

Bindu Gopal Rao

At Jakkur Lake, the call to action came with a simple message: if you want a cleaner city, roll up your sleeves and get to work. NGOs, residents and children recently came together for a citizen-led initiative to clean and de-weed the lake and its surroundings. The gathering drew a motley crowd of volunteers, united by the belief that even a few hours of collective effort could make a difference. There were no grand promises of an overnight environmental turnaround, just people willing to do their bit. It was a small intervention, but one that speaks to a larger shift in Bangalore. As the city expands and its environmental challenges multiply, more residents are stepping out of their homes and into parks, lakes and public spaces to tackle problems that cannot be solved by civic authorities alone. “The civic authorities also have issues in managing waste and preventing littering. We need to change as a society to stop littering and irresponsible waste disposal. This is a necessary behavioural change that can rewire our mindset and help the environment,” says volunteer Kumar. That change in mindset is becoming the driving force behind citizen-led environmental initiatives.

The city needs all hands on deck

Bangalore's rapid urbanisation and growing population have put mounting pressure on its environment. Declining green cover, polluted lakes, plastic waste, littering in public spaces and rising waste generation demand sustained attention. Civic agencies have a crucial role in addressing these challenges, but the task is too large to be left to them alone. Citizens, corporates, educational institutions and community organisations must all be part of the response. “Whether it is planting trees, keeping lakes clean, reducing waste or being mindful of our daily habits, every effort counts. While civic authorities have a major role to play, citizens and corporates can also make a meaningful difference by taking responsibility for the environment and inspiring others to do the same,” says public relations professional Prithvi Jois. For Braja Kishore Pradhan, CEO and founder of Aahwahan Foundation, the emphasis is on turning environmental awareness into action that lasts beyond a single campaign.

“We believe that environmental protection must go beyond awareness and translate into consistent action on the ground. Our environmental initiatives focus on tree plantation, lake restoration and cleaning, and promoting responsible waste management. Through these efforts, we aim to encourage sustainable practices, protect natural resources, and inspire communities to become active participants in environmental conservation. Our efforts become more meaningful when people come together for a common cause,” he says. The foundation has seen corporates, residents and students from schools and universities join environmental activities in Bangalore. Plantation drives, clean-up campaigns, plastic waste collection and awareness initiatives are among the ways in which these groups are contributing. Pradhan also advocates plogging, collecting litter while walking or jogging, as a practical way to combine physical activity with civic responsibility. But he believes the real test lies in what people do after the campaign banners come down. Avoiding litter, cutting down on single-use plastics, segregating waste at source and disposing of garbage responsibly are everyday actions that can help reduce the burden on public spaces.



AAHWAHAN FOUNDATION



From gutka packets to food scraps

Sometimes, environmental action begins with the smallest, and least glamorous, of problems. Odette Katrak, sustainability changemaker and co-founder of Beautiful Bharat, has been working to make public spaces cleaner by drawing attention to habits that have become all too common. One of her concerns is indiscriminate spitting, particularly in public areas where people often behave as though the ground is a convenient dumping spot. Her campaign includes putting up “No Spitting” signs and stickers, especially at pan shops that already display no-smoking signs. She also collects discarded gutka packets and conducts awareness sessions with vendors, urging them to keep bins. Katrak's approach is practical - tackle the behaviour, make the problem visible and persuade people to take responsibility for the waste they generate. She is also taking the battle against waste into the kitchen. Through a series of public workshops, Katrak is encouraging people to cook with food scraps, including peels, skins and other parts that are often discarded. She has developed at least eight recipes using watermelon's white rind and has conducted six workshops so far. Her latest campaign focuses



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THE GREAT GREEN-UP

From rescuing leftovers to reclaiming public spaces, Bangalore's changemakers are proving that no player can win alone



PLOG RAJA



on leftovers. “We may be able to afford it, but can our planet really afford all that food and the farmer's effort to get dumped?” she asks. Her inspiration comes partly from home. Katrak recalls how her mother could transform leftovers into dishes that people would happily eat, even if they had turned their noses up at the original meal the previous day. The campaign

has struck a chord, with people sending in their own recipes. The effort also puts the environmental cost of food waste under the spotlight. Every discarded meal represents not just food thrown away, but also the resources and labour that went into producing it. Alongside these campaigns, Katrak is actively involved in educating people about stopping



FROM ODETTE



1M1B AND CURATOR OF 1.5 MATTERS



picking up litter is only the beginning. The founder of The Indian Ploggers Army says the group has carried out plogging activities this year across close to 64 blocks, covering lakes, parks, public spaces and tourist spots. The intention is to take the message beyond one neighbourhood or one kind of public space. “That's how we divide the month. So, in a month an average minimum of one leg gets covered and then one or two playgrounds and one tourist spot and one temple. At least we do six to seven vlogs, and we cover all these kinds of locations,” Nagaraj says. For the group, plogging is also an opportunity to start conversations about what happens to waste after it is collected. The larger message includes segregating waste correctly, refusing single-use plastics, encouraging people to carry their own containers or bags (BYOC), and discussing sustainable menstruation and composting. The distinction matters. A clean-up can remove

environmental problems. Manav Subodh, founder of 1M1B and curator of 1.5 Matters, believes the city has the engineers, entrepreneurs and companies needed to accelerate net-zero climate solutions. The challenge is to connect that talent with pressing issues such as water scarcity, waste management and energy consumption. In February 2026, 1M1B launched its first Green Skills and Applied AI for Climate Action Centre of Excellence in Bangalore, in collaboration with Microsoft, MeitY Startup Hub and the Government of Karnataka. The centre has dedicated spaces for solar energy, electric mobility, wind energy and artificial intelligence, with the aim of equipping young people to work on real environmental challenges using emerging technologies. Applied AI, Subodh says, “can help businesses track emissions, optimise energy consumption and identify water wastage. Such applications could connect the city's technological capabilities with the practical demands of sustainability.” His next call is to the technology sector - bring real environmental problems to the table, mentor young innovators, offer internships and recruit people with green skills.

Small steps, lasting change

From Jakkur Lake's volunteers to ploggers working across public spaces, from campaigns against food waste to young people exploring AI-powered climate solutions, Bangalore's environmental movement is taking shape through a variety of efforts. These initiatives differ in scale and approach, but they share a common conviction, awareness means little unless it changes behaviour. No single clean-up drive can resolve lake pollution. A plantation campaign cannot, by itself, reverse the loss of green cover. Nor can technology substitute for responsible waste disposal by households and businesses. Each effort addresses only part of a much larger challenge. But together, they can build a culture in which environmental care becomes a shared responsibility rather than an occasional act of goodwill. The task ahead is to keep the momentum going after the volunteers leave the lake, the ploggers finish their route and the workshops end. The green warriors have made their move. Now the rest of the city needs to join them.



MANAV SUBODH, FOUNDER, 1M1B AND CURATOR OF 1.5 MATTERS

balloon use. Her work underlines a broader point: sustainability is not confined to forests, lakes and climate conferences. It also lives in kitchens, shops and streets — in the habits people repeat without thinking.

Plogging with a bigger purpose

For G. Nagaraj, popularly known as Plog Raja,

the litter already on the ground, but preventing the next round of waste requires people to rethink what they consume, how they dispose of it and what they can refuse in the first place. Can Bangalore's tech brains help save the city? The next frontier in environmental action may not be limited to shovels, saplings and garbage bags. Bangalore's technology ecosystem could also play a role in finding solutions to the city's