

## **Roles of Public Interest Organizations in National Chemicals Management and SAICM Implementation**

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The mounting scientific evidences on dangerous impacts of chemicals on health and the environment and the increasing production and marketing of these chemicals during the past years understandably raised concerned within the public opinion when considering the risks that these chemicals represent. Furthermore, the multiple accidents and diseases due to chemicals, occurring each year worldwide, more specifically in developing countries convinced the international community of the urgent need to act. 20,000 accidental deceases and 3 million poisonings due to pesticides are recorded yearly. Around 750,000 people contract yearly a chronic disease such as cancer following an exposure to pesticides. That is in this framework that the international community put in place different international instruments to manage chemical risks. It is amongst others the Basel Conventions on the transboundary movements of hazardous wastes, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent (PIC), the Stockholm Convention on the Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), Protocols of Montreal and Kyoto, the Intergovernmental Forum for Chemical Safety (IFCS), the FAO Code, etc. The last born of international initiatives intended to deal with chemical safety issues is the Strategic Approach for International Chemical Management (SAICM). Based on the Bahia Declaration and Priorities for Action beyond 2000 of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS), SAICM is expected to help in coordination and promoting synergies amongst the several initiatives dealing with chemical management at both national, regional and international levels in order to achieve chemical safety.

Indeed, the overall objective of the SAICM is to achieve the sound management of chemicals throughout their life-cycle so that, by 2020, chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment.

The involvement of all relevant sectors and stakeholders, at the local, national, regional and global levels, is seen as key to achieving the objectives of the SAICM. Non-governmental public health and environmental organizations, trade unions and other civil society organizations are among the main stakeholders in the SAICM. In most countries, they already have made important contributions to the promotion of chemical safety at international, regional, national, or local level and it is expected that SAICM will permit to reinforce their role in chemical management. The SAICM Global Plan of Action (GPA) made several provisions to Public Interest Organization (PIO) through which they could play great role in national chemical management.

### **1) Raising awareness, information and education about chemical hazards and international treaties related to chemicals**

In most countries, PIO are developed the means and skills by which they can transmit the information, knowledge, and perspectives they possess to broader sectors of society. By raising awareness and informing the public about health and environmental issues related to chemicals, they contribute in the implementation of SAICM following *objectives*:

**A. Risk reduction** : population above all vulnerable groups (workers, women, childrens,...)have risky behaviour in relation to chemicals because they are not aware of the danger related to chemicals. In many developing countries and countries with economies in transition, there is often very limited and incomplete public awareness

and understanding about the severe health and environmental harm caused by chemical pollutants. Raising their awareness on chemical hazards, will lead them to be more careful to highly toxic chemicals. For example, well-advised women to safeguard their health and those of their children will minimize chemical exposures before conception and through gestation, infancy, childhood and adolescence.

**B. Strengthening knowledge and information.** The work areas aimed at Strengthening Knowledge and information include improved education, training and awareness-raising activities aimed at those who may be exposed to toxic substances at any stage in the life cycle of chemicals.

**C. Governance: strengthening of institutions, law and policy :** To strengthen institutions, laws and policies dealing with chemical issues, decision makers need to be informed on chemical issues that the country are facing and be aware about the benefits of international treaties and national institutional and regulatory frameworks as key elements to tackle chemical safety issues. By contributing to that, PIO help decisions makers to understand the necessity for countries to strengthen the governance issues related to chemical management.

## **2. Monitoring of chemical impacts on health and environment**

It is important for a country to know the impacts of chemicals that are in use in its territory so that to identify chemicals that are of great concern for the countries. Public Interest Organizations have developed capacities to allow them to help on that. For example, in the framework of the International POPs Elimination Project (IPEP) initiated by IPEN, NGOs through POPs hotspot reports are identifying specific POPs-related problems in some countries with the intent of raising both public and government awareness. These hotspot reports are produced as contributions toward building the support necessary for effective action aimed at reducing and eliminating POPs. Also, PAN Africa through its project Pesticide and Poverty : implementing chemical conventions for safe and just development will monitor the health and environmental impacts of some pesticides widely used in some african countries.

Thus, by developing programmes intended to the monitoring of the impacts of chemical used in the country, PIO may contribute to the achievement of the following objective of SAICM :

**A. Risk reduction :** monitoring the chemicals in use in the country may help on identifying the chemical for which special measures are needed.

**B. Strengthening knowledge and information :** The diffusion of the outcomes of chemical monitoring programmes contribute to strengthen knowledge and information on chemicals issues among populations and authorities.

**C. Governance: strengthening of institutions, law and policy :** monitoring of chemical in use in the country and reporting the results of such activities to decision makers allow them to be aware of the necessity of strengthening institutions, law and policy so that to improve chemical management in the country. For example, the results of PAN Africa monitoring of Granox and Spinox incidents helped PIC DNA to notify the PIC Secretariat these 2 chemicals .

### **3. Promoting sound ecologically alternatives and best practices**

In several countries, NGOs are promoting sound ecology alternatives to chemical and best practices by training peoples and informing them on these alternatives. For example, regarding pesticides, several training sessions such as workshops, seminars, field visits and information exchange are developed by PIOs on the themes of alternatives, Integrated Pest Management, organic agriculture, natural protection of crops. For example, NGO like PAN Africa in collaboration with Community Based Organizations work on identification of traditional knowledge and natural techniques used in crop protection that may constitute sound and cheap alternatives to pesticides and disseminate them widely. PIOs can also work on dissemination of proved alternatives to chemicals.

Such as activities contribute to the achievement of SAICM objective of **improved general practices** and **promote reduction of risks** related to chemicals

### **4. Promoting the implementation of international treaties and strengthening and enforcement of national regulations**

Public Interest Organizations can promote the implementaion of international treaties and the strengthening of national regulations by :

- Launching lobbying and advocacy campaign for the ratification and implementation of international agreements
- Raising awareness authorities on the benefits of international treaties and the necessity of their implementation to achieve sustainable development
- Making the text of these conventions accessible to the wider public by making available these texts but also by helping them to better understand the dispositions of the conventions
- Building capacities among other civil society members on the different international conventions
- Monitoring the implementation of international treaties in the country so that to identify obstacles and difficulties to the ratification and the implementation and suggest solution for that
- Participating in national framework settled up for chemical management : in most countries NGOs have developed skills on the area of international and national policies dealing with chemical management and they can provide government with important policy and information inputs that can contribute to effective implementation of international and national policies. For example, in Senegal the National Committee for Chemical Management is the main framework for chemical management and implementation of international chemical agreements. NGOs are members of this committee and contribute in policies making.

NGOs Most importantly, public interest NGOs can help build the support and commitments that will be needed to ensure that appropriate measures to promote chemical safety are successfully undertaken.

But to do so they need more support and assistance. In the absence of new and additional support and assistance, NGOs lack the capacity they need to play their desired role: in effectively helping to raise public awareness about POPs; in increasing civil society participation, involvement and interest in chemical management-related activities; and in providing direct contributions toward achieving chemical safety.



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