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Traditional community diggers create percolation wells in city to augment groundwater

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About 3 lakh recharge wells or percolation wells were dug by Karnataka's traditional well diggers, the Bhovi Vaddar community, in the city and its surroundings, in the last 15 years, according to Vishwanath S., an urban planner.

By channelling rainwater directly into underground aquifers, they replenish the natural water bank, eventually raising the water table enough to refill dry wells, said Mr. Vishwanath, who is also the founder of Rainwater Club and the director of Biome Environmental Solutions.

In city parks

Vibhinna India Foundation and United Way Bengaluru are among the NGOs that are actively working on the construction of percolation wells in the city. For instance, United Way Bengaluru has already built over 10,000 percolation wells in the city, including 440 in Lal Bagh, Cubbon Park, Indira Gandhi Musical Fountain Park on Raj Bhavan Road and 400 other locations.

The Department of Horticulture and the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board help these NGOs identify locations where percolation wells are required. They plan to build another 20,000 percolation wells by 2028.

S. Ayyappa, a fifth-generation well digger of the



Well diggers Hanumantha and his wife Basamma near one of the dozens of percolation wells they dug at the Indira Gandhi Musical Fountain Park on Raj Bhavan Road. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Bhovi Vaddar community, said he and his team, comprising four members, dig five to six percolation wells in a week. Well digger Bhoivi couple Hanumantha and his wife Basamma, who built percolation wells at the Indira Gandhi Musical Fountain Park, told *The Hindu* that they work together as a family.

In other venues

Sriram Ananthanarayan, director of New Initiatives, Partnerships and Impact at United Way Bengaluru, said they have assessed the campuses of private properties, universities, law and order departments, and defence establishments to dig more percolation wells. A recent water table assessment conducted at Lal Bagh, by a third party and validated by IIT-Madras, showed an increase of nearly 4 meters in the groundwater table, in three months after digging 440 percolation wells, he claimed.

Mr. Ananthanarayan said, as per the NGO's recent assessments, each subwatershed (a smaller, nested drainage area within a larger watershed) required a minimum of 50,000 to 60,000 percolation wells, for an area of eight to 10 kms.

Bengaluru has nine such subwatersheds within an 80 to 90 kms radius of the city. The Bommanahalli zone's subwatershed was assessed and found to have an average of 1-2 meters increase in groundwater, thanks to percolation wells that exist in the surrounding areas.

Lakes in the city

Lakes are the largest natural percolation open wells, as when they get filled, nearly all borewells in the area get recharged. Bengaluru currently has only 210 lakes, of the over 2000 lakes that it used to have, and it has around 6,000 defunct and abandoned borewells.