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Globalising Western Lifestyles, Energy Consumption and Policy Innovations

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1. The problem

Energy consumption and economic growth are closely interrelated. Thus, for almost two centuries, extensive energy consumption and accordingly high levels of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) have been a core feature of the most industrialized countries. Today the emerging economies are about to catch up, although in a very specific way. In the countries that have been the historical forerunners of industrialization per capita consumption of energy is still on a top level but, meanwhile, considerable progress could be achieved in increasing energy efficiency. In comparison, even in developing countries that perform best in economic respect, due to the still enormous weight of the rural and urban poor, per capita consumption of energy keeps to be modest. However, steep increases in per capita energy consumption unfold in metropolitan areas in general and in the social realm of the new middle classes in particular. As a consequence, GHG emissions are also on the rise and this process is assumed to keep on increasing (cf. OECD 2008). In other words: until recently, access to energy used to be the most relevant challenge in the Global South, particularly in *rural areas*. The ongoing rise of the "new consumers" with their Western lifestyle, are estimated to comprise more than a billion persons in developing countries by 2030 (Bussolo et al. 2007), is about to make excessive energy consumption an also relevant issue of strategies towards a more sustainable future in developing countries, particularly in *urban areas*.

It is widely agreed that the *transport* sector belongs to the most significant and growing contributors to GHG emissions. They are projected to be by 80% higher than current levels by 2030, emerging economies accounting for the most dynamic increase (International Transport Forum 2008). Steep increase is also expected for *domestic appliances* such as heating/cooling and all kind of sophisticated electrical devices (Desgupta 2004, 117 passim). Regarding the aim of making development more sustainable this is clearly counter-productive.

In search of potentials for mitigation in "developing countries like India there exists enormous scope of energy conservation by up-grading technology, equipment and appliances in a wide range of areas" (Desgupta 2004, 188). Here, cooperation with countries such as Germany provides significant potential for progress. India can even take a lead in adopting and adjusting cutting edge technologies to the specific conditions and needs of developing countries without stepping into the costly pitfalls most industrialized countries went through.

However, in Germany as well as in any other western countries there is ample evidence that *technological innovations*, aiming at increasing energy efficiency, can realize their potential only within the framework of supportive *policy innovations.* These have to consider the whole bandwidth of fields: from innovation, production and the systems of provision to the realm of consumption and, last but not least, the various domains and institutions of the political-administrative process of regulation.

2. The conceptual framework

As Rajendra K. Pachauri stated with respect to transportation as a key area of GHG emissions, policy innovations to be developed and put in place should "…include among others carbon-price regulations, standards, and taxes as well as a change in land use, in lifestyles and consumption patterns" (International Transport Forum 2008). As a consequence, the need for developing *equipment and suitable technical solutions* goes along with an increasing need to develop medium term strategies that focus on

- ⇨ raising both actor-specific and more general *awareness and acceptance* of the need to save energy
- ⇨ setting up conducive *regulatory frameworks* (including incentives aiming at changes in behavioural patterns).

These are exactly the fields to which in the Global North social science has paid most attention during the last 30 years. This applies to economy and political science as well as to sociology, psychology and geography.

Therefore, an Indo-German network of experts from (i) social science in close contact with (ii) experts from public administration and industry should concentrate on three points:

1. Identifying common ground and differences in private energy consumption between Germany and India: In spite of obvious similarities in dominant trends in energy consumption in India and Germany there are equally obvious differences with respect to institutional systems, welfare state regulations, cultural traditions, etc. Hence, identifying specific Indian needs and priorities should be the first step in setting up a framework for cooperation.
2. Against this background there should be a screening of 30 years of European (and further) efforts to reduce energy consumption, considering the state of the art in questions to be asked and outcomes to be considered. This will allow for focusing on those findings that, offhand or after due adaptation, could be relevant for India and which, subsequently, should be at the focus of Indo-German cooperation.
3. The aim of such cooperation should be to develop concepts for tailored Indian policies reducing energy consumption in a limited number of fields, mainly *motoring and housing.*

3. How to make the concept operative?

Considering the limited experience that has been made so far in Indo-German social science cooperation related to problems of sustainable development, a two-step strategy seems to be appropriate:

Step 1

Setting up a small working group comprising not more than three to four persons from each country. This group should be able to identify two to three fields of action which (i) are seen as relevant on either side and where (ii) there is sufficient competence and experience to built on in either country (= see above point 1). This can be done within the next six months.

Step 2

Setting up two or three project groups which will concentrate on one topic each (see above points 2-3) during the next three years. Its members don't need to be identical with the members of the working group of step no. 1. In any case they should comprise more persons.

References:

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