

2023 session of United Nations High Level Political Forum and Economic and Social Council

Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels

10 to 19 July 2023 / Ministerial Segment 17 to 19 July 2023

Input by the President of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade

Instruction

The General Assembly in resolution 75/290 B defined the theme of the 2023 HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC to be “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”. The HLPF in 2023 will also review in-depth Goals 6 on clean water and sanitation, 7 on affordable and clean energy, 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals. The forum will take into account the different and particular impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across these SDGs and the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Goals.

The HLPF in July 2023 will also help prepare for the September 2023 SDG Summit – the HLPF to be convened under the auspices of the General Assembly from 19 to 20 September 2023. I therefore invite you to provide substantive inputs to the July 2023 HLPF on its review of the above five SDGs and its theme, bearing in mind the preparations for the SDG Summit. Your contribution could showcase the views, findings, research, data and policy recommendations from your intergovernmental bodies on specific aspects of an SDG-driven response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the SDGs.

Introduction

The Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade was adopted in 1998 and entered into force in 2004. As at March 2021, it has 165 Parties and thus its coverage is global. The objective of the Convention is to promote shared responsibility and cooperative efforts among Parties in the international trade of certain hazardous chemicals in order to protect human health and the environment from potential harm and to contribute to their environmentally sound use. It aims to contribute to the environmentally sound use of those hazardous chemicals by facilitating information exchange about their characteristics, by providing for a national decision-making process on their import and export and by disseminating these decisions to Parties.

(a) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs.

Chemicals play a major role with respect to a wide range of products for various applications from construction to household appliances as well as agriculture and food, for example in plant protection and food conservation. This link has long been recognized, and many countries have long-standing legislation to control chemicals in particular used in agriculture and food production. International agreements and bodies that address these and related topics include the Rotterdam Convention, the Code of Conduct and the Codex Alimentarius, a collection of international food standards.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted international trade of chemicals. There were some temporary relaxation or delays to facilitate safer ways of working or shopping at the height of the pandemic. In response to sanitary and hygiene concerns, many regulators across the world have paused or delayed bans, taxes, or fees on items, including chemicals. Governments experienced reduced capacities for the implementation of the Rotterdam Convention, including environmental and/or agricultural regulations, customs controls, and other enforcement measures. A number of national regulatory authorities sought to ease the procedures of regulation to enable products such as disinfectants or hand-gels to come to the market quickly, or to seek to moderate the economic damage caused by the pandemic and the lockdown measures necessary to control it.

From the viewpoint of the Rotterdam Convention, the Covid-19 impacted the progress on the implementation of the selected SDGs in the following manner:

SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation

Water quality is determined by many factors including the polluting of water supplies by toxic chemicals. Safe and adequate water, sanitation and hygiene could prevent more than 350,000 deaths of children under five years annually, representing 5,5% of total deaths in that age group.¹ Once pesticides are sprayed on land, water molecules, via rain, watering or groundwater flows, act as vehicles that pick up and transport chemical substances from land, into the water cycle, and eventually the ocean. The production and use of industrial chemicals, too, results in releases to water bodies, with potential adverse effects on human health and the environment. Other factors contributing to the increase of environmental pollution in oceans and seas is urbanization and soil sealing. In areas with more permeable land, polluted runoff can be absorbed before reaching the ocean, but in urban areas that are heavily concreted, contaminated water has nowhere to go but the sewer system or directly into coastal waters.

The global growth of crop production has been achieved mainly through the intensive use of inputs such as pesticides and chemical fertilizers. The trend has been amplified by the expansion of agricultural land, with irrigation playing a strategic role in improving productivity and rural livelihoods while also transferring agricultural pollution to water bodies.² Production and consumption of industrial chemicals has also been growing rapidly and is expected to continue to do so in the foreseeable future, with potential adverse consequences on water bodies, including rivers, lakes and groundwater.³

SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy

Chemicals play a central role in incorporating resource efficiency and climate friendliness in energy generation, storage, distribution and use. Chemistry is essential to the development of innovative battery technologies, wind turbines and solar panels, among others. Chemistry innovations can help decrease the costs of renewable energy solutions and increase their durability. However, hazardous chemicals used in renewable energy solutions may pose threats to human health and the environment and create future legacies. For example, carcinogenic chemicals such as lead are used in the manufacture of solar panels. With many first-generation solar panels nearing their end of life, the challenge of adequate disposal comes to the forefront. A similar situation presents itself with other renewable energy solutions, such as wind (e.g. the composites used in the blades).⁴

SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure

¹ Chemicals and waste management: Essential to achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs), Inter-organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, 2019.

² Water pollution from agriculture: a global review, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Rome and the International Water Management Institute on behalf of the Water Land and Ecosystems research program Colombo, 2017.

³ Global Chemicals Outlook II, From Legacies to Innovative Solutions: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2019.

⁴ Global Chemicals Outlook II, From Legacies to Innovative Solutions: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2019.

Production of pesticides alongside with plastics, fertilizers and pharmaceuticals, per- and polyfluorinated substances (PFASs), flame retardants, nanomaterials and other groups of chemicals is increasing in many regions.

Industry involvement refers to resources for the chemicals agenda generated by the involvement of industry. A number of countries have clarified responsibilities between the public and private sector; promoted extended producer responsibility and the internalization of costs by industry; and used fiscal instruments. Industry involvement has also been important in mobilizing resources and has built capacity, including through testing, material safety data sheets, information-sharing and voluntary product stewardship. However, gaps remain in increasing contributions to match responsibility and the required level of support.⁵

Agro-chemicals and pesticides play a critical role in sustainable food and agriculture. Unsustainable use of agro-chemicals and pesticides lead to polluted agriculture ecosystems and risks to human health. Innovation in agro-chemicals and efficacy of agro-chemicals and pesticides will contribute to sustainable agriculture and ecosystem health⁶. The Rotterdam Convention promotes replacing chemicals listed under the convention with alternatives for sustainable food production and protection strategies, such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and empowers national and regional pesticide regulators to make informed decisions about the identification, removal and replacement of hazardous chemicals in use in their jurisdictions.

SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities

The rate and scale of urbanization will likely lead to the need to develop accompanying infrastructure and an increasing use of chemicals, including in the housing and transportation sectors. Growth in construction, as well as increasing demand by inhabitants will all lead to increased use of chemicals.⁷

SDG 17 on partnerships

There are currently no partnerships established by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Rotterdam Convention, however there are initiatives and partnerships that support the implementation of the Convention.

One example of the partnerships related to the Rotterdam Convention is the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) which is a network of over 600 participating nongovernmental organizations, institutions and individuals in over 90 countries working to replace the use of hazardous pesticides with ecologically sound and socially just alternatives⁸. PAN work is guided by five common strategic objectives, which were collectively developed by representatives from all regions:

⁵ Global Chemicals Outlook II, From Legacies to Innovative Solutions: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – Synthesis Report, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2019.

⁶ Innovation for sustainable food and agriculture, FAO, 2020.

⁷ Global Chemicals Outlook II, From Legacies to Innovative Solutions: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2019.

⁸ <https://pan-international.org/>

- Protect health and the environment by eliminating highly hazardous pesticides from the market and replacing them with sustainable solutions.
- Resist development and stop the introduction and use of genetic engineering into agricultural production systems.
- Promote empowerment of grassroots movements and citizens to fight agrochemical and seed corporations and challenge corporate globalization.
- Increase public investment, development, adoption and implementation of non-chemical alternative pest management systems.
- Develop further PAN International structures.

(b) Three key areas where transformative actions for accelerated progress have been successful, and three key areas where support is most urgently needed, with regard to the cluster of SDGs under review in July 2023

- **Listing chemicals under the Rotterdam Convention.** At the latest 2022 tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, two industrial chemicals: decabromodiphenyl ether, and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), its salts and PFOA-related compounds were listed under Annex III, making them subject to international trade control under the Convention. This listing will make these chemicals subject to the Prior Informed Consent procedure, thereby granting Parties the right to decide on their future import. The scientific subsidiary body of the convention, the Chemical Review Committee, plays an important role in reviewing the chemicals and pesticides recommended for listing.
- **The Compliance Committee** of the Rotterdam Convention was established, with members elected and initiating work following the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The Committee assists individual Parties through its specific submissions mandate and reviews systemic issues of general compliance. The Committee held its first meeting in November 2022 and has initiated work on a number of issues, including related to laws, regulations, policies, procedures and other measures to implement the Rotterdam Convention, notifications of final regulatory actions, exports of chemicals listed in Annex III, information exchange and submission, and enhanced cooperation with the Basel Convention Implementation and Compliance, and integration in United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework processes.⁹
- **Science-policy interface.** Science is a core component of each of these multilateral environmental agreements¹⁰, informing technical experts', policymakers' and other stakeholders' evaluation of problems, formulation of recommendations and policy

⁹ <http://www.pic.int/TheConvention/ComplianceCommittee/Meetings/CC1/Overview/tabid/9272/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

¹⁰ For more information see the information brochure and other related document: <http://www.brsmeas.org/Implementation/FromSciencetoAction/Overview/tabid/4749/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

responses, and supporting implementation by Parties and other stakeholders at the regional and national levels.

The BRS conventions have been working at the interface of science and policy since their establishment, meeting new challenges and emerging trends in their respective areas of responsibility for management of chemicals and waste. Each of these conventions is structured to ensure that science plays a significant role in policymaking; as such, stakeholders can draw lessons from the successes and challenges that Parties, technical experts, and diverse stakeholders have dealt with as they have worked to fulfill the objectives of each of these conventions.

The “From Science to Action” initiative has yielded valuable insights into the challenges that need to be addressed to enhance science-based action to support implementation of the BRS conventions, such as the following:

- Essential data related to local and national environments are often difficult to access or entirely unavailable, making implementation of effective policy very difficult;
 - Capacity to generate data at the national level as well as access to data is severely limited in many countries due to inadequate research facilities and infrastructure;
 - Capacity for institutional data generation and management should be strengthened at the national level;
 - Enabling environments should be created for publication of research;
 - Industry should be incentivized to invest in scientific research; and
 - Methods of communicating information to policymakers should be improved through training activities.
- In terms of key areas where support is most urgently needed, Parties still need support with meeting the obligations of the Rotterdam Convention, i.e. **technical assistance**, including developing and strengthening national legislative and regulatory frameworks and sub-regional approaches consistent with the requirements of the Rotterdam Convention; compliance with export notification requirements for chemicals banned or severely restricted at national level; risk evaluation and reduction methodologies for hazardous chemicals and pesticides, monitoring and surveillance so as to take decisions on final regulatory action and preparation of notifications; submission of import responses; integrated approach on pesticide management both the work on identification of Severely Hazardous Pesticide Formulations (SHPF) and on Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs) on the national level. Capacity building efforts are needed to support Parties with these activities.
- **Illegal trade in chemicals** pose challenges to environment and human health, with little information available on this issue. Prevention and combatting of illegal trade is a challenging task requiring effective national inter-agency mechanisms, and close collaboration among Parties and regions. Training, awareness and political will of the enforcement community is needed in detection, classification, investigation and prosecution of confirmed cases of illegal trade.

(c) Examples of specific actions taken to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic that also accelerate progress towards multiple SDG targets, including actions identified by your intergovernmental body, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving SDGs

There are a number of measures and policy recommendations¹¹ within the scope of the Rotterdam Convention which will support Parties in accelerating progress for those affected by hazardous and other wastes, with focus on SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11, and 17. 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:

- a) To encourage Parties to develop or strengthen national legal frameworks and take measures to promote the implementation and enforcement of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions.
- b) To encourage efforts of Parties to promote gender equality to ensure that women and men from all Parties are equally involved in the implementation of the three conventions and are represented in their bodies and processes and thus inform and participate in decision-making on gender-responsive hazardous chemicals and wastes policies.
- c) To encourage efforts of Parties and stakeholders to actively contribute to the activities of existing or propose new partnerships promoting the implementation of the Rotterdam Convention.

(d) Assessment of the situation in the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body, and policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In terms of policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery the following is to be considered:

- 1) To call for States to increase their efforts on the implementation of global treaties on hazardous chemicals and wastes, including the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions with the purpose of protecting human health and the environment and in support of circular economy and resource efficiency.
- 2) To increase efforts of governments and stakeholders towards the coordinated implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions including through

¹¹Please see reports and decisions of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention:
<http://www.basel.int/TheConvention/ConferenceoftheParties/ReportsandDecisions/tabid/3303/Default.aspx>

- the establishment of coherent and comprehensive legal and institutional frameworks, and through multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms.
- 3) To provide safe and decent jobs involving hazardous chemicals and waste in manufacturing, design, processes and productions, including resources recovery and recycling.
 - 4) Given the cross-cutting nature of chemicals and waste in our lives, to promote an integrated approach to chemicals and waste management by mainstreaming chemicals and wastes issues into plans and strategies on sustainable development, health, agriculture and other sectors.
 - 5) To encourage States and others to invest in research related to alternatives for hazardous pesticides and industrial chemicals and take measures for replacing them with safer alternatives.
 - 6) To mainstream gender considerations in policies and strategies that promote the sound management of chemicals and waste.
 - 7) To develop and adopt integrated pest management and integrated vector management in national agricultural and public health strategies.
 - 8) To encourage efforts of Parties to promote gender equality to ensure that women and men from all Parties are equally involved in the implementation of the three conventions and are represented in their bodies and processes and thus inform and participate in decision-making on gender-responsive hazardous chemicals and wastes policies.
 - 9) To promote knowledge building and information sharing on hazardous chemicals and wastes, including chemicals in products through labeling and other methods, for the better management and risk reduction throughout their lifecycle.

(e) Key messages for inclusion into the Political Declaration of the September 2023 SDG Summit

- 1) To recognize the importance of multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous chemicals and wastes, including the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions and its evolving role in the overarching architecture of environmental governance in building post-COVID-19 a resilient path to achieve the Agenda 2030.
- 2) To accelerate efforts of Parties to implement their obligations under the multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous chemicals and waste to protect human health and the environment from adverse impacts of chemicals and hazardous and other waste.
- 3) To mainstream the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions into plans and strategies on sustainable development, health, agriculture and other sectors and the

United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks in light of raising profile and visibility of chemicals and waste on the national level, thereby facilitating the integration of information and national reporting needs into such Frameworks and supporting implementation of the Conventions.

- 4) To emphasize the importance of data transmission in accordance with the obligations of the multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous chemicals and waste, including the Rotterdam Convention, as there is the close link between the core obligations of the Convention and the obligation to transmit information in accordance with the SDGs and its monitoring framework.
- 5) To mainstream gender considerations in policies and strategies that promote the sound management of chemicals and waste.
- 6) To promote knowledge building and information sharing on hazardous chemicals and wastes for the better management and risk reduction throughout their lifecycle.