

Role of local governments in fostering the transition to sustainable lifestyles and livelihoods and improved well- being

Dr Shilpi Kapur Bakshi
Fellow

The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)

Background

- Move towards sustainability can only be ensured if the inhabitants of this planet embrace lifestyles and livelihood behaviours that ensure the wellbeing of all people in an equitable manner while conserving the ecology for both current and our future generations.
- Lifestyles of the emerging middle class is a big concern; very resource intensive and characterized by unsustainable consumption patterns
- Governments can use different kinds of instruments (policy, legislation, fiscal mechanisms and public investments) along with the emphasis on voluntarism.
- A bottoms-up approach needed in ensuring the accountability and effectiveness of these instruments
- Local government due to their close proximity to citizens and their better position in terms of understanding the needs, challenges, and opportunities, influencing consumers' behaviour can foster the transition to sustainable lifestyles and livelihoods and improved well-being.
- They can engage and cooperate directly not only with consumers but also with other levels of governance and economic and social actors, including businesses who are important livelihood creators, academia and NGOs
- Local governments can bring together various stakeholders with different resources and skills and complement national government functions.

Objective

- Explore efforts by the local governments in India and neighbouring countries at designing mechanisms for encouraging sustainable lifestyles
- Identify gaps that can be filled through the use of some innovative mechanisms

Agenda 21

- Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption have been identified as a significant contributor to the environmental degradation. Agenda 21 (which was the blue print for a plan of action proposed for sustainable development, formulated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro in 1992) mentioned,

'The major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment (as well as social and economic welfare) is an unsustainable pattern of consumption and production.'

'Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and co-operation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives'

Further

- The Zero Draft of the Outcome Document for Rio+20 acknowledges *the essential role of local governments and the need to fully integrate them into all levels of decision making on sustainable development*

Role of local government

- facilitation and enabling role through provision of information, finance and capacity development so that other local actors such as NGOs can implement activities, thus better utilization of local stakeholders' grassroots networks and mobilisation capacity
- local government needs to incorporate local social, environmental and economic interests and concerns into new initiatives of sustainability projects and programmes during their design and formulation stage (IGES 2010)
- engage with their communities and encourage participation in decision-making, while considering the needs of people who are currently living there and those who will live there in the future
- considered as agents for implementing national and international policy and are responsible for initiating new ideas and approaches for sustainability. Innovative schemes
- invest in capacity building, education and raising awareness for sustainable living
- foster partnerships and collaboration

Some important areas where local government can play an important role

Green public procurement (GPP)

- engage in purchasing “green” products as part of their public procurement strategies
- size of their purchases will promote reliability of their products and also promote the development of green products (demand for hybrid cars or energy efficient appliances)
- give a clear market signal to manufacturers and vendors through their bulk orders
- can play a major role in importing green energy companies to set up operations in their localities through incentives such as temporary tax credits
- through their bulk procurement can create the critical amount of initial demand and thus bring down the cost of green products
- play an important role in expanding the availability of green products in local areas---- in the case of recycled paper, if the local governments establish a policy to purchase the recycled paper on a regular basis, this can create a sorting chain where the local distributors or printing companies are not engaging in recycling on a regular basis
- promote broader environmentally preferred purchases (EPP) ---recycled paper

Japan is a good example in the direction of green public procurement/green bulk purchasing--- a law enforced since 2001 concerning the promotion of eco-friendly goods and services by the government authorities

Barriers to GPP in India

- No regulatory push to promote green purchasing for the local government (and other buyers)
- Procurement staff often are not fully aware of the environmental issues and so do not integrate them into their purchasing decisions; limited awareness and understanding of 'green procurement'
- Procurement process is often very complex and evaluating a product to be greener can be difficult
- Limited availability of data (related to procurement and environment) and systems in place to support effective reporting and performance measurement
- Corruption can hinder the procurement process
- **Solution:** various stakeholders-government, industry organizations like CII, FICCI and ASSOCHAM, consumer organizations, NGOs, academia, research institutions and sector specific institutions will have to play a joint role in evolving easy to understand GPP criteria, understanding market readiness and barriers to deliver green products, ensure availability of green products and creation and dissemination of green purchasing information

Encouraging green building initiatives

- Buildings are responsible for approximately one-third of the earth's greenhouse gas emissions, the impacts are significant and quantifiable
- Local (and regional governments) are in a unique and often advantageous position to implement green building and urban design policies that will influence approaches to sustainability in the building sector
- They can use their position to incentivize green development that will create a more sustainable living environment---popular incentives offered to real estate developers are direct monetary encouragement in the form of tax rebates, fee waivers, or grants; or intangible incentives such as faster permit processing and limited property tax abatements, followed by “density bonuses” and faster development plan review.
- Local governments could also partner with the utility service providers to offer reductions in the costs of providing service in exchange for the construction of certain green building features
- Local government can also design a differential property tax system, wherein the users who incorporate green buildings features could be offered some rebate in the property tax they have to pay.

Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment(GRIHA), India

- GRIHA is India's National Rating System for Green buildings, which has been developed by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) and endorsed by the Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE)
- Local governments (municipalities) in India have shown keen interest in adoption of GRIHA in cities
- Local government can support the initiatives by organizing awareness, training and advocacy programmes for greater adoption of GRIHA in cities
- Owners of GRIHA compliant buildings shall receive a 10% rebate in property tax
- GRIHA registered and pre-certified projects also qualify for a Fast Track Environmental Clearance, which is a mandatory requirement for projects more than 20,000 square metres and have been good incentives to adopt these ratings
- It is extremely important for the local government to incentivize this rating system for commercial and high rise buildings (energy guzzlers such as hotels, shopping malls, and large institutions).
- Local government can also pass bye-laws (set of mandatory and voluntary guidelines) or use market instruments like subsidies for encouraging the use of renewable/recyclables/low energy embodied energy materials in the buildings sector

Promoting sustainable tourism

- Local government policies such as zoning, environmental regulations, economic incentives and license grants have an effect on sustainable tourism development and they are more situated to avoid, remedy or mitigate the sector's potential socio-economic and bio-physical effects
- They are responsible for the legislative framework, and the planning system, within which tourism businesses operate
- Create enabling communities to look after their places, and their natural and cultural environment, to ensure that tourism brings more benefits to local communities than harm
- Integrate tourism policies within the overall policies and actions towards sustainable development in the area. They are responsible for providing infrastructure and amenities that are required by the tourism sector and they can try to provide these in a sustainable manner
- SCP actions in this sector related to the local agenda 21 include:
 - Improved environmental planning in the tourist destination
 - Promote more sustainable transport
 - Helping tourism enterprises- to reduce their energy and water consumption, waste generation and management, encouraging the use of local products

Recycling initiatives by local government

- Local government can influence recycling through various policies which include landfill bans, mandates, incentives, and disincentives, subsidies, deposit laws, advance disposal fees, packaging policies, producer responsibility laws, low-interest loans, grants and tax breaks or through government campaigns and awareness generation programmes that encourage eco-friendly consumption habits
- Phitsanulok municipality in Thailand---carried out a number of waste management initiatives using the 3R approach which have helped to reduce the amount of waste for final disposal, thereby mitigating environmental impacts and GHG emissions; waste management was made a priority
- Naga city of Philippine--- city government aimed to integrate the local waste management issue with global climate change mitigation; started a project that focused on developing materials recovery facilities (MRF), which aim to reduce, reuse and recycle waste, by composting biodegradable wastes and separating valuables; also improved livelihoods and reduced health hazards for the waste collectors
- India ---local municipalities have recognized the potential of recycling to reduce the amount of waste going to landfills and are involved in recycling; have set up composting plants or support the recycling activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)

E-waste management

- Recently e-waste management and handling rules 2011 have come into action and they provide a detailed list of the responsibilities falling on the various stakeholders; It includes legal provisions for Extended Producers' Responsibility (EPR) for recycling, reduction of hazardous substances in electronics and setting up of collection centres.
- Local government can play an important role in facilitating the implementation of these rules
- They can offer various fiscal incentives like grants for setting up recycling facilities and purchasing equipment, offer land for the facilities at subsidized rates, ensure proper recycling of orphan products
- Provide local waste collection services jointly with the informal sector; facilitate the setting up collection centers
- Help formalize the informal sector and improve their working conditions
- Promote waste to energy initiatives
- Create awareness

Promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency

- Integrated industrial development, regulation and education to promote solar power
- Use a mix of policy instruments-legal, fiscal and financial, persuasive and demonstration projects to promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy in their respective communities
- Building bylaws to facilitate installation of solar water heaters, energy conservation codes
- Local government could create awareness about energy efficient appliances
- Encourage energy conservation within their municipal limits by providing efficient street lighting in the city, and encouraging energy-efficiency measures in activities of the municipalities like water pumping for the supply of water, treatment of wastewater etc
- Promote renewable energy and energy efficiency in the urban environment through Solar Cities Program
- Use persuasive and information instruments to accelerate the development and deployment of renewable energy and energy efficiency programmes in communities

Challenges faced by local government

- confronted with a number of political issues and objectives– economic prosperity, equitable distribution of wealth, provision of social and protective services and a high quality of the environment
- those that heavily rely on national government for their financial resources, are faced with many tradeoffs which include that between the economic and social needs of its people and the protection and improvement of the quality of the physical environment
- may find it difficult to select between the identified choices available in terms of their social and environmental impact and cost effectiveness and may make wrong choices; they are always balancing high priority policy goals against significant resource constraints and need to know what should be done immediately and what can wait
- local government initiatives may get subjected to significant corruption which will make it difficult to enforce norms and standards; to establish these norms and standards, public authorities need to have all the relevant information, which at times is difficult
- may also face lack of human and technical capacity
- failures may occur due to the weak institutional capacity for monitoring and using economic instruments and absence of enforceable pollution standards.

Case for collaboration with businesses and civil society

Zero Draft of the Outcome Document for Rio+20, need for engagement of the civil society and local government has been highlighted:

'It is important to enable all members of civil society to be actively engaged in sustainable development by incorporating their specific knowledge and practical know-how into national and local policy making'

- Government's policy measures that include command and control, market based and information based need to be supported with voluntary actions by consumers, the businesses that service them and the organizations of civil society
- Collaboration with civil society representatives by making them a part of this monitoring and enforcement mechanism and financial support from the businesses to address the capacity constraints will enhance the effectiveness of the legislations
- Voluntary commitments by the business sector to public and community welfare are becoming more common, through codes of conduct, recognition of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental marketing and labelling
- Local governments, looking for funding to support energy and waste reduction projects, can look for funding support from the businesses at times through the use of various kinds of public private partnerships based on contractual arrangements
- Industry associations and NGOs in partnership with various governmental organizations can act as a catalyst in creating structural and behavioural transformations