A community-centric approach to building a climate resilient Bengaluru

EMPOWERING BENGALURU FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Women in Bengaluru's slums are diligently occupied with work during the limited daily water supply, which is provided by BBMP every two days. Pic courtesy: Mahila Housing Trust.

According to the World Bank, an additional 68 to 135 million people could be pushed into poverty by 2030 due to the climate crisis and associated risks, disproportionately impacting the poorest countries and most vulnerable communities.

As one navigates the challenges of climate change and its varying degrees of impact across different economic layers of a population, it becomes critical that a collaborative effort towards climate-resilient urban development involves the participation of vulnerable communities.

For instance, Bengaluru has witnessed a significant rainfall deficit and a sweltering couple of months this year, and as per the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), Bengaluru has witnessed its hottest August months in decades.

The extreme weather conditions include seasonal droughts and frequent flooding caused by a few hours of heavy rainfall. The city also witnessed traffic bottlenecks due to floods and increased vehicular movements.

A collaborative effort like Ellara Bengaluru – a coalition of citizens, civil society practitioners, policymakers, and academia – aims to delve into ward-level solutions to combat the impact of climate change by integrating sustainable, economic, and behavioural solutions among the lower-income and vulnerable residents of the city.

Meeting of a coalition of citizens: Ellara Bengaluru. Pic courtesy: Mahila Housing Trust

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Read more: Engaging communities in informal settlements in the climate change agenda

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Developing an inclusive approach

Bengaluru has seen an incremental surge in urbanisation over the past decade, with increased migration of people to Bengaluru, and surrounding areas, for employment and education opportunities. This has subsequently led to an increase in real estate and commercial activities, creating civic and livelihood issues for city dwellers and authorities to tackle.

The urban poor population accounts for only 1.5 % of its overall population, which is much lower compared to the other metropolitan cities as per the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index. With the city expected to cross 20.3 million residents by 2031, according to the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) – higher than the current population of cities like Delhi and Mumbai – the pressure of civic and urban amenities will also see a monumental rise.

Physical manifestations of climate challenges have harsher implications on the vulnerable population of a city – those who cannot afford a healthy living space, flood-resistant houses, proper clean water and sanitation, and face greater exposure to climate stressors through their work.

Their homes are susceptible to damage due to heavy rainfall and poor sanitation facilities, which could lead to water, vector, and air-borne diseases. The informality of their work further jeopardises their ability to secure their health and well-being, even as they face the brunt of climate uncertainties. Therefore, any format of urban planning going forward must include the

voices of these vulnerable communities, such that climate change-resilient methods of living are deeply-seeded into their daily habitual behaviours and workings.

Backed by the Mahila Housing Trust, a grassroots development organisation in India, helping women become leaders and drive progress toward more sustainable and gender-inclusive cities, the Ellara Bengaluru coalition intends to coalesce efforts by communities, organisations, and civic authorities to create, innovate, and implement climate-friendly technologies, activities, and policies that can build a more equitable and climate-just city.

For instance, the Sustainable Energy Led Climate Action Program (SELCAP) by SELCO Foundation – one of the members of the Ellara Bengaluru coalition – brings together small farmers and entrepreneurs with other critical stakeholders in government, non-governmental organisations, investors, and philanthropies, and incubators to match local efforts with national policies, to provide financial and technical support, and to offer innovative ideas.

Unlike large-scale, capital-intensive plans, SELCAP focuses on communities and reducing transaction costs for the poor with customised financial products that understand their business cycle. The initiative established the urgency to educate, empower, and awaken communities to execute impact.

Increasing climate change-associated concerns cannot be solved in silos and without the participation of vulnerable communities. Instead, a tailored and integrated approach connecting multiple sectors from all contexts and geographies will enable the identification and acknowledgment of the challenges, experiences, and expertise. This is at the centre of coalitions such as 'Ellara Bengaluru'.

The Purpose Climate Lab, another coalition member, launched the Bengaluru Moving Campaign to get the city to take action towards more sustainable modes of transportation. The citizen-led communities have also made decision-making participative to address commuter concerns of marginalised communities, especially that of women.

Similarly, the Youth Climate Action Lab by The Restless Development is working to raise awareness to mobilise communities to take action on the barriers brought about by climate change, especially affecting people in the informal settlement colonies.

Globally, community-driven initiatives have championed some challenges associated with climate change. For example, women solar engineers in Bezile help with installations across multiple indigenous communities; grassroots movements in Cape Town address water scarcity; neighbourhood groups in Tokyo promote green rooftops for local communities with the help of civic bodies; and policy groups are taking charge to install new systems in place to correct and prevent climate change- associated concerns.

Decoding climate change consequences; teaching Bengaluru's slum community to grasp Extreme Heat Intensity using a colour code system. Pic courtesy: Mahila Housing Trust.

Read more: How Bengaluru youth are taking part in the global movement against climate change

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Involving the Bengaluru Community

The G20 nations have promised to successfully implement the decision at COP27 on funding arrangements for responding to loss and damage in developing countries that are vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, including establishing a fund.

Before the G20 summit, the Reserve Bank of India's latest Report on Currency and Finance (RCF) emphasises that a sector-specific approach to green transition can succeed when reasonable and sustained progress is achieved across all vital carbon-emitting sectors. This would need active participation by all stakeholders, ranging from state and local governments to private corporates and NGOs.

Practices must be taught and incorporated at the ward level in Bengaluru so that these learnings and implementations involve people from various age groups, professions, and genders across communities. While the top brass of government stakeholders needs to be involved, it is equally critical to bring in middle management, such as local engineers, corporations, and ward-level bureaucrats to get involved in planning and implementation.

Taking action

As newer cities are developing and existing ones are expanding, plans to combat the impact caused by climate change must be intertwined with urban planning efforts – and the poor and vulnerable communities living in these spaces must be included in decision-making across various levels.

Ellara Bengaluru plans to communicate and create awareness via digital voices and on-ground efforts to build climate resilience in the larger ecosystem and enable the adoption of sustainable practices for a more inclusive and equitable Bengaluru. The citizens of Bengaluru city can also enroll in EB programs, just like they have participated in the past and raised the issues they faced in the communities.

About the coalition

The coalition will work to enable people across all wards to be equipped to tackle various economic and livelihood challenges caused by growing climate change-associated challenges. Each organisation will bring its own functional expertise and create ward-level factsheets that will tailor comprehensive data tools. This will be used in working on ward-level reforms. These factsheets will capture critical socio-economic and infrastructural data and environmental parameters that will help facilitate development at the ward level.

Also read:

- [The cost of high LPG prices: Environmental and health hazards in slums](#)
- [Bengaluru's climate change history and lessons to learn](#)
- [Cities must focus on disaster resilient infrastructure in the era of climate change](#)