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Master plan for river restoration in Tamil Nadu

CHENNAI: While a shortage of drinking water continues to be a problem for Tamil Nadu, the state government is planning a major restoration of rivers with the future needs of the ever-growing population in mind.

A master plan is likely to be drafted by a consultant and the project will be funded by the government of the Federal Republic of Germany through KfW Development Bank and the Union government under Sustainable Municipal Infrastructure Financing. Tamil Nadu Urban Infrastructure Financial Services Limited is the nodal agency that will execute the programme.

"We will identify the consultant soon and then send the proposal to the chosen firm," said a senior government official. The rivers are in a terrible state in most districts, with no system in place to keep sewage and garbage from being dumped in them. A feasibility study for integrated solid waste management and a detailed project report for providing storm water drains in various municipalities have been planned to provide a holistic approach to river management.

A Latha of Kerala-based River Research Centre said the government should think of ecological restoration to strengthen river banks and catchments besides regulating sand mining and

improving the downstream flow of dams. "River restoration does not mean concretising the banks," she said.

Tamil Nadu, which has 17 river basins, has a total water potential of 1,682tmcft/year, including contribution from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. The state's demand for water by various sectors is expected to go up to 1,965tmcft by 2045, according to a government study. Experts say the rivers are in this condition because of the utter disregard for the environment.

If Vaigai carries the sewage of Madurai, then Amaravathi bears the tannery effluents of Udumalpet, Tarapuram and Karur.

The over-exploitation of Palar, which runs through Vellore, for high deposit sand and pollution by tanneries of Ambur and Vanniyambadi are responsible for the river going dry.

"A proper vision from all stakeholders will help preserve our rivers," said K Kalidas, president of Osai, an environmental NGO.