

Climate festivals of joy

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At the United Nations climate change summit in 2014, the then-US President Barack Obama famously said, “We are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it.” Sadly, not much has changed since in what we do about it. 2023 has set new climate records: the hottest summer recorded in human history; the hottest ever ocean temperatures (stimulating cyclones and hurricanes); a record-breaking number of mega-forest fires in Canada, and so on.

The first step to climate action -- or indeed, for any kind of action -- is to arm yourself with knowledge. This is especially important for young people -- we, their elders, have created this problem and are leaving an impoverished, fragile world behind for them to inherit and fix. We certainly don't seem to be especially alarmed at what is going on, or motivated to do anything to address the problem of climate change at the scale it requires.

As educators, we recognise that climate communication to the young has to be very different in tone and focus than it is for adults. We cannot bombard children or young adults with horrifying narratives of doom and gloom, true though they may be. Climate communication needs to be interesting rather than preachy, centred around nature instead of climate disasters, and using approaches of ‘show’ not ‘tell’. Climate and nature festivals are a great way to do this, introducing young people to the wonders of nature, the joy of engaging with

environmental issues, and showcasing inspirational stories from individuals, communities and organisations working on environmental recovery that can bring hope and a renewed sense of energy and determination to an otherwise dismal scenario.

[Also Read: Climate change-induced surge in humidity fuels discomfort, drives power demand in Delhi: CSE report](#)

This is the vision that underpins the series of climate festivals that we launched some months back at Azim Premji University (APU). Last year, in November, we ran the 'Rivers of Life' exhibition, which included photographs and essays, art, music, dance, workshops and movies. Over 10,500 visitors attended the festival, including thousands of young children from low-income schools and neighbourhoods that lack access to high-quality education. The festival also travelled to other parts of Bengaluru and Karnataka, hosting close to 2,000 school children in Yadgir. We also held quizzes, essay competitions and debates for selected community schools, ensuring this was not a one-off experience but a continuing engagement.

The childrens' responses have shown us the promise of such an approach. This year, our theme is 'Forests of Life'. A festival for the young, by the young, the festival incorporates photo-essays by 130 student interns selected from a national call and who travelled across the country to document India's forests. The festival also incorporated rare interviews with forest guardians, protectors and writers, including the iconic environmentalist Chandi Prasad Bhatt and the incomparable Ruskin Bond.

Starting with a quiz competition for college students, 'Forests of Life' will be held at the APU's Bengaluru camps from November 2-14. Open to the public (and free), the festival brings the message of climate action to over 15,000 visitors from across Bengaluru and nearby areas, including Mandya and Salem. Through workshops, indigenous communities and forest artisans will share their music, dance, and crafts with student visitors -- demonstrating an intimate and deep connection to nature that is important for residents of a megacity to experience and understand. Trilingual, in English, Kannada and Hindi, the festival will ensure that language is not a barrier to communication -- travelling to other locations in Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, where Azim Premji Foundation works closely with local communities, and exposing tens of thousands of young people to these ideas.

In the process of setting up such a massive festival, the one thing we have learnt is that even at a time of global uncertainty, when the future seems to be at its darkest, there is still hope, joy and the prospect of a better world that lies ahead, one where we live in coexistence and harmony with nature. We should hold fast to that thought!