



Information Exchange Network on Capacity Building for the Sound Management of Chemicals

Report for the Second Preparatory Committee Meeting for the development of a Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM PrepCom2)

Submitted by: INFOCAP Central Coordinating Node

INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION EXCHANGE - A KEY COMPONENT OF SAICM

The First Preparatory Committee meeting for the development of a SAICM (SAICM PrepCom1) identified information exchange as a key tool for capacity building, and for increasing international coordination and cooperation. INFOCAP was specifically recognized in this regard. The European Union recommended using INFOCAP for the creation of a database to exchange information related to ongoing and planned activities, and INFOCAP was included in the concrete elements for a SAICM.

INFOCAP is now operational. As mandated by governments and organizations through the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS), INFOCAP is a voluntary system where countries and organizations are responsible for adding and entering their own information. Many countries and organizations have already posted information.

In overseeing the development of INFOCAP, the INFOCAP Lead Sponsors have identified a number of challenges related to international information exchange mechanisms. During discussions concerning capacity building and information exchange, the SAICM Preparatory Committee may wish to consider the experiences and lessons learned from the development of INFOCAP. In particular, the PrepCom may wish to consider:

- How should existing and new international information exchange activities be linked to and complement INFOCAP?
- What could be done to ensure that countries and organizations actively contribute to an international information exchange mechanism on capacity building? Should the operation of such a mechanism be facilitated through conventions or other agreements?

For Further Information

Please visit www.infocap.info, or contact the Central Coordinating Node at: +41 22 791 3873/1334

Following is a report on the development of INFOCAP to provide background information for discussions at the Second Preparatory Committee meeting (PrepCom2).

What is INFOCAP?

INFOCAP is an internet-based network designed to facilitate the exchange and public accessibility of information related to chemicals management capacity building. This network was designed to enhance coordination and cooperation among countries and organizations which are providing or receiving assistance related to the sound management of chemicals.

INFOCAP acts as a gateway to information on capacity building for the sound management of chemicals. It allows users to post and find information regarding country National Chemicals Management Profiles, Priorities and Action Plans; sources of potential support for chemicals management projects; past, on-going and planned chemicals management projects; chemicals management guidance and training materials; and, key contacts in the field of chemical safety.

INFOCAP is a unique information exchange mechanism, as it enables users to search for information by country, across a wide range of materials (i.e. from National Profiles to training materials), and according to specific categories (e.g. hazard and risk assessment) and key words (e.g. obsolete chemicals). INFOCAP provides summary information about a wide range of capacity building activities and acts as an entry point and directory for more detailed information.

Background and Mandate for INFOCAP

Discussions about the need for a coordinated approach to information exchange on chemicals management capacity building started in 1996. A UNEP Report from the First Session of the Government Designated Group of Experts on Further Measures to Reduce the Risks from a Limited Number of Hazardous Chemicals (UNEP/PIC/EC/1/3/July 1996), recommended that the Governing Council of UNEP "Call upon IFCS to identify country needs for capacity-building for the sound management of chemicals and recommend providing a mechanism to encourage partnerships between recipients and donors of technical assistance to help coordinate these activities." At their 19th session (1997), the UNEP Governing Council invited governments, IGOs, and the IFCS to review the capacity building recommendations in the report of the Expert Group and to consider taking action to implement them.

The development of an Information Exchange Network on Capacity Building for the Sound Management of Chemicals was supported at the third Inter-sessional Meeting of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) in 1998. At its third session, held in October 2000, in Brazil, the IFCS officially endorsed the development of INFOCAP, and support for the network was re-affirmed in November 2003 at IFCS Forum IV in Bangkok, Thailand. INFOCAP is endorsed by, and receives guidance from, the IFCS. It follows the general IFCS principles of cooperation, i.e. the involvement of, and partnership among, governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations.

INFOCAP Oversight and Development

INFOCAP has been developed by, and is currently overseen by several Lead Sponsors and a Steering Group.

The Lead Sponsors for INFOCAP are: The Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS); The European Commission through the European Chemicals Bureau (EC/ECB); The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR); and, The Organization for Economic Cooperation and

Development (OECD) (Collaborating Partner). The IFCS Secretariat currently serves as a Central Coordinating Node for INFOCAP, providing support in maintaining INFOCAP, and in communicating with participating countries and organizations.

The Steering Group consists of representatives from of eight governments, two NGOs, and 8 IGOs. Both the Lead Sponsors and Steering Group members have responsibilities for developing and maintaining INFOCAP, and for raising awareness about INFOCAP.

Organizations and countries participating in INFOCAP are asked to designate Points of Contact, to coordinate regular information contributions to INFOCAP, and to ensure that the information posted is relevant and complete. Points of Contact also assist with raising awareness activities.

The European Commission has provided substantial support for the implementation of INFOCAP. The European Commission is currently funding a three year (2004-2007) INFOCAP awareness raising and training initiative for developing countries and non-governmental organizations, which will contribute greatly to the further implementation of INFOCAP.

International Recognition of INFOCAP

One of the key objectives highlighted in the Terms of Reference is that INFOCAP was developed to: "...provide a general framework for ensuring linkages among global, regional and national capacity building activities, including those facilitated through the IFCS regional groups and in the context of international agreements, such as ILO Convention 170, the Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent, the Stockholm Convention on POPs, and others." In this regard, in addition to SAICM PrepCom1, INFOCAP has been recognized in the following international meetings and governing council decisions:

- *The UNEP Governing Council Decision 21/7* requested that the Executive Director "...assist in the development of an information exchange network on capacity-building for the sound management of chemicals";
- The Final Report of the *6th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention*, held in Geneva from 9-13 December 2002, states that: "Several representatives drew attention to a presentation that had been made in the course of the Conference by the Information Exchange Network on Capacity-building for the Sound Management of Chemicals (INFOCAP), describing INFOCAP as an essential tool for capacity-building over entire life-cycles, including final disposal."
- The Draft Report of the *7th meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Persistent Organic Pollutants* draws participants attention to the launch of INFOCAP and invites participants to regularly use and contribute to the network (final wording needed).
- The Draft Report of the *9th meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Persistent Organic Pollutants* notes that "...the Information Exchange Network on Capacity Building for the Sound Management of Chemicals (INFOCAP) could successfully support assistance" related to the technical implementation of chemicals conventions (final wording needed).
- The Final Report from the WSSD Global Partnership Meeting on the Globally Harmonized System for Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) notes that in developing the GHS website, "UNITAR will ensure full complementarity of its efforts with INFOCAP."

- The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) for the Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent has taken note of INFOCAP. At the ninth INC, held in October 2002, it was noted that INFOCAP could successfully support technical assistance for certain areas of the Convention. At the tenth INC, held in November 2003, it was recommended that the Rotterdam Convention clearing-house should coordinate with INFOCAP to avoid duplication of effort. Decision INC-10/7 on the strategic approach to technical assistance, invites countries to identify their capacity-building and technical assistance needs, and also invites donors to inform developing countries of their activities, through the INFOCAP network set up under the IFCS.

Status of INFOCAP Development and Contributions

Lessons Learned and Challenges Encountered

The pilot phase of the INFOCAP web site was launched in July 2003. There are already a considerable number of contributions to the network areas. Over 85 Points of Contact have been designated and are now listed on the INFOCAP web site.

An informal review of INFOCAP was recently undertaken in order to provide an interim assessment of the network during its pilot phase. The review was conducted through a questionnaire distributed to INFOCAP Steering Group members, IOMC organizations, and several selected countries where INFOCAP has been introduced. Feedback on INFOCAP was also collected through informal discussions with representatives from the IFCS Secretariat, WHO, ILO, the Secretariat of the Basel Convention, UNEP Chemicals, and UNITAR. Although the response rate to the written questionnaire was lower than desired, the results of the overall review provide some useful guidance and include a variety of views and user experiences. Some of the challenges and barriers to using INFOCAP, as identified through the review, include:

- Awareness:

Informal discussions conducted during the INFOCAP review indicate that, despite the recognition of INFOCAP in a range of intergovernmental meetings, and Steering Group and Lead Sponsor efforts, there is still a lack of awareness in some organizations about INFOCAP, its purpose and how it works.

- Accessibility:

Some developing countries noted that they have difficulties in accessing INFOCAP as they have limited and, in some cases, no access to computers with internet connection. Some countries suggested that language may be a barrier to use, as the INFOCAP web site is currently only available in English.

- IGO Participation:

Informal dialogue with several IOMC organizations indicated that potential barriers to use amongst United Nations organizations may be:

- lack of staff resources to enter existing information into INFOCAP
- competitive fundraising process for activities and programmes
- policies in some organizations to only provide information via their own web site

The results of this review will help to inform the INFOCAP Lead Sponsors and Steering Group on possible future INFOCAP enhancements and implementation approach.

Next Steps

The pilot phase of INFOCAP will continue until the IFCS Forum V meeting, to be held in September 2006 in Budapest, Hungary. At Forum V, proposals will be made on the next phase of operation, including the selection of a permanent host organization or institution for INFOCAP. For the long term, a sustainable support basis for INFOCAP must be found. In the next stages, the development of French and Spanish versions of the web site will be considered.