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**Rotterdam Convention on the Prior
Informed Consent Procedure for Certain
Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in
International Trade
Conference of the Parties
Fourth meeting
Rome, 27–31 October 2008
Item 6 (c) of the provisional agenda***

**Issues arising out of previous meetings of the
Conference of the Parties: national and regional
delivery of technical assistance**

Regional and national delivery of technical assistance

Note by the Secretariat

1. By decision RC-3/6, the Secretariat was requested to report to the Conference of the Parties at its fourth meeting on experience gained in the regional and national delivery of technical assistance.
2. Annexed to the present note is a detailed report on technical assistance activities undertaken in support of the ratification and implementation of the Rotterdam Convention pursuant to decision RC-3/6.
3. The Conference of the Parties may wish:
 - (a) To note the progress made by the Secretariat in the implementation of decision RC-3/6;
 - (b) To acknowledge the valuable support of those countries that have made contributions to the voluntary trust fund, thereby enabling technical assistance activities to be undertaken;
 - (c) To invite Parties to report on the actions that they have taken to provide technical assistance to other Parties pursuant to article 16 of the Convention on technical assistance.

* UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/1.

Annex

Report on progress in the implementation of decision RC-3/6 on regional and national delivery of technical assistance

Background

1. By decision RC-3/6, the Conference of the Parties adopted a programme of work for the biennium 2007–2008. A copy of the decision can be found in annex I to the report of the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties (UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.3/26).
2. The programme of work was developed in response to needs identified by Parties, building on previous technical assistance activities and the needs and priorities identified therein. The approach taken was to describe the range of technical assistance activities available and to identify the Parties that might be expected to benefit most from such activities and the partners that might work with the Secretariat in delivering the activities. This approach marked a move away from regionally-based training to activities targeting individual countries or small groups of countries with a focus on those actions deemed necessary for Parties to implement the Convention fully. It placed greater responsibility on Governments to define their technical assistance needs and to be proactive in seeking assistance to meet those needs.
3. At its fourth meeting, the Conference of the Parties will consider a programme of work for technical assistance activities in support of the Convention for the period 2009–2010. In preparing for discussion on this matter, the Secretariat has, in addition to the present report, prepared a summary of the national, subregional and regional meetings held in support of the ratification and implementation of the Convention over the period 2007–2008, including the nature of the meetings, venues, participating countries and numbers of participants (UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/INF.11).

Introduction

4. The purpose of the present paper is to review the work undertaken in 2007 and 2008 with respect to the implementation of decision RC-3/6. The report comprises two chapters: chapter I provides an overview of the activities undertaken over the period 2007–2008 for each of the five main elements of the programme of work, while chapter II briefly summarizes the results of the activities to date and outlines some lessons learned and challenges to be faced as a basis for proposing a programme of technical assistance activities for the period 2009–2010.
5. During the biennium 2007–2008, a lack of contributions to the voluntary trust fund and the need to set aside funds to support participants' travel to the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties hindered the planning of technical assistance activities in the first part of 2008. One result of this lack of secure funding was that a number of activities provided for in decision RC-3/6 and planned by the Secretariat had to be postponed.

I. Overview of the progress made in the regional and national delivery of technical assistance over the period 2007–2008

6. The present chapter considers activities undertaken over the period 2007–2008 in support of the implementation of the Convention. It focuses on the activities undertaken by the Secretariat concerning each of the five main elements of the programme of work (A through E) set out in decision RC-3/6. A brief description of the purpose and structure of the activities for each element is provided, followed, where appropriate, by a summary of the key outputs.

Resource kit

7. The resource kit is a comprehensive source of information on the Convention and has been developed with a range of end-users in mind, including the general public, designated national authorities and stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Convention. It includes elements to assist in awareness-raising activities, detailed technical information and training materials aimed at

facilitating implementation of the Convention. Copies of the resource kit and its various elements have been circulated widely.

8. A number of the general information documents contained in the resource kit were updated to reflect experience gained and documents already available were reprinted. Many of the key documents are now available in all six United Nations languages. Further details can be found in document UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/21 Activities of the Secretariat.

9. The prototype of an interactive e-learning course, intended to facilitate continuous and self-directed training at the national level in the implementation of the Convention's key elements, was field-tested and will be made available on a trial basis as a CD-ROM.

10. Feedback has been sought from designated national authorities during national and subregional meetings to ensure the resource kit's continued usefulness. An evaluation form has also been developed and included in the resource kit as a means for users to provide comments to the Secretariat.

11. Copies of the resource kit and its various elements have been distributed to all new designated national authorities, workshop participants, various regional partners including the regional offices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), FAO in-country representatives and others, such as the World Customs Organization and the World Trade Organization. The resource kit has also been posted on the Convention website.

National and subregional meetings

12. National and subregional meetings were held in three interrelated areas: working with individual countries or small groups of countries to identify elements of national action plans or strategies for the implementation of the Convention; thematic meetings that tackle specific priority areas such as trade and severely hazardous pesticide formulations and, lastly, fostering cooperation between designated national authorities at the regional and subregional levels.

B (i) Identifying the elements of national action plans or strategies for the implementation of the Convention

13. The overall objective of the planning meetings was to facilitate national dialogue between relevant stakeholders as the basis for identifying the key elements in a national action plan or a strategy for the implementation of the Convention. Prior to participating in the meeting, each Party was required to prepare a national report on how chemicals were managed in the country, including the status of implementation of the Convention and the key challenges faced.

14. The meetings were intended to help countries to review systematically the status of implementation of the Convention at the national level. An element key to the meetings' success was the bringing together of a range of stakeholders involved in implementation, such as the ministries of agriculture, health, environment, industry and commerce and Customs authorities. The meetings provided an opportunity to review in detail a Party's obligations under the Convention and to consider what was to be done, by whom and whether and how things could be improved. The meetings were also used to consider how work on the Rotterdam Convention could be integrated with continuing chemicals management activities in a country, together with relevant regional and international agreements such as the Basel and Stockholm Conventions or the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management.

15. A set of tables for each of the Convention's key elements was completed during the meeting to provide a suitable record of the discussions. A summary and introduction, prepared by a small drafting group, contextualized the results of the discussions as reflected in the completed tables and highlighted the status of implementation of the Convention in each country, the key challenges and how they could be taken up, the key conclusions, priorities for action and the next steps to be taken. The summary and introduction prepared by the drafting group, together with the tables completed in the breakout groups, constituted the primary report of the meeting. The report and the associated priorities for action served as the basis for a possible national action plan or strategy for the implementation of the Convention. The report could also assist donors in identifying areas for assistance and contribute to the identification of priorities for action between countries within a region.

16. By decision RC-3/6, the Conference of the Parties agreed that up to three national and five subregional meetings could be convened in 2007 and 2008. In line with the view that technical assistance activities should be country-driven, the Secretariat compiled a list of Parties that had yet to develop a national plan or strategy on the implementation of the Convention. As of August 2006, some 54 developing country Parties across the seven Prior Informed Consent (PIC) regions were eligible to participate in the meetings.
17. In November 2006, the official contact points and designated national authorities in 38 of those countries (in three PIC regions: Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia) were provided with a concept note outlining the purpose of the meeting and its expected outcomes and invited to express interest in convening such a meeting. A total of 32 developing country Parties responded within the given timeframe.
18. Nine national meetings were convened between 2007 and 2008. In cooperation with the FAO regional offices in Accra, Bangkok and Santiago, five national meetings were convened: three in 2007 (held in Thailand in April, in Pakistan in June and in Mexico in November) and two in 2008 (held in Nigeria in January and in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in April). In cooperation with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, national meetings were convened in Guinea (March 2007) and in Cote d'Ivoire (January 2008). Further meetings will be convened by the end of 2008 in Namibia and Togo.
19. Six subregional meetings involving between two and five countries were also convened. Participating countries were invited to send up to eight participants from the various ministries involved in the implementation of the Convention. In addition to allowing for the identification of the elements of national plans or strategies on implementation, the meetings gave participating countries an opportunity to share experiences and set the stage for further subregional cooperation. In conjunction with the FAO regional offices in Accra, Bridgetown, Cairo and Santiago, four subregional meetings were held in Africa: in Nairobi in January 2007 (for Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda* and United Republic of Tanzania); in Accra in September 2007 (for Gambia, Ghana and Liberia); in Dakar (for Mali and Senegal) and in Libreville (for Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Gabon) in November 2007. Two subregional meetings were also held in Latin America and the Caribbean: one in San Salvador in October 2007 (for Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama) and the other in Belize City in November 2007 (for Belize and Dominica).
20. Two other subregional meetings are planned in 2008, subject to the availability of resources: one in Asia (Malaysia and Philippines) and one in Central Europe (Armenia and Moldova).
21. Reports of each of the meetings were distributed to the participants, official contact points, FAO representatives in each country and FAO and UNEP regional offices. They were also posted on the Convention website.
22. Participants were given the opportunity to evaluate the meetings in terms of whether the objectives were met and were requested to comment and make suggestions on the meetings' structure and presentations. Those comments were taken into consideration and the meetings' structure modified accordingly.

Key outcomes

23. Nine national planning meetings will have been completed by the end of 2008. As of June 2008, 19 countries will have participated in the seven subregional meetings. As a result, 28 Parties will have reviewed the status of implementation of the Rotterdam Convention and identified elements of national action plans or strategies for its ratification and implementation. These plans include an understanding of what needs to be done, by whom and when. They also provide a basis for identifying priorities for follow-up actions.

* signifies that the country was a non-Party when the meeting took place.

24. Of the 32 developing country Parties eligible for national planning meetings as of November 2006, 6 could not be accommodated by the end of 2008. Based on the experience gained, it was recognized that it would be more beneficial for these countries (Burundi, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar and Mauritius) to attend awareness-raising workshops or meetings of designated national authorities than to participate in national planning meetings.

25. The remaining 16 developing country Parties and Parties with economies in transition identified as eligible for national action plan meetings in November 2006 but that did not express interest in participating in such meetings during the period 2007–2008, together with any new developing country Parties, will be considered during the biennium 2009–2010.

National seminars in follow-up to subregional planning meetings

26. As a means of ensuring wider national acceptance of the outcomes and, in particular, the priorities identified at subregional meetings, Parties that participated in such meetings were offered the opportunity to convene national follow-up seminars of between one and two days' duration. The purpose of the seminars was not to redraft the subregional workshop's outcomes but rather to disseminate those outcomes to a wider national audience, review progress made and revisit priorities, timelines and responsibilities.

27. To facilitate the preparation of the seminars, the Secretariat provided interested countries with some financial resources, a concept note and a possible draft agenda, together with relevant background documentation. FAO regional officers took a lead role in working with designated national authorities in developing and delivering the seminars.

28. By decision RC-3/6, the Conference of the Parties agreed that up to 20 national follow-up seminars could be convened in 2007 and 2008. In 2007, national follow-up seminars or country visits took place in 12 of the 26 countries that participated in the subregional meetings in 2006 and expressed interest in such follow-up (Cuba*, Kuwait, Lesotho*, Malawi*, Morocco*, Mozambique*, Nicaragua*, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Swaziland*, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen).

29. In 2008, Uruguay and 10 of the 17 developing countries that participated in the subregional meetings in 2007 expressed interest in convening national follow-up seminars (Belize, Cameroon, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Oman and United Republic of Tanzania). The FAO regional offices have worked with the designated national authorities in these countries to schedule these meetings by the end of 2008.

Key outcomes

30. Overall, 23 of the 43 countries eligible for national follow-up seminars or country visits in 2007 and 2008 expressed interest. National seminars were planned in all 23 countries by the end of 2008. In February 2008, Cuba, one of the seven non-Parties that participated in the meetings in 2007 and 2008, ratified the Convention.

B (ii) Thematic meetings: national and subregional meetings on specific issues

31. There were two priority issues for the period 2007–2008: trade aspects of the Convention and severely hazardous pesticide formulations. At its third meeting, the Conference of the Parties agreed that up to three national thematic meetings could be convened in 2007 and to work in conjunction with the Pesticide Action Network on severely hazardous pesticide formulations. The Conference of the Parties also agreed that up to three trade meetings involving trade partners could be convened in 2008. The Secretariat developed a concept note and curriculum for each of the meetings to assist countries in developing agendas for the individual meetings.

Trade meetings

32. Two types of workshops were developed, focusing on the trade aspects of the Convention: one for individual exporting countries and the other for exporting countries, together with their principal trade partners (for example, selected importing countries within the exporting country's region or in other regions). The meetings targeted developing country Parties that were major manufacturers and exporters of chemicals.

(a) (i) National trade meetings

33. The objective of the meetings was to facilitate national dialogue between a broad range of stakeholders to develop a working paper that defined the information flow or interactions necessary for the implementation of the Convention's trade-related provisions. The level of detail in the national working papers would be expected to vary between countries and the various elements but, at a minimum, they set out what should be done, the persons responsible and an appropriate timeline.

34. In order to make the most efficient use of the time available participating countries prepared an initial analysis of the national situation prior to the meeting. This included a preliminary draft of the working paper based on an outline provided by the Secretariat. The outline included consideration of the national actions required under the Convention's trade-related provisions (articles 10–13) and a description of the current operational procedures, if any, for implementing the provisions, including how the key players interacted with each other.

35. A broad range of stakeholders drawn from both the government and private sectors, including chemical manufacturers and traders, participated in the meetings. The initial analysis was developed further during the meeting with the goal of adopting the draft working paper at the end of the meeting as the basis for defining national actions and responsibilities in the implementation of the Convention's key trade-related provisions.

36. Two thematic meetings on trade were convened in 2007: one in Brazil in May and the other in China in October. A shortlist of possible candidates for a third national trade meeting was identified in conjunction with the FAO regional offices. Further information, e.g., whether domestically banned or severely restricted chemicals were exported from these countries, was to be collected before following up with the candidate countries regarding their interest in convening such a meeting. The meeting had not been scheduled as of May 2008 as it was subject to the availability of funds.

(a) (ii) Trade partner meetings

37. Based on experience with the national thematic meetings on trade, a curriculum was developed for a further type of workshop focusing on the trade aspects of the Convention for exporting countries and their principal trade partners (e.g., selected importing Parties within the exporting country's region or in other regions). The meetings were intended to provide an opportunity for a country that had developed a working paper through a national trade meeting to receive practical feedback on the effectiveness of its working procedures. It was proposed that such a meeting should be convened in conjunction with China by the end of 2008.

38. A variation of the trade partner meeting was proposed in the form of a joint project with one or more of the member States of the European Union that are exporters of chemicals and a limited number of their principal developing country trading partners. This meeting had not been scheduled as of May 2008 as it was subject to the availability of funds.

Key outcomes

39. Both China and Brazil are major chemical producers and exporters. As a result of the national meetings, they developed working papers setting out the national procedures for managing the export of chemicals subject to the Rotterdam Convention. The working papers or national procedures were developed following open dialogue with key members of the Government and non-government partners involved in chemicals trading. Clarification of the lines of responsibility should help to ensure that participating countries are better able to comply with their obligations as exporting Parties under the Convention. The working papers were to be revised or amended based on experience gained in their implementation.

(b) Severely hazardous pesticide formulations

40. Many Parties that participated in national or subregional planning meetings have identified the need to develop reporting mechanisms for pesticide poisonings as a priority action. Activities in 2007 and 2008 in this important area took two forms: working in partnership with the Pesticide Action Network and working with countries directly.

41. The Pesticide Action Network initiated a three-year programme in January 2005 to strengthen community health monitoring capabilities relevant to pesticide poisonings in five African countries. The project developed new materials and adapted existing materials for pilot use in communities. The programme included national meetings that brought together trainers and representatives from the pilot communities to share results, evaluate the initiative and strategize on the best means to raise awareness and disseminate information on pesticide poisonings. The focus of the cooperation with the Secretariat was on ensuring that appropriate links were made with the designated national authorities and community health monitoring activities in two pilot countries (Togo and United Republic of Tanzania).

42. The principal outcomes of the project included the development of selection criteria for the pilot countries and communities. Community representatives were trained in health monitoring and reporting and the forms for data collection were disseminated, tested and adapted. The timeline and resources available did not permit collection and analysis of data on pesticide poisoning incidents. The project provided useful feedback on the incident report forms (human health and environment) developed under the Convention, which will be taken into consideration in any revision of the forms and instructions.

43. The Secretariat developed a concept note and curriculum for national meetings on severely hazardous pesticide formulations. The approach was intended to facilitate national dialogue between relevant stakeholders on such formulations by reviewing existing information on incidents related to the use of pesticides, elements that should be considered in setting up and improving data collection and reporting mechanisms. A national thematic meeting on severely hazardous pesticide formulations was scheduled to be convened in Ecuador in September 2008. The report of the meeting will be posted on the Convention website as soon as it becomes available.

Key outcomes

44. The experience with the pilot projects in Togo and the United Republic of Tanzania has been captured in two case studies documenting the methodology developed, the data collection process established and the reporting mechanisms. The case studies should facilitate implementation of a similar process in other communities within the two countries and in other countries in the region. The case studies and final report prepared by the Pesticide Action Network will be made available on the Convention website and have been proposed as the basis for a side event at the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

45. Based on the experience gained in working with Ecuador in the delivery of a national meeting on severely hazardous pesticide formulations, the approach will be revised and refined with a view to delivering assistance to other countries in 2009 and 2010.

B (iii) Fostering cooperation between designated national authorities in a given region

46. A concept note and curriculum were developed for subregional and regional meetings of designated national authorities with the overall objective of fostering cooperation and facilitating dialogue between such authorities in a region on the challenges faced in the implementation of the Rotterdam Convention, in addition to sharing experiences and promoting cooperation at the regional or subregional levels in addressing these challenges.

47. The number of participants in any one meeting was limited to 15 to promote open discussion and information-sharing and to facilitate the undertaking of practical work during the meeting, e.g., reviewing the basis for import decisions for chemicals in Annex III to enable Parties that had not yet made decisions on such chemicals to learn from those that had. Similarly, each designated national authority was requested to prepare a brief report on the status of implementation of the Convention, how chemicals were managed in the country and the key challenges faced. The report also was to identify priority issues that the individual designated national authorities would like considered during the meeting. In identifying this list of issues, designated national authorities were encouraged to review the priorities identified in their national or subregional planning meetings. The meetings also provided an opportunity for the Secretariat to seek feedback from designated national authorities regarding information available on the Convention website as well as on the e-learning prototype, drafts of the export notification form and the contents of the resource kit.

48. By decision RC-3/6, the Conference of the Parties agreed that up to 10 subregional meetings of designated national authority might be convened in 2007 and 2008. Based on the PIC regions, language requirements, numbers of designated national authorities and continuing work with Parties in a region, it was proposed that eight regional or subregional designated national authority meetings could be convened as follows: two meetings in Africa; two in Asia; two in Latin America and the Caribbean; one in the Near East and one in Central and Eastern Europe (non-European Union countries).

49. As a first step, designated national authorities in four regions (Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Near East) were contacted and asked to express interest in participating in a regional or subregional meeting. Only those designated national authorities that expressed interest were contacted further.

50. Four designated national authority meetings were convened, involving 52 designated national authorities from 33 countries. Three meetings were convened in 2007: in Africa (English, in Accra, involving 11 designated national authorities from nine countries) and Latin America (Spanish, in Santiago, involving 14 designated national authorities from seven countries) in November and in the Near East (English, in Cairo, involving 13 designated national authorities from 10 countries) in December. The fourth meeting was convened in February 2008 in Asia (English, in Bangkok, involving 14 designated national authorities from seven countries).

51. Subject to the availability of funds, a further meeting is planned tentatively by the end of 2008 in Central and Eastern Europe (Armenia) involving designated national authorities from up to six countries. Additional meetings are planned for Central America (Panama City), involving designated national authorities from up to eight countries; Africa (Dakar), involving designated national authorities from up to 11 countries and Asia, involving designated national authorities from up to eight countries.

52. Reports of the meetings were distributed to the meeting participants, official contact points, the FAO representatives in each country and the FAO and UNEP regional offices. They were also posted on the Convention website as they became available.

53. Participants were given the opportunity to evaluate the meetings in terms of whether the objectives were met and were asked to comment and make suggestions on the meetings' structure and presentations. Those comments were taken into consideration and the meetings' structure modified accordingly.

Key outcomes

54. Designated national authorities from participating countries were given the opportunity to share experiences of their implementation of the Convention and in addressing the challenges faced in its implementation and enforcement. The meetings were an opportunity to identify how work on the Convention could be integrated better into national chemicals management activities and to strengthen cooperation between designated national authorities within a country and between countries in a region or subregion. The meetings also served as a further form of follow-up to the outcome of the national and subregional planning meetings.

55. The Secretariat created a pilot web-based discussion forum for participating countries as a result of the meeting held in Santiago. Depending on the forum's success, it may be expanded to include other Spanish-speaking designated national authorities in the region.

C. Working directly with individual countries on specific issues

56. The way in which individual Parties' specific needs might be met depends on the issue of concern and the Parties involved. In working with Parties to have a better understanding of their needs with regard to the implementation of the Rotterdam Convention, it was anticipated that there would be requests for assistance on specific issues made to the Secretariat.

57. The reports of the national and subregional planning meetings serve to assist countries to identify their needs with regard to the implementation of the Convention. In accordance with the principle that technical assistance should be country-driven, it is the individual country's responsibility to follow up on those areas where assistance might be needed.

58. Four countries (Ecuador, Madagascar, Thailand and United Republic of Tanzania) have followed up their participation in a national or subregional workshop by submitting specific written requests for assistance to the Secretariat. In the case of Madagascar, the proposal was beyond the scope of the Rotterdam Convention and was passed to the secretariat of the Strategic Approach to Chemicals Management for follow-up. In the case of the United Republic of Tanzania, the proposal was to be considered in part in cooperation with the Pesticide Action Network and was also proposed as a project under the FAO Technical Cooperation Programme. Ecuador requested assistance with severely hazardous pesticide formulations and a national thematic meeting focused on this issue is scheduled for June 2008. Thailand prepared a submission under the Strategic Approach to Chemicals Management Quick Start Programme as follow-up to its national meeting.

D. Partners in the regional delivery of technical assistance

59. The Secretariat continued to seek out opportunities to initiate and strengthen cooperation with regional and subregional organizations involved in chemicals management activities. Over the period 2007–2008, substantive cooperation continued with the regional partners listed below.

(i) FAO and UNEP regional offices

60. The informal newsletter sent to the FAO and UNEP regional offices on developments related to the Convention including the technical assistance activities continued to appear on a quarterly basis.

61. FAO regional plant protection officers have continued to play a key role in facilitating and coordinating national and subregional planning meetings and in follow-up with countries that have participated in such meetings. They have taken the lead in working with designated national authorities in convening national seminars following subregional planning meetings. They have increasingly incorporated the work on the Rotterdam Convention into their regular schedule of activities, including promoting ratification of the Convention.

62. A two-day meeting in November 2007 with representatives from the eight FAO regional and subregional offices provided an opportunity to review progress and obtain feedback on successes and potential improvements as a result of the technical assistance activities undertaken in 2007. It also provided an opportunity for input in developing a schedule of activities for 2008, particularly the national follow-up seminars. An initial brainstorming session highlighted some key issues that could be considered when developing a work programme for the period 2009–2010, together with regional similarities and differences. The report of the meeting was posted on the Convention website.

63. Decision RC-3/6 provided for a further meeting with the FAO regional officers to discuss implementation of the Rotterdam Convention in 2008. Such a meeting may be convened in cooperation with the FAO Plant Production and Protection Division and would provide an opportunity to consider scheduling technical assistance activities in 2009 following the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

64. FAO established in 2007 a subregional office for Central Asia in Ankara to service Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Of those countries, only Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are Parties to the Rotterdam Convention. In the interest of promoting cooperation between these countries, the Subregional Office made funds available for an awareness-raising meeting to promote ratification and implementation of the Rotterdam Convention. It was decided to hold this meeting in conjunction with the Secretariat of the Stockholm Convention as a means of promoting ratification and implementation of the two Conventions. The meeting is scheduled to be convened in Istanbul, Turkey, in July 2008.

(ii) Group of regional experts

65. Representatives of the group of regional experts established in 2005 have worked with the Secretariat in delivering technical assistance to countries. A meeting of the group was convened in October 2007 and included individuals who had worked with the Secretariat in 2006 and 2007, together with some new members. The meeting provided an opportunity to exchange experiences between the experts and with the Secretariat regarding the technical assistance activities undertaken in 2007 and to review plans for 2008. The experts' input in the form of their technical expertise and knowledge of the various regions has contributed significantly to the delivery of the technical assistance programme. The

group is also seen as a means of promoting cooperation between Parties within and between subregions and of developing regional solutions to regional problems.

66. Decision RC-3/6 provided for a further meeting of the group in 2008. The meeting may be convened, subject to the availability of funds, to follow up on the experience gained, to provide an opportunity to include new experts in the group and, possibly, to broaden the range of expertise available within the group.

(iii) Sahelian Pesticides Committee

67. Cooperation with the Sahelian Pesticides Committee began in 2005 with the primary objective of assisting member countries to use the Committee's work as a means to meet their obligations under the Rotterdam Convention. Meetings between the designated national authorities and selected members of the Committee were convened in 2005 and 2006. Decision RC-3/6 provided for two further meetings between the designated national authorities and members of the Committee, together with visits to the individual countries that were Parties to the Convention (Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal).

68. Pursuant to decision RC-3/6, a two-day meeting of designated national authorities and selected members of the Committee was convened immediately before a regularly scheduled meeting of the Committee in August 2007. Significantly, note was taken of the decisions by the Committee in May 2006 and May 2007 not to renew the registrations of atrazine, endosulfan or paraquat, with the result that those pesticides were no longer authorized for use in the member countries. A copy of the report of the meeting is available on the Convention website.

69. In follow-up to the August 2007 meeting, the secretariat of the Committee formally notified member countries of the decision on endosulfan. In the light of their obligation to submit notifications of final regulatory actions under article 5 of the Convention, member countries were encouraged to follow up with the secretariat of the Committee and to submit notifications of this final regulatory action to the Secretariat of the Rotterdam Convention. As of 30 April 2008, no notifications for any of the three chemicals had been submitted to the Secretariat by any member of the Committee. In the light of the limited budget available in 2008, a fourth meeting of the Committee and designated national authorities was not convened in order that visits to individual countries might be undertaken instead.

70. As a means of bolstering cooperation within member countries, individual visits (involving a regional expert) were made to Cape Verde, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal in May 2007. A copy of the report on the outcome of the visits is available on the Convention website. Visits to the remaining four countries (Burkina Faso, Gambia, Niger and, possibly, Chad) are planned for the first part of July 2008. A key element of these individual visits has been to promote integration of work on the Convention with that of the Committee and, in particular, to encourage countries to work with the secretariat of the Committee in finalizing and submitting notifications of final regulatory actions for atrazine, endosulfan and paraquat.

71. Gambia, Mali and Senegal also participated in subregional meetings to identify elements of a national action plan or strategy in September and November 2007. These meetings provided an opportunity to strengthen further the integration of the Committee's work with obligations under the Rotterdam Convention.

72. As a result of cooperation with the Committee, eight of the nine member countries have ratified the Convention (Guinea Bissau being the sole exception). Mali, Mauritania and Senegal have also submitted 28 import responses (previously there had been none), while Burkina Faso has increased the number of import responses submitted from 6 to 28. The secretariat of the Committee and member countries have been invited to present the outcome of this cooperation at a side event during the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

(iv) Asia and Pacific Plant Protection Commission

73. The twenty-fifth session of the Commission, held in September 2007, provided an opportunity to convene a side event on the ratification and implementation of the Convention by member countries (16 of the 24 members of the Commission are Parties to the Convention). The Secretariat sponsored the travel of three designated national authorities (Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam). Representatives from China, Thailand and Viet Nam made presentations as part of the side event. As a result of this meeting, work on the Rotterdam Convention was integrated into the workplan of the Standing Committee on Pesticides under the Commission. An extract of the report of the meeting is available on the Convention website.

74. A similar side event was organized at the twenty-fourth session of the Commission in September 2005. Since then, five members of the Commission have become Parties to the Convention (Maldives – September 2006; Nepal – February 2007; Philippines – July 2006; Sri Lanka – January 2006 and Viet Nam – May 2007).

(v) Other partners

75. The Secretariat has continued to cooperate with the World Customs Organization and the UNEP Green Customs Initiative. More information can be found in document UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/21. Further examples of cooperation with partners include work undertaken with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research in the delivery of national planning meetings in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Namibia and Togo and with the Pesticide Action Network on severely hazardous pesticide formulations.

76. Integration with activities under the Basel and Stockholm Conventions is part of a continuing process. Based on the outcome of the review of the completed national implementation plans for the Stockholm Convention and feedback from national and subregional meetings on the Rotterdam Convention, consideration will be given to the need to revise the relevant guidance documents to strengthen the links between national implementation plans and associated action plans under the Stockholm Convention and the obligations of countries under the Rotterdam Convention. Consideration will also be given to closer cooperation with the Stockholm Convention Secretariat on specific technical assistance activities in 2008 and in developing a programme of work for the biennium 2009–2010.

77. The Secretariat has continued to promote cooperation between designated national authorities and national focal points for the Basel and Stockholm Conventions, together with the Strategic Approach to Chemicals Management, in part through inviting them to participate in the national and subregional meetings on developing national plans or strategies for the implementation of the Rotterdam Convention. Their participation in developing these action plans or strategies is seen as a key step in promoting an integrated approach to the national implementation of these conventions and related chemicals management activities. Lists of the focal points and designated national authorities are also made available to the meeting participants.

78. The two secretariats are also planning to participate in the forthcoming meeting of the Coordinating Group of Pesticides Control Boards of the Caribbean, to be held from 16 to 20 June 2008. Currently, only 5 of the 15 member countries of the Coordinating Group are Parties to the Rotterdam Convention, while 11 are Parties to the Stockholm Convention. During the meeting, the secretariats will organize a one-day consultation, focusing on promoting ratification, stimulating discussion on how the two Conventions are complementary tools to promote more effective pesticides management and aiming at promoting efficient implementation of the two Conventions through closer national coordination.

79. Cooperation with the World Health Organization, its regional and subregional counterparts and national poison control centres has continued. The relevant national institutions were invited to participate in Rotterdam Convention national or subregional meetings (such as those held in Chile, Ghana, Senegal and South Africa).

80. Cooperation with the Basel Convention regional centres has also continued. A national consultation to identify elements of a national action plan or strategy for the implementation of the Convention was convened in Nigeria in January 2008 with organizational support from the regional coordinating centre in Ibadan.

81. As a matter of course, participants in national and subregional meetings were requested to identify potential partners that could play a cooperative role in implementation of the Convention. Participants in the meeting of regional experts held in November 2007 in Geneva and in the meeting of FAO regional officers held in November 2007 in Tunisia also sought to identify further regional or subregional partners. Potential regional partners include the Central African Economic and Monetary Community, the Southern Cone Plant Health Committee in Latin America, the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf and the League of Arab States in the Near East, the Coordinating Group of Pesticide Control Boards (under the Caribbean Community) in the Caribbean, together with the working group on multilateral environmental agreements (established under the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) in Asia.

82. Where identified, regional and subregional organizations and networks directly involved in chemicals management have been informed about activities relevant to the implementation of the Rotterdam Convention and, as appropriate, will be invited to participate in regional and subregional meetings.

E. Measuring progress: indicators of success

83. The workshop materials and curricula developed for the delivery of technical assistance are subject to a continuing process of revision to reflect experiences gained and regional differences. This is accomplished in part by inviting meeting participants to complete an evaluation form that seeks input on those elements that were successful and those that might be improved.

84. A range of reasonably straightforward quantitative indicators may be used to measure the effect of technical assistance activities in support of the Rotterdam Convention, including the number of notifications of final regulatory action and import responses submitted to the Secretariat. Experience has shown that the effect of a meeting on levels of import responses and notifications of final regulatory action can take up to a year to become apparent.

85. Given that the number of chemicals listed in Annex III has not increased since the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties (September 2004), it was to be expected that, for the period 2007–2008, the rate at which import responses were submitted to the Secretariat would decrease and that the overall number of responses submitted would reach a maximum. The continued usefulness of import responses as an indicator of effectiveness of the technical assistance provided to countries is thus limited. It is interesting to note, however, that in most regions there would appear to be a trend for the number of submissions of import responses for chemicals currently listed in Annex III to plateau at around 28, for the most part limited to those pesticides subject to the PIC procedure. The lack of import responses for industrial chemicals in many countries would appear to reinforce the fact that an increasing number of countries are identifying a lack of infrastructure to regulate industrial chemicals as a barrier to full implementation of the Convention.

86. During the period 2007–2008, the rate of notifications of final regulatory actions for banned or severely restricted chemicals, in particular for chemicals not listed in Annex III, decreased. Further thought is required on the role of developed countries in the submission of notifications as they would be expected to be in a position to submit notifications that meet the requirements of Annexes I and II of the Convention.

87. In order to better understand the trends in import responses and notifications of final regulatory actions as quantitative indicators of the effectiveness of the technical assistance activities under the Convention data for the period 2007–2008 have been reviewed by the Secretariat. The results of this review may be found in document UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/11 Implementation Issues.

88. A further quantitative indicator could be the number of follow-up actions that occur as a result of a country's participation in a meeting. For example, national and subregional planning meetings have assisted countries to review the status of implementation of the Convention and to identify national priorities for follow-up actions. For countries participating in the subregional planning meetings, requests for national follow-up seminars may be one indicator of success, while another could be requests for technical assistance related to the actions identified as a result of these meetings.

89. To date, just over half of the countries that participated in the subregional meetings have requested national follow-up seminars or country visits (23 of 43 eligible countries). The national follow-up seminars and regional meetings of designated national authorities are used to reinforce the importance of Parties following up on the priorities identified in the national and subregional planning meetings.

90. Direct requests to the Secretariat for assistance have been very limited. This may reflect the fact that many of the questions relevant to the implementation of the Convention are addressed at the national level. It may also be that subsequent requests are being met through other means, such as the Strategic Approach to Chemicals Management, or incorporated into work with other bilateral or multilateral donors.

91. A review of the meeting reports and priorities suggests that many of the problems encountered by Parties relate to general problems of lack of capacity or capability in foundational chemicals management in particular with respect to industrial chemicals that may be seen to be beyond the mandate and capacity of the Secretariat. Such needs would be met effectively through integration with national development priorities in approaches to bilateral and multilateral donors. Similarly, an integrated approach to the implementation of related multilateral environmental agreements on chemicals may be a further means of meeting such broader needs.

92. Over the period 2007–2008, no substantive progress was made in developing longer-term qualitative indicators that would assist in determining whether the Convention itself was attaining its overall objective of protecting human health and the environment. As this is also relevant to other related multilateral environmental agreements such as the Basel and Stockholm Conventions, the question may be explored more effectively in coordination with them.

II Summary of outcomes and conclusions

93. The present chapter briefly reviews some of the lessons learned through the national and regional delivery of technical assistance in support of the Rotterdam Convention, in particular in defining and understanding the changing needs of Parties to the Convention as the basis for a programme of technical assistance to meet these needs.

94. Implementation of the activities foreseen in decision RC-3/6 required the development of new or significant revision of existing concept notes and curricula for five meeting types including: identifying elements of national action plans or strategies for implementation of the Convention; thematic meetings on trade and severely hazardous pesticide formulations and regional and subregional meetings of designated national authorities. The associated concept notes and meeting documentation, including Secretariat presentations, guidance to meeting participants and relevant background documents, have been made available in three languages and revised periodically to reflect feedback from meeting participants and regional differences. This documentation has become part of a library of materials that may be drawn upon in working with countries.

95. As a result of these activities, some 28 Parties have identified elements of national action plans or strategies for the implementation of the Convention. A total of 23 countries had further opportunities to review their needs and priorities through national follow-up seminars and country visits. In addition, 52 designated national authorities from 33 Parties had the opportunity to exchange experiences and solutions to common problems and challenges in the implementation of the Convention. Two countries convened the first trade meetings focused on the implementation of the import and export aspects of the Convention. Efforts continued to integrate work of the Rotterdam Convention with continuing activities of regional partners including the Pesticide Action Network, the Sahelian Pesticides Committee (eight Parties), the Asia and Pacific Plant Protection Commission (16 Parties) and the FAO and UNEP regional offices. A meeting of the group of regional experts was convened and members of the group have worked with the Secretariat in facilitating the delivery of national and subregional meetings.

96. The reports of the national and subregional planning meetings have been circulated to all participants, together with FAO and UNEP regional offices, FAO representatives in the relevant countries and posted on the Convention website. The FAO regional officers refer to these reports in working with countries. Similarly, the country needs and priorities with respect to the implementation of the Convention are important inputs to discussions at the regional and subregional designated national

authority meetings. Parties are encouraged to integrate these needs with national or regional strategies for chemicals management including those related to the implementation of the Strategic Approach to Chemicals Management and such related chemical multilateral environmental agreements as the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and the Basel or Stockholm Conventions.

Lessons learned and challenges

97. The move to a more country-driven approach, where Parties are required to express interest in participating in a meeting, appears to have been effective. In only a few instances have Parties failed to respond to a request for expression of interest. The requirement that participants develop national status reports as inputs to the national and subregional meetings has helped to increase the effectiveness of the meetings.

98. The efforts to follow up national and subregional planning meetings, through national follow-up seminars, designated national authority meetings, individual country visits and the work of the FAO regional offices has helped to build confidence and experience between designated national authorities. They have also provided an opportunity to build on or reinforce the importance of the outcome of the national and subregional meetings as a basis for a structured approach to the implementation of the Convention at the national level.

99. Feedback from the meetings convened in 2007–2008 suggests that the participants have a good understanding of the key operational elements of the Convention. In many countries, however, there may be frequent changes in personnel and it is not clear to what extent the information and skills acquired by those who attend meetings or workshops are passed on. The national and subregional planning meetings have reaffirmed that in many countries there continues to be little or no inter-ministerial communication on chemicals management issues in general and on integrating work under the Rotterdam Convention with work under the Basel or Stockholm Conventions in particular. In many instances, the meetings convened in support of the Rotterdam Convention were the first time that the national focal points on the Basel and Stockholm Conventions had been in contact with the designated national authorities for the Rotterdam Convention. A further indication of a lack of good inter-ministerial cooperation was that in many instances it was difficult to get countries to nominate eight representatives to the subregional meetings or to ensure that they came from a range of ministries.

100. These issues can be addressed in a number of ways. The challenges presented by changes in personnel may be met in part by the resource kit. The Secretariat will continue to develop the resource kit as means of providing information on the Convention to a broad range of users and to encourage integration of specific activities with other relevant organizations and multilateral environmental agreements, in particular the Basel and Stockholm Conventions. Efforts to improve the accessibility of information on banned or severely restricted chemicals on the Convention website and the development of the electronic learning tool on the key operational elements of the Convention may also help to meet the challenge of frequent changes in designated national authorities.

101. The identification of the elements of national plans or strategies for the implementation of the Convention, including priorities for action, should serve as a framework for structuring the work of the Convention and as a point of reference within each country for defining its needs with respect to the implementation of the Convention, regardless of changes in its designated national authority. As the process for the preparation of these plans necessitates the involvement of a broad range of government representatives, they should also assist in promoting inter- and intra-ministerial cooperation on the implementation of the Convention.

102. As the Convention matures, it is evident that the needs of individual countries within a region and across regions will diverge. As additional countries become Parties to the Convention, and recognizing that there are some that are struggling to meet the basic requirements of the Convention, there is a need to develop a series of meetings aimed at more awareness-raising and training on the Convention. At the same time there are Parties who have made significant progress in the implementation of the Convention who require more targeted assistance. This suggests that, if they are to be effective, technical assistance activities will also need to be country-specific, recognizing that subregional approaches involving small numbers of countries may be useful for issues of common interest.

103. An underlying challenge to the effective implementation of the Rotterdam Convention in many developing countries and countries with economies in transition is the absence of an effective chemicals management infrastructure. While most countries have a basic infrastructure for the management of pesticides, recognizing that the level of enforcement may vary widely, it is increasingly evident that few have any infrastructure for the management of industrial chemicals. This lack of basic foundational chemical management precludes a country from benefiting fully from the Rotterdam Convention and would be expected to affect a country's ability to implement related conventions, in particular the Stockholm Convention. While the development of a foundational chemicals management infrastructure in a country is beyond the mandate or capacity of the Rotterdam Convention secretariat, closer cooperation and coordination between the Conventions, both within the secretariats' activities and at the national level, should contribute to a more effective use of the resources available.

104. The outcome of the national and subregional planning meetings for the implementation of the Rotterdam Convention and the national implementation plans developed under the Stockholm Convention should help to define national needs with respect to chemicals management and be a useful input to any process for the development of national strategies or programmes on chemicals management. Countries should be encouraged to take an integrated approach to chemicals management when seeking assistance from bilateral and multilateral donors to fill these gaps, in particular in developing an infrastructure for the management of industrial chemicals.

105. Over the past two years, the FAO and UNEP regional offices and the FAO representatives in individual countries have played an increasing role in the regional delivery of technical assistance. The regional offices in particular are working directly with countries in organizing national and subregional meetings and increasingly are integrating work on the Convention with their regular programmes of work. An increasing range of regional and subregional groups also participate in the national and subregional meetings and continued efforts are needed to determine the extent to which the work on the Convention might be integrated with their work programmes.

106. In the light of this experience, the Secretariat has proposed a workplan for technical assistance for 2009–2010, which is set out in document UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.4/17.
