

Victories Around the World for Clean Air, Clean Water, a Stable Climate, and a Healthy Planet



Towering piles of asbestos in the Roro Hills.

PHOTO: Shweta Narayan

ELAW made great progress in 2018 on two key goals: winning victories for the environment and building lasting, local capacity to defend the global environment. ELAW collaborated with local partners on dozens of projects to protect communities and the environment, and celebrated victories in India, Mexico, Uganda, South Africa, Kenya, Nepal, Czech Republic, Chile, and Panama.

We are pleased to share highlights of our winning collaboration with the world's leading grassroots advocates.

Victory Over Asbestos in India

For decades, children played in towering piles of asbestos waste dumped near tribal communities in the Roro Hills in Jharkand State, eastern India. In August 2018, India's National Green Tribunal (NGT) ordered prompt remediation of the site.

ELAW partners have diligently followed up with local officials, including the District Magistrate, to ensure that the order is fully implemented.

This big victory took years of hard work. Hindustan Industries Ltd. abandoned hundreds of tons of waste when asbestos mining in the Roro Hills was halted in 1983. In 2012, ELAW partner Shweta Narayan traveled to the Roro Hills to collect soil samples that documented dangerous levels of asbestos exposure. Even small amounts of asbestos can cause severe health problems, including lung cancer.

"Sometimes the wheels of environmental justice turn very slowly," says Dr. Mark Chernaik, ELAW Staff Scientist.

The NGT ordered a committee of government officials to submit a plan that includes placing a fiber mat, soil, and seeds of local plants on top of the asbestos dump and implementing other measures so the dump no longer threatens nearby communities. The NGT relied on the Polluter Pays Principle to order the company to pay the costs of remediation. The NGT also set up a claim procedure so that villagers suffering the impacts of asbestos exposure can be compensated.

Mark worked closely with Rahul Choudhary at the Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment and other Indian advocates to prepare three reports that the NGT considered in rendering its order.

"Indeed this case was challenging," says Rahul. "But we survived it all. Thanks to Mark for giving us hope and valuable inputs."

The NGT also ordered clean up at asbestos mines in Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh.