

Arnika & Nature University Fund

Report on EU-China NGO Twinning program

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Both exchanging organizations Arnika and Nature University have been cooperating on a joint project focused on strengthening the capacity of pollution victims and civil society organizations to increase chemical safety in China. The project was implemented under an umbrella of the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN). Within the mentioned project we were aiming to improve capacities and abilities of impacted communities and environmental groups for involvement in policy making; establish networks and collaborative advocacy actions that contribute to building long-term relationships among cross-cutting sectors of stakeholders; and to generate and distribute new data and information about pollution and pollution victims that contributes to better formulation and implementation of local and national chemical safety policies.

Jitka Straková, Arnika, Czech Republic

Between September 5th and October 3rd 2014, I was visiting our partner organization Nature University Fund in China for a job-shadowing stage as part of the EU-China NGO-Twinning-Program.

I have been working with Mao Da and his organization Nature University over last two years within the China Chemical Safety Project, also including providing expertise on approaches to monitor chemical safety, but unfortunately I have had only very limited opportunity to explore the specific situation in China. During my time in China I wanted to explore the implementation of e.g. pollution hot spots monitoring, sampling and result interpreting in the cultural environment of China. I also wanted to visit several pollution hot spots and learn more about Chinese NGOs' day-to-day working environment.

Main activities and products of the exchange

Soil and egg sampling

Preparation of monitoring and testing of polluted sites and interpretation of the results was the key part of my exchange. In China, when the public applies to the government for the release of emission data, especially the emission of incineration of dioxin and heavy metals, they are usually refused. Not only the central government but also local governments do not disclose emission data. Independent monitoring then becomes significant. This is why we collected data that can be used for negotiations with companies and governments. We focused on testing of heavy metals concentration in soil and dioxins in chicken eggs. This was a step for the pollution victims to find out about emission levels and their impacts on

communities. Monitoring and testing was done in close cooperation with residents of several townships.

A pitch about the Miyun case, where soil was sampled during my stay in China, was elaborated and released at China Dialogue.

Workshop on building a Pollution Victim Aid System in China, Kunming

In the past few years, when environmental NGOs or activists have been intervening at pollution cases in China, they have faced different barriers to protecting victims' rights, calls for polluters' responsibility and remediating pollution harm at the legal and policy level there. Those barriers to Pollution Victim Aid were identified and investigated in the workshop. For example, it was mentioned that in the field of the "right to know", environmental protection bureaus often postpone or reject citizens' information application by requiring so-called proof of qualification. In the field of environmental impact assessment (EIA), the law does not indicate clearly which party (the EIA company or the project developer) can be held responsible for the errors in public participation surveys. When a victim files a suit, the court can reject the case while not issuing an order stating the rejection, which is illegal. Therefore, the more cases are paid attention to and intervened, the more legal and policy problems for aiding pollution victims are discovered. Although NGOs and activists usually tackle these problems during case intervention, it was helpful to summarize them in a two-day workshop in Kunming resulting in a good resource for future policy intervention campaign and case intervention application in China.

Pollution victims, individual activists, environmental NGOs, lawyers, foundation and MEP representatives as well as technical, medical and human aid experts participated in the workshop. The activity reached the desired stakeholder groups.

A press release about the outputs of the workshop was elaborated and shared with Chinese media.

Excursions

To better understand the Chinese waste management system, we visited municipal waste incineration plants and waste separation in villages. I learned that the waste separation in Beijing is a decentralized system and source of income for the poorest part of population.

Building multi-stakeholder relationships

During my stay in China we visited the EU delegation in Beijing and informed them about our project. We also visited the Basel and Stockholm regional centre and discussed with them the situation of non-combustion technologies for municipal and hazardous waste destruction. At the national workshop in Kunming, an official from the Ministry of Environment participated in the working group, thus the viewpoint of local authorities was also explored and addressed.

Sampling training

Partner organizations working together under the umbrella of IPEN together launched a

project for the elimination lead in paint in China. Training on the enamel paint sampling procedure and instruction for paint sampling were delivered to the staff of Nature University.

Toxic-free future skillshare

During my stay, IPEN organized international skillshare activities for IPEN participating organizations in Kunming, China. Chinese NGOs were invited to present and share their experience on campaigns and efforts with regard to persistent organic pollutants elimination. Both Jitka Strakova and Mao Da delivered presentations related to project activities (strengthening chemical safety in China, Czech, and world-wide) and participated in working groups defining IPEN strategic goals for the coming next three years. Arnika, as host organization of IPEN's Heavy metals and Dioxins Working Group, will coordinate future joint activities in this sense with Nature University.

Benefits and effects of the exchange

Through my exchange from Europe to China I was able to obtain an increased knowledge on local specifics and problems of Chinese communities affected by industrial pollution as well as gain experience with practical and legal aspects of the work of NGOs in China. The exchange contributed to an improved effectiveness of implementation of the China Chemical Safety project and prepared the grounds for future projects.

Strengthening of Arnika capacities

For Arnika, which serves as a secretariat for IPEN's Heavy Metals and Dioxin Working Group and works closely with partners from China (as well as from other countries) on numerous projects or studies, this was THE opportunity to improve knowledge on local specifics that will later allow better anchoring of future projects in needs and priorities of target Chinese communities and local NGOs.

Longterm partnership with Chinese NGOs

In particular, new relationships were established at the national workshop on pollution aid and international skillsharing workshop in Kunming. Direct discussion with Chinese civil society representatives allowed us to understand needs and barriers prior to implementation of chemical safety policies in China. Several Chinese NGOs expressed their interest to become participating organizations of IPEN and members of working groups that Arnika hosts. Pollution monitoring data from China will become part of IPEN's global studies and will be used in negotiations about global policies, such as Stockholm Convention or Minamata Treaty. The bottom-up approach using local activities for global policy improvement will lead to enforcement of top-down implementation of legally binding measurements through national policies in next phase.

Mao Da, Nature University Fund, Beijing, China

From September 29th to November 2nd 2014, I visited Europe for the China-EU NGO Twinning program. During our two-year cooperation with Arnika, I found they are a very organized and professional European environmental NGO, with special expertise in identifying pollution sources, consequent public monitoring and proposing solution plans. Their speciality is exactly what NU aims to achieve in China. I viewed the exchange as a good opportunity to work more closely with them in order to get to know their work. Another reason was my professional emphasis on environmental impact assessment law and its implementation, as well as waste management, and Arnika also has good practices in these two areas

The first week was all spent in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic. During that time, my colleagues at Arnika gave me the biggest assistance including logistics and working conditions. During that week, besides getting familiar with the new environment and spending some time in Arnika's office, I also went to Jihlava, a small city in central for a press conference on a local incinerator proposal.

After the trip I continued my work in Arnika's office, with the main focus on our cooperation on a two-year EU project emphasizing assistance to pollution victims and NGO capacity building on chemical safety in China

Activities

Visit to the only municipal solid waste incinerator (MSWI) in Prague

The plant is about 10 km from the downtown Prague and located in an industrial area. Such siting means the transportation is relatively convenient and would pose less impact to residents. Standing in front of the entrance of the plant, visitors could see clearly the online monitoring data of some main pollutants emitted from the chimney, including dioxin. We were welcomed and guided by an engineer who gave a very detailed introduction of the history, technology, pollution control of the plant, brought us to almost every part of it and answered all questions.

My general impression of the MSWI was: (1) the plant is quite open and transparent, and this is also a result of many years of interaction between the government, NGOs and the general public; (2) the plant is old but has been upgraded many times and is able to meet basic EU emission standards; (3) the waste composition in Prague is very different from that in China, with more high calorific-value waste such as paper and plastics and less food waste; (4) the fly ash disposal may still be a problem, because it is now shipped to a radioactively contaminated site for open dumping; (5) the plant has high energy efficiency because it

generates heat and electricity at the same time, which is very rare in China still.

The Aborted Press Conference in Jihlava

As mentioned above, the current relatively good operating condition of the MSWI of Prague is a result of long-term interaction between different social stakeholders. It was a polluter before, but thanks to NGOs like Arnika's involvement, it became better - though not being shut down as NGOs requested. However, according to Arnika, incinerators, once established, would pose high environmental and health risks, and have become an obstacle to waste reduction and separation. That is why Arnika is still actively involved in opposing new proposals coming out from other places in Czech.

On October 2nd, three Arnika colleagues took me to the city of Jihlava. The purpose of the trip was to hold a press conference on opposing a local incinerator proposal. I was also invited to present on China's grassroots anti-incineration movement

Surprisingly, when the beginning of the conference was approaching, no journalists showed up. When searching for an explanation, we learned that the local left-wing party politicians had just taken a political stance to oppose the incinerator proposal raised by the current government, and used that stance for their election campaign. Therefore, in such a sensitive moment, any independent media would avoid attending an activity that may contain strong party interest, in order to show their neutral attitude. Although this meant I missed a chance to learn how environmental NGOs run press conferences or media activities in Czech and introduce the Chinese situation, I instead had a chance to observe the deeper part regarding the relation between environmental campaigns, politics and media in Europe.

Petition for Waste Charge Reform

Arnika is aware that if there were no incentives for preventing waste generation and for waste separation, the anti-incineration campaign would not be successful. That is why its Tocics team has proposed a scheme to reform citizens' payment for waste management services. Basically the proposal is calling for a "generator pays" principle, which means that households generating more waste will pay more for the waste collection and disposal fees. Arnika's staff has been making great efforts to collect citizens' endorsements to this proposal petition.

On 18 October, the participant went with two Arnika colleagues to join an outdoor activity in a suburban community of Prague. That activity consisted of variety of games for children and their families to enjoy nature and take physical exercises. Arnika was invited to set up a booth there to conduct environmental education, such as plant recognition, waste separation and nature book selling. The two colleagues also showed their petition letter for waste charge

reform to every interested adult visitor and invited her or him to sign and support. I had the impression that visitors who stopped and listen took the petition issue very seriously. Before signing it, most of the visitors wanted to know more details of the letter and decide whether they should jump in or not. To a Chinese campaigner, this process might look a bit “slow”, but who could deny that the slow process would make a difference in the end?

Household Hazardous Waste Collection

Due to my own work in China, I have been paying attention to household hazardous waste (HHW) management in Europe in terms of its regulation and real situation. During my time in Europe, I noticed that in both Prague and Berlin there were convenient drop-off facilities for mercury florescent lights and portable batteries in public spaces, which showed that the channel for these HHW exists.

Workshops, Networking and Synergies

From 19 to 23 October, me and Jitka went to Berlin for the Twinning program gathering. We spent three wonderful days with the other Twinners in the capital city of Germany, visiting various organizations and meeting many great people dedicated to social justice, environmental protection and public interests.

One exciting thing about taking part of in Twinning program is getting to know other the 12 twinners. Among them, Anneli Ohvril and her colleagues from Let’s Do It, Estonia left me with the deepest impression and we even agreed on some cooperation occurred later. It was really exciting to listen to Anneli’s presentation and learn that by 50 thousand people acting together they cleaned the whole of Estonia from all illegally dumped waste in about only 5 hours. When I learned that Anneli would be in China the next month, I decided to invite her to introduce such amazing public campaign to more Chinese colleagues.

Between 4 to 6 December, with the support of Bread for the World Foundation and Tetrapak, China Zero Waste Alliance (CZWA) organized a three-day annual conference in Shanghai. On the last day of the event, Anneli was invited to present their story to about 40 CZWA members and inspired everyone therein. Anneli was also invited to give a 2.5-hour public lecture in Beijing and attracted 20 environmental volunteers to listen. Maybe, in the near future some similar waste clean-up activities and cooperation with Let’s Do It will take place in China.

More detailed information is given in the long reports of the twinners. Anyone interested can contact the Stiftung Asienhaus staff/China program to receive more information.