

## Urban Rivers: A Vital Source Of Drinking Water

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When asked where does our water come from, most Malaysians have the romantic notion that it comes from pristine rainfall that collects into clear streams, leading to rivers and subsequently gathering into beautiful lakes and finally reservoirs, with the final stop being our taps. In reality, the picture is not quite that perfect.

Truth is most of our drinking water flow through drains before it gets treated to become drinking water. By drains, I do mean the *longkangs*, *kawahs* and monsoon drains that we often neglect and ignore.

### Drains to Urban Rivers

Many Malaysians do not realise that our concreted drains are actually an essential part of the water eco system that needs to be protected.

Instead many Malaysians regard our drainage system as a convenient waste disposal outlet. You only need to walk to a nearby drain to see it filled with rubbish and in extreme cases items such as old televisions and computer monitors. The waste not only contaminates local natural waterways such as streams and rivers, it also inhibits aquatic life and causes pungent odour.

If you think water treatment facilitates will be able to treat all the polluted water it receives, you are mistaken. In July 2009, two water treatment plants in Hulu Langat and Sepang had to shut down for two weeks due to contamination from effluents from a nearby industrial area. The shut down affected the lives of 20,000 residents who were depending on the water source. Just last year, more than 1.2 million residents in four districts in Selangor were affected by the closure of the Sungai Semenyih water treatment plant. This is just another example of how contamination can affect one's access to water source.

What is more worrying is when draught occurs, as water levels in lakes and rivers will decline. If pollution levels remain constant, this will inevitably impact the concentration of pollution in our water sources. As such, water treatment plants will have greater difficulties in treating polluted raw water, this compounds the effects of the draught. I do believe that we should all take responsibility and try our best to stop polluting our rivers.

### Rehabilitation

In my conversations with many people, the feedback is that our urban rivers are beyond repair but I do think otherwise. In 2007, the Global Environment Centre partnered with GAB Foundation to carry out a unique initiative under the Foundation's W.A.T.E.R (Working Actively Through Education & Rehabilitation) Project. This was aimed at rehabilitating a 2.5 kilometre stretch of Sungai Way in Selangor. At the start of the project, the river was classified as Class IV - V in the Water Quality Index. This indicates that the river is heavily polluted and that no living organism can survive under such condition.

With the support of the Selangor Department of Irrigation and Drainage, Selangor Water Management Board, Selangor Department of Environment and Petaling Jaya City Council, a series of community education and engagement programmes were carried out. Activities include joint community river clean-ups, active management and the monitoring of the river by our team with the help of volunteers. We are pleased that after three years, Sungai Way urban river is now successfully rehabilitated to a Class III in the Water Quality Index, making it suitable for living organisms such as flora and fish species. In fact, if you take a walk along Sungai Way today, you will see dragonflies, catfish and even herons in the vicinity.

In the spirit of World Water Day, we hope that from this day on, all Malaysians will start treating our urban rivers with the respect that it deserves. We also hope that more urban rivers in our country can be successfully rehabilitated like Sungai Way. Happy World Water Day!

### **FAST FACTS**

1. In Malaysia, there are 180 rivers whereby 150 of them are major river systems
2. 97% of Malaysia's water supply comes from rivers and streams. Unfortunately, more than 55% of our rivers are polluted.
3. According to the Department of Irrigation and Drainage (DID), the number of clean river basins in Malaysia has decreased from 76 in 2008 to 70 in 2009.
4. A study by the Economic Planning Unit foresees a water crisis in Selangor and other industrial states in the peninsula in 2014.
5. We need only 80 litres of water a day, of which 3 liters are for drinking

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### **About GAB Foundation:**

GAB Foundation was established in 2007 to carry out Guinness Anchor Berhad's (GAB) corporate social responsibility initiatives in three core areas – environmental conservation, education and community. Within these three key areas, the Foundation strives to identify causes that not only contribute significantly to empowering and enriching the lives of deserving Malaysian individuals and communities, but also resonate with GAB's corporate values of striving for excellence, acting with integrity and having a genuine respect for people, society and its diversity.

The management and administration of the Foundation is governed by a board of trustees made up of senior members of GAB's management team and independent nominees.

For more information on the GAB Foundation please visit [www.gabfoundation.org](http://www.gabfoundation.org) .