

PRTRs: PROMOTING INFORMED DECISIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

3rd Global round table on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs)

7–8 November 2018

Geneva, Switzerland

CHAIRS' SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES¹

PRTRs across the world

- In comparison to previous Global Round Tables on PRTRs, a continuously growing interest in the event was observed from countries from different continents and organisations dealing with improving of existing or establishing new PRTR systems.
- Remarkable examples on the progress made and innovative approaches to the use of PRTRs were illustrated. This included, for example, use of PRTRs to implement the polluters pays principle, addressing a number of waste management issues, integrating a variety of national and international reporting obligations and improving trust between different stakeholders.
- Levels of development of PRTR systems vary in different countries, but their importance and understanding of their potential was recognised through all presentations
- International organisations played an important role for capacity building and advisory support on PRTRs; each organisation contributed different expertise, related to technical matters, policy recommendations or legal and institutional frameworks.
- The Protocol on PRTRs has been used as a prototype for establishing PRTRs across the globe and numerous useful guidance material produced under the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is helping countries to establish PRTR systems effectively. As the treaty is open for accession by any Member State of the United Nations, interested countries are encouraged to accede to the Protocol as to enjoy its solid framework for implementation. Countries are also strongly encouraged to use the OECD material for their work on PRTRs.
- Looking at progress in the implementation of PRTRs, it appeared that strong political will is the precondition for these remarkable achievements. PRTRs have become an important tool for improving access to information on pollutants and their releases thereby promoting transparency in environmental matters around the globe.

PRTRs for achieving Sustainable Development Goals

- The key prerequisite for achieving most, if not all, of the Sustainable Development Goals and their specific targets, are informed decision-making processes.
- Therefore, collection and active dissemination of data on pollution and public rights to information became key drivers for the attainment of SDGs.
- PRTRs clearly have a role to play in that regard. They are the best tool known to date for providing access to information on releases of pollutants and wastes.
- The overarching purpose of PRTRs in this context is that by enhancing transparency and accountability, they can play a central role in promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, and good governance (Goal 16) across the 2030 Agenda.
- In addition, PRTRs are very relevant for achieving specific SDGs. For example:

¹ This document was not formally edited.

- The establishment of publicly accessible databases on the release of hazardous chemical substances can facilitate early warning and manage and reduce global health risks (target 3.d of SDG3) and strengthen global resilience to climate-related hazards and natural disasters (target 13.1 of SDG13).
- PRTRs are also relevant in the context of sustainable corporate practices, as they could make product information available to consumers as to inform their choices. While public availability of such information incentivises companies to prevent pollution and helps communicate their efforts in this regard, the collected data allows for fact-based policy evaluation and sound management of chemicals (target 12.4 of SDG 12). In this way, it contributes to the adoption of innovative and sustainable practices (target 12.6 of SDG 12).
- Work on SDGs require breaking silos and the required information should be presented in an integrated way. PRTRs can offer an effective way to address this demand. Major principles that guide establishment of PRTRs regarding data quality, transparency and usefulness to the public can be applied to databases of other sectors, such as health, urban planning and consumer choices, which in their turn can be linked to PRTR data.
- To share this integrated information and make it actively available to all stakeholders for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, there is a need to:
 - Raise awareness and explain, in particular, to decision-makers how such technical tool as PRTRs could be used for policies in other sectors, related to, for example, health matters, energy consumption, consumer choices or urban planning.
 - Promote interlinking PRTRs with other databases.
 - Promote informed decision-making processes, also across sectors and at household (consumer choices), local (e.g. urban planning) and international levels.
 - Promote simple, single window reporting by polluters to the government.
- In this regard, a joint political commitment at international level through the Budva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Our Sustainable Future was taken under the auspices of the Protocol on PRTRs; activities under the OECD in their turn, focused on preparing guidance material and carrying out specific projects.

Emerging PRTRs

- We are witnessing amazing potential of PRTRs. They can help governments to fulfil their international reporting obligations in a cost-efficient way; they can be combined with other data sources for supporting complex decisions related to economic, social and environmental matters; they can enable governments and relevant organizations to make data available in a form that is useful to the public.
- At the same time, to improve and develop emerging PRTR systems, a number of challenges need to be overcome, and specific or common solutions need to be identified.
- The discussion at the plenary and group discussions identified a number of challenges and responses to them, including, the need to:
 - increase awareness on PRTRs
 - take steps to revise relevant legislation to enable “single window” approach, where required
 - establish efficient reporting structures to reduce the reporting burden for operators as well as governments

- increase overall integration of PRTR systems with other relevant databases and knowledge platforms to help governments to fulfil their different international reporting obligations effectively
- address the issue of use of thresholds as to make data useful and accurate
- improve traceability of chemicals in products
- quantify health impact of pollution as non-preventing pollution may cost more
- identify needs of information users and take them into consideration when working on equivalencies
- address overlap and inconsistency between reporting requirements related to pollutants and activities
- improve harmonization of PRTRs internationally
- engage the variety of uses and users of PRTR systems and develop related communication strategies in order to reach out and increase the awareness
- work closely with educational and scientific institutions as to reach out to young people to promote PRTR as tool for educational purposes regarding the sustainable development
- These will help to continue building a solid basis for future work and cooperation.
- In addition, it has been shown that each country and organization have their own specific challenges and hurdles in making PRTRs efficient and useful instruments:
 - Where there is a political will and the institutional arrangements permit, PRTR systems were established with the aim to provide “a single window” approach.
 - In countries where the institutional arrangements prevent different authorities to establish a fully integrated “single window” reporting system, the political will is important as to explore alternative approaches. For example, to establish reporting systems where the dataflow inside the system can be managed separately for the different purposes by different entities, however the reporting by operators would be done through a single entry.

PRTRs for different stakeholders

- Scientific research projects related to pollutant releases result in knowledge that helps to increase our understanding of how pollutant releases impact health and the environment, which is key for informed decision-making related to chemical management, health and other matters, and also for our choice of different products.
- It is important to promote the usefulness of scientific research to PRTR operators; and to promote active cooperation with Universities and other research partners.
- It is important to promote and facilitate the active participation of academia, NGOs, consumer and private sector associations, in developing PRTR platforms as to respond to stakeholder needs.
- NGOs and research institutions could focus their work on making data available in a user-friendly way.
