Panelist Abstract

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Name of Session: Session VI. GEF-Related Activities in International Waters – Concurrent Information Session II - Thematic Session
Presentation Title: Protecting the Environment from Persistent Toxic Substances: UNEP's Action in the Framework of the GEF

Summary of Key Issues and Best Practices/Lessons Learned

Toxic chemicals that persist for a long time in the environment, travel great distances through various media from their point of origin, bio-accumulate in humans and other organisms, and are bio-concentrated through food chains are referred to as persistent toxic substances (PTS). They can be organic or organo-metallic compounds, or heavy metals; they include persistent organic pollutants (POPs) which have been classified as pesticides, industrial chemicals, or unwanted by-products of industrial processes or combustion. The evidence of detrimental effects on living organisms at the population level demonstrates that PTS are a threat to biological diversity, and even have potential for disruption at the ecosystem level. PTS are one of the priorities of the Contaminant-based Operational Programme of the GEF International Waters focal area (OP-10). Building on its historical interest and strengths in the area of chemicals and given its role in the support to the on-going negotiations for a global POPs convention, UNEP has made a concerted effort to build a coherent portfolio based on a strategy paper issued in 1998.

The UNEP-GEF project portfolio on persistent toxic substances

The portfolio is structured such that the "Regionally-based Assessment" will provide an objective scientific assessment of the global extent and significance of PTS related problems. It will highlight global priorities in terms of specific geographic areas and issues, thus focussing future GEF interventions on objectively identified priorities. The "National Management Needs", in contrast, is designed to evaluate the issue from the country level where the range of issues and problems is equally diverse. The ultimate goal of the project will be to assist 8-12 participating pilot countries to meet their obligations under the future POPs Convention, and to provide widely applicable guidelines on the assessment of PTS related problems and country needs with regard to their management.

Demonstration projects at the country level that address known priorities and involve preventive, mitigation, or remedial actions are required to complement these two programmatic projects. Thus the proposal "Reducing Pesticide Runoff to the Caribbean Sea" addresses pesticide use in the commercial agricultural sector and seeks to promote alternative practices including Integrated Pest Management; the "Russian Arctic Indigenous Peoples" medium size project is an assessment of food chain contamination and will propose remedial actions to affected populations; and the DDT proposal addresses the pressing issue of implementing viable alternatives to DDT in malaria vector control.

Regionally-based Assessment of Persistent Toxic Substances

Country: Global
Executing Agency: Secretariat of the POPs negotiations (UNEP Chemicals Unit)
Duration: 2 years (September 2000 – August 2002)
Funding: GEF: US$ 3 million; Co-financing: US$ 2 million

Persistent Toxic Substances, Food Security, and Indigenous Peoples in the Russian North (MSP)
Country: Russian Federation
Executing Agency: AMAP in collaboration with RAIPON
Duration: 3 years (under appraisal)
Funding: GEF: US$ 750,000; Co-financing: US$ 2 million

Reducing Pesticide Runoff in the Caribbean Sea (PDF-B)
Country: Southwest Caribbean (Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama)
Executing Agency: Regional: Secretariat of the Cartagena Convention (UNEP-CAR/RCU)
Cost estimate (project): GEF: US$ 3-5 million; Co-financing: US$ 2-4 million

Assessing National Management Needs of Persistent Toxic Substances (PDF-B)
Country: Global
Executing Agency: Secretariat of the POPs negotiations (UNEP Chemicals Unit)
Cost estimate (project): GEF: US$ 3-4 million; Co-financing: US$ 3-4 million

Comprehensive Action Programme to Phase-out DDT in Mexico and Central America (PDF-B)
Country: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama
Executing Agency: Regional: Pan American Health Organization
Cost estimate (project): GEF: US$ 2.5 million; Co-financing: US$ 2.5 million

Conclusions

The PTS portfolio is not yet mature enough to attempt to assess "lessons learned". It is, however, possible to emphasise a few important points that were recognised in the original UNEP-GEF strategy: A comprehensive approach to dealing with PTS related environmental issues will require multi-faceted interventions addressing technical issues, scientific assessments, policy reforms, capacity building and investments. Such an approach requires the collaboration between a wide variety of agencies and organisations, including civil society and the private sector.

Addressing POPs in the GEF poses another challenge: one of the estimation of incremental costs. No one will deny that some PTS (including the 12 POPs identified for international action so far) represent a global issue, and that many more are a transboundary regional issue. It remains, however, that many PTS related issues have a local/national dimension. The concept of incremental cost will have to be applied in a creative and flexible manner. Cost-sharing will be an important factor.

A changing scene: the situation is evolving rapidly with regards to PTS and the GEF. The negotiations for a legally binding instrument on POPs are expected to conclude in December 2000, and the future convention to be adopted and opened for signature in May 2001. The GEF has expressed its readiness to act as the financial mechanism for the Convention, should the parties so desire, and should additional resources be made available. The issues of financial requirements and financial mechanism are still to be determined by the negotiators, but irrespectively of the outcome of these discussions, the GEF Council has requested that increased support be given to POPs/PTS country driven initiatives in the field of POPs.

Links

UNEP's POPs page : http://irptc.unep.ch/pops/ (negotiations, POPs and alternatives, useful links)
The International POPs Elimination Network is a global network of NGOs united in support of a common POPs Elimination Platform: http://www.ipen.org/