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International POPs Elimination Project

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

Public awareness-raising on POPs and incineration using film

“ALICE LIVES HERE” – Documentation and Popularization of a Community Struggle against the Broga Municipal Waste Incinerator

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**Malaysia
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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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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily the views of the institutions providing management and/or financial support.

This report is available in the following languages: English

“ALICE LIVES HERE” – Documentation and Popularization of a Community Struggle against the Broga Municipal Waste Incinerator

Project location: Malaysia: Selangor (Broga, Shah Alam), Kuala Lumpur.

Executive Summary

Our project is an advocacy project using the medium of film. To raise public awareness on POPs including POPs hotspots and POPs impact on human health, our five-women team is documenting the on-going struggle of the community of Broga to resist the construction of a mega-incinerator in their village; the largest in Asia of its type.

Using this documentary, we aim to create public awareness on the impact of incinerator to the environment and health, especially with regards to the emission of toxic byproduct waste such as dioxins, and the pollution of groundwater which will affect the water catchment supplying water to 1.5 million people. Our hope is to raise broader awareness of the Stockholm Convention in practice.

The documentary is intended for public screening to provide an avenue for public awareness in light of a media blackout on the incinerator construction. We have since organized 15 public screenings, and duplicated 1000 copies of CDs with subtitles in Chinese and English.

We have completed the project and received encouraging responses from both the public and the media.

The documentary tells the story of how the determined citizens of Broga fought the relocation of the largest incinerator of its type in Asia. It is told through Alice Lee, who comes from a farming family in Broga.

Broga is located some 50 km on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, straddling the states of Selangor and Negeri Sembilan, Broga is a mainly farming community, consisting of 80,00 people, the majority of whom are of Chinese ancestry, minorities of the majority-led Islamic Malay country.

Alice was instrumental in bringing the fight to court, culminating in a “stop work order” to halt the construction of potentially the largest ‘gasification fusion furnace’ incinerator in Asia.

She was the first to realize the impact the 1,500 tonne-capacity plant would have on her community and so, she mobilized them to oppose the project.

The documentary traces the political awakening of Alice, a clerk working a nine-to-five job in a furniture factory who denied ever being interested in politics. The change experienced by Alice, reflects the awakening of political consciousness of the people of Broga.

Background of the project

The RM1.5 billion (USD400 mil) incinerator project is a joint venture between the government of Malaysia and Japanese company Ebara with dubious track record. It was first slated to be built in Puchong, a town nearer to Kuala Lumpur, but intense opposition from middle-class, politically connected people crushed the plans. The next stop was Broga.

Despite the intense struggle in Broga since 2002, few Malaysians have heard of the incinerator. The government's order of a media blackout has effectively prevented the matter from ever seeing the light of day in the mainstream media. Our film managed to raise the issue of Broga in the guise of an award winning film. However, recently, the media blackout has been lifted with the exception of The Star, which is owned by the Chinese party of the ruling coalition that was implementing the project.

But what the government did not bargain for was that, despite the overwhelming disadvantage in power and influence, the people of Broga fought tooth and nail to stop the incinerator from taking root in their backyard.

They campaigned, organized and educated themselves over the dangers of dioxin-poisoning. They learned the due processes of implementing state projects and faulted the government for discrepancies. For instance, with the help of an investigative journalist from the alternative online press, Malaysiakini, they found out from the Japanese government that the cost of the project was RM1.3 billion. What they were told here was that it costs RM1.5 billion, leaving the difference of RM0.2 billion of tax-payers dollars unaccounted for.

They enlisted the help of the Global Alliance for Incineration Alternatives (GAIA) and joined the global fight against incinerators, whilst advocating for zero-waste emissions strategies such as reusing and recycling.

The ultimate deed was voting for the opposition party, the Pan Islamic Society, a fundamental Islamic party that is traditionally shunned by the Chinese populace. That prompted the deployment of some 40 Special Branch personnel (military intelligence) in one anti-incinerator gathering at Alice's village house in Broga.

Not contented with that, they went house to house, collected money, hired a lawyer and took the matter to court demanding answers from the government which was smugly hiding behind the Official Secrets Act. When they realized that work appears to be starting on the project, they applied for a temporary stop work order with Alice as the first plaintiff.

However, the interim stop work order expired in June 2005 and work has resumed despite the case still being fought in court. The community is planning for a second lawsuit.

Alice is humble for what she has done and attributes their victory and continual struggle to collective effort. Their struggle is inspirational as it reflects the growing discontent with

Malaysia's authoritarian politics, which rests on the assumption that the government knows best.

Broga's struggle calls for the freeing of state control information to allow for greater democratic participation in development projects that affects people's lives and the environment.

Our film focused on Alice Lee, the representative of the Broga community. Since February 2005, we have followed the activities of Alice Lee and her community closely documenting their campaign against the incinerator. In the film, not only have we highlighted the struggle of the people but also the potential impact of the incinerator to health and environment, including the potential formation and release of unintended persistent organic pollutants (POPs).

In early June, we produced a 25 minute-documentary, Clean Shit (renamed Alice Lives Here), which won the best film at the Freedom Film Fest 2005, Malaysia (6-10 July, 2005).

We continued to update the film to include the latest information about the campaign and at the same time organized public screenings.

The major contributing members to this project are: Chua Siew Eng, Hilary Chiew, Leow Mei Chern, Loh Yin San, Ong Ju Lin, Tham Kar Yin, and Wong Yuen Mei. We have since named our group ReelPower, with the mission "to use the moving power of film to advocate for social justice, freedom of expression and cultural pluralism".

Feedback Gathered

Generally, we have received very encouraging feedback on the film, not only from the community, but also from other organizations and individuals who have viewed our documentary.

The anti-incinerator committee was pleased with the documentary. They also appreciated our effort in drawing more publicity to this issue.

One criticism of our documentary is that we have not proposed an alternative solution to the incinerator, so the audience would like to know more about the alternatives.

Another comment is that we could still improve on our technical skills (handling of camera, editing). We have since organized informal sharing sessions with friends, and among young filmmakers' groups.

Updated Activities

The major activities initiated by the anti-incinerator committee, in which we have participated in during recent months, are:

- 1) August 16, 2005 – Alice Lee gave a talk to the Malaysian Institute of Management in Flamingo Hotel about the Broga incinerator.
- 2) August 10, 2005 - Alerted of a trespass on Alice Lee's mother's land, we filmed the

reactivation of the project including land surveying and soil testing by contractors.

3) September 2, 2005 - We documented the attempt by the Broga Anti-Incinerator Sub-committee to hand over a memorandum to the Prime Minister who was officiating the opening of Nottingham University in Semenyih.

4) October 2005 - Alice Lee, the lawyers and several members of the community negotiated to keep their land at the Selangor Land Office, Shah Alam.

5) November 19, 2005 - Screening of the updated version, renamed as *Alice Lives Here* at the fundraising dinner, Taman Tasik Semenyih. We helped the Broga community raise funds for their legal fees of RM20,000 to finance the second lawsuit. We contributed 50 CDs to the Anti-Incinerator Sub-Committee to be sold at RM20 each, thus, raising a total of RM1,000, or 5% of the legal fees.

Apart from the above, we have initiated on our own, other activities:

1. Launched a letter writing campaign in response to the Addendum Environmental Impact Assessment of the relocation of the project site a little lower down hill.
2. Organized 17 screenings (see attached)
3. Organizing interested people to conduct screenings in their own communities.
Examples: screening in colleges, private screenings for Ong Ka Ting, Minister of Housing and Local Government, the implementer of the incinerator project.
4. Giving interviews to newspapers and public TV. (See attached for list of interviews)
5. We have started collecting the media coverage on our blog, Reelpower.blogspot.com
6. Reaching out to MPs (members of parliament) to voice the concerns about incinerators.
7. Sending a copy of the CD to Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi.
8. Questions from earlier screenings were synthesized and compiled into an FAQ (attached) and WHAT YOU CAN DO leaflet that was inserted into the updated version CD cover.
9. Two friends volunteered by producing 130 CDs free as a contribution to our efforts- 30 copies of VCD and 100 copies of VCDs in August and November respectively for distribution.
10. Participated in Asian Women in Development (AWID) Conference in Bangkok, Thailand, with an international audience of about 20 people, and collected 40 signatures.
11. We have also circulated copies to our allies in various countries (Philippines, Singapore, Germany, and Canada).
12. We are now preparing to print 1000 copies of “Alice Lives Here” with subtitles in Chinese and English, and plan to distribute them through various networks like NGOs, political parties, anti-incinerator committees, media organizations and even to display them in bookstores or other distribution channels for sale.

Results

The results of this project have been positive and encouraging. The media, though careful, published reports about our film and indirectly brought out the issue of the Broga incinerator. Recently, there has been a lax in the control of the media, brought about by the new prime minister's leadership. However, The Star, which has the widest English readership refrained

from covering the issue as they are owned by the Chinese party of the ruling coalition which is implementing the project through the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

The anti-incinerator committee has campaigned on this issue since 2002 and this documentary offered a new medium which was previously not available to them. Indirectly, this documentary helped boost their morale and gave them a stronger voice.

The effect of this project has snowballed further and reached out beyond our immediate contacts. For example, we have received emails and text messages from individuals and organizations that expressed their support, wanted to organize screening for their groups, or to buy copies of our CDs. We have also received repeated invitations for screenings by the Malaysian Nature Society, and we are still working on screening opportunities with other groups.

In short, we have succeeded in using the medium of film to convey the message effectively, and reaching out to groups that we previously had no access to.

Future plans

The local anti-incinerator committee has put up a tough fight on this issue, and there is a need for continuous campaigns and to foster a stronger overseas collaboration, so that this project can be part of the larger anti-incinerator or environmental movement. By networking with international bodies, we hope to bring this project to the next level, to use this documentary to advocate for more international support, and to gather more pressure on the local authority on this issue.

We also hope to learn from other organizations about using videos in advocacy, to increase our skills in film activism, and to continue producing more videos.

Appendix

Budget

We received RM10,463.86 (about USD2800) via CAP in Nov 2005, and below is the breakdown of our expenses:

Stationery, tapes, CD/DVDs	RM 1,000
Communications/courier	RM 600
Transport	RM 600
Macintosh	RM 6,000
Camera	RM 2,100
Hard disk/drive, mic, cable	RM 800
Editing	RM 700
CD Printing	RM 2,200
Total	RM 14,000

Apart from IPEP funding, we received donations from the public, contributions from the Broga Anti-incinerator Committee (duplication of CDs -RM500), prize money from the film festival (RM1000), friends and team members' contribution, and sale of CDs.

Media Coverage

Print:

- New Straights Times,
- The Sun, <http://www.sun2surf.com/article.cfm?id=10838>
- Off The edge
- InterPress Agency

MEDIA-MALAYSIA:Saying It With 'Indie' Films

on 28/02/2006 09:38:34 GMT

Baradan Kuppusamy KUALA LUMPUR , Feb 28 (IPS) - One day, last year, reporter Ong Ju Lin attended a forum and heard villager Alice Lee argue why a multi-billion dollar incinerator should not be built near her home in Kajang town, about 30 km south of the capital.... *(continue)*

Website:

- Malaysiakini – malaysiakini.tv
- Kakiseni.com (<http://www.kakiseni.com/articles/reviews/MDC2Nw.html>)

Television

- NTV7, My Siasat Mandarin, replayed a few times in national TV
- NTV7, Breakfast Show

International Screenings

1. International Workshop on “Human Security and Gender in Asia”, Centre for Gender Studies, 18 Sept 2005, 3 pm, International Christian University (ICU), Tokyo, Japan, (30 people)

2. AWID (The Association for Women's Rights in Development) Forum, 27 Oct 2005, Shangri-la Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand, (20 people)

List of Local Screenings

1. University Tunku Abdul Rahman, journalism course, June 2005. (100 people)
2. Freedom Film Fest, July 6, 2005 (150 people)
3. Malaysiakini, independent online media - July 15, 2005, (18 people)
4. CMP Medica, July 13 2005 (20 people)
5. New Era College, Economics lecture, about 50 students
6. Notthatbalai, Art Festival Aug 2005 (6 people)
7. All Women's Action Society, October 2005 -January, 2006 (3 screenings - 50 people, used as a training tool on democratic participation.)
8. Malaysian Nature Society, Rimba Ilmu Auditorium, Oct 15, 2005 (30 people)
9. HELP Institute, Kelab Seni Kebangsaan Malaysia, quarterly screening of Malaysian independent documentaries (voted best by audience), 7 November 2005 (32 people)
10. Taman Tasik Fund Raising Dinner, Nov 19, 2005 (150 people)
11. Centre of Independent Journalists, Dec 17, 2005 (25 people)
12. Malaysian Nature Society, Annual Fundraising and Membership-drive Day, Dec 18 (30 people)
13. Malaysian Nature Society, Raptor Watch, Tanjung Tuan, March 5, 2006 (28 people)
14. La Salle training on, 15th National Lasallian Leaders' Convention, December 4-9, 2005, Ipoh (50 people)
15. Gender Studies Programme, 1 March 2006, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, About 70 students
16. March 24th, Chinese Assembly Hall, a crowd of 12 people.
17. March 27th Screening at Help Institute, a crowd of 150 people.

There are other private screenings organized by team members or volunteer, and in total we have reached an audience of more than 800 people.