

Science-Policy Panel for Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution OEWG 1.2 Highlights: Tuesday, 31 January 2023

Discussions firmly focused on substantive issues. There was an initial exchange of views on the panel's functions before delegates met in a contact group on scope and functions. In the evening, informal consultations were held between interested parties and the Secretariat to provide clarifications on the budget.

Preparations of Proposals for the Establishment of a Science-Policy Panel

Functions: Many countries preferred following the functions as outlined, and worded, in UNEA Resolution 5/8 on development of a science-policy panel on chemicals, waste, and pollution.

On the *horizon-scanning function*, JAPAN, CANADA, and others underscored the importance of identifying emerging threats and developments that could affect the sound management of chemicals and waste. PERU highlighted that horizon scanning will provide reliable scientific evidence and facilitate decision making. NORWAY and PAKISTAN said that horizon scanning should be expert-driven, collaborate with states, and include stakeholders. BRAZIL said it should be comprehensive. The EU highlighted its role for prioritizing new issue areas and proposed an expert group for horizon scanning.

JAPAN added that such a process should not necessarily be sequential to an assessment. The US stressed that horizon scanning should remain additive, complementary, and non-duplicative of similar efforts by other bodies. The FARMER'S MAJOR GROUP emphasized that horizon scanning should consider the most vulnerable communities, including farmers and children.

The ROYAL CHEMISTRY SOCIETY emphasized horizon scanning's importance for identifying emerging issues with adverse effects.

On the *assessment function*, the EU highlighted that the panel's outputs should be highly relevant, easily accessible, and fully understandable. SOUTH AFRICA noted the need to include discussions on uncertainties and solutions.

PERU said that assessments should focus on existing pollution-related challenges that affect developing countries. MALAWI suggested that the panel broadly analyze alternative solutions that are applicable in vulnerable developing countries, further highlighting the importance of a needs assessment. KENYA called for integrating assessment activities at national and regional levels.

JAPAN and GHANA supported thematic assessments on specific issues. NORWAY noted that the panel, in addition to global assessments, could produce regional and thematic assessments. IRAN suggested focusing on identified gaps. The UK said that different types of assessments should tackle issues with different complexity levels. The US emphasized that the OEWG should not predetermine the number, scope, and methodological details of the assessments as these depend on the relevant science and policy questions. SAUDI ARABIA cited the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) methods for

assessment review as "well established" and useful to consider for this panel.

SOUTH AFRICA underscored the need for a multi-disciplinary approach that considers economic factors as well as socio-economic ones. SAUDI ARABIA stressed the need to consider the socio-economic implications of policies and measures proposed by the panel. PANAMA said the panel should evaluate value chains and socio-economic consequences in a cross-cutting manner.

Many stressed the need for balanced regional and gender representation. TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, CHILE, CANADA, and MEXICO stressed the need to include traditional and Indigenous knowledge.

The GLOBAL ALLIANCE ON HEALTH AND POLLUTION (GAHP) urged that priority be given to improving the Sustainable Development Goal indicators related to the sound management of chemicals and waste and preventing pollution. The OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS suggested that the panel be informed by human rights standards and principles.

On the *communication, dissemination, and public awareness function*, several countries highlighted the need to identify and fill information gaps, taking into consideration the needs and priorities of developing countries. The EU suggested establishing a communication expert group. The UK supported information sharing and science communication with different audiences.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND COMMUNITIES called for enhanced participation in the panel and expressed their willingness to share lessons learnt. WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP urged better gender-related data on chemicals and their effects, suggesting the panel must provide guidance on data collection and availability. The WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION advocated "breaking down the silos between the health and environmental sectors" and accelerating preventive action.

On the *information sharing function*, COTE D'IVOIRE called for a database to assist with data collection and dissemination. TANZANIA suggested designing a platform ensuring interaction between stakeholders. The US characterized this function as key to the panel's work.

The INTERNATIONAL POLLUTANTS ELIMINATION NETWORK highlighted that information sharing is imperative, noting that a lack of data is a severe obstacle to the sound management of chemicals and waste.

On a *capacity-building function*, many developing countries, including Costa Rica, for the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), and Nigeria, for the AFRICAN REGION, stressed its importance. Many developing countries further underscored technology transfer and resource mobilization.

ANGOLA urged reducing the asymmetries between North and South. MOROCCO called for addressing gaps in data generation, evaluation and dissemination of data and information. KENYA and LIBERIA underlined that capacity building could assist local scientists' participation and ability to collect and disseminate data.

The EU, NORWAY, and the US supported adding this function, with the EU and US noting the need to avoid duplication with existing capacity-building activities under related multilateral environmental agreements. The GAHP suggested learning from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) efforts to build capacity.

Chair Alkemade summarized the morning's discussion, noting comments related to inclusiveness, original balance, transparency, and disclosure of panel members' conflicts of interest.

She proposed a contact group to consider and develop proposals for objective, scope, functions, and possible intersessional work. She called for: basing contact group work on Resolution 5/8, views expressed, and pre-session documents; avoiding duplication of existing work; considering the integrated, value-chain, or life-cycle approach on scope; and reflecting on any additional functions identified in document UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.1/5.

Contact Group: Scope and Functions

Co-Chairs David Kapindula (Zambia) and Marine Collignon (France) recalled the group's mandate and suggested starting with general roundtable views on the objective, scope, and functions.

On objective, several countries supported starting from the title of UNEA Resolution 5/8. Some countries called for an objective that would include the "what," "why," "how," and "for whom" of the panel. A country suggested four elements for the objective: functions, as outlined in the UNEA resolution; aim, as stated in the UNEA resolution; nature of outputs, such as policy-relevant, transparent, and inclusive; and categories of inputs, such as socio-economic, technical, and scientific. A participant added that the conceptual framework could also be included in the objective. Views diverged on whether the scope should be included in the objective.

Several delegates cautioned against wording that suggested the panel itself should act, reiterating that its role is to provide an interface between science and policy, and disseminate information to policymakers to take action. An NGO, supported by numerous delegates, urged including "protection of human health." Several suggested adding a reference to "addressing existing pollution."

One participant, supported by several others, proposed a reference to the sound management of chemicals and waste and prevention of all forms of pollution, including pollution related to chemical waste, and releases to air, water, soil, and the oceans.

On scope, many underscored the need for the scope to be broad and inclusive, and not to prejudge the panel's work. Some suggested referring to "all forms of pollution" rather than listing specific forms of pollution. A country asked what "all forms of pollution" means, querying whether, for example, it includes radioactive pollution. Another suggested referring to policy-relevant scientific evidence on chemicals and waste for the prevention of pollution.

Others opined that the scope should address the problem and recognize the impact of pollution, stressing that "sound management" is the final goal. An observer said the scope should focus on chemicals throughout their lifecycle, including pollutants directly linked to chemicals.

Delegates agreed to ask the Co-Chairs to propose a way forward on objective and scope, taking into account the views heard.

In the evening, deliberations focused on the panel's functions. Co-Chair Kapindula highlighted the four functions included in UNEA Resolution 5/8 and document UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.1/5 (horizon scanning; assessments; communication, dissemination, and public awareness; and information-sharing) as well the suggestion to include a function related to capacity building.

Many delegates stressed the need to retain the suggested functions and focus on additional ones. Some delegates stressed that not all functions will be equally important to all member

states and a discussion ensued on the scope and potential for prioritization. They also exchanged opinions on including health impacts; criteria to address socio-economic disparities; and addressing gaps not covered by existing conventions. A lengthy discussion took place on horizon scanning with some delegates suggesting defining the term in the context of the panel and others underscoring the need to identify future work areas, including emerging issues. Discussions continued into the night.

Deep Dive on Functions

Moderator Kevin Helps, UNEP, opened the deep dive, introducing the panelists.

Warefta Murshed, Children and Youth Major Group, called for training for youth to have roles in producing evidence-based options, needs-based analysis, and implementation activities. She suggested a youth advisory group for the panel.

Miriam Diamond, International Panel on Chemical Pollution, noted the panel must: transcend issues covered elsewhere; consider future trends and factors; include issues despite incomplete evidence; and identify issues through inclusive knowledge, including on economic costs. She called for strict conflict of interest provisions.

Andrea Hinwood, UNEP, outlined that horizon scanning should include: issue identification; analytical methodology; megatrends analysis; and expert engagement to review outputs. She contrasted comprehensive, exploratory scanning with narrow, issue-centered scans of priority topics. For horizon scanning, she advocated developing an approach, methodology, criteria, and a subsidiary body.

David Kapindula, Zambia, provided examples of capacity-building functions in existing science-policy bodies. He suggested the new panel could incorporate capacity building as a principal function in its initial mandate or through its programme of work.

Bob Watson, former IPBES and IPCC Chair, highlighted the need for consensus, the implications of uncertainty for policy formulation, and the socio-economic and environmental implications of action and inaction. To build transparency, credibility, and salience, he emphasized the need for an agreed set of principles and procedures, a conceptual framework, and a priority-setting framework.

Panelists exchanged opinions on the most challenging issues on which agreement is needed, underscoring: communication to address knowledge gaps; innovation for effective solutions; open, accessible, and transparent data; definition of activities that fit within capacity building; and access to knowledge owned by the private sector.

In the discussion, participants focused on: addressing existing and legacy issues through horizon scanning; developing a conceptual framework and a priority-setting process; addressing North-South asymmetries; and avoiding duplication of other relevant organizations' and bodies' work.

In the Corridors

Day one was procedural; day two was substantive. Many delegates noted the marked shift in mode. Discussions were more concrete. They were also more informal, as participants gathered around the figurative table in their first contact group of the process. Some thought that the day's focus on functions helped because they are, to a few delegates at least, "more tangible" than the "slightly abstract" discussions on scope.

Some delegates were enjoying the open nature of the discussion, musing that "we're still all trying to figure out what this panel will be." For others, there were shades of last year's UNEA discussions. The UNEA Resolution, they said, reflects a previous lack of agreement among parties on the objective and scope of the panel – and even how chemicals, waste, and pollution could fit together in the panel's work. One delegate chalked the lack of consensus up to a lack of time at UNEA. With hints at a Contact Group Co-Chairs' text on scope and function, we may soon see what a little more time can produce.