



Summary of the European multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral conference on “A Non-Toxic Environment: The Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste beyond 2020”

Brussels, 25 October 2017

Abstract

On 25 October 2017, following an invitation by the German Ministry for the Environment and the German Environment Agency, about 90 representatives of European institutions and Member States, the private sector, civil society and academia came together in Brussels to discuss the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020.

Following a welcome by the ICCM5 President and four brief scene-setting inputs by different stakeholders, participants expressed their views (under the Chatham House Rule) in four parallel forums whose themes were: 1) Chemicals, health, and occupational safety; 2) Improving the science base on hazardous substances; 3) Governance; and 4) Chemicals in products and the circular economy. A fishbowl-style discussion concluded the debate.

The main conclusions were:

- 1) Greater dissemination and transfer of knowledge and information is needed, while such information should be more transparent and easily accessible for all.**
- 2) The overall vision of the beyond 2020 framework should be clear and easy to convey and be complemented by a set of strategic and prioritized goals, objectives and targets. Whether “a non-toxic environment” should be the motto remains an issue of debate.**
- 3) Common standards could be used to harmonize the sound management of chemicals and waste.**
- 4) Prioritization to reduce the complexity of issues is needed for the sound management of chemicals and waste to become more efficient and, hence, effective.**
- 5) There is a need for stronger involvement of a broader base of stakeholders.**

1. Welcome and Inputs

ICCM5 President Gertrud Sahler expressed in her welcome speech the continued need for SAICM and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 as an essential contribution towards sustainable development. She encouraged EU stakeholders to contemplate the options of a SAICM name-change and enhancing the science policy interface, as well as means of expanding the SAICM community and strengthening the role of the International Chemicals Management Conference (ICCM). Mrs Sahler reflected on the need for strengthening governance structures in developing countries, multi-stakeholder partnerships for achieving greater progress on the emerging policy issues, broader sectoral engagement and the role of sustainable chemistry beyond 2020. She acknowledged that human and financial resources will remain a challenge and urged participants to consider funding options. Finally, the ICCM5 President encouraged all participants to actively engage in the intersessional process, with the next meeting being hosted by Sweden in March 2018.

The subsequent four scene-setting “flashlight” inputs illustrated the perspective of the private sector, civil

society, academia and an innovative business. The private sector representative called for building capacities for basic chemicals management and infrastructure, harmonizing GHS implementation and data collection on the global level and making use of new business models (e.g. chemical leasing). The civil society representative pointed out the many serious and unresolved problems with hazardous substances, the associated health and environmental problems, and the need to develop and implement sustainable solutions. In her view, the steps needed beyond 2020 include a legally binding information system on hazardous chemicals and wastes, the global implementation and enforcement of REACH and the elimination of legacy chemicals. The input from academia highlighted the potential of sustainable chemistry for achieving the 2030 Agenda and for bridging conflicts in the implementation of certain sustainable development goals. The representative of industry described his experience with developing and producing sustainable products over the past 20 years and how mastering the associated challenges provided a long-term competitive advantage.”

2. Parallel forums

Since the conference aimed at fostering networking and exchange among stakeholders, a major part of the conference was carried out in four parallel thematic forums. In order to engage the participants in a most effective and inclusive way, two discussion rounds were held in each forum. Each of these rounds was guided by a moderator, and two invited inputs per session served as a ground for discussion among group members.

Forum 1 on **chemicals, health, and occupational safety** discussed the linkages between chemicals and health, outlined the need for enhanced action, and explored options for strengthened collaboration between the environmental, health, and labor sectors. The outcomes of the discussions can be summarized as follows:

- There is a need for clearer definitions of the precautionary principle (also with regard to unknown long-term effects of chemicals), of what the sound management of chemicals and waste should encompass, and of what a “non-toxic environment” entails.
- Better information transmission and education are needed to improve awareness for Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste (SMCW), while the information needs to become accessible for everyone. At the same time, the differences between developing and developed countries in this regard need to be taken into account.
- The cooperation between different sectors would benefit from a clearer attribution of roles and a more strategic approach to the issues of chemicals and waste management. One suggestion was to create a round-table (possibly under the beyond2020 framework) to generate the so far lacking political will to cooperate. Furthermore, UN Environment, ILO, or WHO could be invited to give presentations e.g. during the second meeting of the intersessional process or at another meeting within the SAICM intersessional process.
- Concerning sector involvement, one idea was to involve more health professionals in the SAICM process since they are very important in educating the general public on chemical exposure and how this can be prevented.
- A greater balancing within SAICM and SMCW beyond 2020 of the environmental, health, and economic issues would serve the purpose of greater integrating further sectors in the process. With regard to the economic issues, a clearer picture of the costs and benefits of SMCW would be welcomed.

Forum 2 on **improving the science base on hazardous substances** discussed the strengths and weaknesses of chemical- and waste related science, how research could be deepened, and possible options of linking policy and science. The outcomes of the discussions can be summarized as follows:

- The presenter from academia emphasized the importance of REACH implementation, the importance of planetary boundary concept in SMCW, the needs for information disclosure to fill the data gap, as well as the external needs from academia on funding and support to carry out and promote SMCW research.
- The issue of chemicals is too diverse to be seen as one issue. Henceforth, a grouping method for research and management of chemicals, thereby differentiating between more and less important issues and more efficient chemical risk management was suggested. At the same time the methodology of research could be harmonized.
- Both, products and chemicals ought to be “safe by design”. Therefore, research on non-chemical solutions and other safer alternatives should be fostered.
- The benefits of chemicals as well as the avoided costs of using safer chemicals and the costs of inaction could be researched and published in a “Stern report” on chemicals.
- Greater use should be made of existing information, whereby the EU and the OECD could take a leading role. The transmission of information, for which there is a great need, should be made transparent. The access to information should be improved. In this regard, criticism at industry and its claim for confidentiality was offered. Data generation needs to be harmonized in order to ensure comparability, credibility and recognition.
- When generating and transmitting information on chemicals, there should be a special focus on the particular needs of (developing) countries. Meanwhile, capacity development should include legislative capacities, education, financial support and the building of partnerships.
- Science should be better integrated not just in SAICM and the beyond 2020 process, but also in other international organisations such as the IOMC, UNFCCC, and/or UNCBD. Existing science-policy mechanisms should be improved and be more inclusive of chemicals, and could be considered as alternative to developing a new mechanism under SAICM.
- Academia should be further encouraged to engage in SMCW discussions, and civil society organizations representing vulnerable populations should be heard.
- More sectors should be included, e.g. downstream users of chemicals, pharmaceutical industries, SMEs etc.
- All stakeholders should become active in improving the science base on hazardous chemicals and work on building trust.

Forum 3 on **enhancing the global governance architecture for sound chemicals management beyond 2020** aimed at rethinking the institutional framework for the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020. The outcomes of the discussions in this breakout group can be summarized as follows:

- The overall vision of the beyond 2020 framework should be clear and easy to convey. It is generally acknowledged that it should be linked to the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the SDGs. At the same time, there was some debate about the specific content. Some participants mentioned their doubts about the phrase “non-toxic environment”, while others welcomed it. The role of the beyond 2020 framework in promoting innovation and enhancing the sustainability of chemicals and other industries was also briefly discussed.
- Developing fit-for-purpose goals and targets which could address global as well as national action is useful for prioritization, but less important issues ought not to be forgotten. They could be modelled based on the Aichi Targets for biodiversity and should be easily measurable. SAICM and SMCW stakeholders should be involved in the discussions on goals and targets.
- A mechanism to address unresolved (legacy) and new issues could be helpful to achieve the sound management of chemicals and waste. One priority could be the development of basic capacities, for example through the building of partnerships that involve clear goals or through the development of national action plans.
- Concerning new binding elements for a future approach, these were generally welcomed. The use and enhancement of existing standards like GHS, as well as new elements like a framework on

plastic pollution were mentioned. It was also mentioned that the intersessional process could agree on the commissioning of a legal expert for analysing how voluntary and binding elements could be combined in a beyond 2020 framework.

- For the review and follow-up, an assessment of national action plans was suggested to work in combination with the goals and targets mentioned above. Also, voluntary peer review and the sharing of experience and mutual learning (including learning from failure) were suggested.
- Multi-Stakeholder and multi-sectoral engagement could be strengthened through focused and precise work areas and by further engagement of small and medium-sized enterprises and start-ups which could show-case their lessons and experiences.
- Novel financial mechanisms to ensure contributions from different stakeholders, including industry, and to operationalize principles (e.g. polluter pays) were briefly discussed.

Forum 4 on **chemicals in products and the circular economy** aimed at investigating how a sound management of chemicals and waste could contribute to a circular economy and how it could help achieve SDG 12 on a sustainable consumption and production. The outcomes of the discussions in this breakout groups can be summarized as follows:

- Since hazardous chemicals pose a threat to recycling, reducing complexity concerning chemicals management could also pave the way for achieving or working towards a circular economy. One question for which answers are needed is the different approaches to existing and new products.
- One possible way of reducing complexity is to develop global standards that could be brought to the national level. Such standards could concern technical issues, safety issues, resources, and recyclability.
- Prioritization of substances of very high concern (SVHC) over substances of concern (SOC) would further help to reduce the complexity of the issue.
- Responsibilities of different stakeholders should be clearly assigned. Meanwhile, incentives to these stakeholders to become active should be given, but caution needs to be exercised so as not to hinder innovation.
- The use of available information on chemicals in products should be improved, while more transparency about such information on chemicals would be beneficial. The existing information should be designed to be more understandable, and thus accessible for more people.
- The need to prioritize waste prevention at its source was also acknowledged.

The afternoon forum that focused in particular on the **textile industry** aimed at discussing the interplay between SAICM in its current form and SMCW beyond 2020 and the textile sector as a major user of industrial chemicals. The outcomes of the discussion can be summarized as follows:

- Standards that are developed could be brought to the national level using SAICM as a catalysing entity.
- Industry-wide collaboration, better data availability and increased capacity building along supply chains and especially in producing countries were considered as essential.
- SAICM could raise awareness globally and contribute to knowledge exchange, such as for example on the harmonization and distribution of training materials as well as research on substitution.
- Downstream users of chemicals should become more involved in SAICM. Therefore, an initiative to define and show business cases that also acknowledge existing initiatives could be useful.
- Countries and companies should sign and implement the Chemicals in Products Programme (CiP).
- Waste reduction should be fostered, while safe substitution of hazardous chemicals should be supported.
- Even a binding protocol on chemicals in products was briefly discussed, providing voluntary actions are not sufficient.

- Awareness-raising among the fashion makers and consumers would be needed to influence their behaviour.
- NGOs have an important role in triggering change among stakeholders.

3. Fishbowl-style Discussion

The fishbowl-style discussion saw different participants walking to the front and taking a seat in order to join the debate. Outcomes of the discussion were:

- One government representative explained that his priorities for SAICM and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 were to enhance stakeholder engagement, to increase information sharing and to build capacities in developing countries. He explained the need to develop criteria for priority setting. He suggested that the intersessional process needed a strategy on objectives and milestones as well as to activate capacities in the IOMC governing bodies. He pleaded that the EU should use its competitive “knowledge” advantage and effective “collaborative mechanisms” as model to replicate on the global level. He added that the EU should share its own failures and successes with third parties.
- One industry representative suggested considering the sound waste management, including waste reduction and the promotion of chemicals and waste management in international trade agreements as topics to be discussed by the intersessional process. Her priorities include the globally harmonized application of the GHS and OECD MAD, the generation of a common understanding of transparency and traceability, the improved involvement of partners (e.g. downstream users, recyclers), as well as the need to address sustainable chemistry.
- An expert on biodiversity explained that while the Aichi targets were negotiated and provided for a good review mechanism, they were difficult to communicate.
- A government representative highlighted the need to monitor the human burden of chemicals, assess costs and develop effective tools for avoiding the most hazardous chemicals. She explained that the EU should assume a leadership role, due to the current situation in the US. She also pleaded to consider enforceability when developing legislation (e.g. grouping of chemicals approach).
- A civil society representative advocated to make the polluter pays principle binding and that costs needed to be internalized. She highlighted the need for the development of a financing mechanism for SMCW. She also explained the impact of consumer behavior (e.g. on waste generation).
- A representative of academia suggested that sustainable chemistry is the overarching vision for the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020.
- A government representative noticed the many new stakeholders in the room and the new policy perspectives they brought into the debate. He said that start-up companies should have a voice in the intersessional process. Finally, he reflected on the actors that may drive change, naming retailers, academics, and start-up companies as examples.

4. Wrap-up and closing

The representative of the German government thanked all participants for such fruitful and stimulating discussions. Special thanks went to those participants who had prepared inputs for the discussions or who took it upon themselves to moderate one of the break-out sessions. To continue the dialogue and discussions on the future of SMCW, a UNITAR workshop on goals and targets was announced to be scheduled for January 2018 in Berlin. A specific date and programme will be announced in due course.

5. Photo documentation

