

# CASE STUDY

## Mercury-added cosmetics and internet trade



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**Identification of mercury waste and mercury-added products in trade control**

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**EEB**

European  
Environmental  
Bureau





# Who we are



## European Environmental Bureau

- Europe's largest network > 170 NGOs > more than 36 European countries > 30 million members and supporters.
- Vision: A better future where people and nature thrive together



## Zero Mercury Working Group

- EEB/Mercury Policy Project > International network (2005) > more than 110 NGOs > from over 55 countries
- Aim: Reduce/eliminate mercury supply, use, emissions, exposure, implementing the Minamata Convention via two-pronged strategy –Promote strong policies nationally and globally & support projects in developing countries





# Introduction



- Mercury, neurotoxicant which presents a serious risk to human health and the environment;
- One of 10 chemicals of major public health concern in WHO list
- Regular use of skin creams >> Rashes, skin discoloration and blotching.
- Long-term exposure >> serious health consequences, including damage to the skin, eyes, lungs, kidneys, digestive, immune and nervous systems.
- Many national governments have banned or set 1ppm Hg content restrictions + Minamata Convention now in place
- Toxic trade of often illegal mercury-added skin-lightening products is a global crisis

# Background & Overview

- Mercury has long been used in cosmetics and is a hazard to users, their families and the environment
- In 2017-18, ZMWG analyzed 338 skin-lighteners from 22 countries and found Hg levels from 93 to 16,353 ppm
- In 2019, we expanded testing to products previously and currently identified by governments as over the legal limit
- Results show that many high mercury products are available locally
- Also show widespread availability from internet marketers
- Enforcement is key!



# 2019 SAMPLING ROUND

- 158 samples purchased in 12 countries.
- 95 were found to violate the 1 ppm mercury limit. (i.e. 60%)
- Mercury levels from 40 ppm to over 130,000 ppm.
- XRF and/or AAS
- Testing confirms the same high Hg brands available on several sampling occasions in different years.





# Product sampling from 12 countries (2019)



- **Côte d'Ivoire (and Djibouti)**, Centre Africain pour la Santé Environnementale
- **Kenya**, Centre for Environment Justice and Development
- **Nigeria**, Sustainable Research And Action For Environmental Development
- **South Africa**, groundwork/FOE South Africa
- **Uganda**, Bio Visio Africa,
- **Bangladesh**, Environment and Social Development Organization
- **India**, Toxics Link
- **Philippines**, Ban Toxics
- **EU (B & UK)**, European Environmental Bureau
- **USA**, Mercury Policy Project, Sierra Club



# High Mercury skin lightening creams (1)



Product name	Countries where purchased	Concentration range (ppm mercury)
Goree Day and Night Whitening Cream	Bangladesh, India, Philippines, South Africa (SA)	47 – 131,567
Goree Whitening Beauty Anti-ageing spots pimples removing Cream	Bangladesh, EU, India, Philippines, SA, USA	46 – 130, 667
Parley Herbal Whitening Cream	Bangladesh, India	113,833 – 116,600
Chandni Whitening Cream	Bangladesh, Djibouti, EU, India, Kenya, SA, USA	0 – 102,233
Sandal Whitening Beauty Cream	Bangladesh, India, South Africa, USA	26,321 – 100,567
Kim Whitening Pearl and Snow Lotus Cream	Bangladesh, India, Nigeria; USA	2,584 – 100,500
Due Whitening Beauty Cream	Bangladesh, India, South Africa, USA	0 – 92,530
Golden Pearl Beauty Cream	Bangladesh, EU, India, South Africa, USA	0 – 73,953
Aneeza Gold Beauty Cream	Djibouti, India, Nigeria, Philippines	17,086 – 54,653
White Rose Whitening Cream	EU, India, USA	0 – 48,840
Temulawak Beauty Whitening Cream	Bangladesh, Nigeria, USA	1 – 32,670
Goree Whitening Soap	South Africa	32,505
Faiza Beauty Cream	Bangladesh, Djibouti, India, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, SA, Uganda	0 – 21,407



# High Mercury skin lightening creams (2)



Product name	Countries where purchased	Concentration range (ppm mercury)
JiaoBi Whitening set	EU	15,404 - 20,813
Parley Goldie Pearl Shine	Djibouti	19,242
Jiaoli Miraculous Cream set	Bangladesh, EU, India, Philippines	585 – 18,877
NOOR Herbal Beauty Cream	Djibouti	17,669
Kim Whitening Ginseng and Pearl Cream	Bangladesh, USA	8,600 – 17,417
Parley Beauty Cream	Uganda	15,985
Palmer's Skin Success Fade Milk	Côte d'Ivoire	14,121
Face Fresh	Bangladesh, South Africa, USA	1,214 – 12,385
Jolié Beauty Cream	Djibouti	9,871
JJJ Magical Spot Removing Cream	Philippines	7,777
White Rose Whitening Cream (super Gold Caviar	EU	6,188
Erna Whitening Cream	Philippines	4,560
Jiaoli Cream Jaoe whitening Yan Ying, set	USA	1,800
Jiaoli Speckle Dispelling & Whitening Cream	Nigeria	1,154
Stillman's Skin Bleach Cream	Bangladesh, India, South Africa	0 - 63
POP Popular Facial Cream Whitening Acne Pimple	Bangladesh, EU, India, Philippines, Uganda,	0 - 60





# Internet platforms



NGO purchasing	Country	Internet platform	Range of mercury (ppm)
ESDO	Bangladesh	Daraz	9,344 - 116,600
EEB	UK & Belgium	Amazon UK/eBay B	0 - 20,813
Toxics Link	India	Amazon IN /Flipkart	47 - 113,833
CEJAD	Kenya	Jumia	0 - 11,313
SRADev	Nigeria	Jumia and Jiji	0 - 20,599
Ban Toxics	Philippines	Lazada	48 - 131,567
groundWorks	South Africa	BidorBuy	0 - 33,083
MPP/S.C.	U.S.A.	eBay/Amazon	0 - 26,000

- 65 of them non-compliant creams (or 68%) were bought online.

# Internet platforms react



## Major internet platforms took down toxic skin-lightening products

### Amazon pulls skin-lightening products after groups' concerns

Amazon has pulled more than a dozen skin-lightening products with dangerous levels of mercury off its website after Minnesota public-health and environmental activists raised concerns.

Associated Press | NOVEMBER 22, 2019 — 10:09PM



CHRISTINE T. NGUYEN — ASSOCIATED PRESS

In this Wednesday, Nov. 20, 2019 photo, from left, Mary Blitzer, of the Sierra Club, gives a petition of over 23,000 signatures to Amira Adawe of the Beautywell Project as they deliver it to the Amazon Fulfillment Center in Shakopee, Minn. The

# ZMWG COMPANION REPORT ON ENFORCEMENT MEASURES

1. Legal framework, mandates and division of responsibilities, labelling
2. Supporting tools and measures (alert systems, detention lists)
3. Inter-agency, national, regional and International Collaboration
4. Inspections and sanctions, screening, tools, informing consumers

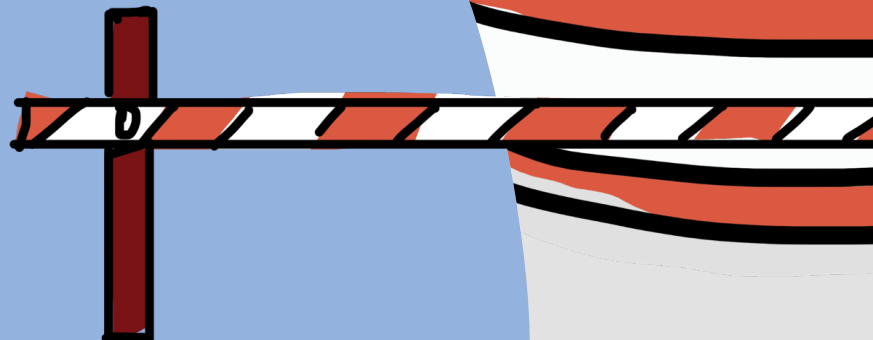


**Enforcement measures**  
to restrict high mercury  
cosmetic products under  
the Minamata Convention



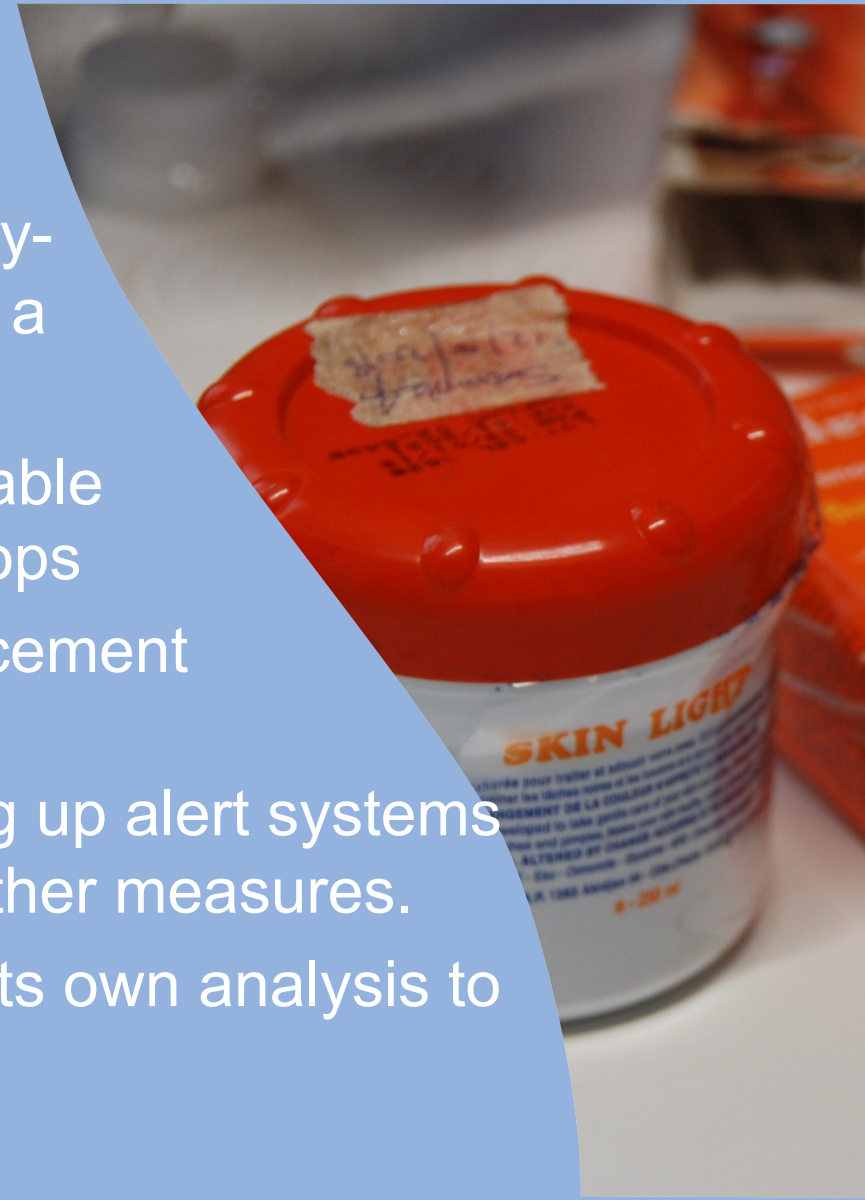
# Steps needed to screen out high mercury cosmetics

- Training of customs officers
- Screening with XRF
- Labelling: ingredients, producer, country of manufacture etc.
- Internet/local market surveillance
- National detention lists
- Civil society could assist



# Conclusions

- Toxic trade of often illegal mercury-added skin-lightening products is a global crisis
- Many high mercury creams available from internet platforms and in shops
- Legislation, key first step – enforcement serious challenge
- International collaboration, setting up alert systems is highly recommended among other measures.
- Each country needs to carry out its own analysis to identify the best way forward.





**THANK YOU FOR YOUR  
ATTENTION!**

[www.eeb.org](http://www.eeb.org)

[www.zeromercury.org](http://www.zeromercury.org)

<https://www.zeromercury.org/mercury-added-skin-lightening-creams-campaign/>