
Indians force Coca-Cola bottling facility in Plachimada to shut down, 2001-2006

- [\(mainly or initiated by\) indigenous participants](#) [1]
- [\(mainly or initiated by\) people of color](#) [2]
- [local community or neighborhood-level campaign](#) [3]

Timing

September

2001

to:

September

2006

Location and Goals

Country:

India

Country:

United States

Country:

United Kingdom

Location City/State/Province:

Plachimada, Mumbai; Several universities in the US and UK

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

To close the Coca-Cola bottling facility in Plachimada, India; to require Coca-Cola to compensate affected community members and be responsible for cleaning up contamination and recharging depleted groundwater; to require Coca-Cola to assist workers who had been blacklisted for activism against the company; to require Coca-Cola to admit liability for long term consequences from environmental damage because of the bottling facility

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support>Thousands of faxes sent to Coca-Cola company
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 016. Picketing>Two year long presence at Plachimada gates
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support›Thousands of faxes sent to Coca-Cola company
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing›Two year long presence at Plachimada gates
- 038. Marches

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support›Thousands of faxes sent to Coca-Cola company
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 016. Picketing›Two year long presence at Plachimada gates
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support›Thousands of faxes sent to Coca-Cola company
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support›Thousands of faxes sent to Coca-Cola company
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing›Human Chain
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support›Human chain
- 048. Protest meetings
- 050. Teach-ins
- 071. Consumers' boycott
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 179. Alternative social institutions›Established a "people's court" that called for the resignation of top management of facility

Methods in 6th segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 048. Protest meetings

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 138. Sitdown

Segment Length:

10 months

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Environment

Group characterization:

- undefined

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Specific local leaders are not known. National and International leaders were: the India Resource Center, Amit Srivastava, and the Center for Science and Environment

Partners:

Research Foundation for Science Technology and Ecology, Vandana Shiva, Plachimada Solidarity Committee, Anti Coca-Cola Struggle Committee, All India People's Resistance Forum, Adivasi Samraksha Sangham, Virushi Samara Samiti

External allies:

National Union of Students in UK, Corporate Accountability International, Corp Watch, National Alliance of People's Movement, People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL)

Involvement of social elites:

Unitarian Church, Local courts, Kerala High Court

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Adivasi Samraksha Sangham
- All India People's Resistance Forum
- Amit Srivastava
- Anti Coca-Cola Struggle Committee
- CorpWatch
- National Alliance of People's Movement
- PUCL
- Plachimada Solidarity Committee
- Unitarian Church
- Virushi Samara Samiti

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Research Foundation for Science Technology and Ecology
- Vandana Shiva

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Center for Science and the Environment
- India Resource Center
- Local courts

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Kerala High Court

Groups in 5th Segment:

- Corporate Accountability International
- National Union of Students in UK

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:

10 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Coca-Cola and its Indian subsidiary Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt Ltd

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Coca-Cola hired the public relations company Perfect Relations to run a marketing campaign to boost its public image. Coca-Cola also established the India Environmental Council and facilitated numerous Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives including distributing water to drought-stricken communities.

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

Activists protesting in front of the Plachimada facility gates were periodically attacked, beaten and verbally harassed by private and state security forces throughout their two year presence at the site, with several protesters sent to the hospital with minor injuries.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Total points:

7 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign was successful in closing the plant, and in 2011 Coca-Cola was declared financially liable up to \$48 million dollars for damages and clean up from operation of the Plachimada plant. However, the Plachimada plant has been used since its closure to make non-cola products and it's unclear if this is having the same environmentally-devastating impact seen when Coca-Cola was operating the plant.

In 1998, Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt Ltd, a subsidiary of the multinational beverage company, was granted a license to operate a bottling plant in Plachimada, a small village in the state of Kerala in southern India. Within two years of the plant's opening in 2000, indigenous people living near the plant, known as the Adivasi people, began protesting the bottling plant's presence in their community. The local population complained that Coca-Cola was lowering the water table and polluting surface and groundwater within the plant site and in the local community. Farmers complained of decreased yields and many local wells ran dry or were too contaminated to be used. Although Coca-Cola contested these claims and insisted that decreased rainfall and unusual monsoon patterns had caused the problems, several studies, including one by the Ground Water Board, backed the protesters' complaints.

In September 2001, a public meeting was held by the National Alliance of People's Movement and the People's Union for Civil Liberties, but the local government moved quickly to suppress any opposition to the plant which brought taxes and jobs to the community. By mid-2002, numerous NGOs had joined the Adivasi people in organizing a campaign demanding that the bottling plant be shut down and that Coca-Cola be held responsible for the environmental damage caused by the plant's operation.

In April 2002, more than 2,000 people began picketing at the gates of the bottling facility in Plachimada. Residents of the community, especially women and children, as well as supporters from throughout India, maintained their presence at the facility gates continuously for the next two years, despite arrests and occasional violence from state and private security forces. On June 9, a protest rally was held and dry slurry waste that had been collected from illegal dumping sites used by Coca-Cola was dumped in front of the plant. This action resulted in the arrest of more than 100 people and marked the beginning of the use of force and abusive language by the opponent to provoke actionists and repress opposition against the plant. In August 2002, 1000 people marched seven kilometers from the affected areas in the state of Kerala to the Plachimada facility.

Numerous organizations were involved in the campaign against Coca-Cola including the Plachimada Solidarity Committee and the Anti Coca-Cola Struggle Committee, which acted as an umbrella group for numerous organizations. The US-based India Resource Center was founded in 2003 by activist Amit Srivastava, who became aware of Plachimada's struggles while working at Corp Watch. Although based in the US, the India Resource Center was an important leader in the campaign, coordinating between multiple organizations in India and raising awareness and generating international support in the US and the UK.

In August 2003, the Delhi-based Center for Science and Environment (CSE) released numerous statements about the presence of pesticide residues in many of the soft drinks produced and sold by Coca-Cola in India. The presence of pesticide residues added a greater human threat to the environmental damage caused by the plant. Testing by the CSE revealed that pesticide levels in Coca-Cola products exceeded global standards by 30-fold. The Indian Parliament responded by banning all Coca-Cola and PepsiCo products in their own cafeterias, although they did not ban the product from being sold in other locations in India.

Coca-Cola responded to CSE's allegations by conducting various media campaigns, with the assistance of public relations company Perfect Relations, to improve their image and to assure the public of the safety and quality of their products. Tests by the official government agencies revealed that 75% of major soft drink samples from Coca-Cola and PepsiCo did not meet the standards set by the European Union for pesticide residues. Although Coca-Cola's products met local standards, the government moved to insist that both Coca-Cola and PepsiCo meet the stricter standards set by the EU.

In September, more than 500 people marched to the Plachimada facility. Because of government tests, other plants throughout India began to face increased opposition from local communities. Although different organizations formed to lead the campaigns against the Mehdiganj and Jaunpur plants, there was some

cooperation between the campaigns as demonstrated by a march in October between the three locations. At the end of 2003, ten activists conducted a five-day hunger strike while more than fifty Plachimada villagers continued the picketing that had been at the Plachimada gates since April 2002.

In December 2003, in response to the widespread nonviolent action waged against the Plachimada plant that had spurred greater investigation into the plant's operations, the local court in Plachimada ordered Coca-Cola to stop drawing groundwater for its bottling operation on the grounds that it was illegal because of the grave environmental damage it was inflicting on the local ecology. Although Coca-Cola held legal ownership of the land, the court declared that the withdrawal of 110,000 gallons of water per day was beyond the "reasonable" limits. The local court, however, did not have the legal power to order the facility to completely shut down operation.

At the beginning of 2004, the World Social Forum was held in Mumbai, and 500 protesters, with representatives from the Plachimada campaign, marched against Coca-Cola in India under the organization of the People's Forum Against Coca-Cola. Also held in January 2004, the World Water Conference in Plachimada attracted thousands of activists who joined those already present in front of the Plachimada plant. In March 2004, the Kerala High Court stated that Coca-Cola could not withdraw groundwater from the Plachimada site for three months due to the severe drought in the area. Coca-Cola's application for a five-year extension license on its Plachimada plant was rejected by the local government two months later and Coca-Cola was ordered to meet three obligations – to not use local groundwater, to clean up waste sludge and to remove toxic elements from products – before the license would be granted. Because the Plachimada plant employed workers from the area, the facility's closure was met with some protest from workers who had lost jobs. Coca-Cola responded to the rejection by claiming that it had adhered to local standards since opening the plant in 2000 and that CSE's tests were unscientific.

While Coca-Cola and the local government battled over licensing, protests continued outside the Plachimada gates and school students conducted demonstrations in the village streets. Organized by the India Resource Center, approximately 9,000 faxes were sent to Coca-Cola demanding closure of the Plachimada plant between 2002 and 2005. In March and April 2004, protesters from Plachimada, with the help of the Democratic Youth Federation of India, captured two water tankers and distributed the water illegally to drought-stricken paddy farmers and women.

At the beginning of 2005, environmental groups organized several nationwide actions against both Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, such as a human chain around the 100 manufacturing units around the country, including the Plachimada facility. A "people's court" issued demands for top management to step down as part of the "Quit India Movement". This was organized in part by the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, led by author and activist Vandana Shiva. Farmers and community members from thirty villages protested at the Plachimada gate as part of this wider campaign.

International support for the wider campaign against Coca-Cola came from the United States and the United Kingdom as students from several universities, including Rutgers University and the National Union of Students in the UK, demanded a boycott of Coca-Cola products on their campuses in February 2005. In April, a speaking tour of the East Coast of the U.S. was organized by Amit Srivastava and the India Resource Center. Protesters demonstrated at a shareholders meeting in Delaware as the culmination of the tour. The World Social Forum, held in Brazil in January 2005, also featured the International Campaign to Hold Coca-Cola Accountable, and a workshop organized at the conference was attended by 500 people who spoke out about problems with Coca-Cola plants in India and Colombia. Members of the India Resource Center and the National Alliance of People's Movements in India were joined in a 100,000-person demonstration at the opening ceremony of the conference.

In May, several local newspapers reported that testing of local wells revealed levels of Total Dissolved Solids that were four times higher than local standards. In June, the local government gave Coca-Cola a three-month license but because of the stipulations attached to the license it was rejected by Coca-Cola, who asked for a two-year-long license with less stringent obligations. This was denied as 700 people marched to the plant and demanded its permanent closure. The Plachimada Solidarity Committee made numerous declarations against the company and 500 people were arrested while protesting with one woman sent to the hospital because of injuries inflicted by security forces. As a further blow to Coca-Cola's statements about the safety of its products, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration rejected a shipment of soft drinks from India because it failed to meet their standards. Although Coca-Cola was briefly granted a license to operate the Plachimada plant in 2005, this was revoked within months when testing proved that Coca-Cola had not dealt with the high levels of toxins in its wastewater and that the company was using local groundwater.

The campaign was successful in closing the plant, and in 2011 Coca-Cola was declared financially liable up to \$48 million dollars for damages and clean up from operation of the Plachimada plant. However, the Plachimada plant has been used since its closure to make non-cola products and it's unclear if this is having the same environmentally-devastating impact seen when Coca-Cola was operating the plant.

Research Notes

Influences:

Several of the NGOs involved, including the People's Union for Civil Liberties among others, were inspired by Ghandi's work and were committed to the techniques of nonviolent action as part of the campaign to oppose Coca-Cola's presence in Plachimada and the rest of India. (1)

Success in the campaign to close the Plachimada plant inspired more action against other plants in India, especially the Mehdiganj plant and proposed plants in Tirunelveli and Jaunpur. (2)

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People's Union for Civil Liberties. "The Struggle Against Coca Cola in Kerala." PUCL Bulletin, November 2002.

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Several news releases and statements from www.indiaresource.org.

Additional Notes:

Although the plant has been closed since 2004, Coca-Cola claimed in 2010 that it could reopen the plant if it chooses to do so, a statement that has inspired renewed activism against the plant. The battle against Coca-Cola has largely become a legal one involving various courts in India. In February 2011, the state legislature of Kerala passed legislation that grants community members the right to seek financial compensation from Coca-Cola (up to \$48 million) for harm from pollution, water depletion, crop loss, and diseases from excessive withdrawal of ground and surface water.

Edited by Max Rennebohm (19/08/2011)

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Nathalie Schils, 11/07/2011

[Back to top](#)

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