

Press Release “What has Gender got to do with Chemicals”.  
14 Dec 2017

The secretariat of the global chemicals conventions, the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions (BRS) jointly with WECF International, WEP Nigeria and Balifokus Indonesia, announce the release of a film “What has Gender got to do with Chemicals”.

The documentary Film follows two Women’s Organisations, WEP and WECF, who are investigating how women and men are impacted by hazardous chemicals and waste in Nigeria, and how both contribute to solutions in halting pollution from chemicals and waste.

The film premiered during the United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi, last week, and is being released to the general public via the website of the BRS secretariat and WECF International this week, on 14<sup>th</sup> of December 2017.

The film “What has Gender got to do with Chemicals” follows Dr Priscilla Achakpa, president of the Nigeria-based civil society organisation “Women Environmental Programme - WEP” on a scoping study interviewing women farmers, waste scavengers, electronic waste handlers and various ministries, agencies and medium sized businesses working on laws, enforcement and solutions. *“We found severe pollution from chemicals, which effects the entire pollution through the open burning of waste, but the least affluent groups are in particularly badly impacted, for example the young men scavenging waste including electronic waste, and women farmers using highly hazardous pesticides. But the most shocking is the information that women food-vendors, who buying adulterated cooking oils containing PCBs, a potent carcinogen. The women are unaware of the toxicity of this oil, and they like using it, as the volume does not decrease as fast as when using vegetable oils”*. Achakpa continues, *“we will release the film on national television so as to reach over a 100 million Nigerians, and inform them about the dangers of persistent-organic-pollutants, and to call for responsibility of international companies to stop the dumping of e-waste and products containing harmful chemicals in our country”*.

WECF International, partner organisation of WEP Nigeria, coordinated the film production. The camera and editing which was done by Laure Poinot.

WECF and BALIFOKUS also launched the accompanying publication “*Gender Dimensions of Hazardous Chemicals and Waste Policies under the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions*” which is available from this [link](#).

Ms. Yuyun Ismawati of Balifokus commented *“the case study for Indonesia shows also the risk of high levels of hazardous pollution from chemicals and waste. The largest waste dump of Jakarta has open burning of POPs containing plastics and e-waste, these fumes are not only a disaster for the 5000 scavengers who live around the dump, but these toxic fumes also go into the rice fields, the egg and meat of domestic animals for consumption, and into the rivers, water ways and air. According to Ismawati: “Not only the waste dump is polluted, also the inner city. Measurements found high levels of new POPs such as flame-retardants in the air in the business district, probably coming from the electronics, decoration and building materials. Everybody is, - unknowingly, - exposed to these chemicals emissions which can lead to diseases such as breast cancer.”*

Ismawati continued *“The most severe health effects were observed in children from gold miners, who have terrible birth defects of which they soon die. The birth defects are probably caused by the burning of mercury to extract the gold from the rock. Mercury has been banned globally under the Minamata Convention, but unfortunately, informal trade continues, and the gold miners are often not informed of the great risks to their and their children’s health. We need immediate action to stop the trade in mercury and to provide alternative job opportunities for the mining families”*.

Sascha Gabizon, executive director of WECF, explains that *“The studies and film show that both in Indonesia and in Nigeria there are also great initiatives being taken, often by civil society organisations and responsible entrepreneurs. We met with entrepreneurs, women and men, in Lagos, Nigeria’s economic capital and largest port, where container ships bring tons and tons of electronic waste and polluting products into Africa. For example, we filmed a woman entrepreneur who has a community-plastic-collection project. And a partner business of Hewlett Packard that shows how to safely treat e-waste, sending the most hazardous parts back to Europe for destruction”*.

Dr Achakpa concludes: *“what we need now is a conscious strategy by our government to address the social dimensions of chemical and waste policies. We need to assess different roles and impacts on women and men. We need to ensure more women in decision making on chemical policies. We need the government to support activities of civil society Women’s organisations. And we need to combine better management of chemicals and waste, with the empowerment of women and men to halt the negative impacts, through a Gender Action Plan”*.

The Film “what has Gender got to do with Chemicals” is being disseminated by the secretariat of the global chemicals conventions, the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions (BRS) and the short version (3 minutes) and the long version (30 minutes) can be seen [here](#).

The preliminary version of the case study “Gender Dimensions of Hazardous Chemicals and Waste Policies..” can be found at [WECF International’s website](#).

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