

CSD plenary, Thursday morning, 13 May 2010 (final version)

Don Cooper talking points:

Agenda 21, Chapter 19 on toxic chemicals laid the ground work for much of what has been accomplished with Chemicals Management since 1992. However, we can only go so far without more coordinated approaches at the national, regional and global levels. In addition it is necessary to change our view of the role of chemicals from a stand alone issue to one which has major impacts on health, food supply, desertification and the loss of soil viability, water bodies, the marine environment, fishing, biodiversity and ecosystem maintenance, climate change and poverty alleviation.

In line with this approach, the global community has seen the need for improved international environmental governance. This will be a key component of achieving sustainable development.

This year efforts to promote more effective environmental government and those to implement the toxic chemicals chapter (19) of the Agenda have come together.

In February in Bali, the Conferences of the Parties of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions met in simultaneous extra ordinary meetings. These meetings took place in the same room at the same time and agreements were reached simultaneously on the same omnibus decisions which will promote synergies among the three global conventions addressing hazardous chemicals and waste.

The EXCOPs, as they are called, and the process to enhance cooperation and coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions that led up to these historic meetings, provides a shining example to other parts of the global environmental agenda, that enhanced international environmental governance can take place within a cluster of related multilateral environmental agreements and with related work of intergovernmental organizations. This is not to say that the process to be followed would be the same but more importantly that it is possible and that there is sufficient global and political will to see it happen.

The outcome of the Ex.COPs produced an omnibus decision which was adopted by the conferences of the Parties of three conventions.

First, agreement was reached to undertake joint activities among the secretariats. These activities are to be incorporated into the programmes of work and budgets of the three conventions. It has a specific mandate to produce benefits to Parties at the national level which would improve their ability to meet their obligations under the conventions

Second, agreement was reach to establish the post of a joint head of the Basel and Stockholm Convention Secretariats and the UNEP part of the Rotterdam Convention Secretariat. Part of the Rotterdam Convention Secretariat is provided by FAO.

Third, agreement was reached to establish joint services among the secretariats of the three conventions. These are a joint financial and administrative service, a joint legal service, a joint information service, a joint information technology service and a joint resource mobilization service.

Fourth, agreement was reached on undertaking joint audits of the accounts of the three secretariats and, as was decided, earlier to synchronize the budget cycles of the Basel and Rotterdam Conventions with those of the Stockholm Convention, UNEP and FAO.

Fifth, agreement was reached on developing dual track processes for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the synergies work under the chemicals and waste cluster. One process would be undertaken using UNEP and FAO in-house evaluation units and another process led by the Secretariats would include Party evaluations of the effectiveness of synergies at the national level.

The results of the ExCOPs are truly a great accomplishment. But they are only the beginning of the synergies process and much will need to be done in the coming years. In 2011 for example, the conferences of the Parties of the Stockholm, Rotterdam and Basel Conventions will meet respectively in April, June and October. The separate COPs will need to again take identical decisions on a number of synergies related issues. This is a tremendous challenge but one in which we are confident the Parties will continue to address boldly and innovatively.

While much attention has been focused on taking advantage of synergies at the level of the secretariats of the three Chemicals and Waste MEAs, much more benefit can be obtained by promoting enhanced cooperation at the national regional levels and from the coordination of the programs of work of these conventions with other stakeholders including IGOs, NGOs and Civil Society.

The efficiency gained through the establishment of joint services and through increased collaboration and cooperation among the secretariats will continue to increase the ability of the technical staff of the three secretariats to provide substantive support and services to Parties, including in the implementation of the three conventions at the national, regional and global levels.

The joint planning and delivery of substantive and technical activities is already facilitating the delivery of joint activities to Parties by reducing the duplication of technical assistance activities at the regional and national levels.

The process of preparing at the national level for the regional synergies workshops has in several Parties led to meetings being held, in some cases for the first time, between the national focal points and designated national authorities of all three conventions. These meetings have enabled and encouraged key national experts and decision makers from various agencies and ministries to identify national opportunities to forge synergies in their work and to agree on the fundamental goal of improving the life-cycle approach to chemicals management.

The joint use of the network of regional centres and offices associated with the work of the three conventions has resulted in the increased participation of these centres and offices in the planning and delivery of capacity-building and technical assistance activities and has enhanced the national and regional capacities required for Parties to develop a more sustainable and independent approach towards the full implementation of the three conventions.

The establishment by UNEP of a network of regional chemicals and wastes cluster coordinators, located within existing UNEP regional offices, supports Parties on chemicals and wastes-related issues by providing a two-way communication link between regional activities, national contact points and activities organized by the three secretariats and by supporting the delivery of capacity-building and technical assistance activities jointly organized by the three secretariats.

Joint cooperation with partners and potential donors is strengthening chemicals and wastes-related issues in the global environmental agenda, ultimately resulting in increased awareness and support for Parties towards the implementation of activities associated with the work of the three conventions. The very constructive partnership with the CSD in this meeting is an excellent example of this.

Finally, the joint implementation of the three Conventions and the broader objective of building or strengthening chemical management at the national and regional level should be an integral part of national development strategies. This is the only way to ensure that developing countries and countries within economies in transition will get the resources they need for these inter-related purposes. Fortunately, the synergies process has helped to raise awareness about how environmentally sound chemicals management is a key component of sustainable development.

I will talk more about this in my presentation during the roundtable this afternoon on strategies for sustainable chemicals and wastes management.