

# Eliminating Mercury Skin Lightening Products

The GEF-funded, UNEP-led project aimed at removing mercury-added skin lightening products (SLPs) was implemented between 2022 and 2026 in collaboration with the Governments of Gabon, Jamaica, and Sri Lanka.



## Legislation and Regulation

Supported governments in strengthening laws and regulatory frameworks to phase out mercury containing skin lightening products in alignment with the Minamata Convention.



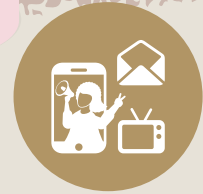
## Monitoring and Capacity Building

Strengthened national capabilities for product testing and surveillance, including training customs officers and other enforcement authorities.



## Supply Chain Engagement

Worked with manufacturers, distributors, and traders to reduce and halt the production, trade, and distribution of mercury containing products.

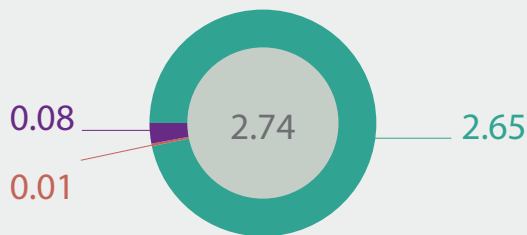


## Awareness Raising

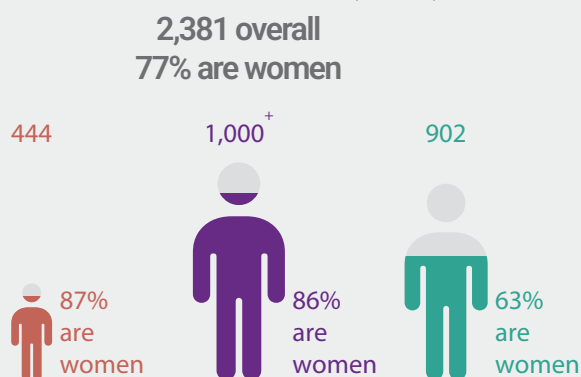
Increased public, national, regional, and global awareness of the health and environmental risks associated with mercury in skin lightening products.

## Key achievements

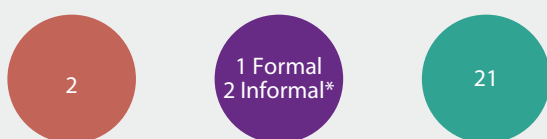
Volume of mercury eliminated (tons)



Number of beneficiaries (direct)



Number of mercury added SLPs removed from sale/market

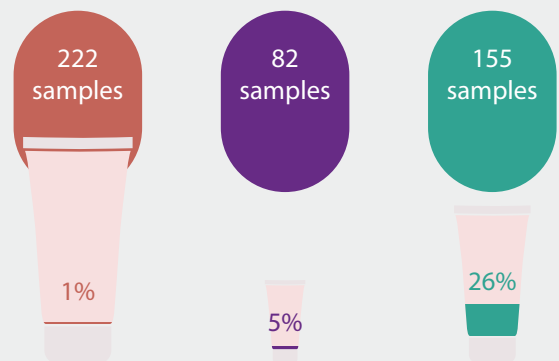


\*Restricted the manufacturer, no import of raw materials since 2024

Number of analyzed samples

459 overall

10% containing mercury



Percentage containing mercury

Number of mercury added SLPs flagged and/or added to the detention list



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# Tools to eliminate mercury-added skin lightening cosmetics



Global knowledge hub



Project stakeholder group



Global outreach



## Global momentum

Expansion to 18 new countries across Africa, Asia, and the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region, underscoring the increasing need for coordinated action across the entire cosmetics sector.

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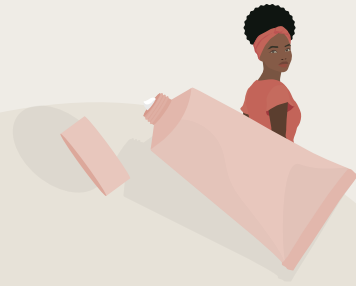


World Health Organization



## Key highlights

Eliminating mercury skin lightening products



### Regulations

Gabon launched the “[Libreville Commitment](#)”, a regional declaration adopted by African ministers in January 2025, calling for eliminating mercury-containing skin-lightening cosmetics and strengthening regulatory actions across the continent.

The strengthening of the legal framework is also reflected in the adoption of [Decree No. 000002/MSAS/CAB of 24 October 2023](#), which prohibits the manufacture, import, export, use, and marketing of cosmetic and personal hygiene products containing mercury, mercury compounds, and other substances harmful to health in the Gabonese Republic.

Gabon took further the lead on behalf of the African region, tabling a Conference Room Document at Minamata COP6. The concerns of the Region were eventually included in the final decision, and further work is to be carried out at the Minamata Convention level.



### Monitoring

A national study tested 222 different SLPs (a total of 230 samples were collected, including duplicates), finding 3 products with high mercury levels (ranging 7,652 - 24,397 ppm).

Further, one online platform and two social media channels were monitored on their online sale activity.

[A list of prohibited products](#) was developed and published by the ANMAPS.



### Supply chain

Most mercury-added SLPs are found in physical markets or through social media and YouTube, and authorities are pursuing actions such as a formal letter addressing platforms and social media on online sales of HgSLPs.

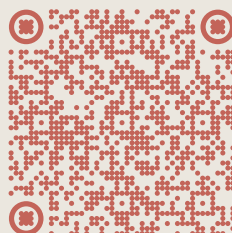


### Awareness

High-level advocacy in Gabon included strong engagement from senior leadership—such as the Prime Minister and First Lady—promoting natural skin and inclusive beauty standards, alongside awareness campaigns linked to the Libreville Commitment, while authorities also shared a prohibited products list across provinces and held community discussions to raise awareness.

Strengthened community engagement through direct involvement of students, teachers, and local leaders, resulting in more effective awareness outcomes.

Behavioral insights: Additionally, a 2024 KAP survey with 444 participants in Greater Libreville highlighted social pressures behind cosmetic use, informing culturally sensitive interventions.



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# Key highlights

## Eliminating mercury skin lightening products

# Jamaica



### Regulations

Undertook gap analysis, identified supporting legislation to bolster enforcement and surveillance.



### Monitoring

A national study tested 82 SLPs products (a total of 83 samples were collected including duplicates), finding four products with high mercury levels (ranging 106 - 16,545 ppm) and confirming widespread daily use among surveyed consumers. Of the four products identified, one was formally manufactured in Jamaica and the remaining three were "home mixtures" sold by street vendors and were assumed to contain the formally manufactured product as an ingredient.

Six platforms and social media were monitored on their activity, selling suspicious HgSLPs.

Ongoing discussions between the MoHW and Customs on the publication of a contraband list.



### Supply chain

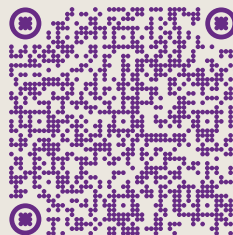
Six platforms and social media were initially identified to sell mercury added SLPs. The country is also benefiting from legal action against [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), [Ebay.com](https://www.ebay.com) and Walmart that are currently taking place in the US.



### Awareness

Awareness activities reached over 800 healthcare providers, and 135 healthcare workers (117 women) were trained through national medical conferences. A social-media discussion engaged 100+ participants, and outreach at the Jamaica International Beauty Expo connected with 10,000 artisanal brands, consumers, and the public, helping expand understanding of mercury risks.

A behavioral insights study was conducted in 2026, revealing higher-than-expected male use of skin-lightening products, requiring adaptation of BI tools. Key considerations include allowing sufficient time for ethics committee clearance, and ensuring interviewer training and pilot testing before full rollout.



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# Key highlights

## Eliminating mercury skin lightening products

# Sri Lanka



### Regulations

Launched the draft [Cosmetics Act](#) (Nov 2025) to curb mercury in cosmetics, enforce import compliance, and align 16 national lab standards.

Bringing down the standard for mercury in cosmetics to 0.5 ppm from the previous 1 ppm level.



### Monitoring

A national study tested 155 different skin-lightening products (SLPs) (a total of 219 samples were collected including duplicates), finding 41 products with high mercury levels (ranging 624 to as high as 41,569 ppm).

Six online platforms have been identified and monitored on their activity.

[Hazardous Products list containing mercury](#) was published and widely disseminated with 49 SLPs listed.



### Supply chain

48 online platforms were contacted. After formal notices two major online platforms fully removed mercury-containing SLPs listings (Essential.lk, [Orion XoXo](#)) and other are in the process ([Daraz](#), [Tudo.lk](#), [Ubuy.com.lk](#)).

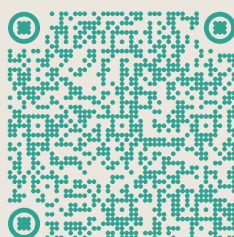
A draft voluntary agreement is discussed with at least one platform, and a draft policy is prepared towards curtailing online sales.



### Awareness

Outreach through trainings reached 902 people, including Medical Officers of Health, Public Health Midwives, Public Health Inspectors and mother support groups at the grassroots level (63% women) through trainings, and two national press conferences, amplified by social media and online platforms.

Behavioral insights (BI) study included 470 people in 4 districts. Preliminary BI results shows that 60% of correspondents were using SLPs (might be underestimated, self reporting bias), influenced mostly by social media, tv, most bought SLPs in pharmacies and fancy stores, 95% knew the danger.



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# Key lessons learned

## Eliminating mercury skin lightening products

### Legislation and Regulatory Frameworks



Strong, enforceable laws are foundational banning Hg SLP manufacture, import, export and sale in local and online markets: clear standards, defined regulatory roles, and consistent public oversight enable effective control of mercury-added SLPs.

Inter-agency cooperation, particularly between health, environment, standards bodies, and enforcement authorities, such as consumer affairs, market surveillance is essential for drafting, updating, and operationalizing legislation that keeps pace with evolving products and markets including online markets.

### Monitoring and Surveillance



Evidence generation must be continuous, with standardized tools, sampling protocols, and risk-based surveillance approaches to ensure reliable, comparable data.

Close coordination between customs, laboratories, regulators, and market surveillance teams builds a coherent monitoring system, while standardized SOPs increase accuracy and support enforcement.

Trend tracking is essential as product availability and distribution routes shift rapidly.

### Supply Chain Oversight



Effective control requires a full-chain perspective, from source material to manufacturers to importers to distributors to informal sellers to digital platforms.

Online sales are reshaping enforcement needs, making traceability systems, digital monitoring, and engagement with e-commerce platforms increasingly important.

Supply-chain mapping must directly inform enforcement actions, and collaboration across all actors, including informal producers, is critical to reducing market entry points for prohibited products.

### Awareness & Behavior Change



Awareness efforts must be continuous, community-anchored, and culturally grounded. Tailored messaging, ethical storytelling, and trusted messengers, including health workers, influencers, and community leaders, are key to shifting norms.

Awareness should be coupled with behavior-change approaches, and outcomes must be measured through meaningful indicators (e.g., behavioral shifts, reduced purchases), not just outreach volume.

Community ownership needs to be ensured as it significantly enhances long-term impact.

### Evidence, Knowledge Management and Multistakeholder Engagement



Robust data systems and accessible knowledge platforms, ideally available in multiple languages, are essential for supporting countries, informing policies, and enabling regional and global experience exchange.

Strong multistakeholder collaboration across sectors and levels enables shared learning, consistent messaging, and coordinated action.

The lessons learned from addressing mercury in cosmetics, and the expertise and partnerships developed through this work, can be leveraged to tackle broader challenges across the cosmetics sector, including for example, the chemicals of concern.

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