

PRESS RELEASE

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

For better management of urban water and sanitation in India the quantity and quality of data needs to improve, says new report

New Delhi, 26 November 2013: An independent report, published by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), has found that the development of “smart cities” in the face of increasing pressures of urbanisation would get hampered unless the quantity, quality and analysis of data on water use, water supply and state of water and sanitation infrastructure are improved.

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. 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.

‘The nature of water data required depends on how water utilities view their role,’ said Dr Arunabha Ghosh, convenor of the roundtables and CEO of CEEW. ‘If utilities identify themselves as merely suppliers of water, the quantity of information needed is limited. But if utilities focus on service delivery or view part of their role as custodians and managers of a larger water system, then the information requirement will also be complex.’

Lack of institutionalised reporting of water consumption, water supply and state of water infrastructure data, limited information on the mix of consumers, lack of data on extraction of water from groundwater sources and lack of information on distributed water supply, particularly tanker supply, was affecting the management of urban water and sanitation. Further, data on consumers’ feedback on the quality of service needs to be collected through a deep understanding of the quality of service they are getting and identifying the areas needing improvement.

Information on the existing state of water infrastructure is important for the water utilities as it helps utilities to budget for both short term maintenance and long term investments. The report emphasises the importance of data and information within various capacity building programmes of water utilities and other state level organisations.

The report recommends that utilities should be allowed to develop a database *before* commencing negotiations for various types of contracts with private firms. The exchange of

information among various organisations and creating higher resolution groundwater databases, are immediate priorities to manage the urban water and sanitation sector both efficiently and equitably.

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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