

Gender Mainstreaming for Sustainable Chemistry

Summary of Virtual Side Event, HLPF 2022, 14th of July 2022



Federal Ministry
for the Environment, Nature Conservation,
Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection



The MSP Institute

Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Sustainable Development eV

This document provides a brief summary of presentations and discussions at the Side Event on Gender Mainstreaming for Sustainable Chemistry held on July 14, 2022 during the UN High-level Political Forum 2022. The event was co-hosted by the [MSP Institute](#) and the German Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection ([BMUV](#)).

The importance of gender dimensions in chemicals management has been increasingly discussed in recent years. However, mainstreaming gender equality into sustainable chemistry concepts and practical implementation is still in its early stages.

Therefore, the intention of this side event was to increase the understanding of the interconnections between gender and sustainable chemistry amongst stakeholders; and to enable an exchange on how to better address issues of gender inequalities in chemicals management at all policy levels. Panelists shared challenges as well as best-practice examples on the integration of gender in chemicals management, and in sustainable chemistry, in the context of SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals.

More than forty participants from different regions and stakeholder groups participated at the side event (governments, non-governmental organizations, inter-governmental organizations, industry and academia). The present summary aims to capture the key points and policy recommendations that were discussed.

Introduction

Facilitator Minu Hemmati, MSP Institute, welcomed participants and presented the agenda of the event. She reminded participants that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that not all people are affected equally by crises and that structural inequalities are exacerbated in times of crises. She argued that lessons learned during the pandemic must be used when addressing the current triple planetary crises (climate change, loss of biodiversity, pollution). Building back better, the theme of the HLPF 2022, must mean that considering the roots of inequalities is part and parcel of crisis management. Sustainable Chemistry, she said, is a framework that provides guidance on how chemistry can adhere to the principles of sustainability, including the empowerment of women and girls and tackling gender inequalities with gender mainstreaming – which requires all stakeholders to learn and to collaborate.

Short info movie

The short information movie “**the gender lens – for a new perspective in chemicals management**” was presented by the MSP Institute. The video is available online under the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5gSkMT-VYs&t=21s>

Welcoming keynote

HE State Secretary Christiane Rohleder from the German Federal Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection highlighted the need to acknowledge feminist perspectives in chemicals management by referring to Rachel Carsons book *Silent Spring* (1962) and the discreditation of her research on the insecticide Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) and its impacts on the environment. According to State Secretary Rohleder, even today

gender injustices impede sustainable chemicals management in all regions of the world, which is why gender mainstreaming and feminist perspectives must become part and parcel of sustainable chemistry.

The complete text of her speech is included in the annex.

Panel discussion

Panelists provided inputs on their work on gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women and girls in chemicals management and shared lessons-learned:

Hans-Christian Stolzenberg from the [German Environment Agency](#) and German SAICM Focal Point presented his experiences within the [GenChemRoadMap project](#) and its pilot phase in Germany:

- In the **GenChemRoadMap project**, a Gender and Chemicals Road Map and workbook was developed and piloted in Germany, in consultation with a multi-stakeholder working group: The pilot phase included four working steps: understand the context, initiate the process, gender analysis, gender impact assessment.
- Lessons learned during the working steps include:
 - **Interaction among chemicals and gender experts**, e.g. in webinars and online courses, are key to initiate activities;
 - Stakeholders, topics and processes may differ depending on the specific situation in your country, your region, the sector – therefore, a **stakeholder analysis** is a very beneficial starting point;
 - **Clear and evidence-based communication** is key for reaching stakeholders in chemicals management and to engaging them;
 - Involving a range of stakeholders for an **open exchange and dialogue** on gender and chemicals helps to initiate interaction and teamwork on gender;
 - It is very useful to work with a **hands-on approach**, and to **focus** on specific sectors or areas of chemicals use first - the pilot phase focused on chemicals in building materials.

Jorge Ocaña, Manager of the chemicals and waste programme at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research ([UNITAR](#)) shared insights about UNITARS work on chemicals and waste management and gender:

- **Project Gender Road Map in Ethiopia**: Development of a Gender Road Map + Action Plan on mercury related aspects in artisanal and small-scale gold mining in Ethiopia;
- **Project on pollutants in Cote d'Ivoire**: Development of a gender module on the sound management of polybrominated diphenyl ethers in Côte d'Ivoire - focus on local legislation, protection of women in e-waste management, short info video on gender and gender inequalities;
- Supporting the development of **National Action Plans (NAPs) for artisanal and small scale gold mining (ASGM)** and role of women;
- Development of a **social-economic research methodology and formalization handbook for ASGM** - both encourage gender considerations; the formalization handbook includes dedicated sections related to gender, e.g. a checklist for ensuring gender equality in the formalization strategy;

- UNITAR is addressing the issue of gender equality mainly through **concrete projects work**, ensuring that: women have access to training; have a balance representation and participation in project steering committees
- Lessons-learned include:
 - **Understanding local conditions** before research and discussing research results with local communities afterwards improves research results;
 - **Using local language** increases women's participation; **building trust** with local communities is key for research;
 - **Celebrating gender champions** to acknowledge engagement is a very valuable method.
 - **Recognizing the role of women** in Chemicals and Waste activities as the basis for equal treatment and perceptions.

Tripti Arora, Gender Coordinator of the International Pollutants Elimination Network ([IPEN](#)) presented IPENs work on women/gender and chemicals, and policy recommendations:

- In 2017, IPEN developed a **gender initiative to empower women** in its work to achieve a toxics-free future. IPEN has released a number of reports on gender and chemicals, including on "Women, chemicals and SDGs", and recently developed nine courses in gender and chemicals;
- Many IPEN Participating Organizations (e.g. PAN Asia Pacific) have been **working on the ground with the women's groups** to identify the inequalities and challenges that they face, to create awareness, collect gender specific data and to develop regulatory mechanisms incorporating gender components.
- Policy recommendations:
 - **High level recognition** of the importance of addressing inequalities related to women and chemicals needs: through ministerial declarations, high level policy dialogue, gender equality plans and mainstreaming gender perspectives in national policies and programmes;
 - Increase the amount and public availability of **sex and gender disaggregated data** on effects of chemicals and waste;
 - The international conventions, or frameworks such as SAICM, need to consider women and chemicals as an **issue of concern**, establish working groups, develop a **gender action plan** accompanied by clear, quantifiable objectives, targets and indicators, promoting and supporting women organizations, voices and leadership;
 - Enhance **women's participation in decision making** at all levels and in all sectors related to chemicals;
 - Developing a **gender responsive budget** which considers gender at all stages of the budget cycle;
 - Gender considerations should be a part of **project planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation**.

Eskeदार Awigchew Ergete, executive director of [Eco-justice Ethiopia](#), presented the outcomes of the UNITAR project on gender mainstreaming in artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) in Ethiopia in detail:

- **Project design** to develop a Gender Road Map for ASGM in Ethiopia:
 - Analysis of mercury use in ASGM in Ethiopia from a gender perspective;
 - Development of initial gender-responsive recommendations for phasing out mercury used in customized gender impact assessment;
 - Literature review and interviews with nine national and international experts;
- Project Results - **Recommendations for a mercury-free ASGM in Ethiopia:**
 - **Gender Data:** participatory research study on mercury pollution;
 - **Gender-responsive awareness raising and training:** information campaign on risk of mercury use and protection; health and technology trainings;
 - **Women's access to finance:** multi-stakeholder workshops on financing mercury-free technologies;
 - **Formalization of women miners:** support for the development of women miner associations for mercury-free technology.

Reflections from the floor

Anna Isabel Becker, Policy Manager and Gender Focal Point at the International Sustainable Chemistry Collaborative Centre ([ISC3](#)), reflected on gender mainstreaming and sustainable chemistry:

- Sustainable Chemistry should facilitate the needs of the present – without compromising the ecological, social, and economic needs of future generations. Sustainable chemistry is key to meet existential environmental and societal challenges such as climate change, scarcity of resources; pollution; biodiversity loss; and inequalities.
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion are closely intertwined and are all equally important to reach the SDGs and the sound management of chemicals and waste.
- The current feminist approach in Germany's development policy, the three "Rs", might be a helpful approach for a feminist sustainable chemistry: improving rights, access to resources, and balanced representation of underrepresented groups, such as women and girls.
- We must not forget about the youth! They are the decision-makers and shapers of the future. Issues such as sustainability, diversity, equality and justice are important to them, and young people demand attention to these issues in education and in their future workplace.

Questions and Answers

If you put on the gender lens, what is most urgent to look at?

- Collecting and analysing sex- and gender-disaggregated data;
- Dialogue between stakeholders - bringing relevant people to the table;
- Recognizing the issue of gender equality at all international platforms;
- Differentiating response mechanisms to environmental harms;
- Ensuring women's access to information and education, justice and basic services;
- Recognizing the work of women - their work is an asset to the sound management of chemicals and waste.

What is needed to enable the implementation of sound chemicals and waste management through gender equality, especially in developing countries?

- Gender equality is often not seen as a major problem - we need to advocate that gender mainstreaming is understood as an essential cross-cutting task;
- Gender mainstreaming is often understood as a benefit only for women – we have to ensure that all stakeholders understand that gender mainstreaming improves the situation for everyone;
- Women's empowerment for meaningful participation in decision making processes at every level is important;
- Acknowledging the role of women in all processes - women's roles are often overlooked and undervalued;
- To avoid being overwhelmed by the complexity of the issue, getting started with practical steps and focusing on one concrete problem situation makes it easier and manageable;
- Greater attention to gender in NAP reporting could promote implementation;
- Incorporating gender considerations directly in the beginning of projects and programmes fosters its implementation.

Conclusions

At the end of the side event facilitator Minu Hemmati summarized several main points:

- We will not achieve the SDGs without gender mainstreaming for sustainable chemistry - that means: chemistry will not become sustainable without gender equality.
- Both gender equality and sustainable chemistry need development and implementation, i.e. knowledge, promotion, tools and methods, and resources – and the willingness to transform. There are experiences we can build on, and methods we can use and develop further.
- Both gender equality and sustainable chemistry need our engagement: as governments, international organisations, women's organisations and gender experts, private sector, labour unions, NGOs, education community, and others.

Next steps and opportunities where we can all engage include:

- SAICM IP4 in August / September in Bucharest, Romania;
- The 5th International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5), 2023 in Bonn;
- The process to develop a Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution;
- Special Issue on Gender of Sustainable Chemistry and Pharmacy - Call for Papers. This will become an important knowledge base on issues relating to gender and chemicals.

We thank all speakers and participants for their contributions and fruitful discussion.
If you have any questions or comments please don't hesitate to email info@msp-institute.org.

Annex

H.E, State Secretary Dr Christiane Rohleder, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) - Welcoming speech at the Side Event on „Gender Mainstreaming for Sustainable Chemistry“ during the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, July 14, 2022

Check against delivery

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues,

This year's HLPF places a special focus on SDG 5 on gender equality. It therefore offers an important platform for reflecting on how gender equality contributes to the sustainable transformation of other areas. To address the importance of gender in sustainable chemistry, I would first like to take you back to the beginning of international discussions on chemicals policy:

In 1962, Rachel Carson, a marine biologist, published her ground-breaking book *Silent Spring*. She highlighted the seriousness of the pollution crisis, especially the significant detrimental impact that the indiscriminate spraying of DDT was having on the environment.

Immediately after publication, Carson's research was discredited as being "soft". Her feminist call to care for nature was called "hysterical". And according to some male colleagues her "emotional picture" of the pollution disaster disqualified her as a scientist. Looking back, *Silent Spring* is widely acknowledged as a catalyst of the modern environmental movement and the institutionalization of environmental impact assessments. Carson's story shows how feminist perspectives received little recognition in chemicals policy, yet strongly influenced and enhanced it.

Even today, gender inequalities impede sustainable chemicals management in all regions of the world, and feminist perspectives are urgently needed:

- Chemicals affect people of all genders differently because of differences in their biological body composition, and chemical exposure also varies due to gendered roles in society. However, gender-disaggregated data and research methods are still lacking. This prevents us from taking the necessary steps – and from even knowing which steps may indeed be necessary.
- The problem of chemical exposure particularly affects poor women and women working in the informal sector. For example, waste in India is often collected by women without any protective gear, exposing them to hazardous chemicals. Despite the health risks, waste picking offers especially women from lower castes the only way to earn an income and to meet their household and child-rearing responsibilities. That is why chemical policies and measures must take their impact on different genders into account.
- A study published by IPEN and the SAICM Secretariat in 2021 underlined that all emerging policy issues are linked to gender in multiple ways - and that global trends in chemicals production indicate that the pollution situation is worsening.

Gender and chemistry are both cross-cutting elements of almost all human activities and both have a key role to play in our societal transformation to achieve sustainable development.

Gender Mainstreaming, as the globally agreed strategy to achieve gender equality and green and sustainable chemistry, as strategies to achieve circular economies and zero pollution, are widely discussed and increasingly implemented.

But we need to combine gender mainstreaming and sustainable chemistry in order to overcome the structural inequalities in the world of chemistry, and to develop new solutions for the pollution crisis – solutions that benefit everyone.

Sustainable chemistry offers a possibility to do exactly that: it aims to enshrine ethical and social responsibility as key characteristics of chemistry, and it should also integrate principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunities, as reflected in SDG 5 on gender equality.

In my view, gender equality must be part and parcel of a holistic framework of sustainable chemistry – because a sustainable world of chemistry is simply not possible without gender equality.

In addition, sustainable chemistry offers an important opportunity to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

From my perspective, feminist sustainable chemistry would mean that:

- 1) no gender suffers from toxic chemicals and structural inequalities in chemistry;
- 2) all genders are seen as agents of change and take leadership roles; and
- 3) all genders benefit from it.

It is therefore vital that we use the potential of gender mainstreaming and feminist perspectives to make our work in the field of chemicals more comprehensive, more impactful and more sustainable. Enabling everyone to enjoy equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities is not only a human rights issue, it is key to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and a healthy planet for all.

Gender tools like the Gender Impact Assessment help us understand how policies and projects affect different genders and thus help us to develop more effective policy solutions for all. In my Ministry, we have developed the Gender Impact Assessment further to analyse environmental policies in the fields of climate change, mobility and sustainable consumption.

Complementing the ground-breaking gender mainstreaming activities undertaken by the BRS Conventions and the Minamata Convention, Germany will support the integration of gender mainstreaming in the new SAICM framework, which is currently under discussion and will hopefully be adopted at the 5th International Conference on Chemicals Management next year in Bonn.

I believe that we can shape the world as Rachel Carson envisioned it and make it cleaner, safer and healthier for all. That is why my Ministry is aiming to develop and implement feminist environmental policy. This still requires Rachel Carson's vision and values, as well as the perspectives of many other agents of change - gender mainstreaming allows these to emerge, and that, in turn, is sustainable chemistry in action.

Thank you very much for your attention!