

A UN System-wide Strategy for Sound Management of Chemicals: *Coordinating delivery for member states*

An EMG proposed set of collaborative actions

Issue Paper

DRAFT

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Executive Summary

This issue paper has been prepared to support a discussion by the UN senior officials on preparation of a possible UN system-wide approach by the EMG on the sound management of chemicals to enhance cooperation and coordination at the global level and by extension at the national level.

The suggested approach is in response to the Rio+20 outcome, decisions of various intergovernmental processes, including the first universal session of the UNEP Governing Council (to be known as the UN Environment Assembly from 2014 onward), the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, and the International Conference on Chemicals Management, which have called for a more systematic approach for cooperation and coordination in the implementation of Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs) and other instruments related to the sound management of chemicals and waste (e.g., the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), and supported by the findings of the UNEP Global Chemicals Outlook 2012 . The paper proposes the creation of an Issue Management Group (IMG) within the Environment Management Group (EMG) to define a UN system-wide strategy for a coordinated approach to the efficient delivery of sound chemicals management. As such, it provides a background, rationale, objectives, and proposes a way forward with activities for consideration by the EMG.

Background

1. Though chemicals are a major contributor to national economies, sound management throughout their lifecycle is essential not only to avoid significant risks to human health and ecosystems along with their associated economic costs, but also to maximize the full benefits of their contribution to human well-being and achieve sustainable development objectives.
2. Chemicals management has been high on the international political agenda since 1972 at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) when pollution from toxic and dangerous substances was a central issue. It was specifically addressed in 1992 by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development with the adoption of Chapter 19 of Agenda 21 and again at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 where the 2020 goal of producing and using chemicals in ways that lead to the minimization of significant effects on human health and the environment was established in the Plan of Implementation of the Johannesburg Summit.
3. The international governance structure for chemicals management is provided by a number of MEAs. These include the Vienna Convention and its Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the Basel Convention on Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Waste, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, the Stockholm Conventions on Persistent Organic Pollutants, and the Minamata Convention on Mercury to be presented for adoption and opened for signature at the Conference of Plenipotentiaries scheduled to take place in Kumamoto, Japan, from 10 to 11 October 2013.

4. The widening gap in capacities, the need for enhancing global cooperative efforts, as well as enhancing cooperation and coordination between existing instruments and processes and the growing urgency to assess and manage chemicals more comprehensively, led to the adoption in 2006, of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM). As a cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder initiative to protect human health and the environment, SAICM provides a unique policy framework to achieve the 2020 goal.
5. Countries renewed their commitment to address chemical (and waste) issues as a key priority area in the outcome document “The future we want” of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012. In its call for integration of efforts and a commitment to accountability and focus, Rio+20 provided an important venue for promoting and renewing a comprehensive approach to the sound management of chemicals and waste. The Rio+20 decisions on green economy, on global environmental governance and on chemicals and waste provide an opportunity for fostering chemicals collaborative approaches and actions. The Rio+20 outcome document requires a renewed institutional commitment by intergovernmental agencies and international organizations to the goals of sustainable development.
6. In the Rio + 20 outcome document, countries recognized the significant contributions to sustainable development made by the MEAs and encouraged Parties to consider further measures to promote policy coherence at all relevant levels, improve efficiency, reduce unnecessary overlap and duplication, and enhance coordination and cooperation among the Multilateral Environmental Agreements, including the three Rio conventions, as well as with the United Nations system in the field.
7. The first round of decisions among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions on cooperation and coordination invited UNEP and the Food and Agriculture Organization, working together with other bodies of the United Nations, in particular the United Nations Development Programme, MEAs, and other international bodies, to develop programmatic cooperation in the field that would support implementation of the three conventions in areas of common concern such as sustainable development, trade, customs (for example through the Green Customs Initiative), transport, public health, labour, environment, agriculture and industry.
8. In response to earlier attention to sound chemicals management, the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) was established in 1995 to provide a coordinating mechanism between international organizations and programmes. The IOMC now has nine participating organizations that collaborate to coordinate in the capacity building, technical assistance and institutional strengthening programmes they provide to support country efforts to implement national frameworks for the sound management of chemicals. To boost take up of the extensive expertise and experience available for sound chemicals management within the IOMC participating organizations, a ‘toolbox’ for sound chemicals management at the national level is being developed. The toolbox will provide guidance on different chemicals management themes such as the management of chemicals in agriculture, industrial accidents involving chemicals, occupational health in industries using chemicals, and international systems for chemicals management, such as the Global Harmonized System for Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS).

Rationale

9. The Global Chemicals Outlook (GCO) alerted the international community to the rapidly changing nature and size of chemicals related challenges and the chemicals intensification of the economies of developing countries and countries in economic transition. These rapid changes increase both economic opportunities, but also risks to human health and the environment, if this intensification is not matched by enhanced programmes and initiatives for sound chemicals and waste management.

10. The cost to national economies of human and environmental exposure to harmful chemicals is often unrecognized, but can be substantial as shown in the UNEP's *Cost of Inaction Report* (2013). Along with WHO's work on the *Burden of Disease*, efforts to overcome the challenging task of quantification indicate considerable risks associated with poorly resourced and fragmented approaches to sound management. They also provide evidence that sound chemicals management can reduce the financial and health burden and lay the foundations for a thriving Green Economy and a more fair distribution of development benefits across society.
11. As the increasing production, use and disposal of chemicals have implications for the environment, human health and national economies, it is prudent to move expeditiously toward legal, economic and technical instruments and approaches that promote sound chemicals management. The GCO report called for urgent and coordinated actions at national, regional, corporate and civil society level as well as international level so that the sound management of chemicals is perceived as essential throughout their life cycle to decouple sustainable development advances and to maximize societal benefits from the potential and growing risks to human health and the environment.
12. Chemicals management is a cross-sectoral issue and, in most countries, responsibility is divided among different authorities. In most countries, there is no central or independent chemicals management agency or integrated management structure or mechanism for coordinating the different sectoral authorities. The lack of effective coordination can lead to redundancies, gaps and inconsistencies in chemicals management together with inefficient use of financial resources. The momentum created by the enhanced cooperation and coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions should be broadened in scope and be further developed to support the achievement of the SAICM goal of sound chemicals management and the future Minamata Convention at the national level through the use of the existing tools, institutions and programmes.
13. Strengthening the chemicals management capacities of national institutions and businesses requires comprehensive, broad spectrum and preventive policies that link the many national agencies responsible for chemicals management into an integrated system. Effective implementation and compliance and enforcement of the chemical-related MEAs and the implementation of SAICM, requires that the policies of the health and environment sectors are aligned with each other, and strong institutional mechanisms to facilitate collaboration with other sectors and greater integration of the sound management of chemicals into the broader development agenda are enhanced or developed.
14. The laudable efforts to improve coordination of the activities and functions of the United Nations agencies and programmes responsible for chemicals should be further strengthened by integrating sound chemicals management beyond the current IOMC participating organizations and into those international organizations charged with social and economic development. The success of a UN system-wide approach will be defined by its capacity to convince international organizations, agencies for national development, multilateral aid programmes and financial partners that funding sound management of chemicals is both critical to economic development and cost effective.
15. A wide range of instruments and approaches, methods and tools have been developed by international organizations, governments, business and civil society initiatives, but the range is so broad that it diminishes the potential for cross-enterprise learning or assessment and makes it difficult for government policy makers to integrate them into a broader, more meaningful, strategy.
16. Member states are keenly interested in enhancing cooperation and coordination for sound chemicals management at the national level. Thus far, UNEP has made efforts through the Basel,

Rotterdam and Stockholm secretariats to begin this process, though more needs to be done and in particular at the national level. This country-led process continues in 2013 and will report back to the UN Environment Assembly in June 2014. The UN-system more broadly needs to be responsive to, as well as support, this process.

17. The Environment Management Group (EMG) as the UN system-wide coordination body on environment can play a key role in engaging the UN system to the sound chemicals management agenda in the process of both developing and implementing a UN system-wide strategic plan with a view to support concrete collaborative actions at the national level.
18. The EMG is well equipped to foster a synergistic approach to position sound management of chemicals as a vital element that underpins the complementary approaches of sustainable development and a green economy and continue to raise awareness and maintain a political and technical focus on the importance of sound management chemicals while demonstrating the contribution and relevance of its programme to the “UN Delivering as One” particularly within the context of the implementation of Rio+20 agenda.

Purpose

19. The success of enhancing cooperation and coordination in the sound management of chemicals and in finding ways to engage the collective capacity of the UN organisations in enhancing coherent management responses to sound chemicals management will be defined by its capacity to mobilize the environmental expertise, competence and capacity across the UN system.
20. The purpose of the approach proposed in this paper is to facilitate the integration of sound management of chemicals into the international organizations charged with social and economic development and to demonstrate to agencies for national development, multilateral aid programmes and other financial partners, that funding sound management of chemicals is both critical to economic development and cost effective. The main purpose of the approach is to build upon and provide an impetus to the work of the IOMC to build capacity at national level to mainstream sound chemicals management into national development plans and processes and to strengthen or establish national coordinating entities for sound chemicals management.

Guiding principles

21. The development of an approach to greater cooperation and coordination for delivery to member states is guided by the following set of principles and considerations:
 - a) **Responsive to country needs and requests.** The “synergies process” for chemicals and waste, designed to improve cooperation and coordination was generated by country interests so the UN system needs to be responsive to their continuing process;
 - b) **Dynamic and coherent process.** A continuing and dynamic process to improve implementation and support a coherent governance process of sound chemicals management at national level including through enhanced coherence and coordination in the environmental, social and development agenda across sectors;
 - c) **Covering multiple instruments.** Covering not only the chemicals related MEAs and SAICM, but also encompassing other existing and future instruments and programmes while respecting the autonomy of each;
 - d) **Life-cycle approach.** Fostering a comprehensive approach addressing all chemicals across their life cycle to integrate and coordinate legal regimes and institutional structures so as to move from a chemical-by-chemical approach at the national level towards a more comprehensive approach that addresses chemicals holistically in terms of social and economic development;
 - e) **Multistakeholder and multisectoral.** A multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach that knits together and coordinates government policies and instruments

with industry and its stakeholders (from investors to retailers) as well as to engage the skills and resources of civil society and NGOs;

- f) **Full-cost accounting.** Demonstrating how a life-cycle full-cost accounting approach to sound chemicals management supports their economies, providing economic and implementation benefits encompassing all economic and social sectors – health, agriculture, industry and mining, trade, transport, building and tourism .

Objectives

22. The overall objective of the present proposal is a UN system-wide strategy for the efficient delivery of sound chemicals management for member states.

Specific objectives

1. Build upon and expand the work of the IOMC to enhance UN system-wide coordination on sound management of chemicals in support of comprehensive, multi-stakeholder and prevention-oriented chemicals management strategies at the international, regional and national level;
2. Sensitise additional international organizations, development agencies, multilateral aid programmes and financial partners that funding sound management of chemicals is both critical to economic development and cost effective;
3. Channel the momentum created by the cooperation and coordination process among the chemicals related MEAs to improve implementation of the sound management of chemicals at the national level through the use of existing tools, institutions and programmes;
4. Enhance coordination among national agencies and ministries and intergovernmental and international organizations, in particular through the UNDAF process, to establish sound chemical management as a national and international environmental, public health and business development priority, that is sufficiently funded and sustainably maintained;

Activities

1. To constitute an Issue Management Group (IMG) on sound management of chemicals within the EMG to develop the UN system-wide approach on cooperation and coordination for sound management of chemicals to enhance delivery at the national level.
2. The issue management group should develop a UN system-wide strategy approach, guided by the country-led process currently underway to:
 - a) Provide a UN system-wide assessment on the progress made in and ways to accelerate the achievement of the Johannesburg Plan of implementation goal that, by 2020, the sound management of chemicals throughout their life cycle and of hazardous waste in ways that lead to minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment;
 - b) Identify post 2015 goals and targets (i.e., SDG) and priority issues and possible post 2020 goals and targets (WSSD on sound chemicals management);
 - c) Provide a sectoral analysis of the linkages between management of chemicals and respective sectoral goals;
 - d) Map out current activities and initiatives that contribute to the achievement of the SAICM 2020 goals and facilitate the implementation of the chemicals related instruments and MEAs;
 - e) Identify barriers and opportunities to the mainstreaming of SCM into development and other sectoral policies and strategies;
 - f) Identify approaches to financing adequate capacity and resources to support sound management of chemicals at national level;
 - g) Provide comparative advantages of the UN system in Delivering as One sound management of chemicals at national level; and

- h) Provide input to inform the fourth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (to be convened in 2015) in the development and consideration of the Overall Orientation and Guidance to facilitate the 2020 goal of sound chemicals management.
- 3. Bring the UN system-wide approach to the attention of the relevant intergovernmental fora to facilitate its implementation.