

Making it a better place

*“When we do the best that we can,
We never know what miracle is wrought
In our life or in the life of another.”*

-Helen Keller

It is better to be small and shine than to be big and cast a shadow.

On-the-spot test of Delhi's drinking water has shown a high Fluoride Chloride and Nitrate content. Some of municipal supplied water showed definite Ammonia contents.

These are the findings of young school children. They aim not to alarm, but to shake adults out of their lethargy towards a deteriorating environment.

Impurities in the drinking water are certainly not lethal, but they do cause health problems. More serious is the presence of ammonia, indicating sewerage contamination.

Leading the Way

Development Alternatives, an Ngo in Delhi conceived the idea-the idea to involve school children to sensitize people. SCS spoke at length to Dr. Vijaya Lakshmi and Maneesha Gopalkrishna at Development Alternatives.

“Over the past one year, we've been networking with about 20 schools in the capital under the DEAN (Delhi Environment Action Network) Programme. Involving Children from Class VIII to XII, Development Alternative conducts workshops to train a core team of 4 students and 2 teachers from a school. This core team goes on to train bigger groups in their own school, explains Magnesia. “There are now over 1000 children involved, plus we have the support of the school Principal, teachers and parents.”

“The Programme is being tested in Delhi and is soon to spread all over the country. Finally, we hope to get an all-India water map as seen through the eyes of children”, says Dr. Vijaylakshmi.

The Programme has just begun in Meghalaya as MEAN (Meghalaya Environment Action Network)- Soon, there will be water monitoring centres at all the metros, with field stations at the district level.

While children monitor the environment, Development Alternatives is working with the authorities- to take action on the children's findings. Networking with other NGOS, resident welfare groups, industry associations and Government authorities to work out a detailed action plan. Action which gets translated down to the individual, the household and at the community level.

TESTING THE WATERS

The rich do not trust the water. Neither do they worry. They can afford to isolate themselves with aqua-guard and zero B-gadgets to purify their water. And the rest? Gastroenteritis, dysentery and other health problems are faced stoically.

So far, testing the waters has meant going to a laboratory-which few of us do. Now, innovative scientists at Development Alternatives have made it possible to test your tap water, river or well water-on the spot.

JAL-TARA

JAL-TARA for water quality, Monitoring in rural areas

A MINI-LABORATORY:

It measures 14 parameters: the pH level, temperature, turbidity, chlorides, ammonia, iron, hardness, residual chlorine phosphates, fluorides, nitrates, coliform bacteria, dissolved oxygen and benthic quality.

- Portable
- Easy to operate
- Cost effective

WHY CHILDREN?

Should or shouldn't children be involved in

Such community action programmes?

"YES" was the enthusiastic response of most parents and teachers SCS spoke to. There were a few who felt otherwise. "Children have enough pressure with their studies, where is the time for such programmes?" said one father.

While joining the programme is voluntary, schools themselves exclude students who are preparing for Board Examinations. Ms. Bali, the enthusiastic science teacher at Kendriya Vidyalaya No. 1, uses the DEAN programme for her science projects and term projects in school.

More importantly, this is their concern. Only by involvement now can the rot be stemmed in the environment they are going to grow up into. Sure, we can point fingers at the Government and other local bodies-but that is neither the full story, nor the solution. Individuals have a big part in the plastic bags littering the street and the stench from garbage spilling on to the roads. Everybody needs to get involved, and I think students are excellent catalysts for change to filter right down into homes. "We need to change attitudes among the younger generations. Children have the potential to do so just give them a chance", says Ms. Bali.

SPREADING RIPPLES

Mrs. Sreenivasan has been spear-heading the environment movement in Naval Public School since 1989. Besides the DEAN water monitoring project, her Nature Club has also been active in a "Greening the Ridge project. In School, their beautiful garden boasts of an entire green house built with throw away plastics. The ripples of her movement have spread to Vasant Kunj, where I live.

One of her student's mother, Mrs. Brar has now begun a garbage recycling programme for the colony.

Besides this, all the teachers involved saw the DEAN programme as an excellent practical learning opportunity. Scientific principles of testing water and analyzing results are used. The children themselves perform experiments and study results. This has made them aware of the inter relations between the many parameters which go into the making of our environment. Participating totally in the programme, field trips and interacting with the local people has given them insights, sensitivity and a sense of responsibility towards society.