

LUNCHTIME TALK

INVISIBLE WATER, VISIBLE CRISIS : MANAGING INDIA'S GROUNDWATER

India is the world's largest user of groundwater, ahead of even the USA and China. India has always been a groundwater civilization, but until recently, restricted itself to tapping the shallow aquifer through dug wells. In the last 40 years, however, approximately 30 million rigs have dug into the deeper aquifers. Unabated extraction has brought water tables crashing down. Almost 60% of groundwater blocks are in a critical state.

Yet, the Indian state regulates groundwater with a very light touch, hobbled by antiquated laws and the lack of institutional capacity. So, how can India manage its groundwater more sustainably?

The talk will focus on the experience of my foundation, Arghyam to answer this question. If groundwater is a common pool resource, how should it be looked after to avoid the tragedy of the commons? What is the role of the state, of new technologies and of community leadership?

In prototypes deployed around the country, Arghyam and its partners have demonstrated how community level management can deliver safe, sustainable water equitably.

Managing water resources better is key to India's dream of rapid prosperity for all. If it does, India will show the way to many countries with their own water emergencies.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER



Ms Rohini Nilekani
Chairman, Arghyam

Rohini Nilekani is Founder-Chairperson, Arghyam, a foundation she has personally endowed to fund initiatives in 'Safe, Sustainable water for All'. Since 2005, Arghyam has supported work in water and sanitation all around India. Arghyam also facilitates the India Water Portal, which has become a singular resource for the sector. In 2014, together with her husband Nandan Nilekani, she co-founded and is a Director of EkStep, an education non-profit that has created a technology platform for early learning.

In 2004, she co-founded and funded Pratham Books, a non-profit children's publisher, which aims to democratize the joy of reading with 'A book in every child's hands'. By the time she retired as Chairperson on December 31st, 2013, Pratham Books had reached millions of children with indigenous, attractive books in multiple languages.

Rohini sits on the Board of ATREE- Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, an environmental think tank. She is on the Eminent Persons Advisory Group of the Competition Commission of India. Between 2010 and 2012, she was a member of the Audit Advisory Board of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

Earlier, she spent several years as a journalist, and has worked or written for many leading publications such as *Bombay Magazine*, *India Today*, *MINT* and the *Times of India*. Her first novel, *Stillborn*, a medical thriller, was published by Penguin Books. In 2008, she anchored a television show called *Uncommon Ground* for NDTV, which created a rare dialogue between top leaders of the corporate and social sectors. A book based on the show was published by Penguin Books India in 2011. Under the pseudo name 'Noni', she has also authored several books for young children, including the popular *Sringeri Srinivas* series, published by Pratham Books.

As a committed philanthropist, she continues to fund work in areas such as governance and accountability, independent media, education and research and environmental sustainability. Rohini Nilekani is an active advocate for Indian philanthropy.

CHAIR

Assoc Prof Eduardo Araral

Vice-Dean (Research) and Associate Professor, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy

Friday, 1 April 2016 12:15pm-1:30pm

Seminar Room 3-5, Level 3, Manasseh Meyer Building, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy
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Admission is free. Please register at lkyschoolevents@nus.edu.sg