

Voicing Silence Series

Understanding Chemicals and Waste Management: Equipping Journalists with the knowledge and tools to cover critical environmental governance issues in Africa

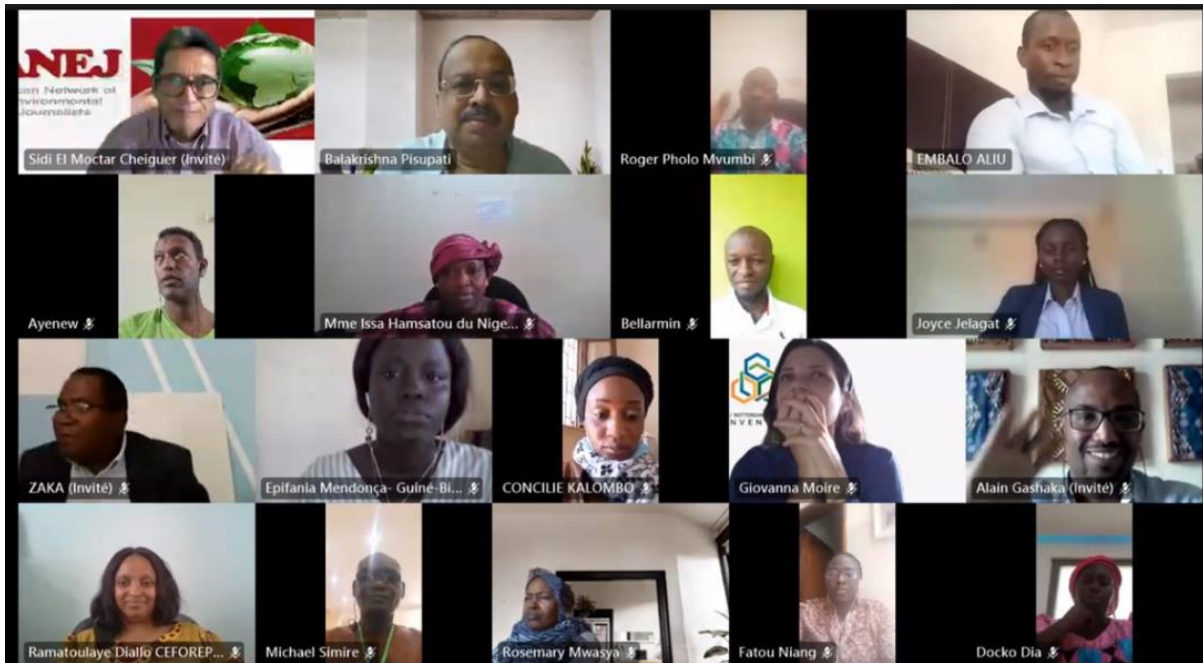
Humanity is facing one of the greatest challenges of our time, due to environmental crises, largely caused by human activities. The Triple Planetary Crisis, of climate, nature, and pollution is exacting heavy losses on individuals, communities, and economies and threatens all forms of life on our planet. We urgently require simplified knowledge that can help make sense of the environmental challenges to halt and reverse the damage we have done to our natural world. The role of common man and woman in reducing the crisis is critical. Media professionals and journalists are in the forefront of efforts to take key messages impacting societies to common people. As the UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted in his message to the World Forum for Democracy, in 2020, “we have the solutions to the triple planetary emergency and know what to do to reconcile humankind with nature”.

Although there have been global efforts to tackle environmental crisis through multilateral agreements following the warnings issued by the scientific community on the rapid degradation of planetary resources, apparent ecological overload, as well as the erosion of nature-based economies, there still exist a huge knowledge gap among those whose livelihoods are closely linked to the environment. Environmental journalists and media organizations are playing a pivotal role in shaping society’s attitudes towards the environment through advocacy, awareness, and spreading the most effective solutions for the human dimension of environmental change and the inspirations for a sustainable future.

Translating the global agreements into actions on the ground requires empowering

change-makers who will facilitate the dissemination of key environmental messages to the common people at the forefront of the current environmental crisis.

On 6th July 2021, UNEP’s capacity building programme for multilateral environmental agreements in African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries, known as the ACP MEAs programme, in collaboration with the Africa Network of Environmental Journalists (ANEJ) organized a virtual capacity building and awareness-raising briefing session for environmental journalists in Africa on issues of environmental governance, focusing on chemicals and waste management and related MEAs (BRS) for the safe and better management of the environment, while promoting knowledge sharing.



Participants during the UNEP-ANEJ Virtual Briefing Session on 6th July 2021

The briefing brought together ninety-three participants from 48 countries in Africa, along with the Minister of Environment, Sustainable Development and Congo Basin from Democratic Republic of Congo, Her Excellency Ms. Arlette Soudan-Nonault, senior officials from Mauritania. During the session, participants were briefed on key issues related to chemicals and wastes, the implementation MEAs related to chemicals and waste (the Basel, Rotterdam and Minamata conventions), and plans for the forthcoming BRS COPs in 2021 and 2022.

In her opening remarks, the Minister of environment, sustainable development, and the Congo Basin, Ms. Arlette Soudan-Nonault, stressed on the link between human health and the environment, the damages to the continent caused by the mismanagement of hazardous chemicals and wastes, loss of biological diversity, and climate change. She also acknowledged the unprecedented destruction of the ecological systems whose existence conditions life on earth and called for international solidarity and cooperation for the management of chemicals and hazardous waste.



Minister Soudan delivering her opening remarks as ANEJ President, Mr. Sidi and ACP MEAs Programme Manager, Dr. Balakrishna paying attention.

Minister Soudan urged the participants to fulfill their civic duties as journalists by raising public awareness on the sound management of chemicals and waste to address urgent planetary challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and gross inequalities affecting human rights and social justice. *“The role of media professionals is inescapable. It is certainly up to you to inform the public opinion about the reality and the risks of chemical pollution, amplifying and accompanying the actions of the public authorities. It is also up to you to say what is wrong and to draw the attention of the same public authorities when it is useful and necessary. This is how you fulfill your civic duty of greening minds and behaviors,”* she noted.

“We are the voice of the aspirations and the motivation of ... all journalists... to inform, educate, and enlighten citizens”.

Addressing the session, Mrs. Menesia Muinjo, ANEJ Vice-President reaffirmed ANEJ’s commitment in tackling some of the challenges plaguing our planet posing a real threat to biodiversity and the world’s population. *“Being aware of the chemicals and waste state of affairs, we, the journalists from the continent, are affirming our contribution towards this fight. We do this through our roles – of informing, educating, and enlightening citizens and being whistle-blowers”,* she said.

Capacity building including awareness briefing sessions on key environmental issues is critical to keep ANEJ abreast of emerging environmental issues, especially when it comes to the follow-up of the rounds of COPs negotiations. *“In February 2020, three ANEJ members participated in the Convention on Biodiversity in Rome. Reports*

and interviews from that Convention were transmitted the next day after the start of the proceedings to several countries on the African continent. With the rapidly changing media industry environment – when it comes to technology, ANEJ members need to have the same level of information at the same speed and be able to distribute their reports or content - be it audio, video or articles through their own portal – which can be achieved through smart partnership with UNEP”, she added.

The ACP MEAs 3 Programme of UNEP will continue to engage with ANEJ and other such networks in Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific to further strengthen capacities of media and journalists. The next briefing session with ANEJ will be held on 7th September 2021 focusing on issues of ocean governance.

The ACP MEAs programme is a partnership between the European Union, the Organization of Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific States, UNEP, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. It aims to build the capacity of 79 countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific to fulfill their obligations to multilateral environmental agreements. In the last decade, the programme has helped states to fully engage in the implementation of environmental accords. It is now in its third phase.

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