

AFRICAN GROUP POSITION ON THE THEME OF UNEA-3

Analysis of Environmental pollution in Africa

1. The threat to the human environment from the progressive deterioration of the biosphere has emerged as a central issue of this decade. Accelerated industrialization, rapid urbanization, the pattern of increasing consumption of natural resources, the development of modern agricultural and transportation techniques, and rising standards of living have not only contributed to modify the ecological balance on which the quality of the environment depends, but present great threats to human survival. The high rate of technological change has increased pollution above the self-cleansing capabilities of the environment.
2. Environmental pollution is increasingly a problem in Africa, where the environmental consequences of development cannot be ignored. The major forms/types of pollution in Africa include indoor and outdoor air pollution, land pollution and water pollution. Pollution affects both urban and rural areas. Poor people, who cannot afford to protect themselves from the negative impacts of pollution, end up suffering the most.
3. In 2012, an estimated 9 million people died from air, water and land pollution, according to the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution. According to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluations (IHME), diseases attributed to indoor and outdoor air pollution were responsible for 1 in 10 deaths worldwide in 2013, and air pollution has become the fourth risk factor for premature deaths, just behind tobacco smoking.

Air Pollution

Air pollution remains a major challenge in Africa. According to the third UNEP Africa Environment Outlook (AEO-3) report, air pollution is rising in many countries in Africa with carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, particulate matter, sulphur dioxide, oxides of nitrogen and lead constituting some of the major indoor and outdoor air pollutants. The key drivers of poor air quality in Africa are urbanisation, industrialisation and motorisation which have all led to an increase in outdoor air pollution on the continent.

In 2012, WHO estimated that there were 176,000 deaths per year in Africa due to outdoor air pollution while an estimated 600,000 deaths per year were attributed to indoor air pollution in Africa.

Reliance on solid fuels for cooking, heating and lighting exposes about 90 per cent of people in Sub-Saharan Africa to indoor air pollution, impacting both economies and livelihoods, while contributing to increased emissions of greenhouse gases. In most homes in Africa, wood fuel, charcoal or kerosene or a combination of these is used for cooking. Indoor air pollution affects vulnerable women and children most. In addressing the theme of pollution, the 2017 Environment Assembly, should therefore focus on both outdoor and indoor pollution and indoor pollution should not be marginalized.

Water Pollution

Africa's expanding economies are resulting in greater demand for freshwater, but its quantity is decreasing and quality is deteriorating as a result of over-exploitation, climate change and pollution. Also, the growing population means that average internal renewable water resources will continue to dwindle. The re-emergence of water-borne diseases such as cholera and dysentery, and the proliferation of water weeds such as water hyacinth is associated with poor access to safe water and eutrophication of water bodies.

As more people move into towns and cities in Africa, they contribute to a number of factors that lead to water pollution. Urbanization results in congestion in urban areas, which results in inadequate sewage management and treatment. When untreated sewage from these congested urban areas is released to water bodies, it causes water pollution.

Chemicals from industries in urban areas also cause water pollution. Clearing land for urban growth and agriculture leads to water pollution. Many developing countries in Africa are experiencing rapid industrial growth without appropriate waste disposal measures in place.

Land pollution

Land is central to human health as it is the main resource base around which ecosystem services such as food, fibre and medicines are produced. According to AEO-3, Land degradation is a major issue in Africa where an estimated 500 000 sq.km of land have undergone soil degradation since 1950 and this includes 65 per cent of the region's agricultural land.

There are many ways of permanently changing the land, from soil contamination (poisoning by chemicals or waste) to general urbanization (the systematic creation of cities and other human settlements). Some, such as huge landfills or quarries, are obvious. Garbage and industrial waste, impacts from mining and other forms of industry, the unwanted consequences of urbanization, and the systematic destruction of soil through over-intensive agriculture; cause long-term land damage, destruction, degradation, or loss hence - land pollution.

Desertification, the degradation of dry land, is another form of land pollution. In fact, in Africa, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the agriculture land has been degraded through desertification. As the land is degraded and deserts expand in some places, food production is reduced, water sources dry up and populations are pressured to move to more hospitable areas. Soil erosion is a form of land pollution and degradation - i.e. through the loss of original soil constituents that give the soil its life-supporting capacity.

E-Waste

The theme should also address threats and opportunities from emerging challenges like E-waste, a category of waste generated by electrical and Electronic Equipment (EEE) at the end of its lifecycle. With the developments in electronics technologies

and the increasing availability of electronic gadgets to people in Africa, the volume of e-waste (or electronic waste) being discarded is increasing. Rapid changes in technology and falling prices mean that millions of tons of high-tech electronic devices such as mobile phones, personal computers, personal stereos, florescent lamp bulbs, large household appliances like television sets, refrigerators, washing machines, air conditioners, become obsolete in developed nations. A significant part of this E-waste ends up in landfills or poorly equipped recycling facilities in developing countries. If properly handled, this area could combine a threat to the planet with opportunities in business, job creation and poverty reduction.

Conclusions

As the impact of human activities and issues of environmental health have become increasingly global in scale and extent, the need to recognize and to address the health risks associated with environmental pollution becomes even more urgent. For Africa, this has been emphasized by the Ministers of Environment and those of health as demonstrated through the Libreville Declaration (2008) and the Luanda Commitment (2010) on Health and Environment in Africa.

As stated in the proposed theme on pollution, and given that environmental pollution is a common theme in the regional assessments (including Africa) being undertaken in the 6th Global Environment Outlook report, it is essential that Member States urgently address these issues during UNEA-3.

AFRICAN GROUP'S PREFERRED THEME

Based on the methodology and criteria used by UNEP Secretariat to arrive at the proposed themes by the two Bureaus and the analysis of Africa's Environmental pollution challenges the African Group reiterates the following:-

- i. The theme should be broad and accommodative.
- ii. The theme should fall clearly within the mandate of UNEP.

The African Group preferred theme therefore is as follows:

“DELIVERING A POLLUTION FREE PLANET”

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