



a toxics-free future

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International Mercury Treaty Enabling Activities Program (IMEAP)

Following the signing of the Minamata Convention on Mercury (the 'mercury treaty') in 2013 and the release of the IPEN Minamata Declaration on Toxic Metals, IPEN expanded its Mercury-Free Campaign and developed a broad program of treaty-enabling activities to be implemented in conjunction with IPEN Participating Organizations (POs). The International Mercury Treaty Enabling Activities Program (IMEAP) is geared toward raising awareness about the mercury treaty while generating data on key thematic elements of mercury pollution to help enable countries to implement the Minamata Convention.

IPEN launched IMEAP in early 2014 and continues to mobilise resources for IPEN POs to conduct activities that support implementation of the mercury treaty¹.

The key objectives of the IPEN IMEAP are:

1. *Preparing for Treaty Ratification & Implementation:* Creating synergies between NGOs in developing countries with ongoing UN agency or government-led mercury activities and NGO priority-setting.
2. *Enabling Activities to Prepare Countries for Treaty Ratification & Implementation:* Support to NGOs to carry out national and thematic mercury treaty activities.
3. *Communication of Issues Related to Mercury and Treaty Ratification & Implementation:* Global dissemination of project results & south-south collaboration.

The following project forms part of the overall IMEAP activities and contributes to the greater global understanding of mercury pollution issues while providing information that may contribute to Minamata Initial Assessments (MIA) and raise public awareness in preparation for early ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

¹ IPEN would like to acknowledge the financial contributions from the governments of Germany, Sweden and Switzerland, and the Swedish public development co-operation aid through the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) and other donors. The views herein shall not necessarily be taken to reflect the official opinion of any of these donors, including SSNC or its donors.



AGENDA
For **Environment** and Responsible Development



REPORT FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL MERCURY ENABLING ACTIVITIES PROGRAM (IMEAP) IN UGANDA

IPEN Mercury Treaty Enabling project: UGANDA

Name of the NGO: Pro-biodiversity Conservationists in Uganda (PROBICOU)

Date: 13th May, 2015 (IMEAP: 2014 Phase)

Country: Uganda

Title of project: “Creating Public Awareness about the Minamata Convention on Mercury and Mercury Pollution in Uganda”

Summary

This is a report of the project titled “*Creating Public Awareness about the Minamata Convention on Mercury and Mercury Pollution in Uganda*” that was implemented by Pro-biodiversity Conservationists in Uganda (PROBICOU) the IPEN International Mercury Enabling Activities Program (IMEAP). The project was conducted in Uganda in the Capital City of Kampala. The main objective of the project was to raise public awareness about the Minamata Convention on Mercury as well as the general mercury pollution. Specifically, the project successfully convened a joint stakeholder dialogue for the technocrats from the sectors of mining, health, environment, water and industry as well as Members of Parliament (MPs) and representatives from civil society to raise awareness of mercury pollution and the need to accelerate Treaty ratification. In addition PROBICOU conducted a public media campaign about the importance of the Minamata Convention on Mercury as well as the dangers of mercury pollution on human health and the environment.

The relevant sections of the Minamata Convention on mercury that were of much interest for awareness raising were those related with the mercury supply sources and trade, mercury added products, mercury wastes, mercury releases/contamination, health effects and legal provisions among others. Of particular interest were the sections related with Artisanal and Small Scale Gold Mining (ASGM), mercury containing products and alternatives to mercury containing products as well as actions needed to be done to minimize and reduce the threats by mercury emissions and releases to human health and the environment.

Describe which aspects of mercury pollution you have prioritized for awareness raising and why it is required:

Four aspects of mercury pollution were prioritized for awareness raising and these were, mercury use and health effects, storage and disposal as well as the existing national, regional and international legal provisions for the sound management of mercury. Raising awareness on these four aspects was deemed very critical in reducing the threat of mercury pollution to human health and the environment.

Assess the level of awareness of the Minamata Convention and the need for early ratification among the public, regulators, media, industry and government:

A country level assessment on the status of mercury in Uganda conducted by Pro-biodiversity Conservationists in Uganda (PROBICOU) in 2010 with support from the IPEN under the International SAICM Implementation Project (ISIP) revealed that the level of awareness on mercury pollution issues in Uganda was very low and minimal among the public, regulators, media, industry and government officers. For instance, the level of awareness is low among communities living around industries, fish dependent communities, consumers of cosmetics that contain mercury, health professionals especially those in the dentistry, managers of school laboratories, members of the civil society as well as policy makers.

The assessment further revealed that although, most products containing mercury have been banned in Uganda, there was no deliberate effort to stop their importation. There was also no deliberate effort by the government to create public awareness on mercury pollution issues in the near future.

Before the implementation of this project, very little was known about the Minamata Convention on Mercury in Uganda. The Convention was initially known by few individuals who work with the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and few individuals in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Besides, very little was known about it by other sections of the society such as civil society organizations and the media. The Convention was only known by a few NGOs which are members of IPEN and worse still, not all the membership of these NGOs were aware about this Convention.

It was against this background that Pro-biodiversity Conservationists in Uganda (PROBICOU) regarded it as vital to create awareness about the Minamata Convention on Mercury as well as the general mercury pollution among the public, regulators, media, industry and government as well as encourage the Ugandan government to quickly ratify this important historic Convention.

Kindly note that PROBICOU has previously participated in the implementation of the International projects coordinated by IPEN including the International POPs Elimination Project

(IPEP) and the International SAICM Implementation Project (ISIP) as well as other IPEN small grant projects. For instance, in 2010, PROBICOU implemented a project titled “A Country Level Assessment for the Status of Mercury in Uganda” and in 2012, it implemented another project titled “Fish and Community Mercury Monitoring Project in Uganda.” Findings from all activities related to mercury which PROBICOU has implemented calls for the need for early ratification of the Convention and its implementation to avoid continued mercury contamination in Uganda.

Indicate why you have prioritized a particular group or groups in your community with which to raise awareness of mercury pollution:

Raising awareness on the Minamata Convention on Mercury as well as the general mercury pollution was conducted among the public including the smallholder and community enterprises, regulators, media, industry and government because their actions were deemed vital in reducing total anthropogenic mercury emissions and releases into the global environment. For example, the government is mandated with legislating on mercury issues while the industry is important in providing alternatives to mercury.

Describe the methods that you have chosen to raise awareness among the population on mercury issues and why they are of strategic significance:

Awareness raising among the population on mercury issues was done through organizing a public dialogue, discussion with government representatives (particularly regulators and policy makers on mercury pollution issues) and highlighting the need for ratification of the Convention.

Dissemination of literature on mercury issues, printing and disseminating fliers as well as conducting a media campaign was also undertaken. These methods were of strategic importance as they helped in bringing all the stakeholders on board as well as reaching a wider public.

Explain why there is a specific need for awareness raising around ASGM activities in your country (if this is the case):

Before the implementation of this project, awareness raising was badly needed around the Artisanal Gold Mining (ASGM) activities because artisanal gold miners in Uganda especially in Karamoja region still depended on the use of metallic mercury as the main technique to extract gold from ore. This was due to limited awareness, lack of technical knowledge on the impacts of releasing toxic chemicals to the environment, to health and lack of alternatives.

Raising awareness around ASGM was needed because recent scientific evidence showed that, gold amalgamation with mercury has adverse effects on human health, not only to the users but also to those indirectly involved, including the unborn, through peripheral contamination and introduction into the food chain.

Project Outcome:

Describe the activity conducted:

Public dialogue: The one half day public dialogue on mercury issues was conducted on 1st December, 2014 at Emerald Hotel in the heart of Kampala city. The main objective of the

dialogue was to raise public awareness about the Minamata Convention on Mercury as well as the dangers of the general mercury pollution. The participants of the dialogue included officials from the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (MoEMD), Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Water and Environment (MoWD), Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives (MoTIC), National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), Uganda Bureau of Standards (UBOS), Uganda Industrial Research Institute (UIRI) as well as Members of Parliament (MPs) and representatives from the civil society and the media fraternity.

The dialogue discussed the Minamata Convention and its implementation status in Uganda as well as dangers of mercury pollution on human health and the environment and it was attended by 53 participants where 12 were from the Government, 5 from the media, 7 from industry and 29 from the civil society. The officials from the sectors of environment and health shared information during this dialogue on the government strategies to minimize and reduce mercury pollution on human health and the environment. Two highly skilled persons on mercury issues facilitated this dialogue. Literature on mercury issues as well as 4,000 copies of fliers containing summarized information on the Minamata Convention were printed and disseminated during this public dialogue (See attached a copy of the flier (Fact Sheet) for the Minamata Convention on Mercury).



Mr Tumwesigye Robert Baganda, the Executive Director of PROBICOU addressing the participants at the one half day public dialogue at Emerald Hotel, Kampala in December, 2014. Photo by: Kwikiriza Aggrey

Media campaign: A press conference for both the print and electronic media was conducted on the 13th February, 2015. Summarized data on mercury issues as well as the Minamata Convention on Mercury was shared with the journalists during this press conference. This was intended to create public awareness to a wider public as well as attract the attention of policy makers in addressing the mercury pollution issues in the country.

Please see below one of the article clippings titled "what you did not know about mercury poisoning by Robert Tumwesigye that was published in the Red pepper Newspaper on Sunday 15 February, 2015.

DISCOVERY

RED PEPPER SUNDAY 15 FEB 2015 **15**

How Nature Can Preserve A Brain For Hundreds Of Years

BRAIN TISSUE is very soft and full of water, and through autolysis it usually begins to decompose rapidly after death. Nevertheless, it can sometimes be preserved.

In 1998, archaeologists excavated the fossilized remains of an 18-month-old infant from a burial site near Quimper in France. The child had died about 700 years previously, and its body was found wrapped in leather and placed in a wooden coffin with a pillow under its head. The skull had a large fracture, suggesting a brain hemorrhage as the probable cause of death – and still contained the shriveled remnants of the left-brain hemisphere.

The brain tissue had lost about 80 percent of its original volume but was otherwise extremely well preserved. The frontal, temporal and parietal lobes retained their original shape, and other brain structures, such as the characteristic grooves and ridges of the cerebral cortex, were visible to the naked eye. Furthermore, the researchers could easily distinguish between grey and white matter in CT and MRI brain scans. Microscopic examination of the tissue revealed that it even contained intact cells.

Last year, a team of Russian



The way nature preserves the brain

researchers reported another remarkable find – the partial carcass of a 39,000-year-old woolly mammoth, excavated from permafrost in the Sakha Republic, Russia, complete with a well-preserved brain.

'GRAVE WAX'

Such finds are extremely rare because brain tissue is only preserved when human or animal remains are buried in very specific

environmental conditions. The child's skeletonized remains were found in an area containing both fresh and salt water, and their continuous immersion in water – combined with the absence of oxygen – is probably why the brain was so well preserved. Conditions like this favor the formation of adipocere (which is sometimes called "grave wax" or "mortuary wax") through a process known as saponifica-

tion. Adipocere is a soapy, wax-like substance formed when anaerobic bacteria break down a person's body fat. It consists mostly of saturated fatty acids, and its formation produces a firm and very stable cast of the soft tissues that would otherwise undergo putrefaction.

FORENSIC HINT

If conditions are right, adipocere formation begins between two weeks and two months after death – and it can sometimes help crime scene investigators to determine the cause of death.

Several years ago, the body of a middle-aged woman was found wrapped in a plastic bag and dumped in a shallow pond in the Gokulpuri area of Delhi. The woman's remains had been submerged for about three months, because of a concrete block tied to the neck with cable wire, and her body was badly decomposed. Because it had been left submerged in water during the rainy season, however, adipose had formed all over it. This had preserved the woman's fatal injury: a large cut in her throat was still visible, and this, investigators concluded, is what killed her.

In another case, lumps of adipocere formed inside the gunshot wounds of a murder victim. Investigators recovered a bullet from one of the lumps and identified the murder weapon from it, leading to a confession from the culprit.

What You Did Not Know About Mercury Poisoning

BY ROBERT TUMWESIGYE

THE MINAMATA Convention on Mercury is an international treaty designed to protect human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds.

The Convention is named after the Japanese city, Minamata. This naming is of symbolic importance as the city went through devastating incident of mercury poisoning. The Convention recognizes that mercury is a chemical of global concern owing to its long-range atmospheric transport, its persistence in the environment once anthropogenically introduced, its ability to bio-accumulate in ecosystems and its significant negative effects on human health and the environment.

Background

Mercury and mercury compounds have long been known to be toxic to humans and other organisms. Large-scale public health crises due to mercury poisoning, such as Minamata disease and Niigata Minamata disease, drew attention to the issue. In 1972, delegates to the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment witnessed Japanese Junior H/S student Shinobu Sakamoto, disabled as the result of methylmercury poisoning in Utero. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was established shortly thereafter. In 2001, the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) invited the Executive Director of UNEP to undertake a global assessment of mercury and its compounds, including information on the chemistry and health effects, sources, long-range transport, and prevention and control technologies relating to mercury. In 2003, the Governing Council considered this assessment and found that there was sufficient evidence of significant global adverse impacts from mercury and its compounds to warrant further international action to reduce the risks to human health and the environment from the release of mercury and its compounds to the environment. Governments were urged to adopt goals for the reduction of mercury emissions and releases and UNEP initiated technical assistance and capacity building activities to meet these goals. The assessment recognized mercury as a substance producing significant adverse neurological and other health effects, with particular concerns expressed about its harmful effects on unborn children and infants. The global transport of mercury in the environment was a key reason for taking the decision that global action to address the problem of mercury pollution was required. The idea to create an international agreement about mercury emission dates back to 2003. The reason the idea was not initially put into an action was that, the USA called for voluntary actions to decrease the emission, undermining the need for the treaty. A mercury programme to address mercury concerns was thus established and was further strengthened by governments in decisions of the Governing Council in 2005 and in 2007. In the decision of 2007, the

Governing Council concluded that the options of enhanced voluntary measures and new or existing international legal instruments would be reviewed and assessed in order to make progress in addressing the mercury issue. On 20 February 2008, following extensive consideration of the issue, the 25th Governing Council of UNEP agreed that voluntary actions had not been sufficient to address the concerns on mercury, and as such, adopted a decision "to initiate international action to manage mercury in an efficient, effective and coherent manner including the preparation of a global legally binding instrument. At this 25th Governing Council of UNEP, USA also agreed to work together with other nations to create a binding agreement on mercury emission. An Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) was therefore established, chaired by Fernando Luján, of Uruguay and supported by the Chemicals Branch of UNEP's Division of Technology, Industry and Economics, to commence its work in 2010 and conclude negotiations prior to the twenty-seventh session of the Governing Council in 2013. The INC has since held five sessions to discuss and negotiate a global agreement on mercury. Forty participating countries were tested for mercury by the representatives from the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) and different nonpartisan organizations from Sweden. Each country was positive on mercury, and "more than a third exceeded the U.S. National Research Council reference dose of 1 ppm." This created a bigger wish among the countries to decrease the impact of mercury. On 19 January

2013, after negotiating late into the night, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) concluded its fifth session with 147 governments agreeing on the text of the Minamata Convention on Mercury. In the early hours of 19 January 2013, Fernando Luján, the Uruguayan chair delegate, proclaimed thus "today, we have closed a chapter on a journey that has taken four years of often intense but ultimately successful negotiations and opened a new chapter towards a sustainable future. This has been done in the name of vulnerable populations everywhere and represents an opportunity for a healthier and more sustainable century for all peoples." The Convention was adopted and opened for signature on 10 October 2013, at a Conference of Plenipotentiaries (Diplomatic Conference) in Kumamoto, Japan, preceded by a Preparatory Meeting from 7-8 October 2013. The European Union and 86 countries signed the Convention on the first day it was open. A further 5 countries signed the Convention on the final day of the Diplomatic Conference, 11 October 2013. Governments were invited and encouraged to sign the Convention at the offices of the Depositary, United Nations Headquarters, New York, during the period it was open for signature (until 9 October 2014). Governments are also encouraged to work towards the implementation of the Convention and becoming a party thereto in order to lead to its rapid entry into force.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Pro-biodiversity
Conservationists in Uganda
(PROBICOU)



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As a result of the press conference, representatives of PROBICOU were invited to facilitate two radio talk shows and one TV talk show



Mr. Muyambi Ellady, the Board Member for PROBICOU as well as the Secretary General for Uganda Network on Toxic Free Malaria Control (UNETMAC) during one of the radio talk shows in January 2015 talking about the dangers of mercury pollution on human health & environment. Photo by Kiiza Joseph

Engagement of and impact on Target Groups

Provide detail on your NGOs engagement with the target groups and report the result of the activity on the target groups:

The target groups from the government, NGOs, media and industry were purposively selected and invited to participate through emails, printed invitation letters and phone calls. Members of the general public were also reached through radio announcements, social networks such as face book and twitter among others. Simple A4 paper posters inviting the general public were circulated in universities as well as other institutions of higher learning around Kampala city. This project helped the government officials and other stakeholders to increase their level of awareness on mercury related issues.

Impact on target policies

Define the target policies and the result of the NGO activity on the target policies:

The project contributed to the overall goal of the UNEP Global Mercury Partnership that aims at protecting human health and the global environment from the release of mercury and its

compounds by minimizing and, where feasible, ultimately eliminating global, anthropogenic mercury releases to air, water, and land and the SAICM 2020 goal.

Currently, the government of the Republic of Uganda is reviewing most of the legislations related with environmental and human health protection such as the National Environment Act and the Public Health Act among many others. This project helped in feeding into these reviews.

The project led to enhanced capacity of the officials from the Government of the Republic of Uganda to understand their obligations towards the ratification and implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

The project also helped in fulfilling Anglophone Africa NGOs' priority areas of action on mercury which is one of the priority activities under the IPEN's international campaign on reducing the dangers of mercury pollution on human health and the environment.

Outreach to Stakeholders: Record the key stakeholders and sectors that were engaged in this activity, and any potential to develop further involvement with these stakeholders:

Stakeholders and sectors that were engaged included the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (MoEMD), Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Water and Environment (MoWD), Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives (MoTIC), National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), Uganda Bureau of Standards (UBOS), Uganda Industrial Research Institute (UIRI) as well as Members of Parliament (MPs) and representatives from the civil society and the media fraternity.

There is a potential for follow-up especially the need to form a stakeholder committee on mercury issues in Uganda which was to be formed as one of the outcomes of the project activities but was not formed due to the fact that there was not enough time. This committee is regarded as crucial because it was to become a potential mechanism of future follow up on mercury related issues in Uganda

Deliverables, outputs and/or products.

List the types of outputs from the activity, including report or information materials:

The major deliverables, outputs and or products of the project were the summarized fliers, media/newspaper clips and public dialogue photos as well as this report.

Communication Efforts: Describe efforts to communicate this activity to the media and/or general public. Please include media coverage and/or photos or visuals.

All the project activities engaged the media. A deliberate effort was made to communicate to the public about this project. Photos and reports generated during the project activities were shared with PROBICOU's members and stakeholders.

Communication with National or Local Authorities

Indicate any communication to or coordination with your National Mercury Treaty Focal Point, or any other national or local authority related to mercury management regarding your Activity:

The idea of raising public awareness about the Minamata Convention on Mercury as well as the general mercury pollution was discussed during one of the stakeholder meetings organized by the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) while reviewing the waste management regulations. NEMA is the National Focal Point for the Minamata Convention on Mercury as well as other Multilateral Environmental Agreements and the officer in charge was in attendance. The intervention and support by IPEN therefore to undertake the project idea forward was timely and appropriate.

The project fliers which were designed, printed and disseminated were reviewed by the National Focal Point of the Minamata Convention on Mercury. Besides, the National Focal Point of the Minamata Convention on Mercury presented a paper during the one half day dialogue.

Mercury Treaty Focal Point: *Provide the name and contact details of your National Mercury Treaty Focal Point.*

The contact person is Dr. Tom O Okurut with Tel: +256 (0) 401 039, +256 (0) 759 777 395 and Email: tokurut@nemaug.co.ug

Recommendations, from a public interest, NGO perspective, on reducing and eliminating human sources of mercury:

The project recommended the need to carry out a comprehensive assessment of mercury use in Uganda and development of the national action plan (NAP) in order to be able to begin the preparation of a total phase out mercury in Uganda as well as a need for continuous public sensitization in order to reduce mercury pollution as well as the total anthropogenic mercury emissions and releases to the global environment.

What, if anything, changed from the original plans and why?

A banner which was supposed to be pinned on the public dialogue venue well in advance so that the public could know about the dialogue in time was not completed because, the funds that were allocated for the banner as a mobilization tool were instead used in running radio announcements calling the general public to come for the dialogue.

A stakeholder committee on mercury issues in Uganda which was to be formed as one of the outcomes of the project activities was not formed due to the fact that there was not enough time. This committee is regarded as crucial because it was to become a potential mechanism of future follow up on mercury related issues in Uganda. PROBICOU plans to conduct an online discussion for those who participated as a follow up activity and also hopes to form a stakeholder committee on mercury issues in Uganda.

Resources on mercury: Please list websites, databases, reports, academic researchers, laboratories, etc. that you are familiar with.

Below are some of the websites/databases, reports, researches that we are familiar with;-

- www.ipen.org (Especially the IPEN Mercury Free Campaign & IPEN Heavy Metal Program)
- www.unep.org/hazardoussubstances (UNEP Global Mercury Partnership)
- www.chem.unep.ch
- www.sustainableproduction.org
- Eisler, R. (2006). [*Mercury hazards to living organisms*](#). CRC Press
- [*Environmental Health Criteria 1: Mercury*](#). Geneva: World Health Organization. 1976
- UNEP, 2002. Global Mercury Assessment. UNEP Chemicals, Geneva