



a toxics-free future

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International SAICM Implementation Project (ISIP)

In 2010, in an effort to demonstrate SAICM implementation via IPEN Participating Organizations, IPEN launched an International SAICM Implementation Project, also known as ISIP. ISIP aims to mobilize resources for initial enabling activities pertaining to national priorities, in keeping with the work areas set out in the strategic objectives of section IV of the SAICM Overarching Policy Strategy.

In particular, the ISIP supports the Governance objective of SAICM's Overarching Policy Strategy paragraph 26, which calls for enhanced "cooperation on the sound management of chemicals between Governments, the private sector and civil society at the national, regional and global levels."

In addition, ISIP builds on the 2008-2009 Global SAICM Outreach Campaign to raise awareness about SAICM and strengthen collaboration among the public interest, health and labor sectors.

ISIP Objectives

ISIP's four objectives include:

- Promoting the need for sound chemicals management
- Advancing National SAICM Implementation
- Promoting global SAICM implementation by global civil society
- Building capacity among NGOs developing countries and countries with economies in transition

Title of activity: Awareness on Health and Safety of people living near Berati former plant ULAB (Used Lead Acid Batteries)

NGO: EDEN Center

Country: Albania

Date: February, 2011

Elements of SAICM Covered:

Participation in activities related to the Global Partnership to Eliminate Lead Paint including identifying potential lead exposure, raising awareness of toxicity to human health and the environment and alternatives, prevention programs to reduce exposure, and promotion of national regulatory frameworks; Follow up recommendations and options for the SAICM OEWG and ICCM3 (57, 157, ICCM2 decision II/4)

Description of the harms of lead exposure, including suspected harm:

Lead is a poisonous metal. Lead is poisonous because it interferes with some of the body's basic functions. The effects of lead on humans are the same whether it enters the body through breathing or swallowing. Lead is unsafe for all humans, but it is especially dangerous for children and fetuses because it interferes with the development of the nervous system.

Exposure to low levels of lead can permanently affect children. Lead is harmful, particularly to young children, even at low levels in the blood. In low levels, lead can cause nervous system and kidney damage, learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, and decreased intelligence. High levels of lead can have devastating effects on children, including seizures, unconsciousness, and, in some cases, death.

Lead poisoning typically results from ingestion of food or water contaminated with lead; but may also occur after accidental ingestion of contaminated soil, dust, or lead based paint. Long-term exposure to lead or its salts (especially soluble salts or the strong oxidant PbO₂) can cause nephropathy, and colic-like abdominal pains. Lead poisoning can cause permanent learning disorders, and according to the American Academy of Pediatrics there is no safe level of lead for children.

Lead exposure also causes small increases in blood pressure, particularly in middle-aged and older people, and can cause anemia. Exposure to high lead levels can severely damage the brain and kidneys in adults or children and ultimately cause death. In pregnant women, high levels of exposure to lead may cause miscarriage. Chronic, high-level exposure has shown to reduce fertility in males.

Because the inhabitants of Uznove live very near to the former lead batteries plant, and also because of the contamination of land, water and air from lead and lead compounds, it is highly likely that the vegetation and the animals might have high levels of lead in them. Because the food chain of people depends on fruits, vegetables and dairy products, people are at risk.

Children, women of childbearing age and pregnant women should take special care to avoid breathing in or swallowing lead.

One of the things that we find suspicious is the fact that this area has a lot of children with mental problems. In the 9-year school of Uznova, from 400 students, 30 of them have mental problems.

Project Outcomes:

Description of the activity:

■ Conduction of the assessment of local people health

✦ Meetings with Stakeholders

Considering that this project was to be implemented in Berat (specifically in the Uznova region where the battery plant is situated), it was an important step to inform and build relations with the main stakeholders. In this regard different meetings were organized. Mrs. Ermelinda Mahmutaj, acting director of EDEN Center, had the first meeting with Mrs. Teuta Mucogllava, head of the Uznova region, Berati Municipality, in her office in Uznova on 22 October 2010. The Municipality was informed about the project and offered its support for it, seeing it as a new opportunity of collaboration. Most importantly, the Municipality offered to help us gain the trust of the local people. During this meeting we learned that local people are very angry with these kinds of initiatives because several examinations have been made from different "individuals" (they call them), but the results have not been shared.

Another important meeting was done in the Berat Directory of the Public Health between Mrs. Mahmutaj and Mrs. Valbona Papa, head of the Directory, on 23 October 2010. Two nurses from the Uznova Health Center and two women, responsible for the Health Education in the Directory, were also present in the meeting. They saw the project positively and a necessity for the area. They were very pleased in being involved in such an initiative, mentioning that even though previous studies have taken place in Uznova, this was the first time they were informed and involved. The Health Education sector offered its support to talk with local people and to help during the public outreach activity.

On 24th and 25th November in Uznova, a workshop was held by our partner Powerful Information. Present in the workshop were teachers of the Uznova schools, students, parents and representatives of the Municipality. The project coordinator, Mrs. Jonida Mamaj, presented the project to the local people, and the municipality staff provided support by trying to ensure them that results will be shared and that this was one of the main purposes of this project.

Also to be mentioned is that a lot of investigation was done to gather information on the area, including searching for previous studies that have been made, conversations with health institutions in Berati and Tirana and scientific institutions like the Institution of Nuclear Physics, visits to the location, and research in the national library. Unfortunately, we found out that data or written information on previous studies was nonexistent. After learning this we considered our project to be much more important than we previously thought.

Apart from building up relations, all these meetings were very useful for the project team to get to know with the real situation and perceptions of the local people in Uznova.

✦ Preparation of the questionnaire for the assessment

The work for preparation of the questionnaire started during November 2010 and ended in December. The process was not an easy one. Questions were designed and defined through frequent discussions among EDEN staff and close cooperation with Arnika. Questions were built around everyday life activities, trying to discover possible sources of contamination, if any way of distribution of this contamination exists, and, most important, how aware are the people living there about risks to their health. 100 copies of this questionnaire were prepared.

✦ Readiness and training of volunteers for filling in the questionnaires

20 November, 2010 a meeting with EDEN volunteers was held in EDEN's office. The aim of the meeting was to present to our volunteers group the new project EDEN is implementing, and make the call for only three of them to commit themselves in actively participating in the project through data gathering and putting them into the SPSS program. Ledina Mahmutaj, Stela Nikaj and Kledian Isufaj were the three committed volunteers.

In the passing days the volunteers were trained by the project coordinator on the logic of the questionnaires, how to fill them out, the targets and where to find them.

✦ Filling in the questionnaire

Filling of questionnaires took two full days by our volunteers. On 17th – 18th December, 2010 they were in Uznova, and, upon instruction, they went up to the battery plant area and walked around it interviewing local people. The volunteers reported that, in general, local people were informed about this project and were "pro" to filling the questionnaires, but the opposite occurred as well. Some of them were skeptical and not willing to cooperate. From our side these reactions were taken as a challenge. When we will share with them the results we hope to reawaken in these people the will of cooperation and the trust in civil society organizations and institutions.

■ Preparation of a report with the findings of the assessment

✦ Elaboration of the gathered data with SPSS program

All the data gathered from the questionnaires was elaborated in an SPSS program. The volunteers, with the assistance of project coordinator, put the data into the program. Afterwards the project assistant extrapolated them in tables in order for the expert to further proceed with the assessment report.

✦ Preparation of the report

An expert on the waste sector in Albania was contracted to build up the assessment report based on the results of the elaborated questionnaires. The project coordinator worked closely with the expert, providing her with the necessary information. The final version of it was built upon cooperation of the expert, project team and Mrs. Merita Mansaku Meksi.

■ **Distribution of the report, along with an issue paper, to the Albanian governmental bodies dealing with health safety**

As mentioned in the project proposal, EDEN is currently running a project in Tirana and Shkoder on ULABs risks to health and environment. A policy paper is being written by experts on this issue. Results from the Assessment Report written within this project are already part of this policy paper. An important part of this policy paper is the analyses results of samples of soil, water, vegetation and blood from the area. Due to the fact that the results of these analyses are not ready yet due to delays from the Institute of Nuclear Physics, one of the laboratories, the policy paper is not completed yet and so not distributed to the governmental bodies in Albania. We are planning to finalize that action in March 2010. The policy paper and a short description of how it was distributed and comments and follow-ups will be sent to Arnika.

Meanwhile, the Assessment Report itself was distributed via e-mail to the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Transport, Berati Municipality, Public Health Institution, Directory of Public Health in Berat, and the Director of the School in Uznova.

Public outreach through media, promotion materials and outdoor event

There have been different articles with regards to the project and assessment process publicized on EDEN's webpage: <http://www.eden-al.org/index.php?id=45>; <http://www.eden-al.org/index.php?id=221>; The Assessment Report also is uploaded in our webpage http://www.eden-al.org/media/IPEN_Assessment%20Report.pdf

500 fliers have been designed and published as public awareness materials. They target the local community in Uznova and the general public, but can be used for all battery handlers as well. These fliers and the report will be handed to the public on 7th of April, 2011, as mentioned in the proposal, on the occasion of World Health Day. Please find the fliers as annexes of this report.

The outdoor event, organized on the occasion of the World Health Day, will take place in Berat. A detailed report immediately after the activity is finished will be sent to Arnika. Meanwhile, we have prepared the action plan for the activity and will make the most of the arrangements, like talks with the Municipality of Berat, and contacts with local and national media, etc.

The table below gives the details of the action plan:

7 th of April 2011, World Health Day, Uznova, Berat		
Activity	Description of the activity	Actors involved
Distribution of promotional materials	There will be different sites for distribution of promo materials: Berati: Uznova: EDEN volunteers, together with the office of Health Education within the Directory of Public Health, with distribute	Municipality of Berat WHO

	<p>the promotional materials to the local people along with conversations and recommendations on possible good practices for a healthier way of living.</p> <p>City center: In the afternoon time when people are on the main boulevard, our volunteers will be placed there with a table for demonstrating the promo materials. Others will be delivering them among general public.</p> <p>Local media will be present at both the occasions to record the activity.</p> <p>Tirana: EDEN volunteers will be delivering the promotional materials in the different areas of Tirana, most importantly to the battery handlers operating in Tirana.</p>	<p>Directory of Public Health in Berat</p> <p>Schools in Berat</p> <p>Local Media</p> <p>National Media</p> <p>General Public</p>
<p>TV debate/Press conference on local media</p>	<p>Occurrence of a TV debate or a press conference it is still undecided and dependent upon the availability of invitees.</p> <p>The main lines of the debate/press conference would go through history and the importance of the World Health Day, what the health risks in the Municipality of Berat are, and our project and its results, with possible interventions from the Municipality.</p> <p>Invitees will be the Head of the Municipality, Environmental Inspector within the Municipality, representatives of WHO, representatives from the Directory of Public Health in Berat, representatives of teachers from the school in Uznova, and EDEN Center.</p>	<p>EDEN center</p>
<p>Strong message on public health on national media</p>	<p>OraNews Channel is the National TV station. It has a morning program where invitees give information on the activities happening on the occasion of a specific day, and sometimes direct recordings of the activity are shown for the wide public.</p>	

Impact on target groups:

With this project we aimed to reach mainly three target groups: local people living in Uznova, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Water Administration, and the general public. If we look closely at each of one after the project we can say that our results were:

Local People:

Considering that the public outreach activity will be organized on 7th of April 2011, the World Health Day, we cannot yet give feedback on the impact our activity had on the local people.

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Water Administration:

In the phase we are in now, and working with the Ministry, their interest on the issue, and especially the policy paper with recommendations, is visible. The policy paper, initiative within the ULAB project enriched with the information gathered from this project, has been prepared for the Ministry of Environment and will be finalized soon.

After providing them with the Assessment Report, face to face meetings will be organized with the Ministry to further discuss the potential actions and policies to be undertaken. Environmental Management Practices, Waste Issues, is one of EDEN's working pillars and some of EDEN's continuous work, especially with governmental institutions.

General Public:

Here we are at the same situation as with the local people.

EDEN volunteers, mostly students, gained knowledge on how to build a questionnaire and how to approach difficult target. They got trained on how to use the SPSS program and also got knowledge on the topic and Albanian situation with regards to that.

Outreach to stakeholders:

In this project the engaged stakeholders were:

Local community in Uznova - This project directly affected them, as one of the main objectives of the project was the awareness of the community to understand what risk is posed to them specifically in the place where they live. Uznova is considered a hot spot in Albania and it is a necessity for further intensive and detailed studies to come up with a governmental strategy for it. Cooperation with and from local people is very important. Through this project, by sharing information we made them realize that further studies are needed for their benefit.

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Water Administration - This governmental institution was not involved directly in our project but is our target in terms of improvements in the area. We have established contacts with them and it was communicated to us that they are open to recommendations. Face to face meetings will follow this initiative. It is EDEN's strategy to always cooperate with governmental institutions in Albania, and we like to involve them in any activity we do.

Municipality of Berat - This institution has been directly involved in the project and we really would like to thank them for the great local support. The Municipality presented us to the public as their partners and helped with the credibility of the action. Apart from the fact that EDEN is very much interested in the topic and would like to go further with it, we think that there will be possibilities to advance the relationship with the municipality also for its interest in the area and different awareness activities they have planned to do.

Directory of Public Health, Berat: One important and useful stakeholder. They are going to help us a lot during the outdoor event on the occasion of World Health Day. Having discovered that each directory of public health has a health education office that deals with public awareness on health issues, we believe that in future occasions will not miss. Very soon, they are going to help us with the policy paper within the ULAB project.

Deliverables, outputs and/or products:

- ✦ Filled questionnaires
- ✦ Assessment report
- ✦ Fliers
- ✦ Highlights
- ✦ Policy paper

Communication efforts:

In this project, considering that a main activity will be organised in a period that is not included in the time frame of the project itself, the situation is a bit difficult to report on.

What we have done is communicate with the media about the idea and possible cooperation with that focus. Both local and national media expressed positive feedback. Local media is interested in these kinds of activities that rarely happen in their programmes. The national media is a very open and positive.

What we see as a problem in this entire situation, and where we have to put continuous efforts, is to ensure reconfirmations of available dates from invitees. The activity will be held in April and slight changes may happen.

NGO Recommendations for next steps:

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- ✦ We discovered that this kind of intervention is really needed in a community that risks harm from contamination. The involvement of the community itself in the action is

crucial, but getting into communication with them requires time and efforts. We recommend a much longer time frame to be given to similar interventions.

- ✦ From the activity of the battery plant during communism and in the recent past, it is supposed that high concentrations of lead are in the ground and water. From our investigation we discovered that there is nothing written nor any concrete study in that regard. *“Everybody talks about the risks but no one has done a concrete study to really know what the situation is,”* said Nikolla Civici, director of the Institute of Nuclear Physics during our meetings while investigating information on the area. In such conditions we do recommend a concrete and detailed study of the area highlighting real risks of contamination and concluding with concrete solutions for the people living there.
- ✦ Sometimes in these situations giving just recommendations is not enough. Concrete investments in the area are needed. One example might be planting trees in the area that absorb lead.
- ✦ During investigations we learned that a tannery is located near the inhabited area of Uznova. Interviewed people very often expressed their concern about it being there up until then, saying that: *“at least the Plant does not function anymore but what to do about that.....???”* The tannery emits sulfuric gas that is very dangerous for people’s health. We recommend investigations on how the tannery operates, its monitoring and reporting, with recommendations to governmental institutions if needed.