

**Background Information
Information/Discussion Session
on Tools and Approaches for
Applying Precaution in the
Context of Chemicals Safety**
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*in consultation with the Forum
Standing Committee Working Group*

Rationale

- To ensure adequate thinking occurs in individual countries before the start of Forum V and thoughtful discussion at the Forum.
- To collect examples of tools, approaches and frameworks for applying precaution (or making decisions in the face of uncertainty) with regards to national chemical safety efforts.
- Summarizes information collected on how countries domestically apply precaution in chemicals management through structured information requests to governments and interviews with selected active members in IFCS

Objectives

- To understand similarities and differences in how precautionary decisions (or decisions in circumstances of uncertainty) are made across countries;
- What tools and approaches countries use to apply precaution in chemicals management;
- How policy, regulatory and scientific processes support precautionary decision-making in the context of chemicals management;
- The challenges and needs for applying precaution in the context of chemicals management;
- Varying perceptions with its application.

Approach

- Goal – diversity of information from various regions and stakeholders
- Ten semi-structured 45 minute interviews of approximately 45 minutes to one hour were conducted with active members in IFCS representing governments (6) and NGOs (4) (industry (2), public interest (1) and labor (1)) from all IFCS regions.

Approach

- An information request form (a survey) was developed with support of the session Working Group, translated to Spanish and French, and sent out to all IFCS national focal points, the Forum Standing Committee, and the IFCS contact database asking for responses. A total of 46 surveys were received, representing 40 governments and 6 NGOs.
- Government responses: 9 from Africa, 5 from Asia and the Pacific, 9 from Central and Eastern Europe, 8 from Latin America and the Caribbean, and 9 from Western Europe and Other Countries.

Limitations

- The process was intended to be a scoping level exercise to examine the range of input from different regions and stakeholders as to the application of precaution decision-making under uncertainty.
- Not meant to be an in-depth empirical analysis.
- Not intended to represent a full diversity of opinions or a statistically representative sample.
- The depth of responses received from countries varied significantly

But...

- There is clearly a range of opinions with regards to precaution and its application and while some countries explicitly refer to precaution in policy and decision-making, in others it is an implicit consideration.
- The information received through the collection process does represent a range of perspectives from different regions, countries and stakeholders.

Common Themes - A

- *There is a wide range of processes used for applying precaution within and across countries and regions.*
 - Precaution is applied in many ways depending on the country, region, and stakeholder group.
 - In developed countries precaution is often applied to prevention of risks with chronic and highly uncertain health implications.
 - In developing countries precaution is frequently applied to prevention of acute events and end of life chemicals concerns, such as pesticide poisonings, transport accidents, and chemical stockpiles
 - broad concurrence of opinion among the responders and interviewees as to the importance of the concept of precaution – taking preventive action in the face of uncertain risks.

Common Themes - B

- *Precaution is most often implicit in chemicals regulation at the national level though in some cases is explicitly referenced.*
 - Few have established legislation or policies that explicitly call for applying precaution in chemicals management.
 - Many countries implicitly refer to precautionary approaches in their national environmental and sustainable development policies, or in their constitutions
 - Precaution is currently applied on a relatively ad hoc and inconsistent basis though there may be established procedures, particularly in developed countries, for undertaking the scientific assessment process.

Common Themes - C

- *Countries have developed a variety of implicit or explicit means to implement precaution domestically.*
 - wide range of tools and approaches used by countries and other stakeholders for implementing precaution either implicitly or explicitly
 - Tools used in developed countries tended to be more detailed and technical (than those used in developing countries, which focused more on impact assessment, hazard identification, and communication.
 - In both developed and developing countries, stakeholder engagement was seen as an essential part of applying precaution.
 - Both developed and developing countries noted that scientific information is a prerequisite for taking precaution.

Common Themes - D

- *Developing countries have a strong interest in applying precaution but face substantial challenges that inhibit its application in practice.*
 - Some noted that taking precaution is of particular importance in their countries which do not have sufficient financial and technical resources to undertake detailed risk assessments.
 - Common set of challenges (affecting both decisions under uncertainty and when there is a degree of certainty)
 - Many challenges overlap with developed countries

Challenges

- Lack of coordination nationally;
- Lack of scientific and socioeconomic analysis tools;
- Lack of support for small- and medium-sized enterprises
- Lack of information/scientific resources (even in universities),
- Lack of resources for implementation and enforcement of precautionary policies over the short and longer terms;
- Lack of capacity of government officials and local authorities in chemicals assessment and management;
- Lack of legal infrastructure and authority to undertake precautionary decisions or oblige those creating risks to undertake preventive actions;
- Lack of financial resources to conduct research, provide technical support, and invest in safer technologies.
- Lack of public awareness and public leadership

Common Themes - E

- *There are numerous common needs for better understanding and more effective application of precaution in chemicals management decision-making across countries and regions.*
 - Information on chemical toxicity and risks
 - Tools for decision-making under uncertainty (including socioeconomic assessment and assessment of alternative technologies),
 - Case examples of applying precaution in practice were common needs across countries.
 - Technical support to business (particularly small and medium sized companies)
 - Local capacity

Conclusions

- Most of responses to the information request and interviews indicated an interest in continued dialogue and international cooperation on more detailed questions of how decision-making under uncertainty can be enhanced.
- In particular, several developed and developing countries indicated a strong interest in on-going dialogue to address these needs internationally through:
 - case examples of precaution in chemicals management
 - development of a database of tools for decision-making under uncertainty;
 - training of government officials in the use of databases and tools for applying precaution.