

Winter Issue 2008

South Asian Forum for Environment

A Non-Profit NGO working towards Sustainable Environment & Community Development in Indian Ecoregion

Events

- Sundarban delta revisited by SAFE
- SHG Training in Kolkata wetlands
- Chuo University interns Visits EKW
- SAFE Collaborates with CEE Ahmedabad
- Planning for IHR Day on 10th December 2008

THE CHAIR SPEAKS...

Friends!

If winter has come can spring be far behind?

I never find a reason to say 'Yes it is'.... Most of us have given up. Be it global warming and climate change or water-war or pollution, as if nothing else can happen here on earth except we perish. We withdraw so easily. Never question 'why?' Never think that 'why can't we bring a change?' and never even allow others to do so. In one word – this involvement is participation. Right to participation is your right as a human being and none else other than you can establish it.

SAFE is tirelessly working towards establishing the BIORIGHTS of commons. We advocate the right of participation of commons in decision support systems especially when it comes to clean environment. Even we appeal for assuring environmental justice in defining Special Economic Zones and designing multi stakeholder development projects through social and environmental impact assessment tools. However, that's not the end of the road. Everyone has to be proactive. Everyone has to understand that closing ones eyes would not stop the changing face of the earth. It's still not so late.

Come let's live like humans, ... those humans who have evolved through changes and challenges.

SAFE will celebrate the 60th Anniversary of International Human Rights Day at Kolkata on 10th December 2008 with "Parivartan" founded by Magsaysay Prize winner and RTI activist Mr. Arvind Kejriwal. Our focus will be Environmental Justice, Right to Participation and Common's BIORIGHTS.



Mr Lew Young
Sr Advisor Asia- Oceania
Ramsar Secretariat

"It is a matter of great pleasure to know that South Asian Forum for Environment (SAFE), a non-profit NGO is working towards sustainable environmental development through community based participatory approach in the East Kolkata Wetland, which is a unique Ramsar site in West Bengal, India. The activities of SAFE are intended to widen economic opportunities through alternative farming and adaptive environmental management for rural agro-environmental appraisal especially in the wetland ecosystem.

The East Kolkata Wetland is currently facing the threat of habitat loss due to urban encroachment and pollution, and is shrinking at a rapid rate. This wetland is the sole natural waste water treatment facility of the city that naturally recycles 780 MLD liquid sewerage and supports the livelihood of 90,000 wetland dwellers. It is important to save this unique ecosystem through community participation and partnership.

SAFE is doing a commendable job in trying to extend basic services for health, education and sanitation to the wetland community, empowered women through micro-financing schemes and spread awareness about the precious environment. I wish them success in achieving their mission in conserving these wetlands and further extend their work in saving the natural resources in the developing countries through community based programmes.

I appreciate the endeavors of SAFE in aligning the cause of poverty alleviation with environmental conservation which is really a strong challenge, and would encourage others to take up this similar task in order to achieve our common green mission."

Mr Lew Young, Sr. Advisor Asia-Oceania, Ramsar Secretariat



UNIVERSAL
DECLARATION
OF HUMAN
RIGHTS

Dignity and justice for all of us

SERVICE TO HIS CREATION IS SERVICE TO MANKIND

Published By Dipayan Dey

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KUSP Project on Ecotourism nearing a grand success

The Innovative Challenge Fund Supported project under KUSP at East Kolkata Wetlands is assuring a grand success as it is nearing completion. This would be the first BIORIGHTS project in India that transforms nature services to a financial tool. By negating the negative link between conservation and poverty alleviation in peri-urban wetlands of Kolkata, the project has become an exemplary precedence in wastewater management of metropolis in developing countries. The project is attracting a number of corporate people and CSO's in the home land for its warmth and beauty whereas the innovation of installing BIORIGHTS of the commons is welcoming researchers and environmental columnists from overseas. SAFE is taking additional efforts to expose students and school children in the area for an educative tour as an awareness campaign for saving the unique wetlands.

Visiting Sundarbans as a community worker

**Chiranjeet Chatterjee
Project Supervisor; SAFE**

I was visiting the remote villages of Sundarbans as a community worker not tourist. My job involved a random socio-metric survey and a general assessment of the area. On 22nd August 2008, from Canning I went to Dockghat by crossing Matla river, and then reached Kultali. I could manage to get some support from locals to introduce myself to the larger community to start the job that I was assigned. However, the very initial observations were rather shocking.



Sanitation facility and health services were almost absent though Indian Institute of health & hygiene, an NGO, had acquired one bigha of land (0.5 Sq Km) to start a project assuring sanitation, drinking water filtration facility and medical care unit. Even WWF had identified an area where endangered gigantic mollusks (Oyster) are available and had acquired land to start the cultivation. The project involved full community participation. According to a local leader, it was said that villagers will be trained to cultivate, but no such thing

ever happened. Now WWF is cultivating prawn in the same land with no community participation which is malice to the existing ecology of the deltas.

From there I had visited Sonakhali, then Gothkali by boat crossing Bidyadhari river via Chandipur to Gosaba and finally to Pakhiralay by van.

In Gosaba, I found one government health center with no medicine or surgery facility. However, there were two dental clinics and pathology centers under private ownership. The common diseases are jaundice, hepatitis B, Kala jar, malaria. Only 4 percent of women go to hospital for delivery rest 94 percent delivers at home. In the name of Ecotourism a huge industry is running in these areas that can only assure habitat loss and damage. I swear it's a hard day for the world heritage site. Will SAFE be able to save this unique deltas with its small hands? Will anyone on good earth stand by us?

Japanese Student Interns worked with SAFE at the EKW



A group of Japanese student from Chuo University in Japan did their internship with SAFE at the East Kolkata Wetlands. The group of five students was headed by Steve Hesse, professor and an environmental columnist of Japan Times, stayed in Kolkata from 5th to 13th September 2008.

After their extensive visit of the area which is a unique model of multiple-use wetlands with us, they defined it as an experience of lifetime. Megumi Hata, a student intern in the group said, "It's amazing to see an ecosystem like East Kolkata Wetland which not only purifies the city sewage but also sustains the life of over a lakh people through fishery, if the wetlands get destroyed so many lives gets destroyed." Project Supervisor of SAFE, Mr. Chiranjeet Chatterjee organised a visit to the ecotourism project site, *Natar Bheri* and *Sukantanagar bheri*, he had to take a special orientation class at the site as

students were interested to know about the project in detail. Kashimi Yoshida, a student expressed, "I am very fortunate to have come here and promise to extend all my support to save the East Kolkata Wetlands". On the last day of the internship by boat they were taken to the community shrine, Banabibi temple, from there we took another boat to Sardar Bheri, where they spend a lot of time seeing the fishermen and women catching fish.

Indeed, for a sustainable future it is important that we encourage more such internships where student gets a hand on opportunity of feel the environment and community. They will be the part of the decision making system in future, thus such on field activity immensely helps develop a positive attitude in them towards environment and human beings at large.

Worst flood hit in Bihar SAFE builds a partnership network with neighboring countries

Prolonged negligence and lack of serious concern proved that Bihar's worst floods was man-made. The misery and devastation that was ten times more than TSUNAMI is a result of human folly rather than the nature's fury. Signs of an approaching overflow came as early 2004 with satellite images showing the Kosi's flow had begun moving to the left bank, exerting more pressure on the embankment, but, as usual, authorities at the centre and state didn't react. Diplomats and high officials are talking for a long time but there is no push on implementation as yet.

Meanwhile, SAFE has initiated a partnership network involving the multi-stakeholders of Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan that will help garner support in making a common minimum program that brings an end to the catastrophe. The partnership is aimed towards developing a proposal for integrated water management strategy that involves impact assessment studies with neighboring countries and at the same time there will be major emphasis on poverty alleviation projects entailing the NGOs, international aid agencies, scientific departments worldwide.

SAFE is also planning to send a team of young house surgeons from Kolkata to assist the volunteers working in Saharsa and Madhepura of Bihar. Any one interested in such work is requested to contact SAFE's office OR call us at 9836063759, 9433203034, 9903973271.

