



Confederation of Indian Industry

CII Annual Business Summit 2026

The FutureTM

Global Economy | Industry | Society

Our Water Future

1430 to 1530 hrs:

11 May 2026, Hotel Taj Palace, New Delhi

Session Proceedings

The session on **Our Water Future** convened senior policymakers, industry leaders, global development partners, and technology innovators to deliberate on India's water challenges and pathways toward long term water security.

Moderator

Mr Nikhil Sawhney, Chairman, CII Triveni Water Institute and Vice Chairman & MD, Triveni Turbine Ltd

Speakers

- **Shri Ashok K. K. Meena**, Secretary, Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti
- **Dr. Mihir Shah**, Former Member of the Planning Commission
- **Mr Ravichandran Purushothaman**, Chairman, CII Mission on Water and Chairman, CII (Southern Region) and President, Danfoss Industries Pvt Ltd
- **Mr Imad N. Fakhoury**, Regional Division Director for South Asia at the International Finance Corporation (IFC)
- **Mr Bhartendu Sinha**, Founder & CEO of Ingeniti Inc

Discussions

Shri Ashok K. K. Meena shared that the Jal Jeevan Mission has delivered a historic transformation from just 3.23 crore rural households with tap water connections to over 15.8 crore today, ensuring that nearly 81 percent of rural India now has drinking water at home, however, true success should not be measured by infrastructure creation alone, but by whether water is delivered regularly, safely, adequately, and sustainably to every household, he stressed. Jal Jeevan Mission 2.0, he said, marks a deliberate shift from a construction-centric approach to a service-delivery mindset.



He emphasized that sustaining this achievement requires strengthening local institutions such as Gram Panchayats, building a cadre of rural water professionals, and ensuring robust operation and maintenance systems.

Shri Meena emphasised that Industry, training institutions, and technology providers must play a critical role in skilling local youth, supporting water quality surveillance, adopting digital public infrastructure, and fostering community ownership. He also outlined the move towards asset digitisation, real-time data, and the use of AI-enabled, local-language platforms to improve grievance redressal and transparency.

Shri Meena also underscored that industry and rural water security are interlinked and called upon industry to use CSR for skills and capacity building, behaviour change, source sustainability, and grey water reuse.

Dr. Mihir Shah underscored that India's water crisis stems not from an absolute lack of water, but from poor management and fragmented governance. Despite abundant rainfall, major river systems, rich forest catchments, and some of the world's largest aquifers, India faces declining groundwater levels, falling river flows, and worsening water quality.

He called for a decisive shift from an infrastructure heavy, extraction driven approach to one focused on integrated management, recycling, reuse, and community participation. Citing the Prime Minister's five pillars for water reform ie breaking sectoral silos, respecting regional diversity, prioritising management over construction, scaling up reuse and recycling, and empowering people's participation, Dr. Shah stressed the need to plan drinking water, irrigation, rivers, and groundwater together. He also underscored on community stewardship and source sustainability.

Dr Shah cautioned of emerging risks from rapid urbanisation and data centre expansion, especially in water stressed coastal regions. Welcoming the government's push for advanced cooling and efficiency technologies, he urged India to embed sustainability into the design of cities, industries, and digital infrastructure.



Mr Nikhil Sawhney stressed that water plays an increasingly critical role in society, serving not only as a key resource for industry to mitigate risks but also as a driver of new opportunities. He emphasised that while the government plays the most crucial role in the water sector, both in facilitating and enabling, and financing the interventions needed to ensure sustainable water management, the role of industry is equally important in leveraging expertise, adopting innovative solutions, and driving scalable, on ground implementation of water management practices.

He shared that, the CII-Triveni Water Institute undertakes both inward and outward assessment, from water neutrality initiatives to detailed water audits. The services of the Water Institute have been scaled to assess both spatial and temporal accessibility to water. He reiterated the importance of adoption of water use efficiency targets to help improve industrial water usage.

Mr Ravichandran Purushothaman, Chairman, CII Mission on Water and CII Southern Region, emphasized that water must be treated as a strategic business priority and that water neutrality should become the new license to operate for industry. Highlighting data centres as a critical concern, he also noted that poor water-use efficiency combine with high energy consumption and carbon emissions, makes standard-setting essential.

While industries have net zero carbon targets, he stressed that the absence of clear water neutrality goals poses a serious risk, especially in water-stressed regions. He underlined that achieving water neutrality begins with measurement and transparency, much like carbon accounting. Drawing on industry experience, he highlighted the need to measure water use across the value chain and address water neutrality at the watershed level, as water cannot be offset remotely like energy.

He advocated for watershed level planning that balances industrial, agricultural, and community needs, supported by locally relevant technologies, upgraded standards for pumps and equipment, and closer engagement with state governments and local bodies.

He also highlighted behavioural change within organisations as a critical lever, demonstrating how data driven awareness among employees can significantly reduce water consumption.

Mr Imad N. Fakhoury, Regional Division Director for South Asia at the International Finance Corporation (IFC), highlighted India as IFC's largest global portfolio, exceeding USD 10.3 billion, with annual commitments targeted to reach USD 10 billion by 2030. As India aspires to become a developed nation by 2047, achieving this vision will require sustained investments in resilient infrastructure, inclusion, innovation, and private sector-led growth. He stressed IFC's role in mobilising private and commercial capital alongside public investment to amplify development impact, create jobs, support MSMEs, and finance resilient infrastructure.

He emphasized that water is critical economic infrastructure, as essential as energy or transport, and warned that water insecurity poses serious economic and humanitarian risks across South Asia. Through the World Bank Group's Water Forward initiative, IFC is supporting coordinated policy reform, institutional strengthening, and innovative financing to shift water from a source of risk to a driver of jobs, growth, and resilience. He highlighted examples spanning sanitation, river rejuvenation, sustainability linked financing, and technology enabled water solutions.

Mr Bhartendu Sinha, Founder & CEO of Ingeniti Inc., stressed that India's water crisis is already at a civilisational scale. He pointed that reliance on large, centralised, government funded solutions is neither viable nor sufficient, and advocated for low cost, scalable technologies.

He identified three priority interventions: precision and automated irrigation to drastically reduce agricultural water use while transforming farmer livelihoods; complete treatment and reuse of urban and industrial wastewater; and accurate metering to address distribution losses.

He highlighted that nearly 40% of urban water supply is lost due to leakage and poor monitoring, calling for accurate measurement and smart water management systems. In urban areas, he argued that all water used should be treated and reused to near drinking quality standards, eliminating dependence on fresh water sources.

Mr Sinha underlined that with the right and not complex technologies, India can simultaneously solve water scarcity, support farmers, and secure its future food and water systems.



Key Highlights



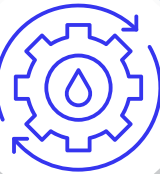
India faces a critical water situation driven by rising demand, climate variability, and stressed water quality, necessitating a shift to integrated and resilient water management.

The Jal Jeevan Mission has significantly increased rural household tap connections, with a renewed focus on sustainable service delivery, operation, and maintenance.



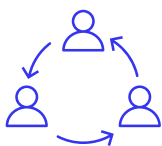
Industry has a vital role in rural water security through technology transfer, skill development, local economic augmentation, and CSR initiatives focused on behavioural change and source sustainability.

Effective water management requires adoption of water use efficiency measures to improve water usage across industrial operations. Industry needs to adopt targets towards improved water usage.



The burgeoning data center industry presents significant water consumption challenges, requiring sustainable cooling technologies and integrated resource management.

Strengthening local governance, particularly Gram Panchayats, is paramount for effective drinking water and sanitation service delivery.



Community participation and behaviour change are critical drivers for successful water management and conservation initiatives.

Recommendations

Enhance Integrated Water Management:

Break down silos between drinking water, irrigation, and wastewater sectors. Foster collaboration between agencies like the Central Water Commission and Central Ground Water Board to manage water resources at the river basin level.

Shift to Service Delivery:

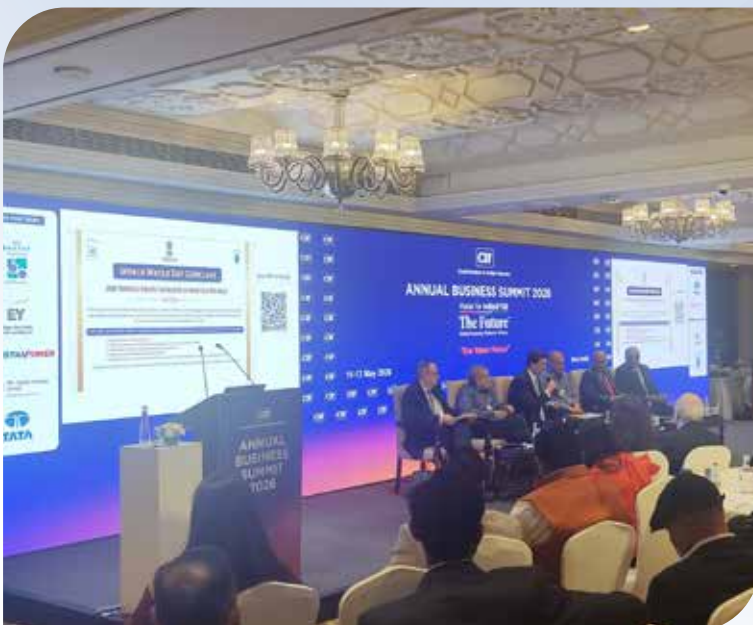
Prioritise operation, maintenance, and reliability of water systems over new construction.

Strengthen Local Governance, Promote Community-Led Governance and Capacity Building:

Build capacities of Gram Panchayats and enable community-led water management. Strengthen local institutions (Gram Panchayats, Pani Samitis) for operation and maintenance of water infrastructure. Invest in skilling rural youth as water professionals through programs like Nal Jal Mitra and partnerships with ITIs/Polytechnics.

Adopt Water Neutrality:

Establish water neutrality goals for industry, supported by measurement and disclosure. CII promotes adoption of voluntary water use efficiency targets for improved water usage.



Incentivize Water Reuse and Efficiency:

Encourage industries to adopt water neutrality targets and implement advanced water-saving technologies. Develop clear standards and pricing mechanisms for water to discourage overuse and promote recycling, particularly in high-consumption sectors like data centers and agriculture. Scale wastewater treatment and reuse across urban, industrial, and rural contexts.

Leverage Digital Infrastructure:

Expand the use of digital public infrastructure for rural drinking water, including asset mapping on PM Gati Shakti, hydrological mapping, and unique scheme IDs. Implement real-time monitoring, smart metering and AI-enabled grievance redressal. Utilize AI and sector-specific language models for improved complaint redressal and service delivery.

Prioritize Source Sustainability and Greywater Management:

Focus on natural capital through aquifer recharge, watershed management, and rainwater harvesting. Develop robust systems for greywater reuse in rural areas, with industry support through CSR initiatives.

Mobilise Private Capital:

Encourage blended finance and private sector participation for scalable water solutions.

Focus on Behaviour Change:

Promote and scale up community-driven water conservation and recharge initiatives, fostering a culture of citizen participation and behavioural change. Invest in awareness, community engagement, and behavioural interventions to sustain outcomes.

