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We'd like the program to be locally self-reliant, running on locally enerated funds. We **do not** accept corporate or government funding and would like to maximise our reliance on individually donated funds.

Make an annual contribution of

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The Other Media (Comment: For CEM)

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Community Environmental Monitoring

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Community Environmental Monitoring



Science in Struggle & Solidarity

*Informed Grassroots Action
for Social Change*

Twenty years of pollution. Twenty years of complaints by communities. Twenty years of inaction by regulatory authorities. And then, something changed for the residents of SIPCOT chemical industrial estate in Cuddalore, Tamilnadu.

World over, toxic facilities and dirty industries are disproportionately located in communities that are economically and politically disadvantaged. SIPCOT Cuddalore is no exception. The villages around SIPCOT Cuddalore were host to a thriving agrarian and fisheries economy, until chemical industries set up there. Pollution from the factories have since devastated agriculture, eroded local fish resources and played havoc with the health of the residents. Regulatory authorities have routinely dismissed the health and environmental damage by industries there as an unavoidable price of development.

Tired of waiting for Government regulators to do their job, villagers decided to move towards self-reliance in terms of monitoring and documenting pollution, and organising their communities across village and caste lines.

What is Community Environmental Monitoring?

Besides training villagers in the science of pollution, the **Community Environmental Monitoring** initiative seeks to involve villagers in the fight against pollution by engaging them in environmental and health monitoring, and sustainable livelihood activities.

CEM is as much about the community as it is about the environment. CEM sees political empowerment and the right to make informed decisions about development as

key to success in the struggle against environmental casteism and discrimination. While local self-help is an



emphasis, CEM's philosophy also hinges on holding corporations and polluters accountable.

Less than a year after the launch of the initiative, village monitors in SIPCOT are now organised as the **SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitors (SACEM)**. In September 2004, SACEM published its first scientific report on ambient air quality in SIPCOT. The report was a first of its kind, not only because it was a scientific report by villagers, but also because it quantified toxic gases in ambient air – an exercise that no agency in India has undertaken till date. The report forms the basis for a Supreme Court order calling for the setting up of national standards for toxic gases in ambient air.

Involvement with other pollution-impacted communities in Kodaikanal and Mettur Dam in Tamilnadu, and Eloor and Edayar Industrial areas near Kochi, Kerala, is growing.

Among other things, CEM aims to inform and educate town and city residents about the plight of pollution-impacted communities, and mobilise their support for the

struggle of such communities against pollution and polluters.

Activities

- a) **Information and Organising Support:** Alerting communities of proposals to set up polluting industries in their neighbourhoods, and offer them information and organising support to prevent the entry of environmentally destructive industries in their communities.
- b) **Environmental & Health Monitoring Skills Training:** To build skills among pollution-impacted community representatives to monitor, document and communicate pollution and its effects to regulators and the general public, and take science-based action to eliminate pollution and hold polluters accountable;
- c) **Emergency Response Team:** To set up teams of trained community youth in various pollution-impacted communities to provide first-aid, relief and disaster response, and facilitate legal follow-up for compensation and action against polluter in the event of industrial accidents;
- d) **Emergency Relief Fund:** To set up a pool fund to provide immediate and interim relief to the survivors of industrial accidents;
- e) **Clean Livelihoods Program:** Involving members of pollution-impacted communities – particularly women -- in the revitalisation of the local economy by equipping them with skills to pursue environmentally sustainable livelihood.