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Championing the Rejuvenation

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The beauty of a city is enhanced when its citizens unite to safeguard its resources. The people of Coimbatore, in large numbers, are coming together to protect their water bodies, with some citizens even dedicating their whole lives to the cause. The State Government, Municipal Corporation, Non-Governmental Organizations- all have exhibited growing concern towards the quality of the lakes. In the last five years, many efforts have been undertaken towards rejuvenating these bodies and making them the centres of attraction in Coimbatore.

Under the **Coimbatore Smart City Mission**, actions are being taken to develop the ecosystem around the eight lakes. Development of parks and open public spaces is underway and the Coimbatore Smart City Limited (CSCL) also envisions regular monitoring of lake water quality and studies of lake biodiversity. The mission seeks to restore the health of the lakes and use them effectively for its original purpose- flood control. The water hyacinth that grows on the river surface is cleaned on a regular basis. Encroachments around the lakes have been removed, and desilting done to increase their water-holding capacity. The lakes with notable development are Selvachintamani Lake, Ukkadam Periyakulam and Valankulam, with developments of walking ways, children's parks and open air recreational spaces. The Coimbatore City Municipal Corporation (CCMC) is planning on more concentrated efforts towards improving the water quality in Singanallur Lake, using natural water treatment methods. Technical assistance from local academic institutions is being sought for the same.

The Smart City has also initiated bids for a 24x7 water supply system across the area of the Corporation, with goals of incorporating smart metering, SCADA systems and leak detection systems. Construction of new water treatment plants is also being done as part of the mission. CSCL aims to further bridge the gap between wastewater generation and treatment by imbibing concepts like Wastewater Recycling in the Corporation. The Corporation also intends to procure a robotic weed remover to increase the frequency of hyacinth removal.

With the city losing many of the 'pearls on the plateau' to development, a major role has been played by the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in reviving these lakes. The NGOs have championed the cause of water security and have made incredible strides in safeguarding the aquatic backbone of the city. They also work to keep a check on the works of the Corporation, guiding them to take correct steps in improving the water around.

Siruthuli is one of the pioneering NGOs in the field of water resources management. The trust, established in 2003, is a coming together of some of the conscientious corporates in Coimbatore. Members of the organization make dedicated efforts towards the restoration of Noyyal River. Their first project was the desilting of Krishnampathy Lake, which had over 50 acres of area taken

over by illegal encroachments. They have desilted and cleaned 7 lakes since, leading to an increase in storage levels, and subsequently, the groundwater levels. Siruthuli has also implemented several Rainwater Harvesting projects across the district to aid farmers by recharging groundwater. The organization also strives towards public involvement and regularly works with schools to inculcate values of environmental protection in children. One of their most notable achievements is the Noyyal Yatra- an awareness walk on the glory of the river, with over one lakh participants.

Kovai Kulangal Pathugappu Amaippu (KKPA), true to its name, has endeavoured to clean and protect the lakes, ponds and canals in Coimbatore district, since 2017. Hundreds of volunteers, including students and professionals, gather every weekend to clean the water bodies. They also undertake extensive awareness campaigns to attract people towards the cause of protecting their lakes. KKPA, which started with 10 volunteers, now has over five thousand volunteers and supporters. The organization's efforts also include revamping 19.5 km of water canal, which has augmented the filling up of the lakes. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-India) has collaborated with Kovai Kulangal Pathugappu Amaippu to monitor water quality in Noyyal's lakes, as a part of the Noyyal-Bhavani basin conservation programme. KKPA has been authorized to periodically check pH, Electrical Conductivity and Total Dissolved Solids in these wetlands.

Other organizations that work to protect the water of Coimbatore include **Osai, DHI Green Foundation, Neer Nilangal Pathugappu Amaippu** (partners with WWF-India in monitoring project), **Jeevanadhi Noyyal, Kousika Neerkarangal, Environmentalist Foundation of India** and many more.

The Forest Department of the State Government is implementing the '**Wetland Mitra**' scheme (introduced by the Central Government) which encourages the public to volunteer as a 'friend' of the wetlands. The project aims at maximum involvement of the civil society and NGOs in both protecting the wetlands and developing them into biodiversity learning centres. It is envisioned to be a coming together of like-minded, concerned citizens to conserve and manage the wetlands. This endeavour is supported by WWF-India, and also incorporates the periodic quality monitoring by KKPA.

NGOs in Coimbatore now strive to introduce the concept of Miyawaki forest around the lakes. Coimbatore City Municipal Corporation (CCMC) has already set up around 20 forests across the city. The Centre for Urban Biodiversity Conservation and Education (CUBE) is responsible for establishing the Miyawaki forest in Singanallur Lake. The canopy has now developed into a butterfly hotspot and is also home to several species of birds. Singanallur Lake is now developing into a Biodiversity Learning Centre. A similar scenic presence is also observed at Vellalore Lake, lying on the southern side of Noyyal River. The forest at this lake was established and is managed by Kovai Kulangal Pathugappu Amaippu. CCMC further plans to create 104 Miyawaki forests the 100 wards in its jurisdiction as a part of the Clean and Green Cities Initiative, 75 of which were inaugurated on 15th August 2022, the 75th Independence Day of India.

The will is intact. The efforts are in place. Coimbatore is on the right track towards bringing its water resources back to life. AQUA-Hub aims at giving the city a supporting hand in this journey. We aspire to bring the best of German Water Management Technologies to the stakeholders in Coimbatore. Team AQUA-Hub expresses its sincere gratitude to the participants of the Stakeholders' Meeting in April 2022 for their valuable inputs and support. We hope our continued partnership will help achieve our collective aim of making Coimbatore the Water Innovation Hub of the future- self-sufficient and sustainable.

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The AQUA-Hub project

In the AQUA-Hub project Water Innovation Hubs are being implemented in the two Indian Smart Cities, Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu) and Solapur (Maharashtra), and accompanied by pilot measures of German technology for water quality monitoring. AQUA-Hub addresses the needs of the local water sectors identified in previous projects, as well as the challenges of the German water industry to develop projects, relationships and business on the Indian market. Qualified HubManagers as a local presence of the Water Innovation Hubs are of great importance for the relations and the exchange of information between the German and Indian actors. In addition to network activities and the mediation of business partners, the hubs fulfil the function of project centres for the realisation of technical demonstration projects, provide information on current developments in the water sector for the respective local situations and support the access to water technologies "Made in Germany".

For more information: www.aqua-hub.de

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Appendix



Figure 1: Newly developed walkways at Selvachintamani Lake in April 2022.
Source: AQUA-Hub Project Team (Liehr)



Figure 2: Wastewater Treatment Plant at Selvachintamani Lake in April 2022.
Source: AQUA-Hub Project Team (Liehr)



Figure 3: Transformation of Valankulam Lake landscape- an effect of public intervention.
Source: AQUA-Hub Project Team (Mohr, Beckett)



Figure 4: Team AQUA-Hub with Coimbatore Stakeholders at the Stakeholders' Meeting of April 2022. Source: AQUA-Hub Project Team (Beckett)