

Suttha Muttha: connecting school communities in peri-urban Bengaluru to local ecology and biodiversity

A collaborative project by the Fig Tree Learning Centre & Nature Conservation Foundation

Supported by the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum

Project Update: June – October 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting school closures have definitely impacted our work and the Suttha Muttha project timelines.

Our focus in the first two months of the grant was to use the additional funds received from BSF for putting together physical learning kits for the students since many of them have limited or no access to devices to be able to attend or benefit from virtual learning programmes.

These learning kits included basic stationery like pencils, erasers, colouring material, sketchpad as well as learning material in the form of stories, activities and games.

The Fig Tree Learning Centre (FTLC) took the lead in this work and curated stories, riddles, DIY art & craft and poems that the children would be able to attempt on their own while staying safe at home. Along with this, we also carefully selected age-appropriate, nature-themed children's books sourced from Pratham Books and the Lightroom Bookstore in Kannada, Hindi and English for each child.



Physical Learning Kits



Nature-themed picture books distributed as part of the learning kits



Teachers from FTLC ensured the distribution of these learning kits with the support of the parents and headmistress of the Tarabanahalli government school. In addition, these kits were distributed to children in the community library in Kasaghattapura.

The first round of distribution happened in mid-June and then in July 2020.

Children have been engaging with the storybooks and even reading them out to each other!

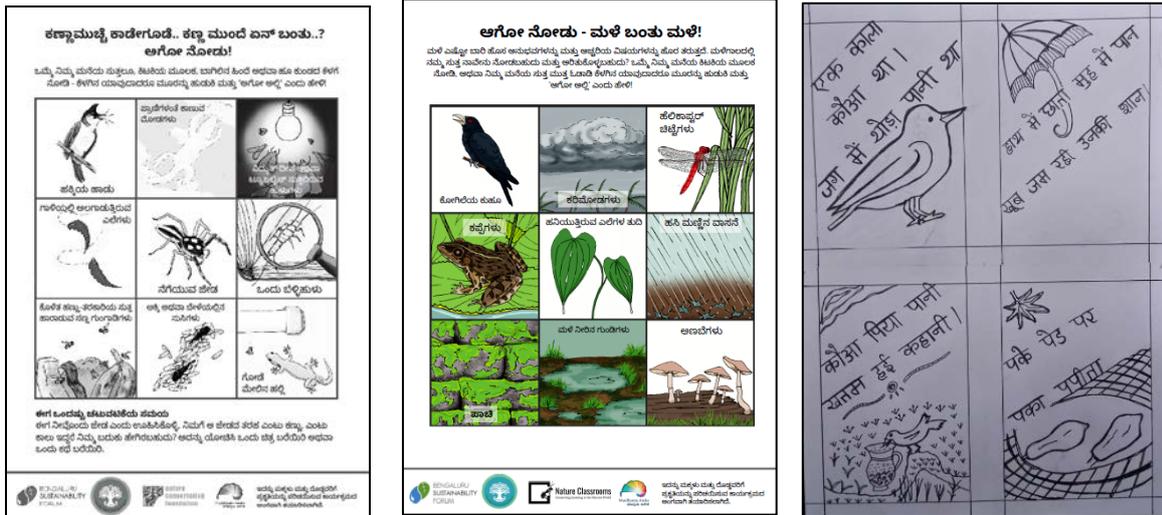
Once the Vidyagama program started at the school, FTLC teachers were able to visit with greater frequency and meet the children once or twice a week- this allowed for sharing of more materials as well as discussions and conversations with the children.



Sarojini from FTLC has recently translated a book called “A Child and a Tree” which is a simple story of how a child realized the consequences of cutting trees and decided to do something about it. The older children in the library and the 4th and 5th standard children in the government school have each received a copy to read and colour.

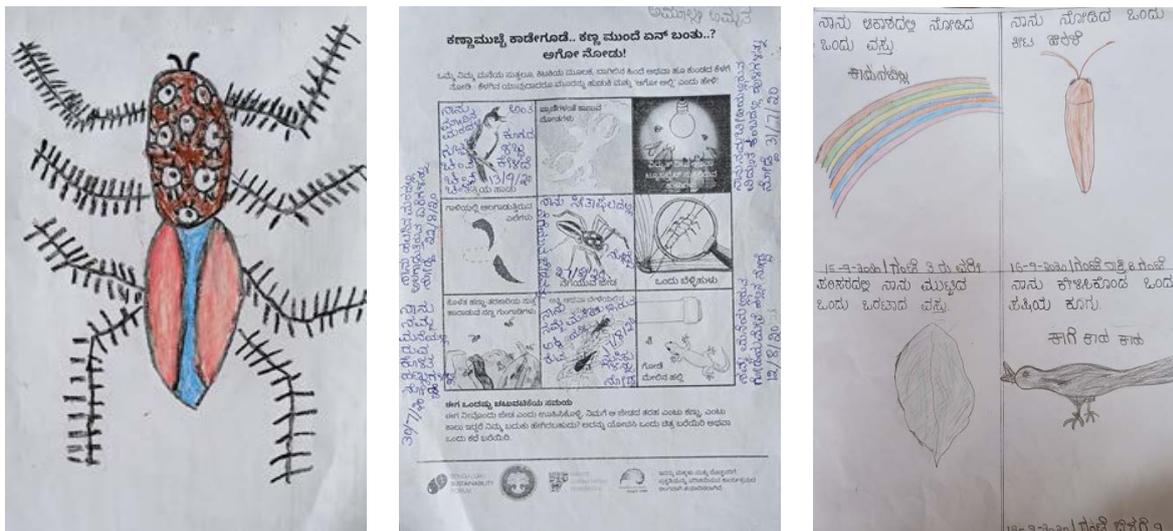
She has also translated a book called *“The Sea in a Bucket”* for the children to explore the idea of the water cycle.

Bingo activity sheets about nature in and around our homes were shared with the students. We have also put together a Rain themed bingo and activity sheet and teachers at FTLC are putting together stories and activities that will encourage children to observe how rain changes our immediate surroundings- this is yet to be distributed to the students.



Material developed around the theme of Rain/Monsoon

Many students seemed to have enjoyed the bingo activities and under the guidance of the teachers, have made detailed notes about their observations. Below, we have shared a child’s response to the activity prompt: **“Imagine if you had 8 eyes, 8 legs like a spider. How would your life change? Make a drawing or make a story.”**



Children’s observations, stories and drawings

*A story- **If I were a spider...***

"I am a spider, when I am outside I build, create webs on a tree and inside the house I build webs in corners. I have 8 legs and each leg has small hair all over. The colours on my body are blue, pink, brown and black. One lady moved me with a broom while cleaning and I had to go outside and sit on a branch, creeper. Sunlight fell on my body and I felt happy so I stayed there, in the evening when the clouds turned black, the clouds made noise 'dum dum', I felt very scared because when I was inside the house, I had not heard this noise.

Suddenly, it started raining and my body got wet and I got a cold! I was shivering and went back to where I was inside the house, built a web and slept cosily."

Since mid-October the schools have been closed and the Vidyagama program has stopped. There is no clear indication yet about when schools will reopen, especially for the primary school students.

We hope to use the next 2-3 months to brainstorm and create teaching-learning material about local biodiversity that can also be included in the physical learning kits for the students at the government school and community library. These are likely to take the form of anchor charts (about local trees & other biodiversity), short stories, poems, fact sheets, games and DIY activities. The content for this will be collaboratively discussed and developed between NCF and the teachers at FTLC.

Children at the government school have been given notebooks to maintain observations of their immediate surroundings- we hope in this time they will continue to write in these nature diaries. Depending on the status of school closures, we will also continue to distribute learning materials to the children as well as make regular visits as permitted by the school/education department.