

Thematic review of the United Nations High Level Political Forum to be held on 9 -18 July 2019

Input by the President of the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention

Instruction

In July 2019, the HLPF will discuss the following SDGs together with SDG 17: SDG 4 (Quality education), 8 (Decent work and economic growth), 10 (Reduced inequalities), 13 (Climate change), and 16 (Peaceful societies, justice and strong institutions). The General Assembly also defined the theme of the 2019 July HLPF to be “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”.

Inputs can be in the format best adapted to your intergovernmental body. They do not have to be negotiated outcomes and can be summary of discussions, communication by bureau or other kind of inputs. Your contribution will also be treated as your contribution to the work of the Economic and Social Council. It will thus also be included in ECOSOC Integration Segment in preparation of the HLPF.

Introduction

The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) was adopted on 22 May 2001 by the Conference of Plenipotentiaries in Stockholm, Sweden, and entered into force in 2004. As of February 2019, it has 182 Parties and thus its coverage is global. The overarching objective of the Stockholm Convention is to protect human health and the environment from chemicals that remain intact in the environment for long periods, become widely distributed geographically, accumulate in the fatty tissue of humans and wildlife, and have harmful impacts on human health or on the environment.

The current scope of the Stockholm Convention is 28 POPs, which are pesticides, industrial chemicals and/or byproducts. Any Party may submit proposal for listing a new chemical to be listed under the Convention. The scientific subsidiary body, the POPs Review Committee, evaluates the proposals and makes recommendation to the Conference of the Parties on such listing.

The provisions of the Convention center around the following principal aims:

Eliminating production and use. Most of the intentionally produced POPs are targeted for immediate elimination with very few exceptions. PCBs are the most notable exception. Production has been stopped but their use in existing equipment is allowed until 2025 to ensure that PCBs are disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.

Restricting production and use. The Convention allows very limited and carefully controlled use of certain POPs while also seeking alternatives. For example, DDT is only allowed to be used to control disease vectors like the mosquitoes that carry malaria.

Reducing unintentional production with the aim of elimination. The Convention promotes the use of the best available means of preventing the release of dioxins and furans from major sources into the environment.

Ensuring wastes containing POPs are managed safely and in an environmentally sound manner. The Convention requires that such wastes be identified and managed to reduce or eliminate POPs releases from these sources. The Convention also recognizes that a special effort may sometimes be needed to phase out certain chemicals for specific uses and seeks to ensure that this effort is made. It also channels resources into cleaning up the existing stockpiles and dumps of POPs that litter the world's landscapes.

Targeting additional POPs. The Convention is charged with identifying other POPs chemicals that require action. This is achieved through a scientifically rigorous process and ensures that those chemicals are considered even if there is a lack of scientific certainty about the harm they cause.

(a) The identification of progress, gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges in achieving the SDGs; and, or in relation to the theme within the area under the purview of your intergovernmental body;

There are a number of gaps and challenges faced by Parties related with the implementation of the Stockholm Convention.

In accordance with the 2017 technical assistance needs assessment of developing country Parties and Parties with economies in transition for the implementation of the Stockholm Convention, stockpiles and wastes, unintentionally produced POPs, legal and institutional frameworks, intentionally produced POPs (industrial chemicals) and national implementation plans for the Stockholm Convention are among priority areas for the developing countries and countries with economies in transition for which technical assistance is required. The development of inventories, including the identification of substances containing POPs, sampling and analysis is also indicated as the highest priority challenge.

Furthermore, assistance is equally required to set up legal and administrative measures to implement and enforce the provisions of the Convention via provision of advice for institutional arrangements, scientific or technical issues, to draft legislation and to support project development. As far as national and regional coordination mechanisms are concerned, the main challenge for developing country Parties and Parties with economies in transition is coordination at the national level for the implementation of the Stockholm Convention in coordination with Basel and Rotterdam conventions¹. Participating in the work of the POPs Review Committee still required a

¹ A reference is made to the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, which are global treaties which also address hazardous chemicals and wastes.

better understanding of the process for reviewing and listing chemicals and still needed assistance to provide information during the different steps of the process.

Developing country Parties and Parties with economies in transition identified the open burning of waste and waste incinerators as the main sources of unintentional POPs. They also indicated the implementation of best available techniques and best environmental practices as the main challenge for which technical assistance is needed, along with support to update and revise inventories of unintentionally produced POPs.

As for POPs stockpiles and wastes, most of developing country Parties and Parties with economies in transition indicated facing challenges with the identification of products and articles in use and wastes consisting of, containing or contaminated with POPs, remediation of contaminated sites, and management of wastes consisting of, containing or contaminated with POPs.

(b) Valuable successful experiences and lessons learned on empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality;

There is a number of examples of activities and initiatives aiming to enhance the implementation of the Stockholm Convention and to ensure that all in developed and developing countries, representing various stakeholder groups are empowered and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.

One of such examples is the gender mainstreaming into the Stockholm, but also Basel² and Rotterdam³ conventions. The impact of poor management of hazardous chemicals and wastes on vulnerable groups such as women and young children are significant for human health and the environment. However, empowerment of women and vulnerable groups and their full and effective participation in decision-making with respect to the management of chemicals and wastes lead to positive outcomes.

At the meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the BRS conventions in 2017, Parties adopted decisions BC-12/20, RC-8/13, SC 8/23 on gender mainstreaming, recognizing that efforts are still needed to ensure that women and men, boys and girls, from all Parties, are equally involved in the implementation of the three conventions and are represented in their bodies and processes, and thus participate in decision-making on gender-responsive hazardous chemicals and waste policies.

(c) Emerging issues likely to affect inclusiveness and equality at various levels;

The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions share the common objective of protecting human health and the environment from hazardous chemicals and wastes at all stages of their life cycle, from production to disposal. All three conventions provide for a range of measures to achieve their goals, including the setting of conditions and procedures to be followed for the import

² Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal.

³ Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade.

and export of the covered chemicals and wastes. These conditions and procedures are expected to ensure that importing States are not confronted with hazardous chemicals and wastes that they do not wish to receive, for instance because they have prohibited their use or because they are unable to manage them in an environmentally sound manner. The control of the international trade of chemicals is covered by the Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, while wastes trade is primarily regulated under the Basel Convention. While prevention and combat of illegal traffic of hazardous waste has been addressed under the Basel Convention, efforts are now made to consider this matter in relation to the Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions which deals with chemicals.

Marine plastic and microplastics is an emerging issue that requires urgent global action by the international community. Plastics wastes and its burgeoning impact on human health, the environment and economic systems presents a big challenge. The problem is multidimensional, including the widespread disposal of single-use plastics and other items as litter and marine biodiversity. 28 POPs currently regulated by the Stockholm Convention, include those used as additives of plastics (e.g. plasticizers, flame retardants, coating). In the environment, plastics are known to absorb POPs such as PCBs and dioxins and those are frequently detected in marine plastics. In addition to the detrimental consequences that ingestion of plastics by marine biota may entail, worrying environmental consequences of marine litter also stem from microplastics (less than 5 mm in diameter) and nanoplastics (less than 100 nm in at least one of its dimensions), which could potentially affect marine biota both from their physical nature if ingested and by transfer of chemicals associated with them, including POPs and endocrine disruptor chemicals. Mid-ocean islands close to gyres and the small island developing States, are particularly concerned, as in addition to the challenge of marine litter, these States face serious deficiencies in basic waste management capabilities, due mainly to small and sparse populations with limited potential economies of scale.⁴ There are ongoing discussions under the Basel Convention to establish a multi-stakeholder partnership on plastic wastes that also addresses marine plastic litter and microplastics.

Another emerging issue likely to affect inclusiveness and equality at various levels is transfer of technology to developing countries and countries with economy in transition to support them in dealing with the waste management in a safe manner is another area where progress is lacking behind.

(d) An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global, regional and national levels

On the global level, the Stockholm Convention serves to protect its Parties from the harmful effects of POPs.

The adverse effects of chemicals on different groups of the population vary depending on the level of exposure, behavioural patterns, age, biological effect (e.g., endocrine disruption), geographical

⁴ Gallo F., Fossi C., Weber R., Santillo D., Sousa J., Ingram I., Nadal A., and Romano D. (2018) “Marine litter plastics and microplastics and their toxic chemicals components: the need for urgent preventive measures”, *Environ Sci Eur.* 2018; 30(1): 13.

location, nutritional status and co-exposure to other chemicals. POPs can build up to dangerous levels in humans and wildlife causing adverse reproductive, developmental, immunological, hormonal, and carcinogenic effects with varied impacts on vulnerable groups. Children are particularly susceptible to the negative health impacts of chemicals due to their rapid growth and development and greater exposure relative to body weight. Breastfeeding can transfer further toxic chemicals from mother to child.

According to the latest evaluation of the effectiveness of the Stockholm Convention conducted in 2017, it was concluded that the Stockholm Convention provides an effective and dynamic framework to regulate POPs throughout their lifecycle, addressing the production, use, import, export, releases, and disposal of these chemicals worldwide. However, inadequate implementation is the key issue that has been identified in the evaluation. Regulations targeting POPs are succeeding in reducing levels of POPs in humans and the environment. For legacy POPs, concentrations measured in air and in human populations have declined and continue to decline or remain at low levels due to restrictions on POPs that predated the Stockholm Convention and are now incorporated in it. For the newly listed POPs, concentrations are beginning to show decreases, although in a few instances, increasing and/or stable levels are observed.

However, even though the majority of the production of POPs pesticides ceased before 2004 and exports and imports have been banned, legacy POPs pesticides are reported to exist as obsolete stocks. Several Parties indicated that obsolete stockpiles of such substances may be illegally used by farmers. Mislabelling or a lack of appropriate labels are cited as reasons for such illegal use. These illegal uses may result in an ongoing risk to human health and the environment. According to estimates, only a limited proportion of known POPs wastes and stockpiles upon becoming wastes, in particular POPs pesticides and PCB, have been eliminated to date.⁵

The Stockholm Convention and the Basel Convention have a joint mandate on POPs wastes and have agreed to cooperate closely on establishing levels of destruction and irreversible transformation necessary to ensure that POPs characteristics are not exhibited.

Given long range transport of POPs and legacy POPs stockpiles, no one government acting alone can protect its citizens or its environment from POPs and therefore the effective implementation of the Convention by all Parties supports the protection of all from these toxic chemicals.

(e) Areas where political guidance by the high-level political forum is required

The area in which the political guidance from the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development would be important is to encourage the lead ministries and agencies that are tasked with the coordination of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national level to integrate chemicals and wastes management issues into plans and strategies on sustainable development, health, agriculture and other sectors.

⁵ Report on the effectiveness evaluation of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutant, UNEP/POPS/COP.8/INF/40.

(f) Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in empowering people, ensuring inclusiveness and equality, and achieving SDGs.

There are a number of actions within the mandate of the Basel Convention which will support Parties to the Rotterdam Convention in accelerating progress for those affected by toxic chemicals. In light of enhancing coordination and cooperation of the implementation between the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, some of the recommendations address all three conventions:

- 1) To develop and enhance institutional, legal, and regulatory frameworks for the implementation of the Rotterdam but also Basel and Stockholm conventions, including enforcement.
- 2) To increase efforts of governments and stakeholders towards the coordinated implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions and SAICM, including through multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms.
- 3) To promote integrated approach to chemicals management by mainstreaming chemicals and wastes issues into plans and strategies on sustainable development, health, agriculture and other sectors.
- 4) To promote the adoption of sound chemicals management corporate policies and practices throughout the value chain, including extended producer responsibility, publicly available information about chemical hazards and risks, green design and best available techniques and best environmental practices, and monitoring of contamination of air, water and land by hazardous chemicals and wastes.
- 6) To maximize efforts for the management of hazardous chemicals and wastes through the regional delivery mechanisms including regional centres under Basel and Stockholm conventions.
- 7) To provide safe and decent jobs involving chemicals and waste in manufacturing, design, processes and productions, including resources recovery and recycling.
- 8) To invest into research related to alternatives for the use of highly hazardous pesticides and toxic industrial chemicals and take measures for replacing them with safer alternatives.
- 9) To develop and adopt integrated pest management and integrated vector management in national agricultural and public health strategies.
- 10) To take measures towards reducing frequency and severity of chemicals poisoning from household and other products, such as by labeling and sharing information on chemicals in products.