

REPORT of the WORKSHOP on
**Conserving Wetland Wealth of
Chhattisgarh**

February 2-3, 2017



World Wetlands Day
2 February 2017

Organised Jointly by

Chhattisgarh State Planning Commission, Naya Raipur, India
National Institute of Ecology, New Delhi, Raipur, Jaipur
Indira Gandhi Agricultural University, Raipur.



**World
Wetlands Day**
2 February 2017

Wetlands for Disaster Risk Reduction



BACKGROUND

Wetlands are the places where water in abundance governs the kinds and life of organisms. Such habitats also called as sar, sarovar, taal, jheel etc. or lake, pond, marsh and swamp, laid the foundation of human civilisations, and were an integral part of our socio-cultural ethos. Construction of such habitats to meet the water needs during dry periods of the year was considered to be 'Raj Dharma'. During the British rule, these habitats with no value for the revenue were declared as 'wastelands'. Their values were re-discovered in Europe and North America, first for the migratory water birds, and later other benefits. To ensure their conservation worldwide, an international convention, the Ramsar Convention, was agreed upon on 2 February 1971 (in Ramsar, Iran). This day is now observed as World Wetland Day.

India became a Party to the Convention in 1981, and has so far designated 26 wetlands in 15 States as internationally important under the Ramsar Convention. The State of Chhattisgarh is fairly rich in wetlands of which agricultural wetlands occupy a significant proportion. Many of these centuries old human made wetlands are of great historical and



cultural importance. Also interesting are the karst wetlands (cave systems) with unique and endemic biodiversity. The State Government has initiated steps to develop a programme for conservation and management of wetlands in the state and identify wetlands of national or international importance. Recognising the important role of wetlands in agriculture, fisheries and the overall economy and ecological sustainability of the State, the State Planning Commission (SPC) has constituted a Standing Working Group on Wetlands (among 7 such Groups) under the Task Force on Agriculture and Allied Sectors.

THE WORKSHOP

On the recommendation of the Standing Working Group on Wetlands, the State Planning Commission decided to organise a 2-day Workshop (2-3 February 2017) on the occasion of the World Wetland Day 2017 in Raipur, with the following objectives:

- ▶ To assess the status of wetlands in the State,
- ▶ To develop a programme of wetland

research, training, capacity building and public awareness,

- ▶ To identify wetlands of national or international importance with potential for designation under the Ramsar Convention,
- ▶ To suggest a framework for State Wetland Policy, and
- ▶ To initiate a network of individuals and institutions engaged with wetlands in the State.

The Workshop was organised jointly with the National Institute of Ecology and the Indira Gandhi Agricultural University, Raipur, in the Conference Hall of the SPC in Naya Raipur. About 85 participants included several invite experts, faculty and research scholars from academic institutions, representatives of concerned government departments, NGOs and civil society. On the second day, the participants made a field visit to wetlands in and around Dhamtari where they interacted with the local communities and farmers to understand the issues related to wise use and management of wetlands.

The Opening Session of the Workshop was chaired by Mr Sunil Kumar, Vice Chairman of the State Planning Commission. He welcomed the participants and briefed them about the wetlands in the State of Chhattisgarh, their importance to the water and food security and livelihoods of the people,



and the actions taken by the Government for their conservation and management. Prof. D.K. Marothia, Member (non-official) of the State Planning Commission, welcomed the participants and described in detail the work of the Task Force on Agriculture and Allied Sectors, emphasising upon the importance of management of water and wetlands for sustainable development in the State. He further briefed the participants about the background and structure of the Workshop which was the first ever in the State to focus attention on wetlands and the World Wetland Day. Dr Brij Gopal (Chairman of the SPC's Standing Working Group on Wetlands) elaborated on the important ecosystem services of wetlands, the need for wetland conservation, important wetlands of Chhattisgarh, and the developing wetland programme in the State. Dr Gopal highlighted the fact that Chhattisgarh is home to numerous wild races of rice and has very large number of human-made wetlands of great historical, social-cultural and religious importance. These wetlands have provided water and food security for many centuries and continue to provide livelihoods to thousands of people. These wetlands are critical to prevent and mitigate the disasters like droughts and floods and to meet the challenges of climate change. Dr Gopal also drew attention to important urban and peri-urban wetlands in the State. Further, the State has several karst wetlands in Bastar district which deserve to be protected and conserved urgently in view of their highly endemic rare biodiversity and socio-cultural value. Recent evidence shows that humans lived in some of these caves and used fire about 7000 years ago.

These opening observations were followed by detailed presentations by invited experts. Prof. Asad Rahmani (Member, Central Wetland Regulatory Authority) discussed issues of management of wetlands in general whereby various human interventions have a negative impact. He stressed upon the maintenance of hydrological regimes and wise use. Prof. J.K. Garg who produced the first remote-sensing based assessment of wetlands in India, described in detail the historical developments with the use of remote sensing and GIS, the wetland categorisation, application and limitations of remote sensing in wetland management, and the latest developments with India's wetland Atlas. Ms Archana Chatterjee (IUCN-India, former Member, STRP, Ramsar Convention) presented in



detail the elements of planning for wetland management. Dr M.A. Hassan (CIFRI, Kolkata) discussed the issues concerning fisheries in wetlands, the problems caused by exotics, the need for conserving biodiversity and the role of water quality. Prof. A. Wanganeo (Bhopal) discussed the wise use of wetlands and various human impacts, especially those related to encroachment and pollution. Prof. Y. Rangareddy, an expert on groundwater fauna, discussed the importance of studies on subterranean and karst wetlands and presented his work on some endemic species from Kotumsar cave in Chhattisgarh. Besides invited speakers, Ms S. Gupta, Nodal Officer for Wetlands in the State Forest Dept discussed the distribution of wetlands within and outside the forest areas, and the steps taken by the Department in response to the orders of the National Green Tribunal in the matter. Mr Kawishwar made a presentation using RS and GIS based identification, on distribution of wetlands. Each of these presentations was followed by discussion by the participants. Mr P.P.Soti, Member, SPC underlined the role of PRIs in managing village water bodies.

Next session included presentations on specific wetlands and their agricultural use, biodiversity, water quality, cultural aspects etc. within the State. Mr Pradeep Sharma made a

detailed presentation on the history and culture of Ratanpur (District Bilaspur) and its numerous wetlands created more than 7 centuries ago. Prof. A.K. Pati presented his detailed biological studies on the wetland



fauna, especially a loach – a blind fish- of Kotumsar cave. Ms Rajeshwari of IGKV described the use of wetlands in Dhamtari for cultivating lotus, makhana, singhara and water spinach, along with their economics and livelihood importance. Mr Adikant Pradhan of IGKV presented the history, biodiversity, fisheries and management problems of Dalpatsagar – a large (360 acres) urban wetland in Jagdalpur (Bastar). Avian biodiversity of various wetlands in the state was discussed with special emphasis on migratory and rare species by Mr K.C.Yadav and Mr Mohit Sahu. A brief presentation on Aquatic Organisms of Chhattisgarh was made by Dr M.L. Naik.

Another session had presentations by the officials of State Govt. Mr D.K. Singh Fisheries Department presented a detailed report on the programmes of his department to promote fisheries production and livelihoods in different wetlands which are leased out for fishing. Mr. P. C. Mishra, Secretary, Rural Development and Panchayats briefed about creation of ponds under MNREGA. Mr R.K.Dey made a presentation on ecological health of wetlands in Raipur Capital Zone. Officers from departments of Agriculture, Municipal Corporations, district Collectors, NABARD and SPC also interacted during the session.



Twenty eight posters on different

aspects of biodiversity and management of wetlands in the State were prepared by various researchers and displayed in the Conference Hall. Several posters of the Ramsar Convention highlighting the importance of wetlands in preventing disasters were also displayed at the venue.

Four wetland Briefs on important identified wetlands namely, the Ratanpur Wetland Complex, Dalpatsagar, Dhamtari Lotus fields and Kotumsar cave karst wetlands, and a brief status report on wetlands of Chhattisgarh were prepared and released during the workshop.

An important feature of the Workshop was that deviating from the common practice of the VIPs addressing the Opening Session, the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh and Chairman, SPC, Dr Raman Singh, attended the closing Session and delivered the Valedictory address. He examined all posters exhibited there with great interest while the participants were still making their presentations. Later he listened to two of the presentations also. At the Closing session, the participants were introduced to the Chief Minister and the objectives and scope of the workshop and the deliberations were summarised by Mr Sunil Kumar and Prof. D.K. Marothia. A presentation was also made by Dr Marothia on, 'Chhattisgarh Wetlands: The Dwindling Cultural and Ecological Heritage'. He advocated adopting polycentric governance approach to conserve and manage wetland ecosystems sustainably.



Dr Brij Gopal submitted the main recommendations of the workshop and appealed to the Chief Minister for the conservation of Ratanpur wetland complex as a Cultural Natural Heritage area, Dalpatsagar as a RAMSAR site, and Kotumsar as a World Heritage site together with its designation under the Ramsar Convention. Further, the workshop called for urgently setting up a Centre for research, training and capacity building, management and public awareness on wetlands in the State.

The Hon'ble Chief Minister in his address highlighted the traditional use of wetlands in people's daily life and expressed concern over the loss and degradation of wetlands in the State. He called for participatory management by involving local communities and village level institutions and NGOs. He also favoured the development of a wetland at Gidhwa as a Conservation Reserve with the active participation of local people instead of declaring it as a bird sanctuary. He asked the concerned govt officials to initiate action in this regard. He also announced that a State level Wetland Regulatory Authority has just been constituted. He also asked the concerned officials to prepare plans and budget estimates for conservation of wetlands



in Ratanpur and Dalpatsagar.

The workshop concluded with the vote of thanks by Mr Amitabha Panda, Member Secretary, CGSPC.



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Annexes:

S.No.	Particulars
1	Programme of the Workshop
2	List of Participants
3	List of Presenters
4	List of Posters
5	Publications released at the Workshop Four Wetland Briefs and Status and policy paper
6.	Wetland visit photographs
7	Print media clippings