



ECO ETHICS

KENYA

The POPs Project

Location: Mombasa

Timeline: September 2009 to July 2011

Funding: UNDP Global Environment Facility, Small Grants Programme

Objectives: Reduce production of unintentional POPs by Mombasa's informal economy; raise awareness of chemical pollution; develop alternative income-generating activities

About the project:

Persistent organic pollutants (POPs) are among our most harmful chemical pollutants. Since they resist breakdown by chemical and biological processes they can remain in the environment - water, soil and air - for decades, and accumulate in the food chain. In humans, POPs are linked to serious health effects such as cancer, diabetes and disruption of reproductive systems. Most at risk are breast-feeding infants and workers regularly exposed to the chemicals. Sufferers of HIV/AIDS with weakened immune systems are also vulnerable.

The most infamous source of POPs is the pesticide DDT, but they are also released as by-products from the burning of materials including tyres, electronic waste and plastics. Such activities are common in the slum districts of Mombasa. In the informal (juakali) sector, youths burn used car-tyres to extract wire for re-sale, scrap-metal dealers melt down electronic waste in the search for valuable metal, and open burning of trash, though illegal, is a daily occurrence in the absence of a proper collection system. Workers and nearby residents breathe in the toxic fumes, while ash drains into watercourses and pollutes local water supplies.

With funding from the Global Environment Facility's Small Grants Programme, Eco-Ethics launched a project to sensitise juakali artisans to the potential consequences of their work and help them find alternative sources of income. The project proposal had four components: To carry out a baseline survey in juakali areas such as Kibarani to measure the level of awareness of the environmental and health issues, map pollution hotspots and record people's concerns. programme of public education and awareness-raising, including sensitisation workshops, on-site visits and a bimonthly POPs talk series. Promotion of best available technology and best environmental practices through training for artisans and youth groups, and demonstration of alternatives. To establish a civil society network in Mombasa to lobby municipal authorities to introduce new bylaws and enforce existing policies on safe chemicals management.

There are examples of artisans successfully developing alternative livelihoods. For example, rather than burn car tyres for wire, groups can recycle them to make brake pedals, toys or tyre-soled shoes. Nevertheless, the entire production chain must be considered. For example, Eco-Ethics learned of one group who made products from vehicle tyres. Their work was commendable - save for the fact that their refuse ended up in Kibarani, where it was eventually burnt.

Results from the baseline survey revealed a low level of environmental awareness among juakali communities and high levels of poverty and drug use. We used findings and interview footage from the survey to create a video documentary, which was featured on Kenya's KTN News environment show and has since proved a useful education tool. Project stakeholders identified from government, civil society and research institutions gathered at a workshop to share information and agree on an action plan. We also held a successful workshop for artisans involved in activities that lead to POPs. During the day, participants were introduced to the hazards of POPs and considered alternative activities. Many promised to take the message back to their fellow workers. It was a positive step, but work on the project in education, capacity-building and lobbying continues.