2015 outlook

Unep – next on the global agenda

It is critical to mainstream goals, targets and indicators within the national sustainable development plans

As 2014 came to a close, the international chemical management community gathered to set out next steps of the international chemical management agenda. Following the 47th session of the Global Environment Fund’s (GEF) council and the 6th session of the intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) of the Minamata Convention on Mercury which initiated substantive preparation for the COP1 of the Convention when it enters in force, the Strategic Approach to Sound Chemicals Management (Saicm) convened for the second open-ended working group (OEWG2) meeting to prepare for the fourth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM). At OEWG2, delegates considered several chemical management issues that will pave international discussions and work throughout 2015 in a proposal for Overall Orientation and Guidance (OOG) for achieving the 2020 goal of sound management of chemicals.

Earlier in 2014, the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA1) of UNEP adopted a resolution on chemicals and waste covering; the continued strengthening of the sound management of chemicals and waste in the long term, the integrated approach to financing sound management of chemicals and waste, and the continuous work to integrate sound chemicals management into future sustainable development goals (SDGs). The meeting established the need to: recognise the continued relevance of the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020; adopt the terms of reference for a special programme to be funded by voluntary contributions, to support institutional strengthening at the national level to enhance implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BSR) conventions, the Minamata Convention, and Saicm; and strengthen Saicm, emphasising the need for continued and strengthened multisectoral and multi-stakeholder involvement.

UNEA1 emphasised that sound management of chemicals and waste is an essential and integral cross-cutting element of sustainable development and is of great relevance to the sustainable development agenda. It requested facilitation of the cooperation, as appropriate, between the interim secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Secretariat of the BSR Conventions.

While the world is grappling with many highly visible environmental agendas, the importance of chemicals and waste as a sustainable development issue made significant advances. Therefore, 2015 is promising to be a pivotal year with the scheduling of the joint COPs of the BRS, the conclusion of the SDG work and the crucial fourth session of the ICCM.

Reaching the 2020 goal
The overarching goal of Saicm, namely that chemicals will be produced and used in a manner that will minimise their negative impacts on human health and the environment is progressing in implementation but significant work still needs to be undertaken at all levels in order to achieve the 2020 goal. With only five years until the 2020 goal, there is a sense of urgency. While significant achievements have been made towards achieving the 2020 goal, changes that have occurred since the establishment of Saicm in 2002, and since it was adopted in 2006, have resulted in a need to review plans and strategies. To ensure lasting achievements by 2020 and beyond, stakeholders must respond to the advances made in the overall chemicals and waste cluster, build on the solid foundations and momentum that the Strategic Approach and the Quick Start Programme have helped to create, and make optimal use of resources.

The OOG document for Saicm for the period until 2020 was reviewed by the OEWG2 in December 2014. It is critical to mainstream goals, targets and indicators within the national sustainable development plans.

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Saicm stakeholders to achieve the 2020 goal. The six core activities include:

- enhance responsibility of stakeholders
- strengthen national legislative and regulatory frameworks for chemicals;
- mainstream sound management of chemicals and waste in the sustainable developments agenda;
- promote risk reduction and information sharing on emerging policy issues;
- promote information access; and
- assess progress towards the 2020 goal.

ICCM4 will provide an important platform for Saicm stakeholders to renew the initiative’s momentum, committing to the concrete actions identified in the guidance to achieve the 2020 goal. The meeting will mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Strategic Approach in Dubai in February 2006 and will include a high level international forum for multi-stakeholder and multisectoral discussion and exchange of experience.

Strengthening link between Environment and Health

Unep is placing an increased focus on integrated approaches to promote the natural linkages between health and environment in its strategic vision. The SDGs being discussed by governments and other stakeholders in New York, responds to the Rio+20’s expectations to both strengthen institutional framework for sustainable development and implement policies that break the vicious cycle linking poverty, environmental degradation, ill health and continued inequities related to gender and vulnerable groups. Action at the junctures of health and environmental linkages is critical to meeting this challenge.

Synergies in implementation

The momentum created by the synergy process, to enhance cooperation and coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions and the establishment of a joint secretariat should be harnessed and channelled to improve implementation at the national level through the use of existing tools, institutions and programmes. The joint COPs of the BRS in May 2015 will be an important fora to further these initiatives.

Comprehensive, broad and preventive policies that link the many national agencies responsible for chemicals management into an integrated system are essential to strengthen the chemicals management capacities of national institutions and businesses. Effective implementation and enforcement of both the chemical-related international conventions and the Saicm requires that the policies of the relevant sectors are aligned with each other, and that there exists strong institutional mechanisms to facilitate collaboration with other sectors.

The Minamata Convention on Mercury

Last year saw the first year of action on this new legally binding agreement, with a round of capacity building and awareness raising workshops working with countries at the subregional level, as well as meetings of the expert group on emissions and the sixth session of the intergovernmental negotiating committee. In 2015, the interim secretariat will build on these initial activities, planning a series of further workshops, in cooperation with the BRS secretariat, to further encourage countries to ratification and effective implementation. The expert group intends to conclude the first round of its work, producing draft guidance which will be made available for consideration by the seventh session of the committee. As agreed by the sixth session, an intersessional ad hoc working group on financing will meet, to develop further plans which can also be considered by the seventh session of the committee.

Additionally, the interim secretariat will work closely with the secretariat of the GEF, and with implementing agencies, to progress the delivery of support to countries as they move towards ratification. Starting the year with nine Parties to the Convention, the ambition target of ‘50 in 2015’ is still potentially achievable.

Chemicals management and the SDGs

The synthesis report of the UN Secretary-General on the post-2015 agenda entitled “The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet” will be central to this year’s agenda. The report refers to the sound management of chemicals in three of the proposed SDGs: on healthy lives and well-being, on availability and sustainable management of water, and on sustainable consumption and production.

Financing the sound management of chemicals...

A critical element on the landscape of chemical management in 2015 will relate to the sustainable financing of activities at national and international levels. The implementation of the Special Programme to support institutional strengthening at the national level, and the establishment of GEF’s focal area on chemicals and waste offer a window of opportunity for a more integrated approach to financing towards the 2020 goal.

Although these initiatives are raising enthusiasm, translation of the commitment into action for sustainable, predictable, adequate and accessible financing for the chemicals and wastes agenda is awaited by the recipient countries.

To spearhead the agenda there is a need to find sustainable approaches to the financing of sound chemicals management. Mainstreaming goals, targets and indicators for sound chemicals management within the national sustainable development plans and programmes of developing country partners is critical. Failing such integration the complex and interlinked range of hazards and risks of chemicals requiring the development of integrated policies that address health, environment and development goals coherently will remain an illusion.

Countries should take measures to further encourage industry involvement, including the development of policies on the responsibilities of the industry sector and national administrations, and should develop financial solutions, appropriate mechanisms and economic instruments to cover the costs of chemicals management regimes at the national level.

In seeking dedicated external financing, Strategic Approach stakeholders should secure funds from new and innovative donor sources and provide guidance on the use of resources available under the sixth replenishment of the GEF, within the chemicals and waste cluster, and also provide resources to support the effective implementation of the special programme on institutional strengthening of the chemicals and wastes cluster to support institutional strengthening at the national level for implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata Conventions and the Strategic Approaches.

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