



Cultivating an IPEN Gender Initiative

Thought Starter, developed by IPEN Co-Chairs Olga Speranskaya & Pamela Miller
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Introduction

Gender equality is a fundamental human right that is well-established in international law. Women face substantive barriers to the achievement of equality due to factors such as poverty, prejudice, violence, oppressive social and institutional structures, and lack of inclusion in decisions that affect their lives.¹ Women and girls should be free to realize their potential and rights in all aspects of their lives.

In 2015, more than 190 world leaders committed to 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) designed to assist all people to empower themselves to work toward achieving the SDGs, one of which is Gender Equality. The SDGs came into effect in January 2016 and will continue to guide the policy and funding of the United Nations Development Programme for the next fifteen years.

To ensure realization of the goal of gender equality, IPEN developed a Gender Initiative to empower women in our work to achieve a toxics-free future. IPEN's Gender Initiative will enhance the role of women and women's leadership in local, regional, national, and global efforts to reduce exposures to harmful chemicals and wastes. IPEN will expand the role of women and leadership of women within the network at all levels. This Initiative is based on consultations with IPEN Participating Organizations, builds on their ideas and achievements, and reflects global trends and accumulation of evidence about what should be done to close the existing gaps in gender equality.

Overview

IPEN is a network of more than five-hundred non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working for a toxics-free future in over one-hundred countries in eight regions. IPEN's

¹ Fredman, S. and B. Goldblatt. Gender Equality and Human Rights. July 2015. Discussion Paper for the Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016 Number 4. United Nations Women.



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Participating Organizations (POs) are committed to the development and implementation of safe chemicals policies and practices that protect human health and the environment, recognizing the particular vulnerability of women and children. IPEN POs work to eliminate exposure to chemicals that disrupt endocrine function and cause neurodevelopmental harm, reproductive impairment, cancers, and birth defects. Women are differently susceptible to chemical exposures and health outcomes because of their physiology, different types of occupational exposures, and differential exposures to chemicals in personal care and household products. They are particularly vulnerable during critical windows of development: in utero, early childhood, adolescence, pregnancy, lactation, and menopause.

Women are the first environment for children and the first educators of children. Throughout their lives, women are exposed to numerous harmful chemicals that can be transferred across the placenta during fetal development and through breast milk to the nursing infant. A recent study showed that pregnant women are regularly exposed to multiple chemicals, including chemicals currently used in everyday products as well as others that have been banned since the 1970s. “Certain PCBs, organochlorine pesticides, PFCs, phenols, PBDEs, phthalates, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and perchlorate were detected in 99 to 100% of pregnant women.”² Chemical exposures in the womb or in early childhood may cause lifelong harm. Exposures during fetal development increase the risks of such harmful effects as preterm births, birth defects, childhood and adult diseases. Adverse effects can be carried across multiple generations.

Women’s knowledge about and ability to deliver understanding of crucial environmental issues to their children is important in building a sustainable future. Women cannot be empowered if they are being poisoned by toxic substances and if their children are born pre-polluted. Gender equality cannot be achieved if exposures to hazardous chemicals leave women suffering from cancer, chronic illnesses, infertility, and damage to their nervous systems. Further, the health of girls and women is critical to reducing child disabilities and mortality, and to improving the health of families and communities.

Women are generally underrepresented and often disenfranchised or excluded entirely from positions of power and decision-making about chemical safety, waste, and

² Woodruff, T. et al. 2011. Environmental chemicals in pregnant women in the United States: NHANES 2003-2004. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 119 (6):878-885.



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environment. This creates an unbalance of power and injustice that must be corrected. Women have also been underrepresented or not represented at all in studies concerning chemical exposures and health outcomes. Gender disaggregated data are needed to understand different vulnerabilities based on biology, occupations, and gendered practices. Thus, gender mainstreaming into each step of sound chemicals and waste management decisions at the national and international levels is crucial for achieving effective and inclusive processes. Gender considerations should be part of project planning, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, which will help avoid inequality between women and men and better address ways to minimize chemical exposures for all.

Eliminating gender disparity will empower women and help to successfully achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but this cannot be accomplished if hazardous chemicals are allowed to weaken women across the globe.

Environmental Violence

Indigenous women from the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) and Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT) travelled to New York City in 2012 to participate in meetings with the Expert Group Members of the Permanent Forum of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The focus was on *Combating Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls*. ACAT and IITC introduced the concept of “environmental violence,” which was well received by all participants and later developed by The Native Youth Sexual Health Network as an educational tool in their programs and on their website.³

IITC and ACAT also convened the Second International Indigenous Women’s Symposium on Environmental Reproductive Health in 2012 in Alaska. The women in

Final Report of 2nd International Women’s Symposium – 2012.

The detrimental health effects of toxic contaminants on Indigenous women are well documented... Environmental contaminants causing disease, birth defects and death are deliberately released into the environment by industrial military processes that are judged by states or corporations to pose an “acceptable risk.”... States and corporations deny provable impacts that disproportionately affect Indigenous women and children. This constitutes “environmental violence” by states and corporations and must be identified as such by Indigenous Peoples and human rights bodies.

³The 2nd declaration for health, life and defense of our lands, rights and future generations. Native Youth Sexual Health: Statements & Press Releases. Chickaloon Native Village, Alaska. apr292012pdf – Adobe Pro 2012 <http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/environmentalviolenceandreproductivejustice.html>



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attendance embraced the environmental violence concept by consensus in a Declaration that included specific recommendations to prompt policies on the tribal, regional, national, and international levels to build the leadership capacity of Indigenous women.^{3,4}

Because the groups were focused on “combatting violence” against Indigenous women and children, and because they were also looking at environmental and reproductive justice issues, they defined “environmental violence” in terms of corporate and governmental harm caused to the wombs of Indigenous women. The concept resonated with these Indigenous women of all ages. With some modification to include all women, here is the definition:

Environmental violence occurs when states allow corporations to continue contaminating women despite clear evidence that their polluting activities cause serious health and reproductive harm to women and children.

IPEN has and continues to stand in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples in their struggle to prevent environmental violence.

Proposed IPEN gender initiative 2017-2020: Mission and Approaches

IPEN believes that gender equality is fundamental to international human rights to live in a healthy, violence-free environment where there is no allowance for chemical corporations to violate the integrity and health of people and the environment. The fulfillment of human rights is central to IPEN’s mission and vision.

IPEN promotes gender mainstreaming by supporting the empowerment of women through gender-specific, targeted interventions on the role women play in achieving chemical safety and on the way they have been impacted by toxic chemicals. IPEN also addresses gender concerns in developing, planning, implementing and evaluating chemicals policies and programs at the international, regional, national and local levels.

As Co-Chairs, we suggest that elements of a proposed IPEN Gender Initiative in 2017-2020 should give special attention to women facing inequality due to: 1) poor access to education, 2) poverty, 3) religious or political constraints, and 4) indigenous status.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWhgd1NY9bl>



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IPEN can provide a platform for POs and their NGO partners to share knowledge about best methods to achieve policy changes that produce Gender Equality, especially strategies that focus on sound chemicals management⁵ and waste management. IPEN should assure that women participate equally in each project's action plans, which should include training that raises awareness of gender inequality and monitors each project to ensure that women participate equally and that their priorities are an integral part of planning, managing, and evaluation. IPEN has facilitated gender-specific biomonitoring, and should continue to build on this with more research and data exchange among NGO partners from different countries and regions.

We propose that gender-specific activities become a part of all IPEN project action plans and include specific training on gender awareness-raising and systematic monitoring of project implementation to ensure that gender issues are not forgotten, there is a good gender approach, and women's needs and priorities are considered from planning through evaluation.

IPEN could work closely with governmental institutions, local authorities, the health sector, educational organizations, and intergovernmental institutions to achieve progress on gender equality and establish methods to assist women to empower themselves. IPEN could encourage countries to abide by the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1991);⁶ the Convention on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR); the Equal Remuneration Convention of the International Labour Organization;⁷ the Convention on Economic, and Social and Cultural Rights;⁸ and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and take part in international initiatives, including the Beijing Platform for Action⁹ and Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁰ Participation in these international agreements could help to ensure that gender equality issues are addressed at the legislative level and are reflected in the national constitutions and development strategies that guarantee equal rights and prohibit gender discrimination.

⁵ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=41&menu=35>

⁶ https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en

⁷ http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_llo_Code:C100

⁸ <http://indicators.ohchr.org/>

⁹ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

¹⁰ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.



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Currently, most of the international agreements mentioned above do not include the concerns of women who are beleaguered by harmful chemicals and hazardous waste. However, in December 2013 the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions (BRS) finalized the BRS Gender Action Plan (BRS-GAP) to mainstream gender within the BRS Secretariat. All three of these conventions are concerned with environmental pollutants and must effectively involve women in implementing their missions, *i.e.* Basel: controlling transboundary movements of hazardous waste; Rotterdam: sharing responsibility to maximize safety and minimal risks of industrial chemicals including pesticides; and Stockholm: protecting human health and the environment from persistent organic pollutants (POPs).¹¹

How might IPEN organize the “Gender Initiative”?

Collect input from IPEN’s global network

We recommend that IPEN organize an inventory among POs to identify experiences, good practices, and gender programs related to work on chemicals and waste. Gathering input from IPEN’s POs is crucial to determine progress thus far in addressing gender issues. A survey might include information about experiences, views, activities, and priorities related to gender. The POs’ input would help to assess the interest of the network concerning gender issues and which NGOs might be included in IPEN’s Gender Initiative implementation.

Promote Gender Equality through awareness and education about chemicals safety

IPEN works primarily in developing countries and those with economies in transition, some of which are educating women about chemicals and waste management, but gender gaps continue--especially among the poorest. An obvious lack of awareness remains about the valuable role women can play as agents of change, educators, trainers, and decision-makers in addressing chemicals and waste problems. Not enough women are involved in policies and practices concerning harmful chemicals and hazardous waste, and countries lack sufficient analyses of the link between toxicants and gender. IPEN could increase efforts to close these gaps by providing better access to information about the impact of harmful chemicals and hazardous waste on the health of women and children, and the role women can play in addressing these challenges.

¹¹ <http://www.brsmeas.org/?tabid=3651>



Address the role and status of women within IPEN's POs

Close collaboration with IPEN POs is important to achieving better gender equality outcomes. IPEN could integrate gender trainings with its capacity-building work, to possibly provide policy direction and support to POs as they formulate, implement, and review their gender policies. Closing the gender gap within POs often depends on each country's traditions and religions, education, financing, and projects. This is especially true for those projects that support women's health or deal with health-risk occupations or behaviors.

To better address and close the gender gap, IPEN could work toward developing the capacity to support each organization to educate leaders about harmful chemicals and hazardous wastes and to learn about the benefits that women bring as leaders within their organizations. IPEN could support exchanges among the POs to implement gender strategies, and encourage POs to review their strategies, bylaws, policies and programs for transparent and accountable governance so that they are in harmony with international agreements on gender equality. To elevate women in leadership roles, IPEN will aim for gender balance among staff and key advisors at all times.

IPEN should develop a Gender Policy, provide overall policy direction, and support the formulation, implementation, and review of the Gender Policy of the POs. IPEN could also coordinate advocating, lobbying and networking activities on issues of gender with NGOs and other stakeholders and provide institutional strengthening and capacity development initiatives that advance gender equality.

Improve IPEN leadership and Secretariat staff capacity

IPEN is committed to enhancing the role of women and achieving gender balance within IPEN's Secretariat, Staff, Chairs, Regional Hubs, Steering and Executive Committees, experts, advisors, consultants, and spokespeople. IPEN successfully achieves gender balance among participants in IPEN events and other meetings where IPEN member organizations participate, and IPEN encourages its POs, Hubs, and program/project managers to do the same. IPEN should integrate gender equality issues into staff trainings. These trainings could include the following issues:

- ❖ Raise awareness of the importance of identifying gender gaps in achieving a toxics-free future;
- ❖ Discuss good and bad practices for achieving gender balance;



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- ❖ Enable IPEN staff to provide ideas for achieving gender equality for all IPEN- driven projects and on the-ground programs;
- ❖ Conduct trainings with invited experts about project gender assessment;
- ❖ Conduct trainings with invited experts about methods to generate gender disaggregated data for IPEN biomonitoring projects and programs.

IPEN could set up a Gender Resource Centre within the IPEN structure that will help to develop overall policy direction and coordinate advocacy and networking on gender issues with IPEN Hubs and POs. The Centre could strengthen IPEN's capacity to develop initiatives that advance gender equality, and help mobilize resources for gender mainstreaming. Trainings and research will be conducted at the Centre to build capacity for gender responsive interventions at all levels within IPEN.

IPEN could monitor a Gender Initiative implementation effort through program-specific reports, Regional Hub meetings and annual staff meetings. The results of the monitoring could be incorporated into IPEN's reports to donors.

Collaborate with external women's organizations and others on gender-related programs

Although there are many women's organizations and gender strategies developed by different organizations, only a few include the link between gender and chemicals and highlight the importance of gender equality in the work on toxic chemicals and waste. Health groups make efforts to address women's issues with the aim of reducing maternal mortality ratios, ensuring hygiene and sanitation, and attending to nutritional needs, but most fail to make the important link between gender and chemicals exposure.

Nevertheless, some NGOs and networks are paying attention to this link. For example: Women Engaged for a Common Future (WECF) developed a guide on *Why and How to Achieve Gender Equality in the Sanitation and Wastewater Sector*; Pesticide Action Network Asia-Pacific prepared a publication on pesticides, livelihoods and women's health; and Envirocare in Tanzania recently developed a *Gender Strategy on Sound Chemicals Management*. IPEN could build on these experiences, and explore strategic collaborations.

In reviewing international projects funded by the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, Health and Environment Justice Support, an IPEN PO,



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conducted a study showing that the majority of projects on chemicals and wastes implemented between 2006 and 2014 under the SAICM Quick Start Programme clearly missed gender considerations. This was despite the fact that the countries where the projects were carried out had committed to the implementation of gender equality through such mechanisms as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

When it becomes more obvious to more people that the link between sound chemicals management and Gender Equality is important for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the majority of organizations and countries will have to “start from scratch.” This is where IPEN’s experience and that of the POs could become an invaluable source of information for raising capacity and awareness among organizations and movements beyond IPEN’s network, including intergovernmental organizations, health and victims groups, and human rights groups.

IPEN could collaborate with external organizations by increasing media coverage and public awareness about the effects of harmful chemicals on women, make more presentations at meetings set up by groups within and outside of IPEN (including meetings that include discussions about environmental violence), and ensure that these groups are invited to IPEN-hosted events at regional, national, and international levels.

IPEN should make additional connections with groups working on human rights and health issues such as cancer and other diseases that may have strong links with toxic chemical exposure with the goal to link them to the work IPEN is doing on chemicals. IPEN could build on its experience of working with Minamata victims of mercury exposure and continue to share this knowledge with other health, victims, and human rights groups. These actions also bring new expertise into the IPEN network, which is much needed at the regional and national levels.

Develop new and work on existing IPEN activities to expand the role of women

IPEN currently works on four primary areas that are described on IPEN’s website at <http://ipen.org/about-ipen>. These are:

- 1) Reducing and Eliminating the World’s Most Hazardous Chemicals;
- 2) Promoting Stronger International Chemicals Standards;
- 3) Halting the Spread of Toxic Metals; and
- 4) Building a Global Toxics-Free Movement.



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Building upon IPEN's 2020 plan, a proposed IPEN women's leadership group could focus on developing 2020 objectives to reflect IPEN's commitment to gender equality and human rights, and in addressing environmental violence.

Because it is fundamental to all that we do to achieve a toxics-free future, IPEN will continue to advocate for the Precautionary Principle in our work to protect vulnerable populations. The precautionary principle was described in a March 2005 report by the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) and published by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). A UNESCO COMEST website¹² provides a discussion and definition for the Precautionary Principle:

THE PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

When human activities may lead to morally unacceptable harm that is scientifically plausible but uncertain, actions shall be taken to avoid or diminish that harm.

"Morally unacceptable harm refers to harm to human or the environment that is threatening to human life or health, or serious and effectively irreversible, or inequitable to present or future generations, or imposed without adequate consideration of the human rights of those affected."

[*ibid*]

Suggested Action Plans

To highlight the role of women in addressing toxics issues, IPEN could allocate space on its website for stories about women heroes, especially those from POs who are working at the grassroots and regional levels. IPEN could also draw on previous experience to conduct environmental health and justice campaigns specifically focused on women. Below are examples of possible actions:

1. Conduct biomonitoring studies and explain results to participants, their communities, and public media.
2. Expose harmful chemicals in women's and children's products.

¹² <http://www.precautionaryprinciple.eu/>



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3. Create a brochure and/or fact sheets about environmental violence and the Precautionary Principle.
4. Conduct speaking tours to inform women, health care professionals, policymakers, and the general public about the necessity to end environmental violence by using the precautionary principle.
5. Train women to become public speakers who address environmental violence issues and the precautionary principle.
6. Investigate gender specific routes of chemical exposure;
7. Educate parents and caregivers about the exposure pathways of harmful chemicals.
8. Advocate at the national, regional and international level for gender equity policies in relation to chemicals and waste and the precautionary principle, and to end environmental violence.
9. Map priority chemical hotspots and hazardous waste sites that affect the health of women and children.

Special attention should be made to use careful and sensitive methods (such as those developed by Silent Spring Institute) for reporting results of monitoring and to inspire women to take actions to protect themselves, their children, and communities.

IPEN could time the release of biomonitoring results, data and recommendations prior to international events such as International Women's Day, International Workers' Day and others. Many IPEN POs could take part in these campaigns based on their previous experiences of joining campaigns focused on lead and mercury elimination, or chemicals in products. Such actions could help to build capacity of civil society, private sector and government institutions on gender, human rights and chemicals.

IPEN could focus on occupations dominated by women: nursing, artisanal gold mining (ASGM), farming, janitorial, and others where women are disproportionately harmed by toxic chemicals. IPEN reports could be developed and released in conjunction with



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events such as the International Women’s Day, International Workers’ Day, ExCOPs (Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions), Open-Ended Working Group for SAICM, and the International Conference on Chemicals Management.

IPEN is committed to the full implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 5: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” IPEN believes that this especially relates to the important role of women in environmental decision-making, whether as consumers, agricultural or industrial workers, or researchers and politicians. Without meeting this target, women cannot exercise their environmental responsibilities effectively. IPEN will continue to work to realize Gender Equality while assisting women to empower themselves to contribute to sound chemicals and waste management.

IPEN is committed to the important role of women in environmental decision-making.

IPEN Women’s Caucus:

On November 15, 2016, in conjunction with the IPEN Global Meeting, the Co-Chairs convened an initial meeting of thirteen women leaders¹³ within IPEN including staff, current and former Co-Chairs, and Steering Committee members. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the Gender Initiative paper and determine possible next steps.

Outcomes/Next Steps: The participants agreed that this is a very important issue for IPEN and that we should develop a Women’s Caucus to provide a forum for planning, discussion, and engagement. Initially, the group suggested that we establish a listserv in order to facilitate communications. The group suggested that the Women’s Caucus may have rotating co-chairs. Participants also noted the importance of considering the needs of different regions, and that multiple languages must be taken into account. The Caucus would work to further develop and implement an IPEN strategy on gender issues.

The group suggested a three-focus approach:

1. Work on gender issues within the IPEN network;

¹³ Sara Brosché, Alexandra Caterbow, Jennifer Federico, Semia Gharbi, Imogen Ingram, Yuyun Ismawati, Genon Jensen, Maria Johansson, Mariann Lloyd-Smith, Pamela Miller, Sharyle Patton, Maria Elena Rozas, and Olga Speranskaya



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2. Work on gender issues within IPEN projects or projects in which IPEN collaborates;
3. Work on gender issues related to exposure to toxic chemicals.

Regarding the focus on work on gender and toxics chemicals, it was noted that although the relevant Conventions include language about women/children being especially vulnerable, very little information and resource materials on the issue are available. The few materials available were mentioned and it was agreed that additional informational materials are needed.

Participants discussed the concepts of environmental violence against women and children and the rights of children. The group also discussed the linkages between women and chemicals and human rights and chemicals and how to better integrate them in IPEN's projects.

Some ideas from the discussion:

- Analyze the problem and see how we can connect this in specific Conventions;
- Establish a Women's Caucus initially chaired by current IPEN Co-Chairs, with a rotation in Fall 2017;
- Form a Women's Caucus listserv of women IPENers willing to be involved;
- Connect with additional civil society groups and introduce this as women's issue;
- Create opportunities to educate women about the issue (e.g. women feel guilty and/or are being blamed for transferring chemical pollution to children; much unawareness);
- Influence national curricula;
- Develop case studies about certain chemicals and their effects on women's health;
- Develop specific guidance on women in ASGM;
- Create opportunities for training and for women to share experiences;
- Create an internet-based platform for women to share their problems and ideas related to toxic chemicals exposure.