ASSISTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TOWARDS REDUCING MERCURY USE IN THE ARTISANAL AND SMALL SCALE GOLDMINING SECTOR UNDER THE MINAMATA CONVENTION

WORKING DOCUMENT (15 MAY 2018)

WHAT IS THE ISSUE – MERCURY USE IN THE ARTISANAL AND SMALL SCALE GOLDMINING SECTOR

Mercury is a dangerous neurotoxic metal that is now ubiquitous in the global environment due to decades of unchecked anthropogenic releases. Primarily through widespread releases from coal-fired power plants, mercury added products, waste disposal, artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM), and other sources, mercury pollutes soils, waterways, seafood and people. To significantly reduce exposure to mercury, coordinated international action is needed.

The Minamata Convention on Mercury, which entered into force on 16th August, 2017, reflects the world’s willingness to control use, trade storage, supply and emissions of mercury. It represents a major milestone in global efforts to reduce the adverse impacts of mercury.

Artisanal and small scale gold mining (ASGM) is a complex global development issue. ASGM uses substantial amounts of mercury in mineral processing usually in highly unsafe and environmentally hazardous conditions. Mercury is used to bind the gold to form an amalgam, which helps separate it from the rock, sand and other materials. The amalgam is then heated to vaporize the mercury leaving the gold behind.

Globally, ASGM is the biggest source and accounts for 35% of anthropogenic airborne emissions of mercury. An estimated 10-15 million artisanal and small scale gold miners globally in approximately 70 countries are involved and eventually exposed to mercury. Furthermore, ASGM is the largest demand sector for mercury globally (estimated at 650-1000 tonnes in 2005).
The Convention defines artisanal and small-scale gold mining as “gold mining conducted by individual miners or small enterprises with limited capital investment and production.” (Article 2.a). A Party to the Convention must “take steps to reduce, and where feasible eliminate, the use of mercury and mercury compounds in ASGM, and the emissions and releases to the environment of mercury from such mining and processing.” (Article 7.2). If a Party determines that there is “more than insignificant” ASGM activity in its territory, a country must notify the Secretariat, and develop and implement a NAP in accordance with Annex C. A Party may make this determination at any time. (Article 7.3).

The NAP should include: National objectives and reduction targets; Actions to eliminate activities which are using a lot of mercury (e.g. whole ore amalgamation, open burning of amalgam etc); Steps to facilitate formalization; Baseline estimates of quantities of mercury and practices used; Strategies to promote emissions, releases, exposure reduction, to manage trade, to prevent diversion, to involve stakeholders, to address public health and prevent ASGM exposure, to inform miners and communities; and a schedule for NAP implementation.

**WHAT COULD NGOS DO TO ASSIST THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ASGM NAP AND RELEVANT RESOURCES**

1. Assist in eliminating high mercury consuming practices and promote mercury free techniques
   i. Raise awareness to miners on dangers of existing practices and benefits of alternative techniques
   ii. Raise awareness and inform of existence of mercury free techniques
   iii. Implement pilots

2. Assist in stakeholder consultations
   i. Outreach to relevant government Ministries – Environment and Mines
   ii. Identify relevant stakeholders – parastatal bodies, other ministries, miners, miners’ associations, affected communities
   iii. Conduct consultations with stakeholders to raise awareness about the Minamata Convention and its requirements, effects of mercury etc.
   iv. Conduct intensive consultations with miners communities / ZMWG Guide engaging miners in consultations
   v. Build capacity of national small-scale mining associations
   vi. Through these consultations assist also in facilitating formalization of the sector.

3. Assist in the inventory work
   i. Conduct research and develop background documents profiling the status of the country / Ghana and Tanzania
   ii. Provide training on baseline mercury inventories – on the field work.

**RESOURCES**
• UNEP Global Mercury Partnership – ASGM
  http://www.zeromercury.org/index.php?option=com_phocadownload&view=file&id=235%3Abaseline-information-for-the-nap-on-asgm-ghana&Itemid=70
• “NAP starter kit” page of UNEP http://web.unep.org/chemicalsandwaste/nap-starter-kit
• GEF GOLD (about to start) brief description can be found here:
  https://www.thegef.org/events/gold-addressing-mercury-pollution-artisanal-gold-mining
• "Toolkit for identification and quantification of mercury releases"
• ZMWG – Projects focusing on assisting the ASGM NAP process webpage
• NRDC – Minamata Convention on Mercury Resources Website