

Eleven projects for SACEP Council approval

Eleven 'down-to-earth' environmental projects will be put up for approval when the first Governing Council of the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme meets in Colombo from 27 to 29 January.

The meeting held under the auspices of SACEP will be attended by ministerial representatives from nine South Asian countries. They are: Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Maldives, India, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Among the project activities are the following: identify and promote fuel-efficient stoves, re-cycling wastes particularly agricultural residues; establish an environmental education programme for South Asia; strengthen and improve environmental legislation, set up a clearing house for environmental services; and evaluate the impact of six projects in the region on the environment.

Fuelwood which in most South Asian countries provide more than 60 per cent of the total energy consumed is the poor man's chief source of energy. The increasing scarcity of this commodity is making life miserable for millions in the countries of South Asia. The project, in this connection, will study the

various research and development activities that are underway by different organisations in the region to identify and promote stoves that have high efficiency and are capable of being manufactured at low cost.

Three projects, on re-cycling wastes will be submitted for approval. These concern the establishment of demonstration plants to produce cement from rice husk in Sri Lanka, manufacture of animal feed from agricultural residues in Pakistan and wall bricks from building waste materials in Nepal.

For government policies and programs for improving the environment to succeed, it is absolutely essential to have an informed public, which is motivated to participate and promote such programs. Thus a well organised environmental education, training and public awareness program is the key for ensuring public participation in environmental activities.

In each country of the sub-region, a plethora of legislation dealing with environmental issues exist. But most of these are obsolete and incapable of tackling the complex environmental problems. The proposed project on legislation is intended to improve this situation.

The clearing house for environmental services is intended to provide data to various sectors of the community and facilitate the exchange of information among countries. Such an activity would avoid wasteful and time-consuming duplication of efforts that are a drain on national coffers and lead to the development of better programs.

Commenting on the forthcoming meeting, Dr. Leslie Herath, Director of SACEP, said that the Secretariat has been working hard since it was established just over a year ago to develop the project proposals.

'Governments are sick and tired of studies, more reports and guidelines. We are past that stage. We need action now. That is why we have concentrated on practical activities', added.