



**“Wetlands: The Heartbeat of Biodiversity”**

**A REPORT**

# **Framing Wetlands:**

## **Wetlands for LiFE: Regional Media Consultation**

**September 13 – 14, 2024 | Regenta Central, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh**



## #write4wetlands

Supported by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, GOI, and GIZ as part of the BMUV-IKI Project on Wetlands Management for Biodiversity and Climate Protection.

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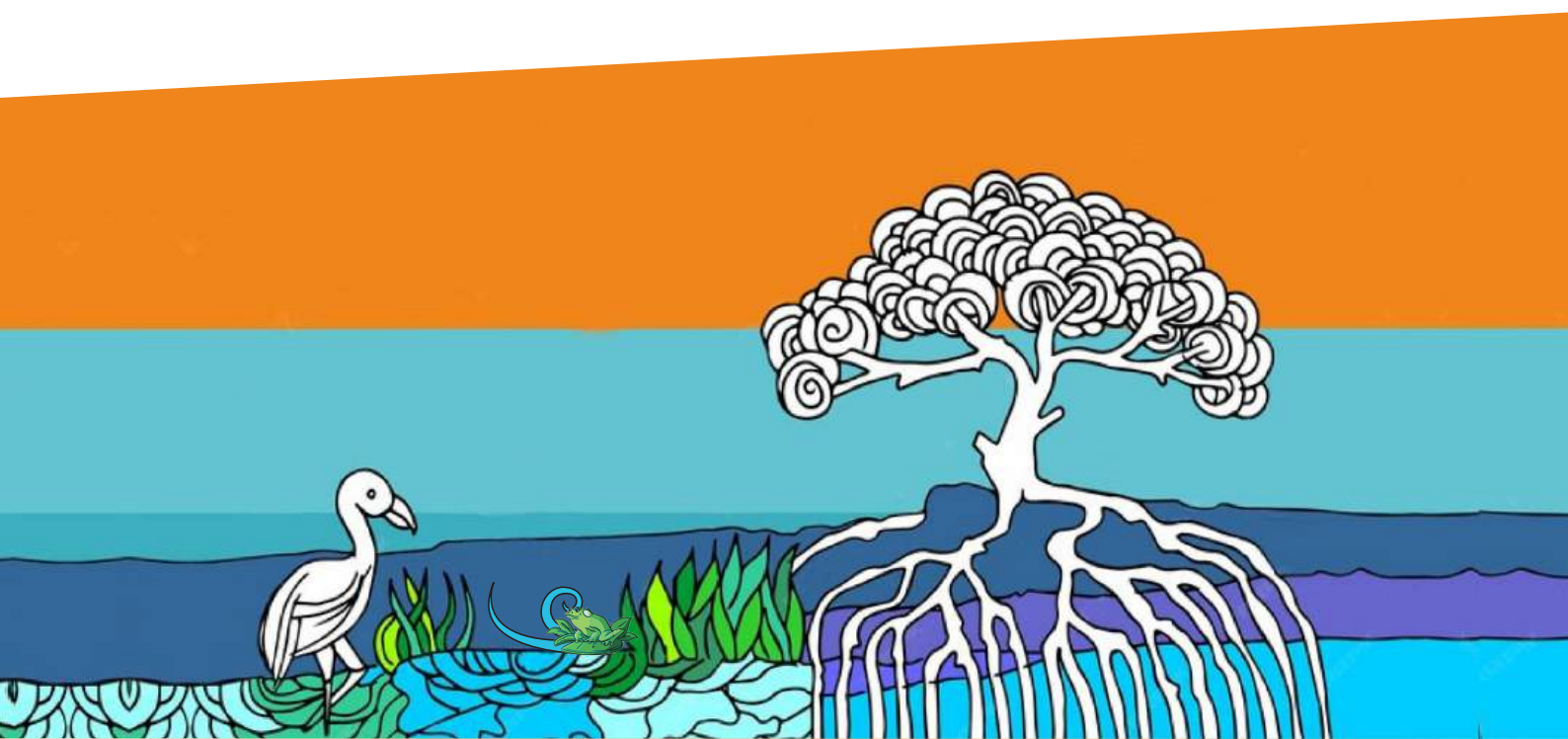
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*Picture of CMS, GIZ Team and Participants*



*Dr Ritesh briefing on Programmes and Policies related to Wetlands*



*Discussion during Session*



*Participants heading towards Bird Watching View*



*Panel Members of Media Round Table*



*Field Visit Group Picture of Speakers and Participants*



# I. Executive Summary

The Wetlands for LiFE Regional Media Consultation Workshop held in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh was the second consultation after the first one in Patna, Bihar, and the Lucknow consultation successfully convened 29 media professional participants (19 males and 10 females) from various districts of Uttar Pradesh and media organizations including Gaon connection, Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Language University, major media houses like Deutsche Welle, Dainik Jagran, Business Standard and Navbharat Times, along with environmental experts, government officials, and media professionals to explore the critical significance of wetlands in the region.

The primary objective of the workshop was to enhance media engagement with wetland-related issues, equipping journalists with comprehensive knowledge about wetland conservation, relevant policies, and the ecological importance of these ecosystems. Throughout the workshop, sessions underscored the vital role of media in shaping public perceptions and influencing policy discussions regarding environmental issues, particularly wetlands. The program featured expert presentations, interactive discussions, and a field visit to the Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary, a designated Ramsar site, providing participants with first-hand exposure to wetland ecosystems.

The initial session focused on the ecological, economic, and cultural significance of wetlands in Uttar Pradesh. Experts shared insights aimed at equipping journalists with a thorough understanding of wetlands' functions and ongoing multi-stakeholder initiatives for their conservation. The second session delved into existing programs, policies, and best practices related to wetland management. Experts from Wetlands International South Asia and the Indo-German Biodiversity Programme provided detailed insights into the policy landscape surrounding Ramsar sites and the legal frameworks governing wetland management in India.

A dynamic media roundtable discussion constituted the third session, aimed at bridging the gap between media and civil society in wetland conservation. Distinguished panellists from various fields shared their perspectives on effective communication strategies and challenges faced in reporting on wetland issues. This session offered journalists valuable insights into collaborative approaches for impactful environmental reporting.

The second day included a field trip to Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary, where participating journalists observed the ecological importance of wetlands first-hand. This practical experience allowed them to witness diverse wildlife and understand the complexities involved in wetland management. The field trip effectively complemented the theoretical knowledge gained during previous sessions.

Overall, the workshop highlighted the need for collaboration among journalists, researchers, civil society organizations, and government entities to effectively address environmental issues related to wetlands. Panellists emphasized that understanding local contexts and engaging communities are essential for successful conservation efforts. They urged participants to leverage their platforms to raise awareness about environmental challenges while promoting responsible reporting practices.

The workshop concluded with a strong call for continued dialogue on pressing environmental issues and partnerships that foster positive change for wetlands and sustainable resource management. By enhancing media engagement and knowledge sharing among stakeholders, the workshop aimed to empower journalists to play a pivotal role in advocating for effective wetland conservation strategies in Uttar Pradesh.



*Candle Lighting Ceremony*

## **II. Day 1: INAUGURAL SESSION SEPTEMBER 13, 2024**

The inaugural session of the Wetlands Media Consultation Workshop set the tone for a two-day event focused on the media's role in advancing wetland conservation in Uttar Pradesh. The session brought together government officials, environmental experts, and international partners, each underscoring the need for media engagement to bridge the gap between policymakers and the public, fostering a deeper understanding and commitment to wetland issues.

Dr. Vasanti Rao, Director General of the Centre for Media Studies (CMS), opened the session by highlighting the essential role of media in translating scientific knowledge into compelling narratives that can drive policy changes and public action. She outlined the objectives of the Wetland Media Engagement Program, emphasizing the importance of equipping journalists to report effectively on wetland conservation. Dr. Rao noted that media plays a pivotal role in raising public awareness and amplifying conservation efforts.

Mr. Kirtiman Awasthi, Senior Advisor for the Indo-German Biodiversity Programme (GIZ), provided a comprehensive overview of the workshop's objectives. He emphasized the commitment of the Indo-German partnership to support environmental journalism, focusing on how media can elevate awareness about the ecological and socio-economic importance of wetlands. Mr. Awasthi stressed the need for integrated wetland management involving diverse stakeholders and advocated for ongoing media coverage that highlights both local community engagement and biodiversity conservation. He also mentioned Uttar Pradesh's innovative "Conference of Panchayats," which acknowledges the role of village councils in climate action and economic development, gaining global attention as a model for positive social change.

Dr. Ritesh Kumar, Director of Wetlands International South Asia, delivered an engaging address on the national and global significance of wetlands, spotlighting their roles in biodiversity conservation, flood regulation, and climate change mitigation. He underscored the challenges facing wetlands, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, and urged journalists to highlight the socio-economic benefits of these ecosystems. Dr. Kumar emphasized the media's responsibility in shaping public discourse and fostering support for wetland protection.

Dr. Kumar praised Uttar Pradesh as a leading state in ecology, applauding the efforts of the state's community forest department in conserving wetlands within community forests. He commended Shri Sanjay Srivastava for his exceptional contributions to wetland conservation in Uttar Pradesh, despite the state's high population density and the challenges of implementing conservation efforts. Dr. Kumar highlighted key innovations led by Shri Srivastava and his team that have been recognized and adopted as best practices by the Government of India.

The first innovation involves integrating wetlands into official land records; traditionally, wetlands are classified as wastelands, but Shri Srivastava ensured that they are now recognized within land records, making Uttar Pradesh the only state in India to do so. This initiative resulted in a 10% increase in the state's wetlands, and Uttar Pradesh is now cited as a model for other states.

The second achievement was during the COVID-19 pandemic, when 218 wetlands along the Ganga River were surveyed—a challenging feat. Shri Srivastava pioneered an innovative inventory system based on hydrology, geology, and morphology, mapping these wetlands with baseline data accessible through a digital portal. This model has since been adopted by the National Mission for Clean Ganga and replicated in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.

The third innovation involved expediting the implementation of wetlands regulations. Uttar Pradesh was the first state to draft notifications, with Ramgarh Taal becoming the first unprotected area governed by wetlands rules, achieved through extensive community consultation. This model of community-driven conservation led to over 1,000 green documents produced in just two days. It also inspired decentralization of wetland governance, with the establishment of a state wetland authority and regional wetland committees. Tamil Nadu has since adopted this model, which is influencing conservation approaches nationwide.

Shri Sanjay Srivastava, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), Wildlife, Environment, Forests & Climate Change, Government of Uttar Pradesh, spoke about the state's wetland conservation priorities. He outlined collaborative efforts between the forest department and other stakeholders and encouraged journalists to engage actively with these initiatives. He highlighted the media's crucial role in holding governments accountable and ensuring effective policy implementation at the grassroots level.

Shri Ashish Tiwari, Secretary of Environment, Forests & Climate Change, Government of Uttar Pradesh, offered insights into the state's policy framework on wetland conservation. He discussed recent policy initiatives and the integration of wetland conservation into broader environmental and developmental strategies. Shri Tiwari emphasized the importance of balancing ecological conservation with development, urging the media to promote public dialogue on sustainable development.

Mr. Utkarsh Lal, Advisor at GIZ, concluded the session by reiterating the program's potential to improve wetland reporting in Uttar Pradesh. He encouraged journalists to leverage the knowledge gained during the workshop to craft impactful stories capable of shaping both public opinion and policy decisions.

The inaugural session laid a strong foundation for collaboration, with all speakers emphasizing the media's critical role in advocating for wetland conservation. The session underscored the potential for sustained media engagement to drive public awareness and policy change, ultimately contributing to the protection and restoration of wetlands in Uttar Pradesh.





*Mr Kirtiman Awasthi, discussing about Significance of Wetlands in Uttar Pradesh*

## II.I SIGNIFICANCE OF WETLANDS IN UTTAR PRADESH

**Moderated by Mr. Kirtiman Awasthi, Senior Advisor, Indo-German Biodiversity Programme, GIZ**

This session explored the critical ecological and socio-economic roles of wetlands in Uttar Pradesh, with presentations highlighting the current challenges and opportunities in wetland management. The session aimed to equip media professionals with the necessary tools to cover wetland-related stories more effectively, connecting them with experts who can offer insights into wetlands' broader environmental, economic, and social impacts.

Mr. Awasthi engaged journalists by asking them about their expectations from the session. Journalists shared diverse perspectives, reflecting a range of informational needs on wetland conservation and its socioeconomic impacts in Uttar Pradesh.

Mr. Vikram Mishra, an independent journalist, expressed that he was not well-versed in wetland-related topics but was keen to learn how he could effectively report on wetlands and associated issues in Uttar Pradesh. Mr. Ashish Chaturvedi from All India Radio was interested in understanding the role wetlands play in combating climate change, especially in relation to waterlogging and flood mitigation.

Ms. Diksha Patel, familiar with Ramsar sites, wanted guidance on communicating the impact of agriculture on wetlands, especially around Nawabganj. She hoped to inform local farmers about the consequences of wetland loss on conservation efforts. Ms. Aishwarya Tripathi, an independent rural journalist from Unnao district, conveyed strong expectations for the consultation. She aimed to explore the intersection of wetlands with public health and other sectors, identify collaboration opportunities, and learn methods for tracking and analysing wetland data. Additionally, she was interested in understanding how traditional knowledge from local communities could be incorporated into conservation models. Ms. Shalu Agarwal from Dainik Bhaskar (Meerut) expressed a desire to know more about government-led eco-tourism initiatives in wetlands and the ongoing issue of encroachment on these ecosystems. Mr. Divendra Singh raised a practical question on accessing reports of lake sites across Uttar Pradesh to enable in-depth reviews, while Ms. Sadhana Shukla similarly wanted information on reliable data sources to better comprehend the impacts of wetland degradation in the region.

Mr. Awasthi also highlighted the joint efforts of GIZ and Wetlands International South Asia (WISA) to integrate wetlands into district-level disaster risk planning, emphasizing the vulnerability of wetlands to flood and rainfall-related disasters.



Mr. Shashi Pandey Mishra of Nav Bharat Times reflected on the diminishing presence of lakes and small water bodies in rural areas, urging media collaboration with the government to raise awareness of the vanishing water resources. Mr. Suhil Sahai from Uttar Pradesh Samachar called for increased media coverage of wetland conservation, encouraging fellow journalists to make wetlands a mainstream issue to build momentum for preservation efforts.

Ms. Vaishnavi Sahu acknowledged her basic understanding of wetlands and expressed a desire to learn actionable ways she could contribute to conservation efforts in her own locality. Mr. Virendra Singh Rawat, a correspondent from Business Standard focusing on finance and development, emphasized the need for a financially sustainable approach to wetland conservation. He cited an ongoing UP-World Bank project that integrates community livelihoods with local flora and fauna. His concern was addressed by Mr. Awasthi and Dr. Kumar, who introduced the concept of “wise-use” – a model promoted by WISA that supports economic incentives for wetland conservation without compromising ecological integrity.

## II.II UNDERSTANDING WETLANDS

### Dr. Pranab J Patar, Technical Expert, CMS

Dr. Pranab Patar led an informative session on “Understanding Wetlands,” designed to enhance awareness of wetlands’ ecological significance, the threats they face, and current conservation efforts. The session aimed to equip journalists with the knowledge needed to effectively communicate these critical issues to the public.

Dr. Patar began by providing a comprehensive definition of wetlands as per the Ramsar Convention, describing them as areas where water is a dominant factor in shaping the environment and supporting diverse plant and animal life. He highlighted the ecological diversity of wetlands, noting that they can be classified as aquatic, terrestrial, or seasonal, with some appearing dry and grassy at times, leading to misidentification.

Various types of wetlands were showcased, including marshes, swamps, and mangroves, with specific references to ecologically vital areas like the Sundarbans, which are also culturally significant to local communities. Dr. Patar discussed the essential functions of wetlands, such as their role in natural flood control by storing excess water and providing critical habitats for numerous species, including migratory birds.

A significant portion of the discussion focused on the alarming rate of wetland loss—three times faster than forest depletion—resulting in over 80% of wetlands disappearing since the 1700s. The primary threats identified included urbanization, infrastructure development, agricultural



*Dr. Pranab J Patar, Wetland Technical Expert, presenting Presentation on Programmes and Policies around Wetlands*



*Interaction between Speaker and Participants.*

runoff containing chemicals, and the impacts of climate change, such as rising temperatures and altered precipitation patterns. Dr. Patar emphasized that these threats are compounded by unsustainable agricultural practices and a general lack of public awareness regarding the ecological importance of wetlands.

Dr. Patar highlighted India's efforts toward wetland conservation, including the National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA), which has identified 130 wetlands for restoration. He also discussed the Amrit Dharohar initiative, aimed at restoring or creating wetlands in every district across India.

A key example presented was the Namami Gange Programme, recognized globally as a leading restoration initiative. This comprehensive approach focuses on cleaning and restoring the Ganga River and its tributaries, with a significant budget allocation of ₹30,000 crores dedicated to these efforts.

The session emphasized the importance of local initiatives and community involvement in wetland restoration. Dr. Patar shared a success story from Ghaziabad, where local residents revived a water body in just six months. This case exemplified the impact of community engagement in ecological restoration, fostering a sense of ownership over local resources.

Throughout the session, the role of the media was emphasized as crucial in raising awareness and maintaining consistent coverage of wetland issues. Dr. Patar encouraged journalists to engage in citizen science initiatives, promote data-driven reporting, and involve the community in monitoring environmental quality. He referenced examples like the Earthwatch Institute's Fresh Water Watch, which mobilized citizens in 32 cities to monitor water bodies.

Ms. Aishwarya Tripathi, an independent rural journalist from Unnao district shared about her experience regarding local wetlands, raising concerns about their disappearance due to unchecked urbanization. Questions arose about restoration efforts in areas like Kanpur and Nawabganj, where wetlands have been cemented or degraded. The discussion included strategies to enhance public awareness through continuous reporting on local conservation initiatives.

Dr. Pranab Patar's session provided a robust understanding of wetlands' vital role in ecological balance and the urgent need for their restoration and conservation. Journalists were encouraged to champion wetland conservation by engaging in consistent reporting, participating in citizen science projects, and fostering community-driven restoration initiatives. The session underscored that wetlands are not merely environmental assets; they are essential lifelines for communities, biodiversity, and climate change mitigation. The knowledge shared by Dr. Patar represents a crucial step in empowering the media to influence public opinion and policy for wetland conservation.





*Mr Arjit Mishra, talking about initiatives on River Wetlands in Uttar Pradesh*

## II.III MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES ON RIVER WETLAND CO-MANAGEMENT IN UTTAR PRADESH

**Mr. Arjit Mishra, Associate Director - Rivers Wetlands and Water Policy, WWF**

This session led by Mr. Arjit Mishra, Associate Director of Rivers, Wetlands, and Water Policy at WWF India, focused on the collaborative management of wetlands in Uttar Pradesh. The session explored the challenges faced in wetland conservation and highlighted the importance of cooperation among local communities, government agencies, and environmental organizations.

Mr. Mishra opened the session by addressing the state of wetlands in Uttar Pradesh, particularly emphasizing the degradation of wetlands in the Ramganga basin, where an alarming 65% have been lost or degraded. He stressed the urgency of conserving the remaining 30% of functional wetlands, citing examples like Lalor Lake in Bareilly, which underscore the social and cultural significance of these ecosystems and their historical ties to local traditions.

The discussion included an explanation of the three types of wetland connectivity, longitudinal Connectivity - This refers to surface and groundwater connections between rivers and wetlands. Lateral Connectivity - Water flows from rivers to floodplains during monsoons. Groundwater Connectivity - Interaction between rivers and groundwater tables, which has been severely affected by over-exploitation. Mr. Mishra also outlined several challenges to wetland conservation, including, encroachment, agricultural activities and infrastructure development have blocked natural water channels. Pollution, agricultural runoff containing chemicals has contaminated water bodies, negatively affecting biodiversity and the health of local communities. Lack of Ownership, a decline in local communities' sense of responsibility toward wetlands has contributed to their neglect.

A significant emphasis was placed on a multi-stakeholder approach to wetland management. Mr. Mishra stressed the necessity for collaboration among district administrations, village communities, technical experts, and NGOs. He provided examples of initiatives such as the Hungama Wetland project, where local efforts included the removal of water hyacinth, community monitoring, and farmer training programs aimed at ecosystem restoration. Citizen science was highlighted as a critical component, with local residents trained to monitor water quality, biodiversity, and the overall health of wetlands.



*Mr. Arjit Mishra, Associate Director - Rivers Wetlands and Water Policy, WWF briefing session on Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives on River Wetland Co-Management*

Mr. Mishra presented successful conservation models from the Aril River Basin, showcasing strategies such as mapping and topographic surveys to identify degraded areas. He emphasized the need for engagement with various government departments, including revenue, water, and flood control, to develop integrated management plans.

The session also addressed the importance of sustainable agricultural practices, where farmers were trained in organic farming methods to minimize chemical usage, benefiting both crop yields and wetland health. Additionally, Mr. Mishra highlighted the potential of public-private partnerships in wetland restoration, noting how corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds could be harnessed for conservation initiatives. The Namami Gange Programme was cited as an exemplary model of effective integration of government policies with community and private sector involvement.

Throughout the session, journalists actively engaged in the discussion, posing critical questions about the legal framework governing wetlands. An independent journalist from Lucknow inquired about the effectiveness of existing regulations in the state. Mr. Mishra acknowledged the gaps in enforcement and encouraged the media to highlight these issues.

When discussing climate change, a participant raised concerns about its impact on wetlands. Mr. Mishra underscored the role of wetlands in climate adaptation strategies, particularly for flood control and groundwater recharge.

Several journalists requested success stories of wetland restoration. Mr. Mishra encouraged the media to cover positive narratives, such as the restoration of Lalor Lake and Hungama Wetland, where significant improvements in water quality and biodiversity have been achieved.

The session concluded with a strong call to action for the media to take on a pivotal role in promoting wetland conservation. Mr. Mishra urged journalists to raise awareness, highlight gaps in policy implementation, and emphasize the critical role of wetlands in climate resilience. He encouraged continued coverage of both the challenges and successes in wetland conservation to ensure the sustainability of these vital ecosystems in Uttar Pradesh.





*Dr. Ritesh briefing on Programmes and Policies related to Wetlands*

## II.IV PROGRAMMES, POLICIES AND GOOD PRACTICES

**Moderated by Dr Pranab Patar, Technical Expert, CMS**

This session addressed the policies, programmes, and international frameworks guiding wetland conservation in India, focusing on their relevance to Uttar Pradesh. The discussions highlighted government and NGO initiatives, particularly the implementation of Ramsar Convention guidelines, and best practices in wetland management.

## II.V PROGRAMMES AND POLICIES RELATED TO WETLANDS

**Dr Ritesh Kumar, Director, Wetlands International South Asia**

Dr. Ritesh Kumar, Director of Wetlands International South Asia, led an informative session on wetland conservation policies and programmes in India, focusing on Uttar Pradesh. The presentation aimed to educate journalists about the importance of wetlands and the regulatory frameworks governing their protection. Key policy frameworks discussed included the Ramsar Convention, an international treaty for wetland conservation and sustainable use; the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017, which provide India's national regulatory framework; and the National Wetland Conservation Programme (NWCP), which aims to ensure sustainable management and restoration of wetlands across the country.

At the state level, the Uttar Pradesh State Wetland Authority plays a crucial role in aligning state policies with national guidelines and coordinating between various departments and stakeholders. Dr. Kumar highlighted successful community-based conservation initiatives in Uttar Pradesh, emphasizing the importance of local involvement and the need for community engagement in wetland management.

Funding mechanisms such as the National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA) and the National Lake Conservation Plan were discussed, with Dr. Kumar stressing their significance in executing effective conservation projects. He also addressed policy challenges, including fragmented approaches among government departments and the need for improved inter-departmental coordination.

Dr. Kumar provided a historical overview of wetland perception and management in India, from traditional reverence to colonial-era changes and post-independence sectorial disconnects. Current challenges include the ongoing degradation of natural wetlands, which impacts biodiversity and water quality, and urbanization pressures that lead to wetland loss and increased flood risks. Positive developments noted included increased local action and advocacy for small wetlands, evidence of state-led conservation efforts, and growing policy acceptance of whole-of-society approaches.

Participants actively engaged in the session. An Independent Rural Journalist participant, inquired about the effectiveness of policies in achieving conservation goals, and Dr. Kumar acknowledged progress while emphasizing the need for continuous evaluation and adaptation. The participant also raised concerns about public awareness, prompting Dr. Kumar to highlight the media's critical role in bridging the awareness gap and promoting community engagement in conservation efforts. Another journalist participant from Meerut asked about local community involvement in wetland management, leading Dr. Kumar to share successful community-based conservation models and stress their importance in fostering local ownership.

In conclusion, Dr. Kumar called for collaborative efforts between government agencies, local communities, and media to enhance wetland conservation. He encouraged journalists to leverage their platforms to raise awareness, advocate for policy improvements, and engage the public in conservation efforts. The session underscored the necessity of an 'all-of-society' framework to address the complex challenges of wetland conservation and management in India, emphasizing the critical role of journalists in promoting sustainable wetland management in Uttar Pradesh and beyond.

*Ms Nivedita Mani, Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG), talking about bridging the gap between Media and Civil Society*







Mr Utkarsh Lal, Advisor, Indo-German Biodiversity Programme, GIZ, talking about Significance of the Wetland



Discussion with Participants

## II.VI SIGNIFICANCE OF RAMSAR SITES

### Mr. Utkarsh Lal, Advisor, Indo-German Biodiversity Programme, GIZ

Mr. Utkarsh Lal, Advisor for the Indo-German Biodiversity Programme at GIZ, delivered an informative session on the “Significance of Ramsar Sites”. The session provided a comprehensive overview of the Ramsar Convention, its history, and its crucial role in wetland conservation globally. Mr. Lal explained that the Ramsar Convention, established in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, is the oldest multilateral international conservation convention and the only one focusing on a single ecosystem type - wetlands. He emphasized the critical importance of wetlands for flood control, groundwater recharge, and biodiversity conservation, noting that they provide habitats for countless species.

However, he also highlighted the alarming fact that 35% of wetlands have been lost since 1970, disappearing three times faster than forests. The session traced the historical perspective on wetlands, particularly in developed countries, where they were often viewed as wastelands and drained for agriculture and development. This approach led to numerous environmental issues, including groundwater depletion, flash floods, shoreline destruction, pollutant accumulation, and loss of wetland-dependent flora and fauna. Mr. Lal detailed the Ramsar Convention’s evolution from its origins as a response by birdwatchers to its current status as a global treaty with 172 contracting parties. He explained the criteria for Ramsar site designation, which include representing a unique ecosystem or supporting significant biodiversity, particularly water birds or fish species.

The presentation highlighted the benefits of Ramsar designation, such as increased global recognition, support for conservation efforts, access to best practices and expertise, and fostering international collaboration. Mr. Lal specifically focused on Uttar Pradesh’s ten Ramsar sites, including Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary, Upper Ganga River, and Bakhira Wildlife Sanctuary, emphasizing their ecological characteristics and biodiversity significance. He discussed the commitments required from state governments for Ramsar site management, including appointing a nodal agency, defining wetland boundaries, preparing integrated management plans, and regular monitoring and reporting. The role of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in supporting these efforts was also outlined.



*Media Round Table - Bridging the Gap Between Media and Civil Society*

Mr. Lal stressed the importance of intersectoral cooperation in wetland management, involving departments such as agriculture, education, and tourism. He introduced the Wetlands of India Portal as a valuable resource for staying informed about wetland conservation efforts and updates. The session concluded with a discussion on the global 30x30 conservation target and the potential role of wetlands in achieving this goal.

Mr. Lal emphasized that while Ramsar designation is significant for raising a wetland's profile and attracting resources, the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017, provide a framework for protecting all wetlands in India, regardless of Ramsar status. He encouraged journalists to use their platforms to raise awareness about wetland conservation, promote eco-tourism, and highlight the socio-economic importance of these ecosystems for local communities. Overall, the session provided a comprehensive understanding of Ramsar sites' significance, emphasizing their role in biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, and sustainable development.





*Interactive session during Media Round Table - Bridging the Gap Between Media and Civil Society*

## **II.VII MEDIA ROUND TABLE - BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

**Moderated by Dr. Vasanti Rao, DG, Centre for Media Studies**

The session “Media Round Table - Bridging the Gap Between Media and Civil Society,” moderated by Dr. Vasanti Rao, DG of the Centre for Media Studies, convened four expert panellists: Shri Sudhir Misra, Resident Editor of Navbharat Times; Prof. (Dr.) Venkatesh Dutta from the Department of Environmental Science at BBAU, Lucknow; Ms. Nivedita Mani from the Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG); and Shri Kirtiman Awasthi, Senior Advisor for the Indo-German Biodiversity Programme at GIZ. The panel focused on enhancing collaboration between media and civil society to effectively address environmental issues, particularly concerning wetlands.

Shri Sudhir Misra highlighted the challenges of making wetland-related stories engaging for the public. He advocated for a shift from event-based reporting to continuous coverage, underscoring the need for journalists to balance scientific accuracy with engaging narratives. He emphasized the crucial role of regional language media in reaching grassroots communities effectively.

Prof. Dutta presented the academic viewpoint, stressing the necessity of integrating scientific data into environmental journalism. He encouraged collaborations between academia and media to support evidence-based reporting and proposed interdisciplinary approaches to enhance the understanding of wetland ecosystems. He also noted the potential of citizen science initiatives to strengthen wetland monitoring efforts.

Ms. Nivedita Mani provided insights from the NGO perspective, explaining how organizations like GEAG bridge the gap between communities, scientists, and media. She shared success stories of community-led wetland conservation projects in Uttar Pradesh and discussed the challenges of translating grassroots experiences into compelling narratives for media engagement. Her emphasis was on maintaining media interest in long-term environmental issues and the need to reconnect communities with their wetlands.



*Speakers of Media Round Table*

Shri Kirtiman Awasthi highlighted the media's influential role in shaping policies related to wetland conservation. He stressed the importance of accurately interpreting policy information and suggested that the media could serve as a watchdog to ensure effective implementation of policies. He pointed out the potential for collaborative projects between policy advisors and journalists to improve the quality and impact of environmental reporting.

The discussion emphasized the necessity for collaborative storytelling, where journalists work alongside scientists and communities to craft engaging narratives about wetlands. Data-driven journalism was identified as crucial for enhancing credibility, while localization of stories was deemed vital for connecting global environmental issues to local contexts. The panellists also stressed the importance of sustained coverage beyond immediate crises, alongside a multilingual approach to reach diverse audiences.

They highlighted the need for solution-oriented reporting, focusing on success stories and potential solutions to challenges faced by wetlands, while also considering the ethical implications of reporting on sensitive environmental issues affecting vulnerable communities. The session concluded with a strong call for ongoing collaboration among journalists, researchers, civil society organizations, and government entities to bridge knowledge gaps and foster public engagement in environmental conservation efforts. Dr. Rao's closing remarks reiterated the importance of partnerships in promoting sustainable management of wetlands and natural resources, encouraging all participants to actively engage in advocacy and education regarding environmental issues.





*Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary & Ramsar Site*

### **III. Day 2: FIELD VISIT TO NAWABGANJ BIRD SANCTUARY & RAMSAR SITE SEPTEMBER 14, 2024**

The exposure field visit to Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary and Ramsar Site commenced with participants gathering at Regenta Central in Hazratganj at 10:30 AM. During the two-hour journey to the sanctuary, journalists were briefed on the site's ecological significance and what to expect upon arrival. Welcomed by local forest official Mr. Vivek, the group learned about the sanctuary's establishment in 1984 and its designation as a Ramsar Site in 2019. Located approximately 45 km from Lucknow in the Unnao district, the sanctuary spans around 2.25 square kilometers and serves as a crucial habitat for over 250 bird species, including resident and migratory varieties such as Sarus Cranes, Painted Storks, and various duck species. The visit highlighted the sanctuary's role in the Central Asian Flyway for migratory birds.

Participants observed various ecological features, including the lake's hydrology and surrounding vegetation, while gaining insights into the wetland's functions in groundwater recharge and flood control. Sanctuary scientists demonstrated water quality testing methods, emphasizing the importance of maintaining healthy ecosystems. Beyond avian diversity, attendees spotted other fauna such as fish species, turtles, and Nilgai, fostering discussions about the interdependence of species within this wetland ecosystem.

Conservation efforts were a focal point of the visit, with Mr. Vivek shared about the management strategies such as water level management, invasive species control, and habitat restoration projects. The engagement of local communities in conservation initiatives was highlighted, showcasing eco-tourism benefits for nearby villages. However, challenges persist due to agricultural runoff, pollution from surrounding areas, urbanization pressures, and climate change impacts on migratory patterns.



*Participants gazing at Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary*



*Participants heading towards Bird Watching View*

The field trip included interactive sessions designed to enhance participants' understanding of environmental journalism. Stakeholder interactions enriched the experience as journalists met with local forest officials involved in day to day management at the site. Throughout these discussions, participants explored storytelling opportunities that highlight unique angles for wetland conservation narratives and techniques for translating scientific data into engaging content.

The visit emphasized responsible reporting guidelines for sensitive ecological issues while balancing tourism promotion with conservation messaging. Ideas for sustained coverage on Nawabganj and other wetlands emerged, with potential for collaborative multimedia projects identified as a way to maintain public interest.

Overall, this exposure visit provided journalists with an understanding of Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary's ecological significance and conservation challenges. It underscored the importance of collaboration among journalists, researchers, civil society organizations, and government entities to effectively communicate environmental issues and foster public engagement in wetland conservation efforts. The experience reinforced the need for continued dialogue on these pressing environmental challenges to promote sustainable management of natural resources.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The Wetlands for LiFE Regional Media Consultation Workshop in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, successfully fostered dialogue between environmental experts and media professionals, emphasizing the media's essential role in advocating for wetland conservation. By bridging scientific knowledge and public awareness, the workshop equipped participants with a comprehensive understanding of the ecological and socio-economic significance of wetlands, helping them develop impactful narratives to drive public engagement and policy reform. Emerging suggestions from the consultation includes,



1. Continuous, Solution-Oriented Coverage: Participants recognized the need to shift from event-based reporting to ongoing, solution-focused coverage on wetlands. This approach would engage the public more effectively and build sustained support. Dialogues with experts and officials during such workshops enhance media professionals' understanding and reporting on environmental issues.

2. Supporting Community-Led Conservation: Media professionals emphasized the importance of amplifying the voices of local communities involved in wetland management. Highlighting grassroots success stories and promoting citizen science can strengthen community ownership and inspire broader public participation in conservation efforts.

3. Highlighting Climate Adaptation: Recognizing wetlands as essential for climate resilience, journalists committed to reporting on their role in flood management and groundwater recharge in Uttar Pradesh. They saw an opportunity to frame wetlands within a broader climate adaptation narrative, potentially influencing policy and public perception on addressing climate challenges.

4. Driving Public Awareness: The participants expressed a strong commitment to supporting public awareness that resonate across diverse audiences in Uttar Pradesh. Collaborating with environmental experts and civil society, they aim to produce compelling stories that educate citizens on the environmental and socio-economic importance of wetlands, fostering a stronger commitment to conservation.

The field visit to Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary, a Ramsar site, reinforced these insights. This hands-on experience provided participants with a tangible connection to the wetland ecosystem, inspiring story ideas on ecosystem services, bird conservation, and climate change adaptation. The visit enriched journalists' understanding, enabling them to create accurate and impactful stories that contribute to sustainable wetland management in Uttar Pradesh. The consultation underscored the need for ongoing collaboration between media, government, and local communities. By fostering continued dialogue, this consultation has laid a foundation for stronger conservation efforts, ensuring the protection of critical ecosystems for future generations.

*Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary & Ramsar Site*



## V. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The success of the Regional Media Consultation: Wetlands for LiFE held in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh on September 13-14, 2024, was made possible through the collaborative efforts of numerous organizations, experts, and participants. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all those who contributed to this impactful event.

We sincerely thank the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of India (MoEFCC) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) for their expertise, support, and partnership in organizing this consultation. Special appreciation goes to Mr. Kirtiman Awasthi, Senior Advisor, and Mr. Utkarsh Lal, Advisor, for their invaluable contributions and insights throughout the workshop.

Our gratitude extends to Wetlands International South Asia, particularly Dr. Ritesh Kumar, Director, for sharing expert knowledge on wetland conservation policies and programs.

We are deeply appreciative of the Centre for Media Studies (CMS) team for their crucial role in facilitating the sessions and bridging the gap between environmental experts and media professionals. Special thanks to Dr. Vasanti Rao, Director General, and Dr. Pranab J Patar, Technical Expert, for their moderation and expertise.

We acknowledge the participation and insights shared by government officials, including Shri Sanjay Srivastava, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), and Shri Ashish Tiwari, Secretary of Environment, Forests & Climate Change, Government of Uttar Pradesh.

Our appreciation goes to Mr. Arjit Mishra, Associate Director - Rivers Wetlands and Water Policy at WWF, for his presentation on multi-stakeholder initiatives in wetland management.

We thank the panelists of the Media Round Table session: Shri Sudhir Misra, Resident Editor of Navbharat Times; Prof. (Dr.) Venkatesh Dutta from the Department of Environmental Science at BBAU, Lucknow; and Ms. Nivedita Mani from the Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG) for their valuable perspectives.

Our gratitude extends to the local forest officials at Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary, particularly the Local Forest Official, Mr. Vivek, for hosting and guiding the exposure visit, providing participants with first-hand experience of this important Ramsar site.

We sincerely appreciate the active participation of all journalists, environmentalists, and community representatives who attended the consultation. Your engagement and insights have greatly contributed to the success of this event and the ongoing dialogue on wetland conservation.

Finally, we thank all the support staff and organizers whose behind-the-scenes efforts ensured the smooth running of the consultation.

This collaborative effort has significantly contributed to enhancing media engagement in wetland conservation, and we look forward to continued partnerships in promoting sustainable management of these vital ecosystems.



## VI. ANNEXURES

### Annexure-I



Day 1: September 13, 2024 (10:00 AM - 6:00 PM)	
	<b>REGISTRATION &amp; TEA</b>
10:30 AM–10:40 AM	Welcome Address & Introduction of the Wetland Media Engagement Program <b>Dr Vasanti Rao</b> , DG, Centre for Media Studies (CMS)
10:40 AM – 10:50 AM	<b>Lighting the Lamp &amp; Felicitation of Dignitaries</b>
10:50 AM to 12:00 AM	Overview of the Programme by <b>Shri Kirtiman Awasthi</b> , Senior Advisor, Indo-German Biodiversity Programme, GIZ
	Opening Remarks by <b>Shri Neeraj Kumar</b> , CCF, Member Secretary, UP State Wetland Authority (tbc)
	Special Address by <b>Dr. Ritesh Kumar</b> , Director, Wetlands International South Asia
	Special Address by <b>Shri Sanjay Srivastava</b> , PCCF, Wildlife, Environment, Forests & Climate Change, Government of Uttar Pradesh (tbc)
	Special Address by <b>Shri Ashish Tiwari</b> , Secretary Environment, Forests & Climate Change, Government of Uttar Pradesh
	Inaugural Address by <b>Shri Manoj Singh</b> , IAS, Addl. Chief Secretary, Environment, Forests & Climate Change, Government of Uttar Pradesh (tbc)
	Vote of Thanks by <b>Shri Utkarsh Lal</b> , Advisor, Indo-German Biodiversity Programme, GIZ
<b>Group Photograph</b>	
<b>SESSION I: SIGNIFICANCE OF WETLANDS IN UTTAR PRADESH</b> Moderated by <b>Mr. Kirtiman Awasthi</b> , Senior Advisor, Indo-German Biodiversity Programme, GIZ	
12:00 PM – 12:20 PM	<b>Understanding Wetlands</b> <b>Dr. Pranab J Patar</b> , Technical Expert, CMS
12:20 PM – 12:45 PM	<b>Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives on River Wetland Co-Management in Uttar Pradesh</b> <b>Mr. Arjit Mishra</b> , Associate Director - Rivers Wetlands and Water Policy, WWF
12.45 PM - 1:15 PM	<b>Discussion and Q &amp; A</b>
1:15 PM – 2.15 PM	<b>LUNCH</b>



SESSION II: PROGRAMMES, POLICIES AND GOOD PRACTICES Moderated by Dr Pranab Patar, Technical Expert, CMS	
2:15 PM – 2:45 PM	<b>Programmes and Policies related to Wetlands</b> <b>Dr Ritesh Kumar</b> , Director, Wetlands International South Asia
2:45 PM – 3:10 PM	<b>Significance of Ramsar Sites</b> <b>Mr. Utkarsh Lal</b> , Advisor, Indo-German Biodiversity Programme, GIZ
3:10 PM - 3:45 PM	<b>Discussion and Q &amp; A</b>
3:45 PM – 4.00 PM	<b>TEA Break</b>

SESSION III: MEDIA ROUND TABLE - BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY Moderated by Dr Vasanti Rao, DG, Centre for Media Studies	
4:00 PM - 5:15 PM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shri Sudhir Misra</b>, Resident Editor, Navbharat Times</li> <li>• <b>Prof. (Dr.) Venkatesh Dutta</b>, Department of Environmental Science, School of Earth and Environmental Sciences (SEES), BBAU, Lucknow</li> <li>• <b>Ms Nivedita Mani</b>, Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG)</li> <li>• <b>Mr Ramveer Tanwar</b>, Environmental activist &amp; Pond man of India</li> <li>• <b>Shri Kirtiman Awasthi</b>, Senior Advisor, Indo-German Biodiversity Programme, GIZ</li> </ul>
5.15 PM – 5:45 PM	<b>Experience sharing and story ideas on Wetland related issues by the participants</b>
5.45 – 6 .00 PM	<b>Field Trip Logistics &amp; Vote of Thanks</b>

Day 2: September 14, 2024 (10:00 AM - 5:00 PM)	
9.3.0 AM – 10:00 AM	<b>Assembly at Regenta Central (Royal Orchid Hotels), Hazratganj, Lucknow</b>
10:00 AM -12:00 PM	<b>Departure &amp; travel for field visit to Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary &amp; Ramsar Site</b>
12:00 PM to 5:00 PM	<b>Sanctuary visit and discussions at the Ramsar Site</b>  <b>Group Photograph and Lunch</b>  <b>Return to Lucknow</b> <i>(departure around 3.30 pm from Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary)</i>



**GIZ INDIA**

B 5 / 1, Safdarjung Enclave  
New Delhi - 110029

P: 91 11 4949 5353  
[www.giz.de](http://www.giz.de)

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**CENTRE FOR MEDIA STUDIES**

RESEARCH HOUSE, Saket Community Centre  
New Delhi - 110 017

P: 91 11 2685 1660  
[www.cmsindia.org](http://www.cmsindia.org)