

GENDER AND THE SOUND MANAGEMENT OF CHEMICALS AND WASTE

Policy Brief, September 2018

The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) is a catalyst, connecting sectors and stakeholders, towards the goal of a chemical-safe, clean and healthy future by 2020. Strategic Approach stakeholders are currently reviewing the approach for the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020, future objectives and milestones are to be informed by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This policy brief provides insights that are intended to inform related stakeholder discussions.



THE GLOBAL GOALS
For Sustainable Development

BACKGROUND

“Gender mainstreaming” is defined as a strategy for making both men and women’s concerns and experiences an integral part of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres.

In practice, gender mainstreaming supports the contribution of men and women to society equally, through policies and programmes that address their specific needs. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda aim to address inequalities among all population groups, especially women, children, and the impoverished. Directly addressing the links between the environment and gender in the context of the SDGs will provide new opportunities to achieve these goals in a more sustainable and beneficial manner.

SDG 5, a component of the Sustainable Development Goals on the 2030 agenda, aims to achieve gender equality and improve women’s rights.

The varied roles of men and women in society shape their exposure to chemicals, and so the gender dimensions of the sound management of chemicals and waste are highly relevant. Exposure to chemicals depends on geographical location, behavioural patterns, age, nutritional status, and other biological factors.

Gender mainstreaming across high priority development areas provides benefits for both men and women through the creation of strategic opportunities and improved focus of operations. Identifying these strategic opportunities – such as promoting secure and safe working conditions – can yield tangible results.

SUSCEPTIBILITY AND EXPOSURE

Sex and gender are highly influential in an individual's physiological susceptibility to chemicals. The varying roles of men and women in the workplace and at home help determine the respective vulnerabilities to chemical exposure.



Biological Factors

While chemical exposure can pose a risk to all, it has been seen to affect males and females differently, whether in physical conditions or reproductive health.

- The susceptibility to chemical exposure varies by sex starting in the womb, and continuing through infancy and the early years of development and on through puberty when adolescents are particularly vulnerable.
- Men and women have different susceptibilities that must be understood for the health of future generations.



Occupational Exposures

As chemical use rapidly expands, there is growing concern for workers involved in such chemically intensive sectors as agriculture, construction, electronics and textiles.

- Women are working in the informal sector in increasing numbers, and seldom receive basic training related to the chemicals they use. This increases their vulnerability to pesticide-related health hazards.
- The cut flower industry in many African countries, for example, employs many women, and uses pesticides extensively and without strict regulations.



Domestic Exposures

While often overlooked, domestic exposures to chemicals and toxins must also be considered. Men and women use different personal care products and cosmetics, and are affected differently.

- Women tend to use more personal items than men, increasing their dermal exposure to toxins.
 - Work involving household cleaning products also leads to chemical exposures. As gender roles change, so do exposure patterns.
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SAICM EMERGING POLICY ISSUES AND OTHER ISSUES OF CONCERN

SAICM stakeholders have identified eight emerging policy issues and other issues of concern since the inception of the Strategic Approach in 2006. In general, all these have susceptibility and exposure considerations related to gender, though no on-going activities are formally identified within the Strategic Approach context. A full gender review across the current emerging policy issues and other issues of concern may be beneficial in considering the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020, supporting the identification of gender-related opportunities and priorities in moving forward.



Legislation

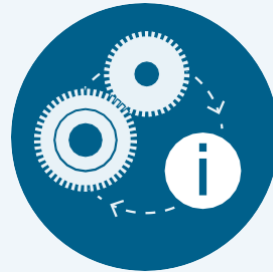
Strong legislation is needed to minimize the harmful effects of handling toxic chemicals.

Lead in paint

Lead, a widely used toxic metal, contaminates the environment and causes extensive public health problems. Children are particularly vulnerable, and the exposure of pregnant women to high levels of lead may cause miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth, and minor malformations.

Highly hazardous pesticides

A large number of women in South Asia, East Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa work in agriculture and related tasks such as washing pesticide containers and thinning crops exposed to pesticides. The resulting exposure calls for the regulation of the use of highly hazardous pesticides.



Information Systems

An effective information system that promotes transparency and access to data will allow both manufacturers and consumers to make informed decisions that minimize their vulnerability to harmful chemical exposure.

Chemicals in products (CiP)

The CiP Programme promotes information transparency in supply chains, and focuses on textiles, toys, electronics and building materials.

Hazardous substances within the life cycle of electronic products

The manufacture of electrical and electronic products relies on the use of over 1,000 chemicals, many of which lack comprehensive health and safety information due to weak regulatory policies. As the electronics industry has grown, women in Latin America and Asia have become the primary source of labour, and are now exposed to high levels of toxins such as lead and chromium.



Scientific Evidence and Knowledge

The effects of many chemicals on human health, particularly the different physiological susceptibilities of men and women, remain largely unknown. More scientific evidence and knowledge are needed to protect the population.

Nanotechnology and nanomaterials

Nanomaterials, which can be found in many consumer products, can affect both male and female reproductive systems. These materials are prevalent in pharmaceuticals and textiles, and in the products related to information and communications technology.

Endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs)

EDCs affect the hormone systems of men, women and children. The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics notes that the global rise in non-communicable diseases, as well as the increase in preterm births, low-birth-weight babies, and the early onset of breast development can be partially attributed to EDCs.

Environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants (EPPPs)

The sources of pharmaceutical pollution include drug manufacturing, human excretion, disposal from homes and hospitals, and wastewater from large-scale livestock operations. Gender-specific effects of EPPPs remain largely unknown due to the limited methods to measure such a widespread phenomenon.

Perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs)

PFCs have become extensively used in both industrial and consumer products to make them resistant to stains, water, grease, or heat. Studies have shown that high levels of PFCs can be highly toxic, and animal tests have found PFCs to be potentially carcinogenic in the reproductive and fetal development stages, although these effects on humans remain inconclusive.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE PROJECT CYCLE

Gender Analysis

Gender analysis is the critical examination of how differences in gender roles, activities, needs, opportunities, and rights affect men, women, girls and boys. It examines the access to resources, and the constraints that each group faces. Improved scientific knowledge on health outcomes specific to men and women will greatly help inform policymaking.

Gender Indicators

Indicators are criteria or measures against which changes can be assessed. They are used to signify changes in specific conditions or progress towards particular objectives. Gender norms vary depending on local contexts, making it difficult to create a single set of indicators to monitor the achievement of gender equality in policies and programmes. Thus, gender indicators incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data to account for changes over time.

Communication of Gender Results

A communication strategy that shares gender equality work and results through regular channels can promote gender mainstreaming efforts, increase awareness and raise advocacy efforts. It is crucial to reduce the information gap and support information exchange among stakeholders.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Voices and Leadership

Promoting gender equality in the scientific research community can empower women and ensure that gender perspectives are incorporated into decision-making, consistent with SDG 5. Target 5.5 calls for “women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.”

Furthermore, gender considerations have been increasingly incorporated into global multilateral environmental agreements, including:

- The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions
- The Minamata Convention on Mercury

In addition, the 23rd session of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change recently approved their first Gender Action plan to include women in all climate activities.

Looking Ahead

SDG 5 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides new and renewed opportunities to incorporate gender considerations into decision-making. In reflecting on SAICM and in the future for sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020, all stakeholders have the opportunity to tap into the potential to address gender issues, promote equality, and protect vulnerable populations in the context of sound management of chemicals and waste.

FURTHER READING

Gender and the sound management of chemicals and waste (2018), Note by the SAICM secretariat SAICM/IP.2/6, http://www.saicm.org/Portals/12/documents/meetings/IP2/IP_2_6_gender_document.pdf

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This policy brief has been developed within the framework of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) project ID: 9771 on Global Best Practices on Emerging Chemical Policy Issues of Concern under the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM): [Chemicals Without Concern – towards safer products for our environment and health.](#)

More information about this project is available at www.chemicalswithoutconcern.org



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