

Civic Issues

Rs 1000 crore washed down the storm water drain? Bengaluru's misguided plan to revive SWDs

BBMP's Rs 800 crore project to revive storm water drain is nothing but an attempt to conceal reality, say activists.

TNM Staff (/author-articles/TNM-Staff) | Monday, September 04, 2017 - 16:29

Follow @thenewsminute

(<https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/rs-1000-crore-washed-down-storm-water-drain-bengaluru-s-misguided-plan-revive-swds-67867>) ([https://twitter.com/share?url=http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/rs-1000-crore-washed-down-storm-water-drain-bengaluru-s-misguided-plan-revive-swds-67867&text=Rs 1000 crore washed down the storm water drain? Bengaluru's misguided plan to revive SWDs](https://twitter.com/share?url=http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/rs-1000-crore-washed-down-storm-water-drain-bengaluru-s-misguided-plan-revive-swds-67867&text=Rs%201000%20crore%20washed%20down%20the%20storm%20water%20drain%3F%3FBengaluru%27s%20misguided%20plan%20to%20revive%20SWDs)) ([mailto:?Subject=TheNewsMinute&Body=Rs 1000 crore washed down the storm water drain? Bengaluru's misguided plan to revive SWDs](mailto:?Subject=TheNewsMinute&Body=Rs%201000%20crore%20washed%20down%20the%20storm%20water%20drain%3F%3FBengaluru%27s%20misguided%20plan%20to%20revive%20SWDs)) (<http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/rs-1000-crore-washed-down-storm-water-drain-bengaluru-s-misguided-plan-revive-swds-67867>) ([https://plus.google.com/share?url=Rs 1000 crore washed down the storm water drain? Bengaluru's misguided plan to revive SWDs](https://plus.google.com/share?url=Rs%201000%20crore%20washed%20down%20the%20storm%20water%20drain%3F%3FBengaluru%27s%20misguided%20plan%20to%20revive%20SWDs)) (<http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/rs-1000-crore-washed-down-storm-water-drain-bengaluru-s-misguided-plan-revive-swds-67867>) ([http://reddit.com/submit?url=http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/rs-1000-crore-washed-down-storm-water-drain-bengaluru-s-misguided-plan-revive-swds-67867&title=Rs 1000 crore washed down the storm water drain? Bengaluru's misguided plan to revive SWDs](http://reddit.com/submit?url=http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/rs-1000-crore-washed-down-storm-water-drain-bengaluru-s-misguided-plan-revive-swds-67867&title=Rs%201000%20crore%20washed%20down%20the%20storm%20water%20drain%3F%3FBengaluru%27s%20misguided%20plan%20to%20revive%20SWDs))



Every year, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike promises to desilt the city's storm water drains to avert flooding of low lying areas.

Well known for not keeping its promises, the Palike has kept up its reputation. The desilting, which must begin in the summer months to ensure smooth flow of rainwater into these drains during the monsoon, has once again not been done.



The proposal

In June 2015, the Palike made huge promises of giving the pathetic storm water drains (SWD) a makeover.

In that year, the government announced a Rs 1,000 crore (<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/552400/rs-800-crore-remodelling->

125.htm) project to give the city's SWDs a facelift. Out of this huge sum, Rs 800 crore was meant to revive the existing SWDs, while Rs 200 crore was allotted for constructing new ones.

According to data provided by the BBMP, the civic body maintains 633 major storm water drains stretching over 840 km. While primary drains run over 415.5 km, the secondary drains cover 424.5 km.



Two years after the project was announced, the Palike has only started the work this year. The BBMP is currently working on reinforced cement concrete box drains, U-shaped RCC retaining walls, bridges, culverts, and desilting and fencing drains. The project is estimated to be completed by December 2019.

The misguided plan

While slamming the delay in the project, citizen activists say that this new 'quick fix' the BBMP is planning will do more harm than good.

"What is the point of spending Rs 800 crore in pouring concrete over the existing drains? How will groundwater recharge happen if the SWDs are concretized? This is just an eye wash. There is no pointing in spending huge amounts of money for a project that is bound to fail," says Naresh Narasimhan, Urban Planner and member of Citizens for Bengaluru.

Narasimhan says that constructing concrete SWDs will only stop groundwater recharge, which will in turn lead to accumulation of silt in the SWDs.

"We have been crying about the same issue for 10 years and nothing has been done. The city does not need more storm water drains, but it needs a proper plan for watershed management," he adds.

The BBMP vs BWSSB 'passing the parcel' game

"When it rains, the rajakaluves (storm water drains) will overflow as there is no scope for the water to seep into the ground, and Bengaluru will get flooded again. How can they not see that the plan is bound to fail? Besides, the biggest problem is that BBMP is in charge of storm water drains, while the BWSSB is responsible for managing the city's sewage system. So many sewage lines are connected to the SWDs. People have been ranting about this same issue and yet the agencies lack basic imagination," he says.

Narasimhan believes that instead of spending Rs 800 crore for a failure-bound project, the government must intervene and ensure that both the sewage and storm water drains are maintained by one civic agency.

"Both BBMP and BWSSB are passing the buck. It has been decades now and no one is bothered to rectify the city's sewage and storm water drain system," he says.

Dr TV Ramachandra of the Indian Institute of Science agrees and believes that unchecked concretization of the city and bad urban planning has led to Bengaluru becoming prone to floods.

"Building concrete drains will not solve the issue. What we need is an eco-friendly system of drainage which will contribute to groundwater recharge," he says. "Dumped construction material and solid waste have blocked the system," he adds.

"When you look at the maps of Bengaluru's watershed management during the British era, it will baffle you. It was so well planned that the city could sustain heavy rain. The rampant encroachment of marshlands and buffer zones of lakes, obstruction of sewer pipes and manholes, encroachment of storm water pipes, garbage dumped in the SWDs have blocked the outlets of rainwater," Dr Ramachandra says

The Mayor's justification

In June 2017, the Palike had informed the Karnataka High Court that it had removed encroachments on 430 km of the city's SWD network.

According to Bengaluru Mayor G Padmavati, a lot of desilting work remains to be done, along with the reconstruction of SWDs. "We are now working on desilting storm water drains, building concrete drains over kacha drains, and fencing and jacketing them, in 180 areas. Constructing huge projects takes time. We have divided the project in 28 broad areas and getting work done will take time," she insists.

Continuing the blame game with the BWSSB, the Mayor says, "The sewage system belongs to BWSSB and they have to divert the sewage pipes connected to storm water drains."

However, the Mayor did not have an answer for activists' claim that the Rs 800 crore project is bound for failure.

'Stop distracting from the real issue'

In addition to the 800 crores, Bengaluru Development Minister KJ George has announced that an additional Rs 300 crore will be allotted for a 'temporary plan' to avert flooding.

While the announcement may seem like a relief, activists claim it is again a way to distract the people from the actual problem.

"This is ridiculous. The agencies must sort out their jurisdictional problems and then get to the root of the problem. Activists have been crying out and stating what the problem is and how it can be solved. But it is sheer stupidity to not listen," Narasimhan says.
