



A community came together to clean its lake.. Its Lifeline



As we start the New Year with tougher measures to combat the rising pollution, this story is heartwarming for the hope it brings in the face of eminent danger to nature's gifts.

We have shared about our post floods work in J&K (Adapting to changing realities and disaster rehabilitation, Story no. 37) but any story about the valley is incomplete without the mention of Dal Lake, God's own artwork.. a fascinating ecosystem around a lake. This is a story about the symbiotic relationship the Dal has with its inhabitants and what it brings about.

Dal is the soul of Kashmir, known worldwide for its serene beauty but what's not so well known is that the lake is getting choked by the increasing web of weeds (Azolla, Algae, Lily pads, other wild weeds and garbage etc) and that's bothering the people for whom the Lake is home. According to an eminent scientist Dr. Abdul Majid Kak, studying the

Dal Lake, 'The thick mats of Azolla block sunlight to the lake's flora and fauna and ultimately cause their decay. Azolla is hampering Dal's water circulation, which is a must, for it carries away the lake's nutrients and prevents growth of harmful water ferns.'



We have been working closely on reaching relief material to the people of Moti Mohalla village, (Asthawol area of the Dal Lake) right from the time floods took over the Dal Lake and it spilt over to the entire Boulevard road and surrounding areas. A year later, recently when we introduced Cloth for Work (CFW) to them and asked about what bothered them, on which they would like to work; the answer was unanimous.. Clean the Dal.. Let it breathe..



In the first round 145 people carried out the cleaning work. 70 boats were used for extracting around 15 trucks (weighing around 50 tons) of uprooted weeds. Bearing dense fog and winter chill these people worked for 2 days. 'The Government spends crores of rupees cleaning Dal using machines every year but all in vain. Goonj has taken better approach by involving us locals, we have been doing it for centuries, we know how to clean Dal" says Wahid Hussain , a local participant. One month later, in second phase, 167 participants cleaned a part of Dal using 78 boats over a span of 2 days. Another 10 trucks of weed and other material was extracted. True to the dictum that in nature nothing is a waste, some of extracted weeds became fodder for the cattle and the rest will decay and form manure. Cleaner water of the lake means less water borne diseases for the people who live in it apart from enhanced mobility besides endless ecological benefits. Over 1 lakh sq. meter area of Dal is touched and cleaned in these 2 exercises. We know that this is just a drop in the ocean.. But at least it's one step towards averting the choking of one of nature's jewels...



The fact that it happened entirely due to the hard work, wisdom and efforts of the locals only indicates where the solutions lie. The fact that in the short span of one year the local communities have shown tremendous faith in our work is a source of joy for us as well. Jawan Akbaria Trust (local partner organization) have been a key link in this

connect..Water has been a constant in Goonj's work; whether it's cleaning water bodies, digging wells or making irrigation canals, this elixir of life has been a priority basic need of the masses we work with across the country. In J&K as well our work is driven by the needs of the communities and their wisdom and leadership

You can hear the hope in the words of Ghulam Ahmad, a participant, "If we continue to organize such events, the old beauty of Dal Lake will be restored and the polluted Dal will become free from different polluted materials".



We say Ameen to that...

