



**ANNUAL REPORT: 2021 to 2022**



*... to rethink our privileges,  
received ideas and knowledge ...*

*... to seek new pathways  
of learning, sharing, and living.*

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Covid-19 continued to mark us and our work. As in the previous year, we ceased some of our regular programs and engaged in out-reach and support activities for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our region. The delayed South-West monsoon and then the excessive North-East monsoon brought home the reality of climate change. The need to develop local adaptation and resilience measures in agriculture and in human-nature relations have become all the more pressing. In a world made socially porous by the pervasive social media, issues of democracy, religious fundamentalism, authoritarianism, mob violence and the rising cases of intolerance have become challenges that we must also address in our learning spaces and in our everyday interaction with local community members. These issues have gained urgency as we head towards our tenth year of work and we see the continued need to make and be part of a 're-think' network in which alternatives to economic organisation, political mobilisation and social being must be worked out, shared and then implemented. We are thankful to our friends and supporters who in reposing their trust in us and our work have continued to be co-travellers in this journey. Ms. Kala Sunder, our Trustee and long-term supporter has relocated to Moscow but she will continue to be our moral and social anchor. We recollect with gratitude the continued support that Shri Lakshmana Char had provided us. In his honour and memory, at the request of his family, we have planted a tree sapling at Angarike Maala, a place that he had appreciated. The fact that some of our rural learners have now joined us as regular team members and that a few of our ideas and practices are being implemented in at least some villages gives us hope for the future and confidence for us to keep up our endeavours. Two new team members, Vinay Kumar (an engineer with interests in ecology and conservation) and M. Lakshmi (a graduate with interests in community mobilisation) have brought additional strength and enthusiasm to our work.

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# PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES

## RELIEF AND REHABILITATION FOR COVID-19

The Delta variant of Covid-19 saw many of the team members and their families fall ill. As a health and economic emergency enveloped the region and nation, we were compelled to respond by providing basic food, medical and financial aid to several individuals and families. On May 3rd, 32 persons died in the Chamarajanagar government hospital for lack of access to oxygen. We witnessed the deep sorrow of this national tragedy as two young men from Nagavalli village, where we live, were also victims. The collapse of the public health system and the desperation that set in before supportive measures were put in place, highlighted the need for civil society to work towards better public health care. Engaging with various networks and groups, PUNARCHITH team members lent support to families and individuals across the district.

Some of these activities and measures included:

### **Conceptualising and Developing a Covid Awareness Handout**

We worked with inputs from a national support network and developed a handout on covid awareness and home management. The flyer (in Kannada) was printed in bulk by the district health administration and then distributed widely. Hard and soft copies of this flyer were also shared with civil society in other districts. Later, when the vaccine drive was initiated, some of the ILP alumni worked in their villages and hamlets to enable elder persons and others to access vaccines.

### **Mobilising Medical Equipment and Materials**

After the tragedy at the government hospital at Chamarajanagar, Mr. Aroon Raman kindly arranged to have 19 oxygen concentrators sent to the district hospital. Subsequently, we redirected all the donated medical equipment and materials to the district centre and then to various covid care centres. With the support of the covid relief network, initiated by Karnataka JanaShakti, we reached out to several families and individuals across the district who were in dire straits and supported them with advice, financial aid or food kits.

### **MNREGA Work in Various Villages**

As in the previous year, we also initiated MNREGA works in 13 panchayats across the district. For this, we are grateful to the then CEO of the Zilla Panchayat, Mr. N. Bhullar Rao, who was particularly supportive of our work and requests. A few of the ILP alumni were able to mobilise their fellow village residents and seek employment via the MNREGA.

## LAND: RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION

Work on restoring, conserving and cultivating at the highly degraded and barren 7-acre piece of land called 'Angarika Maala' (meadow of *Dodonaea viscosa*) continues. Our focus has been on restoring the soil, seed, water and biodiversity of the land so as to develop it into a demonstrative plot for regenerative agriculture, community-owned and group led agriculture and for various methods and practices of conservation and alternative learning. Based on the suggestion of the landscape architects, INDESIGN, Bengaluru, we have formally conceptualised this transformation and endeavour to establish this land into a 'living lab'. The activities and programs that this 'living lab' will relate to: place-based education; community ownership and responsibility for natural and agricultural resources; restorative agriculture that can address climate change issues; conservation of seeds, water, agro-biodiversity and soil; use of both traditional and appropriate modern methods in cultivation; demonstration of use of appropriate technologies, energy conservation etc. Bearing the above in mind, the activities undertaken over the past year include the following:

### Development of new water catchment and management sites

Given the sharp fluctuations in the rainfall pattern and the aridity of the site, importance has been given to rainfall harvesting and to conserving bodies of water for use during lean/drought periods. Based on suggestions and plans by INDESIGN, we have developed a new water detention pond and an open well.



Although work was begun in July 2021, the work continued with periodic gaps until October. Heavy rains and some structural faults in the construction led the open well to collapse. We have since then, hired new workers and the open well and the detention pond have been completed. New fauna and grasses have started growing in the area and we hope to develop a perennial garden of fruits and vegetables in this area.

## 'Taragu Benki' or 'litter fire' experiment and observations

Dr. Samira Agnihotri initiated trials of the traditional Solega method of litter fire at Angarike Maala. Three Solega men, Range Gowda, Kethe Gowda, and Veere Gowda, have been coming regularly to conduct the annual fires and to also help with documentation and identification of plants/grasses. In addition, Solega elder women, Masanamma and Rangamma and their daughters and granddaughters, have also come and identified the plants that have grown in this site.



A key feature of these visits by the Solega has been the fact that they are able to relate to the landscape and to the flora and fauna and has led them to have singing and dancing sessions there. This has also consolidated their confidence and the need to retrieve their knowledge and practices related to landscape conservation. Details of this are being documented (written and photographs) by Vinay Kumar.



## 'Seed Sharing' Programme

On Dec 3rd Sunita Rao and Santhosh from Vanastree led the 'Beeja Baluvali' (Seed Sharing) programme in which the importance of seed saving and the joy of home gardens were discussed. Thirty-six women from Nagavalli and Puttanapura joined us at PC and shared the seeds from their home garden with us. Bhagyamma and Mahadevamma shared with us the ragi grown as a part of restorative agriculture.

After the exchange of seeds, they visited Angarike Maala and expressed their happiness about the transformation of the land. We also informed them about PC's interest in opening the kana as a community space. They accepted the invitation to use Kana as a community threshing yard.



## Organic Manure Production

Based on various reviews and suggestions, three different kinds of organic manure are now being produced on the land. These include the conventional heap composted cow-dung manure; hot compost (Berkeley method); and Amrut Mitti. A separate site has been cordoned off for this and the manure from meets all our manure requirements for the land. Samples of the manure have been stored to be used as demonstration for persons who visit the land.



## Plans and Designs for Basic infrastructure

Since the number of programmes on the land have increased, we felt the need to have some basic infrastructure in place. INDESIGN worked closely with us to identify the site, design the architecture and align sustainable water management strategies. Work is in progress and the 'Living Lab' will be formally inaugurated only after the basic construction is completed.

## International Farm Women's Day October 22nd

For the second year in a row, we celebrated the Farm Women's Day as a way to highlight the need for women to be recognised as 'farmers', to have legal rights to their land, and for facilitating fair access to government programmes. The special guest for this occasion was Prof. Rameswari Varma, a veteran gender studies and theatre specialist, who not only exhorted the women to be independent and empowered but also highlighted the need for co-operative activities to be conducted by them. A handout (in Kannada) was distributed to the women. Some of the women sought counsel and support to register their land in their names and to access some of the new government schemes. The women visited Angarike Maala and saw the various endeavours and also discussed possibilities of them forming work groups among themselves.





## Soil Month at Angarike Maala

Since December 5th is World Soil Day, we decided to have month-long activities related to soil conservation, study and use for various groups of people. Soil Month included discussions on soil, food and health. The experiential walk around the land was to share details of the earth work, restorative agriculture, conservation of seeds, soil, water and bio-diversity. Visitors enjoyed the walk around the land and many appreciated the transformation of the degraded land into a verdant place.



## Dec 2nd

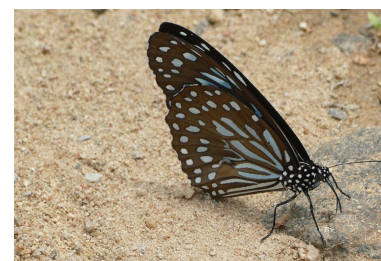
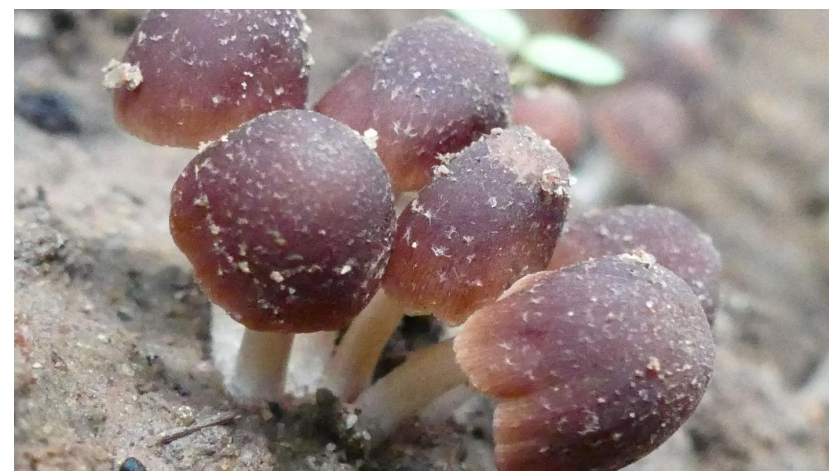
The inauguration ceremony of the newly built threshing yard, or kana by K.C Raghu, a well-known nutritionist from Bengaluru. This was followed up by his talk on food and health and on soil and health by 'Soil' Vasu. We were also especially pleased to have thirty children and five teachers from Arivu School, Mysuru join us for the program. They not only participated in the program, but they also took a long walk around the land and then spent time making murals with seeds and soil. Other guests included local farmers from the villages of Nagavalli and Puttanapura. During the programme, as a sign of gratitude, eight workers who had worked at Angarike Maala were felicitated.



## Other Visitors to Angarike Maala

Over the month, the other visitors to the land included teams from ATREE, Gramanthara, the Deputy Conservator of Forests and Director for BRT Tiger Reserve, Dr Santoshkumar G, Solega men, women and youth, neighbours from the Nagavalli panchayat villages, Dr. Manjunath and team from School of Natural Farming, Tumkuru, Ms. Venu Arora from IdeoSync Media Combine and family, Dr. Madhulika from New Delhi, and family and friends of PUNARCHITH team members. We were also pleased to host a team from MoonFrog Labs, Bengaluru who engaged with us in discussions about changing rural society and the challenges of economic and ecological sustainability.

Credit for much of the physical, organisational, and supervisory work at the land go to Muthuraju, Vinay, Veerabhadranaika and Chandrakanth.



## 'AADHI' PATHWAY: SOLEGA INTER-GENERATION KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Dr. Samira Agnihotri, who has worked since 2005 in the B.R.Hills with the Solega on ecological issues and on documenting their language and traditional knowledge has conceptualised this program. Responding to concerns from Solega elders about the loss of their knowledge and practices, this is an attempt to find new pathways to facilitate inter-generational sharing of traditional knowledge from elder Solegas to the younger/youth generation. We are pleased to note that based on a collaborative approach with the community members and with their leaders from the Zilla Budakattu Girijana Abhivrudhi Sangha, PUNARCHITH has facilitated several engagements and the documentation indicates the possibility of developing a rich repository of Solega knowledge. More particularly, the key interlocutors, Solega elders and several youth, especially girls, are trying to engage with this programme and are keen to re-think their own history and community situation.

While Dr. Samira Agnihotri anchors the whole programme, Lakshmi M is the field coordinator and draws on her own experience of being a young Solega in these conflicting times for indigenous youth all over the world. Ms. Priyam Vadaliya is the art consultant who designs the brochures and other material that will be used as teaching and learning aids. Dr. Aung Si, a linguist who has worked on the Solega language, will be an advisor. In addition, Dr. Veerabhadranaika and Ms. Sundamma of PUNARCHITH provide additional support in organisation, inputs and engagement with the community.



## CLIMATE CHANGE OUT-REACH

This programme is a continuation of the work initiated in 2018 and the focus is on facilitating out-reach and awareness workshops/engagements on climate change with people in the district. Since the past year, we've been engrossed in several activities ranging from continuing the research and out-reach, to reconceptualising the presentation on climate change for various audiences. Overall, much to our disappointment, the gravity of the situation caused by climate change is not an issue that finds acceptance among rural citizens, elected representatives or with the government administrators. Our key learning has been that despite the onset of several climate adversities, the emphasis on continuing life as before and the focus on livelihood activities that will bring remunerative incomes takes precedence over preparing for climate change mitigation or resilience. We have much more to do and need to think of multiple strategies.

### **Continuation of data compilation and Research on Climate change impact in the district**

We continued to collect and collate data related to rainfall, adverse natural events, agricultural changes and other parameters for the district. We are keen on accessing data related to issues in health conditions (linked to periodic out-breaks of epidemics and undiagnosed fevers) but have not been able to find reliable data sources for this. Drawing on our study of the region as a 'dry grain complex' we are attempting to indicate how climate change mitigation and resilience activities can be built around reviving the earlier 'Dry Grain complex'. The linkage of such an agricultural complex to that of food cultures and to the restoration of natural resources will be a key approach. We are currently accessing and analysing data related to the recent excessive and unseasonal rains in the district and their impact. These would enable us to highlight how the region is being impacted by climate change. Several versions (made for different audiences) of a detailed presentation on climate change in the district have been made. Some of them are bilingual (English and Kannada) but many are in Kannada. Some of the data has been used to present the 'infographics' in the climate change video.

### **Video on Climate Change in Chamarajanagar District**

Based on data, infographics, and a short film on people's understandings of climate change, Ratheesh, Sharada and Shreekanth (as volunteers and friends of PUNARCHITH) have made a five-minute video on climate change in the district. We first released this video to a select audience or network of people in the district and then based on requests have shared this video after having English sub-titles added to the video. Although the video has circulated widely and we have received positive comments, only a few people have come forward to take actions for climate change mitigation or adaptation. We now need to consider ways in which the video can be circulated with a feedback loop.

## **Out-reach Programs**

On September 17th, we organised an out-reach program for several NGOs in the district. Seventeen people attended this event and reviewed the presentation. A detailed discussion circle was also organised. While many acknowledged the issues and challenges, none of the participants came forward to act as catalysts or to take responsibilities for any specific action. On November 1st, we made a similar presentation to members of the NGO, Environment Support Group (ESG) at Bengaluru. The team gave us several comments and suggestions including leads to meeting persons in the government who can take this work forward. Due to the periodic Covid-19 restrictions in the district, we were not given permission to share this with government employees or with students in the district.

On March 6th (2022), we had a meeting with the Secretary, Dept of Panchayat Raj and Rural Development, at Bengaluru. The Secretary watched the short video and was keen to partner with us to take climate change issues to the larger public. She has appointed a liaison officer to keep in touch with us and we are currently in discussions with them as to how to take this forward in the district.

## **A WhatsApp Group called 'HasiruAvarana' or 'Green Environment'**

Chamarajanagar Environment and Climate Action Group was made and it currently has 52 members on it. The response and engagement via this WA group has been limited and only a few sent in comments or queries. The short video has also been released on this WhatsApp group.

## **Street Play on Climate Change**

Based on discussions, which indicated that we needed more 'culture specific' formats for the message about climate change to reach rural people, we engaged the well-known theatre and cultural activist, Mr. Berty Olivera (originally from the district) to develop a street play. After several iterations, Berty wrote a play which focused on the issues and trends (chemical agriculture, neglect of public natural resources, the indifference of youth to rural issues, the challenges of climate change related to adverse natural events etc) in the local dialect and included several songs. The play ('Times have Changed') was practiced from Jan 10th to 20th by Mr. Shantharaj and his team of actors, and then due to alarm and restrictions about the third wave of Covid, the play practice was postponed. The team reconvened in March and 14 performances of the street play were made in 11 villages in the district. The response was good but very few opted to sign up for further discussions or engage with us on a long-term basis.

P. Veerbhadranaika, Samira Agnihotri, Ratheesh Pisharody, and A.R.Vasavi are engaged with this work.

## HONNERU : RURAL PRODUCERS' COLLECTIVE

The Covid situation had a negative impact on the collective's production and sales, especially of edible products. Since the women's group was unable to meet for prolonged periods it meant a lack of production. In addition, the closure and inability to conduct events and sales in Mysuru and Bengaluru meant that sales were low. The online sales via Instamojo continued to be activated but sales were significantly low during this period. Since there were several women who sought employment and support during the covid period, we had Ms. Misba Wadehra, a designer from the garment industry, train the women in embroidery and tailoring. Some of these products were sold and it was heartening to see the extent to which this activity enhanced the confidence and self-esteem of the women.

We also took on lease a new house for the HONNERU group so that the women could meet more regularly and conduct various programmes and interaction sessions there.

Manuja Priya and Chandrakanth anchor this programme.



## CHILDREN'S PROGRAMME

The Saturday programme and activities for children has continued over much of the year, except the months of February to April due to the covid situation. Compensating for their absence over these months, we distributed dry rations of pulses, jaggery, and oil to the children so as to supplement their nutrition. In addition, assessing the 'learning loss' that many children were experiencing, we requested Berty Olivera and Ratish of Mysuru to develop a teachers' training programme to help address such learning loss. The training programme included not only PUNARCHITH team members but also 15 teachers from various schools. Berty and Ratish drew on activity-based methodologies to enable teachers to assess, engage and encourage children to learn basics. Children from Nagavalli participated in these training sessions and later learning groups were formed to follow up and support their learning levels. We are particularly pleased that eight of the children who attend the Saturday programme are now keen gardeners and have started to cultivate their own small vegetable gardens. Six children, who were in varied difficult situations, now receive scholarships to enable them to continue their education.

Sundramma and Manuja Priya engage with this programme. Vinay and Suma also provide periodic inputs especially for activities related to ecological awareness.



## RESTORATIVE AGRICULTURE

As a way to promote the idea of restorative agriculture and to document how the shift from chemical to restorative and sustainable agriculture could take place, we had decided to support 6 small or marginal farmers. We selected three women, who were widows, from the Nagavalli area and three youth from various villages and provided them with seed money and knowledge support. While some of them were very sincere and did their best, we observed that each of the cultivators required much more supervision and attention than what we could provide. The influence of chemical agriculture persists and the vagaries of climate change made it difficult for any of the plots to be considered a success. Given these challenges we will discontinue this programme from the new financial year. Details of the economics and working of such units will be key to formulating alternatives to mainstream subsidies and government support programmes.





## HOME GARDEN AND SEED BANK

The garden programme was initiated late as the South-West monsoons were delayed. The annual 'seed sharing' or 'beeja baluvali' programme was held and women from Nagavalli came by. Some of the women who had taken vegetable seeds from us, returned some of the seeds to us and also shared new seeds with us. We are now charging a nominal amount of Rs. 5 for 10 grams of seeds as a way to ensure that they are being used. Sixteen women can now be identified as 'seed savers' but much more needs to be done to develop their skills and interests in conserving and sharing seeds. The seed bank now has 49 varieties of seeds (31 vegetable seeds and 18 of cereals, pulses and oil seeds) in the collection. More attention needs to be paid to documenting and storing the seeds. Lack of space and the lack of full-time person to caretake the seed collection are issues that need to be addressed. Chandrakanth and Sundramma anchor this work with support from Vinay and other team members. Sunita Rao continues to provide inputs to the seed collection and Santhosh from Vanastree has visited to share his knowledge and skills in seed conservation.



## INTEGRATED LEARNING PROGRAMME

With Covid restrictions in place, we were not able to organise the ILP this year. Instead, we focused on revamping the curriculum and reading materials and then had all the Punarchith team members participate in an 'internal ILP'. Some of the resource persons who engaged with us were Shreekumar from Sangatya (Dakshina Kannada district) who shared with us his insights on issues of inequality and sustainability, Mallige conducted a day-long program on gender sensitisation, and Vasu shared updates on new experiments and practices for soil restoration. We also conducted a review of all the ILP alumni via telephone and then updated their profiles. Based on this, we conducted an indepth, internal review of the ILP and decided that we needed to change the target group of youth so that older and more experienced persons who were interested in agriculture and rural issues could be selected for the next round of ILP. We were also able to share some of the key issues about youth and rural India with a team from Samvada, Mangalore, who spent a day with us.



## 'GRAAM SETHU' OR VILLAGE BRIDGE PROGRAMME

We had initiated this programme as a way to support ILP alumni in their own villages and settlements. While we had started with 8 youth in various villages, we found that many of them were not able to sustain their activities. Only three youth, Geetha and Yathish in Tumkuru, and Mahendra in Kullur village have continued to engage in community activities. Geetha and Yathish (who work under the close supervision and support of Chitra and Prashanth) continue to do stellar work. They have motivated 18 children, from ages 8 to 17, to participate in various activities such as tree planting, gardening, clearing garbage etc in their areas. In addition, the children have been taught to make short videos about various issues in their region and they have now started to upload these to YouTube channel – Hakki Pakka Makkala Balaga. Based on one of their videos, about sand mining and the ecological and health hazards it has created in their area, Deccan Herald had reporters do a story on this issue. Geetha and Yathish also run a night school or learning support centre in two villages and conduct regular extra classes on various science and ecological issues in three government schools. Mahendra has collaborated to set up a collective vegetable garden in his village and also provides mentoring and academic support to several children. Since only these three youth were engaged under this programme, we decided that we could absorb them into the general extension work and the 'Graam Sethu' programme would be closed in the new financial year.

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# PUBLICATIONS/LECTURES AND OUTREACH ACTIVITIES BY TEAM MEMBERS

## Dr. Samira Agnihotri

### Publications

Shifting our Gaze – Towards a Just, Inclusive Approach to Research in the Field in *The Wire Science* 17.6.21 <https://science.thewire.in/environment/call-to-decolonise-ecology-conservation-field-research/>

Agnihotri, S., Madegowda, C. and Si, A., 2021. Tiger becomes termite hill: Soliga/Solega perceptions of wildlife interactions and ecological change. *Frontiers in Conservation Science*, 2.

### Out-reach Activities

Member of the Organising Committee of the Student's Conference on Conservation Science-Bengaluru (27th-30th September 2021)

<https://www.sccs-bng.org/>

Part of the working group that administers The Coexistence Consortium, whose vision is to promote human-wildlife coexistence and a more holistic, inclusive and just approach to nature conservation.

<https://www.coexistenceconsortium.com/>

## Dr. P. Veerabhadranaika

Edited a volume with five case studies of government schools in Chamarajanagar District. The volume was published by Azim Premji Foundation and was released at a meeting organised by the district education office at Chamarajanagar.

Presented a paper on learning loss among Adivasis at the webinar organised by V-Lead, Mysuru.



## Dr. A.R.Vasavi

Published articles in *The Wire*, *The Indian Express*, *Praja Vani* (Kannada) and *Deccan Herald*.

Delivered online lectures organised by Delhi University, Ambedkar University (New Delhi), Sikkim University, JNU (New Delhi), and participated in various discussions fora organised by different civil society organisations.

Presented a paper, 'From Magic Chants to Miracles Seeds :Shifting Significance of Agricultural Land' at the international conference (online) on the Anthropology of Land, organised by Wenner Gren Foundation, New York.

# CHALLENGES AND ON-GOING WORK

Covid-19 and the periodic 'lock-downs', restrictions on movement, illness and health set-backs among team members have meant that programmes have taken longer to be implemented than planned. A key limitation has been the lack of infrastructure facilities at the land which means that all programmes are short and day-long only. Despite the onset of a situation of climate change emergency, the issues of climate change are not reckoned with by most people including administrators and political representatives. We need to consider expanding and intensifying our work with children. With the opening up of educational institutions and the ability to conduct sessions, we hope to increase the number of our presentations, out-reach, and awareness programmes. Finding continued financial support, especially since we do not have FCRA, remains a major concern. Developing the corpus fund so as to ensure continuity of the key activities and retaining the core team will be key to future planning.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## ORGANISATIONS

MoonFrog Labs, Bengaluru  
YuvaLok Foundation, Bengaluru  
RainMatter Foundation, Bengaluru  
Exotic Journeys Pvt Ltd, New Delhi

## INDIVIDUALS

Ashish N Patel  
Damodaran D Nampoothiri  
Dr. Ashwin Narayanan  
Gayathri Arakere & Dilip Ahuja  
Indira Krishnappa  
Maya Iyengar  
Miriam Paul Sreeram  
N Lakshmana Char  
Pratibha Priyadarshini  
Rekha Jayakishan  
Sangeetha Ramaswamy  
Shanmuga Sundaram Mayilsamy  
Shreyas Ravikumar  
Sujatha Vijayaraghavan  
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Tara Sinha  
Tirthankar Ghosh  
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Shantharaj (theatre)

Misba Wadehra (tailoring and embroidery)

Ratish (teaching learning modules)

Shreekanth (infographics and translations)

Sharada Ganesh (video and infographics)

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G.S. Jaydeva (plants)

Dr. Geetha Ramaswami (climate change)

## Trustees

Dr. Nagarjuna (Chamarajanagar)

Mr. C. Balachandran (Mysuru)

Ms. Sunita Rao (Mysuru)

Prof. A.R.Vasavi (Bengaluru)

## Team Members

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H. Suma

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Sundramma

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M. Lakshmi

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