



Saving Children's Lives by
Cleaning Up Pollution

Project Completion Report

Project Name: To Save & Clean Wah Umkrah (Umkrah River)

ID#: Not known

Location: Shillong, Meghalaya, India

Start Date: March 2004

End Date: April 2005

Cost – Blacksmith: \$ 15,000
Others: Not Known

Implementation Partner: North east Educational and Development (NEEDS)

- **Project Summary:**

Background & the Scope of the Problem:

Shillong, the capital of India's northeastern province of Meghalaya, is a picturesque hill station commonly called the *Scotland of the East*, known for its temperate climate, beautiful landscape, and a network of streams and rivers. Two rivers, the Umkrah and Umshyrpi, flow through Shillong on their way to Umiam Lake, about 12.5 miles (20 kms) downstream. These rivers are important sources of drinking and bathing water for the 268,000 people living in the city. During the rainy season, the river flushes all the sewage and rubbish from the city into the lake. There is no municipal sewage service in the city, and most homes feed raw effluent into drains and streams that feed into the Umkrah River. The river itself is now basically a sewer feeding into the lake.

There are also thousands households that live on the Umkrah's banks. Some of these families depend on it for drinking supply, while also spilling kitchen and toilet waste directly into the water. The alarming rate of pollution has posed a serious threat to the health of the city's residents. Pollution-related ailments are common among citizens who use the river as a source of water, including cholera, typhoid, acute gastroenteritis, diarrhea, dysentery, poliomyelitis, viral hepatitis, skin diseases and others.

Solution Implemented:

BI partnered with a new local NGO (NEEDS) in its infancy and supported it to:

- Complete the survey of the project area in four localities of: socio-economic statuses of the people; amenities & supply; sanitation, drainage & waste disposal and Health & attitudes.
- Conduct a networking meeting of headmen with Shillong Municipal Board, State Council of Science, Technology & Environment, North East Hills University etc

- Mobilize the Bengali community and took a cleanup drive in the month of October 2004 after Idol-immersion ceremonies and restored the rivulet sides.
- Organise Awareness programmes with different schools in the project area. A special event of Tree Plantation cum Art Competition on “Save and Clean Wah Umkhrah” was on the World Environment Day
- Organise a workshop on Solid Waste Management which was inaugurated by the Minister of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya and attended by Shillong Municipal Board, the Professor of the School of Environmental Studies of the North Eastern Hill University, the Member-Secretary of the State Council of Science, Technology, and Environment and the Doctor of the North East Indira Gandhi Research Institute of Health and Medical Sciences.
- Set up compost units and organic waste collection by the SHGs .
- Make some efforts towards banning plastics use in the city but due to lack of any alternative to plastics, people reverted back to it.
- **Project Metrics and Results:**

The objective of the project was to engage the community and initiate a program to clean up the river system. This project was one of the first one supported by BI identified & recommended by its representative organisation -Toxics Link in India. The organisation comprised of a young energetic team of teaching professionals. The problem they addressed was of municipal and sewage waste and did not match with BI’s mandate of dealing with toxic industrial pollution. The needed municipal investment program has not yet become reality in Shilong.

The team could build a rapport with the various govt bodies & local community and established itself with the expertise in handling solid waste however, they couldn’t achieve their plan of action for it lacked experience hence had set up unrealistic targets like cleaning up 8 km river stretch at a select site.