

CSD Seminar on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (SCP) Chair's Summary

The CSD Thematic Seminar on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (SCP) was held at UN Headquarters on 30 March 2010. The event was moderated by Mr. Ulf Jaeckel, Vice Chair (Germany) of CSD-18, who is also serving as co-Chair of the advisory committee for the Marrakech Process on Sustainable Consumption and Production, created in 2003 to support the implementation of policies and capacity building activities on SCP and the elaboration of a 10-Year Framework of Programs on SCP (10YFP). An introductory statement was also made by Mr. Tariq Banuri, Director of the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD), who presented a slide from a recent article from the scientific journal *Nature* that defines nine earth biophysical services and carrying capacities for each that should not be exceeded, to ensure stability.¹

A video entitled "Living Outside The Box - Sustainable Lifestyles" produced by the Ministry of the Environment (Sweden) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was presented to highlight differences in lifestyles across the planet and outcomes of the Marrakech Task Force on Sustainable Lifestyles.

Thomas Graedel focused his presentation on the exponential increase in use of virgin materials over the last century, using metals such as chromium, aluminum and nickel as examples. He introduced the "master equation" to demonstrate that absolute decoupling will be a product of addressing the technical and societal relationships that link personal wealth, development, and consumption. He concluded that although new recycling technologies and design for recycling will help, major cultural changes will be needed to "dematerialize" and achieve long term sustainability.

Catherine Nicholson presented the work done by consumers' groups around the world and supported by Consumer International to help raise awareness on consumers' rights and how the power of their purchases (or lack thereof) support procurement of materials to schools, facilitate investigation of supermarkets and whole supply chains, and provide information and assurance of certified goods and services. Yet because voluntary initiatives are not delivering rapid and consistent progress, international multi-stakeholder solutions and regulation are needed, such as an international convention on corporate accountability that could address transparency down the supply chain and promote a better balance of power between suppliers and supermarkets.

Gemma Adaba represented the International Trade Union Confederation. She indicated that more cooperation is needed between consumers and workers to insure that standards, certifications, and international regulations are enforced. A tri-partite dialogue among consumers, governments and trade unions is needed to set a social "floor" that covers not only environmental but labor conditions as well. States must reach to facilitate trade unions' work for sustainable production, including by providing institutional capacity building for labor organizations.

Jim Fava discussed the difference between a life cycle assessment as developed by the international standard organization (ISO), and a life cycle approach or perspective. A life cycle

¹ Rockstrom J. et al. 2009. *Nature* 461: 472-475 (September) 2009.
<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v461/n7263/full/461472a.html>; accessed September 23, 2009.

approach reaches beyond impacts during the manufacturing phase to factor in major environmental issues from the extraction phase throughout the use and disposal/recycling phase as well. The coordinating committee for the Life Cycle Initiative created jointly by UNEP and the Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC) provides capacity in the development and application of life cycle approaches globally, and executes policies and projects. Yet, more could be done to enhance educational forums to include life cycle thinking in science and engineering schools, executive development programs, and secondary schools.

Al Iannuzzi presented the example of Johnson & Johnson, a company that uses life cycle thinking in developing a continuous improvement program to provide greener products and create business value by meeting customers' needs and demand for sustainable products at the same price. Their goal is to reduce water, energy, materials, chemicals, waste and packaging embedded in products by 10 percent. They demand to know whether any "watch list" materials are used in the product, what ingredients are used in the product, where the product and packaging end up after use, and whether agricultural or mined ingredients in the product are from environmentally or culturally sensitive regions.

Following the panel presentations, the interactive discussion revolved around several key issues. While many tools are now available to support sustainable production, their use must be expanded in both developed and developing countries, something UNIDO and UNEP have been doing through the cleaner production centers. Sustainable production is a continuum—once companies have implemented cleaner production methods, they advance to designing for the environment, and once completed, they move to cooperation among companies to change the whole life-cycle of the products. This last step requires support. Also, more needs to be done to reach small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Leading companies are actually ahead of governments in terms of traceability and applying life-cycle approaches, but there is definitely a role for governments in cooperation with other stakeholders to ensure that entire production and consumption systems are transformed. Governments can also support transformation through greener procurement policies and by agreeing on international definitions of greener products.

Though it is commonplace for people to think that sustainable is costly, this does not have to be true. With the right incentives, designers can bring better products to markets inexpensively. The market is increasingly demanding sustainable attributes at no costs to consumers, and this should be encouraged. There is also a need to address the challenge of developing standards and labels that are both comprehensive and informative and yet simple.

Similar progress is needed on the consumption side, which remains in the shadow of sustainable production. The role of consumer and consumer groups is very important. Existing networks can be strengthened to educate consumers and workers so companies are compelled to use proper manufacturing practices and design more sustainable products and services at the same prices for the consumers. The Marrakech Process has developed an umbrella 10YFP that summarizes lessons learned and regional consultations over the last 7 years that will be submitted to CSD for input to this CSD cycle.

A press conference was held after the seminar. Further information is available at: http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd_aofw_scpp/scpp_pc0310.shtml