Extended producer responsibility mooted for Sri Lanka waste disposal

ECONOMYNEXT - Sri Lanka should consider Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes for dealing with solid waste which are becoming increasingly popular and could reduce the burden on cash-strapped local authorities, according to a new study.

Urban solid waste management is a high cost exercise and the cost is difficult to recover, said Bilesha Weeraratne, a research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, a think-tank.

Although there is greater demand for solid waste management services and more generation of waste, not enough money was being allocated by governments with revenue collected by local authorities for waste disposal being negligible.

The problem was highlighted in April 2017 with the collapse of Colombo’s main waste dump which destroyed many houses and killed many people,” Weeraratne told the ADB–Asian Think Tank Development Forum 2017 in Colombo.

“We need to find financing mechanisms for sustainable waste disposal.”

Types of financing for solid waste management include property tax and user fees where what is paid by residents depends on the amount of trash they throw.

Another option whose feasibility has been demonstrated and is becoming popular is the extended producer responsibility (ERP) schemes where producers and importers of certain products are involved in managing the waste, such as oils and electronic products.

Weeraratne said it was important to consider what would work for Sri Lanka and understand the local context and issues and adopt a strategy that is appropriate.

“There are benefits from a combination of shared responsibility of consumers, the state and private sectors,” she said, noting how Taiwan was successful in addressing waste management issues with shared responsibility between users and producers.

“Sri Lanka can draw from Taiwan’s experience to develop a sustainable solution.”

However, it was important to consider the local context in adopting a ‘pay as you throw’ scheme because of the large proportion of poor households in the island who may find it difficult to bear the extra cost.

“To prevent extra costs being passed to users Sri Lanka can make it optional or voluntary, not mandatory,” Weeraratne said.

EPR schemes, being adopted in an increasing range of countries, aim to make producers responsible for the environmental impacts of their products throughout the product chain, from design to the post-consumer phase.

They are expected to alleviate the burden on municipalities and taxpayers for managing end-of-life products, reduce the amount of waste destined for final disposal, and increase rates of recycling.

Since EPR involves producers taking responsibility for collecting end-of-life products and for sorting them before their final treatment, it also creates an incentive for producers to
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redesign their products so that they can more easily be treated at the end-of-life stage.