

Outcomes of the informal workshop on SMCW beyond 2020 in Berlin on 19 May 2017

On 19 May 2017, about 50 participants representing European and non-European governments as well as non-governmental stakeholders came together in Berlin, following an invitation by the German government to discuss the future framework for the sound management of chemicals, and in particular SAICM, beyond 2020.

Participants discussed the outcomes of the first meeting of the intersessional process in February 2017 in Brasilia and the future process, based on the updated Co-Chairs' Summary. In three breakout groups on governance, future challenges, and high-level political attention, fruitful discussions took place whose main results were then reported back to the plenary, after which an energetic fishbowl-style discussion took place, which saw different participants walking to the front and taking a seat in order to join the debate.

The meeting was held under the Chatham House Rule, so I cannot reveal the affiliation of anyone who participated or what their contributions were. That said, the main outcomes of this workshop are:

- To enhance the sound management of chemicals and waste, a **clear and understandable vision** must be formulated. Participants discussed some examples of a simple message to use such as “detox”, “pollution free planet” or “non-toxic environment”. It was noted that such an easily communicable and clear vision may not entirely conform to text that took years to redraft through UN procedures. But the advantage to clearly state what the mission/message is to non-chemical experts could outweigh this by far.
- The **2030 Agenda** and SAICM beyond 2020 are clearly linked, including through goals and targets. The milestones and measurable objectives, which are mentioned in the Co-Chairs' Summary, should be building on the related SDG goals and targets. They could also include goals related to the legally binding conventions to clearly link them with SAICM.
- Beyond 2020, the focus should lie less on chemicals and shift more towards **processes** in which chemicals are used. This includes not only chemical production but also downstream use of chemicals in textiles, car, electronics or toy manufacturing. The concept of circular economy was highlighted in that regard. Focusing on processes means to check for exposure to hazardous chemicals for workers as well as for emissions to water and air, and last but not least on chemicals embedded in products. The socio-economic impacts of such contamination should be assessed.
- Some participants were not happy with the **name** of SAICM. Especially in terms of communicating more widely what the Strategic Approach does, a more fitting designation might be appropriate. For the emerging policy issues and other issues of concern, some noted that the latter term was generally more appropriate, as some of the problems listed there have been around for a longer time.
- Also regarding chemicals-related issues and challenges, two elements stood out: Apart from the need for an accessible and transparent process to identify new issues of concern, which to a large extent we already have, is the need to **develop effective programs/projects** including targets, timelines and end-dates. In addition, a budget should be allocated to each issue of concern.
- The **dialogue at the national and regional level** should be facilitated through workshops. Regional meetings should be used for interactions and mutual support.
- The **linkages** between the BRS and Minamata Conventions on the one hand, and SAICM on the other hand were discussed as well. SAICM could play a facilitating role for substances that are known to be problematic, but which are not listed under the legally binding conventions.
- An **enhanced science-policy interface** was seen by many as an important element, but the details of this, including its mandate and composition, require very careful deliberation. A possible subsidiary body should not duplicate existing efforts, but build on these. It could provide state of the art knowledge on proposed issues of concern, review progress in implementing SAICM and the framework beyond 2020, contribute to scientific capacity building in emerging economies and developing countries, and increase the visibility of hazardous substances as a challenge to public health and the environment.
- As a very **direct activity**, it was proposed to use UNEA3 and its theme on “Pollution” to highlight the importance of SMCW. Participants could be asked to hand in a sample of their hair or even their blood to have the levels of common chemicals tested. By highlighting their

own **body burden**, ministers might realize in an instant how close this issue is to themselves, and to everyone else.

- It became clear that SAICM and the framework beyond 2020 will not be able to bring together everyone, up- and downstream from all sectors and all stakeholder groups. Instead, it might achieve more with less by getting its message across loud and clear, pointing out the centrality of sound chemicals management, and let other actors come up with their own solutions on how to deal with it.
- **Governments** play a fundamental role in bringing chemicals and waste on the international agenda. They need to ensure that ICCM decisions are taken up by the governing councils of intergovernmental organizations, like the WHO has done repeatedly. IGOs do not take mandates from SAICM. Recurrent **multi-ministerial meetings** are necessary to ensure high-level political attention. The competition of resources between IGOs should be addressed.
- The issue of **women and chemical safety** should be promoted, for example in a declaration of women ministers. The gender dimension is important to understand the distribution of the burden of chemical pollution.
- The interactive workshop format may be used as **model for the second meeting of the intersessional process**.