Conference of the Parties to the
Minamata Convention on Mercury
Fifth meeting
Geneva, 30 October–3 November 2023
Item 4 (m) of the provisional agenda*

Matters for consideration or action by the
Conference of the Parties: gender

Mainstreaming gender

Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. The preamble to the Minamata Convention on Mercury notes the parties’ awareness of health concerns, especially in developing countries, resulting from the exposure to mercury of vulnerable populations, especially women and children and, through them, future generations. In addition, article 16, on health aspects; article 18, on public information, awareness and education; article 19, on research, development and monitoring; and article 22, on effectiveness evaluation, all refer to the needs of vulnerable populations.

2. Furthermore, subparagraph 1 (i) of annex C to the Convention states that national action plans to address artisanal and small-scale gold mining are to include strategies to prevent the exposure of vulnerable populations, particularly children and women of childbearing age, especially pregnant women, to mercury used in such mining. At its fourth meeting, in decision MC-4/4, on artisanal and small-scale gold mining, the Conference of the Parties adopted the updated guidance on developing a national action plan to reduce and, where feasible, eliminate mercury use in artisanal and small-scale gold mining. The guidance indicates how to prevent the exposure of vulnerable populations to mercury used in such mining.

3. Also at its fourth meeting, the Conference of the Parties adopted decision MC-4/10, on gender mainstreaming, which inter alia invited parties to support the secretariat in its efforts to mainstream gender into all activities to be undertaken by the secretariat as well as by parties and other stakeholders, including through the development of a gender action plan for the Minamata Convention during the biennium 2022–2023. In the same decision, the Conference of the Parties also took note of the gender road map presented by the secretariat in its note on mainstreaming gender (UNEP/MC/COP.4/22). The gender road map analysed initiatives undertaken in the field of gender by other multilateral environmental agreements and United Nations bodies and identified priority actions to be undertaken by the secretariat to mainstream gender into the programme of work of the Convention. The development of a gender action plan was one of the top priority actions identified in the road map.

* UNEP/MC/COP.5/1.

† The gender road map is available at www.mercuryconvention.org/sites/default/files/documents/other/Minamata_Convention-Gender_Road_Map.pdf.
II. Implementation

4. The integration of gender into conservation approaches is gaining attention in high-level political forums. In March 2019, in resolution 4/17, entitled “Promoting gender equality and the human rights and empowerment of women and girls in environmental governance,” the United Nations Environment Assembly invited Member States to prioritize the implementation of gender policies and action plans developed under the multilateral environmental agreements to which they were a party.

5. In 2022, during the second part of its fifteenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including target 23, on ensuring gender equality. Similarly, at its nineteenth meeting, in November 2022, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora approved a resolution on gender.3

6. With respect to the Minamata Convention, gender considerations are already embedded not only in the text of the Convention but also in its financial mechanism. The Global Environment Facility (GEF), which is one of the two entities of the financial mechanism of the Convention together with the Specific International Programme to Support Capacity-Building and Technical Assistance, is committed to ensuring gender equality and promoting women’s empowerment across its operations and to applying a gender-responsive approach throughout the identification, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of GEF-financed programmes and projects.4 In its publication GEF 2020: Strategy for the GEF, GEF emphasizes its gender mainstreaming commitments, including that it will continue to strengthen its focus on gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment and to emphasize the use of gender analysis as part of socioeconomic assessments and that gender-sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data will be used in GEF projects to demonstrate concrete results and progress related to gender equality.5

7. Furthermore, the Specific International Programme, since its inception, has included gender as part of the application criteria for funding.6 The secretariat’s application guidelines and the forms for each round of applications to the Specific International Programme include a requirement that project applicants explain how they will incorporate gender mainstreaming.

8. During the intersessional period, the secretariat carried out a number of activities related to gender and mercury. On the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention in August 2022, the secretariat launched, on InforMEA, the United Nations Information Portal on Multilateral Environmental Agreements, an e-learning course on gender and mercury7 that focuses on the health effects of mercury exposure on women and children and the description of the main sources of exposure to mercury and the main risks and emphasizes the actions taken by the secretariat to advance gender equality in implementation of the Convention. The course was developed thanks to the generous financial support of Sweden. More information on recent initiatives undertaken by the secretariat to mainstream gender in its programme of work is available on the Convention website.8

9. Pursuant to decision MC-4/10 and thanks to the generous financial support of Sweden, the secretariat also prepared a draft gender action plan and organized two online consultations for parties and other stakeholders between September and November 2022 to present and receive input on the draft. A call for nominations to participate in this consultive process9 was issued by the secretariat on

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2 The text of the resolution is available at www.unep.org/environmentassembly/proceedings-report-ministerial-declaration-resolutions-and-decisions-unea-4.
3 The text of the resolution is available at www.cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/COP/19/resolution/E-Res-19-03.pdf.
7 The course is available at https://elearning.informea.org/course/search.php?q=mercury%20gender&areaid=.
9 The call for nominations is available at www.mercuryconvention.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-08/ES_Intersessional_work_GAP.pdf.
12 August 2022. Twenty-three representatives were nominated by parties. After the consultations, the secretariat invited additional written comments from parties and stakeholders. The gender action plan, incorporating the comments received by the secretariat through the consultative process, is set out in document UNEP/MC/COP.5/INF/10.

10. The gender action plan provides a comprehensive blueprint for actions to promote gender equality. It identifies both the enabling conditions and the specific policy and programmatic steps needed to mainstream gender and to work effectively towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all activities within the purview of the Convention. The plan is organized according to actions proposed for the secretariat, for parties and for other relevant stakeholders. Considering its long-term objectives and the limited resources available for its implementation, the gender action plan does not include any specific timelines or deadlines. Instead, the suggested approach for implementation the plan is to identify a list of activities that could be carried out during each biennium and to integrate those activities, as appropriate, into the programme of work and budget to be adopted by the Conference of the Parties.

11. The secretariat has identified, for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its fifth meeting, activities that could be carried out by the secretariat and by the parties during the biennium 2024–2025. The list of activities builds on existing commitments embedded in the text of the Minamata Convention and on recent initiatives of the secretariat and parties to integrate gender considerations into their work. The list of suggested activities is set out in annex I to the present note.

III. Suggested action by the Conference of the Parties

12. The Conference of the Parties may wish to consider the information contained in the present note and to adopt a decision along the lines of the text contained in annex II hereto.

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10 Nominations were received from the following parties: Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Colombia, Congo (Republic of), Comoros, Gabon, Guinea, Guyana, Iraq, Mauritius, Mexico, Niger, Peru, Qatar, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Yemen, Zimbabwe.

11 In November 2020, the secretariat issued a call for information, inviting parties and interested stakeholders to submit scientific, technical and policy information on gender and mercury. The secretariat received submissions from 10 countries and 16 stakeholders. The information was used to develop communication and awareness-raising materials, including a publication on gender and mercury. More information is available at www.mercuryconvention.org/en/gender.
Annex I

Possible activities to be carried out by the secretariat and parties to advance the gender action plan during the biennium 2024–2025

1. On the basis of the gender action plan, the following activities could be carried out by the secretariat under the programme of work for 2024–2025, subject to the availability of resources from core and voluntary contributions:
   
   (a) Review, according to gender considerations, of national reports submitted by parties under article 21 to identify measures related to the control of mercury-added products used primarily by women and children, such as cosmetics and dental amalgam;
   
   (b) Review of gender elements in existing national action plans submitted by parties pursuant to subparagraph 3 (a) of article 7 to establish a baseline for future reviews of national action plans, in collaboration with the Chemicals and Health Branch of the United Nations Environment Programme;
   
   (c) Development of case studies on the gender dimensions of projects funded by the Specific International Programme to Support Capacity-Building and Technical Assistance;
   
   (d) Continued inclusion of gender considerations in the process of appraising and evaluating projects under the Specific International Programme;
   
   (e) Delivery of gender-sensitive training in the development of project proposals in order to access funding under the financial mechanism of the Convention, in collaboration with the GEF secretariat;
   
   (f) Incorporation of gender elements into existing training, such as training related to mercury-added products, training for negotiators and potential chairs of contact groups and training in mercury wastes organized by the secretariat in cooperation with partners, such as the secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions and GEF;
   
   (g) Measurement of the meaningful participation of women in meetings of the Conference of the Parties, in Bureau meetings, in other official and expert meetings and in the processes and activities of the secretariat;
   
   (h) Promotion of efforts to identify “champions” to support the secretariat in its endeavour to mainstream gender into all activities to be undertaken by itself, by parties and by other stakeholders, in accordance with decision MC-4/10;1
   
   (i) Sharing of parties’ surveys and requests for information to enable the secretariat to identify gender-related capacity-building needs and the interests of parties and other stakeholders.

2. On the basis of the gender action plan, the following activities could be carried out by parties, within the scope of their respective capabilities, to advance the implementation of the gender action plan during the biennium 2024–2025:
   
   (a) Provision of gender-sensitive information, as appropriate, in their national reports to be submitted pursuant to article 21 of the Convention;
   
   (b) Incorporation of gender elements into the review of national action plans to be submitted in accordance with subparagraph 3 (c) of article 7 and subparagraph 1 (i) of annex C to the Convention;
   
   (c) Ensuring that gender-disaggregated data is included in the effectiveness evaluation process under article 22, in particular with respect to the monitoring of data on trends in the levels of mercury and mercury compounds observed in biotic media and vulnerable populations, in accordance with paragraph 2 of article 22;
   
   (d) Responding to surveys and requests for information to enable the secretariat to identify gender-related capacity-building needs and the interests of parties and other stakeholders;
   
   (e) Inclusion of gender considerations in the terms of reference for the next review of the financial mechanism;

1 The text of the decision is available at www.mercuryconvention.org/en/documents/gender-mainstreaming.
(f) Ensuring that there is gender balance in delegations to the meetings of the Conference of the Parties and other Convention-related meetings.
Annex II

Draft decision MC-5/[--]: Gender action plan

*The Conference of the Parties,*

Noting that gender equality and gender mainstreaming are vital to global sustainable development efforts and have been recognized by various international agreements and policy instruments, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

Recalling General Assembly resolution 70/219, which calls upon Member States to ensure the full and equal participation of women in decision-making and in the formal economy, and encourages Member States and United Nations system agencies to promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes,

Recalling also United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 4/17, entitled “Promoting gender equality and the human rights and empowerment of women and girls in environmental governance”, which invites Member States to prioritize the implementation of gender policies and action plans developed under the multilateral environmental agreements to which they are a party,

1. Welcomes the gender action plan of the Minamata Convention on Mercury;¹

2. Invites parties to carry out activities to implement the gender action plan during the biennium 2024–2025,² and to share with the secretariat their related experiences and good practices;

3. Also invites parties to provide comments, as appropriate, on possible activities to be carried out by the secretariat, parties and other stakeholders during the biennium 2026–2027;

4. Requests the secretariat to carry out activities during the biennium 2024–2025,³ subject to the availability of resources, to implement the gender action plan;

5. Invites parties to provide, within the scope of their respective capabilities, financial resources to support the implementation of the plan;

6. Requests the secretariat, in the implementation of the gender action plan, to continue collaborating with the United Nations Environment Programme, the secretariats of other multilateral environmental agreements, the Global Environment Facility and other relevant partners in the field of gender mainstreaming;

7. Also requests the secretariat to review implementation of the gender action plan and to propose possible activities to be carried out by the secretariat, parties and other stakeholders during the biennium 2026–2027, as appropriate, for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its sixth meeting.

¹ The gender action plan of the Minamata Convention on Mercury is set out in document UNEP/MC/COP.5/INF/10.
² Suggested activities are set out in paragraph 2 of annex I to document UNEP/MC/COP.5/18.
³ Suggested activities are set out in paragraph 1 of annex I to document UNEP/MC/COP.5/18.