

# Press Release

## Field School on Environmental Change and Governance held at Chilika Lagoon

A Field School on Environmental Change and Governance: Coastal Wellbeing and Ecosystem Services Amidst Rapid Change took place at Chilika Lagoon, Badakul, India from 4 - 8 May, 2017. It was organized by the Environmental Change and Governance Group (ECGG) of the University of Waterloo, Canada in collaboration with Rekhi Centre of Excellence for the Science of Happiness, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur, and NIRMAN Odisha (An Initiative for Sustainable Development). Over the span of the 5 day field school graduate students from IIT Kharagpur and the University of Waterloo, faculty members from both institutes, NIRMAN program staff, fisher community leaders, and government marine and coastal department officials came together in order to learn and understand many concepts and approaches in coastal environmental change, human wellbeing, ecosystem services, and governance. This Field School will become an annual event to take place at Chilika Lagoon / Bay of Bengal Odisha Coast during every February in order to bring continuity to monitoring the impacts of environmental change on the wellbeing of members of fishing villages. Additionally, the Field School will continue to bring world renowned scholars in environmental change and governance, graduate students, researchers, policy makers and practitioners from international and national institutions to deliberate on some of the pressing issues facing our precious coastal regions.



Rapid changes in coastal human-environment systems are negatively impacting ecosystem services and threatening human wellbeing significantly. A number of presentations were given on topics such as ecosystem services and wellbeing, governance and rapid coastal change, political ecology of ecosystem services, livelihoods for the poor, the relationship between rights, ecosystem services, and wellbeing, and wellbeing and happiness. Key speakers included Prof. Prateep Kumar Nayak,

University of Waterloo, Canada, Prof. Priyadarshi Pattnaik, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, India, Mr. Kanna Siripurapu, Program Manager, NIRMAN Odisha, India, Prof. Jenia Mukharjee, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, India, Mr. Sisir Pradhan, Odisha Rural Livelihoods Mission, Government of Odisha, India, Prof. Derek Armitage, University of Waterloo, Canada. The classroom learning was combined with field training. Field School participants travelled to six different fishing communities in order to conduct surveys evaluating the wellbeing of community members in the face of ecological change, challenging policies, and management and governance challenges of Chilika Lagoon. Participants gained exposure to small, rural, fishing villages and were able to witness the interactions between wellbeing and benefits from ecosystem services. Local fishing communities opened their homes to the participants while they were interviewed, and became an integral part of the overall learning process hosted in the heart of Chilika Lagoon. Valuable experience and knowledge was gained throughout the Field School process that will continue to positively influence future actions of the participants.

The field school provided the participants with novel perspectives on the interactions



between human wellbeing, happiness and the natural environment. They observed the challenges fishing communities are facing as a result of the rapidly changing coastal systems. Theory and practice came together throughout the field school in order to provide a holistic understanding of the current state of the Chilika Lagoon and its many fisher inhabitants. On the final day of the program concluding reflections were made. Many traditional fishers are no longer able to earn their livelihoods through fishing as a result of depleted resources,

challenging policies, and high competition between fishers. Marine Protected Areas are restricting villagers from accessing traditional fishing areas. The combination of these factors has led to an increase in out-migration in the Chilika fishing villages. The overall wellbeing of fishing communities has been impacted negatively by the ecological change and management of Chilika Lagoon. The participants reflected that it is challenging to achieve a perfect balance between conservation and local livelihoods, especially in connection with human wellbeing and happiness.

The five-day Field School concluded with a community feast accompanied with multitalented cultural activities from both the local villagers and the Field School participants. The cultural experience of the shared meal and talents ended the Field School perfectly with a celebration to commemorate the collaboration between the local fishing communities and the Field School participants.