



NADI Mahotsav[©]

Connecting Rivers with Life & Livelihood

An initiative by: SAIARD - IIRA – International Institute of River Affairs

1. Background

Rivers are not merely channels of flowing water; they are living systems that shape landscapes, sustain ecosystems, support agriculture and livelihoods, connect communities, and have deeply influenced the cultural and civilisational history of India. From the Ganga, Yamuna, Brahmaputra and Narmada to thousands of smaller rivers and streams, India's social, economic, ecological and cultural identity is intrinsically connected with its rivers.

However, increasing urbanisation, pollution, encroachment of floodplains, unplanned infrastructure, changing land-use patterns, excessive extraction of water and the impacts of climate variability are creating growing challenges for river systems and river-dependent communities.

There is therefore a need to move beyond viewing rivers only through the lens of water resources or engineering and create a broader **people–river relationship** based on knowledge, participation, responsibility and cultural connection.

Against this backdrop, **NADI Mahotsav** is proposed as a national-level celebration dedicated to India's rivers and the communities, cultures, knowledge systems and livelihoods connected with them.

2. The Concept

NADI Mahotsav will be a multidisciplinary river festival bringing together **communities, students, youth, researchers, scientists, environmentalists, artists, cultural practitioners, policymakers, administrators, industries, entrepreneurs, media and civil-society organisations** on a common platform.

The Mahotsav will seek to transform the way society perceives rivers—from “**water resources**” to “**living natural systems and shared heritage**.”

It will combine **celebration with awareness, knowledge with dialogue, and dialogue with action**.

The festival can be organised annually, with different editions hosted in different river cities or river basins across India, thereby creating a nationwide **River Festival Network**.

Suggested Core Message

“Nadi ko samjhein, Nadi se judhein, Nadi ke saath badhein.”

Understand the River. Connect with the River. Grow with the River.

3. Vision

To establish **NADI Mahotsav** as India's premier public platform celebrating rivers, river cultures and river-dependent communities, while fostering a stronger societal commitment towards river conservation, sustainable river management and living harmoniously with rivers.



4. Objectives

The principal objectives of NADI Mahotsav would be to:

- Create greater public awareness about the ecological, social, economic and cultural importance of rivers.
- Reconnect communities, particularly younger generations, with rivers.
- Celebrate India's diverse **river cultures, traditions, heritage and knowledge systems**.
- Provide a platform for dialogue between communities, government, academia, experts and practitioners.
- Promote responsible use and conservation of river resources.
- Encourage scientific understanding of rivers and river basins.
- Highlight river-dependent livelihoods and indigenous knowledge.
- Promote discussions on flood resilience, floodplain management and living with rivers.
- Showcase innovative technologies, solutions and good practices in river management.
- Encourage youth participation in river conservation and research.
- Create partnerships among government institutions, research organisations, communities, industries and civil society.
- Generate actionable ideas and commitments for healthier and more resilient rivers.

5. Major Components of NADI Mahotsav

A. River Knowledge Conclave

A high-level knowledge and policy platform involving scientists, researchers, policymakers, engineers, administrators and practitioners.

Possible themes:

- Future of India's Rivers
- River Basin Management
- River Health & Ecological Restoration
- Floodplain Management
- Climate Change & River Resilience
- Urban Rivers
- Groundwater–River Interaction
- River Pollution & Waste Management
- Sustainable Water Use
- River Governance & Institutions



B. Nadi Sanskriti – River Culture & Heritage

A celebration of the cultural relationship between people and rivers.

Activities could include:

- Folk music and dance
- River-based traditions
- Storytelling
- Poetry
- Theatre
- Traditional boat culture
- River photography
- Painting and art exhibitions
- Documentary screenings
- Traditional knowledge demonstrations
- Exhibitions on river heritage

This component would establish that **river conservation is also about preserving the cultural memory associated with rivers.**

C. Nadi Mela – River Exhibition

A large public exhibition showcasing:

- River projects
- Government programmes
- Research institutions
- River technologies
- GIS and remote sensing applications
- Water-quality monitoring systems
- Flood forecasting technologies
- River restoration solutions
- Sustainable livelihood models
- Start-ups and innovations
- Community-led river initiatives

A dedicated **River Innovation Pavilion** could provide space for young entrepreneurs and technology companies.



D. Nadi Bhagidari – Community River Forum

Building on the principle of **people's participation and community ownership**, communities from river-dependent areas can share their experiences, challenges and solutions.

Special participation could be invited from:

- Fisher communities
- Farmers
- Boatmen
- River-island communities
- Wetland-dependent communities
- Women-led community groups
- Indigenous and traditional knowledge holders
- Riverfront communities

The objective would be to bring **community knowledge into mainstream river governance discussions**.

E. Youth River Parliament

A special youth component can be organised under the existing **Youth River Parliament** concept of IIRA.

Students and young professionals could deliberate on:

- The future of India's rivers
- River pollution
- Climate change
- Flood resilience
- River-linked livelihoods
- Technology and river governance
- River entrepreneurship

The programme could culminate in a **Youth River Declaration**.

F. River Walk & Nadi Yatra

A public **River Walk** can be organised along the host city's riverfront, accompanied by experts, students, artists, citizens and community representatives.

A larger **Nadi Yatra** could subsequently travel through important river locations, connecting communities and documenting river stories, challenges and solutions.



G. Save River Action Zone

A dedicated public engagement area under IIRA's **Save River Campaign** could encourage citizens to participate in practical river-related actions.

Possible activities:

- River-cleaning initiatives
- Plastic-free river campaigns
- Plantation and ecological restoration
- Citizen water-quality monitoring
- River awareness drives
- School campaigns
- Community pledges
- Local river documentation

The emphasis should be on **sustained action rather than a one-day symbolic event**.

H. Nadi Film & Literature Festival

A dedicated cultural programme featuring:

- River documentaries
- Short films
- Photography
- Books
- Research publications
- River literature
- Poetry
- Podcasts
- Digital storytelling

An annual **Nadi Film Award** and **River Writing Award** could also be instituted.

I. River Innovation & Technology Pavilion

The Mahotsav could showcase emerging technologies for:

- River monitoring
- Water-quality assessment
- GIS and remote sensing



- Flood forecasting
- Early-warning systems
- Drone-based river mapping
- AI-based river analytics
- Wastewater treatment
- Restoration
- Smart river governance

This could create opportunities for **industry–government–academic partnerships**.

6. NADI Mahotsav Marketplace

A dedicated **River Economy & Livelihood Pavilion** could highlight products and services associated with river-dependent communities.

Potential sectors include:

- Fisheries
- Handicrafts
- Handloom
- River tourism
- Eco-tourism
- Traditional boats
- Agriculture
- Aquaculture
- River-based food products
- Community enterprises
- Sustainable products

This would reinforce the idea that **healthy rivers support healthy local economies**.

7. NADI Mahotsav Awards

An annual **NADI Awards** could recognise outstanding contributions to river affairs.

Possible categories:

- River Conservation Champion
- River Community Leadership Award
- River Research Award



- Young River Leader Award
- River Innovation Award
- River-Friendly Industry Award
- River Journalism Award
- River Art & Culture Award
- River Restoration Award
- Lifetime Contribution to River Affairs

The awards should focus on documented contributions and measurable impact.

8. NADI Mahotsav Declaration

Each edition could conclude with a **“NADI Mahotsav Declaration”**, capturing key recommendations, commitments and partnerships emerging from the event.

Rather than being only a ceremonial document, the Declaration could become an annual **River Action Agenda** containing:

- Priority issues
 - Recommended actions
 - Institutional commitments
 - Community commitments
 - Research priorities
 - Partnership opportunities
 - Follow-up mechanisms
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9. Proposed Institutional Structure

NADI Mahotsav could be developed as a collaborative platform led by **SAIARD Research Group / IIRA**, with participation from:

Central Government Institutions • State Governments • Urban Local Bodies • Research & Academic Institutions • River Basin Organisations • Industries • NGOs • Community Organisations • International Organisations • Start-ups • Media • Youth Organisations

IIRA can serve as the **knowledge and institutional coordination platform**, while different editions can be hosted in partnership with state governments, municipalities, academic institutions or other appropriate organisations.

10. Proposed Format

The Mahotsav could be designed as a **2–3 day annual event** comprising:

Day 1 – Nadi Knowledge

Policy dialogue, technical sessions, River Knowledge Conclave and institutional discussions.



Day 2 – Nadi Sanskriti

Cultural programmes, exhibitions, River Mela, films, art, literature and community activities.

Day 3 – Nadi Bhagidari & Action

Youth River Parliament, River Walk, community programmes, partnership announcements and NADI Mahotsav Declaration.

11. Long-Term Vision

NADI Mahotsav should not remain a conventional festival held at a single location once a year. It can gradually evolve into a **national river movement and knowledge platform**.

The long-term model could include:

NADI Mahotsav National Edition

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State Nadi Mahotsavs

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River-Basin Nadi Mahotsavs

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District/Community River Festivals

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Year-round Nadi Bhagidari & Save River activities

This would create a network connecting India's major rivers, tributaries, communities and institutions.

12. Expected Outcomes

NADI Mahotsav is expected to contribute towards:

- Greater public understanding of rivers.
- Stronger community ownership of river conservation.
- Increased youth engagement.
- Greater visibility for river-dependent communities.
- Exchange of scientific and traditional knowledge.
- New government–academic–industry–community partnerships.
- Promotion of river-friendly technologies and enterprises.
- Greater attention to river heritage and culture.
- Development of actionable river initiatives.
- Creation of a national network of river stakeholders.