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Elimination of Obsolete Pesticide Stockpiles and Addressing POPs (Persistent Organic Pollutants) and Contaminated Sites within a Sound Chemicals Management Framework in Armenia

UNDP/GEF full-sized Project

2017 FIRST MEETING OF THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT BOARD

Session hall of the Ministry of Nature Protection

April 4, 2017

11:00-13:00

Participants

<i>Members of the Project Management Board</i>		
1.	Khachik Hakobyan	Deputy Minister of Nature Protection of the RA, co-chair of the Project Management Board
2.	Vrezh Gabrielyan	Deputy head of the Rescue Service of the Staff of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the RA, co-chair of the Project Management Board
3.	Lilia Shushanyan	Adviser to the Minister-Chief of Government Staff of the Republic of Armenia
4.	Ashot Harutyunyan	Deputy Minister of Agriculture of the RA
5.	Dmitry Mariyasin	UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Armenia
<i>UNDP</i>		
6.	Armen Martirosyan	UNDP environmental projects coordinator
7.	Gayane Gharagebakyan	Project coordinator, UNDP
8.	Vardan Tserunyan	UNDP Project TOR leader
9.	Kristina Tereshchatova	Project assistant, UNDP
<i>Participants</i>		
10.	Anahit Alexandryan	Head of the Hazardous Substances and Waste Policy Division, Ministry of Nature Protection of the RA
11.	Armen Vardanyan	Head of the Information and Public Relation Department, Ministry of Nature Protection of the RA

Presented documents/materials:

- Modified list of the Project Management Board members,
- Project work plan 2017,
- Brief description of the major project activities involved in the Project work plan 2017.

Introduction/Opening speech

Mr. Khachik Hakobyan, deputy Minister of Nature Protection of RA, co-chair of the Project Management Board (PMB) made an opening speech presenting the newly appointed members of the Project Management Board: Mr. Vrezh Gabrielyan, Deputy head of the Rescue Service of the Staff of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of RA, co-chair of the Project Management Board, Mrs. Lilia Shushanyan, Adviser to the Minister-Chief of Government Staff of the Republic of Armenia and Mr. Dmitry Mariyasin, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Armenia, as well as other participants of the PMB meeting. Mr. Hakobyan also presented the meeting agenda suggesting that one more issue be included, namely, the brief description of the activities implemented in 2016, so that the Board could draw a conclusion on the work done. Then Mr. Hakobyan gave the floor to Mr. Gabrielyan.

In his opening speech Mr. Gabrielyan specified the issue of the waste storage to be built in Kotayk region of RA; he suggested that the discussion on the subject should take into consideration that the area/storage facility expected to host hazardous chemicals should serve as a national center where hazardous waste collected from different places could be transferred. The next proposal referred to considering the potential option of moving the storage facility from priorly assigned Kotayk surroundings to another, more remote and environmentally safe location. The speaker stressed that the facility should be only temporary storage for obsolete pesticides, and, indeed, it should meet all sanitary-hygiene, technical and environmental norms and standards to preserve the substances properly. A question was asked - whether the pesticide waste would be moved out of the country in three years so that there is no need to repackage it. It was mentioned that the positive conclusion of the environmental expertise will provide an opportunity to tackle these issues, and the facility established back in the Soviet era used to serve similar purposes in the past and can also be considered as an acceptable option. Mr. Hakobyan asked whether there were other hypothethic alternatives or not.

With regard to the next issue on the Project co-funding Mr. Hakobyan said that since the fixed assets of the Project and, in particular, state co-funding means are very limited, it is important to negotiate with international partners and organizations to raise additional funds and involve them in the implementation of separate components of the Project. A suggestion was voiced to target all the development agencies and embassies which have ever expressed their interest in the Project. In view of this circumstance, Mr. Hakobyan suggested that the Project team should prepare a brief summary about the Project within 10 days and establish a negotiating team and specific schedule plan of negotiation meetings to organize and perform them efficiently.

Mr. Martirosyan appreciated Mr. Gabrielyan's remarks and stated that the capacities the state is going to build through the Project in this region will later serve for storing other chemicals, and these issues should be viewed in a long-term perspective. He further added if there are any other alternatives, maybe they should already be considering them, without losing 6-7 months on examining the currently proposed area. Mr. Martirosyan suggested that alternative options be considered during the mentioned 10-day period, other similar premises be identified at disposal of both the Ministry of Emergency Situations of RA and the Ministry of Nature Protection of RA. It was stated that a very thinly populated, little-used area, far from agricultural lands, settlements and people should be provided. Mr. Hakobyan mentioned

the opportunity of using the area for conservation of some hazardous substances within the site of Nairit industrial unit. Mr. Gabrielyan and Mrs. Alexandryan said it was impossible.

Mr. Mariyasin welcomed the participants of the PMB meeting and the current discussion, saying it was necessary at the moment when major financial decisions are not yet taken. He offered to give the Project team an opportunity to present the previous outcomes of the Project and the planned activities. He shared Mrs. Alexandryan's idea that all problems related to preservation of chemical waste in the country cannot be settled within the framework of this Project, since there are restrictions related to the Stockholm Convention and project documents (which are approved by the UNDP, RA Government, and GEF, and amendments will need to be introduced officially on other level), saying that the PMB can come up with proposals but it cannot solve the issues fully. Mr. Mariyasin also mentioned two issues voiced during his meeting with the Minister of Emergency Situations: how the project can support the elimination of a wider range of chemicals existing in the country, and what's the integrated perspective of Armenia's current potential for preservation and elimination of chemical waste. Mr. Mariyasin welcomed the idea of establishing a working group to negotiate with donors and suggested that the timeframe for preparing a brief summary be extended until late April.

Mr. Hakobyan, briefly covering the outcomes of the previous year's project activities, named them below satisfactory because of activity delay. He highly assessed the professional qualities of the Project team and the transparency of the work; the activities have always been visible for the Board. However, there have been delays, and he believes the year was lost in terms of chronology, so he urged to make the project activities more efficient.

Mr. Harutyunyan voiced concerns over the launch of reconstruction of the hazardous chemical waste storage facility in Kotayk/Hrazdan included in the Project work plan, noting that bearing in mind the proposal to move the facility to an alternative location voiced during the meeting, this work is also open to question. It was mentioned that the final approval of the storage location will in any case depend on the results of the environmental expertise.

Mrs. Shushanyan welcomed the participants and thanked them for their views, offering her support in tackling the problems. She asked to present the works implemented last year in these aspects so that they could see what decisions need to be taken, or what works the Board members should commence, because the last year's gaps must be filled during this year.

Mr. Hakobyan offered to present the works of the previous year and then move on to the work to be done in 2017.

Mrs. Gharagebakyan thanked the participants for the interesting discussion at the beginning of the meeting, saying there are numerous concerns. While acknowledging that the works had been delayed, Mrs. Gharagebakyan however disagreed with the view that no result has been achieved. According to her, the previous year started with agreements reached with the parties as to what specific contribution each unit would bring to specific activities. In particular, she presented the successful work with Yerevan municipality, numerous visits to Nubarashen site where even the selection of a safer road to the landfill took much effort due to joint visits of Mr. Areyan and specialists, and measurement works. On June 26, 2016 the decision of Yerevan mayor was approved; measurements were taken at Nubarashen waste dump, and the site was assigned for implementation of the project activities. "Yerevan Jur" was instructed, and "Electric Networks of Armenia" company was offered to support the installation of the main necessary infrastructures. During the first half of the year a tender for Nubarashen cleaning works design was announced, the evaluation of which took much time. The Board was informed about this process through meetings and messages. The tender was cancelled in August, despite being legitimate in terms of the

format and procedure. There was a winner organization, but some technical disagreements by the UNDP leadership during the evaluation process led to the decision to cancel and reannounce the tender.

The TOR for Kotayk was also developed, the tender was announced but there was no winner, since the two technically eligible proposals offered huge budgets (660 thousand and 347.7 thousand USD, accordingly) which exceeded the one planned by the Project. In case of selection the budget deficient should have to be covered by the stakeholder, the MES; this scenario would be quite unwelcome. Another aspect of the project activities that Mrs. Gharagebakyan touched upon was the waste transit through the country. She said a working visit to Georgia was organized in late 2016 which involved, among others, the first meeting in the Georgian ministry. It had been repeatedly mentioned there was a problem with Georgia. Actually, the problem is not with Georgia, but with the fact that the Georgian legislation bans transit of hazardous substances through the country. Armenia's legislation also prohibits transit of hazardous materials through our country. A number of meetings should be organized in order to find reasonable solutions. However, this stage requires more updated information about Nubarashen site evaluation in order to get more specific answers. Mrs. Gharagebakyan clarified that the design envisages work modelling, and there should be a plan to locate and move the equipment in this area.

A question was asked as to what act regulates transit through Georgia. Mrs. Alexandryan said that the waste transit is regulated by provisions of Basel Convention which says it is up to the country to specify the hazardous waste it bans. The ban covers transit and import, while the export is allowed, if the country of import is specified. It was also mentioned that the Basel Convention aims to prevent uninformed transit of hazardous substances, but according to its provisions countries may enter into bilateral agreements for transboundary movement of waste for disposal in an environmentally sound manner, taking into consideration that the country of import has capacities exceeding the annual imported amount. In view of the above-said, Alexandryan stressed that there is no barrier hindering a bilateral agreement between our countries.

It was presented that the design tender for Kotayk storage facility has been evaluated, and the winner organization is selected; contract signing works are underway. The storage design works are expected to be finalized within five months after the signing; however, depending on the EIA final approval, which depends on the process of public hearings.

Concerns were voiced with regard to the following: if during the design works the Nubarashen waste cleaning project appears to be much more expensive than envisaged by the budget, how the process will be organized. Mrs. Alexandryan clarified that according to preliminary estimates, Nubarashen contains not more than 500 tons of obsolete pesticides (OP), and the actual amount may appear to be even less. About 7000 tons of contaminated soil needs to be just neutralized, which is not a difficult task. Mrs. Alexandryan asked whether they could consider the option of placing the excavated waste on a platform with a simple cover and package it safely on the site in compliance with the UN requirements. She voiced the opinion that the transfer of the waste could be organized without storing it in the storage facility; the packaged waste can be accumulated at another location, and the project will benefit much from it. Mrs. Alexandryan once again emphasized that the attention should be focused on the mentioned 1000 tons of waste. Cleaning of 7000 tons of contaminated soils is easier to handle, since there are express test devices which can define the degree of soil contamination on the site. A cover should be placed on the site, and guarded for 3-4 months, so that the waste could be temporarily stored in that place. With regard to this approach a remark was voiced stating that a political decision was made during the project development, so that the project would also support the establishment of local infrastructures. The government wanted to have reserve infrastructure, and the elimination of 1000 tons of waste is not the final solution of the waste problem. Meanwhile, the creation of a temporary storage facility in Nubarashen is impossible because of landslide risks, and namely these risks were the justification for quick removal of the waste

from that location. Mr. Hakobyan asked for a detailed discussion of scenario content at the board meeting so that they could introduce the required changes, if necessary.

With regard to Kotayk storage facility Mr. Mariyasin noted that UNDP is a supporting party, voicing willingness to not support acceleration of the Project implementation. Mr. Mariyasin also touched upon the need to respond, in a precise and timely manner, to questions raised by the NGOs. He said maybe there is need to organize meetings to provide comments, because there are problems related to both misunderstanding and mercenary ends, when the latter are attempted to be covered under altruist reasons. Mr. Hakobyan reminded of a similar precedent related to transfer of 7000 tons of contaminated soil. The issue was voiced by the NGOs, the UNDP and MES were informed. An alternative option was developed and submitted to the board; a week later the board convened a meeting and presented a proposal which resulted in a change in the terms of reference. This means that those opposing the issue should have a clear understanding of the specific way of addressing it, so that the problem could be solved. It was mentioned that active work should be done in terms of public awareness. This awareness-raising should be carried out on a regular basis in the format of organized cooperation with the mass media. A proposal was voiced to first specify and clarify the issues, and then move on to awareness-raising.

Mrs. Gharagebakyan agreed that it is too early to disseminate information in terms of activities; however, the country faces an information gap on the danger of persistent organic pollutants. There is very generic information, e.g. the Convention, the stockpiles, etc. Still, POPs comprise not only the pesticides, and there is need to understand the problem in a broader framework.

Mr. Hakobyan once again underlined the need to regulate the information segment. He suggested that the project should allocate some funding in 2017 for a team to work towards shaping the correct public opinion. Mrs. Alexandryan mentioned that the public is sufficiently informed about the POPs: materials and leaflets were regularly distributed in 2002, the NGO “Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment” has implemented numerous public awareness-raising programs. The commitments undertaken under the Stockholm Convention comprise many indicators in accordance with which the government should report, and most of them refer namely to the data on Nubarashen dump. Mrs. Shushanyan suggested that the awareness-raising measures target not the POPs but the Project. She proposed to develop materials and organize a general meeting/workshop with the civil society representatives to present the project and the activities in two months.

Mrs. Gharagebakyan remarked there are different soil-cleaning technologies, but according to the GEF requirement, the cleaning process should take place within the Project framework, i.e. no uncleaned amount should remain there after the Project completion. This would narrow the range of the technology selection. So they’d perhaps opt for thermal cleaning (burning) of the soil, and modules will be imported from abroad. Another question is whether they would remain in the country or taken away once the service is delivered; this is to be settled later. The selection of solutions will require months-long work, from soil sampling to selection of the best optimal technology. Taking into consideration the risks related to sampling of estimated 2nd category contaminated soil, Mr. Harutyunyan suggested to assign the sampling and testing to 3-4 priorly chosen companies, in order to avoid further discrepancies and related problems.

Mr. Hakobyan wondered whether the designer is expected to carry out training. Mrs. Gharagebakyan said they would develop all training materials in accordance with the environmental and healthcare plan, and the team will involve relevant training specialists. This refers to both Kotayk and Nubarashen subprojects. Training materials will be developed in accordance with the operational plan. The latter will serve as a basis for both design and training. Maintenance team will be appointed in Kotayk by the

MES of the RA. The specialist developing the operational plan will develop training materials on environmental and healthcare security basing on this plan. Training of trainers will take place, involving participants from relevant departments to ensure continuity of the training in the future.

Mr. Harutyunyan voiced concerns over falling behind the planned schedule of the project components suggesting that either the Project completion date be postponed, or all project commitments should be fulfilled by the estimated Project end. Mr. Martirosyan asked to record the given concern noting that since they have only one-time project extension opportunity, it would be more appropriate to address this issue in late 2018 when it is clear how much time the full completion of the works would require. In addition, Mr. Hakobyan said they should take into account the circumstance that the selected decontamination equipment and method would have certain timeframe which might not necessarily match the date of the Project completion. Therefore, when this becomes known, and the timeframe is specified, they would be able to provide GEF with a more logical justification for the required extension of the Project.

Mr. Hakobyan came up with the last proposal to specify the schedule of the Board meetings in compliance with the logic of Project works and stages in 2017.

Proposals/Decisions

- Prepare, within 10 days, the project summary and the schedule of meetings of the project team and international missions;
- In 20-day period, prepare the list of specific project activities in 2017;
- Within 20 days develop a plan for involving a specialized company to implement a public awareness-raising campaign;
- Taking into consideration the risks related to sampling of estimated 2nd category contaminated soil, assign the sampling and testing to 3-4 priorly chosen companies;
- Develop the schedule of the Management Board meetings, in compliance with the logic of Project works and stages in 2017.

Khachik Hakobyan

Vrezh Gabrielyan

Deputy Minister of Nature Protection of the RA,
Co-chair of the Project Management Board

Deputy Director of the Rescue Service of the Staff
Ministry of Emergency Situations of the RA,
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