

Namami Gange Programme (NGP), 2014: Rejuvenating the National River Ganga

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[Home Insights](#): Namami Gange Programme (NGP), 2014: Rejuvenating the National River Ganga

Policy Update

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Background

The Ganga River, which runs for about 2,525 km, was declared the National River of the country in 2008. However, the river is not immune to the challenges of pollution and excessive water abstraction. Every day, 2,953 million litres of sewage are generated along the main channel of the Ganga River. The major pollutants include sewage, industrial waste, solid waste, agricultural run-off, open defecation, and partially cremated bodies. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has identified 1072 Gross Polluting Industries (GPIs) in the Ganga basin as of 2020.

The Ganga River is revered as a sacred river by most Indians. It is considered to be the lifeline of India, supporting more than 40% of India's population. Thus, the health of the river is hugely significant for the whole nation. Taking it into consideration, the Government of India launched an integrated conservation mission for restoring the National River in 2014-15, known as the Namami Gange Programme (NGP). The Namami Gange Programme, also called the National Mission for Clean Ganga, set out two main objectives—effectively abating pollution as well as rejuvenating and conserving the River Ganga. The Namami Gange Programme is a flagship initiative under the Ministry of Jal Shakti.

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Functioning

The Namami Gange Programme falls under the purview of the Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation (DoWR, RD & GR), part of the Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India. The NGP was approved in June 2014 with a financial outlay of Rs. 20,000 Crores for five years, up to March 2021. The programme was later extended to March 2026 with a budgetary outlay of Rs. 22,500 Crores. The NGP's vision for Ganga rejuvenation outlines ensuring "Aviral Dhara" (Continuous Flow), "Nirmal Dhara" (Unpolluted Flow), and Geologic and Ecological Integrity.

The main pillars of the Namami Gange Programme include Sewerage Treatment Infrastructure, River-Front Development, River-Surface Cleaning, Biodiversity, Afforestation, Public

Awareness, Industrial Effluent Monitoring and Ganga Gram. The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) was accorded the status of authority in 2016 and implements the NGP. The Namami Gange Programme adopts a river basin approach and includes all tributaries. The key interventions by the NGP can be grouped under:

- **Pollution Abatement (Nirmal Ganga):** Addressing and reducing the sources of pollution in the river.
- **Improving Ecology and Flow (Aviral Ganga):** Improving the ecological health and continuous flow of the river.
- **Strengthening People-River Connect (Jan Ganga):** Fostering a deeper connection between the people and the river through community engagement and awareness.
- **Facilitating Research and Policy (Gyan Ganga):** Promoting diversified research, scientific mapping, studies, and evidence-based policy formulation.

Performance

The Namami Gange Programme has taken progressive steps in terms of mitigating pollution in the Ganga river water, boosting biodiversity, afforestation and increasing sewage treatment capacity. In order to mobilise contributions from all sections of society, the Clean Ganga Fund has been set up. The dedicated fund allocation and implementation of various projects in the cause showcase the positive impact of the programme. As of 31 January 2025, a total of 492 projects have been launched, which encompass sewage infrastructure projects. A comprehensive cost of these projects is sanctioned at Rs. 40,121.48 Crores.

Among these, 307 projects have been finished and are now in an operational state. An impressive 206 projects addressing sewage infrastructure have been initiated. Funding of Rs. 33,003.63 Crores has been sanctioned for these sewage infrastructure projects. Out of these sanctioned projects, 127 sewage projects have been completed so far, helping in pollution reduction. In addition to the sewage projects, 56 Biodiversity & Afforestation projects have been undertaken. These projects have received funds of over Rs. 905.62 Crores. Notably, 39 projects focused on biodiversity and afforestation have been successfully concluded, enhancing the ecological equilibrium of the Ganga River basin.



Source: PIB

Impact

The Namami Gange Programme, working towards reducing pollution in the Ganga River and rejuvenating the national river, has made significant strides in terms of pollution abatement, improving water quality and the riverine ecosystem. Overall, the programme has made measurable progress in restoring the ecological health of the Ganga River.

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- **Pollution Abatement**

The NGP has made significant progress in pollution abatement. The programme has resulted in the creation of 3,446 MLD (Megaliters per Day) of sewage treatment capacity, which is 30 times the pre-2014 treatment capacity. For instance, in Prayagraj, the treatment capacity increased from 268 MLD in 2017 to 348 MLD in 2024, which

has positively contributed to the water quality rise from the Polluted River Stretch (PRS) of Priority IV to PRS V. In Varanasi, sewage treatment capacity has increased from 100 MLD to 420 MLD, and PRS has improved from IV to V.

- **Increase in Water Quality**

In many places in the Ganga Basin, the efforts of the NMCG have improved the water quality. According to the Central Pollution Control Board's report, the stretch from Kannauj to Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh was in the category of Polluted River Stretch (PRS) of Priority III in the year 2015, which means the BOD was between 10 and 20 mg/l. [BOD refers to Biochemical Oxygen Demand and is an indicator of water quality.] In 2022, the river quality witnessed an improvement due to continuous efforts, and the improved polluted river stretch falls in PRS V (BOD 3-6 mg/l).

Another case would be the stretch from Buxar to Bhagalpur in Bihar, which fell in the category of PRS II (BOD 20-30 mg/l) in 2015, yet the water quality has improved in 2022 to PRS IV (BOD 6-10 mg/l) due to the strenuous efforts of NGP. In West Bengal, in 2018, the stretch from Triveni to Diamond Harbour was in PRS III (BOD 10-20 mg/l) category, whereas in 2022, it has moved to PRS IV (BOD 6-10 mg/l).

- **Improvement in Riverine Ecosystem**

The NGP has led to the improvement of the riverine ecosystem of the Ganga. It is substantiated by the increase in the population of Gangetic Dolphins. In comparison to the earlier study conducted in 2018, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has currently recorded an increase in the Gangetic dolphins' population from 3,330 (+/-) 630 to 3,936 (+/-) 763. Dolphins have been found in previously unreported stretches of the Ganga River, such as the stretch between Bithura and Rasula Ghat. First-time reports of the dolphin have taken place from the Babai and Bagmati rivers in India.

- **Global Recognition**

The Namami Gange Programme has received global recognition due to its success in rejuvenating the River Ganga. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration in December 2022 recognised NGP as one of the Top 10 World Restoration Flagship Initiatives. The International Water Association awarded the title of Climate Smart Utility to the NMCG for its commitment to sustainable water management.

Emerging Issues

- **Underutilisation of Funds**

According to a PRS Legislative Research analysis, only 69 per cent of funds allocated to the Namami Gange Programme were utilised till 2024-25, which unearths the underutilisation of funds in the project.

- **Persistent Pollution Problem**

While there has been an improvement in the river's water quality, CPCB identifies industrial waste as a major pollutant still. PRS has noted that more than 450 industries have failed to meet pollution norms.

- **Inadequate Sewage Treatment Capacity**

NGP has a target of 7,000 MLD sewage treatment capacity, but only 52 per cent of it has been realised. It means untreated sewage is still being released into the river.

- **Lapses in Project Management**

Lapses in project management by NMCG include spending a large expenditure on advertising and promotion, without a proportional impact from the same. There have also been delays in the approval of detailed project reports, a slow pace of implementation, poor record maintenance and low fund utilisation.

Way Forward

The Namami Gange Programme, the Government of India's flagship initiative, rolled out in 2014, has had a discernible impact in improving the water quality and ecological status of the Ganga. It is true that NGP has increased the sewage treatment capacity and enhanced the biodiversity of the river. The quantitative data shows the improved water quality in various places in the Ganga River basin. While earlier initiatives like the Ganga Action Plan in 1985, National River Conservation Plan (NRCP) in 1995, and National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) in 2009 helped, the Namami Gange Programme (NGP) pioneered an integrated basin-based approach.

The NGP is an ongoing initiative and has not fully realised its stated goals yet. The NMCG is working towards its objectives, but various hurdles emerge in its way. The most pertinent issue is that funds are being underutilised, and the slow implementation process. Ensuring that the industries meet pollution control standards and reducing industrial waste in the river is another key challenge. Addressing and solving these issues could result in the efficient implementation of the Namami Gange Programme by the Ministry of Jal Shakti.

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