



MUKTI

(NEWS LETTER)

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THE SUNDERBANS AND MUKTI

The **Sunderban** ecosystem, spread over India and Bangladesh, is the largest contiguous mangrove ecosystem in the world. It serves as a major pathway for nutrient recycling and pollution abatement and plays a crucial role in providing a natural barrier against cyclones from the Bay of Bengal for deltaic settlements including Kolkata.

The 2001 census estimated that 8 million people live in and around the Sundarbans, far exceeding the capacity that can be supported. Thus, the beauty and ecological value of the area is under dire threat from excessive population pressure. The environmental impact comes in the form of staggering deforestation as locals attempt to eke out a living from agriculture, fishing, woodcutting, honey collection etc. While this fallout has earned the ecosystem some international protection (UNESCO World Heritage Site and Global Biosphere Reserve in India and RAMSAR site in Bangladesh), the plight of the community is still largely unaddressed.

Sankar Halder, a Sunderban native from an underprivileged family, was inspired by his own experience of the area's problems to involve energetic local youth in community self-help projects. Since community and ecological health are interrelated, addressing the problems faced by people living in the area is critical to returning the Sunderbans to the path of stability. He founded the non-profit organization **MUKTI** in 2003, registered under the Government of India Trust Act Section 64. Mukti's vision is to exonerate the Sunderban underprivileged through empowerment and education.

About 200 local volunteers are associated with Mukti's socio-economic development projects organized in 4 categories: **Health, Education, Economic and Cultural.**

Additional details can be found at www.muktiweb.org

THE VILLAGE SANITATION PROJECT

Mukti has dedicated itself to a health awareness program as a means of preventative health care. A goal of this program is to make the village sanitation be 100% compliant with modern day practices. Educating the villagers and improving their sanitation habits will reduce pollution and subsequently the spread of many diseases.

Studies have shown that only 5-10% of the entire Sunderban population have their own sanitation arrangement. Mukti has taken up the challenge of providing **low cost latrines** for the needy. The initiative has started in the village of Purbasridharpur, where 3,000 families have been targeted as beneficiaries. The Central Government started a venture of providing low cost latrines, consisting of a base sanitation plate. The government commitment was Rupees (INR) 200 (\$5) per latrine, with the recipients liable for an additional INR 250 (\$6). This project was not well received by the villagers for the high cost on their part for what would have been a low quality product. Mukti suggested some improvements for the latrine (including metal corrugated sheets for a roof and door) to make it more usable. An assessment shows the cost per latrine is INR 650 (\$16). Mukti is aiming to fund the balance of the costs (INR 450, \$10) with an aim to increasing health care awareness in the region.

The latrines are intended for use up to two years, after which the sanitation plate and structure will be relocated. The aim is to utilize the used septic tank contents as manure. Mukti is currently researching options that will enhance the usability of the latrines from a structural angle. It is intended that the recipients will be stakeholders in any new innovations. (Cont. on next page)

Current Projects:

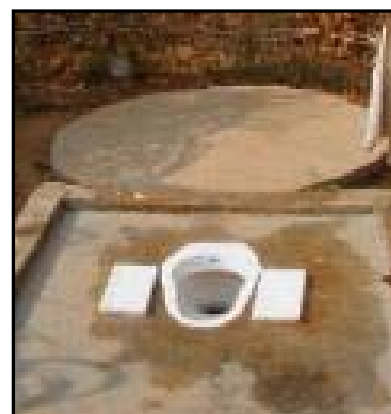
- * Village Sanitation
- * Book Bank for underprivileged students
- * Sponsorship of Talented Students

In the pipeline:

- * Village Primary School
- * Special Coaching for underprivileged students



Mukti representative addressing the assembly



The Low-Cost Latrines

VILLAGE SANITATION PROJECT CONTINUED....

The initial construction has been divided into three phases based on the availability of funds for the program. Phase 1 was completed in April of 2005 and Phase 2 (in progress) will be completed by March 2006. It is estimated that the project will be completed by September 2006. The construction is being performed by local Mukti volunteers, in conjunction with skilled labor provided by the local *Panchayat*.

Currently, 350 households are recipients of these low cost latrines. Mukti representatives have also been training the households in usage and maintenance of the latrines and increasing the health awareness of the people with respect to the outcomes of improved sanitation practices.

A mass assembly was held at Purbasridharpur on May 03, 2005, which was attended by the BDO and the *Pradhan* (head) of the local *Panchayat*. Mukti representatives explained the advantages of the latrines in great detail and affirmed their commitment to stay involved with the problems of the local population. The BDO and the *Panchayat Pradhan* praised Mukti for their commitment; they also added that since it was not possible for the government to provide infra-structure services in these areas in an efficient or expedited fashion, they assured Mukti of their support to ensure success of this endeavor.

The successful implementation of the project and the resulting benefit of sanitation and health care awareness will manifest itself in a cleaner environment and better standards of health of the local population. The project will serve as a model for other areas of the Sunderbans which can be recipients in the future for similar systems.

Raising the required funds is critical to the timely completion of this project. See below for details.

YOU TOO CAN HELP US SUCCEED

Mukti has members spread across India with an especially strong presence in the Sunderbans. Mukti also has several committed members in the United States. We encourage people with broad visions for uplifting of the underprivileged to join us and support our mission.

Fund raising is critical to our mission. You can donate in INR (payable to Mukti A/c , Central Bank of India , Subhasgram Branch, with a reference to your name, address, and phone number) to:

Mukti

Attn: Tribute Gifts

Purbasridharpur, Raidighi, 24 Parganas

West Bengal, India

MUKTI is registered under the Government of India Trust Act Section 64. Donations in INR to Mukti are tax deductible.

You can also assist us in raising funds through events. For details, please contact Sumon Sengupta at sumon.sengupta@muktiweb.org

Our finish date for completion of the construction of low cost latrines is September 2006, with phase two being scheduled for completion by March 2006. Our target is to raise INR 2,92,500 (\$7,000) by January 2006 and INR 4,50,000 (\$10,700) by July 2006 in order to ensure the timely completion.

We are currently working with other organizations to raise the funds required to complete the sanitation project. Any donations made towards this project will help make this project successful through a mix of private and foundation sponsorship.

Sponsorship of Talented Students through MUKTI

MUKTI has been facilitating sponsorship of talented students towards a goal of eradicating illiteracy in the region and to encourage young talented children not only to complete school with good grades but also to go for graduate studies. The sponsorship rates are INR 4,400 (\$100) per student per year.

The program is designed to create a long term relationship between the sponsor and the students being sponsored, with MUKTI serving as a bridge between the two parties. Sponsors are requested to consider long term sponsorship over several years through graduation for long term sustainability. The sponsorship involves direct contact with the students through letters or visits if possible. Thus, the sponsorship is not only meant to provide monetary support, but also guidance and mentorship to the students.

MUKTI requests patrons interested in sponsoring children to contact MUKTI through the website www.muktiweb.org.

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PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE
WWW.MUKTIWEB.ORG