MSP Institute - Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Sustainable Development e.V.

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UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment  
Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division  
UNOG-OHCHR  
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

**Berlin, October 13, 2022**

**Submission: input for the upcoming thematic report on women, girls and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment**

Dear Mr. David Boyd, Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment,

Thank you for your call for submissions to support preparations for your upcoming report on women, girls and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

We very much appreciate the opportunity to share with you herewith information relating to gender equality and chemicals management.

Since 2017, we at MSP Institute (<http://msp-institute.org/>, a charitable association based in Berlin), have been doing advocacy work for the integration of gender in the SAICM Beyond 2020 process. Information on our projects, background materials, position papers and webinars are available at our project website: <http://gender-chemicals.org/>.

For further information or if you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact us.

Best regards,

Anna Holthaus and Minu Hemmati, MSP Institute

**Women, girls and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment**

**without hazardous chemicals**

**PROBLEM SITUATION**

**The pollution crisis is adversely impacting women and girls** due to biological and social reasons:

Biological dimension: Women’s bodies are often affected differently by certain chemicals than men’s. Women tend to store more environmental pollutants in their body tissues than men due to a higher body fat content. In addition to puberty, women live through other phases of life such as pregnancy, breastfeeding and menopause, during which their bodies become more susceptible to health damages from chemicals due to the significant physiological changes. Furthermore, chemical exposure can also be passed on to the next generation. This chemical exposure happens through the placenta, as well as during breast-feeding, and that is why women in childbearing age needs special protection ([UNDP, 2011](https://www.undp.org/publications/chemicals-and-gender); [SAICM and IPEN 2020](https://saicmknowledge.org/library/women-chemicals-and-sdgs)).

Social dimension: chemical exposure is influenced by various social gender aspects and women and men are affected differently because of their gendered roles in society. Women for example are more likely to work in the care sector and come more often into contact with chemicals from cleaning agents and cosmetics or care products then men. Additionally, the division of labour also causes differences in exposure within individual sectors: men are often more directly exposed because they more often perform risky tasks, and women’s occupational diseases are on the other hand often under-diagnosed, under-reported and under-compensated because their exposition is often more indirect and over a long time period. For example, women in agricultural are more affected by indirect exposure, e.g. from harvesting and handling chemically-treated plants or contaminated clothing, while men are often more directly exposed, e.g. when mixing chemicals. ([UNDP, 2011](https://www.undp.org/publications/chemicals-and-gender); [ILO, 2021](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/safety-and-health-at-work/resources-library/publications/WCMS_811455/lang--en/index.htm); [MSP, 2017](http://gender-chemicals.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017-12-04-Gender_and_Chemicals_IssuePaper_MSP_Institute.pdf)).

**PRINCIPAL BARRIERS**

One of the biggest principal barriers is **the nearly complete lack of sex- and gender-disaggregated data and research** on pollution and toxicology:

* The need for gender-disaggregated information is crucial: “In the absence of such data, environmental analyses remain inadequate and partial, and establishing baselines, monitoring progress and assessing outcomes is almost impossible.” ([UNDP, 2016](https://www.unep.org/resources/report/global-gender-and-environment-outlook-ggeo))
* “[…], men and women are exposed to differing levels of toxic chemicals and they have different health reactions when they are exposed to toxic chemicals. Thus, gender is a critical component to consider when formulating policies and programmes in the area of sound management of chemicals. However, current health and exposure models have not been targeted by gender. Going forward, it is important to collect epidemiological health data on chemical exposures that are gender-specific.“ (UNDP, 2011)
* “Overall, there is limited data or hard numbers on how different gender roles differentially expose men and women to hazardous chemicals.” ([SAICM, 2017](http://www.saicm.org/Portals/12/documents/meetings/IP2/IP_2_6_gender_document.pdf)).
* “There is limited hard data and exact figures on how the different gender roles expose women and men in a different manner to chemicals. More research is required to attain information such as absolute numbers of exposed women, exposure pathways, typical chemicals and their effect on women’s health.” ([WECF, 2016](https://www.wecf.org/77912/)).
* “It is […] important to have access to both gender- and sex-disaggregated data, i.e. data and information collected that records responses separately for women and men and presents the results in a way that makes it possible to identify differences between these two groups. When analyzing issues related to gender equality in the workforce, gender-disaggregated data could for example include the percentage of the workforce that identify as male/female and their salary levels, whereas sex-disaggregated data would focus on the sex-specific differences in e.g. impact of chemical exposure at the workplace. Only when both types of data are available can progress towards gender equality be tracked and evaluated. However, gender-disaggregated data in labour statistics is unfortunately often lacking for occupational exposure to hazardous chemicals. This lack of data makes occupational epidemiology challenging in many cases.” ([SAICM/IPEN 2020](https://saicmknowledge.org/library/women-chemicals-and-sdgs))
* According to the General Comment No. 25 by the [CESCR](https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cescr/pages/cescrindex.aspx) “a gender-sensitive approach is of particular relevance to the right to sexual and reproductive health” (paragraph 33). This is particularly true with as “*exposure to certain hazardous chemicals has been shown to effect sexual functioning and fertility in both women and men, as well as developmental disorders in the foetus and o spring. Preconception and prenatal exposure to toxic chemicals is a critical issue for both women and men of childbearing age*” ([UNDP, 2019](https://www.unep.org/resources/report/global-chemicals-outlook-ii-legacies-innovative-solutions)).

**Other principle barriers include:**

***Gaps in understanding gender***

* Women’s rights are human rights: gender equality is a precondition and an indicator for sustainable development (SDG 5). These issues are complex, multi-dimensional, cross-sectoral, and understandings of gender continually evolves.
* Gender mainstreaming is the internationally agreed strategy since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), but it is rarely understood as a strategic opportunity.

***Gaps in representation***

* Women are underrepresented at all levels of political decision making;
* Women are underrepresented in chemical sciences;
* And women often have less decision-making power at work(places) in the chemical and chemistry-related industry.

***Gaps in implementation***

* Women are often less well reached by projects and communication on chemical safety;
* Women’s specific experiences and expertise as well as feminist perspectives (by members of any gender) are often not acknowledged in chemicals management;
* And women’s businesses and start-ups in the chemical industry face many structural barriers and less funding. (see [MSP Institute, 2021](http://gender-chemicals.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/two-page_Summary_Webinar_Series_2020.pdf))

**EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES FOR BETTER POLICY MAKING**

**GenChemRoadMAP – a project to initiate concrete steps towards gender mainstreaming in national chemicals management in Germany and beyond (2021-2022)**

To minimise negative impacts of chemicals on people and the environment as chemical production increases, future chemicals management must integrate the needs and realities of life for all. For this to happen, the gender dimensions of international and national chemicals policy must be acknowledged and taken into account in practice.

The linkages between gender and chemicals are receiving increasing attention in international agreements on chemicals management. In national chemicals management, however, ideas and approaches for a practical implementation of gender mainstreaming are still lacking, as many of the actors involved, such as research institutions, the chemical industry, governmental as well as non-governmental organisations, often have only a vague idea of the potential that tools such as gender analysis offer.

The MSP Institute conducted the “GenChemRoadMap” project in 2021 and 2022. The project aimed to help initiate and build support for the systematic integration of gender into national chemicals management with the Gender and Chemicals Road Map, a guide for SAICM National Focal Points. The road map was piloted in Germany in collaboration with the German SAICM National Focal Point, Dr Hans Christian Stolzenberg, and in consultation and collaboration with other German stakeholders. The following article presents a brief summary of the project activities as well as the first results from the pilot phase in Germany:

From April-May 2021, the [Gender and Chemicals Road Map](http://gender-chemicals.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Gender-Road-Map-final.pdf) and the associated [Workbook](http://gender-chemicals.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/GenChemRoadMap_Workbook_print_Version_final-.pdf) were developed. The Road Map offers an overview how to mainstream gender into chemicals management at national level and the workbook offers a step-by-step guidance for the implementation.

T[he kick-off event for the pilot phase in Germany](http://gender-chemicals.org/event-report-roundtable-genchemroadmap) was the next step. A round table meeting with stakeholders took place on July 20, 2021, organized by Dr Hans-Christian Stolzenberg, the German SAICM National Focal Point at the Federal Environment Agency, and the MSP Institute. More than 40 participants from industry, governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as professional associations and science followed the invitation and engaged in a first exchange on gender and gender equity among diverse stakeholders of chemicals management in Germany.

The event was followed by an [international workshop on Gender in National Chemicals Policies](http://gender-chemicals.org/event-report-international-webinar-the-gender-and-chemicals-road-map-veranstaltungsbericht-internationales-webinar-zur-gender-and-chemicals-road-map) for SAICM National Focal Points on Sept. 24, 2021. The aim of the workshop was to generate interest in the linkages between gender and chemicals, to present and discuss the Gender and Chemicals Road Map, and to facilitate exchange on gender aspects among SAICM National Focal Points. A total of 39 participants from government organizations, academia, civil society and industry attended the virtual workshop, including about 20 National Focal Points from different parts of the world.

An initial implementation of the steps included in the Gender and Chemicals Road Map took place from October 2021 to April 2022 as part of the pilot phase in Germany: In October, the German SAICM National Focal Point and the MSP Institute started with a core working group of interested stakeholders. The working group held several virtual meetings to take stock of the integration of gender in German chemicals management and was able to gather initial ideas for optimizing the integration of gender. This was done along five action areas based on the questions for gender analysis, step 3 of the Gender and Chemicals Road Map. To narrow the scope of the work, the team focused on the topic of chemicals in building materials. The gender analysis highlighted that while several projects and policy activities in chemicals management in Germany do address gender aspects, the lack of gender-specific data, or the advancement of women in chemicals management, a strategic overview to improve gender mainstreaming in chemicals management has been missing to date.  The team then conducted a Gender Impact Assessment, step 4 of the Gender and Chemicals Road Map, including secondary research as well as expert interviews on the gender impacts of a policy proposal currently under discussion: the introduction of a building resource passport in Germany. The assessment showed how the information needs of building owners on the topic of chemical safety can be taken into account from a gender perspective, and how the policy instrument could be designed effectively.

A summary of the results and experiences of the pilot phase in Germany can be found in the [flyer](http://gender-chemicals.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Flyer_Pilot_Germany_GenChemRoadMap.pdf), and a detailed presentation of the results and experiences can be found in the [presentation](http://gender-chemicals.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Presentation_Pilot-Phase_Germany_GenChemRoadMap.pdf). The project once again highlighted the relevance and potential of integrating gender aspects for sustainable chemicals management

**Side Event: Gender Mainstreaming for Sustainable Chemistry (July, 2022)**

A Side Event on Gender Mainstreaming for Sustainable Chemistry was held on July 14, 2022 during the UN High-level Political Forum 2022, and co-hosted by the German Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) and the MSP Institute.

The intention of this side event was to increase the understanding of the interconnections between gender and sustainable chemistry amongst stakeholders; and to enable an exchange on how to better address issues of gender inequalities in chemicals management at all policy levels. Panelists shared challenges as well as best-practice examples on the integration of gender in chemicals management, and in sustainable chemistry, in the context of SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals.

More than forty participants from different regions and stakeholder groups participated at the side event (governments, non-governmental organizations, inter-governmental organizations, in- dustry and academia).

A [summary](http://gender-chemicals.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Summary-HLPF-Side-Event_Gender-Mainstreaming-for-Sustainable-Chemistry.pdf) documents the key points and policy recommendations that were discussed.

**🡪 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

To ensure the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment for women and girls countries, businesses and all relevant stakeholders must:

🡪 **ensure the protection of women and girls** from exposure to toxic chemicals;

🡪 provide much more and more systematic support for **gender-responsive research, analysis methods and data collection** in regard to chemicals exposure, wherever relevant; and businesses, unions, research institutions, and other stakeholders in a position to do so should collect and publish gender-disaggregated data;

🡪 strengthen governments’, businesses and all stakeholders’ efforts to **mainstream gender approaches and methods** into chemicals policies and practices;

🡪 include gender equality and **recognize women and girls as agents of change** in their sustainability concepts and approaches for chemicals management.