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NEED FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Sustainability has become the buzz word now-a-days. Scarcity of resources and the world population are two reverse words that actually force us to think about sustainability. To meet the need of future generations everyone should act or think in a sustainable manner. For that reason in this study the author tries to generate some ideas to promote sustainable consumption. Secondary information and review of existing literature are the sources of information used to conclude on some problems and prospects of sustainable consumption. At the same time the researcher suggested to solve those problems by building awareness of consumers, making policy and necessary legislation and imposing tax on products etc.

Keywords: Sustainable consumption, Legislation, Consumer, Innovation.

1. Introduction

Sustainable consumption is not only searching for greener products or services but also consuming less. Sustainable consumption will be used as extraordinary competitive opportunities for businesses. If we do not change our spending pattern or way of consumption, the world will face the prospect of multiple, interlocking global crises for the environment. Sustainable consumption is a basic requirement for a prosperous, safe and healthy global future for the next generation. Worldwide consumption patterns are not sustainable now. It is clear that efficiency gains and technology advances alone will not be sufficient to bring global consumption to sustainable levels. Changes will also be required to consumer lifestyles, including the way in which consumers choose and use products and services. Achieving sustainable consumption patterns is more technically and politically complex than changing production patterns, because it raises important issues such as human values, equity and lifestyle choices.

Consumers play a very important role for driving sustainable production and play a central role in sustainable development and consumption. This research emphasizes how to promote sustainable consumption in Bangladesh by changing lifestyle, building awareness, and making policy. Consumers can practice sustainable consumption in various ways, by recycling household wastes, purchasing sustainable products, using energy efficient appliances, choosing green electricity tariffs, composing garden and kitchen wastage, conserving water and energy, buying organic foods, retuning electrical good for re-use or recycling, switching transport mode, etc.

Research has sharply shown that consumers from many countries around the world express an interest in purchasing green products (Chan&lau2001).A study in 1990 showed that 82% of Americans were willing to pay more for a product that was environmental friendly (Shrum, McCarty & Lowrey1995.)



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David Allaway (2012) mention in his article, a 2008 report developed by members of World Business Council for Sustainable Development's consumers and sustainable consumption work stream draws a number of conclusions as follows:-

1. "Current global consumption patterns are unsustainable...efficiency gains and technological advances alone will not be sufficient to bring global consumption to a sustainable level. Changes will also be required to consumer lifestyles, including the ways in which consumers choose and use products and services. We recognize the need for business to play a leadership role in fostering more sustainable levels and patterns of consumption, through current business processes such as innovation, marketing and communications, and by working in partnership with consumers, governments and stakeholders to define and achieve more sustainable lifestyles."
2. "Human well-being does not necessarily rely on high levels of consumption many poorer countries achieve levels of life satisfaction that is just as high as their wealthier neighbors. Above a minimum level, there is no apparent correlation between per capita GDP and life satisfaction."
3. "Consumers are increasingly concerned about environmental, social and economic issues, and increasingly willing to act on those concerns; however consumer willingness is not translating into sustainable consumer behavior. A variety of barriers has been identified, such as availability, affordability, convenience, product performance, conflicting priorities, skepticism and force of habit."
4. "There is currently no common understanding of what a sustainable product or lifestyle is. Business may determine the sustainability of a product based on a full life cycle analysis. Retailers, governments and other actors may assess the "sustainability"...of a product based on varying disclosure criteria or societal pressure. As a result of this confusion over who determines the sustainability of a product, choices to edit the availability of certain products are often in conflict. Business, governments and society (including consumers) must work together to define sustainable products and lifestyles."

Most of the consumers in Bangladesh are environment conscious but do not know more about sustainable consumption, they consider it from an individual perspective rather than from a uniform perspective. They lose more gas for saving a diaslai kathi. But after a commercial campaign initiative taken by Government, consumers are more conscious about sustainable consumption than previous time.

2. Review of Literature

Lorek,et al.,(2013) stated that for achieving sustainable consumption, two developments must take into consideration: the first one is it requires both an increase in the efficiency of consumption as well as a change in consumption patterns, and the second one is to reduce consumption levels in industrialized countries. Technological improvements and eco-efficiency support a necessary reduction in resource consumption. Once this aim has been met, the second prerequisite, the change in patterns and reduction levels of consumption, is indispensable.

Two perspectives on how to reach sustainable consumption have developed, which the following sections elaborate. They show that the two perspectives are based on different conceptual assumptions. What we term the 'weak sustainable consumption' approach is rooted in market approaches and



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technological optimism. Strong sustainable consumption, in turn, emphasizes social innovation as a starting point and strategically takes a technologically pessimistic position.

Sylvia Lorek and Doris A. Kuchs (2004) identified various actors and their behavioral impact on sustainable consumption. Consumers, businesses, Government and international organizations are the actors of sustainable consumption. By changing their views and actions good governance of sustainable consumption can be ensured easily and effectively. Tukker Arnold, et al (2007) recommend a framework for action to change sustainable consumption production in the food, energy, mobility and housing. They give importance on the actions of the stakeholders involved in the process of sustainable consumption especially Government, consumers and NGO's. As Fuchs and Lorek (2005) have shown with a stakeholder analysis of global sustainable consumption governance, consumers, business and political decision makers both in governments and IGOs tend to find themselves locked into the "more-is-better" paradigm when it comes to consumption (Jackson, 2009; Princen, 2010; Shove and Walker, 2010).

The Brundtland commission (1987) defined sustainable development that meets the needs of present without compromising the needs of future generations. Pearce, Mankandia & Barbier (1989) explain that sustainable development involves devising a social and economic system, which ensures that the following goals are sustained: real incomes rises, educational standards increases, health of nation improves, and general quality of life is advanced.

Pearce (1989) states that sustainable development is concerned with the development of a society where costs of development are not transferred to future generations, or at least an attempt is made to compensate for such costs. A strong 'green' awareness among consumers is needed to overcome acquired (non-sustainable) habits and to facilitate behavioral changes which pave the way for responsible actions (Kahneman 2012; Ruckriegel 2014).

3. Objective of the study

- To get an idea about sustainable consumption.
- To explore the ways to practice sustainable consumption.
- To find out the problems facing the practice of sustainable consumption.
- To provide some recommendations to overcome those problems.

4. Methodology of the study

This study is mainly prepared by using secondary data and reviewing of existing literature available on sustainable consumption. Secondary data are collected from various journals, magazines, newspapers, weekly publications of newspapers, and from various websites. The collected data are analyzed in the perspective of progress and adequacy of sustainable consumption practices in Bangladesh compared to the global endeavors. The major limitation of the study is that no primary data is involved in the study.

5. Definition of sustainable consumption

Lewis Akenji and Magnus Bengtsson (2014) argue that sustainable consumption and production (SCP) should play a prominent role in the formulation and implementation of sustainable development



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goals (SDGs) and discuss how this could be practically done. Unsustainable patterns of consumption and production have been declared the primary cause of environmental deterioration.

Sustainable or responsible consumption implies the satisfaction of personal needs without an adverse impact on the lives and consumption potentials of present and future generations and complies therefore with the principles of sustainability (Agenda 21, 1992; Belz et al., 2007; Belz and Peattie, 2009).

The Oslo Symposium in 1994 proposed a working definition of sustainable consumption as “the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations.

Sustainable consumption is related to the process of purchasing products and services, consuming and disposing, while sustainable lifestyles include a broader set of activities, such as interaction, leisure activities, sports and education, including, but not limited to, material consumption (Mont, 2007).

Sustainable consumption refers to measures to achieve a more equitable distribution of consumption around the world and reduce the overall environmental impact (Hertwich and Katzmayer, 2003).

To meet the better future for the next generation in 1992, the concept of sustainable consumption is established in chapter 4 of Agenda 21. From this the concept is enriching itself day by day.

6. Development of global sustainable consumption governance

(Global) sustainable consumption governance is highly necessary. Unsustainable consumption patterns and levels, in particular in industrialized countries, are perhaps a major cause of environmental degradation in the world today (UNDP1998, World watch 2004).

- i. 1992-At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) the concept of sustainable consumption is established in chapter 4 of Agenda 21.
- ii. 1994-sustainable consumption symposium in Oslo.
- iii. 1995-Sustainable consumption was requested to be incorporated by United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECONSOC) into the UN guidelines on consumer protection.
- iv. 1997-A major report on Sustainable Consumption was produced by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
- v. 1998-United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) starts a sustainable consumption program and sustainable consumptions is discussed in the Human Development Report of the UN Development Program.
- vi. 2002- Creation of a ten year program on SCP in the plan of implementation at the world summit on sustainable development (WSSD) in Johannesburg.
- vii. 2003-The “Marrakech process” was developed by co-ordination of a series of meetings and other multi stakeholder processes by UNEP and UNDESA following the WSSD.

7. Importance of sustainable consumption

Sustainable consumption practice means finding ways to meet needs and desires without depleting natural resources. Practicing sustainable consumption can ensure the environment has resources available long into the future. In most industrialized and developed nations, consumption pattern are not sustainable, because they require too many resources, cause too many emissions, and produce social



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impacts in developing countries. In many developing countries, consumption patterns are unsustainable because the consumption is insufficient to meet basic needs (Sen 1998). They may also be unsustainable because they are based on resource exploitation or cause adverse side effects, such as soil erosion and salinization.

Also, in the developed countries, consumers have more purchasing power, so they have the tendency to misuse it. In the developing nations, consumption patterns can be unsustainable because citizens of these countries may need to exploit their natural resources to meet their basic living needs. It is widely recognized that changing household consumption pattern is essential to achieve sustainable development (Kok *et al.*, 2006 p2744 12).

In view of these challenges, sustainable consumption refers to measures to achieve a more equitable distribution of consumption around the world and reduce the overall environmental impact (Hertwich and Michael, 2004).

8. Rebound effect of Sustainable Consumption

Sustainable consumption has both way impact on the consumer. It reduces the demand for more product as well as increases the purchasing power of the consumer. The effects are as follows:

- i. Direct/ pure price rebound effects (micro-effect): improved energy efficiency for a particular energy service will decrease the effective price of that service and should therefore lead to an increase in consumption of that service. This will tend to offset the reduction in energy consumption provided by the efficiency improvement.
- ii. Income effect (micro-effect): holding the price of commodities constant, the reduction in the cost of an energy service implies the consumer has more money to spend on other goods and services. For example, if the cost to heat a household is reduced through installing a more efficient central heating system, then the household is likely to spend the money saved on other items. This may be a more energy intensive activity such as a holiday overseas.
- iii. Substitution effect (micro-effect): the price of an energy service drops, and so consumers should substitute indefinitely for the cheaper energy service.
- iv. Indirect/ secondary effects (macro-effect): other goods and services also require energy, and so total energy will increase in areas not directly affected by the energy efficiency improvement.
- v. Economy wide effects (macro-effect): a fall in the real price of energy services may reduce the price of intermediate and final goods throughout the economy, leading to a series of price and quantity adjustments, with energy-intensive goods and sectors likely to gain at the expense of less energy-intensive ones (Sorrell and Dimitropoulos, 2008; Hertwich, 2005 and Greening *et al.*, 2000, adapted from Kate Scott,2009).

9. Ways of practicing sustainable consumption

Eco-friendly living is not so difficult or expensive. By following simple principles to manage power, water, and waste better, we could practice it. Living green means reversing climate change, but also having healthy families, cleaner surroundings and financial savings.



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Bangladesh produces 36 million metric tons of CO₂ every year. This figure may be low compared to many other nations, but with population density of 1100/sq.km, pollution control and the sustainable use of resources have become life-and-death issues for Bangladesh.

Table: Ways of sustainable consumption practice

	Energy saving	Water saving	Waste saving
1.	Switching to energy saving light bulbs. These may cost a little more initially, but they use around a quarter of the power of standard light bulbs and last eight times longer.	Fixing any leaky taps, toilets or water pipes. Even a small drip can add up to a lot of water over time. Research has shown that one dripping tap can cause a loss up to 2000 litres per month.	Not throwing out toxic households waste, such as paint, paint thinner and car fluid, in the garbage or down the drain.
2.	Leaving appliances on standby wastes millions of taka worth of energy annually. As such, always turn appliances off. Switch all lights off on leaving a room.	By washing the car in natural ways- for instance, waiting until it rains.	by taking one's own bags to grocery store. Take canvas bags rather than flimsy flyaway polythene bags.
3.	Most modern electric appliances consume electrically even when turned off. Switch off wall sockets when possible.	Doing a water audit-don't waste water	By composting food waste and use as nutrient rich soil for kitchen garden.
4.	When using washing machine always make up a full load. Dry on a clothes line.	Only after soaping and shampooing-turn on the shower.	By avoiding products with excess packaging.
5.	Don't buy a freezer that is larger than one needed, especially if anyone lives close to the shop.	Considering a rainwater harvesting apparatus. It is cheap to install.	Always use re-usables: mugs, lunch containers, batteries, pens, razors etc.
6.	Buy a laptop instead of a desktop, if possible. It consumes five times less electricity.	By buying water efficient appliances.	Replacing paper products with reusable ones, and using recycled paper when to use paper.
7.	Checking the computer power system.	Reducing current shower time by one minute-it can save thousands of litre per month.	Print on both sides of a sheet. Avoid printing unless necessary.



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8.	By minimizing printing. Laser printers use more electricity than inkjet printers.	Locating and repairing silent toilet leaks.	Check for errors in a document on screen before printing
9.	Considering using a cold shower rather than using the tub.	By giving water garden on demand, not on schedule.	Segregate waste into biodegradable and non-degradable.
10.	Avoid using cars. Walk or take public transportation whenever possible.	By kicking bottles. Ring filtered water instead of buying water in bottles. The plastic bottles take thousands of years to decompose.	

Source: The Star, a weekly publication of The Daily Star, January 29, 2010

10. Examples of sustainable consumption around the world

In Australia and Canada, for saving energy, phasing out of less efficient incandescent has been introduced. Australia was the first country to announce incandescent light bulbs would be completely phased out by 2010 and replaced by florescent models which use about 20% of the electricity to produce the same amount of light. Canada decided to do it by 2012.

For example, almost all automobile companies now have advertising campaigns promoting their concern about climate change and the environmental features of their models – Daimler Chrysler (Fresh Air), Honda (Safe and Environmental), Toyota (Clean Air), Volkswagen (Save Fuel), Peugeot (Flower), Kia (Think Before you Drive). Similarly, many petrol companies are projecting a green image and advertising commitments to preserving nature – BP (Beyond Petroleum), Shell (Gardener), and Total (Dolphin). At the same time, ads for consumer goods stress support of human, labour and social rights – Walmart (Community), Bristol-Myers (Diversity and Success), Unilever (Hopscotch), American Apparel (Sweatshop-free Tshirts), and IKEA (Stuffed Animal).

In Australia, mandatory energy efficiency rating labels, now recognized by more than 95% of consumers, complement Minimum Energy Performance Standards for a comprehensive range of household electrical products. The government introduced mandatory sustainability reporting for corporate pension schemes in 2005, runs an ethical and ecological investment platform aimed at increasing the market for sustainable investments, and is developing an eco-label for green funds. From a successful beginning in 2004, *Das bringt's Nachhaltig* has become a yearly *Sustainability Weeks* event when thousands of retailers throughout the country promote and have special offers on organic, fair trade, and locally made products.

In Canada, Homeowners are encouraged to improve the energy efficiency of their homes through the *ecoEnergy Retrofit* scheme, introduced in 2007, which grants a maximum of C\$ 5000 for this purpose. A *Sustainability Reporting Toolkit* was developed by the government to assist firms in assessing the need to report and creating an effective report in terms of communicating its sustainability practices to consumers.

France (with the United Kingdom) has initiated discussions at the European Union level on temporary variations in VAT taxes according to a product's social and environmental performance as denoted by third-party certified labels. The *Velib* (free bike) programme launched in 2007 placed 20,000



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bicycles at more than 1,000 stations around Paris in the attempt to reduce car traffic and pollution. Also, the French environmental energy agency, ADEME, mounted a television communications campaign in 2005 to mitigate climate change, *Energy Savings: Hurry Up. It's Getting Hot*, where individuals tried to break through consumer apathy and suggested small steps for conserving energy.

Energy consumed in Mexico by household appliances fell by more than 50% due to standards and labels developed for washing machines, refrigerators, water heaters, lights, water pumps, boilers, thermal insulation materials and other household products.

The US Nutrition Labeling and Education Act require labeling on all prepackaged foods in the form of a "nutrition facts panel," including nutrients associated with diet-related disease.

In Denmark, Household water consumption was greatly reduced by a 150% increase in the price of water through a combination of taxes -- water supply tax (41%), VAT (20%), variable water taxes (12%), green taxes (14%), variable taxes (9%), fixed wastewater charge (2%), and State wastewater tax (2%).

In Ireland, a 15 cent (€0.15) levy on plastic bags reduced consumption of these bags by 92% and promoted the use of reusable bags by the majority of shoppers, with receipts going to a fund used to support waste management and other environmental initiatives.

In Netherland, the local government and NGOs introduced a green loyalty point system called *Nu Spaarpas* which gives green points for sustainable consumer behavior and allows points to be redeemed for sustainable products and services.

Japan launched its *Cool Biz* campaign in 2005 to lower CO2 emissions by encouraging people to wear casual clothes and businessmen to go without ties and jackets to reduce the use of air conditioning. In United Kingdom, The Climate Change Communication Initiative uses the latest multimedia techniques, including interactive websites, champion blogs, and films, to promote individual involvement in action against climate change under the theme *Tomorrow's Climate: Today's Challenge*.

11. Examples of sustainable consumption in Bangladesh

Unilever and proctor and gamble, among others have been engaging consumers to change their washing habits in keeping with advances in technologies and detergents.

Deshal bd.com, a leading fashion house in Bangladesh, launched paper made shopping bag for very beginning of their inception as a sign of sustainable consumption. Consumers of this boutique house are happy to purchase from the shop as it is their social responsibility to act sustainably.

12. Problems facing the practice of sustainable consumption

Sustainable consumption practice is not so easy to implement, nor is a matter of overnight task. There are some problems that need to be addressed by all.

Contradiction to economic growth: Consumption of goods drives a strong economy. Consumer consumption drives business consumption which is called derived demand. Business consumption in turn generates economic growth. So, the goals of economic growth contradict the goals of sustainable consumption.



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Low consumer awareness: Most people do not know the environmental cost of the products they buy and the services they use. For sustainable consumption to be promoted, there is first need to overcome ingrained thinking and behavior patterns.

Limited access to green products and services: Bangladesh is a developing country. Here people are not aware about green products and services so that access to green products and services are limited.

Lack of transparency and credibility: In Bangladesh transparency and credibility is very low. As such, there are those who are claiming that their products are green but there are no ways to evaluate whether they are actually sustainable or not.

Few take back mechanisms: Take back facilities of products or services can play a very important role for promoting sustainable consumption. In Bangladesh, take back is now at the introductory phase.

Lack of appropriate waste infrastructure: In Bangladesh no proper waste management is present. About 80% per cent of the waste produced in Dhaka is organic and suitable for composting. As oxygen is a vital part of composting process, this is a much greener way of using up household waste.

No after sales support: After sales services are relevant particularly for technically complex or high maintenance products. Providing after sales services can help to stay in touch with end consumer fostering joint learning to improve existing products and develop new ones. In Bangladesh after sales support services are very low.

13. Recommendations

1. Government can undertake campaign to raise awareness of consumers on issues related to sustainable consumption by eco-labeling a product as it works as a consumer information tool. Government of Bangladesh can make it mandatory for all manufacturers to give information of their product's best possible usage in the product labels.
2. Sustainability may be used as value to influence the brand image that will in turn increase the sales of the company.
3. Consumption pattern should be changed to promote sustainable consumption. Sustainable consumption patterns are patterns of consumption that satisfy basic needs, offer humans the freedom to realize themselves, and replicable across the whole globe without compromising the earth's carrying capacity. Consumers can reuse the product again and again by changing the usage form of the product. A sari can be reused by making it as a bazar bag. Also, the government of Bangladesh could ban plastic bags.
4. Producers should be encouraged to implement take-back responsibility as well as the consumer to be motivated to return the used products to the producers for recycling the products. Coca-cola introduced this facility for their product, but consumers are reluctant to back the product, for minimizing that problem. They introduced plastic pet bottle which is so harmful for the environment, so the Government of Bangladesh should monitor this matter seriously and should ban plastic pet bottle for all kind of beverages available in Bangladesh.
5. The more the company educates consumers on the implicit and explicit value of sustained or conscious consumption, the consumer will become more motivated and informed which will encourage consumers for purchasing the company's product. A Bangladeshi Company Walton is giving necessary information of conscious consumption of the product on the label of the product.



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6. Companies should encourage the consumers on practice of sustainable consumption, because they are also the employees of larger organization. These practices could be like using less paper by writing on both sides, making less wastage and saving energy of the organization.
7. Government should raise the price of less sustainable products and also impose taxes on consumers who will use less sustainable products. Government can impose taxes on fuel, which will help car emissions, car purchase or registration taxes, household energy consumption taxes, water use and household waste (e.g. waste disposal tax.). During the time of budget preparation, government should give importance on this matter.
8. Manufacturers should apply cleaner, ecofriendly design products.
9. Government should take initiatives to promote sustainable choice of the customers through making strict legislation. Government of Bangladesh can make necessary laws, amendment, and legislative rule for implementing sustainable consumption practice.
10. Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (DESA) can introduce smart electric meter as a pre-paid billing system.
11. Banking sector can introduce green credit card, that is one credit card can be used for various banks transaction.
12. Government could make operational agreements on implementation of instruments like green public procurement, stimulating eco-design, etc.
13. Government should foster greening innovation systems and support sustainable entrepreneurs. Bangladesh Krishi Bank is giving loan to green entrepreneurs who actually take initiatives for green business.
14. Government should encourage sustainable consumption by encouraging the company to use performance standards and labels that maximize damages from products before consumption.
15. Companies should use label for providing information about recycling or reusing or recollecting products for further production. Now-a-days environment-friendly companies are using these sign and symbols.
16. Government campaigns are frequently aimed at encouraging ecofriendly consumption habits. For example, Japan is building on cultural traditions to promote sustainable packaging and recycling through its *3R* campaign.
17. Taxes and high price should be imposed over the usage of electricity. Electricity may be taxed upon delivery to the end user; household user should bear more tax burden than industry. During the time of budget preparation this matter should get priority.
18. Awareness raising campaign should be introduced among the customers about energy conservation like concert, mobile road show etc.
19. Advertising can play a very promising role in promoting sustainable consumption. Other public relation tools such as newspaper, magazines, billboard and radio commercials can be used as a tool for promoting sustainable consumption.
20. By producing new knowledge about product usage through behavioral change, especially in day-to-day household routines that affect water and energy use, garbage etc. These changing habits avoid the waste of resources.



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21. By Influencing of product choice and home improvement investments through marketing campaign, 'Green products' will be promoted. Small investments may also be necessary, such as installing low-flow showerheads.
22. By educating consumer about the best usage of the product like how to use, how to reuse and recycling. Consumer could be motivated to repair faulty product rather than replacing them.

14. Conclusion

Sustainable consumption is a new concept in Bangladesh. People do not know about the concept, but consciously or unconsciously they are practicing sustainable consumption. This research was conducted to get an idea about sustainable consumption and to explore the ways to practice sustainable consumption. This research also revealed some problems and made recommendations to promote sustainable consumption in practice.

Sustainable consumption is the kind of consumption that requires wise use of resources for future consumption. The problems which are associated with sustainable consumption are contradiction to economic growth, low consumer awareness, limited access to green products and services, lack of transparency and credibility, and no after sales support etc. It is still now practiced on an individual basis and not in a uniform way.

If the usefulness of sustainable consumption can be wisely presented to customers, the result will be significant. Sustainable consumption can be practiced by saving energy, water and by wastage management. To ensure sustainable consumption, it is not only the duty of government but also other stakeholders including businesses, customer, NGO and other actors.

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