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Optimizing the structure and organization of the Global Mercury Partnership

Note by the Secretariat

The Global Mercury Partnership, since its formalization in 2008, has worked to protect human health and the environment from release of mercury. 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, and stressed the importance of continued support of the Partnership in implementing the Convention. The Partnership played an equally important role prior to entry into force by catalysing action towards ratification of the Convention. With the entry into force of the Minamata Convention, the Partnership will continue to play a crucial role in its early implementation.

The Chair of the Partnership Advisory Group prepared the annexed thought starter further optimizing the structure and organization of the Global Mercury Partnership. The Partnership Advisory Group may wish to discuss and provide advice on how the Partnership can strengthen its role in the early implementation of the Convention.

Annex

Thought starter on optimizing the structure and organization of the Global Mercury Partnership

Background

The overall goal of the UN Environment Global Mercury Partnership is to protect human health and the global environment from the release of mercury and its compounds by minimizing and, where feasible, ultimately eliminating global, anthropogenic mercury releases to air, water and land. The Partnership has worked closely with stakeholders to assist in the timely ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, which entered into force in August 2017. The Partnership has an important role to play in ongoing implementation of the Minamata Convention, by bringing together expertise of diverse stakeholders, Parties and non-Parties, in global dialogue and collaboration to address mercury challenges.

Taking stock on the activities and functioning of the Global Mercury Partnership after entry into force of the Minamata Convention

At the eighth meeting of the Partnership Advisory Group (PAG8), the participants discussed the role and potential strategy of the Partnership following the entry into force of the Minamata Convention. At that meeting, the concept of Partnership area “clusters” was introduced to stimulate discussion and project development among Partnership areas. The four clusters were presented as:

- ASGM
- Mercury emissions and releases
- Products, processes and waste management
- Research, development and monitoring

Participants broke into groups and discussed ways to structure collaboration within these clusters so as to minimize stove-piping by Partnership area and maximize cooperation.

Since PAG8, this cluster model has been used in the development of several projects, concepts, and initiatives, for example:

- At the time of PAG8 the artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) Partnership area had already been involved in two Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded projects: The GEF GOLD knowledge management project and the global component for ASGM National Action Plans implemented by UN Environment. The GEF GOLD work, in particular, was identified as a model for how Partnership areas might leverage their knowledge and network to implement large projects for the implementation of the Minamata Convention. While the National Action Plan global component has been under way for almost two years, the GEF GOLD program began in 2018.

- At PAG8 discussions began on the possibility of a GEF-funded programme on reducing mercury emissions from Annex D sources, including coal combustion, non-ferrous metals smelting and cement production. Since that time the concept may develop into a GEF7 programme submission. The Partnership, including the Coal Partnership area, could assume a similar role in knowledge management as the ASGM Partnership area in the GEF GOLD programme. Additional considerations for the GEF concept include determining the role of the Cement Partnership area and on how non-ferrous metals smelting could be incorporated into the Partnership structure.
- Several GEF project concepts are under discussion in the area of mercury-containing products. These include projects on dental amalgam, medical devices containing mercury and cosmetics containing mercury compounds. Collaboration between the Products and the Waste Partnership areas may be possible to add a lifecycle dimension to the projects. In addition, the Products Partnership area is exploring how the Harmonized System (Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System) could be better used to help countries track trade in mercury added products, mirroring efforts on tracking trade in elemental mercury.
- The Chlor-alkali, Waste, and Supply and Storage areas have continued the momentum from last year's joint meeting, focusing in particular on innovative and collaborative approaches to address financing of facility conversions, ensure environmentally-sound disposal of elemental mercury used in the process and to address site contamination. A meeting on mercury waste (hosted by UNIDO) brought these Partnership areas together to discuss project needs and ideas. In addition, these Partnership areas have been investigating possibilities of joint work on decommissioning chlor-alkali plants, including a field visit to a facility in Uruguay.
- The area of research, development and monitoring has also been active, following closely the developments of the expert group on effectiveness evaluation (established at the first session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Minamata Convention - COP1). The Transport and Fate Partnership area participated as an observer of the expert group meeting, and is developing a number of concepts on mercury monitoring that could contribute to the evaluation of the effectiveness of the Convention.

Opportunities for improving the effectiveness of and increasing collaboration within the Partnership

Over its last few meetings, the Global Mercury Partnership Advisory Group (PAG) has discussed ways to refresh the Global Mercury Partnership in the context of the Minamata Convention, to support the Partnership Area leads and leverage additional resources to continue to advance the work of addressing mercury challenges worldwide. The PAG may wish to consider the following three recommendations/options:

Continue collaboration and project development through Partnership area clusters

Given that discussion and project development has begun in some of the cross-area clusters, the PAG may wish to consider continuing and strengthening such collaboration.

In the ASGM cluster, the Partnership area has a leading role in the global knowledge management component of the GEF project. The Coal Partnership area is developing a GEF programme on mercury emissions, and could seek ways to bring in expertise from the Cement area and on non-ferrous metals smelting. Work on research, development and monitoring could follow progress from Minamata Convention's expert group on monitoring and effectiveness evaluation and could be further developed at the 14th International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant in 2019. The cluster of products, processes and waste management has several options to enhance cooperation, such as on decommissioning chlor-alkali plants, and taking action on phase-out and waste management of mercury containing products.

In order to strengthen these Partnership area clusters, discussion and information sharing could be facilitated through teleconferences, webinars, or in-person meetings, perhaps coinciding with Partnership area meetings.

Cross-cutting Issues for Collaboration

The PAG may also wish to consider the concept of cross-cutting issues. These are specific topics where the collaboration of multiple Partnership areas would facilitate the development of needed information, interventions and projects. Depending on the particular topic, the particular Partnership areas working together would differ.

The following list provides some ideas for potential cross-cutting issues. These topics were chosen because they do not easily fit within the mandate of any one existing Partnership area, and areas where more Partners and other stakeholders may consider that work is needed.

- **Mercury produced and released in oil and gas production**
Goal: Evaluate current practices for controlling mercury releases from the oil and gas sector and managing wastes and mercury generated
- **Use of mercury compounds in polyurethane elastomers**
Goal: Increase the understanding of the use of mercury catalysts in polyurethane elastomers and recommend options to speed the transition to non-mercury alternatives
- **Sites contaminated with mercury**
Goal: Disseminate information on identifying and assessing sites and prioritizing action to minimize negative impacts to human health and the environment from identified sites

- **Measuring and managing mercury stocks and flows**
Goal: Provide technical advice implementing interim storage guidelines. Analyze data to understand the flow of mercury for use and disposal and recommend options to manage such flows under the Convention
- **Mercury emissions from open burning of waste**
Goal: Better characterize and control emissions from open burning by providing management options for mercury-containing waste streams

Work on cross-cutting issues could take the form of, *inter alia*, initial consultations and needs assessment via teleconference, the establish of a working group consisting of selected members of the relevant Partnership areas, the publication of a white paper or issue summary, development of project concepts, or in-person meetings or conferences subject to availability of funds. Partnership area leads could nominate a coordinator who would facilitate the work on the cross-cutting issue and report on progress at the next PAG meeting. Where appropriate, the Secretariat could also participate in and assist with the work on these issues.

Taking stock of the Partnership areas

The idea of restructuring Partnership areas has been raised in past meetings of the Partnership Advisory Group, and at those times the group elected not to make any changes to the eight existing areas. Nevertheless, meetings of the Partnership Advisory Group present an important opportunity for the members to take stock of the structure of the Partnership and consider whether any changes are warranted.

The Partnership Advisory Group may wish to consider practical issues that might call for revising the Partnership Overarching Framework to change any of the eight Partnership areas. The rationale for such a decision would be to make the structure of the Partnership fit better with current needs and interest. For example, the group could choose to address new areas such as mercury management in non-ferrous metals, to combine one or more Partnership areas, or eliminate or change the name and focus of existing Partnership areas.

Meeting the Partnership's needs for funding and other support

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, GEF, and the Quick Start Programme of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management. UN Environment provides Secretariat services such as website maintenance, membership management, convening PAG meetings and outreach. Currently, staffing for UN Environment's Secretariat support and contribution to Partnership activities consists of one staff member funded by the Environment Fund, as well as temporary part-time consultant support funded by donor contributions. Continued and enhanced contribution is needed both for the Secretariat function and for activities of partners.

As the largest of the two components of the financial mechanism of the Minamata Convention, GEF presents the most promising opportunity for seeking funds for projects to reduce mercury pollution. Many of the members of the Global Mercury Partnership, including Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, are well-positioned to participate in GEF-funded projects. The Partnership itself can play an important role in creating coalitions and project teams to access this funding. The Partnership's role in the execution of the knowledge management child project of the GEF GOLD programme is an illustrative example, and one that could be reproduced on other topics, such as mercury emissions. Partnership area leads and Partners may wish to consider working closely with UN Environment and other GEF implementing agencies to develop concepts and projects for GEF funding. The Partnership Secretariat will work with interested Partners to help form project teams and develop concepts as well.

Partnership areas may seek to add value to programmes funded by other sources, with assistance from the Secretariat. Two mechanisms that also fund implementation of the Minamata Convention are the Specific International Programme under Article 13, which became operational after Minamata Convention COP1, 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. The Partnership could be specifically included in project proposals as a way for parties to take advantage of the expertise and access to information that the Partnership offers. More information on the criteria for application to the Specific International Programme is available in the Minamata Convention COP2 information document [UNEP/MC/COP.2/INF/16](#).

Businesses and trade associations that are Partners could help support specific targeted research projects and initiatives to develop solutions that can be implemented by parties and communities. The private sector plays a leadership role in developing innovative and cost-effective approaches to addressing the challenges of removing mercury from the environment. The active support and participation of mercury waste related enterprises was evident during a recent international expert group meeting on sustainable management of mercury waste hosted by UNIDO.

Finally, some Governments continue to provide bilateral or other funding for projects that advance the goal of the Global Mercury Partnership. Where such opportunities arise, UN Environment will seek to work with members of the Partnership on execution of these projects, and the Partnership Secretariat will share information on such opportunities with Partners.
