
International Conference on Chemicals Management

Third session

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Item 4 (d) of the provisional agenda*

**Implementation of the Strategic Approach to
International Chemicals Management:
financial and technical resources for implementation**

Executive summary of the report of the midterm review of the Quick Start Programme

Note by the secretariat

1. In its resolution II/3 on financial and technical resources, the International Conference on Chemicals Management requested the Quick Start Programme Executive Board to evaluate the Programme, report on its effectiveness and the efficiency of its implementation and make recommendations in the light of its findings for the consideration of the Conference at its third session. In the same decision, it called upon the Conference at its third session to review and evaluate the above-mentioned report and to consider the adequacy of financial and technical arrangements for Strategic Approach implementation for action as appropriate.
2. At its fifth meeting, held in Geneva on 19 and 20 April 2010, the Executive Board approved the terms of reference for a midterm review of the Quick Start Programme, and the secretariat engaged two international experts to conduct the review in May 2011. The Executive Board considered the findings of the midterm review at its sixth meeting, held in Geneva on 13 and 14 September 2011, and decided that additional input from stakeholders was required to enable the Executive Board to make recommendations to the Conference based on the review's findings. The report was revised to incorporate additional input from stakeholders, and the revised draft report was considered by the Board at its seventh meeting, held in Geneva on 7 and 8 May 2012.
3. Having considered the report, the Executive Board decided that it contained sufficient evidence upon which to base its evaluation of the Programme and recommendations to the Conference. The note by the secretariat conveying the conclusions and recommendations of the Board's midterm evaluation of the Quick Start Programme is set out in document SAICM/ICCM.3/8.
4. The secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Conference for its consideration the executive summary of the report of the midterm review of the Quick Start Programme (see annex). The full report of the midterm review of the Quick Start Programme is contained in document SAICM/ICCM.3/INF/17.

* SAICM/ICCM.3/1.

Annex

Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management

Executive Summary

Report on the Mid-term Review of the Quick Start Programme

Introduction

The Quick Start Programme (QSP) and its trust fund is a funding mechanism under the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management. Established in 2006, the Programme was developed to support initial enabling capacity-building and implementation activities in developing countries, least developed countries, small island developing states and countries with economies in transition. With more than 100,000 chemicals in use worldwide¹, and many new chemicals being introduced to market each year, there is increasing urgency in advancing chemicals management capacity and governance.

Under resolution II/3 on financial and technical resources for implementation of the SAICM, the International Conference on Chemicals Management requested the QSP Executive Board to undertake a mid-term evaluation of the Programme, including an assessment of its overall effectiveness, the efficiency of its implementation and key recommendations. Using criteria developed to assess overall outcomes of the QSP, this report summarizes the findings of the Mid-Term Review of the Programme, including QSP Trust Fund operations, the impacts of lessons learned from the projects financed through the Trust Fund, and the overall governance of the Programme.

The QSP has achieved widespread recognition among stakeholders as being accessible, flexible and practical. Since its inception in 2006, the QSP programme has approved 145 projects in 104 countries, demonstrating its success in supporting a range of countries in the initiation of sound chemicals management activities.

Mid-Term Review Scope, Objective and Methods

The Mid-Term Review period includes information available from December 31, 2006 to December 31, 2011. Information available as of February 29, 2012 was also used as supporting evidence, according to the approved scope and timeline for the completion of the evaluation.

The scope of the review is set out in the terms of reference approved by the QSP Executive Board, and includes an analysis of information in the following categories:

- a) Overall Outcomes of the QSP
- b) Institutional and Administrative Arrangements of the QSP
- c) Project Performance and Impact
- d) Conclusions on the Main Findings

The review was based on a multiple method approach to gathering data. This included:

- A “desk study” review of documentation relevant to the QSP, its operation and project portfolio;
- Key informant interviews with stakeholders such as implementers, members of the Executive Board and the QSP Implementation Committee, and officials from UNEP Chemicals;
- An email survey of 46 stakeholders that focused on project outcomes and achievements, including capacity building, awareness raising, mainstreaming, planned activities, cost effectiveness, catalytic role, relevance to QSP strategic priorities, country ownership and stakeholder involvement;
- A review of QSP project documentation, including final narrative and monitoring and evaluation reports;

1 Practices in the sound management of chemicals (UNDESA, UNEP, Stockholm Convention, 2010)

- Site visits to four countries in the African and three in the Latin American regions, aimed at collecting additional information related to project impacts and achievements.

Overall QSP Performance

Since its inception, the QSP has achieved considerable success in supporting projects aimed at initial capacity building in a range of countries. As of December 31st 2011, 145 projects had been approved with a total funding of US \$30.9 million. At the time of the review, 37 projects had completed all activities – 30 of these projects had submitted the required final reports and the remaining seven projects were in the process of preparing their final reports for submission to the secretariat.

Contributions from project implementers represent approximately 20% of the financial contributions provided by donors, suggesting a strong commitment to the sound management of chemicals from developing countries. This is particularly compelling considering their resource limitations. The Programme has also been highly successful in mobilizing, leveraging and dispersing funds on a priority basis:

- The QSP has mobilized a total of US\$40.8 million, including contributions to the Trust Fund and in-kind contributions from project implementers and executing agencies;
- The QSP has been successful in leveraging US \$25.2 million from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to support projects in Africa and Asia-Pacific regions;
- The QSP Trust Fund has demonstrated success in prioritizing the provision of assistance to least developed countries and small island developing states, which constitute 70% of the portfolio of funded projects.

Strategic Priorities of the QSP

The QSP trust fund was established with three strategic funding priorities, as outlined in the strategic objectives of Section IV of the SAICM Overarching Policy Strategy (OPS):

- A) Development or updating of national chemical profiles and the identification of capacity needs for sound chemicals management;
- B) Development and strengthening of national chemicals management institutions, plans, programmes and activities to implement the Strategic Approach, building upon work conducted to implement international chemicals-related agreements and initiatives;
- C) Undertaking analysis, inter-agency coordination, and public participation activities directed at enabling the implementation of the Strategic Approach by integrating – i.e., mainstreaming – the sound management of chemicals in national strategies, and thereby informing development assistance cooperation priorities.

Based on the findings of the Mid-Term Review, the projects to date have focused primarily on Strategic Priorities A) and B).

This is a rational initial approach as these activities will facilitate a better understanding of the chemicals management situation of the respective countries through the development of basic infrastructure. This has been particularly relevant for countries where chemicals management is not a priority or where there is significant lack of information about chemicals issues in general. It would be reasonable to expect that countries that have already addressed Strategic Priorities A and B as an initial approach may decide to follow up with capacity strengthening for specific areas of work that are considered as priority at the national level (e.g. those identified through enabling activities) and continue efforts towards SAICM implementation.

The QSP Funding Guidelines emphasize a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral framework. As such, the Programme is widely recognized by stakeholders from all sectors and several channels have been used to

share information about the Programme. These include national, regional and international meetings in the field of chemicals and waste management; publication and dissemination of materials distributed by the SAICM strategies; and information sharing mechanisms available through intergovernmental organizations, executing agencies, etc.

Although a requirement for multi-stakeholder endorsement is embedded in the application and reporting processes, stakeholder engagement remains an ongoing issue. Data obtained from stakeholder consultations indicates that stakeholder involvement is generally challenging. It is noted that attendance at workshops is modest, and that there is low awareness about chemical management issues. Chemicals, therefore, are a low priority in the development agenda and projects are not focused on mainstreaming (Priority C). Further analysis of this feature should be carried out in future evaluations of the Programme to better assess its important contribution in facilitating broad stakeholder involvement in the sound management of chemicals.

In addition, while most projects describe a multi-sectoral approach in their proposals, the majority of projects are led by the environment sector. It will be essential to continue actively encouraging other sectors to participate in project proposals and implementation since they play an important role in different stages of the chemicals management life cycle.

Institutional and Administrative Arrangements

The Governance of the QSP comprises the International Conference on Chemicals Management as the most senior body, followed by the QSP Executive Board and the QSP Implementation Committee. The Executive Board sets operational rules in line with ICCM negotiated parameters of the QSP, reviews progress and directs administrative changes as might be required or desirable.

A similar conduct of business is followed by the QSP Trust Fund Implementation Committee. A review of meeting reports from the annual Executive Board Meetings and the twice-annual Implementation Committee meetings indicates that the respective functions of these groups have been carried out with a high degree of professional integrity.

The Executive Board and the Implementation Committee also ensure that the QSP continues to operate dynamically. This is reflected in the strong positive response that has been obtained from donors and their contributions to the Trust Fund; from governments and other implementers that have submitted proposals; and from Executing Agencies that continue their active involvement by providing technical assistance and methodological support for project implementation.

The review of the available information, including meeting reports and the outcomes of face-to-face interviews, shows that the Executive Board performs its functions efficiently and effectively, and has followed the conduct of business that is to be expected from a governance body.

The contribution of the QSP Implementation Committee to the governance of the QSP follows standard procedures for the appraisal of proposals and monitoring of projects. It should be noted, however, that while the screening and approval process adheres to a set of guidelines established for each round of application, the process for monitoring the progress of funded projects could be improved by establishing standards and indicators for project evaluation to assist the Committee and the Secretariat in assessing progress. Such tools would facilitate the monitoring and evaluation functions of the governing bodies of the QSP and the secretariat.

The QSP Implementation Committee is responsible for ensuring all available funds paid into the Trust Fund account are disbursed at each round of application. This is subject to the availability of complete and eligible project proposals and the need to maintain an overall geographical and sectoral balance in the long run. As

well, this provides assistance as a matter of priority to least developed countries (LDCs) and small islands developing states (SIDS)². The review also found:

- The process of project application is transparent, but improved clarity and guidance may be required for implementers to better design proposals;
- The current provisions allowing disbursement of funds until November 30th 2013 may impact new projects from rounds 12 to 14 as well as ongoing projects in their ability to complete all activities by the set date;
- The administrative structure under the SAICM secretariat has become insufficient given the two-fold increase in projects funded under the Trust Fund from 2009 to 2012.
- Since 2009, the number of projects under the QSP portfolio has more than doubled from 71 to the current 145 projects. This steady increase in the workload has affected the secretariat's capacity to service all aspects of the Quick Start Programme in a timely manner.

An important limitation of the secretariat is the increasing workload which currently falls under the responsibility of two staff members. Given the increased demands of an expanding Programme, it is challenging to provide adequate follow up to the operation and execution of all QSP projects. To improve the overall efficiency and delivery of all administrative and management aspects of the Programme, the secretariat would benefit from an increase in human resources for the following tasks:

- Facilitating and expediting the institutional and administrative procedures of the QSP projects, such as the development of agreements between UNEP and the Executing/Implementing Agencies.
- Development of project indicators and identifying means of verification, as well as conducting a rigorous follow-up of projects through their complete life cycle. This additional support would assist the secretariat in providing a better rate of response and continuous feedback to implementers on the progress made during the execution of the project.

Project Performance and Impact

A review of the outcomes achieved by the 30 completed projects for which all final documentation and deliverables was submitted to the secretariat by February 28, 2012 indicates that all the objectives identified in the approved work plans were achieved. The evidence underlines the QSP's success in developing new initiatives and fostering further commitment to sound chemicals management issues relevant to the Strategic Approach. Stakeholders also reported strong motivation and interest to continue the work of SAICM implementation as a result of the outcome of projects.

Indeed, completed projects have reported positive impacts and significant progress related to capacity-building efforts and SAICM implementation activities, as well as successfully achieving objectives relevant to their national context and needs. Moreover, impacts on national planning and decision making – mainly through political commitment and enhanced communication, coordination and collaboration with stakeholders – have been widely reported. All completed projects have enabled long term positive impacts by building socio-political and institutional frameworks and governance in the field of chemicals.

The results of the projects also serve to act as a baseline for future assessment of the chemicals management situation in the country. Several projects state that by increasing their understanding of national chemicals management, and through setting national SAICM priorities, they have reached a fundamental stage for future action to implement SAICM.

The majority of project reports reveal specific examples of how their implementation has contributed to the elaboration of national programmes, legislation and policies on chemicals management. From a policy perspective, all projects state that they have had an impact either directly or indirectly on national planning and decision making through the following actions:

- Political commitment (e.g., through meetings and workshops);
- Increased awareness of the role and function of local authorities (due to the new information and data available);
- Increased knowledge and understanding of local authorities with regard to chemicals management and associated risks;
- Enhanced communication, coordination and collaboration between government and stakeholders; and
- Development of synergies between the different International Chemicals Conventions and treaties through the respective projects.

Stakeholder participation and project completion delays are among the most important challenges facing projects. Some projects report effective participation from a range of stakeholders from multiple sectors. Others, however, have indicated that achieving this level of engagement has been an ongoing challenge. Another challenge identified during the review process is a difficulty in meeting timelines. The majority of projects have requested extensions as a result of various factors, including delays in administrative procedures (internal and external), political instability, natural disasters and lack of multi-sectoral involvement. This has considerably affected completion timelines for projects extending beyond 24 months.

Depending on the country's needs and level of its development, all projects have triggered positive actions to achieve sound management of chemicals. That said, it would be easier to assess the nature and significance of projects contributions if a more detailed description of the country's situation, that is, the *context*, was provided in the projects' initial and final reports.

Lessons Learned

The Mid-Term Review offers a number of lessons learned through project implementation, including achievements in capacity building, development of legislation, policies and regulations, and governance and institutional strengthening of chemicals management. The following represents some of the most compelling lessons learned:

- Technical and awareness-raising workshops have been instrumental in engaging stakeholders in project implementation activities;
- The Programme has provided an opportunity to share information and experience at the national and regional levels;
- Given the right circumstances, fostering synergies among relevant sectors may lead to improved collaboration in chemicals management issues;
- Strategies to implement SAICM should be aligned with broader national policies;
- Some of the challenges identified, such as insufficient technical capacities or limited data, may be attributed to inadequate project design that fails to consider these national deficiencies from the outset; and

- Other challenges of a political nature, such as lack of political commitment and chemicals management being a low priority in the national environmental agenda, should be adequately addressed.

Conclusions

The Mid-Term Review of the Quick Start Programme shows that this SAICM initiative has been successful in enabling initial capacity-building activities in developing countries, small island developing states and countries with economies in transition. The QSP has also been widely recognized as being accessible and flexible, and it is seen as a practical vehicle for quick project implementation. Although a multi-sectoral approach has been identified in QSP projects, broader participation from sectors other than the environment should be encouraged and put into practice.

The Governance of the QSP appears sufficient to support the administrative and decision-making functions for an efficient implementation of the Programme. However, the structure of the SAICM secretariat supporting the administration of the Programme, which seemed appropriate in 2009, has become insufficient to support the current portfolio of projects managed by the secretariat given the two-fold increase in the number of projects funded by the QSP between 2009 and 2012. This has had a negative impact on the secretariat's ability to efficiently administer the Programme.

An overall assessment of all completed projects indicates that these met their strategic objectives and achieved meaningful impacts related to capacity building and SAICM implementation activities. Upon achieving positive results through enabling activities, several countries have moved towards SAICM implementation, focusing on mainstreaming. However, the number of projects addressing strategic priority C (mainstreaming) was lower than strategic priorities A (capacity needs assessment) and B (institutional strengthening). This suggests that it may still be necessary to support countries in achieving mainstreaming.

In summary, the evidence reviewed indicates that the QSP has been successful in supporting initial capacity-building activities. As SAICM enters into a critical phase of its implementation after six years of its adoption, a more sustainable financial mechanism may be necessary to support implementation of SAICM beyond enabling activities.