



**MULTI-STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP  
ON STRENGTHENING THE  
SCIENCE-POLICY INTERFACE IN  
INTERNATIONAL CHEMICALS  
GOVERNANCE: SUMMARY**



**December 2018**

A workshop was convened by the International Panel on Chemical Pollution (IPCP)<sup>1</sup> in Geneva, Switzerland on 15-16 November, 2018 with the participation of experts from 10 intergovernmental organizations, 14 national and regional governments, and 6 international non-governmental organizations representing academia, the chemical industry and civil society. The workshop aimed to support the ongoing dialogue on strengthening the current science-policy interface in international chemicals governance<sup>2</sup> by reviewing the status quo, identifying gaps, and discussing needs and possible actions. This document reflects a collection of the views shared during the workshop. These views represent of the participants and not necessarily the views or official policies of their organizations and/or governments.

## 1. Background of the workshop

The workshop is a part of an ongoing initiative by the IPCP to help inform policy-makers and interested stakeholders regarding the strengthening of the science-policy interface in international chemicals governance, particularly within the context of the Intersessional Process under SAICM and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020. This initiative is financed through the IPCP's own funds, in-kind contributions from its members, and financial support from the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN).

Building on previous participation in the Intersessional Process<sup>3</sup>, the IPCP has prepared a mapping and gap analysis that aims to help inform policy-makers and interested stakeholders on key questions including:

- What are the desired objectives and functions of a strengthened two-way science-policy interface in international chemicals governance?
- How are these objectives and functions fulfilled by existing science-policy interface bodies, and what are the major gaps?

---

1 The IPCP is a global network of academic scientists working on issues related to chemical pollution and was established in 2008. For more information on the mandate and membership of the organization, see: <https://www.ipcp.ch>.

2 Although waste governance is not explicitly mentioned here, it is considered as a part of a comprehensive chemicals governance framework, which includes the end-of-life stage of chemicals and associated products.

3 The IPCP's input in response to the co-chairs' summary of discussions at the first meeting of the Intersessional Process: <http://www.saicm.org/Portals/12/Documents/IP-consultation/Jul-Sep-2017/IPCP.pdf>

The IPCP's thought starter on a possible model for the science-policy interface under the Post 2020 Framework was submitted during the second meeting of the Intersessional Process: [http://www.saicm.org/Portals/12/documents/meetings/IP2/A%20Thought%20%20Starter%20on%20a%20Possible%20Model%20for%20the%20Science\\_draft\\_15March2018\\_updated.pdf](http://www.saicm.org/Portals/12/documents/meetings/IP2/A%20Thought%20%20Starter%20on%20a%20Possible%20Model%20for%20the%20Science_draft_15March2018_updated.pdf)

- What are options for a way forward to strengthen the science-policy interface?

To seek stakeholders' feedback and input for finalizing a mapping and gap analysis, the workshop was organized by the IPCP. Prior to the workshop, a first draft of the mapping and gap analysis as well as a "Thought Starter on Options for a Way Forward" were prepared by the IPCP and shared with the participants as background documents to help guide the discussion at the workshop. In addition to the present workshop summary document, comments and information received from the experts during and after the workshop were reviewed for incorporation into the final version of the mapping and gap analysis<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. Needs for a strong, two-way science-policy interface

Participants highlighted the importance of a strong, two-way (science-to-policy and policy-to-science) interface<sup>5</sup>. In addition, some participants pointed out benefits of such an interface, including the following aspects:

- 1) providing rigorous, authoritative assessments that collect, digest and process fragmented pieces of scientific information on specific issues into a comprehensive, yet easily accessible format for policy-makers. These assessments should help to reduce the complexity and ambiguity of such scientific information for non-experts and to raise policy-makers' confidence and trust in using such scientific evidence;
- 2) raising awareness of chemicals and waste issues among policy-makers and the general public, possibly using the IPCC<sup>6</sup> in the area of climate change as a role model;
- 3) increasing governmental ownership and stakeholder buy-in of final products (e.g. scientific assessments) through early involvement in the development process;
- 4) enabling scientists to better understand and be confident in their roles, to be aware of opportunities to be involved, and to understand the specific needs, languages and dynamics (e.g. timelines and key actors) to participate more effectively in policy processes;

---

4 The mapping and gap analysis: <https://www.ipcp.ch/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/IPCP-Sci-Pol-Report2019.pdf>

5 The science-policy interface is a space of interactions between scientists and policy-makers to enhance science-based policy/decision-making and is facilitated by interface bodies and individuals through science-policy interactions. A two-way science-policy interface includes not only interactions to transmit scientific knowledge and needs to the wider policy community, but also interactions to transmit policy knowledge and needs to the wider scientific community.

6 IPCC - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (<https://www.ipcc.ch>), an official entity with multi-governmental backing and funding with a long track record.

- 5) providing a reference point for stakeholders/governments to look for specific information and keeping them up-to-date with the rapidly developing, often cross-cutting chemical landscape in a timely manner;
- 6) raising the profile of and demand for related disciplines at universities to create incentives for scientists to participate in policy processes in addition to their research work and to keep these disciplines attractive for future generations of students; and
- 7) providing scientific consensus on certain issues, while ensuring that the work toward consensus does not preclude timely action on chemicals issues.

### 3. Understanding the current science-policy interface

Participants noted the contributions by, and importance of, various existing interface bodies on the global, cross-regional, regional, national and local levels at the science-policy interface. They also shared their perspectives on existing challenges and opportunities within the current science-policy interface, which included the following:

- 1) insufficient scientific information or insufficient access to scientific information on certain issues, especially emerging policy issues;
- 2) challenges in communication between scientists and policy-makers due to a difference in scientific and policy languages:
  - a. scientific information is often not in a form that policy-makers can directly use;
  - b. scientists are often not aware of policy needs due to a lack of information about policy-relevant processes, a lack of fora available to scientists, as well as a lack of direct communication and outreach to scientists;
- 3) specifically related to developing countries, countries with economies in transition, and the poor in all countries:
  - a. a lack of capacity-building to support scientists in understanding how to be involved in science-policy interface work, in addition to the training of new scientific experts;
  - b. a lack of experts and/or resources as well as limited potential of political intervention, which impede the active and effective participation of many countries in international science-policy interface work;

- c. a lack of specific evidence as well as of scientific consensus (and confidence) at the international level to support decision-making at the national level;
- d. challenges associated with language barriers for participation in international science-policy interface work;
- e. information and reports from many countries are often in national/local publications and/or not in English, and they are therefore often not included in international assessments;
- f. lessons learned from existing science-policy interface bodies/mechanisms such as POPRC and CRC show that in several areas there is sufficient scientific information available to address a particular issue, and the challenge is rather related to political will, which cannot be addressed strictly by a science-policy interface;
- g. a lack of consensus of scientific information on certain issues;
- h. often there are missing links between ongoing and upcoming mega-trends (e.g. transition to a circular economy) and chemicals and waste issues;
- i. a lack of adequate coordination across many existing bodies/mechanisms.

#### **4. Possible functions of a strengthened science-policy interface**

During the discussions, functions of a strengthened science-policy interface were suggested by participants (without prioritization) as follows:

- 1) early warning and horizon scanning with outcomes brought to the attention of policy communities;
- 2) monitoring and assessment of progress;
- 3) contextualization: collecting, reviewing, digesting, synthesizing and translating of i) specific policy needs/questions into research questions and ii) scientific information into actionable information for policy-makers;
- 4) conducting peer-reviewed scientific assessments and translating results for different audiences (e.g. from scientific data into policy-relevant information) including in languages other than English;
- 5) ensuring communication between scientists and policy-makers (as well as with the public) when needs arise;

- 6) covering emerging and legacy issues of concern, as well as generic chemical management issues;
- 7) providing knowledge management (including capacity building) to ensure easy accessibility to the extensive range of existing information and knowledge (including on the local level), including options for the context-specific prioritization of data for different communities/countries;
- 8) integration of science from different fields (e.g. human health and the environment as well as labor and agriculture);
- 9) contributing to reducing scientific uncertainty and to reaching scientific consensus, but also recognizing that uncertainty is inherent to scientific data, and timely policy action should be ensured despite this uncertainty.

## **5. Specifics to be considered in the design of a strengthened science-policy interface**

During the discussions, the following specific characteristics were suggested by different participants to be potentially considered in the design of a strengthened science-policy interface:

- 1) credibility (e.g. through peer-review and stakeholder consultation processes for relevant products), legitimacy, processes to ensure independence of scientific research, saliency;
- 2) transparency (including procedures for selection of data and experts);
- 3) budget;
- 4) flexibility allowing it to reflect the diversity and complexity of chemical issues and different needs of different stakeholders/countries/contexts;
- 5) being policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive;
- 6) either voluntary or compulsory participation/involvement;
- 7) a balanced, multidisciplinary perspective (e.g. inclusion of socio-economic aspects, ecosystem services, and other disciplines, as needed) and avoidance of cherry-picking evidence;
- 8) ensuring governmental and stakeholders' buy-in and ownership through an inclusive approach (multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral);
- 9) direct links to policy frameworks, e.g., the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020;
- 10) a clear mandate and vision with no duplication of work;

- 11) a consideration of the needs of developing countries, countries with economies in transition, and the poor in all countries, including the very different circumstances that can exist (e.g. DDT still being a topic of discussion; lack of technical capacities);
- 12) specific review of scientific information produced in developing countries that is not necessarily easy to access;
- 13) good practice of a science-policy interface as learned from existing science-policy interface bodies;
- 14) balanced participation taking into account factors such as gender and regional diversity;
- 15) a precautionary approach (e.g. assessments done by one interface body can be used by other interface bodies) and the precautionary principle<sup>7</sup>.

## 6. Institutional arrangements

Prior to the workshop, three options were proposed by the IPCP in its “Thought Starter on Options for a Way Forward”<sup>8</sup> to the workshop participants: i) establishing an IPCC/IPBES-like Panel, ii) establishing a network of networks, and iii) expanding the activities of the IOMC organizations. During the workshop, potential institutional arrangements needed for a strengthened science-policy interface were not discussed in detail and not by all participants. However, a range of options were mentioned by some participants during the discussions as follows, whereas some participants stated that a broader spectrum of options should be considered. In addition, some participants mentioned that the form of institutional arrangements should follow its functions, have no duplication of work, and be subject to available resources and cost-benefit balances.

- 1) Option A: to have an intergovernmental panel on chemicals and waste modeled on the functions of existing intergovernmental institutions such as IPCC and IPBES. This was noted as offering a global overview, a comprehensive perspective, early warning capabilities, and high credibility (governmental approval and stakeholders’ buy-in). However, concerns were mentioned regarding the financial costs of such a panel.

---

7 Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration from the Earth Summit in 1992: Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm>

8 The IPCP’s thought starter in preparation for the workshop: <https://www.ipcp.ch/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/IPCP-Sci-Pol-WorkshopThoughtStarter2018.pdf>

- 2) Option B: to have a network of networks, e.g., through using a lean central hub to support the coordination and collaboration between existing and future science-policy interface bodies. This was noted as offering flexibility and agility; however, effort required for logistics would need to be minimized.
- 3) Option C: to enhance existing interface bodies to meet the needs of a strengthened science-policy interface.
- 4) Option D: to have a hybrid option between Option A and Option B through having a network of networks institutionalized with an intergovernmental nature.
- 5) Option E: to have a hybrid option between Option B and Option C.