BY SIDI MGUMIA, recently from Kampala

Within the context of global lead paint elimination, AGENDA for Environment and Responsible Development (AGENDA) organized a workshop which took place in Drax in Tanzania last month.

The three days skillbase workshop is aimed at a local NGO to promote the ban on lead-free product control and advance the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) emerging issue to eliminating lead in paint, hazardous substances in electronics, mercury and highly hazardous pesticide.

The workshop brought together NGOs and CSOs from 13 African countries as well as representatives from the Tanzania Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies, the stakeholders agreed on joining forces to tackle the situation.

Officializing the workshop, Prof. Jamilu Fatima, Chairman of AGENDA talked about the 3rd International Conference on Chemical Management (ICCM3) that took place from 16 – 21 September in Nairobi, Kenya with the objective to review progress of SAICM implementation and to consider ICCM3 outcomes.

Prof. Fatima said that there was a need to put in place a SAICM implementation and for ICCM3 to produce a roadmap for its implementation up to 2030 and the ongoing campaigns for removing and restricting lead-based paint, and the promotion of agro-ecological production while various regional groups and countries reported on their implementation activities.

Prof. Fatima said as emergent issues, a variety of chemicals have been found to disrupt the endocrine systems of animals in laboratory studies, and there is strong evidence that chemical exposure has been associated with adverse developmental and reproductive effects on fish and wildlife in particular locations.

"The actions recommended for the time period from 2012 – 2015 include the provision of up-to-date information and scientific expert advice to relevant stakeholders for the purpose of identifying or recommending potential measures that could contribute to reductions in exposures to the effects of endocrine disrupting chemicals, in particular among vulnerable populations," he said.

He added that these should also be raise awareness at all levels and provide international support for activities to build capacities in countries, in particular developing countries and countries with economies in transition, for generating information and for assessing issues related to endocrine-disrupting chemicals in order to provide support-detecting mechanisms, including the prioritization of actions to reduce risks.

Among the other important things the Chairman pointed out, he also insisted on the promotion of international third-party certification of new products to help consumers to recognize paint and coatings without added lead, consistent with international obligations.

"Pronouncement of national regulatory frameworks, as appropriate, to stop the manufacture, import, export, sale, and use of paint and products coated with lead paints and to encouraging companies involved in manufacture lead compounds to add paint with safer alternatives," he added.

He further said that the need to have an integrated approach to financing and referenced the UNEP Executive Director's draft proposal which includes mainstreaming, industry involvement and external financing.

ICCM3 requested that SAICM be included in any integrated financing mechanisms.

Speaking at the same occasion, Silvani Mbang'eny, AGENDA’s Principle Program Officer and the Coordinator of IPEN Angolaphone Africa said: "As for Angolaphone Africa Regional Action Plan there should be activity of Address NGOs needs in terms of technical, financial and policy support and strengthening coordination, collaboration and communication. Organizational development training as well as data collection on the priority issues and available alternatives," said Mbang’eny.

He also mentioned a group in implementing SAICM whereby there is inadequate human and financial resources, technical capacity for implementation of projects for SAICM implementation and uncoordinated implementation of chemicals management activities by different organizations, government, CSOs and NGOs.

"There is also poor enforcement of legislative frameworks for environmental management particularly chemicals management leading to many chemicals related accidents and incidents and lack of regulations to control and monitor importation and disposal of e-waste and near expiry electronic equipment," he noted.

Mbang'eny also insisted that people in their homes should stop using the buckets that once had paint in them for keeping drinking water as the chemicals are still there something which is dangerous to human beings’ lives, those buckets are suitable for example gardening (flowers), etc.

According to Gilbert KUPOPU, from CREP, Cameroon, the study conducted there shows that the excess lead concentration found in 67 percent of New House Paints in Cameroon which is too much.

Kupepo said they have also realized that children are at risk of poisoning other substances available (painting of old paints from residences and schools buildings and furniture demonstrated lead presence above recommended levels of 90.

Kupepo said there are challenges in the process, one of them is that it is very difficult or very slow to very slow for the project's activities related to policy issues (like regulation or national standard development) due to Administrative procedures (business process) and the low level of awareness among decision makers. "As far as Uganda is concerned, especially, the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, it is a high lead paint problem," he said.

In adults, blood lead levels in this range of levels are also associated with hypertension, damage to the central nervous system, and the reproductive and developmental systems.