow the Secretariat to provide direct assistance or enlist the help of a consultant to do so, to ensure that project closure processes and requirements were completed.

ITEM 7. PREPARATIONS FOR THE LAUNCH OF THE EIGHTH ROUND OF APPLICATIONS

7.1 Presentations from the Secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the Minamata Convention, the Global Framework on Chemicals and the Global Environment Facility

27. Noting that the secretariat of the Global Framework on Chemicals had made a presentation during the informal information session in the margins of the Executive Board meeting, the Board agreed to include a summary of the presentation for the purposes of the meeting report, as follows:

The Secretariat of the Global Framework on Chemicals highlighted the main outcomes of the 5th session of the ICCM held in Bonn from 25 to 29 September 2023. In this context, the secretariat underlined the relevance of resolution 5/3 on financial arrangements. The resolution in establishing the Global Framework on Chemicals Fund defined the main focus and objectives of the Fund and explicitly welcomed with appreciation the decision at UNEA-5 to extend the duration of the Special Programme in support of institutional strengthening at the national level. The presentation provided further details on the early implementation of the new Global Framework on Chemicals Fund and on its ad interim solution, in particular on the objectives and expected outcomes of the first Executive Board meeting, which was taking place in parallel with the Special Programme Executive Board meeting, as well as on the status of pledges made to the Fund to date.

28. Representatives from each of the other 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.
29. Speaking on behalf of the secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions, Mr. Frank Moser remarked that the decisions of the COPs adopted during 2023 had been widely presented and would not be repeated here. He noted the positive net effect of the work of the Special Programme, which was apparent in strengthened institutions. He then provided a summary of intersessional work ongoing under each of the Conventions, including the expert working groups and open-ended working groups. These included the review of annexes in the context of proposals to amend the Basel Convention annexes and the upcoming meeting of the Implementation and Compliance Committee in June 2024. Work towards improving the prior informed concept and technical guidelines on POPs waste would continue, along with guidelines on lead acid batteries and other batteries, among other workstreams. Under the Rotterdam Convention, the Chemical Review Committee recommended listing new chemicals in annex III and finalized a number of draft decisions; the Rotterdam Compliance Committee had adopted its programme of work for 2024-2025. The Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee (POPRC) under the Stockholm Convention had met in October, with new chemicals coming in and a risk profile for another chemical adopted. Work on best available techniques (BAT) and best environmental practices (BEP) continued, a small intersessional working group on PCBs was ongoing and the GMP monitoring programme had also met. The sixth review of the financial mechanism under the Stockholm Convention was also under way. Looking at crosscutting issues, requests had been sent for parties to express their needs for technical assistance.
30. Ms. Marianne Bailey and Ms. Maria Irene Rizzo, speaking on behalf of the Secretariat of the Minamata Convention, reported back on the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties which had taken place in Geneva in October-November 2023, with 21 decisions adopted and various activities during the week in celebration of the 10th anniversary including knowledge labs and an event on skin lightening products as well as side events. The meeting was notable for the large number of observers representing Indigenous Peoples and the adoption of a decision on Indigenous Peoples. Technical assistance and capacity building had been a theme throughout the COP, as reflected in a number of the decisions. The COP also adopted its first ever decision on knowledge management with links to a digital strategy, and developed a gender action plan, with a gender knowledge lab held with inclusion of GEF Secretariat and Special Programme Secretariat, that was repeated online in March 2024. Ms Bailey noted that a particularly important outcome of the COP was a decision to amend the annexes of the Convention on mercury-added products and manufacturing processes using mercury or mercury compounds, further limiting the use and need for mercury on the global market. Other decisions related to releases to land and water, mercury emissions, mercury supply sources and trade, national reporting pursuant to article 21 of the Minamata Convention, including amendments to the reporting format and reporting guidance in time for the second full national reports, which are to be submitted by

December 2025. She noted that a second review of the financial mechanism had been completed and the terms of reference for the third review were being prepared in time for the sixth meeting of the COP. Ms Bailey concluded by noting that the work of the Special Programme was considered important in helping Parties to advance on these fronts, and the Secretariat welcomed the good cooperation with the Special Programme.

31. Mr. Anil Sookdeo, speaking on behalf of the GEF Secretariat, informed the meeting that the GEF-8 replenishment cycle was midway, and the GEF-9 replenishment was due to start by the end of the year. The relevant meetings of the Conferences of the Parties would provide additional guidance on this. He highlighted that COP-5 (Minamata) and ICCM-5 (SAICM/Global Framework on Chemicals) had provided new guidance to continue GEF's work on chemicals and waste, including ICCM-5's resolution that the GEF should support the implementation of the new framework. The Stockholm Convention included a focus on accelerating the phaseout of PCBs and expanding work on the global monitoring of POPs. The GEF Secretariat was working with the Minamata Convention Secretariat and agencies to craft a new activity on Artisanal Small-scale Gold Mining (ASGM) for consideration by the GEF council later this year. Mr Sookdeo also recalled that the GEF had been asked to operate part of the financial mechanism for biodiversity, with the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund established, with two rounds of applications done so far. Mr Sookdeo concluded by noting that the GEF welcomes the complementarity with the Special Programme and had good success where Special Programme projects had been escalated into GEF projects and programmes, which should be encouraged going forward.
32. Following the presentations, and a question-and-answer session for the Secretariats, which emphasised the mutual reinforcement provided by the different conventions in their approaches to similar issues such as mercury, the co-chair expressed the Board's appreciation to the representatives of the Secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the Minamata Convention, Global Framework on Chemicals and the GEF for sharing this information with the Board.

7.2 Approval of revised application guidelines and forms

33. The co-chairs of the Executive Board invited the Special Programme Secretariat to present an overview of the updated application guidelines and forms for the eighth round of applications, as outlined in documents SP/EB/9/4, SP/EB/9/4/Add.1, SP/EB.9/Add.2, SP/EB.9/4/Add.3A, SP/EB.9/4/Add.3B and SP/EB.9/4/Add.4.
34. The representative of the Secretariat highlighted the changes in each of the documents comprising the application package components included in the addenda to document SP/EB/9/4 as described in the body of the meeting document itself. The proposed changes included further criteria/considerations relating to regional/multi-country applications.
35. In addition, the members of the Executive Board discussed the need to revise the overall project budget limits. This was in line with the decision adopted as part of the Risk Management Framework to request all future project applications to include an inception workshop. As a result of the discussion, the members of the Executive Board agreed on the following overall revised budget limit:
 - a. \$275,000 for individual country applications;
 - b. \$500,000 for individual country applications that meet the additional criteria for high-value projects;
 - c. \$550,000 for regional/multi-country applications, allowing within these \$550,000 to dedicate up 10% to administrative costs.
36. The Executive Board welcomed the updates made to the application documents, with some edits proposed during the meeting and requested the Secretariat i) to integrate the new budget limits in all application documents, ii) to arrange for translation of the application package into the relevant United Nations languages, and iii) to make any necessary updates to the e-learning course, available on the Secretariat's website in English, French and Spanish.

7.3 Timeline for review and appraisal of applications

37. The Secretariat briefly presented the proposed timeline for the submission, appraisal and review of the applications as outlined in document SP/EB.9/4. Following its deliberations, the Executive Board endorsed the timeline for processing the eighth round of applications, as set out in Annex I.

7.4 Interpretation of paragraph 4 of the Special Programme Terms of Reference

38. The Secretariat briefly presented the issue, noting that the terms of reference of the Special Programme in paragraph 4 specify that the Special Programme “should avoid duplication and proliferation of funding mechanisms and associated administration and should fund activities that fall outside the mandate of the GEF”. The question of whether a proposed activity falls into the GEF mandate is determined by the GEF secretariat, who participate in each round of funding as part of the Internal Task Team.
39. The Secretariat noted that, while the SP TORs have remained substantively the same since their adoption, the mandate of the GEF had evolved significantly over time and GEF financial support to chemicals and waste management had significantly increased in recent years. If a strict interpretation of paragraph 4 was applied, any activity that fell into the GEF mandate whether or not the GEF was funding it, could not be funded under the Special Programme.
40. At its eighth meeting the Executive Board had considered the matter but opted not to adopt an interpretation of paragraph 4 of the terms of reference at the time. However, recently some donors including Board members had requested a legal opinion on paragraph 4, which had been received recently from UNEP’s law division and made available document SP/EB.9/INF/7. The Secretariat briefly presented the main points in the legal opinion which noted that the use of the word ‘should’ meant that there was room for an element of discretion. The opinion concluded with a recommendation that a suitable interpretation of paragraph 4 of the Terms of Reference would mean that “The Special Programme should not fund activities that are in the GEF’s active project portfolio or strategic plan but may consider funding those within the GEF’s potential remit but which are not yet slated for GEF support.”
41. Following the Secretariat’s presentation, the co-chair invited the secretariat of the GEF to make some remarks. The representative of the GEF Secretariat expressed the view that there was a flaw in the logic expressed in the legal opinion, as it assumed that the GEF operated in countries, while the reverse was true: countries access the GEF to develop projects. The GEF is operating in those countries but may not be providing funding. The opinion also implied that the GEF portfolio included non-active parts, whereas the work elements are never retired. The work programme is informed by guidance from the COPs, which was built into the GEF in each successive replenishment; the mandate of the GEF would continue to increase as new chemicals were added under the relevant conventions. He noted that at present each application was considered on a case-by-case basis, with some flexibility applied where only a small proportion of the project fell into the GEF mandate.
42. Representatives of the secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions and of the Minamata Convention also took the floor, as members of the internal task team. They noted that it could be difficult for applicants, who might include an activity in their Special Programme application with no expectation or intention that it should be funded by the GEF, but because of the broad framing of the GEF programming directions it would not be eligible under the Special Programme. Providing more clarity would help the applicants have a better understanding of the distinctions between the two funding mechanisms and would also make the work of the internal task team more efficient to avoid a back-and-forth with the applicants requesting that they remove elements from their applications.
43. The Board held a brief discussion on the matter and concluded that as the opinion had only recently been received, it would be beneficial to allow more time for the Board to consider it and to discuss it domestically. It was agreed that the matter would be deferred to the next meeting of the Board for further consideration, with a request that the Secretariat and the internal task team provide inputs to inform the discussion, including possible suggestions on how to address the matter.

ITEM 8. UPDATE ON THE OPERATIONS OF THE SPECIAL PROGRAMME

8.1 Update on Secretariat activities

44. The co-chairs invited the Secretariat to present an update on the activities of the Secretariat since the last meeting, as outlined in SP/EB.9/5.

Update on Communications

45. The Secretariat presented an update on its activities relating to communications, noting that it had completed a comprehensive review and update of the Special Programme communications strategy with the lessons learned gained over the years and adjusted to the extended timeline of the Special Programme. The strategy focuses on enhancing outreach and deepening engagement with both existing and prospective partners.
46. The quarterly newsletter remained a key communication tool, reaching over 300 stakeholders, while the completion of country profile factsheets for 11 closed projects was underway. These factsheets build on the insights from the 2022 closed projects assessment report to share lessons learned. Finally, the Secretariat informed the Board that the Special Programme's webpage has undergone a significant overhaul in collaboration with the UNEP Communications Division to modernize and improve usability, aligning with the latest web design standards.

Study on domestic financing mechanisms that can promote the sustainability of outcomes of projects funded through the Special Programme

47. The Secretariat updated the Executive Board on the progress of the study on domestic finance, initiated with support from the German Government. This study aims to identify sustainable domestic financing mechanisms that can strengthen the institutional frameworks developed under the Special Programme. Drawing lessons from sectors like climate change, biodiversity, health, worker protection, and pollution prevention, the study was being led by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) and the University of Cape Town (UCT). SEI had completed the initial desk research, setting a solid foundation for the subsequent phases. UCT was finalizing the study by conducting interviews and formulating actionable recommendations. The findings and recommendations from this study were expected to provide valuable insights to countries, enhancing the financial sustainability of their initiatives under the Special Programme.

Independent assessment of closed projects

48. During the eighth meeting of the Executive Board, the Secretariat had presented an overview of the independent assessment of the first eleven projects closed under the Special Programme (Argentina, Belarus, Benin, China, Dominican Republic, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Serbia, Tanzania and Uganda). Building upon the success of that first assessment, the Secretariat informed the Board that a second independent assessment of closed projects had started on 1 April 2024. The second independent assessment would cover the next eleven projects that closed under the Special Programme (Angola, the Gambia, Ghana, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Nigeria, North Macedonia, South Africa and Tajikistan).

Resource mobilization

49. The Secretariat recalled that during this meeting emphasis had been placed on the need to increase the resources of the Special Programme. The Board had in 2019 endorsed a resource mobilization strategy, which needed to be updated not only because of the extension of duration of the Special Programme to provide funds for additional timeframe, but also to reflect the track record that the Special Programme had established. The representative of the Secretariat informed the Board that work in this regard was ongoing, with a consultant hired to update the resource mobilization strategy for the Special Programme and undertake some initial work on mapping of prospective new donors. While this had not, unfortunately, been concluded in time for the Board's consideration at this meeting, the work was well advanced, and was being undertaken in the context of UNEP as a whole, with recourse to relevant corporate offices such as the private sector and public sector resource mobilisation units.

50. The Secretariat noted that it would continue to work with the consultant to finalise the document, which it regarded as the first step. Once the updated strategy and action plan were finalised the Secretariat would proceed to implement it, in conjunction with relevant communications activities such as developing resource mobilization materials and outreach, refining the strategy and plan along the way. The Secretariat would then report to the board at its next meeting on not only the refined strategy but also results of resource mobilization efforts, which were a particular focus for the Secretariat going forward.

8.2 Contributions, expenditure and proposed Special Programme budget from Q2 2024 to Q1 2025

51. The co-chairs invited the Secretariat to make a brief presentation on the topic. The representative of the Secretariat began by providing an update on the status of contributions to the Special Programme Trust Fund, noting that contributions and pledges as at March 2024 stood at just over \$34,4 million and expressing UNEP's gratitude to the donors for their ongoing contributions and support. She noted once again that this amount included contributions that were time-bound, with a few of them set to expire at the end of 2025. As requested by the Board the Secretariat would engage with the donors concerned to explore the possibility of a no-cost extension for the grants.
52. The secretariat then briefly presented the interim expenditure of the Special Programme through to December 2023, which stood at \$26,2 million dollars plus an additional amount for the approved but as-yet unsigned projects, bringing the overall total expenditure including earmarked funds to \$28,8 million.
53. The Secretariat then presented the proposed budget for the remainder of 2024 and the first quarter of 2025, which included provision for the projects approved under the seventh round, implementation of aspects of the risk management framework adopted by the Board, one regional meeting, the costs of the tenth meeting of the Executive Board, arrangements for the launch and support to applicants under the eighth round of funding, an additional amount to support resource mobilization, and work on communication including the website refinement and development of a series of factsheets.
54. Responding to a question from one Board member the Secretariat confirmed that the budget did not include any proposal to increase the staffing of the Secretariat but did include a slight increase in staff and personnel costs, in line with the norm for the United Nations.
55. The Executive Board approved the proposed budget of \$3,6 million, as set out in Annex V.
56. As a result, the overall forecasted expenditure as at March 2025 is expected to \$32,5 million.

ITEM 9. DATE AND VENUE OF THE TENTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

57. To facilitate the Executive Board's deliberations under this agenda item, the Secretariat gave a brief presentation noting that tentative proposed timeline would be March 2025, which took into account the BRS COPs, scheduled for 28 April to 9 May 2025. It was noted during the ensuing discussion that dates for regional meetings ahead of the COPs were not yet decided, and programme submissions for the GEF would take place in early March 2025.
58. With regard to the venue the Secretariat noted that in the absence of any decision to the contrary the meeting would take place in Geneva by default. In response to a question concerning the implications of holding the meeting elsewhere, the representative of the Secretariat recalled that, in principle, it would require a host country agreement to be signed and that (subject to confirmation) the incremental costs of holding the meeting somewhere other than its usual venue would be covered by the host country.
59. The Secretariat then briefly displayed the proposed agenda for the tenth meeting, noting that it would be amended to include the Board's request to revisit the interpretation of paragraph 4 of the Terms of Reference.
60. The Board agreed to request the Secretariat to finalise the provisional agenda and the dates for the tenth meeting, taking into account other meetings that may be happening at the time, in consultation with the co-chairs, and noted that in the absence of any offers to hold the meeting elsewhere, it would take place in Geneva.

ITEM 10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

10.1 Follow up from the informal information session with the Executive Board of the Global Framework on Chemicals Fund and the Minamata Convention Secretariat

61. Following the discussions held at the previous day's informal information session, the Executive Board considered UNEA's request to UNEP to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication among the Special Programme, the new Global Framework on Chemicals Fund and the Specific International Programme under the Minamata Convention.
62. In line with those discussions, the Executive Board decided to authorize the co-chairs to participate as observers, as needed, in meetings of the Executive Board of the Global Framework on Chemicals Fund and also decided to invite the co-chairs of that Executive Board to participate as observers in meeting of the Special Programme Executive Board.
63. On the question of whether to decide to hold joint meetings or back-to-back sessions of the two Executive Board, it was noted that, for the new Fund in particular, joint meetings might be beneficial, to highlight how the Special Programme works and to discuss necessary efficiencies, although this type of meeting may not be required each year. It was agreed that this could be decided on a case-by-case basis, if the co-chairs felt that there was value in doing so.

10.2 Special Programme Photo Awards

64. The Secretariat recalled that the photo awards had been launched in January 2024, with two aims: first, to collect good quality, relevant photographs for communications materials including the website; and secondly to allow for the individual country projects to raise their profiles and raise awareness about what they were working to achieve.
65. Entries were received from the Micronesia, Mongolia, State of Palestine, South Africa, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. No submissions were received from projects in the Latin America and Caribbean region. The Executive Board had cast their votes over the previous two days, resulting in the following regional and global winners:
 - a. Global winner: Mongolia
 - b. Africa winner: South Africa
 - c. Asia Pacific winner: Micronesia
 - d. Central and Eastern Europe winner: Tajikistan
66. The Board congratulated the winners, who would receive a printed and framed copy of their winning entry and a certificate. The entries would also be highlighted in a calendar and on Special Programme communications tools and website.

ITEM 11. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

67. 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 thanked the members of the Executive Board, the observers and the Secretariat for their contributions and hard work over the past few days.
68. The meeting was closed at 2pm on Wednesday 10 April 2024.

**ANNEX I
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

**9th MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
8 – 10 April 2024, Geneva, Switzerland
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

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ANNEX II

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

Africa

	Country	Country Status	Project Title
1	Angola	Least Developed Country	Supporting the strengthening of Angola's National capacity to implement the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata Conventions including SAICM.
2	Eritrea	Least Developed Country	Country Driven Institutional Strengthening for Promoting an Integrated Approach to Address the Sound Management of Chemicals and Wastes.
3	Ethiopia	Least Developed Country	Enhancing institutional capacity for the implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions, SAICM, and ratification of the Minamata Convention in Ethiopia.
4	Guinea	Least Developed Country	Institutional capacity building for the improvement and implementation of the synergy between the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm, Minamata conventions and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) in the Republic of Guinea.
5	Nigeria	Developing Country	Strengthening National Infrastructural and Human Capacity for Sound Chemicals and Waste Management in Nigeria.
6	Somalia	Least Developed Country	Application for Implementation of Stockholm, Rotterdam, and Basel Conventions.
7	Uganda	Least Developed Country	Institutional Strengthening for Full Life Cycle Management of Chemicals and Waste in Uganda (ISMCWU).

Asia Pacific

	Country	Country Status	Project Title
1	Bhutan	Least Developed Country	Development of a Master Plan for waste infrastructure and services for Bhutan.
2	Sri Lanka	Developing Country	Institutional Strengthening for proper management of chemicals and waste and their waste.

Central and Eastern Europe

	Country	Country Status	Project Title
1	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Country with economy in transition	Strengthening the synergies between the Basel, Rotterdam Stockholm Conventions and SAICM in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
2	Moldova	Country with	Scaling up sustainable management of chemicals and waste in Moldova to accelerate transition to a toxic free environment.

	economy in transition	
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Latin American and the Caribbean

	Country	Country status	Project Title
1	Grenada	Developing Country	Institutional Capacity Building for the Implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions in Grenada
2	St. Lucia	Developing Country	Building the foundation for a Comprehensive Framework for Sound Chemicals and Waste Management in Saint Lucia

Multi-Country Applications

	Region	Included Countries	Project Title
1	GRULAC	Bolivia, Guatemala, Paraguay	Legal implementation and strengthening of capacities for the GHS in the Latin-American region
2	GRULAC	Dominican Republic, Honduras, Panama	Strengthening capacities to implement the GHS in the Latin-American and The Caribbean region

ANNEX III

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

Activity	Main Actors	Timeframe
Launch of the call for applications for funding from the Special Programme	Special Programme Secretariat	24 April 2024
Application Deadline for the submission of Project Proposals	Countries	23 August 2024
Acknowledgement of application receipt and information on eligibility and completeness	Special Programme Secretariat	30 August 2024
First Meeting of the Internal Task Team	Special Programme Secretariat and Internal Task Team	3 September -1 October 2024
Applications with comments and suggestions for improvement sent back to countries for their review	Special Programme Secretariat	14 October 2024
Deadline for the resubmission of final applications taking into account the comments made by the Secretariat and the Internal Task Team	Countries	15 November 2024
Second Meeting of the internal Task Team	Special Programme Secretariat and Internal Task Team	9-10 December 2024
Documents submitted to the Executive Board for their consideration	Special Programme Secretariat	Mid-February 2025
Eighth Meeting of the Executive Board is convened	Members of the Executive Board	Mid-March 2025
Decisions of the Executive Board on approved applications are communicated to countries	Special Programme Secretariat	March 2025

ANNEX IV

INTERIM FINANCIAL EXPENDITURES STATEMENT: 01-JAN-2017 to 31 March 2024 (USD)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Grand Total
Contractual Services	1,412	21,236	38,469	65,559	34,589	23,395	10,786	(146)	195,299
Equipment, Vehicles and Furniture			7,869	31	570		773		9,242
IP-PSC						2,898	(4)		2,894
General Operating and Other Direct Costs	4,885	165,743	70,385	16,263	345,631	109,273	105,130		817,311
Staff and other personnel costs	418,501	618,495	1,040,062	605,410	1,175,904	1,175,666	1,392,982	273,482	6,700,501
Transfer/Grant to IP	1,457,914	2,795,864	1,872,089	3,460,593	485,150	3,965,307	1,678,642	381,695	16,097,254
Travel	50,269	26,769	81,606	(5,844)		1,432	25,168	21,930	201,330
UN-PSC (Indirect Support Costs)	140,675	143,147	408,384	461,863	185,367	445,225	390,502	77,543	2,252,706
Grand Total	2,073,656	3,771,254	3,518,864	4,603,875	2,227,212	5,723,195	3,603,979	754,504	26,276,538

9 projects approved, agreements pending signature 2,561,776

Grand total actual, commitments and unsigned approved projects

28,838,314

ANNEX V

APPROVED BUDGET FOR Q2-Q4 2024 AND FIRST QUARTER OF 2025

Output 1 - Management of Trust Fund and Secretariat Services	USD
Event - Board meeting x 1	50 000
Resource mobilization consultant + learning course update	70 000
Operating costs	56 000
Output 2 - Technical Assistance	
7th round project agreements + inception workshops	1 979 619
Event - Regional Workshop	100 000
Output 3 - Communications	
Publications	50 000
Event - webinars	50 000
Website revamp and knowledge management update	41 000
Output 4 - Monitoring	
Risk management Travel - staff (inception workshops, spot checks)	80 000
Risk management Country Audits	20 000
Closed projects assessment 2	70 830
Salaries Forecast 2024	1 100 000
Total proposed operational budget	3 667 449