

# BREATHING LIFE INTO A DEAD RIVER IN ODISHA

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

Though the target of reviving a dead river in span of six months sounded ambitious, the green tribunal had made its intent clear. “The government is readying plans to rejuvenate Sukapaika river,” Suresh Chandra Mohapatra, Odisha Chief Secretary, told *The Hindu*. Mr. Mohapatra recently held a high level meeting of engineers and discussed various aspects on breathing life into Sukapaika. The government has, however, set a target to complete the renovation within 18 months. Engineers involved in planning and execution said it was possible. “The government has approved Rs. 49.67 crore for rejuvenation of Sukapaika River. This is not a huge amount and so the government need not show reluctance. But it requires government’s determination to make it happen,” said Sisir Das, counsel for the petitioner in the NGT.

Dr. Pratap Chandra Rath, a Hyderabad-based cardiologist who hails from the region, was among the first to encourage people to build a movement for rejuvenation of Sukapaika. Subsequently, grassroots-level representatives gathered and resolved to exert pressure on government for the cause. “What made people realise the need for revival of the river was that most tube-wells were becoming defunct due to depletion of groundwater. Irrigation was the biggest casualty. The situation came to such a pass that people were not able to use any waterbody to perform last rites as they were dry. Traditional fisherfolk became jobless. Villagers encountered a host of problems without the river,” said Nrusingha Prasad Das of Bodhapur village. In 2019, a people’s march for the river’s restoration attracted the attention of authorities. As the movement gained momentum, public hearings were held, comments were sought and there was overwhelming support for breathing life into Sukapaika again. Emotional about river’s rejuvenation, villagers say it will touch lives of 10 lakh people in 425 villages.

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