

Editorial

Bamako Conventional Wisdom

Why should African countries need a special international convention to prevent pollution of their environment with hazardous wastes, despite the existence of the Basel Convention *on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal*? The Bamako Convention *on the ban of the Import to Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Waste within Africa* purports to fill gaps within Basel Convention, including specific attention to radioactive wastes, to hazardous wastes generated within the African continent, and to preventive strategies against waste generation.

The Basel Convention, which went into effect in 1989 does provide for the establishment of regional agreements that are at a minimum not weaker than the global agreement. Therefore, the Bamako Convention was adopted in Bamako, Mali, on 30 January 1991. It became effective on 22 April 1998 after ten countries signed on¹. But 20 years after its adoption, there are only 30 signatories and 23 parties to the convention.

Regardless of formal adoption of the Bamako Convention, one hopes that African countries in general practice the primary goal of adopting the precautionary principle, as stated in the Convention:

“Each Party shall strive to adopt and implement the preventive, precautionary approach to pollution problems which entails inter alia preventing the release into the environment of substances which may cause harm to humans or the environment without waiting for scientific proof regarding such harm. The Parties shall cooperate with each other in taking the appropriate measures to implement the precautionary principle to pollution prevention through the application of clean production methods, rather than the pursuit of a permissible emissions approach based on assimilative capacity assumptions.”

The Bamako Convention is even more forward thinking in the promotion of “green chemistry” and clean promotion strategies in manufacturing consumer goods by stipulating that Parties to the Convention shall promote clean production methods applicable to the entire produce life cycles, including:

1. Raw material selection, extraction and processing
2. Product conceptualization, design, manufacture and assemblage
3. Materials transport during all phases
4. Industrial and household usage
5. Reintroduction of the product into industrial systems or nature when it no longer serves a useful function

“Clean production shall not include “end-of-pipe” pollution controls such as filters and scrubbers, or chemical, physical or biological treatment. Measures which reduce the volume of waste by incineration or concentration, mask the hazard by dilution, or transfer pollutants from one environmental medium to another, are also excluded.”

The implementation of these fine level requirements require monitoring programs that are probably not fully developed in many African countries, but the intent of the Convention is laudable. The question is:
Is it Bamako working where Basel isn't?

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¹ Bamako Convention: <http://www.cetim.ch/en/documents/conv-bamako-ang.pdf>