

Facts From The Ground

The Art of Living's World Culture Festival did not damage or pollute the Yamuna floodplains. The claims that it did are based on a distortion of facts and unsupported by objective or scientific assessment.

Let us take a look:

1. Floodplains are large tracts of land that are spread over thousands of acres. How much of the Yamuna floodplain was used by the WCF? A tiny portion – less than 1%.

2. The land allocated for WCF is neither a wildlife sanctuary nor a reserved nor designated forest, protected by preservation orders. It is not even a notified area. Had it been so The Art of Living would not have applied for it or been granted permission.

3. The Art of Living started work on the WCF only after it received all permissions necessary from the Delhi Development Authority (an autonomous civic body that is the custodian of the land along the Yamuna floodplain) and other relevant agencies of the State and Central governments. The organizers were careful in ensuring that the event adhered strictly to the Delhi Pollution Control Committee's advisory notes.

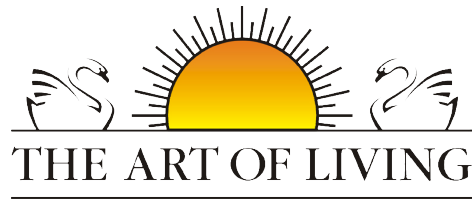
4. When the Art of Living received possession of the allotted land, it was filled with malba, dumped on the floodplains by construction companies. The Art of Living cleared truckloads of malba for a month for the grounds to be usable! Even to clear the malba, we took permission from the DDA, who said that we could do it at our own expense.

Far from harming the environment, we left the place cleaner and greener than we had received.

5. Till the Art of Living started work on the WCF, the floodplains were being used for illegal activities. In fact, the Delhi police acknowledged that the floodplains had been a law and order problem for them, and appreciated that they had been cleared of anti-social elements since the WCF.

6. The ground where WCF was held is flanked by unauthorized colonies on one side; on the other are construction works for an elevated road and the Barapullah drain discharging untreated wastewater into the Yamuna. Beyond this drain are colossal dumps of construction waste. If this were not enough, a new line of the Delhi Metro Rail project is in progress. Construction for three hospitals is currently underway on the floodplains.

In addition, permanent structures such as the DND Flyway, Batla House, unauthorized housing along the Kalindi Bypass, the Commonwealth Games village and the Nafees Road coming from Jamia Millia Islamia have been standing on the floodplains for years.



Why has Art of Living's temporary three-day event attracted so much unjustified criticism from environmentalists and the media, while they have for years completely overlooked the permanent structures, the unauthorized colonies, and the huge construction dumps? Why was WCF asked to pay a compensation for a 3-day event when permanent structures have been standing there for years without having to do so?

7. The Art of Living evacuated and handed over the land as soon as was possible to the DDA after clearing all the event-related infrastructure and litter. (Please find attached the pictures of the venue taken before - in December 2015 -- and after the event -- April 2016.)

8. The seven-acre stage for the event was an architectural marvel: a temporary structure erected in just 50 days and dismantled in 28. The stage was set up without a foundation to prevent damage to the soil.

9. The Yamuna, unfortunately, has been subjected to unacceptable levels of pollution and damage long before the event. A lot needs to be done to rejuvenate Yamuna and its floodplain. However, the WCF did not discharge any wastewater into Yamuna nor drawdown the groundwater in the floodplain.

The Art of Living categorically states that we did not pollute the either the water, or air, or earth in any way.

10. The Art of Living was guided by Mr. Anil Kapoor, lead assessor for ISO-14001 (international standard for environment, with authority to certify industries, other commercial organizations PSU, Coal India and railways), to make an organic formulation from kitchen waste. This was used to clean up the drains at the Yamuna which had an unbearable stench. After this process the stench was completely gone.

It is a process done after extensive study, much proven and practiced the world over. We have available with us a research study on this method done by World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology which has been published in 'International Journal of Environmental, Chemical, Ecological, Geological and Geophysical Engineering Vol:5, No:12, 20' by Fu E. Tang, and Chung W. Tong titled "A Study of the Garbage Enzyme's Effects in Domestic Wastewater".

Importantly, The Art of Living has not put enzymes into the open drains after the NGT court's ordered not to do so.