

Gender Heroes: from grassroots to global action

A COLLECTION OF STORIES FEATURING
GENDER PERSPECTIVES ON THE MANAGEMENT
OF HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS AND WASTES



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



BASEL CONVENTION



ROTTERDAM CONVENTION



STOCKHOLM CONVENTION

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FOREWORD

It is an inspiration and a delight to bring you such a varied collection of stories from around the world that provide a snapshot of how gender perspectives are being incorporated into the sound management of chemicals and wastes. Bringing gender issues to the forefront of the chemicals and waste agenda is absolutely key as women, men, boys and girls are exposed to these harmful substances in different ways and to varying degrees depending on where they work and live. In addition to gender differences in exposure to hazardous substances there are also differences in physiological susceptibility between men and women, girls and boys. We need to take these differences into account when we devise measures for the sound management of chemicals and wastes so that we tailor our responses with gender aspects in mind.

The stories featured in this publication bring forth a picture of grassroots action being taken around the world every day by individuals and communities to protect the most vulnerable segments of our population from the potentially harmful effects of certain chemicals and wastes. Many of the stories speak of the empowerment of women in marginalised communities and the impacts that their actions have had in the promotion of ecological agriculture and the reduction of use of highly hazardous pesticides, in the protection of children from the toxics found in toys and in the collection of e-waste from landfill sites, to name but a few examples. Several stories break down gender stereotypes and show women as pioneers in areas that have traditionally been thought of as a man's domain, such as in scientific research, the shipping industry, even sailing. Whilst approaching the issue from differing perspectives, it is clear that all of the proponents in these stories are playing an invaluable role in not only bringing gender issues to the fore, but also in raising awareness and promoting action to ensure the sound management of chemicals and wastes.

I hope you enjoy reading the publication as much as we have enjoyed creating it.

Kerstin Stendahl
Deputy Executive Secretary
Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam
and Stockholm Conventions



INTRODUCTION

The adverse effects of hazardous chemicals and wastes on different groups of the population vary depending on the level of exposure, behavioural patterns, age, biological effect (for example, endocrine disruption), geographical location, nutritional status and co-exposure to other chemicals. Certain types of chemicals, such as persistent organic pollutants (POPs), can build up to dangerous levels in humans and wildlife causing adverse reproductive, developmental, immunological, hormonal, and carcinogenic effects with varied impacts on vulnerable groups of the population.

Low-income pregnant women and children in developing countries are particularly vulnerable to toxics and their exposure to certain chemicals can compromise the ability of children to escape poverty through education and work.¹ Women comprise 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force, while some 60 per cent of child labourers aged 5 to 17 years work in agriculture often in informal, low-paid or unremunerated jobs and under poor working conditions.² Pesticides are among the most severe hazards children and adults are exposed to in agriculture.³

Children are particularly susceptible to the negative health impacts of chemicals due to their rapid growth and development and greater exposure relative to body weight. They are exposed to chemicals in the womb, during their most sensitive developmental phase, and later born into a world polluted by chemicals. For example, methyl mercury exposure in utero and early in life can result in mental retardation (IQ loss), seizures, vision and hearing loss, delayed development, language disorders and memory loss. Breastfeeding can transfer further toxic chemicals from mother to child. Prenatal and early childhood exposure to lead, for instance, can result in demonstrable decreased intelligence and alterations in attention and behaviour that are irreversible and result in diminished economic and social productivity over the entire lifespan of the affected person.⁴

¹ IFCS, *Poverty Reduction and the Sound Management of Chemicals: A Thought Starter* (2006), p. 12.

² ILO and UNCTAD, *Shared Harvests: Agriculture, Trade and Employment* (2013), p. v and ILO, "Agriculture, an engine of pro-poor rural growth," 2011, p.1, online: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_165994.pdf.

³ ILO, "The impact of pesticide exposure on child labourers in agriculture," 22 June 2011, online: http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/features/WCMS_158425/lang--en/index.htm

⁴ See Keml report, 2005, supra note 17, p.18 and Caravanos, Jack et al, "The burden of disease from paediatric lead exposure at hazardous waste sites in 7 Asian countries," *Environmental Research* 120 (2013) 119–125, p.120.

Considering the strong linkages between gender and exposure to hazardous chemicals and wastes as well as the importance of incorporating gender perspectives in the chemicals and waste agenda, the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions has been making efforts to integrate the gender dimension into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of its activities as well as to promote gender equality internally.

For gender equality to become an integral part of the implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, including the secretariat activities, is the vision which BRS has been striving to attain⁵.

Gender issues related to implementation of the conventions have been discussed by the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, particularly the impact of the potentially harmful effects of certain chemicals and wastes on vulnerable groups such as women and young children. The issue of gender mainstreaming was also raised at the ordinary and extraordinary meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions in May 2013 in the Executive Secretary's proposal for the organization of the Secretariats of the three conventions⁶ and in a document on mainstreaming gender in the Secretariat⁷.

Recognising the need to promote gender equality both within the Secretariat and externally, in line with applicable United Nations and UNEP rules, regulations, and policies as to gender, in July 2012 the Executive Secretary established the BRS Gender Task Team to develop targets and an approach to gender mainstreaming within the BRS Secretariat. The BRS Gender Task Team was also to liaise with the UNEP Gender Task Team established in July 2012 by the Executive Director of UNEP to deal with a range of policy issues and recommend strategic direction for the UNEP Gender Programme.

In 2013, the BRS Gender Task Team developed an action plan (Gender Action Plan (BRS-GAP))⁸ that includes a vision, a list of expected short, medium and long-term goals and activities, and monitoring and reporting modalities. The ultimate goal of BRS-GAP is to incorporate gender equality into achieving the common objective of the conventions, namely protecting human health and the environment. It is also hoped that the BRS-GAP will lead to a greater

⁵ <http://synergies.pops.int/ManagementReports/Gender/BRSGenderActionPlan/tabid/3652/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

⁶ Document UNEP/FAO/CHW/RC/POPS/EXCOPS.2/INF/7

⁷ Document UNEP/FAO/CHW/RC/POPS/EXCOPS.2/INF/25

⁸ <http://synergies.pops.int/ManagementReports/Gender/BRSGenderActionPlan/tabid/3652/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

recognition of the links between gender, poverty and hazardous chemicals and wastes.

In the lead up to the 2015 COPs gender mainstreaming discussion⁹, the Secretariat requested Parties and others to submit stories on how gender issues are considered in and impacted by hazardous chemicals and waste management at the local, national and regional levels. The stories in this publication have been selected as they raise issues of chemicals and wastes management of particular relevance to gender and highlight actions taken at the individual and community level to protect the most vulnerable segments of our population from the potentially harmful effects of certain chemicals and wastes.

⁹ Documents UNEP/CHW.12/INF/49, UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.7/INF/33, UNEP/POPS/COP.7/INF/54



GENDER HEROES OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC

By Sarojeni V. Rengam

Pesticides Action Network, Asia and the Pacific¹⁰

Rural women are playing a leading role in the campaign against highly hazardous pesticides and in the promotion of ecological agriculture as a viable alternative. The Pesticides Action Network in Asia Pacific (PAN AP) has been working closely with rural communities to further strengthen the role that such women can play.

Pesticide production and its use have commonly prioritized profits over the health of communities and the environment. As such, food sources and the environment of many rural communities have been adversely impacted. Farmers and agricultural workers that are heavily exposed to pesticides suffer a range of acute and chronic health effects. But the health impact has been especially harmful for rural women and children, who are at risk of endocrine disruption, among others.

PAN AP thus challenges the dependency of small farmers on pesticides and helps empower communities to work towards the reduction and elimination of pesticide use. It focuses on women workers and farmers in Asia since their problems and issues are often not addressed due to marginalisation by cultural and social norms.

Among the approaches that PAN AP has been using is participatory action research through Community-based Pesticide Action Monitoring (CPAM). CPAM helps communities document the adverse impacts of pesticides, raises awareness and motivates them to adopt ecologically sound and sustainable agricultural practices. It also prompts them to influence governments and campaign for better pesticide regulation and implementation of international conventions on pesticides. Importantly, CPAM also provides leadership training for rural women.

In the past 10 years, learning exchanges and capacity-building workshops have been organized and CPAM surveys carried out in countries including Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. The results of these surveys were compiled and discussed at national and international meetings, stressing the need for national and global action.

¹⁰ <http://www.panap.net/>



In 2010, PAN AP published the landmark “Asian Regional Report¹¹” produced by 12 organizations from 8 Asian countries. It was followed by the publication “Communities in Peril: Global Report on Health Impacts of Pesticide Use in Agriculture¹²”. These publications helped in raising awareness and contributed to the campaign led by the NGO Tenaganita and female workers that stopped the use of paraquat and monocrotophos by a plantation operator in Malaysia and Indonesia.

As an alternative to pesticide use, CPAM encourages farming communities to move towards organic or ecological agriculture. PAN AP has worked with Vikalpani (Sri Lankan Women’s Federation) on a series of training workshops on organic farming for its members. Many of them are now practicing organic agriculture in their home gardens and in their rice fields. One participant, Amara, went back to her community Monaragala and initiated awareness campaigns on pesticide impacts on health and the environment. She inspired the women in her community to learn ecological agriculture. Amara is now a well-established community leader and continues to pursue the empowerment of rural women and the promotion of ecological agriculture.

Another CPAM training participant is Huong from Vietnam. She was among those who pioneered training on Integrated Pest Management and Systems of Rice Intensification through farmer field schools. In these field schools, gender and environmental issues are discussed hand-in-hand. As President of the Women’s Union, Huong also organised the “No Pesticides Use Week” in

¹¹ http://www.panap.net/panfiles/download/asrep_lowres.pdf

¹² <http://www.panap.net/en/p/post/pesticides-cpam/78>



Hai Van, which involved many women. This initiative highlighted the women's demand for accessible and affordable agricultural inputs and less use of highly toxic pesticides.

In India, the local community in Kasargod, which has been working with PAN AP partner Thanal, has successfully stopped the use of endosulfan after more than 10 years of campaigning, first in Kerala, then in other parts of India. The struggle of the community in Kasargod, where women leaders played a key role, as well as the support of many civil society organisations, inspired the inclusion of endosulfan in the list of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) in the Stockholm Convention.

PAN AP continues its work to support the struggles of communities against pesticides; for the empowerment of rural women; and for the promotion of food sovereignty and ecological agriculture as alternatives. It has built solid partnerships with peasants, agricultural workers and rural women's movements in the Asia Pacific region. PAN AP now comprises 108 network partners in the region and has links with about 400 other civil society and grassroots organizations, at the national, regional and global levels.

Based on its experience, PAN AP's greatest asset and most powerful resource is its strong and growing network of people's organizations and marginalized communities. Having such a dynamic network that represents diverse movements and organizations allows PAN AP to build on its gains and to replicate its success stories through its various advocacies, including the elimination of hazardous pesticides and the promotion of ecological agriculture through the meaningful participation and leadership of rural women.

WOMEN FROM ALMATY LEARN ABOUT THE DANGER OF TOXIC METALS

By *Lydia Astanina*
*Greenwomen*¹³

Irina, a resident of Almaty, Kazakhstan, and a mother of two, didn't really care what kind of materials the children's toys were made of. She purchased the toys which her kids, five-year-old son Oleg and two-year-old daughter Alina, liked. However, Irina became more concerned about the safety of toys after she read some information in a leaflet prepared by Greenwomen, Analytical Environmental Agency, from Almaty. "I learnt about the labelling of toys, the materials from which a toy should be made and also about the general requirements for safety of children's products", says Irina. "I have now started to care more about the toys my kids play with. I choose their toys much more carefully now", she admits.

Greenwomen prepared the leaflet on safety of children's toys in September 2012, as a part of a project to raise awareness in Kazakhstan of the toxics found in toys. The project, which was developed to support toxic-free toys as advocated by the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN), was part of a large-scale project aimed at promoting and implementing the 2020 Goal of a "Toxic Free Future". Greenwomen distributed the leaflet amongst sales staff and customers in various stores.

Through this campaign, Irina also learnt that low-quality children's toys may contain toxic metals. At the end of 2012, the media in Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Ukraine wrote about this issue, covering the results of a study entitled "Toxic metals in children's products: an insight into the market in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA)"¹⁴.

The study was carried in close collaboration with NGOs, including members of IPEN - Eco-Accord¹⁵, IPEN's EECCA Regional Hub in Russia, Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment¹⁶, the Centre for Environmental Solutions in Belarus, Greenwomen in Kazakhstan, Independent Environmental Expertise in Kyrgyzstan and MAMA-86¹⁷ in Ukraine.

¹³ <http://www.greenwomen.kz/presentation.htm>

¹⁴ The study was initiated and financially supported by GRID-Arendal, a centre collaborating with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), IPEN, The Norwegian Foundation, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, and the Swiss government, among others.

¹⁵ <http://www.ipen.org/>

¹⁶ <http://www.awhhe.am/>

¹⁷ <http://www.mama-86.org.ua/index.php/en.html>

Items in the study were selected from various categories for different age groups. These included dolls, jewellery, children's cosmetics, construction kits, sports equipment, hair accessories and school supplies. The study tested a variety of products, made of metal, plastic, wood, cloth and cardboard.

It was found that many of these products contained chemicals and other substances at levels that could cause harm to both human health and to the environment. These toxics can enter products during treatment processes and heavy metals can be used in paint and as stabilizers in plastics.

Lead was the most common toxic metal found in children's toys. Irina was surprised that about 23% of toys bought in Kazakhstan contain a variety of toxic chemicals and substances. The lead content in these toys had exceeded 100 times the safety limit. Irina warned her girlfriends that they should be careful when they buy low-quality toys which are sold at street markets. Rather, they should buy high-quality toys only in reputable stores which require sellers to have certificates of conformity.

Saule, a second-year student of the Kazakh National Technical University, learned in October 2013 that lead exposure can pose serious harm to children and adult's health. Saule, as a volunteer, handed out leaflets to pedestrians on Almaty's streets. These leaflets were prepared by Greenwomen as a part of a campaign during the First International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week of Action, held in October 2013 in different countries around the world. Saule was particularly concerned to learn that lead may be present in household paint which is widely used for interior decoration, painting of children toys and playground equipment.

Saule and her friends visited playgrounds and handed out leaflets to parents, to raise awareness of the impact that lead can have on children's health and to explain how parents can reduce a child's exposure to lead and protect themselves from this dangerous chemical exposure. "I already started to wash my hands more frequently and do moist mopping in my house to remove the dust that may contain lead particles" Saule says. "I would never pay attention to information that household paint, which we recently used for painting the window frames in the dormitory, may contain lead. Thanks to awareness raising campaigns conducted by Greenwomen, we now know that when you buy paint, you must carefully check the information on the labels and purchase paint which doesn't contain lead."

THE FUTURE WE DON'T NEED: ELIMINATING THE IMPACTS OF HAZARDOUS WASTES ON OUR CHILDREN

By Jonelle Jones

*Basel Convention Regional Centre for the Caribbean Region
in Trinidad and Tobago¹⁸*



For a long time, the world has known about the effects that mismanaged hazardous wastes have had on the human population and our environment. However, it is usually the most vulnerable segment of these populations that are subject to the full impact of these substances: the children of the world. In Trinidad and Tobago, like any other small island state in the developing world, the issue is more pronounced. With little or no environmentally sound options for dealing with its hazardous wastes and with limited land area and capacity to properly establish such systems, the nation's populace has long been at risk from exposure to these life-threatening substances. This was the case in the 1990s in Wallerfield, Trinidad and Tobago, where some of the country's children became victims of the indiscriminate dumping of lead wastes.

A small, rural village located in east Trinidad, Wallerfield is home to an informal community of approximately 500 citizens. In the 1990s, children under the age of 10 made up almost half of its population. It was this cohort that highlighted the issue of lead contamination. The problem was identified when several children were brought to nearby hospitals displaying symptoms of lead poisoning. The situation arose as a result of the recycling and disposal of lead slag and car batteries in the area since the start of the 1990s. This included their reuse in road and home repairs throughout the community, including areas where children played. The wastes were also used by some residents to

¹⁸ <http://bcrc-caribbean.blogspot.ch/>

create lead sinkers for the fishing industry as a source of income. The situation climaxed in the death of a 10 year old boy from severe lead poisoning.

This incident garnered the attention of several national organisations and the general public at large. Institutions such as the Environmental Management Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (EMA) and the Ministry of Health were called upon to address the situation. A Task Force on Lead Poisoning was established by the Cabinet and even international organisations such as the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), the US Centre for Disease Control and the US Environmental Protection Agency came to assist in solving this particular scenario as well as the wider lead management problem in Trinidad and Tobago.

These entities sought to address the issue by providing immediate medical attention for the children, as well as evacuation, permanent resettlement in some instances and land decontamination and remediation of lead 'hot spots' throughout the entire community. The EMA led the decontamination work along with other members of the Task Force. This included identification, characterisation and mapping of the contaminated area. Finally, the lead contaminated soil was excavated, transported and treated prior to being disposed of in an encapsulated and secure area of one of the national landfills.

This incident and the subsequent activities resulted in the protection of the health of the children from the previous impacts of the contaminated soil as well as in the creation of a contamination-free area in which they could live. The situation also raised public awareness on the 'lead problem', the contamination situation and the impact of hazardous wastes in the local community and among the wider population. Furthermore, it successfully demonstrated the ability of multiple stakeholders to immediately respond, cooperate and coordinate national efforts to protect human health – an effort that ensured that Trinidad and Tobago's most vulnerable, its children, were guaranteed their future.

GENDER AND E-WASTE MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA

*By Prof. Oladele Osibanjo
Basel Convention Coordinating Centre for
the African Region in Nigeria¹⁹*



photo credit: Öko-institut

Exposure to hazardous substances in and around sites dismantling electronic and electrical waste (e-waste) poses numerous health and safety risks for waste collectors, recyclers and neighbouring communities. Marginalized populations disproportionately suffer the negative effects of improper e-waste practices. Unsound e-waste management practices in the informal sector of the economy involve hundreds or thousands of poor people, many of whom are unaware of the hazards of exposure to toxics in e-waste. The most vulnerable groups, especially children and old women, are actively involved in e-waste scavenging and crude recycling activities especially in African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria.

The engagement of men, women, boys and girls in informal e-waste management differs from country to country, however some common

¹⁹ <http://www.basel.int/Partners/RegionalCentres/DirectorsContactPersons/tabid/1558/Default.aspx>

trends can be observed. A study on the informal e-waste management sector revealed that the e-waste refurbishing, collection and recycling sectors in Nigeria are dominated by adult and child male workers. There are hardly any women working in refurbishing and repair operations itself. Nevertheless, women make up a significant share of the workforce among the waste picker communities on dumpsites, where women and girls are estimated to make up around 30% of the workforce.

Nigeria and Ghana do not have any formal e-waste recycling facilities, so e-waste is dumped in existing municipal waste dumpsites in urban centres, especially in Computer Village, Ikeja and Alaba international market in Lagos; and in Agbogbloshie in Accra. At these dumpsites, women and children (often young boys) are e-waste pickers who scavenge for any valuable components, earning between USD 1 and USD 3 a day by collecting components. The children burn cables and wires to recover reusable metals like copper wire. In the process, toxic chemicals including dioxins and metals are released into the surrounding environment. Girls hawking water in polythene sachets sell water to the boys to put out burning cables as burnt copper wires fetch less money compared to un-burnt copper.

While the scrap metal sector often uses child labourers, child labour is uncommon in the refurbishing sector. Collection and dismantling activities are carried out by children from the age of 12, however younger children from the age of 5 are sometimes engaged in light work, including dismantling of small parts, such as the recovery of copper containing deflection coils in the cathode-ray tube monitors, and sorting of materials. Children were also seen to be involved in e-waste collection and burning activities. In Ghana, field observations and Greenpeace reports confirmed the employment of children, mostly boys, sometimes as young as 5 years old and mostly between 11 and 18 years in the informal e-waste recycling sector. Young girls aged between 9 and 12 years old were also observed working as collectors, and in many cases as vendors of water sachets, at Agbogbloshie, Ghana.

Working conditions in the informal e-waste management sector are very difficult. Most of those employed in the e-waste recycling sector in Ghana, aged mostly between 14 to 40 years, were found to work for 10 to 12 hours per day, i.e. 300 to 360 hours per month. In the refurbishing sector, people worked between 8 to 10 hours per day or 210 to 260 hours per month. Furthermore, evidence suggests that incomes of children between 5 and 14 years old could be as low as USD20 per month in the collection sector, which is significantly lower the average income of USD 70 to USD 140 per month.



In areas where the informal e-waste recycling and refurbishing activities are centered, such as Agbogbloshie in Accra, Ghana and Ikeja Computer Village and Alaba International Market, Lagos, Nigeria, concentrations of copper, lead, zinc and tin can be in the magnitude of over one hundred times typical background levels. It is known that children, due to their hand-to-mouth behaviour, are one of the most vulnerable groups in areas where soil and dust are contaminated with lead. Exposure to lead dust or fumes leads to the underdevelopment of brain of children, hence causing intellectual impairment.

A report by the Shantou Medical University Hospital in November 2003 found a high incidence of skin damage, headaches, vertigo, nausea, chronic gastritis, and gastric and duodenal ulcers, especially among children and women in Guiyi, China, who recycle circuit boards and plastic. Another study has revealed e-waste labourers in China have very high concentrations of toxic flame retardants in their bodies. This situation could already exist in the African region among e-waste scavengers.

FIGHT FOR HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN VOLGOGRAD CITY

By Olga Speranskaya²⁰

International POPs Elimination Network²¹ and Eco-Accord

This is a story about the courage and dedication of Elena Vasilieva, a Russian environmentalist who fiercely fights for social and environmental justice in Volgograd city, Russia. Elena moved to Volgograd from Moscow in the mid-80s. She received her diploma as a teacher and worked at the Department of Journalism of Volgograd University for several years. Elena's decision to set up an NGO was realized when an article written by her on the threats of a nuclear power plant in the Rostov region was published. This was the first time she realized the importance of environmental justice. Since then she has not stopped helping citizens and community groups gather and use information on violations of their social and environmental rights. This story is just one episode of her tireless work to protect people and the environment in Russia.

High levels of mercury in fish is a serious problem for Volgograd citizens who already face numerous environmental and health issues. As the head of a small NGO "Volgograd-Ecopress" Elena sees her role as attracting the attention of the regional and municipal environmental authorities to numerous environmental problems in the region, focusing on mercury contamination as the major threat to people's health and the environment. Mercury is a chemical of global concern owing to its long-range atmospheric transport, its persistence in the environment once anthropogenically introduced, its ability to bioaccumulate in ecosystems and its significant negative intergenerational effects on human health and the environment. This is the only heavy metal so far which is regulated globally by the recently signed Minamata Convention.

Volgograd-Ecopress participated in the global "Mercury in Fish and Hair" project supervised by the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) and Eco-Accord, IPEN's Regional Hub for the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) region. Volgograd-Ecopress collected important data that demonstrated high levels of mercury concentration in fish and the hair of people living in the vicinity of certain industries.

²⁰ Europe 2009 Goldman Prize Recipient

²¹ <http://www.ipen.org/>

The results revealed in the frame of the global fish and hair project were broadly disseminated to all stakeholders in Volgograd region, including local authorities. “We achieved broad media coverage and faced negative reactions from industries in the region”, says Elena. At the time of writing, the data gathered by Volgograd-Ecopress as part of the project is subject to ongoing court proceedings in Volgograd.

In the meantime, Volgograd-Ecopress maintains that pollution resulting from industrial activities in the region has become worse. People regularly call the emergency centre set up by the NGO to highlight the environmental threats they face and to complain about severe health problems caused by toxic exposure.

“Since then we have been in a daily battle. It involves local residents, entire families suffering from pollution, workers, the media”, says Elena. But she vows to never stop fighting for the right of people to live in a healthy, pollution-free environment.



POLITICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS WORKING TO GET SHIPBREAKING “OFF THE BEACH”

*Interview with Patrizia Heidegger & Ingvild Jenssen
NGO Platform on Shipbreaking²²*

The NGO Platform on Shipbreaking is a coalition of 19 environmental, human and labour rights organisations working to prevent the dangerous pollution and unsafe working conditions caused when end-of-life ships containing toxic materials in their structure are freely traded in the global marketplace. Through their “Off the Beach” campaign, they aim to raise public awareness of the human rights issues and pollution caused by shipbreaking practices in South Asia and to promote marketplace incentives to divert traffic away from the beaches.

A representative of the Secretariat recently sat down with their Executive Director, Patrizia Heidegger (a German national), and Ingvild Jenssen (a Norwegian and French national), who is the founder and a Policy Advisor with the Platform, to find out about their main motivations for undertaking this challenging work.

1. TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELVES AND HOW YOU ENDED UP WHERE YOU ARE TODAY

Ingvild: After finishing my Master’s degree in Political Science in Oslo, moving to Brussels made sense to me as it is the epicenter of European politics and an exciting place to be for a political scientist. I became involved in the shipbreaking issue over 10 years ago when there was an effort from NGOs in Europe to persuade the European Union (EU)



to work on this issue, which sparked the interest of the EU Commissioner at the time. With shipbreaking having been successfully implanted into the

²² <http://www.shipbreakingplatform.org/>

EU agenda, the decision was taken to form a coalition of the NGOs working on this issue which became known as the NGO Platform on Shipbreaking. The first high-profile case the Platform was involved in was the export of the decommissioned French aircraft carrier, the *Clémenceau*, to India for breaking. As a result of our and partner's campaigns, President Chirac ordered the vessel be returned to France in early 2006. The ship was eventually dismantled at a facility in the Northeast of England in 2010. This incident also provided the impetus for the Supreme Court in India to develop specific rules on the issue of shipbreaking. Seeing the successful outcome of this case gave me a strong motivation and momentum to continue this work.

Patrizia: I'm also a political scientist by trade, and have always had an interest in South Asia, having travelled there extensively. My work prior to joining the Platform was human rights based: I even had the opportunity to work for a human rights NGO in Bangladesh for a year and a half. It was during this time that I became aware of the ship



breaking issue. I joined the Platform in October 2012 and was immediately absorbed by the complexity of this industry which has implications for human rights, labour rights, the environment and in particular, the dangers associated with toxic chemicals and wastes. Beyond the issue from a developmental standpoint is the definitive link between what happens on the beaches of Chittagong (Bangladesh), Alang (India) and Gadani (Pakistan) with the global shipping industry, which we know has many ties within Europe. It was hard not to be drawn into such a fascinating and challenging issue.

2. WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN INSPIRATIONS AND PASSIONS IN DOING THE WORK THAT YOU DO?

For both of us, a huge inspiration is being able to work with such a wide array of organizations and with people of differing backgrounds. This gives us a real insight into the motivations of the main stakeholders involved in shipbreaking. The breadth of our work spans from persuading European shipowners to adopt, and cargo companies to insist, on responsible ship recycling practices (i.e. away from the beaches of South Asia) to defending workers and their families in the case of injury, and even death, at the shipbreaking yards. Our partner NGOs in developing countries are also a source of great inspiration – in some developing countries, working as an environmentalist can be a dangerous profession, some have even received death threats. Nevertheless, they carry on with their mission regardless, these are the true heroes.

3. IN WHAT SITUATIONS DO YOU REALLY FEEL YOU'VE MADE A DIFFERENCE?

The Platform has brought cases of certain ships being illegally exported to Bangladesh and India before the courts in these countries. As a consequence of the courts' involvement, there are now sector specific regulations on shipbreaking in Bangladesh and India. In India, authorities have also set up a hazardous waste disposal and treatment facility. Something we continue to work on is the implementation of shipbreaking regulations in these countries, which to date remains quite weak. Our work, which also includes research and cooperation with other experts, has resulted in a significant increase in the coverage of the shipbreaking issue on the media, particularly in South Asia.

4. DESCRIBE YOUR "BEST DAY" DOING THE WORK THAT YOU DO

Recently we had a great week, during which the European Commissioner for the environment clearly stated that the practice of European vessels being broken on South Asia's beaches needs to end. That same week we also confirmed that funding was available for us to be able to continue our valuable work (the European Commission is our main donor). Another major coup was our role in ensuring that 11 major cargo companies will insist that responsible ship recycling practices be adopted in the annual contracts they sign with shipowners. Corporate social responsibility is obviously a huge concern for companies who suffer greatly from negative publicity.

In addition to these 3 success stories, this week really stands out for us as it was one of the rare occasions when we had both policy makers and business stakeholders “on our side”!

5. HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE WORKING IN A MALE DOMINATED SETTING?

The shipping industry is largely a male domain. This, coupled with the fact that we are viewed as critics of the industry, makes for interesting dynamics. Having said this, while you can't help but notice when you attend shipping conferences and address audiences which are over 90% male, at the end of the day, we don't necessarily feel that our impact would be any greater if we were men. After all, some of our strongest partners within the Platform are female. Rizwana Hasan, Director of the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) and a partner in the Platform, created great publicity for our cause when she won the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2009.

Read more about these inspirational women and the work they do on the website of the NGO Platform on Shipbreaking: <http://www.shipbreakingplatform.org/>.



A TRIBUTE TO WOMEN FIGHTING AGAINST ASBESTOS IN THE EECCA REGION

By Alexandra Caterbow

*Women in Europe for a Common Future*²³

People often ask me why we, as a women's organisation, would work on a "man's" issue like asbestos.

When we hear about asbestos in the press, it is most often a story about men with occupational exposure, about men suffering the consequences. The answer is easy: asbestos is one of the top ten causes of occupational cancer worldwide. It kills our husbands, brothers, fathers, but also many women and children — around the world.

Many women started to fight against asbestos because they had to cope with the tragic loss of a family member; others were defending victims in developing countries from asbestos produced and imported from the North; or they were concerned about asbestos mining and production in their own country.

They and many more are doing endless and brave work worldwide, not willing to stop until all problems concerning asbestos are solved.

Eastern Europe and Central Asia are two regions struggling with the use and regulation of asbestos, not only because Russia and Kazakhstan are two of the biggest producers of asbestos worldwide, but also because several countries across this region lack effective regulation to protect their citizens. In this part of the world, asbestos is still one of the most commonly used building materials in homes, schools, kindergartens, and hospitals. The great dangers of asbestos are unknown to citizens, who are being told by the industry that 'their' asbestos is safe. The asbestos industry is very influential in these regions and closely linked to politicians, trade unions and scientists. It is an onerous task to bring the issue of asbestos onto the national political agenda, and raise awareness of the public as to its grave risks.

For some years now, I have had the honour to work with colleagues from other NGOs in these regions on the issue of asbestos. In Russia and Kazakhstan, but also in Ukraine and Georgia, it is mainly women working on this topic. Together, we organize high-level conferences with national and international participants, training for national experts and civil society organisations, we

²³ <http://www.wecf.eu/>

publish articles and exchange information and expertise, inform the public, and report back to our communities about the international policy processes such as the Rotterdam Convention. Unfortunately, we have found that in the regions where we are working, there is no independent data available, there are no cancer registers in place, and national scientific studies are often not independent.

Despite all of these problems, we are a strong and growing network of women and men across Eastern Europe and Central Asia working to eliminate the incidence of asbestos-related disease worldwide. We receive support from like-minded colleagues around the world, and we plan to work with NGOs in asbestos-importing countries in Asia and Africa in the future to contribute to the global efforts to finally eliminate this scourge through the only way possible, by halting all mining, production and use of asbestos worldwide.

GENDER EQUALITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DUETS IN PANAMA

*By Maria Gabriela Batista Rivera²⁴ & Jorge G Conte Burrell
Zero Pollution Alliance*



Gabriela Batista, also known as “GaBa”, started the Zero Pollution Alliance with her artistic work on “The Right Bag²⁵” and “The Right Bag workshops” to spread knowledge regarding the negative impacts of plastic bags on the environment and to educate children of all ages about these impacts.

With the support from the Alliance’s co-founder, Jorge, also known as “Gio”, GaBa organized and delivered 40 workshops for approximately 600 children and 400 adults, with more than 12 private companies and NGO’s supporting the initiative. By 2014, the programme had handed out more than 16,000 re-useable bags at events including workshops, film presentations, as well as at fundraising galas. GaBa also worked with several local artists and entertainers as well as NGOs to produce a TV video clip and community program called “Úsalas para todo...hasta para salvar el Planeta²⁶” (roughly translated as “use them for everything ... even to save the planet”), which promotes the use of re-useable bags.

The impact of these activities was promising but it needed more support from government and private organizations with a real interest in changing the attitude towards plastic bags. As Gaba admits, “Some large retailers in Panama are

²⁴ <http://www.gabrielabatista.com/>

²⁵ <http://gabrielabatista.com/trb.php>

²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnOuckf1pGk>

carrying on with this initiative. However, the world waits for younger generations who will remember their experience in painting reusable bags with their favorite themes and recall at the cashier line the importance of their participation for change and the use reusable bags. While the number of reusable bags is still low, it is a strong start”.

Aside from its work to promote re-useable bags, the Zero Pollution Alliance started in 2009 to promote the segregation and proper disposal of mercury contaminated products, mercury compounds and waste consisting of elemental mercury. The first program on the Zero Mercury Mission was “Ponte Las pilas con las Pilas” or “Put Batteries with Batteries”, to promote the separation of spent batteries from common waste for proper collection and final disposal. The program started at the United Nations School in La Chorrera City, Panama, in July 2009 with more than 60 children, 20 teachers and volunteers in attendance. At this time Gaba and Gio hosted a workshop to foster awareness of the importance of waste segregation with respect to spent batteries at home, in schools and at businesses. The composition of the batteries and their potential impacts on health and the environment was also explained. The workshop participants worked on a simple solution to remove the negative impacts on the environment of improper disposal of spent batteries: re-useable plastic bottles were decorated for use at home, school and work to remind people to collect spent batteries to help protect the environment. The Alliance hosted such workshops all over Panama, reaching approximately 4,500 people. By 2014, more than 23 tons of spent batteries, coming from schools, homes, hospitals, universities, and private companies, and UNEP’s headquarters in Ciudad del Saber, had been collected and disposed of in an environmental sound manner.



FROM TOXICS TO GREEN - THE STORY OF SAYRA BANO

*By Bharati Chaturvedi & Chitra Mukherjee
Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group²⁷*

Sayra Bano, aged 32, has always lived near the landfill in Bhalaswa, North Delhi, the place where much of Delhi's nearly 8000 metric tonnes of trash is dumped every day. Sayra was just 6 months old when she moved to Delhi, along with her parents, 2 brothers and 2 sisters, from Kolkata in West Bengal. Sayra never got to go to school. She spent her time picking through trash on the landfill, with her parents and siblings. They would spend the day separating paper, plastics and a hoard of other recyclable materials from soggy discarded food, used sanitary napkins and diapers, rusted blades, needles and syringes: stuff thrown indiscriminately in the city's mixed garbage.

Her family was very hardworking and struggled from dawn to dusk on a dangerous landfill where avoiding severe burns from spontaneous combustion of methane-rich waste was the norm. The mounds of soggy wet waste were treacherous and they often slipped and fell right into it. Trucks carrying garbage would sometimes start an avalanche of trash, almost burying hundreds of wastepickers in the landfill. This was the only life Sayra and her family knew.

Growing up, Sayra's hard life continued. The living conditions were dismal. They had no electricity, safe drinking water or access to clean toilets. Her husband Lutfar, also a wastepicker, despaired about ever being able to make their lives and those of their 5 little children better.

In 2012, Sayra attended a meeting of Safai Sena, an association of wastepickers, doorstep waste collectors, itinerant waste buyers and small waste traders, held in her community. They talked of formalizing the industry and training wastepickers to help them achieve more dignified livelihoods. Sayra was curious, if not entirely convinced. She joined Safai Sena and its partner Chintan. She soon found herself being trained to pick up electronic waste, and selling it to authorized dealers. She knew all about e-waste in any case, because she was increasingly finding so much of it in the trash.

²⁷ <http://www.chintan-india.org/>

Sayra began to focus on e-waste, and made it her specialization. She began collecting electronic waste from households and shops. She would collect old mobile phones, laptops, monitors and other electronic devices that people indiscriminately disposed of.

Sayra became a part of the whole new initiative of Chintan to convert “toxics to green” and generate livelihoods, especially for women. By her own interest, she became part of Chintan’s Responsible Electronics initiative, which trains informal sector workers to serve as grassroots e-waste collectors, and sell to authorized recyclers. Sayra now sells the electronic waste via Chintan, which is authorized by the Delhi Government to collect e-waste for safe recycling, to an authorized recycler. She is directly paid by the recyclers for her work. Chintan helps collectors like her because no matter what, they collect very small amounts of e-waste. Under the E-Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2011, only authorized collectors can collect e-waste and they must store it in self-run authorized collection centres, which are hard and expensive to run. Besides, the recyclers only accept large quantities of e-waste. But collectively, Sayra and others collect enough e-waste, along with Chintan’s own e-waste drives, to attract recyclers.

By doing this, Sayra has not merely conjured up a livelihood for herself, but has also prevented e-waste from being burned, and poorly recycled, which can generate dioxins and furans. It is people like Sayra: who are poor, illiterate, but enthusiastic about being trained for their livelihood, who help India phase-out furans and dioxins and move towards responsible e-waste recycling. Sayra’s work also brings her dignity and a far more stable livelihood. “I can now send my 5 boys to school. I never touched fresh clean paper as a child working on the landfill, but my boys will,” says Sayra with a satisfied smile on her face.

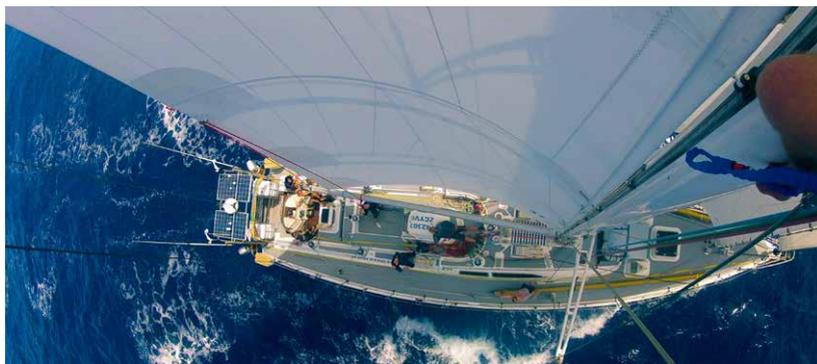


eXXpedition: A JOURNEY TO MAKE THE UNSEEN SEEN

By Susan Wingfield

Based on an interview with Lucy Gilliam & Emily Penn

Co-founders of eXXpedition²⁸



eXXpedition, an all-women crew of talented and inspirational women, has set sail on a journey to make the unseen seen: from the toxic chemicals found in the human body to those found in our seas. Aboard the Sea Dragon, a 72-foot sailing vessel run by Pangaea Exploration, 14 women from all walks of life set sail to conduct research into the chemical and plastic pollutants found in the Atlantic Ocean and, through the well-established Body Burden²⁹ campaign, to explore their own bodies for the presence of toxic chemicals.

For its co-founders Lucy Gilliam and Emily Penn, eXXpedition revolves around making positive choices and supporting positive actions through society and governance. Their collective ambition towards this mission statement is borne from two distinctive paths of educational and life experience. Lucy holds a PhD in soil microbiology. Her interest in chemicals and toxics grew not only through her specialism at university, but in the assistance she provided to the heavy metals and toxics team of scientists, performing sampling work in the lab on polar bear and seal blubber. For her, the discovery of the extent to which POPs and industrial pollution impact populations in the Arctic Circle, particularly through human breast milk, started a fascination, and concern,

²⁸ <http://exxpedition.com/>

²⁹ <http://www.chemicalbodyburden.org>



with how toxic chemicals can interfere with endocrine systems, impacting the sexes in different ways. After all, she contends, women are the carriers of the next generation.

After her studies, Lucy joined the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, working to build scientific basis in policy making, then moved into the chemicals and toxics team, at which time she met Emily.

Lucy and Emily met at a National Geographic event in London and quickly established their joint desire to launch an all women's sailing expedition to investigate, and spread awareness of the impact of plastics and toxic chemicals on our oceans and the environment at large. Whilst realising that in some cases, the linkage between toxic chemicals and disease outcomes is still difficult to prove definitively, it was at the back of their minds when founding eXXpedition. Added to this was the urgency of the message: if we don't know, shouldn't we at least exercise caution?

Emily's journey to meet Lucy at the National Geographic event in London was via a slightly more unconventional path. As a student of sustainable architecture, Emily had the opportunity to visit China during her studies to write her dissertation on eco-cities. Her intention to minimise her carbon footprint in travelling to China via land developed her love of what she terms "slow travel" to experience the transitions in climate, culture and people and not to miss all the bits "in between". Following her studies, she continued her quest to minimise her carbon footprint and to embrace slow travel by voyaging to Australia, where she had an internship lined up, via boat. As a keen sailor, Emily secured an opportunity on "Earthrace" which was taking off around the world for a promotional campaign on biofuels. Having seen the state of the



oceans – through the Atlantic, Caribbean, Panama Canal and Pacific Islands – she discovered the pervasive lengths to which plastics had reached even the most desolate and uninhabited parts of our planet. Coupled with this was the recognition of how climate change and illegal fishing were impacting the most remote pacific islands. Inhabited islands, facing the decimation of fish stocks due to illegal fishing and agriculture due to brackish soil from climate change, were reliant on imports for their food supply, much of which would come in single-use packaging. Most of this packaging would find its way to the beaches of these pristine islands. Uninhabited islands also had their fair share of plastics: she discovered items such as toothbrushes that were clearly thousands of miles from their point of origin. Soon after, with these discoveries Emily, in cooperation with partners, led one of the biggest community-led clean-ups and awareness raising campaigns ever launched in the Pacific Islands.

With these collective experiences in tow, Lucy and Emily, together with their crew, embarked on the maiden voyage of eXXpedition in November 2014.

During their 3-week journey, the group used surface trawl nets to sample for plastics to quantify microplastic distribution along their route. Pelagic fish were also caught to assess the plastic fragments found in their guts and the presence of toxic residues. At the same time, the group explored their own bodies for the presence of toxic chemicals by assessing their blood and urine samples for the presence of phthalates, heavy metals, PCBs, and other persistent organic pollutants.

Lucy and Emily are ambitious in their intentions to spread awareness of the results of this and planned subsequent voyages of eXXpedition. On the

one hand is the importance of the scientific results themselves: the scale of the problem of plastics, particularly microplastics, in our oceans and the detrimental impact this has on aquatic life and the fundamental threat to our ecosystems. The other message is more subtle: this is a project intended to celebrate the role of women in science, technology, sailing. Not only does it break down gender stereotypes, but it also harnesses the power of them. Women still make the majority of the purchasing decisions in the home. Lucy and Emily hope that by opening up the dialogue about the harmful effects of single-use plastics and the impact of plastics and toxic chemicals on the environment, human health and well-being in general, that consumers will be motivated to reduce plastic in their lifestyles, to choose products with low toxicity and to inspire change in others. In parallel to informing consumers about their everyday choices is the bigger fish: to support global action on toxic chemicals and to influence governments to take regulatory action.

Without a doubt, these are women who have a passion in connecting with people on the issues of plastics and toxic chemicals – to see change and to make change happen.

Note:

eXXpedition plans further voyages from Cote d'Ivoire to Brazil via Ascension Island in November 2015 and through the Great Lakes in North America in 2016.

Funds raised from the voyages and the documentary film recently produced will go to support the development of educational materials for use in schools. Download the documentary film from Vimeo via the following link: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/eXXpedition>.

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