PROJECT REPORT:

Enhancing Knowledge and Action towards the Terminal Storage of Surplus Mercury in the Philippines

And

Drastic Reduction of Environmental Emissions of Mercury: Small-scale Gold Mining

> Ban Toxics! November 2009

I. The Projects

From May to October 2009, Ban Toxics (BT) conducted activities related to two projects: Enhancing Knowledge and Action towards the Terminal Storage of Surplus Mercury in the Philippines (Storage Project) and Drastic Reduction of Environmental Emissions of Mercury: Small-scale Gold Mining (ASGM Project).

The Storage Project sought to take advantage of the favorable mercury policy climate in the Philippines, which has been one of the progressive Asian governments on the mercury issue. With its recent move to phase-out of mercury containing devices in all healthcare facilities, the Philippines is poised to begin considering efforts towards environmental safe storage options for mercury waste.

The concept of terminal storage is not a very familiar issue in the Philippines. There is a gap in the national policy and regulation as well as gaps in information and education available to policymakers, local officials and civil society. The Storage Project was created to begin addressing these gaps.

The Storage Project has two key objectives: 1) to raise awareness, at the national and local level on the dangers of environmentally unsafe mercury disposal by promoting storage as an interim solution, and 2) to support the regional activity of the Zero Mercury Working Group in engaging Asian regional governments towards the creation of a regional terminal storage facility for surplus mercury coming from the region.

To accomplish these key objectives, the Storage Program will, in a period of 6 months attempt to: a) convene a national workshop or forum on terminal storage of mercury wastes, b) publicize essential information on mercury and terminal storage issues, particularly on the need for safe disposal alternatives, c) launch creative awareness-building efforts on the issue of mercury and usage and improper disposal that can endanger humans, wildlife and the environment, and 4) participate in chemical safety policy development, particularly on the issue of mercury, in the Philippines and regionally.

BT recognized that addressing the storage issue was only an aspect of the Philippine mercury situation. The Philippines is considered one of the top ten consumers of mercury globally in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining industry (ASGM). Approximately 200,000 artisanal miners are active in the Philippines. Thus, BT saw an urgent need to engage in the ASGM issue as well, and dove tail local efforts with the ongoing UNEP SAICM Quick-Start Program for the Philippines.

BT launched the ASGM Project last September 2009, with 3 key tasks in mind:

1. Information gathering and development of a report that uncovers the inner workings of the ASM sector in the Philippines.

- 2. Sampling of sediments and fish consumed in downstream areas from selected ASM mining sectors.
- 3. Outreach to mining communities by creating linkages and determine where possible points on information/technical intervention can be made that is most effective.

Note that the Sigrid Rausing Trust, through the EEB, supported a portion of the ASGM Project, particularly Task 1 above.

II. Activities and Results

The table below shows the summary of activities conducted by BT and the accompanying results. For more details, see Interim Reports on Annex 1.

ACTIVITY	RESULTS
 Held workshop entitled: "Developing Solutions: Managing Mercury and Mercury Contaminated Wastes in the Philippines". Held last October 14, 2009 at the Sulo Hotel, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines 	 49 national stakeholders participated including the following government agencies: Environment, Health, and Labor. BT, Healthcare Without Harm, and EcoWaste Coalition represented civil Society groups, among others. Statement on mercury was developed and signed on by the participants including 125 lawyers who are members of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines. (See Annex 2)
 Creative campaign for building awareness on safe and ecological alternatives to mercury. 	 BT prepared 4 Mercury Fact Sheets for use during local campaigning. The first fact sheet is called "Quick Facts on Mercury"; the other fact sheets touch on coal, ASGM, and mercury bioaccumulation in the Arctic. Conducted workshops in schools to begin raising
 Participated in the UNEP Asian Regional Terminal Storage Executive Committee discussions. 	 awareness of toxins such a mercury to the younger generation. Workshops were linked with medical missions, ecological fairs, and religious retreats. 5. Policy engagement with Philippine policymakers.
 Disseminated information on mercury issues. 	 BT conducted radio and TV guest interviews. BT issued 4 press releases on current and issues involving mercury, including a submission for the Letters to the Editor. BT participated in the 6th OEWG on Mercury in Bangkok. Provided materials on Hg Storage and other issues to the WHO meeting in South Korea.
 Conducted research on the ASM sector to understand the structure and inner working of the sector. 	 Collected Previous data on ASM sector touching on health, economic, and environmental. Interviewed government agencies working on the ASM sector. Established partnership with national NGO coalition on mining to work on and develop NGO policy position on ASGM.

 Sampling of sediments and fish in selected areas including mining and downstream communities. 13. Developed a sampling protocol for use by NGO partners in sampling and monitoring.



II. Lessons Learned

BT experienced success and difficulties in implementing the projects. The following are the successes BT experienced:

1. Filling in a lack of information on mercury in the Philippines.

The initial shock by those participating in the workshops was always evident to the BT staff. During the open forum portion of the workshops, we would always hear participants mention that they never realized the extent of the danger caused by mercury, and we would hear them relate their "mercury story". Everyone has an experience playing with mercury when they were younger or have encountered it during their work. These were the "mercury story" we often hear.

The "mercury story" helped establish an immediate rapport with the issue and humanizes the issue to the participants. The presence of this reaction is an indicator that the project is filling an information gap on mercury that government or other groups are not able to address. This places the project in excellent footing with the community, government, local government units (LGUs) and other stakeholders.



Ban Toxics' community outreach activities.

2. Immediate acceptance of the project objectives by those participating in the workshops.

In BT's workshops we were able to get colleges, local government officials, and government agencies to call for action. We are able to do this because of the approach we took.

We endeavoured to use the workshop as an information-sharing venue not a venue to confront and lay blame on people or institutions. Second, we have been fortunate that we have been able to get the Department of Health to partner with us with their expert on mercury presenting at the workshops. This helps show people that this issue is shared both by government and NGOs and becomes a positive invitation for people.

Third, I think the status of BT helps. As an NGO that is engaged in the international and regional issues, we are seen as "above" the local issues and come in with a good track record for government and communities to see. We also come in as third party collaborators with government and local groups without any specific agenda other than mercury elimination. We are not burdened by local politics that often beset national initiatives.

3. Ability to draw in other sectors into the project, including grassroots support and encourage action.

In our workshops we worked in collaboration with local groups. They immediately wanted to help and saw the merits and strength of the project. So there was an immediate draw. This comes from a well-placed idea and scope of the project.

On the part of the government agencies and local government units, the objective way in which the information is presented and the "safe" forum we provided gave them the comfort to interact and engage NGOs and communities towards a solution.

4. Generate media attention.

In our workshops, we prepare and issue press releases (providing statements and media opportunities with the local groups we work with) photo opportunities and press interviews. This has helped us reach out to far more individuals than we could ordinarily with the conference alone. A key to the success is the collaboration with the local groups, which "localizes" the issue and does not make it appear as a vague policy issue.

Amidst the above successes, BT encountered the following obstacles:

1. Lack of time

Bureaucracy and scheduling challenges were difficult to overcome and caused problems with the activities. We could not bypass particular procedures, and we also faced the challenge of juggling in getting the attention of the right people and meeting their schedules.

2. Sensitivity of certain sectors

It became clear that certain stakeholders in ASGM sector have a raw nerve with regard to mercury. Small-scale miners were very wary of the mercury issue being used against them by the large-scale mining companies. Because of this they have denied usage and are paranoid with efforts to understand their plight.



Not only are the small-scale miners paranoid, even local officials as well. Local officials see the ASGM sector as a source of revenue and support for communities and their constituents. The threat of the ASGM industry being driven away by bad publicity is a strong motivator for them not to work with NGOs and other groups.

Ban Toxics with youth community leaders.

BT has recognized these obstacles and is increasing efforts to engage with stakeholders such as NGOs working on forests who have been engaged with the miners for some time. The idea is to look for linkages that the miners trust to begin building trust.

III. Promoting Environmental Justice

The right to life involves the right to a healthy environment. These are two interdependent rights. How can an individual enjoy the right to life if the environment in which he lives in is polluted or is poisoned? Within the right to a healthy environment is the right of equality; particularly pollution should not be disproportionately borne by a segment of the population due to their race, economic circumstance, gender, etc.

Since mercury greatly impacts the foetus, unborn children, young children, and pregnant women without their consent and without giving them the possibility of redress for any grievance, mercury pollution violates the very tenet of human right and democracy. This is the same violation that coastal communities that rely on fish for subsistence face. The continued mercury pollution by inland industries and other sources impact these communities in their source of livelihood and their nutrition.

We inject the concept of human rights in the workshops to drive home the point that those who are the least able to defend themselves in society are the most aggrieved by mercury pollution. Thus, the need for immediate and comprehensive action against mercury to uphold the rights of these impacted sectors.

IV. Future Work

- Engage the Department of Education. We need to ramp up efforts with the Department of Education in order to include toxics education in the curriculum of schools.
- 2. <u>Develop phase-out manual for</u> <u>schools</u>. Most of the people we



Ban Toxics' Executive Director, Richard Gutierrez (left) officially submits Ban Toxics' Report on Mercury Waste Storage t Environment Management Board's Director, Julian Amador.

have worked with have asked us to help them find mercury-free alternatives. The need to develop a phase-out manual that includes information on alternatives, storage options and other relevant information will help speed-up and ensure proper phase-out.

 <u>Develop film on mercury.</u> It is not economically sustainable for BT to go around the country to share the crucial information on mercury. By developing a film on mercury, we will be able to reach more people in a shorter period of time. This can also be used as an accompanying material for the module and could greatly aid local groups spread the word on mercury.



Students participating in a Ban Toxics creative event.

- 4. <u>Cultivate local NGO participation/collaboration and continue workshops</u>. We need to drum up greater grass roots involvement for the bigger fight on heavy metals and other toxins. The Storage Project provides a platform for this expansion, and we need to involve the grassroots more. We need to continue the workshops and trainor's training to empower the local base and provide them with knowledge to take action on the mercury issue.
- Follow-up, review, and support proposed bills in the House of Representatives and Senate. Several bills are moving with regard to mercury. There is also a bill that is being considered for the phase-out of mercury in schools. The bills are in the initial stages and could get watered down or severely compromised if we do not pay attention and apply pressure on the legislators.
- 6. <u>Continued engagement with ASGM communities and annual monitoring.</u> We need to continue engaging the ASGM miners to open up the opportunity to learn and dialogue with them. We also would need to monitor the mercury levels in their community annually to measure the Hg levels as well as Hg use.

V. Financials

Provided below is the monthly summary of the Project expenses. For more details, please see Annex 3.

	COST ITEMS	AMOUNT
May	Salary	US\$ 667.00
	Administrative Expense	250.00
	NGO Statement on Mercury	130.00
	Printing of Fact Sheets	100.00
June	Salary	667.00
	Administrative Expense	250.00
	Printing of Fact Sheets	100.00
July	Salary	667.00
	Administrative Expense	75.00
Aug.	Salary	1,000.00
	Administrative Expense	250.00
Sept.	Salary	1,000.00
	Mercury Forum Work	281.50
	ASGM Research	645.00
	Administrative Expense	138.43
	Supplies	345.86
Oct.	Salary	1,000.00
	Mercury Forum Work	280.50
	Mercury Forum	899.00
	ASGM Research	645.00
	Administrative Expense	139.26
	Supplies	69.00
	TOTAL	9,599.55
	Total EEB Funding	9,594.12
	Difference	(5.43)

- END -



The only world worth passing to our children is toxics-free.

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