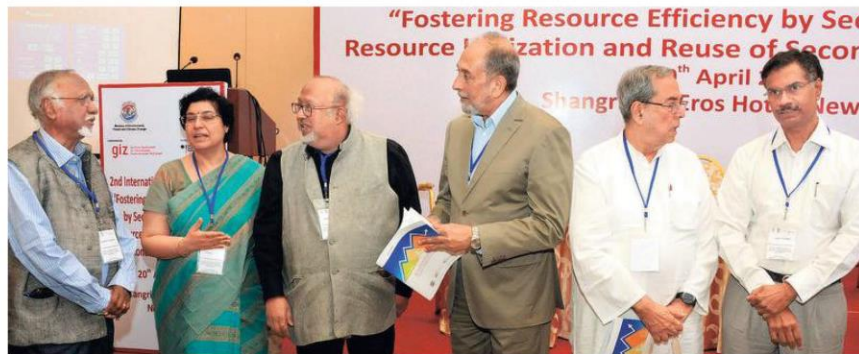


'We need to persuade the government to get involved'

The Indian Resource Panel members in conversation with Preeti Mehra on dealing with Resource Efficiency



With economic growth and urbanisation taking place at a rapid pace in India, there is increased demand for natural resources, be it land, soil, water or mined materials. With their impending depletion and the threat of serious scarcity in the future, it is imperative that we find more efficient ways to use them. Hence Resource Efficiency (RE) and Resource Management (RM) have become important in the agenda to combat future environment burdens in the country and at a global level where issues such as climate change, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) are occupying centre stage.

The Indian Resource Panel (IRP) was set up to deal with precisely these issues in November 2015, and last week it submitted its first set of recommendations to the government.

The IRP is an advisory panel embedded within the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and its role is to advise on key barriers to progress on resource efficiency at national, regional and sectoral levels and give practical suggestions on how to deal with them.

Since its inception it has been supported by the German Agency for International Cooperation GIZ along with its knowledge partners under the Indo-German collaboration on resource efficiency. Currently, the IRP is focusing on problems arising from construction & demolition waste and the automotive sector.

In a freewheeling interview as part of the 2nd International Workshop on "Fostering Resource Efficiency by Securing Sustainable Resource Utilisation and Reuse of Secondary Raw Materials" members of the Indian Resource Panel dwell on issues that have arisen, the challenges and the way forward. Excerpts

What is the process by which the Indian Resource Panel sets priorities and develops policy recommendations? Do you divide them into long term and short term achievable goals and make appropriate time-bound recommendations?

Dr Ashok Khosla: I would like to answer that question in two parts. First, how we have been doing it in the last couple of years since it was set up. We have been fairly ad hoc and have been supported by external secretariat and support systems from GIZ and other institutions. We have done a fair amount of thoughtful drafting and putting together a framework of thinking, which was then bounced off the members, but basically it was an interactive process of thinking through.

And now, the second part. Can we keep on doing that? No. We will now have to get much more proactive inputs from the panel members as one constitutes a whole new approach to managing resources.

As you know, everything we have been doing so far has been around resource efficiency and it ought to be. But resource efficiency from an Indian point of view and from a G20 point of view is only one half of resource management and we will need the panel to start opening up to the issues of environment, impact, social impact, health impact and go a little beyond efficiency. It should go much more into equity issues, much more into environment issues particularly from the point of view of future generations.

At the moment, the project has structured its history with a lot of pro-active inputs from GIZ and from support organisations such as TERI, Development Alternatives and

others. It has reached a stage when we have produced a report that is persuasive enough for the government to take note that this is an area that is important for climate change and biodiversity. This is really of the level of big global issues and has not been quite captured by the decision makers in our country. G7 has begun to understand it and when they met in Tokyo they got electrified by the report that we gave as International Resource Panel (IRP). I think G20 will start doing that and I think India ought to be a part of that process.

The future, to answer your question, will come a lot from think tanks, universities, government agencies and will have to be massaged into a framework. Resource efficiency will continue to be a focus and I hope that we will start branching out into other aspects as well.

As the panel has been working for one year, what have been your learnings from the work on RE with the government? Do you foresee any challenges in the future?

Dr Pradipto Ghosh: The concept of RE is something we don't any longer need to be convinced about. The whole issue is about how we can now translate this concept into practice, so I am going to give my impressions on the practice bit. I think the report and recommendations have realised the importance of policy reforms and the congruence between policies. That message is very clear – it is a herculean task. How will you bring that congruence and reflect it seamlessly within our regulations? But the real game changer I still feel, not to say less important than government, is business. And if resource efficiency is understood, which is the case in some of the business sectors and a huge informal sector is part of it, then that will lead to some changes.

There was a point that has been talked about regarding monitoring data, knowledge. For the last four years have been deeply working on C&D waste and I find that we don't have numbers, we have conflicting reports on how much we generate, there is no approved methodology

of how we estimate a potential resource. On the characteristics of construction waste the data is so scanty that if you ask some private sector player to come on board and engage in a PPP model (Public-private partnership) to handle this waste for the next 20 years with so much of uncertainty, what do you get then? You find bids not happening, bids going into litigation, so on the ground you don't see what you want to see in terms of RE.

I think we know the way out of those difficulties, either by building credible data and also the understanding of local authorities on these subjects. That becomes very vital. Years ago there was a programme called Water G – a US Aid supported initiative for the local bodies to realise the nexus between water and energy. What I want to emphasise is that when you look at resources you have to recognise the nexus and that should be also brought in. Now when we talk about even technology, I think there is a serious issue on technological maturity on recycling in this country. When it comes to sorting, separation and the low hanging fruits we know how to handle, but when it comes to more advanced techniques we probably still don't have the goods and certainly we need to adapt what is already there, not transpose, but we do need our research institutions working with the industry to come up with solutions for the higher order value chain.

Do you feel you need another kind of institutional framework along with the panel to achieve such a difficult task?

Dr Ghosh: I think we need a network of institutions, not one institution. And it should be designed in such a way that we are continuously bringing knowledge and practice together. It's not one single institution, it should be like a mission mode.

Dr Tishyarakshit Chatterjee: I have a slightly different opinion. When we are looking at institutional support we are really thinking of holding a process that is already initiated by the government, if we do that what may happen is that this institutional network gets to be a

INDIAN RESOURCE Panel members



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Dr Prasad Modak
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S Vijay Kumar
Former secretary to the Government of India, is part of The Energy and Resource Institute (TERI) and member of the United Nations' International Resource Panel

standalone. It's not main-streamed. My suggestion has always been that this institutional support, which our movement requires has to be main-streamed. In other words, institutions like the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) or the Bureau of Indian Standards, they

should do this work at a progressively increasing level. For that we may need to have subordinate cells in these organisations and existing mainstream bodies so that it is already legitimately acceptable to issuance of Centre or State government orders. Second point about the State governments. We need to hit the State governments immediately, even before the Centre, because already industry has shown tremendous amount of progress in Secondary Resource Management (SRM) if not so much in RE. But in SRM lots of things have been happening, small niches throughout the country. It's happening at the State or district level so unless we go down there with this institutional network, it will take time.

S Vijay Kumar: For instance, a mention was made about the BEE as a model. The point is that the bureau is a legal institution, a statutory body. That gives it enormous power, influence and ability to get things done. The RE body should very clearly be placed in one of the slots and given the power to come out with rules and regulations and actually enforce them. Or if it is a science oriented body then it is for the government to take or not to take its recommendations. Or it comes up as a public educative influencing body, but it has to be very clearly identify the nature of the role. You may also need to create other institutions and other roles around it.

So, what you envisage could be like a Bureau of Resource Efficiency?

Kumar: Well, I wouldn't call it RE but would rather call it Resource Management because otherwise you are narrowing it down to only efficiency.

How does the panel make sure that stakeholders such as civil society and industry are on board with your recommendations?

Dr Chatterjee: We need to get Niti Aayog involved in this. It is the only way we will be able to cover all stakeholders. Today Niti Aayog is in a position to call anybody, both in the private sector, civil society, government ministries and very

importantly the States, at least to discuss with them their way of thinking. In the last two or three years we haven't heard too much about Niti Aayog, but they are very well positioned to do this work for us and we are only going to be fuelling what they want to do.

Dr Ghosh: Let me address what the resource panel has actually done. It has relied on background studies done by GIZ, TERI and Development Alternatives. In these background papers stakeholders such as civil society, academia and industry were consulted and their inputs taken on board. And they would be available to the resource panel within the background paper. Now this report is with the government and in the government when something comes under the radar of the policymakers then there is a formal process of consultation with different stakeholders. And having said that policymaking is about finding middle ground, the government has to, in its policy process, deal with a wider variety of consensus but when it has to be translated into law and regulation it has to come to Parliament and the Parliament has a different complexion of stakeholders... and ultimately the final say

Seema Arora: I think we need to create an ecosystem with all players involved. We need to also create market mechanisms, which will give a pull. A lot of times we are giving a push and the push can take us only this far, we need a pull. That's why the consumer is very important. We can create a pipeline of resource efficient products and have no market for it. Then what do we do?

So, I think we really need to have an ecosystem created and allow different stakeholders to participate. The financial sector is equally important to rope in. So, the issue is how do we create this through policy and through market mechanisms. Industry is, of course, a key stakeholder and it has been participating. We have had several rounds of consultation with industry and the inputs are getting reflected in the report, which is very good. We do get feedback from our members who come to ask what is the next step. Very importantly, what is happening in the global space could be leveraged through

globally. Companies that could be used as a trigger point. We should look at public procurement as a major driver. In CI, we have worked with the government four years back to provide a full legislation on green public procurement and if we get that done we will get much going.

Which resources and waste streams, according to you, need the most urgent attention of the government and industry to improve conditions in the country?

Dr Prasad Modak: The next step I feel should be to look at electronic waste. It is something we have an advantage in as it's a newly drafted regulation... this is a sector where there is a lot of opportunity and the business models will foster well.

Dr Khosla: When you discuss these things about prioritising, it all depends on your DNA and mindset and where you come from. And it is easy for middle class to think of low hanging fruits like C&D waste, e-waste... these are very important so don't get me wrong, we have to do these. But we completely forget about the large amount of waste in rural India and those who are poor and who waste because they have no other choice. Crop waste, our soil, our rivers, our forests have been wasted... we don't think about them when we sit in a place like this where the obvious focus is urban. Now this country is losing an incredible amount of nutrients, soil, water systems through neglect of resources that impact the lives of two-thirds of this country. It is really important for us to give a little more emphasis on how to make resource more efficient in rural areas and poorer communities...

How do you harness learnings from international research and best practices through linkages with global institutions? Do these play a role in strengthening your position?

Dr Khosla: The IRP went very systematically through data, scientific collection. It did 4-5 reports on metals, it did a lot of reports on resources like land, water and then it looked at cross sectoral reports and studies on how to use resources. This is very important for India as in the next 30-odd years we are going to build as much cityscape as we have in the past five thousand years, so we really need an understanding of what circular economy means for us. But the fact of the matter is that we haven't given much thought to the material, energy and resource implications quite apart from other implications of how you make a city a good place to live in.

The international panel has one advantage over the Indian one, it has a steering committee, in which the panel members are global experts and have done studies and reports on 18-20 sets of different issues. The steering committee is like a client that tells the panel what the governments want to hear about and takes those findings and puts them into the EU and government policy process.

Would you recommend a steering committee for the India panel?

Dr Khosla: Well, I am not going to recommend any specific thing right now but I do want to make the point that India does not have an equivalent. The government has shown singular disinterest in this panel... I am worried about it... they have hardly ever attended meetings or commented on things. I, as a member of the panel, feel very unhappy about it. Whether you call it a steering committee or otherwise, we need to persuade the government to get involved and we need to take this to the policymaking domain or we are just making waste.