

BENGALURU

'Phosphorous content in detergents a threat to lakes'



STAFF REPORTER

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Researchers, scientists, citizens brainstorm about ways of rejuvenating and saving Bengaluru's lakes

From introducing policy changes that can effectively put a check on what goes into the city's dying lakes to what citizens can do to help, researchers, scientists, citizens and academics brainstormed on Thursday about ways of rejuvenating and saving what is left of Bengaluru's waterbodies.

At a day-long workshop on 'Urban Lakes: Water Security and People's Livelihood', organised by the Karnataka Environment Research Foundation, the Energy and Wetlands Research Group - Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES) - Indian Institute of Science (IISc.), and the Institution of Engineers, discussions centered around the importance of lakes to the regional hydrological cycle.

Lakes, they said, support large biological diversity, and provide ecosystem services such as food, fibre, waste assimilation, water purification, flood mitigation, erosion control, groundwater recharge, apart from enhancing the aesthetics of the landscape.

However, TV. Ramachandra from the CES said Bengaluru is a dying city, with froth and fire coming out of it, referring to the 900-acre Bellandur lake. Recalling the rejuvenation blueprint readied for Bellandur and Varthur lakes, he said apart from identifying an 'owner' for the lakes, which neither the Bangalore Development Authority or the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike is willing to own up, residents welfare associations should act as pressure groups and keep vigil on the progress of rejuvenation work.

Challenges to rejuvenated lakes

At the workshop, citizens who are part of rejuvenation efforts recounted challenges encountered in the process and post-rejuvenation. For instance, representatives from the Devarabisanahalli Lake Improvement Trust said the lake, for which the first phase of rejuvenation was completed in December 2018, has no 'breathing space' outside the fence as the catchment area on the buffer zone has been concretised.

"We are also dependent on rain as we have no perennial source of water or a working STP," said a representative.

Groundwater

The lack of regulations for groundwater use and the urgent need for it was also emphasised.

K. Elangovan, member of Whitefield Rising, said though recycled water is supposed to be used for construction and by industries, this is not the case. "The groundwater regulations are zero. There is also no third party audit of water quality," he said.

Former ISRO scientist C.J. Jagadeesha said it is necessary to treat groundwater as a 'common property resource and not an individual resource'. "Then lake water will become a valuable commodity," he said.

Solutions and suggestions

Almitra Patel, Member, Supreme Court Committee for Solid Waste Management, suggested a policy to get companies to indicate the phosphorous levels in detergents, which would help

consumers make an informed choice.

Taking forward a point put forth by Sridhar Pabbisetty, Chief Enabler, Centre for Inclusive Governance, on decentralisation of water management, she said citizens should switch to options other than strong phenyl and bleaches, which are microbe killers, in their bathrooms. She also called for better management of construction debris, which is often being dumped on lakebeds.

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