

# **Pocket Guide to the BRS Gender Action Plan**

**Integrating a gender perspective in the  
sound management of chemicals and waste**



BASEL / ROTTERDAM / STOCKHOLM  
CONVENTIONS

*"Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance."*

– Former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan

*"The meaningful inclusion of women in decision-making increases effectiveness and productivity, brings new perspectives and solutions to the table, unlocks greater resources and strengthens efforts across all areas of our work."*

– Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres



# **Pocket Guide to the BRS Gender Action Plan**

## **Integrating a gender perspective in the sound management of chemicals and waste**

Mainstreaming from a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action and responding by designing gender-neutral procedures and approaches.

The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Convention (BRS) Gender Task Team, established in 2012, developed the BRS Gender Action Plan (BRS-GAP). It sets out a vision of gender mainstreaming within the Secretariat and externally with its partners. It also includes ideas for Parties and other stakeholders on how to integrate a gender perspective in the sound management of chemicals and waste.

The BRS Gender Action Plan is available at <http://www.brsmeas.org/Gender/>

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*A Centre collaborating with  
UN Environment*

# Why does gender matter?

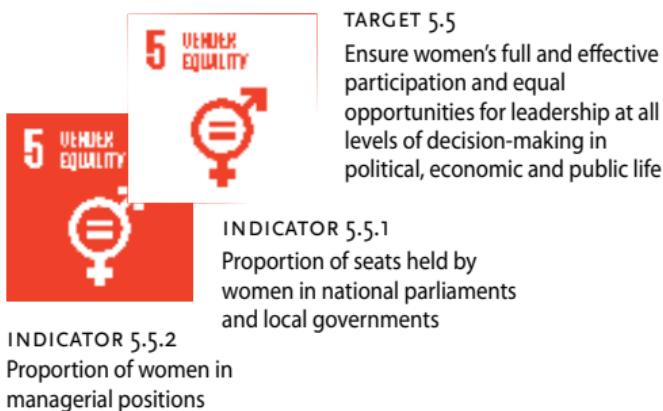
'Gender' refers to the socially defined roles and identities of women and men that may be: socially constructed rather than biologically determined, culturally learned and differing across societies and cultural contexts. These roles and relationships are not fixed, but can and do change.

Gender mainstreaming has been defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council as "a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated".

Gender equality does matter. Equality is a human right and striving for its achievement takes us a step closer to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

## UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL # 5

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls





# **Physiology**



## **FOR FEMALES**

Changes in women's bodies, such as those that occur during adolescence, pregnancy, lactation, and menopause may increase their physical vulnerability.

Generally, women have a higher proportion of body fat and are thus more likely to store more environmental pollutants in their tissues.

## **FOR MALES**



Men's exposure to environmental toxicants can affect their reproductive health.

Occupational and environmental exposure to chemicals is one of the major causes of male infertility.



## **FOR CHILDREN**

Children are generally at an increased risk from exposure to chemicals due to their rapid development and dynamic periods of growth.

Chemicals can be passed on to unborn children through the placenta or to infants through breastfeeding.

Chemicals transferred during fetal development can cause lifelong harm, such as birth defects, and childhood and adult diseases. They can even exert multigenerational and transgenerational effects.

# Cultural, social and occupational norms



## FOR FEMALES

Cosmetics and personal care products can contain toxic ingredients. Women use an average of 9 personal care products each day, potentially exposing themselves to a mixture of over 100 different chemicals.

More women than men are exposed to toxic chemicals found in cleaners, insecticides, or those used in textile processing.

Women generally represent the majority of workers in the nursing sector, administering care or conducting medical tests. This increases their chances of being exposed to chemical agents used in these procedures.

## FOR MALES



Men may be at greater a risk of exposure to toxic chemicals used, for instance, in artisanal gold mining operations, tanneries and mechanical workshops.

In many countries, men may be asked to do more dangerous jobs than women thereby increasing their likelihood of exposure to hazards.



## FOR CHILDREN

In some countries, children take part in work-related activities where they are exposed to toxic chemicals, for example in the application of pesticides to commercial crops.

Storing chemicals in the home poses a threat to young children who have a tendency to explore and put things in their mouths and lack the capacity to identify risk.

# The Vision of the BRS-GAP

Gender equality is an integral part of the implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions. The goal is to ensure that the principles of gender equality are firmly embedded within the BRS Secretariat and in all activities undertaken by it. Achieving this vision of the Gender Action Plan means pursuing the following actions:

- **Gender mainstreaming within the Secretariat**

*Developing an understanding amongst and support from BRS staff on the issue of gender equality, particularly in the context of BRS operations and activities.*

- **Implementing gender mainstreaming activities with partners**

*Ensuring that the Secretariat's programmes and projects are planned and implemented from a gender equality perspective.*

- **Integrating gender considerations in the implementation of the BRS Conventions**

*Promoting consideration of gender issues in hazardous chemicals and waste management at the national, regional and global levels.*

## The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions (BRS)

Multilateral environmental agreements that aim to protect human health and the environment from hazardous chemicals and wastes by promoting environmentally sound management.



**The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants** is an international environmental treaty that aims to eliminate or restrict the production and use of persistent organic pollutants (POPs).

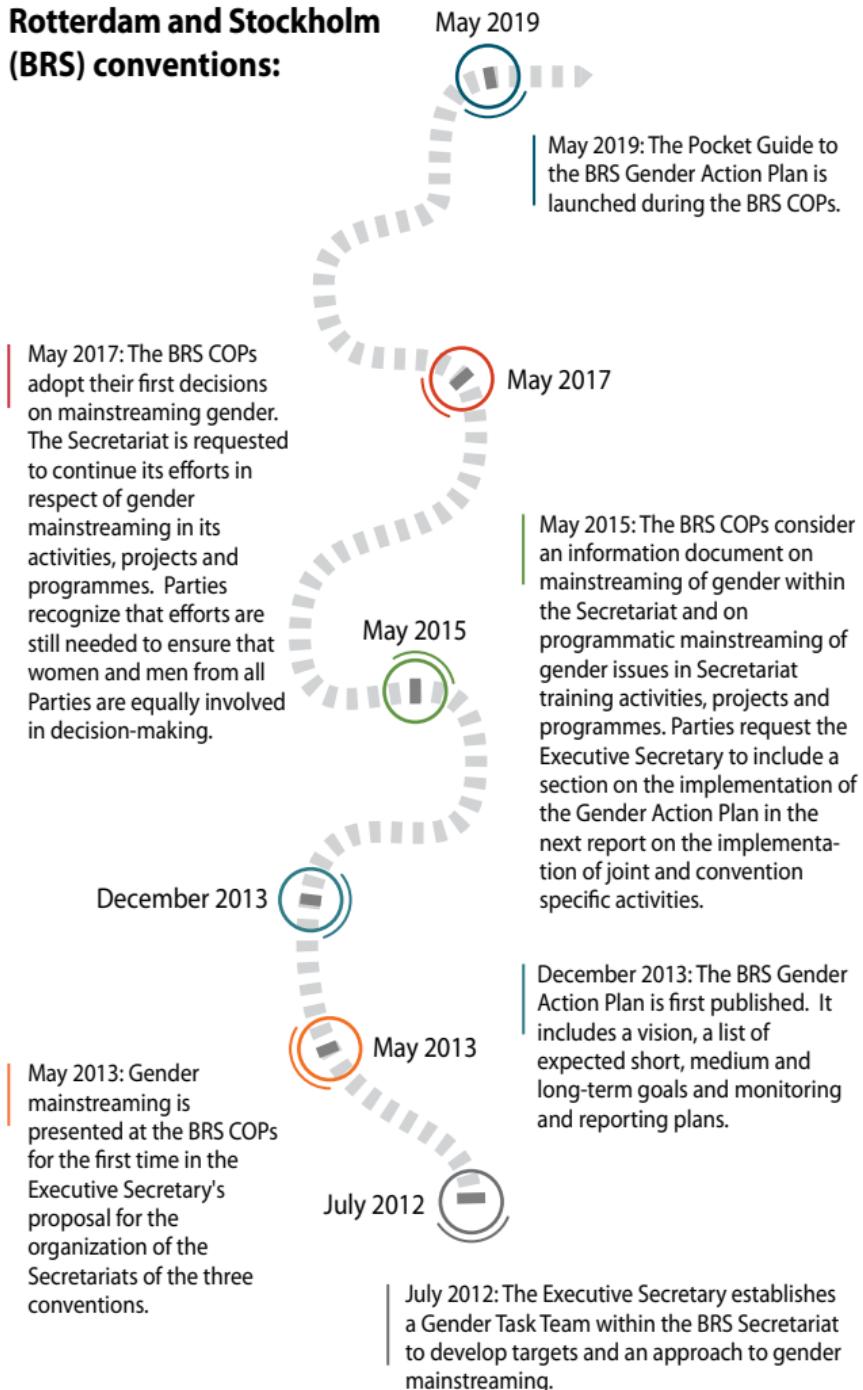


**The Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade** is a multilateral treaty to promote shared responsibilities and open exchange of information in relation to the trade of hazardous chemicals.



**The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal** is the most comprehensive global environmental treaty on hazardous and other wastes.

## **Evolution over time of gender in the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) conventions:**



# **Gender mainstreaming actions by the Secretariat**

## **Collect sex-disaggregated data**

- Establish the Secretariat's internal baseline on gender issues using both qualitative and quantitative indicators, such as membership of Convention subsidiary bodies, Party and observer delegates at COPs, country contacts, national implementation plans and national reports
- Establish a baseline on gender issues in projects and programmes with partners using both qualitative and quantitative indicators

## **Communicate with impact**

- Ensure that BRS staff, Parties and partners are aware of the Gender Action Plan and its objectives by publishing information online and organizing training and information sessions
- Alert vulnerable groups and the general public to issues related to hazardous chemicals and wastes to raise awareness of their health and environmental impacts
- Promote gender-balanced participation in meetings of the Conferences of the Parties and subsidiary bodies

## **Mainstream gender in the Secretariat's programmes and projects**

- Recognize the need to programme for gender as women are disproportionately affected by exposure to chemicals and waste
- Ensure consideration of the gender dimension in developing its programme of work and project activities. This is achieved either through development of activities with a specific gender focus or by integrating gender considerations during the design phase of programmes and projects
- Promote understanding of the differing impacts of chemicals and waste on men and women and how to mobilise action at the national and regional levels

## **Cooperate with other partners on gender-related activities**

- Cooperate with IGOs and NGOs to support the integration of gender-related activities in their programmes of work as they relate to hazardous chemicals and wastes management

## **Training and skill development**

- Develop an understanding amongst BRS staff on the issue of gender equality, particularly in the context of BRS operations and activities
- Provide staff with the skills, tools and equal opportunity to apply for senior management roles

## **Gender equality in human resources management**

- Create a working environment which is supportive of a work-life balance. Establish a “family room” and introduce alternative types of working arrangements
- Strive towards gender parity in the staffing of the Secretariat, in line with the UN System Wide Strategy on Gender Parity

## **Promote gender equality through the Standard Operating Procedures**

- Integrate gender considerations in the standard operating procedures of the Secretariat

## **Monitor and report**

- Measure the progress in achieving the objectives of the Gender Action Plan and in implementing activities within the Secretariat and in projects and programmes, including by collecting measurable information on gender, relating to both qualitative and quantitative indicators

# Possible actions for Parties on gender mainstreaming

## Engage in implementing the BRS Gender Action Plan

- Encourage Parties and other stakeholders to participate and engage in implementing the BRS Gender Action Plan to advance towards the goal of mainstreaming a gender perspective in the chemicals and waste agenda
- Invite Parties and other stakeholders to share information on their work related to integrating a gender perspective in the activities and work under the Conventions
- Provide financial or in-kind support to: (i) dedicated activities of the BRS Secretariat on integrating a gender perspective in the sound management of chemicals and waste; (ii) the technical assistance plan of the BRS conventions through which gender considerations may be mainstreamed

## Mainstream gender at the national level

- Enhance the capacity of Parties and stakeholders to develop gender-responsive policies, plans and programmes on the sound management of chemicals and wastes
- Integrate gender considerations in the development of national development strategies or plans
- Strive to have both women and men participate in decision-making at all levels and to have the same access to resources to make this a reality.
- Designate budgetary resources for gender mainstreaming and develop gender-responsive budgets
- Cultivate national expertise on gender, in addition to establishing gender focal points within government institutions and organisations

## Training and awareness raising

- Promote training and awareness-raising activities for female and male delegates on issues related to gender, chemicals and waste
- Organize and conduct capacity-building training on leadership, negotiation, facilitation and chairing in the context of BRS processes

## Gender-balanced delegations

- Promote gender balance in selecting delegation representatives, officers to BRS subsidiary bodies and those participating in project or training activities
- Promote travel funds as a means to support the participation of women in national delegations at BRS meetings

## **Integrating gender considerations in the implementation of the BRS Conventions**

As highlighted in the Rio +20 Outcome document “The Future We Want”, women have a vital leadership role to play in achieving sustainable development. Gender equality and women’s empowerment needs to be promoted to ensure their full and effective participation in sustainable development policies, programmes and decision-making at all levels.

The Conferences of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies are the main decision-making fora for the BRS Conventions. As such, Parties are encouraged to ensure a balanced gender representation within their respective delegations. Further information on the gender composition of BRS meetings is available on the BRS gender website: <http://www.brsmeas.org/Gender>.

Parties to the BRS Conventions can also use the available tools, such as national implementation plans under the Stockholm Convention and reporting mechanisms under the Basel and Stockholm Conventions, to highlight gender considerations within their national contexts.

# Possible Actions for Parties to Include the gender dimension

## Linking chemicals and gender equality policy framework

Create a list of national and international policy frameworks relevant to chemicals management and sustainable development and use it to guide the development of national implementation plans for the Stockholm Convention.

## Activities to support gender equality and women's empowerment

Develop education and public awareness programmes on POPs for women, children and vulnerable groups.

**Example:** Bosnia and Herzegovina's national implementation plan for the Stockholm Convention is the only one to include an entire section on the importance of mainstreaming gender.

## Example: Mexico's

national implementation plan for the Stockholm Convention includes an activity that advocates for the inclusion of a gender perspective when involving the public and private actors in the implementation of the national implementation plan.



## Women's empowerment and gender equality included in the objectives and goals in the national implementation plan

Consider women's engagement and gender considerations as an objective.

## Example: Bolivia

advocates for taking a gender perspective into consideration in the promotion of awareness in its initial national implementation plan for the Stockholm Convention.

## Example: Ghana

lists gender analysis as one of the areas of expertise needed for the implementation of the national priorities regarding the implementation of the national implementation plan for the Stockholm Convention.

## Gender analysis

Include a gender analysis for the development of the national implementation plan. The analysis could be used as a baseline and as a starting point for creating objectives and indicators.

## Gender indicators and sex-disaggregated data

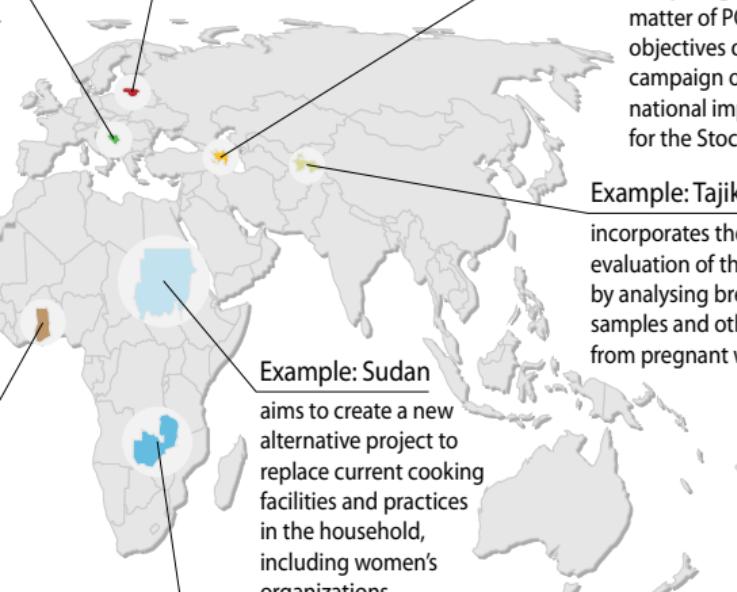
Most Parties use sex-disaggregated data in relation to demographics and background information on their respective countries. Parties could also consider other ways of including sex-disaggregated data, such as number of women that have participated in POPs analyses and/or percentage of women affected by certain hazardous chemicals.

# in Stockholm Convention National Implementation Plans

 Monitoring and evaluating efforts in gender- or women-focused activities  
Include monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in the national implementation plans.

## Example: Lithuania's

indicators include information for pregnant and nursing women on the harmful effects of POPs and the methods to prevent exposure.



## Example: Azerbaijan

considers improving the knowledge of pregnant women and young mothers on the matter of POPs as one of the objectives of an information campaign on POPs in its initial national implementation plan for the Stockholm Convention.

## Example: Tajikistan

incorporates the monitoring and evaluation of the effects of POPs by analysing breast milk, blood samples and other human tissues from pregnant women.

## Example: Sudan

aims to create a new alternative project to replace current cooking facilities and practices in the household, including women's organizations, universities and research institutions in the process.

## Example: Zambia

includes the organization Women for Change that advocates for "policies and practices that are gender sensitive, just and effectively respond to the plight of the vulnerable in society."

## Involvement of women's organizations

Include participation of women's organizations and interest groups in the development of national implementation plans for the Stockholm Convention.

## Budgeting of gender- or women-focused activities

Allocate a budget to gender- and women-focused activities in the initial national implementation plan. The budgeted activities can include education and awareness raising, needs assessment, training and research on the impact of chemicals and waste on segments of the population.

# **Highlighting gender in National Reports to the Conventions**

## **Stockholm Convention**

The National Reports prepared and transmitted by Parties to the Stockholm Convention report on actions associated with Convention provisions and decisions and update on progress in implementing National Implementation Plans. National reporting is supported by questionnaires and guidance supplied by the Secretariat.

### **EXAMPLE**

*Of the National Reports analyzed, Serbia's Third National Report to the Stockholm Convention, is the only report that mentions the keyword gender. Serbia explains that it received funding from the GEF to review and update its National Implementation Plan, with the help of UNIDO, and identifies the consideration of gender aspects in POPs management as one of the overall objectives.*

## **Basel Convention**

The National Reports to the Basel Convention are transmitted annually via a questionnaire. In addition to questions of a more technical nature requesting information on volumes of transboundary movements, etc., a section is included on the effects of the generation, transportation and disposal of hazardous wastes and other wastes on human health and the environment. Parties are encouraged to include gender keywords if relevant.



## **Rotterdam Convention**

The Rotterdam Convention does not have any reporting mechanism per se, but it disseminates a Prior Informed Consent (PIC) Circular biannually to provide Parties with relevant information on chemicals, including decisions adopted by the Conference of the Parties regarding specific chemicals, as well as examples of specific environmental and health concerns.

### EXAMPLES

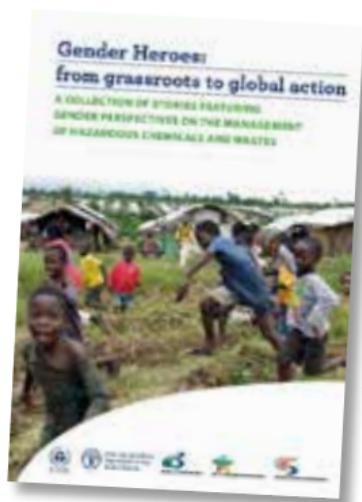
**Brazil's notification** mentions women and/or gender keywords three times in its rationale to ban the pesticide phorate. The notification cites an incident in India where 40 rural women experienced phorate poisoning on a tea plantation. Most of these women were severely poisoned and stayed in the hospital for two days. In another mention, the notification by Brazil recognizes that gender is a contributing factor to the increased risk of poisoning by organophosphates.

**Norway's notification** cites a scientific study on the detection of the chemical Hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD) levels in women throughout Norway and Russia to inform its decision to severely restrict HBCD.



# Celebrating our gender heroes

The BRS Secretariat's publication "Gender Heroes: from grassroots to global action" features stories that illustrate actions being taken every day by individuals and communities to protect the most vulnerable members of our population from the potentially harmful effects of certain chemicals and wastes. The authors of these stories come from all different corners of the world.



These gender heroes should be recognized and celebrated, and the Secretariat endeavours to do just that through its website and publications.

# **Gender heroes of the Asia-Pacific**

*By Sarojeni V. Rengam*

*Pesticides Action Network, Asia and the Pacific*

Rural women are playing a leading role in the campaign against highly hazardous pesticides and in the promotion of ecological agriculture as a viable alternative. The Pesticides Action Network in Asia Pacific (PAN AP) has been working closely with rural communities to further strengthen the role that these women can play.

Pesticide production and use has commonly prioritized profits over the health of communities and the environment. As a result, food sources and the environment of many rural communities have been adversely impacted. Farmers and agricultural workers that are heavily exposed to pesticides suffer a range of acute and chronic health effects. But the health impact has been especially harmful for rural women and children, who are at risk of endocrine disruption, among other ailments.

PAN AP challenges the dependency of small farmers on pesticides and helps empower communities to work towards the reduction



and elimination of pesticide use. It focuses on women workers and farmers in Asia whose problems and issues are often not addressed due to marginalization by cultural and social norms.

Among the approaches that PAN AP has been using is participatory action research through Community-based Pesticide Action Monitoring (CPAM). CPAM helps communities document the adverse impacts of pesticides, raises awareness and motivates them to adopt ecologically sound and sustainable agricultural practices. It also prompts them to influence governments and campaign for better pesticide regulation and implementation of international conventions on pesticides.

Importantly, CPAM also provides leadership training for rural women. In the past 10 years, learning exchanges and capacity-building workshops have been organized and CPAM surveys carried out in countries including Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. The results of these surveys were compiled and discussed at national and international meetings, stressing the need for national and global action.





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# Taking it Forward

## **Educate**

*both men and women on the risks associated with chemicals, taking into account gender disparities in access to information.*

## **Raise**

*awareness of the linkages between chemical exposures, the effects on human health and the environment, and gender differences in risks and impacts.*

## **Support**

*mandatory labeling of all chemicals in products to ensure the right to information.*

## **Promote**

*a multi-stakeholder approach to ensure the participation of women and vulnerable populations in policy development and decision-making processes for the sound management of chemicals and waste.*

## **Implement**

*the polluter pays principle and the precautionary principle for chemicals that are harmful or suspected to be harmful to human health and environment, through regulatory measures.*

## **Gather**

*gender-disaggregated data and research on the intersection between women and chemicals.*

## **Strengthen**

*women's rights, in particular their participatory rights, in all aspects of decision making, chemical production, use and disposal.*



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