



The Udaipur Declaration 2015*: Healthy River, Healthy People

The Issues

Indian cities are growing and by 2030 will hold more than half the population will devour and create even more peri-urban agricultural land, produce larger volumes of wastewater used for growing food and unless treatment improves will have an even greater impact on the health of rivers, lakes and groundwater than it does today. Currently it is underappreciated that untreated wastewater contains harmful organisms that lodge on food crops grown with wastewater and contaminate food that is in contact and not boiled before eating. Furthermore the salt, metals, nutrients and organic chemicals present in wastewater also harm rivers and soils, and if unchecked will render land unproductive, pollute groundwater, and make rivers and lakes lifeless, dirty and smelly.

The antibiotics freely prescribed and used in Indian cities mean the wastewater contains these and so antibiotic resistance development is facilitated. Some bacteria are now resistant to four types of drugs and modern medicine cannot keep up the supply of new antibiotics and our children will be exposed to managing sickness without effective medicines. Some industries discharge wastewater that is so contaminated that agricultural land can be rendered useless within a year or so and streams are contaminated for tens of kilometers.

The Solutions

- Waste starts with every individual. Reducing waste by using an effective septic tank, connected to a non-leaky sewer that discharges into a basic sewage treatment system such as a waste stabilization pond or other eco-technology-based system would go a long way to making agriculture sustainable.
- Septic tank designs should be improved and guidelines/policies on septage management need to be developed and incorporated into the urban development planning.
- Reducing wastes on the street by recycling plastics and paper using bins with local government collection. Disposing of unused medicines safely will slow down the anti-biotic resistance development problem. Industries treating their wastes to acceptable standards and environmental monitoring of water quality and ecological response.
- Planning of new developments must take account of the quantity and quality of wastes they produce and land provided for wastewater treatment and solid waste recycling and disposal. Rainwater harvesting can also help reduce wastewater and contribute directly to water supply. Farmers need advice on farming with treated wastewater as it is more difficult to manage than conventional uncontaminated groundwater supplies.
- Environmental officers are needed to oversee this program and record; the quality of wastewater, status of reaches of rivers, farm soils and groundwater, and of the safety status of food produced.
- Awareness of the issues and solutions is necessary to motivate the full suite of actions required to improve the health of our waterways and communities. Sustained and concerted actions by residents, industries, farmers, municipalities and governments will be needed and these can begin today with individuals and all manner of educational, religious, cultural and community organisations.

The Ahar River Udaipur Wastewater Declaration

The workshop attendees from different parts of India and Australia declare their intent to bring about change in wastewater management in and around Udaipur and all Indian cities. We aim to turn the downward spiral of increased wastewater discharge killing streams, making food unsafe, making our cities sicker, and consequently our wastewater more hazardous into an upward spiral with wastewater treatment, restoring the health of streams, the safety of food, making our cities healthier and consequently improving our wastewater quality.

We call upon all citizens, industry, farmers, municipalities and relevant government departments to develop awareness and commence implementing fundamental steps at household and enterprise level, and developing plans at municipal and state level involving environmental health committees with membership representing all stake holders and sharing resources to undertake the necessary work. We call on each city to form a local task force of all stakeholders to coordinate messages, actions and resources and to measure and report outcomes for rivers, lakes and groundwater, peri-urban agriculture and liveability of cities.

* The Declaration made at the Australia-India Workshop on "Beneficial and safe reuse of waste and wastewater in peri-urban agriculture in India" Udaipur 23-26 Nov 2015, sponsored by the Crawford Fund.

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