WANANCHI & SOCIETY

NGOS URGES THE PROMOTION OF TOXICS-FREE MALARIA CONTROL

BY SIDI MGUMIA, recently from Kampala

Within the context of global lead paint elimination, AGENDA for Environment and Responsible Development (AGENDA) organized a workshop which took place in Dar es Salaam last month.

The three days skillshare and workshop focused on African NGO efforts to promote toxics-free malaria control and advance the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) emerging issue to eliminating lead in paint, hazardous substances in electronics, mercury and highly hazardous pesticide.

The workshop brought together NGOs and CSOs from 13 African countries as well as representatives from the Tanzania Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies the stakeholders agreed on joining forces to tackle the situation.

Officiating the workshop, Prof Jamidu Katima, Chairman of AGENDA talked about the 3rd International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM3) that took place from 16 – 21 September in Nairobi, Kenya with the oobjective to review progress of SAICM implementation and to consider emerging issue.

Prof Katima said that there was mixing evaluation on whether we are still on track to achieve the 2020 goal as well as IPEN (A global network of non-governmental

organizations working to establish and implement safe chemicals policies) noted that Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) was not on track.

He said IPEN called for accelerating the pace of SAICM implementation and for ICCM3 to produce a roadmap for its implementation up to 2020 and the ongoing campaigns for prohibiting and restricting aerial pesticide spraying and the promotion of agro-ecological production while various regional groups and countries reported on their implementation activities.

Prof Katima said as for the emerging issues, a variety of chemicals have been found to disrupt the endocrine systems of animals in laboratory studies, and there is strong evidence that chemical exposure has been associated with adverse developmental and reproductive effects on fish and wildlife in particular locations.

"The actions recommended for the time period from 2012 – 2015 include the provision of up-to-date information and scientific expert advice to relevant stakeholders for the purpose of identifying or recommending potential measures that could contribute to reductions in exposures to or the effects of endocrine disrupting chemicals, in particular among vulnerable populations," he said

He added that there should also be raise awareness at all levels and provide international support for activities to build capacities in countries, in particular developing countries and countries with economies in transition, for generating information and for assessing issues related to endocrine-disrupting chemicals in order to support decision-making, including the prioritization of actions to reduce risks.

Among the other important things the Chairman pointed out, he also insisted on the promotion of international third-party certification of new paint products to help consumers to recognize paint and coatings without added lead, consistent with international obligations.

"Promotion of national regulatory frameworks, as appropriate, to stop the manufacture, import, export, sale and use of lead paints and products coated with lead paints and to encouraging companies involved to substitute lead compounds added to paint with safer alternatives," he said

He said the decision noted the need to have an integrated approach to financing and referenced the UNEP Executive Director's draft proposal which includes mainstreaming, industry involvement and external financing. ICCM3 requested that SAICM be included in any integrated financing mechanism.

Speaking at the same occasion, Silvani Mang'enya, AGENDA's Principle Program Officer and the Coordinator of IPEN Anglophone Africa said IPEN Declaration for a Toxics-Free Future is to work for and achieve by the year 2020 a Toxics-Free Future.

"All chemicals are produced and used in ways that eliminate significant adverse effects on human health and the environment, and where persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and chemicals of equivalent concern no longer pollute our local and global environments, and no longer contaminate our communities, our food, our bodies, or the bodies of our children and future generations," he said

Mang'enya said towards sound chemicals management ,a toxic free future there is a need for active participants in negotiations, development, implementation of international chemical treaties, programmes, projects and playing active role in national policies and regulatory frameworks review.

He said also mentioned the projects and programmes development, implementation and monitoring and data generation as well as joint networks at national and international on specific programmes and collaborative work with other stakeholders including governments, IGOs, research and academic institutions, communities, etc.

Silvani Mang'enya, AGENDA's Principle Program Officer and the Coordinator of IPEN Anglophone Africa.

"As for Anglophone Africa Regional Action Plan there should be activity of Address NGOs needs in terms of technical, financial and policy support and strengthening coordination, collaboration and communication. Organizational development trainings and data collection on the priority issues and available alternatives," said Mang'enya.

He also mentioned gaps in implementing SAICM whereby there is inadequate human and financial resources, technical capacity for implementation of projects for SAICM implementation and uncoordinated implementation of chemicals management activities by different organizations, government, CSOs and NGOs

"There is also poor enforcement of legislative frameworks for environmental management particularly chemicals management leading to many chemicals related accidents and incidents and lack of regulations to control and monitor importation and disposal of e-waste and near expiry electronic equipment," he noted

Mang'enya also insisted that people in their homes should stop using the buckets that once had paints in them for keeping drinking water as the chemicals are still there something which is dangerous to human being's lives, those buckets are suitable for example gardening (flowers), etc

According to Gilbert KUEPOUO, from CREPD, Cameroon, the study conducted there shows that the excess lead concentration found in 67 percent of New House Paints in Cameroon which is too much.

Kuepouo said they have also realized that children are at risk of poisoning; safer substitutes available (testing of old paints from residences and schools buildings and furniture demonstrated lead presence above recommended value of 90 ppm.

Kuepouo said there are challanges in the process, one of them is the fact that it is very difficult or very slow to archive the project's activities related to policy issues (like regulation or national standard development) due to Administrative procedures (business as usual) and low level of awareness among decision makers.

As far as Uganda is concerned, Ellady Muyambi, Secretary General for Uganda Network of Malaria Control (UNETMAC) recommended that more research is needed including identifying potential lead exposure and research is also needed on examining the impact of lead exposure on human health and environment.

"Public awareness about the toxicity of lead exposure to human health and the environment is highly wanted should be given, the public also should be educated on the existence of alternatives and to advocate and lobby for prevention programs to reduce lead exposure, and for promotion of national regulatory frameworks," said Muyambi

On his part Griffins Ochieng from iLima Organization, Kenya, there is a need for increased public awareness on hazards of lead exposure, continue to hold policy dialogue with all stakeholders for effective national lead control instrument, efforts made to engage other paint manufacturers in Kenya to no longer use paint pigments, just like Crown has made commitment.

However, with the effects of Mercury, Haji Rehani from AGENDA said the existing alternatives for Mercury reduction are by burning gold-mercury amalgam in the fume hood water condenser can minimising mercury release on the environment and exposure risks.

Rehani said this is capable of capturing at least 62percent of mercury emitted from burning amalgam (gold shop trials suggest more like 75 percent capture) and a busy gold shop can recover up to 1kg of mercury per month and has a potential to prevent the release of at least 5 tons of mercury to the atmosphere on an annual basis and the captured mercury can be re-activated by using salt water and 12 Volts battery.

Generally, Lead in Paint is any paint that relies on lead compounds for drying or for its colour. Lead is added to paint to speed up drying, increase durability, maintain a fresh appearance and resist moisture that causes corrosion.

Lead can as well be found in other items. Most lead is used in batteries for vehicles and for back-up power. These are significant hazarders whenever lead is melted down in manufacturing or recycling lead batteries.

In addition, toys, plastics, some imported crayons, calcium supplements, hair dyes, pottery, certain cosmetics, leaded crystal and some folk remedies have high lead content. Even ammunition and fishing weights are made from lead.

Lead poisoning is the presence of too much lead in the body. Lead is a highly toxic metal that may cause a range of health problems. Even very low level exposures can impact young children.

When lead is absorbed into the body, it can cause damage to the brain and other vital organs, like the kidneys, nerves and blood. Lead may also cause behavioral problems, learning disabilities, seizures and in extreme cases, death.

According to the World Health Organization and the U.S Centre for Disease Control (CDC), there is no known safe level of lead in the body. Repeated studies have demonstrated that even very low exposure levels impact children's school performance and intellectual capacity.

In adults, blood lead levels in this range are also associated with hypertension and are significant contributo to heart disease and stroke.

A higher exposure levels, kidney disease and damage to the gastrointestinal, nervous and reproductive systems occur.