

Summary of the Health Sector Meeting held on Tuesday 1 October 2019 as part of the third meeting of the intersessional process considering SAICM and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020

The health sector meeting brought together approximately sixty SAICM health-sector stakeholders, including ministries of health, NGOs, IGOs, industry and academia. It was also attended by colleagues from other sectors. The meeting focused on health sector perspectives on the co-chairs paper on multi-sectoral engagement and the relevance of proposed indicators and milestones.

The key points in the WHO submission on additional measures to ensure multi-sectoral engagement were reviewed and initiatives recalled such as the ***WHO Roadmap to enhance health sector engagement in SAICM towards the 2020 goal and beyond*** (approved by World Health Assembly in 2017), and the **WHO Global Chemicals and Health Network**.

The availability of the formal “sectoral space” during IP3 was very much welcomed providing important time for discussion additional networking opportunities. Such practices during SAICM meetings should continue.

It was noted that the proposals in the WHO submission on multisectoral engagement provide a range of suggestions – several were identified as needing minimal effort and resources to implement. Organizing themed discussions on sectoral subjects of interest during meetings would provide further rationale for increased sectoral attendance. Inclusion of the IOMC organizations’ logos on SAICM meeting invitations, rather than only the UNEP logo, could also make it easier for sectors other than environment to get approval to participate, including with their own resources.

Looking for ways to improve multi-sectoral engagement at regional levels was identified as important as well as the relevance of coordinating with existing regional ministerial health and environment initiatives.

Health NGOs mentioned that the IOMC is useful in bringing the sectors together, including at the national and regional levels. WHO mentioned that the Global Chemicals and Health Network contact points can be put in touch with relevant contact points in other ministries. An environment ministry representative mentioned how information on the health impacts of chemicals and on issues of food safety helps them to get attention on this issue at the political level. This links to the importance of the SDGs, such as indicator 3.9.3 on unintentional poisoning, which is included in WHO estimates on the burden of disease attributable to chemicals.

It was recognized that ministries of health lead various aspects of chemicals regulation in many countries, for example on drinking water, air quality, food safety, and in some countries also industrial chemicals and pesticides. Other important roles include health impact assessments, e.g. on contaminated sites.

Regarding targets and indicators, the SDGs provide the big picture for countries.

Existing WHO data sources on health impact and burden of disease including several that already contribute to SDG targets and potential SAICM targets were identified, including several where WHO is a custodial agency under the SDG. A key indicator in this regard is SDG 3.9.3 on mortality from accidental poisoning.

The International Health Regulations (2005) and strengthening of the core capacities monitored in those regulations for preparedness and response for chemical-related incidents and emergencies was of interest to several discussants. Member State progress with achieving the core capacities is monitored annually by the World Health Assembly and assessing progress at national levels presents a number of opportunities for cooperation between health, environment and other stakeholders. IHR capacities encompass a range of aspects such as chemical regulation, availability of poisons centres, development of laboratory capacity for chemicals and the existence of multi-sectoral coordination. Achievement of the IHR capacities is also formally included as SDG indicator 3d.

Having targets and indicators relevant to the health sector is important for encouraging health sector participation in the work beyond 2020. This may include also an indicator for sectoral participation in SAICM bodies and events and an indicator on sectoral access to support for implementation of SAICM, e.g. , through any financial arrangements.
