

Policy Brief

Input to the first session of the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP) in Geneva, Switzerland on 2-6 February 2026

Leveraging Solution-Oriented Assessments for the ISP-CWP

Following UNEP/EA.5/Res.8 the goal of the ISP-CWP is to “contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and prevent pollution.” One of its chief proposed functions is “conducting assessments of current issues and identifying potential evidence-based options to address, where possible, those issues, in particular those relevant to developing countries”. To what extent will these assessments reflect the recent trend towards “solution-oriented assessments”?

Historical development

Since their inception in 1977, Global Environmental Assessments (GEAs) have played a crucial role in synthesizing scientific knowledge to inform policy decisions. Early GEAs, such as the Montreal Protocol, focused on identifying and quantifying environmental problems. These assessments were instrumental in fostering international cooperation and achieving consensus on issues such as acid rain and ozone depletion. Over time, environmental issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss have become key dimensions of sustainable development, introducing new expectations and conditions for GEAs.

The Shift Towards Solutions

In response to the changing landscape of international governance, there has been a marked shift toward exploring solutions within GEAs. This “solutions turn” comprises future outlooks, response strategies, and action-oriented narratives, moving beyond retrospective analyses of biophysical and ecological problems. Solution-oriented assessments (SOAs) represent the evolving landscape of GEAs, with analyses of policy options and policy pathways emerging as the state-of-the-art for dealing with contested policy problems. The approach originated from the IPCC’s climate scenarios that link different sets of future socioeconomic developments and climate policy pathways, on the one hand, to different future climate change scenarios, on the other hand.

Similarly, the IPBES adopted this pathway approach to project future impacts of different solution scenarios on biodiversity. In both cases, the pathways clearly communicate a range of policy actions needed to achieve societal and environmental objectives while also pointing out the damages that are associated with inaction. SOAs can also include analyses of the institutional and societal capacity needed for effective, regionally appropriate implementation.

Implications for the ISP-CWP

Solution-oriented assessments present an opportunity for the new ISP-CWP to produce actionable knowledge and a range of policy responses for policymakers and other societal actors.

Recommendations

- The ISP-CWP could consider SOAs to include analyses of possible solutions to chemicals and waste-related problems. Typically, such problems are “wicked problems”, that have no single solution, but require a variety of societal responses.
- SOAs could include multiple solution pathways that also analyze regionally-attuned and realistic options for implementation.
- Analyses of solution pathways could include targets that could be met along the various pathways presented.
- SOAs must consider multiple sectors to achieve “buy in” and cooperation while ensuring that the solutions explored maximize human and ecosystem health protection and prevention.
- Inputs to SOAs should come from multi- and interdisciplinary science and Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge to develop a range of options informed by lived experiences.

This work was facilitated by IPCP
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For detailed background information, please refer to our working document, Schäfer, M. (2024) Solution-oriented assessment: a literature review and conclusions for the SPP on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution Prevention
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CONTACT

Martin Scheringer, ETH Zürich
scheringer@usys.ethz.ch

Miriam Diamond, University of Toronto,
miriam.diamond@utoronto.ca

Gabriel Sigmund, Wageningen University
gabriel.sigmund@wur.nl