

THE ABC OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

Expert opinion is that the recent Coastal Regulation Zone Notification 2018 disregards the vulnerabilities of coastal regions to climate change. While the hospitality/tourism industries and local economies stand to gain from the changes, the lives and livelihood of thousands of citizens continue to be at risk.

India's vulnerabilities to climate challenges can no longer be ignored. Government, businesses and civil society have the responsibility of constructive action to address this environmental challenge. It is no secret that governments in India do not prioritise climate change mitigation, fearing that it will impede economic growth and efforts to alleviate poverty. On the other hand, several businesses have already established sustainable mitigative measures in their operations. It is time now for civil society to recognise our contribution to climate catastrophes and commit to containing an already precarious situation.

The role for civil society is to establish efficient and sustainable patterns of consuming essential and luxury products and services and, in the process, improve quality of life in multiple dimensions — physical environment, health and finance, for example. If we hope to make a significant difference, there must be a change in consumption-related thinking and behaviour. This requires that we embed the term sustainability deeply in our thinking and vocabulary, so that it becomes the default mode in which we operate. That implies making mobility choices that result in efficient fuel use and lower carbon emissions. It calls for considering alternative sources of domestic electricity. We need to observe and alter the use of cooling devices and power. How do we consume and manage water in homes and communities? How do we deal with household waste and other items that have outlived their intended utility?

Making changes in our consumption habits will necessarily draw in producers and government agencies through the goods and services they make available. Their involvement offers tremendous opportunity for citizens' needs to be heard. We ought to engage with manufacturers and marketers to co-create products and services that support efficient, sustainable consumption. With policy makers and regulators, we must force a shift in the current stance, to address climate challenges with much greater urgency. Civil society should be more assertive about being included in shaping the country's climate policy.

It is difficult enough for individuals to change entrenched habits and attitudes. Mobilising a large number of diverse people to think differently and learn new ways would likely be a herculean task. Yet, it is possible, demonstrated by instances of positive and sustained civic action by the public.

Altering our lifestyles for sustainability has a silver lining — we have a valuable chance to re-orient our lives for substantive improvement. The sooner we act, the more significant the gain.

The writer is Bengaluru-based and interested in climate change

Pakistan's identity crisis, going back to the debates since its creation, remains unresolved

END