

# Ethiopia Activities

## Spirited Campaign Against Plastic Waste in Addis Ababa

"Plastic Bag Waste: a big challenge and an opportunity to clean up Ethiopia" was the theme behind this year's "Anti-Festal" campaign. In this week-long campaign three major programmes were featured: a panel discussion, a 'Festal' ('Festal' in the Ethiopian local language 'Amharic' refers to the flimsy plastic bags) collection competition and a street parade that altogether raised public awareness of the damaging effect of plastic bags on our environment.

SOS Addis, in collaboration with the Millennium

Secretariat, other organizations as well as the support of several concerned individuals and members conducted its second annual "Anti-festal" pollution campaign week from 20 to 28 October 2007.

It was established a few years ago. The women founders aspired for a greener and cleaner Addis Ababa. It is committed to making a positive contribution for Ethiopia's development through improving environmental sanitation in the rapidly growing urban areas, creating



*Campaigners marching on the streets of Addis*

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## Factoring Gender into Environmental Management

increment of donor pressure are beneficial opportunities which can play a great role in the integration of gender issues in environmental activities, it was suggested.

A group discussion among the participants was held to come up with what has to be done to increase the role of women in environmental activities, in policy implementation, decision-making and sustainable utilization of environmental resources. In discussion of successes and experiences from different areas, the example of the success of the Maasai women rainwater-harvesting project in Kenya was used. Closer to home, the gender equality and proportional as well effective labor division in Aweramba Society was cited to illustrate how even a little could make a difference to empower

women. The support of local NGOs, regional programmes like NEPAD, Ministries, research and training institutes, organizations working on gender issues should also be given emphasis.

According to Ms. Azeb Girma, Country Coordinator of ENDA Ethiopia, the main aim of the workshop was not to create awareness and knowledge about gender issues, environmental policies and programs. These are already known by more or less all the responsible sectors related with gender. The aim is to come up with possible solutions on how to implement these commitments at ground, grassroots level. It is also about how to provide focal persons with information, reports, ideas, gaps in implementation of their plans and action and finally how to use this tool to challenge the

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employment opportunities for financially disadvantaged women and by facilitating community mobilization for self-help and people-centered development. The main focus of the association is to contribute to the alleviation of environmental pollution caused by plastic waste. SOS has established three project areas that benefit over 150 unemployed and disadvantaged women who have no other means of income but to sell collected waste plastic bags to a plastic recycling factory called Oxford Polyethylene Plc, based in Debre Zeit (South East of Addis Ababa).

The panel discussion, which was held in the municipality cabinet hall on 20 October 2007, kick started the anti-festal pollution campaign. The energetic children and youth of the "Tena Kebena Ginfilen Enastda" Association entertained and inspired the audience with their theme songs. In attendance were government officials, UNEP, civil society organizations, university and high school students, SOS Addis members, and members of the public.

H. E Mr. Desalegn Mesfin, Deputy Director-General of the Federal Environment Protection Authority gave the keynote address and said that "Environment is not a museum that is preserved without serving life but it is something one has to conserve for sustainable use.... We can prevent soil erosion and land degradation and thereby ensure survival and future development".

H.E. Mr. Berhane Derresa, Mayor of the Addis Ababa Caretaker Administration, added, "Plastic bags are polluting and creating irreversible environmental problem to the beauty of Addis Ababa as well as to the health of city dwellers. Although efforts are being exerted from the municipality to remedy solid waste problems of Addis Ababa, NGO support to avert the problem is particularly significant. Dr. Feleke Zewge from Addis Ababa University Department of Chemistry, Mr. Getaneh Gebre from Addis Ababa Environment Protection Authority and Mr. Getachew Haile from Bole Sub-City Environment Protection Bureau made presentations covering the subject from the scientific aspect to the day to day instances on the ground.

Two options that are available for plastic waste disposal are burial and incineration, both of which release hazardous chemicals to the environment. Therefore recycling of plastic waste is highly beneficial. It was recommended that the manufacture of thin plastic bags should be discontinued and instead thick and durable

ones for long-term use should be promoted. Apart from the environmental benefits of recycling it also has economic benefits in that it reduces petroleum import; industries at the moment choose to manufacture plastic from original materials because petroleum is highly subsidized by the government.

The second event, also by SOS Addis, was the Festal collection competition held among eleven schools in Addis Ababa. Students of these schools organized a clean up campaign to collect and weigh large amounts of waste plastic bags. The competition achieved its goal of inspiring schools to establish environment clubs. According to the association, the major aim of this competition is to raise awareness about the danger of plastic bags to the environment, especially with the younger generation. The winners of the competition who collected the most bag litter received a computer, Philips radio and Oxford Advanced Dictionary respectively as prizes.

The highpoint of the week long campaign was a street parade held from Menelik Square to Meskel Square on Sunday 29 October 2007. In this parade, over 1200 participants marched chanting slogans and waving banners, wearing T-shirts prepared for the event. Marchers included SOS members, students, activists and the general public.

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