**Corporate sector and urban adaptation**

[Munir Ahmed](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/munir-ahmed/)@EmmayeSyed

NOVEMBER 14, 2020

Corporate sector is said to be the backbone of the economy. Those who understood it in letter and spirit have grown up to developed countries. Others are shambling and facing the situation as Pakistan is going through – chaos, confusion and clumsiness. Additionally, this backbone in Pakistan has much more burden of taxes, kickbacks, fears and harassment. Moreover, the hanging sword of so-called unaccountable accountability for all except the close cronies of the government. The shrewd ones, as always, have explored new ways of their ‘meaningful engagement’ with the government supported and facilitated by the present-day close cronies. Now, they are enjoying the flowering spring while the rest are waiting for their turn. But, we need to think beyond the usual. The real investments for genuine profits and genuine development.

Investing in the environment and urban climate adaptation is the new venue of profits with genuine pro-people development. Environmental investments not only bring financial benefits to the corporate sector but also cut down environmental degradation and pollution. Those having money have no knowledge about the new avenues of rational investment. Those having knowledge, unfortunately, have no money. The government has wishful thinking only and some political statements. That’s it. No adoptable urban adaptation investment-friendly plans, even they are short of funds too. The trust deficit between the corporate sector and government is even higher. A general public belief is that whatever is available, it is for the close cronies of the smart Prime Minister. The green agenda of the government is merely an eyewash.

To engage the corporate sector in urban climate adaptation, the government has to overcome the trust deficit with adequate policy framework taking the provinces onboard. A troika of district government, experts and local businessmen can play a significant role in urban adaptation. Assurance for sustainability would come from the community participation that would ultimately result in ownership.

*The government should bridge the trust deficit and engage the local businessmen into the local environmental solutions with small investments at the district*

The participants of a recently organized Devcom-Pakistan webinar believed that the government, corporate sector and experts make a dynamic triangle for an urban sustainable adaptation model. Corporate sector shall come out of discretionary social charity and environmental services to social investment plans at district level including environmental interventions.

The experts were of the view that the environment is not limited to tree-plantation or water conservation. It starts from the provision of safe drinking water to sanitation, waste collection to its segregation and disposal, clean air to cost-efficient green energy and a healthy environment.

Indeed, they were true and their opinion could be a source of inspiration to outlay plans for piloting a model working relationship, and could test the synergy and trust of the stakeholders.

The government should bridge the trust deficit and engage the local businessmen into the local environmental solutions with small investments at the district level. For the large interventions, the government should give incentives and invest in from the public exchequer too. All the interventions for the investments shall be prepared by the independent experts with the consultation of local communities and civil society groups. It would help prioritize the interventions, engagement and ownership of the local communities.

We need to understand that the government is short of funds for sustainable urban adaptation while businessmen lack sufficient knowledge and expertise for unconventional investments. Corporate sector can fill the investment gap while the environmental experts can equip the corporate sector with knowledge. It could be a win-win situation for all.

The role of Environmental Protection Agencies (EPAs) and district officers responsible for maintaining local environmental conditions become crucial and mandatory. Our businessmen are always receptive if approached rationally to convince them. The Pak-EPA engagement with the sector I-9 steel industry in Islamabad has been an example with exceptions and rumours. The industry was polluting the air. Pak-EPA approached them with a carbon-selling model. One adopted the investment plan and seven others followed him. They all recovered their investments in less than a year by selling carbon to other manufacturers they collected from the chimneys of their industries.

It is a known fact that awareness is the first step for any initiative. It is needed for urban climate adaptation too. This could be done easily. It is where the experts could help in bridging between the government and corporate sector. The awareness would lead to objective collaboration and investments by the corporate sector. Citizens’ participation would make it work for longtime. Enforcement of legal framework shall after the collaborative investment mechanism is air-born.

To start with the urban climate adaptation model, the Capital Development Authority (CDA) should develop public-private partnership models to engage local industry, corporate sectors and traders for sanitation, water conservation, waste management and air pollution. Civil society and experts should pilot an awareness campaign on environmental investments with the support of Pak-EPA for the twin-cities. We all need clean, green and sustainable cities but no one likes to lead the initiative.

Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) has launched some environmental improvement initiatives. It would be exemplary for other chambers of commerce and industry if the RCCI members pilot some urban management schemes. Women entrepreneurs can contribute in awareness raising campaigns to reduce consumption and management of domestic waste. We never tried to use the full potential of youth by engaging them more meaningfully in environmental improvement initiatives. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) shall develop a mechanism for on-ground engagement of youth which is 62 percent of the population.

This is quite unfortunate that the country’s population is increasing while the resources are decreasing. Therefore we need to conserve and protect from pollution our natural resources by reducing wastage and consumption. Engaging domestic women and youth in the concept of green neighborhood could contribute significantly in the urban adaptation model. Let’s begin together on the ground and beyond the slogans and shout-outs.

*The writer is a freelance journalist and broadcaster, Director Devcom-Pakistan, a policy advocacy and outreach think tank in Islamabad. His email: devcom.pakistan @gmail.com Twitter Handle: @EmmayeSyed*