

# INDIA RIVERS WEEK 2021

## Healthy Rivers, Fish and Fishers

The poster features a background image of a wide river with a sandy bank and three small boats. At the top, there is a colorful logo for 'India Rivers Week' showing a river, trees, and a sun. Below the logo, the text 'INDIA RIVERS WEEK 2021' is written in blue, followed by 'a series of virtual dialogues on the theme: *'Healthy Rivers, Fish and Fishers'*'. A list of dates and topics is provided: 8th November - Polluted Rivers, 13th November - Captive Rivers, 17th November - Science, Data & Advocacy, 20th November - Changing Political Economy, and 27th November - Governance & Way Forward. The registration information 'REGISTER AT: www.indiariversforum.org/IRW2021' is centered below the list. At the bottom, the IRF logo (India Rivers Forum) is displayed in a white box.

**INDIA RIVERS WEEK 2021**  
a series of virtual dialogues on the theme:  
*'Healthy Rivers, Fish and Fishers'*

8<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER - POLLUTED RIVERS  
13<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER - CAPTIVE RIVERS  
17<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER - SCIENCE, DATA & ADVOCACY  
20<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER - CHANGING POLITICAL ECONOMY  
27<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER - GOVERNANCE & WAY FORWARD

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**IRF** { INDIA RIVERS FORUM

Millions of fishers and their families once had a stake in free-flowing and unpolluted rivers across India. However, the health of river ecosystems have been affected through regulation and fragmentation by hydropower projects, dams, barrages and embankments; diversion of water for domestic, irrigation and industrial uses; massive pollution from liquid and solid waste, and effluents; and sand and boulder mining. As a result, the productive river based capture fisheries have declined across the country.

Shockingly, if you look at the Environment or Social Impact Assessment of any dam, hydropower project or diversion, there is never any credible assessment of the impact of the project on riverine fish or the fisherfolk whose livelihoods would be affected by such projects. There has **never** been any compensation, leave aside resettlement or rehabilitation of the people so affected by the destruction of their fisheries livelihood. The Ganga e-flows notification of October 2018 that became possible only due to decades of struggle by people and advocacy groups, is not even based on assessment for need to sustain fisherfolk livelihoods. Even the National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy does not address the injustice heaped on the fisherfolk communities.

Furthermore, the demand for fresh-water and estuarine fish by a growing population is now met, to a large extent, by aquaculture and reservoir based fisheries. This has further marginalised the river based fishers. Where river stretches are still being leased out for fish catch by the authorities - a mafia has grown around it which has further marginalised the traditional fishers and compromised their fish based livelihood security. Resultantly the traditional fishers have been forced to seek alternate avenues to eke out a living. Lack of unity or strong community level institutions amongst traditional freshwater fishers have also contributed to an absence of fishers voice or political clout.

That the fisheries departments & institutions who ought to have taken a lead role in championing the cause of river protection for freshwater fisheries have conveniently taken to ex situ aquaculture or reservoir seeding targeting just fish productivity with little bother or focus on need to maintain indigenous fish biodiversity in free flowing rivers is an unfortunate fact.

Free-flowing river ecosystems have to be restored to perform their vital ecosystem services from head-waters to estuaries and deltas so that capture fisheries with its important contribution to livelihoods, culture and protein security can be revived and sustained. What challenges does this pose and how do we find a bridge across these troubled waters to a future with ecologically sustainable river fisheries in free-flowing rivers? The five-episode webinar series at India Rivers Week 2021 with the theme – “Healthy Rivers, Fish and Fishers” – will respond to this core question.

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*Register for the webinar series here: [www.indiariversforum.org/IRW2021](http://www.indiariversforum.org/IRW2021)*

*Proceedings from India Rivers Week 2021 will be available at this link:  
[www.indiariversforum.org/indiariversweek2021/](http://www.indiariversforum.org/indiariversweek2021/)*

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