



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the advantages of river linking projects and its possible impact on the environment. (150 words)

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Approach

- Introduce by explaining about the river interlinking project.
- Discuss advantages of the project.
- Enumerate possible impacts of the project on the environment.

Introduction

- River linking projects is a proposed large-scale civil engineering project that aims to effectively manage water resources in India by linking Indian rivers by a network of reservoirs and canals and so reduce persistent floods in some parts and water shortages in other parts of India.
- Under the **National Perspective Plan (NPP)**, Ministry of Water Resources, has already identified **14 links under Himalayan Rivers Component** and **16 links under Peninsular Rivers Component** for inter basin transfer of water based on field surveys and investigation and detailed studies.

Body

Advantages of river linking projects

- **Equitable availability of water:** The inter-linking of the rivers is expected to address the chronic drought in drought-prone region and ensure availability of water to dry areas.
- **Increase Irrigation potential:** Water deficit region would get water for irrigation which in turn boosts agriculture production and food security in the drier region.
 - The overall implementation of Interlinking of Rivers programme under National Perspective Plan would give benefits of 35 million hectares of irrigation, raising the ultimate irrigation potential from 140 million hectare to 175 million hectare.
 - E.g. Ken-Betwa river interlinking will provide irrigation to about six lakh hectares of land annually in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- **Drinking water in drier region:** It will ensure people and livestock get required drinking water
 - Ken-Betwa river interlinking will provide drinking water to 13.42 lakh people in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- **Inclusive Prosperity:** The project could bring prosperity in dry regions as seen in Rajasthan due to Indira Gandhi canal.
- **Electricity generation:** Also, it can bring generation of 34000 megawatt of power, apart from the incidental benefits of flood control, navigation, and water supply, fisheries, and salinity and pollution control.
- **Fisheries and Aquaculture benefits:** The inter-link would create a path for aquatic ecosystems to migrate from one river to another, which in turn may support the livelihoods of people who rely on fishery as their income.
- It will create employment and help in socioeconomic development of people.

Impact on the environment

- **Mass deforestation:** In order to create canals and reservoirs, there will be mass deforestation. This will have impact on rains and in turn affect the whole cycle of life. It will adversely impact habitat of tribal and forest dwellers community.
- Usually **rivers change their course** and direction in about 100 years and if this happens after interlinking, then the project will not be feasible for a longer run.
- Due to interlinking of rivers, there will be **decrease in the amount of fresh water entering seas** and this will cause a serious threat to the marine life system and will be a major ecological disaster.
- Due to the creation of Canals and Reservoirs, huge amount of area which is occupied by the people will be submerged leading to **displacement of people** and government will have to spend more to rehabilitate these people.
- The **finances required** for these projects is so huge that government will have to take loans from the foreign sources which would increase the burden on the government and country will fall in a debt trap.

Conclusion

It will be wise not to hurry for interlinking of the rivers but to keep it as a long-term goal. The immediate need is to examine the feasibility of the river links and other alternatives to interlinks with more data and sound economic analysis of cost- benefit of different alternatives to achieve the same objectives.

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