



Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management: PrepCom 1

Contribution of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), through its training and capacity building programmes in chemicals and waste management, proposes that the following elements are included in SAICM discussions:

- 1) Development of ***Benchmarks for National Chemicals Management Programmes*** against which national capacity assessments (e.g. National Profiles), priority setting, and action plans can be developed more effectively
- 2) Possible promotion/endorsement of the concept of ***Integrated National Programmes for Chemicals Management*** (INCEM) through which various sectors collaborate at the national level, while recognising each others strengths and advantages
- 3) Systematic identification and application of ***Synergies for Capacity Building Under International Chemicals Management Agreements*** (SYNCEM) as a basis for developing national chemical management programmes
- 4) Development of ***Human Resource Skills and Capacities for Sound Project Planning/Action Plan Development and Financial Resource Mobilisation***

Proposed Element #1: Development of Benchmarks for National Chemicals Management Programmes

Programme Area E of Chapter 19, as well as subsequent IFCS recommendations, refer to a wide range of instruments and concepts which should constitute a National Chemicals Management Programme. In addition, several international agreements put forward specific obligations for countries. This array of recommendations has created a challenge for many countries regarding where to start and how to select priorities for taking action.

UNITAR proposes that if the goal of sound management of chemicals by the year 2020 is to be reached by developing countries and countries in transition, SAICM may consider developing (or initiate a process to develop) clear benchmarks for capacity building to guide countries in their step-by-step approach to develop or strengthen a national chemicals management programme. These benchmarks could have sufficient flexibility to take into consideration different starting points in countries, such as different levels of industrial and agricultural development.

For example, one possible priority benchmark could be the recently completed Globally Harmonized System for Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS). Several experts have pointed out that the GHS can serve as a basic building block for a national chemicals management programme. Its hazard classification criteria can be applied to virtually any chemical in commercial use and could serve as the basis for targeted risk reduction activities throughout the chemical life cycle.

A major advantage of having benchmarks in place would be that national capacity self-assessments (such as those undertaken through National Profiles) as well as national priority setting processes and action plans would become more focused. Similarly, progress by countries could be evaluated more effectively if clear reference marks exist. Such assessments are at present difficult to undertake, except for international agreements which often have specific obligations.

Proposed Element #2: Development of Integrated National Programmes for Chemicals Management (INCEM)

A number of countries have taken important steps to link and integrate chemicals management activities into a more coherent and integrated “programmatic” framework, or what can be called an *Integrated National Programme for Chemicals Management (INCEM)*. Core elements of such an Integrated National Programme may include, for example, inter-ministerial co-ordination, national information exchange, and co-ordinated priority setting through multi-sectoral task teams, as well as consolidated efforts to raise the importance of chemicals management within national sustainable development.¹

A core feature of the INCEM approach is that all government sectors contribute to the national programme within their own areas of competence, thus maintaining their independence. For activities where a single approach provides added-value (such as preparing a National Profile), efforts may be undertaken collectively. The vision of this concept is that the sum of activities within an INCEM is greater than adding up its individual parts, thus synergies are created and resources maximised.

UNITAR proposes that SAICM reviews experiences gained by pilot countries that have initiated an Integrated National Programme for Chemicals Management. If considered a valuable tool, SAICM may want to consider how the INCEM concept could be put in practice. Countries and UNITAR stand ready to share experiences gained through the UNITAR/IOMC programme to assist countries to develop and sustain an Integrated National Programme for Chemicals Management.

Proposed Element #3: Synergies for Capacity Building Under International Chemicals Management Agreements

International agreements addressing chemicals management serve as important driving forces to strengthen national chemicals management programmes. Yet, such agreements are often very specific in nature and focus on specific problem areas. For this reason, related technical assistance projects are usually narrow and focus on specific convention obligations rather than strengthening chemicals management in general. Implementation of specific obligations, however, often requires core skills and infrastructures to be in place at the national level which is also important for chemicals management in general (e.g. skills for risk assessment and management, infrastructure for import control).²

Some important work has already been undertaken to identify synergies for capacity building under international agreements, mainly through sub-regional workshops. UNITAR proposes that SAICM addresses this issue and related experience gained in a more systematic way. The rationale behind the proposal is that reaping benefits from synergistic capacity building will in the long-term help to strengthen chemicals management schemes and save resources at the same time.³

Proposed Element #4: Skills and Capacities for Sound Project Planning/Action Plan Development and Financial Resource Mobilisation

Experiences from capacity building projects conducted over a number of years suggests that lack of skills for sound project planning and financial resource mobilisation is one of the limiting factors preventing progress in strengthening national chemicals management programmes.⁴ Often, external international

consultants have written project proposals, while little has been done to strengthen skills in developing countries to write sound proposals independently and based on country-driven processes. Sound planning and project documents are, however, not going to lead to new projects, unless chemicals managers have a good understanding about national and international funding allocation processes for technical assistance and capacity building. Thus, the two areas are inherently connected.

In light of the fact that the two above-mentioned constraints constitute a major bottleneck in many developing countries and countries in transition, UNITAR proposes that SAICM discusses these issues and considers ways and means of how relevant capacity constraints can be best overcome.

¹ More information, including guidance and training materials, regarding the UNITAR/IOMC programme that assists countries in addressing issues related to INCHEM can be found at: www.unitar.org/cwm/a/inp/index.htm.

² This important issue was discussed at a June 1999 workshop convened by UNITAR/IOMC/IFCS on Developing and Strengthening National Legislation and Policies for the Sound Management of Chemicals. The full report of the meeting is available at the UNITAR website: www.unitar.org/cwm/publications.htm

³ UNITAR, in cooperation with other international organisations will hold a Thematic Workshop on Synergies for Capacity Building under International Agreements Addressing Chemicals and Waste Management on 1-3 March 2004. This meeting is open to interested countries and organisations and its conclusions may be of interest to participants in the SAICM process.

⁴ UNITAR has developed draft guidance on skills building for action plan development and financial resource mobilisation which are available at: www.unitar.org/cwm/publications.htm (see also Proposed Element #2, above).

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