

THE GREEN GOBLIN

The what, how and why of lake restoration

Your cup of high-end coffee may cost more this year, thanks to climate change. Brazil is facing its worst-ever recorded drought, leading to close to 200,000 forest fires which – along with unseasonal frost – threaten 20% of the country's premium Arabica coffee crops. Prolonged drought has also led to widespread hunger in many parts of Africa. In heartbreaking news, Namibia and Zimbabwe recently announced plans to cull elephants and hippos for food.

Despite heavy rains and trees falling in many parts of the city, Bengaluru has been relatively unscathed by flooding so far this year. But, as the recent City Biodiversity Index for Bengaluru demonstrates, the city's ecology is in bad condition, impacting Bengaluru's climate resilience. Funded by Bengaluru Sustainability Forum and developed by ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability South Asia, the index, launched on September 9, shows that the city's 'natural', or ecological, spaces constitute just 13% of the area.

Despite a combined BBMP budget of Rs 102.3 crore for lake maintenance, development and improvement (including fencing) last year, many of Bengaluru's lakes continue to be in terrible condition. *Kaluves*, or stormwater drains, have been converted into concretised drains that carry sewage; wetlands and marshlands have become buildings and concrete surfaces; and the excessive landscaping of many restored lakes has impacted bird diversity.

The City Biodiversity Index report concludes that the BBMP should work with a range of other groups, including citizens' associations, to manage parks and lakes. The residents of Bengaluru, and of cities across the country, can attest to the importance of such collaborations.



Harini Nagendra

the Azim Premji University Prof prides herself on barking up all trees, right and wrong

Last Saturday, on September 14, we conducted a day-long workshop on 'The What, How and Why of Lake Restoration' at the Azim Premji University campus in Bengaluru, with close to 100 different individuals and organisations joining us to discuss the future of the city's lakes. People came from nearby towns such as Hosur, as well as cities farther away, such as Hyderabad and Varanasi, and many of the attendees were experienced ecologists, lake activists, civil society practitioners and corporate employees engaged in lake protection.

We began with a brief history of how Bengaluru got its waterbodies – originally tanks, created for rainwater harvesting – and then heard from two organisations that worked with the BBMP to restore and manage lakes in very different parts of the city – Puttenahalli Neighbourhood Lake Improvement Trust, which works on the JP Nagar Puttenahalli Puttakere; and Jala Poshan, which focuses on Jakkur Lake.

Speaking of their experiences, Usha Rajagopalan and Annapurna Kamath described the importance of stepping up as residents of the city to care for our neighbourhoods. They also spoke about how the effort involved in restoration of lakes pales in comparison to the challenges required to maintain these lakes in good condition. S Vishwanath, the city's Zen Rainman, spoke poetically about the importance of lakes in the city's periphery for farmers, who supply us with food. Azim Premji University's Prof Ankur Jamwal spoke about the little-known implications of lake environmental science, including the reasons why mass fish death is often seen in the early morning, just before dawn – and how to guard against heavy metal poisoning while restoring lakes.

The energy in the room was palpable – as was the despair. Lack of basic information – maps, environmental data, knowledge of where to begin – hampered many efforts. Perhaps the biggest outcome of the workshop was the networks that developed. But a repeated question was – where do we go from here? The government needs to step in to anchor such initiatives – academic institutions and civil society can only take it so far!