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Other matters

**Information provided by the United Nations Environment
Programme Division of Technology, Industry and Economics,
Chemicals Branch (UNEP Chemicals) on strengthening the
capacity of national focal points for information exchange
pursuant to Article 9 of the Stockholm Convention**

Note by the Secretariat

The annex to the present note contains information on strengthening the capacity of Stockholm Convention national focal points for information exchange pursuant to Article 9 of the Convention. The information is reproduced as submitted by the secretariat of UNEP Chemicals and has not been formally edited.

* UNEP/POPS/COP.3/1.

Annex

Information document for the Stockholm Convention COP3 on “Strengthening the Capacity of the Stockholm Convention Focal Points”

1. Introduction

Paragraph 3 of Article 9 of the Convention specifies that: “Each Party shall designate a national focal point for the exchange of such information”, where such information refers to:

- “Information relevant to the reduction or elimination of the production, use and release of persistent organic pollutants; and,
- Alternatives to persistent organic pollutants, including information relating to their risks as well as to their economic and social costs.”

While this is the only explicit reference to the focal point, the role of the focal point need not be limited to this function. The aim of the series of workshops was to assist focal points reflect on their most appropriate role in facilitating the implementation of the Convention.

A number of developing countries and countries with economies in transition requested more specific guidance on the role of focal points in facilitating the implementation of the Convention.

Based on this request UNEP with the support of the Canadian Funds undertook to assist focal points reflect on their most appropriate role in facilitating the implementation of the Convention.

This paper presents the synopsis of activities undertaken by UNEP Chemicals.

2. UNEP activities

To assist countries in addressing their needs expressed under the framework of the Stockholm Convention implementation, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) through its Chemicals Branch (CB) of its Division on Technology, Industry and Economics (DTIE), in collaboration with the Canada, the Swiss government through the SAFEL, initiated a project to identify the capacities building needs of developing countries’ focal points to fulfill their role and ensure the successful implementation of the Convention. Regional workshops were held as forums where focal points could discuss their roles and needs and identify ways to strengthen their capacity. A few national pilot studies were initiated to begin building capacity at the national level. The driving line of the project was to strengthen the Focal Point capacity to better understanding their needs and to ensure that they would be able to perform their role as described in the Convention.

3. Descriptions of activities

- **Assessment of Country Situation and Needs Identification**

UNEP Chemicals developed a questionnaire to help countries provide a summary of the situation in their country and to begin an identification of needs. This questionnaire was sent to participating countries in the Africa and Asia and the Pacific regions as part of the preparation for the workshop. The topics covered in the survey included:

- TOR for the focal point: if he or she had been designated, if the roles and responsibilities of the focal points were defined, and if yes, were these defined before the designation
- Information about the roles and activities of the focal point
- Information on the status of the implementation of the Convention, including ratification, NIP development and implementation, stakeholders involved
- Information on needs of the focal point: indication of what support was needed to ensure that the focal point could undertake his or her duties

This survey was used to inform the discussions in the workshops.

- **Workshops**

Workshops on “Strengthening the Capacity of the Stockholm Convention Focal Points” were held in three regions – Africa (Marrakech, 28 February to 4 March 2005), Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok, 27-31 March 2006), and Latin America and the Caribbean (Lima 12-15 February, 2007). The goal was to provide guidance and direction to the Stockholm Convention Secretariat on assistance that could be given to National Focal Points. The objectives of these workshops were:

- To identify the functions of the national focal points regarding the implementation of the Convention;
- To discuss the role and functions of the Stockholm Conventions focal points;
- To discuss the Conventions’ reporting requirements to the Secretariat and to the Conference of the Parties; and
- To discuss the needs of the focal points in implementing their functions including the tasks related to information exchange.

Signatories and Parties to the Convention were invited. A total of 69 countries participated: 26 in the Africa workshop, 23 in the Asia Pacific workshop and 20 in the Latin America and the Caribbean workshop (Appendix 1 lists the countries).

The workshops were organised in thematic sessions:

- Country Presentations
- Role of Focal Points
- Obligations of Focal Points
- Capacity Building Needs of Focal Points

4. **Countries’ presentations**

Countries were at various stages in their development of the National Implementation Plans (NIPs). The majority of the participating countries had either embarked or completed the preparation of their national implementation plans (NIPs) which involved discussions with multiple stakeholders, such as government agencies, academic and research institutions, private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the general public. Many countries expressed having difficulties in the following areas:

- Establishing an accurate inventory database on POPs (such as PCBs in transformer and capacitors) in their respective countries
- Building capacity to monitor and analyze POPs releases and in the environment
- Management and disposal of existing stockpiles of PCBs and other POPs in an environmental sound manner
- Identification, management and remediation of areas contaminated by POPs, and
- Assessment of the impact of POPs on public health.

In many countries, there are no specific instruments for the management of POPs, rather POPs are addressed as part of the overall framework to address chemicals (including pesticides) or the environment. Many countries have already restricted or prohibited /banned the use of the 8 POP pesticides and 2 industrial POPs, and had a legislative framework in place to provide tools and powers to the ministries and agencies that control the import, use and storage of POPs. Some countries indicated having difficulties in the enforcement of regulatory requirements. Many countries noted that there was a need to strengthen the laboratory capacity in their region.

While involvement of civil society varied greatly by country and region, some participants stressed the importance of engaging various sectors in society (government, industry, civil society) as well as the multi-disciplinary nature of the management of POPs. In particular, non-governmental organizations were considered as having an important role in awareness raising.

5. Findings

Role of the National Focal Point:

While the role of the focal point were identified as relating predominantly to Articles 9, 10 and 15 (information exchange, public information and reporting), the focal point is seen as a key person for the implementation of Convention with a role to play in the implementation of other articles of the Convention. It was considered important for the focal point to have links with all other stakeholders. In many countries the focal point is involved in other activities related to the implementation of the Convention and is sometimes the co-ordinator of national activities.

Some countries also noted that it would be advantageous for the focal point to have relevant scientific or technical knowledge.

While it was recognised that the decision is a national one, all regional groups felt that there were advantages to have the same entity as both Official Contact Point and National Focal Point. Given the information exchange role of the National Focal Point, when these are separate entities, it is important to clearly define the roles of each entity and to ensure good communication between them.

In countries where French or Spanish is the working language it was noted that the term for National Focal Point in the official translation (“Correspondant national” and “Centro nacional de coordinación”, respectively) has led to different interpretations or misunderstandings since focal point is often translated as “point focal” or “punto focal”. It will be necessary that information or guidance materials in these languages clearly explain that these terms are equivalent.

A guide for Focal Points could help focal points orient themselves to their roles and responsibility, especially as these relate to all the articles of the Convention. In addition it was thought that a guide on the implementation of the Convention could improve their understanding of the Convention as a whole, including the roles and responsibilities of the parties.

Capacity Building Needs

A variety of training needs were identified. While these differed among countries, these included training related to various aspects of the implementation of the Convention, for example:

- Legislation development and methods of enforcement
- Building or creation of inventories and databases
- Increased knowledge of alternatives to POPs, methods for site decontamination, risk assessment and other topics related to the management of POPs
- Effective awareness raising programmes on POPs, including ways for making decision-makers understanding the advantages to being a party to the Convention
- Capacity building and training for stakeholders at the national or local level
- Training on implementation and evaluation of the NIP
- Use of the dioxin “toolkit”
- Development of training for customs officers

Participants noted the importance of improving networking and sharing of experience and skill among countries within their region. Information exchange on POPs, including improved circulation of information on chemicals and chemical products was also noted as a way to help focal points meet their obligations. Some of the suggestions to improve this networking included:

- Improved infrastructure such as computer equipment and resources for the development and maintenance of databases
- Training in the creation and maintenance of networks with neighbouring countries, including updating of Web sites
- Regional workshops to discuss issues related to the Convention and other relevant MEAs

In addition to regional networking, many countries indicated the need to strengthen the information exchange infrastructure at the national level. It was noted that the national multi-stakeholder committee that was formed for the development of the NIP are a potential kernel for this national networking. Some countries continue to experience a lack of access to basic information such as environmental health databases. As well, various countries indicated that they would benefit from

training such as that provided under the Chemical Information Exchange Network (CIEN) project, including the use of the Environmentally Sound Technology Information System (ESTIS). In addition to strengthening the institutional infrastructure, some countries continue to lack the necessary computer equipment to support networking.

Activities undertaken in the preparation of NIPs have raised awareness on issues related to POPs and provided countries with baseline information on POPs. However, mobilisation of financial and human resources for the implementation of the Convention remains a widespread challenge. Training in project development and proposal writing as well as project management could assist focal points in obtaining the resources necessary at the national and international levels. Participants in all three workshops thought that it would be useful to have an international awareness campaign that focuses on POPs, such as a World POPs Day.

6. Recommendations

There is a range of capacity building, training and financial needs. In addition to assistance to specific countries and their national needs, there are also activities that can be helpful to a wide range of parties and signatories.

It is recommended that the Conference of Parties and the Secretariat consider:

- Fostering regional networks through facilitation of regional meetings of National Focal Points, electronic information exchange, exchange of experts, access to information on POPs and their alternatives
- The development of materials that describe on the implementation of the Convention, the role of the National Focal Point, including the relationship between the focal point and other obligations in the Convention.
- The provision of materials such as “Tool Kits”, and where appropriate workshops, that outline the process and methods to meet specific requirements of the Convention, including the creation and maintenance of databases, information exchange, awareness raising, reporting and evaluation.
- Assistance to countries in mobilizing funds through training on project development, proposal writing, project management, budgeting and reporting.
- Foster awareness raising through a “World POPs day”

7. Conclusion

In many countries the focal point is involved in more than awareness raising and information exchange. There is a need to better understand the requirements of the Convention, how to implement it, and the role of the National Focal Point, including the relationship between the functions outlined in Article 9 and other articles in the Convention.

There is a range of capacity building, training and financial needs. Technical assistance continues to be needed to ensure the Convention is successfully implemented. For example, POPs inventories were started without much local expertise or knowledge within NIP teams, and many countries identified a specific need for improved access to laboratory capacity in their region.

While there is some involvement of NGOs, in some regions it is not always systematic or prominent. There is a need to strengthen national networks and regional cooperation, including exchange of experience and the sharing of experts

Appendix 1

List of participating countries

Africa:

Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda, Senegal, Sudan, Chad and Togo.

Asia and the Pacific:

Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Iran, Jordan, Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Qatar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Vanuatu, Vietnam

Latin America and the Caribbean:

Antigua & Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Bolivia, Brasil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Granada, Guatamala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, St Kitts & Nevis, St Lucia.

Appendix 2 : Workshops recommendations**Regional Workshop on Capacity Building for Stockholm Convention Focal Points Marrakech, Morocco, 28 February to 4 March 2005**

Workshop recommendations have been summarized below, and represent a general consensus of the discussions on the objectives of the Workshop and the related themes below:

- Roles of the various actors in the Stockholm Convention and the Focal Point in particular;
- Identification of approaches to pursue and the means needed to achieve these;
- Development of effective approaches to mobilize the necessary means;
- Make relevant recommendations to be brought forward to Parties and the COP.

The workshop recommends that:***Roles of the Focal Point and Other Actors***

- the role and the responsibilities of the Focal Point as outlined in article 9 of the Convention be clarified to not only include the collection, exchange and transfer of information, but also to ensure the coordination of national programme activities and the implementation of actions and strategies related to the implementation of the Convention (See Appendix 3);
- the Focal Point have the principal responsibility for dissemination and transfer of information;

Information, Awareness and Training Obligations under the Convention

- a World POPs Day be established;
- POPs be proposed as a principal theme for World Environment Day;

Tools Needed for the Implementation of the Convention

- an information network of African Stockholm Convention Focal Points be established;
- a financial mechanism to implement NIPs be developed and instituted;

Mechanism for the Capacity Building of Focal Points

- Focal Points are provided with the appropriate and sufficient resources to undertake tasks related to the Stockholm Convention;
- developed countries be encouraged to recognize the importance of honoring their commitments for financial and technical assistance to African countries in order to achieve the objectives of the Convention;
- the Chemical Information Exchange Network (CIEN) project be strengthened and its implementation extended to all African countries;
- the Secretariat be invited to seek the funds necessary for the implementation and extension of CIEN.

During the Workshop, participants held a working group on the creation of Regional Centres for the Stockholm Convention in order to: 1) clarify existing opportunities in the sub-regions and to explore ways and means to come to a common position at the sub-regional level, and 2) to become aware of the feasibility study on the use of existing regional centers by UNEP Chemicals.

The debate was extensive but a consensus was not achieved. The outcome was:

- A consensus was reached on the need for regional and sub-regional centres and that the mandate of these centres should combine both information exchange and technical assistance roles;

- However, the following two positions were expressed and maintained: one supporting the reinforcement of centres established under other multilateral agreements, and the other, supporting the creation of new regional and sub-regional centres dedicated to the Stockholm Convention.

Appendix 3:

Proposed recommendations for the expansion of the role of the focal point under the Stockholm Convention

Whereas the efficient and effective implementation of the Convention requires the coordination of national planning and the implementation of strategies and activities, in addition to the collection, exchange and transfer of information;

Whereas the function of Focal Points already extends beyond information exchange;

The participants attending the Workshop in Marrakech on Capacity Building of Stockholm Convention Focal Points **recommend** that the Focal Point assumes the role of facilitator and coordinator of national [and international] activities related to the Stockholm Convention:

Activities of the Focal Point:

- Facilitate the implementation of Convention activities;
- Coordinate transfer of information to the Convention Secretariat including reports identified and specified in Article 15 of the Convention;
- Development of a national information exchange mechanism;
- Coordinate [and oversee] the development of strategies and national action plans for the reduction and elimination POPs and their wastes, including NIPs;
- Provide information and promote research, education, information and public awareness raising initiatives on POPs;
- Identify national technical and financial needs and communicate these to the Convention Secretariat;
- Identify opportunities for technical and financial assistance for the reduction and elimination POPs and their wastes at the national, regional and international levels;
- Identify opportunities for technical and financial assistance that countries can offer to other parties.

1. **Regional Workshop on Strengthening the Capacity of Stockholm Convention Focal Points, Bangkok, Thailand, 27-31 March 2006**

Participants agreed that the role of the Focal Points should not be limited to Article 9 and recommended that the Focal Point also act as point-of-contact for communication with different national stakeholders, the Stockholm Convention Secretariat and other State parties and that the Focal Point also co-ordinate the implementation of National Action Plans and strategies related to the implementation of the obligations of Stockholm Convention.

To support this they further recommended that, State parties:

- Designate only one institution, committee or agency as the focal point and as the contact point for official communications – the focal point may elect to designate more than one individual to deliver duties
- Establish a clearing-house mechanism at the national level and that external assistance might be required to ensure this
- Establish national POPs databases
- Set up a “POPs Office” with the assistance of donors to ensure sustainability

The Secretariat:

- Provide a mechanism, such as creating and maintaining a databank, to allow information exchange on POPs related issues including alternatives to POPs under Paragraph 1(b) of Article 9

- Establish a networking mechanism for sharing of information materials produced within the region in conjunction with regional centres/offices, including circulation of a newsletter
- Facilitate the establishment of national and regional forums and their regular meetings
- Provide improved training materials and manuals to guide states parties in the development and implementation of NIPs and action plans.
- Develop guidance materials so that focal points would be fully aware of their responsibilities
- Provide guidance on the methodology to collect and report data, in addition to outlining the format
- Develop and support training activities at national and regional levels in issues identified in the meeting report, including the identification of experts
- To continue the effort to mobilize sufficient resources to ensure the implementation of the Convention, including the Chemical Information Exchange Network (CIEN) Project

The Conference of Parties:

- Clarify the role of the focal points beyond Article 9 and ensure that only one communication line is established with countries to facilitate national coordination
- Support the establishment of “POPs Offices” in countries and facilitate donor assistance to ensure sustainability
- Establish national and regional forums possibly through regional centres or offices
- Establish an “International POPs Day” and as a Quick Start, suggest that POPs be added as a theme to the next possible World Environment Day

UNEP Chemicals:

- Adapt the Chemical Information Exchange Network (CIEN) Project to national needs and make it available through the SAICM Quick Start Programme to Asia and Pacific countries that request it.

(Draft)

2. Regional Capacity Building Workshop for Stockholm Convention Focal Points Lima, Peru, 12-15 February 2007

Parties and signatories are invited to:

- Consider the establishment of a formal inter-sectoral mechanism for collaboration and cooperation at the national level and that country representatives to international and regional POPs meetings and other events be members of this mechanism, as appropriate
- Consider formalizing the committees that have been established for the NIP development process when they exist as the mechanism for collaboration and cooperation identified above,
- Ensure that the National Focal Point is positioned to have links with all other stakeholders
- Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the entities identified as the National Focal Point and the Official Contact Point to minimize conflict if they are different entities and also ensure good communication between them in such cases
- Consider the use of the SAICM Quick Start Programme as an opportunity for funding the strengthening and expansion of regional networking such as CIEN

The Conference of Parties (CoP) is invited to:

- Clarify the role and responsibilities of the National Focal Point and Official Contact Point
- Recognise the need to clarify the use of the term “Centro nacional de coordinación” and “Focal Point” which is commonly translated as “Punto Focal”
- Find means to mobilize the necessary resources to ensure continued capacity building and implementation of the Convention

- Establish a “World POPs Day”
- Encourage the regional exchange of experience and lessons learned from the development of NIPs and the provision of regional assistance to other countries in the development of NIPs as required (South-South cooperation)

The Secretariat is invited to:

- Ensure that all communications are translated into the preferred language of communication of the country
- Ensure that all communications, specifically technical communications are translated into the official UN languages (thus, Spanish for the GRULAC countries)
- Provide sufficient time for response to information requests, for example, a minimum of four weeks for complex requests, and two weeks for simple ones
- Ensure that, whenever two different entities are identified as Official Contact Point and National Focal Point, a copy of all communication is sent to both entities
- Create and/or expand sub-regional and regional networks for information exchange
- Mobilize the resources necessary to strengthen and extend implementation of information systems, such as CIEN, ESTIS, GIS (geographic information systems), and other databases, data management and networking systems to all GRULAC countries
- Assist in mobilizing the necessary resources to ensure continued capacity building and implementation of the Convention
- Increase awareness of information on the development of BAT/BEP, capacity building assistance (e.g. contacts for experts, laboratory capacity, research and monitoring, regional training workshops), development of information systems including networking, development of alternatives to POPs, and facilitate access to this information
- Make available information and capacity building documents or tool kits to assist in the implementation of the Convention (for example, model legislation, communication strategies, awareness raising, and reporting).

UNEP is invited to:

- Extend the implementation of information systems, such as CIEN, ESTIS, GIS, and other databases, data management and networking systems to all GRULAC countries
 - Present the report of this workshop as an information document at CoP III
-