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# Civil Society and Government Plan for Sound Chemicals Management in Mongolia

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2004, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) reported the large-scale use of chemical substances in Mongolia, largely maintained in five key sectors—agriculture, manufacturing industries, livestock management, disease control, education and scientific research. While the country has both domestic policies and international commitment to address the growing concerns relating to chemicals, the general public continues to be directly and indirectly exposed to chemicals.

The increasing use of chemicals in these five sectors brings with it (1) increasing burden of diseases linked to chemical exposure of the general population, as well as (2) increasing financial costs related to loss of productivity and the inaction in managing chemicals in an environmentally sound manner. Hence, dealing with the interlinking concerns surrounding the issues of chemicals and wastes will require a consolidated approach by various stakeholders along the lifecycle of the chemicals.

The main objective of the workshop is to bring together different stakeholders, from government agencies, civil society and academe, to facilitate exchange of knowledge on the intersect of human rights and chemicals management, and to identify strategies to promote the sound management of chemicals. Chief among the issues identified in the workshop are the clear cases of rights violations due to chemicals exposure; the lack of awareness among the negative impacts of chemicals; and the ineffective management systems and mechanisms in place to prevent exposure, among others.

While there is no silver bullet that can adequately address the complex issues surrounding chemicals and wastes management in the country, the participants have identified mechanisms and potential solutions to various concerns. These include:

- a. Partnership and collaboration for research and advocacy. Sharing of information between stakeholders; awareness-raising and information dissemination regarding the negative impacts of chemicals; and the use of scientific research to lobby for policies on chemicals management.
- b. Technology. Building capacity for analysis, including the procurement of necessary equipment; and the development of plan for the storage and disposal of chemicals.
- c. Policy Advocacy. Developing policies on chemicals management, as well as reviewing existing laws regarding restricted chemicals to examine whether new chemicals can be included in the regulation; and more stringent monitoring.

- d. Development of the Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining (ASGM) sector. Raising the awareness of the sector regarding the effects of mercury on health and the environment; building the capacity of miners on mercury-free mining processes; and developing guidelines for the sound management (i.e., storage and disposal of mercury wastes).

Continuous collaboration between stakeholders, civil society and the governments was also identified as critical in promoting the sound management of chemicals in Mongolia. These will the stakeholders to develop more concrete steps to achieve the objectives of the approaches identified.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASGM	Artisanal and small-scale gold mining
CSO	Civil Society Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MEAs	Multilateral Environmental Agreements
MEGDT	Ministry of Environment, Green Development and Tourism
MOHS	Ministry of Health and Sports
MPDSP	Ministry of Population Development and Social Protection
WHO	World Health Organization
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

# BACKGROUND

Mongolia is a landlocked country located in East and Central Asia with a total land area of almost 1.6 million square kilometers<sup>1</sup>. Its 8,000-km border is shared with Russia in the North and China to the south, east, and west<sup>2</sup>. The capital city is Ulaanbaatar which supports around one-third of the country's three million strong population<sup>3</sup> (2016 est.). However, 72% in total reside in the urban areas. The median age is 27.9 years. There are various ethnic groups in Mongolia but almost 82% is composed of the Khalkh. Around 53% of the Mongolians are Buddhists while the rest are Muslims, Christians, and other smaller religious sects.

Gross domestic product (GDP) in 2016 was dominated by exports of goods and services and household consumption. Sector-wise, services comprise 50% of the GDP, followed by industry (35%) and agriculture (15%)<sup>4</sup>. Although the country has very little arable land, agricultural activities are still pursued with products including wheat, barley, vegetables, forage crops, livestock, camels, and horses. Industry players, on the other hand, focused on the areas of construction and construction materials, mining, oil, food and beverages, processing of animal products, cashmere and natural fiber manufacturing.

Growth in the manufacturing sector seemed to have peaked in 2005 but the use of chemicals continues. The World Wildlife Fund reported in 2004 that the large-scale use of chemical substances in Mongolia was maintained in five key sectors, namely, agriculture, manufacturing industries, livestock management, disease control, education and scientific research<sup>5</sup>. The Mongolian government used to import chemicals from the former USSR and is in charge of distribution as well as of controlling use of chemicals. When the country shifted to democratic free market economy in 1990, many industries and organizations were privatized and in the transition, centralized control and coordination of toxic substances have become irregular and insufficient. In 1995, the Law on Protection from Toxic Chemicals was passed to address the growing concerns. Since then, the country has also been involved in several multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs), particularly in the area of chemicals and wastes such as the Montreal Protocol and the Basel, Stockholm, and Rotterdam Conventions.

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<sup>1</sup> US Central Intelligence Agency. (2013). *The World Factbook 2013-14*. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mg.html>

<sup>2</sup> Asian Disaster Reduction Center. (2010). *Mongolia*. Retrieved from [http://www.adrc.asia/countryreport/MNG/2010/MONGOLIA\\_CR2010B.pdf](http://www.adrc.asia/countryreport/MNG/2010/MONGOLIA_CR2010B.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* 1

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* 1

<sup>5</sup> Dolgormaa, L. (2004). Toxics Issues in Mongolia, *World Wildlife Fund*. Retrieved from <http://mongolia.panda.org/?92900/Dolgormaa-L-2004-Toxics-issues-in-Mongolia>

The increasing use of chemicals in the country have posed serious threats to both human health and the environment. Toxic industrial chemicals such as chromium, PCBs, pesticides, and mine wastes have ravaged the country causing issues in air and water quality<sup>6</sup>. Large-scale mining and ASGM operations, although are major contributors to national and local economy, are also main sources of mercury pollution. The World Health Organization (WHO), in 2005, released a report<sup>7</sup> highlighting the need to deal with the health impacts of various types of pollution in Mongolia from the agriculture, energy, industry, transport, urban, and rural development sectors.

## **ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND MANAGEMENT OF CHEMICALS AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH**

Chemicals are an integral part of modern daily life. They are used in a wide array of products and processes, and play an indispensable role in economic growth and social development. Millions of people throughout the world have led richer, more productive, and more comfortable lives because of the thousands of chemicals that are found in the market today.

This increasing use of chemicals in different industries and sectors can be seen as a double edged-sword, bringing with it (1) increasing burden of diseases linked to chemical exposure of the general population, as well as (2) increasing financial costs related to loss of productivity and the inaction in managing chemicals in an environmentally sound manner. This has made chemicals pollution a cross-cutting issue which reflects the interconnectedness of the socioeconomic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and situates humans and their rights at the center of the discussion.

However, looking at the impacts of chemicals pollution using the human rights (HR) lens has not been common practice, so much so that frameworks focused on the environmentally-sound management (ESM) of chemicals and wastes, in the context of sustainable development, has traditionally been seen as efforts leaning more toward economic growth rather than human and social development. With this perceived lower association with human development aspects such as health, education, and justice, plans to pursue a higher level of chemicals and wastes management are therefore often deprioritized over other “more urgent” concerns.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* 5

<sup>7</sup> World Health Organization. (2005). *Environmental Health Country Profile – Mongolia*. Retrieved from [http://www.environment-health.asia/rfeh/country\\_profiles/mongolia.pdf](http://www.environment-health.asia/rfeh/country_profiles/mongolia.pdf)



Hence, shifting paradigms and framing chemicals pollution as a human rights concern, will require an understanding of the different treaties and declarations on the fields of human rights and environmental protection and national constitutional provisions, laws and jurisprudence, and appropriate tools to integrate these topics and to mainstream the issue to the consciousness of the general public.

# PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Dealing with the interlinking concerns surrounding the issues of chemicals and wastes and how they contribute to environmental degradation and negative health impacts will require a consolidated approach by various stakeholders along the life cycle of the chemicals. Although chemicals have drastically contributed to society's current social and economic landscape, their contribution to economic growth need not be at the expense of health and the environment. Importantly, looking at the problem from a human rights perspective may be crucial in elevating the discussions toward identifying a multi-sectoral approach in dealing with the issues.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the workshop include:

- (1) To facilitate exchange of knowledge between CSOs and relevant stakeholders on the intersect of human rights and chemicals management;
- (2) To solicit CSO response on the issues and challenges on chemicals management, particularly the ASGM sector in Mongolia; and
- (3) To identify barriers or impediments in establishing a stronger governance system for the sound management of chemicals in Mongolia and how the thriving stakeholders can support this process.

# RESULTS

Thirty-two representatives from various civil society organizations (CSOs) and government agencies in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia came together to discuss the issues of chemicals and wastes (*See Annex 1*). The discussions focused on (1) understanding the chemicals management situation in Mongolia, and (2) identifying strategies and approaches on how to manage chemicals and wastes in an environmentally sound manner. The learning exchange was facilitated by BAN Toxics and the Public Health Institute of Mongolia and Ministry of Health and Sports (MOHS). Topics of the presentations included:

- **The Intersect of Human Rights and Chemicals**
- **Overview of Chemicals Management in Mongolia**
- **Poverty and Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining in Mongolia:** BAN Toxics' Programme on Eliminating Mercury Use in ASGM and Community Development
- **Mercury and Public Health Aspect of Mercury Exposure**
- **Resource Mapping:** Promoting the Rights-based Approach in Chemicals Management in Mongolia

## DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

The following issues were identified by the participants as some of the issues relating to chemicals management in Mongolia:

- Clear cases of human right violations (e.g. impacts to children's health) caused by exposure to chemicals are committed;
- Violation of animal rights are also observed, as herding lands and food (e.g. grass, water) sources become contaminated;
- Lack of information on the chemicals present in consumer products (i.e. household, food), as well as chemicals used in manufacturing and agriculture;
- Lack of awareness among the general public and the communities regarding the negative impacts of chemicals to human health and the environment;
- Continued generation of domestic wastes, and improper management (i.e., storage, disposal and treatment) of wastes;

- Ineffective control and monitoring of processes relating to chemicals management (e.g. manufacturing of products, management of wastes, etc.), as well as the lack of capacity in conducting environmentally sound monitoring;
- Insecure borders leading to the continued entry and exit of chemicals into territory;
- Need for toxics-free alternatives in processes (i.e., mercury-free mining methods);
- Lack of cooperation between environmental and human rights groups, resulting from the lack of recognition of the intersect between environmental concerns and human rights.

## **PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR THE SOUND MANAGEMENT OF CHEMICALS AND WASTES IN MONGOLIA**

<b>AREAS OF CONCERN</b>	<b>ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN</b>	<b>FOCAL PERSONS/ ORGANIZATIONS</b>
1. Partnership and Collaboration	Sharing of information through formation of knowledge information center between CSOs	- Center for Health Study of the Ministry of Labor - Human Rights Center for Citizens
2. Research and Advocacy	Awareness raising among CSOs and information dissemination to the communities	- Public Health Division of the Policy Implementation and Coordination Department of MOHS
	Collaboration on human rights issues with other CSOs	- Environment and Natural Resources Management Department of the Ministry of Environment, Green Development and Tourism (MEGDT)
	Mapping out existing studies which can be used to lobby for reforms (i.e., expose more cases of human rights violations)	- Mongolian National Disaster Response Center
	Further research and profiling of new chemicals and their toxicity	
	Monitoring of the entry of new/ unknown chemicals	
	Lobbying for new laws and policies on chemicals management	
3. Technology	Laboratory equipment for research and analysis	- MOHS
	Draft plan for storage, disposal and management of chemicals (e.g. mercury)	

4. Policy Advocacy	<p>Drafting of new/ more effective laws and relevant policies on the sound management of chemicals</p> <p>Review of current list of restricted chemicals; identify new chemicals to be included in the list</p> <p>Provision for more stringent monitoring and imposition of more restriction on chemicals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Amnesty International</li> <li>- Center for Health Study of the Ministry of Labor</li> <li>- Human Rights Center for Citizens</li> <li>Public health division of Policy implementation and Coordination Department of MOHS</li> <li>- Environment and Natural Resources Management Department of the Ministry of Environment, Green Development and Tourism (MEGDT)</li> <li>- Social Protection Policy Implementation and Coordination Department of the Ministry of Population Development and Social Protection (MPDSP)</li> </ul>
5. Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining	<p>Awareness raising of local communities</p> <p>Training miners on mercury-free method</p> <p>Development of plan for the sound disposal, storage and management of mercury</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Darkhan University</li> <li>- Development Solutions</li> <li>- Step Without Borders</li> <li>- Mongolian Women's Fund</li> </ul>

# ANNEX 1

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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