

REPORT ON STORIES OF RESILIENCE

Small Grants Programme of the Bangalore Sustainability Forum

- Submitted by Quicksand and Bharat Mirle

Intent for the project

Tackling an issue like climate change requires a systems approach. The work of systems change involves seeing systemically—looking at the elements, interconnections, and wider purposes of systems—and acting systemically. Story-telling plays a vital role in helping us do both of these things. It is a direct route to our emotions, making it important for taking action and decision-making. It makes meaning out of patterns, coheres communities and engenders empathy across differences. It makes the possible feel probable in ways that rationale alone cannot address or comprehend. Storytelling is foundational to changing values, mindsets, rules and goals of a system and its people.

[Quicksand](#), a multidisciplinary design thinking practice came together with independent filmmaker [Bharat Mirle](#) to tell the [Stories of Resilience](#) of some individuals and groups who are learning to adapt to the changing weather patterns and environmental degradation in and around Bengaluru city. This project, which was supported by the [Small Grants Program](#) of the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum sought to build empathy and understanding around climate change issues among the general public living in Bengaluru. By wrapping the overwhelming scientific evidence around climate change in stories of real people, the effort was to create a more human way to drive awareness around climate change.

Approach

Globally, researchers, storytellers and artists are getting together to contribute towards raising awareness and inspiring action to tackle climate change. Our hope is that Stories of Resilience contributes to this trend. This is the primary reason that we chose a web based storytelling medium, where we brought together a number of mediums such as video, photos, audio, text etc. More people, especially younger ones, are now getting their information and inspiration online. We hope that by taking this approach we will be able to reach a large number of them. This approach also allows us to create a format for a story archive that can be expanded in the future.

We started with the hypothesis that by engendering this human connection and by telling compelling stories using rich media, we will be able to more effectively communicate the pressing challenges that Bengaluru faces in the near future. Through the course of two years, disrupted severely by waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, stories of resilience, which is an on-going project has collected five stories of individuals and groups around Bangalore. These stories highlight the disruptive impact of climate change and environmental degradation

around the city of Bangalore. These stories also inspire hope in the ingenuity and adaptability of people in the face of this change.

Process

Broadly our process was linear. We had a number of interesting stories shortlisted when the project kicked off. We started off by conducting reccees, which entailed conducting desk research, visiting these locations and meeting people whose stories we wanted to feature. We developed an approach to tell these stories collaboratively with these individuals and groups. This was usually followed by a short phase of data collection, which ranged from full fledged video shoots in some cases, to one on one interviews. This data was then synthesized by our team and a media approach for storytelling was arrived at. For some stories, we chose video as the medium while for some we decided to work with illustrators, whose art works were combined with written descriptions. Finally these stories were contextualized with some basic mapping data and uploaded onto a microsite that our team created for this purpose.

Challenges

The pandemic, which started disrupting lives and livelihoods soon after the project kicked off, was a major roadblock in our plans and efforts to collect and tell these stories. A number of stories had to be shelved and some others, which finally found a way to the microsite were severely delayed as the pandemic and accompanying lockdowns meant that face to face interactions, which we deemed critical to telling these stories, were rendered difficult if not impossible. Furthermore, as the lockdown hurt livelihoods it became hard to retain the attention of some of the individuals and groups we wanted to work with. In the face of overwhelming sufferings that the pandemic inflicted on people, discussions around climate change had to be put on the back-burner while the focus shifted to survival. Through the microsite and through our social media, we have also put out a call to request to the general public to submit stories and ideas for stories that we can pursue.

Deliverables

As mentioned earlier, we collected five stories of resilience.

1. The first story, which is from Sarjapura, located on the south-east of Bangalore explores the evidence of the green past of the area, which in the last two decades or so has seen rapid urbanization with the built up area rising rapidly. This green past is embodied by a small community of farmers, who continue to reside in the area today and are reviving local greens and traditional recipes.
2. The second story, from a hamlet near the Bannerghatta national park describes the efforts of the Buffalo Back Collective, which is seeking to engage the local population of

this eco-sensitive area near the forest in sustainable ventures that are community owned.

3. The third story is from the area around the Byramangala lake system on the outskirts of Bangalore, where the heavily polluted lake has long stopped sustaining local fishing or even large-scale farming. Yet a group of cattle owners harvest the cattle feed from this lake.
4. This fourth story, from Veerammanahalli in Chikkaballapur district documents the efforts of Narasimha Reddy, a legendary organic farmer in the region. Mr. Reddy's methods, which are almost entirely organic, have not only created a magical farm but also inspired other farmers in that region and beyond to go organic.
5. Finally the last story focuses on the plight and resilience of nomadic pastoralist communities around Bangalore. As their way of life becomes harder, their resilience still serves as an inspiration for us all to make our own lives more sustainable and friendly to the planet.