Frequent droughts coupled with over-abstraction of surface and groundwater through a large network of hydraulic infrastructure and deep wells have escalated Iran's water situation to a critical level. This is evidenced by drying lakes, rivers and wetlands, declining groundwater levels, land subsidence, water quality degradation, soil erosion, desertification, and more frequent dust storms.

In this seminar, Kaveh Madani overviews the major drivers of Iran's water problems. He argues that Iran is suffering from a socio-economic drought—i.e. “water bankruptcy,” where water demand exceeds the natural water supply significantly. Madani believes that the current structure of the water governance system and the food-dependence paranoia in Iran leaves minimal hope for a meaningful reform that can address Iran's water problems in a timely manner.

Kaveh Madani is an environmental scientist, educator, and activist, Iran's former Deputy Vice President as the former Deputy Head of the country's Department of Environment, a former Vice President of the UN Environment Assembly Bureau, and a Henry Hart Rice Senior Fellow at the Yale's MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies. Madani has received numerous awards for his fundamental research contributions, teaching, as well as outreach and humanitarian activities, including the New Faces of Civil Engineering recognition in 2012, the Arne Richter Award for Outstanding Young Scientists in 2016, and the Walter Huber Civil Engineering Research Prize in 2017.