

# *DISHA*

*concern for environment, social health & human rights*



Society for

**Direct Initiative for Social and Health Action**

[www.dishaeath.org](http://www.dishaeath.org)

## ***MISSION STATEMENT***

Our planet,  
the cradle of all life and activity is in peril.

Shrinking forests, dwindling bio-diversity,  
polluted water sources, poisoned air,  
degenerated soil, nuclear catastrophes and  
climate calamities  
confront and threaten us from every corner.

The disaster, most ironically, is largely man made.

There is a ray of hope, awareness is dawning.  
People are fighting back.  
And we all have a role to play.

The formidable task ahead  
calls for strengthening of individual efforts.

This can be done by learning from each other,  
sharing resources, exchanging views,  
joining initiatives and coordinating activities.

**Let Us Join Hands  
To Fight For Environment  
To save our planet**

**We Believe**

***TOGETHER WE SHALL BE ABLE***

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## *The journey in brief*

Some environmental, public health and social activists came together in early 1995 to form a nongovernmental non-profit organisation -

### **Beginnings**

*Society for Direct Initiative for Social and Health Action (DISHA)*. Based in Kolkata, *DISHA* started

its journey through small local efforts. The most important one was running of a clinic near city waste dumpsite at Dhapa. This gave *DISHA* an opportunity to study the pattern of diseases among waste pickers and their socio-economic conditions. The basic environmental condition of the dumpsite area was also reviewed through air and water quality monitoring. The experience propelled *DISHA* towards developing an approach on waste issues, the cardinal environmental concern of the age. *DISHA* started the **Campaign for a Zero-Waste Society** based on reduce-reuse-recycle and source segregation of waste.

One important activity of that period was to open a **Documentation**

### **Documentation**

**Centre** on environment, to support environmental activists and researchers. Since 2008, the

documentation centre has been producing an yearly compendium of news related to environment of West Bengal published in main stream print media.

In 1997 *DISHA* embarked on policy level intervention protesting the

### **Policy Intervention on Waste**

proposal to set up waste incinerators in all government hospitals in West Bengal having 300 or more beds under a World Bank project. The

incinerators were likely to cause noxious pollution along with destruction of recyclable wealth. The proposal was finally withdrawn. Since 1998 *DISHA* has been participating in national forums to develop central legislations on municipal and medical waste management. *DISHA* is also a partner in various international networks on waste and toxic issues.

In 2000 *DISHA* had supported the state government in developing and implementing a policy on use and management of disposable plastic



materials. Surveys were conducted and campaign was launched at different places in West Bengal including hills and sea-coast, networking with local groups and putting forward recommendations to the state environment department. A campaign against use of PVC, the most noxious plastic, was also launched.

#### Efforts to combat Plastic menace

Since 2002 *DISHA* has been supporting the State Health Department and Pollution Control Board in the implementation of medical waste management – undertaking studies and research, developing strategy, providing training, monitoring and assessing the status of **Medical Waste** management in the state. Compliance (statutory) survey on **Municipal Solid Waste (MSW)** management was conducted across the whole state of West Bengal to bring the real situation in public knowledge and make the authorities act. *DISHA* also works in partnership with several municipalities in managing municipal waste. In this area too *DISHA* has been **protesting the setting up of waste incinerators**. Since 2008 *DISHA* has been campaigning for proper management of electrical and electronic waste. A programme has been initiated to form **association of e-waste recycling vendors and workers** in Kolkata to address the issue.

#### Municipal, Medical and E-Waste

Since 2002 *DISHA* has been involved in the **protection of coastal environment** and collaborated with traditional fish workers' struggles in coastal areas of the country. *DISHA* protested against the eviction of fishers from Jambudwip in 2002-03. *DISHA*, in its efforts to protect the Indian coast, has been working with the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF). In 2008 *DISHA* supported and participated in the NFF led coastal long march '**Machhimar Adhikar Rashtriya Aviyan**' from Jakhau in Gujarat to Sundarbans in West Bengal via Kanyakumari thereby, covering the whole coastal stretch of Indian mainland. Raising peoples' awareness and help them fight on various issues like **selling out the coast** to reckless investors in polluting industries and businesses, **over and destructive fishing** by trawlers and mechanized boats, elbowing out

#### Coastal Issues

the coastal fishers from **coastal resource management** have been the broad areas of activity. Opposition to the attempted replacement of CRZ-1991 notification by Coastal Management Zone notification in 2008 and harmful clauses in the new CRZ-2011 notification, Sahara mega tourism in Sundarban, illegal and eco-destructive tourism in Mandarmani, proposed chemical hub on Nayachar island and Nuclear Power Plant at Haripur – are some of the important issues taken up over the years. **DISHA** conducted studies on some key issues in the coastal areas of West Bengal.

**DISHA's** concern for the lives and livelihood of coastal fishers led it to conduct five State Level Seminars on **ILO Convention No.288 on Work in Fishing**.

**DISHA** has also conducted campaigns to develop Digha (in East Midnapore) as an eco-friendly tourist sea resort.

#### The Coast and Climate Change

Coastal concerns have also brought in their train the concern with climate change, for coastal areas are at the frontline of climate susceptibility. **DISHA** was a co-organiser of the **National Public Hearing on Climate Change and Coastal Communities** held in October 2009 at Puduchery and prepared the submission on 'The Impacts of Climate Change on the Coastal Communities of West Bengal'. **DISHA** has also participated in relief work in Sundarban in post-Aila days

#### On Climate Change and CDM

Apart from concerns stemming from its coastal commitments, **DISHA** has, since 2008, been involved in general campaign on climate change issues. **DISHA** has tried to address the question of adverse effects of carbon trade in India. Campaign initiatives and in some cases active opposition have been organized against projects which are selling carbon-credit in the name of **Clean Development Mechanism**, but in practice acting as polluters.

#### Against Nuking the Coastal Environment

Since 2006 **DISHA** has been protesting the proposal of setting up of a nuclear power plant at Haripur on the East Medinipur coast. Apart from conducting series of local campaigns, mass meetings, rallies etc., **DISHA**



has organised a national convention in Kolkata to stop the nuclear initiative. Since 2007 **DISHA** has been opposing another proposal of setting up of *Petroleum, Chemicals and Petrochemical Investment Region* (PCPIR) in the Haldia-Nayachar area, an estuarine site close to Sundarban. The grounds for protesting the project was that it would inflict severe damage on the coastal-estuarine ecology and biodiversity and on the livelihoods of the fishers in the region.

Since 2004 **DISHA** has worked on toxic issues like Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPS), Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC), mercury, toxic metals and hazardous substances including pesticides. **DISHA** has conducted awareness programmes and campaigns for ban on or reduction in the manufacture and use of these materials, appealed to the central government to ratify the **Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants** and be party to UNEP programme for mercury reduction. **DISHA** undertook a significant research to investigate presence of **mercury in fish** samples taken from different places of West Bengal. The work has received wide acclaim and has commanded the attention of the United Nations Environment Programme.

**DISHA** has been involved in various movements against industrial pollution. Pollution caused by a food processing industry in Mourigram and by some sponge iron industries in the districts of Pashchim Medinipur, Purulia, Burdwan, Bankura and Birbhum have been some of the important issues addressed by **DISHA**.

Since 2003 **DISHA** has been campaigning against filling up of wetlands and water bodies at various places and has taken part in several movements initiated by local communities. Since 2007 **DISHA** has been active against destruction of a large wetland cluster in the districts of Howrah and Hooghly.

**DISHA** has brought out a number of Bengali and English publications on various issues like municipal and medical waste management, persistent organic pollutants, mercury, chemical hub in Nayachar, coastal zone management, annual compendium of environmental news etc.

## Constitution

**DISHA** is constituted as a Society under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act, 1961. It was registered on 12.09.1995 (Registration No. S 81188). Donations to **DISHA** are eligible for tax deductions under section 80G of the Indian Income Tax Act. **DISHA** also has permission under FCRA to receive foreign contributions.

## The People

**DISHA** is more than merely an organisation. From the very beginning **DISHA** has been a close-knit group of friends with similar concerns. **DISHA**'s great success has been to reconcile organizational formality and devotion to work with warm intra-group relationship. **DISHA** consists of some dozen members from various walks of life. It has a small but efficient staff. Activism through the years has earned for it a large number of sympathisers among environmentalists, environmental activists and concerned citizens in general. Enthusiastic volunteers always have a warm welcome in **DISHA**.

Presently, **DISHA**'s chief functionaries and contact persons are:

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## COAST, COMMUNITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

### *Ecology*

The coast is of immense ecological importance. This mega-confluence of terrestrial (land-based) and marine ecologies provides our planet with bio-diversity wonderfully rich which in turn support of hundreds of millions of people.

The coast is the most favoured destination for immense investments by way of ports, industries, tourism and real estate. Added to this is oil and gas exploration, mining and large scale industrial fishing. On

India has some 7600 kilometers of coastline but very poor coastal governance

account of the monumental load of pollutants daily discharged into it, the coastal land and waters are being rapidly transformed from an ecological hub into a major site of ecological destruction.

### *Traditional fishing community*

This massive ecocide brings with it the destruction of lives and livelihoods of the people dependent on the natural resources, especially the **traditional fishing community** living on the coast.

The small scale coastal fishing communities are by far the largest stakeholders and natural custodians of the coast. Catch size depends on quality of the water. Access to the sea, processing and drying the catch, repairing the boats and nets require encroachment-free shore. The traditional fishers, with relatively little ecological footprint, have been active in fighting against predatory investors and encroachers of coastal land and waters. The fight is not only still raging - it has expanded, intensified and matured.

### *Climate change*

The already vulnerable Indian coast is further threatened by climate change effects. A major effect is of course the rise in the mean sea level, which imperils vast tracts of the Indian coast. The other major concern is increasing unpredictability of the weather and enhanced intensity of extreme events.

With the loss of sand dunes and mangrove cover due to 'developmental' pressures, the ability of coastal areas and populations to cope with extreme events has declined. The coastal fishers, living off the sea and dwelling on the shore, are the most vulnerable of all climate victims.

The coast needs dedicated conservation efforts on the one hand, and climate mitigation and adaptation efforts on the other.

**DISHA** stands for community based and eco-friendly coastal resource management coupled with mitigation and adaptation measures for climate change effects.

## ACTIVITIES

### On the Ground

#### **DISHA**

- conducts workshops, seminars and training camps on various coastal issues for capacity building of the coastal fishing community.
- collaborates with *National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF)* in organizing coastal awareness campaign "*save water - save coast - save coastal people*" and helps in organizing workshops, public meetings, citizens' meets in the coastal areas of the country.

### At the Policy Level

#### **DISHA**

- prepared a detailed critique of the draft CMZ Notification published by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) '**CMZ Notification 2008 - A Critique and Pointers Towards an Alternative Approach**' to sensitise all concerned to the perils of the Indian coast and prevent its depredation. **DISHA's** critique played an important role in the final rejection of the draft CMZ notification.



Protest Against Draft CRZ 2010

- supported the National Fishworkers' Forum in preparing a critique of the draft CRZ Notification 2010.
- conducted five State Level Seminars on **ILO Convention No. 188 on Work in Fishing** at Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Chennai, Ongole and Kolkata
- was a co-organiser of the **National Public Hearing on**

**Climate Change and Coastal Communities** held in October 2009 at Puduchery'.



## In Research and Study

### DISHA

- conducted a **Rights Study** on the coastal Fishworkers of East Medinipur.
- conducted a baseline study of **Corporate Abuse** in the Sunderban
- undertook study on **Problems of Traditional Fishers** in the **Sunderban Protected Area**.
- prepared a report on 'The Impacts of Climate Change on the Coastal Communities of West Bengal.



Mangrove Plantation with NFF  
at Gujarat Coast

## In Campaigns

### DISHA

- launched a campaign against the eviction of **20,000** fishers from livelihood options secured through age long practice of seasonal drying of marine fish in **Jambudwip** in Sundarban.



- launched a civil society campaign against the proposed **Five Star Mega Tourism** project of Sahara India Group in Sundarban. The project was eventually shelved.
- moved the High Court in Kolkata against violation of CRZ norms and destruction of coastal natural resources by hotels and resorts at **Mandarmani** in Purba Medinipur.
- conducted awareness campaigns among coastal community on the climate change issue.
- has been campaigning against dumping waste on coastal land and water and conducting campaign for ban on disposable plastics and waste water treatment to save Digha, the most important coastal resort of West Bengal.

**PROTECT WATER, PROTECT COAST  
PROTECT COASTAL PEOPLE,  
OUR COAST IS NOT FOR SALE**



## WASTE ISSUES

The problem of environment is in many ways the problem of waste. Human activity since the industrial revolution has produced solid, liquid and gaseous waste at rates that nature and organisms fail to absorb / assimilate within their usual cycles. 'Pollutants', most often, are wastes that are harmful or unmanageable.

**DISHA** stands for **zero waste society** based on reduce-reuse-recycle practices. We advocate a scientific materials policy, waste minimization, source segregation and eco-friendly management of waste.

**DISHA** has long been campaigning for community based waste management.



**DISHA** opposes incineration of waste since it destroys the wealth reposed in waste, pollutes the environment and acts against all the

**DISHA** is a partner organisation of Global Alliance for Incineration Alternative (GAIA) and health care without harm (HCWH) – two international coalitions on waste and safe health care.

good practices of waste minimization, reuse and recycle.

**Municipal Solid Waste** is usually dumped in fields adjacent to cities and towns contaminating air, land,

water bodies, streams, rivers and even ground water. But the same waste may turn into 'wealth' if managed properly. Source-segregated biodegradable wet waste may be composted and the compost may be

used as organic fertilizer to replenish lost nutrients in the soil, reducing the need for chemical fertilizers. Similarly, source-segregated dry waste may be recycled.

**Bio-medical waste** is only 20% of the total waste generated in hospitals. These must be separated from municipal waste at the point of generation. Utmost care should be taken regarding sharps – i.e., needles etc. Bio-medical waste should be suitably treated through steam sterilization and / or chemical disinfection. Efforts should be made to recycle treated waste as much as possible and incineration should be avoided except in case of anatomical waste produced in bulk in cities.

**Electric and Electronic waste** or *E-Waste* is a growing concern in present era. Amount of waste is increasing by leaps and bounds. Most of the waste is handled and recycled in very inefficient and unhygienic manner in unorganized sectors in our country. Hazardous substances contained in such waste get exposed through such recycling practices causing deadly pollution of the surroundings and posing serious health risks to the recycling workers. **DISHA** has been advocating organised collection and appropriate channeling for recycling of e-waste.

## ACTIVITIES

### In Waste Management

#### **DISHA**

- has been associated with various municipalities in West Bengal at different levels to facilitate implementation of *municipal waste*



**E-waste Recycling**

*management* complying with the Municipal Solid Waste (Management and Handling) Rules 2000.

- has been active since 1996 in study, research, strategy development, training and implementation of *bio-medical waste management* in West Bengal. **DISHA** has worked with the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of West Bengal and the West Bengal Pollution Control Board in various projects. **DISHA** has special expertise in health care waste management in remote areas where central facilities do not reach.

- offers its services to help health care institutions, health and municipal authorities in safe and *eco-friendly management of bio-medical waste*, complying with India's Bio-medical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules 1998.



Assessing BMW Generation

- has been associated with studies to assess generation of *E-waste* and their recycling practices in and around Kolkata city. **DISHA** is involved in the effort of developing awareness and forming associations of recycling workers to institute appropriate recycling practices.

**REDUCE REUSE RECYCLE  
WASTE IS WEALTH**

**INITIATE COMMUNITY BASED WASTE MANAGEMENT**



## TOXICS TIMES

Humans, and living creatures in general, have evolved to withstand and make use of chemicals in their environment. Even then, an occasional increased exposure to a particular chemical in the natural environment has resulted in non-salubrious effects; prolonged exposures have resulted in serious debility or even death.



Protest Against Sponge Iron Pollution

into the environment in far higher proportions than have existed in earlier times. And about a hundred thousand new and synthetic chemicals have entered the environment during the last hundred years. The human species today inhabits a brand new chemical environment. Unfortunately it is also one that has far higher toxic potential than any

**DISHA** is a member of  
International POPs  
Elimination Network  
(IPEN)

environment humans have experienced in their history. Poisoning from ambient sources is one of the most commonplace and mundane facts of modern human existence. Arsenicosis, Fluorosis, silicosis, poisoning from mercury,

lead or chromium or toxic effects from a mind boggling array of organic pollutants are reported every day. Moreover, very large number of toxic events remain undiagnosed.

We have come to a pass where it is not merely a question of reducing pollutants – although that aspect is vitally important. Human society, must now move on to an environmentally safe materials and production policy.

**DISHA** campaigns against use of persistent organics pollutants (POPs), mercury which are dangerous for human health. **DISHA** has been active in demanding that the Indian Government ratify the Stockholm Convention on POPS. **DISHA** also supports the UNEP agenda for Strategy Approach to International Chemical Management (SAICM). **DISHA** advocates restricted and minimal use of toxic substances such as mercury, lead, cadmium, chromium etc.

Through its publications, advocacy and campaign efforts **DISHA** ceaselessly tries to build up a strong opinion / movement for a non-toxic existence.

## ACTIVITIES

### **DISHA**

- has campaigned against use of persistent organic pollutants (POPs), chemical pesticides, hazardous substances. **DISHA** demanded



Water Sample Collection

the ratification of Stockholm Convention on POPs, took part in campaign for Strategy Approach to International Chemical Management (SAICM), International negotiation for a legally

binding treaty for reduction of mercury launched by UNEP.

- has conducted studies to show how mercury is callously handled in laboratories of schools and colleges, threatening health of the student, teachers and staff and imperiling the general environment through mercury vaporizing or getting into the general waste stream.
- has campaigned in schools for safe use and handling of mercury and in hospitals to drastically reduce mercury dependence and promote good mercury management.
- has in collaboration with *Toxics Link*, conducted a study on '**Mercury Contamination in Fish**' at different locations spread throughout the length and breadth of the state of West Bengal. The findings are alarming and a public campaign coupled with policy level intervention are planned. The report has been incorporated into the global report, *Mercury in Fish – A Global Health Hazard*, and placed before the Governing Council of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The report has been published in January 2010. This study continues to attract a lot of attention, nationally and internationally.
- is conducting a study on heavy metal contamination in drinking water in Kolkata Metropolitan Area.
- has been involved in various movements against industrial pollution. Pollution caused by a food processing industry in Mourigram and by some sponge iron industries in the districts of Pashchim Medinipur, Purulia, Burdwan, Bankura and Birbhum have been some of the important issues addressed by *DISHA*.



## DOCUMENTATION AND NETWORKING

A small documentation centre having a rich collection of newspaper clippings along with occasional papers, magazines and books is also maintained at the organisation's head office to support interested readers and activists. The news archives have been drawn upon in the publication of *Sambade Paribesh* 2008 and *Sambade Paribesh* 2009, a collation of news reporting on environment, published in major newspapers during 2008 and 2009 respectively.

### Documentation Centre

Meetings with environmental activists are organized, networks are formed and movements are chalked out. Issue based media sensitization and campaign initiatives are regularly taken up in collaboration with like minded groups and individuals.

### Networking

## SOME OTHER INITIATIVES

*DISHA* has consistently stood and campaigned for *protection and conservation of wetlands*. Since 2007 *DISHA* has been active against destruction of a large wetland cluster in the districts of Howrah and Hooghly.

*DISHA* advocates use of *clean and renewable energy sources* and campaigns for weaning away from both fossil fuel and nuclear sources.

*DISHA* has conducted workshops on *diagnostic criteria for occupational diseases* with Employees State Insurance Corporation and NGOs.

*DISHA* conducts competitions, rallies, exhibitions etc. to spread *environmental awareness*.

## DISHA'S PUBLICATIONS

| Books, Booklets |   |             |          |
|-----------------|---|-------------|----------|
| Sl. No.         | Name  | On          | Language |
| 1               | <i>Aabarjanaa Mukta Prithibir Lakshye</i><br>(Towards Zero Waste)   | Jul-03      | Bengali  |
| 2               | <i>Saafai Karmachaari Saha Chathurtho Shrenir Karmider Dakshataa Briddhir Janyo Prashikhan Pustikaa; Bisay : Haaspuataal Sanitation</i><br>(Training Manual for capacity building of Sweepers including Group D Staff; Subject : Hospital Sanitation) | Jan '04     | Bengali  |
| 3               | <i>Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs): Campaigner's Hand Book</i>   | Jan '05     | English  |
| 4               | <i>Plight of the Forest People (Buxa Tiger Reserve)</i>   | April '05   | Language |
|                 | <i>Gangaa Hok Dushan Mukto</i><br>(For a Pollution Free River Ganga)  | Dec '05     | Bengali  |
| 5               | <i>Prithibi Hok POPs Mukta</i><br>(Make a POPs Free World)  | March '06   | Bengali  |
| 6               | <i>Nuclear Power - A Treacherous Choice</i>   | Jan '07     | English  |
| 7               | <i>Pauro Aabarjanaa Bishaye Prashikkhan Pustikaa ; Kanchrapara Municipality</i><br>(Training Manual on Municipal Waste Management for Kanchrapara Municipality)   | March '07   | Bengali  |
| 8               | <i>Polybag, Polycup : Paribesh Dushan ki Chaltei Thaakbe?</i><br>(Polybag Poly Cup: Will the Pollution Continue?)   | June '07    | Bengali  |
| 9               | CMZ Notification 2008 – A Critique and Pointers Towards an Alternative Approach   | June '08    | English  |
| 10              | CMZ BigNpoti Sorbonasha Keno<br>(Why CMZ Notification is Dangerous)   | June '08    | Bengali  |
| 11              | <i>Chok Choke Bish</i><br>(Silvery Poison- Mercury)   | January '09 | Bengali  |
| 12              | <i>Nayachar O Chemical Hub - Ekti Paryaalochonaa</i><br>(Nayachar and Chemical Hub - A Review)<br>Co-published with TASAM   | March '09   | Bengali  |

|    |   |               |         |
|----|---|---------------|---------|
| 13 | <i>Sangbaade Paribesh : Paschimbanga 2008</i><br>(Environment in News : West Bengal 2008) | March '09     | Bengali |
| 14 | <i>Sangbaade Paribesh : Paschimbanga 2009</i><br>(Environment in News : West Bengal 2009) | October '10   | Bengali |
| 15 | <i>Hospitale Parode Dushon</i><br>(Mercury Pollution in Hospitals)                        | September '10 | Bengali |
| 11 | <i>Fluoride Bishon</i><br><i>Fluoride Contamination</i>                                   | January '11   | Bengali |

| BROCHURES |   |          |
|-----------|---|----------|
| Sl. No.   | Name  | Language |
| 1         | <i>Ekti Shaharer Parichhanna Hoye Othaar Natun Pather</i><br><i>Paanchali - Kaanchraapaaraa Municipality</i><br>(Kanchrapara Municipality - Saga of Transformation into a Clean City)   | Bengali  |
| 2         | <i>Poly Vinyl Chloride Ek Bipadjjanak Plastic</i><br>[Poly Vinyl Chloride (PVC) - A Hazardous Plastic]  | Bengali  |
| 3         | <i>Gangaa Action Plan - Naagarik Angsagrahan ebang</i><br><i>Janachetanaa Briddhi Karnasuchi</i><br>[Ganga Action Plan - Public Participation And Awareness Campaign]   | Bengali  |
| 4         | Campaign for Environment Friendly Community Based<br>Municipal Solid Waste Management in West Bengal  | English  |
| 5         | <i>Pashcimbange Paribeshbandhu Naagarik Nirbhar Paura</i><br><i>Aabarjanaa Byabasthaapanaar Lakshye Prachaar Abhijaan</i><br>Campaign for Environment Friendly Community Based<br>Municipal Solid Waste Management in West Bengal | Bengali  |

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