GBPN globally promotes "deep" renovations in existing buildings to ensure that the buildings sector plays a significant part in meeting ambitious energy and climate change goals. Such ambitious improvements are generally called "deep", although it means different things for experts in different countries and regions. Because the GBPN works at the global level, it is important to find some common understanding, avoid mis-communication and develop as much consensus as possible.

The acronym, DR, can mean a deep renovation, a deep retrofit, a deep refurbishment, and to a lesser extent, a deep reduction. A standard renovation or refurbishment will often achieve energy savings ranging between 20% and 30%, sometimes even less. However, by renovating deeply, it is possible to reduce the energy consumption of a building by more than 75%. But for some experts, the expected savings that they call a DR is significantly different.

The GBPN developed a project to help provide a harmonised DR definition. The project included an initial desktop literature search to collect current global and local definitions and conditions of a deep renovation. This was used to organise two webinars, a questionnaire and a review process. Thirty international experts in the field of building renovation were invited to the webinar to collect the opinions and understandings of what these experts believe to be a DR definition. These opinions were presented as conditions and targets of a DR definition in a questionnaire that was sent to the same group of experts. The questionnaire sought to harmonise and clarify a definition for DR.

It became obvious from the reaction of the panel of experts that there is no common definition of DR established, neither at a regional or international level. The definition of DR varies between the regions. The results of the questionnaire displayed a clear distinction between the terms "deep renovation" and "deep retrofit". European experts normally used the expression renovation while American experts usually called them retrofits.

In Europe most definitions focus on heating, cooling, ventilation and hot water and there is general agreement that a "deep" renovation means at least 75% energy savings. In the US, there is no clear definition of an energy renovation used consistently throughout the US building sector. But for the US, DR meant improvements of 30% – 50% based on total final energy consumption including plug load. At this point, India and China have no common definitions.

To continue the dialogue, the GBPN established a knowledge platform on its website consisting of a discussion forum and an interactive research tool where project results and findings can be reviewed. The GBPN will then use the results of the collaboration to develop criteria for selecting best practices for individual projects or groups of buildings.

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