



RIVER-CITIES ALLIANCE

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Based on the vision of the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to entrench river-centric mindset in planning for cities on river banks, the first-of-its-kind initiative – River Cities Alliance (RCA) was launched by the Union Minister for Jal Shakti Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat in November 2021. The primary objective of the RCA, funded by National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) and implemented jointly with the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), is to incorporate River Management as one of the key elements of Urban planning and to provide its member cities (city on the banks of a river) a platform to ideate, network and co-learn to foster river centric development. Preparation of Urban River Management Plans (URMP) with ideas for: sustainable river management with emphasis on reduction of liquid/solid pollution in the river flowing by the city; promotion of “Catch The Rain” concepts to maximize rain water harvesting and conserving urban lakes and water bodies to maintain ecological flow in the urban rivers; abatement of urban floods (making room for rivers!) and other climate change related impacts; breaking silos in water management; taking steps to ensure water security following the

5-R (Recycle, Reuse, Reduce, Recharge and Respect) principles; promotion of better water governance with appropriate water pricing; reducing/banning the use of potable water for all not potable uses; reducing Non-Revenue Water; democratizing access to 24*7 Water supply etc can be facilitated and best practices shared. RCA is to bestow water and rivers its place in urban planning as engines for tourism (river cruises!) and economic growth, and incidentally also improves aesthetics of the city; health of people, real-estate value of their river front property and return the tax revenue to ULBs!

It all started with a consortium of IITs suggestion to connect urban-governance and river-management in India. On 16,17th May, 2019 a kickoff workshop was held at IIT, Kanpur, with officials of Kanpur Nagar Nigam, experts from NIUA/NMCG and other stakeholders participating. Despite Covid restrictions, Kanpur's URMP – the first of its kind – was finally compiled and released in 2021. In the meanwhile, NMCG, in collaboration with NIUA, came up with guidelines to bring river management into the mainstream governance at the municipality level. In November 2020,

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There is a need for new thinking for 'River Cities'. There is need for the residents of these cities to ask, 'What can we do for the rivers?' There is a need for a new river centric thinking in planning for cities on the banks of rivers. The river health needs to be mainstreamed into urban planning process by developing Urban River Management Plans. Cities should be responsible for rejuvenating their rivers. It has to be done not just with the regulatory mindset but also with developmental and facilitatory outlook.

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Hon'ble Prime Minister
during the first meeting of National Ganga Council held on December 14, 2019

'Urban River Management Plans: A Strategic Framework for Managing Urban River Stretches in the Ganga River Basin' was released followed by 'Strategic Guidelines for Making River-Sensitive Master Plans' in June 2021 to help city planners across the country understand how to integrate river-sensitive thinking into a Master Plan. These documents hold the key to possible solutions to river governance in urban dwellings. Some of the issues flagged in these documents are restriction of river channels, natural/storm water drains, encroachment on river banks, land use, increasing concretization of city surfaces, pollution in rivers and drains, drying up of rivers and streams (due to over abstraction of water), degrading water bodies and wetlands, deleting green cover, weak people-river connect, piecemeal governance etc. Besides, in the past one year, using the domain expertise of NIUA, regular training workshops and e-courses have been created to enhance the capacities of ULBs across the country to integrate river management in urban planning.

These systemic efforts culminated in the launch of RCA in November 2021 with 30 members, a major step in providing cities with a platform to come together and manage their rivers effectively. Now, with nearly 150 members, including the international city of Aarhus, RCA, provides cities opportunities to cooperate, work together, learn from each other's best practices, share knowledge, thus paving the way for Gyan Bhagidari, which will lead to transformational solutions. NMCG is planning a MoU with nearly 124 member Mississippi River Cities Towns Initiative (MRCTI) in the USA to widen its outreach.

DHARA (Driving Holistic Action for Urban Rivers) 2023 was organised on 13th & 14th February 2023 in Pune. In the opening session presided over by the Hon'ble Union Minister for Jal Shakti Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, URMPs for Ayodhya and Aurangabad and "75 River Initiatives – a Compendium" were launched. Hon'ble Minister inaugurated DHARA 2023 by mixing water brought from 52 participating cities in a Jal



Kalash. It is a unique manifestation of Jal Shakti through Jal Sangam, embodying the concept of a unified DHARA.

The “Pune Declaration” was signed in the presence of the Minister of State for Urban Housing and Affairs Shri Kaushal Kishore during the closing session. Shri G. Asok Kumar, DG, NMCG and Municipal Commissioner, Pune Shri Vikram Kumar, on behalf of all municipalities, signed the declaration stating “protecting, cherishing and managing rivers in a sustainable manner is our core responsibility”. The member-cities committed to improve citizen-river connect, tech and operational capacities, rejuvenate water bodies, restrict untreated used water flow and Catch the Rain. DHARA is now an annual event with the next one scheduled to take place in Gwalior.

Building on the momentum of DHARA 2023, 'RCA: Global Seminar' was organized by NMCG /NIUA on 4th May 2023 in New Delhi. RCA Global witnessed participation of high ranking officials from Embassies and proved successful in deliberating on crucial issues pertaining to urban river management. Cities of Manchester, Arhus, Copen Hagen and Hamberg made presentations on their efforts to use rivers flowing by them as growth engines. The Indian cities Ayodhya and Chhatrapati

Sambhaji Nagar also presented their URMPs.

With more and more national and international river cities showing keen interest in RCA, the next stage focuses on concerted efforts to hand hold and pursue cities to prepare URMPs comprising three key elements – Environmental (River to support a habitat for biodiversity to thrive), Economic (River to provide opportunities for economic development) and Social (River to be celebrated among the citizens).

In another significant step providing impetus to URMPs in cities, a project envisaging preparation of 60-70 Urban River Management Plans (URMPs) in two phases was approved by the 50th Executive Committee of NMCG on 31st July 2023 costing around Rs 20 crore. In the two-phased project, 25 and 35 URMPs shall be prepared in first and second year respectively. The first phase would cover 25 cities from 5 main stem Ganga basin states.

RCA is a step in the right direction especially in the wake of manifestation of climate change, most recently witnessed in the form of flooding of River Yamuna in the National Capital, reinforcing the urgent need to effectively integrate river management in urban planning across the country.