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Organized by the SAICM Secretariat and the University of Cape Town



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Discussion 4 Digest

Topic of Discussion: Environmental Injustice Issues to Consider for Chemical Risk

ABOUT THE PRESENTERS

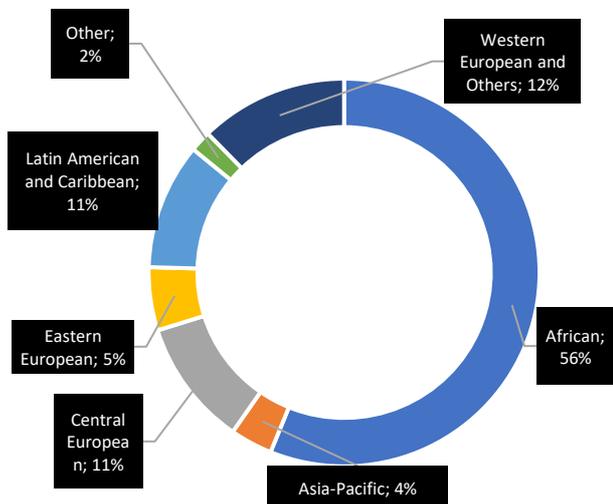
Rico Euripidou works as a Campaign Coordinator at groundWork, Friends of the Earth South Africa. groundWork is a non-profit environmental justice organisation working primarily in South Africa and seeking to improve vulnerable people's quality of life. Rico manages and supports staff campaign in the strategic alignment of groundWork's six campaigns (Climate & Energy Justice, Coal, Environmental Health, Waste, Environmental Justice School, and Global Green and Healthy Hospitals). He has been with groundWork since 2005. His interests are on issues of energy, chemicals policy, climate change and public health: all which are closely interrelated.

DISCUSSION 4 ATTENDANCE BREAKDOWN

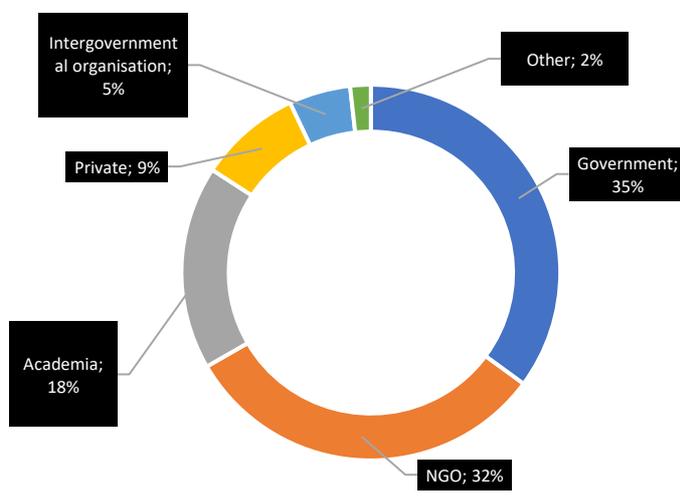
TOTAL ATTENDEES FOR DISCUSSION 4: 57
Female: 35
Male: 21
Other: 1

Key:
IGO – Intergovernmental organisation
NGO – Non-governmental organisation

REGIONAL REPRESENTATION



SECTOR REPRESENTATION



Chemicals and SDGs Community of Practice Discussion 4 Summary and looking ahead

1. Discussion participants identified prevalent environmental injustices in their countries (Ethiopia, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Senegal, Jamaica, USA, and Jordan). The **polluting industries identified were tanneries, the textile industry, pharmaceutical industries, waste disposal sites, the transport industry, street pesticide markets** (where the sale of highly hazardous pesticides occurs) and the chemical industry. These polluting industries were in **town centres with high population densities, in residential areas on the outskirts of cities, in urban areas with pollution risks (such as contamination), in rural areas and in areas where previously disadvantaged groups reside**. As a result of unequal distribution of polluting industries, **vulnerable communities experience a range of health risks** such as cancer, endocrine disruption, and many other permanently damaging body effects.

Participants felt that the **chemical industry has a role in transitioning from a resource-dependent to a low-carbon economy**. To achieve this, the chemical industry would need to be part of the discussions and attend regulation and surveillance discussions on the process; eliminate hazardous chemicals (i.e., pesticides); have an open and transparent products' movement and develop innovations for alternative approaches.

2. In the discussion, participants expressed that the **right to comprehend information of chemical products** is important for end-users to make informed decisions. However, a challenge faced was that **labelling and pictograms were not enough for end-users to understand the information and apply it to their context**. Participants mentioned that for the average consumer, labels should not only communicate a products chemical composition, but it should also **mention it's health and environmental risks**. Another challenge raised with informed decision-making is that the chemical industry has more financial resources to support their views whereas, **disadvantaged communities have little power and resources to fight for their rights** if they are impacted by chemical pollution. On the other hand, participants from developed countries shared the fact that government departments can be exempt from taking responsibility for the damage they cause.

Participants were asked whether there are national initiatives in their countries to disclose information on chemical identities and hazards. The majority said that their countries had voluntary hazard labelling according to national or industrial standards and binding hazard labelling according to national standards. However, all agreed **that disclosure of information on the chemical composition of materials and products outside the supply chain is important** for the fulfilment of environmental justice.

3. When asking participants if disclosing only the identity of a chemical in materials and products, and not concentrations conflicts with the principle of **confidential business information**, the majority of those who responded said no or they do not know. Participants felt that to fully enable informed decisions for chemicals (i.e., purchase, use), there should be a **distinction in the role and responsibilities of stakeholders in the chemical management sector**. There should also be an **environmental and social risk assessment** for all co-formulants in chemicals.

For a more detailed summary of the discussion, see the Annex below:

ANNEX

DETAILED SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION 4

THE DISCUSSION WAS STRUCTURED AROUND THREE QUESTIONS AND THE KEY DISCUSSION INPUTS FROM PARTICIPANTS ARE PRESENTED UNDER EACH QUESTION:

Question 1: In your country, are there polluting industries or practices that impact people's health? If so, which industries or practices cause pollution and where are they more likely to be situated? (List your country in your response.)

AFRICA

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Ethiopia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In Ethiopia, there are plenty of polluting industries across the country. The polluting industries identified were tanneries, textile industries and pharmaceutical industries. Many are in the centre of towns which makes their impact worse. ➤ Textile industries impact human health and are in the capital with a high population density. |
| Malawi | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Waste disposal sites are a concern for polluting industries. They act as a breeding ground for different vectors and impact public health. Furthermore, waste disposal from local industries has limited environmentally sound structures. For example, these disposal sites are situated on the outskirts of the city but surrounded by nearby residential areas. |
| Nigeria | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hydrocarbon pollution is a challenge in the country. It is produced mainly by the transport industry (i.e., air pollution) and the petroleum industry (i.e., air pollution from gas flaring and oil spillage during extraction and transportation). |
| South Africa | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs) are a concern as their impacts are unknown by the workers who use them. ➤ Proper management of the cradle-to-grave principle is needed. ➤ Pesticides decanted into unlabelled containers and sold illegally can result in pesticide poisoning. ➤ Street pesticides (agricultural pesticides sold for use in households) are an issue. ➤ Agricultural pesticides used for the fumigation of households can cause fatalities. ➤ Polluters are more likely to be situated in urban areas where the pollution risk is extreme when there is contamination. |
| Senegal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The pesticide reformulation, Louga, impacted the health of people in this area and the environment. ➤ The recycling industry in Dakar affects the health of people. |

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Jamaica | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The industry of Bauxite resulted in a high incidence of cancer in communities, and it contaminated the water affecting marine life. ➤ Agricultural communities have a high incidence of cancer. ➤ Industries are in rural and suburban areas. |
|----------------|---|

NORTH AMERICA

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| United States of America (USA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Despite being a nation considered a leader in environmental protection laws and regulations, environmental impacts from chemical industries are widespread and concentrated in predominantly black and brown communities, economically challenged communities, and communities with low political power. An example is vapour intrusion, which is colourless and odourless chemical vapours that migrate from beneath the ground and into the indoor air of homes, businesses, and schools. Common vapour intrusion chemicals are chlorinated solvents, linked to cancer, endocrine disruption, and many other permanently damaging body effects. Often the most impacted populations are children and youth. |
|---------------------------------------|---|

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Jordan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The chemical industry is the largest industrial user of fossil fuels for feedstock and energy. As a result, it is the third largest industrial emitter of CO₂. ➤ There is growing evidence showing rising temperatures, extreme weather events, melting ice sheets, and rising sea levels (all these proven features of climate change). These adverse weather events have the potential to amplify the release of chemical pollutants into the environment and increase the toxicity of some chemicals, especially pesticides, persistent organic pollutants, and mercury. |
|---------------|---|

Throughout the discussion, informal polls were conducted to help encourage discussion among the participants. They do not provide any representative data

Poll 1: What role does the chemicals industry have to play in the just transition to a resource efficient and low-carbon economy? (n=13)

- The industry should be **part of the discussions** and **attend to regulation** and **surveillance** of the process.
- Most **textile industries impact human health** and are **around high population density areas**.
- The chemical industry should **implement the hierarchy of control, eliminate HHPs, identify pesticides that should be eliminated** and **substitute them with safer pesticides**, remove fossil fuel-based pesticides and adequately train workers.
- They play a role in the **open and transparent movement** for crop management.
- The chemical industry, including the pesticide industry, is dependent on fossil fuel/oil production. Under human rights, **businesses have an obligation to address the harmful effects** of their actions and protect affected human rights.
- More **regulation and monitoring** of the impact on health and the environment are needed.
- **Access to health services and notifiable conditions** and easy access to record these and training or health staff at clinics are important.
- **The chemical industry is the biggest industrial user of fossil fuels** for both feedstock and energy purposes, and it is **the third largest industrial emitter of CO₂**. The chemical industry generates 140 Mt of methane and 287 million tonnes of CO₂ as a secondary.
- **Shift** from an extractive to a regenerative economy is necessary.
- **Supporting innovation** of less toxic molecules and alternatives is needed.
- The chemical industry can play a role in **minimizing carbon emissions** through available and innovative technology.
- The chemical industry should **implement good manufacturing practices** and **adhere to public health regulations**. Funds should be allocated for programs to mitigate health impacts and fix existing problems.
- **Develop/come up with innovations** to not be reliant on carbon.
- The chemicals industry should **participate in the policy-making processes** and raise fair awareness of their products and the steps they plan to take towards a resource-efficient and low-carbon economy.

Question 2: In your experience, which conditions that support informed decision-making for chemicals, are linked to environmental justice? How can environmental justice considerations in chemical risk management fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? List the SDGs in your response.

AFRICA

NIGERIA

- The government does not give proper attention to extraction because it is an area that generates money. There is a need to move away from an extractive economy.

SOUTH AFRICA

- For informed decisions on chemicals to be made, the right to comprehend should be adhered to. Access to understandable and context specific information is important.
- A misconception is that pictograms on labels are enough for low-literate populations to understand the risks/hazards and how to prevent them. However, pictograms are not intuitively obvious, and people need to be informed as to exactly what they mean.

UGANDA

- Transparency and including everyone in planning and decision making is needed in the chemical sector.
- The imbalance of power stems from disadvantaged communities not having access to resources to hire scientists and attorneys to “fight their corner”. On the other hand, chemical industries have access to financial resources to hire experts. A majority of the client base for private environmental consulting firms is in the industry.

NORTH AMERICA

CANADA

- Comprehensible information on labelling is important for the average person (e.g., about the risks rather than the chemical composition).
- Education is important for people to make informed choices about the products they use or consume.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (USA)

- Chemical industry lobbying is a priority issue for activists in the country. The deeply intertwined relationships between industry lobbyists/political donors and congressional representatives are challenges faced.
- The Department of Defence (military bases) contributes to pollution. However, they are exempt from being held accountable for damages caused to communities.
- Families living in contaminated communities from across the USA gathered in Washington D.C. to advocate for strengthened protections by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Poll 2: Are there national initiatives in your country to disclose information on chemical identities and hazards?

(N=13)

- Yes, voluntary hazard labelling according to national or industry standards (n=7)
- Yes, binding hazard labelling according to national standards (n=5)
- Yes, voluntary disclosure schemes for chemicals in materials and products (n=4)
- Yes, binding hazard labelling according to GHS (n=4)
- Yes, voluntary hazard labelling according to GHS (n=1)
- Yes, binding disclosure schemes for chemicals in materials and products (n=1)
- None of the listed types of initiatives (n=1)
- I do not know (n=1)

Poll 3: Is disclosure of information on chemical composition of materials and products outside the supply chain important for the fulfilment of environmental justice? (N=14)

- Yes (n=13)
- I do not know (n=1)
- No (n=0)

Question 3: What conditions are missing in your country, or multilaterally, to fully enable informed decisions for chemicals? How can these be included in chemical management strategies? Who are the leading sectors to do this? (List your country in your response)

AFRICA

ETHIOPIA

- Chemical and pesticide management in the country does not empower the environmental protection authority on chemicals management but rather on pesticides only.
- There is a lack of coordination, transparency and no roles and responsibilities in the chemical management sector.

MALAWI

- Unlike countries where the public holds their institutions accountable throughout the supply chain, Malawi relies on established agencies within the government to take up legislation issues and enforcement.

- Consumers should be empowered with adequate knowledge and heard when demanding safer environments free from pollution.
- Many times, toxicity information is hidden behind confidential business information (CBI), even when it is not the case.

SOUTH AFRICA

- All co-formulants in chemicals should allow for a full environmental and social risk assessment to inform the strategy on use in local conditions. The leading sectors would be agriculture, environment, health, labour, supply chains and labour movements.
- Information on the type of chemicals used, where it used, and the quantities, are missing in the country. As a result, a challenge is focusing on the most hazardous chemicals first.

➤ A complete list of registered pesticides in the country is necessary. Thereafter, an HHP list should be prioritized for phasing out HHPs (e.g., starting with WHO 1a, 1b classified pesticides then moving to WHO 2a, carcinogenic and other pesticides with unmanageable risks).

UGANDA

- The overall coordination of the chemical sector should be improved as it is regulated by various departments: the National Environmental Management Authority, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Animal Industry and Fisheries.
- Awareness raising of HHPs should be prioritized.

ZIMBABWE

➤ Disclosure outside the supply chain is not important, but rather, the impacts of chemicals on the environment and health is.

SOUTH ASIA

INDIA

- The inclusiveness of scientific communities and communities living around the pollution zones is helpful to form impactful decisions.

SOUTH AMERICA

GUYANA

- The concentration percentage of each chemical is required as it is a determining factor in assessing the overall risk of the chemical. Some products may have more than one chemical in the formulation and therefore each active ingredient's percentage is required to determine the risk of the combined substances.

Poll 4: If only the identity of a chemical in materials and products is disclosed and not concentration, is this in conflict with the principle of CBI? (N=12)

- Yes (n=1)
- I do not know (n=5)
- No (n=6)

RESOURCES:

1. Almroth B.C et al (2022). Circular economy could expose children to hazardous phthalates and chlorinated paraffins via old toys and childcare articles: Journal of Hazardous Materials Advances: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hazadv.2022.100107>
2. Plastic treaty – transparency requirement for chemicals constituents in plastic is a must: <https://www.globalchemicaltransparency.org/#a13lightbox-work-12609>
3. Boedeker, W., Watts, M., Clausing, P. et al (2020). The global distribution of acute unintentional pesticide poisoning: estimations based on a systematic review. BMC Public Health 20, 1875 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09939-0>

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If you have any question or require clarification on this initiative, please contact the SAICM Secretariat at saicm.chemicals@un.org or UCT at uctcops@outlook.com.

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