



The International Relations

Friends of the Ganges/US

Catherine J. Porter

At the very beginning of the effort to clean Gangaji, the Swacha Ganga campaign included friends from the United States who were captivated by the plight of Ganga and who wanted to serve in any way. The earliest partners in this work, Linda Hess (who introduced Fran Peavey to Mahantji), Mark DuBois, Jerry Brown, Barbara Pyle and many others, were thinking partners for Mahantji and the Directors

S.N. Upadhayay and S.K. Mishra. Social change activist Peavey committed to come every year for five years as a strategist in the campaign – a commitment that soon grew to include each of the last 25 years. She and the directorship became fast friends as well as colleagues in the work of Swacha Ganga, and have grown in the joy of that friendship through thick and thin times of the campaign. Joined in the work in 1988 by Catherine Porter, the two women have introduced dozens of other supporters from Friends of the Ganges/US – people who contribute their time, engineering expertise, access to international media, financial resources, and the gift of friendship.

Highlights in the FOG/US and SMF partnership, besides the growing amity among all the SMF staff and FOG friends, include the 1992 International Seminar supported by USAID (via program director Earl Kessler) and others. It brought together some of the two nations' best engineering minds to imagine a sewage treatment system that would work on nominal electricity. Tunneling expert Tim Smirnoff remains active on the FOG/US team.

A subsequent exchange with prominent engineer

William Oswald of University of California at Berkeley, and his partner Bailey Green, finally helped SMF and Varanasi Nagar Nigam identify the treatment system they felt would work best for Ganga in Varanasi: the Advanced Integrated Wastewater Ponding System (AIWPS) and a gravity-feed interceptor to transport wastewater downstream to the treatment ponds.

The FOG/US team has been active mostly in political strategies and in garnering support from friends in Delhi and the U.S. They sponsor a regular visit by Mahantji – every three years or so to the US to be sure the campaign retains a high profile in the media and among long-time supporters.

Fran Peavey introduced Gangaji and the campaign to Australian educator activists Sue and Colin Lennox in 1992. The Australians fast became partners in the work, creating the youth, education and outreach programs that give the campaign breadth and scope. Their support, and the support they garnered from Aus/AID has been key to the campaign all these years.

It is hard to imagine the Swacha Ganga campaign without remembering hundreds of friends and supporters from across the globe, too many to list here, but all appreciated for their generosity and kindness.

FOG/US is proud to have been an active partner from Day One, and renews its commitment to provide help every year until "not a single drop of sewage enters the river along the bathing ghats of Varanasi".