

# Report of the Programmes Organised on the Occasion of the World Wetlands Day 2<sup>nd</sup> February

2024

## IELA & Partners



## 1. Background:

Celebrated annually on 2 February, World Wetlands Day aims to raise global awareness about the vital role of wetlands for people and the planet. The Day also marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea.

World Wetland Day 2024 focuses on the theme of 'Wetlands and Human Wellbeing'. The theme recognizes wetlands as critical to people and nature, underscoring the intrinsic value of wetland ecosystems and their benefits and services, including contributions to sustainable development and human wellbeing.

For more details, see - <https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/>  
<https://sdg.iisd.org/events/world-wetlands-day-2024/>

## 2. The Wetlands of Udaipur

Amidst the efforts to declare Udaipur as a Ramsar wetland city, the first in India and the efforts to declare Menar village as a Ramsar wetland site, commercial concerns related to business as usual mean that efforts to bring pollution, deforestation and related air, water quality and siltation of lakes are still far from satisfactory. Last year in collaboration with National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSF) and the local cooperatives of fishers around Jaisamand lake, concerns related to Tilapia invasion and the ever increasing urban demand from Udaipur that were resulting the depletion of fish catch had been raised. The depletion of fish catch and the invasion of Tilapia is also affecting other ponds and lakes in the Udaipur city and its surroundings as well. These lakes are rich in phytoplanktons and zooplanktons that are supporting the aquatic food chain and attracting thousands of migratory birds every year. The nullahs that carry the overflow waters through the city are a sanctuary for diversity of marsh habitat birds and fish in pools. Not just the city lakes, but also the ones around it harbor threatened fish species like Mahseer, a fish that weighs up to 40-50 kgs and was considered a great sport fish, in Lake Badi. Far from restoring the prevalence of the Mahseer, without seriously addressing the issues raised above, single minded focus on tourism and its related pollution will destroy rather than save these lakes which the efforts at declaring Udaipur a Ramsar city are driving at.

For more details, see –

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/travel/travel-news/udaipur-set-to-become-countrys-first-wetland-city/articleshow/104366189.cms>

<https://udaipurtimes.com/wild-life/udaipur-wetland-ramsar-status/cid12811700.htm>

### 2.1 Visit to Menar Village Wetlands

Recognised as the “bird village” following community-driven conservation efforts, Menar in Udaipur district is set to be notified as Rajasthan's new wetland. This will pave the way for getting the Ramsar site status for this rural heartland of the Mewar region. The two

water bodies in the village – the Brahm talab and Dhandh talab – play host to a large number of migratory birds in the winter season every year. Here as in Ghana National Park (a Ramsar Wetland Heritage Site) issues related to deforestation, pollution from fertilizers and pesticide in agriculture and issues related to invasive species if unaddressed will seriously threaten the long term stability and development of the region.

For mor details, see -

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/udaipurs-bird-village-set-to-be-declared-wetland/article65563912.ece>

<https://jda.urban.rajasthan.gov.in/content/dam/environment/env-swa/FinalWetlandGazetteNotification/Brahm%20Talab%20and%20Dhand%20Talab%20Menar%20Wetland%20Udaipur.pdf>

<https://tim>

[esofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/rajasthan-proposes-to-develop-5-wetlands-as-ramsar-sites/articleshow/106338889.cms](https://esofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/rajasthan-proposes-to-develop-5-wetlands-as-ramsar-sites/articleshow/106338889.cms)

The gazette notification dated 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023, declares Menar as a wetland site. Schedule I of the notification describes area coming under wetlands, the related catchment area and the detailed map of Brahm Talab and Dhand Talab. Schedule II describes the activities prohibited in the wetland and its catchment area and Schedule III the regulated activities in Menar.

For more details, see –

<https://jda.urban.rajasthan.gov.in/content/dam/environment/env-swa/FinalWetlandGazetteNotification/Brahm%20Talab%20and%20Dhand%20Talab%20Menar%20Wetland%20Udaipur.pdf>

Discussions with Umesh Menaria a resident of Menar and wildlife conservationist, indicate that one of the first documented stories of the people of Menar conserving the wetlands was when they protested a permission given by the king for shooting of birds in the region after seeing the impact the firing was doing to the birds. The aquatic habitat of Menar was such that there was plenty of fish and other feed for the migratory birds coming to the region. However it was only as late as 2014 when Menar got attention when the first Udaipur Bird Fair was organised and nature enthusiasts reached Menar for birding field visit. They have been coming regularly since then. The fact that Brahm talab is deep and Dhandh talab shallow allows for a variety of habitats for the birds. While 50 bird species have been documented by Umesh Menaria himself, there are more than 100 birds to be found in the region around the two lakes.

For more details, see -

<https://rajasthanbiodiversity.org/menar-iba/>

<https://www.facebook.com/umeshmenariyamemar/>

<https://umeshmenaria.wordpress.com/2017/04/05/%E2%80%8Bi-have-never-ever-seen-a-place-like-memar-where-birds-and-humans-live-in-such-proximity-poll/>

<https://www.instagram.com/umeshmenariya/reel/C1CftmHP358/>

<https://www.sanctuarynaturefoundation.org/article/the-bird-villages-of-udaipur%3A-memar%2C-krishna-kareri-and-badwai>

In addition to the number of stories narrated by Umesh Menaria was the one where the Egyptian Vulture was able to survive and breed due to the specific efforts taken by the people of Menar.

For more details, see - <https://vagabondimages.in/memar-again-for-owls-and-vultures-this-time/>

## **2.2 Reconnaissance Visit to Menar Village**

A team from St. Mary's Senior Sec. School Fatehpura and Institute for Ecology and Livelihood Action visited Menar to get a first hand feel of the place. As pointed out earlier, Umesh Menaria a bird conservationist and resident of Menar provided a firsthand account of his experiences, understanding, photographs and observations over the ten years that he has studied the region closely. Among the things he shared was the unique cohesion among the local population that made this conservation effort possible. Some images from the visit are shown below.

## **2.3 Follow up by St. Mary's Sr. Sec. School, Fatehpura, Udaipur**

On the occasion of World Wetland Day on 2<sup>nd</sup> February at the Assembly Sr. Jyothsna, Principal St. Mary's gave the following message

*"We should take care of our common home namely mother earth and nature. Celebrating World Wetland Day is step in this direction. Our small actions will have great impact on nature - acts like saving water at home and in school to start with, saying no to plastic and reducing pollution."*

Students of the school read out the posters they had prepared for the occasion (the videos of the same are available with Ms Shalu Bilochi the teacher who facilitated the students). Separately in the class room, a short video was shown to create awareness of what wetlands are. The teachers were exposed to the following material

The wetlands a short film - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyLCCTF1vdo>

Portal for wetlands in India - <https://indianwetlands.in/resources-and-e-learning/videos/>

A film on why wetlands in India need our attention - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8uR4qh6ZQxQ>

Rajasthan Wetland Atlas -

[https://www.tourism.rajasthan.gov.in/content/dam/environment/env-swa/PDFs/Rajasthanl\\_Wetlands\\_Atlas.pdf](https://www.tourism.rajasthan.gov.in/content/dam/environment/env-swa/PDFs/Rajasthanl_Wetlands_Atlas.pdf)

How to build on this small effort will be taken up in the coming months.



Photographs of Menar Village Wetlands (Photo credit - Mrs. Shalu Bilochi, Teacher Faculty of St. Mary's School)



A Student showing her poster at the school assembly on WWD

### 3. SPWD and Prayatna Samiti Relationship with the Wetlands

Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development (SPWD) first took up the question of looking at the relationship of a sub-basin to the basin in the year 2000 following a serious debate on the larger relevance of watershed development. The debate threw up the fact that while the watershed embodied the principles of conservation of water at the site when it fell to the ground, it had limitations in dealing with issues related to ecosystem issues which in terms of water resources were captured at the basin level. Given the fact that at time, monitoring of water resources were looked at seriously at the basin level and larger water bodies, it was felt that to seriously relate the watershed to the basin could be best looked at when examining the sub-basin. Accordingly, in collaboration with SOPPECOM a pilot study was done in a segment of Jaisamand lake catchment area to understand its relationship with the catchment area of Jaisamand. SOPPECOM came up with the revised 'Han model' that was able to tweak issues relate to low and high rainfall (full percolation to full runoff) with the help of an understanding of the basic catchment area characteristics.

Following this, in collaboration with Prayatna Samiti, Hanuman Van Vikas Samiti and Jagran Jan Vikas Samiti, SPWD undertook a study of one of the river basins of Jaisamand catchment area namely 'Jhamri River Basin' where 101 villages of the 419 villages of the catchment were located. The study revealed on one hand the importance of the commons which comprised of 78% of the catchment area while on the other, the socio-economic study pointed to the relevance of Buffaloes for Dangi community who inhabited the lower catchment areas and goats for the Rawats who occupied the upper catchment areas of the region. This dichotomy in the use of land and water resources led SPWD to look more closely at the relationship between ecology and livelihood of the local communities leading to a

more inclusive and comprehensive planning process at the village level in collaboration with the Panchayat to which it belonged so that land and water conservation activities could be taken up on a systematic basis with the help of MGNREGA, the employment guarantee scheme of the Government of India.

The COVID pandemic brought home the need to look more closely at the relevance of the biodiversity resources in the village in terms of their relevance for food and health security. Discussions with IELA helped to integrate issues related to the larger questions of ecological governance and the relevance of the ecosystems approach to sustainable development. This culminated in a workshop in September 2022 '**Relevance of the Ecosystems approach to Sustainable Development: Case studies of Mahi River Basin, Aravallis and other ecosystems of India.**'

For more details, see –

[http://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Workshop-Report\\_Final\\_SPWD\\_IELA\\_PS.pdf](http://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Workshop-Report_Final_SPWD_IELA_PS.pdf)

<http://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Summary-Way-forward.pdf>

Following this the policy paper 'ecosystems approach to land use and ecology and livelihoods in Rajasthan' tries to spell out the concerns and necessity for a qualitatively new approach to the issue of land use and livelihoods.

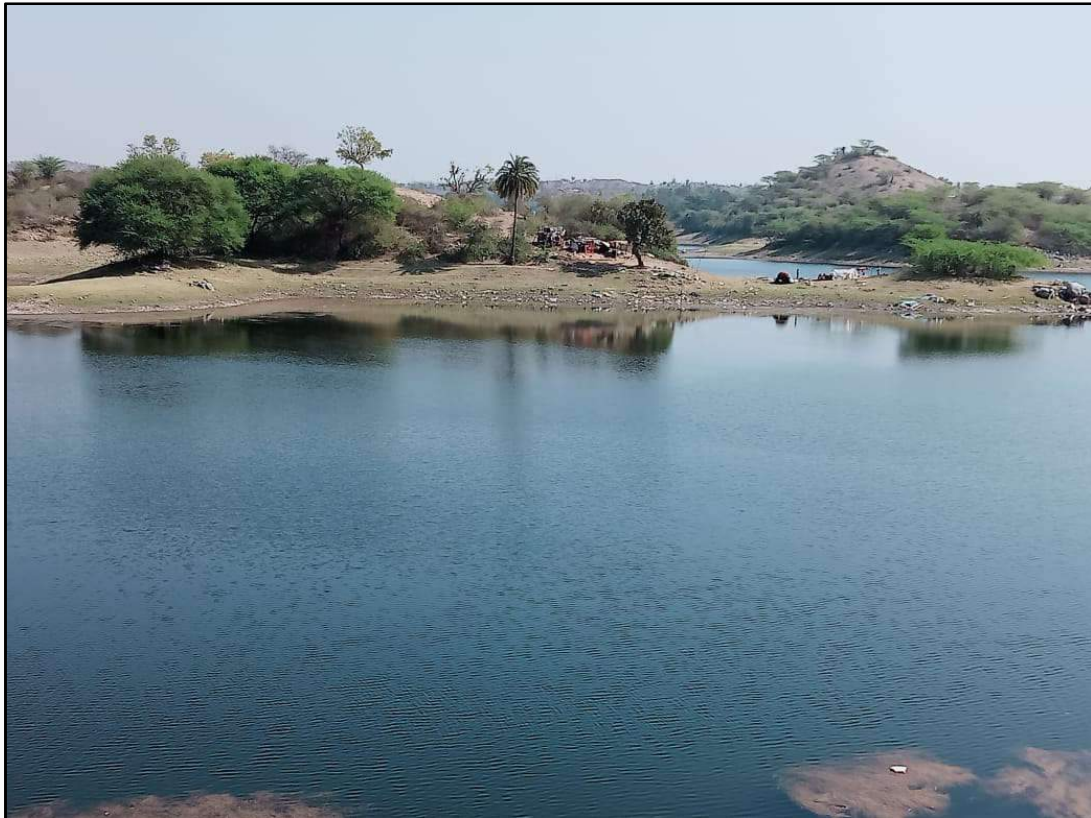
For more details, see -

[http://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Ecosystems-approach-to-land-use-ecology-and-livelihoods-in-Rajasthan\\_A-policy-brief.pdf](http://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Ecosystems-approach-to-land-use-ecology-and-livelihoods-in-Rajasthan_A-policy-brief.pdf)

### **3.1 World Wetland Land Day and Relevance of Pheela Village:**

To celebrate World Wetland Day, a meeting was organised at Pheela Pond on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024. Mohan Dangi, secretary of Prayatna Samiti, on behalf of the group explained this effort as a new way to engage on the complexity of the ecological and livelihood issues facing rural communities. While trying to understand the way the community as a whole engaged with the wetland body it was understood that the water users committee was only responsible for distribution and regulation of water from the lake to downstream users of the canal.

In the discussions that followed, Mohan Dangi impressed upon the need to look at broader issues related, to conservation, distribution and management of water. In this connection he pointed out the need to look at the treatment of the upper catchment area and also the need to look at the relevance of organic farming and local species for better water use efficiency, improved soil health and regulation of moisture availability above and below the surface as also in the recharge of ground water and continued water availability in the well.



**Picturesque view of Pheela Pond where WWD was Celebrated**

Darpan Chhabaria, Project Coordinator of Prayatna Samiti while introducing the subject of the wetlands and the global call to celebrate World Wetland Day on 2<sup>nd</sup> February also talked of its intricate relationship with Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The discussions that followed showed how the wetlands were related to the land use and biodiversity of the entire landscape and hence a proper perspective of the landscape would help in integrated and sustainable development of the region.

Madhav Menaria from Menar village pointed out how Menar villagers had developed rules to conserve the wetlands of Menar and the efforts taken to creatively use the MGNREGA programme to clear the area of invasive species, provide drainage lines inside the tank for better water availability for the fish and in general provide a clean and healthy atmosphere for the migratory birds that flock to Menar.

Viren Lobo, Managing Trustee of IELA while pointing out that a team had recently visited Menar also pointed out that since the Government of Rajasthan was communicating to the Ramsar headquarters to declare Udaipur as a Ramsar City and Menar as a wetland site, the overall climate could be used to push for improving the wetlands of Udaipur District as a whole by raising issues related to the health of the Catchment and Command areas. Given that Mohan Dangi and Darpan Chhabaria had raised issues related to an integrated and sustainable approach to land and water management through a planning process at the Gram Sabha, he pointed out that there was a need to look at the 29 departments that were a part of the Panchayati Raj system.





**Participants at Pheela Pond during World Wetlands Day Program**

A radically different way of using the funds available would be possible if the Gram Sabha could get its act together to examine the resources at their disposal differently. In this connection he talked of the relevance of an environment and social education programme with the schools that documented and highlighted the issues of the region in a way that children could engage with. Given that the school was bang below the Tank Bund, it could serve as a very useful interpretation centre for the wetlands and related issues. In tandem with this he also pointed to the relevance of a fresh look at health and nutrition issues with women at the centre in terms of collection, conservation and promotion of local seeds, nutritional programme based on the local varieties available in the regions and primary health care based on the medicinal diversity in the region (linked to traditional wisdom of the same).

Sarpanches of two Panchayats were present and endorsed the issues that emerged. They however expressed concern at the lack of unity in the village and overdependence on the Sarpanch to deliver the goods. How this could be dealt with would be taken up later. For now it was resolved that regular bimonthly meetings to take the issues identified forward would help a great deal.

### **3.2 Way Forward for Pheela Wetland:**

The meeting declared the intention of developing Pheela as a model village for integrated developed centering around the pond which defined the upper and lower catchment areas of the region. How organic/ natural farming could help improve water use efficiency, improve the health of the soils, water and quality of life would provide the base to the drive for a more sustainable livelihood system. How this would provide the impetus for

engaging with women and children to provide the base for a differently empowered Gram Sabha engaging seriously with agenda 2030 and the 17 SDGs was also taken up. The house resolved to meet again on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2024 to follow up.

#### **4. Issues with the Wetlands of Udaipur**

The consequences of this callous and enormous lapse are now being felt all over the country, as precisely the activities that are supposed to be forbidden are merrily undertaken on wetlands. And this is the concern in the city of Udaipur, Rajasthan, where a five-star hotel is being constructed on land that is clearly a wetland, on an island on one of the city's lakes.

The lake in question – Udaisagar – was constructed around 1565 by Maharaja Udai Singh, founder of the city. Surrounded by Aravalli hills, it has a catchment of 7.70 square km. On this lake there is an island of around 8 hectares, which was under the tenancy of some peasants. More than three-fourths of the island lies below the high flood level. Since the island is partially submerged during the monsoons, the peasants would cultivate their land when the rain water receded, and in general it was a safe habitat for a wide variety of avian and aquatic species.

Such issues plague other wetlands of Udaipur as well. Efforts at conservation and eco-restoration have been undertaken by a number of agencies across the district with varying results. The Mewar Biodiversity Park in Amberi located west of Udaipur city along the Udaipur-Nathdwara national highway near Chirva Ghat is one such which has helped to restore the native biodiversity to its pristine glory. Work related to watershed development is being seriously examined in some locations in relation to its potential for development of other wetland sites. These need to be properly documented as well.

For more details, see –

<https://udaipurtimes.com/issues/addressing-pollution-environment-and-traffic-in-udaipur/cid11201464.htm>

<https://www.networkideas.org/news-analysis/2018/01/destroying-wetlands/>

#### **5. IELA Celebration of World Wetlands Day with Partners**

##### **5.1 RAJASTHAN**

##### **5.1.a Visit to Menar Wetlands to Understand Community Led Protection to Water Bodies to Provide Refuge to Resident and Migratory Birds:**

The report of this visit and issues therein has been provided in detail above. Of importance here is the issue related to how the community has participated in such a process. There are a number of wetlands in Udaipur district where community protection and conservation of water bodies have led to an influx of migratory birds to the region. IELA is keeping close watch on such wetlands and motivating the local communities as to the specific

conditions and concerns related to how they are being maintained. The event was registered on the International website of World Wetlands Day.

For more details, see –

<https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/display-event?eventEntryId=1473172&redirect=%2Fdashboard%23event1473172>

#### 5.1.b. Meeting with Small Scale Fishermen at Lake Jaisamand in Udaipur District:

Since members of the small scale fisher community of Jaisamand are part of the National Platform of Small Scale Fish Workers forum, IELA is in regular touch with these fisher communities. Following up on the even organised with them last year, IELA felt it would be better to organise the event at Jaismand Dam itself so that a wider canvas of issues could be covered. Fish Workers from Rentguria, Saradi, Gamdi, Minduda, Toran Mahudi and Padarda villages attended the meeting.



Meeting with fisher community of Jaisamand Lake on the Occasion of World Wetlands Day

At this meeting, the following points came up sharply -

- a. The need to establish 'community water rights' of fish workers in line the 'community forest rights' of forest dependent communities. This in the larger context of 'community control of natural resources'.

- b. This need above requires the fish workers of the 22 villages where fisher cooperatives exist to organise themselves collectively as a union for which the National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSF) is providing the framework for collective action.
- c. In line with the above two, the right to determine the kind of fingerling species that would be put into the water bodies for later harvesting. The right to raise these fingerlings locally, the necessary wherewithal to raise funds, creation of their own workshops to manufacture and repair boats and fish nets, collection, value addition and independent marketing of the fish catch were also discussed in depth.
- d. It was also pointed out that when fishers are recognised as wage workers, they shall be entitled to avail various benefits provided to them by the Government of India. For this the fish workers need to be registered as workers on the Government of India portal. As of now, fisheries department is not cooperating hence this issue needs to be properly argued collectively so that their recognition and identity could be confirmed in the government records and database. The event was registered on the International website of World Wetlands Day.

For more details, see –

<https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/display-event?eventEntryId=1473099&redirect=%2Fdashboard%23event1473099>



**IELA Team and Local Participants Displaying Poster of the World Wetlands Day at Jaisamand**

### **5.1.c. Meeting with Panchayat Representatives and Villagers at Pheela Village in Collaboration with Pratayna Samiti**

The details have been given in the previous section of this report.

#### 5.1.d. World Wetlands Day at Chittorgarh in Collaboration with SAFEL and other partners:

In Chittorgarh, Rajasthan, 'Society About Forest, Earth and Living Organisms' (SAFEL) organised multiple events related to the World Wetlands Day in collaboration with IELA, Shekhawati Science Academy Chittorgarh, Vidya Vihar Seniro Secondary School Chittorag and Radiant Academy Chittorgarh. Children from schools participated in various events that included workshop, field visit, seminar, poster presentation, oral presentation, and quiz competition. Dr. Mohammed Yaseen, Secretary of SAFEL coordinated the whole program and spread the WWD message to masses through mass media. The event was registered on the International website of World Wetlands Day.

For more details, see –

[https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/display-event?p\\_p\\_id=eventDisplay&redirect=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.worldwetlandsday.org%2Fevents&eventEntryId=1513096](https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/display-event?p_p_id=eventDisplay&redirect=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.worldwetlandsday.org%2Fevents&eventEntryId=1513096)



Winners of the World Wetlands Day Events at Chittorgarh with Organising Team and Partners



Children Participating in the World Wetlands Day Event at Chittorgarh

## 5.2 MAHARASHTRA

In collaboration with IELA, Ashankur has been working with the fish workers in Rahuri, Nevasa, Pathardi and Shirampur taluka where fisher community is dependent on tanks and reservoirs as well as rivers for fishing based livelihood. In order to develop a proper perspective with the Fishing community of the region it was thought to organise WWD meeting events at Mula Dam in Baragaon Nandur and Taklibhan village near Godavari River on the occasion of the world wetlands day 2024.

### 5.2.a. Meeting with Small Scale Fish Workers of Taklibhan (Godavari River):

Visit was made to Taklibhan village where fish workers dependant on the Godavari river were interacted with to understand how Ashankur could fit in and deepen it's engagement with fish workers of the region, particularly with fisher women who were not under access by Ashankur in its women empowerment programs till date. The purpose of this visit was to consolidate the work related to fish workers in the region and understand the specific issues being faced by the fishers of Taklibhan. One of the major issues, invasion of Tilapia fish and its impact on the local fish diversity and consequently the livelihood of fishers, was also discussed.



**Rekha from Ashankur speaking to the fishers gathered at Takalibhan Village**

At Jainpur village, Ashankur team was guided to conduct river bank survey to understand the wetland ecology of a river. Several plant species of local importance were identified and many species having potential invasive nature were also identified. The invasive pathways of terrestrial and aquatic invasive plants were explained along with

demonstration of their occurrence and distribution along the river bank. Issues similar to those raised in Taklibhan were also discussed with Ashankur staff in depth. A consolidated report of the region is being prepared along with the readings taken with GPS apps.

For more details, see –

<https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/display-event?eventEntryId=1512832&redirect=%2Fdashboard%23event1512832>



Local Fishers, Ashankur Staff and IELA Staff Displaying Banner of WWD at Takalibhan Village

### 5.2.b. Meeting with Small Scale Fish Workers at Mula Dam (Gyaneshwar Sagar Dam):

Ashankur team had visited this area few times in the recent past. Initial visit was meant to find out the fisher community living in the area and identification of their issues, including the status of fisher women. Ashankur is not operating in this area, but based on a pilot family survey of fisher households during previous visits, Ashankur found that it would be worthwhile to know about these despised people who are even not well recognised and are living in miserable conditions despite contributing significantly in fisheries based economy of Ahmednagar district. Ashankur team planned a meeting with fisher community at Mula Dam.

The occasion was used to commemorate the World Wetlands Day and point to the larger issues facing the fish workers in the region which would require them to organise themselves for collective realisation. Since some of Ashankur's staff those present at this meeting had participated in the regional meeting organised by National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers at Mumbai, it was easy for them to relate to this agenda. Specifically the issue of invasion of Tilapia and its impact on the local fish diversity was discussed in some depth.



Sister Prisca Tirkey, Incharge of Ashankur Addressing the Fisher Community at Mula Dam



Rekha from Ashankur speaking to the fishers gathered at Mula Dam



For more details, see –

<https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/display-event?eventEntryId=1512769&redirect=%2Fdashboard%23event1512769>



Group Photo of the Fisher Community, Ashankur and IELA Staff on the Occasion of WWD 2024 at Mula Dam

## 6. What Can Be Done?

Last year IELA in collaboration with NPSSF and the fishermen of Jaisamand celebrated world wetland day at Lake Jaisamand in Rajasthan. It was for the first time that issues related to fishermen in Jaisamand lake were raised in connection with World Wetland Day, this cry of the fishermen resonated with others across the country.

<https://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/IELA-Press-Note-Fishermen-of-Jaisamand-Celebrated-WWD-Program-English.pdf>

IELA in collaboration with Ashankur is separately working with the fish workers of Ahmednagar District to develop a forum to deal with the specific issues in that region. Expanding the scope of this call IELA made a more comprehensive call related to the wetlands of Udaipur. Resonating with the move to declare Udaipur as the first wetland city of India, we want to highlight the larger issues at stake when seriously engaging with what this move takes.

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