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International POPs Elimination Project

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

Public Information and Awareness Campaign on POPs

Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ)

**Nepal
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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

Public Information and Awareness Campaign on POPs

BACKGROUND

Public participation is the key to any change in the society. The general public has the right to know both the negative and positive aspects of existing practices. They also need to be aware of the changes that need to be introduced as well as how the same could be achieved. This holds well in the context of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) as well.

People have the right to know of the dangers that these chemicals, which have till recently been considered man's best friend, pose to the health and environment. They also have to know about the practices, for example the use of incinerators etc. that are endangering their lives. They need to be fully informed about the various aspects of these chemicals in order to make an informed decision. This also includes having knowledge of alternatives to POPs and POPs generating activities. Only then can one expect a change in behaviour and practices resulting in POPs elimination.

Though there has been a general awareness on environment conservation in Nepal, the issue of POPs is very new. The general public in Nepal who can play an important role in the elimination of POPs are not well informed on the issue.

With this backdrop, the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ) initiated a Public Awareness campaign in Nepal. The primary aims of this campaign were to raise awareness on POPs among the general public and to increase public participation in campaign to eliminate POPs from Nepal

Date-expired POPs are lying in different depots of His Majesty's government. These POPs are located in the residential areas. Their storage and packaging is in very bad conditions. NEFEJ took up a survey of these POPs storage hotspots to unravel the detailed information of the types of POPs stored, conditions of storage and packaging. It prepared a video documentation for dissemination among the general public. This contained information on the impacts of POPs and recommendations for containing and/or eliminating POPs. The campaign highlighted the role of common people in POPs reduction and elimination.

Below is a brief description on the various activities taken up and their outcome.

DETAILS OF ACTIVITIES AND THEIR OUTCOME

1. Survey of Obsolete Pesticide and POPs storage site in different parts of Nepal

The NEFEJ team visited different POPs / obsolete pesticides hotspots. The team's quick observations are as follows:

Amlekhgunj (Central Nepal)

- This site contains 50 metric tones of obsolete pesticides. The pesticides are packed in steel and plastic drums. The store is an old house. The store is next to a secondary school with more than 800 students and is surrounded by human settlement. Students, teachers and guardians demanded removal of pesticides from Amlekhgunj.
- The pesticides packed in steel and plastic drums have not leaked to the floor. However, the wall facing the school is damp which scares the local people and school children.

Biratnagar (Eastern Nepal)

- This site has been found recently. It contains about two metric tones of old pesticides including some POPs. Pesticides have not been properly packed and are leaking to the bamboo-mud floor.
- The roof of the warehouse is leaking. Condition of the warehouse suggests possible contamination of the ground from leaked pesticides.

Nepalgunj (Western Nepal)

- There have been two sites with obsolete pesticides in western Nepal. While one warehouse is relatively far from huge settlement another is in the middle of the town. In both stores, pesticides have not been properly packed posing a serious risk of contamination.

2. Publication of booklet

After visiting the sites where the pesticides were stockpiled, two members of NEFEJ, Mr. Mohan Mainali and Mr. Hasta Gurung, prepared a report on the issue. This report has taken the form of a booklet and is available in Nepali. 500 copies of this booklet were printed and disseminated.

Content

The booklet contains

- i. Introduction of POPs and their affects on human and natural cycles. The introductory chapter also deals with the definition of POPs, their basic characteristics and the effects on humans and environment. It also describes the various types of POPs such as pesticides, industrial chemicals like the Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCB) and other by-products. The booklet describes these POPs in details.

- ii. The second chapter of booklet deals with POPs in Nepal. One of the main sources of POPs in Nepal is the obsolete pesticides stockpile. There are about 75 metric tones of pesticides in Nepal. Of them about eight metric tones of pesticides are POPs. They are stored in at least five different locations. Obsolete pesticides in general and POPs pesticides in particular are not stored in a safe manner.

The problem of obsolete pesticides was first recorded 20 years ago. There have been several efforts to dispose these stocks but without any desirable results.

The conditions of these warehouses where the date-expired pesticides are stockpiled are also detailed. Here is an excerpt from that section:

Biratnagar of East Nepal: The warehouse is made up of bamboo. Its roof is leaking. This does not meet the Nepali standard for pesticide warehouses.

Amlekhgunj: This is the largest obsolete pesticides warehouse in Nepal where about 50 metric tones of pesticides are stored. The warehouse is surrounded by densely populated village. At least one thousand students and teachers have demanded removal of pesticides from their neighbourhood.

Khumaltar: There are about 5 metric tones of pesticides in Kathmandu. These were safely packed by Greenpeace in 2001.

Nepalgunj: The pesticides warehouse is surrounded by human settlements. Its roof is leaking. Pesticides are leaking from the containers. Some of the pesticides have been packed in plastic drums. But the drums are not safe enough.

Khajura: This is the most dangerous warehouse in terms of storage condition. The liquid pesticides are leaking on the floor.

The booklet also provides records of the amount of pesticides stock, which is as follows:

Location	Pesticides stock (in MT)	POPs (in MT)
Biratnagar	1.5	-
Amlekhgunj	51	5.6
Khumaltar	5	
Nepalgunj	5	2.18
Khajura	1.5	-
Others	5	-
Total	70	7.78

The booklet also has a description on polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in Nepal. Though Nepal is not an industrial country it has been using PCBs for about 10 years. PCBs in Nepal are being used in heat transfer fluid in various equipments.

Transformers containing PCBs are not stored properly. PCBs in Nepal are being used in welding machines and various household electrical equipments.

Dioxins and Furans: Nepal has been disposing household and hospital wastes in open dumps, which are openly burnt. The incinerators used by various hospitals and hotels are substandard and produce dioxins and furans in huge quantities. In addition, Nepal has some pulp and paper factories using chlorine, another source of dioxin.

- iii. Finally the booklet describes the efforts made so far to tackle POPs issue. This chapter deals with international efforts to stop the use of POPs worldwide. Nepal signed the Stockholm convention on 5th April 2002 but has not yet ratified it. The Ministry of Population and Environment is currently implementing POPs Enabling Activities Project to address the issue.

The booklet also includes two articles independently written by journalists Mr. Chandra Kishor Jha and Mr. Krishna Adhikari.

Mr. Jha's write up is about trauma of students living with pesticides and Mr. Adhikari's story is about date expired pesticides.

Distribution

The booklet was distributed to concerned government officials and journalists. It was distributed as training resource material during the reporting training to journalists. It was also distributed to other NGOs and individuals interested in the issue.

3. Video report

NEFEJ produced a video to highlight the issue of POPs among the general public. The video is in Nepali. It focuses mainly on obsolete pesticide stock in Nepal in general and POPs pesticides in Nepal and documents the same.

It also has interviews with local people, owner of the pesticides warehouse, case of students' request to the government to remove pesticides stock from their schoolyard in Amlekhgunj and a minister's response.

It used both, archival as well as fresh footage to highlight the gravity of the issue in Nepal.

Dissemination:

This was aired through NEFEJ's video magazine *AANKHIJHYL* through Kantipur Television and Channel Nepal TV on 18th July 2005. The report was also broadcasted repeatedly by Image Channel, Kantipur TV and Channel Nepal. In addition to being aired on various local channels, the video was distributed to different NGOs and CBOs for public screening. It was also screened at the South Asia Regional Capacity Building Workshop on POPs organized by Toxics Link in New Delhi, India. The workshop had over 60 participants from South Asian countries including NGOs, academic scientists, chemical industry representatives, and

representatives from UNDP, UNEP, GEF Small Grants Programme, and GTZ, and a member of the Indian Parliament.

Conclusion

The video as well as the booklet has been well received by the public as well as other stakeholders. It is seen as a valuable awareness material on POPs issues and widely referred to and used by the civil society groups as well as individuals, journalists, students etc. Being in Nepali language it has a wider reach and the simplicity of content makes it popular among the masses. It is strongly recommended that more awareness materials should be produced on the issue since it will strengthen the campaign against POPs in the country.