UNITED
NATIONS

EP

**Governing Council
of the United Nations
Environment Programme**

**Ninth special session of the Governing Council/
Global Ministerial Environment Forum**
Dubai, 7–9 February 2006
Item 5 (a), (b) and (c) of the provisional agenda∗
Policy issues:
Energy and environment
Chemicals management
Tourism and the environment

Background papers for the ministerial-level consultations on energy and environment for development, chemicals management as well as tourism and the environment

Discussion papers presented by the Executive Director

Summary

      The present document together with its addenda provides background papers intended to stimulate discussion and highlight issues of concern to Governments to be addressed by ministers and heads of delegation during their ministerial-level consultations at the ninth special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum. The addenda to the present document are as follows: UNEP/GCSS.IX/9/Add.1 (Energy and environment for development); UNEP/GCSS.IX/9/Add.2 (Chemicals management) and UNEP/GCSS.IX/9/Add.3 (Tourism and environment).

      A synopsis of each of these addenda is provided below. Each addendum contains a section on questions for the ministerial consultations with a view to suggesting issues which ministers and head of delegations at the ninth special session may wish to take up during their discussions.

∗   UNEP/GCSS.IX/1.

I. Energy and environment for development

1.   This chapter provides a summary of document UNEP/GCSS.IX/9/Add.1, which examines the principal issues concerning environment, development and energy together with the sometimes conflicting goals of maintaining energy security, providing sufficient energy for development and ensuring environmental integrity. It contains information on the global energy situation, impacts of energy use on human health and the environment, links between energy and development, and also key policy issues.

2.   Developed countries presently focus on security of supply issues and on reducing the regional and global environmental consequences arising from energy use, in particular climate change. Developing countries and countries with economies in transition are concerned with extending modern energy and transport services to their poorer citizens and solving more immediate human health problems caused by use of inefficient, outdated combustion technologies. The challenge is to bridge these different priorities and bring about a broad consensus for changing the way humans supply and use energy, while at the same time ensuring that enough energy is made available to meet development needs.

3.   A key challenge for the coming decades is to supply growing numbers of people in developing countries and countries with economies in transition with affordable energy services that they need to improve their lives, and to do so in a manner that is cleaner and more efficient, with fewer impacts on human health and the environment, including climate change.

4.   The global energy policy scene is to a large extent dominated by three overriding concerns: security of energy supply, energy for development and climate change. These three areas are interlinked and, if dealt with individually, action in one area can have adverse impacts on another. As discussed below, however, it is possible to design policies and programmes with positive impacts in all areas.

5.   The production, consumption and use of energy are associated with many different health and environmental impacts. Health and environmental impacts generally encompass air pollution ranging from indoor air pollution to that occurring at the local and regional levels, climate change, ecosystem degradation, water pollution and radiation hazards.

6.   In industrialized countries, the transport sector is the dominant source of urban air pollution, although various technical improvements and policies have eliminated lead and reduced levels of many of the transport related pollutants other than carbon dioxide. In developing countries and countries with economies in transition, the situation is more mixed; many megacities suffer from a combination of heavy traffic emissions and those arising from industrial and domestic combustion of fossil and biomass fuels.

7.   Airborne emissions of pollutants can lead to damage at large distances from the emission source while undergoing chemical reactions that are detrimental from an environmental perspective. Some of the known regional environmental effects of air pollution relate to acidification of soils and water systems caused by deposition of sulphur and nitrogen compounds, eutrophication (the enrichment of water with nutrients like nitrogen) and the formation of damaging tropospheric ozone as a result of sunlight induced atmospheric chemical reactions involving multiple pollutants.

8.   Climate change has, over the last decades, evolved into an issue of global concern. Human understanding of the relation between emission levels, concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and changes to the global climatic system is improving and there is increasing consensus in both the scientific and political communities that significant reductions in emissions are necessary in order to limit climate changes to manageable levels.

9.   The major anthropogenic contribution to emissions of greenhouse gases comes from fossil-fuel-based energy-related activities, which currently account for over 80 per cent of the total, excluding land use, land use change and forestry. Industrialized countries are responsible for the majority of current and historic emissions, but the rapid growth of energy consumption has meant that the developing countries are significantly increasing their share.

10.   Hydropower developments, and large dams and their resulting reservoirs in particular, can have significant impacts on ecosystems. By modifying the hydrological regime of a river, dams can alter local climatic conditions and disrupt ecosystems.

11.   From an overall policy perspective, three sets of actions are required at the national level to address the energy requirements for meeting the goals of the Millennium Declaration:

>   (a)   Improving the efficiency of the energy sector;

>   (b)   Improving energy access rates in rural areas;

>   (c)   Improving energy service provision to the poor in peri-urban and urban areas.

12.   When global energy demand and supply trends are assessed against the three global concerns of improving energy security, combating climate change and expanding access to modern forms of energy in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, it is clear that current policies and regulatory frameworks will not achieve these goals. Governments must stimulate demand for more efficient and cleaner technologies, including technologies that tap renewable sources of energy, improve energy efficiency on the supply and demand sides and make cleaner use of fossil fuels. Correcting policy and market failures is a pre-condition for success.

13.   Experience shows that the policy approaches that have had the most significant and sustained impact on energy for sustainable development in both developed and developing countries and those with economies in transition are all characterized by:

>   (a)   A combination of different policies, rather than reliance on a single policy;

>   (b)   Longevity and predictability of policy support;

>   (c)   Adaptation to and use of markets to deliver efficiency given stated policy goals.

14.   In order to address the three concerns of maintaining security of supply, providing energy for development and combating climate change over the coming decades, urgent policy action at the national and international levels is required. The specific policy tools need to be designed to fit specific national and local circumstances. Significant experience exists to guide decisions. Targets and timetables at the global level related either to emissions or technologies can be important instruments to ensure and accelerate national action. But it is not necessary to wait for a global consensus before moving.

15.   Ministers and heads of delegations may wish to focus the discussions around the three themes listed below. Given the breadth of the topic and the different national realities and priorities, the questions under each theme are provided for illustrative purposes only (that is, they are not intended to be exhaustive in their coverage of any of the proposed themes):

>   (a)   Environmental impacts of energy use:

>   >   (i)   How can energy, environment, and development policy making be integrated more closely, particularly in developing countries and countries with economies in transition? What specific steps can ministers take to ensure that policy planning is not conducted in separate "silos", as it were?

>   >   (ii)   To what extent can renewable energy sources meet the growing energy needs of developing countries and countries with economies in transition in an environmentally sound manner? Are there specific steps that Governments can take to foster renewable energy uptake, particularly in developing countries and countries with economies in transition?

>   >   (iii)   What precautions are necessary regarding the large-scale development of bioenergy, particularly in view of its possible environmental consequences? What are the trade-offs between bioenergy development and biodiversity, food production, water requirements, and so on? What steps need to be taken to ensure that bioenergy systems contribute positively to meeting energy and environmental needs?

>   (b)   Energy efficiency and financing cleaner energy systems:

>   >   (i)   What policy changes would allow energy efficiency efforts to expand, including through market mechanism? What steps can Governments take to accelerate efforts that improve energy efficiency in different sectors such as buildings, households, industry, and transport?

(ii)   How can flows of investment into new energy infrastructure be shifted towards technologies and systems that cause less impact on the environment? Are different approaches needed in developing and developed countries? What good models exist?

(iii)   How can Official Development Assistance be used more effectively to make advanced technologies available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition?

(c)   Technology advances and cooperation:

(i)   How can we achieve consensus on the approach to developing hydropower resources in an environmentally and socially acceptable manner, particularly in developing countries and countries with economies in transition?

(ii)   How can we secure greater public acceptance of renewable energy facilities such as wind farms? What approaches have proved successful and can these be replicated?

(iii)   What can Governments do to increase the likelihood that clean fossil fuel technologies contribute to a secure energy future? What is the role of cooperative research, development and deployment programmes in speeding the diffusion of improved fossil fuel technologies?

(iv)   Given technological uncertainties, what steps can Governments take now to prepare for a hydrogen economy or, at a minimum, to preserve options? How can developing counties best prepare for an eventual hydrogen future?

II.   Chemicals management

16.   This chapter provides a summary of document UNEP/GCSS.IX/9/Add.2, which discusses issues pertaining to current chemicals management in the context of the development of a strategic approach to international chemicals management (SAICM). These issues are presented in three categories: chemical safety as a cross-cutting sustainable development issue; the role of UNEP in the implementation of the strategic approach to international chemicals management; and the need for multisectoral commitment at the international level to the sound management of chemicals.

A.   Chemical safety as a cross-cutting sustainable development issue

17.   The cross-cutting impact of unsound chemicals management and its potential to undermine the achievement of development goals suggest that the chemicals issue should be integrated into sustainable development strategies on the part of both national Governments and the international donor community. This will usually require enhanced interdepartmental cooperation and the elevation of chemicals management as a priority in national planning tools. For developing countries and countries with economies in transition, these will include country assistance strategies and poverty reduction strategy papers. Bilateral and multilateral development cooperation agencies and international financial institutions will need to be similarly cognizant of and receptive to the sound management of chemicals as a legitimate element in such national plans. In some cases, there may be a considerable challenge in raising the awareness of officials and decision-makers from national ministries and donor agencies for whom chemicals management has not traditionally been associated with more obvious development goals. In addition to ensuring a multisectoral approach among government agencies, it will be desirable to engage other stakeholders such as non-governmental organizations and the private sector in improving the management of chemicals.

18.   From the outset of the SAICM development process, the linkage between chemical safety and sustainable development has been emphasized. The objective of integrating the sound management of chemicals into national development strategies is reflected in the SAICM documents themselves at all levels, as a political commitment in the high-level declaration, in the objectives set out in the overarching policy strategy and as a work area in the global plan of action.

19.   In their discussions, ministers and heads of delegations may wish to explore the linkages between the sound management of chemicals and the achievement of sustainable development, comment on the needs and modalities for enhanced cross-sectoral coordination on chemicals issues in the context of national development planning and consider the potential of SAICM to encourage such coordination.

20.   Ministers and head of delegations may wish to consider making recommendations pertaining to:

        (a)   Further recognizing the contribution to be made by the sound management of chemicals to sustainable development;

        (b)   Encouraging the integration of the sound management of chemicals into national development planning, taking into account the commitments and objectives expressed by SAICM in this regard.

B.   Role of UNEP in SAICM implementation

21.   Subject to the concurrence of the International Conference on Chemicals Management, the SAICM Preparatory Committee, at its third session, held in Vienna from 19 to 24 September 2005, agreed that the Executive Director of UNEP would be requested to establish and assume overall responsibility for a secretariat to support the implementation of SAICM. UNEP and WHO would take lead roles in the secretariat in their respective areas of expertise. It was envisaged that the secretariat would be co-located with the UNEP chemicals and wastes cluster in Geneva and take full advantage of existing synergies. In order to reflect the multisectoral nature of SAICM, the secretariat would work in coordination and cooperation with the participating organizations of IOMC, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, as well as with other intergovernmental organizations, as appropriate, as provisionally agreed by the SAICM Preparatory Committee at its third session.

22.   In decision 23/9, adopted at its twenty-third session on 25 February 2005, the Governing Council requested the Executive Director in its decision 23/9 as a matter of high priority to make appropriate provision for the implementation of the responsibilities of UNEP under the strategic approach to international chemicals management, once adopted. It further requested the Executive Director to make provision for activities to support developing countries and countries with economies in transition in implementing SAICM, taking into account the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building.

23.   Ministers and heads of delegations may wish to discuss the proposed roles for UNEP in SAICM implementation, reflecting on the significance of SAICM as an international policy initiative in the field of chemicals management and an element of sustainable development, the appropriateness of UNEP endorsing SAICM and taking on support functions for its implementation, and the importance of UNEP support for developing countries and countries with economies in transition in implementing SAICM.

24.   Ministers and heads of delegations may wish to consider making recommendations pertaining to:

        (a)   Endorsing or otherwise appropriately recognizing SAICM, as adopted by the International Conference on Chemicals Management;

        (b)   Requesting the Executive Director to undertake the support functions requested by Conference in relation to SAICM implementation;

        (c)   Affirming the provision of assistance by UNEP to developing countries and countries with economies in transition in developing capacity to implement SAICM, taking into account the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building and opportunities for synergies.

C. Need for multisectoral commitment at the international level to the sound management of chemicals

25.   It is anticipated that the International Conference on Chemicals Management, having adopted SAICM, will refer it to the governing bodies of relevant intergovernmental organizations for consideration. The first such governing body to address SAICM will be UNEP Governing Council, whose ninth special session commences immediately after the Conference. Other key governing bodies would include the World Health Assembly, which will meet in May 2006, the International Labour Conference in June 2006, and the FAO Council in 2006.

26.   The development of SAICM was initiated by the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum and UNEP has provided the secretariat and raised the funds needed to underwrite the process. UNEP is expected to continue this central support role and, in February 2005, the Governing Council requested the Executive Director to make provision for SAICM implementation activities. Subject to the actual outcomes of the International Conference on Chemicals Management, ministers and heads of delegations may therefore wish to consider making a recommendation that the Governing Council give favourable consideration to proposals for UNEP to play a key role in implementing SAICM, as outlined above.

27.   Multisectoral engagement has been one of the distinguishing characteristics of the SAICM development process and it will continue to be important during the implementation phase. Just as an integrated approach to the sound management of chemicals is essential at the national level, so too will it be critical to maintain the involvement of the major intergovernmental organizations, including the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreement, and international financial institutions at the global level if SAICM is to be truly strategic and represent an advance on the status quo. Cooperation among the agencies to facilitate SAICM implementation, maximizing synergies among their programmes and activities, will be an essential element in its success.

28.   Decisions to endorse or otherwise acknowledge SAICM and to reflect its objectives in the work programmes of the various organizations will be a matter for each of their respective governing bodies. Ministers and heads of delegations participating in the ninth special session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum may nevertheless wish to assist this process of parallel endorsements by ensuring that colleagues from other national ministries are appropriately briefed and encouraged to give positive consideration to SAICM in the context of governing body meetings for which they are responsible.

D. Proposals for the ministerial consultation

29.   Ministers and heads of delegations may wish to discuss ways in which the engagement of all relevant intergovernmental organizations, including the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements, and international financial institutions in the implementation of SAICM, maximizing synergies among their programmes and activities, could be encouraged.

30.   In addition to recommending that SAICM be endorsed on behalf of UNEP itself (see above), ministers and heads of delegation may wish to consider commending SAICM to the attention of the governing bodies of other relevant intergovernmental organizations and international financial institutions and encouraging national authorities to take an approach to SAICM that involves their entire Governments in order to facilitate parallel endorsement by those other governing bodies in due course.

III. Tourism and the environment

31.   This chapter provides a summary of document UNEP/GCSS.IX/9/Add.3, which discusses issues related to the impacts of tourism on the environment together with the opportunities which it offers, the approaches which can reduce those impacts, and also the key challenges for sustainable tourism.

32.   The special two-way relationship between the tourism industry and the environment falls within the context of environmental policy. The tourism industry is itself very dependent on the quality of the environment. Tourists are increasingly looking for attractive, unpolluted places to visit, and involvement with tourism can also make local people more aware of the need to conserve the environment. As a high-quality environment is a key part of the tourist product, tourism can be an ally, and a supportive economic and political force, for conservation.

33.   Negative impacts of tourism on the environment include:

        (a)   Emission of greenhouse gases and other pollutants, contributing to global warming and climate change and affecting local air quality;

        (b)   Development of tourism facilities in sensitive environments, leading to physical degradation of land, damage to habitats and loss of biodiversity and destruction of natural landscapes;

        (c)   The operation of tourism facilities leading to the use of non-renewable or precious resources such as freshwater and fossil fuels and the generation of pollutants and waste. The latter includes the discharge of sewage and the generation of solid waste.

34.   Tourism can also bring negative social impacts that have important consequences for environmental resource management. In many communities, scarcity of fresh water is a major concern which can be greatly exacerbated by tourism development.

35.   There are also a number of ways in which tourism can contribute positively to the environment, largely as a result of social and economic influences. These include:

        (a)   Providing a direct source of income for conservation;

        (b)   Supplying a source of income for local communities from tourism activities;

        (c)   Raising awareness of environmental quality, and its social, cultural and economic value, among visitors and host communities, leading to increased interest and support.

36.   Achieving more sustainability in tourism requires the support of government. Challenges include gaining more political support, increasing transparency and expanding knowledge. There is a need to integrate tourism into national development plans and to strengthen both the tools available to Governments to influence action on the ground and the skills and resources needed to apply them effectively.

37.   Looking more specifically at the role that Governments need to play in making tourism more sustainable, responsibilities include:

        (a)   Providing leadership and coordination;

        (b)   Setting the strategy for sustainable tourism;

        (c)   Developing and managing infrastructure and resources in the public domain;

        (d)   Providing a regulatory framework;

        (e)   Promoting and facilitating other ways of influencing enterprises and visitors;

        (f)   Initiating or supporting research into tourism impacts and sustainability and disseminating good practices.

38.   An effective and sound integration of sustainability in tourism policies must be based on the development of specific actions and the deployment of tools that address:

        (a)   The overall scale and shape of tourism;

        (b)   The development of tourism facilities and activities;

        (c)   The operation of tourism enterprises and the provision of services;

        (d)   The behaviour of tourists, including holiday choice and awareness of conservation and community issues in destinations visited.

39.   The effectiveness of policies will be enhanced by setting up structures that would allow coordination between all stakeholders and the adoption of a balanced mix of tools, including economic and legislative instruments as well as strengthening of the provisions of multilateral environmental agreements relating to obligations for conservation and environmental protection, prevention and control of pollution, and sound management of natural resources.

40. The implementation of sustainable tourism policies rests on the adoption and implementation of a mix of instruments that can be grouped as follows:

    (a) Measurement instruments;

    (b) Command and control instruments;

    (c) Economic instruments;

    (d) Voluntary instruments;

    (e) Supporting instruments.

41. In addition to the role of Governments, the private sector should be stimulated:

    (a) To include protected areas in tourist itineraries and to give customers information about the natural and cultural features of visited sites and their roles in the conservation of local ecosystems;

    (b) To provide customers with guidelines on how to avoid negative impacts while visiting sensitive areas, to avoid related impacts on the environment.

42. The development of guidelines and codes of conduct would set clear expectations and performance indicators for the industry. Promoting the regular and transparent reporting of sustainability performance can also create a conducive atmosphere for continuous improvement. Reporting can be also performed by entire destinations, under the leadership of the local authorities and based on a defined set of the destination's sustainability indicators.

43. Ministers and heads of delegations may wish to consider the following questions:

1. What role should Governments play in meeting the challenges described above (with particular reference to governance structure and policy implementation tools)?

2. Protected areas are increasingly valuable tourism products: what forms of additional protection within and outside protected areas would be needed to prevent tourism from generating additional impacts?

3. What strategies, tools and actors should be involved in promoting sustainable consumption in tourism?

4. What role should be played by economic instruments in modifying production and consumption behaviour and raising revenue for conservation?

5. How can sustainable production and consumption in the tourism sector be promoted by Governments?

6. What is the role of certification in promoting sustainability in tourism?

7. How can UNEP activities in the area of sustainable tourism be strengthened?

_____