

Conference Summary: Healthy Planet, Healthy Children: Success Factors for a Future without Toxics

Online Conference on **May 19th, 2022**

Hosted and organized by the *World Future Council*, in partnership with the *United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)* & *Healthy Babies Bright Futures (HBBF)*, supported by the *German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV)*, the *German Federal Environment Agency (UBA)*, *Michael Otto Foundation* and *Jua Foundation*

Pollution is one of the three planetary crises, right next to climate change and biodiversity loss. In particular, chemical pollution has become a major threat for environmental and human health. Toxic metals, highly hazardous pesticides, endocrine disruptors, amongst others, are responsible for 1.7 million pre-mature deaths in children under the age of 5 each year. Moreover, the exposure to hazardous chemicals and pollution during childhood severely increases the chance to develop a disease, such as cancer, or a disability later in life. This has urged several governments to take action. Exemplary policies protecting current and future generations from toxic chemicals have been recognized with the [Future Policy Award 2021](#). However, we urgently need more governments to follow suit! To urge further action and highlight existing solutions we held an online conference entitled “**Healthy Planet, Healthy Children: Success Factors For A Future Without Toxics**” on May 19th 2022, in anticipation of Stockholm+50 and in partnership with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and Healthy Babies Bright Futures (HBBF), supported by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), the German Federal Environment Agency (UBA), Michael Otto Foundation and Jua Foundation. The event gathered international, academic, NGO and policy experts, who shared their insights on how hazardous chemicals affect children’s health, and discussed key success factors of chemical policies, inspiring award-winning policies and a set of useful policy recommendations, in order to advance the protection from hazardous chemicals.

Opening Plenary

Healthy Planet, Healthy Children - what’s the state of play?

The conference was opened by our Executive Director Alexandra Wandel, who highlighted the urgency for international action seen the impact on children’s health, and who at the same time gave an encouraging outlook: “Our toxic-free future is within our reach. It is possible.” (05:20)

The opening statement on behalf of HE Annika Strandhäll, Minister for Climate and the Environment from Sweden, delivered by Jesper Lindholm, Political Advisor for the same Minister (07:13), underlined the dire need for united efforts to protect children’s health from the detrimental influence of a chemically polluted environment: “The health of our children is a pressing issue, it is about our future and intergenerational justice.” (07:31)

Afterwards, Nikhil Seth (11:33), UN Assistant Secretary General and Executive Director of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), held a keynote focusing on the omnipresence of chemicals in our daily lives and how it especially effects children: “Children are the most vulnerable group to the impact of chemicals in society, children’s bodies are still developing and the process to eliminate chemicals is slower than in adults” (12:34). Moreover, he pointed out the adverse interconnectedness of exposure to chemicals, poverty, child labour and restricted access to health care and education, suggesting that a holistic approach combining legislation, communication and education is required.

Dr Monika MacDevette (17:22), Chief of the Chemicals and Health Branch at the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), further elaborated on this issue in her keynote by drawing explicit connections between environmental sources of harmful pollutants and children’s health using the examples of lead, mercury, pesticides and fertilizers whilst reporting on UNEP’s work.

Finally, Samia Kassid (29:05), Senior Programme Manager for Rights of Children and Youth at the World Future Council, introduced seven policy recommendations, which reflect a holistic approach as suggested by Nikhil Seth and emphasize the need for a stronger focus on children’s health

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and for a child rights-based approach with regard to regulating and fighting chemical pollution: “Act as if millions of children’s lives are at risk; because they are“ (29:44).¹

After this noteworthy opening plenary, participants could join one of two breakout sessions with a special focus on either Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs) or on Toxic Metals.

Parallel session 1

The Dangerous Assistants: [Highly Hazardous Pesticides \(HHPs\)](#)

The session on Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs) was moderated by Renate Künast, Member of Parliament and former Federal Minister of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture in Germany, who introduced the topic by informing on the grave health risks posed by HHPs, including fatal and non-fatal (unintentional) poisoning as well as self-poisoning, which is “the most common suicide method globally” (02:41). She also pointed out the disproportionate effect on children, and “with use increasing worldwide” (01:54) the dire need “to take bold action in this matter” (03:25).

To share a promising example of such “bold action”, the session started with an interview with Sundar Anbalagan (07:37), Chief Executive Officer of the Sikkim Organic Farming Development Agency in India. Sikkim is the first 100 % organic state in the world and this achievement was honored with the [Future Policy Gold Award](#) in 2018. Mr Anbalagan firstly pointed out that the starting point was the conservation of biodiversity, which led to an extensive phase of preparatory work to make Sikkim completely organic: “The preparatory work included training of farmers [and of] all the stakeholders, creating institutional mechanisms, infrastructure, and facilities, and even pilot projects” (11:48). In addition, he explained that the implementation and optimization of a policy is an ongoing process, by showing how, after Sikkim became organic in 2016, a value chain was created to support farmers. Farmers were grouped into organizations and marketing policies were enabled, with the latter also being intended to encourage young people to work in this sector. If you wish to know more about organic Sikkim, you can watch the film shared after the interview [here](#).

Another impressive example for political action on HHPs followed with a [short film](#) (15:45). The film reported about the impact of Sri Lanka’s Control of Pesticides Act No. 33 (1980, amended in 1994, 2011, 2020) and the National Policy and Action Plan on Prevention of Suicide (1997). These policies won together a [Future Policy Special Award](#) in 2021, because they helped to reduce the suicide rate in Sri Lanka tremendously (once one of the highest worldwide).

Subsequently, the discussion started (25:48) with a focus on issues regarding the nexus of HHPs and children’s health. Gamini Manuweera (27:35), Independent Consultant on Chemical Risk Management at the Centre for Pesticide Suicide Prevention (CPSP) at University of Edinburgh firstly pointed out “the lack of children-targeted policies, laws and actions” (28:48), especially in developing countries and therefore the need “to have targeted actions on highly hazardous pesticides related to children’s health” (31:26), including the protection from exposure and the restriction of access to HHPs.

Gerold Wyrwal (32:19), Agricultural Officer for Pesticide Management at the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) spoke on behalf of Baogen Gu, Senior Agricultural Officer Pest and Pesticide Management at FAO. He said that one of the biggest issues in relation to regulating HHPs is that although “all key actors actually saying there are a few economically feasible alternatives” (34:34), farmers in the field often do not feel that there are. So, while it is important

¹ The seven policy recommendations are based on UNEP’s *Global Chemical Outlook II* (2019) and were compiled with support from the NGO Healthy Babies, Bright Futures (HBBF).

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to raise these issues with member states and arrive at global policy agreements, it is also very important to provide technical and financial assistance.

Gamini Manuweera (36:20), who was involved in the development and implementation of the Sri Lankan policies, was asked to share insights on key factors for a successful implementation: “The two points I have is effective collaboration with agencies, of course, the health sector, agriculture sector, and research and extension. And last but not least, the political blessing at the highest level to support this; that was really very much of an important thing that allowed us to sort of work through all these different sectors, across the problem to come to some kind of very sustainable situation in the country” (38:28).

In relation to this, Ingrid Fritsche (42:31), Future Policy Award Project Manager at the World Future Council (WFC), elaborated on the aspects that build an exemplary policy by referring to the seven Principles for Sustainable Development Law as promoted by the International Law Association, and by pointing out the need for a holistic approach. In accordance with the WFC goal – to showcase exemplary policy solutions, the discussion then turned to the question how successful policies can be implemented elsewhere, with Gamini Manuweera (48:01) stating that with the Sri Lankan example it was vital that NGOs and research groups were and are spreading the experiences and learnings to the global community. Gerold Wyrwal (51:24) added that “we need these success stories to convince other countries and policymakers that it is actually possible, that it’s not just a theoretical activity” (51:36) and that young people need to be inspired by them.

Finally, all speakers shared their view on the policy recommendations and key success factors (53:03): Sundar Anbalagan (01:04:26) stated that in Sikkim it was firstly “political will” (01:04:40) and “political continuity of the organic farming activities in our state that has really helped us in our health as our costs” (01:05:06) as well as a strong focus on the issue. Gamini Manuweera (01:05:39) outlined “communication, the media role and science policy interface” (01:07:02), meaning that it is very important to turn a complex scientific issue into something comprehensible and understandable, “to break this barrier” (01:06:11). Gerold Wyrwal (01:07:21) claimed that “awareness raising, sharing that information and whatever is coming, that is key to our success” (01:07:26), as well as countries working “hand in hand” (01:08:03), sharing knowledge as well as highly qualified actors. Ingrid Fritsche (01:10:08) lastly underscored the importance of a multistakeholder approach: “It’s really important to take into account and involve the people who are affected by these policies and to do that in a holistic way, to really involve all the target groups and the vulnerable populations but also industry, so all the stakeholders that need to give their voice on that” (01:11:03). She also shared that her experience with the Future Policy Award shows that it is very important that policies are not only good “on paper”, but are properly implemented, and that sometimes it only takes one person to achieve this: “It’s also coming down to single people, individuals, to go the extra mile and really bring about such great policies” (01:12:20).

Parallel session 2

The Invisible Enemy: [Toxic Metals](#)

The session on Toxic Metals focused on lead in paints and was moderated by Eduardo Caldera Petit, SAICM Programme Officer and UNEP Programme Management Officer. He shortly introduced the topic by pointing out the nexus between lead exposure and children’s health and by noting that according to WHO lead exposure causes 143,000 cases of death and 600,000 cases of intellectual disability in

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children every year: “Chemical safety plays an important role in protecting children's health and calls for actions to enact legislation and implement regulations necessary to protect our children from lead exposure” (01:17). Moreover, he highlighted promising global developments within projects such as SAICM’s [Global Best Practices on Emerging Chemical Policy Issues of Concern under the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management](#): “Within this project, we're working with over 35 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in six countries, assisting them to switch to lead paint, to paint that doesn't contain any lead or that doesn't contain any additive of lead. And we're demonstrating through this small pilot project with these SMEs, that converting to lead-free production of paint is feasible and is achievable” (03:50).

After this insightful introduction, Angela Bandemehr (06:28), International Lead Paint Program Manager at US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Chair of the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint, elaborated on the impacts of unregulated lead on children’s health, explaining the need to act now with “one in three children globally being lead poisoned” (08:33) and low- and middle-income being disproportionately affected. This, combined with the health impacts caused by lead being irreversible, calls for preventive rather than reactive approaches: “Preventing exposure is really the best way to prevent health impacts” (09:33).

Following these insights, Joel Maleon (15:49), Senior Environmental Management Specialist at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources—Environmental Management Bureau (DENR-EMB) was interviewed by Mr Caldera Petit regarding his experiences in the Philippines. He was involved in the implementation of the Philippines’ Chemical Control Order (CCO) for Lead and Lead Compounds (2013-2024) from the beginning, an exemplary policy that was rewarded with a [Future Policy Special Award](#) in 2021. The Philippines were the first Southeast Asian country to successfully implement legislation mandating lead-safe paint by applying a multistakeholder approach. He pointed out that several related factors were vital to implement the CCO successfully: “The key here really is that all stakeholders believed in one objective, and that is human safety and safe environment for all” (19:40). In conclusion he stated: “I think key factor number one is a multistakeholder approach in the development of a policy. And number two, being able to compromise, each of the stakeholders should be able to compromise in order to achieve this common objective” (23:43).

Then, the discussion was opened (24:04) with Angela Bandemehr (26:39), who took part in developing UNEP’s [Model Law and Guidance for Regulating Lead Paint](#) and who shared insights on this work as well as her efforts with the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint. Supporting Mr Maleon’s argument of a common objective, she stated that “the Alliance essentially keeps the drumbeat going at the global level” (27:46) and applies a multistakeholder approach: “Building on the Model Law, building on what needs to be in an effective law, one has to think about compliance and enforcement, while one drafts a law, so that the law itself contains the right provisions for document and compliance for assuring that those who are affected by the law know exactly what they need to do” (30:51). This highlighted the importance of integrating a focus on compliance and enforcement. She further underscored the significance of global experience, best practices exchange as well as awareness raising

Subsequently, Shankar Prasad Paudel (34:17), Senior Divisional Chemist at the Department of Environment in Nepal, shared that for Nepal Angela Bandemehr’s last aspect, namely raising awareness, is currently the most vital factor, because “people are still not much aware about lead poisoning” (34:38). He also urged to think of potential difficulties, when implementing a law and to develop a multi-faceted plan beforehand.

Dr. Tadesse Amera (36:16), Co-Chair of the International Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN) and Executive Director of Pesticide Action Nexus Association (PAN-Ethiopia), pointed out that

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for Ethiopia's Lead in Paint Control Regulation No. 429 (2018), which was shortlisted for the Future Policy Award in 2021, the key factors for implementation were, as suggested by Samia Kassid's policy recommendations in the Opening Plenary, to act as if millions of children's lives are at stake, to establish legally-binding regulation and "to create a pathway to a toxic-free future for the environment's biodiversity" (37:25). He also stretched the need for global action as taken by WHO and UNEP to be able "to trickle down to the national level, so that governments, civil society and industry can also work together" (40:47) and, especially in the Global South, adequate financing. Finally, he suggested to include further sources of lead in the future development of environmentally sound management, for instance lead-acid batteries.

Mr Maleon (39:28) additionally underscored the importance of information and education to make the common objective understandable and feasible: "You may have a good policy, you may have a good law, but if on the other side the end user does not understand this policy, then I think it would not work as intended" (39:53).

Finally, Angela Bandemehr (44:07) shared the promising insight that the experience with existing policies and the Model Law suggest that regarding lead regulation many countries „were actually able to move forward on a kind of lower than usual level of effort for resources" (44:42).

Closing Plenary

What can bring us closer to a Future without Toxics? About policies, success factors and international developments

After the enlightening and fruitful breakout sessions, all participants joined the Closing Plenary, moderated first by Ingrid Fritsche and later by Anja Leetz, Advisor - One Health at GIZ and Senior Advisor at World Future Council.

It started with Renate Künast and Eduardo Caldera Petit sharing the main results from the parallel breakout sessions. Regarding policies regulating HHPs, Renate Künast (01:08) highlighted as the key success factors: political blessing (meaning political will), at least one individual with a strong incentive to work on the issue, collaboration and cooperation, a multistakeholder approach, success stories as well as a common objective, e.g. "how can we produce food in a sustainable way?" (05:16).

Eduardo Caldera Petit (06:37) explained that for the panelists in the session on Toxic Metals, "coordination and multistakeholder engagement is key" (07:19): all stakeholders should be included from the beginning (e.g. industry), by integrating them into coordination efforts on the national and international level and creating opportunities to find compromises. He further noted the importance of a strong common objective as well as of organizations like the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint to enable support and knowledge sharing across borders. Additionally, according to the panel, to make a policy feasible, a focus on enforcement and compliance is vital, requiring "adequate resources and advanced planning" (10:40). Lastly, he highlighted the need to spread available knowledge and make it understandable: "Information and education campaigns, awareness raising events are important. If a good policy or a law is not understood by the end user, then there is no success" (10:49).

Closing the introductory part, Samia Kassid (13:03) shortly shared the results of a survey all participants could take part in, in which they were asked to choose one of the seven Policy Recommendations that had been introduced in the Opening Plenary. Most participants indicated that they deemed recommendation Nr 7, namely 'Creating pathways to a toxic free future by inspiring the evaluation and adoption of safer alternatives', the most important one for their country.

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Then, Ingrid Fritsche (14:49) opened the closing discussion with Tatiana Santos, Policy Manager - Chemicals & Nanotechnology at the European Environmental Bureau, Dr Linn Persson, Head of the International Department at the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), Dr Monika MacDevette, Chief of the Chemicals and Health Branch at the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and last but not least Malin Fijen Pacsay, Chairperson of the Climate and Sustainability Committee for the Region Stockholm in Sweden – the Swedish region’s Phase-Out Lists for Chemicals Hazardous to the Environment and Human Health (2012-2016, revised for 2017-2021) won a [Future Policy Gold Award](#) in 2021.

Dr Linn Persson (16:33) began by elaborating on her research on planetary boundaries, explaining that the boundary of chemical pollution has clearly been crossed: “It means that we are experimenting with our own health, with the ecosystems on which we depend” (18:06). She also reinforced the urgency to act now on behalf of children: “So as clearly outlined today, children are especially vulnerable when it comes to exposure to chemicals. But, of course, they also stand the largest future risk of living on a planet, where today also five other planetary boundaries have been crossed” (18:52). Taking this up, Dr Monika MacDevette (20:05) pointed out inequity issues regarding knowledge about chemical pollution: “I have lived and worked in Africa, for example, where people are exposed and don't have the kind of information that we've heard about today, and so are actually unaware of what's happening to their bodies, what's happening to their children, and don't have the choice that we do to either demand change, or to choose products in the market“ (20:50). Therefore, she explained that it is vital to further education efforts and to ensure “predictable sustainable finances” (21:56) to make sure good laws and policies can actually be implemented. Moreover, “it includes the ability to shut down on things like black markets, and the illegal trade in chemicals and in products, you know, find those loopholes where legislation is unable to be enforced simply because the capacity or the resources aren't there to do that“ (22:23). With Anja Leetz (23:09) taking up moderation, Tatiana Santos (23:46) introduced examples that show how even in Europe the chemical management system (one of the most advanced systems in the world) fails. It “is still insufficient to protect our health and the one from our future generations” (24:03). “Scientists are now describing children as born pre-polluted with alarming, literally, levels of PFOA and PFOS, even at higher levels than their mothers. So, this means that [...] PFAS [...] still affect our children today, the effect of these forever chemicals will be felt for generations to come” (26:23).

However, solutions exist. Malin Fijen Pacsay (27:55) accordingly introduced Sweden’s efforts regarding the protection from chemicals and HHPs, and shared some insights on the award-winning policy: “We have two different phase-out lists, one stating hazardous chemicals and one stating different products or use in products. We have been using these lists for all the [public procurement] operations to choose the least, to be able to phase out the most hazardous chemicals” (29:33).

All speakers then shared their view on success factors: Dr Monika MacDevette (30:54) reinforced the importance of the inclusion of all stakeholders at an early stage and the integration of different perspectives and experiences. She also added a holistic understanding of the issue at hand, e.g., chemicals: “So, we really do need to start looking at what we mean by pollution and chemicals in a much more, I think, integrated way, rather than chemical by chemical, that's for sure” (33:34). Taking up the latter aspect, Malin Fijen Pacsay (35:22) also stretched the importance of a holistic approach and that this significantly contributed to the success of Region Stockholm’s Phase-Out Lists, by being able to identify the most hazardous chemicals and making this understandable and accessible for every actor working with the lists: “I think for us, it is the simplicity that has been a success factor” (36:42). Dr Linn Persson (37:28) underlined the “importance of having a good system for classification and labelling of

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chemicals” (37:42) by referring to the Globally Harmonized System for Classification and Labelling (GHS).² She stated that it was important that all countries agreed on a goal, but that “implementation is really lagging behind” (38:17). A solution promising success would be to put a “cap” on production: “without reducing the number of different chemicals in products, we will never be able to increase circularity in our material flows the way that we state that we want to do. We want to have a circular economy and so on, but without reducing the number of substances in our products this will never be possible” (39:20). Tatiana Santos (40:50) supported this claim by relating to the precautionary principle, suggesting “that we don't need specific and very detailed risk assessments rather than making a general assessment and saying, okay, if the chemical is highly problematic and exposure is overused, or it's impacting vulnerable populations, as in the case of children, we don't have time to lose. It's quite interesting that industry doesn't have to prove the safety of the chemicals to market them” (46:24). To stop favoring “market over protection” (43:11) is therefore vital in her opinion.

Coming to the close (44:23), all speakers shared some outlooks on international developments. Dr Monika MacDevette (44:57) shared that in her experience all UN member states show a strong will to tackle chemical pollution and by producing “sound science” (45:42). UNEP will support them in doing so: “There's always that opportunity to create the change that governments themselves say they want, and that they want help in making. And really, we have huge opportunity to do that now” (47:21). Tatiana Santos (48:03) elaborated on the European Commission's Restrictions Roadmap, calling it a “bold approach” (48:23) that, if applied properly, will “greatly accelerate the way Europe eliminates harmful chemicals” (48:32), because being far more holistic. However, she also stretched the need “to be watching officials closely to ensure that they walk the talk and certainly implement this Restrictions Roadmap” (50:09). Dr Linn Persson (50:30) shared that the successful broadening of awareness in the past 10 years on the pollution crisis is making here hopeful for a toxic-free future. On that note, Dr Monika MacDevette (52:06) finally reminded all participants “that each and every one of us can make a difference. Everything we do, everything we bring to the table, all of our expertise, all of our passion, all of our networks, everything: Never forget that you can make a difference” (52:12).

Alexandra Wandel finally closed the event with many thanks to the team at the World Future Council, especially Ingrid Fritsche, Samia Kassid and Anna-Lara Stehn, as well as the technical support (Damian Cramer, Auguste Meister) and media team (Nadine Kas, Anna Khomutkova), without whom this insightful event would not have been possible.

Conference follow up: New report launched!

Containing key facts on how chemicals impact children, as well as critical policies & policy steps

In the aftermath of this important event and on the occasion of World Environment Day (5th June 2022), the World Future Council and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) launched their **new report "A Healthy Planet for Healthy Children"**, which provides key facts on how hazardous chemicals affect children's health, inspires with award-winning policies and highlights the most critical policy recommendations for a toxic-free future. Our full report is now available online – you can find it at this link: <https://bit.ly/3NJMBBW>.

² Kyrgyzstan is one of the few countries in the world to make the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) legally binding. The provisions are reflected in the work and budgets of all relevant government agencies and ministries. This inspiring policy received a [Future Policy Gold Award](#) in 2021, you can watch a report on it [here](#).

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With united efforts, a toxic-free future is possible!

This conference summary has been written by Auguste Meister, Intern for Rights of Children and Youth, at the World Future Council.