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International POPs Elimination Project

*Fostering Active and Efficient Civil Society Participation in
Preparation for Implementation of the Stockholm Convention*

Implementation of the Stockholm Convention in Paraguay: Participation of the civil society in awareness-raising on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)

Altervida

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About the International POPs Elimination Project

On May 1, 2004, the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN <http://www.ipen.org>) began a global NGO project called the International POPs Elimination Project (IPEP) in partnership with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The Global Environment Facility (GEF) provided core funding for the project.

IPEP has three principal objectives:

- Encourage and enable NGOs in 40 developing and transitional countries to engage in activities that provide concrete and immediate contributions to country efforts in preparing for the implementation of the Stockholm Convention;
- Enhance the skills and knowledge of NGOs to help build their capacity as effective stakeholders in the Convention implementation process;
- Help establish regional and national NGO coordination and capacity in all regions of the world in support of longer term efforts to achieve chemical safety.

IPEP will support preparation of reports on country situation, hotspots, policy briefs, and regional activities. Three principal types of activities will be supported by IPEP: participation in the National Implementation Plan, training and awareness workshops, and public information and awareness campaigns.

For more information, please see <http://www.ipen.org>

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Introduction

The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) is an issue known in the country in very restricted circles: The Environment Secretariat – SEAM – is directly responsible for the implementation of the Convention. Other involved entities include the national coordination of the Pesticide Action Network In Latin America (RAP-AL), certain ministerial offices and certain Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs). The main result of this project was the more extensive broadcasting of the content of the Stockholm Convention, the health and environmental effects of POPs, and the expression of the concerns and the opportunities for participation from municipalities and NGO members of different networks.

The activities performed in the IPEP project were:

Contact with the National Authority Designated for the Stockholm Convention (AND)

Previous to the implementation of the Project, there was already an established relationship with representatives of the Environmental Secretariat – SEAM – in charge of the Stockholm Convention, through the activities of ALTER VIDA as RAPAL’s national coordination. This approach has facilitated the coordination for the development of the most important event within the Project’s frame, which was the workshop carried out with Fernando Bejarano, a member of International Pops Elimination Network (IPEN). Likewise, the governmental person in charge, Lic. Guillermo Pineda, held previous meetings with the directly participating NGOs of the Project in order to report about the activities they were performing as part of the Convention.

Information Material

We prepared a triptych with basic information on the POPs and the Stockholm Convention. This material was carried out with subtitles in the Guarani language which, together with the Spanish language, is the country’s official language. This made the materials more accessible to popular sectors. Likewise, the format and drawings were formed with the same criterion. Besides the triptych, other material was distributed at the workshops, such as “Citizens participation in the Stockholm Agreement”, and videos and CDs containing experiences in other countries regarding the struggle for the elimination of POPs.

Broadcasting of information through electronic bulletins

Various materials are being prepared to be placed in the web page of the Rural Network of Private Development Organizations, as well as other information that has been provided.

Also, for the web page visitors, there are available a significant number of documents available for those interested in studying in depth or obtaining more information concerning the performed events or workshops. Also, we have provided representatives of the healthcare sector with a significant number of documents, in particular for the Pediatric Society of Paraguay, with which it has been agreed to periodically update the information appearing in their web site.

Performance of workshops

Awareness-raising workshops were performed with the different foreseen sectors such as the municipalities, both of the capital area and of the metropolitan area. The municipal departments participating of the workshops were mainly those of the Offices of Environment, Health, Transit, Inspectorate, Youth, Works, Media, and Administration. Also, workshops were carried out with academic institutions and with certain popular organizations, such as the “Pre-Cooperative of Recyclers of the Cateura Rubbish Dump”. (Pre-cooperativa de Recicladores del Vertedero Cateura).

There has been the opportunity, through these workshops, not only to broadcast information but also to dialogue with the workers who are exposed to these toxic products, such as the recyclers at the municipal rubbish dumps. In these places, it is very common to burn PVC plastics, in particular cables, in order to take out the copper wires and to trade them at a good price. They talked about certain skin discomfort as a result of this activity.

The central worry of most people after receiving the information was focused on the problem caused by the open burning of garbage, the monitoring of the official withdrawal of the transformers using PCBs, and the emissions of two state-owned industries (cement and steel). While Paraguay is a not very industrialized country, there are activities that produce POPs and the population is exposed. This concerns sectors related to healthcare. The principal claim of this sector was about their marginalization regarding the implementation of preventive or educational actions. Members of the Pediatric Society of Paraguay mentioned that the external funds related to international agreements are mainly destined to the payment of consultants and not to specific actions that could alert, avoid and even mitigate certain effects of these products among the less informed population and in risky situations.

Workshop on “Citizens participation in the agreement of the Stockholm Agreement”

The workshop was held on March 27th, in Asunción, sponsored by the Association of NGOs of Paraguay – POJOAJU, the Network of Environmental NGOs of Paraguay – ROAM and the Rural Network of Private Development Organizations. There were 60

participants of different institutions and organizations interested to know and study in depth the information about the POPs. The workshop's program covered the lecture of Fernando Bejarano from IPEN and member of the Pesticide Action Network in Mexico (RAPAM). The event also included Mr. Guillermo Pineda, Engineer, the exhibition of DVDs and videos related to the struggle in other countries to eliminate the POPs and to conclude the workshop, a debate about the presentations. It is important to stress that at a local level, the event itself and the presence of Fernando Bejarano caused a great deal of interest and was extensively supported by the media.

The lecture of Fernando Bejarano covered: The objectives of the Stockholm Convention, the historical context of citizen struggles against POPs, the health and environmental effects of POPs products and unintentional POPs, the example of bad practices like burning of waste with PVC content, the incineration problem including the burning of waste in cement kilns and medical waste hospital incinerators, problems concerning incineration, public awareness and education, research, development and monitoring, among other subjects.

Among the main opinions/setting outs/questions of the participants, we can transcribe the following:

- Physician participant: He said the it was very interesting since the problems related to the dioxins was a new issue which he did not know, since he only knew about the problems related to toxic waste caused by agrochemical products.
- Participant of the Lambaré Municipality: He said they feel worried about the need of a correct elimination of transformers with PCBs, since there is no certainty that all of them were actually withdrawn, as stated by the authorities in charge.
- NGO participant: Is there any responsibility by the enterprises that manufactured POPs since currently it is a citizen's task to clean the hazardous waste and contaminated sites?

The lecture of Mr. Guillermo Pineda, Engineer, Coordinator of the National Implementation Plan (NIP) of the Stockholm Convention, covered the following subjects: Presentation of the NIP's objectives, Plan Development, Expected Products of each stage.

The participants interventions presented to Mr. Pineda specific cases that took place in the country and asked about the intervention and the follow up of the authorities, such as: barrels apparently containing toxic matter stored at the customs facilities in the capital city of Asunción, the follow up of many companies which deposited their waste in populated communities; the case of transformers that exploded at the Acaray Dam, containing Askarels (PCB's), among other cases.

Conclusion

The implementation of the IPEP Project allowed a smooth relationship with the national authority designated for the Stockholm Convention and the coordinator of the National Implementation Plan (NIP). It was coincident with the creation of the National

Implementation Committee. It has been demanded by Altervida that more NGOs that represent the civil society should be part of this Committee and contribute to a process that actually responds to the needs of the country. For example, among other things, that the dioxin factor emissions applied to non controlled combustion sources for example the burning of the biomass and open back yard burning, be more appropriate to the reality. The awareness-raising activity performed by the IPEP Project has been received with satisfaction by the people in charge of the NIP, since it facilitates and complements the task to be undertaken within the frame of the Stockholm Convention.

Finally, the workshop developed with the participation of one member of the IPEN has been very useful in many aspects: it has been able to gather and interest, in one event, to diverse sectors concerning the subject of the POPs, motivating the attention not only of public institutions, educational institutions and NGOs, but of diverse media sectors, which allowed an extensive broadcast. On the other hand, the exponent's solvency and experience contributed with information not handled in the available material or documents and that was required by physicians and other professionals. Also, thanks to the workshop, problem concerning the POPs in environments where only little was known about this issue have been introduced.

The project, executed with the help of the IPEN, has been very useful to start a process of greater knowledge of the civil society in regard to the Stockholm Convention and the concerned chemical products in it. While there are factors in favor of the country, such as the little industrialization, the use of new electric transformers and the prohibition of POPs chlorinated pesticides (except for endosulfan) there are situations that represent a daily risk for workers of lower economic and social levels, such as the recyclers at the municipal rubbish dumps, where they burn garbage. Besides, the participants were able to get to know and to be aware about the great number of objects they use daily, that are manufactured out of PVC material, which are later, burned as backyard garbage. Also, it has been useful to discuss the difficulty of changing the seasonal burning of great extensions of pasture, which is repeated year after year with its negative outcomes over the environment.

An interesting group of qualified professionals is in a position to perform a follow up to the execution of the National Implementation Plan from their different action scopes. Also, the verification of the withdrawal of transformers containing PCB's and their current storage conditions in a highly populated community close to the capital city has remained as a pending matter. While the public sector is performing activities and monitoring, it has been installed the worry about the quantity of potentially harmful toxic products for the human health and for the environment which must be known and for which elimination we have to struggle. This fact is deemed as very important and a first step to eliminate what attempts against a healthy and deserving quality of life.