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International POPs Elimination Project

*Fostering Active and Efficient Civil Society Participation in
Preparation for Implementation of the Stockholm Convention*

Organic Farming: An Answer to the Problem of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)

Gramin Vikas Evam Paryavaran Sanstha, (GVEPS)

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**Gramin Vikas evam Paryavaran Sanstha, (GVEPS)
Village Basadi- Boroda, Post Udawala, Via Sainthal,
District Dausa,
Rajasthan 303-507, India
Tel: (91 1426) 261545, 261149
Email: gveps@rediffmail.com**

About the International POPs Elimination Project

On May 1, 2004, the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN <http://www.ipen.org>) began a global NGO project called the International POPs Elimination Project (IPEP) in partnership with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The Global Environment Facility (GEF) provided core funding for the project.

IPEP has three principal objectives:

- Encourage and enable NGOs in 40 developing and transitional countries to engage in activities that provide concrete and immediate contributions to country efforts in preparing for the implementation of the Stockholm Convention;
- Enhance the skills and knowledge of NGOs to help build their capacity as effective stakeholders in the Convention implementation process;
- Help establish regional and national NGO coordination and capacity in all regions of the world in support of longer term efforts to achieve chemical safety.

IPEP will support preparation of reports on country situation, hotspots, policy briefs, and regional activities. Three principal types of activities will be supported by IPEP: participation in the National Implementation Plan, training and awareness workshops, and public information and awareness campaigns.

For more information, please see <http://www.ipen.org>

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BACKGROUND

As the ill effects of the green revolution are becoming more evident, there is no way left for the cultivators but to make a shift from the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Quite often the coping mechanisms that the affected people adopt result in unsustainable exploitation the natural resources.

Among several other chemicals in use are the Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). These are synthetic chemical substances with unique and harmful characteristics. They pose severe risks to human health and the environment due to their toxicity, persistence, ability to travel long distances on air and water currents, and propensity to bio-accumulate in food chains. These include some of the world's most harmful pesticides such as DDT, Dieldrin, Aldrin, Heptachlor, Endrin, and others. These are proven to be highly toxic to wildlife and to humans.

INTERVENTION PREMISE

The particular intervention under International POPs Elimination Project (IPEP) is based on the belief that the issue of large-scale use of POPs is multifaceted. There are several issues linked to POPs. These adversely affect human health, environment and livestock. Under this intervention efforts were made to create awareness and enhance understanding on POPs issues among the community. Pesticides used by the farmers contain several pollutants including those from among the “dirty dozen”. There is therefore a need to simultaneously work on alternative methods of minimizing the use of POPs. One such strategy is the promotion of organic farming methods.

To address the issue, GVePS worked at two levels -- raising awareness on POPs and their ill effects; and promoting organic farming methods.

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this activity was to create awareness among the communities on the persistent organic pollutants and provide necessary support for adoption of organic farming practices as a sustainable solution to the issue..

COVERAGE

The activity was implemented in the following 15 villages of Dausa Panchayat Samiti of District Dausa, Rajasthan: Choumeda, Rampura, Binawala, Chouradi, Chainpura, Bapi, Govindpura, Khakhala, Katleshwar, Bisanpura, Habibwala, Udawala, Dharpura, and Singpura.

ACTIVITIES OVERVIEW

Here is a brief overview on the activities taken up:

Awareness Camps

Foremost, it was important to sensitise the target population of the issues related to POPs. This was a completely new issue for them. Therefore a series of awareness activities were organised with the rural population, particularly the farmers and school children. The immediate and long term affects of POPs were discussed during these camps. Appropriate display material was developed to make the learning process smooth. Experts were invited to discuss the issue in depth. The doctors provided more information on the health implications resulting from these pollutants.

The awareness activity covered all the 15 villages with the following objectives: creating the requisite ground to gear-up the project; creating awareness on POPs issues among the community; and identifying the extent and source(s) of indigenous knowledge related to organic farming and initiating the institution building processes

Institution Building

Institution building has been GVePS's cross cutting activity. In this campaign, the Village level institutions played an important role. The Village level committees were instrumental in pushing the agenda of the campaign. With the help of these institutions the existing knowledge within the community, as well as the popular organic farming practices in the area were identified and disseminated.

Organising Padyatras (Foot March)

Padyatras were organised to mobilise the masses on the issue of POPs. The *Padyatras* were organised across the project area in order to create a favourable environment. Individual contacts with different sections of the society were established during the *yatras*. Public meetings were organised during these *padyatras* during which the issues related to safe agricultural practices were discussed. The *yatras* proved effective in sparking the debate on the issue of POPs.

Wall painting

Wall painting was done in the project area. The purpose of this activity was to disseminate knowledge about the Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). Appropriate slogans were developed and painted on the walls. The wall painting was done on strategic locations to reap maximum benefits from the activity.

Demonstration

Compost (or organic manure) plays an important role in organic farming. When done properly, the composting process converts organic waste into a rich source of plant nutrients and is therefore a sustainable alternative to the chemical fertilizers. Unlike chemical pesticides and fertilizers, the cultivators can easily produce organic compost on the farm. Therefore besides creating awareness about the same, training was imparted to the cultivators to encourage them to produce their own organic manure. The focus of the

activity was on domestic production of bio-fertilizers through a process called as *Vermi composting*.

Networking:

For the success of any campaign, it is important to involve and work with other stakeholders. This provides the necessary momentum to the campaign. Efforts were therefore made to involve various stakeholders in the process. Institutions and individuals were contacted for necessary support. The activities gained full support from the various stakeholders, particularly the student community who came forward to support the initiative in a big way. Efforts were made to bring together the likeminded organizations, institutions, CBO's and individuals working on the issue of POPs and organic farming.

Research and Development of Publication

The "popular knowledge" covering diverse areas viz. indigenous seed preservation and treatment, farm management practices, indigenous pesticides shall be collated, researched and documented. GVePS intends to publish this document using appropriate illustrations and easy to understand language for use by the farmers.

Farmers' Fair

The objective of organising a farmers' fair was to develop and facilitate the knowledge generation process particularly related to the ill effects of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Farmers in large number participated in the fair. The experts discussed issues such as toxics in agriculture, health impacts and sustainable practices. The hazards caused by POPs were displayed through exhibits. The organic farming methods were also on demonstration to encourage the framers. Debate competition for the school children was organised during the fair.

OUTCOME

The outcome from the various interventions can be summarized as follows:

- The initiative was instrumental in arousing debate among the farmers on the issues associated with POPs.
- Understanding of the hazards caused by chemical fertilizers and pesticides, including POPs has been enhanced in the area.
- High level of commitment has been shown by the community towards ecological regeneration and bio-diversity conservation. This will ensure sustainability of the efforts.
- Enthusiasm among the farmers for adopting organic farming practices as a viable alternative.