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50% interconnectivity between Bengaluru lakes lost: IISc study

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BENGALURU: That Bengaluru's lakes are in dire straits is well known. Now, scientists from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) have only confirmed this further. According to a recent analysis done by them, Bengaluru has lost 45 to 50% of interconnectivity among lakes, owing to encroachments and unplanned development. This has not only resulted in decaying of lakes due to sewage inflow, but has also led to frequent flooding of areas in the neighbourhoods.

T V Ramachandra, coordinator, energy & wetlands group, Centre for Ecological Sciences, IISc, told TOI that interconnected lake systems, which are part of traditional water-harvesting practices, have been destroyed due to ruthless encroachments, unplanned rapid urbanisation and large-scale unrealistic and uncontrolled development activities along wetlands

and their neighbourhoods. "Our analysis shows that about 45% to 50% of connectivity between lakes is lost," he added.

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While Bellandur and Varthur lakes have been hitting the headlines for all the wrong reasons, Bengaluru's other waterbodies are only in marginally better shape. This is what the IISc study underscores. The flawed notion of development has visibly taken its toll on the city's lakes, and the consequences have reached our doorsteps in the form of flash floods. The problems plaguing these waterbodies may be plenty, but the solution aren't far-fetched, only if the authorities care to sit up and take notice. Concrete, coordinated and sustained efforts, devoid of excuses, could bring about change. Collective willingness will be a good starting point.

The team also found that compared to early 1970s, the number of wetlands in Bengaluru reduced from nearly 285 to 194. "And when it comes to loss of connectivity, the damage is seen across waterbodies along all three valleys — Koramangala-Challaghatta valley, Vrishabhavathi valley and Hebbal valley," added a team member.

Scientists associated with the study say that while connectivity between lakes is lost, sustained inflow of untreated sewage and industrial effluents is killing the waterbodies further. "Bellandur and Varthur, which spew froth and fire every now and then, are some examples. Sadly, many other lakes in the city are staring at a similar fate. Dumping of solid waste is another concern. Lack of interconnectivity is also resulting in frequent floods, like the one the city witnessed in the later part of 2017," said a team member.

Ramachandra said that to make the city liveable, the new government should first focus on re-establishing lost connectivity between waterbodies. "Desilted and rejuvenated lakes can go a long way in harvesting rainwater and avoiding floods. The chief minister, who is showing keen interest in convincing his coalition partner to run the government, should show equal interest in managing waterbodies for a better tomorrow," he added.

The study also calls upon the authorities to take up large-scale watershed programme, which involves soil and water conservation. Lakes are the optimal means of rainwater harvesting at community level, it adds.