



The Global Inventory Project - A Brief Overview

Summary

The Global Inventory Project (GIP) is a joint effort by the Blacksmith Institute, UNIDO, Green Cross Switzerland and the European Commission to develop a comprehensive database of polluted places across the planet. Based on the existing Blacksmith database of 500 polluted sites and Initial Site Assessment protocol, this project seeks to fortify already catalogued sites and discover other communities impacted by industrial and mining pollutants.

Focused specifically in developing countries and those with economies in transition, the GIP is concerned primarily with identifying sites where pollution may be impacting human health, and conducting a screening health risk assessment that can be used as a starting point for the design of future interventions. Other information related to the site and its stakeholders is also collected and compiled in an on-line database.

Background

Industrial wastes, air emissions, and legacy pollution affect over a billion people around the world, with millions poisoned and killed each year. Despite the increasing efforts applied over the past two decades into improving environmental institutions and systems, toxic pollution in developing countries is a major risk to human health.

Polluted sites can be found in all poor countries. Industrial areas with poor pollution controls can be found in many, others have abandoned smelters (such as Kabwe, Zambia, with lead as the contaminant) or mines that have runoff draining into water supplies (such as in the Philippines). Others are urban areas with illegal dump-sites of various chemical toxins which frequently pollute local water supplies. Battery processing facilities that are informal and unregulated pollute city blocks with lead (such as in Dakar, Senegal). Ground water polluted with the cancer-causing hexavalent chromium is the only choice for drinking around many around tanneries and factories. Sites contaminated with radionuclide are scattered in many Central Asian countries.

Sadly, the adverse impacts of toxic pollution are particularly severe on children. They play outside, and are exposed to larger doses of toxins than adults. Smaller bodies, coupled with maturing biological systems also accumulate higher doses per unit of mass, causing greater harm. Certain pollutants can permanently damage brain cells and nervous systems in young bodies. The longer these problems are left unaddressed, the more children are harmed. If children are the future, then toxic pollution – besides being morally indefensible – seriously stunts the economic prospects of developing countries.



The Global Inventory Project's key objective is to provide data to governments and international organizations that will enable them to prioritize activities and programs that will mitigate this risk, saving the lives of millions of people.

The Process

Coordinated through Blacksmith's New York head offices, a team of investigators in over 80 countries is being trained to conduct Initial Site Assessments (ISA) of polluted sites. Working in collaboration with local and national authorities, the site assessment process reviews and collects as much information as possible from all stakeholders, including local NGO's, businesses, technical agencies, and governments.

The ISA protocol, developed by Blacksmith over a decade of activity in polluted sites, involves a visit to the site and a review of key technical and historical information. Samples are taken, where credible test results are not already available, and information collected related to population and pollutant pathway.

This data is then used to calculate a ranking for the site on the Blacksmith Index. The Blacksmith Index gives a number from 1 to 6, with the latter indicating the highest risk to human health from pollution.

All site information is input into an on-line database, and reviewed by a team of technical experts. Other experts conduct field visits for quality assurance purposes. Summary reports for country authorities will also be produced as needed. Non-confidential information will be made available for public access at www.hpfund.org.

Timeframe

The Global Inventory Project will commence in January 2009, and is planned for completion in the middle of 2010.

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