

9th United Nations Conference on Competition and Consumer Protection
Room XIX, Palais des Nations
Geneva
7-11 July 2025

**Empowering Consumers for a Circular Future:
Protecting Rights, Enabling LiFE**

Contribution

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Empowering Consumers for a Circular Future: *Protecting Rights, Enabling LiFE¹*

The climate crisis is no longer a distant threat, it is a present and escalating challenge confronting communities worldwide. While international treaties, government action, and corporate accountability are central to climate mitigation, the impact of everyday individual choices is gaining increasing recognition. At the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced 'Mission LiFE' (Lifestyle for Environment), a framework that places behavioural change at the heart of climate action.

Mission LiFE seeks to shift the global narrative from high-consumption, linear economies toward more mindful, circular systems that emphasise reuse, repair, and responsible consumption. It promotes informed and conscious consumption, empowering individuals to become agents of environmental change. As societies everywhere transition to greener pathways, consumer protection frameworks must evolve to enable and support sustainable behaviour. Simultaneously, producers should promote sustainable production so as to enhance their contribution to the society. They should respect the consumers' right to repair and ensure that spare parts and service is available for their products after they are sold to consumers.

This paper explores how consumer protection can intersect with environmental sustainability, drawing from the vision of Mission LiFE and offering insights relevant across global contexts.

Mission LiFE: Reimagining Sustainability Through Behaviour

Mission LiFE reframes climate action as a citizen driven movement. It encourages small, everyday actions that collectively contribute to significant environmental gains. Rather than solely relying on top-down solutions, Mission LiFE promotes a grassroots approach that integrates sustainability into culture, values, and behaviour.²

Central to this strategy is the creation of a global community called 'Pro-Planet People', a network of individuals committed to adopting and promoting environmentally friendly lifestyles. This community leverages the power of social connections to shift social norms, creating a self-sustaining ecosystem of behaviour change.

Key pillars of the Mission include:

- Promoting climate conscious actions in everyday life.
- Building a global community of Pro Planet People.
- Leveraging social norms and networks to drive behaviour change
- Creating ecosystems that support sustainable practices
- Embedding lifestyle shifts into both national and global climate strategies

As of mid-2025, India is actively considering the integration of Mission LiFE into its National Action Plan on Climate Change, aiming to embed behavioural change and sustainable lifestyle practices into the nation's broader climate policy framework. However, its ethos of citizen led, behaviourally anchored environmental action is applicable far beyond India's borders.

¹ Authored by Pradeep S. Mehta with assistance from Simi TB of CUTS International, India who can be reached at psm@cuts.org

² Mission LiFE – Lifestyle for Environment, Press Information Bureau, 09 Nov 2022. Accessed at <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2022/nov/doc2022119122601.pdf>

Why Consumer Behaviour Matters

Traditional policy instruments such as regulations, subsidies, and market mechanisms often neglect the role of consumer behaviour. Yet individual and household actions account for an estimated two-thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions when accounting for indirect supply chain impacts.³ This underscores the immense mitigation potential of lifestyle and behaviour based interventions.

Behavioural strategies such as nudges, prompts, and social influence, can reduce emissions substantially when applied at scale and supported by enabling policy environments. However, unlocking this potential requires more than just behavioural science alone, it demands robust consumer protection and empowerment frameworks that specifically facilitate participation in circular economy practices.

For example, consumer rights frameworks that guarantee access to reliable product lifecycle information empower consumers to make choices that prioritise reuse, repair, and recycling – the core principles of circularity. Likewise, policies ensuring repair rights and mandating product durability, with availability of spare parts and servicing, support sustainable consumption by extending product lifespans and reducing waste.

To facilitate a shift toward more sustainable lifestyles, several enabling conditions must be in place:

- Access to accurate, credible and transparent information on environmental impacts and product lifecycles
- Strong protection from greenwashing and deceptive sustainability claims
- Availability and affordability of sustainable alternatives across income groups and geographies
- Standardised and trusted eco-labelling and certification systems
- Equity-focused policies that include and support vulnerable and marginalised populations.

This is where consumer protection policies intersect with sustainability. A resilient consumer rights framework grounded in transparency, accountability, and inclusivity not only safeguards consumers but also actively supports the systemic shift toward circular, sustainable consumption. By ensuring consumers are informed, empowered, and incentivised, such frameworks bridge the gap between individual intent and collective environmental impact.

Global experiences from the EU's Green Claims Directive⁴ to the growing emphasis on product environmental footprints in OECD⁵ and G20 countries⁶ highlight the importance of aligning

³ What can consumers do to help solve the climate change crisis?, World Economic Forum, 08 Feb 2021. Accessed at www.weforum.org/stories/2021/02/consumers-help-solve-climate-change/

⁴ EU Green Claims Directive, European Commission. Accessed at https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/circular-economy/green-claims_en

⁵ The carbon footprint of everything, OECD Net Zero+ Policy Paper, No.6, OECD, 07 Feb 2025. Accessed at www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-carbon-footprint-of-everything_ae22f8e8-en.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁶ G20 Environment and Climate Ministers' Meeting Outcome Document and Chair's Summary, G20 Document Database, 2023. Accessed at https://g7g20-documents.org/database/document/2023-g20-india-sherpa-track-environment-ministers-ministers-language-g20-environment-and-climate-ministers-meeting-outcome-document-and-chairs-summary?utm_source=chatgpt.com

consumer policy with climate goals. India's Mission LiFE offers a compelling, citizen centric model that could complement and inspire such global efforts.

Protecting and Empowering Consumers in the Circular Economy

Transitioning to a circular economy involves closing the loop of resource use through reuse, repair, remanufacture, and recycling. In this system, the consumer plays a central role not just as a buyer but also as a participant in resource stewardship. To enable this participation, consumer protection frameworks must evolve to ensure the following globally relevant pillars:

- *Right to Reliable and Transparent Information*

Consumers require credible, standardised, and comparable information to make informed choices that support environmental sustainability. This includes:

- Carbon footprints and lifecycle impact disclosures.
- Recognisable and verifiable eco-labels and sustainability certifications.
- Digital Product Passports that provide traceability and recyclability data.

Transparency enables consumers to reward sustainable practices and push markets toward responsible production.

- *Right to Safety and Sustainability*

Environmental sustainability is increasingly integral to product safety. Consumers should be protected from products and services that harm ecosystems or contribute to environmental degradation. Governments and regulators should:

- Mandate eco-design standards to minimise emissions, toxicity, and waste
- Prohibit or restrict non-recyclable and single-use materials
- Implement Extended Producer Responsibility frameworks across jurisdictions, making producers accountable for post-consumer product impacts

- *Right to Access and Affordability*

Sustainable products and services must be affordable and widely accessible. Circular economy solutions should not exacerbate socio-economic inequalities. Policies should:

- Offer fiscal incentives for sustainable consumption, such as tax credits or subsidies
- Support inclusive innovation and localised circular practices
- Promote circular business models like sharing, leasing, and repair services with availability of spare parts

- *Right to Redress*

In an era of increasing environmental claims, consumers must be shielded from greenwashing and deceptive marketing. Effective redress mechanisms are essential. Effective mechanisms require:

- Regulatory oversight of environmental marketing claims.
- Sanctions and disincentives for false or exaggerated sustainability assertions.
- Accessible mechanisms such as ombudspersons, consumer courts, or collective action channels to resolve grievances.

- *Right to Environmental Education and Participation*

Long-term behavioural shifts require environmental literacy. Building environmental awareness is central to Mission LiFE. Key enablers include:

- Public awareness campaigns, behavioural nudges and community engagement

- Integration of sustainability into formal and non-formal education systems
- Platforms for consumers to co-create and influence circular economy policies and standards.

Global Relevance and Applications of Mission LiFE

Though Mission LiFE was conceived and launched in India, its underlying ethos of lifestyle based climate action holds transformative potential across geographies. In an era where per capita emissions in high-income countries significantly outstrip those in the Global South, even marginal behavioural shifts when scaled can yield substantial environmental dividends. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report underscores that demand side mitigation, including changes in consumption patterns, could reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to the extent of 40–70% by 2050 compared to baseline scenarios.⁷ Mission LiFE provides a structured framework to actualise this potential.

Globally, Mission LiFE offers several avenues for integration and adoption:

✓ *A Citizen-Led Approach to Demand-Side Climate Solutions*

Unlike top-down regulatory approaches, Mission LiFE places individual and community actions at the centre of climate mitigation. This resonates with initiatives such as the UN's Act Now campaign⁸ and the OECD's 'Greening Household Behaviour' studies⁹, both of which emphasise behavioural nudges and community mobilisation to reduce carbon footprints. In democracies with strong civil societies, Mission LiFE offers a tool to mainstream climate action through public engagement rather than only through policy enforcement.

✓ *A Scalable Model for Resource Efficiency and Waste Reduction*

The mission's emphasis on circularity, zero waste, and mindful consumption aligns closely with global goals such as the EU's Circular Economy Action Plan¹⁰ and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's circular economy frameworks¹¹. From reducing food waste to encouraging product reuse, these strategies not only lower emissions but also lessen pressure on landfills, oceans, and supply chains contributing to both environmental sustainability and economic resilience.

✓ *Opportunities for Intercultural Learning on Sustainable Lifestyles*

Mission LiFE champions a lifestyle rooted in simplicity, frugality, and ecological balance values that are deeply embedded in many indigenous and traditional cultures. Its global adoption encourages a two-way learning process: while countries can adapt India's framework, they can also contribute their own cultural insights and sustainable practices. This enriches global climate discourse and nurtures South-South and North-South collaborations based on mutual respect and shared learning.

⁷ Climate Change 2022 – Mitigation of Climate Change, Working Group III contribution to the sixth assessment report of the intergovernmental climate change, IPCC, pg.34, July 2023. Accessed at

www.cambridge.org/core/books/climate-change-2022-mitigation-of-climate-change/2929481A59B59C57C743A79420A2F9FF

⁸ Act Now. Accessed at www.un.org/en/actnow

⁹ Greening Household Behaviour: A review for policy makers, *OECD Environment Policy Papers*, No. 3, 17 Dec 2014. Accessed at <https://doi.org/10.1787/5jxrcllp4gln-en>

¹⁰ Circular Economy Action Plan, European Commission. Accessed at https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/circular-economy-action-plan_en

¹¹ Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Influence on Circular Economy, *Sustainability Magazine*, 19 Feb 2024. Accessed at <https://sustainabilitymag.com/sustainability/ellen-macarthur-foundations-influence-on-circular-economy>

✓ *A Unifying Narrative that Complements State-Level Climate Diplomacy*

At a time when geopolitical divisions often hamper consensus on climate action, lifestyle-based initiatives provide a politically neutral and culturally resonant platform for global cooperation. Mission LiFE can serve as a tool that complements formal negotiations under frameworks like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and Paris Agreement by building public pressure and political will from the ground up. It can also serve as a bridging narrative between mitigation and adaptation, and between global commitments and local action.

✓ *Alignment with Global Agendas and Reporting Frameworks*

Mission LiFE is well-aligned with several international agreements and global sustainability goals. It directly contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production, SDG 13 on climate action, and SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation. It also supports the objectives of the Paris Agreement, especially Article 6, which promotes voluntary cooperation through both market and non-market approaches to help countries meet their nationally determined contributions (NDCs). Furthermore, Mission LiFE resonates with the calls for transformative change outlined in UNEP's Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6)¹², which emphasises the urgent need to shift consumption patterns and improve the relationship between humans and the environment.

Applications Across Contexts

Countries looking to operationalise Mission LiFE's principles can consider the following actions:

- *Design National Campaigns to Promote Sustainable Behaviour* - Countries can launch public awareness campaigns and community-led initiatives to make sustainable practices a societal norm. This includes promoting energy conservation, reducing meat consumption, increasing public transport use, and minimising waste. Japan's *Cool Biz* campaign is a strong example, successfully encouraging citizens and office goers to adopt lighter clothing in summer to reduce air conditioning use, demonstrating how behavioural shifts can lead to significant energy savings and cultural change.
- *Institutionalise Eco-Labelling and Transparency Standards* - Transparent and credible eco-labelling systems empower consumers to make environmentally responsible choices. Initiatives such as the EU's Ecolabel and the Singapore Green Label demonstrate how such standards can build consumer trust and drive sustainable consumption. Mission LiFE offers a valuable framework for countries, particularly in emerging markets, to adopt or enhance labelling schemes that reflect environmental performance and encourage market-wide shifts toward sustainability.
- *Strengthen Legal Frameworks Against Greenwashing* - With rising scrutiny over false environmental claims, Mission LiFE can support national policies aimed at enforcing accountability in corporate sustainability practices, complementing international movements such as the EU Green Claims Directive.
- *Create Incentives for Businesses to Adopt Circular Models* - Public-private partnerships, innovation grants, and tax incentives can encourage industry players to shift from linear to circular production. The success of initiatives like the Netherlands' Circular Economy 2050 roadmap demonstrates the feasibility of systemic shifts supported by policy and behavioural change.

¹² Global Environment Outlook 6, UNEP, 04 Mar 2019. Accessed at www.unep.org/resources/global-environment-outlook-6

- *Build Broad Based Coalitions for Sustainability* - Civil society organisations, educational institutions, faith based groups, and businesses can be engaged to create coalitions that mainstream sustainable living. These networks can amplify the reach of lifestyle based climate action and embed it into cultural and institutional systems.

Conclusion

As we face the urgent challenges of climate change and environmental degradation, Mission LiFE offers a timely and transformative approach, placing individual and community action at the heart of global sustainability efforts. India's experience demonstrates how lifestyle choices aligned with environmental values can generate powerful collective impact. Whether through shifting consumption patterns, promoting local solutions, or embracing the circular economy, Mission LiFE empowers individuals to become agents of change, not just consumers of resources.

By building the global Pro-Planet People community, Mission LiFE leverages the influence of social networks to reshape collective norms and make environmentally friendly behaviours self-sustaining. This citizen centric model does not replace systemic action but complements it by creating strong demand for sustainability in markets, governance, and innovation.

The road ahead calls for deeper collaboration. Countries must co-create enabling ecosystems supporting policy innovation, responsible business practices, and behaviour change at scale. Whether through eco-labelling, anti-greenwashing regulations, or coalition building or respecting consumer rights, we have the tools to mainstream sustainable living. India stands ready to share its lessons and to learn from others as we collectively shape a future where our daily choices contribute to planetary well-being. Let us commit to a global movement where pro-planet living becomes not just aspirational, but habitual.