Commitment Platforms and the Global Agenda for Chemicals and Waste Management

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Abbreviations

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CiP	Chemicals in Products
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSD	Commission on Sustainable Development
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
EDCs	Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals
EMAS	EU's Eco-Management and Audit Scheme
EPI	Emerging policy issue
EPPPs	Environmentally Persistent Pharmaceutical pollutants
GPML	Global Partnership on Marine Litter
HLPF	High-level Political Forum
HPP	Highly hazardous pesticides
HSLEEP	Hazardous Substances within the Life Cycle of Electrical and Electronic Products
ICCM	International Conference on Chemicals Management
IOMC	Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals
LPAA	Lima-Paris Action Agenda
MEA	Multilateral environmental agreement
MPAs	Marine protected areas
NAZCA	Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action
NBSAP	National biodiversity strategy and action plans
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OPS	Overarching policy strategy
PFCs	Perfluorinated Chemicals
PFAS	Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances
SAICM	Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management
SBI	Subsidiary Body on Implementation to the UNFCCC
KemI	Swedish Chemicals Agency
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDS	Small-Island Developing States
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGC	United Nations Global Compact
VBC	Voluntary Biodiversity Commitment
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

Summary

Problem statement

One of functions of the of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) is to call for appropriate action on emerging policy issues as they arise and to forge consensus on priorities for cooperative action as identified in the paragraph 24 of the Overarching Policy Strategy (OPS). In 2015, the Fourth International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM-4) initiated the development of the framework for sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 that is envisaged to be adopted in the fifth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM-5). This process currently includes issues of concern as one of its recommended five strategic objectives. This shows continued interest in addressing issues of concern, including hazardous chemicals, groups of chemicals, mixtures, and materials. An efficient approach for dealing with issues of concern, one which can fully harness the multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral character of the new Framework, is needed.

Objective

In this report, selected international mechanisms for encouraging voluntary commitments are presented, and their main functions and principles outlined. It then deliberates on how such a mechanism could be part of addressing issues of concern identified to warrant international action in the new global agenda for chemicals and waste management. This report is intended to inform discussion in the intersessional process considering the Strategic Approach and the framework for sound management of chemical and waste beyond 2020.

What are voluntary commitments and commitment platforms?

Voluntary commitments were central to the global sustainable development conferences, including the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) and the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (2012). In 2015, the State leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17. SDG 17 highlights the role of multi-stakeholder partnerships and calls for revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development, including promoting effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships. Consequently, non-state actors—including business groups, civil society organizations, local governments, international organizations, and collaborative groupings — have mobilized an increasing number of voluntary commitments, alongside undertakings or agreements by states.

This growth has been followed by several voluntary commitment platforms that operate independently or in conjunction with existing UN bodies or multilateral environmental agreement (MEAs); these platforms aim to catalyze new commitments and track progress in meeting them. Since 2014, such voluntary commitments have become a significant part of the climate regime with the emergence of the Global Climate Action Agenda and, since 2018, of the biodiversity regime with the announcement of the Action Agenda for Nature and People. They have also emerged in areas that lack legally binding frameworks, as witnessed with the emergence of two voluntary platforms for oceans: Our Ocean Conference and the UN Ocean Conference. These platforms provide a space to explore innovative ideas and develop cooperative approaches that spur world-wide concrete action.

What can be learned from existing models?

Before considering the development of a possible global voluntary commitment platform within the framework for sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020, it is useful to understand experiences gained from existing initiatives. This report has been prepared by examining how ten existing voluntary commitment platforms have stimulated voluntary commitments on sustainability issues, based on expert interviews and a literature review. This report also identifies a preliminary non-exhaustive list of key principles and functions of global commitment platforms.

Key principles that provide guidance for establishing a commitment platform:

- Transparency: Commitments, progress reports and other relevant information are made publicly accessible online to generate trust and confidence
- Credibility: Greenwashing is avoided by ensuring that commitments are substantive and significant and represent a genuine attempt to progress from status quo
- Accountability: Achievements are regularly reported, and performance reviewed to understand outcomes and impacts
- Leadership: Champions are identified and empowered at various level to extend the reach and influence of the platform
- Inclusiveness: All relevant stakeholders are engaged, enabling to create collaborative efforts between industry, government, and other stakeholders

Key functions in exiting commitment platforms:

1. Implementation modalities

- Targets play an important role in providing aspiration
- Workplans may take different forms, ranging from declarations to detailed work programmes

2. Commitment procedures

- Criteria for the content of commitments ensure that they fulfill desired characteristics
- Validation of commitment proposals, ideally facilitated by an independent review committee
- Launch of commitments in conjunction with conferences to ensure visibility
- Peer-learning is facilitated by organizing events, often in conjunction with conferences

3. Monitoring of progress

- Reporting on commitments on a regular basis, either as voluntary or mandatory requirement
- Review of collective progress, on a regular basis, to identify best practices and understand outcomes

4. Communication

- Registries used for showcasing commitments and displaying achievements online
- Campaigns can be organized to enhance communication to the general public

What can a commitment platform offer for issues of concern?

The second edition of the Global Chemicals Outlook highlights that "all relevant stakeholders could be challenged to make voluntary yet clear public commitments and pledges, specifying concrete plans and steps to be taken" with the view to "facilitate the success of the global collaborative framework on chemicals and waste" (UNEP, 2019a). Indeed, the development of a possible voluntary commitment platform in the framework for the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 is highly pertinent and provides an opportunity to reinforce the 2030 Agenda, and in particular support the implementation of targets 3.9, 6.3 and 12.4. Given the importance of the sound management of chemicals and waste for sustainable development, it will be critical to ensure that the Framework will effectively enable joint efforts. A commitment platform

could help increase engagement of actors to be part of an international movement operating under the UN umbrella. More specifically, a voluntary commitment platform for chemicals and waste could help to promote action on identified issues of international concern including on reducing risk from hazardous substances that are not covered by existing MEAs but may still warrant global action.

What is wanted for a mechanism for commitments related to issues of concern?

Such elements should provide for accountability, credibility, transparency, capitalize on leadership and be inclusive to all relevant stakeholders. To this end, elements that could enable the development of a dynamic and credible agenda to catalyze commitments for issues of concern include:

1. Set time-bound targets for adopted issues of concern and develop work plans to operationalize them. Assign operative co-leads from governments, intergovernmental organizations, and other stakeholders to deepen the impact of the action plans. Accompany targets with indicators to enable measuring of progress.
2. Agree on commitment procedures towards identified actions in the agreed workplan to encourage substantive and significant commitments, including criteria for content, and validation of proposed commitments. In addition, provide a space for their announcement in conferences, ideally at the high-level, and arrange opportunities for peer-learning either face-to-face or electronically.
3. Develop procedures on reporting and tracking of progress on the commitments linked to the governance structure for the Beyond 2020 Framework. Monitoring results of commitments and pledges made should focus both on qualitative and quantitative aspects, striving to measure outcomes and impacts.
4. Develop a dynamic, accessible, and updated online interface - or use an existing online registry such as the Partnerships for SDGs online platform - to showcase commitments and illustrate progress. Outreach can be further enhanced with public campaigns.

The role of commitments in the action plan for agreed issues of concern could consists of varying forms. Main options for encouraging commitments though workplans include:

1. Encourage **open-ended commitments**, including individual and joint commitments, partnerships, and campaigns, to meet the activities outlined in the agreed workplans in an organized manner
2. Outline **high-level principles** and actions that guide the work of all

actors that become signatories to the principles, including set an initial minimum bar and gradually raise the level of ambition

3. Outline **performance levels** for activity areas in the workplans, so that countries, companies, and other stakeholders are encouraged to gradually progress from level 1 to level 5 in activity areas

The science-based recommendations could be prepared by the possible scientific body, also discussed in context of the Beyond 2020 Framework, to inform the development of the action plans, in particular to address substances of concern. The commitment platform would be managed by the secretariat, in cooperation with working groups, or by an assigned organization of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC). The sessions of ICCM provide an opportunity for regularly taking stock of overall progress, as well as announcing commitments and launching partnerships to ensure recognition and visibility, as well as discussing achievements and challenges among peers. Synergies should be sought with existing commitment platforms, including the Partnerships for SDGs online platform hosted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

1. Introduction

The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) is a policy framework to promote chemical safety on a global scale. It plays an important role in addressing gaps between the capacities of different countries to manage chemicals safely, complementing the existing MEAs and providing overall coordination for existing efforts. In 2015, the fourth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM-4) initiated an intersessional process to prepare recommendations regarding the Strategic Approach and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 (SAICM, 2015). The new framework is envisaged to be adopted at the fifth session of ICCM (ICCM-5) to be held in Bonn, Germany.

Within the intersessional process, five strategic objectives for achieving the sound management of chemicals and waste have been outlined and the development of targets under these objectives is ongoing. Objective C on Issues of Concern is one of the draft objectives to be considered by ICCM-5 (SAICM, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, a virtual working group has refined modalities for Issues of Concern, including nomination, adoption, implementation and tracking progress (SAICM, 2021).

In order to generate required implementation of the actions needed to address issues of concern, greater involvement from all stakeholders and relevant sectors is needed. This provides an opportunity to include a possible mechanism for encouraging voluntary commitments from all stakeholders within the process for nominating, adopting, implementing and tracking progress on issues of concern to secure the delivery of actions towards agreed issues of concern. This responds to the second edition of the Global Chemicals Outlook that highlights that "all relevant stakeholders could be challenged to make voluntary yet clear public commitments and pledges, specifying concrete plans and steps to be taken" to "facilitate the success of the global collaborative framework on chemicals and waste" (UNEP, 2019a).

The report is structured in six sections. Section one outlines an introduction, while section two provides a background to the evolvement of issues of concern in the context of SAICM. Section three describes the role of voluntary commitments, describes existing global commitments platforms, and explains their main functions and underlying principles. Section four outlines elements for a global commitment platform for issues of concern in the framework of chemicals and waste and section five deliberates options for detailing workplans to spur commitments. Conclusions are provided in section six.

1.1 Objective and scope

The objective of the study is to analyze how global commitment platforms have been used internationally and how such a mechanism could be developed to support implementation of, and follow-up on, issues of concern as part of the broader global agenda for sound chemicals and waste management.

The scope of the report focuses on issues of concern that warrant global action that refer to broader thematic policy areas, including harmful materials and products, as well as specific substances and groups of substances of concern.

Substances of concern identified as issues of concern that warrant global action refers to specific substances and groups of substances of concern that are not restricted by existing MEAs and for which national action is not sufficient for risk reduction.

1.2 Methodology

The preparation of the report is based on a literature review, including of scientific and grey literature, focusing on how commitment mechanisms have been included in relevant international agreements and voluntary instruments. In addition, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with relevant key stakeholders involved in existing commitment platform in order to gather facts and information about current commitment mechanisms. The study of existing mechanisms forms a basis for understanding best practices that can be applied to sound chemicals and waste management. Interviewees included predominantly current officials in relevant UN bodies, as well as consultants and other experts. The interviews, which are included in this report, were anonymized through a random two-digit number designation.

The study has been funded by the Swedish Chemicals Agency (KemI). It builds on and complements work conducted in the context of the Nordic Council of Ministers (Honkonen & Khan, 2017) to enrich the knowledge base for discussions leading to the formulation and, eventually, the adoption of the global agenda for chemicals and waste management replacing SAICM beyond 2020.

1. Paragraph 14(g)

2. Advancing on issues of Concern

2.1 Existing Modalities

The overarching policy strategy (OPS) of SAICM includes as one of its aims for risk reduction "to ensure that existing, new and emerging issues of global concern are sufficiently addressed by means of appropriate mechanisms" (SAICM, 2006).[1] The modalities for bringing proposals on emerging policy issues for the consideration of the ICCM are set out in the annex to ICCM Resolution II/4 (SAICM, 2009). The current nomination modalities are focused on providing the relevant information necessary to assess an issue. Proponents need to clarify why an issue is considered as an emerging policy issue based on current levels of scientific information on significant adverse effects on human health and/or the environment. The secretariat is tasked with verifying that the nominations follow the definition and the general information to be provided when submitting proposals (see annex 1).

Since 2009, ICCM has recognized six "emerging policy issues" (EPIs): lead in paint, chemicals in products (CiP), hazardous substances within electrical and electronic products (HSLEEP), nanotechnologies and manufactured nanomaterials, endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs), and environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants (EPPPs). In addition, ICCM has recognized two so called "other issues of concern": perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs) and highly hazardous pesticides (HPP). These issues are broad policy areas in general and are not necessarily restricted to substances. In this report, the term "issues of concern" is used to collectively refer to the recognized emerging policy issues and other issues of concern, as well as to any new issues included in the framework that is yet to be adopted. Table 1 provides an overview of current issues of concern currently recognized under SAICM; the last column identifies the organization(s) from the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) that has been identified as taking the lead on each issue of concern.

Table 1. Overview of current issues of concern recognized under SAICM

Issue of Concern	Objective	Adoption	IOMC Lead(s)
Chemicals in Products	Improve the availability of and access to information on chemicals in products in the supply chain and throughout their life cycle (Res. II/4 C, para 1)	2009	UNEP
Hazardous Substances within the Life Cycle of Electrical and Electronic Products (HSLEEP)	Phase out, where feasible, hazardous substances contained in electronic and electrical products (Res. II/4 D, para c)	2009	UNIDO
Lead in Paint	Promote phasing out the use of lead in paints (Res. II/4 B, para 1)	2009	WHO / UNEP
Perfluorinated Chemicals (PFCs) and the transition to safer alternatives	Reduce emissions and the content of relevant perfluorinated chemicals of concern in products and to work toward global elimination (Res. II/5, para 1)	2009	OECD / UNEP
Nanotechnology and Manufactured Nanomaterials	Facilitate the exchange of information on the sound management of manufactured nanomaterials throughout their life cycle (Res. II/4 D, para 4)	2012	UNITAR / OECD
Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs)	Implement cooperative actions on EDCs with the overall objective of increasing awareness and understanding (Res. III/2 F, para 5)	2012	UNEP / WHO / OECD
Highly hazardous pesticides (HPP)	Address highly hazardous pesticides in the context of the Strategic Approach (Res. IV/3, para 1)	2015	FAO / WHO / UNEP
Environmentally Persistent Pharmaceutical pollutants (EPPPs)	Implement cooperative actions on EPPPs with the overall objective of increasing awareness and understanding (Res. IV/2 III, para 4)	2015	WHO / FAO / UNEP

The SAICM Secretariat commissioned an independent evaluation of SAICM from 2005-2016 delivered in 2019. This report highlights that the adoption of issues of concern has helped to raise their international profile and that some progress has been achieved in their implementation (SAICM, 2019a). Progress has been most notable in addressing lead in paint, where the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint has helped spur the adoption of regulations to control lead in paint in many countries. In addition, the voluntary international programme for information on chemicals in products has been endorsed for operationalization as mandated by ICCM4. However, the evaluation expresses concern that progress on issues of concern has been slow, modest and uneven and generally limited to information collection, with few concrete risk elimination or risk reduction measures. The main challenges are summarized in Figure 1.

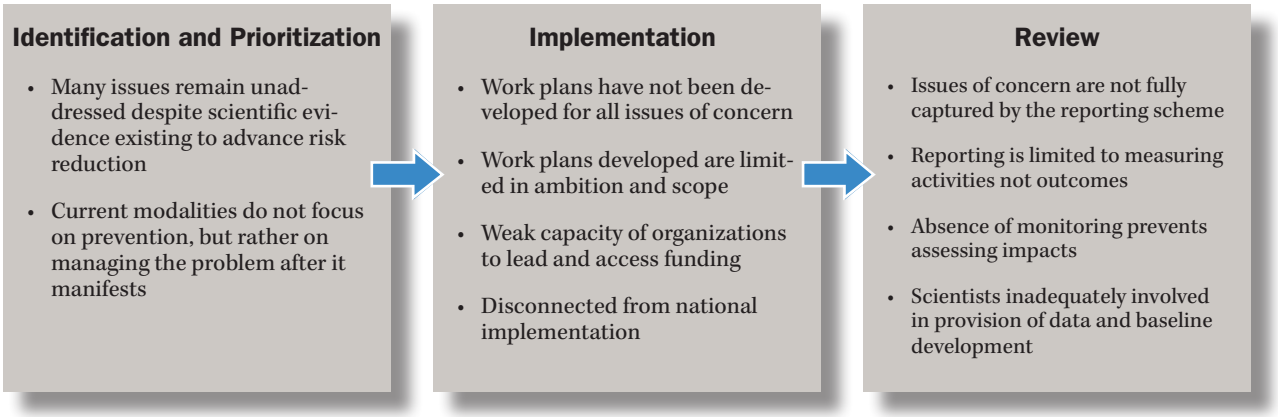


Figure 1. Summary of main challenges in the identification, prioritization, implementation and review of issues of concern (SAICM, 2019a; Health and Environment Justice Support et al., 2020; UNEP, 2017; SAICM 2019b; UNEP 2019a).

The current modalities in Resolution II/4 state that in nominating an emerging policy issue for consideration by the Conference, a proponent will be required to complete a format that addresses the criteria listed in the resolution. After a new issue of concern has been adopted, it is usually taken up by an organization within the IOMC. However, IOMC organizations are accountable to their own governing bodies, which sets limitations to the development and operationalization of workplans (Urho, 2018). The role of governments and other stakeholders in relation to issues of concern is undefined, thus they are insufficiently reflected in national implementation plans and poorly funded within national budgets (Health and Environment Justice Support et al., 2020). Furthermore, the level of industry engagement remains limited (UNEP, 2019b).

2.2 Process for Defining Modalities

The co-chairs' paper prepared for the third session of the Open-Ended Working Group for SAICM (OEWG-3), held in April 2019 in Montevideo, Uruguay, presented issues of concern

as Strategic Objective C. The proposal was welcomed by stakeholders, and the co-chairs presented a paper on issues of concern including revised modalities for the third meeting of the intersessional process held in October 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand (SAICM, 2019c). A compilation paper covering all areas has been prepared for the fourth meeting of the intersessional process that proposes a draft mechanism for adoption of issues of concern, this paper has been further refined through series of virtual working group meetings (SAICM, 2020). The resulting proposal (dated 1 February 2021) from the co-facilitators of the virtual working group outlines the following elements for the mechanism for issues of concern (SAICM, 2021):

1. Nomination, selection and adoption process
    - Nomination of issues
    - Initial review and publication of nominations
    - Decision-making and adoption
2. Mechanisms for implementation
    - Workplans
    - Tracking progress
    - Determining the need for further work on an issue

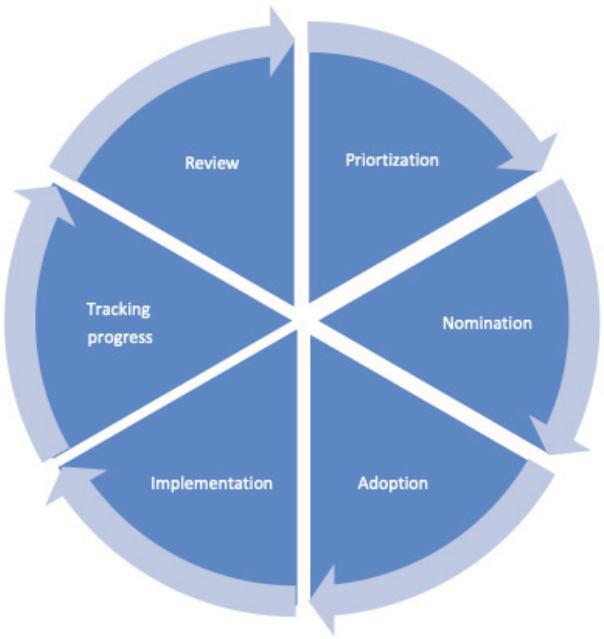
The co-facilitators' 2021 proposal is more detailed concerning the mechanisms for implementation compared to existing modalities under SAICM. First, it details that actions are to be guided by workplans that have clear timelines and milestones. Second, it proposes the establishment of multi-stakeholder committees to guide progress towards implementation of the workplans and to oversee monitoring and reporting back from stakeholders.

The proposal from the co-facilitators also outlines information to be submitted with a nomination of issues of concern (SAICM, 2021).

With regard to identification of substances of global concern, in February 2020, the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the Swedish Chemicals Agency (KemI), and the University of Gothenburg, co-hosted a technical workshop on criteria for substances of global concern (UNITAR, 2020). Based on a study published by the University of Gothenburg (Backhaus et al., 2020) and the discussions at the workshop, a proposal on information relevant for identification and nomination of substances, or groups of substances, of global concern was developed by KemI. See Annex 1 for a table summarizing existing modalities and the proposal on issues of concern distributed by the co-facilitators and the proposal of KemI.

2.3 Way Forward

Given that the implementation of issues of concern has been uneven in the past, it is important to consider new ways to encourage more robust implementation by all governments and other stakeholders (SAICM, 2019a). In other words, it is important to consider how governments, the private sector and other stakeholders can better address agreed issues of concern, including through voluntary commitments towards specific actions adopted in workplans. Figure 2 illustrates a comprehensive approach for addressing issues of concern at the international level. The potential role of a voluntary commitment platform in inducing stronger implementation is discussed in the following section.



- *Prioritization* refers to identification of issues of concern against specified information
- *Nomination* refers to the process for nominating issues of concern for consideration by ICCM
- *Adoption* refers to the decision taken by ICCM to adopt the issues of concern
- *Implementation* refers to procedures established to support implementation of issues of concern by all stakeholders
- *Tracking* progress refers to procedures established for regularly taking stock of implementation
- *Review* refers the regular revision and update of issues of concern

Figure 2. Comprehensive approach for addressing issues of concern under the Beyond 2020 framework.

3. What are Voluntary Commitments?

3.1 How did Commitment Platforms Evolve?

Voluntary approaches in environmental policy represent a "third wave" of management in the environmental field. "Command and control" was the first wave that is based on uniform emission standards and other regulatory measures that need to be enforced through extensive monitoring and severe sanctions (Croci, 2005). The second wave focused on altering "natural" market mechanisms to include externalities across the value-chain using, inter alia, taxes, levies, and subsidies (Croci, 2005). Regulatory and market-based approaches are policies supported by legislation. Voluntary approaches are secondary instruments that can help to reinforce and complement legislation. The chemical industry's Responsible Care programme is an example of voluntary self-regulation for going beyond regulatory compliance. Figure 3 summarizes steps for environmental policymaking for chemicals safety, where voluntary approaches can help to fortify the legislative framework.

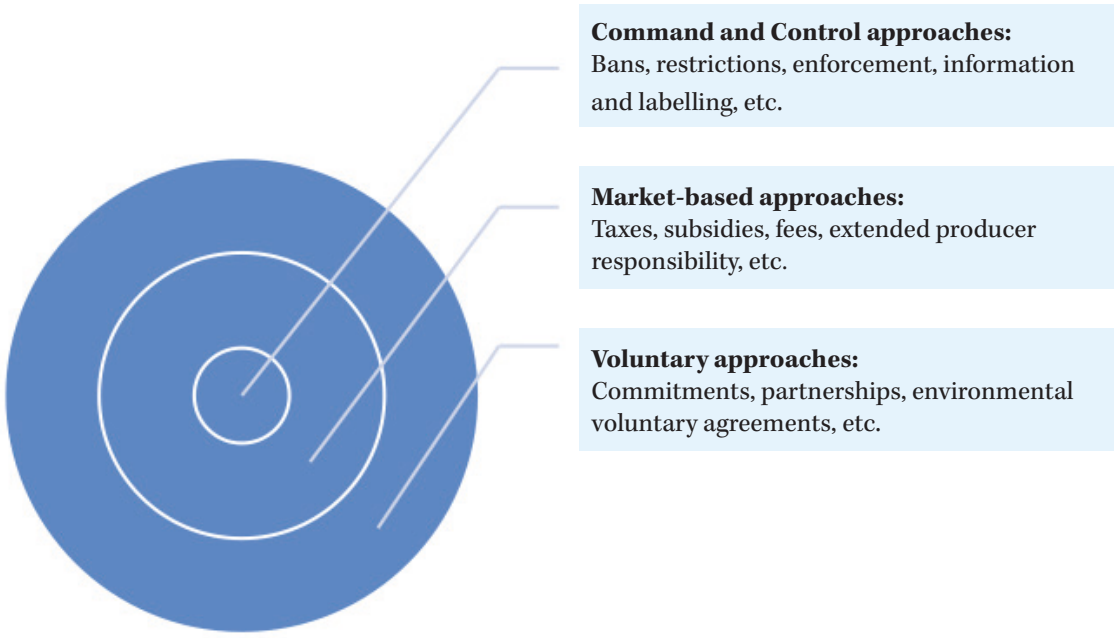


Figure 3. Three waves of environmental policymaking.

Croci (2005) has identified six forms of voluntary approaches to environmental policy described in box 1. Voluntary approaches include environmental voluntary agreements where public and private counterparts are identified, and industry is primarily responsible for implementation. This includes voluntary public schemes, negotiated agreements, industry's unilateral commitments recognized by the public administration, which encourage businesses to go beyond regulatory compliance (Croci, 2005). Environmental voluntary agreements can be deployed at the national or international levels. In this context, SAICM could be classified as an environmental voluntary agreement that falls within the subcategory of a negotiated agreement.

At the international level, sustainable development institutions took the lead in promoting voluntary commitments. In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) adopted the Johannesburg Plan of implementation. More than 200 partnerships for sustainable development were announced at the Summit, linked to the implementation of commitments in Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (Bäckstrand, 2006). The partnerships were collectively branded as "type II agreements" and were registered in a database managed by the Secretariat of the then Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). Type I outcomes refer to negotiated agreements between states, such as declarations, action plans and treaties.

The rationale of the partnerships was to translate multilateral commitments on sustainable development into concrete action (Bäckstrand, 2006). According to the UN definition, partnerships are "voluntary and collaborative relationships between various parties, both public and non-public, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common goal, share risks and responsibilities, pool resources and deliver mutual benefits" (UN, 2014). The overarching idea was that the "implementation gap" in sustainable devel-

Box. 1 voluntary approaches to environmental policy (Croci, 2005)

1. **Voluntary public schemes** are standardized schemes, designed by regulators (e.g., the EU's Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) and ecolabel schemes)
2. **Negotiated agreements** are agreements that result of a negotiation process between the public administration on one side and one or more firms or an association of firms on the other side
3. **Unilateral commitments recognized by the public administration**
4. **Unilateral commitments** are set by the industry (either individual firms or associations of firms) without a public counterpart (e.g., Responsible Care programme)
5. **Third-party initiatives** are programs designed by third parties open to the participation of individual firms (e.g., ISO 14000 and the UN Global Compact)
6. **Private agreements** are reached through direct bargaining between polluters and pollutees

opment could be reduced by "results-based" and "outcome-oriented" partnerships (Bäckstrand, 2006). In practice, the partnerships' hybrid governance structure represents "coalitions of the willing" among non-state and state actors. This new policy paradigm opened the door to flexible, decentralized, voluntary market-oriented approaches to environmental problem solving, as an important complement to traditional top-down state-centric decision-making.

While some type II partnerships produced results, they have been criticized as being ineffective, since the partnerships criteria were vaguely defined, a consistent monitoring process was missing, and the online platform was not accessible (Ramstein, 2012; Bäckstrand & Kylsäter, 2014). An issue of particular concern was that the type II partnerships model was not accompanied by a mechanism to track progress. Lessons learned from type II partnerships show that effective monitoring requires a solid framework for regularly reviewing commitments, that commitments are funded, and dynamic exchanges of experiences via online platform and regular (in-person) meetings (Ramstein, 2012). In addition, measurable targets and timetables are needed (Bäckstrand, 2006).

The 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) adopted the voluntary commitments system, which is conceptually broader than the preceding partnerships model. The term "commitment" implies a shift in emphasis to implementation and outcomes rather than the union of different actors. According to the definition used by the UN Ocean Conference, voluntary commitments are initiatives voluntarily undertaken by states, intergovernmental organizations, international financial institutions, NGOs, academic and research institutions, the scientific community, the private sector, philanthropies, and other actors either individually or in partnership (DESA, 2021).

In response to the call at Rio+20, DESA developed a global registry of voluntary commitments (known today as the Partnerships for SDGs online platform) endeavoring to compile and transparently present different commitments.[2] The Rio+20 Outcome Document "The Future We Want" specifies that commitments need to be specific, measurable, funded, and new; include at least one tangible deliverable and a timeline for completion; and define resources for delivering commitments.

Since the Rio+20 Conference, voluntary commitment platforms have expanded to cover almost all areas of sustainable development. These platforms are international initiatives that enable non-state actors operating on par with states to submit voluntary commitments and establish partnerships to achieve sustainability goals. Commonly, voluntary commitment platforms have developed organically, and there has usually been little if any explicit planning. DESA encourages registering global commitment platforms as "action networks" in the Partnerships for SDGs online platform, which aims to function as an umbrella platform.

3.2 Selected Global Commitment Platforms

Commitment platforms exist and operate in conjunction with UN bodies and MEAs, while others operate more independently. Some commitment platforms have been registered as action networks in the Partnerships for SDGs online platform. Table 2 summarizes key information regarding ten global commitment platforms that are examined for this study.

2. Paragraph 283

Table 2. Summary of key information on ten voluntary global commitment platforms.

Platform	Established	No. of intiatives (as of 10 March, 2021)	Host	Thematic Area(s)
Partnerships for SDGs online platform	Initially 2002 (builds on type II partnerships, redeveloped in 2015)	5,366 commitments	DESA	17 Sustainable Development Goals
UN Global Compact	2000	12,600 business signatories	UN	1) Human rights labor and social sustainability, 2) Environment and climate, 3) Global governance
SIDS Action Platform	2014	Over 500 partnerships	DESA	Sustainable development in the Small-Island Developing States (SIDS)
UN Ocean Conference	2017	1,642 commitments	DESA	1) Coral reefs, 2) Implementation of international law as reflected in UNCLOS, 3) Mangroves, 4) Marine and coastal ecosystems management, 5) Marine pollution, 6) Ocean acidification, 7) Scientific knowledge, research capacity development and transfer of marine technology, 8) Sustainable blue economy, 9) Sustainable fisheries
Our Ocean Conference	2014	1,345 commitments	Independent	1) Marine protected areas, 2) Climate change, 3) Sustainable fisheries, 4) Marine pollution, 5) Sustainable blue economy, 6) Maritime security
UNEA platform	2017	Over 400 commitments	UNEP	1) Pollution reduction and control, 2) Removing barriers, 3) Education and public-awareness campaigns, 4) Research and development
Clean Seas	2016		UNEP	Marine litter
New Plastics Economy Global Commitment	2018	Over 500 business, government, and other signatories	Ellen MacArthur Foundation and UNEP	Plastic packaging
Global Climate Action Agenda	2014	27,782 commitments	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	1) Land-use, 2) Oceans and costal zones, 3) Water, 4) Transport, 5) Human settlements, 6) Energy, 7) Industry
Action Agenda for Nature and People	2018	198 commitments	Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	1) Food systems and health, 2) Freshwater, coastal and ocean ecosystems, 3) Conservation and restoration of land ecosystem, 4) Climate change mitigation and adaptation, 5) Conservation and sustainable use of species, 6) Sustainable consumption and production, 7) Stewardship/ good governance, 8) Urban sustainability, 9) Green finance, 10) Biosafety, 11) Access to benefit-sharing

3. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnerships/

3.2.1 Partnerships for SDGs Online Platform

Partnerships for Sustainable development have evolved through UN Conferences starting from the WSSD (2002) and culminating in the Partnerships for SDGs online platform that is the global registry of voluntary commitments for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[3]

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, partnerships and voluntary commitments have become even more prominent. Target 17.16 of the 2030 Agenda specifically requests to "enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources." The High-level Political Forum (HLPF) has been mandated to "follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments"[4] and to provide a "platform for partnerships".[5] In connection with sessions of the HLPF, a one-day Partnership Exchange is organized to review the role and impact of the initiatives. In addition, an informal progress report is presented to HLPF annually.

The registry currently lists 5,366 entries accompanied with information, including description, objectives, schedule for deliverables and resources mobilized. The registry requires defining commitment deliverables following the smart (specific, measurable, achievable, resource-based and time-based) criteria and reporting annually that significantly improve accountability. A traffic light system has been introduced to indicate status of reporting for commitments. The platform registry shows that 4% of the initiatives have reported in a timely manner (green light), 18% have failed to report within a year (yellow light), and 66% are inactive (red light). The traffic light system was introduced to incentivize reporting, as explained by one interviewee: "the traffic light system has yielded more engagement, but with varied results. Some people take it very seriously - especially if the light turns red – others do simply not know it is there, which then defeats the overall purpose of greater engagement" (interview 63).

DESA has organized many voluntary commitments into 'action networks'. Many of the action networks have evolved independently and have pioneered some best practices that have been accommodated to other partnerships, notably the accountability frameworks of SE4All (Abbott, 2017).

3.2.2 UN Global Compact

The UN Global Compact (UNGC) was established in 2000, and it has emerged as the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative that operates in 160 countries and involves 12,600 companies. UNGC consist of universal principles and aspirational standards of conduct by committing companies to ten principles incorporating values of human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption, and motivating companies to integrate the SDGs into their core business strategies and operations.

In 2005, UNGC adopted a governance Framework that was later reviewed in 2017. The updated Framework consists of the following components:

- Leaders' Summit, a triennial gathering of top executives

4. A/RES/67/290 (para 2)
5. A/RES/70/1 (para 84)

- Board with 25 members from business, civil society, labor, and the UN that meet annually
- Office entrusted with overall management
- Local networks, self-governed groups that exist in 68 countries
- Annual Local Network Forums to share experiences and compare progress
- Inter-agency team represented by seven UN agencies
- Donor group with 17 donor countries that meet annually

UNGC has made efforts to increase transparency and accountability. In 2015, a mandatory disclosure framework was introduced; it requires participating companies to produce an annual Communication on Progress that details how their work embeds the ten principles into their operations (UNGC, 2015). Failing to communicate progress on an annual basis results in a downgrading of participant status from active to non-communicating. Participants who do not communicate progress for two years in a row are expelled. To date, over 47,000 Communications of Progress have been posted. While the reporting requirements ask for including measurement of outcomes, what this entails is very loosely defined and thus does not provide meaningful information on signatories' performance over time.

The initiative has been praised for creating a space for dialogue, learning, and partnerships, helping formerly discordant parties to explore common ground under the umbrella of the UN system (Rasche & Waddock, 2014). However, UNGC has also been accused of "blue-washing" with criticism focusing on the insufficient attention being paid to assurance of conformity to the principles (Deva, 2006; Nolan, 2005). The controversy illustrates the potential dangers of the lack of screening of proposals for commitments and their meaningful monitoring, and the confusion between a registry for voluntary commitments and a certification mechanism (Ramstein, 2012). In response, the UNGC has enhanced its due diligence mechanism and screening of reporting, as one interviewee explained "we want to detect whether there is any sort of fraudulent communication, and put a minimum threshold of expectations, so if there's no progress under a certain period of time, the company is delisted from our initiative" (interview 85).

3.2.3 SIDS Action Platform

The Third International Conference for Small-Island Developing States (SIDS) was held in 2014 in Apia, Samoa, which resulted in an intergovernmental agreed outcome document – the SAMOA Pathway - and the launch of 300 multi-stakeholder partnerships devoted to sustainable development in SIDS. A key request from the SAMOA Pathway was establishing a SIDS Partnership Framework. This Framework was to monitor progress of existing partnerships and stimulate the launch of new partnerships for sustainable development in SIDS. In 2015, the UN General Assembly decided to establish the SIDS Partnership Framework that outlines the following elements:[6]

- A member state driven steering committee
- An annual global multi-stakeholder dialogue
- Regional and national dialogues
- A standardized reporting process

This commitment platform is unique in the sense that it is part of an intergovernmental

6. A/70/472/Add.2 (para 11)

process itself, as pointed out by an interviewee: "one of the elements of the SIDS Partnership Framework is its annual partnership dialogue with member States and partners to ensure engagement of stakeholders around partnerships. Another key aspect is the intergovernmental steering committee, which meets regularly to discuss the annual workplan" (interview 63). To date, over 500 partnerships have been registered. At the global level, the majority (52%) of partnerships are led by UN organizations, while regional organizations and/or governments generally lead the majority of partnerships in the regions (Göransson et al., 2019a). Participation by the private sector and academia is low.

The SIDS Action Platform is the main online resource for SIDS partnerships, with details of all registered partnerships.[7] In 2019, a SIDS Partnerships Toolbox was launched that includes a set of policy tools for enhancing capacity around the design of partnerships for SIDS, and for assisting stakeholders in monitoring and reviewing partnerships (Göransson et al., 2019b). It outlines smart criteria and norms to help to articulate commitments and register it to the SIDS Action Platform. The SIDS Partnership Framework is the first intergovernmental framework devoted to reviewing and monitoring partnerships. To date, 65 progress reports have been submitted by partnership focal points since the reporting template was launched in 2016, representing not even 20% of all registered partnerships.

3.2.4 UN Ocean Conference

The UN Ocean Conference held in June 2017 in New York City culminated in the outcome document Our Ocean, Our Future: Call for Action and the launch of close to 1,400 voluntary commitments to advance implementation of SDG 14 (Life Below Water). The role of this Conference was pivotal to attracting commitments, as mentioned by an interviewee: "I think you need to have something to focus minds on - a deadline - as we had with the 2017 Conference. That was a big push to get commitments posted before the end of the Conference" (interview 54). To date, the registry has 1,642 commitments, most of which are led by governments (39%), NGOs and civil society organizations (29%) or intergovernmental organizations (12%). Only 6% are led by academia and 7% by the private sector.[8] The financial contribution is significant evidenced by 541 commitments that provide for funding that amounts to USD 25.5 billion (DESA, 2017).

The registry includes nine thematic Communities of Ocean Action. Each Community is coordinated by designated focal points. These focal points work together with DESA and with the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, Ambassador Peter Thompson, in carrying out the activities. Each community is expected to organize on a regular basis virtual global webinars and face-to-face expert meetings. The registry is open to anyone wishing to register a voluntary commitment to advance implementation of SDG 14. The registration process is fairly simple and encourages specific, measurable, achievable, resource-based and time-based commitments and specification of means of implementation, such as financing or capacity building. Stakeholders with a registered commitment are encouraged to share their experiences by being featured in a monthly Ocean Action Newsletter.

Impacts on the ground could be significant if commitments are realized. For instance, commitments related to marine protected areas

7. https://sidspartnerships.un.org/
8. https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments/

Table 3. Challenges and Solutions faced by Communities of Ocean Action[9]

Challenges	Solutions
Resource deficiency, in particular financial challenges	Introduce a matchmaking mechanism between sponsorship proposals and interested sponsors
Weak participation from philanthropic organizations, scientific community & academia, and private sector	Direct outreach to stakeholder groups that are not aware of the challenges and/or possibility to contribute through the registry Develop a special interface, such as google maps for exploring the registry and promote it among industry
Reporting mechanism is weak and reporting rates are low	Define methods, data and indicators to support follow up Consider how reporting can support formalized reporting under SDG14 Introduce regular reporting with minimum common elements Review commitments and incorporate progress reports to assess individual and collective progress in a transparent manner Develop incentives for reporting e.g., by offering recognition in the form of certificates for commitments where progress is demonstrated

(MPAs) could contribute an additional 3% to the global coverage of MPAs (DESA, 2017). However, analysis of voluntary commitments and community-specific interim assessments reveal challenges and potential solutions summarized in Table 3. A notable gap is the absence of a formal reporting and accountability mechanism. Furthermore, implementation could be improved by introducing community-specific strategic plans (DESA, 2019).

3.2.5 Our Ocean Conference

Since 2014, the Our Ocean Conference has become a high-profile platform to announce ocean commitments.[10] This platform is changing social norms among leaders of countries and others, making it desirable and commendable to act, or announce actions, in this setting (Grorud-Golvert et al., 2019). To date, these annual conferences have been hosted by the United States (2014 & 2016), the Republic of Chile (2015), the European Union (2017), the Republic of Indonesia (2018) and Norway (2019). Invitees are encouraged to announce major commitments in six thematic areas: MPAs, climate change, sustainable fisheries, marine pollution, sustainable blue economy, and maritime security. The host country makes decisions on accepting new commitments.

Currently, Our Ocean Conference is undergoing institutionalization. Recently, an Advisory Group has been established to ensure greater continuity between Conferences. It consists of past and confirmed future hosts, and special advisors invited by the Advisory Group, not to exceed three special advisors in total. The establishment of a permanent secretariat is also under way.

The Conference hosts have consistently articulated their strong expectation of accountability for all announcements. Our Ocean Conference asks for reports on the completion status

9. DESA, 2019; DESA & WRI, 2019; UNEP & International Coral Reef initiative, 2018
10. https://www.ourocean2020.pw/

of the project (from 25-100 %) and this functions as an incentive for reporting and helps the secretariat review progress. Efforts are under way to increase validation of proposals for commitments to ensure that they are substantive and significant, as one interviewee exemplified: "when we receive a commitment, we forward it to a specialist who knows more about the facts and what a protected area commitment should involve to ensure it is credible and ambitious" (interview 02).

Third-party reviews have also been carried for some of the thematic areas. Promisingly, a third-party review of 143 commitments on MPAs found that 46% of the commitments have been completed and 49% show some progress (Grorud-Golvert et al., 2019). It also found that 40% of the groups making MPA commitments are in developing countries. Since the first Our Ocean Conference, 1.4% of the surface area of the ocean has been protected through voluntary MPA commitments that have almost doubled the surface area of MPAs worldwide.

3.2.6 UNEA Platform

In December 2017, the third session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-3) was organized in Nairobi, Kenya. UNEA-3 adopted a Ministerial Declaration entitled "Towards a Pollution-free Planet" and a number of resolutions connected to managing different forms of pollution. The Assembly was informed by the Executive Director's report "Towards a Pollution-free Planet" that underlines the importance of political leadership and partnerships (UNEP, 2017). In the run-up to UNEA-3, UNEP welcomed voluntary commitments from state and non-state actors as long as they met the following criteria:[11]

- Relate to pollution of air, water, land, coastal and marine, and cross-cutting chemicals and waste
- Consist of concrete targets or actions to avoid, reduce, mitigate, measure, monitor, report, and/or manage pollution
- Include implementation period and time frame
- Encourage wide participation by stakeholders

By the end of 2017, about 400 voluntary commitments had been submitted by governments, civil society and business (UNEP, 2018). These voluntary commitments address all areas of pollution, with 29% targeting specifically chemicals and waste. The commitments fall into four action categories: pollution reduction and control, removing barriers, education and public-awareness campaigns, and research and development.

The role of UNEA has been key for attracting commitments, as on interviewee noted "I think you need a strong political arena to reach the highest political levels, to do something about it. And it goes back to visibility, to showing political leadership at a level that is visible with your internal audience and externally" (interview 21). In the future, the UNEA platform is envisaged to evolve by encouraging new commitments to support the implementation of the UNEA theme that changes from one session to another. Plans are under way to help the UNEA platform to function as an "umbrella process" for all voluntary commitments, regardless of their theme.

In the run-up to UNEA-3, the #BeatPollution campaign was launched to raise awareness of the many forms of pollution and to encourage individuals, governments, businesses,

11. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnerships/unea

and civil society to commit to action. Almost 2.5 million individual social media pledges were made through an online platform (UNEP, 2018).

3.2.7 New Plastics Economy Global Commitment

In 2018, the New Plastics Economy launched its Global Commitment in conjunction with Our Ocean Conference. The Global Commitment is led by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, in collaboration with UNEP. Ellen MacArthur Foundation leads the engagement with the private sector signatories of the Global Commitment, and UNEP leads the engagement with government signatories. The initiative has over 250 business signatories, over 200 endorsers and over 20 national, subnational and local level government signatories.[12] Companies representing more than 20% of all plastic packaging used globally have committed to this initiative.

The Global Commitment outlines specific commitment areas for both government and business signatories, which makes it an interesting hybrid platform to encourage action from both public and private spheres. The initiative encourages signatories to set ambitious 2025 targets and to report annually and publicly on the implementation of these commitments and on progress made. Moving from qualitative to quantitative reporting is an ongoing effort, as highlighted by an interviewee: "The good thing is governments are committed to report annually back to the to the global community about their progress. So far, most of the inputs that we collected from the governments are kind of in narrative, but we are exploring with government signatories ways to measure their progress with quantitative data" (interview 48). An annual progress report is prepared by aggregating reporting data: the 2020 progress report draws from reports provided by 98% of business signatories and 85% of government signatories, allowing for quantitative and qualitative assessment of progress.

The New Plastics Economy initiative has also created the Plastics Pact, a network of public and private parties at the national or regional level, to help meet the Global Commitment. Plastic pacts are environmental voluntary agreements and can resemble voluntary extended producer responsibility schemes. So far, national Plastic Pacts have been developed in Chile, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, the UK and the United States. The first regional Plastic Pact was developed in Europe. Each initiative is led by a local organization that unites governments, businesses, and citizens behind a common vision with a concrete set of targets. Annual reporting helps to determine where members stand against the targets and to identify gaps and future priorities.

3.2.8 Global Climate Action Agenda

Negotiations under the UNFCCC have long been strongly intergovernmental. Outside of UNFCCC processes, however, non-state actors have initiated numerous climate commitments, partnerships, and other voluntary initiatives since the 1990s. Since 2014, the UNFCCC has begun to integrate such commitments into the climate regime.

In 2014, France and Peru launched the Lima-Paris Action Agenda (LPAA) at the twentieth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP-20) to showcase existing commitments

12. https://www.newplasticseconomy.org/projects/plastics-pact

and action initiatives, help them scale up, and catalyze new ones. LPAA welcomed both individual commitments and cooperative initiatives from local governments, businesses, civil society organizations, and multi-stakeholder coalitions. In parallel to LPAA, COP-20 launched the Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA) portal, an interactive online map, managed by the UNFCCC Secretariat, that showcases voluntary non-state commitments.[13] The Paris Agreement acknowledges the LPAA and encourages registration on the NAZCA portal.

In 2015, COP-21 initiated a process for nominating High-Level Champions who serve normally for two years for the "scaling-up and introduction of new or strengthened voluntary efforts, initiatives and coalitions."[14] In 2016, two High-Level Champions were appointed. They initiated the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action commonly referred as the "Global Climate Action Agenda" that outlines seven themes for mobilizing action (land-use, oceans and costal zones, transport, human settlements, energy and industry) and sets the following criteria for commitments (UNFCCC, 2016):

- Relevance: advance the goals of the agreement
- Scale: should be of sufficient size to have an impact
- Specific: have clear, quantifiable outcomes with targets enabling to assess progress
- Transparency in progress: report progress and results on a periodic basis
- Impact-oriented: need to be focused on concrete, real-world action
- Ownership: carried out by entities with responsibility to deliver results and mobilize resources

The Global Climate Action Agenda catalyzes action and helps to connect and share experience gained from organizing different events. During the session of the COPs, thematic action events and roundtables are organized to showcase progress on the first week, and high-level events are organized for making new commitments on the second week. In addition, regional climate weeks are organized to catalyze concrete climate action on the ground, in particular in developing countries.

At present, the Global Climate Action Portal does not track progress of individual commitments made. However, in 2019, the COP requested the Secretariat to continue engaging with non-Party stakeholders and enhancing the effectiveness of the NAZCA platform, including the tracking of voluntary action.[15]

Overall progress is tracked via The Yearbook of Global Climate Action, initiated by the High-level Champions. The yearbook highlights that the Global Climate Action Agenda is helping to close the gap in action to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2018). As of January 2021, the portal listed 27,513 commitments from around the world, including from companies (15%), cities (40%), regions (1%), investors (4%) and organizations (7%).

The High-level Champions have initiated several influential campaigns. The Race to Zero campaign encourages net-zero commitments, which have seen a significant increase, nearly doubling from late 2019 to late 2020 (UNFCCC, 2020).[16] The High-Level Climate Champions have established an Expert Peer Review Group tasked with reviewing Race to Zero

13. https://climateaction.unfccc.int/
14. Decision 1/CP.21, paras 121-123
15. Decision 1/CP.25, para 29
16. https://racetozero.unfccc.int/

partner applications and providing independent recommendations to the Champions on whether the initiatives meet the minimum criteria for participation. A sister campaign, the Race to Resilience campaign aims, by 2030, to catalyze action by non-state actors to build the resilience of 4 billion people from groups and communities who are vulnerable to climate risks.[17]

In addition, in 2018, COP-24 launched the UN ActNow campaign with a call by Sir David Attenborough in conjunction with the award-winning "People's Seat" initiative that has attracted 1,541,062 individual actions on climate and sustainability.

3.2.9 Action Agenda for Nature and People

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is currently calling for parties to submit Voluntary Biodiversity Commitments (VBCs) as a mechanism for increasing ambition and traction ahead of COP-15 (scheduled to be held in October 2021). In 2018, COP14 committed to the Sharm El-Sheikh to Kunming Action Agenda for Nature and People encouraging non-state actors to make voluntary commitments to contribute to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework development process.[18] The action agenda aims to raise public awareness, inspire and help implement nature-based solutions, and catalyze cooperative initiatives across sectors and stakeholders.

The Action Agenda is hosted on an online platform intended to receive and showcase concrete commitments and contributions to biodiversity ranging from large-scale collaborative efforts to individual actions. The online platform lists several criteria for VBCs: actions need to be scientifically sound, biodiversity relevant, include tangible and measurable actions, and contribute to transformational change. The platform is intended to enable the mapping of global efforts on biodiversity, in order to estimate impact and to identify key gaps. To date, it has received 198 commitments, including 70 in Europe, 26 in Eastern Europe, 36 in Asia, 27 in Africa, 23 in Latin America, 13 in North America and 3 in Australia.

There has been some confusion over the role of the VBCs and whether they are being proposed as an additional instrument alongside the national biodiversity strategy and action plans (NBSAP) and national reporting processes. Clarity has now been given by the CBD Secretariat that the VBCs should build upon and be an add-on to, and not in replacement of, the NBSAP.

How states and non-state actors can contribute best to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (currently under negotiation and to be adopted at COP-15 in late 2021) has not been decided. Three different options for commitments in addition to the NBSAPs will be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI) (spring 2021, tbc).

3.2.10 Clean Seas and Global Partnership on Marine Litter

In 2017, UNEP launched Clean Seas with the aim of engaging governments, the general public and the private sector in the fight against marine plastic pollution.[19] Clean Seas is a campaign that uses #CleanSeas on social media. The campaign contributes to the goals of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter

17. https://racetozero.unfcc.int/race-to-resilience/
18. https://www.cbd.int/action-agenda/
19. https://www.cleanseas.org

(GPML), a voluntary open-ended partnership for international agencies, governments, businesses, academia, local authorities and NGOs hosted by UNEP. GPML has a steering committee that sets priorities on the strategic directions of the GPML.

To date, Clean Seas has members from 62 countries, many companies and individuals. Membership provides for use of the Clean Seas Logo that provides an incentive for participation. An interviewee noted benefits of Clean Seas for both countries "to show the leadership that they are taking in joining the campaign and a platform for them to share what they're doing" and the Secretariat "to see what's happening in different regions and try to compile that information into the global processes that are going on the topic" (interview 75).

3.3 Characteristics of Global Commitment Platforms

The interviews and the literature review conducted for this study identified a non-exhaustive list of functions and principles for global voluntary commitment platform.

3.3.1 Key Functions

Functions identified in this study to be key include: I) implementation modalities (targets and workplans), II) commitment modalities (criteria, validation, launch, and peer-learning), III) monitoring of progress (reporting and review), and IV) outreach (registry and communication). Table 4 provides a summary of the main functions in ten existing voluntary global commitment platforms. Their applicability for issues of concern is explained in section 4. It is important to note that the number of functions deployed does not equal to the efficiency of the platform. In addition, the functions may be realized with different levels of stringency, for example although reporting is an inherent part of almost all commitment platforms, it is mandatory only in the UN Global Compact.

Table 4. Summary of Main Functions in Ten Voluntary Global Commitment Platforms

	Implementation		Commitment modalities				Monitoring of progress		Outreach	
	Targets	Work plans	Criteria	Validation	Launch	Peer-learning	Reporting	Review	Online registry	Public campaign
SDGs Online Platform	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
UN Global Compact		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
SIDS Action Platform	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
UN Ocean Conference	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Our Ocean Conference		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
UNEA Platform		✓	✓		✓				✓	✓
GPML & Clean Seas		✓								✓
New Plastics Economy	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	
Global Climate Action Agenda		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CBD Action Agenda			✓		✓		✓		✓	
Generates:	COMMITMENT		CREDIBILITY		VISIBILITY		ACCOUNTABILITY		TRANSPARENCY	

The main functions (I-IV) identified in ten global commitment platforms are briefly discussed below, along with examples of best practices.

I. Implementation modalities

1. **Time-bound targets** play an important role in encouraging aspiration. When accompanied with indicators they enable measuring progress.
   - The New Plastics Economy Global Commitment lays down a set of time-bound targets for achieving circular economy for plastics by 2025. The targets constitute a "minimum bar" and are regularly reviewed, and the level of ambition raised to ensure the initiative continues to evolve.
   - The Race to Resilience is a campaign established by the High-level Champions for Climate Action that specifies a set of time-bound targets for relevant actors, including policymakers, businesses, investors, innovators, and citizens.
2. **Workplans** developed by commitment platforms may take different forms, ranging from strategies to detailed work programmes. They may be accompanied with working groups or task forces to assist in operationalization.
   - The follow-up the UN Ocean Conference (2017) is delivered by nine Communities of Ocean Action. Each community is coordinated by two designated focal points from civil society and the UN system. Each community is expected to organize on a regular basis virtual global webinars and face-to-face expert meetings. The communities are also responsible for reviewing progress within their thematic area.

II. Commitment modalities

1. **Criteria** for commitments aim to ensure that they fulfill the desired characteristics. Most commitments platforms seek specific qualities from commitments using the "smart criteria" meaning that they should be specific, measurable, achievable, resource-based, and time-bound, although different nuances exist in their articulation between commitment platforms.
   - The SIDS Action Platform pioneered the use of smart criteria: "the reason behind the smart criteria is to get information for accountability and also for us to be able to do an analysis much easier", one interviewee noted, and "we have a big data set and with all this information we can do a lot of analytical work" (interview 63).
2. **Validation** of commitment proposals is needed to generate substantive commitments. Ideally this is facilitated by an independent review committee.
   - Race to Zero is a campaign established by the High-level Champions for Global Climate Action to encourage net-zero commitments. An Expert Peer Review Group has been established to review Race to Zero partner applications and provide independent recommendations to the Champions who then decide whether the initiatives meet the set-out minimum criteria.
3. **Announcement** of commitments are made in conjunction with conferences to ensure visibility that functions as an important incentive: "the idea is that there is this connection between making commitments and getting a spotlight to talk about it in front of

ministers, CEOs and so on" (interview 2).

- Activities of the Global Climate Action Agenda are highlighted in several events during the sessions of the UNFCCC COP, which includes the organization of high-level events during the second week for announcing new commitments.

4. **Peer-learning** is facilitated in conjunction with conferences by organizing events to present and discuss successes and challenges.
    - The SIDS Action Platform organizes an annual global multi-stakeholder dialogue which provides a global platform for SIDS and partners to review progress, launch new initiatives, and for all stakeholders to exchange lessons learned, identifying good partnering practices, and engage in dialogue.

III. Monitoring of progress

1. **Reporting** is often voluntary, and descriptive in nature, which prevents measuring outcomes.
    - The UN Global Compact has a mandatory disclosure framework that requires participating companies to produce an annual Communication on Progress detailing their work to embed the ten principles into their operations. Failing to communicate progress on an annual basis results in a downgrading of participant status from active to non-communicating. Participants who do not communicate progress for two years in a row are expelled.
    - The Partnerships for SDGs Online Platform uses traffic light colors to incentivize reporting: green light signals reporting in a timely manner, yellow light signals failure to report within a year, and red light means the initiative is inactive due to lack of reporting within two years.
2. **Reviewing** collective progress on a regular basis to identify best practices and understand outcomes.
    - The Yearbook of Global Climate Action is produced annually with the help of partnering institutions.
    - Third-party analysis has been carried out for select Areas of Action of Our Ocean Conference.
    - An annual Progress report, illustrating outcomes has been prepared by the New Plastics Economy Global Commitment.

IV. Outreach

1. **Registries** are used for showcasing commitments and displaying collective progress online. It can also function as a platform for submitting progress reports.
    - The NAZCA Climate Action portal functions as an megaportal that aggregates information provided by data partners.
2. **Campaigns** can be organized to communicate to the general public.
    - The UN ActNow campaign launched, in 2018, has yielded 1,541,062 individual actions on climate change and sustainability.

3.3.2 Key Principles

On the basis of the research presented above, five key principles that underpin the functions of an effective global commitment platform are identified below.

1. ***Transparency:*** *Commitments, progress reports and other relevant information are made publicly accessible online to generate trust and confidence*

Transparency of commitments can be achieved with an online registry that provides up-to-date information of commitments and progress made. Moreover, clarity and transparency in reporting can help to further the platform's public image and encourage new commitments.

2. ***Credibility:*** *Greenwashing is avoided by ensuring that commitments are substantive and significant and represent a genuine attempt to progress from the status quo*

Inactive commitments burden many commitment platforms. Announcements often takes place with great fanfare, but then are never implemented, raising doubt and suspicions that the new announcement is nothing more than "greenwashing." In response, commitment platforms have developed incentives to encourage reporting to ensure that registered commitments are active. This includes using traffic light colors to distinguish commitments for which progress is reported in a timely manner from those non-reporting commitments. In addition, early validation of proposal for commitments may help to ensure that commitments are substantive and genuine.

3. ***Accountability:*** *Achievements are regularly reported, and performance reviewed, to understand outcomes and impacts*

Most commitment platforms seem to be weak on reviewing progress. First, reporting formats are normally not designed to collect quantitative information: "It's an open reporting format so we are not able to aggregate any information" (interview 85). Second, reporting rates are generally low, as one interviewee noted "there's been a lot of challenges in terms of, you know, asking people to update" (interview 54). It is relevant to consider the introduction of outcome-oriented indicators to collect quantitative data, design incentives to encourage reporting, and have the secretariat encouraging reporting.

4. ***Leadership:*** *Champions are identified and empowered at various level to extend the reach and influence of the platform*

Identifying champions and using leadership at many levels is important, as one interviewee noted "champions are essential to ensure visibility on a very packed development agenda" (interview 63). Another interviewee remarked: "a global champion can bring it all together, keep it moving forward and be the link between the UN agencies and national governments and give it a face" (interview 54). This is exemplified by the Paris Agreement's use of High-level Champions for spurring voluntary climate commitments. In this case, the inaugural outlined an ambitious agenda that was adopted the following year. The champions are appointed by the current and incoming COP presidencies, and they have helped to generate political ownership and institutionalize key functions.

5. ***Inclusiveness:*** *All relevant stakeholders are properly engaged, enabling the creation of collaborative efforts between industry, government, and other stakeholders*

Defining the target audience of the commitment platform is important: who is ultimately expected to act? The audience may include public authorities, the public at large, civil society, local communities, municipalities, academia, indigenous peoples and industry and anyone in the supply chain. Although private sector engagement is featured in all global commitment platforms, its role in often small in comparison to that of other stakeholders. A promising example comes from the New Plastic Economy Global Commitment that engages with private sector through the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, whereas UNEP leads work with governments. The Global Climate Action Agenda has provided a particularly important entry point for encouraging action by municipalities.

3.4 Role of voluntary commitments for issues of concern

The international community has adopted MEAs to address some hazardous substances, including persistent organic pollutants, mercury, ozone-depleting substances and certain greenhouse gases. However, there currently does not exist a comprehensive mechanism to identify and regulate hazardous substances that are not covered by existing MEAs but may still warrant global action.

The Executive Director's report for UNEA-3 highlighted that scientific evidence exists to further advance risk reduction on many substances, including on phosphorus, nitrogen, lead, cadmium, arsenic and chromium and selected flame retardants (UNEP, 2017). The second edition of the Global Chemicals Outlook expanded this list with bisphenol A, glyphosate, neonicotinoids, organotins, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, phthalates and triclosan (UNEP, 2019a). While the link between chemicals safety and human health is indisputable, the COVID-19 pandemic has further revealed that certain immunotoxic chemicals, namely Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) are associated with an increased risk of a more severe course of the coronavirus disease (Grandjean et al., 2020).

The nomination of issues of concern under SAICM would aim to fill the international regulatory gap through voluntary action. The current proposal from the virtual working group on issues of concern provides the following definition: "an issue of concern is an issue involving any phase in the life cycle of chemicals and which has not yet been generally recognized, is insufficiently addressed or arises from the current level of scientific information and which may have significant adverse effects on human health and/or the environment" (SAICM, 2021).

One goal would be to achieve risk reduction including from hazardous chemicals. Such risk reduction in the SAICM text refers to restricting production and use of chemicals that pose an unreasonable and otherwise unmanageable risk to human health and the environment based on a science-based risk assessment and considering the costs and benefits as well as the availability of safer substitutes and their efficacy (SAICM, 2006).

4. Elements for a Global Commitment Platform for Issues of Concern

This section explains how a dynamic, voluntary and credible commitment platform for contributing to addressing issues of concern could be developed based on experiences from existing commitment platforms. Elements identified in section 3 are used to tailor an agile commitment platform for issues of concern that fulfills main principles, including accountability, credibility and transparency, as well as ensures leadership and inclusiveness.

4.1 Targets and action plans (implementation modalities)

Set clear time-bound targets for issues of concern and develop action plans to operationalize them. Assign operative co-leads form governments, intergovernmental organizations and other stakeholders to deepen the impact and reach of the action plans.

Targets are needed to provide aspiration and guide action by all stakeholders. Targets can also help to measure progress when they are accompanied by indicators. Commitment platforms that function in conjunction with MEAs and the 2030 Agenda often encourage reaching goals specified therein, thus function as their implementation arms. More nuanced targets can also be developed for specific initiatives, workstreams and/or campaigns that operate under the umbrella of the commitment platform.

Workplans help to determine responsibilities and enhance implementation. Workplans for issues of concern could describe main measures and set time-bound targets for achievement for issues of concern, as illustrated in Figure 4. Workplans could be led by co-chairs or "sherpas" who would enable "building a community" of the like-minded. This community building would help in networking and outreach. To ensure that workplans are useful for achieving action on issues of concern it will be important to pay attention to their clarity, specificity, level of detail, and the assigning of roles and responsibilities to stakeholders. See section 5 for more discussion on the role of workplans.

Figure 4. Workplans would constitute an inherent part of a platform and possible commitment mechanism.

4.2 Modalities for Commitments

Outline clear procedures for commitments, including to guide the preparation of proposals, validation of proposed commitments, and modalities for their public announcement and for peer-learning.

Criteria for preparation of commitments is needed to elicit stronger commitments and facilitate accountability. The premise is that commitments need to be substantive and significantly contribute to activities to achieve the agreed workplan. The requirements (criteria) for commitments could include a combination of any of the following:

- Contributes to achieving activities outlined in workplan
- Uses common metrics for measuring progress
- Is realistic and specifies resources
- Includes a timeline for its deliverables
- Reports on progress and results on a periodic basis
- Encourages wide participation by stakeholders
- Contributes to transformational change
- Is scientifically sound

Validation of proposed commitments can help to ensure that commitments are substantive and credible, and do not result in "greenwashing." Initial validation should take place prior to the publication or announcement of new commitments. This could happen through a review by operative leads of respective issues of concern. More ambitiously, review could be carried out by independent experts put in charge of keeping standards constant.

Announcement of commitments serves as an important incentive and most commonly occurs in the realm of international conferences. Public launches help to amplify political leadership, as well as interest from the private sector and NGOs. To this end, the sessions of the ICCM could be accompanied with an event focusing on launching the most ambitious commitments, which could attract high-level participation and facilitate new networks around issues of concern.

Peer-learning can be facilitated by organizing sessions for issues of concern in conjunction with the ICCM session for sharing experiences and presenting achievements between partners, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders. This will facilitate networking and development of new partnerships, as well as allow for the replication of successful initiatives.

4.3 Tracking Progress

Ensure that progress on issues of concern is tracked with reporting and a periodic collective review, focusing on quantitative data to understand outcomes and impacts, and embedded in the reporting and review modalities of the Beyond 2020 Framework.

Reporting on performance is fundamental for tracking progress. Clarity and transparency in reporting would further the public image of issues of concern, provide confidence within the chemicals and waste community and among the public, and encourage other organizations to make and deliver commitments. Reporting would be specific to the voluntary commitments and targeted to the institutions championing them, thus it would complement any

regular reporting under the new agenda. At a minimum, reporting should be able to distinguish between active and inactive initiatives. The possibility of attaching supporting documents (e.g., list of regulations, management plan, etc.) would increase accountability and enhance the transparency needed for evaluating outcomes. The setting of targets and/or indicators to assess outcomes could also be considered.

Review of progress is needed to assess collective progress. Proactive review, monitoring, and accountability processes in a regular manner can provide crucial information on the performance of commitments and avoid the creation of low-impact or short-term activities that do not allow progress in reaching targets. However, quality control and ensuring that commitments are effective and impactful will be difficult to achieve. This results from a lack of quantitative data and thus difficulties in aggregating information. Reviews can be carried out by the Secretariat and/or scientific institutions and NGOs can be tasked with undertaking independent reviews.

4.4 Outreach

Develop a dynamic, accessible and updated online interface - or use the infrastructure of an existing online registry - to showcase commitments and illustrate progress. Enhance outreach via targeted public campaigns.

An online registry - accommodated in the reporting system - would promote transparency. The registry should be maintained and updated regularly, ensuring open and transparent access to data and information. The registry could provide grounds for developing and applying indicators and analytical frameworks for monitoring and evaluating performance and impacts. The registry could also be a vehicle for the sharing of best practices. It could be part of an existing online registry; for example the Partnerships for SDGs online platform hosted by DESA provides the possibility to register a commitment platform as an "Action Networks for the SDGs" and thereby benefit from its digital platform maintained by UN system entities.

Campaigns have proven to be very important in reaching out to the broader public. Similarly, a campaign could be launched to bring awareness of issues of concern. The campaign could outline activities that individual consumers or users could take in their daily life across all issues of concern. Alternatively, a campaign could be tied to a target related to certain substances of concern, encouraging producers, manufactures and retailers to commit to voluntary action. These actions could be featured in the online registry indicating level of progress i.e. either being in process to working towards achieving the target or having achieved it – and thus a campaign could provide an incentive for the public to monitor progress.

5. Options for Progress on Issues of Concern

This section elaborates options for developing a voluntary mechanism for commitments linked to agreed Issues of Concern in the agenda, focusing on how activities and science-based recommendations could be articulated in the workplans to generate commitments from all stakeholders.

First, one option could be to encourage **open-ended commitments**, including individual and joint commitments, partnerships, and campaigns, to meet the activities outlined in the agreed workplans in an organized manner. Both state and non-state actors could pledge and register open-ended commitments preferably in an online registry. The most ambitious and substantive commitments could be put in the spotlight in conjunction with ICCM sessions. The process developed should ensure that commitments are substantial and significant, and that reporting will take place until commitments are completed. This approach allows for flexibility and possibly innovative solutions and actions.

For addressing specifically substances of concern that warrant global action, the workplans could outline and recommend possible risk reduction measures, including phase-out of production and uses. To help detail actions needed, a scientific body could develop **science-based recommendations** concerning substances of concern. Stakeholders that sign on to the recommendations could be listed in the registry, which would encourage participation and demonstrate performance to their respective constituencies.

Another option entail outlining **high-level principles** and actions that guide the work of all participating actors, including governments, the private sector, and others. Actors may become signatories to the principles – and any adjunct targets – and commit to adapt them to their own context (e.g., national context or company operations). This would require actors signing on to set targets and identify measures in line with these principles, and periodically report on progress. Credibility could be ensured by setting a clear minimum level of ambition for signatories that will be reviewed — and will become increasingly ambitious — over time to ensure the commitment continues to provide leadership and drive change. This model would be suitable to broader thematic policy areas, in particular harmful and problematic products and materials, such as electrical and electronic products. The New Plastics Economy Global Commitment provides a successful precedent for this option.

A fourth option would outline **performance levels** for certain activity areas. In practice, this would mean that activity areas would have 4-5 performance levels and the aim would be to progress from level 1 to level 5 in all of them. Performance levels should be tailored for governments and industry to accommodate their different roles. The Cradle to Cradle Certified Products Standard provides a possible precedent. The Standard uses five categories, and each has five performance levels (Cradle to Cradle Products Innovation Institute, 2016). Similarly, WHO's International Health Regulations outlines 24 activity areas graded in five performance levels to be reported upon annually against a simple checklist (WHO, 2005). The strength of this approach is that it would encourage continuous improvement and reporting would reveal how performance differs across nations, regions and sectors.

To conclude, an approach combining options discussed above is illustrated in Figure 5. After an issue is identified by the ICCM as an issue of concern for international concerted action, a working group could be established to further develop and promote implementation of a workplan. To support in detailing actions needed, science-based recommendations for actions and risk reduction measures could be prepared by the possible scientific body envisaged to also support the Beyond 2020 Framework. The commitment platform would be managed by the secretariat, in cooperation with the working group, or by an assigned IOMC organization. The ICCM sessions would provide the opportunity for organizing events for peer-learning as well as high-level events for announcing new commitments, as well as for regularly taking stock of overall progress.

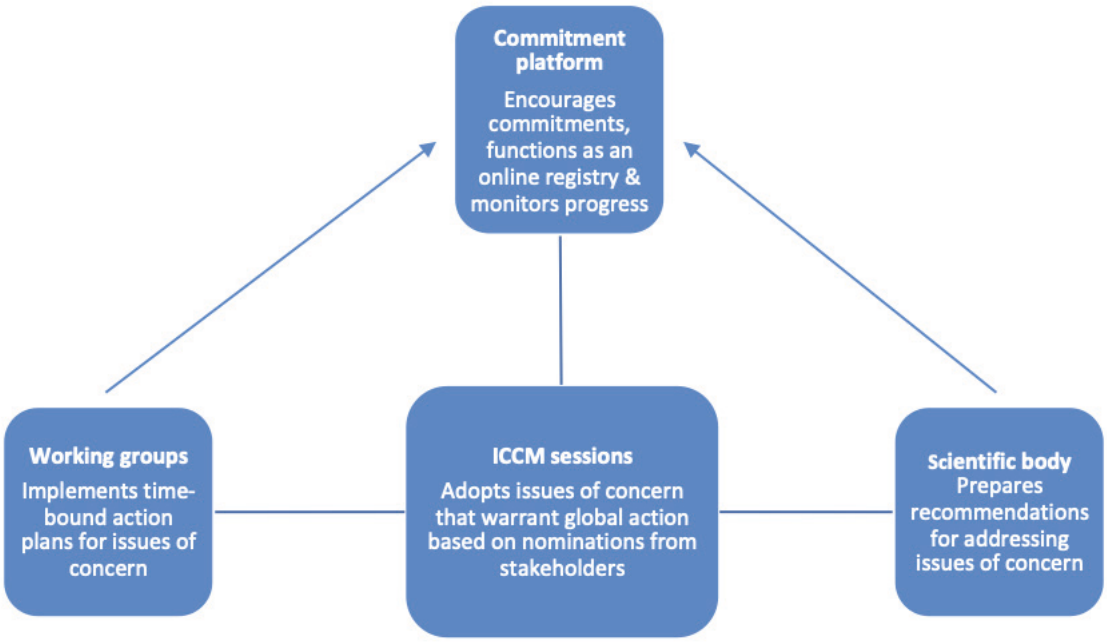


Figure 5. Illustration of the hybrid option for the commitment platform.

6. Conclusions

Chemicals and waste governance has not yet seized the full opportunity presented by voluntary commitment systems. Orchestrating a collective effort within the new agenda - for transparent voluntary commitment systems that enhance implementation of agreed issues of concern - makes it possible to incentivize innovation and action, while ensuring accountability and transparency.

The main rationale for voluntary commitments is based on the concept that responsibility for implementing complex and cross-sectoral issues cannot be limited to governments but has to be diffused across wider sectors of society. Though not replacing state measures to implement legally binding agreements, voluntary commitments hold great additional potential for driving transformative change for chemicals safety in a way that supports global agreements but also complements them.

It is expected that a process will be established at ICCM-5 to identify, prioritize, and address issues of concern that warrant global action. Within such a process, time-bound commitments for the implementation of various actions or measures related to addressing identified issues of concern could be valuable. Structures to initiate a process for all actors to equally take on commitments with specified actions would be central to such a process as well.

To this end, by presenting the elements of, and options for a commitment platform, this report endeavors to mobilize action across all sectors and stakeholders, and to help deliver on workplans for agreed issues of concern. To date, voluntary action has been taken through a range of commitments and pioneering partnerships to advance issues of concern. Thus, valuable practices are emerging that need to be scaled up. A global commitment platform provides an opportunity to enhance the impact and transparency of existing efforts and catalyze further action by all actors.

Such a platform could support to mobilize actions and means for improving chemicals and waste management, support the creation of new partnerships across different sectors, and facilitate learning processes and exchanges of innovative practices. Moreover, a commitment platform could help to raise visibility and build greater momentum for developing a dynamic global agenda for chemicals and waste management that speaks to and draws in non-state and substate actors to be part of an international movement operating under the UN umbrella. More specifically, a voluntary commitment platform could help to promote action on reducing risk from hazardous substances that are not covered by existing MEAs but may still warrant global action. Through voluntary commitments lengthy negotiations to reach consensus on the actions can be avoided.

Many areas that warrant further research have only been touched upon in this study. This includes examining in more detail the role of third-party standards and certification programs as a voluntary tool to encourage self-regulation of the private sector, building on the study prepared by Hengstmann and Nuguid (2019). The role of a scientific body in relation to the Beyond 2020 Framework has been studied by Wang et al. (2019) and Kohler & Templeton (2020), but its possible role for identifying and addressing issues of concern would benefit from a detailed analysis to understand the scope of recommendations as well as possibilities for supporting effective implementation through national commitments.

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Annex 1.

Existing modalities and new proposals for identifying and nominating issues of concern and substances of concern

Existing modalities for emerging policy issues (Annex of Resolution II/4)	Proposed information to be submitted for issues of concern (1 Feb 2021 proposal from co-facilitators of the virtual working group)	Proposal on information related to substances of concern (KemI)
In nominating an emerging policy issue for consideration by the Conference, a proponent will be required to complete a questionnaire that includes the criteria listed below in subparagraph (b). The information to be submitted to the secretariat should include: a. Information demonstrating why a given issue is considered to be an emerging policy issue, in particular how it is consistent with the definition of an emerging policy issue, i.e., an issue involving any phase in the life cycle of chemicals and which has not yet been generally recognized, is insufficiently addressed or arises from the current level of scientific information and which may have significant adverse effects on human health and/or the environment b. Information demonstrating how the issue meets the following criteria: - Magnitude of the problem and its impact on human health or the environment, taking into account vulnerable subpopulations and any toxicological and exposure data gaps - Extent to which the issue is being addressed by other bodies, particularly at the international level, and how it is related to, complements, or does not duplicate such work - Existing knowledge and perceived gaps in understanding about the issue - Extent to which the issue is of a crosscutting nature - Information on the anticipated deliverables from action on the issue	To nominate an issue, the following information should be provided: a. Why the Beyond 2020 Framework is best placed to advance the issue b. Impacts on human health and/or the environment related to the issue, taking into account inter alia women, children and other vulnerable populations, biodiversity ecosystems and any toxicological and exposure data c. How the issue is integral to the vision of the Beyond 2020 Framework, is ongoing, and needs to be addressed to enhance basic chemicals and [associated] waste management and/or advance the implementation of innovative and sustainable solutions, particularly taking into account the needs of developing countries /countries with economies in transition d. How the issue is integral to the Sustainable Development Goals e. Extent to which the issue is of a cross-cutting nature including at the sectoral level f. Extent to which the issue is being addressed by other bodies, at the regional or international level, and how the proposed action to address the issue is related to, complements, or does not duplicate such effort g. Existing knowledge and perceived gaps in understanding about the issue h. A list of priority actions and related timelines to guide implementation and the elaboration of a proposed workplan, including opportunities for multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral engagement	During the process of identifying and nominating substances or group of substances as issue of concern, this information could support their identification and prioritization: a. Chemicals that are: (i) Persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic (PBTs); or (ii) Very persistent and very bioaccumulative (vPvB); or (iii) Assessed as being persistent and mobile in the aquatic phase and toxic (PMT); or (iv) Assessed as being very persistent and very mobile in the aquatic phase (vPvM); or (v) Carcinogens, mutagens or reprotoxic (CMR) or that adversely affect, inter alia, the endocrine, immune or nervous systems; or (vi) Toxicity or ecotoxicity data indicate the potential for damage to human health or to the environment of equivalent level of concern; and; (vii) With a monitored or potential long-range transport in air, water, migratory species or through trade with products; or (viii) High production volumes and wide dispersive uses; or other negative effects on human health or to the environment, including effects on climate, biodiversity, ecosystem services, circular economy, resource efficiency, food production, or increased antimicrobial resistance.

This report explores opportunities for upscaling ambition and action from a wide array of social actors and institutions, alongside with governments, for achieving the sound management of chemicals and waste. Based on an analysis of existing global commitment platforms, the report identifies key functions and principles therein. It then proposes how they can be applied for increasing commitment to ensure the needed action to address issues of concern that warrant global action, including harmful chemicals, materials, and products. The report aims to inform the development of the global agenda for chemicals and waste management. Its findings may also help other foras seeking to unlock the potential of all actors.

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