



Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)

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Further development of a strategic approach to international chemicals management

Paper submitted by the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals on information sources and exchange on capacity-building for chemicals management

Note by the secretariat

The secretariat has the honour to circulate, in the annex to the present note, a paper submitted by the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) on information sources and exchange on capacity-building for chemicals management, for the consideration of the Preparatory Committee at its third session. The annex is being circulated as received, and has not been formally edited.

* SAICM/PREPCOM.3/1.

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Annex

IOMC



INTER-ORGANIZATION PROGRAMME FOR THE SOUND MANAGEMENT OF CHEMICALS

A cooperative agreement among **UNEP, ILO, FAO, WHO, UNIDO, UNITAR and OECD**

Information Sources and Exchange on Capacity Building for Chemicals Management

June, 2005

Background

The number of technical support and capacity building projects undertaken by IGOs, bi-lateral donors, the private sector and NGOs aimed at assisting countries in strengthening various aspects of their national chemicals management schemes has been growing steadily in recent years. Similarly, there has been an increase in the interest of many countries and organizations involved in chemicals management capacity building in understanding who is doing what, where, and when. The rationale for this interest is that an increased availability of basic information about capacity building projects will allow for improved co-ordination and more efficient use of resources.

There are a number of systems in place that store project data and facilitate information exchange for capacity building. The IOMC Inventory of Activities contains summary information on major ongoing projects executed by IOMC Organizations, including capacity building activities. OECD has collected data and regularly publishes a document summarizing bi-lateral assistance projects. In addition, IGOs usually maintain internal databases and websites providing information on capacity building. INFOCAP has been initiated by the IFCS as an overarching mechanism to facilitate information exchange for capacity building. INFOCAP is comprehensive in that it strives to include information about the “supply” of capacity building assistance (projects, training materials, funding opportunities, etc), as well as priorities and action plans in beneficiary countries (the “demand” side).

In light of the existence of a number of capacity-related information exchange systems and initiatives, SAICM PrepCom2 requested the IOMC to undertake an evaluation of existing mechanisms and systems concerned with information exchange for capacity building. The IOMC assumes that this request was probably based on the premise that SAICM should result in an effective and non-duplicative mechanism to facilitate information exchange in the area of chemicals management capacity building.

In conducting its analysis, the IOMC was guided by several objectives. First, duplication of efforts at the international level must be avoided. Second, information exchange must be very simple in light of existing resource constraints. And third, any system should be flexible and accommodate the needs of various organizations.

Analysis

Demand for information on chemicals management capacity building exists, and governments and others have requested that international organizations (such as IOMC Organizations) coordinate to deliver such information (e.g. in IFCS, SAICM concrete measures process, etc.). There is also demand for information of a broader nature than what INFOCAP currently provides. However, basic and comprehensive information on chemicals management capacity building is still not easily publicly available, including IOMC-related information and information from countries and organizations from all sectors.

There is also a lack of current coordination efforts among a wide diversity of interested parties (e.g. through a national poverty reduction strategy paper or sustainable development strategy development process), which, if implemented, can contribute to assisting coherent and useful chemicals management capacity building-related information exchange on the national, regional and international levels.

The IOMC notes with concern that a number of mechanisms are in place to provide information on chemicals management capacity building at the international level. It is of even greater concern, however, that it is unclear how these mechanisms are linked and whether the information they provide actually addresses the needs of clients.

In terms of the efforts of INFOCAP to act to provide such information, the recent IFCS evaluation documented that INFOCAP has not been able to provide the overarching framework for information exchange for capacity building that was originally intended. The evaluation also found that the system as a whole, including some of its services, requires significant restructuring. The IOMC appreciates the efforts undertaken by the IFCS to review the effectiveness of INFOCAP and much can be learned from the INFOCAP experience to guide future efforts.

From an IOMC perspective, factors which may have prevented INFOCAP from achieving its intended results include for example the following:

- INFOCAP is comprehensive and ambitious. It attempts to address virtually all aspects of information exchange at once.
- Data entry requirements for several INFOCAP services are quite complex and may require training to ensure correct data entry.
- The governance structure of INFOCAP is resource intensive. Significant time has been spent by countries, IOMC Organizations and other organizations in INFOCAP meetings and teleconferences.
- The system requires significant up-front entry of data by participants and does not include “portal-based” and dynamic search functions.

Proposals: a Step-by-Step Approach to Strengthening Information Exchange

Rather than entering into a resource-intensive process of how INFOCAP can be reformed as a whole, the IOMC proposes a building block, step-by-step approach to gradually strengthen information exchange for capacity building within the context of SAICM implementation. IOMC has reviewed each of the five INFOCAP services and explored what can be contributed towards achieving the intended objectives, while taking into consideration the lessons learned from the challenges encountered by INFOCAP, and information exchange in general. Most importantly, IOMC advocates a bottom-up approach which provides flexibility to organizations such as the IOMC to make their contribution to an international network aimed at strengthening information exchange on capacity building. Such a network should be based on the following principles:

- “light” administrative infrastructure;
- minimum complexity;
- cost-effectiveness;
- build on existing internet-accessible data, where possible;
- a building-block (stepwise approach) involving, initially, a few key players (like IOMC Organizations), and then expanded as successes are built upon; and that,
- over time, all efforts are somehow linked together to facilitate ease-of-access.

IOMC proposes a number of stages comprising the overall step-by-step approach, with key activities for each. In taking these actions forward the IOMC proposes to simplify data entry requirements in comparison with what is currently required by INFOCAP. The first proposed stage can also be designed to determine the extent of the demand for such information among governments and other users. These proposed stages are as follows:

Stage 1

Activities at this initial stage would include the “absorption” of the National Profile component of INFOCAP into the existing UNITAR/ECB National Profile Homepage. IOMC could also explore, as part of this stage, which existing INFOCAP services could be readily adapted into a “portal-based” approach. In addition, IOMC could develop basic summary information (e.g. project title, contact person, duration, etc.) of IOMC Organization projects, with links to other, more detailed information,

where available (as a complement to the existing IOMC Inventory of Activities). IOMC could also make available, in a searchable format, information about guidance and training materials produced by its Organizations.

Stage 2

Activities at this stage could include the development of a “helpdesk” function that can actively facilitate information exchange through answering basic inquiries (including having standard email responses, depending on the subject matter, and ensuring that responsibility for answering inquiries is assigned). A second activity could be the development of a “smart” search option – one that “selects” and “filters” for relevant documents and self-sorts them (using existing software, which will be researched for suitability). Adopting selected INFOCAP services as identified in Stage 1 can also take place. Furthermore, the IOMC could explore how its own projects can be made further compatible and harmonized with information collected by OECD concerning bi-lateral projects.

Stage 3

Based on the further determination of demand as outlined above, Stage 3 can, in part, comprise the expansion of this information to include other IGOs (beyond IOMC); governments; academia, labour, the private sector and public interest NGOs. In addition, the IOMC could investigate the possible contribution that coordinated information exchange – related to the development of national poverty reduction strategy papers and national sustainable development strategies – may make to international information exchange efforts.

Annex 1: Overview of Relevant Systems

IOMC Inventory of Activities - The IOMC Inventory of Activities provides details of the relevant programmes and activities of each IOMC Organization. It includes the title of each activity, the name of the IOMC Organization responsible for implementation, any partners involved, programme area, outputs of the work, duration of activity, resources allocated, geographical coverage, and the relevant contact point. The listing of activity profiles can be sorted by Organization and date. However, the information contained in the IOMC database is currently not detailed enough to obtain a simple overview of ongoing capacity building projects in the recipient countries. The IOMC database can be accessed at: www.who.int/iomc/activity/en/.

IOMC Calendar of Events - The database includes main events organized by IOMC Organizations. The information included is up-dated by each organization, which can be contacted for further information. The database can be accessed at: www.who.int/iomc/events/en/. The database has a strong emphasis on international meetings organized by IOMC Organizations. In general, it does not cover major national meetings organized or supported by IOMC Organizations. Thus it does not facilitate the participation of IOMC Organizations in major national capacity building events.

OECD Survey on Bi-lateral Assistance Activities - In 1996, the Intersessional Group (ISG) of the IFCS invited the OECD to develop an information exchange programme on 'capacity building'. The specific objective was to facilitate co-ordination of capacity building assistance in the field of chemicals/pesticides management provided by OECD member countries to developing countries, including those with economies in transition. This project complemented activities conducted through the IOMC to co-ordinate the capacity building activities of multi-lateral organizations. In response, the OECD conducted a first survey in 1996, with results made available at the IFCS II meeting in Ottawa, in February 1997. A second survey was then conducted in 1998, with results made available at the ISG 3 meeting in Yokohama, in November 1998. As agreed in June 1997 by the OECD Joint Meeting on Chemicals, the range of information to be collected is regularly up-dated and the survey undertaken every two years. A fourth survey is currently under preparation published by OECD.

Information Exchange Network on Capacity Building for the Sound Management of Chemicals (INFOCAP) - INFOCAP is an internet-based network designed to facilitate the exchange and public accessibility of information related to chemicals management capacity building. The general objective of INFOCAP is to enhance effective cooperation and coordination among countries and organizations that provide or receive assistance related to the sound management of chemicals.

INFOCAP provides a gateway to information on chemicals management capacity building. It allows users to post and find information regarding:

- National Chemicals Management Profiles, Priorities and Action Plans;
- sources of potential support for chemicals management projects;
- past, on-going, and planned chemicals management projects;
- chemicals management guidance and training materials; and
- key contacts in the field of chemical management capacity building.

Discussions about the need for a coordinated approach to information exchange on chemicals management capacity building started in 1996. The development of INFOCAP was officially endorsed at IFCS Forum III, held in Brazil in 2000, when preliminary terms of reference for the Network were adopted. Support for the network was re-affirmed in November 2003, at IFCS Forum IV in Thailand. INFOCAP has also been recognized as a potential element of SAICM. The Lead Sponsors for INFOCAP are IFCS, the European Commission and the European Chemicals Bureau, and UNITAR. The OECD is a collaborating partner. The lead sponsors are responsible for developing and maintaining INFOCAP, raising awareness about the network, and responding to inquiries.

A Central Coordinating Node (CCN, currently the IFCS Secretariat) provides support in maintaining INFOCAP, and in communicating with participating countries and organizations. A Steering Group provides oversight and guidance in the development of the network

In light of current low levels of participation of countries and organizations in INFOCAP, a review has recently been undertaken with a view to assessing its effectiveness to date. Interviews will be conducted, in particular with non-participating countries and organizations, in order to ascertain what the reasons are for their non-participation.

Annex 2: Specific Comments and Suggestions on the Specific INFOCAP Services

Service 1: National Profiles, Priorities/Related Needs and Action Plans

This service provides an opportunity for developed countries, developing countries and countries with economies in transition to make available information about their national profiles, priorities/related needs, and action plans. It intends to provide a global overview of existing needs in the area of chemicals management. The main challenges for this service at present include that, to-date, very few countries have entered information.

Since a UNITAR/ECB National Profile homepage already exists, which contains many more profiles than are currently in the INFOCAP system, UNITAR could substitute its homepage for the present, under-populated National Profile component of the service.

Service 2: Sources of Potential Support

This service provides summary information about organizations and countries providing assistance in the field of sound chemicals management and official procedures to apply for support. Contributors of information can come from different sectors: official agencies, the private sector, academia and public interest non-governmental organizations. To-date, the main challenge of this service is that few organizations responded when asked for information by the secretariat. This service could be developed into a web portal.

Service 3: Past, Ongoing and Planned Projects

This service provides access to information on past, on-going or planned capacity building projects carried out by countries and organizations. It builds on and includes information obtained in the OECD Survey of Development Assistance Activities for Capacity Building. Current challenges include that very few projects have been added that are additional to the currently available OECD survey data. IOMC could provide basic project summary information.

Service 4: Guidance and Training Manuals

This service facilitates the exchange of information on chemicals management capacity building documentation and training materials available through organisations and countries participating in the Network. It builds upon a UNITAR/IOMC document that lists and summarizes guidance and training materials of IOMC Organizations that related to capacity building. Participation to-date beyond this list is low. IOMC can update its existing listing of guidance and training materials, or inter-link this information via portals (if technically feasible).

Service 5: Points of Contact

Network Points of Contact are responsible for coordinating and facilitating the provision of information to INFOCAP. We believe that the current TOR for the Points of Contact are too onerous, and contribute to the “top-heavy” nature of the administrative infrastructure of the current system.

Annex 3: Comments by the INFOCAP Steering Group

The IOMC paper Information Sources and Exchange on Capacity Building for Chemicals Management was circulated to the IFCS INFOCAP Steering Group for comment. Comments received are provided below (in English only, due to the deadline for submission of SAICM PrepCom3 papers).

**Comments on:
Information Sources and Exchange on Capacity Building for Chemicals Management - June 2005, prepared by IOMC for SAICM PrepCom3**

**Submitted by the INFOCAP Steering Group
07 July 2005**

The INFOCAP Steering Group appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on the IOMC document on Information Sources and Exchange on Capacity Building for Chemicals Management - June 2005, prepared for SAICM PrepCom3.

A formal review of INFOCAP, in its start up phase, was recently undertaken by the INFOCAP Steering Group, in order to provide an assessment of the use and effectiveness of the network. The main conclusions of the review and a recommendation for the future direction of INFOCAP are presented in the IFCS Forum Standing Committee paper submitted to SAICM PrepCom3 entitled "Information Exchange Network on Capacity Building for the Sound Management of Chemicals, Recommendation to the Third Preparatory Committee Meeting for the development of a Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM PrepCom3)". The document also presents background information on the development of INFOCAP. SAICM PrepCom3 participants are encouraged to review this document as it includes important historical context and additional information to help participants make informed decisions on information exchange at PrepCom3.
