The Role and Benefits of Public Interest Organizations in Chemicals Management and How Potential Capacity Constraints of Relevant Groups can be Addressed

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Abstract

Government and regulatory agency decisions made with the involvement of civil society are much more likely to be put into practice successfully.[i] Experience shows that it is very difficult to manage or mitigate the impacts of chemicals and hazardous waste without the ability to communicate effectively and equitably involve all those concerned with the issue. Public interest, public health and labour based NGOs have an essential role to play in effective chemical management if the 2020 goal set at WSSD is to be achieved. However, this is not only an issue of obvious benefits, it is also a right enshrined in the Bahia Declaration on Chemical Safety, that is, communities have the "right to participate meaningfully in decisions about chemical safety that affect them."[ii] The growing acceptance of public participation in chemical policy making and management is also dependent on developing adequate capacity to support the involvement of civil society. This paper will provide a summary of the role that NGOs play in effective chemical management, with particular focus on capacity building activities and will draw on case studies of effective participation and capacity building models.

Role of Public Interest and Labour Organizations in Chemicals Management

"We work with representatives of civil society, seeking to draw on their expertise and local knowledge of industrial chemicals (including hazards, exposure, controls and use), and ensure their equitable involvement in chemical decisions that affect them."

- NICNAS Community Engagement Charter 2005-06[iii]

This statement by a national chemical regulator is an acknowledgement of the expertise and experience that civil society brings to the issues of chemical management, particularly in the assessment of industrial chemicals, the monitoring of pesticides and their use and in the siting of hazardous waste facilities.

Case Study 1 – *The Egg Report, Contamination of chicken eggs from 17 countries by dioxins, PCBs and hexachlorobenzene, "Keep the Promise, Eliminate POPs!" Campaign and Dioxin, PCBs and Waste Working Group of the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) Report -the Role and Benefits of Public Interest Organizations in Chemicals Management*

In 2005, the Dioxin, PCBs and Waste Working Group of the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) completed the Egg Report. This report investigated dioxin, furan, PCB, and HCB contamination in free-range chicken eggs from 17 countries on five continents. The eggs were collected near waste incinerators, cement kilns, metallurgical industries, waste dumps, and chemical production facilities in Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Egypt, India, Kenya, Mexico, Mozambique, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, Senegal, Slovakia, Tanzania, Turkey, Uruguay and USA.

The study focused on backyard and free-range eggs as a useful bio-indicator of food and environmental contamination and demonstrated that the vast majority of samples exceeded European Union (EU) limits for contaminants in eggs with some containing the highest dioxin levels ever measured in chicken eggs.

This study provided the first datasets about U-POPs for many of the countries examined in this study. It provided a range of information largely unavailable and demonstrated pollution sources and exposure patterns, for example, the link between dump sites or PVC plastic production / burning and contamination in eggs. Most importantly, it indicated priority areas for action. This global study clearly demonstrates the role and benefits of NGOs in the generation of data pertinent for effective chemical management.

Case Study 2. *The 3C Stakeholder Involvement Program to Establish New and Better Hazardous Waste Treatment Facilities* **- a**n *example of specific chemicals management topic which is benefiting from a partnership approach involving government, industry, and public interest and labour organizations*

A pertinent example of cooperative stakeholder lead processes is the '3C Stakeholder Involvement Program to Establish New and Better Hazardous Waste Treatment Facilities', currently being undertaken by NGOs, industry and labour unions in Western Australia. The WA Core Consultative Committee on Waste (3C Committee) through a well designed and implemented public involvement program has succeeded in developing criteria for both hazardous waste destruction technologies and site selection that have received wide acceptance. Encouragingly, through the process a number of public nominations for potential sites for an industrial hazardous waste facility have been received.

The 3C Stakeholder Involvement Program had three aims; to maximise participation in and enhance the process for establishing new and better waste treatment facilities in WA; to place the establishment of new and better waste treatment facilities clearly within the context of broader hazardous /industrial waste management issues, including minimizing hazardous waste generation; and to ensure that proposed locations and technologies are the most broadly-supported taking account of environmental, economic and social factors. The siting of hazardous waste treatment facilities remain a vexed issue and the use of a stakeholder lead process may result in breaking the deadlocks experienced by government or industry working alone.

Capacity Building – Addressing Potential Capacity Constraints of Relevant Groups

> *Unless the community has the capacity to receive the information, to interpret it, and to incorporate it into the decision making process, the amount and quality of information provided is irrelevant.* [iv]
>
> **- UN Earthwatch**

The need to build the capacity within civil society to address the challenges of rapid environmental change and chemical management has been identified as an environmental priority for the new century.[v] **To be effective, capacity building needs to reflect the specific needs of the parties and requires them to work together as partners, jointly identifying the**

issues, tackling the problems, and sharing responsibility for the results. It has been acknowledged internationally that capacity building for environmentally sustainable chemical management must include all interested parties, especially the community sector (IFCS 1996)[vi]. The Terms of Reference for the international Capacity Building Network, (IFCS 2000)[vii] recognised that NGOs and the community were integral to the success of capacity building initiatives for chemical life cycle management. Their critical role in the design and the implementation of the capacity building activities helps ensure programs are appropriate and effective.

Case Study 3 – *The International POPs Elimination Project (IPEP) – addressing potential capacity constraints of relevant groups*

The broad goals of IPEP are to enhance the skills and knowledge of NGOs to help build their capacity as effective stakeholders in the Convention implementation process; and to help establish regional and national NGO capacity in support of longer term efforts to achieve chemical safety. More than 200 NGOs in 64 developing and transitional countries have engaged in 290 IPEP activities [viii] to provide concrete contributions to country efforts to prepare for Convention implementation. IPEP is a medium-sized GEF project and

IPEP is regionally coordinated by eight NGOs, designated the "*IPEP Regional Facilitation Hubs***." The Hubs foster awareness of POPs and help NGOs prepare proposals, oversee progress, and provide regional leadership. The Hubs are located in the Czech Republic (Central and Eastern Europe), Egypt (Middle East operating in Arabic), India (South Asia), Mexico (Latin America operating in Spanish), Philippines (Southeast Asia and the Pacific), Russia (Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia operating in Russian), Senegal (Francophone Africa operating in French), and Tanzania (Anglophone Africa).**

IPEP's wide variety of project activities include: preparing an overall description of the POPs situation in a country; mapping obsolete pesticide stockpiles and POPs-contaminated sites, and promoting their proper cleanup and disposal; sampling soil, eggs, fish, and people for POPs; investigating new POPs such as brominated flame retardants and lindane; raising awareness among farmers, rag-pickers, college students, women, agricultural workers, children, physicians, government officials, informal sector workers and others; proposing new methods of waste prevention; documenting the continuing use of POPs pesticides and promoting alternative farming methods. These are made available to governments and others, contributing to the preparation of National Implementation Plans, country ratification efforts as well as the effective implementation of the Stockholm Convention. IPEP works in five languages (Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish), and it makes project materials and reports publicly available on a multi-lingual website (http://www.oztoxics.org/ipepweb/).

The IPEProject has created increased awareness, understanding, and knowledge about POPs and chemical issues within national NGO communities and society as a whole. Most importantly, it has helped expand the capacity and competence of NGOs and civil society in many countries to address chemical management issues.

Case Study 4 – *Community Information Systems (CIS) - addressing capacity constraints of relevant groups*

Capacity building can take many forms with many different approaches. One way to build capacity of NGOs and civil society to address priority chemical management issues is to develop a learning environment in which a cooperative information collection and consolidation process can take place.[ix] This approach has been taken by NGO researchers in a range of chemical policy and management issues. It requires clear problem definition and a participatory design and development cycle. Through a structured user needs assessment including surveys and personal interviews, participants are provided with opportunities to reflect on their own information requirements and decision-making needs. The Community Information Consolidation (CIC) process represents a progression from the identification of the problem to consolidation of information in a community information system (CIS) repository to aid informed decision-making.

The basic CIC steps are as follows:
Step 1. Review the history and identify the components of the issue.
Step 2. Conduct preliminary problem identification.
Step 3. Identify other interests or stakeholders.
Step 4. Clearly define the protocols of the CIC process.
Step 5. Carry out a literature review of similar issues and disputes.
Step 6. Conduct a user study and user needs assessment by surveying key regulators, industry, residents and NGOs and list all identified concerns.
Step 7. Confirm problem identification and establish the aims and objectives of the CIS.
Step 8. List the dispute components as a series of questions needing explanation, which form the datasets for the CIS repository.
Step 9. Jointly work through the CIS questions, prioritising and also identifying contentious issues that may require special attention.
Step 10. Identify data gaps and restricted information, and a process to address them.
Step 11. Identify need for expert advice and a process to address it.
Step 12. Jointly identify key documents and datasets specific to the dispute issues and negotiate their inclusion into the CIS repository.
Step 13. Consolidate the information into an agreed CIS repository focusing on ease of data management, retrieval and dissemination.

Through the CIC process the information components are identified and compiled into categories that represent logical components and answer specific questions. The information components are then prioritised as the main information units and represent both chapter headings and main menu components. Each of these major information components is further broken down into logical subcomponents addressing the concerns and queries of the participants.

The CIC process leads to the consolidation of data and relevant information in an accessible and user-friendly CIS repository. The reiterative development process incorporates ongoing modifications and changes, reflecting the constant feedback from participants and other users. The final CIS is provided in Adobe Acrobat format as a CD, in html format as a website and as printouts and fliers for distribution or to be used in workshop materials.

While the final CIS provides an information resource for both stakeholders and the wider community, the CIC process itself acts as an important capacity building activity for participants, focusing on the information needs required for sound decision making in chemical management.

Conclusion

Environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste is reliant on the participation of all stakeholders and interested parties. While developing capacity is an essential element to support participation, NGO based projects have proven to be an efficient and cost effective way of identifying and addressing capacity building needs, as well as supplementing information generation by national governments.

Endnotes

[i] NSW Environment Protection Authority *Public participation* Available at <ww.epa.nsw.gov.au/ethics/>
[ii] Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety, *Bahia Declaration on Chemical Safe*ty, Forum 3, IFCS, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, 18 October 2000
[iii] NICNAS or the National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme is the Australian national regulatory agency for industrial chemical. For further information see <www.nicnas.gov.au>
[iv] See *UN System-Wide Earthwatch: Earth Watch & Agenda 21, Information for Decision-Making*, UNEP. Available at <http://www.earthwatch.unep.net/ >
[v] Allen, W.J. (2000) Capacity building (social capital) Improving The Use of Collaborative Approaches Within Natural Resource Management Available at <http://nrm.massey.ac.nz/changelinks/capacity.html>
[vi] IFCS Chairman's Report of Plenary Session, Thematic Program Area E: Strengthening of National Capabilities & Capacities, prepared for the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety, (ISG/96.WP.19 8 March 1996), Second Meeting of the Intersessional Group (ISG), Canberra, 1996
[vii] IFCS Raising Awareness & Raising the Priority of Chemicals Management Capacity Building, Issues at a Political Level. (IFCS/FORUMIII/15w) , Prepared for Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety 22 March 2000 at 1-3
[viii] For further information and examples of IPEP activities see the IPEPweb at <http://www.oztoxics.org/ipepweb>
[ix] Allen, W.J. Bosch, O.J.H., Gibson, R.G. & Jopp, A.J. "Co-learning our way to sustainability: An integrated & community-based research approach to support natural resource management decision-making." in El-Swaify & Yakowitz (eds) *In Multiple Objective Decision Making for Land, Water & Environmental Management*. Lewis Publishers, Boston 1998