

Campaign against DDT in Uganda

Written by Administrator

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Campaign against the re-introduction of DDT for malaria disease vector control in Uganda

Malaria is one of the major health problems with devastating impact on the Ugandan population especially among children under the age of five and pregnant mothers. In order to curb down this disease, many interventions have been employed including the use of DDT indoor residual spraying (IRS).

DDT was first used for malaria disease vector control in the extreme area of Rwangaminyeto, Kihhi Sub County, presently, Kanungu district in South Western Uganda from 1959-1960 during the Global WHO pilot project but was completely banned in the 1980's.

The debate for the re-introduction of DDT began in early 2004. This attracted a lot of public criticisms. Between June-July 2005, the Ministry of Health (MOH) commissioned an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) which consulted very few stakeholders.

In early 2006, a study on the impact of DDT use was done in Kanungu by some few individuals from the Pathology Department, Faculty of Medicine, Makerere University and Mulago Hospital, Department of Medicine.

In November 2006, the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) called for a public hearing on the use of DDT in Uganda and with due disregard of public views, NEMA went a head and authorized the use of DDT in Uganda. These conditions and many others led to the birth of the Uganda Network on Toxic Free Malaria Control (UNETMAC).

Between April- May 2008, DDT indoor residual spraying (IRS) for Malaria control was piloted in the two districts of Oyam and Apac in Northern Uganda. During this period, UNETMAC members monitored the whole program activities and gross violations of the guidelines under the Stockholm Convention on POPs as well as those under the WHO were noted.

By Mid 2008, UNETMAC at the time not being a legal entity mobilized seven of its members to petition the government of Uganda over the misuse of DDT (Petition No: HCT-00-CV-MC-0149 of 2008). The petition was filed in the High Court through two law firms of Tumusiime and Kabega Co Advocates and Nile Law Chambers. This prompted a court injunction, which argued that several ten thousand small-scale farmers had lost their income of selling organic produce due to the spraying. This case was however later dismissed not due to lack of merit but simply because the lawyers failed to show up in court for three consecutive times.

Upon receiving this sad news, UNETMAC with financial support from the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) mounted a campaign for increasing public awareness about the dangers of DDT on human health and environment in late 2008 and early 2009.

By Mid 2009, UNETMAC at this time as a legal entity with support from members filed another petition this time in the Constitutional Court (Constitutional Petition NO. 14 of 2009) through

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another law firm, Niwagaba and Mwebesa Co Advocates. Initially, the case progressed well up to the rescheduling phase. At this stage, the case came to a very difficult progress and has been prolonged a few times. The reason for this delay is due to the fact that the constitutional court has not been fully constituted for a long time. The court is currently composed of only three judges and yet, it is supposed to have five judges at every sitting. Due to this technical mess, many constitutional petitions have not been handled.

At the moment however, our lawyer is trying to collaborate with the Court Registrar, to see that the case is fixed for hearing. This requires a lot of lobbying for this to happen.

Although the government of Uganda claims that it has stopped using DDT and that, the surplus DDT has been flown back to South Africa, the use of the chemical seems to be continuing secretly mainly by farmers and traders within the country. With expected funding from the PMI through Abt Associates

<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/successful-malaria-control-project-in-uganda-to-continue-161848285.html>, the Government of Uganda intends to implement a comprehensive IRS program for malaria vector control through the US President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) in the districts of Kitgum, Lamwo, Pader, Agago, Apac, Kole, Oyam, Gulu, Amuru and Nwoya. With the support from Biovision, UNETMAC is currently assessing the malaria situation in the above districts.

<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Anti-malaria-efforts-get-a-shot-in-the-arm/-/688334/1749476/-/fr2ddq/-/index.html> .

Although the contract does not directly mention using DDT, the information obtained from the local sources in Uganda clearly reveals that DDT will be used. The contenders argue that the chemical is cheap compared to other chemicals because of its longer residual effect.

The risk of severe economic impacts from spill-over effects and from deliberate misuse of DDT in agriculture on small holder farmers will therefore be evident in Uganda. It is therefore important to note that the risk that DDT will be reintroduced is pertinent with potential devastating consequences for even more farmers.

This trend of events is in contravention of the United Nations (UN) political goals of strengthening capacity of countries to transfer safely to reliance on sustainable alternative products, methods and strategies to DDT and to the goal of the Stockholm Convention on POPs which is to ultimately eliminate the use of DDT.

Although malaria is one of the major global health problems with devastating impact on many populations, particularly in Africa and Uganda, there are alternatives to DDT to deal with this disease as demonstrated by examples from Kenya, Ethiopia, Mexico and Vietnam.

UNETMAC has therefore been fighting this deadly tropical disease in Uganda both in the field and on the policy level. UNETMAC supports an integrated and sustainable approach to fight malaria and save lives of people. For these reasons, UNETMAC is dedicated to a worldwide phase-out of DDT.

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As such, UNETMAC participated at the Global Policy Round Table on the use of DDT in Malaria Vector control which took place in Geneva from 19th-20th, March, 2013 that was organized by the Biovision Foundation and the Millennium Institute in association with the UNEP Chemicals and the Global Alliance for DDT Alternatives.

UNETMAC will also be represented at the ordinary and simultaneous extraordinary meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions in Geneva, Switzerland from 28 April to 10 May 2013 as well as participate at the 66th World Health Assembly also taking place in Geneva from the 20th -28th May, 2013 in order to strengthen the global policy support for a reduced reliance and total phase-out of DDT by increasing pressure on the exemption rule for DDT.