



## Interlinking of Rivers Has Little Scientific Basis Along With Meagre Social and Environmental Optimality. Critically Analyse in View of The Recent Push for Ken-Betwa Project. (150 Words / 10 M) (GS-1 Geography)

### Approach:

1. Introduction.
2. Briefly state the objective of KBP.
3. Mention the issues plaguing the project.
4. Measures to move ahead with the project.
5. Conclusion.

A series of moves by the governments have provided a push to the interlinking of rivers. The latest move being the **revised estimate** for the Ken-Betwa project for **FY 2022**, and the **budgetary estimates for FY 2023**, followed by the announcement of the formation of an **authority to implement the KBP**.

The Ken-Betwa link project aims to **transfer the surplus water from ken river in Madhya Pradesh to Betwa in Uttar Pradesh**, to **irrigate the drought-prone Bundelkhand region**. It is the **1<sup>st</sup> project** of the **National Perspective Plan for Interlinking of rivers**.

**Persisting issues with the KBP:** The KBP has **not got the forest clearance** yet. The **stage I forest clearance report prevents implementation** of the project in its current form. The **wildlife clearance** has been **questioned** by a comprehensive report of the **Central Empowered Committee of the Supreme Court**, which is yet to be considered by the apex court. Along with these, **opposition by local communities** is also gaining strength.

The project is perceived to have **adverse impacts of a scale** that will go **beyond the Bundelkhand region**. Similarly, the push for river-interlinking is **devoid of sound scientific basis, acceptance by donor state, social or environmental optimality or desirability**. Pushing for ILR projects can be **counterproductive** in the context of **changing climate & limited economic resources**. Also **no state seems to be ready to share water** with other states. The **hydrology figures** of the **National Water Development Agency** are routinely **questioned by the states** that the project covers. It will **peril the critical Tiger habitat** of the **Panna Tiger Reserve**.

### What must be done before moving ahead with the project ?:

- A **thorough hydrological assessment** of the river basin declared as surplus. The assessment should be in **public domain reviewed by an independent agency**. No such exercise has been done for the KBP; contrarily, evidence shows that there is no surplus in the Ken basin and any such claim has no scientific support. The project will destroy a major hydrological asset of the Ken basin – the rich natural forest.
- **Comprehensive assessment of all available options** in the concerned basins



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including rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge, watershed development, pollution control, optimal use of existing water infrastructure, cropping pattern , and most importantly, **assessment of even small sub-basins**.

- Adequate steps should be taken to **preserve the groundwater**, since such projects do not help in sustaining the water lifeline.
- Bring **consensus among the states** regarding water sharing. E.g., Gujarat & Maharashtra had signed a MoU way back in 2010, but still there is no meaningful consensus in sight.

As evidence is strong **against its desirability, optimality and even viability** of ILR proposals, cautious steps must be taken to move ahead with the project, keeping in mind the above potential measures.

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