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Mercury Pollution Costs Billions in Lost Earning Potential in Cameroon

New analysis of the 2013 data finds that significant mercury exposures near sources named in the Minamata Convention

Yaoundé, 24 July 2017- The Douala area stands to lose 34 to 45 billion franc in earning potential every year due to mercury contamination according to a new study published in *The Journal of Environmental Management*.¹ The report is the first peer-reviewed analysis to estimate economic losses due to IQ damage from mercury pollution in Cameroon and 14 other countries.

CREPD participated in the study, collecting hair samples from participants living in the industrial area, which houses cement plant, waste incinerator facilities, polyurethane production, metal recycling, and various dumpsites. These types of sources are specifically named in the Minamata Convention on Mercury, which obligates governments to take actions to minimize and eliminate mercury pollution to protect human health and the environment. The facilities are located next to the Wouri River, a major location for fishing.

Hair samples in all participants had mercury levels greater than a 0.58 parts per million (ppm) standard, the reference dose standard proposed in light of data suggesting harmful effects of mercury at low levels of exposure. Levels in the Douala participants ranged from .90 ppm to 3.77 ppm.

“This study gives us just a small sample of the extent of the damage that is happening throughout similar sites in other industrial and fishing cities in Cameroon like Limbe, Edea, Kribi. The high cost of mercury contamination should trigger actions to address pollution sources in the country,” said **Dr. Gilbert KUEPOUO**, Coordinator of CREPD. “The Minamata Convention that represents a global consensus to cooperate to eliminate anthropogenic sources of mercury exposure needs to be ratified and fully implemented to prevent lost earning potential in innocent population and pave the way for ensuring quality human resource to carry our nation vision of becoming an emerging economy in 2035. All is about brain and mercury is a brain drain substance” he added.

“Cameroon is currently in the phase of preparation of the ratification and implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury. This phase includes the complete inventory of all sources of mercury emissions and release in Cameroon, said, **Mr. ENOH Peter AYUK**, Focal Point for the Minamata Convention on Mercury in Cameroon. »

“Mercury is a serious global threat to human health and this study shows that it also imposes additional burdens on the economy,” said Joe DiGangi, PhD, a senior advisor to IPEN, and co-author of

the report. "That's why it is critical to monitor sources of mercury pollution so that impacts on communities and the environment can be minimized and eliminated."

"Exposure to mercury damages the nervous system, the kidneys and the cardiovascular system. Bodies in developing, in this case the fetal nervous system, are most sensitive to the toxic effects of mercury, although almost all organs are vulnerable, said **Professor Hugo MBATCHOU NGAHANE**, M.D, Respiratory and Occupational Medicine, Douala General Hospital, and Associate Professor at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Douala". Human exposure to mercury occurs mainly through consumption of contaminated fish, rice and direct exposure to mercury vapor may also be sources of exposure for humans, he said.

References

¹ Trasande L, DiGangi J, Evers D, Petrlik J, Buck D, Samanek J, Beeler B, Turnquist MA, Regan K (2016) *Economic implications of mercury exposure in the context of the global mercury treaty: hair mercury levels and estimated lost economic productivity in selected developing countries*, Journal of Environmental Management 183:229 - 235, doi: 10.1016/j.jenvman.2016.08.058
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27594689>

Hair samples for the study were collected through a standardized hair sampling protocol by public interest organizations in the IPEN network in participating countries. **CREPD has been a member of IPEN since 2008**/ Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI) Mercury Laboratory provided the analysis of the samples.

[IPEN](#) is a network of non-government organizations working in more than 100 countries to reduce and eliminate the harm to human health and the environment from toxic chemicals. www.ipen.org

[Biodiversity Research Institute](#) (BRI) is a nonprofit ecological research group whose mission is to assess emerging threats to wildlife and ecosystems through collaborative research, and to use scientific findings to advance environmental awareness and inform decision makers. www.briloon.org

[CREPD](#) (Centre de Recherche et d'Education pour le Développement) is Cameroon based nonprofit organization working to bridge the gap between science and action in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond in the context of sustainable development through the promotion of enabling conditions protecting the human health and environment from toxic substances and unsustainable practices.