Toxic chemicals and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): proposed Targets for 2030

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The UNEP 2012 global chemicals report estimates close to 1 million deaths from harmful chemicals and pesticides each year! The above experts of major group and civil society organisations are concerned about the lack of focus on a goal and targets to address the immense economic and health damage from hazardous chemicals in particular in developing countries, which is not sufficiently addressed by the current co-chairs 16 focus area document.

The SDGs should include an overall focus or target area which aims at achieving:

„Zero harmful chemicals contamination of people and planet by 2030".

Furthermore the SDG preamble should strongly emphasize the need for commitments to the basic 6 principles that underpin a global toxics-free future:

1. Precaution;
2. Right to know;
3. Substitution and elimination of hazardous substances;
4. Internalization of environmental and human health costs;
5. Full application of the polluter pays principle and extended producers' responsibility, and
6. Adequate long-term funding.

***Target 1*: Expand the scope of legally-binding obligations under national and international law in the field of chemicals management by 2030 to include all chemicals of concern.**

Possible Focus Areas: (9) Industrialization (11) Sustainable consumption and production; (3) Health and population dynamics; or.

Rationale

At the 26th Session of the UNEP Governing Council in 2011, members noted "that further action may be needed to strengthen the sound management of chemicals and wastes globally up to 2020 and beyond."[1] Recent analyses show that the unmet need for sound management of chemicals is rapidly growing most rapidly in developing countries, and the costs of inaction continue to mount for people, governments and businesses.[2] In some instances, the costs associated with toxic chemicals exceed official development assistance received by developing regions.[3]

The present scope of two international treaties with a lifecycle approach only applies to one narrow class of chemical (POPs), and one element (mercury)—and only for certain sources of exposure. Eighty percent of the World Health Organization's (WHO's) "Ten chemicals of major public health concern" do not fall within the scope of legally-binding treaties with a life-cycle approach, which is necessary to protect people and the environment.[4] These chemicals include "low-hanging fruit," such as lead and cadmium. It is estimated that, in low- and middle-income countries, the burden associated with childhood lead exposure amounts to 1.20% of world GDP in 2011, with the largest burden of lead exposure is now borne by low- and middle-income countries.[5]

The European Union estimated in 2001 that as many as 1400 industrial chemicals may be of concern, most of which would not fall within the scope of the above two treaties.[6] To achieve and maintain sustainable development, chemicals linked to lower productivity, increased healthcare costs, and deteriorating ecosystem services, must be subject to legally-binding obligations at the global level.

***Target 2*: Substitute all highly hazardous pesticides with safer alternatives by 2030 and move towards non-chemical alternatives.**

Possible Focus Areas: (2) Sustainable agriculture, food security and nutrition; (11) Sustainable consumption and production; or (3) Health and population dynamics.

Rationale

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) also recommends that developing countries should speed up the withdrawal of highly hazardous pesticides from their markets, recognizing the potential serious risk to human health and the environment from the use of highly hazardous pesticides through their life

[1] UNEP GC-26/12.
[2] UNEP, *Global Chemicals Outlook* (2012); UNEP, *Cost of Inaction* (2012).
[3] UNEP, *Global Chemicals Outlook* (2012).
[4] This agreement is the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), which applies to a very narrow class of chemicals, and not the broad suite of chemicals of concern recognized under international chemicals frameworks. Chemicals of concern include, for example, persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic substances (PBTs); very persistent and very bioaccumulative substances; chemicals that are carcinogens or mutagens or that adversely affect, inter alia, the reproductive, endocrine, immune, or nervous systems; mercury and other chemicals of global concern; chemicals produced or used in high volumes; those subject to wide dispersive uses; and other chemicals of concern at the national level. In addition, a recently concluded treaty for mercury pollution applies legally-binding obligations to certain sources of mercury exposure.
[5] Attina TM, Trasande L. 2013. Economic costs of childhood lead exposure in low- and middle-income countries. Environ Health Perspect 121:1097–1102; http://dx.doi. org/10.1289/ehp.1206424
[6] EU REACH white paper (2001).

cycle. In 2012, 2013 and 2014 the Latin America and Caribbean (GRULAC), African and Asia Pacific regions called for increased efforts on the urgent need to reduce the use of highly hazardous pesticides.[7]

One of eight key components of the new chemicals and waste framework of the sixth replenishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF-6) is to "facilitate the deployment of environmentally safe technologies, techniques, practices and approaches for the elimination and reduction of harmful chemicals and waste." The substitution of all Highly Hazardous Pesticides with safer alternatives by 2030 would be in line with recommendations by the FAO, GEF and the regional priorities of GRLUAC, Africa and the Asia-Pacific regions.

***Target 3*: Generate and provide global access to a standard data set for information on cancer, hormone (endocrine) disruption, reproductive toxicity, and other health risks of all substances used in industrial processes and agriculture by 2020.**

Possible Focus Areas: (11) Sustainable consumption and production; (3) Health and population dynamics; or (9) Industrialization.

In 2006, stakeholders around the world agreed by consensus that "there is often limited or no information on many chemicals currently in use and often limited or no access to information that already exists," and there was need to remedy this situation.[8] Among hazardous properties with inadequate information were cancer, mutation, and adverse effect to, inter alia, the reproductive, endocrine, immune, or nervous systems.[9]

The amount of information missing is staggering. The World Health Organization (WHO) and UN Environment Programme (UNEP) note that for chemicals that interfere with the normal function of hormone systems, linked to cancer and other adverse health effects, many information gaps currently exist.[10] For example, 85 % of new chemicals entering the market in the United States do not have basic information regarding their potential to cause cancer, interfere with the normal function of hormone systems, or result in other adverse health effects.[11] Removing just one chemical that interferes with the normal function of hormone systems (bisphenol A or BPA) from food uses might prevent 6,236 cases of childhood obesity and 22,350 cases of newly incident coronary heart disease per year, with potential

[7] SAICM, report of the third meeting of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM3); SAICM regional meeting for Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (2013); SAICM Regional Meeting for African Region (2013).
[8] SAICM, Overarching Policy Strategy, para 6(d) (2006).
[9] SAICM, Overarching Policy Strategy, para 14(d) (2006). The full list of groups of chemicals that might be prioritized for assessment and related studies are: persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic substances (PBTs); very persistent and very bioaccumulative substances; chemicals that are carcinogens or mutagens or that adversely affect, inter alia, the reproductive, endocrine, immune, or nervous systems; persistent organic pollutants (POPs), mercury and other chemicals of global concern; chemicals produced or used in high volumes; those subject to wide dispersive uses; and other chemicals of concern at the national level.
[10] UNEP & WHO, *State of the Science on Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals*, xvi (2012)
[11] U.S. EPA Office of Inspector Gen., *EPA Needs a Coordinated Plan to Oversee Its Toxic Substances Control Act Responsibilities*, 4 (2010), http://www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2010/20100217-10-P-0066.pdf.

annual economic benefits of $1.74 billion.[12] More robust information on intrinsic hazards of chemicals could enable a transition to safer chemicals, with tremendous savings to individuals and governments, especially in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

It is essential that people and governments have access to this information to enable the sound management of chemicals. Although the European Union is implementing policies requiring chemical manufactures generate this type of information for tens of thousands of widely used industrial chemicals, governments around the world—including those with highly-robust systems in place for protecting confidential business information—cannot access complete information generated by the chemical industry to reduce the risk of hazardous chemicals.[13]

***Target 4*: Develop action plans to reduce by 2020 and eliminate by 2030 chemical-linked and other environmental determinants of NDCs (non communicable diseases) and other health disorders, in particular for vulnerable groups children, women and specific occupational groups.**

Possible Focus Areas: (3) Health and population dynamics; (9) Industrialization or (11) Sustainable consumption and production;

In 2012, the UNEP 2012 global chemicals report estimates that close to 1 million people die from exposure to harmful chemicals and pesticides each year! Not to speak of the many diseases and disabled. Almost all environmentally related health indicators show a worrying upward trend, except for a few where specific harmful chemicals have been banned through a global effort, however, body-burden studies show strong increases for other harmful chemicals including so-called "endocrine disrupting chemicals".[i]

***Target 5*: Develop a global action plan and fund for clean-up of chemical pollution hot-spots and support for sound chemical management measures funded a.o. through a 0.1% global tax on chemicals sales**

Possible Focus Areas: (3) Health and population dynamics; (9) Industrialization or (11) Sustainable consumption and production;

According to the Global Chemical Outlook 2012 published by UNEP, the chemicals industry is growing to become a USD 4 trillion business and has become a powerful sector in the supply chains. But with great power comes great responsibility. Therefore, the chemicals industry and its supply chains, must be liable and responsible with their products until the end of the life cycle of the chemicals. A very important proposal launched by governments is that of a very small – 0,1% – but globally applied tax on chemical sales, to provide funding for innovation away from hazardous chemicals and clean up of damage.

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[12] Leonardo Trasande, Further Limiting Bisphenol A In Food Uses Could Provide Health And Economic Benefits, Health Affairs, 33, no.2 (2014):316-323 (published online January 22, 2014; 10.1377/hlthaff.2013.0686)

[13] Dinesh Kumar, US EPA weighing legal action to get REACH data (ChemicalWatch, 5 March 2014), available at: http://chemicalwatch.com/18593/us-epa-weighing-legal-action-to-get-reach-data?q=TSCA%20access%20to%20information

[i] See overview of recent science and research in the WECF/IPEN publication **„non-communicable diseases and environmental determinants“** „http://www.wecf.eu/english/publications/2013/NCD-publication.php