VIRTUAL WORKING GROUP ON ISSUES OF CONCERNS
Report of the 1st Virtual Meeting on Issues of Concerns
Date: Monday 16 November 2020

Co-facilitators: Sam Adu-Kumi (Ghana) and Sverre Thomas Jahre (Norway)

1) Welcoming remarks

Welcome remarks were given by co-facilitator Mr. Sam Adu-Kumi (Ghana).

2) Overview of the Virtual Working Group Process and Mandates

The secretariat gave a general overview of the VWG3 process, group mandate, meeting schedule and walked through the dedicated webpage were participants can find all the update information pertaining to VWG3.

3) Proposed Schedule of Meetings of the VWG3

Co-facilitator Mr. Thomas Jahre provided an overview of the schedule.

He highlighted that stakeholders had been invited to submit comments on both the compilation text on issues of [international] concern, and on how to address the existing emerging policy issues beyond 2020. 12 submissions were received from the following organizations: Brazil, Canada, Colombia, EU + its Member States, Japan, Norway, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, ICCA/Croplife, IPEN, NGO Group: HEJSupport, SSNC, PAN International, groundWork South Africa, WECF, AWHHE, Toxisphera, CEJAD, Commonweal.

Review Annex B of SAICM/IP.4/2

The co-facilitators reviewed the main items of Annex B of SAICM/IP.4/2.

General views from interventions of meeting participants on Annex B

General considerations on the title: Issues of [international] concern

- Some participants showed their support to replace the current title with "Issues of interest" to encourage the focus of efforts on providing solutions, as well as the implementation of sustainable approaches.

- Some participants pointed out the consistency and previous consensus under the current SAICM framework on the term "concern", bringing clarity on the meaning.

- Another stakeholder concurred with the suggestion of "Preventing and addressing issues of concern." with the purpose to also have a positive spin, by embracing innovate thinking and addressing the preventive aspect of solutions.

- Other interventions were focused on the use of the terms "international" or "global". Some participants proposed the use of "global" because of the cross-boundary nature of chemicals. "Issues of concern that warrant global action" was also raised as a proposal. Others felt that neither international or global are required when issues need to be resolved at a national level and that Issues of Concern allows for a holistic and broad approach.

Interventions on section I. definition

Generally, stakeholders agreed that a definition should be simple and broad enough to cover different aspects of the beyond 2020 framework. Some participants suggested that the current definition should also take into account the scope of SDG 12.4.

- Several stakeholders expressed support or interest in the definition in ICCM Resolution II/4 definition which has been the basis for the EPIs until now (Annex resolution II/4, Section B). Some felt this could also link more easily to moving forward on the existing EPIs and the work done under SAICM.

- Participants expressed divergent views on the use of the term "significant" in "may have [significant] adverse[impact] [effects] on human health and/or the environment". Some participants wanted to emphasize the need for prioritization, to reserve investments of time and resources to significant impacts of chemicals and to not scattered efforts and financial support, whereas other participants asked for its removal due to the ambiguity of the term and the fact that it does not address all aspects of harm.

Interventions Section II. Criteria

- Some suggested the deletion of the entire section while others suggested that the current criteria be placed under the information requirements section.

- Many pointed out unnecessary specific chemical properties included in the current list that might limit important issues to go forward.

- Some also stressed the need for nominations to be broader, and to adopt an inclusive and complementary approach to include all stakeholders and to not duplicate efforts while using existing resources efficiently. In order to avoid duplication, rigidity and limitations on addressing some issues, a large portion of the participants recommended to delete the criteria section and to merge the selected points to the information requirements instead.

- Some expressed views that there is a need to explain how to screen proposals, including the sufficient and necessary conditions for the screening process.

- Other views suggested adding a criterion regarding the impact on meeting the 2030 Agenda goals and related targets as well as targets of other international agreements.

- There were additional suggestions to add a criterion concerning the demand for collaboration or assistance by a certain number of countries or regions. This criterion should be self-sufficient so that the beyond 2020 framework not only calls for commitments and obligations but also provide opportunities.

Interventions Section III. Information Requirements

- In terms of additional considerations, proposals suggested to add consideration on the science-policy interface.

- Some participants suggested to include a proposed lead agency and a workplan that refers to targets and indicators to assess progresses.

- It was raised that new issues of concern added to the new framework should be linked to the vision and directly relate to the new framework's targets and indicator.

- Information requirements should also assess the possibility for implementation. There were concerns on the limitations inherent to the text that might exclude some nominations (i.e developing countries) and the removal of the criteria on synergistic effects of chemicals which implied that some chemicals may behave differently in a certain environment than it does alone.

Interventions Section IV. Mechanisms for adoption of issues of [international] concern and for monitoring their progress
- Some participants raised that there is a need for clarity on how to enhance collaborative work on IoCs. Furthermore, it was suggested that ICCM should prioritize, adopt time-bound workplans for implementing measures and include regular progress reports in order to increase efforts on IoCs.

- Another suggestion was a process to evaluate nominations that could be brought forward by a multi-stakeholder subsidiary body. The subsidiary body would discuss the level of interest, available resources, priority, and possible path forward for each issue of concern prior to ICCM consideration.

- It was also suggested that the information on the potential IoC could be public and the process for nominating could be submitted six months prior to an ICCM meeting.

- A complementary proposal was to use a new science-policy interface, whether under the future framework or independent, that would be responsible for these evaluations and recommendations with final decision making during ICCM. This subsidiary body could provide technical assistance to help countries' implementation.

- Another proposal is to establish time-bound tasks forces and working groups for each of the issues to monitor and evaluate the progress and to make recommendation to the ICCM on the issue (i.e workplan, indicators, coordination with other groups and the Secretariat).

- It was highlighted for the beyond 2020 framework to consider available capacity to deal with additional activities. The instrument should not add new tasks without sustainable resources and available workplans.

- There were some concerns with the following sentence [To promote communication at the national level, nominations should be communicated to Focal Points]. Participants explained that there could be cases where Focal Points could constitute a barrier to engagement of NGOs, civil society and other stakeholders.

- Furthermore, the necessity to protect vulnerable groups or governments as well as the problem about prioritization was a recurring comment. Some actors noted that prioritization is needed for the nomination and evaluation of the issues and some actors thought there is no need for prioritization in the text.

4) Next steps

The next virtual meeting will focus on addressing the existing emerging policy issues. In preparation for this discussion, the co-facilitators will release a draft proposal on Monday, 30 November 2020 for consideration of the virtual working group on how to address existing emerging policy issues, based on feedback received through the call for written inputs. The draft proposal will be posted online (SAICM website) and seek electronic feedback

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, 14 December 2020 14.00-16.00 CET.