



BNP promises to work towards water security of the city

Bengaluru's lakes were created more than four centuries ago by damming the natural valleys of the city. The work initiated by the city's founder Kempe Gowda was continued later on by the Wodeyars. Lakes have not just been reservoirs of water but also recharge neighbouring aquifers and serve as sources of water for drinking, washing and irrigation. They also have flood-absorption capabilities, the loss of which has contributed significantly to the relatively new phenomenon of 'urban floods'. Additionally, lakes play an important role in carbon capture and therefore help mitigate climate change. With the natural elevation of Bengaluru, these lakes have served as microclimate regulators giving the epithet of "naturally air-conditioned" to Bengaluru.

More than 900 lakes were constructed using the three main topographically formed valleys of Koramangala-Chellagata, Hebbal and Vrishabhavati. These numbers have been dwindling steadily to just a handful with increasing population and urbanisation. The rise in breaching to accommodate the growing city's housing demands is one of the major causes.

Historically, lakes in the Bangalore region were managed by government agencies such as the Forest Department, Minor Irrigation Department, Horticulture Department, Public Works Department (PWD), [Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike \(BBMP\)](#), [Bangalore Development Authority \(BDA\)](#), Tourism Department, City Municipal Councils and Panchayats, resulting in an inconsistent and uncoordinated approach.

There is also a paucity of administrative will in lake maintenance. After much public agitation, the lake development authority was set up in 2002, with the exclusive mandate of preserving, protecting and maintaining lakes. Over time the authority started to outsource its responsibilities to private agencies. The handling of the lakes by private enterprise was driven by short-sighted policies and caused much damage to the biodiversity surrounding the lakes.

On account of the perseverance of socially responsible Bengaluru citizens, the Government of Karnataka decided to terminate the public-private partnership and rejuvenate 27 lakes in the first phase, by allocating Rs. 1,50,00,000 to Rs. 2,00,00,000 for each lake. The lakes are currently being maintained by a combination of BBMP and the Karnataka Forest Department.

As part of the lake preservation and maintenance for improved water security, BNP will focus on the following aspects.

1. Zero sewage discharge into the lakes with a good underground drainage network and functional sewage treatment plants (STPs) wherever installed.
2. Zero disposal of construction debris and garbage.
3. Well-designed stormwater drain (SWD) network that will link lakes and also recharge groundwater.
4. Setting up of biodiverse natural spaces surrounding lakes instead of landscaped parks.
5. Monitoring and maintaining biodiverse aquatic life within the lakes.
6. Encouraging active citizen participation, and working with citizens and well-meaning groups for rejuvenation and maintenance of lakes through a variety of IEC programs
7. To avoid interdepartmental delays and communication gaps, setting up of a single agency which will formulate all lake-related policies, provide work approvals, and ensure that relevant works are carried out.
8. Removal of existing encroachments wherever possible and strict prevention of any new encroachments and relocating persons living in slums next to lakes.
9. Setting up of biofiltration and aeration methods to maintain water quality.
10. Dedicated budget allocated for lake maintenance from BBMP with additional grants from the Karnataka Forest Department for biodiversity maintenance.
11. Strict punitive action against offenders who threaten the environment of the lake and surrounding areas.