

# It's not a castle in the air

Demystify the terms green and sustainable housing so that the common man doesn't think of a green home as unattainable

Sumit Banerjee

Most green buildings in India are non-residential commercial structures located in big cities. Flip through any architecture magazine and you will inevitably find glossy pictures of stylish homes flaunted as being green. But, the common man still sees such homes as a luxury.

There are many challenges to surmount before the average home buyer is convinced about the significance of green homes. He probably still perceives a green house as a quixotic castle-in-the-air replete with the proverbial windmill, space-guzzling solar panels and biogas plants. Therefore, it is necessary to demystify the terms green and sustainable housing.

The common man's fundamental concerns are economy, utility, durability, and comfort. What he needs is a house that is easy and economical to build and maintain. Green homes should be seen not as an ethical choice but as a superior style that merges aesthetic appeal with these qualities.

The eco-friendly advantages of a green house should accrue to the house owner by way of monthly savings in water, electricity, maintenance and other resources.

What is needed is a roadmap to go green in progressive stages. Builders must shift from mere designer creations to building homes that are

practical and affordable.

To begin with, the builder and developer must meet the tenets of sustainable construction by using scalable designs, eco-friendly materials and techniques. Basic constructions must be made only with environ-

ment-friendly blended cements that use wastes like fly-ash and slag. The next step could be the use of energy-saving devices and practices.

Later stages could include rainwater-harvesting, water recycling, solar energy and so on. The journey would be accelerated if the state and local bodies offer financial incentives to individuals to build green homes, by way of rebates on tariffs.

So are green homes merely an elitist fad? Well, for now, it would appear so. Nevertheless, I would say it is a good trend that must be encouraged and can be accelerated through policy interventions.



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