



a toxics-free future

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Statement on the Partnership between IPEN and UNEP with the focus on women and chemicals

By Olga Speranskaya, IPEN Co-Chair

Here at UNEA we have heard from critical women leaders working to empower women and protect children and future generations from pollution.

I have the honor to announce an official launch of the Partnership between two global institutions, the United Nations Environmental Programme and IPEN, to take action on Women on Chemicals for our future.

UNEP is the leading organization within the United Nations system in the field of environment. IPEN is a global network of civil society organisations who are committed to achieve a future where our food, water, soil, and air are not contaminated with chemicals which cause cancer, disrupt endocrine systems or cause birth defects, when our children are born free from hazardous chemicals that may harm their life and the life of the generations to come.

IPEN and UNEP share common goals with regards to human health and the environment worldwide, and wish to collaborate to further these goals. Together we will enhance and mainstream the theme of women and chemicals into our global operation.

The decision to focus the Partnership on women and chemicals was made with the idea to elevate the need for the gender aspects of chemical safety, which has largely been ignored. There are nearly 4 billion women and girls on the planet. Despite the fact that women make up roughly half of the population and chemical exposure is widespread, knowledge of exposure routes and the true impacts of chemical exposures on women are difficult to determine because there is lack of gender-disaggregated data.

Environmental assessments of activities on chemicals and wastes usually ignore gender aspects and thus differences in gender susceptibility to chemical exposure are not considered, which may reduce the effectiveness of project outcomes.

There are 3 components to the IPEN-UNEP Partnership:

First, we are focusing on the Impacts of Chemicals to Women and Children.

Throughout their lives, men and women are exposed to numerous harmful chemicals. But chemicals in a women's body can be transferred across the placenta during fetal development and breast feeding to the baby. Exposures during fetus development can cause lifelong harm and increase the risks of irreversible effects. Adverse effects can also be carried across multiple generations.

Women and men both experience occupational exposures to chemicals, but these may differ based on the region, type of occupation, and access to information. There are types of occupation dominated by women. Very often these are low paid jobs that require long work hours and exposure to toxic chemicals.

Women typically work at the lowest level in global production systems. We witness the feminization of poverty that makes women more vulnerable to toxic chemical exposure, putting their health at risk.

Second, we focus on Equality in Decision-Making.

Women generally have more limited decision-making power. There are wide disparities between women and men in access to education, resources, social protection, financing, capacity-building and training, and technical knowledge and skills.

Third, we focus on Raising Awareness on Women and Chemicals Issues in the International Chemicals and Health Policy Processes, Including the Sustainable Development Goals, and the SAICM Beyond 2020 Process.

To address these and other issues IPEN and UNEP are launching the Partnership Agreement with the focus on women and chemicals and we are looking forward to working with UNEP to advance these issues further.