Data-driven Decision making for fiscal allocation

Episode 84 | Big Ideas

Manyank Manish

Transcript

2nd November 2026

Manish, Manyank. "Data-driven Decision making for fiscal allocation." Episode 84 of Big Ideas. XKDR Forum, 2nd November 2026. Video, 3:31.
https://www.xkdr.org/viewpoints/data-driven-decision-making-for-fiscal-allocation-big-ideas-ep-84

Abstract

Public finance management in India, as Manyank Manish describes it, was never designed to help decision makers plan. It was built for accounting, control, and auditing. This design choice has real consequences: district officials, state governments, and national policymakers lack the real-time, structured data they need to anticipate problems rather than just respond to them once they happen.

Manish walks through how this plays out in practice, using the example of flood preparedness in Assam to show how the absence of timely, visible data prevents proper planning at both the district and state level. He then traces the downstream effect of this data fragmentation: without evidence to guide decisions, resource allocation tends to favor whoever advocates loudest, rather than whoever has the greatest actual need.

The second half of the talk turns to what can be done about it. Manish lays out a vision centered on standardized, public datasets validated through ground truthing, and argues that AI has a specific and useful role to play here, not in making decisions, but in doing the unglamorous work of structuring, collating, and cleaning data so that researchers, policymakers, and experts can focus on inference and action.

Supplementary Resources

- **Unpacking State Budgets** by Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (Blog post) [1]
- **Status of State Disaster Mitigation Fund** by Ministry of Home Affairs (Newspaper article) [2]

Contents

Flaws in India's public finance system **3**

Lack of visibility for district and state planning **3**

How ad hoc funding decisions get made **3**

Building standardized, public datasets **4**

AI's role in data cleaning and structuring **4**

Toward evidence-based, prepared policymaking **4**

Flaws in India's public finance system

[00:00:09] Manyank Manish: So, one of the big ideas in public finance management in India especially is that our current public finance system is mostly designed towards accounting and control, auditing, and so on. It doesn't allow decision makers, policy makers, people sitting at the district level, people sitting at the state level or national level to actually make the decisions, plan decisions better.

[00:00:33] Manyank Manish: The data which exists definitely exists in silos, in fragmented forms. It doesn't reach to them in time. There is no real time visibility in a lot of variables. So they can't plan.

[00:00:33] Manyank Manish: For a district in Assam, they can't plan for floods in advance because they do not have the visibility on what all is getting affected.

Lack of visibility for district and state planning

[00:00:53] Manyank Manish: For the state government similarly, they don't know which districts to prioritize because they don't know which districts are more likely to face impact of disasters. They don't know which districts already have some provisioning left from previous years. They don't know which districts require which specific item.

[00:01:11] Manyank Manish: So for example, one district might require help in repairing an embankment or a dam. Another district might require help with their electricity system or roads, and so on. One of the key areas which leads to this data gaps and fragmentation is that it slows down decision making and it creates a lot of ad hoc methods to do that decision making.

How ad hoc funding decisions get made

[00:01:36] Manyank Manish: So rather than seeing where the evidence leads, where the data leads, what is the actual need of people, districts, departments, what ends up happening is that whoever has the loudest voice usually gets the most money, usually gets the most preference and usually gets the most priority.

Building standardized, public datasets

[00:01:54] Manyank Manish: The best way to do that is to create these systems which can define what you need and then validate those with the people who exist on the ground, provide some kind of a ground truthing. The basic starting point is to build data sets which are standardized, which help in looking at this data from different geographical entities, different states, different districts.

AI's role in data cleaning and structuring

[00:02:20] Manyank Manish: And at the same time, make that data public so that people can also see the broad trends, help governments identify that these are the areas where you need to focus and these are areas where you're currently focusing on. A big leap which AI can provide probably in this area is that this data standardization, building the structure of the data, collating it, and at least processing and cleaning of this data, AI can help in so that the people, the researchers, the experts, the academics, the policy makers can then just look at this data, form their inferences, take the decisions and make better plans.

Toward evidence-based, prepared policymaking

[00:03:02] Manyank Manish: So that policy making and decision making is not as ad hoc as it currently is and is more planned, not more reactive, but rather more in fact prepared for it. So, I hope that we leverage the use of technology and AI for this. We ensure that decision making is built more and more on evidence, and policy making has time to prepare, not just react to crisis one after the other.

[00:03:31] Manyank Manish: Thank you so much.

References

[1] Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability. Unpacking state budgets. *CBGA India*, August 2022. https://www.cbgaindia.org/insights/data-visualisations/unpacking-state-budgets/.

[2] Ministry of Home Affairs. Status of State Disaster Mitigation Fund. *Press Information Bureau*, March 15, 2023. https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1907163.