

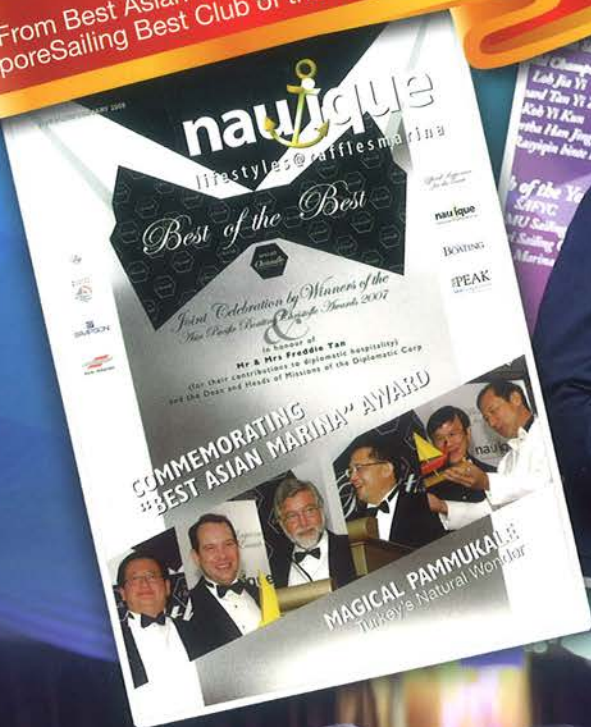
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Cleaning the Bagmati River in Kathmandu



Bagmati River in Kathmandu after cleaning



Kathmandu valley



Raj Kumar Aryal and Api Kunwar cleaning in Pokhara

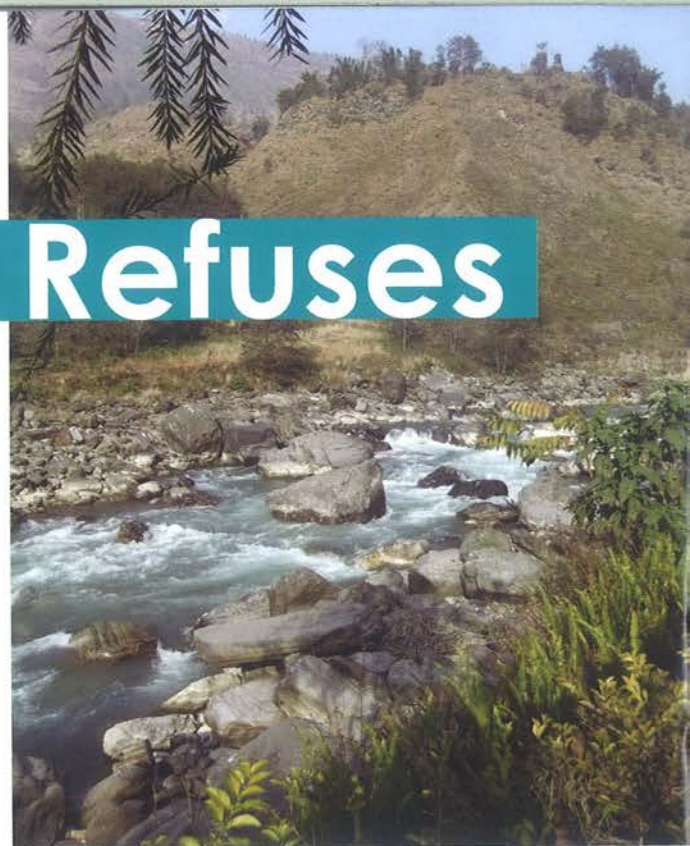
An active social responsibility in cleaning one's environment may be a drop in the ocean, but it causes ripple effects that go a long way.

By Carol Milner

In May 2013, Biosphere Foundation sailed *Mir* on an expedition across the Bay of Bengal with '5 Gyres' to research plastic in the Indian Ocean. We trawled for plastic and found a significant amount floating in the water. The best way to address this issue is to stop the plastic reaching the oceans. What we do on land flows down rivers to the sea. Starting at the top, in the Himalayas in Nepal, Biosphere Association is working with local organisations to improve waste management practices and river conservation.

The most common form of waste management in Nepal is 'Open Dumping', especially on riverbanks. In 2010, when asked about the heaps of rubbish, a local explained that the monsoon was about to start and it would all be washed to India. After India, the waste enters the Bay of Bengal and the ocean system.

Traditionally, people took care of their living space with the appreciation that it was supporting them with food, water, health, shelter, and beauty. The craving for a consumerist society and larger cities has taken many away from traditional roots and the awareness of the cycles of life. Nepal has over 6,000 rivers and streams: About 50% of the annual flow of the Ganges comes from Nepal. In towns and cities, the rivers are more like open sewers



Botekoshi River in Nepal

and tips. Despite heavy monsoon rains, there is a shortage of clean water in Kathmandu and city dwellers rely on water delivered in tankers.

Some individuals and groups have begun to take action to make a change. In Pokhara, 14-year-old Raj Kumar Aryal goes each day after school, to pick up plastic rubbish from the side of Fewa Lake. Pokhara is not even his hometown but he has been sponsored to study in a school there. He says he shows his respect and hopes for the future with positive actions.

In Kathmandu, volunteers gather to pick up plastic rubbish along the banks of the holy Bagmati River every Saturday morning for two hours. In 37 weeks, over 500 tons of waste have been collected. Now over 3,000 volunteers come each week to improve the river environment. The government has started to respond by installing pipes to stop sewage reaching parts of the river. Now the trees and plants look more vibrant, the smell is much reduced, and even the sound of the water is more melodic.

Individuals can make a difference by taking responsibility for their own waste:

- Buy fewer products with plastic packaging, plastic water bottles and plastic bags.
- Segregate rubbish so that all compostable, reusable and recyclable materials can be recovered.
- If there are no facilities easily available then contact the local municipality and request a system for responsible and sustainable waste management.

It's clear from the efforts in Nepal that sharing a small amount of time each week for cleaning the environment and social responsibility can make a positive difference.

Biosphere Association is contributing to the effort to clean up the rivers in Nepal by volunteering with the Solid Waste Management Technical Support Centre and Nepal River Conservation Trust. For more information, visit www.biosphereassociation.org