

PRESS RELEASE

Urban Water and Sanitation in India Report Launch, 26 November 2013

Urban water and sanitation should be of top priority for governments in coming years, says new report

New Delhi, 26 November 2013: An independent report, published by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), has found that in the face of rapid urbanisation, already a reality in India's cities, fulfilling the human right to water in India is going to be a daunting challenge. Hence the urban water and sanitation sector should be of top priority for governments in coming years.

The report, *Urban Water and Sanitation in India: Multi-stakeholder Dialogues for Systemic Solutions*, was released here today by Mr Arun Maira, Member Planning Commission. It follows a series of discussions that CEEW convened with key stakeholders in the urban water and sanitation (UWS) sector. The initiative was supported by Veolia Water India, a firm that is managing a few urban water management projects in different Indian states. The report calls for greater emphasis on the UWS sector from the central and state governments, and sustained deliberations between public agencies, water utilities, private companies and nongovernment organisations to find systemic solutions for ensuring access to water and sanitation services for all.

India's urban population, already estimated to be 377 million, is growing more rapidly (32% in the last decade) than total population growth (18%) or growth in rural populations (12%). Less than half of India's households (43.5%) have access to tap water and more than a quarter of the urban population (28%) does not have access to water within their premises.

On sanitation and quality of water, less than a third of India's population (32%) receives treated water and nearly a fifth of the population (18.6%) does not have access to any form of sanitation facilities at home. The majority of urban households have no wastewater outlets to closed drainage systems. Moreover, about a quarter of the urban population lives in slums, often not counted or under-counted in estimating the reach of basic services such as housing, water, sanitation and sewerage.

Dr Arunabha Ghosh, CEO of CEEW, said, 'Honouring the human right to water in India's cities is going to be a growing challenge thanks to rapid urbanisation as well as citizens' impatience with the quality of one of the most basic services.'

India has nearly 8000 towns and cities. Increasing pressure on resources and lack of access has resulted in unregulated and unsustainable pumping of groundwater. Unaccounted water loss and wastage are adding to already stressed resources. The report argues that for "water-

oriented development” emphasis must shift away from merely increasing supply to demand side management and efficiency of water use through multiple measures like water conservation, aquifer recharge, rain water harvesting, water recycling and reuse and watershed management. Although a few successful cases of sustainable water resources management exist, their success is localised and more information and experience is needed to scale up the interventions.

‘We need greater public discourse to reduce mistrust, develop policies based on improved evidence, and to identify the appropriate roles of public and private institutions,’ Dr Ghosh said.

ABOUT THE REPORT

From December 2012 to July 2013, the Council on Energy Environment and Water brought together a range of stakeholders for a series of roundtables on urban water management. Water utility managers from different parts of the country, public officials, private water companies, financing institutions, credit rating agencies, nongovernment organisations, think-tanks, academics, architects and town planners had the opportunity to deliberate on the challenges facing the urban water and sanitation sector in India. The report, *Urban Water and Sanitation in India: Multi-stakeholder Dialogues for Systemic Solutions*, contains research that informed the discussions, the proceedings, essays written by individual participants, and recommendations on key issues: water utility management, the roles of the private sector and civil society, the roles of urban water regulators, improving the quality of water data, and the opportunities in building capacity in the sector. The report and related information material are available at: <http://ceew.in/water>.

Overall, the report recommends that policymakers should focus on three priorities:

- Increasing policy emphasis on UWSS in future given the pressure of urbanisation and lack of access: The increasing pressure of urbanisation, coupled with lack of access to treated water supply and sanitation among a significant section of the urban population, is adding to the stress on water resources and challenging the fulfilment of the right to water. The focus has to be on households, especially poor households, which pay more for less water in India’s cities. Governments at various levels must give top priority to the UWSS sector and regulators need to oversee quality of services to the poor.
- Going beyond the public versus private debate and focusing on common challenges: India’s urban areas need to focus on challenges that are common to public utilities as well as private contractors. The ultimate responsibility for the provision of water for human needs is that of the State. However, the responsibility of the State does not necessarily translate into the State becoming a service provider. Although public private partnerships (PPPs) are not objectives in themselves, PPP targets have to be realistic, unambiguous and set on the basis of verified data before private parties are able to offer services as per flexible contracts based on standardised principles.

- Strengthening the quantity, quality and analysis of water data: What cannot be measured cannot be managed. The current status of water data collection in India – quantitatively, qualitatively and analytically – is poor. Reliable data needs to be gathered on water service delivery, water consumption, status of the water and sanitation infrastructure, and overall condition of the main water sources. Utilities need to develop the database before starting a contracting process with private contractors.

Dr Ghosh said, “The strength of the process has been to convene stakeholders from a range of different backgrounds, interests and experiences in the sector. There is a need for neutral forums where stakeholders may exchange frank opinions, contest others and yet find consensus on key principles and specific actions.’

The **Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)** is an independent, not-for-profit policy research institution. Ranked as India’s top climate-related think-tank, CEEW addresses pressing global challenges through an integrated and internationally focused approach. It does so through high-quality research, partnerships with public and private institutions, and engagement with and outreach to the wider public. For more information, visit ceew.in.

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