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International POPs Elimination Project

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

Awareness on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)

Environment Centre

**Andhra Pradesh, India
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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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This report is available in the following languages: English

Awareness on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)

INTRODUCTION

The problems related to POPs have yet to percolate into the general awareness of the people. In a country where disease, pollution and health hazards are accepted as a fact of life, concerns regarding POPs have no place. International declarations, UN sponsored conventions et al are a matter of very little concern in smaller cities and towns. In a situation like this, the Environment Center took up the task of awareness building on POPs especially at levels where such efforts yield long-term benefits.

Environment Center has a long experience of working with school students and teachers, sensitizing them on environmental issues and emphasizing on the importance of immediate/local ecosystems.

ACTIVITIES OVERVIEW

The following activities were taken up:

- **Awareness campaign**

Environment Centre selected eight schools for conducting awareness camps on POPs. The schools were a mix of private, government and government-aided since each caters to a specific section of the society. An expert, a Senior Reader in Chemistry in the state University, was invited as a resource person. The focus of the program was on students of grades seven, eight and nine.

The resource person adopted some simple exercises to disseminate the message among the students. He divided the students into two groups and opened the discussion by posing a simple question -- "Why do we fall ill?" The students came up with different answers such as food contamination and pollution etc. They were then drawn into a discussion on pollution and crops leading to the problem of pesticides. Some visual aids showing farmers sprinkling pesticides were shown. Coloration of sweets sold in shops and coloration of fruits like banana and mangoes was also explained. These were familiar surroundings. The most visible pollutant, the DDT was also explained, focusing on how POPs have entered the food chain and have become a part of our lives. Students with their basic knowledge of human physiology were able to relate to the information on health impacts of POPs in humans.

Students were then asked to collect data/ information in their respective surroundings to discover the omnipresence of POPs.

- **Teachers' workshops**

Besides educating the students, the need for also engaging the teachers was felt. A Teacher's Workshop was organized. Two teachers each from the selected eight schools participated in the workshop. Besides imparting a general introduction about POPs and their health impacts, teachers were also informed about the Stockholm Convention and its various provisions and obligations.

The issue of POPs was discussed by linking it with local issues. The area is under the threat of rapid industrialization. Among several other industries and processes are also proposed some ship breaking units. These are all sources of POPs and would impact the health of the community and the ecosystem. The idea was to strengthen the local campaign against these facilities to reduce their impacts.

- **Education material**

Awareness building activities around any issue needs to be supplemented with the dissemination of adequate information, especially in the local language. There is hardly any material available in the local language on the issues concerning environment in general and POPs in particular. Environment Centre has published three books covering issues related to environment, biodiversity and the legends largely focused on students. These books are in Telugu. Likewise Environment Center produced some educational material on POPs, issues related to POPs, the health hazards with special reference to the health of women and children.

- **Seminar**

A first of its kind seminar on POPs was organized in the state and had participation from the State Pollution Control Board. It covered two broad areas, POPs and their health impacts and the Stockholm Convention. The focus has been on pesticide POPs since people could relate to that more closely at the local level. Subject experts were invited to share their views. It also presented before the participants epidemiological studies showing the health impacts of POPs. The need for more Indian specific studies was felt. The industrial policy of the State was also along with some of the pressing local issues that need to be urgently addressed. The seminar was attended by over 50 participants representing NGOs, environmental activities, government, academicians and others. A resolution was passed at the end, which demanded immediate steps to eliminate POPs from the District/ State. One such recommendation was for the State PCB to take up the Environmental Impact Assessment before setting up of any industrial unit. Currently the EIA is done by the project proponents themselves.

- **Status on POPs usage**

Environment Center identified two mandals namely Mandapeta and Gokavaram to study the pesticide consumption pattern with the intention of verifying the continued use of POPs pesticide in agriculture. The use of all POPs pesticides, except DDT, which is restricted, is banned in the country. However there are reports of illegal use of these in agriculture. It is therefore important to look into the local situation and confirm if POPs are being used in agriculture or not.

With this purpose, the organisation interacted with the farmers and the local pesticide dealers to ascertain usage of banned pesticides, especially POPs. The findings have been documented in the form of a report.

Along with collecting information, the organisation also attempted to educate the farmers on POPs and their impacts on health and environment. In addition, concerns about the growing use of pesticides in agriculture were also shared. Options such as use of bio pesticides were presented before them as a sustainable solution. This would be the first report in Telugu on the subject and shall be distributed among all the educational institutions and NGOs in the area.