

Project Background

Sustainable Consumption and Production in India: A Consumer Perspective

Introduction

In 1985, the United Nations adopted a set of Guidelines for Consumer Protection which was revised in 1999. The Guidelines addresses the interests and needs of consumers worldwide and provided a framework for governments to use for adopting, elaborating and strengthening consumer protection policies and legislation. The Right to Healthy Environment also made to the list of eight consumer rights defined in the guidelines, thereby, broadening the understanding of consumer protection, globally.

According to Guidelines, Right to Healthy Environment means, right to live and work in an environment, which is non-threatening to the well-being of present and future generations. The right contains the following elements:

- The right to live and work in an environment that is neither threatening nor dangerous and which permits a life of dignity and well-being.
- The responsibility to minimise environmental damage through careful choice and use of consumer goods and services.
- To reduce waste, reuse products and to recycle whenever possible.

India along with other countries signed the declaration on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, comprising of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the Sustainable Development Summit of the United Nations in September 2015. Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) has emerged as an important part of the SDGs, with one of the 17 goals, Goal 12, devoted to SCP. While SDG 12 is said to be built upon 10 Year Framework of Programmes (YFP) on SCP made by member states at Rio+20 conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, the world needs to visualise other perspectives to achieve SCP that is beyond Goal 12. In fact, an important and critical aspect is to look at SCP and SDG 12 in the background of UN guidelines on Consumer Protection and Right to Healthy Environment.

The current targets of Goal 12 and related policies/schemes/programmes at national level to achieve SCP needs to studied, analysed and reframed, if needed, to incorporate the consumer perspective. There is a dire need to check if the guidelines which were accepted for more three decades now, have been able to make difference in the way policies are designed and planned for implementation.

Sustainable Consumption and Production

SCP promotes social and economic development within the carrying capacity of ecosystems, raises efficiency and ensures sustainability in the use of resources and production processes,

reducing resource degradation, pollution and waste¹. In an increasingly consumption influenced world, where many admire the Western culture, producing and consuming less is a challenge which demands massive behavioural change from individuals and strategic approach in the form of policy change from Governments. Hence, SCP can only be achieved when every country makes sure that their production and consumption patterns are not undermining the environmental boundaries of the planet and simultaneously keeping in mind the social and economic impact.

The UN Guidelines contain governments, which in partnership with business and relevant organisations of civil society, should develop and implement strategies to promote sustainable consumption through a mix of policies that could include regulations; economic and social instruments; sectoral policies in such areas as land use, transport, energy and housing; information programmes to raise awareness of the impact of consumption patterns; removal of subsidies that promote unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; and promotion of sector-specific environmental-management best practices.

India's effort to achieve SCP

Keeping in mind the UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection, in 1986, the Government of India enacted the Consumer Protection Act (CoPRA). Except the Right to Basic Needs and the Right to Healthy Environment, all other rights, as per the UN Guidelines, are included in this Act. CoPRA is one of the benevolent social legislations in India enacted since independence, intended to protect the consumers from exploitation. Though, the right to healthy environment is not covered in the Act, there are other provisions which deal with the issue. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution requires the state, inter alia, to protect life, which is construed as including the right to a healthy and safe environment. The Directive Principles of State Policy direct the state to endeavour to protect and improve the environment, forests and wild life. Also, the Constitution, under Article 51A(g) imposes a Fundamental Duty on citizens to protect the environment. It is of no doubt that a healthy and safe environment is inalienably linked with sustainability and promotion of sustainable consumption and promotion.

The incoming of SDGs in 2015 gave a new life to the already existing concept of SCP. It has been almost two years since the SDGs have come into existence. The Government of India has taken several initiatives through revision of existing policies and framing of new ones which directly or indirectly deal with one or more SDGs. When the SDGs came into existence in 2016, the Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office (DMEO), an office attached to *NITI Aayog*² has been nominated as the nodal organization for the implementation of the SDGs in India. Though, *Niti Aayog* is the nodal agency but several ministries have been assigned different tasks in the form of some of existing and new policies to achieve these 17 goals in a time bound manner.

India is a federal country and the action plan to promote SCP cannot be done in silos without coordination and corporation of Central and State Government. In fact, the major and most

¹ <http://ris.org.in/sdg/india-and-sustainable-development-goals-way-forward>

² National Institution for Transforming India (NITI), is a policy think tank of the Government of India.

active role is of the State government, since they need to put in place state mechanism to realise and implement any policy or scheme on ground as per the regional conditions. As far as the progress of SDGs is concerned, as per some media reports, some of the states have put in some mechanism to realise the goals up to district level but there is need to check their effectiveness and present status.

Problem Statement

The patterns of consumption and production have been receiving vital importance in international policy discussions and related frameworks as necessary approach to realise SDGs. While the world is busy talking about SDGs and the targets to be achieved by 2030, the already existing policies and references related to SCP are losing their presence in the process. Setting up new targets with extended deadlines overshadows the already existing ones and put them in a black box where they end up losing their visibility but not the relevance.

The new and mainstream understanding of SCP through SDG 12 which somewhere misses a holistic approach shall not be followed to define and achieve a crucial concept of SCP. It is very critical to understand that the concept which had made into list of eight consumer rights in UN guidelines three decades ago, had a vision which was designed following a process of unending deliberations in international policy circles, ending up as part of Right to Healthy Environment of consumers.

The perspective of consumers' and upholding their 'Right to Healthy Environment' in realisation of Sustainable Production and Consumption in multiple sectors forms an important part in designing of action plan. It is important to understand how far the understanding of SCP from a crucial consumer perspective has been incorporated in the current understanding of SCP mainly driven and popularised by SDG12. The SDGs which are designed to build a better and liveable world for the people, who are also end user or consumers of various resources and services in the value chain shall justify their presence.

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development has pointed at the "serious concern" regarding the lack of an adequate monitoring framework for many of the targets under SDG 12. In India also, the SDG India Index released by Niti Aayog, has comfortably left out **SDG 12**, 13, 14 and 17 from the purview.

Also, as per mapping by *Niti Aayog*, various existing schemes and policies are mapped with different targets under SDG12 leaving one confused about the approach being followed to achieve these targets, leaving aside the consumer perspective in a dark corner.

The whole picture from International to National level not just point towards the lack of holistic understanding of SCP and the targets defined under the goal, but also at the missing planning framework to be followed, especially from the consumer perspective, to achieve the targets and track the progress. It is strongly felt that that the State should put in a mechanism with engagement of other stakeholders, especially the common people, if the country wants to move forward with SCP.

Scope and Objective of Study

As described above, the concept of SCP deserves an understanding which goes beyond SDGs and their targets. The study proposes to study the concept of SCP from the perspective of consumers who are the main force to drive change in any direction. The designs of policies, schemes, regulations, treaties or any agreement cannot be considered as appropriate without taking into consideration the views and suggestions of people whose lives will be affected by these documents.

SCP has potential to push for massive saving on natural resources, reducing waste generation drastically, decreasing pressure on Earth and dealing with issues of GHGs emissions and climate change directly. In another context, pushing for responsible consumption can have a major impact on reducing poverty and promoting equality in the world.

The major objective of the proposed study is to frame the understanding of concept of SCP beyond the SDG 12 and expand it beyond its current environment dimension. The concept shall be studied taking consideration of its presence in UN guidelines for Consumer Protection under Right to Healthy Environment which goes beyond environment protection and is driven by views and rights of the consumers. At the same time, there is also need to study if the global goal of SDG 12 is making the desired progress in India.

Realising the importance of the subject, the project proposes to conduct a study to:

- 1. Analyse and examine the initiatives of Government of India towards realising SCP:**
The planning framework and various efforts by government need to be studied in detail to understand the current work w.r.t both progress of SDG 12 and how far the efforts has taken into consideration the approach to realise the consumers' right to healthy environment. This will include mapping of legislative framework supported by institutional mechanisms of the Government of India. The idea is to highlight 'how India has interpreted SCP and SDG 12 at present' and at the same time study and analyse the approach it has taken to achieve targets by 2030. The policies and approach will be studied from the consumer perspective to understand how far the government has been able to incorporate this important dimension.
- 2. Identify the gaps and challenges in current plan and work with Government of India to redraw the framework for more focussed approach towards realising SCP:**
The second part of the project will involve a critical analysis of work in progress till date, study present gaps and challenges at the policy level and suggest recommendations to government. This will also include study of best initiatives and approaches by any state in relation to SCP which can be portrayed as replicable models for other states. The concept of People Powered SCP using cases from India in relation to SDG 12 will also be included. This part of the study will focus on 'What India can do to achieve the SCP' and will form the basis of future advocacy to fill in gaps.

The projects aims to study and bring to light the plan and progress in promoting sustainable consumption and production in India and put in public domain how India should move ahead to achieve the goal. This report will help to track the approach towards Goal 12 and will act as a tool to streamline existing policies and push for more dedicated efforts to support SCP in India.

Expected Outcomes

1. An appropriate approach to view and understand the concept of SCP from the consumer perspective which is beyond SDG12 and its targets.
2. An advocacy tool to streamline existing policies and push for more dedicated efforts to support SCP in India from the consumer perspective.
3. A potentially replicable policy and practical model which can be used by other countries.
4. SCP will receive its due attention and importance amongst other SDGs through continuous advocacy efforts, especially after the proposed National Consultation.

Duration

The duration of the project will be 18 months.

Start Date: May 1, 2019

End Date: 31 October, 2020