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## **A Leafy Mission: Greening the City, One Sapling At a Time**

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Volunteers planting Saplings at Seegehalli Wet Waste Treatment Plant

### **A Leafy Mission: Greening the City, One Sapling At a Time**

A group of city-based NGOs, Rotary Club, and BBMP have come together to create urban forests in the city.

*By Durga Prasad, Roshini Muthukumar and Shreya Rai*

**Bangalore:** Jairaj Mandayam was always dedicated towards protection, conservation and betterment of the environment. When he saw trees being cut recklessly to make way for development projects in his beloved Bangalore, it broke his heart. It also spurred this young sales executive to get proactive and make his city green again.

That is why Jairaj and his friends set up Hasiru Mission (hasiru means green) in 2016. “We started it while sitting around a table at a restaurant in Malleshwaram and today it has become a community of conscious, connected, and well-informed individuals whose vision is to revive the Garden city.” The idea for this mission occurred to him when Jairaj tried to plant a sapling outside his house. “When I dug two feet into the ground, I found plastic contaminating the soil!” That jolted him into action.

Jairaj approached experts, government officials, and fellow nature enthusiasts to learn about where and how he could plant trees in Bangalore. After he understood the science behind nurturing and growing a sapling, his aim was to find places outside the city free from contamination. Even today, Jairaj inspects the location for accessibility and soil fertility to ensure that planted saplings thrive.

“Honestly speaking, my success rate with planting saplings successfully was less than 10% initially,” he admits. But, he did not give up. And today, Hasiru Mission stands strong with four core members and over 700 volunteers across the city who have so far planted more than 8000 saplings.

Recently, Hasiru Mission in collaboration with the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), Save Our Trees a city-based NGO, the Bangalore Political Action Committee (BPAC), and the Rotary Club of Bangalore Downtown organised a drive to emphasise the need for planting more trees to combat rising pollution. The work was undertaken by 130 volunteers from city schools and colleges -- Jyoti Nivas NCC cadets, Mount Carmel College eco-club members and Malleshwaram government school students. The students gathered at Seegahalli Wet Waste Treatment plant at Kannahalli, located off the busy NICE road. “Students enjoyed being one with nature and getting their hands dirty as they are never allowed to play in the mud,” says Jairaj. During the event, 450 saplings of neem, silver oak, lemon, and many more were planted. These different tree species were chosen for a reason. “For instance, we chose neem as it has medicinal properties and is known to be an air purifier. The nitrogen levels around the wet waste processing plant are high. Therefore, we expect the trees to act as green buffers to improve air quality and soil fertility,” he explains.

Who will take care of these saplings? Jairaj says: “The BBMP played a major role in the success of the Seegahalli tree-planting drive. The BBMP has not only offered the space for the saplings, but also the compost. Further, the BBMP will be responsible for nurturing the saplings.” To ensure that the saplings flourish “...volunteers located near the area will check on the saplings every three weeks and report back to our core team,” adds Jairaj.

Hasiru Mission’s motto is, ‘Each One Plant One’, and the team aims to create mini urban forests that can help the city breathe clean air again. An urban forest is a cluster of trees that grow within city limits like the Jayanagar mini forest and JP Nagar mini forest in Bangalore. Jairaj then points out: “There are laws to prohibit the cutting of trees, but there are no laws restricting the planting

of new trees. Bangalore city is currently surviving because of 10 mini-urban forests located outside the city. Now it needs more.”

## **BOX**

An experiment that began in 1980 at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, is proof that urban forests are necessary today. The project initially began as an experiment to conserve native woodland trees and study their adaptability to afforestation programmes. Students of IISc’s Centre for Ecological Sciences department (Energy and Wetlands Research group) planted 500 saplings of 49 species on two hectares. Some of the trees thriving here today include species such as mahua, arjuna , and hirik, which are found only in the moist tropical forests of the Western Ghats. Lead faculty for the project, Dr T V Ramachandra notes: "Temperatures inside the IISc campus are now 2 degrees Celsius lower than the rest of Bangalore city. This is because of the mini forest planted 25 years ago. The forest has also raised the formerly 200-foot deep water table to 10-feet as trees have helped in the the percolation of water". Source: TheBetterIndia