



India creates a tool to manage water resources amid crisis

Information is power, and that is true as India tries to solve its water crisis. In June 2018, the Government of India acknowledged that it is in the midst of the worst water crisis in the country's history. By creating a tool that points out where exactly the government is lacking in managing water resources, India has armed itself with the power to fix the crisis. The move could not have come at a better time as poor water access and sanitation threaten people's lives and livelihoods.

The Composite Water Management Index, the tool the government's premier think tank developed to help Indian states manage water resources, is evolutionary. It aims to promote a culture of evidence-based decision making based on data on critical aspects of water management.

The index deserves praise. Let's hear from Nikhil Bugalia, a University of Tokyo doctoral candidate studying the operation and maintenance dimension of infrastructure sustainability:

The Composite Water Management Index brings us closer to understanding the problem of water management and is surely a welcome move. It will be a powerful mechanism to raise awareness among policy makers and other stakeholders and help them identify areas that need the most urgent action to ensure that people have reliable access to clean, affordable, and sustainable water for their basic needs and livelihoods.

The success of Bangladesh, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam in solving their water-related problems began with policy makers recognizing how water, sanitation, and hygiene affect health.

Once information from all states is collected and systematically organized, the Government of India expects the water sector to attract interest from a wider spectrum of stakeholders keen to improve the country's water security. For example, since the National Institution for Transforming India identified the gaps in data on the country's water resources, it expects researchers and nongovernment organizations to step in to help fill these gaps.

Awareness of the problem leads to a strong desire to find solutions. By establishing a clear benchmark in water management for state governments to aspire to, the index aims to promote collaboration and constructive competition among states. The states will then be open to work with the private sector and other investors.

To assess state governments' ability to manage water resources, the index will look at nine areas: source augmentation and restoration of water bodies, groundwater source augmentation, irrigation, watershed development, participatory irrigation practices, sustainable on-farm water-use practices, rural drinking water, urban water supply and sanitation, and policy and governance.

Although the index focuses on food security, the information collected could reveal links between water management and other fields and help set policy direction.

The National Institution for Transforming India also focuses on equity and decentralized decision making, community organization, and women's leadership. Its approach is consistent with a recent framework of best practices in urban sanitation proposed by the Asian Development Bank and will surely help guide the Asian Development Bank Institute's programs in India.

This episode is based on [research](#) done for the Asian Development Bank Institute by Nikhil Bugalia, an ADBI intern and PhD candidate at the University of Tokyo.

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