

Sustainability for All

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Sustainable development has so far been considered in the domain of natural resources and environment. Climate change is a relatively recent issue. While it potentially large impacts for developing countries, the developed countries fear of losing current quality of life and property.

Large cities and medium-to-large industries in developing countries like Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia realize the problems of waste-water, air pollutants and solid wastes, and have some mechanisms in place to treat these while simultaneously emphasizing development.

The waste-water and other local pollution treatments consume a lot of energy in developed countries. To take the example of river water treatment in Tokyo, about 20-90% of water is treated at various river bridges in Tokyo. But purification of waste-water needs energy. Purification of 1 ton of waste-water consumes equivalent of 0.5 litre of crude oil and releases 0.2 kg CO₂.

A typical sewer system in developed country cities consists of the following:

- Pipeline to drain storm water
- Pipeline to drain waste-water from houses and buildings
- Treatment facility to treat waste-water; this process is energy intensive

While the cost of treatment facilities is not so high, the cost of setting up sewer pipes for all cities of the world is beyond its economic level.

Hence the developed country practices may not be suitable for developing countries.

Key issues for establishing a sustainable urban environment in developing countries are as follows:

- Model of developed country cities may not be suitable for setting up urban environmental systems in developing countries, and we may have to look for an alternate model to ensure sustainability
- Requirements of development and urban infrastructure must be balanced
- While local environmental issues are being considered in urban areas of developing countries, climate change issues are not the major driving force for action