How the public is getting India's Adyar River clean

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The Citizen Action Group, Clean Adyar Initiative is making inroads into cleaning up one of India's rowing rivers, the Adyar River in Chennai (Madras).

Over the last six months volunteers from the Chennai Trekking Club and the Madras Boat Club have spent one morning a week cleaning up the plastic and other debris that has been deposited along the banks of the Adyar River, which flows through the city of Chennai.

The pollution in the river from urbanisation and industry has meant that rowers are limited in how far they can row which has motivated members of the Madras Boat Club to help with the clean up. Organiser Krishnamohan Ramachandran says that on average around 80 people from all walks of life have participated in gathering up the debris, sorting it and transporting it out of the area.

“Public involvement in social projects like these can become an effective reality,” says Ramachandran. “This can be used as an excellent example to raise civic consciousness in society.

“It has taken 80 volunteers 25 Fridays to remove the mountains of debris over a stretch of just 3 kilometres,” adds Ramachandran. “And even along this stretch, we have really only scratched the surface. The Adyar River runs along a course of 42km. Debris and garbage flung into the river along other stretches is far worse.”

The work done so far in restoring the Adyar River is now entering a second phase. Says Ramachanran; “The success of the restoration can be measured by the diversity and density of both flora and fauna that exists today -172 species of plants and 62 species of vertebrates.”

In the second phase some of the islands in the Adyar River are being replanted with native species of trees and mangroves and the Detailed Project Report has been approved to treat all sewage inlets into the river.

“In this connection we have been actively working with an Israeli company, Ayala, to help promote a natural, ecological waste water management system to treat the sewage and industrial waste being released into our river systems,” says Ramachanran. “We are happy to report that due to our combined efforts proposals for two pilot projects are being actively considered by the local government.

“We believe that there is adequate government support to make the rivers of Chennai clean again. Strong public involvement and support from global movements like World Rowing's Clean Water initiative will help accelerate the process.”