

Panel: Use of Chemicals in South Asia: Environmental Health Threats and Challenges

Chemicals know no geographical borders. Their presence has been reported in places and regions far away from their source of release and emissions. Chemicals travel in every direction and contaminate all segments of environment. Adverse health impacts, especially on children, pregnant women and the elderly, due to hazardous chemicals like persistent organic pollutants (POPs), metals/metallic compounds, such as mercury are well known and established. Unhealthy population leads to both poor economy and poor life quality.

Mercury ranked as the third most hazardous substance is a fast emerging global issue of grave concern, leading to global negotiations among representatives of national governments and finally enacting “Minamata Convention on Mercury” which has already been signed by Pakistan and many other countries in Asia. The main objective of the convention is to reduce mercury use and control its emission and release by 2020 for safeguarding public health and provide environmental protection.

However, ratification (so far only two countries have done so) and implementation of Minamata convention on mercury is a big challenge, especially for developing countries and countries with economy in transition, in view of low priority to environmental issues, lack of resources, technology and technological knowhow.

The main focus of the session would be to discuss and define pathways to achieve the above, through on-going and future research work, training, awareness raising, advocacy and collaboration at the national and regional levels. Participants would also share the status of mercury related health and environmental issues, policy interventions, workable solutions and the national implementation plan (NIP) in their respective countries. Besides South Asia, contributions are also invited from countries of other regions, highlighting the success stories which may serve as lessons learnt.

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