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International POPs Elimination Project

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

Governmental and Public Awareness-raising on POPs

Forum for Justice

**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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Governmental and Public Awareness-raising on POPs

BACKGROUND

Along with the other countries of the world, Nepal, too, has started to popularize the use of pesticides to increase the agricultural production. Farmers saw pesticides as a miracle to control insects. Unfortunately, policy makers had not seriously realized the harmful effects of pesticides. (Dhruba N. Manandhar; SPOTLIGHT Vol.23, No. 35, Mar. 19-25, 2004).

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has warned that huge amounts of obsolete and unused pesticides continue to threaten human health and the environment in many developing countries. FAO has urged the international community to increase its efforts to solve "this environmental tragedy" as the stockpiles of obsolete pesticides are seen as a time bomb.

The trend of current use of pesticides in Nepal has moved away from the most toxic POPs. However, there are reports that state, "most of the Nepalese people are still using the chemicals in their agricultural land despite being banned by international conventions. Organochlorine pesticides such as DDT and Lindane (BHC) are still openly used in some pocket areas of the country such as Dhading, Bhaktapur and Panchkhal.

About 75 tons of obsolete pesticides were distributed for use in farms and for other agriculture purposes. A remaining 75 tons were sprayed or buried without proper planning, equipment or knowledge. Today, more than 75 tons of obsolete pesticides remain distributed in different warehouses in Nepal as stockpiles. These areas have frequently been referred to as "ticking time bombs," due to their unstable nature and highly toxic properties. They also pose a tremendous health risk to the people dwelling in the surroundings areas as well as to the majority of Nepalese citizens.

In spite of the enforcement of the Pesticides Acts and Regulations, different kinds of pesticides and POPs-related chemicals are haphazardly being used in the country. Agriculture pesticides use and its expansion is directly related to farmers' acceptance and adaptation of improved exotic crop varieties, increasing use of chemical fertilizers and use of irrigation facilities to achieve more crop yield of better outlook.

A recent survey conducted by Entomology Division, Kathmandu indicated that farmers are still using pesticides included in POPs such as DDT, Endrin, and Lindane (BHC) for different purposes. According to the report, the shopkeeper had provided DDT in the name of Lindane (BHC) to the farmers. The nationally banned pesticides are easily available on the market through illegal routes. These pesticides are also imprudently used for poaching and fishing purposes in addition to the agricultural field. There is evidence of frequent use of Lindane (BHC) by women and children to kill lice on their bodies and bugs in their beds. POPs-related chemicals such as Lindane (BHC) are used on crops at the milking stage against rice bugs. It is also used to

manage the aphids in mustard plants and ants in households. The chemicals will persist in soil for years.

FAO estimates that there are more than 100 thousands tons of obsolete pesticides in developing countries. Due to the absence of environmentally sound disposal facilities, stocks are constantly increasing. Some stocks over 30 years old. Large proportions of obsolete pesticides are left over from earlier foreign assistance programs. They can no longer be used because they are now banned or they have deteriorated as a result of prolonged storage.

Large quantities of banned and expired pesticides have been sent to Nepal as "aid" from both developed and developing countries. For example Indonesia exported 100 tons of old stocks of DDT to Nepal in 1994. In addition to DDT, several other pesticides were given to Nepal as International Aid. As a result, Nepal has been forced to pick up the burden of other countries' unwanted pesticides, despite having its own unmanageable quantity of old stocks.

As a result of years of accumulation Nepal has large quantities of expired pesticides stored in various government-owned warehouses throughout the country. In many cases, pesticides are stored in inadequate facilities, including warehouses located in populated areas adjacent to dwellings, schools and livestock.

Since these stocks of old chemicals present a serious risk both to human health and the environment, in 1988 The UN Development Programme provided grants to the government of Nepal for the technical assistance to dispose of stocks of old pesticides (Obsolete Pesticides, Global Pesticides Campaigner, Vol. 2 No 1).

Greenpeace has called upon pesticides manufactures to remove and ensure the safe disposal of obsolete pesticides that the companies have exported to and abandoned in Nepal over the past 20 years. The most dangerous pesticides at the Kathmandu site according to Greenpeace are chlorinated organomercury compounds produced by the German company Bayer and banned in the European Union since 1988. Greenpeace added that Bayer has refused the repeated request of Nepalese government to help in cleaning up the stocks (Companies slow to clean up Obsolete Pesticide Stocks; From Pesticide Action Network Updates Service, November 2, 2001).

The use of banned or restricted pesticides cannot be prevented effectively because of illegal trans-boundary movement of pesticides. There is little or no information on such illegal movements regarding the name, quantities of chemicals sold. Many farmers/workers are unaware of some of the properties of pesticides, and their adverse consequences for human health. They do not know how to protect themselves from poisoning. Generally people believe that pesticides kill people immediately and if it does not kill immediately then it is harmless. There is widespread ignorance of the existence of chronic pesticide poisoning. Concepts of pesticide resistance/resurgence are still not understood by the farmers. As agriculture is more commercialized, Nepalese farmers have started using various kinds of pesticides to increase yields. They are using highly toxic and hazardous pesticide, ignoring their impact on health and environment. Importers/resellers/farmers refer to pesticides as medicines rather than poisons. The national consumption of pesticides is about 56 tons of active ingredient formulation annually (Dhruba N. Manandhar SPOTLIGHT Vol. 23, No. 35, Mar. 19-25, 2004).

According to the law, it is mandatory for a person or firm to acquire a certificate of registration before the import, export, sale or purchase of pesticides, insecticides and herbicides. But in practice the sell of pesticides still take place openly without following these guidelines in many parts of the country. A study conducted by Nepal Research Council (NARC), an apex government agriculture research body, reveals that vegetable farmers wait for less than the required time to harvest vegetables after using pesticides. Nepal shares a long open boarder with India where agrochemical production is growing without quality controls. Cheap and environmentally harmful agrochemicals come across in Nepal.

OUR INTERVENTION

In this context effective programs on awareness generation for the general public and information on substitutes to POPs etc are very much needed to protect human health and the environment.

Considering these facts, Forum for Justice proposed a PAM to disseminate information on POPs.

In the first phase of the programme, collection of literature on POPs and chemicals that are being used in agriculture was done. During the information collection period we attained all the seminars organized in Kathmandu to get information regarding pesticides and chemicals. The live interactions and the feedback coming from those seminars were in fact very useful for us and boosted our effort to collect information and to know the real situations of pesticides use within the country.

In the same way, we conducted series of discussions with the coordinator of the POPs enabling projects, under the Ministry of Population and Environment. These were fruitful discussions and involved sharing information on POPs. Through discussions we came to know the work being undertaken under the project and the number of non-governmental organizations working to eradicate persistent organic pollutants. Then we also discussed with some of the NGOs about their efforts and activities being done by them.

Similarly, we conducted a field visit to Amlekhgunj, where obsolete pesticides have been piled up for a long time. It is regarded as time bomb. From the visit we were convinced that the stocks that are piled pose a serious threat to the locals. They can neither throw out the pesticides nor can they simply use it as pesticides. We found that there are number of organizations working to reduce pesticides within Amlekhgunj. Through the discussion we came to know that many children are suffering from different illnesses.

After the collection of literature and sharing of information on POPs with different communities we conducted a round table discussion in course of an interaction programme conducted by Forum for Justice in Chitwan. Around 40 participants including officers from the agriculture office, NGOs, local people, lawyers and people from different disciplines were present in the program. The media took an initiative role in publicizing the program. The media and the participants of the program really praised the round table discussion. The commitments of local people were found to be very positive to get rid of the pesticides in Chitawan.

As a part of sensitizing people and making them aware about the impact of POPs under the project, a leaflet containing information on POPs was published. The information leaflet of eight pages found to be very useful in disseminating information regarding persistent organic pollutants. The feedback of the readers is even more encouraging.

THE RESPONSE/ IMPACT

There is very limited information on the Stockholm Convention on POPs at the policy and grass roots level in Nepal. Due to the lack of access to information and language problems people often do not know about the pollutants and their harmful effects as well as the way to prevent and control negative effects on public health and ecosystems. Knowledge about POPs is likely to facilitate meaningful participation of local people in the development of a POPs action plan and its subsequent implementation at the local level.

The project was found to be very useful to enhance knowledge about Stockholm Convention on POPs and statutory provisions of Nepal. It is expected that the publication can play a key role in disseminating knowledge on the impacts of POPs on public health and ecosystem to the people at different levels.

The publication enlightens people about the status of Stockholm Convention on POPs; impacts of POPs on public health and ecosystems; initiates a discourse on POPs and the state's responsibility to eliminate import and use of POPs in Nepal; influences and encourages local people and institutions to claim their rights to be protected against the negative effects of POPs; and builds public pressure for the accession and ratification of Stockholm Convention on POPs.

The policy brief is expected to assist NGOs, governmental organization's local agencies, and the general public in enhancing public awareness on POPs; increasing access to information on POPs; and enhancing cooperation among governmental and non governmental agencies to address POPs problems.

FUTURE PLANS

The Forum for Justice aims to give continuity to the project considering the difficult situation in Nepal. Thus, in the future, Forum for Justice aims to publish articles on POPs in the newspaper so as to inform people about the impacts of POPs and relevant issues. In the same way, we are still unaware about the total stockpiles of pesticides in the country. So we have planned to update information regarding unknown stockpiles. Similarly in the due time, we will have managed to make a network with farmers, NGOs, and GOs. In the future, we plan to share information regarding pesticides uses and relevant issues in Nepal.

Annexure A:

POPs Information Letter (Language: Nepali)

The topics included in the information letter are Introduction of Persistent Pesticides; Their physical and chemical natures; Impact of POPs on human health and environment; Ways of pesticides bio-magnification in human body and its Consequences; Sources of Persistent pesticides; Situation of Persistent Pollutants and chemicals in farmland, hospitals and industries; International efforts to control sale and use of pesticides (Basel Convention on the Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Waste, 1989; Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedures for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, 1998; Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), 2001); Objectives of these three International Conventions; Major Provisions of these International Conventions; Responsibility of the Conference of the Parties for effective implementation of Convention's provisions; Nepal's involvement in fulfilling the provisions of International Convention; Situation of Persistent Pollutants in Nepal; and Some Recent Research and their results in national and international levels.

The information letter has also emphasized the different provisions of Stockholm Convention. Apart from these it dealt with number of small-highlighted boxes include typical examples and information on POPs.

Annexure B:



Picture 1. Stockpiles stored safely in Khumaltar



Picture 2. Amlekhjung stockpiles in school