

ECO-Labels in India: Driving Sustainable Choices

The focus of Environmental Information, Awareness, Capacity Building & Livelihood Programme (EIACP) scheme is to disseminate environmental information to decision makers, policy planners, scientists and researchers across the world.

CERC-EIACP, Programme Centre - Resource Partner to MoEF&CC works on the thematic mandate of 'Environment Literacy - Eco-labelling & Eco-friendly Products'. This bi-monthly e-bulletin features latest of Environment, developments and innovations.



Introduction

In today's world, where environmental concerns are becoming increasingly significant, eco-labels serve as essential tools for promoting sustainability. Eco-labels help consumers make informed choices by identifying products and services that have been certified as environmentally friendly. They provide a reliable means of distinguishing green products from conventional alternatives, pushing industries to adopt sustainable practices while encouraging a culture of conscious consumption. This Green Alert focuses on the role, evolution, and importance of eco-labels in India, a country experiencing rapid industrial growth alongside rising environmental challenges.

What are Eco-Labels?

Eco-labels are marks or symbols that signify that a product or service complies with environmental standards. These standards often involve various aspects of sustainability, such as energy efficiency, reduced carbon footprint, minimal use of harmful chemicals, and responsible sourcing of raw materials. By offering consumers clear information about the environmental performance of products, eco-labels foster responsible consumption and production patterns. Eco-labelling schemes are either voluntary or mandatory, and they can be government-led, industry-led, or managed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The certification process generally involves a life-cycle assessment, which evaluates the environmental impact of a product from the raw material extraction stage through production, distribution, usage, and eventual disposal.

The Importance of Eco-Labels

Eco-labels are essential for several reasons:

- Promoting Transparency:** In a market flooded with products, eco-labels act as reliable indicators of a product's environmental credentials. They help cut through greenwashing a practice where companies falsely claim to be environmentally friendly.
- Encouraging Sustainable Production:** For manufacturers, obtaining an eco-label often involves rethinking their production processes to meet specific environmental criteria. This promotes innovation in sustainable practices.
- Empowering Consumers:** Eco-labels empower consumers to align their purchases with their values. As sustainability becomes a key factor in purchasing decisions, eco-labelled products offer a way for consumers to contribute to environmental protection.
- Contributing to Global Climate Goals:** Eco-labels help countries meet their climate commitments by fostering industries that reduce resource consumption, energy use, and greenhouse gas emissions.

The Evolution of Eco-Labels in India

India has seen significant growth in the eco-labelling sector in recent years. As the country undergoes rapid industrialization, the environmental consequences are becoming more apparent, prompting businesses and consumers alike to seek sustainable alternatives. India's eco-label landscape has evolved in response to both international environmental agreements and domestic environmental policies.

Key Milestones:

- Eco-Mark:** India's first eco-label, Eco-Mark, was launched in 1991 by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) to encourage the use of environmentally friendly products. It covers a wide range of product categories, including detergents, paper, food items, and textiles. However, the uptake of Eco-Mark has been slow due to lack of awareness and enforcement.
- Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Fairtrade:** India has also seen the adoption of international eco-labels like FSC, which certifies responsible forest management practices, and Fairtrade, which ensures ethical sourcing of products like tea, coffee, and cotton.
- Energy Star and BEE Star Labelling:** To promote energy efficiency, the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) introduced the BEE Star Label in 2006 for household appliances such as refrigerators, air conditioners, and lighting equipment. The label helps consumers compare energy consumption and operational costs, driving the demand for energy-efficient appliances.
- Organic Certification:** With the growing awareness around the harmful impacts of pesticides and chemicals in agriculture, organic certifications such as India Organic and PGS-India (Participatory Guarantee System) have gained prominence. These labels ensure that agricultural products are grown without synthetic inputs, benefiting both the environment and human health.

Types of Eco-Labels in India

India has a diverse array of eco-labels catering to different industries, environmental concerns, and consumer needs. These labels fall into three major categories:

- Product-Specific Eco-Labels:** These eco-labels certify individual products based on specific environmental criteria. Examples include:
 - BEE Star Label:** For energy-efficient appliances.
 - FSC Certification:** For wood and paper products from sustainably managed forests.
 - India Organic:** For organically produced food and agricultural products.
- Industry-Specific Eco-Labels:** These eco-labels focus on promoting sustainability within a specific industry. Examples include:
 - GreenPro Certification:** Launched by the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC), GreenPro certifies products used in green buildings.
 - LEED India:** Certifies buildings that meet environmental standards in design, construction, and operation.
- Process-Oriented Eco-Labels:** These eco-labels assess the sustainability of the processes involved in producing a product. Examples include:
 - ISO 14001:** Focuses on improving environmental performance through efficient use of resources and reducing waste.

The Role of Eco-Labels in Mission LiFE

India's ambitious Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, aims to reduce waste, conserve natural resources, and promote a culture of sustainable living. Eco-labels play a vital role in realizing these goals by nudging both consumers and industries toward environmentally responsible choices. By encouraging the purchase of eco-labelled products, consumers can actively participate in Mission LiFE's vision of a sustainable future.

Eco-labels also support India's commitments under the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Eco-labels in India face several challenges that limit their impact, including a lack of consumer awareness, high certification costs for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), greenwashing, and limited coverage across industries. Many consumers remain unfamiliar with eco-labels, and SMEs often struggle with the costs of obtaining certification, while misleading sustainability claims erode trust in eco-labelling schemes. Furthermore, certain sectors, especially the informal economy, are underrepresented in eco-labelling efforts.

To strengthen eco-labelling in India, a multi-stakeholder approach is necessary. Awareness campaigns, such as those led by organizations like CERC EIACP, can help educate consumers about the importance of eco-labels. Additionally, government support for SMEs through subsidies or tax incentives can reduce the barriers to certification. A stronger regulatory framework is also needed to prevent greenwashing and ensure that eco-labels maintain their credibility, along with aligning domestic standards with global practices for better market access.

In conclusion, eco-labels can drive sustainable consumption and production in India. By addressing the key challenges of awareness, certification costs, and credibility, the country can develop a robust eco-labelling ecosystem that supports environmental goals, promotes consumer trust, and enhances market opportunities. This will not only contribute to India's national sustainability objectives but also help the country meet its global climate commitments.

Eco Tips

Choose products with certified ecolabels to reduce your environmental footprint.

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