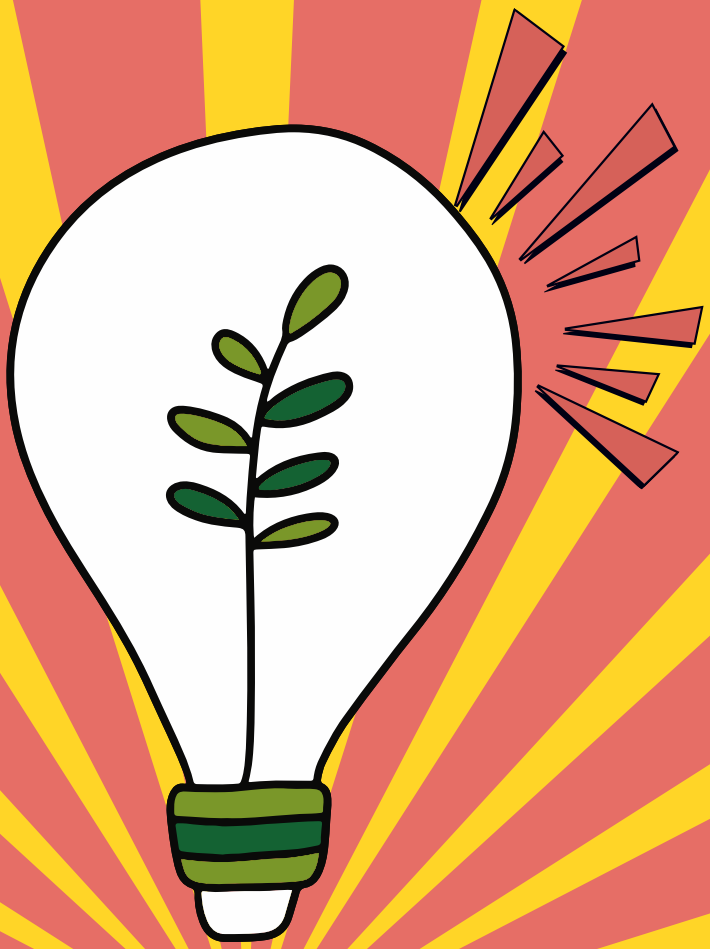


Pop Culture for Environmental Awareness

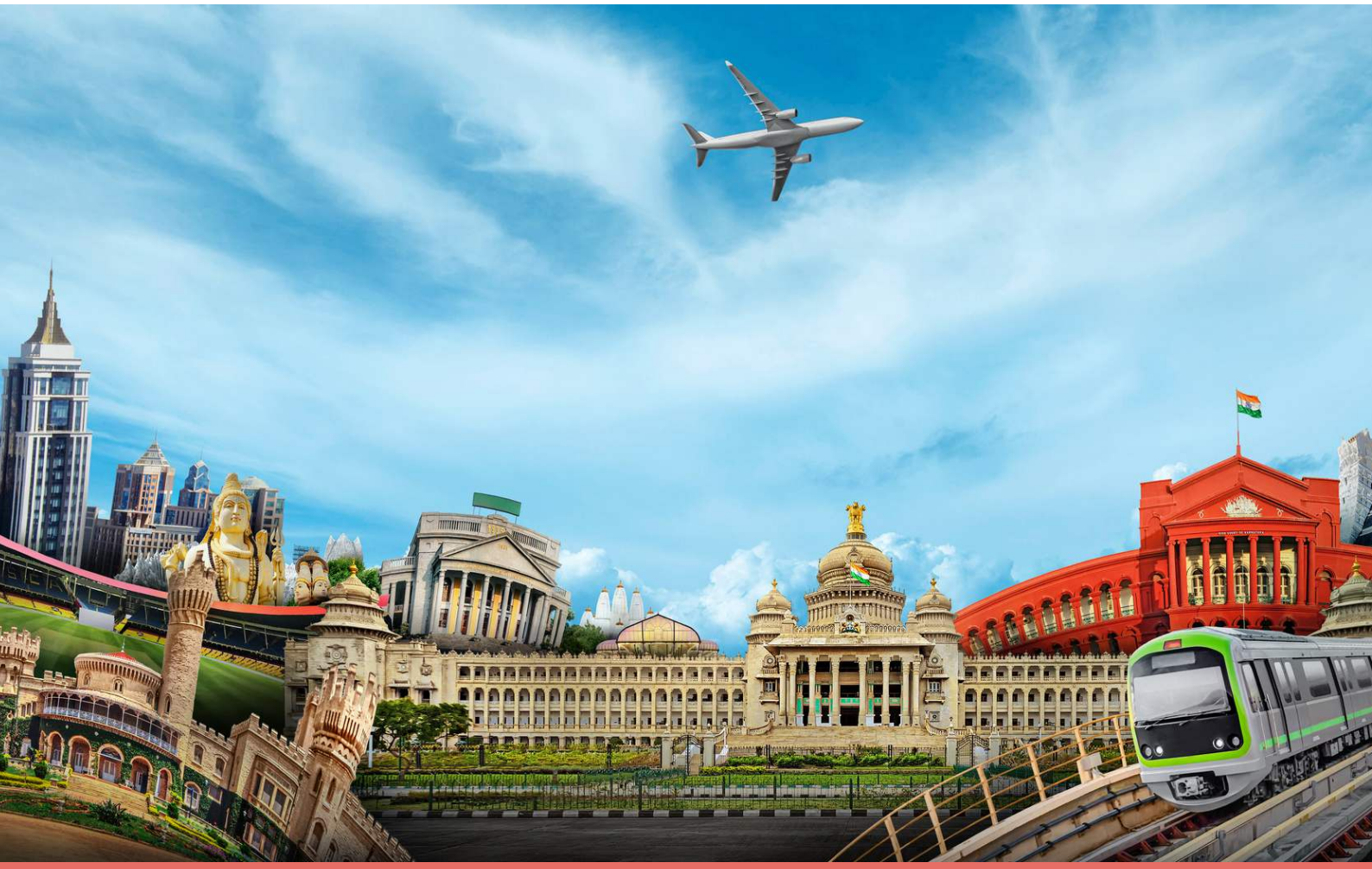
Based on the Bengaluru Environment Unplugged Course

OORVANI

WHY THIS PROGRAMME

Bengaluru is facing serious environmental challenges, from lakes choked with sewage to shrinking green spaces and worsening waste and traffic issues. These problems are made worse by climate change. Bengaluru and other Indian cities require an informed and engaged citizenry to advocate for sustainable solutions.

Yet, how we communicate these issues is changing. Young people today often bypass traditional news outlets and instead rely on social media, influencers and pop culture references to stay informed.



Through this playbook, we aim to make the programme replicable and adaptable.

Whether you are a civic organisation, educator, or youth leader, this guide will help you run a hands-on, engaging course that builds awareness, encourages creativity, and fosters the next generation of civic storytellers.

Today's youth are extremely concerned with environmental issues and particularly see climate change as a direct threat to their generation. However, an understanding of local issues that contribute to environmental problems remains low. Civic groups and environmental organisations often struggle to reach this generation effectively.

Pop Culture for Environmental Awareness

This programme can be offered formally by a college or an environmental education organisation. The course can be adapted to be an optional credited course, a certification programme or simply a short or long-term workshop.

The sessions outlined in this playbook can be offered collectively as part of a single course or individually, structured as multiple short-term workshops.

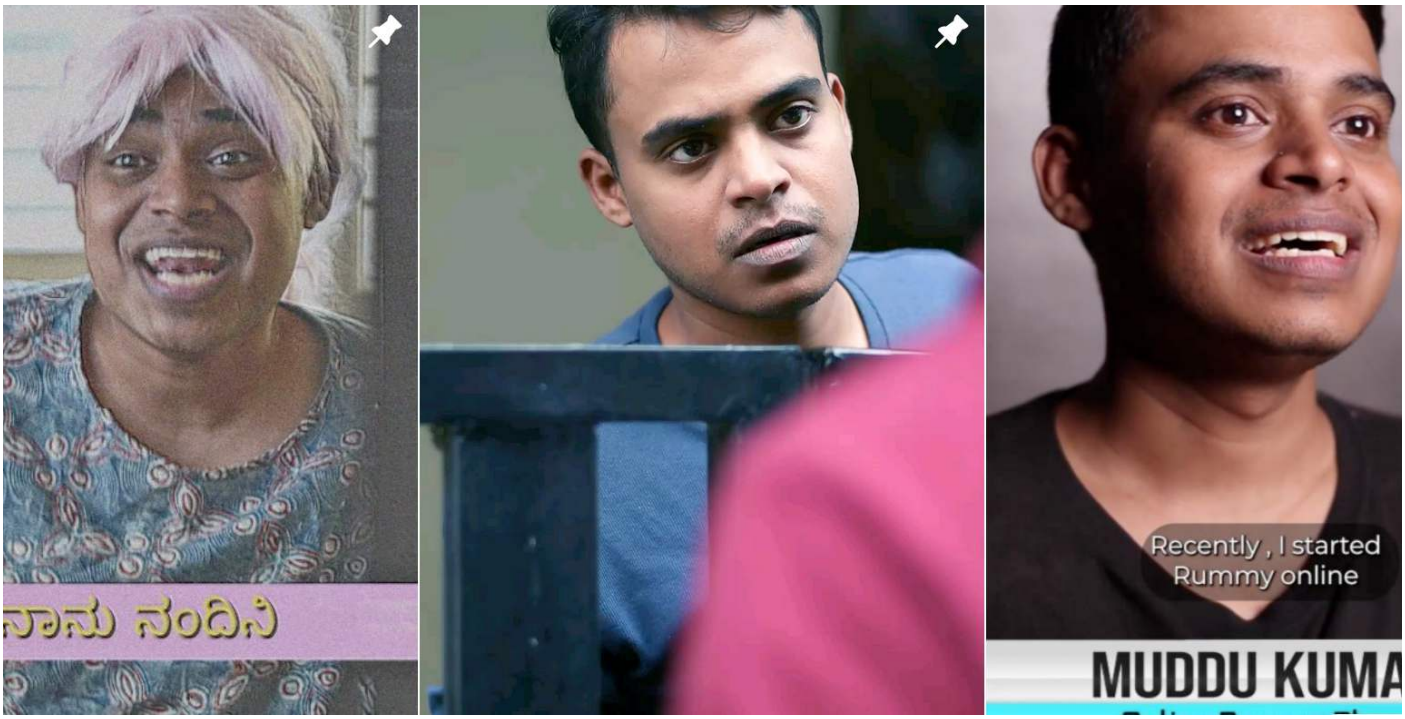
Context: Pop Culture as a learning medium

It is important to define pop culture in the context of this project. The Oxford Dictionary defines pop culture as “modern popular culture transmitted via the mass media and aimed particularly at younger people.”

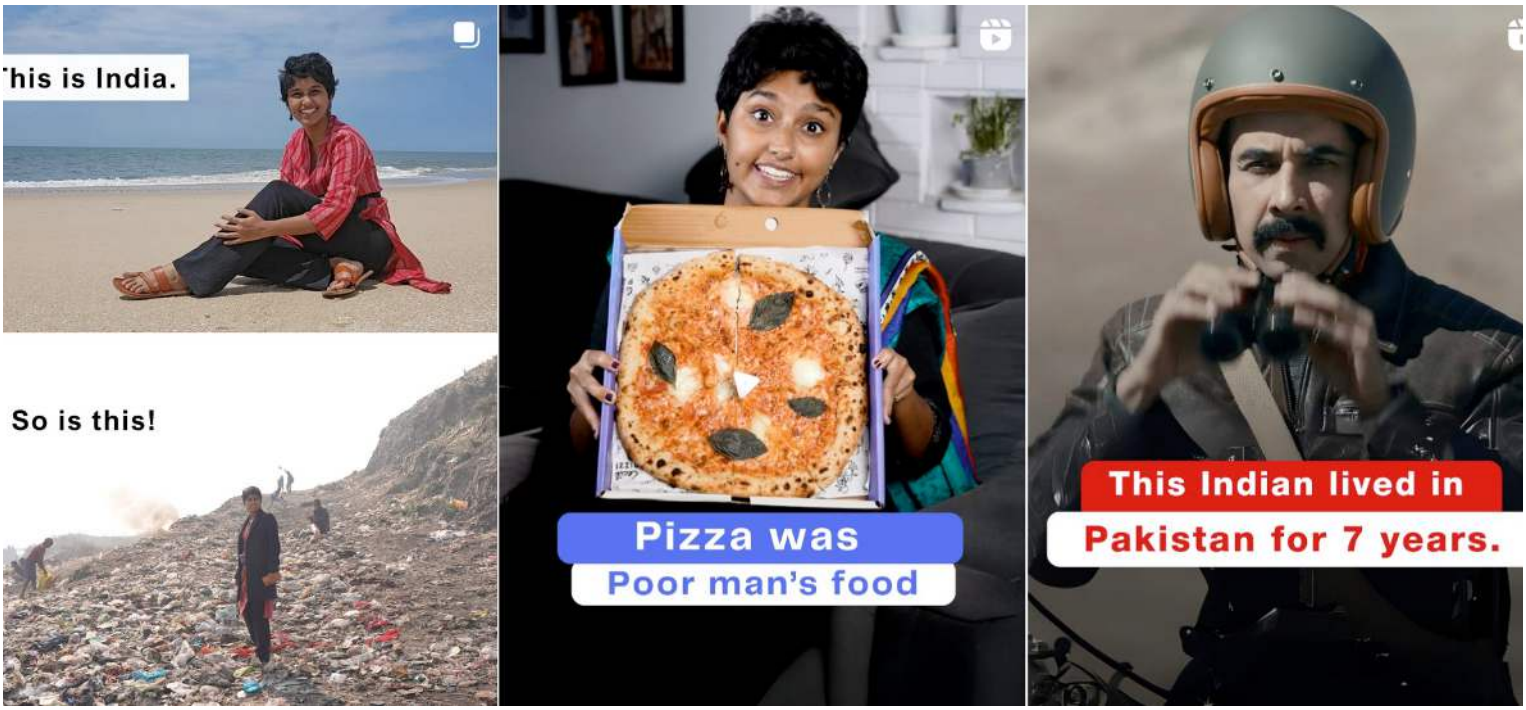
While the definition remains largely the same in this context, we include popular social media platforms amongst mass media and consider localised internet culture, i.e., content trends such as memes, certain reels/videos and music to be popular culture.

By extension, we consider content creators on platforms like Instagram and YouTube to be pop culture icons, akin to musicians, actors and sportspersons.

This approach reflects platforms where young people spend the most time and pop-culture references that are likely to be familiar and appealing to them. This approach allows participants to take the lead in their own learning.



Popular content creator Vickipedia. Screenshot from Creator’s Instagram account



Popular content creator KK Create. Screenshot from Creator's Instagram account

Using pop culture as a medium to communicate environmental issues, as opposed to just standard forms of articles, video reports, research papers etc, can lead to better engagement from young people, giving them an opportunity for hands-on learning. They are not only asked to create stories, but also analyse and dissect pop culture posts that they consume, for style, substance and techniques.

The pop culture space is also a showcase for blatant consumerism and superficial social trends. Analysing it helps participants reflect on how economics and social culture are impacting the environment and climate. The goal is also to question the messages, ideologies, and biases within media representations. Participants need to deconstruct and challenge stereotypes and misinformation.

The Approach

This programme is designed to offer young participants a unique blend of environmental education, creative expression, and civic engagement. It helps them gain valuable insights, skills, and a deeper connection to their city.

Expert-Led Learning

Participants gain firsthand insights from domain experts who have worked on real-world environmental challenges—going beyond textbooks and peer conversations to understand the complexities of urban systems and tested solutions.

Pathways to Active Citizenship

By observing their surroundings and translating their learnings into pop culture content, students develop a deeper connection with their city. This encourages civic curiosity, collaborative thinking, and active participation in local issues.

Creative and Digital Skill Building

Participants sharpen their storytelling abilities through hands-on experience with formats like memes, reels, comics, and infographics—valuable skills for digital expression and advocacy.

Peer Learning and Awareness Amplification

Working in teams and sharing content online not only builds teamwork but also spreads awareness among their social circles—creating a ripple effect of environmental learning and engagement.

Execution Details

The Bengaluru Environment Unplugged 2025 programme was open to SJU students of Journalism and Optional English, Journalism and International Relations/Public Policy and MA English courses. It was also open to Communicative English and Journalism and International Relations students and available as an elective for other departments like environmental science.

Steps followed from planning through delivery and output.

Programme Overview

Format

Weekly Expert-led Sessions on Key Environmental Topics - Suggested - 5 sessions + assignments

Mode

In-person, expert-led, with project-based learning

Target Group

Undergraduate students: Ages - 16-19

Learning Goals: Understand Bengaluru's key environmental challenges, Apply storytelling formats for Instagram, and Critically consume and create media on civic issues.

Initiation

We began with preliminary discussions with the coordinator of the participating group. Together, we developed a high-level plan that covered:

- Context and goals of the programme
- Duration and frequency of sessions
- A communication plan for smooth coordination
- Roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders
- A mechanism for how participants would reach out to Oorvani Foundation for queries or assignment reviews

Planning

We then set up the operational aspects of the programme to ensure a smooth run:

1. Designed and shared promotional posters
2. Created a Google Form for participant enrollment
3. Maintained a shared tracker for attendance and assignment submissions
4. Agreed on basic social media and photo-sharing guidelines
5. Set up a dedicated Instagram account to publish student-generated content
6. Finalized minimum attendance criteria
7. Discussed the process for assignment review and optional grading
8. Developed a detailed session schedule with topics, facilitators, and expected action items
9. Understood the participant demographic to adapt material and examples for better accessibility

Execution

Each session focused on a specific environmental topic (e.g., Water Management, Waste, Air Quality, Climate Action, Mobility, etc.). We co-developed presentations with facilitators and structured sessions as follows.

The topic presentation was followed by Q&A and interactive discussion. The sessions were structured around:

- Reflection: How did you feel about the topic? What surprised you the most? How would you like to make an impact in this space?
- Opening conversation: What are the issues? What are the symptoms and root causes? How can these issues be solved? Your personal relationship with this issue (the water you consume, the waste you generate, the transport needs your have etc)
- Call to Action: One small change you can adopt in your daily life
- A mini-assignment to reinforce the topic
- Sessions documented in detail: attendance, key discussions, student interest areas, and outcomes
- Presentations and materials were stored in a shared Google Drive folder
- Daily task summaries and checklists were maintained for internal coordination

Activities and Assignments

After each session, participants were given some activities (specific to the topic) to help clarify their understanding. They also had individual and group take-home assignments. These could include:

Read and reflect. They were given a couple of articles, podcasts or video documentaries to read/listen/view. They were then given a short questionnaire to reflect on the learning and insight they got.

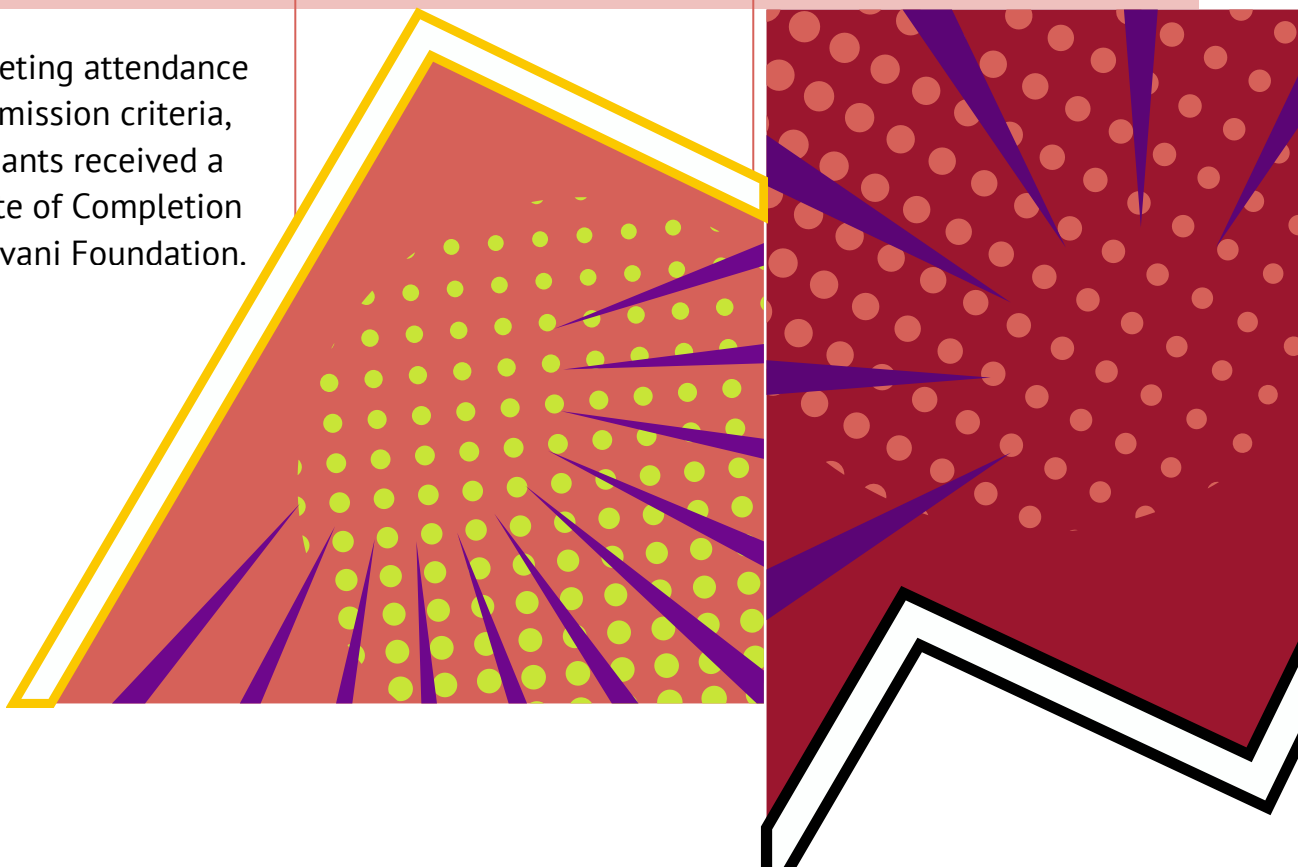
Instagram post. Each group was asked to develop a graphic, meme, or slide show on a key aspect.

Note: Topic-specific activities are listed in the following sections.

Outputs and Evaluation

Post-session, participants received reading material and small exercises (like finding relevant content or making memes) to help reinforce learning. These were to be submitted the following day to assess comprehension.

Larger assignments were completed in groups, with a submission window of up to four days.	All student submissions were reviewed by our team, and feedback was documented on the file itself.	Participants had the option to consult our team one-on-one before submitting their final portfolio work.
Review comments could be incorporated into final portfolio pieces.	Where applicable, Oorvani advised on grading structures	All final outputs—memes, videos, graphics, etc.—were published on social media (e.g., Instagram), allowing wider peer learning and visibility.
Upon meeting attendance and submission criteria, participants received a Certificate of Completion from Oorvani Foundation.		



Introduction to the Programme

Objective: To understand the goals of the programme, what they would be doing as part of it, and how their contributions can help spread awareness of the city's issues.

Key discussion points

Global and local context

What are the world's biggest environmental challenges?
Climate change, air and water pollution, biodiversity loss, and waste management - why do they matter globally—and which of these affect you personally?

Zooming in: from global to local
Environmental issues exist at multiple levels—national, city-wide, and hyperlocal. How do these challenges show up in your neighbourhood, and what are the consequences?

Who is responsible for fixing these problems?
Addressing environmental issues involves multiple actors:
1. governments (through regulation and policy)
2. civic agencies (through infrastructure and public projects)
3. communities and individuals (through awareness and behavioural change)

Intersections with governance, economy, health, and equity
Environmental issues are not standalone—they affect and are affected by how cities are governed, economic choices, public health, and access to resources. for example, pollution impacts health, and poor waste management can disproportionately affect marginalised communities.

The power of awareness and communication
Some problems can be solved faster when people are aware and engaged.

1. Which environmental issues are most closely tied to lack of public awareness?
2. How can we reach and influence a significant portion of Bengaluru's population?

Why pop culture matters
Pop culture—memes, videos, art, storytelling—can break down complex issues and make them relatable. It is a powerful tool to spread environmental awareness, especially among young people.

Your role: how young people can make an impact
Young citizens can contribute by creating content, asking the right questions, participating in civic efforts, and influencing their peers. This programme is a starting point.

About the programme

01

Goal of the programme

To build environmental awareness through creative expression and connect young people to real-world urban challenges.

02

Take away

Understanding of key environmental issues in Bengaluru, tools/experience for critical thinking and civic observation, awareness/ skills in digital storytelling and pop culture formats, and a personal portfolio of work on local issues

03

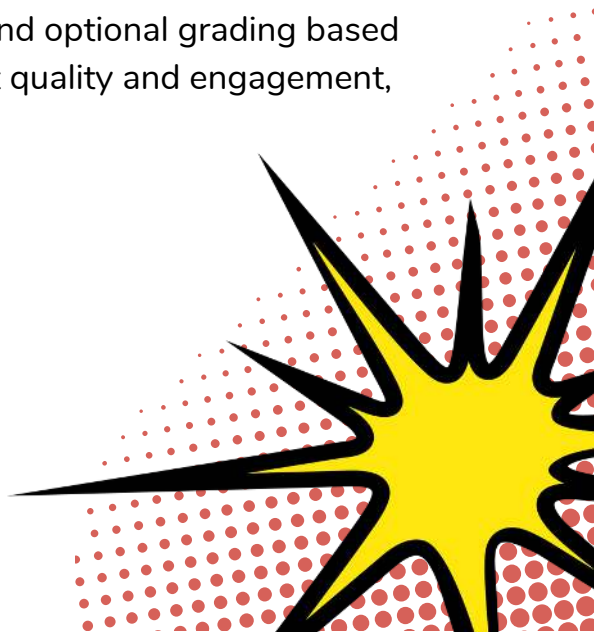
Programme Structure & Format

Interactive sessions led by experts, mini assignments and group work, creation of content for public sharing, individual support and feedback, and peer learning and team collaboration

04

Attendance and evaluation

Minimum attendance criteria to receive a certificate, participation, assignments, and review of final content and optional grading based on output quality and engagement,



Activities

Mindmap

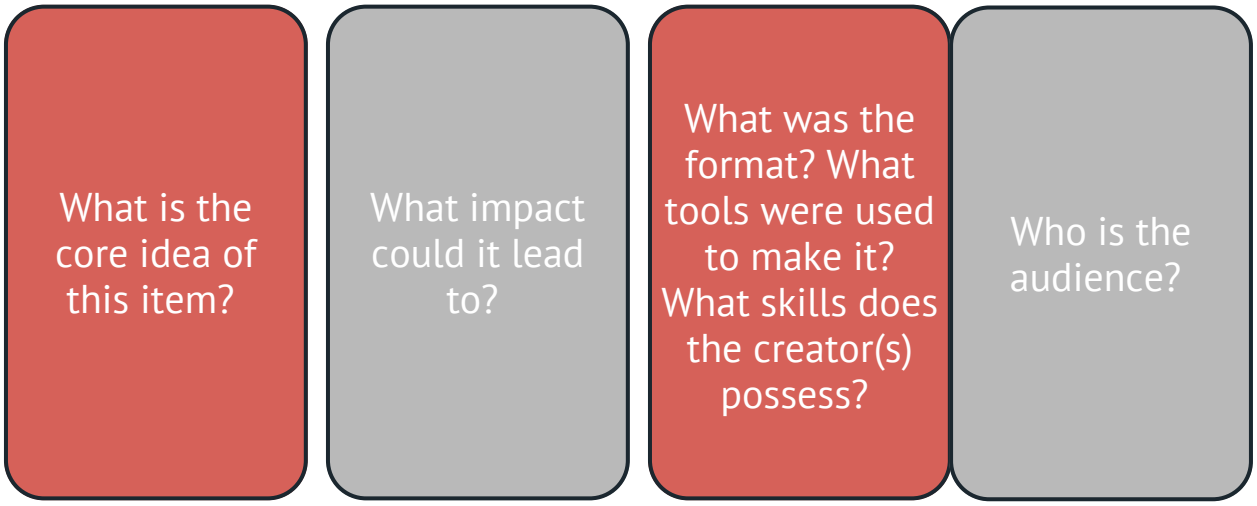
Think of some critical environment issue in your neighbourhood. What is the one thing the entire neighbourhood should know about the issue?

Example of social post on environment

Task

Think of a notable, impactful piece related to the environment that resonated with you. Can be social media post, reel, video, article, meme, comic, anything.

Points for analysis



Reference and Reading Material

https://citizenmatters.in/
https://www.nature.com/natcities
https://questionofcities.org
https://www.bloomberg.com/citylab

Screenshot from Instagram account of Green Humour

Screenshot from Instagram account of Kashi Cats

Bengaluru's Environment A Primer

Objective: To understand key environmental challenges in the city and the need for sustainability.

Key learning points

Overview of concepts of ecology, sustainability, SDG, climate resilience, urban design and development, air quality, thermal comfort, etc

Look at the city's population density, size, impacts of an expanding city and key issues.

Bengaluru's position and factors that benefit and impact its position, biodiversity, etc.

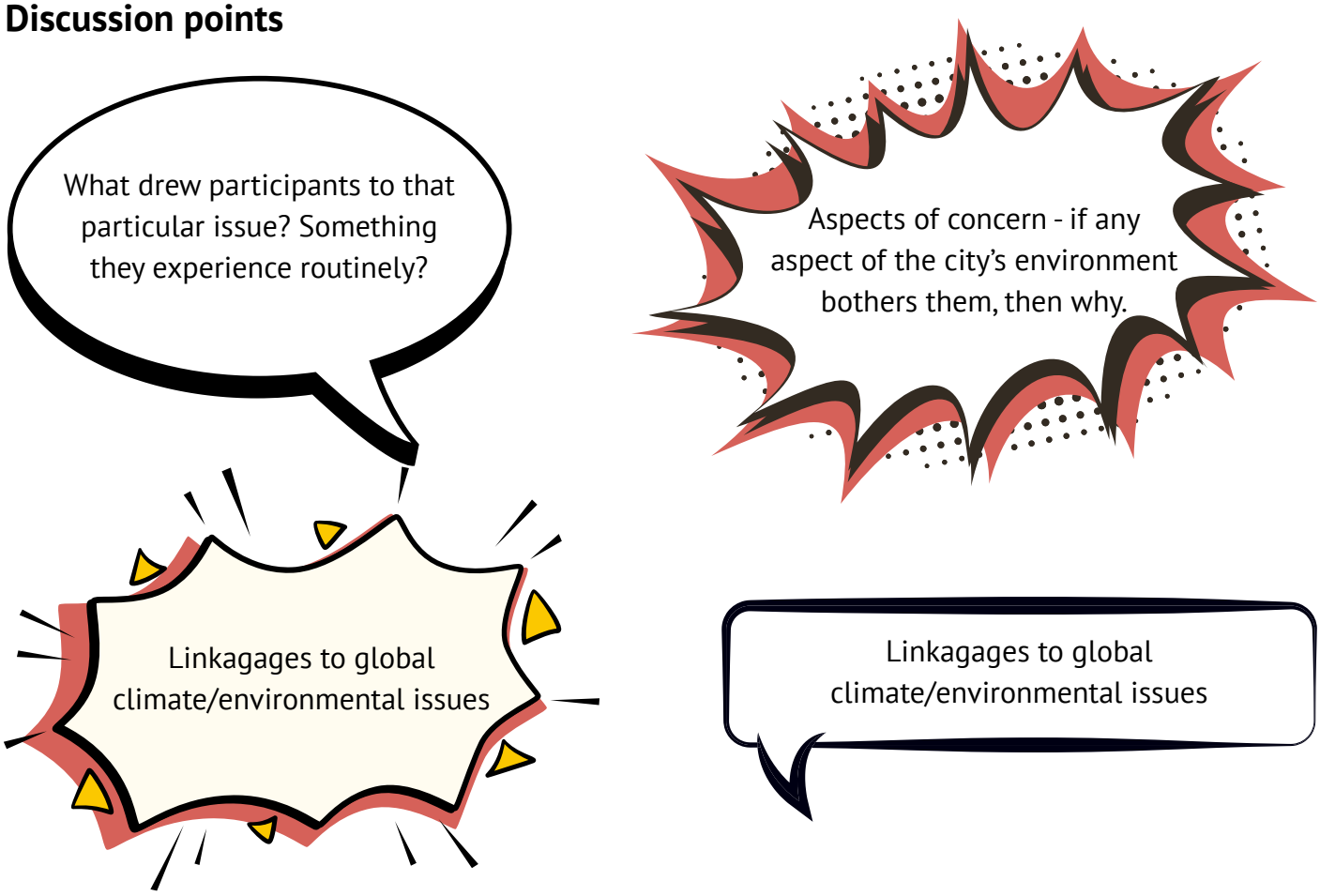
Invite sharing of lived experiences from participants.

Activities and Assignments

1 Record video clips

Task: Record three 30 seconds (approx) videos depicting environmental issues in your city, preferably in neighbourhoods you frequent like around your home/hostel/college. You can highlight positive or negative aspects of your city.

Discussion points



2 Synthesising information - spot the key message

Watch a 5-minute video on an environmental topic. As you watch, think about this:

What's the one key point you'd want others to remember?

Write it down as either: One punchy line, or A simple visual/graphic idea

Reference and Reading Material

- Bengaluru's climate no longer cool. Here's why
- 1055% increase in concrete cover in Bengaluru, reports IISc study
- Bengaluru's street vendors struggle with extreme heat, heavy rain, and limited options
- The journey of Bengaluru's waste

Solid Waste Management

Objective: To understand key waste management challenges in Bangalore, including an understanding of wet, dry, medical waste, e-waste and other types.

Key learning points

Overview and categories of waste generated

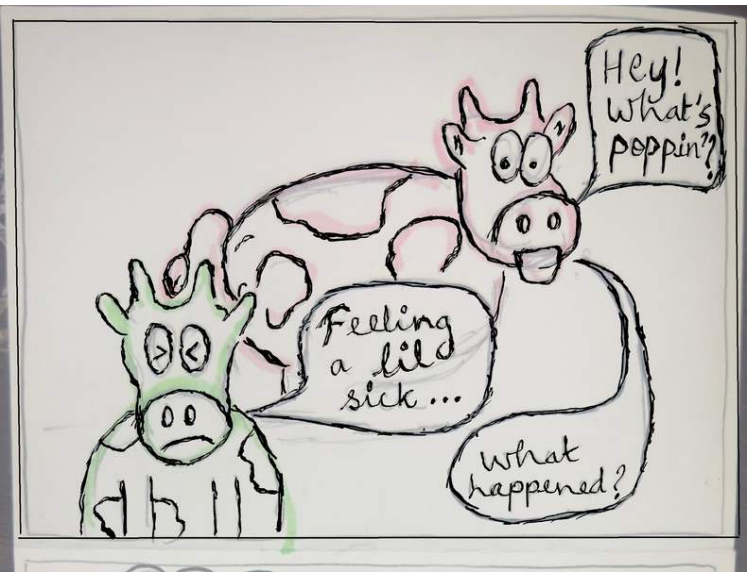
Overview of Bangalore's waste management issues, the journey of waste and the stakeholders involved through its journey and identification of different categories of waste and segregation

Waste management lifecycle

What happens when waste breaks down, enters water bodies, how it impacts lakes, soil quality, further impact on crops, the importance of segregation, how not segregating causes issues for those involved in waste management and recycling, what can be recycled and what cannot be and more based on interaction during the session.

Challenges in solid waste management in Bengaluru, including increasing waste generation, lack of landfills, disposal sites, segregation issues

Vital role of waste-pickers; gender, dignity, equity; wastepickers collectives



Assignment from Pilot Workshop. Cartoon inspired by a popular Content Creator Vickipedia

Assignment from Pilot Workshop. Cartoon inspired by a popular Content Creator Vickipedia

Field visit

Visit a waste segregation facility, or community composting facility. Take photographs and document what you saw as a photo essay.

Reading Material

- Bengaluru's daily waste production soared from 200 to 6,000 tonnes over two decades
- Waste management in Bengaluru: Where do we stand in 2023?
- Bengaluru knows the solutions to waste problems, but looks the other way
- Check what happens to all that plastic that comes with your online purchases
- No, those who make a living out of waste are not 'rag pickers'
- Waste workers take the lead in solving Bengaluru's textile waste crisis
- The journey of your soft drink bottle from your recycle bin

Urban Water

Objective: To understand key water challenges in Bangalore, including sources of water, state of water bodies, water supply, urban flooding, shortage, contamination and sustainability efforts.

Key learning points

Overview of Bengaluru's water availability, needs and how it impacts our environment

Bengaluru's topography and what that means for water availability

Brief overview of Bangalore's rapid urbanization and its impact on water availability and supply.

Bengaluru Rainfall Patterns

Sources of water for Bengaluru's consumption

Dependence on Cauvery river water, lakes, borewells, and rainwater harvesting.

The issues we have with regard to water management

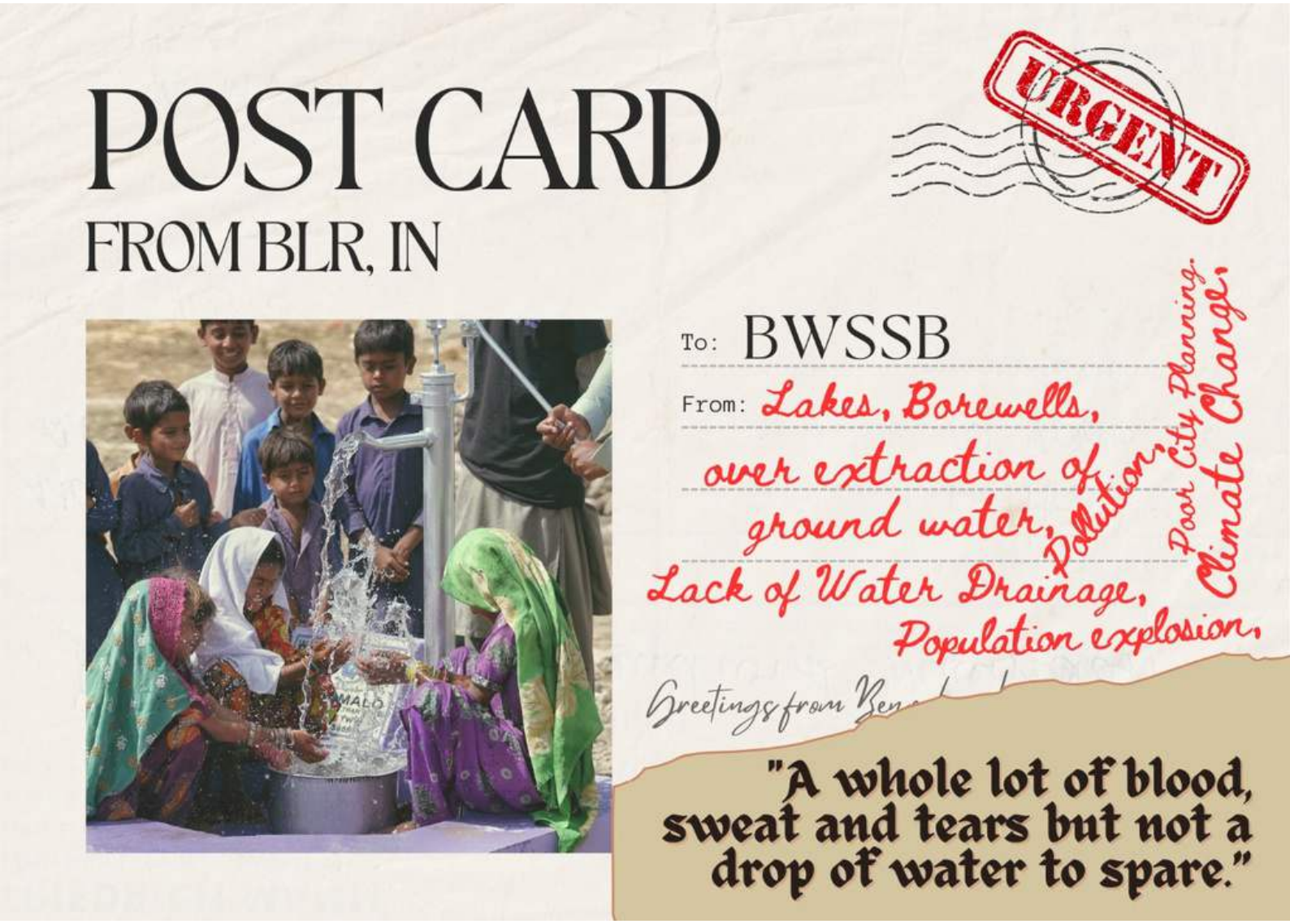
- Issues: Groundwater depletion, water pollution, and inequitable access.
- Case Study: Bellandur and Varthur Lakes—causes of pollution and their consequences
- Urban Flooding: Causes (encroachment of stormwater drains, loss of wetlands), major flooding events, and solutions.
- Urban Water Management and Scarcity - Bengaluru's transition from a lake network to Cauvery + over-extraction of groundwater
- Impact of Unplanned Urbanisation
- Environmental Injustice and Vulnerable Communities - flooding impacts on rich and poor communities
- Infrastructure and Governance Gaps

Sustainability goals and efforts

Sustainable Practices: Rainwater harvesting, lake rejuvenation.

Role of Citizens & Policy: How individuals and communities can contribute (e.g., composting, sustainable transport, policy advocacy).

Nature-based solutions; climate adaptations, resilience



Activities and Assignments

Towards behaviour change

Take a use case where water is getting consumed - home, office, college, restaurant etc. What could be the current water usage? Suggest how it can be reduced. How would you drive the conversations around water management with all the stakeholders in that context? Draw a mind map to illustrate the various aspects.

"HYPOCRITE"

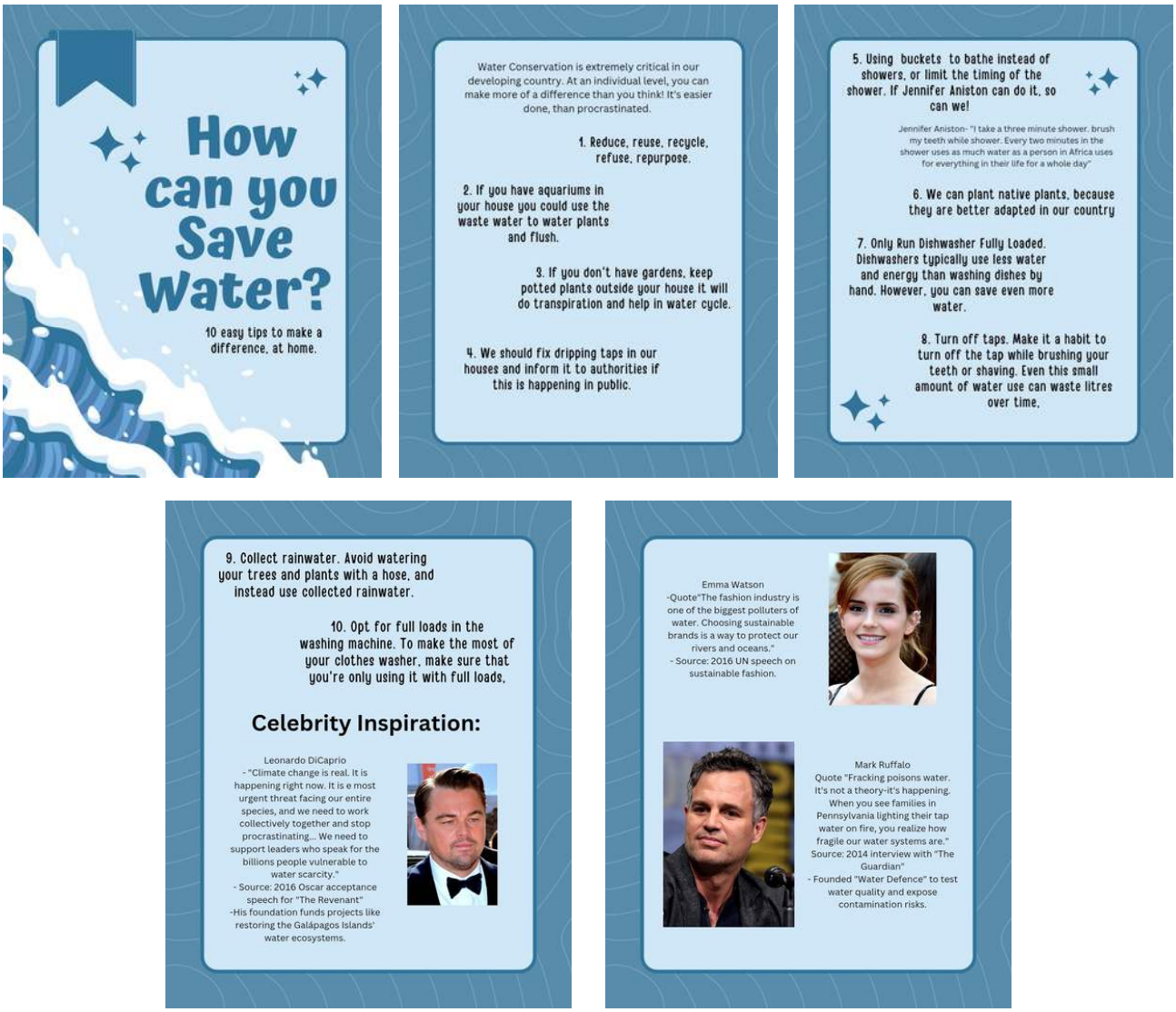

WHOOOSH


"gurgle"
"gurgle"


S-P-L-O-O-S-H


"Scribble"
"Scribble"


SAVE WATER
Water
Conservation



Field visit

Visit a lake that is getting or has been restored. Understand the lake ecosystem and fill the audit checklist, based on the Lake Assets Framework.

Guide: Saving Bengaluru's lakes: How citizen audits protect ecosystem assets

Reading Material

- Over 100 years of Bengaluru rains decoded
- The Secret Life of Bengaluru's Lakes: A look at their history and the current situation
- A to Z guide to Bengaluru's lakes
- Why certain areas in Bengaluru flood: A simple video explainer
- Rainbow Drive — layout or lake? The man-made tragedy of Bengaluru's flood-prone neighbourhoods
- Homeless and penniless, families of Brookefield settlement blame adjacent tech park for flooding

Mobility

Objective: To understand various mobility needs of a city, how much environmental impact each means contributes to, what are the good practices and how to spread awareness.

Key learning points

- ✓ Overview of the city's commuting patterns and how daily travel choices impact emissions, air quality, noise levels, and energy use
- ✓ Jams leading to higher emissions (CO_2, NOx, and PM2.5) worsening air quality and climate impact
- ✓ Mobility as a key driver of urban environmental health as well as residents' wellbeing
- ✓ Economic and social costs, including wasted fuel, time, and increased stress.

Environmental footprints of walking, cycling, buses, metro, cars, and bikes

Role of public transport and non-motorized transport (NMT)

How people make choices and trade-offs: convenience vs carbon emissions, speed vs sustainability.

Public transport accessibility is a matter of environmental justice—ensuring everyone can travel sustainably, not just the privileged.

Challenges to sustainable mobility

- Inadequate infrastructure for walking and cycling
- Gaps in public transport connectivity and accessibility
- Gender and safety concerns

Sample Case Study: Cycling routes, metro feeders etc.

- Solutions that show increased adoption of public transport or NMT and reduced use of personal vehicles
- How better planning reduces traffic volume and emissions

How citizens can drive policies and change

Activities and Assignments

User journeys

Each group thinks of an individual resident of the city, and imagine their commute needs. What are their origins and destinations? How would they travel? What would be their travel budgets? What would be their constraints? Plot their journey on a collaborative Google My Maps or a visual map with icons and route maps.

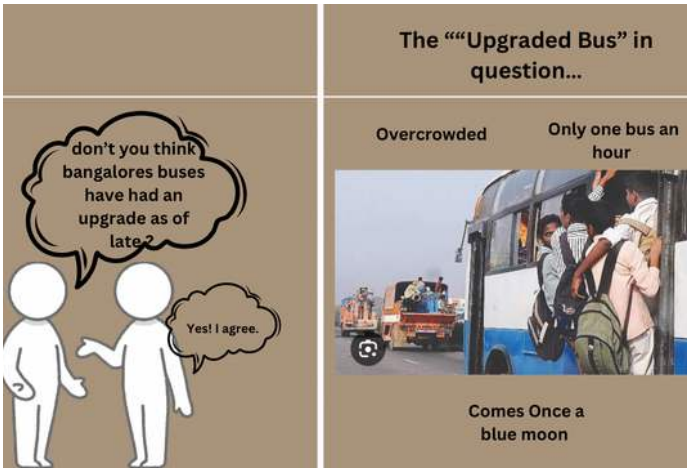
Come together to build a story around this to convey the role of mobility in the city.

Emissions for a week's travel

Each participant lists:

- Their own modes of transport and approximate distances travelled daily over the past week.
- The same details for one friend or family member.

Calculate the Carbon Footprint: Use a standard transport emission calculator or a provided conversion chart (e.g., grams of CO_2 per km by mode) to estimate total emissions for the week. (Example rates can be shared to simplify calculations)



Reflect and Reduce

User journeys

- Without considering comfort: What are the possible ways to reduce the emissions? (e.g., shift to walking, cycling, public transport, carpooling)
- With comfort as a factor: What's the most environment-friendly option they can realistically choose that still meets their comfort or convenience needs?

Group Discussion

- What patterns did you observe?
- What are the trade-offs between comfort, speed, cost, and emissions?
- What could help more people shift to greener transport options?

Thank You

This playbook produced as part of a collaborative project between Oorvani Foundation and St. Joseph's University. The project and this playbook was supported by a grant from the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum.

FIDE ET LABORE

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