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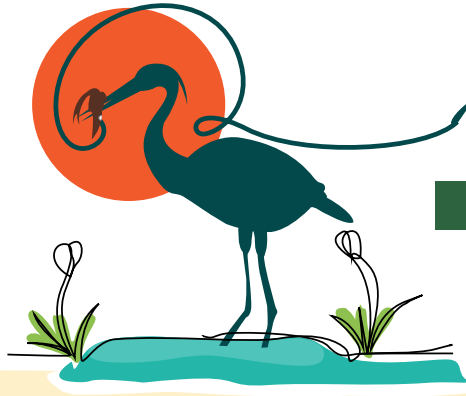
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# Wetlands for **LIFE**

## FILM FESTIVAL & FORUM



AUGUST 1 – 3, 2024 | 11:00 AM – 05:00 PM



Atal Bihari Vajpayee Auditorium, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University  
Vidya Vihar, Raebareli Road, Lucknow

# FESTIVAL REPORT



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **Lucknow Wetlands for LiFE Film Festival & Forum**, held from **August 1–3, 2024**, at the **Atal Bihari Vajpayee Auditorium, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow**, was a landmark event dedicated to raising awareness about wetland conservation and their critical role in biodiversity and climate resilience.

The festival was organized as part of the Indo-German Technical Cooperation Project, '**Wetlands Management for Biodiversity and Climate Protection**.' It was implemented by **GIZ** on behalf of the **German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV)** in collaboration with the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)** and implemented by CMS, New Delhi.

The Shimla edition of the festival is being organised in partnership with the **Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University** and **WWF India**, aimed to raise awareness about the critical role wetlands play in sustaining biodiversity, promoting climate resilience, and ensuring ecological balance.

The inaugural ceremony featured an impressive line-up of dignitaries. The keynote address was delivered by **Honourable Mr Arun Kumar Saxena**, State Minister (Independent Charge), EF&CC Department, Govt. of Uttar Pradesh. Special addresses were presented by **Mr Manoj Singh, IAS**, Additional Chief Secretary, EF&CC Department, **Mr Ashish Tiwari, Secretary, EF&CC** and **Prof. Neel Mani Prasad Verma**, Honourable Vice Chancellor, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University.

**Mr. Kirtiman Awasthi**, Project Manager, GIZ, provided context setting for the festival, emphasizing collaborative approaches to wetland conservation. The welcome address was delivered by **Dr. Vasanti Rao**, Director General, Centre for Media Studies (CMS), and the vote of thanks was extended by **Prof. Narendra Kumar**, Head, Department of Geology, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University.







Over the course of three days, the festival showcased 21 impactful films that explored themes related to wetlands, climate resilience, and biodiversity conservation. These films served as powerful visual narratives to inspire action and educate audiences about the ecological importance of wetlands.

Complementing the screenings, a Social Impact Filmmaking Workshop conducted by Mr. Ritesh Taksande from FTII trained 55 participants in creating conservation-focused short films. The workshop resulted in 10 films produced by participants, highlighting real-world challenges and solutions related to wetland preservation. A painting competition also took place, attracting 34 participants who used visual art to express their commitment to environmental conservation. Their creations celebrated the beauty and significance of wetlands, sparking further discussions on sustainable practices.

A panel discussion titled '**Rivers of Life: Wetlands & Climate Resilience**' brought together a diverse group of experts. Moderated by **Mr. Kirtiman Awasthi**, the panel featured **Dr. Heera Lal, IAS**, Uttar Pradesh; **Mr. Aviral Saxena**, Environmental Engineer, GIZ India; **Mr. Nitin Kaushal**, Director, WWF-India; **Dr. Prathna TC**, Urban Water Resilience Specialist; environmentalist **Mr Ramveer Tanwar**, known as the "Pond Man of India"; and **Prof. Narendra Kumar**, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University. **Dr. Vasanti Rao** concluded the discussion by emphasizing the need for collaboration in wetland conservation. Panellists highlighted strategies for integrating wetlands into urban planning, addressing plastic pollution, and enhancing water resource management.

The **Wetlands Mitra Engagement Session** on day two further enriched the festival with an in-depth presentation by Mr. Nitin Kaushal from WWF-India, who emphasized the ecological and socio-economic significance of wetlands. He detailed ongoing conservation strategies and highlighted the role of wetlands in water security, biodiversity preservation, and climate adaptation. The session also featured inspiring stories from five grassroots-level Wetland Warriors from different parts of Uttar Pradesh, actively working with WWF-India. These warriors shared their personal journeys, challenges, and successes in protecting local wetlands. Their stories resonated deeply with the audience, motivating 69 new participants to enrol as Wetlands Mitras and commit to championing local wetland conservation efforts.

The closing ceremony marked a celebratory end to the festival, reflecting the collective commitment to wetland conservation. The event was chaired by **Prof. (Dr.) Rajesh Kumar**, Head, Department of Environmental Microbiology, BBAU, and included special addresses by **Dr. U V Kiran**, Professor & Dean, School of Home Science, BBAU, **Dr. Narendra Kumar**, Professor, Department of Environmental Science, BBAU, and **Dr. Rachana Gangwar**, Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication & Journalism, BBAU. **Mr. Yaiphaba Akoijam**, Forestry and Biodiversity Advisor, GIZ, and **Mr. Nitin Kaushal** from WWF-India also addressed the audience.

**Mr. Sabyesachi Bharti**, Deputy Director, CMS VATAVARAN skilfully compared the ceremony and awards presentation. Certificates were distributed to participants of the filmmaking workshop, Wetland Mitras, and winners of the painting competition. The closing remarks acknowledged the efforts of all stakeholders, including students, experts, and volunteers, in making the festival a success. The festival concluded with a call for continued collaboration and action towards preserving wetlands, leaving attendees inspired and motivated to further environmental causes in their respective communities.

The festival attracted 1,172 attendees, including students, researchers, policymakers, and environmental advocates. Social media engagement reached 5.6K, significantly amplifying the festival's impact. The festival reinforced the critical role of wetlands in sustaining ecosystems, managing water resources, and mitigating climate change. It underscored the value of combining science, media, and grassroots action to drive conservation efforts.

In conclusion, the Wetlands for LiFE Film Festival & Forum successfully educated, inspired, and mobilized stakeholders for wetland conservation. By integrating films, workshops, and discussions, it established a strong foundation for continued action, ensuring the preservation of wetlands in Uttar Pradesh and beyond.







## INAUGURAL CEREMONY DAY 1

The **Lucknow Wetlands for LiFE Film Festival & Forum** commenced with a grand inaugural ceremony on **August 1, 2024**, at the **Atal Bihari Vajpayee Auditorium, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow**. The event began with the registration and arrival of esteemed guests, followed by a series of events that set the stage for the three-day festival focused on wetland conservation, biodiversity, and climate resilience.

The inaugural proceedings started with the ceremonial offering of flowers in respect of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar by the Chief Guest, **Honourable Mr Arun Kumar Saxena**, State Minister (Independent Charge), EF&CC Department, Govt. of Uttar Pradesh, and **Prof. Neel Mani Prasad Verma**, Honourable Vice Chancellor of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University. This floral tribute symbolized reverence for the legacy of Babasaheb Ambedkar and highlighted the values of equality, justice, and environmental stewardship.







The '*University Kulgeet*' was performed, instilling a sense of institutional pride and cultural identity. This was followed by a warm and inspiring welcome address delivered by Dr. Vasanti Rao, Director General, Centre for Media Studies (CMS). Dr. Rao highlighted the significant contributions of CMS in advancing environmental awareness and sustainable development through its flagship initiative, CMS VATAVARAN.

In her address, Dr. Rao elaborated on CMS's commitment to fostering meaningful dialogues and actions for sustainability. She stated, "CMS has been at the forefront of promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices for over two decades. Through initiatives like CMS VATAVARAN, we have established a unique platform that combines the power of media, films, and storytelling to drive impactful change."

Dr. Rao spoke about CMS VATAVARAN as Asia's largest environmental film festival and forum, which has showcased over 4,000 films and conducted numerous national and international workshops. She emphasized how these workshops focus on empowering youth, educators, and communities with tools and knowledge to address pressing environmental challenges. "Through CMS VATAVARAN, we aim to inspire both thought and action. Our festivals and programs serve as a catalyst for advocacy, innovation, and partnerships to build a sustainable future," she added.

She further stressed the importance of collaboration in achieving environmental sustainability. "Events like this festival create a space where scientists, policymakers, artists, and the community can come together to learn, share, and act. It is this collective effort that will pave the way for a resilient and sustainable future."

Following this, the dignitaries were felicitated, and an Inaugural Plant-Watering Ceremony was conducted. This symbolic gesture underscored the festival's focus on nurturing sustainability and fostering growth in conservation efforts.





**Mr. Kirtiman Awasthi**, Project Manager & Senior Advisor, Wetlands Management for Biodiversity & Climate Protection, GIZ, delivered a compelling address, setting the context for the festival. He elaborated on GIZ's significant contributions to environmental conservation, particularly through its Wetlands Management for Biodiversity and Climate Protection project, implemented in collaboration with the German Federal Ministry for the Environment.

Mr. Awasthi highlighted the project's primary goals, which include capacity building to empower stakeholders with skills and knowledge for integrated wetland management, network building to foster collaboration across regions, and the development of tools and monitoring systems for effective wetland conservation. He stated, "The Wetlands for LiFE initiative embodies our mission to protect wetlands, which are vital for biodiversity, water security, and climate resilience. Through capacity development, monitoring systems, and innovative tools, we are enabling sustainable management practices."

He also spoke about GIZ's efforts to implement green recovery measures post-COVID-19 and strengthen cooperation networks, ensuring that wetland management strategies align with national priorities. "Our focus remains on Ramsar sites—wetlands of international importance—spanning seven states in India. These wetlands are crucial for India's ecological and food security, but they face threats from pollution, over-exploitation, and climate change," he explained.

Mr. Awasthi emphasized the importance of integrating traditional knowledge with modern technologies for effective wetland management. "This initiative is about creating synergies—between science, policy, and communities. The Wetlands for LiFE Festival is a call to recognize wetlands as ecosystems that sustain life, mitigate climate impacts, and support livelihoods," he remarked.

**Prof. Neel Mani Prasad Verma**, Honourable Vice Chancellor of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, delivered the opening remarks at the inaugural ceremony of the Wetlands for LiFE Film Festival & Forum. Prof. Verma began his address by warmly welcoming the dignitaries, participants, and organizers, expressing his pride in hosting such an impactful event at the university.



Prof. Verma highlighted the critical role that academic institutions play in driving sustainability initiatives through education, research, and community engagement. He emphasized the importance of integrating academic knowledge with grassroots actions to create meaningful solutions for environmental challenges. “Education and research form the foundation for impactful conservation efforts. By combining scientific expertise with local practices, we can build sustainable models for wetland preservation and ecological resilience,” remarked Prof. Verma.

He went on to commend GIZ and CMS for conceptualizing and organizing the festival, lauding their commitment to environmental awareness and capacity-building programs. Prof. Verma acknowledged the longstanding contributions of GIZ in strengthening wetland management through capacity building, monitoring systems, and innovative planning tools. He stated, “The collaborative efforts of GIZ in bringing cutting-edge practices and CMS in utilizing the power of media and storytelling have created a powerful platform for engaging stakeholders. Their focus on empowering youth through education and skill-building is commendable and essential for fostering future environmental leaders.”

Prof. Verma underscored the importance of organizing programs like the Wetlands for LiFE Film Festival, which not only highlight critical environmental issues but also offer practical solutions and tools for conservation. He elaborated, “These programs are not just about discussions; they are about empowering individuals with knowledge, skills, and motivation to take action. Festivals like this inspire participants to look beyond theoretical concepts and apply solutions in the real world, addressing pressing challenges faced by wetlands today.”

He concluded by reaffirming the university’s commitment to sustainability and environmental education. “As hosts, we are proud to support this initiative that not only educates but also inspires meaningful change. It is through such partnerships and programs that we can collectively safeguard our natural resources and build a more resilient future,” remarked Prof. Verma.



**Mr Manoj Singh**, Additional Chief Secretary, EF&CC Department, Government of Uttar Pradesh, delivered a compelling special address at the inaugural ceremony of the Wetlands for LiFE Film Festival & Forum. His address underscored the state government's unwavering commitment to environmental conservation and sustainable development.

Mr Singh began by highlighting the ecological and economic significance of wetlands, describing them as vital ecosystems that sustain biodiversity, regulate water cycles, and provide livelihoods to millions of people. He stressed that wetlands are indispensable to ensuring ecological balance and water security, particularly in a state like Uttar Pradesh, which is home to several critical wetland sites.

In his remarks, Mr Singh acknowledged the growing threats faced by wetlands, including pollution, encroachment, and the impacts of climate change. He emphasized the need for a multi-pronged approach to address these challenges, combining policy interventions, scientific research, and community participation.

Mr Singh commended the collaborative efforts of GIZ and CMS in organizing the festival, which he described as a timely and impactful initiative. He praised the use of films and workshops to raise awareness and equip participants with practical knowledge and skills. "This festival serves as an excellent platform to bring together policymakers, scientists, educators, and youth, enabling them to learn, share, and collaborate for the conservation of wetlands," he said.

Mr Singh also discussed the various initiatives undertaken by the state government to strengthen wetland management, including policies for the restoration and protection of wetlands, promotion of sustainable agriculture practices, and implementation of integrated water resource management strategies. "The government is committed to providing the necessary support and resources to ensure that wetlands remain a sustainable source of ecological and economic stability," he stated.

He concluded by calling for a collective effort to protect wetlands, urging stakeholders to act as custodians of these vital ecosystems. "Wetlands are not just water bodies; they are lifelines for our planet. Through platforms like this festival, we can inspire action and empower communities to preserve these critical habitats," Mr Singh asserted.

Mr Singh's address left the audience motivated and set the tone for an engaging and impactful festival dedicated to wetland conservation and environmental stewardship.





In his keynote address **Mr Ashish Tiwari**, Secretary, EF&CC Department, Government of Uttar Pradesh, delivered an insightful address during the inaugural ceremony of the Wetlands for LiFE Film Festival & Forum. His remarks focused on the critical role of governance, policy frameworks, and strategic interventions in ensuring sustainable wetland management and environmental conservation.

Mr Tiwari began his address by acknowledging the efforts of GIZ and CMS in bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders through this festival. He commended the initiative's focus on using films and workshops as tools for education and awareness, stating, "Platforms like this serve as catalysts for dialogue and action, enabling us to address pressing environmental challenges while engaging communities and experts alike."

Highlighting the significance of wetlands, Mr Tiwari described them as natural infrastructures that support biodiversity, regulate water resources, and mitigate climate change impacts. He emphasized the role of wetlands in securing water supply, preventing floods, and maintaining groundwater levels, particularly in a state like Uttar Pradesh, which has numerous wetlands of ecological importance.

Mr Tiwari stressed the need for integrating scientific approaches with governance mechanisms to protect and restore wetlands. "Effective conservation requires a holistic approach that combines scientific research, community participation, and robust policy frameworks," he said. He added that the state government is actively working to implement strategies that ensure the long-term sustainability of wetlands.

Drawing attention to the challenges posed by pollution, urbanization, and climate change, Mr Tiwari discussed the importance of adopting innovative solutions, including digital monitoring systems and data-driven management practices. "We need to utilize technology and data analytics to monitor and assess the health of wetlands continuously. This will help us design targeted interventions and improve decision-making processes," he explained.

Mr Tiwari also emphasized the role of capacity building and public participation in wetland conservation. He pointed out that involving youth, researchers, and local communities is crucial for achieving long-term conservation goals. "Empowering people with knowledge and tools is the key to fostering stewardship and responsibility for our wetlands," he remarked.

Concluding his address, Mr Tiwari urged all participants to become advocates for wetland conservation and environmental sustainability. “The Wetlands for LiFE initiative is not just about preserving ecosystems; it is about securing our future. Let us work together to protect these lifelines for generations to come,” he said.

Mr Tiwari’s address resonated with the audience, leaving them motivated to actively participate in discussions, workshops, and initiatives aimed at strengthening wetland conservation efforts.

## Inaugural Address by Honourable Mr Arun Kumar Saxena

Honourable Mr Arun Kumar Saxena, State Minister (Independent Charge), Environment, Forest, and Climate Change Department, Government of Uttar Pradesh, delivered a powerful and inspiring inaugural address at the Wetlands for LiFE Film Festival & Forum in Lucknow. His speech set the tone for the three-day event, emphasizing the importance of wetlands in biodiversity conservation and climate protection.

Mr Saxena began his address by welcoming the dignitaries, experts, scholars, students, and members of the public present at the festival. He highlighted the critical role of the festival in fostering awareness and action for wetland conservation. “The Lucknow edition of this festival aims to create a platform where experts and the community can come together to deliberate on the challenges faced by wetlands and explore solutions. We believe that awareness and education are the first steps toward meaningful conservation,” he stated.

He praised the initiative’s approach of using films, discussions, workshops, and competitions to engage diverse audiences. Mr Saxena underscored the transformative power of storytelling through films, noting that visual media can effectively communicate the urgency of environmental issues. “Films have the power to not only inform but also to inspire action. By showcasing films that address critical environmental challenges, we hope to motivate people to take responsibility and contribute to sustainable wetland management,” he said.

Mr Saxena stressed the importance of wetlands as vital ecosystems that support biodiversity, regulate water cycles, and provide livelihoods. He elaborated on the multifaceted benefits of wetlands, describing them as natural buffers against floods, sources of groundwater recharge, and habitats for numerous species. “Wetlands are the lifelines of our planet. Protecting them means protecting our future,” he emphasized.



The minister outlined the government's unwavering commitment to wetland conservation. He highlighted the state's initiatives, including policies to restore degraded wetlands, promote sustainable practices, and integrate wetland management into urban planning. "Our government recognizes the ecological, economic, and cultural value of wetlands. We are committed to implementing policies and programs that prioritize their protection and restoration," he affirmed.

Mr Saxena also emphasized the role of youth engagement in conservation efforts. He encouraged students and young professionals to take an active role in safeguarding the environment. "Youth are not just the future—they are the catalysts for change today. Their energy, creativity, and passion are invaluable assets in our fight to protect wetlands and build a sustainable future," he said.

Highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts, he praised GIZ and CMS for organizing the festival and creating a platform for meaningful dialogue and capacity building. He remarked, "Events like this foster collaboration between government bodies, academic institutions, and civil society. Such partnerships are essential for addressing environmental challenges effectively."

In his concluding remarks, Mr Saxena urged all attendees to actively participate in the festival's activities, including film screenings, panel discussions, and workshops. "This festival is not just about watching films; it is about starting conversations, building networks, and inspiring change. Let us use this opportunity to learn, share, and commit ourselves to the cause of wetland conservation," he stated.

The address by Mr Arun Kumar Saxena left a lasting impression, inspiring attendees to view wetland conservation not just as a policy priority but as a shared responsibility. His call to action resonated with the audience, setting the stage for a productive and impactful festival.

The ceremony concluded with a heartfelt vote of thanks delivered by **Prof. Narendra Kumar**, Organizing Secretary of the event and Head of the Department of Geology, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University. Prof. Kumar extended gratitude to the dignitaries, organizers, and participants, stating, "The success of this festival lies in its ability to inspire action. Through shared knowledge and collaboration, we can secure a sustainable future for our wetlands and communities."

The inaugural ceremony ended with a group photo, capturing the spirit of unity and commitment among all stakeholders. This was followed by high tea, providing an opportunity for informal networking and discussions among participants, experts, and policymakers. The opening ceremony set the tone for an engaging and impactful festival dedicated to environmental stewardship and sustainable development.





## Panel Discussion on Rivers of Life: Wetlands & Climate Resilience

Another attraction of the first day of the festival was the panel discussion titled “**Rivers of Life: Wetlands & Climate Resilience.**” The discussion served as a dynamic platform to explore the ecological, social, and economic significance of wetlands in building climate resilience. The session brought together leading experts, policymakers, scientists, and environmentalists to discuss challenges and solutions related to wetland conservation. It aimed to highlight the interconnectedness of wetlands with biodiversity, water security, and sustainable development, while offering insights into policy frameworks, scientific approaches, and grassroots initiatives. Moderated by Mr. Kirtiman Awasthi, Senior Advisor, GIZ India, the discussion emphasized collaborative approaches, innovative strategies, and the need for community engagement to ensure the long-term preservation and management of wetlands.

**Mr. Kirtiman Awasthi**, the moderator, skilfully conducted the panel discussion, setting a thoughtful and engaging tone for the session. He began by introducing the theme of wetlands and climate resilience, reflecting on his extensive experience working in wetland conservation. He highlighted the work of GIZ under the Wetlands Management for Biodiversity and Climate Protection project, which focuses on capacity-building, monitoring systems, and sustainable planning tools to manage wetlands effectively. “Wetlands are nature’s safeguards, and protecting them requires scientific knowledge, policy alignment, and grassroots involvement,” he remarked.

Mr. Awasthi elaborated on the vision behind the Wetlands for LiFE initiative, emphasizing its role in integrating wetlands into climate resilience strategies. He spoke about the critical functions wetlands perform, from flood mitigation to groundwater recharge, and their importance in maintaining ecological balance. Drawing from his professional journey, he shared insights into practical approaches to conservation and the challenges faced in translating policies into actionable strategies. “Conservation is not just about protecting landscapes; it’s about protecting livelihoods, ecosystems, and future generations,” he said, reinforcing the festival’s mission to inspire impactful actions.

His opening remarks effectively laid the foundation for the panellists, tying together themes of policy, science, and community-driven efforts. He stressed the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, urging participants to view wetlands not only as ecological assets but also as critical resources for climate adaptation. Mr. Awasthi’s ability to bridge diverse perspectives created a cohesive dialogue, ensuring that each panellist’s contribution complemented the overall discussion.



**Mr. Ramveer Tanwar**, widely known as the “Pond Man of India,” captivated the audience with his inspiring journey of grassroots wetland conservation. He began by sharing the personal motivation behind his work, explaining how witnessing the degradation of local water bodies in his village compelled him to take action. “Growing up, I saw ponds and lakes slowly disappearing due to neglect and pollution. I realized that saving these water bodies was not just about conservation; it was about preserving livelihoods, biodiversity, and cultural heritage,” he stated.

Mr. Tanwar detailed how he started his efforts by mobilizing local communities and raising awareness about water conservation. He emphasized the importance of community engagement in his restoration projects, noting that involving people in the process fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. “Conservation begins with awareness. When people understand the value of wetlands, they become the strongest advocates for their protection,” he said.

Sharing insights into his work, Mr. Tanwar revealed that he has successfully cleaned and restored over 80 ponds across multiple states, including Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Gujarat, and Karnataka. He explained the challenges faced in the early days, from convincing communities to overcoming bureaucratic hurdles. “Restoring wetlands is not an easy task—it requires persistence, collaboration, and the willingness to get your hands dirty,” he remarked.

Mr. Tanwar also spoke about founding Se Arth, a social organization dedicated to water conservation, and launching Jal Chaupal, a campaign focused on community dialogues about water issues. Through these initiatives, he has built networks of volunteers and supporters who work collectively to revive and protect water bodies. “Se Arth and Jal Chaupal are not just programs; they are movements to create awareness, engage communities, and implement sustainable water management practices,” he explained.

He shared some of the key lessons learned during his journey, emphasizing the need for patience, consistency, and innovation. “Every pond has its story, and every restoration project teaches us something new—whether it’s about soil dynamics, water recharge, or community behavior,” he said. Mr. Tanwar stressed the importance of using both traditional knowledge and modern techniques to achieve long-term conservation goals.

His address resonated deeply with the audience, particularly students, who asked numerous questions about starting similar initiatives in their own communities. In response, Mr. Tanwar encouraged them to start small, focus on awareness-building, and involve local stakeholders. “Change begins with small steps. Gather a group, identify a water body, and work together to make a difference,” he advised.

## **Dr. Heera Lal, IAS, A visionary for Climate Change Mitigation and Water Resource Management**

Dr Heera Lal, Special Secretary of the Irrigation & Water Resources Department and Chairman of the Greater Sharda Sahayak Command Area Development Authority, Govt. of Uttar Pradesh, delivered a highly engaging and inspiring address during the discussion. Born in Basti, Uttar Pradesh, Dr. Lal is widely recognized as a ground action leader in climate change mitigation and resource management. Drawing from his extensive administrative experience and innovative approaches, he captivated the audience with examples of transformative projects implemented under his leadership.

Dr. Lal began his address by highlighting the critical need for sustainable water management practices and the role of wetlands as natural buffers against climate change. “Water is life, and wetlands are its reservoirs. Protecting these ecosystems is not just about conservation—it’s about securing our future against droughts, floods, and ecological degradation,” he stated.

He shared success stories from his tenure as District Magistrate of Banda, Uttar Pradesh, where he implemented award-winning, people-centric solutions for climate adaptation. One of his most notable achievements was the increase in the groundwater level by 1.34 meters, effectively addressing natural water scarcity through innovative, community-driven water conservation measures. “When people take ownership of their natural resources, sustainable change becomes inevitable,” he remarked.

Dr. Lal also spoke about the creation of an ‘Oxygen Bar’ within an Oxygen Park, which served as both a symbolic and functional step to enhance green spaces and improve air quality. He introduced the ‘Tree Survival’ (Ped Jiyaon) initiative, which significantly increased Banda’s green cover and enriched the local environment. “Trees are not just plants; they are providers of life, oxygen, and balance. Preserving and nurturing them must be a collective responsibility,” he emphasized.





His impactful campaign for a plastic-free environment also drew praise from the audience. Dr. Lal explained how his campaign promoted the adoption of eco-friendly alternatives, including earthen pots, cloth bags, and leaf utensils. “This initiative not only saved the land from degradation but also prevented water pollution, fostering a culture of sustainability,” he stated.

Throughout his address, Dr. Lal outlined his universal framework for climate change mitigation, emphasizing that effective solutions do not require large budgets but rather active public participation and strong leadership. “Low-cost and no-cost models driven by community ownership can transform any village, city, or organization into a sustainable ecosystem,” he added. He encouraged participants to replicate these strategies in their own contexts, calling them scalable, adaptable, and suitable for various geographies and cultures.

Participants were deeply engaged, asking numerous questions about replicating his models in their local areas, combining traditional practices with modern technologies, and addressing water scarcity. Dr. Lal’s responses were practical and motivating, emphasizing that every action—no matter how small—can contribute to larger conservation goals. “Water conservation and wetland restoration are not just government agendas; they are people’s movements,” he concluded, earning applause from the audience.

## **Dr. Prathna TC – Building Urban Water Resilience through Sustainable Solutions:**

Dr. Prathna TC, Manager of Urban Water Resilience at World Resources Institute, India, delivered an insightful address on addressing critical urban water challenges and enhancing wetland resilience through nature-based solutions. With over a decade of experience in water management, including roles with the Govt of NCT of Delhi and UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education, The Netherlands, Dr. Prathna brought a wealth of technical expertise and practical strategies to the discussion.

Dr. Prathna began by explaining the urgency of integrating wetlands into urban water management systems. She emphasized that urban wetlands are not just ecological assets but essential infrastructures that support flood mitigation, water storage, and groundwater recharge. “Urban wetlands act as natural sponges, reducing flood risks while enhancing urban livability. Their conservation must be treated as a priority in city planning,” she stated.

Highlighting her work on decentralized wastewater treatment systems, Dr. Prathna shared examples of using Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to manage wastewater and rejuvenate water bodies. She described how these low-cost, sustainable systems offer dual benefits of water treatment and ecosystem restoration. “Nature-based Solutions are not only effective but also adaptable, allowing us to design systems that are locally relevant and environmentally sustainable,” she noted.

Dr. Prathna also spoke about her experience with the revival of River Yamuna and natural wetlands in urban areas, demonstrating how community-led approaches and scientific innovations can be combined to achieve impactful results. “Reviving urban wetlands requires multi-stakeholder engagement—from governments to academia and local communities. Collaboration is the key to success,” she emphasized.



The discussion further explored the need for water-sensitive urban design and planning (WSUDP), which integrates wetland conservation into citywide water management strategies. Dr. Prathna stressed that urban planning must prioritize ecological preservation as a core principle. “Cities need to shift from conventional planning models to water-sensitive frameworks that recognize the role of wetlands in sustaining water cycles and protecting urban ecosystems,” she said.

Responding to questions from participants, Dr. Prathna elaborated on scalable approaches for rejuvenating stagnant water bodies and improving access to clean water. She provided insights into fabricating decentralized drinking water treatment systems and wastewater reuse models that are both resource-efficient and environmentally sustainable. “Small interventions at the local level can have a ripple effect, leading to large-scale improvements in water quality and resilience,” she remarked.

Dr. Prathna’s talk resonated deeply with students and practitioners in attendance, who expressed appreciation for her practical approach to solving urban water challenges. She concluded her remarks by calling for greater investments in research, capacity-building, and implementation of NbS. “Building urban water resilience requires innovation, collaboration, and a shared vision for sustainability. Wetlands must be at the heart of this effort,” she said.

### **Mr. Aviral Saxena – Innovative Approaches to Waste Management and Wetland Conservation:**

Mr. Aviral Saxena, Environmental Engineer at GIZ India, delivered a compelling address on the importance of managing waste and pollution to protect wetlands. Drawing from his extensive experience in Marine Litter, Circular Economy, Solid Waste Management, and Plastic Waste Management, Mr. Saxena emphasized how localized and scalable strategies can effectively address pollution challenges.

Mr. Saxena began by sharing insights from his work in Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, where he implemented programs to tackle marine litter and solid waste management. He highlighted the success of these models, which integrated circular economy principles and community-driven solutions. “Marine litter is not just an ocean issue; it impacts wetlands and freshwater ecosystems as well. Addressing this challenge requires a systematic approach that combines policy, technology, and behavioral change,” he said.



He described how the learnings from Port Blair are now being adapted for wetland conservation efforts in Uttar Pradesh. “We are leveraging the strategies developed in Port Blair—such as decentralized waste management systems and plastic recovery programs—and applying them to address the pollution problems affecting wetlands in Uttar Pradesh,” he explained.

Mr. Saxena elaborated on the role of circular economy principles in waste management, emphasizing reuse, recycling, and reducing dependency on single-use plastics. “Creating value from waste is key to sustainability. We need to reimagine waste not as a burden but as a resource,” he noted. He detailed examples of community-led clean-up drives and partnerships with local governments that successfully reduced waste entering water bodies.

Highlighting the connection between solid waste management and wetland health, Mr. Saxena pointed out the need for public participation and ownership. “Wetlands cannot be saved by policies alone; they require grassroots action. Engaging local communities to take charge of their environments is fundamental,” he remarked.

Mr. Saxena also discussed the importance of integrating technological tools such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and real-time monitoring systems to track waste patterns and assess the impact of interventions. “Data-driven solutions allow us to monitor progress and make informed decisions, ensuring accountability and long-term results,” he stated.

During the interactive Q&A session, students and participants expressed keen interest in understanding how they could initiate similar waste management programs in their communities. Responding to questions, Mr. Saxena encouraged the adoption of decentralized approaches. “Start small, focus on segregating waste at the source, and build partnerships with local authorities and NGOs to scale up efforts,” he advised.

He concluded by emphasizing the role of education and awareness campaigns in shifting mindsets toward sustainability. “We need to empower people with knowledge and tools to make sustainable choices. Conservation is not just a government responsibility; it is a collective effort,” he said, leaving the audience motivated and inspired.





## **Mr. Nitin Kaushal – Championing Wetland Conservation through WWF-India’s Grassroots Work:**

Mr. Nitin Kaushal, Director - Rivers, Wetlands & Water Policy, WWF-India, delivered an insightful and passionate address focused on WWF-India’s extensive work in wetland conservation across Uttar Pradesh and the country. With years of experience in managing water resources and developing conservation strategies, Mr. Kaushal provided a comprehensive overview of the grassroots efforts being undertaken to rejuvenate wetlands and mitigate the conditions that lead to wetland degradation.

Mr. Kaushal began by emphasizing the fundamental role wetlands play in sustaining biodiversity, recharging groundwater, mitigating climate change, and supporting local livelihoods. “Wetlands are not just water bodies; they are the lifelines of ecosystems, providing water, food, and livelihoods to millions while supporting an incredible diversity of plants and animals,” he stated.

He elaborated on WWF-India’s mission to protect and rejuvenate wetlands, citing specific projects in Uttar Pradesh aimed at restoring degraded wetlands through scientific and community-driven approaches. “We work closely with local communities, governments, and academic institutions to develop models for wetland restoration that are scalable and sustainable,” he said.

Highlighting the importance of integrating wetlands into broader water management strategies, Mr. Kaushal explained how WWF-India’s initiatives focus on sustainable agriculture practices, water resource planning, and flood management. He shared success stories where wetlands have been rejuvenated, leading to improved water quality, increased groundwater recharge, and enhanced biodiversity. “With every wetland rejuvenated, we recharge groundwater, mitigate climate change, and enrich the region’s biodiversity. The ripple effects of this work are profound and far-reaching,” he remarked.

Mr. Kaushal stressed the urgency of conserving wetlands in the face of increasing threats such as pollution, urbanization, and climate change. “Wetland loss is a global crisis, but it’s one we can address effectively through partnerships and grassroots action. Saving our wetlands is not just an environmental priority—it’s an economic, social, and cultural imperative,” he emphasized.

He further discussed WWF-India's work in mobilizing Wetland Mitras, local champions who are trained and equipped to monitor and protect wetlands in their areas. "Building local leadership ensures that conservation efforts are rooted in community ownership, making them more effective and sustainable over time," he said.

Responding to questions during the interactive Q&A session, Mr. Kaushal elaborated on how students and young professionals can contribute to wetland conservation. He encouraged participants to engage in citizen science initiatives, volunteer with local conservation programs, and advocate for policy changes to protect wetlands. "You don't have to be an expert to make a difference. Small actions, whether it's participating in clean-up drives or spreading awareness, can lead to big changes," he advised.

Mr. Kaushal concluded by reinforcing the need for collaboration and sustained efforts. "Wetland conservation cannot be achieved in isolation. It requires partnerships between governments, civil society, academic institutions, and local communities. Together, we can protect these vital ecosystems for future generations," he said, leaving the audience inspired and motivated.

**Dr. Narendra Kumar** from Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University provided insights into the geological and environmental significance of wetlands. "Wetlands preserve ecological history and are indicators of environmental change," he explained. Responding to questions about research applications, Dr. Kumar stressed integrating geology with conservation planning to develop sustainable management practices. "Understanding geological changes is critical to forming long-term strategies for wetland preservation," he said.

### **Dr. Vasanti Rao – The Power of Media and Films in Conservation Advocacy:**

Dr. Vasanti Rao, Director General of CMS VATAVARAN, delivered a compelling address on the role of media, films, and storytelling as powerful tools to inspire action and create awareness about environmental conservation. She emphasized how CMS VATAVARAN, Asia's largest environmental film festival and forum, has effectively used visual storytelling to influence policies, engage communities, and amplify voices for environmental causes.

Dr. Rao began her discussion by explaining the significance of communication strategies in conservation. "Environmental issues often feel distant or complex, but films have the ability to bring these stories closer to people's lives. They evoke emotions, inspire action, and make abstract challenges relatable," she stated. Highlighting CMS VATAVARAN's legacy, she noted that the initiative has showcased over 4,000 films and engaged millions of viewers worldwide.

Dr. Rao elaborated on how CMS VATAVARAN's initiatives go beyond film screenings. She highlighted the festival's workshops, interactive discussions, and partnerships with educational institutions, NGOs, and government bodies as key drivers of its impact. "Our goal is not just to inform but to create platforms for dialogue, capacity-building, and community engagement," she said.



She discussed specific case studies where films showcased at CMS VATAVARAN had sparked grassroots movements, influenced local policies, and mobilized communities to protect natural resources. “Films act as catalysts for behavioral change. They not only raise awareness but also build networks of motivated individuals ready to act,” she emphasized.

Dr. Rao also spoke about the integration of filmmaking into educational programs, empowering youth to use visual media to advocate for conservation. “Young minds are incredibly creative and passionate. We need to harness this energy by equipping them with tools like impact filmmaking to address pressing environmental issues,” she remarked.

She further highlighted CMS’s collaboration with stakeholders, including governments and international organizations, to scale up conservation communication efforts. She pointed out that storytelling through films has a universal appeal, making it easier to reach diverse audiences and address barriers to environmental understanding. “The key is to simplify complex messages without losing depth, ensuring that everyone—whether in urban centers or rural areas—can connect with the cause,” she said.

Responding to questions from participants about using films as advocacy tools, Dr. Rao shared practical strategies for impactful storytelling. She encouraged participants to focus on local stories, use personal narratives, and highlight solutions rather than just problems. “A compelling story can shift perspectives and drive change. Focus on hope and possibilities,” she advised.

In her concluding remarks, Dr. Rao called for stronger partnerships between media, civil society, and government institutions to amplify conservation efforts. “The challenges we face are immense, but by working together and leveraging the power of media, we can inspire collective action and ensure a sustainable future for wetlands and ecosystems,” she stated.



## Interactive Q&A Session – A Platform for Deeper Engagement:

The Q&A session following the panel discussion proved to be one of the highlights of the event, with participants actively engaging with panelists to delve deeper into wetland conservation strategies, challenges, and solutions. The audience, comprising students, researchers, policymakers, and environmentalists, posed thought-provoking questions, showcasing their keen interest in contributing to conservation efforts.

Dr. Heera Lal received multiple questions about replicating his successful models in other regions. Participants sought insights into his low-cost, high-impact water conservation frameworks and how communities can be mobilized effectively. In response, Dr. Lal emphasized the importance of community participation and integrating traditional practices with modern scientific methods. “Start by engaging with the people directly impacted by wetland loss. Once they see the benefits, their support and involvement grow organically,” he advised. He also elaborated on the importance of sustained awareness campaigns and partnerships with local governments to ensure long-term success.

Mr. Ramveer Tanwar’s grassroots initiatives sparked considerable interest, especially among students and young professionals eager to initiate similar projects in their communities. He was asked about overcoming bureaucratic challenges and sustaining community enthusiasm. Mr. Tanwar shared practical tips, including starting with small wins, such as cleaning a pond or conducting awareness drives, and gradually building momentum. “When people see results—cleaner water, restored greenery—they become advocates and contributors to the cause,” he explained.

Dr. Prathna TC received questions related to urban wetlands and integrating wetland preservation into city planning. Attendees were curious about the implementation of nature-based solutions and how decentralized water management systems could be established in urban settings. She explained that sustainable urban planning requires a paradigm shift where wetlands are treated as assets rather than obstacles. “Urban designs must include wetlands as critical infrastructure that not only store water but also enhance the livability of cities,” she emphasized.



Mr. Aviral Saxena's presentation on waste management and pollution control generated discussions about practical applications of his models. Several participants asked about adapting the strategies he implemented in Port Blair to inland wetlands in Uttar Pradesh. Mr. Saxena emphasized the role of circular economy principles and waste segregation at the source. "Technology, awareness, and localized solutions can transform how we manage waste and protect wetlands," he said. He encouraged attendees to initiate cleanup drives and partner with municipalities for sustainable waste management programs.

Mr. Nitin Kaushal fielded questions about WWF-India's on-ground initiatives and the role of Wetland Mitras in conservation efforts. Students were particularly interested in how they could get involved in WWF's programs and contribute to wetland restoration. Mr. Kaushal explained the process of enrolling as a Wetland Mitra and highlighted the need for citizen science initiatives to monitor wetland health. "You can be the eyes and ears of wetland conservation. Collect data, share observations, and create awareness within your community," he advised.

Dr. Vasanti Rao's insights into using films and media for advocacy inspired questions about creating impactful visual narratives. Participants wanted to know how they could leverage storytelling to address local environmental issues. Dr. Rao shared tips on effective storytelling, including focusing on relatable human experiences, showcasing solutions, and building emotional connections. "A good story doesn't just inform—it inspires action and builds movements," she noted.

The session also featured questions about integrating policies and governance frameworks into conservation strategies. Panelists stressed the need for collaborative efforts between governments, NGOs, and academic institutions, emphasizing that multi-stakeholder partnerships are critical for effective wetland management.



## Key Takeaways from the Q&A Session:

- Community participation and ownership are vital for long-term conservation success.
- Nature-based solutions and decentralized systems can address urban water challenges effectively.
- Grassroots approaches, when combined with scientific research, create scalable and sustainable models.
- Circular economy principles can transform waste management and reduce pollution in wetlands.
- Media and storytelling are powerful tools to influence behavior and policy decisions.

The Q&A session left participants feeling inspired, informed, and empowered to take concrete steps toward wetland conservation. The enthusiastic interaction highlighted the importance of involving youth, leveraging technology, and building partnerships to protect wetlands and ensure water security.

The session ended with a consensus on the need for sustained collaboration among governments, academic institutions, NGOs, and local communities to protect wetlands. Panelists and attendees agreed that wetland conservation must be treated as a shared responsibility, requiring proactive strategies and collective action.

The panel discussion served as a cornerstone for the festival, leaving attendees with valuable insights, practical strategies, and inspiration to contribute to wetland conservation efforts actively.







## Film Screenings:

The first day of the Lucknow Film Festival began with an inspiring line up of impactful films focused on wetland conservation, cultural significance, and environmental challenges. The screenings highlighted pressing environmental issues and celebrated success stories of conservation efforts. Each film provided a unique perspective, combining education, visual storytelling, and emotional narratives to emphasize the importance of preserving wetlands and natural ecosystems.

The screening session was highly interactive, with Ms. Vasanti Rao and Mr. Sabyasachi Bharti engaging with the audience throughout the event. After each film, a dedicated Q&A session allowed participants to share reflections, ask questions, and discuss ideas, creating an enriching learning experience for all attendees.

The first film showcased the ecological richness and biodiversity of the Dhanauri Wetlands and its association with the Sarus Crane. It highlighted the importance of designating the area as a Ramsar site and emphasized the need for conservation to protect this critical habitat. The film captured the beauty of the wetlands while shedding light on the threats posed by urban encroachment, pollution, and habitat destruction. Audience members were deeply moved by the visuals and the urgent call to action, leading to lively discussions about policies and conservation strategies.

The second film provided a thought-provoking portrayal of the environmental and human challenges faced by the Jharia region, which is known for its coal mines. It addressed the ecological destruction caused by mining and its impact on local communities, sparking conversations about balancing industrial growth with environmental sustainability. The audience engaged actively in the post-screening discussion, reflecting on the role of grassroots efforts in mitigating environmental damage and adopting sustainable practices.

The third film explored the spiritual and cultural significance of the Ganges River while addressing its environmental degradation. It juxtaposed rituals of purification and religious ceremonies with alarming levels of pollution and industrial waste, offering a powerful commentary on the paradox of the sacred river's exploitation. The audience was captivated by the narrative and visuals, prompting questions about reconciling spiritual reverence with ecological responsibility. Discussions focused on the need for stronger governance, waste management systems, and community-led conservation initiatives.

The final film of the day provided an insightful look into the cultural and ecological importance of Renuka Wetland. It celebrated the wetland's heritage value and emphasized the need for sustainable management practices to protect it from emerging threats. Despite its brief runtime, the film left a lasting impression, inspiring participants to explore ways to integrate cultural narratives into conservation strategies. The interactive Q&A session that followed focused on balancing development with preservation and fostering community involvement in conservation.

## **Audience Reactions and Engagement:**

The interactive screenings created a platform for dialogue, learning, and reflection. Ms. Vasanti Rao and Mr. Sabyesachi Bharti facilitated meaningful discussions that encouraged participants to think critically about the challenges and solutions presented in the films. The audience's curiosity and enthusiasm were evident in the range of questions and ideas shared, highlighting the role of films in sparking action-oriented conversations about conservation.

Day 1 of the Lucknow Film Festival successfully set the tone for the event, blending education, advocacy, and inspiration through impactful films. The interactive format and engaging discussions enriched the experience, leaving participants empowered to champion conservation efforts and implement sustainable practices in their own communities.

## **DAY 2**

The second day of the Lucknow Film Festival unfolded as a vibrant celebration of environmental awareness, blending visual storytelling, interactive discussions, and creative expression. The day was primarily dedicated to impactful film screenings, audience engagement sessions, and an inspiring painting competition that drew participation from 34 university students. The combination of these activities created a multifaceted platform to highlight the importance of wetlands conservation and fostered deep connections between art, education, and environmental action.

The film screenings featured compelling narratives focusing on wetland conservation, pollution management, and sustainable practices. Films like "Kalichaat," "Waste Management at Renuka Wetland," and "Pong Dam: A Safe Haven for Migratory Birds" set the tone for the day, addressing ecological challenges and showcasing solutions through storytelling. Each screening was followed by interactive discussions led by Mr. Sabyesachi Bharti, Deputy Director of CMS, who facilitated meaningful conversations with the audience. These sessions provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on the themes presented, ask questions, and explore practical approaches to conservation. Mr. Bharti skilfully bridged the gap between the visuals on screen and real-world issues, encouraging attendees to draw connections between global challenges and local contexts. The audience, comprising students, researchers, and conservationists, showed keen interest in topics such as wetland restoration, policy frameworks, and sustainable development. Discussions were particularly lively as participants shared their observations and explored ways to implement the lessons learned in their own communities.



## Painting competition

The highlight of the day was the painting competition, which transformed the festival into a hub of artistic expression and creativity. Held in the Convention Room of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Auditorium, the competition invited 34 university students to interpret themes related to wetlands and water conservation through art. The participants poured their creativity onto canvas, illustrating diverse perspectives on biodiversity, climate resilience, and human-wetland relationships. The room buzzed with energy as students sketched, painted, and brought their ideas to life, using vibrant colors and imaginative designs to capture the essence of wetland ecosystems.

The paintings depicted themes ranging from serene landscapes and thriving birdlife to the threats of pollution and degradation. Many artworks portrayed wetlands as lifelines for biodiversity, emphasizing their role in sustaining life and providing natural defenses against climate change. Others reflected on human responsibility, illustrating the interconnectedness between communities and ecosystems. Judges and attendees were deeply impressed by the depth and originality displayed in the paintings, which highlighted not only artistic talent but also an understanding of ecological challenges. Mr. Sabyesachi Bharti engaged with participants throughout the competition, encouraging them to think about the impact of their artwork in raising awareness. He emphasized that art has the power to convey complex messages in relatable ways, inspiring action and advocacy.

The painting competition concluded with a vibrant display of the artworks, offering attendees a visual journey through the students' interpretations of wetlands and conservation themes. The event served as a reminder that art and storytelling are powerful tools for environmental advocacy, capable of capturing attention and inspiring change. The competition also provided a platform for students to connect emotionally with the cause, transforming abstract environmental concepts into personal reflections.

The day ended on a high note, with participants expressing appreciation for the blend of education, creativity, and dialogue. The film screenings and interactive sessions demonstrated the effectiveness of visual media in raising awareness, while the painting competition added a unique dimension by encouraging artistic engagement with conservation issues. Attendees left the festival motivated and inspired, carrying with them ideas, connections, and a renewed commitment to protecting wetlands and promoting sustainability.





# DAY 3

## Film Screening:

The third and final day of the Lucknow Film Festival provided an impactful conclusion to three days of thought-provoking discussions, creative expressions, and meaningful reflections on wetland conservation. The day focused on showcasing a series of compelling films that addressed the challenges, solutions, and inspiring stories related to water conservation, wetland restoration, and sustainable practices. The interactive discussions led by Mr. Sabyasachi Bharti after each screening enriched the experience, providing audiences with an opportunity to explore ideas, share insights, and raise questions about pressing environmental issues.

The day began with the screening of “Rain Man,” which narrated the inspiring journey of a grassroots water conservationist who revived dying water bodies in rural India. The film highlighted the transformative impact of small-scale interventions and community-driven initiatives, demonstrating how ordinary individuals can become catalysts for change. The audience responded enthusiastically, asking questions about the methods used and how similar models could be replicated in their own regions.

The next film, “Renuka Wetland: A Step Towards Organic Farming,” focused on sustainable agricultural practices and their role in protecting wetlands. It showcased how farmers near Renuka Wetland adopted organic farming techniques to minimize chemical runoff and preserve the ecological balance of the area.

The screening continued with “Wings & Wetlands - A Story of Migration,” which provided a visually stunning exploration of the journeys undertaken by migratory birds and their reliance on wetlands as stopover points. The film celebrated the beauty and importance of wetlands as habitats for avian species while also highlighting the threats posed by habitat loss and climate change. Audience members, particularly students, were captivated by the cinematography and the scientific insights presented in the film. The interactive session focused on the role of wetlands in supporting biodiversity and maintaining ecological balance, with participants discussing measures for habitat protection and community involvement in monitoring bird populations.

The fourth film, “Sundarbans: Rising Water, Ebbing Life,” delved into the challenges faced by the Sundarbans, one of the world’s largest and most fragile mangrove ecosystems. The documentary highlighted the dual threats of rising sea levels and human activities, showcasing the struggles of local communities adapting to a changing environment. The audience was deeply moved by the stories of resilience and survival depicted in the film.

The final film of the festival, “Water Warrior,” paid tribute to the efforts of individuals and communities working tirelessly to combat water scarcity and restore degraded water bodies. It highlighted inspiring stories of leadership and action, demonstrating the power of collective effort in overcoming environmental crises.

Throughout the day, the interactive sessions facilitated by Mr. Bharti provided a dynamic platform for learning, debate, and reflection. The discussions not only unpacked the themes presented in the films but also connected them to broader issues of policy, governance, and community engagement. Participants were encouraged to take ownership of conservation efforts and leverage the knowledge gained during the festival to create meaningful change.



## Wetland Mitras Orientation and Experience Sharing – A Special Session

The post-lunch session on Day 3 of the Lucknow Film Festival was a captivating and insightful event titled “Wetland Mitras Orientation and Experience Sharing.” Organized by WWF-India and led by Mr. Nitin Kaushal, Director - Rivers, Wetlands & Water Policy, WWF-India, the session brought together grassroots conservationists, environmental enthusiasts, and young students to explore the vital role of wetlands and their preservation. The session proved to be highly engaging, leaving the audience informed, inspired, and motivated.

Mr. Nitin Kaushal opened the session with an informative and visually stimulating PowerPoint presentation on wetlands, their ecological significance, and their critical role in biodiversity conservation. His presentation explored the various types of wetlands, their functions, and the threats they face due to climate change, pollution, and human interference. Mr. Kaushal emphasized the need for wetland conservation as a pillar of sustainable development and ecological stability. He underscored the interdependence between wetlands, water security, and local livelihoods, stressing that conserving wetlands is essential for mitigating climate change impacts, maintaining water cycles, and supporting rich biodiversity.

The interactive presentation captivated the young audience, who demonstrated their curiosity and enthusiasm through thought-provoking questions during the Q&A session. Mr. Kaushal’s responses provided clarity and encouraged participants to think critically about the importance of wetlands and the role they could play as Wetland Mitras in preserving these natural resources. The session highlighted WWF-India’s ongoing efforts in mobilizing communities and empowering local champions to protect and restore wetlands.

Following the presentation, the session transitioned into an experience-sharing platform featuring seven grassroots wetland conservationists—fondly referred to as “Wetland Warriors.” Among the speakers were Mr. Tejpal Singh, Mr. Ram Bahadur, Mr. Cheda Lal, Mr. Omprakash, and Mr. Gireesh Singh, who represented different regions of Uttar Pradesh. Each speaker shared compelling stories of resilience, community-driven efforts, and innovative approaches to wetland conservation.



Their experiences emphasized the importance of perseverance, collaboration, and innovation in addressing wetland-related challenges. The stories also showcased how these warriors leveraged limited resources and strong community ties to achieve remarkable results in wetland restoration. Each speaker highlighted the challenges they faced—ranging from funding constraints to lack of awareness—and shared practical strategies for overcoming them.

The session concluded with reflections on the importance of empowering local communities and nurturing grassroots leadership to safeguard wetlands. The audience was encouraged to take inspiration from the Wetland Warriors and explore ways to contribute to wetland conservation efforts in their own communities.

The session served as a reminder that sustainable wetland management is not just the responsibility of governments and large organizations but also a collective effort driven by local stewards and community involvement. Attendees left the session feeling empowered, equipped with new ideas, and inspired by the stories of perseverance and success shared by the Wetland Warriors.

The “Wetland Mitras Orientation and Experience Sharing” session was a highlight of the festival, fostering knowledge exchange and inspiring future conservation leaders. It reinforced the idea that local champions and grassroots efforts are at the heart of wetland preservation, and through collaboration, awareness, and action, these ecosystems can be protected for generations to come.





## MoJo Filmmaking Workshop: Crafting Impactful Stories for Conservation

The Lucknow Film Festival hosted a three-day Mobile Journalism (MoJo) Training Workshop, an intensive program aimed at equipping participants with the skills to create impactful social impact films. Conducted as part of the festival's focus on amplifying environmental awareness, the training combined theory, hands-on practice, and storytelling techniques to inspire participants to tell meaningful stories about wetland conservation and sustainability.

The workshop commenced on Day 1 with an introductory session led by Mr. Ritesh Taksande, a renowned faculty member from the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII). He provided participants with a foundation in the art of mobile filmmaking, covering topics such as storyboarding, visual composition, and editing techniques. The session emphasized the power of mobile devices as accessible and versatile tools for storytelling. Mr. Taksande demonstrated how technology can democratize filmmaking and empower individuals to create narratives that resonate deeply with audiences.

Over the course of the three days, participants delved into scriptwriting, production planning, filming techniques, and post-production processes. The workshop included practical exercises where participants filmed short sequences, conducted interviews, and captured visual elements that complemented their narratives. This hands-on approach allowed participants to immediately apply the lessons learned, receiving feedback and tips from trainers to refine their work.

A total of 55 participants, including university students, conservation enthusiasts, and young storytellers, took part in the MoJo training. Their enthusiasm and creativity were evident as they collaborated in teams to conceptualize and produce films focused on wetlands, water conservation, and community efforts. The workshop provided not only technical skills but also insights into the power of visual media to influence opinions, drive advocacy, and inspire action.

The final day of the festival featured a special screening of 11 short films produced by the participants. These films explored themes such as pollution, biodiversity, and community-driven conservation efforts. The screening drew widespread appreciation from the audience, with viewers praising the quality, creativity, and emotional impact of the films. The participants' ability to translate complex environmental issues into relatable and visually compelling stories was particularly lauded.

Participants also shared their experiences in video interviews recorded during the festival. They expressed gratitude for the training and emphasized how it had boosted their confidence to create impactful visual content. Many remarked on the value of learning practical filmmaking skills and how they planned to use their newfound expertise to advocate for social and environmental causes.

One participant commented, "This training has shown me how powerful storytelling can be in driving change. I never thought I could make a film, but now I feel equipped to share stories that matter." Another participant stated, "The workshop was not just about filmmaking; it was about finding our voice to speak up for wetlands and the environment."



The trainers highlighted the participants' enthusiasm and adaptability, noting how quickly they grasped key concepts and applied them creatively. They also emphasized the importance of mobile journalism as a tool for citizen engagement, encouraging participants to continue using their skills to document and promote conservation efforts.

The success of the MoJo training underscored the festival's commitment to empowering youth and emerging filmmakers to become advocates for sustainability. It demonstrated that storytelling, when combined with technology and passion, can be a catalyst for awareness and change. The screening of the participants' films was a testament to their dedication and talent, leaving a lasting impression on the audience and reinforcing the role of media in environmental advocacy.

The MoJo Training Workshop at the Lucknow Film Festival proved to be a transformative experience for participants, equipping them with the skills and confidence to create films that inspire action. The 11 films produced during the workshop stand as a powerful reminder of the impact that visual storytelling can have in raising awareness and mobilizing communities for wetland conservation. As participants left the festival, they carried with them not only technical skills but also a sense of purpose to continue their journey as storytellers and environmental advocates.



## The Closing & Valedictory Ceremony

The closing ceremony of the Lucknow Film Festival marked a celebratory and inspiring conclusion to three days of impactful discussions, creative expression, and educational engagement focused on wetland conservation. The event served as a culmination of efforts aimed at fostering awareness, building capacity, and motivating collective action towards preserving wetlands. It brought together participants, organizers, and stakeholders to reflect on the festival's achievements and reinforce commitments to future conservation efforts.

The ceremony was chaired by **Prof. (Dr.) Rajesh Kumar**, Head, Department of Environmental Microbiology, BBAU, who highlighted the importance of integrating scientific research, education, and community engagement in wetland conservation. He commended the festival's efforts in providing a platform for dialogue and action, emphasizing the role of academic institutions in advancing environmental sustainability.

Special addresses were delivered by **Dr. U V Kiran**, Professor & Dean, School of Home Science, BBAU, who applauded the participants for their dedication and creativity in promoting environmental awareness through films and art. **Dr. Narendra Kumar**, Professor, Department of Environmental Science, BBAU, emphasized the need for continued research and policy advocacy to protect wetlands. **Dr. Rachana Gangwar**, Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication & Journalism, BBAU, praised the use of media and storytelling as effective tools for education and advocacy. She highlighted the significance of empowering youth and local communities to lead conservation initiatives.

Adding further insights, **Mr. Yaiphaba Akoijam**, Forestry and Biodiversity Advisor, GIZ, spoke about the importance of partnerships in achieving sustainable conservation goals. He encouraged participants to leverage the skills and knowledge gained during the festival to contribute meaningfully to environmental protection efforts. **Mr. Nitin Kaushal** from WWF-India shared reflections on the festival's outcomes, particularly the successful enrolment of 69 new Wetland Mitras. He applauded their commitment to protecting wetlands and underscored the need for grassroots action to sustain conservation efforts.

A significant highlight of the closing ceremony was the **oath-taking ceremony for the 69 newly enrolled Wetland Mitras**. The pledge symbolized their dedication to safeguarding wetlands and promoting sustainable practices within their communities. The audience applauded their resolve, recognizing them as ambassadors of change and champions of conservation.

The awards and certificate distribution segment was a moment of pride and celebration. Certificates were awarded to the participants of the Mobile Journalism (MoJo) Training Workshop, who successfully created 11 impactful films on social and environmental themes. Their work received widespread appreciation for its creativity and message-driven approach. Certificates were also distributed to the Wetland Mitras, acknowledging their role as local custodians of wetland ecosystems.





The winners of the painting competition were honoured for their outstanding artistic interpretations of wetland conservation. The artworks displayed during the festival stood as visual reminders of the ecological and cultural significance of wetlands, demonstrating the power of art in driving awareness and action.

Mr. Sabyasachi Bharti, Deputy Director, CMS VATAVARAN, skilfully compared the ceremony and awards presentation, ensuring a seamless flow of events while maintaining an atmosphere of celebration and inspiration. His remarks highlighted the collaborative spirit that defined the festival and the dedication of all participants, stakeholders, and organizers in making it a resounding success.

In his closing remarks, Mr. Bharti acknowledged the collective efforts of students, experts, volunteers, and organizations involved in the festival. He emphasized the need for sustained collaboration and urged participants to carry forward the momentum generated during the festival into their respective communities and fields of work.

The ceremony concluded with heartfelt gratitude extended to the organizing team, sponsors, and partners for their support in bringing the festival to life. Attendees left the event feeling inspired and motivated, with renewed commitment to champion environmental causes and protect wetlands for future generations.

The closing ceremony encapsulated the spirit of the Lucknow Film Festival—a celebration of creativity, collaboration, and conservation. It reinforced the importance of partnerships, education, and grassroots action in addressing environmental challenges. With the enrollment of 69 Wetland Mitras and the recognition of impactful contributions through awards and certificates, the festival not only raised awareness but also laid the foundation for sustained efforts in wetland conservation.





## Closing Reflection – Lucknow Film Festival: Wetlands for LiFE

The Lucknow Film Festival – Wetlands for LiFE concluded on a note of inspiration and purpose, leaving participants motivated to champion wetland conservation. Over three days, the festival successfully combined visual storytelling, expert discussions, and hands-on training, offering a platform for dialogue, creativity, and action.

The festival stood out for its ability to engage diverse voices—from grassroots conservationists to students and academics—demonstrating the power of collaboration in addressing environmental challenges. The enrolment of 69 new Wetland Mitras and the screening of impactful films created during the MoJo workshop underscored the event's success in mobilizing individuals and fostering a culture of responsibility.

Creative expressions like the painting competition and the exchange of ideas during experience-sharing sessions highlighted the importance of community-driven conservation efforts. The films and discussions reminded attendees that wetlands are not just ecological resources but lifelines that demand immediate and sustained protection.

As the festival drew to a close, it left behind a legacy of inspiration, collaboration, and action. Participants departed with renewed energy, armed with knowledge and tools to promote sustainability and protect wetlands, ensuring their preservation for future generations.

## Challenges and Insights

The Lucknow Film Festival – Wetlands for LiFE was a resounding success, bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders, including students, conservationists, academics, and grassroots leaders. However, like any large-scale event, the festival encountered several challenges that provided valuable insights for future planning and execution.

One of the key challenges faced was the weather. Heavy rainfall during the festival posed logistical difficulties, affecting travel and attendance, especially for participants commuting from surrounding areas. Despite these hurdles, the dedication of attendees and organizers ensured that sessions continued seamlessly, demonstrating the commitment of everyone involved.



Another significant challenge was the distance of the venue from the main town. Located away from central urban areas, the venue posed accessibility issues, particularly for participants reliant on public transportation. While the serene and academic environment of the university contributed to the festival's atmosphere, future events may benefit from improved transportation arrangements or alternate locations to ensure easier accessibility.

Timing also posed an obstacle, as the festival coincided with the start of a new academic session in colleges and universities. This limited participation from several institutions that were still settling into their academic schedules. Additionally, ongoing unit tests in schools resulted in fewer registrations and lower attendance from younger students, who are often a critical demographic for fostering long-term environmental awareness.

Despite these challenges, the festival demonstrated resilience and adaptability. The interactive sessions, hands-on workshops, and creative competitions were able to sustain high levels of engagement among those who attended. The festival's success highlighted the importance of pre-event planning and closer coordination with academic institutions to address scheduling conflicts in the future.

The insights gained from this experience will be instrumental in shaping future editions of the festival, enabling organizers to anticipate potential challenges and implement solutions that further enhance participation, accessibility, and impact. The challenges faced during the Lucknow Film Festival ultimately reinforced the importance of community-driven efforts and adaptability in advancing environmental education and advocacy.

## **Conclusion – A Celebration of Conservation**

The Lucknow Film Festival – Wetlands for LiFE concluded as a landmark event that blended education, creativity, and community engagement to promote wetland conservation and sustainability. Over three enriching days, the festival brought together a dynamic mix of experts, grassroots conservationists, students, and the general public, creating a space for meaningful dialogue and action-oriented initiatives. Through film screenings, panel discussions, interactive workshops, and creative competitions, the festival effectively highlighted the ecological, social, and cultural significance of wetlands.

The festival's success was anchored in its diverse programming, which included impactful films that explored themes of biodiversity, climate resilience, water conservation, and sustainable practices. These screenings, combined with post-film discussions, sparked intellectual curiosity and inspired participants to reflect on the urgent need for preserving wetlands. The Mobile Journalism (MoJo) Training was another major highlight, empowering 55 participants with the skills to create 11 compelling social impact films that resonated with audiences and underscored the power of visual storytelling in advocacy.

The painting competition provided a creative outlet for 34 university students, enabling them to visually interpret and communicate the importance of wetland conservation. Their vibrant and thought-provoking artworks not only showcased talent but also demonstrated the emotional connection young minds have with nature and their ability to advocate for its protection.





A pivotal component of the festival was the Wetland Mitras Orientation and Experience Sharing session, which saw the enrolment of 69 new Wetland Mitras who took an oath to protect and preserve wetlands. Their commitment, along with inspiring stories shared by grassroots warriors, underscored the role of local communities as stewards of conservation efforts. The interactive sessions provided insights into real-world challenges and solutions, emphasizing that sustainable change is driven by collective efforts.

The closing ceremony provided a fitting end to the festival, celebrating achievements and recognizing the contributions of participants. Awards and certificates were distributed to filmmaking workshop participants, Wetland Mitras, and painting competition winners, reinforcing the festival's objective of acknowledging and empowering change-makers. The presence of esteemed guests and experts during the ceremony added gravitas to the event, leaving attendees with a renewed sense of purpose and inspiration.

Despite facing challenges such as adverse weather conditions, accessibility issues due to the venue's distance from the main town, and academic schedules affecting participation, the festival demonstrated resilience and adaptability. These challenges offered valuable insights for future editions, emphasizing the need for improved logistical planning and better alignment with institutional calendars.

The Lucknow Film Festival successfully created an inclusive platform for learning, collaboration, and action, proving that conservation efforts are most effective when driven by education, creativity, and community participation. It reinforced the message that wetlands are not only ecological treasures but also vital lifelines for climate resilience, biodiversity, and sustainable development. The festival's legacy lies in the connections it fostered, the awareness it raised, and the commitment it inspired among participants.



As the festival came to a close, it left behind a strong foundation for future initiatives, serving as a catalyst for ongoing advocacy and action. The participants departed as ambassadors of change, equipped with knowledge, skills, and a shared vision to safeguard wetlands and promote sustainability. The festival's impact will continue to echo in the efforts of the Wetland Mitras, the stories captured through films, and the dialogues initiated during the sessions, ensuring that the message of wetland conservation endures and grows stronger.

## Social Media

In today's digital era, social media plays a crucial role in disseminating information and engaging audiences. Recognizing this, the Festival leveraged social media's power for extensive promotion. The festival's presence was significantly amplified across various social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Facebook, with its vast user base, served as the primary platform for our digital campaign. The festival's promotional activities on Facebook and its affiliate, Instagram, were highly effective. We employed a range of engaging content, including festival promos and regular updates, to capture the audience's interest.

The impact of these efforts was evident in the substantial organic reach achieved during the festival. Without any paid promotions, our posts on **Facebook alone reached over 5.6K members and 737 members on Instagram**. This remarkable organic reach underscores the festival's relevance and the resonance of its theme with the online community. The success of our social media campaign played a significant role in enhancing the festival's visibility and engagement, contributing to its overall success.





The Festival and Forum garnered substantial media attention, with extensive coverage across various channels. The event was featured prominently in several newspaper dailies, which provided detailed reports on the festival's activities and programs. The collective media coverage across print, television, and digital platforms significantly contributed to raising awareness about the festival's objectives and successfully disseminated its key messages to a diverse audience.

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## Promotional Materials

The Lucknow Festival was extensively promoted through various channels, including eye-catching posters, banners, and a detailed program schedule. The organizers designed and strategically placed these promotional materials across multiple venues and locations to reach a broader audience.

The festival posters and banners were designed in a way that effectively conveyed the message of environmental conservation and highlighted the importance of the event. The bright and vivid colours used in the designs not only caught the attention of passer-by but also created a sense of excitement and anticipation among the audience.

Additionally, the program schedule for the festival was thoughtfully designed to include a diverse range of events and discussions that catered to different interests and age groups. The schedule featured a line-up of renowned speakers, interactive workshops, and engaging activities, making it an ideal platform for learning and sharing knowledge about environmental issues.

Through the promotion of the festival, including the use of banners, posters, and program schedules, the organizers successfully spread the word about the event to a vast audience. This led to a heightened level of awareness and anticipation for the festival, ultimately contributing to its success in generating interest and involvement in environmental conservation efforts.

