

## Thematic Workshop on Governance, Civil Society Participation and Strengthening Partnerships for Chemicals and Waste Management and SAICM Implementation

Ilang Ilang Quijano  
PESTICIDE ACTION NETWORK PHILIPPINES

Pesticide Action Network Philippines, as a non-stock, non-profit organization that has been consistently involved in the development of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, reaffirms its commitment to the Dubai Declaration on International Chemicals Management adopted at the 2006 International Conference for Chemicals Management. We believe that public interest organizations like ours have much to contribute to the implementation of the SAICM programme at the international, national and local levels.

For almost a decade now, PAN Philippines has been working toward the prevention or minimization of health and environmental harm caused by pesticide use. In collaboration with local and international organizations, we have been conducting research, monitoring, and awareness-raising activities in remote communities on the adverse effects of pesticides. We have contributed in successful campaigns against some highly toxic pesticides (such as endosulfan, methyl parathion, triphenyltins, monocrotophos, and ethyl parathion), which resulted in banning or severe restrictions of these chemicals. Although PAN Philippines is also involved in advocacy against toxic wastes and industrial pollutants, our work in chemical safety focuses on issues related to the use of pesticides and other agrochemicals.

Statistics show that most pesticide poisoning cases occur in developing countries such as the Philippines where regulatory, health, and education systems are the weakest. Meanwhile, our own experience has led us to believe that the human, environmental, and social costs of chemical-intensive way of agriculture have reached critical levels. Poor farmers literally bathe in potent cocktails of old and highly toxic chemicals that are near impossible to use safely under real field conditions. The availability of these chemicals, lack of information and knowledge of their hazards, aggressive marketing by industry, insufficient government regulation; as well as poverty, illiteracy, and lack of health facilities in the rural areas make pesticides a major public health concern. In addition, most farmers do not own the land they till. Thus, they have no control over what is used in plantations and use what is dictated to them and what is available rather than what is appropriate. The incapacity of the industry and government to decisively, systematically, and effectively address this situation endangers the lives of millions of Filipino farmers everyday, and contributes to the worsening state of global chemical pollution as well.

PAN Philippines has participated in various global fora aimed at addressing chemical safety issues through developing and/or implementing multilateral environmental agreements and tools such as the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants and the Globally Harmonised System for Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS). It has done so in the belief that civil society plays a significant role in identifying and addressing the gaps in chemical safety management and with the intent of synergizing our energies with that of industries and governments which similarly commit to take international and national concerted action towards the sound management of chemicals.

PAN Philippines believes that in taking the crucial initial steps towards the implementation of the SAICM programme, of which most of our efforts fall under, public interest NGOs has several roles:

1. First of all, public interest NGOs can ensure that the precautionary framework is upheld. The precautionary approach attempts to avoid the creation of pollutants, in contrast to risk assessment strategies that attempt to manage pollutants to some level of "acceptability" after they have been created. With the precautionary principle, there is recognition that long-term impacts of toxic chemicals are difficult to predict and often impossible to prove. It also accepts the fact that, historically, many toxic chemicals have been shown to cause serious and often irreversible damage to human health and the environment. While the precautionary approach must still rely on science and on certain elements of the "risk assessment" methodology to identify potential risks to human health and the environment, it is not dependent, as traditional risk assessment is, on a system of decision making that demands generation of extensive scientific data and requires exhaustive analysis of risks as pre-conditions to policy formulation and action. This is particularly relevant to developing countries where the resources needed to characterize the risks are not readily available. A commitment to the precautionary framework, when applied to areas outlined in the SAICM Global Plan of Action, such as measures to support risk reduction, strengthening of knowledge and information, governance, enhancing capacity-building, would bring us closer to the realization of the over-all objective of SAICM.

2. NGOs can make certain that knowledge and information on chemicals and chemicals management has the correct content and form, and that such is properly disseminated to the general public. NGOs can use their existing research and monitoring tools and output to develop such knowledge and information and ensure its accuracy and effectiveness. Since public interest NGOs work closely with workers, farmers, consumers, and other groups in society, NGOs know the appropriate language and medium by which chemical hazard information can best be communicated. Furthermore, NGOs could help identify priority groups that would immediately and highly benefit from appropriate knowledge and information on chemical use. For years of grassroots experience in attempting to fill the gap in knowledge and information on chemicals and chemicals management by conducting research, monitoring, and awareness-raising campaigns, public interest NGOs are ideally suited conduits through which such information can be coursed through to reach the public.

3. With regards to governance, NGOs can also participate in the decision-making process of national bodies for the implementation of the SAICM programme. In doing so, NGOs can inform government and industry on the needs and aspirations of the common people with regards to the protection of health and environment. NGOs can lobby in the legislative arena, and push for the development and implementation of national laws and regulations regarding chemicals management, including those that serve to execute international agreements. Without the genuine involvement of NGOs, government and industry would likely not be able to develop the comprehensive, effective, efficient, transparent, coherent and inclusive mechanisms for chemical safety management that the SAICM envisions. Furthermore, without pressure from NGOs that serve as the voice of marginalized groups most affected by unsound chemical management, government and industry might not be inclined towards expediting and fully committing to the implementation of the SAICM programme, which is not a legally binding instrument. NGOs will also be instrumental in taking stock of the progress of the implementation of the SAICM programme in terms of determining behavioral and policy changes at the grassroots level, if any.

4. The lack of and need for capacity-building and technical cooperation is most direly felt in developing countries like the Philippines, particularly by public interest NGOs among the various stakeholders. To address this concern, NGOs can help promote awareness among donors and multilateral organizations of the relevance of chemical safety for poverty reduction and sustainable development. It can also share among other NGOs helpful information regarding capacity-building and pool technical skills and resources

whenever possible in order to aid in the fulfillment of each other's needs in furtherance of the SAICM programme implementation. It can also ask the industry and government to provide capacity-building and technical support as part of their inherent responsibilities to chemical safety.

PAN Philippines has been involved in a lot of endeavors that serve the SAICM programme's different objectives at different levels. A multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral approach in harmony with SAICM's principles can be gleaned from such diverse activities:

1. We conduct community-based pesticide action monitoring (CPAM), where we do awareness-raising on health and environmental effects of pesticides among farmer communities. CPAM also includes training on recognition of acute poisoning, and documentation of poisoning incidents, pesticide use, and health profiles of farmers. Using the CPAM model, significant attention was brought upon glaring case studies of pesticide poisoning of victims of aerial spraying by a banana plantation in Southern Philippines, of former International Rice Research Institute workers in Laguna, and of communities exposed to endosulfan in Kasargod, India.

2. We participate in government activities in developing a National GHS Implementation Strategy, including a regional workshop on GHS among ASEAN countries and a national GHS workshop. PAN Philippines also participated in the Comprehensibility Testing training, and contributed to the situation and gap analysis for the agricultural sector.

3. PAN Philippines also serves as a network point of contact for public interest NGOs in the INFOCAP or Information Exchange Network on Capacity Building for the Sound Management of Chemicals. It is a web-based information exchange mechanism designed to enhance effective cooperation among countries and organizations which are providing and/or receiving assistance related to sound management of chemicals.

4. We are also the Southeast Asia co-hub of IPEP, or the International POPs Elimination Project. The project supports hundreds of NGO Project Activities, in approximately 40 developing countries and countries in transition, all aimed at contributing to country preparations for Stockholm Convention implementation.

PAN Philippines has also experienced certain constraints common to public interest NGOs involved in chemical safety issues. Since NGOs work on limited funds and depend on volunteerism, capacity-building and technical support, as stated above, is even more imperative in sustaining its activities. Many donors and multilateral institutions stringently require that government approve NGO project proposals. In developing countries like the Philippines, however, the government is often not interested in cooperating with NGOs, whether in developing or implementing chemical safety management programs (although token participation of some NGOs sometimes occur to fulfil certain requirements). When NGOs are isolated from decision-making processes and left to materially and morally fend for themselves in conducting highly technical work and confronting chemical mismanagement by the industry, the relationship between NGOs and government turn adversarial.

PAN Philippines adheres to the SAICM principles of a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach to the sound management of chemicals. It is hoped that this workshop would successfully identify areas of collaboration between government, industry and civil society towards the much anticipated implementation of the SAICM programme in each of our respective countries.