

## Protecting Hyderabad's natural and cultural heritage

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Hyderabad, situated on India's Deccan Plateau, hosts Archaean-era geology in its majestic denudational landforms. The city is also a metropolis with high-density urban land use growing exponentially – almost quadrupling – over the last 30 years. This increased spatial need has resulted in urban development displacing Hyderabad's natural heritage, eroding the city's Genius Loci. The ensuing loss has impacted three realms – geological, ecological and cultural. This presentation reports results of a landscape design project that contributes to protecting Hyderabad's cultural identity through the development of an educational Geopark that inspires stewardship by putting Hyderabadis in closer contact with their environs.

Three criteria informed the Geopark site selection: recommendations of a non-profit organization, the Society to Save Rocks; Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority's 2031 Master Plan for Greater Hyderabad; and a critical analysis of urgent urban threat to select boulder sites in Hyderabad. The initially chosen 400-Hectare Venkateshwaragutta site was expanded to 600 Hectares to connect relationships between natural systems including a stream corridor, natural lake, and municipally conserved forest areas in the vicinity.

Mirroring the city's dichotomous character, the site's existing conflicting land uses are a religious temple and a master-balancing reservoir located adjacently on the site's tallest hillock. They represent the necessities of cultural living in Hyderabad. The challenge in designing this Geopark is to successfully integrate the spiritual, practical and ecological in one harmonious whole, while educating park visitors about interconnected natural environmental systems. This is achieved through an interpretive center communicating best practices in geology and urban water use/conservation, a spiritual complex, and recreational trails. The goals of this park are protecting rockscapes, engaging people physically and emotionally, and inspiring stewardship through education. They are aligned with Global Geoparks Network's emphasis on Conservation, Sustainable Development and Community Involvement.

Presented in Theme 4.