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Action for Food Production begins study of water bodies



TAKING STOCK: AFPRO Unit-II Head Vijayakumar James (second from left) and field staff making a survey of Krishnampathy Tank in the city on Thursday. Photo: K. Ananthan

K.V. Prasad

Helicopter to be used for survey of canals

COIMBATORE: Action for Food Production (AFPRO), a non-Governmental organisation, has begun studying the condition of tanks in the city as part of the efforts of the Coimbatore Corporation to rejuvenate water bodies under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission of the Central Government.

AFPRO has been appointed as consultant by the Corporation to make a study of the condition of the tanks and canals, including the level of pollution and the extent of encroachment, and submit a detailed proposal for rejuvenation. The organisation has been given a month's time to study and submit a detailed project report that has to be forwarded to the Union Ministry of Urban Development for its clearance.

Though it has also carried out revival of water bodies, it will play the role of only a consultant in the scheme here. The mission rules say that the consultant cannot be the implementing agency also. "We already have an idea of the problems," says the Unit Head of AFPRO's Field Unit-II at Bangalore, Vijayakumar James, who was here on Thursday to oversee the study of the Krishnampathy Tank. Siruthuli, a public initiative to revive water bodies had desilted this tank. But, it is now covered by water hyacinth.

Discharge of untreated sewage and effluents is a major concern that the study will cover. Preventing growth of the hyacinth by letting in only treated wastewater and strengthening of the bunds are the most basic needs. Maintenance of the tanks is also important to avoid the present levels of contamination. The tanks will have to be fenced totally and a walkers' path can be created around them. Dustbins can be installed to prevent littering and toilets can be built to prevent the abuse of the water body or the areas around it.

AFPRO plans to make an aerial survey. It will make a video coverage from a helicopter. "Otherwise, it will be impossible to cover 48.8 km of canals across the city," says Mr. James. "We have to identify at which points sewage mixes with the water bodies."

The organisation will also use an eco-sounding recorder to measure the exact depth of tanks. Modern gadgets and helicopter survey are all aimed at providing a lasting solution to the problems that plague the water bodies now.

"Stone benches, lighting and even soft music in the morning and evening will be added attractions to turn the environs of the water bodies attractive," he says.

AFPRO feels that stakeholders' (people benefiting from the water body) participation is vital to effective maintenance of the water bodies. It had rejuvenated a tank at Jaimahal Extension in Bangalore and raised lawns around it. "Members of women self-help groups are now maintaining the tank. A fine of Rs. 500 is levied for dumping anything into the tank," says Mr. James.

The women also make a living out of the tank by rearing three types of freshwater fishes. Besides providing an income, this also funds the maintenance of the tank.

"Bangalore and its outlying areas had 658 tanks 40 years ago. Now, there are only 104," says Mr. James. AFPRO has asked the Coimbatore Corporation to provide a list of encroachments on water bodies.