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International POPs Elimination Project

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

Campaign and Awareness Building on POPs and Participation in Developing the National Implementation Plan

Society for Direct Initiative for Social and Health Action (DISHA)

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

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ABOUT DISHA

In 1997, *DISHA* opposed the decision of the Government of West Bengal to implement a World Bank project proposal to install incinerators in every government hospital in West Bengal having more than 300 beds. The campaign was supported by international organizations like Health Care Without Harm (HCWH). The proposal had been withdrawn. Since 1998 onwards *DISHA* has been organising public campaigns and delivering a watchdog function for safe management of medical waste. Later *DISHA* got involved with other projects of the same World Bank on safe management of bio-medical waste completely on the basis of non-incineration technology. The State Pollution Control Board is being pursued to stop incineration of soiled bio-medical waste in central treatment facility in Kolkata.

DISHA, being a network partner of Global Alliance for Incineration Alternative (GAIA) and Alliance for Waste Management (AWM) is active on the issues of urban solid waste management and is opposed to thermal treatment of waste in the name of 'Waste to Energy' Projects. *DISHA* is working with a number of Municipalities and also intervening at policy level to develop good practices municipal waste management through non-incineration technologies based on community initiative, composting and recycling.

DISHA is engaged in a campaign against PVC. *DISHA* developed a state level network to carry on the campaign, demanding 'Phase out PVC'. Municipalities and state authorities are being pursued to stop purchase of PVC materials for construction, water supplies and office furniture. Health Department is being pursued to stop use of PVC medical equipments in hospitals. Demands have been raised to ban PVC toys.

DISHA is partnering with organizations to fight against indiscriminate use of chemical pesticides in agricultural fields and in tea gardens.

On the basis of the above experiences, it was felt that POPs should be given special emphasis. Awareness activities and a campaign need to be developed especially on the issue of POPs. Hence the following activities were undertaken through the project.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITY

Knowledge and awareness regarding Persistent Organic Pollutants are least in the state of West Bengal, although some general awareness regarding ill effects of chemical pesticides is present. Multiple sources of POPs are little known. POPs are yet to be on the agenda of environmental initiatives working in the region. Authorities are either unaware of or indifferent about the health hazards associated with POPs. Although the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) had identified four (DDT, PCBs and unintentional POPs

– that is, dioxins and furans) among the twelve POPs as more relevant for India, there have been few steps to restrict or minimize them. The region has a good number of industries where POPs are either produced or used. Tea gardens in East and North East India extensively use pesticides. DDT meant for mosquito control is illegally used in agriculture. There is little control on production and use of PCBs in industries. A huge amount of plastics including PVC routed through municipal waste are openly burnt in the agricultural fields adjacent to garbage sites. Central Treatment Facilities for treatment of bio-medical waste are coming up. The one which has been installed in Kolkata (the capital city of the state) is incinerating soiled waste violating CPCB guidelines. There has been eschewing increase in incidence of diseases that may be caused by POPs produced through these processes. The project was envisaged to address these problems.

ACTIVITIES OVERVIEW

The following activities were proposed:

1. Documentation of existing literature, data and field level experiences with a view to serve the campaign activists and researchers and provide informational input in the process of developing of the National Implementation Plan.
2. Publication of an information pack about POPs, POPs sources, health and environmental impacts, and appropriate alternatives. Publication of campaign literatures.
3. Campaign activities and networking.
4. A state level meeting/ workshop to work out a future campaign.

Here is a brief on the activities that were undertaken by DISHA under the proposed activity.

A. Documentation:

Apart from standard books and literatures, a good number of research papers, occasional papers, studies, newspaper clippings, have been collected and processed. The documents are available for the researchers, students and interested social activists.

The special drive for documentation was given to collect materials with a view to develop an Information Pack as a guiding material for the campaign activists.

B. Publication and Campaign Material:

1. An Information Pack titled “A Campaigners’ Handbook” developed through the documentation effort has been published for distribution among activists and interested persons.

2. A leaflet in Bengali was produced for distribution during poster exhibitions and meetings.
3. A Booklet in Bengali explaining POPs in detail was published for relatively serious readers.

Besides, some campaign materials were produced. These include:

1. A Poster Set consisting twelve exclusive posters narrating the general information related to POPs in Bengali was developed.
2. A slide set in English for Over Head Projection (OHP) was produced for discussion in small group meetings.

C. Networking:

Campaign activities focusing exclusively on POPs started with issuance of a letter to all like-minded civil society groups active on environmental issues.

A campaign launching meeting was held on 3 May 2005. The report of the meeting is available as Annexure 6. The possibilities of launching a POPs Elimination Network in West Bengal with the participation of initiatives from different districts of the state were assessed.

In addition, number of group meetings and poster set exhibitions were organized to popularize the issue.

The POPs issue was raised at other related forum and sectors. These include:

- a) Anti PVC campaign
- b) Bio-medical waste management by writing a letter to the State Pollution Control Board against burning of bio-medical waste in Central Treatment Facility of Kolkata. A poster was also developed on the issue.
- c) Municipal Solid Waste by opposing stand of the Ministry of Non-conventional Energy to subsidies Waste to Energy Projects.

D. State level meeting:

The West Bengal state level meeting was held on 7 January 2006. NGOs and individuals from eight districts attended the meeting. Participants resolved to take on the campaign in their respective areas and involve more groups and individuals to carry forward the cause. A network on toxics issues including waste management was proposed. The network shall include POPs as one of the important issue to deal with.

E. Media Sensitization and Press Conferences:

Media representatives were invited to attend the meeting. They were briefed on the issue of POPs and a Press note was released.

EVALUATION:

The issue of POPs is almost an unknown subject among the environmental activists. Even many of the academicians and physicians are unaware about the characteristics of POPs. Concerned people have had some introduction to pesticides and PVC etc. But POPs as a group of toxins are yet to be known to the activists. So the task was to introduce the subject to the concerned people. The project activities could at least reach a section of the civil society activists who are concerned about environmental issues. They have taken interest to develop knowledge base and sustain the campaign.

All the activities undertaken were complied with but some delay took place in completion of the project.

OVERALL IMPACT

Apart from demanding that the government ratification the Stockholm Convention, no direct action targeting POPs in general could be suggested.

Most of the pesticides belong to POPs groups are banned. They may be present in the market in different names but that needs intensive probing, which could not be done through this project. Regarding DDT, two kinds of reactions were found. Among the POPs, DDT is most commonly known to the people. A good number of activists are aware about the problems of DDT. But at the same time a large number are in favour of using it for mosquito control, as Malaria is prevalent in large parts of West Bengal. A specific study regarding the use of DDT in agriculture or large scale dumping of unaccounted DDT is yet to be done in the state.

Although the presence of industrial POPs and unintentional POPs may be ascertained through cause and effect relationship, the same is not supported by any specific study in the state. The studies, which proved presence of POPs in breast milk, could not specifically indicate the sources.

The effects of POPs cannot be readily seen. Sources also cannot be readily detected. Any such effect is not summarily proved. So the feedbacks were not very frequent. Media did not take much interest.

Still a handful of researchers and activists have taken keen interest in the subject. They have committed to carry on the campaign.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Some of the key achievements can be listed as follows:

- The issue has been brought to the agenda of a section of concerned researchers and environmental activists.
- Campaign materials in the local and easy to understand language have been produced.

FUTURE PLAN

- Demand for effective implementation of the provisions of the Stockholm Convention.
- An awareness campaign shall be taken up.
- A state level network will be developed to sustain the campaign.
- A survey among the peasants will be conducted to ascertain and collect samples of pesticides being used by them in the fields.
- Probe ongoing studies on POPs at institutes will be made
- State level environmental authorities will be pursued to take necessary steps regarding rampant open burning of waste, incineration of bio-medical waste etc. Any effort to develop WTE plants would be opposed.
- Possibility for participation in NIP will be probed.