

Educating Communities:

Conservation of Lakes as Public Commons, Reclaiming Cities, Making Homes Environmentally Just are some of the many themes that have been a focus of our educational action with communities. Ever popular and always in demand, we have benefited in doing more of these in collaboration with the Karnataka State Council for Science and Technology.



Study Abroad Programmes:



For close to a decade worked in launching and building the "Health and Communities" and "Cities in the 21st Century" courses with International Honours Programme (USA). Students drawn from some of the best universities in USA and elsewhere participated in these courses that they repeatedly defined were 'life transforming'. We conduct

similar study abroad programmes in collaboration with various universities abroad and the list includes University of Washington, University of Wisconsin, Loyola College (Chicago), Can Tho University (Vietnam) and Technical University (Germany).



Environmental Justice Workshops:



We are actively involved in organising user defined training programmes for civil society organisations across India. Over time we have had the privilege of in launching environmental justice and social action workshops in partnership with Indian Social Institute, CARITAS, Action Aid, Ford Foundation, North East Regional Alliance, National Fishworkers Forum, Campaign for Environmental Justice – India, etc.

Securing seed sovereignty, food security and biodiversity conservation:

As India debated the pros and cons of introducing Bt Brinjal, the country's first genetically modified food, we worked with a variety of farming, campaign and research organisations to broad base this process. Our petitions before the Karnataka Biodiversity Board and the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests exposed that Monsanto and its collaborators accessed local varieties of Brinjal in patent violation of Biological Diversity Act and Convention on Biological Diversity. We are active participants in ongoing debates and reforms relating to seed sovereignty and biotechnology regulation.



Tackling India's ravaging appetite for Energy:

All along, we have helped communities adversely impacted by a variety of power projects - thermal, hydro and nuclear. We have exposed plagiarised EIAs by Ernst and Young for the Dandeli dam in 2000, thus stopping the dam. We have worked with communities in ecologically sensitive Chamalapura (Mysore) to pressurise Karnataka Government to abandon plans for a mega coal-fired power plant. We have exposed how foreign direct investment in power is anything but transparent or technologically



advanced as we exposed and stopped the corrupt Cogentrix power project in Dakshina Kannada region. We assist communities in North Eastern region of India who are the latest victims of India's ravaging appetite for power: 168 large dams and several thermal power plants are proposed in this cultural and biodiversity hotspot.

Tackling industrial pollution: Our research and campaign initiatives have helped stem decades of pollution of the Kali river by West Coast Paper Mills in the ecologically sensitive Uttara Kannada region of Karnataka. Mobilising local tribal communities to stand up for their right to a clean environment, ESG has advanced a variety of legal



challenges to the expansion of one of Asia's largest paper production factories, backing it with questionable financing from International Finance Corporation. Similarly, we have assisted many communities in questioning reckless industrialisation, be they of Special Petrochemicals



Economic Zones in Mangalore or questioning the rationale of the world's largest integrated steel-power-port-mining complex proposed by POSCO in ecologically sensitive coastal Orissa.

Deepening Democracy in Urban Governance:

Hasiru Usiru and *Bangalore Janara Vedike*, forums of progressive individuals and organisations, ESG has played a critical role in raising major concerns and helping shape debates on a variety of urban governance issues. ESG has also successfully mobilised communities against a highly controversial decision to limit access to public parks based on Electronic ID systems – a sure policy of disenfranchising the poor and the marginalised from the urban commons.



Environmental Justice in Action

ESG has been amongst the most active research and campaign organisations in India pushing for genuine reform of environmental decision making. A major contribution to this process is its publication "*Green Tapism: A review of the Environmental Impact Assessment Notification – 2006*" which former Environment Secretary R. Rajamani acknowledged as a "must read" for policy makers, engineers, scientists, contractors, independent thinkers and even investors". Continuing with such efforts, we are now working with fishing communities in demanding a comprehensive and independent Coastal Regulation Law that fully recognises traditional and customary rights of fishing communities and sincerely aims to protect coastal environment. Similarly, ESG's seminal contributions helped secure several progressive amendments in Parliament to what would otherwise have been a deeply problematic National Green Tribunal Act.



Tackling commodification of the Commons:



Be it genetic diversity, lakes, urban commons, grazing pastures or forests, today there is an aggressive shift in law and policy to commodify the commons and make them assets for profiteering. The true value of nature is being lost in the market where the waters of rivers and lakes are being privatised. It is only strong and popular public action that can stop such reckless destruction of the idea and quality of our commons, critical spaces supporting livelihoods of the poor in urban and rural areas, and of natural -resource dependent

communities. We have been in the forefront of several campaigns opposing the grab of the commons. A critical success is from our PIL against lake privatisation in Karnataka which has resulted in enforcing judicial oversight for protection of wetlands.

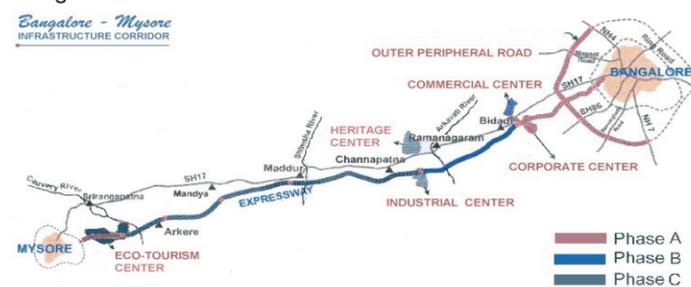


Standing by Toxic communities:

As cities grow rapidly and recklessly, the management of waste has become a major environmental and public health issue. Caste and class prejudices ensure that depressed classes continue to suffer as they are forced to clean up cities and their communities become victim and face dumping of urban waste on their lands. We actively work with these communities in fighting against this injustice, even as we encourage communities to become socially and ecologically sensitive. Our community education material based on critically acclaimed documentaries Nagara Nyrmalya and Nammuru Chandadooru have inspired hundreds of communities to critically appraise their lifestyles and become more caring people.



Urban interventions: Our presence in Bangalore means we are extensively and deeply engaged with the city's issues and concerns. As Bangalore sprawled uncontrollably the Government responded by promoting the highly controversial and corrupt land development, Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructure Corridor Project. For almost a decade now, we have assisted project-affected communities from 170 villages and 6 urban areas to question the need for this project and support the complex litigation that has resulted.



As in many mega Indian cities, Bangalore too is a candidate for the Metro – viable or not. The process of implementation of the project has been highly undemocratic and torn through the cultural, ecological and aesthetic fabric of the city. In addition to challenging certain aspects of the project in a PIL, we have been a key proponent of city-wide debates and protests against the manner in which the Metro has been conceived and is being implemented.

The viability of road widening projects, given its potential to destroy thousands of homes, livelihoods, the city's character and economy, has come into careful examination based on our community awareness building and PIL initiatives. Consequently, we have helped slowed down substantially this ill thought and reckless project that has had a devastating impact on urban greenery and streets as the commons. The cannibalisation of parks and open spaces –ostensibly in the public interest – by infrastructure projects is a core concern of our action.



Documentation:

ESG's meticulous documentation of a variety of public concerns has been a strong foundation of our social and environmental actions. *Newsrack*, the online research tool, has been extensively used to back our well organised library of reports, books, newsletter and law and policy literature. *Maru Dhwani*, our bi-monthly newsletter, gives a detailed report of our activities and concerns.

