

Cities along rivers urged to include conservation plans

Policy document from Clean Ganga mission sets out norms

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Cities situated on river banks will have to incorporate river conservation plans when they prepare their Master Plans, says a policy document from the National Mission for Clean Ganga.

The guide document, while spelling out provisions in the National Water Policy that emphasise the need for such plans, also says that these “river-sensitive” plans must be practical and consider questions of encroachment and land ownership.

“There is a need for a systematic rehabilitation plan for such encroaching entities that emphasises on alternative livelihood options in addition to a relocation strategy. Planners should make every attempt to engage with such entities during the preparation of the Master Plan in order to develop empathetic and humane solutions,” the document notes.

The recommendations are currently for towns that are on the main stem of the



Towns along the main stem of the Ganga are in focus.

the Ganga. There are, as per the estimate of the policy document, 97 of them encompassing five States – Uttarakhnad, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal.

The plan must also clarify on land ownership. A key aspect of conserving and protecting river and riverine resources involves increasing green cover in the vicinity of the river by creating green buffers, removing concrete structures and employing “green infrastructure.”

However, implementing such solutions will require restrictions on the Floor Area Ratio, ground coverage and setting limits on the

maximum permissible heights of buildings. “Ascertaining the land ownership in these areas is, therefore, important to avoid legal complications while the Plan is being implemented,” says the document.

The Master Plan should not mandate specific technologies, but it can “create an environment” for facilitating the use of state-of-the-art technologies for river management. These include satellite-based monitoring of water quality; artificial intelligence for riverine biodiversity mapping; big data and citizen science for river health monitoring; and unmanned aerial vehicles for floodplain mapping. These were being used across the world successfully.

Cities with an ongoing Master Plan tenure ought to be conducting an “immediate analysis” of the extent to which these the river guidelines could have been adopted and this “will help” in incorporating the appropriate revisions when the current plan is reviewed.