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Jan Ganga Strengthens People's Participation in Namami Gange for Integrated River Rejuvenation and Sustainable Ganga Governance

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Recent Developments:

- The Government has emphasised **Jan Ganga** as the public-participation pillar of the **Namami Gange Programme**, seeking to transform river conservation from a primarily government-led programme into a **people-driven movement** based on **Jan Bhagidari**.
- As of **February 2026**, a total of **524 projects** had been sanctioned under the Namami Gange Programme, of which **355 projects, or about 68%, had been completed**. The projects cover sewage management, pollution abatement, riverfront development, ecological restoration, biodiversity conservation and other interventions.
- The programme entered **Phase II up to March 2026**, with a stronger emphasis on basin-level river rejuvenation, ecological sustainability, pollution control and community participation.
- Recent government initiatives have increasingly combined **scientific monitoring with public outreach**, including cleanliness campaigns, youth engagement and community-based biodiversity conservation. A 2025 campaign reached approximately **7 lakh students across 5 Ganga-basin States**, demonstrating the growing role of youth in river conservation.

Namami Gange Programme:

Background and Objectives:

- The **Namami Gange Programme** was launched in **June 2014** as a **Flagship Integrated Conservation Mission** for effective pollution abatement, conservation and rejuvenation of the National River Ganga and its tributaries.
- The programme initially received an approved outlay of **₹20,000 crore** for the period up to March 2021 and was subsequently extended up to **March 2026** with an additional outlay of **₹22,500 crore**.
- Its objective extends beyond conventional river cleaning to restoring the **ecological integrity, water quality, biodiversity, flow regime and overall health of the Ganga river system**.
- The programme follows a **river-basin approach**, recognising that pollution and ecological degradation of the main river are closely connected with tributaries, drains, wetlands, groundwater, land use and human activities throughout the basin.

Major Intervention Areas:

- **Pollution abatement:** Treatment of municipal sewage, interception and diversion of drains, industrial-effluent management and solid-waste management.
- **Ecological restoration:** Afforestation, wetland conservation, biodiversity protection, habitat restoration and maintenance of ecological flows.
- **Riverfront management:** Development and improvement of ghats, crematoria and riverfront infrastructure while seeking to reduce ecological pressure.

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Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**

- **Scientific monitoring:** Use of water-quality monitoring, geographical information systems, aerial surveys and digital platforms for identifying pollution hotspots and prioritising interventions.
- **Public participation:** Community awareness, cleanliness drives, educational programmes and grassroots participation through the **Jan Ganga** framework.

Jan Ganga and Community Participation:

Concept and Significance:

- **Jan Ganga** represents the people-centred dimension of the Namami Gange Programme and is based on the principle of **Jan Bhagidari**.
- Its objective is to make citizens active stakeholders in river conservation by promoting **awareness, participation, behavioural change and local ownership**.
- Community participation is important because river pollution is generated not only by industrial and municipal systems but also through everyday activities such as waste disposal, sanitation practices and unsustainable resource use.
- A people-driven approach can therefore complement infrastructure-based interventions and improve the long-term sustainability of river-rejuvenation efforts.

Cleanliness and Public Campaigns:

- **Ganga Swachhta Pakhwada**, observed annually during **16–31 March**, mobilises students, volunteers, community organisations and other stakeholders for cleanliness and awareness activities across the Ganga basin.
- Such campaigns seek to convert river cleanliness from an occasional government campaign into a **regular civic responsibility**.
- Public participation also helps spread awareness about responsible waste disposal, sanitation, plastic reduction and protection of riverbanks.

Plantation and Riverbank Restoration:

- Plantation campaigns such as **Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam** encourage citizens to participate in tree planting and contribute to ecological restoration.
- Vegetation along riverbanks can support **soil stabilisation, reduction of erosion, habitat restoration and improvement of riverine ecological conditions**.
- Community participation can make plantation programmes more sustainable because local residents can monitor and protect planted areas after government agencies complete initial interventions.

Youth and Educational Institutions:

- **University Ganga Clubs, eco-clubs and educational institutions** involve students through lectures, field visits, competitions, volunteering and environmental-awareness programmes.
- Youth engagement can create long-term environmental responsibility because students become potential **community ambassadors and local conservation leaders**.
- Recent government outreach has demonstrated the scale of this approach, with approximately **7 lakh students** engaged during a 2025 basin-wide cleanliness and awareness campaign.

Cultural and Awareness Programmes:

- **Ganga Utsav** uses cultural activities, exhibitions, performances, public dialogues and educational initiatives to strengthen the relationship between communities and the river.
- Linking environmental conservation with cultural heritage can increase public participation while reinforcing the idea that river protection is both an **ecological responsibility and a social responsibility**.

- Other public campaigns can similarly connect sanitation, environmental stewardship and community action with the cultural significance of the Ganga.

Grassroots Conservation Networks:

- **Ganga Praharis** and **Ganga Seva Doots** contribute at the grassroots level by spreading awareness, supporting biodiversity conservation, encouraging sustainable practices and facilitating community participation.
- Community-based conservation can also support wildlife protection by enabling local people to identify threats to aquatic species and sensitive habitats.
- Recent biodiversity programmes have incorporated trained community members as **Nest Guardians** to protect vulnerable nesting sandbars from predation, trampling and human disturbance.

Key Achievements under Namami Gange:

Project Implementation:

- As of **February 2026**, **524 projects** had been sanctioned and **355 projects** had been completed, indicating substantial expansion of river-rejuvenation infrastructure.
- Sewerage management remains a central component because **untreated domestic wastewater** is one of the major sources of pollution entering the river system.
- By July 2025, **212 sewerage infrastructure projects** with a planned treatment capacity of **6,540 million litres per day** had been taken up, while **136 sewage-treatment projects** with a capacity of **3,780 million litres per day** had been completed and made operational.

Water Quality Improvement:

- Government monitoring has reported improvement in several indicators of river health, particularly **dissolved oxygen**, which is an important indicator of aquatic ecosystem conditions.
- The government reported that dissolved oxygen levels along almost the entire main-stem Ganga were within acceptable limits of the notified primary bathing-water criteria and were generally supportive of the river ecosystem.
- However, improvements are not uniform across the entire basin, and several stretches continue to require targeted pollution-control interventions.

Biodiversity Conservation:

- Namami Gange integrates biodiversity conservation with pollution abatement through programmes for **Gangetic dolphins, gharials, turtles, Hilsa, otters and other aquatic species**.
- Restoration of aquatic habitats can improve ecological connectivity and strengthen the resilience of riverine ecosystems.
- Biodiversity outcomes are therefore an important measure of river rejuvenation alongside conventional indicators such as sewage-treatment capacity and water quality.

Afforestation and Ecosystem Restoration:

- Forestry interventions under the programme have contributed to restoration of approximately **33,024 hectares** in the Ganga basin.
- Afforestation and riverine vegetation can reduce soil erosion, improve habitat quality and strengthen ecological functions within the river basin.
- Such interventions demonstrate the shift from a narrow **river-cleaning approach** towards broader **ecosystem restoration**.

Institutional Framework:

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Multi-Level Governance:

- The **National Mission for Clean Ganga** functions as the principal implementation agency for the Namami Gange Programme under the broader institutional framework of the National Ganga Council.
- The governance structure involves multiple levels, including the **National Ganga Council, Empowered Task Force, National Mission for Clean Ganga, State-level institutions and District Ganga Committees**.
- Urban local bodies and State pollution-control authorities are also crucial because sewage generation, solid-waste management and industrial pollution largely require action at the local and State levels.
- The multi-level framework reflects the federal nature of river governance because the Ganga basin extends across several States and involves multiple administrative jurisdictions.

Technology and Scientific Monitoring:

- Recent interventions increasingly employ **geospatial technology, aerial surveys and digital monitoring** to identify drains and pollution hotspots.
- High-resolution aerial surveys along the Ganga main stem in Uttar Pradesh have been integrated into a **live geographical-information-system-based Drain Dashboard** for pollution monitoring and prioritisation of remediation measures.
- Such technology can improve evidence-based decision-making by enabling authorities to identify pollution sources, monitor interventions and allocate resources according to ecological priorities.

Broader Pillars of Ganga Rejuvenation:

Nirmal Ganga and Aviral Ganga:

- **Nirmal Ganga** focuses on reducing pollution and ensuring cleaner river water, while **Aviral Ganga** focuses on maintaining ecological flow and the river's natural functioning.
- River rejuvenation therefore requires both **water quality and adequate flow**, because a polluted or excessively depleted river cannot sustain a healthy aquatic ecosystem merely through sewage treatment.

Gyan Ganga and Arth Ganga:

- **Gyan Ganga** promotes research, scientific mapping, knowledge generation and evidence-based policy formulation for river management.
- **Arth Ganga** seeks to create an economic connection between river conservation and local livelihoods by promoting sustainable economic activities associated with the river and its communities.
- Together, these pillars broaden Namami Gange from a pollution-control programme into an integrated framework combining **ecology, knowledge, participation and sustainable economic development**.

Challenges and the Way Forward:

Key Challenges:

- **Untreated sewage, industrial pollution, solid waste, excessive water abstraction and ecological degradation** continue to place pressure on the Ganga river system.
- Infrastructure creation alone cannot ensure river rejuvenation unless sewage-treatment plants remain operational, connected sewer networks function effectively and untreated wastewater is prevented from entering rivers.
- The Ganga basin also faces challenges related to **inter-State coordination, urbanisation, agricultural runoff, groundwater stress and maintaining environmental flows**.
- Community participation can become symbolic unless local institutions receive adequate resources, responsibilities and mechanisms for monitoring outcomes.

Way Forward:

- India should move from a project-oriented approach towards **outcome-based river-basin management**, with measurable indicators for water quality, biodiversity, ecological flow and community participation.
- **Decentralised governance** should be strengthened by empowering District Ganga Committees, urban local bodies and community organisations.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on the **reuse of treated wastewater, circular economy approaches, nature-based solutions and sustainable urban drainage systems**.
- Community participation should be linked with measurable conservation outcomes rather than limited to awareness campaigns.
- Scientific monitoring, transparent public data and independent evaluation can improve **accountability, adaptive management and evidence-based policymaking**.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Prelims Facts:

- **Namami Gange Programme:** Launched in **2014** as a flagship integrated conservation mission.
- **Implementing institution:** **National Mission for Clean Ganga**.
- **Latest project status:** **524 projects sanctioned and 355 completed as of February 2026**.
- **Major pillars:** **Nirmal Ganga, Aviral Ganga, Jan Ganga, Gyan Ganga and Arth Ganga**.
- **Jan Ganga:** Focuses on **public participation and people–river connect**.
- **Arth Ganga:** Connects river conservation with **sustainable economic activities and livelihoods**.
- **United Nations recognition:** Namami Gange was selected among the **Top 10 World Restoration Flagships** under the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration in 2022.

Mains Perspective:

- **Core argument:** River rejuvenation cannot be sustained through engineering infrastructure alone because pollution sources, ecological degradation and unsustainable resource use are embedded within the wider river basin.
- **Governance principle:** **Jan Bhagidari** can convert citizens from passive beneficiaries into active environmental stakeholders, thereby improving the durability of conservation outcomes.
- **Way forward:** The next phase of Ganga rejuvenation should combine **scientific river-basin management, ecological-flow restoration, effective sewage treatment, biodiversity conservation, technological monitoring and meaningful community participation**.
- **Conclusion:** **Jan Ganga** represents a shift from treating river conservation as a government service to recognising it as a shared societal responsibility. The long-term success of Ganga rejuvenation will depend on integrating **Nirmal Ganga, Aviral Ganga, Jan Ganga, Gyan Ganga and Arth Ganga** into an accountable, science-based and community-driven model of river governance.