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Role and Strategy of the Partnership with Minamata Convention Entry into Force

Note by the Secretariat

The Global Mercury Partnership ("Partnership") since its formalization in 2008 was instrumental in the understanding of countries on issues around mercury. Governing Council decision 27/12 recognized the Partnership as one of the key mechanisms for the delivery of immediate actions on mercury, and urged Governments and other stakeholders to continue to support, participate in, and contribute to the Global Mercury Partnership.

During the negotiations of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, many governments emphasized the key role of the Partnership in supporting the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC), and stressed the importance of continued support of the Partnership in implementing the Convention. The Partnership played an equally important role during the ratification period by catalysing action towards ratification of Convention. With the entry into force of the Minamata Convention, the Partnership will continue to play a crucial role in its early implementation.

The Co-Chairs of the Partnership Advisory Group prepared the annexed thought starter on the role and potential strategy of the Global Mercury Partnership with the entry into force of the Minamata Convention. The Partnership Advisory Group may wish to discuss and provide advice on the Partnership's strategic role and activities in the early implementation of the Convention.

Annex

Thought starter on the Role and Potential Strategy of the Global Mercury Partnership with entry into force of the Minamata Convention

Background

The global community celebrates the entry into force of the Minamata Convention on Mercury in August 2017. UN Environment's Global Mercury Partnership has played a pivotal role in the development of the Convention, and is expected to strengthen its contribution to supporting and complementing the Convention to protect human health and the environment from mercury. This paper is intended to advance the development of a strategy for the Partnership after Entry into Force of the Convention.

Through its voluntary multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder nature, the Partnership contributes to the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management in achieving its goal of minimizing the adverse effects of chemicals to human health and the environment by 2020, and supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Highlights of accomplishments of the Global Mercury Partnership

Since its establishment in 2005, the UN Environment's Global Mercury Partnership has played an important role in creating awareness of the mercury issue, building momentum to the development of the Minamata Convention with critical scientific and technical information. The Partnership, through on-the-ground actions and multi-stakeholder approach, showed that there are practical steps that governments and stakeholders can take to reduce mercury use and emissions. It developed easily accessible technical documents and provided information about the relevant sectors to the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee through information sessions and side events. The Partnership made significant contribution to the UN Environment's Global Mercury Assessment and other key publications, as well as providing technical support which contributed to the negotiation of the text of the Convention.

The Partnership has catalysed immediate action to reduce the risk of mercury to human health and the environment. It has developed an extensive library of sector-based technical guidance documents and tools that can be accessed through its website. It has provided crucial technical support through country-specific mercury reduction projects funded by donor governments, the Global Environment Facility, and other organizations.

The Partnership consists of eight sectors: artisanal and small scale gold mining (ASGM); coal combustion; cement; chlor-alkali; products; supply and storage; waste management; and fate and transport. It has sector-specific business plans to clarify the roles that each partnership area can play in assisting countries in fully meeting their Minamata obligations.

Specific examples of the achievements of the Partnership include:

- The ASGM area developed draft guidance to assist countries in developing their ASGM National Action Plan, and it is expected to be agreed for use at the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The ASGM partnership area has also facilitated the development of GEF projects.
- The Coal Combustion area developed the Process Optimization Guidance for coal-fired power plants, and provided technical support and capacity building in a number of countries.

The Partnership's activity reports provide further information on the achievements of specific partnership areas.

In addition to these activities of the partnership areas, individual partners implemented various activities benefiting from the network of experts in the Partnership.

These achievements were delivered building on the voluntary commitments by partners including leading scientific and technical experts, empowered by the knowledge sharing platform of the Partnership. The work has been coordinated through the co-leads of partnership areas and the Partnership Advisory Group, and serviced by the secretariat hosted by UN Environment Chemicals and Health Branch. These features – voluntary commitment, access to a network of dedicated key experts and knowledge management platform – are part of the strengths of the Partnership.

Role of the Partnership after the entry into force of the Convention

With the entry into force of the Minamata Convention, the needs for capacity building and technical support will increase. Article 14 of the Convention mentions partnerships as one of the mechanisms for delivering capacity building, technical assistance and technology transfer. The key mission of the Partnership will be to step up its efforts to assist governments and stakeholders in the implementation of the Convention.

In considering the Partnership's strategy to assist in the implementation of the Convention, one may benefit from considering some of the time frames set out in the Convention. These include the phasing out of primary mercury mining in 15 years; phasing out of manufacturing, import, and export of Annex A products by 2020, phasing out of mercury cell chlor alkali production by 2025, reviewing annexes A and B in five years, developing national action plans on ASGM in three years, implementing best available technologies and best environmental practice on mercury emission in five years and measures on existing mercury-emitting facilities in ten years (for the sectors listed in Annex D). Article 14 requests the second Conference of the Parties to review the existing initiatives, progress, needs and challenges on alternative technologies. The first meeting of the Conference of the Parties will initiate the establishment of arrangements for effectiveness evaluation.

The Partnership may also address emerging, or not well understood, sources of mercury use and emissions, by looking into new evidence on the supply, demand, emission and transport of mercury. This could eventually support the Convention process for effectiveness evaluation and review of Annexes. Additionally, the Partnership may wish to initiate action to reduce other sources of emission (e.g, non-ferrous metals mining) currently listed in the Convention but not covered by the Partnership.

Activities of the Partnership may contribute to broader sustainability agenda. Technical support in the ASGM sector will not only reduce the health and environmental risk of mercury, but also contribute to the formalization of the sector that can promote the sustainability of the mining communities. Control of mercury emission may take multi-pollutant approach contributing to the global efforts toward a pollution-free planet as well as reducing climate change drivers. Projects on mercury-containing medical devices and dental amalgam can be an integral part of environmental sustainability programme (such as sustainable procurement projects) in the health sector.

Strategic sectoral and cross-sectoral approaches

The 7th meeting of the Partnership Advisory Group discussed regional needs for the activities of the Partnership. Mercury added products and waste management were priority in most of the countries. ASGM was also a priority in many countries. Coal combustion, and Chlor-alkali (with associated issues on supply and storage) were priorities in countries where these sources exist.

Taking into account these regional needs, and building on the achievements so far, partnership areas may develop strategies to respond to the technical needs in the implementation of the Convention, to address emerging issues, and to contribute to broader sustainability agenda.

The following are possible elements for consideration of sectoral and cross-sectoral strategies.

- ASGM: As a large number of countries are developing National Action Plans, and the GEF GOLD project will be starting soon, the development of a knowledge management platform and delivery of technical assistance may be a key activity of the Partnership. Further project development may be considered.
- Mercury emissions and releases: The reduction of the anthropogenic emissions and releases is a core element of the Convention. Building on the activities of the coal partnership area, a GEF project proposal was developed including demonstration of selected control measures for coal-fired power plants, conduct of cleaner production audits and demonstrations, national and international workshops to build capacity and share lessons learned and knowledge management. This proposal may be extended to cover other emission sources including cement production and non-ferrous metal production, and training in continuous emission monitoring.

- Products, processes and waste management: After the 7th Partnership Advisory Group, three partnership areas (chlor-alkali, supply/storage and waste management) started to develop collaborative activities/joint projects on technical assistance and capacity building in stabilization/solidification of mercury from chlor-alkali plants. Similar cooperation between product and waste management areas may be considered. The Partnership may provide technical expertise in the review of Annexes A and B of the Convention. The finding from the Global Mercury Waste Assessment may be taken into account.
- Research, development and monitoring: The fate and transport area has worked on expanding global monitoring networks, and has developed networks between the partners to discuss monitoring programs and results. These monitoring activities, combined with a review of inventories being developed under the Minamata Convention Initial Assessments and compilation of other scientific information, may lead to the identification of further needs for capacity building and technical assistance.

Securing funds for activities of the Partnership

The activities of the Partnership in technical assistance and knowledge management have been supported by the financial and in-kind contribution by partners and donors, including donor governments, the GEF, and Quick Start Programme of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management. UN Environment provide secretariat services such as website maintenance, membership management, convening PAG meetings and outreach, with staff funded by the Environment Fund and additional donor contributions. Continued and enhanced contribution is needed both for the secretariat function and for activities of partners.

The Partnership secretariat can coordinate fundraising for the activities of the Partnership Areas. One good example is the GEF GOLD programme which was approved in 2016, to be jointly implemented by UN Environment, UN Industrial Development Organization, UN Development Programme and Conservation International. The draft guidance to the GEF from the Conference of the Parties put priorities on projects that are related to the legally binding obligations, facilitate early implementation of the Convention, and allow for reduction in mercury emissions and releases. Partnership Areas, with the assistance from the secretariat, may develop projects in line with the Guidance from the Conference of the Parties.

Partnership Areas may endeavour to access other funding sources, with the assistance from the Secretariat. Two sources particularly addressing the Convention are the Specific International Programme under Article 13, which is expected to become operational after the first Conference of the Parties, and the Special Programme to support institutional strengthening at the national level for implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the Minamata Convention and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management. In view of the contribution of the Partnership's activities to broader sustainability agenda, still other funding sources may be explored.