

## **ROLE OF PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS IN THE SOUND MANAGEMENT OF CHEMICALS**

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Chemical production in Uganda constitutes less than 2% of the total demand of chemicals meaning most is imported. A wide variety of pesticides are used for the quality of livestock and crops. These are usually applied in small amounts by small scale farmers using traditional methods and are ill-equipped for the application of pesticides. This causes risks to the environment and human.

Uganda also because of its tropical climate breeds an abundant number of vectors including tsetseflies, mosquitoes, watersnails and more. As a result diseases such as malaria, bilharzias, sleeping sickness and more are rampant thus necessitating the use of chemicals for public health purposes. Cases of pesticide misuse have been reported. Apart for use in suicide intention, pesticides have been used by unscrupulous men in the catching of fish, control bird pests and driving snakes out of holes.

Another area of concern would be the use of pesticide containers for storage and packaging purposes of a variety of foodstuff. Due to improper cleaning before use there is high possibility of chemicals migration and contamination.

A case study on stockpiles of obsolete pesticides in Uganda is at KARI-Kawanda Agricultural Research institute. It is located outside of Kampala and surrounded by human settlements and wetlands. The settlers exist on crop and animal husbandry and the water accessible is non-piped water (water from springs). In the 1980s, the government bought stocks of herbicides to protect cottonseed dressing and bananas and stored them. The stocks were not used because of political instability. To date these stockpiles of pesticides have been kept and started to leak out of the containers resulting in the corrosion of the iron walls of the storage rooms. This is a key example of the negligence on storage of chemicals and the need for NGOs to carry out research on the ground that would be relevant towards the cause of sound management of chemicals. Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil society involvement at national and regional level is key in support of effective and sound management of chemicals in Uganda and other countries at large.

NGOs and other public interest organizations play a key role in ensuring that there is sound management of chemicals in a nation. NGOs work with the local communities at grassroots' level and are thus aware of the limitations of chemicals management and safety policies. It is therefore essential that they are capacitated and engaged in international chemical conventions for national ratification and implementation. Their ability to educate government on the realities of chemicals management is a key element in these processes leading to the sound management of chemicals.

In Africa ,there are capacity gaps between the international policy and the national/local activities and this should be addressed in order to effectively implement national polices that reflect the concerns of local NGOs. There is need to strengthen national and regional and international laws and programs to reduce and eliminate stockpiled chemicals that pause the most serious threat to humans and wildlife.

International chemical safety requires cooperation among all stakeholders, by adopting SAICM developing countries will strengthen their capacity for sound management of chemicals and hazardous wastes. Government through NGOs, CSOs and public interest groups can create massive awareness through campaigns using the media and educational campaigns. An established sound documentation system for the management of chemicals should be set in place and accessible to the public and other organizations working towards chemicals management.

There is need for government by exploring opportunities provided for by the international conventions of POPs such as the Stockholm convention and work with NGOs in their capacity building, acquiring of skills and expertise not available in the country.