

2021 HLPF Thematic Review

Expert Group Meetings

Virtual, 18-20 May 2021

Meeting Summary for Session on SDG 12

(3 pages)

1. Introduction

<Define SDG and inform on structure of review drawing from multi-stakeholder EGM and relevant substantive reports>

Under the guidance of the UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs, the session on Sustainable Development Goal 12 on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) was jointly organized by the UN Environment Programme and the UN Industrial Development Organization. Twenty experts from the private sector, organizations working with governments and the private sector, academia, and youth representatives joined the meeting. Seven representatives from Major Groups also engaged in the discussion. With the additional presence of representatives from UN organizations, the expert group meeting benefited from an engagement with more than 35 experts.

Discussions were framed around the draft SDG progress report 2021 which was made available in advance to all meeting participants.

2. Stocktaking and challenges

<Summarize key trends in progress drawing from SDG Progress Report, identify any changes since the Goal was last reviewed>

The science is clear: human activities are putting extreme pressure on the planet, driving us towards the three planetary crises: climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The common thread that runs through these global crises is unsustainable production and consumption patterns.

SDG 12 is one of the most transversal issues in the SDGs, with more than 50 of the 169 SDG targets in 13 different goals that are dependent on the shift to SCP patterns. But progress in achieving the ambition of SDG12 has been limited and several indicators show that we are on the wrong trajectory.

The 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP) is the first target of SDG 12. Through its One Planet network, more than 4,000 policies and implementation activities from 194 different countries were reported for the period 2013-2020. This includes over 700 policies reported since 2017 by 83 Member States plus the European Union.¹ In addition, 40 governments have adopted Sustainable Public Procurement policies and action plans, to promote more responsible purchasing practices and sustainable supply chains. Consultations² conducted in the context of UNEA4 resolution 1 “*Innovative pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production*” identified that the application of these policies and tools to foster tangible change remains limited. Most policy interventions are sectoral or stand-alone plans, hindering the potential to overcome sectoral silos and align existing policies and regulations.

The limited impacts of policies and tools is confirmed by the data: the global material footprint per capita has been on a growing trend and has increased by almost 40%, from 8.8 metric tons in 2000 to 12.2 metric tons in 2017. Similarly, data on waste production and management is also not encouraging. In 2019, the amount of e-waste generated was 7.3 kg per capita, and only 1.7 kg per capita is documented to be managed in an environmentally sustainable manner.

UNIDO’s global Member State consultations on circular economy in May 2021 confirmed that there’s broad understanding of circular economy and its benefits both by developing and developed countries, but it is not

¹ 2021 HLPF Progress report on the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (forthcoming)

² UNEA 5 report “Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/1 on innovative pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production”, available at <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/34684/K2002486-E.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

yet sufficient to drive all towards a common direction. Stronger awareness raising, and capacity building interventions are needed. Policymakers agree that shifting to responsible consumption and production patterns and ensuring industrialization, urbanization must be sustainable and inclusive, but they have difficulties in prioritizing where and how to start circularity initiatives and how to monitor, measure and assess their outcomes and impact. The business/industry community is energised about new circular economy opportunities along value chains, but they need policy support for markets, access to finance, particularly in support of innovation and upskilling of workers, and for investors to better understand and support circular business models. Citizens, on the other hand, want to consume in a more sustainable, cleaner way, and use circular products, but they do not know whether these products exist, are affordable, or if they are even on the market.

During the expert group discussion, experts highlighted that, if material consumption continues to grow, the consequences of this trend will inhibit the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals. Current unsustainable consumption and production modes will continue to drive our economies and societies towards the three planetary crises: the climate change crisis, the biodiversity loss crisis, and the pollution crisis.

Experts discussed that this will not change only as an outcome of behavioral change; deeper systemic transformations of the housing, food, mobility, energy and water systems are required. This entails challenging the current development model to adopt one where economic growth and development are decoupled from waste generation and pressure on natural resources. Experts also stressed that natural resource governance has not progressed since the last review of this SDG in 2017, and that challenging questions such as: *Are developing countries utilizing the natural resources for the best interest of their people?* still remain relevant.

Experts agreed that one of the main changes since 2017 was the increased attention and traction of circular economy. This is supported by the growing understanding that circular economy and sustainable consumption and production are very closely aligned. The same momentum for circular economy exists at the political level as well, particularly with the launch of the Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency (GACERE), and regional alliances in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa.

Experts also recognized that knowledge, technologies, and measures required to achieve a system-wide transformation to sustainable consumption and production are known. What seems to be lacking is the political will to drive these changes.

3. COVID-19 crisis impacts and recovery

<Identify several ways the COVID-19 crisis is impacting progress and how recovery efforts are interacting with progress on the SDG in question with an eye to short and long-term impacts>

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed an unprecedented challenge to humankind, revealing the weaknesses of many aspects of our current economic and development models. It has clearly highlighted the need to re-shape policies, business practices, investments and consumer choices that are driving production and consumption patterns to create more resilient economies which ensure human well-being and conservation of the natural environment. There is a need to “build back better” from the Covid-19 pandemic, while ensuring a just transition to sustainable and resilient economies with environmental and social benefits, including job creation and shared prosperity. Shifting to sustainable consumption and production addresses the key drivers of ecosystem disruption, biodiversity loss, resource depletion, and climate change³.

The COVID-19 recovery packages offer a unique opportunity to incentivize the shift towards more sustainable consumption and production. Total spending announced by the 89 countries amounted to USD 15.1 trillion at the beginning of May, of which USD 2 trillion was recovery-type spending. About 20% of the recovery spending was considered to be positive for the environment⁴. There is significant scope to increase this value. Experts also recalled that measures aimed at addressing unsustainable food systems are today underrepresented in the recovery packages. However, food systems can be the biggest barrier or solution to a sustainable future.

³ UNEP 2019: Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6)

⁴ <https://greenfiscalpolicy.org/observatory/>

Reference was also made to the fact that COVID-19 has changed consumption and waste generation patterns especially in relation to the growing amount of discarded medical waste. At the same time, it has shown new opportunities such as those emerging from telehealth, 3D printing, and robotics.

4. Policies and actions to maximize synergies, mitigate trade-offs and drive transformation

<Identify the most promising actions for accelerating progress where needed, reversing any losses from COVID-19, leaving no one behind and leveraging interlinkages with other goals>

Experts identified the following policies and actions would play a fundamental role in accelerating the transition to sustainable consumption and production:

- Develop coherent and integrated policies, shifting away from current sectoral or stand-alone plans, which are hindering the potential to overcome sectoral silos.
- Ensure enforcement and implementation of existing policy instruments for sustainable consumption and production.
- Promote structural reforms of our economic system that enable our shift from a linear to a circular system and which incentivize upstream interventions for circularity. These will complement and strengthen downstream and waste focused solutions.
- Accelerate the adoption of a carbon market and of economic instruments, including taxes, that would favour more sustainable products, circular business models and circular resource flows.
- Develop more inclusive policies, bringing on board all value chain actors, ensuring that the policies are also culturally sensitive and drawing on a human-rights approach to development.

5. Means of implementation: Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress

<Identify ways that solutions can be adopted and scaled up through collaboration among all stakeholders and sectors - governments, business, individuals, civil society, the science and technology community.>

The shift to sustainable consumption and production and to circularity needs to be underpinned by strong collaboration across the entire value chain. The right enabling conditions should be in place to facilitate the engagement of all value chain actors and to ensure that this transition is not leaving anyone behind.

Experts highlighted the importance of the following actions and mechanisms to ensure more effective and broader collaboration across value chain actors:

- The shift to SCP and circular economy is closely connected with the employment agenda. Priority should therefore be given to planning a transition to circularity which maximizes employment and skill development opportunities, ensuring that decent jobs are promoted across the entire supply chain. Skill development will enable people to take advantage of new opportunities of employment in the circular economy.
- The need to engage SMEs in the transition to circularity was stressed, recognizing their importance for the economy and job creation in many countries.
- Experts concurred on the importance of increasing awareness and education on sustainable development as a basis for engagement and collaboration. Education will be required if we expect people to be part of the solution for circular economy. More focus should be given to education on sustainability and consumption impact particularly with children and young people.
- Consumer information on companies and products will need to be simplified and focused on what is essential for making sustainable choices, in order to be useful and relevant for consumers.
- The digital transformation, including through dematerialization, will offer opportunities to accelerate progress towards SDG12. Digital solutions will offer new data driven opportunities, including more information and transparency on international supply chains and trade. They will help to track progress more effectively.