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Policy issues: Chemicals management

**Background papers for the ministerial-level consultations on energy
and environment for development, chemicals management as well as
tourism and the environment**

Discussion papers presented by the Executive Director

Addendum

Background paper on chemicals management

Summary

The present document is a background paper intended to stimulate discussion and highlight chemicals management issues of concern to Governments to be addressed by ministers and heads of delegation during the ministerial consultations at the ninth special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum.

The document presents current chemicals management issues in the context of the strategic approach to international chemicals management (SAICM) which is expected to be adopted by the International Conference on Chemicals Management, to be held in Dubai from 4 to 6 February 2006. The issues are grouped under three themes: chemical safety as a cross-cutting sustainable development issue; the role of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in the implementation of SAICM; and the need for multisectoral commitment at the international level to the sound management of chemicals.

* UNEP/GCSS.IX/1.

Chemicals management

I. Introduction

1. The ninth special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) will take place immediately after the International Conference on Chemicals Management, which will be held in Dubai from 4 to 6 February 2006 and which is expected to adopt the completed strategic approach to international chemicals management (SAICM). Chemicals management is thus a very timely topic for the ministerial consultations.

2. The development of SAICM was mandated by the UNEP Governing Council in its decision SS.VII/3 in February 2002 and further guided by decisions 22/4 IV and 23/9 in 2003 and 2005, respectively. Its development was endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the World Health Assembly and the International Labour Conference in 2003, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment in 2004 and the high-level plenary meeting of the sixtieth session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2005 (2005 World Summit). SAICM has been elaborated over a three-year period through a multistakeholder consultative process, engaging representatives of over 140 Governments together with non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations in three sessions of a Preparatory Committee and a series of regional consultations. These participants have been drawn from a wide range of sectors with an interest in chemical safety, including agriculture, environment, health, industry, labour and science. The SAICM development process has been convened jointly by UNEP, the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) and the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC)¹.

3. SAICM comprises a high-level declaration, an overarching policy strategy and a global plan of action which together will provide a policy framework to guide global efforts towards achieving the goal of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation that, by 2020, chemicals should be produced and used in ways that minimize significant adverse effects on human health and the environment. The objectives of SAICM are grouped under five headings: risk reduction, knowledge and information, governance, capacity-building and technical assistance, and illegal international traffic. The present paper introduces the following SAICM-related themes that ministers and heads of delegations may wish to explore during their consultation:

- (a) Chemical safety as a cross-cutting sustainable development issue;
- (b) The role of UNEP in SAICM implementation;
- (c) The need for multisectoral commitment at the international level to the sound management of chemicals.

4. Ministers and heads of delegations may also wish to refer to document UNEP/GCSS.IX/6, which is a progress report on the SAICM development process. This will be supplemented at the ninth special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum by a more detailed report on the outcomes of the International Conference on Chemicals Management, including the completed SAICM text.

II. Chemical safety as a cross-cutting sustainable development issue

A. Summary

5. The importance of the sound management of chemicals as a factor in the achievement of core sustainable development goals is not always well recognized. SAICM presents an opportunity to promote the better integration of chemical safety into national development planning.

B. Introduction

6. Increased use of chemicals frequently accompanies economic development and chemicals can play an important role in the improvement of living standards, including in relation to disease eradication, safe drinking water and the alleviation of hunger. At the same time, the sound management

¹ The participating organizations of IOMC are the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), UNEP, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

of chemicals is essential for environmental sustainability, which, in turn, is a prerequisite for sustainable development as a whole. There is increasing recognition of the importance of the sound management of chemicals in meeting the internationally agreed goals of the Millennium Declaration and of the potential for exposure to toxic substances to undermine development, health and poverty alleviation investments. Many people living in poverty have weakened immune systems leaving them more vulnerable to diseases caused or exacerbated by toxic substances and many lack knowledge of toxic substances in their community. Inadequate living conditions often leave them exposed to hazards of toxic substances and many work in occupations, such as agriculture and mining, which constantly expose them to harmful substances. Chemical exposures can also interfere with primary education by impairing children's physical growth and emotional development and, in the case of metals such as lead and mercury, can have serious and irreversible adverse effects on children's mental development.

C. Need to integrate chemicals management into national planning and sustainable development strategies

7. The cross-cutting impact of unsound chemicals management and its potential to undermine the achievement of development goals suggest that the chemicals issue should be integrated into sustainable development strategies on the part of both national Governments and the international donor community. This will usually require enhanced interdepartmental cooperation and the elevation of chemicals management as a priority in national planning tools. For developing countries and countries with economies in transition, these will include country assistance strategies and poverty reduction strategy papers. Bilateral and multilateral development cooperation agencies and international financial institutions will need to be similarly cognizant of and receptive to the sound management of chemicals as a legitimate element in such national plans. In some cases, there may be a considerable challenge in raising the awareness of officials and decision-makers from national ministries and donor agencies for whom chemicals management has not traditionally been associated with more obvious development goals. In addition to ensuring a multisectoral approach among government agencies, it will be desirable to engage other stakeholders such as non-governmental organizations and the private sector in improving the management of chemicals.

D. Potential of SAICM to advance the integration of chemical safety in national planning

8. From the outset of the SAICM development process, the linkage between chemical safety and sustainable development has been emphasized. For example, the Governing Council, in its decision SS.VII/3 15 of February 2002, acknowledged the essential role of the sound management of chemicals throughout their life cycle, including the management of hazardous wastes, in achieving sustainable development and underlined that SAICM should promote the incorporation of chemical safety issues into the development agenda. The objective of integrating the sound management of chemicals into national development strategies is reflected in the SAICM documents themselves at all levels, as a political commitment in the high-level declaration, in the objectives set out in the overarching policy strategy and as a work area in the global plan of action.

E. Proposals for the ministerial-level consultation

9. In their discussions, ministers and heads of delegations may wish to explore the linkages between the sound management of chemicals and the achievement of sustainable development, comment on the needs and modalities for enhanced cross-sectoral coordination on chemicals issues in the context of national development planning and consider the potential of SAICM to encourage such coordination.

10. Ministers and head of delegations may wish to consider making recommendations pertaining to:

(a) Further recognizing the contribution to be made by the sound management of chemicals to sustainable development;

(b) Encouraging the integration of the sound management of chemicals into national development planning, taking into account the commitments and objectives expressed by SAICM in this regard.

III. Role of UNEP in SAICM implementation

A. Summary

11. The present chapter sets out the role that UNEP is expected to play in SAICM implementation, based on provisional agreements reached by the SAICM Preparatory Committee and guidance from the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum. These roles fall into two categories: the functions that UNEP is likely to be requested to perform in support of SAICM implementation as a whole (principally secretariat and financial administration services) and activities that it would undertake to assist its environment sector constituents, especially developing and transition economy countries, in implementing SAICM.

B. UNEP support for overall SAICM implementation

12. Subject to the concurrence of the International Conference on Chemicals Management, the SAICM Preparatory Committee, at its third session, held in Vienna from 19 to 24 September 2005, agreed that the Executive Director of UNEP would be requested to establish and assume overall responsibility for a secretariat to support the implementation of SAICM. UNEP and WHO would take lead roles in the secretariat in their respective areas of expertise. It was envisaged that the secretariat would be co-located with the UNEP chemicals and wastes cluster in Geneva and take full advantage of existing synergies. In order to reflect the multisectoral nature of SAICM, the secretariat would work in coordination and cooperation with the participating organizations of IOMC, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, as well as with other intergovernmental organizations, as appropriate.

13. Anticipated secretariat functions, as provisionally agreed by the SAICM Preparatory Committee at its third session, include the facilitation of meetings of the International Conference on Chemicals Management, which would be reconvened at appropriate intervals in the future, reporting to the Conference on SAICM implementation, maintaining a network of SAICM stakeholders, preparing implementation guidance materials, assisting in the preparation of project proposals and providing information clearing house services.

14. The Preparatory Committee did not reach a conclusion at its third session on SAICM financial considerations but discussed a proposal for UNEP to administer a trust fund in relation to a possible so-called "Quick-Start Programme" to support SAICM implementation. Should this be agreed upon at the International Conference on Chemicals Management, UNEP may be requested to perform financial administration and other services in connection with the proposed programme. While there was no discussion of specific mechanisms to fund a secretariat, this could be achieved by adapting an existing trust fund.

C. UNEP support for implementation of SAICM in the environment sector

15. In decision 23/9, adopted at its twenty-third session on 25 February 2005, the Governing Council requested the Executive Director in its decision 23/9 as a matter of high priority to make appropriate provision for the implementation of the responsibilities of UNEP under the strategic approach to international chemicals management, once adopted. It further requested the Executive Director to make provision for activities to support developing countries and countries with economies in transition in implementing SAICM, taking into account the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building.

16. In response to the above request, UNEP is preparing an initial programme of activities for the 2006–2007 biennium. Building on the existing work of UNEP in the area of hazardous chemicals and wastes, these activities are expected to include the development of a longer-term UNEP action plan for meeting SAICM objectives by 2020 and a range of projects and initiatives, including those related to the risks posed by obsolete stocks, improved information flows, integration of SAICM into efforts towards the Millennium Development Goals, partnerships with non-governmental organizations and industry, guidance for SAICM national implementation plans and illegal international traffic in hazardous chemicals.

D. Proposals for the ministerial consultation

17. Ministers and heads of delegations may wish to discuss the proposed roles for UNEP in SAICM implementation, reflecting on the significance of SAICM as an international policy initiative in the field

of chemicals management and an element of sustainable development, the appropriateness of UNEP endorsing SAICM and taking on support functions for its implementation, and the importance of UNEP support for developing countries and countries with economies in transition in implementing SAICM.

18. Ministers and heads of delegations may wish to consider making recommendations pertaining to:

(a) Endorsing or otherwise appropriately recognizing SAICM, as adopted by the International Conference on Chemicals Management;

(b) Requesting the Executive Director to undertake the support functions requested by Conference in relation to SAICM implementation;

(c) Affirming the provision of assistance by UNEP to developing countries and countries with economies in transition in developing capacity to implement SAICM, taking into account the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building and opportunities for synergies.

IV. Need for multisectoral commitment at the international level to the sound management of chemicals

A. Summary

19. One of the keys to the ultimate success of SAICM will be the commitment of all relevant intergovernmental organizations, including the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements, and international financial institutions to contribute to its implementation. While participants in the present meeting will only be in a position to recommend favourable consideration of SAICM by the Governing Council on behalf of UNEP, they may also wish to encourage colleagues from other sectors to take similar action in the governing bodies of other intergovernmental organizations.

B. Introduction

20. It is anticipated that the International Conference on Chemicals Management, having adopted SAICM, will refer it to the governing bodies of relevant intergovernmental organizations for consideration. The first such governing body to address SAICM will be UNEP Governing Council, whose ninth special session commences immediately after the Conference. Other key governing bodies would include the World Health Assembly, which will meet in May 2006, the International Labour Conference in June 2006, and the FAO Council in 2006.

C. Consideration of SAICM by the UNEP Governing Council

21. The development of SAICM was initiated by the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum and UNEP has provided the secretariat and raised the funds needed to underwrite the process. UNEP is expected to continue this central support role and, in February 2005, the Governing Council requested the Executive Director to make provision for SAICM implementation activities. Subject to the actual outcomes of the International Conference on Chemicals Management, ministers and heads of delegations may therefore wish to consider making a recommendation that the Governing Council give favourable consideration to proposals for UNEP to play a key role in implementing SAICM, as outlined above.

D. Consideration by other governing bodies

22. Multisectoral engagement has been one of the distinguishing characteristics of the SAICM development process and it will continue to be important during the implementation phase. Just as an integrated approach to the sound management of chemicals is essential at the national level, so too will it be critical to maintain the involvement of the major intergovernmental organizations, including the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreement, and international financial institutions at the global level if SAICM is to be truly strategic and represent an advance on the status quo. Cooperation among the agencies to facilitate SAICM implementation, maximizing synergies among their programmes and activities, will be an essential element in its success.

23. Decisions to endorse or otherwise acknowledge SAICM and to reflect its objectives in the work programmes of the various organizations will be a matter for each of their respective governing bodies. Ministers and heads of delegations participating in the ninth special session of the UNEP Governing

Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum may nevertheless wish to assist this process of parallel endorsements by ensuring that colleagues from other national ministries are appropriately briefed and encouraged to give positive consideration to SAICM in the context of governing body meetings for which they are responsible.

E. Proposals for the ministerial consultation

24. Ministers and heads of delegations may wish to discuss ways in which the engagement of all relevant intergovernmental organizations, including the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements, and international financial institutions in the implementation of SAICM, maximizing synergies among their programmes and activities, could be encouraged.

25. In addition to recommending that SAICM be endorsed on behalf of UNEP itself (see above), ministers and heads of delegation may wish to consider commending SAICM to the attention of the governing bodies of other relevant intergovernmental organizations and international financial institutions and encouraging national authorities to take an approach to SAICM that involves their entire Governments in order to facilitate parallel endorsement by those other governing bodies in due course.
