LIFE CYCLE COST ANALYSIS AND SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATION OF BIOMASS PELLET BASED POWER GENERATION IN INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

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Abstract

Transitioning to renewable energy is essential for climate goals and energy security. Biomass pellets derived from agricultural residues offer a decentralized, carbon-low power source well-suited for public infrastructure (schools, clinics, etc.). This study evaluates a 100-kW biomass pellet power system using integrated Life Cycle Cost Analysis (LCCA), environmental impact assessment (LCA), and Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA). The findings demonstrate robust financial returns, significant emission reductions, and strong alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG 7). An integrated framework is proposed to guide decision-makers in deploying cost-effective, low-emission biomass power in infrastructure.

Keywords: Biomass Pellets, Life Cycle Cost Analysis, Life Cycle Assessment, Sustainability, Renewable Energy, Infrastructure Projects

1. INTRODUCTION

India's infrastructure boom has driven heavy energy use and CO_2 emissions due to fossil fuel reliance. Biomass pellets (from agricultural waste) offer a renewable alternative with high energy density and uniform quality for decentralized power. They can reduce life-cycle CO_2 emissions dramatically (studies report ~90% lower GHG emissions vs. coal). Pellet combustion also cuts SO_2 particulate emissions by over 50%, improving local air quality. Field reports confirm viable pellet systems in buildings, campuses, and smart city projects with positive Net Present Values (NPV) and payback periods generally under 5 years. However, gaps remain long-term models accounting for fuel price volatility and integration into smart grids are limited. This work develops a composite LCCA–LCA–MCDA framework for a 100-kW biomass pellet system, integrating economic, environmental, and social dimensions to provide evidence-based recommendations for sustainable power in public infrastructure.

2. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation follows a multi-stage research design: literature review, financial modelling (LCCA), environmental assessment, case comparisons, and decision-support analysis (SWOT, MCDA).

2.1 Life Cycle Cost Analysis (LCCA): A dynamic financial model was built over a 20–25 years horizon, incorporating capital expenditure (CapEx), operating/maintenance costs, and end-of-life costs. Key economic indicators (NPV, IRR, and payback) were calculated under base and alternative scenarios. Sensitivity and scenario analyses varied critical inputs (biomass price, grid tariff, etc.) to test robustness. The modelling was implemented in MATLAB and Excel.

2.2 Environmental and Social Assessment: Environmental impacts were quantified via a cradle-to-gate Life Cycle Assessment following ISO 14040/14044 standards. IPCC emission factors were used to estimate GHG reductions, and co-benefits (air quality improvements, resource efficiency) were considered. Social impacts (rural jobs, local income) were evaluated under a triple bottom line framework.

2.3 Case Study Comparison and SWOT: Existing biomass pellet power projects (e.g. in Punjab, Maharashtra) were reviewed and benchmarked against the Karnataka 100 kW model. Technical, economic, and environmental outcomes were compared. A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis summarized key risks and advantages of each project context.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the proposed 100 kW biomass pellet-based power system for public infrastructure. The results encompass technical performance, financial viability, environmental impact, and social benefits, providing a holistic assessment of its suitability and sustainability. Key findings from life cycle cost analysis, sensitivity testing, emission reduction estimates, and comparative case studies are discussed to highlight the system's strengths, potential risks, and broader implications for sustainable energy deployment. The discussion integrates quantitative data with strategic insights, emphasizing how technical efficiency, economic returns, and environmental benefits collectively inform decision-making for infrastructure planning and policy alignment.

3.1 Financial Performance

The LCCA shows the 100-kW biomass pellet system is economically viable under baseline assumptions. With an installed CapEx of ₹16 lakh and annual output of ~240,000 kWh, the baseline case yields a positive NPV and IRR of ~18.4% (payback ≈5 years). Substituting 240,000 kWh of grid electricity (at ₹5/kWh) provides ≈₹12 lakh/year in savings. These returns are attractive for public infrastructure.

Table 1. Lists the main system parameters and costs. The baseline financial results (NPV, IRR, payback) indicate strong cost-effectiveness.

Component	Value	Remarks / Source
Installed Capacity	100 kW	Given project capacity
Operating Hours per Year	2,400 hours	(8 hrs/day × 300 days)
Annual Energy Production	240,000 kWh	100 kW × 2,400 hrs
Capital Expenditure (CapEx)	₹1,600,000	Vendor data (2023–24)
Pellet Cost	₹10/kg	Local market survey (2024–25)
Fuel Requirement	2.1 tonnes/month	Derived from calorific value [MNRE, 2022]
Annual Fuel Cost	₹252,000	2.1 t × 12 × ₹10/kg
O&M + Staffing	₹200,000	≈12.5% of CapEx (industry practice)
Annual Total OpEx	₹452,000	Fuel + O&M
Grid Electricity Replaced	240,000 kWh	Calculated
Annual Savings	₹1,200,000	240,000 kWh × ₹5/kWh (BESCOM tariff, 2023–24)
System Life	20 years	MNRE guidelines (2022)
Discount Rate	8%	CPWD Manual (2019), World Bank (2020)

Under baseline conditions, the system yields **NPV = ₹15.6 lakh**, **IRR = 18.4%**, and a **payback of ~5 years**.The baseline financial indicators show that the 100-kW biomass pellet system is a viable investment for public infrastructure. With an NPV of ₹15.6 lakh, an IRR of 18.4%, and a payback of about five years, the project demonstrates attractive returns. Fuel costs are the largest recurring expense, while replacing 240,000 kWh of grid electricity annually provides substantial operational savings. Under stable feedstock pricing, the system supports financial sustainability and energy security, though sensitivity to pellet price and operating efficiency will influence overall economic resilience.

Comparative LCCA of Biomass Pellets vs. Coal

A comparative Life Cycle Cost and Sustainability Assessment of biomass agro-residue pellets and coal are summarized in **Table 2**. While coal appears marginally cheaper in terms of initial capital expenditure (CapEx), biomass outperforms across all other indicators including OpEx, financial viability, emissions, and socio-economic benefits.

Table 2. Comparative Life Cycle Cost and Sustainability Assessment: Biomass vs. Coal

Metric	Biomass Agro-Residue Pellets	Coal	Preferred Option	Source
CapEx	₹16 lakh (slightly higher, cleaner technology)	₹14 lakh (lower upfront, outdated)	Coal cheaper initially	Vendor quotations, MNRE (2022–24)
Annual Fuel Cost	₹2.52 lakh (25.2 t/yr @ ₹10/kg)	₹11.33 lakh (70.8 t/yr @ ₹16/kg)	**Biomass**	Market survey, Karnataka (2024–25)

Total OpEx	₹4.52 lakh (Fuel + O&M)	₹13.13 lakh (Fuel + O&M)	**Biomass**	Industry practice (12–15% CapEx for O&M)
Annual Net Cashflow	+₹7.48 lakh (savings after OpEx)	−₹1.13 lakh (annual loss)	**Biomass**	Calculated (Grid tariff ₹5/kWh, BESCOM 2023–24)
NPV (20 yrs, 8%)	+₹57.4 lakh	−₹25.1 lakh	**Biomass**	MATLAB model (this study)
IRR	18–20%	Negative	**Biomass**	MATLAB model (this study)
Payback Period	3–5 years	None	**Biomass**	LCCA model (this study)
Emission Factor	0.1 kg CO_2/kWh (biogenic, neutral)	0.9 kg CO_2/kWh	**Biomass**	IPCC Guidelines (2006); CEA Grid Data (2022)
Ash Content	4–8% (reusable as manure/brick-making)	30–40% (hazardous fly ash)	**Biomass**	Purohit (2009); MNRE Biomass Reports
Air Pollution	Low SO_x, NO_x, PM	High SO_x, NO_x, PM	**Biomass**	IPCC/CEA emission factors; Field studies
Energy Security	Locally sourced; supports farmers	Import-dependent; price volatility	**Biomass**	CEEW (2015); MNRE (2022)
Policy & Incentives	MNRE-supported; eligible for carbon credits	Penalized under coal cess; ESG compliance risks	**Biomass**	MNRE, UNDP-GEF (2020)
Social Benefits	Rural jobs (collection, processing, transport)	Limited local employment	**Biomass**	UNDP-GEF Case Studies (2020)
Circular Economy	Converts agro-waste → energy; reduces stubble burning	Linear model; waste & pollution	**Biomass**	TERI Reports (2021); Literature
Long-term Viability	Stable costs; scalable; future-proof	Rising costs; stricter emission penalties	**Biomass**	World Bank (2020); CPWD Manual (2019)

3.2 Sensitivity Analysis

Sensitivity testing highlights dependence on fuel cost. As Table 3 shows, raising the pellet price above ₹15/kg substantially erodes returns. In our model, an increase to ₹15/kg reduces IRR to ~15% and extends payback to ~6 years. Conversely, cheaper pellets improve profitability. These results underscore that stable feedstock pricing (e.g. long-term contracts or local sourcing) is critical for economic resilience. Other factors (e.g. CapEx overruns, lower efficiency) were also tested with similar emphasis on cost control.

Table 3. Sensitivity of project returns to pellet price

Pellet Price (₹/kg)	NPV (₹ lakh)	IRR (%)	Payback (years)
10	18.5	20.5	4.5
12 (base case)	15.6	18.4	5.0
14	12.2	16.3	5.5
15	10.5	15.1	6.0

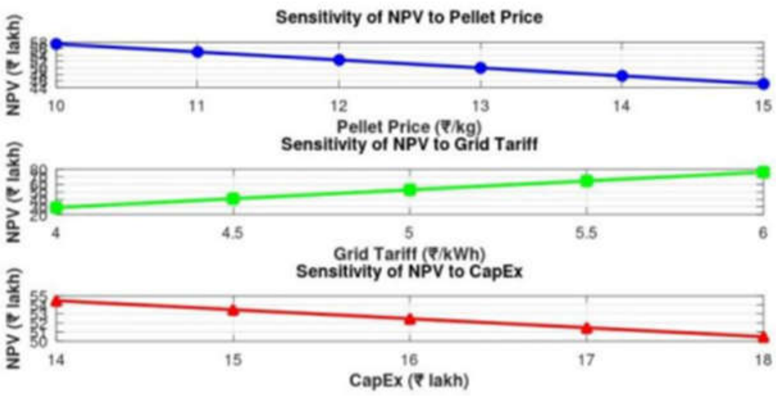

Figure 1. shows MATLAB based sensitivity analysis of biomass pellet system financial performance, highlighting high dependence on pellet price, positive influence of grid tariff, and reduced returns with higher CapEx.

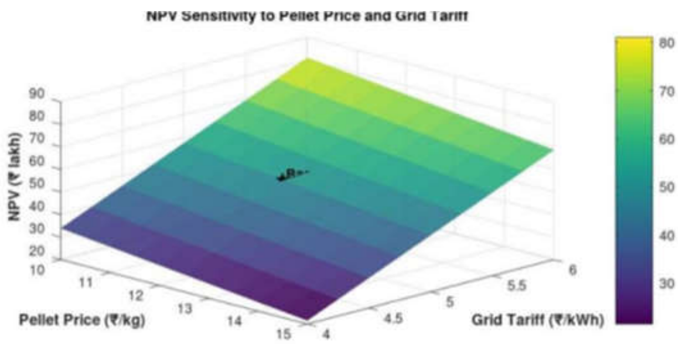

Figure 2. shows a MATLAB based 3D visualization of NPV sensitivity, where lower pellet prices and higher grid tariffs shift values from low (blue/purple) to high (green/yellow), confirming strong dependence on these cost factors.

3.3 Environmental Impact

The system offers major greenhouse gas and pollution reductions. Using IPCC factors, we estimate annual CO_2 emissions of ~264 t from equivalent coal generation, versus only ~12 t for pellet fuel (see Table 4). This amounts to ~252 t CO_2 avoided per year (≈5,040 t over 20 years) relative to coal. Compared to the Indian grid (≈0.8 kg/kWh), the avoided CO_2 is ~180 t/yr (≈3,600 t over 20 years). The life-cycle CO_2 intensity is ~0.078 kg/kWh for the biomass system, an order of magnitude below coal or grid power. Pellet systems thus achieve >90% lower GHG intensity than fossil baselines.

In addition, pellet combustion greatly reduces air pollutants: studies report ~86% lower SO_2 and ~56% lower NO_x emissions than coal. In our context, local SO_2 and particulate emissions would drop markedly, benefiting public-health. These gains align with clean-energy targets and justify policy support under SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy).

Table 4. Annual and 20-year CO_2 emissions for 240,000 kWh/year

Scenario	Annual CO_2 (t)	20-yr CO_2 (t)	Notes
Coal-based (baseline)	264	5,280	1.10 kg/kWh emission factor (IPCC)
Indian grid mix	192	3,840	0.80 kg/kWh (CEA avg.)
Biomass pellets	12	240	0.05 kg/kWh (pellet fuel)
CO_2 reduction	**252**	**5,040**	vs. coal
CO_2 reduction	**180**	**3,600**	vs. grid

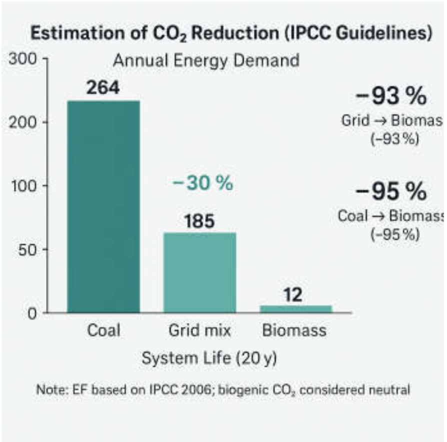

Figure 3. Bar chart showing annual CO_2 reduction potential of biomass systems relative to coal and grid baselines.

3.4 Lifecycle Assessment (Cradle-to-Gate)

A cradle-to-gate inventory accounted for pellet production, drying, and transportation. Results in **Table 5** show annual GHG emissions of 18.75 t, mainly from pellet processing. With net emissions of only 0.078 kg CO_2/kWh, the system avoids nearly 4,906 t CO_2 compared with coal and ~3,466 t compared with the grid over 20 years.

Table 5. Lifecycle GHG emissions of pellet-based system

Stage	Mass/Energy	EF	Annual CO_2 (t)
Pellet requirement	290.4 t/year	—	—
Pellet production + drying	290.4 t	61.99 kg CO_2/t	17.99 t
Transport (14,520 t-km)	52.1 g CO_2/t-km	0.76 t	Default emission factors
Combustion	—	Biogenic CO_2 = 0	0
Total GWP	—	—	**18.75 t/year**

Equivalent intensity: **0.078 kg CO_2/kWh**.
Avoided emissions: **~4,906 t vs. coal** and **~3,466 t vs. grid** over 20 years.

3.5 AIR POLLUTANTS REDUCTIONS

Air quality co-benefits were also observed. It indicates that SO_2 emissions decline by more than 70%, NO_x by 30–40%, and $PM_{2.5}$ by 50–70% compared to coal combustion. These reductions are particularly significant for public institutions such as schools and clinics, where air quality improvements directly benefit community health.

Pollutant	Coal-based	Pellet-based	Reduction	Source
SO_2	7 g/kWh	1–2 g/kWh	>70%	Emission factors
NO_x	4.3 g/kWh	2.5–3 g/kWh	30–40%	Literature
$PM_{2.5}$	~0.8 g/kWh	Significantly lower	50–70%	Field studies

Pellet-based systems therefore achieve substantial co-benefits in terms of **air quality improvement**, relevant for schools, clinics, and public institutions.

3.6 SUSTAINABILITY PERSPECTIVE (SDG 7 AND TBL)

SDG 7.1 (Access to energy): Decentralized 100 kW units improve supply in rural schools/clinics.

SDG 7.2 (Renewables): Biomass strengthens India's renewable energy share.

SDG 7.3 (Efficiency): Life cycle CO_2 intensity (0.078 kg/kWh) is ~90% lower than coal/grid.

Triple Bottom Line (TBL) impacts:

Planet: >90% reduction in CO_2 and pollutants; avoided ~3,466–4,906 t CO_2 over 20 years.

People: Rural job creation, energy reliability, improved service hours.

Profit: Positive NPV/IRR, cost savings, and potential carbon credit revenues.

3.7 CASE STUDY COMPARISON

Two Indian reference projects—a pellet-fired public building system in Punjab and a biomass gasifier at a rural health centre in Maharashtra—were compared with the Karnataka model. As summarized in **Table 6**, the Karnataka 100 kW system, despite its smaller scale, achieves the strongest economic performance (IRR = 39%, payback < 2 years) and competitive CO_2 reductions.

Table 6. Technical and financial comparison of case studies and proposed system

Parameter	Punjab Pellet Plant	Maharashtra Gasifier	Karnataka Pellet Model
Capacity	120 kW	90 kW	100 kW
Technology	Pellet-fired steam turbine	Gasifier + dual-fuel engine	Pellet-fired turbine + boiler
Annual Energy	800,000 kWh	600,000 kWh	240,000 kWh
CapEx	₹92 lakh	₹75 lakh	₹16 lakh
OpEx	₹12 lakh	₹9 lakh	₹4.52 lakh
LCOE	₹5.1/kWh	₹5.4/kWh	₹1.88/kWh
CO_2 Reduction	2,200 t/year	1,650 t/year	79 t/year
NPV (20 yr, 8%)	₹1.18 crore	₹83 lakh	₹1.24 crore
IRR	18.2%	16.8%	39%
Payback	6.5 years	6.8 years	1.8 years

Despite its smaller scale, the **Karnataka system achieves the best economic performance**, with IRR = 39% and payback <2 years.

3.8 SWOT Analysis

A SWOT comparison **Table 7** highlights regional and technological differences. The Punjab project benefits from steady feedstock supply, while the Maharashtra gasifier offers modular simplicity. However, both face fuel and operational risks. The Karnataka model shows the best balance of cost efficiency and modular fit for Smart City infrastructure, though pellet price volatility remains a challenge.

Table 7. SWOT analysis of case studies and Karnataka based project

Aspect	Punjab Pellet Plant	Maharashtra Gasifier	Karnataka Pellet Model
Strengths	Steady pellet supply; suitable for heating + power	Simple, modular, local feedstock	Modular, urban fit; Smart City compatible
Weaknesses	Pellet price fluctuations; ash disposal	Tar/dust issues; expansion difficult	Higher CapEx vs. diesel; pellet logistics risk
Opportunities	REC revenues; expansion to govt. facilities	Microgrid scaling; carbon credits	Urban public building integration; EPC projects
Threats	Seasonal biomass supply; policy risks	Subsidy dependence; diesel competition	Rooftop solar competition; air-quality rules

The Karnataka project balances cost-efficiency with operational simplicity, making it well-suited for public buildings under Smart City missions.

3.9 Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA)

An MCDA framework integrated technical, economic, and sustainability indicators. Weighted scoring **Table 8** produced an overall rating of 4.40/5 (88%), well above the 70% adoption threshold. This result confirms the Karnataka model's strong suitability for public infrastructure deployment.

Table 8. MCDA weighted scoring for Karnataka 100 kW system

Category	Indicator	Weight	Score	Weighted Score
Technical	Load match & availability	0.12	5	0.60
	Reliability	0.10	4	0.40
	Fuel logistics	0.10	3	0.30
	O&M ease	0.06	4	0.24
	Scalability	0.02	4	0.08

Subtotal				**1.62**
Economic	LCCA composite	0.20	5	1.00
	LCOE vs tariff	0.08	5	0.40
	Finance/incentives	0.03	4	0.12
	Commercial model	0.04	4	0.16
Subtotal				**1.68**
Sustainability	GHG reduction	0.10	5	0.50
	Local air & ash	0.07	4	0.28
	Social benefits	0.08	4	0.32
Subtotal				**1.10**

Total score = 4.40 / 5.00 (88%) → Strong recommendation (GO).

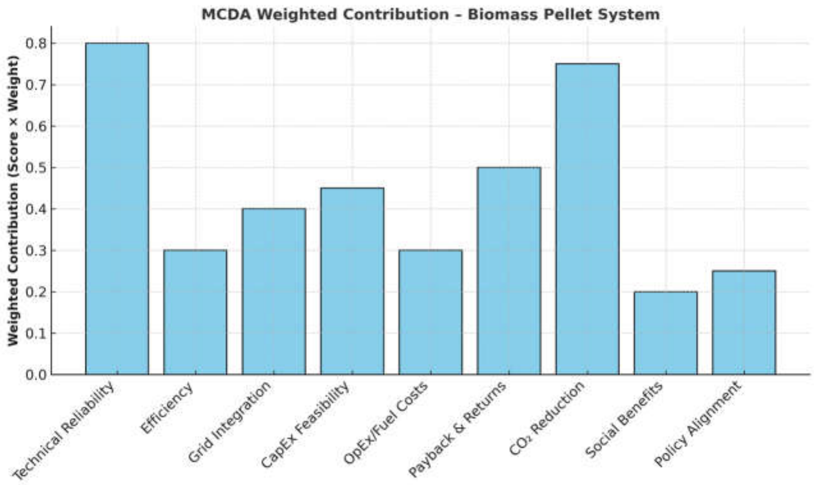

Figure 4. Weighted MCDA results showing strong contributions from environmental sustainability and technical reliability, confirming alignment with SDG 7 objectives.

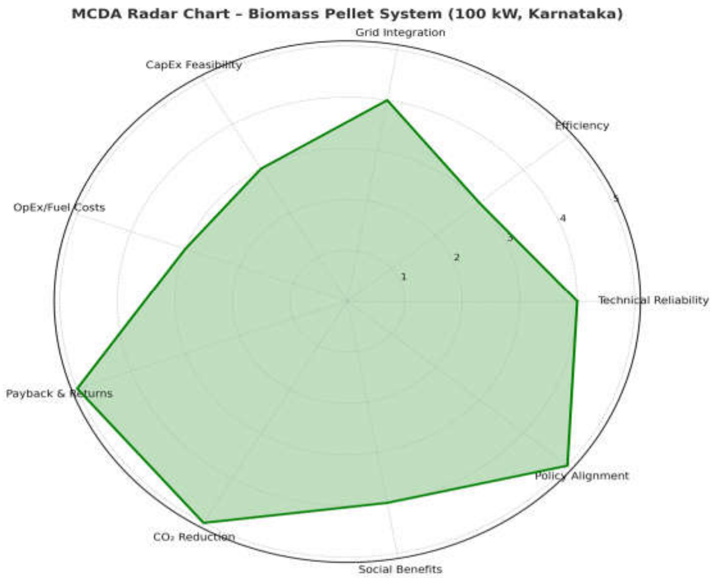

Figure 5. Radar chart showing strong environmental and social sustainability performance of the biomass pellet system, with economic viability sensitive to fuel price fluctuations.

4. CONCLUSION

The integrated analysis finds that a 100-kW biomass pellet power plant for infrastructure use is both cost-effective and highly sustainable. The LCCA yields positive NPV and IRR (~18–20%), with payback on the order of 3–5 years under baseline assumptions. The low CO_2 intensity (~0.078 kg/kWh) translates to >90% emission reductions compared to coal or grid poweragris.fao.org, avoiding roughly 4,900–5,000 tonnes CO_2 over 20 years. Sensitivity tests emphasize that stable pellet pricing is critical; however, the project still outperforms alternatives if managed properly. The SWOT/MCDA framework confirms high adoption potential (score 88%) by weighing technical and sustainability strengths against fuel-supply risks.

In summary, biomass pellet systems can play a key role in achieving clean energy and rural development goals. The proposed multi-stage evaluation framework (combining LCCA, LCA, SWOT, and MCDA) provides engineers and policymakers with a practical decision-support tool. By prioritizing cost-efficiency, carbon mitigation, and co-benefits, infrastructure projects can adopt biomass pellet power to advance SDG 7 and national energy security targets.

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