

All is Well

ISABELLA PORRAS AND THE WATER STORY



June 19, 2019, is a day Chennai will not forget in a hurry. Like something out of a dystopian dream, local authorities announced that it was 'Day Zero', or the day when the city had literally run out of water. It was also this day that added the much-needed fillip to Bengaluru's two-decade-old water conservation programme. Following the state of affairs in Chennai, the NITI Aayog said that Delhi and Bengaluru would soon meet the same fate. But Silicon City decided to turn the tables and 'One Million Wells for Bengaluru' became the war cry.

The 'One Million Wells for Bengaluru' movement, initially started by the Biome Environmental Trust, Bengaluru, also helped the Mannu Vaddars, the community of well-diggers. Currently about 750 Mannu Vaddar families reside in Bengaluru and have dug close to 1.4 lakh wells in the city. Shankarappa, 40, who lives in Bovipalya village, says this has been their family's profession for years. "I started learning how to dig a well when I was 15." He points out that the water from the wells can be used for drinking as well. "All you need is to just filter it. We do get a lot of calls from people who opt for borewells and find a lot of silt. They then prefer digging a well instead." Interestingly, while borewells need permission from the corporation, recharge wells do not need any permission.

The city's lung spaces are also leading from the front in this fight to sustain groundwater. Recharging the seven existing wells and adding 70 more, has ensured that water needs are taken care of at



The 'One Million Wells for Bengaluru' project

the city's various parks and reduced the burden on the Cauvery. Raghuram CG, who got a well dug at his site when he started constructing his home in Vid-yaranyapura in Bengaluru in 2018, says, "It helped in the construction of our home. Even today we use this water." He also got a 12,000-litre rainwater sump connected to the well. So when it rains heavily, the water flows into the well, recharging it.

"In Bengaluru, we have about five lakh borewells. The recharge is virtually zero. Therefore, a bylaw has been put in place by the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board that mandates for every sq m of roof area, you must create 60 litres of storage and for every sq m of paved area around the plot, you must create 30 litres of storage. Now on a 60 by 40 plot you can get an equivalent of three lakh litres of water. A well can easily take in this water and recharge the groundwater levels," says S Vishwanath of Biome Environmental Solutions. It always pays to be water wise.

—BGR