

Chennai, India · a student tests a household's drinking water

WASH NEWS · PEOPLE'S WATER DATA · TEASER

Students are mapping the water people actually drink

In Chennai, Coimbatore and Bhimavaram, college students knock on doors with a water-testing kit in one hand and a phone in the other. They test the water the family drinks, ask how it is stored and used, and wait a day for the bacteria result. Then the record goes onto an open public map. This is People's Water Data, a hybrid course on water quality run by IIT Madras, Tel Aviv University, and KMCH Research Foundation. Since January 2024 more than 2,000 students from colleges across India have taken part, and in the 2025 program year alone they surveyed 2,705 households and 1,032 water bodies.

The model has already travelled: a workshop and field sessions with Busitema University in Uganda, household testing with a Bedouin community in Israel's Negev, and a UK edition planned for 2027. The fifth batch starts in January 2027 and is open to institutions that want to bring a class.

15,000+
households surveyed

2,000+
students participated

4 countries
India · Uganda · Israel
UK planned for 2027

Read more →

Link to the framework:
https://doi.org/10.1021/acssusresmgt.6c00149

PEOPLE'S WATER DATA · TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY אוניברסיטת תל אביב · KMCH

Making history with People's Water Data.

Measure where it matters: how People's Water Data turns students into local water researchers

From field measurements to public water intelligence. A university course that puts testing kits in students' hands, surveys the households they visit, and publishes the results for all to see.

What it is

People's Water Data (PWD) is a community-centred, open-data initiative on drinking-water quality. Its engine is a four-month hybrid course, "A Hybrid Course on Water Quality – An Approach to People's Water Data", taught online by faculty from the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Tel Aviv University and KMCH Research Foundation (Coimbatore), with in-person practical sessions at IIT Madras and partner colleges. Students learn the basics of water quality and standards, receive a testing kit, and spend their field days measuring the water that real households drink. Every record passes a quality-control check before it is published on the open People's Water Data platform.

The course has run four times since January 2024. The first batch registered 467 participants, half of them students and the rest faculty, researchers and water professionals; later batches have been built around whole classes brought by college coordinators. More than 2,000 people have taken part so far, from more than 58 institutions.



Doorstep testing, Chennai



Samples photographed and logged on the spot

A field day

A field day starts with a short training on the kit and the survey. In the morning students choose their sources: taps, wells, storage tanks, water cans, and the ponds, rivers and canals that serve a neighborhood. At each household, they measure pH, turbidity, total dissolved solids, and conductivity on the spot, take a sample for a coliform test, and ask the family how they fetch, store, and treat their water, and whether they think it is safe. The bacteria result comes the next day, and that is usually the moment students remember.

Everything is recorded on a phone through the EpiCollect app, with the household's consent, given in 99.8 percent of the 2026 session's 1,958 records. In the 2025 program year, 353 student collectors uploaded 3,745 records: 2,705 household samples and 1,032 water-body samples, each with physical, chemical, and biological measurements. The spring 2026 session added 1,799 households in a single month.

3,745
records uploaded, 2025 program year

353
student collectors, 2025

99.8%
household consent recorded, 2026 session

India: the engine

India is where the model was built and where it runs at scale. Student teams from Dr. N.G.P. Arts and Science College in Coimbatore, SRKR Engineering College in Bhimavaram, Madras Christian College and Stella Maris College in Chennai, KPR and JJM colleges, Sri Paramakalyani College in Alwarkurichi and partners in Jabalpur, Delhi and Guwahati have mapped their own towns. Nearly half of the first batch came from Tamil Nadu, with participants from Maharashtra, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Assam. In 2026, 250 students joined with their fees covered through a SPARC-supported program between IIT Madras and Tel Aviv University.



Coimbatore · Bhimavaram · SRKR lab, 2025

What students take away

70%	81%	77%	77%
ran the tests themselves	explained results at home	guided a peer or resident	would recommend it

End-of-field questionnaire, May 2025 and May 2026: 616 responses from 490 students; shares are of those answering each item.

"I believed that all water was safe to drink after using a filter unit. During this course, I learned that water can be contaminated even though it's been filtered."

"I was surprised by how quickly and clearly we could detect contaminants in the water using the tools." - students, 2025



Busitema, Uganda: the kit on a household table



Uganda: students after a sampling round



Negev, Israel: results shared with the Al-Furah community

Uganda and Israel

The same kits and the same forms have been used beyond India. In January 2025 the PWD team ran a workshop with Busitema University in eastern Uganda, combining ultraviolet water-treatment technology with hands-on household sampling by local students; a further practical session followed in August 2026. In Israel, Tel Aviv University students tested household water with the Al-Furah Bedouin community in the Negev and returned the results to the families in Arabic, Hebrew and English.

Next: the United Kingdom and Batch 5

A UK edition of the program is planned for 2027. In India, Batch 5 of the hybrid course starts on 27 January 2027 and runs to early May. Colleges can bring a whole class; the course provides lectures, kits, practical-session training and a registration link.

27 Jan 2027
bring a class from your institution

Why it matters for the WASH community

Most of the places PWD works have no routine public data on what comes out of the tap. Students generate that data at low cost, learn to read it, and carry it home, and the open platform lets anyone, from a municipal engineer to a Rotary club, see it. For WASH practitioners the model offers three things: a replicable way to produce verified local water-quality data, a water-literate cohort of young people in each place it runs, and an open dataset that grows every semester.

How to get involved

Host a cohort. Bring a class to Batch 5, starting January 2027.

Sponsor seats. Sponsored places, like the 250 funded in 2026, remove the fee barrier.

Partner on a Global Grant. PWD seeks Rotary host and international partners for WASH projects built on community water monitoring.

Use the data. The platform is open to everyone.

www.peopleswaterdata.org

Suzan Kagan ·
suzankagan@gmail.com