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WEEKLY NEWS LETTER

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2306th Regular Weekly Meeting
Attendance: 11

Greetings on Birthday
Mar 29th : Rtn. Chiranjib Sha

How One Meghalaya Teacher Solved Her Village's Water Crisis

In the lush landscapes of Meghalaya, rural women endured arduous daily treks to fetch water, navigating challenging terrains while balancing heavy pots, even during menstruation or illness. That changed when Lakmen Mary Nongkhlaw led water conservation efforts, vastly improving access and transforming her community's quality of life. Here's how she achieved it.

In the lush and verdant landscapes of Meghalaya, the daily routine of rural women began with a trek. The paths are steep and arduous, winding through hilly landscapes where the women balance heavy aluminium pots on their heads and waist.

Filled with water from distant streams, women were required to trek up to one kilometre each way. This daunting task must be completed not once, but twice daily — to secure water for drinking, cooking, and cleaning. Sometimes, even while braving illness and menstruation. Despite feeling weak, dizzy, or experiencing pain, women must participate in this daily ritual, as water is too vital a resource to forego.

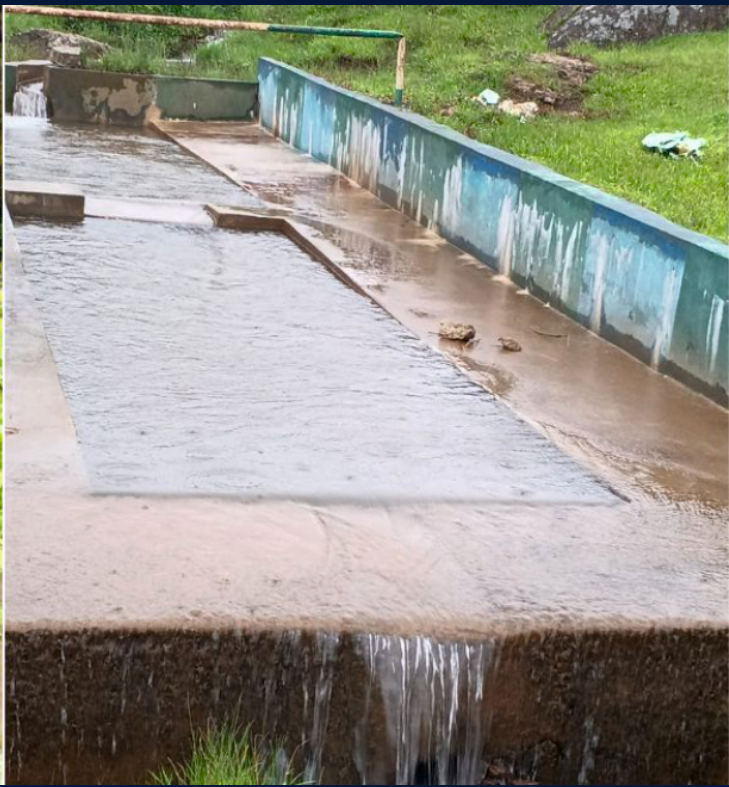
The time spent collecting water left women with little opportunity for education, leisure, or other productive activities.

Safety is another concern. Women travel in groups to avoid potential threats, both human and environmental, while navigating these remote paths. Each journey is undertaken out of sheer necessity, not choice.

Surprisingly, such was the situation of Kyrdemkhla village which is located close to Mawsynram – renowned as the wettest place on Earth, receiving an average annual rainfall of over 11,871 mm.

The Integrated Basin Development and Livelihoods Promotion Programme (IBDLP), a flagship livelihood program of the Meghalaya government mentions that “Meghalaya grapples with the irony of scarcity amidst plenty. The rainfall is only for 6-8 months in a year, leaving the dry months with lots of water scarcity problems. Due to the distinct topographical and geomorphological conditions of the state, there is high surface run off to the neighbouring plains very quickly.”

Fast forward to 2025, Lakmen Mary Nongkhlaw stood up to ease the physical burden on her community women and also improve the overall quality of life in her community.



A woman's quest for water self-sufficiency

Lakmen Mary has been working as an assistant teacher at Diengkynthong LP School for the past 15 years. Her determination to tackle the water crisis began with her first-hand experience of its impact on daily life. She was amongst those village women trekking uphill balancing water buckets.

Sharing her experience, she says: “The school started at nine. This meant I needed to do all household chores including cooking, cleaning, and fetching water before leaving for work. I'd leave to fetch water at seven in the morning and stand in the queues as the water needed to be collected from a specific area in a stream that was not polluted.”

Touched by the inefficiency and challenges faced by herself and her community, she has championed solutions to ease these burdens.

Over the past 15 years, she led initiatives to construct water assets such as check dams and water storage tanks. She also spearheaded afforestation movements to protect water catchment areas, significantly improving water availability closer to villagers' homes.

Under her leadership, the villagers planted 16,000 saplings, constructed five water storage tanks, and renovated six spring chambers. “We built four check dams and implemented water conservation projects to ensure sustainable access to this critical resource. These efforts have resulted in six water taps installed within the village which facilitated easy water access even during the dry winter seasons. We now get water effortlessly,” adds Lakmen Mary, who also holds the post of Secretary of the Village Employment Council since 2016.

From trekking for water to taps on demand

Recognised as a “changemaker” in her community, Lakmen Mary's exemplary work in water resource management has significantly transformed the water accessibility in her village.

The transformation brought about by these water conservation efforts is profound. “Women now spend less time on arduous water-fetching trips, allowing more quality time to be spent with families or on economic and social activities. These changes have revitalised community life and have even offered educational opportunities for women and girls, who now have time to attend school regularly,” she adds.

Notably, Lakmen Mary's initiatives have encouraged the community, especially women, to engage more actively in conservation and developmental projects, igniting a sense of empowerment and agency among the villagers.

Batrity Warkri, who has been working as a teacher in the village since 2007, says, “Lakmen Mary has become a role model of how grassroots leadership can ignite change. I have seen her devote her time after work to conservation efforts. From planting saplings to digging soil and constructing check dams, she is a very hardworking woman. Because of her efforts, life of villagers has improved.”

These narratives are not just about overcoming immediate barriers; they are about reshaping futures. “By addressing something as fundamental as water access, communities can begin to tackle larger issues such as health, education, and economic development,” says Lakmen Mary.

She continues to add, “Working on this project did not cost me a penny, but I only devoted my time post-teaching. After my working hours, I'd go around the village armed with construction tools and repair spring chambers and construct check dams. It's all our labour of love.”

Her efforts have not gone unnoticed. Lakmen Mary's efforts have earned her numerous accolades, including from the Office of The District Rural Development Agency, East Khasi Hills District, Shillong, affirming her positive impact on her village.

Last September, Lakmen Mary found herself in the distinguished company of President Droupadi Murmu at India Water Week in New Delhi.

Overcome with pride and disbelief, she remarks, “I couldn't believe that I was standing in front of the President. I got to narrate my work to her. Back home, my community members shared this joy and celebrated my recognition with pride: my photos were being circulated in WhatsApp groups, many of them proudly set their WhatsApp status to mark the occasion,” she recalls with pride.

Yet, her sense of fulfilment is coupled with a commitment to further progress. “The work is far from over. Now, I aim to initiate additional projects, including the construction of a large check dam and implementing three new rainwater harvesting systems, to continue improving water access and conservation in my community,” she adds.

The pursuit of peace is not futile

Ralph Josephsohn

My writings have recently been those of a GAD (Gloom and Doom) Fly. It's time to smell the rose of hope for peace and tranquillity. Lamentably, as I took a sniff of the rosy blossom, I was reminded that a rose is anchored on a stalk of sharp thorns. The rose of peace may be nice to look at, but not to touch.

The Longmont Rotary Club recently featured a distinguished guest speaker, a long time Rotarian who has extensive expertise in anger and conflict management and resolution. He was one of 27 Rotarians in the U.S. and Canada to be trained in the new peace endeavour of Rotary International and the Institute for Economics and Peace. The goal of the Rotarian mission is to promote global peace by following the polestar of the Rotary Four-Way Test. The credo is to seek truth, fairness, goodwill, as the Golden Rule to be beneficial to all concerned. Rotary International has 46,000 clubs populated by 1.4 million members. Rotary exemplifies highest standards of professional and personal ethics, leadership, and service above self, locally and the world beyond. The shield of Rotary International is raised to parry animosity, privation, disease, and suffering, whatever the source.



The program presented by the Rotarian brought to mind a religious faith which has existed for over two millennia. It currently has 2.6 billion individuals worldwide who identify themselves as affiliated. This religion is a fragrant rose which sprang out of the fertile soil of the Old Testament. The New Testament inspires the faithful to achieve peace on earth, goodwill to men, and brotherly love. It admonishes the faithful to love the enemy, and pray for those who persecute them. The Golden Rule to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” is a guiding principle.

From its scriptural germination and throughout the history of this faith, it has blossomed as a rose of peace on earth. Time and again, it was scarred by aggressive thorns. Ironically, much violence has been perpetrated under the imprimatur of divinity. Examples include the Crusades to reclaim the Holy Land from Muslim control, the Medieval Inquisition when “heretics” were persecuted and burned, and the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland between the Protestant unionists (loyalists) and Roman Catholic nationalists (republicans). The rose of brotherly love was wilted by violence since time immemorial. The seeds planted in the furrows of hope by Rotary International, as the Gospels, can lie fallow in the drought of indifference, choked by the suffocating weeds of human aggression. Human nature has not changed an iota since eons ago homo sapiens sharpened battle-axes, and now are primed to launch mass devastation deploying thermonuclear

hypersonic missiles. The sharp thorns on the stalks girding the rose of peace have, and continue to, draw blood. They inflict deep wounds, stacking the odds against chances of mankind's very survival.

The question is whether the pursuit of peace is a hamster spinning in a wheel of futility. The faster the hamster runs and the wheel whirls, the more obvious it becomes that there is no progress. In the context of modern weapons of mass annihilation and festering divisiveness, the faster humans spin the illusory wheel of peaceful coexistence, the further the objective of peace becomes. The question presented is whether the pursuit of peace simulates not only the futility of a hamster going nowhere in a wheel, but also a hamster chasing its unreachable stubby tail. Is the Gloom and Doom Fly resigned to cavalierly and with indifference eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow its wings will cease to flap?

Nothing could be further from the truth. The more critical the affirmitiy, the more imperative the need for intervention and comprehensive treatment. Both aggression and compassion are indelibly, however incongruously, ingrained in the human psyche. Even though the proclivity for aggression will never be totally abated, the quest for peace and compassion is a palliative mitigating risk, giving comfort, and inspiring hope of survival which transcends generations. Peaceful coexistence, if girded by the steadfast commitment of all religious persuasions and secular assemblages, to fervently strive in the quest of peace, the prospect of the survival of the human race will greatly be enhanced.



President and the members of Rotary Garden Reach congratulates Faheen Halder, daughter of Rtn. Abbas Ali Halder for completing her Graduation in Mass Communication from the very prestigious St. Xavier's University, New Town on March 5th, 2025. We wish Faheen the best for her future endeavours.



Water is Life: The Transformative Power of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

Pat Merryweather-Arge, WASH (Rotary Action Group), Chair 2024-2025

Water is Life—a common saying among the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Rotary Action Group (WASH-RAG). For us, this isn't just a saying; it's a guiding principle. Water is the foundation of life, essential for the survival of humans, plants, and animals. Without it, life simply cannot thrive.

However, water is more than just a necessity. When combined with sanitation and hygiene, it plays a vital role in all of Rotary's areas of focus.

Why water, sanitation, and hygiene matters

Hand washing with soap is one of the best ways to prevent disease transmission. Many rural communities in low-income countries lack access to soap or do not know how to use it properly. Rotary's WASH initiatives aim to address this gap. That's why we call it WASH – Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene together build healthier households and communities.

Access to clean water and proper hygiene ensure safer childbirth, reducing the risk of infections for newborns and



mothers. In healthcare settings, WASH significantly lowers the chances of hospital-acquired infections, benefiting patients undergoing surgery or recovering from accidents.

For education, clean water and sanitation make a tremendous difference. Girls are more likely to stay in school when they have access to hygienic washrooms during their menstrual cycles. Female teachers also experience fewer absences when proper facilities are available.

Beyond personal well-being, water is crucial for economic growth. Many businesses rely on a clean water supply—whether for cooking, baking, or operating hydraulic equipment. In some regions, water shortages due to climate and environmental changes have led to conflicts over this valuable resource.

According to Stew Martin, WASH-RAG Technical Officer, Rotary investments in water, sanitation, and hygiene provide 4 to 10 times the economic return in the communities we serve. Providing WASH in clinics and hospitals saves millions of dollars spent treating avoidable illnesses – over US\$120 million in Malawi alone, per the World Bank.

Transforming communities: stories of impact

The impact of WASH initiatives is tangible and life-changing. Rotary members have countless inspiring stories to share. Here are two examples from South Asia and East Africa that involved a community assessment and detailed plans for the development, implementation, sustainability, and measurable outcomes of these initiatives in the communities.



Duppada, India

In Duppada, the community's vision of a water well and bathhouse with sinks, showers and toilets became a life-changing reality. Before the bathhouse, women were forced to relieve themselves in fields at night, leaving them vulnerable to assaults. Working with Rotarians Prakash Tata and architect Chuck Newman, Rotary Club of Vizianagaram, the community designed a safe and functional bathhouse, significantly improving daily life.

I visited Duppada nine years after the installation of the water well and bathhouse and found them to be in impeccable shape. Since the installation, the village has transformed:

- **Roads have been paved.**
- **The school has expanded, and more girls are attending classes.**
- **Dysentery has become a thing of the past.**
- **Women no longer face the threat of violence.**

➤ **Jobs and services have been established within the community.**

Empowering Change

Access to clean water is more than a necessity—it is a catalyst for health, safety, education, and economic prosperity. Rotary members worldwide support WASH initiatives and collaborate with communities to improve access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene for a sustainable future.

You don't have to be a water expert to bring safe water to a community. Together, with the strength and knowledge of communities, we can ensure access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene for all, creating a sustainable future where everyone thrives.



Providing public toilets: Early Rotary service

One of Rotary's earliest service projects helped to bring public toilets to Chicago, the quickly growing industrial city in the Midwest of the United States where Rotary began in 1905. Club members didn't construct the restrooms themselves, as they sometimes do today. But just as they do today, they worked with other local groups to raise awareness of the need for sanitation in this urban area and advocated to get the project funded.

These public toilets, then known as "comfort stations," were typically underground structures at busy sites such as parks and public squares. Civic leaders and reformers in several American cities were noting a need for them, and Rotary members in Chicago were part of the movement.

Rotary founder Paul Harris and his fellow member Donald Carter worked with other club members and other organizations to make a plan to build public toilet facilities in the city and gather support for the initiative.

In October 1907, the Chicago Daily Tribune (now the Chicago Tribune) reported that the Rotary Club of Chicago had had plans drawn for public toilets in the downtown district known as the Loop. The club held a forum on the topic later that month, noting, "the topic is many-sided and can be treated to best advantage if we start with recognition of this fact and with due appreciation of its significance." Representatives from the club, the city, and other local organizations spoke at the meeting. The discussion cited the need for Chicago to keep up with the latest practices in municipal improvements and considered who would pay for the project and what impact it might have on sanitary conditions and public health in the city.

Their efforts were noticed beyond Chicago. In December, Charities and the Commons, a weekly journal about social issues that was published in New York, reported on a study that found a lack of public comfort stations in Chicago.

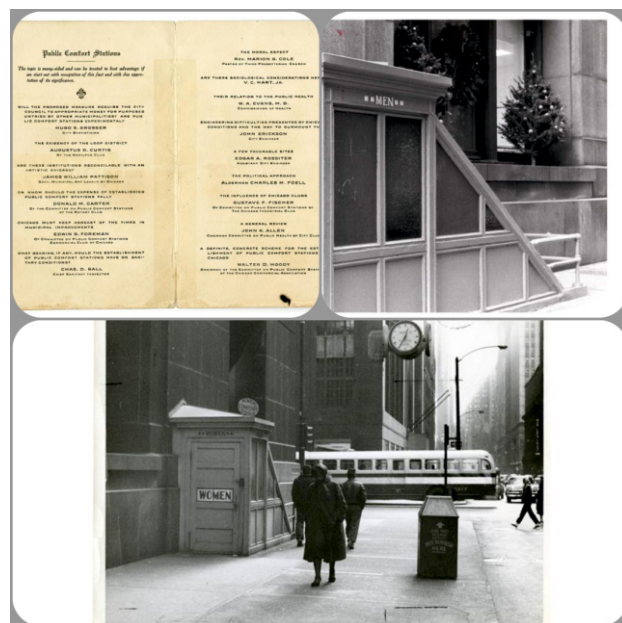
The project faced opposition from the Chicago Association of Brewers and the Association of Department Stores on State Street, which represented businesses that had public toilets. In the social conventions of the time, men could use toilets in bars or their own places of business. Women's access to sanitation facilities was more limited. Often the only toilets it was acceptable for them to use were in department stores, where they were expected to make purchases.

Chicago was building a new city hall at the time, and it was suggested that public toilets be constructed there. By March 1908, at least one location had been approved, and others were being considered. The City of Chicago and Cook County each allocated about US\$20,000 for the project.

As the city hall building neared completion in January 1911, the Chicago Daily Tribune reported, "In the basement are public comfort stations for men and women, entered at the Washington and LaSalle street corner of the building."

Paul Harris later recalled that additional public toilets were proposed but a lack of funding prevented the effort from expanding. Underground roads were also expected to be built in the future, and people thought that might require a different approach.

Today, the outline of one of the entrances can still be seen on the outside wall of city hall, along LaSalle Street. And Rotary members continue work to get clean water and sanitation to people in communities around the world.



Minutes of the 2305th RWM held on March 18th, 2025 at Rotary Sadan, Chowrenghee

1. President Biswajit welcomed the members and requested them to rise for the National Anthem.
2. Proposed Water Purifier equipments installation at BNR North Colony. The transportation arrangements are currently in process. Construction Part is completed by Railway department and plumbing will be done Rotary Garden Reach for Rs. 10,000 approx. Its approved the members.
3. President informed about the Cervical Cancer Awareness & Screening at Bata Factory, Batanagar on April 11th, 2025. Screening for 80 to 100 women workers of the factory. It's a joint initiative with Rotary Calcutta. Our club will bear Rs. 5000, readily approved by the members.
4. The 9th Board Meeting will be on March 25th, 2025 followed by RWM.
5. In absentia of the Club Secretary, Secretary-elect Rtn. Shubhayan completed the Club Business.
6. Minutes of the last RWM was confirmed.
7. President Biswajit terminated the meeting.

