

ARGENTINA's successful experience on developing voluntary programs through multisectoral collaboration

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Through the activities developed within the Project "POPs Enabling Activities" – or NIP Project as it is widely known - in Argentina, a strong partnership has been established between the governmental sector and certain NGOs.

That partnership made possible the development of several other successful connected projects as is the case of the following ones:

1) The *Secretariat of the Environment* is working together with the *Asociación Argentina de Médicos por el Medio Ambiente (AAMMA)* on the Project "*Children's Environmental Health Profile - Perfil SANA*" to complete a Profile that collects and compiles information on the state of Children's Environmental Health in Argentina. The Project has been developed with support from the Canadian government through the *Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA-ACDI)*.

The overall direction of the project is determined by a Steering Committee, comprised of representatives from Canada and Argentina as the *Canadian Institute of Child Health (CICH)*, *Asociación Argentina de Médicos por el Medio Ambiente (AAMMA)*, *the Secretariat of the Environment and the Ministry of Health of Argentina*, *Health Canada*, *the University of Ottawa* and *the Argentine Society of Pediatrics (SAP)*.

The goal of the project is to assist in the protection of Argentine children's health by decreasing environmental hazards, resulting in healthier children and healthier environments.

In order to achieve this goal, the following data collection activities are taking place:

- A **Survey distributed to over 13,000 argentine pediatricians**, who are members of SAP, to collect information on the perception pediatricians have on the following issues: the type of environmentally related health problems seen in their pediatric practice; specific information on the prevalence of air, water and chemical pollutants in practice locations; and, the need/interest of professional education to prevent and detect environmental risks for the protection of children's health. The survey has been jointly developed by Argentine and Canadian partners, and reviewed by the Ethics Committees of the Argentine Society of Pediatrics and the Memorial University of New Foundland (Canada).
- **Literature Review Process** to compile CEH information which takes into account Argentine as well as international publications and key informant interviews. For this purpose, the different project partners have been working on the development of a frame for the definition and selection of *National*

Children's Environmental Health Indicators. The selected potential indicators of context, environmental exposure, outcome and action indicators within the frame are being used to organize the Children's Environmental Health Profile in Argentina.

- **Two field case studies** that address unique environmental health issues faced in different environments. *One case study* examines a rural community (in the Province of Misiones, Argentina) where children are exposed to agricultural chemicals (pesticides). *The second case study* looks at an urban setting (Municipality of Zarate in the Province of Buenos Aires), where children are exposed to industrial pollution (lead).
- **Dissemination activities** as the development of a Standard PowerPoint Presentation and an Article that describe the project; distribution of a Project Bimonthly Newsletter in both languages (Spanish and English); the creation and maintenance of a Project Website to report activities on-line.
In collecting and analyzing the data, networks have been created, bringing together stakeholders from different parts of society including decision makers, government officials, non-governmental organizations, academia, professionals as physicians, the general public and private sector.
The Profile will become an educational tool which highlights gaps, problem areas and points toward solutions. The Profile operates on the premise that knowledge and understanding precede action and that any action must take place in partnership with all stakeholders. This is the ultimate rationale for the project: once the issues are recognized and understood, the issues can then be addressed.

For further information on the project, please visit:

<http://www.aamma.org/ceh/ceh.htm>

2) Argentina is participating in a project whose overall objective is to reduce environmental releases of dioxins and mercury by demonstrating and promoting best techniques and practices for reducing and managing healthcare waste in a number of countries and regions. These overall objective will be met through the following activities: establish model health care institutions with best practices in health care waste management that demonstrate approaches to reduce and eliminate the release of dioxins and mercury to the environment; establish a countrywide or regional training program, using the model facilities to train and certify experts in health care waste management; assure that the new practices and piloted systems are nationally documented, promoted, disseminated, replicated and institutionalized; dissemination and replication of Project results regionally and globally; and assure Project Sustainability and Replicability.

This project, which is being developed simultaneously in seven (7) countries (Argentina, India, Latvia, Lebanon, Philippines, Senegal, Vietnam) is run globally by a Global Project Team (GPT) that is constituted by: a Project Coordinator, a WHO/OMS--- Senior Project Advisor, a Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) - Senior Project Advisor and two international consultants

(expert on treatment technologies & expert on health care waste management systems).

In each participating country, the PDF B work was conducted under the guidance of a National Project Steering Committee (NPSC) with help and assistance from a National Working Group (NWG) and a National Project Consultant.

The NPSC members in Argentina were: the Secretariat of Environment acting as Government Focal Point and as operational institution in charge of developing the NIP Project, the South American Basel Convention Centre, HCWH and AAMMA acting as leading NGOs, a National consultant hired especially to develop the PDF B, representatives from local UNDP and WHO, and the GEF Operational Focal Point

The NPSC assumed oversight for national Project activities: assuring that support existed and was maintained at all levels of government and within relevant sectors of society; providing guidance to the National Working Group; assisting in seeking co-finance to support the outputs and activities of the full project; reviewing and approving significant Project decisions at the national level; monitoring and evaluating national activities; and reviewing and approving the national work plan.

On the other hand, a National Working Group (NWG) was formed – through the participation of all the interested stakeholders involved – that advised the NPSC,; assisted it in the collection and dissemination of information on policy, economic, scientific and technical issues; assisted it identifying candidate hospitals and health centres, planning of a national policy conference and development of national and regional Project result dissemination strategy; and provided assistance and advice to the National Project Coordinator and National Focal Point in the preparation of national progress reports

Finishing this phase of the Project in due time was possible through the close collaboration and joint efforts displayed by the Secretariat of the Environment, the Basel Regional Centre, HCWH Argentina and AAMMA, all of them taking full responsibility for the National Project completion. The four institutions developed a strong partnership that resulted in a good product achieved in a relatively short span of time.

3) The *Secretariat of Environment* is working together with the *Asociación Argentina of Medicos por el Medio Ambiente (AAMMA)* on the Project “*Building Capacities on Chemical Safety Awareness in the different regions of Argentina*” to disseminate and spread information on “Children’s Chemical Safety – Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) under the premise “Informing and Capacitating without Alarming”.

This Project works as “axis of support” and accompanies the training and educational activities under the NIP process developed by the Secretariat of Environment. In this way, this Project joins strengths and actions for the elaboration of policies on POPs, its identification and elimination, and supports

the NIP process through the development of training activities in different Argentine communities; facilitating multi-stakeholder involvement in process.

The POPs crisis, its effects on children's health and future generations can be prevented and mitigated through the implementation of concrete actions and suitable policies. That's why, the urgent necessity of institutionalizing POPs Awareness as part of children's environmental health issues in the Southern Cone country of Argentina.

This Project involves a network methodology among different stakeholders, particularly between governmental sectors, non governmental organizations and civil society, which strengths the development of the proposal. The Project is based on the organization and development of Multi-participative Regional Training Workshops (Northern East, Northern West, Center and South Region of Argentina) on "Children's Chemical Safety - Impacts of POPs on Environment, Biodiversity and Human Health".

This project is under the framework of the "Mar del Plata Declaration of the Meeting of Ministers of Health and Environment of the Americas¹" (HEMA Meeting - June 17th, 2005): *"...We recognize that our countries are facing difficult and complex challenges related to the health and environmental areas. Our efforts, both at the regional and sub regional levels, will be aimed at supporting the progress and achievement of the results on the following three priority issues: Integrated Management of Water Resources and Solid Waste; Sound Management of Chemicals; and Children's Environmental Health ... We are committed to developing and implementing strategies to manage risks, reduce threats to ecosystems and to human health in our region from pesticides and other chemical pollutants, particularly with respect to vulnerable populations, including indigenous groups, industrial and agricultural workers, women and children. This will be done in order to comply with the obligations under the Stockholm, Rotterdam and Basel Conventions..."* and the "Civil Society Mar del Plata Declaration of the Meeting of Ministers of Health and Environment of the Americas²" (HEMA Meeting - June 16th, 2005).

This Project also supports the "Intergovernmental Forum of Chemical Safety Recommendations" (Fourth Session of the Intergovernmental Forum of Chemical Safety, IFCS – December 1st to 7th, 2003). The Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) is strongly involved in protecting children of harmful chemicals exposure. This project is under the IFCS FIV Recommendations³: *"...Governments should promote education and training on children's chemical safety...Governments and stakeholders should commit to sharing information on options for taking effective action to protect children from established chemical threats and from chemical risks where there is a degree of uncertainty..."*

¹ Meeting of Ministers of Health and Environment of the Americas (www.aamma.org/english/index.html)

² Civil Society Mar del Plata Declaration of the Meeting of Ministers of Health and Environment of the Americas (www.aamma.org/english/index.html)

³ Fourth Session of the Intergovernmental Forum of Chemical Safety, IFCS FIV – December 1st to 7th 2003, (www.ifcs.ch)

This Project particularly supports the “Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management”⁴ (SAICM) that also seeks to bring together all the sectors involved in chemicals management (including the health sector).

Under this framework, the Proposal contributes with the implementation of policies, takes protective actions and allows the National government through the Secretariat of the Environment responds to international agreements and acts according to international recommendations.

This Project complements and supports the processes taken by Argentina to develop the National Implementation Plans (NIPs) for the Stockholm Convention; building public support for its ratification and implementation.

Through the project activities as the development of Multi-participative Regional Training Workshops (Northern East, Northern West, Center and South Region of Argentina) on “Children’s Chemical Safety - Impacts of POPs on Environment, Biodiversity and Human Health” and other dissemination activities with interventions in the communities, the *Argentine NIP focal point, the Chemicals Unit of the National Secretariat of the Environment (National Direction of Environmental Management) together with AAMMA* have joined criteria to raise awareness on POPs, as part of the elaboration of the National Implementation Plan (NIP) and achieve the aim of the Stockholm Convention.

⁴ The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, SAICM (www.chem.unep.ch/saicm)