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Implementation Programme

"Industry Engagement and Action along Value Chains"

Construction Sector Implementation Programme
Terms of Reference – September 2026

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About this document:

This document sets out the Terms of Reference for the Construction Sector Implementation Programme under the Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC), established to support coordinated action on the sound management of chemicals and waste across construction value chains, particularly in support of GFC Target D6. It defines the Programme's objectives, thematic scope, governance and coordination arrangements, stakeholder participation and approaches to implementation and resource mobilisation. Developed through consultations with construction-sector stakeholders and relevant organizations, the Terms of Reference provide a framework for collaboration, knowledge exchange and stakeholder-led action, building on existing initiatives and avoiding duplication of ongoing efforts. The document is complemented by a separate annex outlining indicative activities, workstreams and potential areas for collaboration.

Contributing organizations: UNDP Cambodia; Ministry of Environment, Cambodia; Green Building Council Costa Rica; Bioregional; Habitable; Circular Innovation Lab; Tarkett and Hernán Baulo Darhanpe.

GFC Construction Sector Implementation Programme Terms of Reference

September 2026

Background

The buildings and construction sector is one of the largest industries worldwide. It is a well-recognized contributor to climate change and biodiversity loss and is among the most materials- and chemicals-intensive sectors of the global economy. It constitutes one of the largest end markets for chemicals and generates the highest chemical revenue across all sectors.[1]

Chemicals are present throughout the full life cycle of buildings and infrastructure, from the extraction and processing of raw materials to the manufacture of construction products, the installation and use phases, and finally demolition and end-of-life management. However, the impacts of chemicals of concern may differ significantly across life cycle stages, as exposure varied for different actors along the value chain.[2] Examples of such chemical components and material systems used in construction include cement and concrete additives, coatings, preservatives, adhesives, plasticizers, sealants, insulation materials, flame retardants, engineered composites, and plastics, which are widely used across construction applications. Some of these chemicals and materials, particularly those that use or release chemicals with hazardous properties throughout their life cycle, pose risks to human health and the environment.

While progress has been made through regulatory developments, green building standards, and voluntary initiatives, chemical releases and pollution continue to occur along construction value chains, resulting in adverse impacts on workers, communities in proximity to construction, manufacturing, and demolition activities, indoor environmental quality, biodiversity, soil and water systems, and waste streams. As underscored by the Global Chemicals Outlook II, such releases and exposures occur at all stages of the life cycle[3], including those arising from unintentional emissions such as dust, combustion by-products, and material degradation.

At the same time, there is growing recognition that chemicals are not only a source of risk, but also a critical factor influencing the sustainability and circularity of construction systems. Circular economy approaches in construction such as material reuse, recycling, and design for disassembly are gaining momentum globally. However, their

[1] UNEP (2019). *Global Chemicals Outlook II. From Legacies to Innovative Solutions*. https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste/what-we-do/policy-and-governance/global-chemicals-outlook

[2] UNEP (2021). *Chemicals of Concern in the Building and Construction Sector*. https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/35916/CoCBC.pdf

[3] UNEP (2019). *Global Chemicals Outlook II. From Legacies to Innovative Solutions*. https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste/what-we-do/policy-and-governance/global-chemicals-outlook

effectiveness depends on improved chemical transparency and traceability as well as safer material choices, to avoid the recirculation of hazardous substances within material loops. The sector also has an important role to play in managing waste streams, provided that chemical risks are properly understood and managed. Addressing chemicals is therefore essential to enabling safe circularity and reducing lifecycle impacts in the sector.

To address these challenges, the proposed Construction Sector Implementation Programme aims to encourage and support results-oriented activities by stakeholders across the construction value chains to advance the implementation of the Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC) and operationalize its targets and strategic objectives. The GFC, adopted in 2023, establishes a multilateral commitment to the sound management of chemicals and waste across all sectors of the economy.

This sectoral programme is aligned in particular with the GFC **Target D6**, which stipulates that "*by 2030, sustainable chemical and waste management strategies have been developed and implemented for major economic and industry sectors, which identify priority chemicals of concern and standards and measures, such as the chemical footprint approach, to reduce their impact and, where feasible, their input, along the value chain*". Other relevant GFC targets include: A3, A4, A7, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, D1, D4, D7, E2, E3, E5, and E6.

The proposed programme aims to contribute to and benefit from broader global agendas on climate, biodiversity, and sustainable development. It would support alignment with efforts under the Paris Agreement and the Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction (GlobalABC) Roadmap to Zero by ensuring that decarbonisation and circularity transitions are underpinned by safe and sustainable material choices. It intends to further aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 12, in particular Target 12.4 on the environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste and is consistent with relevant multilateral environmental agreements on chemicals and waste, including the Basel, Stockholm and Minamata Conventions, as well as broader biodiversity objectives under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

The construction sector is now taking the first steps toward developing this programme. UNEP is facilitating the process by convening initial discussions in collaboration with industry associations, standards bodies, civil society organizations, scientific institutions, governments, and other relevant stakeholders. A dedicated multi-stakeholder Construction Sector Working Group will be established to guide the programme's design, implementation, and continuous improvement.

Objectives of the Construction Implementation Programme

The Construction Sector Implementation Programme brings together stakeholders committed to implementing the GFC across all stages of construction value chains. It builds upon existing initiatives, expertise, standards, and ongoing efforts across the

sector**.** The Programme is intended as a collaborative platform to support coordination, knowledge exchange, and collective action among stakeholders working to advance safer chemical management and sustainable chemistry in the construction sector.

A Construction Sector Working Group will be established to guide and support the development and operationalization of the Programme. In support of the GFC, and consistent with its Target D6, the Programme aims to ensure that by 2030, the construction sector has developed and implemented sustainable chemical and waste management strategies that:

i. Raise awareness and build sector-wide understanding of chemical risks and opportunities, enhance hazard communication, and promote green and sustainable chemistry approaches within global construction discourse.
ii. Strengthen transparency, data availability, and information systems for the traceability of chemicals in construction materials, products, and waste streams, including the development of material inventories, material passports, building passports, and digital product information systems to support the reduction of chemical risks, safe reuse, recycling, and informed decision-making.
iii. Advance knowledge, identification, and prioritisation of chemicals of concern across the construction life cycle, including those classified as GFC Issues of Concern, and promote the phase-out and substitution of hazardous chemicals with safer and more sustainable alternatives.
iv. Promote the transition toward safer, more circular, resource-efficient, and sustainable construction systems through life-cycle approaches, green and sustainable chemistry, safer material selection, innovation, and design strategies that reduce chemical risks, support material longevity, and enable safe material recovery, reuse, and recycling.
v. Strengthen the protection of human health and the environment across the construction life cycle through improved chemicals and waste management practices.

Scope of the Construction Sector Implementation Programme and Relevant Stakeholder Initiatives and Actions

The scope of the programme encompasses initiatives, activities, and projects undertaken by stakeholders across the construction value chain to support the implementation of the GFC. While specific actions will be identified, owned, and executed by stakeholders, the Programme provides a framework to catalyse, coordinate, connect and align efforts that advance safer chemical management, green and sustainable chemistry innovation, and a non-toxic circular economy within the construction sector. It builds on existing initiatives, standards, tools, and stakeholder-led activities already underway across the sector.

The Programme also serves as a platform for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and network-building among stakeholders working across the construction value chain. It

is not intended to duplicate existing initiatives, but rather to help strengthen coherence, identify gaps, promote collaboration, and support collective progress toward relevant GFC targets.

The identification, prioritisation, and sequencing of specific activities will be undertaken by the Construction Sector Working Group (see**Error! Reference source not found.** Section 0 through the development of a Workplan. This may include the identification of short-, medium-, and long-term priorities, taking into account differing national contexts, capacities, and levels of market maturity. The thematic areas below provide an indicative and non-prescriptive framework for organising collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and implementation activities under the Programme. They are intended to support and connect ongoing stakeholder efforts and should be implemented in a manner that builds on existing initiatives, sector knowledge, standards, tools, and practical experience across different regions and value chains. The thematic areas do not predetermine specific activities, outputs, or sequencing, which will be further refined through the Programme Workplan. The scope of the Programme includes, inter alia, the following thematic areas.

i. Raising awareness and building sector-wide understanding of chemical risks and opportunities
ii. Strengthening transparency, traceability, data availability, and information systems, including the use of tools such as material passports, digital product information systems, and Building Information Modelling (BIM) to enable tracking of chemical content across building lifecycles and support safe reuse, recycling, and circular material flows.
iii. Advancing knowledge and prioritisation of chemicals of concern across the life cycle, including support for safer substitution, phase-out approaches, and the promotion of safer and more sustainable alternatives.
iv. Promoting life-cycle approaches, circularity, and sustainable construction systems, including safer material selection, material efficiency and reuse, design strategies, and the application of LCA and life-cycle costing approaches that account for the long-term environmental and health impacts of chemical choices, to inform procurement decisions and support the development of business cases and policy approaches for safer and more circular construction value chains.
v. Supporting the development and implementation of sustainable chemicals and waste strategies (cross cutting), including the integration of gender-responsive and inclusive approaches, and consideration of vulnerable groups and alignment with national policies, corporate strategies, and sector-wide initiatives.
vi. Strengthening the protection of human health and the environment across the construction life cycle improved implementation of chemicals and waste management measures, including regulatory, voluntary, and market-based approaches, as well as support for monitoring, compliance, enforcement, and capacity-building, particularly in resource-constrained contexts.

Illustrative examples of potential activities, workstreams, and areas of collaboration under each thematic area are provided in Annex 1[4]. These examples are indicative and non-exhaustive, and are intended to support early implementation, stakeholder engagement, and the identification of priority actions. The further refinement, prioritisation, sequencing, and operationalization of activities will be undertaken by the Construction Sector Working Group through the development of the Programme Workplan.

Governance Framework and Participation Modalities

The Construction Sector Implementation Programme is designed as a partner-led, multi-stakeholder initiative, supported by the UNEP in a facilitation and coordination role. This governance structure is intended to promote shared ownership of the Programme and encourage contributions from stakeholders already active in relevant areas of work across the construction sector. It is designed to remain flexible and evolve over time in line with the needs of the Programme and its stakeholders.

The governance framework aims to:

- Promote collaboration and coordination across stakeholders and initiatives;
- Support technical credibility, inclusiveness, and transparency;
- Facilitate stakeholder engagement, knowledge exchange, and collective action;
- Maintain coherence with relevant GFC targets and other sectoral implementation programmes.

All governance bodies under the Programme will operate in accordance with a conflict-of-interest approach to support transparency, impartiality, and integrity in decision-making. The work of the Construction Sector Implementation Programme is built on voluntary contributions of time, expertise, and in-kind support.

Programme Facilitator

The IOMC (UNEP) will serve as a facilitating and supporting partner to the Construction Sector Implementation Programme and will:

- Support the establishment and functioning of the Programme and its Working Group
- Facilitate coordination and communication among stakeholders;
- Support linkages with other GFC sector programmes (textiles, agriculture, electronics, etc.).
- Promote consistency with GFC processes and relevant GFC targets, including Target D6 methodology.

[4] Annex 1 - Indicative Areas for Action and Collaboration on Construction

- Assist, where appropriate, with stakeholder outreach and resource mobilisation.

Construction Sector Working Group (Core governance body)

A voluntary, multi-stakeholder Construction Sector Working Group will be established to guide and support the development and implementation of the Programme. The Working Group will provide strategic and technical guidance and support the development and periodic update of the Programme Workplan.

The Working Group will aim to ensure balanced representation across relevant stakeholder groups, regions, and areas of expertise, including industry, governments, academia, civil society, standards bodies, technical experts, and international organizations. Selection processes will seek to promote gender balance and equitable geographic representation.

The working group may:

- Provide technical guidance and strategic advice to the Programme;
- Support the identification, development and prioritisation of activities and workstreams;
- Review and contribute to Programme outputs and implementation progress;
- Facilitate stakeholder engagement and collaboration;
- Designate a chair or co-chairs;
- Establish and oversee Technical Task Teams, as needed;
- Act as ambassadors for the Programme within their respective networks.

Programme Chairperson

The Programme may designate a Chairperson or co-Chairs from among participating stakeholders to help provide strategic leadership, facilitate coordination, and support stakeholder engagement under the Programme.

The Chairperson(s) may:

- Support coordination of Working Group activities and meetings;
- Facilitate dialogue and consensus-building among stakeholders;
- Help represent the Programme in relevant external fora and sectoral initiatives;
- Support collaboration with the IOMC and other stakeholders.

The Chairperson(s) will be selected through an open and transparent process coordinated in consultation with the Working Group and relevant stakeholders, taking into account expertise, convening capacity, gender balance, and regional representation.

Construction Sector Expert Group (primary participation platform)

A broader Construction Sector Expert Group will serve as the primary participation and engagement platform under the Programme. The Expert Group will provide a space for consultation, technical exchange, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing among stakeholders working across the construction value chain.

Participation in the Expert Group is open to all relevant stakeholders, including:

- Industry actors and manufacturers;
- Governments and regulatory authorities;
- Standards bodies and certification initiatives;
- Civil society organizations and labour groups;
- Academic and research institutions;
- International organizations and UN bodies;
- Financial institutions and other relevant stakeholders.

The Expert Group may contribute through:

- Participation in consultations and calls for inputs;
- Engagement in webinars, workshops, and stakeholder dialogues;
- Participation in Technical Task Teams and pilot activities;
- Sharing of technical expertise, case studies, tools, and lessons learned;
- Voluntary implementation activities aligned with the Programme objectives.

Technical Task Teams (sub-groups as needed)

The Working Group may establish time-bound technical task teams or sub-groups within the implementation programme as needed. Task Teams may include members of the Working Group, Expert Group participants, and additional external experts or stakeholders where specialized expertise is required.

Example task teams / sub-groups may include

- Chemicals of concern task team
- Traceability and data task team
- Safer substitution and innovation task team
- Circularity and demolition/reuse task team
- Awareness raising, capacity-building and training task team
- Standards, policies, and procurement approaches task team.

Voluntary Participation and Implementation Activities

Stakeholders may contribute self-initiated, voluntary, and context-specific activities aligned with the objectives of the Programme and relevant GFC targets. These activities may support implementation across different regions, value chains, and stakeholder groups.

Voluntary contributions may include:

- Pilot projects and demonstration activities;
- Development of tools, guidance, standards, or methodologies;
- Research, training, and awareness activities;
- Regional or sector-specific collaboration initiatives;
- Reporting of activities, progress, lessons learned, and case studies through relevant GFC channels.

Recognized voluntary activities may contribute to:

- Knowledge-sharing and peer-learning;
- Identification of good practices and scalable approaches;
- Regional and global stocktaking processes;
- Future refinement of Programme activities and workplans.

Finance considerations

Successful implementation of the Construction Sector Implementation Programme is expected to rely on a combination of voluntary in-kind contributions, partnerships, technical support, and mobilized financial resources from participating stakeholders and relevant initiatives.

The Programme is not intended to function as a standalone funding mechanism under the GFC. Participating stakeholders are encouraged to contribute, where appropriate, through staff time, technical expertise, knowledge-sharing, pilot activities, research, training, and other in-kind support aligned with the Programme objectives.

Where additional resources are required, joint fundraising and resource mobilisation efforts may be undertaken by participating stakeholders and partners. Potential sources may include multilateral and international funding mechanisms, development cooperation, philanthropic support, private-sector financing, and other relevant funding opportunities aligned with sustainable construction, circular economy, climate, and chemicals and waste objectives.