

Saving Holiest River using Capacity Building as a Tool

"The holy Ganga River, a symbol of purity and spirituality, holds a special place in the hearts of millions, inspiring reverence and devotion."

Capacity building is not only training but also a way to unlock the human potential. There are many other ways to protect the River Ganga through use of technologies, cleaning and many more, nevertheless the capacity building plays a major role. The way that a person views the Ganga River depends on his or her personal, social and cultural values, which are reflected in how that person engages with the river on various occasions. A sage may use it as a place of devotion, while a scientist may use it as a centre for research. Different perspectives would be taken by different communities. Capacity building initiates that spark into the minds of people that make them better understand the holiness of the River Ganga and come up with the best solutions.



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Ganga being invincible and pure is a sacred river in India which originates from the ice caves "cow's mouth" i.e. Gaumukh and drains into the mangroves of Bay of Bengal. From the snow mountains to the forest region, Ganga covers five states of India namely Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. Over the years, it has gained the status of 'Maa Ganga' and worshipped by millions of devotees around the globe. The river holds the spiritual, cultural, economical and ecological significance. With more than 400 million inhabitants, the Ganga River basin is one of the world's most densely populated areas. River Ganga is known as "lifeline of India" as it provides 40% of the water to the population. In India, the river is an utmost source of water for domestic, industrial, and agricultural usage. The Ganga basin is the most fertile region and agriculturally productive river ecosystem. The primary source of income for the residents in this area is still agriculture or farming. Many sectors have been flourished along the banks of River Ganga. The Ganges River remains important to the Indians as it harbours a wide variety of species of flora and fauna such as the Ganges River dolphin, a very rare species of freshwater dolphin that is native only to that area. Along



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with this, *rohu*, *hilsa*, *catla* and *susu* (Blind Dolphin) are the other aquatic animals. One can also observe Bengal tiger, gharials, otters, turtles and several aquatic and terrestrial birds.



But it is not the same Ganga as it was; now it's more polluted and faces several challenges like pollution, water depletion and construction of dams. Generally, rivers have the power of self-cleansing but this can fail if the threshold value of any of the contaminants exceeds. To address the above mentioned challenges, the government had launched *Namami Gange* programme in 2014 to improve water quality, conserve biodiversity and promote sustainable development. This initiative aims to achieve twin objectives of effective abatement of pollution and conservation and rejuvenation of National River Ganga. A comprehensive and integrated

strategy was started, inspired by the goal of an *Aviral* (unrestricted flow) and *Nirmal* (unpolluted flow) Ganga. Three verticals like *Gyan Ganga* (research and knowledge management), *Jan Ganga* (public participation and connecting people to rivers), and *Arth Ganga* (self-sustainable economic model) further support this. By strengthening local capacities to improve decentralized water governance, it is necessary that citizens participate in order to increase synergies among the stakeholders, cultural heritage, and tourism as well as strengthen institution building. Capacity building is one of the important pillars to restore and revitalize Ganga River.

Namami Gange entrusted IIPA to take the lead by incorporating public engagement for Ganga Rejuvenation in order to promote sustainable ecological, and economic development for the Ganga Basin. The program's main goals are to foster multi-sectoral collaboration, build capacity, and increase public awareness. By involving stakeholders and fostering a positive public perception, National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) places a strong emphasis on River Ganga conservation. The major stakeholders are school and college students, master trainers, urban local bodies (ULBs), spiritual leaders and academia. Another major task is to sensitize them about the Ganga River. It is essential to spread the knowledge across people about the grandeur of River Ganga and its importance. Sensitizing the students is like nurturing a plant into a tree that will bear fruits in the near future. Developing their minds and trickling their nerves to think out of the box to conserve and preserve rivers; and build emotive connect towards River Ganga. As a result, students come up with the innovative ideas during the interacting session of training and it is enthralling to see the unique responses by both the students and teachers.



Providing training to Urban Local Bodies is also necessary, as they are directly linked and responsible for urban development management including waste management, water supply and sanitation. Therefore, it is vital to train and equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge for preserving River Ganga.

Master trainers are very important in raising awareness about environmental issues and the value of safeguarding natural resources like rivers. Providing training to them will help them to integrate environmental education into their teaching, which can promote a culture of environmental stewardship among students. This can lead to positive behavioural changes and a more environmentally conscious society.

Along with Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism are two additional religions that place importance on the River Ganga. Engaging spiritual leaders in conversation about the river Ganga can encourage interfaith communication and understanding, which can result in a more peaceful and inclusive society. Spiritual leaders can utilise their influence to encourage their followers to engage in sustainable behaviours including waste reduction, water conservation, and ecosystem preservation.

In terms of training, IIPA has trained more than 17,000 school and college students, 1,000 master trainers, 120 ULBs, 5,000 spiritual leaders and 200 academia till date. These are not only the number of trainings, but also this is the way towards encouraging people to save Ganga by raising awareness, promoting sustainable practices, and fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership towards the river. The profound concept that all living things on Earth have a connection and are fundamentally a part of the same family is expressed in the ancient Sanskrit scripture "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*" from the *Maha Upanishad*. For the sake of everyone's wellbeing, it is our common responsibility as members of our global family to protect and maintain the environment, especially our rivers.

Har Har Gange, Namami Gange!!

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