



## The problem: Ken-Betwa Link Project

[sanskritiias.com/current-affairs/the-problem-ken-betwa-link-project](https://sanskritiias.com/current-affairs/the-problem-ken-betwa-link-project)

**(Mains GS3:Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.)**

### Context:

Recently on the occasion of World Water Day( March 22), a memorandum of agreement was signed between Union Minister of Jal Shakti and the chief ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh to implement the Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP).

- But the Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP), estimated at a cost of Rs 38,000 crore, is not the solution.
- The project will, on the contrary, lead to huge adverse impacts in the region.

### About ken-betwa link project:

- The Ken-Betwa Link Project is the first project under the National Perspective Plan for interlinking of rivers.
- Under this project, water from the Ken river will be transferred to the Betwa river. Both these rivers are tributaries of river Yamuna.
- The Ken-Betwa Link Project has two phases.
- Under Phase-I, one of the components i.e. Daudhan dam complex and its appurtenances like Low Level Tunnel, High Level Tunnel, Ken-Betwa link canal and Power houses will be completed.
- While in the Phase-II, three components — Lower Orr dam, Bina complex project and Kotha barrage will be constructed.
- According to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, the project is expected to provide annual irrigation of 10.62 lakh hectares, drinking water supply to about 62 lakh people and also generate 103 MW of hydropower.

### Project is based on apprehension not facts:

- The Supreme Court-appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC), in its report of August 30, 2019, had raised fundamental questions not only on the appropriateness of the wildlife clearance given to the project, but also the viability, optimality and desirability of the project.
- It estimates that the KBLP will lead to a loss of “10,500 hectares of wildlife habitat” in the Panna Tiger Reserve.
- The detailed project report of KBLP prepared by the project proponent National Water Development Agency (NWDA) says: “The main objective of the Ken-Betwa link project is to make available water to water-deficit areas of the upper Betwa basin”.
- However, the upper Betwa region is outside the Bundelkhand and has higher rainfall than the region.
- Most areas of Bundelkhand that have been promised water are already being supplied by existing projects.
- There is a great scope for improving the water availability in Bundelkhand from existing resources and projects, which can be achieved faster and much cheaper.
- Both the forest advisory committee (FAC) and the CEC conclude that the NWDA has not examined the alternatives to the project.
- The Panna district, one of the least irrigated areas of Madhya Pradesh, will, on the other hand, suffer maximum destruction, while getting very little benefit from the project.
- Downstream, Uttar Pradesh’s Banda district too stands to suffer adverse impacts.

### **Hydrological data is in question:**

- The project is based on the premise that the Ken, the smaller of the two rivers, has surplus water.
- But the hydrological data that is claimed to support that premise is not in public domain, and has never been put to scrutiny by any independent credible agency.
- In this context, the FAC made a suggestion that has never been implemented was that “A team of independent experts on surface water hydrology, drawn from leading scientific institutions, should have been requested to examine the hydrological aspects of the Ken-Betwa river link”.
- The CEC report raises the question about the neglected water needs of the Upper Ken basin, a tribal area which this project is likely to keep permanently backward.

### **Forest clearances are not proper:**

- The KBLP does not have the final forest clearance, and its wildlife clearance has been opposed by the SC-empowered CEC.
- A challenge to its environment clearance is pending before the National Green Tribunal.
- The CEC report’s findings on the impact of the KBLP is at odds with the shoddy Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) of the project, based on which it was given environment clearance in August 2017.

- Even the forest advisory committee has noted the factual errors and inadequacies in the EIA-EMP.
- The reconstituted EAC (Expert Appraisal Committee) set aside earlier EAC's concerns and in its very first meeting, cleared the KBLP without resolving the issues raised.

**Other concerns:**

- The Stage I forest clearance is based on a number of conditions that will require fundamental restructuring of the current project.
- Restructuring of the project includes change in project costs, benefits and impacts and hence will require a fresh appraisal.
- Such conditions include the stipulation that the proposed 78 MW powerhouse shall not be constructed in the forest area.
- The entire inflow to the proposed reservoir will be released for the downstream river and flow in the downstream river will be maintained throughout the year till Ken river reaches Yamuna river, and no building material is to be taken from the forest area.

**Conclusion:**

In words of FAC (Forest Advisory Committee)-“In an ideal situation, it would have been better to avoid KBLP as it will not be in the interest of wildlife and the overall well-being of the society in the long term.”