By Zohara Ghaffoor

Sri Lanka should inculcate a holistic approach in funding ‘urban solid waste disposal services’ involving consumers, producers and the State, says Institute of policy studies of Sri Lanka Research fellow, Bilesha Weeraratne speaking at the ADB-Asian think tank development Forum held on 20 September 2017.

Weeraratne pointed out that issues such as irrecoverable fixed costs on garbage equipment and technology, dependency on funds by the central government, negligible service fees collected by local authorities and lack of focus on sustainable activities have debilitated funds coming into the solid waste disposal services system.

While making note that insufficient funds were allocated by the Central Government and that minimal revenue was collected for these service. She also said local authorities were finding it difficult to balance funds provided and the service demand from the public and business organizations. She said the Meethotamulla garbage landslide was a repercussion of local authorities being incapacitated from a lack of strategy.

She stressed two strategies as being the solution to overcome such funding necessities by the Central Government, first looking at opportunities within the county and second to explore funding mechanisms used in countries of like nature, namely Taiwan.

Weeraratne noted that private sector participation was necessary and that systems such as ‘Build Own Operate’, ‘Build Own Operate Transfer’, ‘Build Operate transfer’ and ‘Lease to the private sector’ were viable options while encouraging the existing private sector players in the country.

She also proposed the ‘Extended producer responsibility scheme’ which encourages producers to reduce waste at the source and pay a product tax or fee for advanced recycling to local authorities.

While emphasizing that ‘Property tax’ will also be a steady source of income, Weeraratne also focused on the ‘Deposit refund system’, a mechanism of tax and subsidy, where a deposit is paid by customers for pollutant products and refunded once packaging, residuals are returned. She claimed that such measures will improve environmentally-friendly behaviour by the public.
She also said ‘Result based financing’, a mechanism where international institutions provide grants according to the service providers, provided pre-determined goals or certain actions are undertaken. User fees which should be adopted by the Government, Taiwan’s ‘Pay As You Throw’ (PAYT) system, where citizens will be charged a significant amount for special garbage bags bins and the weight of the litter.

Weeraratne also pointed out factors that will inhibit possible strategies to raise finances for solid waste disposal services. That impoverished households may find it difficult to pay increased rates to local authorities due to insufficient income along with the resistance from the public and low political will, there will also be a hike in illegal dumping and littering of garbage by the public. However, Weeraratne noted that such strategies must be inculcated smoothly into the system to avoid any hiccups in the long run.

Taiwan adopted a ‘polluter pays’ principle in 2000 introducing ‘Per-Bag Trash Collection Fee Program’ which is a PAYT system. This system urged the public to use garbage bags designated for garbage disposal which came with a price, this system encouraged the public to choose consumption patterns that discharged less waste. The Taiwan government also introduced a recycling programme which collects and recycles household waste separately. Due to the combinations of various strategies used by the Taiwanese government, it noticed that the garbage reduction rate reached 66.7% and 56.8 % on recycling rate in the end of 2014.

Taiwan previously known as ‘Garbage Island’ has strategically got over the problem by inculcating a culture of waste consciousness in the minds of citizens. Taiwan’s recycle industry has grown immensely, turning trash into treasure and now recycling 55% of its total waste and bringing in millions of dollars. One major recycling turning point for Taiwan has been the recycling of consumer electronics where some companies extract precious metal such as gold.

Taiwan also has a mobile app introduced for the public to track garbage trucks and alert them on nearby locations. Trash cans are scarce in the capital and maybe seen around train and bus stations, encouraging citizens to take trash home. The government has established a system that punishes and humiliates violators. The violators if caught are given a strict warning and will suffer a video footage encouraging citizens to take trash home. The government has established a system that punishes and humiliates violators. The violators if caught are given a strict warning and will suffer a video footage...

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