



Interdisciplinary Action Research: Conversations with Emerging Leaders

A collaborative initiative of Centre for Financial Accountability (Delhi) and Environment Support Group (Bangalore)

In this climate of despair induced by COVID-19, various young researchers and activists have been working on emerging trends in Interdisciplinary Action Research which address some of the most pressing issues of our times, and that from various sectors: urban planning, public health, sociology, ecology and environment, digital commons, public education, migration studies, entrepreneurship, informal economy, and more. CFA and ESG collaborate to bring to focus various exciting explorations by such young researchers, who conscientiously draw attention to some of society's biggest challenges through their interdisciplinary efforts.

Webinar 2: Cityscape Transformation And Crisis Of Conservation: A Comparison Of Kolkata Wetlands And Bangalore's Lake Systems.

Introduction

With growing urbanisation, the pressure on water bodies has been tremendous across all cities in India. Privatisation, dumping of garbage and sewage, encroachments threaten the last remaining tanks and lakes. While NGOs have played a crucial role in raising awareness, campaigning and advocating for their protection, there have been mixed responses. In this context Dr. Sana Huque and Mr. Vinay Kumar shared their experiences from the cities of Kolkata and Bangalore in the protection of these water bodies to ensure water security.

Discussants

1. **Dr. Sana Huque** has a Masters degree in Geography from Delhi School of Economics and Ph.D. in Sociology from Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. In her Ph.D. thesis, Sana has studied wetland loss, as well as its conservation, from a sociological perspective, and with a special focus on the East Kolkata Wetlands. Sana is associated with ESG as a Senior Research Associate.
2. **Mr. Vinay Kumar** is an Intellectual Property consultant, specializing in the area of medical devices. He has been involved in civic activism with various citizen groups in

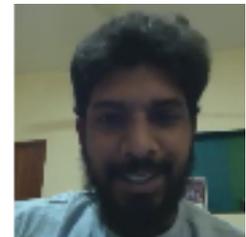
Bengaluru. His areas of interest are local self-governance, environment and heritage conservation.



Dr. Sana Huque began her intervention by drawing attention to the important services the East Kolkata wetlands offer to the people of the city. “40% of Kolkata’s daily vegetables and thousands of tonnes of fish are sourced directly from the wetlands”, she revealed. Despite being a source of sustenance for a large chunk of the city’s population, the wetlands are facing serious threats which include the dumping of waste, release of effluents and illegal construction.

Dr. Huque then went on to describe the sorry state of several of Bengaluru’s lakes such as *Subramanyapura Kere*, *Begur Kere* and *Jaraganahalli Lake*, all of which have been victim to untreated sewage, industrial waste and illegal encroachments. As a part of Environment Support Group (ESG), she has been involved in efforts to save many of these threatened lakes. Using the judicial system, ESG has received several favourable orders in relation to lake conservation. “As a result of a PIL filed by ESG in 2008, the High Court of Karnataka directed the creation of district-level lake committees and an apex state level committee”, she shared.

Mr. Vinay Kumar, a citizen activist from Bengaluru, referred to historical data which suggests that the city was home to around 2,300 lakes and tanks in 1882. “Sadly, due to mismanagement, we’ve now come down to less than 200”, he sighed. Rather than simply being perturbed by this information, Mr. Kumar advocated for greater citizen engagement in saving Bengaluru’s lakes.



Mr. Kumar himself was involved in efforts to conserve the natural ecology of Begur Lake. He mentioned that there was a proposal to redevelop the Begur lake, build three concrete islands within it and open it up to boating. All of this was in gross violation of the lake conservation guidelines, Mr. Kumar discovered. Being concerned about these worrying developments, he got into contact with ESG and worked in collaboration with them to try and stop the destruction being done to Begur Lake. Mr. Kumar also cited the 2011 Patil Committee report, an instrumental piece of legislation that is critical to ensuring the ecological and cultural sanctity of Bengaluru’s lakes.



Ms. Bhargavi Rao, moderator for the discussion, enquired as to what means concerned citizens can take to save their city’s lakes. In response to this, Mr. Vinay Kumar suggested that even small steps can make a difference, such as the filing of RTIs when citizens notice that a lake is being mismanaged. He also proposed that educational institutions assign their students interdisciplinary projects which aim at solving pressing social and environmental problems. Dr. Huque called for greater citizen

engagement, saying that from her experience, it does generate a favourable response from the authorities.

Both panelists were adamant that serious and immediate action needs to be taken to save the few remaining lakes of Bengaluru, which are facing multiple different threats at the same time. As Mr. Kumar put it, “I don’t mean to sound alarmist but we really don’t have the time to simply sit around. All of us need to act now to save our city’s lakes.”

To know more about the efforts of Dr. Sana Huque, Mr. Vinay Kumar and ESG in saving lakes, please visit:

1. <https://esgindia.org/new/esg-publications/compiled-list-of-reports-on-lakes/>
2. <https://esgindia.org/new/campaigns/lakes/saving-lakes-using-judicial-orders-issued-in-esg-pils/>
3. <https://esgindia.org/new/education/karnataka-high-court-directs-state-to-ensure-karnataka-lakes-are-protected-per-2012-order-in-esg-pil/>

ESG and CFA continue the **“Interdisciplinary Action Research: Conversations with Emerging Leaders”** series next Thursday, 3rd September 2020 (5:00 - 6:30 pm on Zoom and Facebook) addressing the theme: **“Enabling human-elephant coexistence through mobile technology”** with **Vinod Krishnan** and **Dr. M Ananda Kumar**, **Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysore**. More details on this webinar series can be accessed on www.esgindia.org and www.cenfa.org. Recording of the webinar is accessible at: <https://tinyurl.com/y3e2hrb6>

[This report has been prepared by Ashwin Lobo Research Associate, Karthik Anjanappa Research Associate and Malvika, Sneha, Satvika, Himamshu Interns, at ESG. Leo Saldanha, Coordinator, at ESG provided inputs.]

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