

Delhi's Yamuna Project

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Delhi's Yamuna Project: A Model for Cooperative River Rejuvenation

Context

The newly elected government in Delhi, working in alignment with the central government, has prioritised the **cleaning of the Yamuna River**.

This initiative supports and enhances the **Namami Gange Programme (NGP)** and offers the potential to act as a **replicable model for river rejuvenation** through strengthened **Centre-State cooperation** and improved **urban governance**.

Namami Gange Programme (NGP): A Paradigm Shift in River Rejuvenation

- Launched in **2014**, NGP marked a transition from a **regulatory pollution control approach** (under the Ministry of Environment) to an **executive, mission-based framework** under the **Ministry of Jal Shakti**.
 - This shift reflects a broader focus, moving from **pollution abatement** to enhancing the **ecological health** of rivers.
 - The programme adopts a **river basin-based planning approach**, developed with inputs from **IITs**.
 - This integrated model mirrors successful global efforts such as the **International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR)**, founded in **1950**, which revived the **River Rhine** through coordinated planning.
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Institutional and Legal Reforms under NGP

- The **River Ganga Authorities Order, 2016** established a multi-tier governance structure

for effective coordination:

- **National Ganga Council (NGC)** chaired by the **Prime Minister**
 - **Empowered Task Force** headed by the **Union Jal Shakti Minister**
 - **Executive Council** led by the **Director General of NMCG**
 - **State and district-level Ganga Committees** for subnational involvement
 - Despite these provisions, **state-level participation** has remained weak.
 - Challenges include inadequate **legal, financial, and institutional support** from basin states, leading to concerns about the **sustainability** of the programme.
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Delhi's Yamuna Project: A Case Study in Urban River Restoration

- Nearly **80% of Yamuna's pollution** originates from **Delhi**, primarily due to **uncaptured and untreated sewage**.
 - This highlights the **critical role of urban governance** and the need for effective sewage treatment infrastructure in river rejuvenation.
 - As the **Yamuna is an interstate river**, its restoration requires **interstate collaboration**, making Delhi's approach a **model for federal cooperation**.
 - The project can help understand **what motivates subnational mobilisation** under centrally sponsored programmes like the NGP.
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Learning from Global Best Practices

- The **European experience** with the **ICPR**, especially after the **Sandoz chemical disaster**, led to the creation of the **Water Framework Directive**, which institutionalised long-term water governance.
- India can draw lessons by encouraging **state ownership** and creating strong **institutional partnerships** within the NGP framework.

Conclusion

- Delhi's Yamuna cleaning initiative presents an opportunity to address existing gaps in the **Namami Gange Programme**, especially related to:
 - **Urban sewage management**
 - **Subnational participation**
 - **Interstate cooperation**
- If leveraged effectively, it can contribute to building a **robust and layered governance framework** for river rejuvenation in India.
- This will also advance goals related to **environmental federalism**, **urban development**, and **sustainable water governance**, making it highly relevant for **UPSC aspirants** studying environmental policy and governance.

