

Sustainable Drinking Water Services at Scale

Everyone Forever

A Roundtable Discussion

India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

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Background Note

The Indian water supply sector provides a mixed picture. The national vision for the drinking water supply sector is one characterised by progressive decentralisation regulated by public institutions rather than direct service providers. The Strategic Plan 2011-22 of the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) proposes an ambitious target of achieving at least 55% piped water supply coverage of all rural households by 2017ⁱ, and 90% by 2022, anticipating strong support from the Twelfth Plan (2012-2017) for improved service delivery of drinking water supplies in rural areas. There exist large budgetary outlays for WASH initiatives at central government level, over 95% of which is funded through internal budget resources.

Today's India is home to some of the more innovative and visionary policies in the domain of water and sanitation (e.g., Rural Drinking Water Strategic Plan [2011-2022], draft National Water Policy 2012, the Twelfth Five Year Plan [2012-17], and the 2010 Rajasthan state water policy based on IWRM)ⁱⁱ. India has technical expertise of high quality, with high impacting sector programmes in place, such as the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (2010)ⁱⁱⁱ. With such conditions in place, policy, budgets and programmes are not lacking and are therefore not viewed as the real cause for poor performance on the ground.

Performance on the ground and in particular, issues pertaining to sustainability paints a different picture. On average, 30-35% of all schemes are dysfunctional, with another 30% functioning at sub-optimal levels leading to high rates of slippage and poor service levels. Despite these continued challenges, State governments routinely return unspent funds at the end of the financial year. Some factors have been identified to impede further progress in the delivery of water and sanitation services. As India continues to seek for innovative solutions clearly the situation calls for a process of reflection and analysis—reviewing the range of international best practices that have worked at scale, and understanding to what extent these may be replicated and/ or adapted in the context of Indian States.



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All India Disaster
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Co-organised by IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC) in the Netherlands in association with the Center of Excellence for Change (CEC), the Government of Tamil Nadu and All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) in Ahmedabad, this round table discussion seeks to provide a platform for:

- i. identifying a number of issues that continue to hamper on-the-ground performance of the drinking water sector in India; and
- ii. reaching consensus on a direction forward, leading to the collective development of a national sustainability framework for action.

IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre brings with it regional and global WASH sector experience for over four decades. More specifically, IRC is known to spearhead multi-country action research learning programmes such as Triple-S (Sustainable Services at Scale) and WASHCost (which has introduced a life-cycle costs approach now being adopted by some WASH stakeholders in government and non-governmental organisations). Under IRC's South Asia and Triple-S programmes, IRC has recently completed two out of a total of three capacity building activities for high level officials of the Government of India. This round table discussion is funded with support from IRC.

The sustainability framework for action that will be developed is expected to anchor IRC's India country programme in the next three to five years.

ⁱ Within this 55%, it seeks to achieve the following: at least 35% of all rural households will have piped water supply with a household connection; less than 20% will use public taps and less than 45% will use hand pumps or other safe and adequate private water sources.

ⁱⁱ Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (2011). *Strategic Plan: 2011-2022 Ensuring drinking water and sanitation- rural drinking water*. New Delhi: Government of India.

ⁱⁱⁱ Over the years the Government of India has been supplementing State government efforts linked to rural drinking water through various centrally sponsored programmes. Through this partnership and considering the magnitude of the challenges, the rural water supply programme and guidelines had been revised—w.e.f 1.4.2009—into the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP).