
14 August 2009

Dear UN CSD Secretariat:

Please accept the following comments as a NGO contribution by the One Earth Initiative Society to the Secretary-General's state of implementation report for CSD 18.

We have focused our comments on sustainable consumption and production patterns as addressed through the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP). Indeed, One Earth has been a very active participant in the Marrakech Process over the past several years, and has already submitted constructive and detailed comments on the two drafts produced by UN DESA and UNEP on the 10YFP since the Third International Expert Meeting on SCP (Stockholm, June 2007). We have worked closely with the Marrakech Process Secretariat in an effort to ensure the 10YFP's success and, in addition, we have actively sought out to engage civil society in the Marrakech Process. Our comments are largely based on our ongoing discussions and exchanges with NGOs, academics and other stakeholders from Canada and around the world with whom we have been working.

We hope the Secretary-General finds our contribution useful.

Kind regards,



Emmanuel Prinet,
Executive Director

New Developments and Challenges (pertinent to the future implementation of given commitments, goals and targets in the thematic areas)

A world in crisis desperately needs sustainable production and consumption patterns

We have reached a unique point in history. The unsustainable consumption and production (SCP) trends of the world's wealthy minority have already surpassed the Earth's ecological carrying capacity, and thus constitute a significant long-term threat to humanity as a whole (see *Living Planet Report*, WWF, 2008). It is, therefore, no longer an option to not adopt ecologically- and socially-sustainable economic systems if we are to provide not only the basic needs for all, and allow every individual to thrive, but to do so without undermining our life-support systems. It is a matter of grave concern that the world community is far from being on track towards sustainable modes of production and consumption. Achieving sustainability compels us to recognize that the human economy is a subsystem of, and entirely dependant upon, the larger ecological system, but is currently depleting the latter.

Without healthy and resilient ecosystems, social sustainability cannot be achieved, and is indeed undermined. The recent UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment concludes that 60% of the world's ecosystem services are highly degraded or failing, and that further degradation of these ecosystems is a barrier to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Regrettably, the consequences of this eco-degradation are being borne

disproportionately by the poor. These alarm bells are not new– in 1992, some 1700 of the world's leading scientists, including the majority of Noble laureates in the sciences, came together and issued a "Warning to Humanity". The introduction stated that:

Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices put at serious risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know. Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring about (UCS, 1992).

Understanding the Role of Sustainable Consumption and Production

There is a misunderstanding and disagreement (genuine or simply feigned in support of short-term self-interest) about the role and importance of "sustainable consumption and production". Sustainable consumption and production is the material heart of sustainable development. It is not just another overarching theme; it is the mainstay of the framework that will enable us to meet the consumptive needs of all (as articulated in the MDGS, among others) within the ecological carrying capacity of the planet. If we are genuinely interested in long-term sustainability, then we must acknowledge the central roles played by our individual behaviours and our collective behaviour as a species. The simple facts are that over-consumption and social inequality dominate our relationships both to each other and to the natural world. If we are not able to agree on the factors that are exacerbating social and ecological tensions, and on how to overcome them, then the chances of making effective progress are small.

Specific Experiences (e.g. case studies)

1. The costs of pursuing growth relentlessly

As Dennis Meadows, co-author of the seminal *Limits to Growth* report and its subsequent updates, indicates, climate change, the loss of agriculturally productive land, water scarcity, etc., are not so much problems as *symptoms*: symptoms of humanity's relentless and unquestioned pursuit of economic growth, at the national scale and, collectively, at the international scale. Growth has, admittedly, created enormous wealth for millions around the world over the past 60 years, but we need to ask ourselves whether, beyond a certain point, *growth at the global scale* doesn't become uneconomic. This is the point at which the marginal costs of growth begin to exceed the benefits. Today, science tells us that global growth is exacerbating the very problems we are trying to solve and pushing us in the *wrong* direction. In a world where humanity is already in overshoot, eroding further nature's ability to provide for us and absorb our wastes by encouraging people to consume more in the name of boosting the GDP is reckless and irresponsible. Is it not time to question whether reckless growth can be tolerated if we are to avert global ecological, and thus societal, collapse?

2. Wealth redistribution and fair Earthshares

What the world desperately needs is redistribution of existing wealth. Greater equity is a fundamental social imperative for sustainability. This goal also implies that the rich countries that consume more than their "fair Earthshare" need to switch their policy emphases from economic growth (quantitative increase) to social *development* (qualitative improvement). The world needs to move towards an ecological steady-state economic system based on the principle of sufficiency and away from a consumerist model that creates insatiable demands for material- and energy-intensive goods and services. This implies less pandering to greed and much more effort on equity. It follows that we need a combination of both self-restraint and conscious policy to develop sustainable production and consumption patterns.

3. National accounts and measuring well-being

Going further, "if you can't measure it, you can't manage it", so it is also necessary to reform national accounting,

progressively letting go of GDP/GNP as the sole indicator of national "progress", and complementing it with indicators such as the Genuine Progress Indicator, the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare, the Ecological Footprint, the Happy Planet Index, etc. Agenda 21 is clear on this point: "Consideration should [...] be given to the present concepts of economic growth and the need for new concepts of wealth and prosperity which allow higher standards of living through changed lifestyles and are less dependent on the Earth's finite resources and more in harmony with the Earth's carrying capacity. This should be reflected in the evolution of new systems of national accounts and other indicators of sustainable development" (Chapter 4, 11).

4. Technology: not the panacea

New forms of technology and greater techno-efficiency are often held up as the only acceptable means to increase welfare while conserving natural resources. We hear that Factor 4 and Factor 10 efficiency gains can help dematerialize the economy and decouple economic growth from resource consumption. "Doing more with less" through technology, however, is only part of the answer. It must be accompanied by policies and behaviour changes that actually lead to *absolute* decreases in material and energy use while maintaining or enhancing quality of life, rather than merely reducing the energy and material intensity of growth (e.g. as some countries are doing in the fight against climate change). Indeed, history has shown that focusing on technology and efficiency can actually *undermine* sustainability if corrective steps are not taken to compensate for the "rebound effect": as a process becomes more efficient, its products become less expensive so individuals may tend to consume more of those products at the same cost to themselves than they otherwise would have. This cancels any intended benefit from the gain in efficiency. Alternatively, the savings gained from purchasing a more fuel-efficient vehicle, for example, may be spent on other energy-using goods and services which also undermines the ecological benefits of a more efficient vehicle. *In fine*, it needs to be recognized that over-consumption in the rich countries and wealthy elites of the Global South is primarily a cultural problem, not a technological one.

Lessons Learned / Trends Observed / Obstacles to Overcome

Governments have a prime responsibility

Fundamental changes in the ways societies produce and consume goods and services are needed immediately. For this to happen at the speed and scale that is now necessary, governments, above and beyond any other stakeholder, need to take their responsibilities seriously. As the overseers and guarantors of the public good they must act accordingly. Citizens also have a strong role to play. Through their purchase and investment decisions, they are, in many respects, important change agents. Other important and sometimes active stakeholders include local authorities, in their abilities to direct change at the local level, and trade unions, in their capacity as workplace experts and as the main interface between the management and workers.

However, what is urgently needed is *structural* change (change at the macro-economic level), which inevitably calls for institutional change (the type and scale of policies that are developed). Governments, in their role as policy and decisions makers as well as tax collectors and investors, are therefore the main players in the effort to move towards sustainable production and consumption patterns.

Qualitative Data A brief assessment of progress or lack of progress in the implementation of given commitments, goals and targets in the thematic areas of Transport, Chemicals, Waste Management, Mining and the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption & Production Patterns

Past commitments on sustainable consumption and production made through the UN

The need to move towards SCP was highlighted explicitly in the Rio Earth Summit's Declaration and in Agenda 21, and reiterated by the international community a number of times after that (Rio + 5; Johannesburg 2002; Millennium Summit). At the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, 180 Heads of State agreed that "to achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate their unsustainable patterns of production and consumption...", and that developed countries should take the lead. To date, 191 countries have signed on to this agreement. Where is the significant change that has

been committed to over 15 years ago?

Governments must be held accountable

Democratically-elected governments, ostensibly accountable to their citizens, have not kept their promises made through the United Nations. Today we are asking that they assume their solemn responsibilities and begin immediate and effective action.

Quantitative Data (e.g. charts, tables, and graphs)

Policy Directions What should be brought to the attention of the CSD?

In order to achieve sustainable consumption and production patterns as supported through the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on SCP, the CSD must begin by recognizing the following:

1. It will not suffice to reinforce the greening of individual consumer behaviour, nor will it suffice to improve existing technologies along value chains and resource webs. We have to go beyond attempts to make individual consumption more sustainable by thinking about system-wide basic innovations, and aiming for substantial societal and structural change.
2. It will not suffice to focus on the environmental sustainability of these systems; questions of value creation and wealth distribution, power, visions, and social learning have to be addressed as well.
3. The dynamics for reducing demand for resources are in the hands of industry and most importantly in those of governments who have an obligation to act on behalf of the common good (as policy makers and regulatory bodies).
4. It will not suffice to be concerned only with the sustainability of production and consumption systems. Human population growth remains the other major driver of global ecological change and is capable of overwhelming gains made toward sustainable production and consumption. Efforts to reduce energy and material consumption must be accompanied by efforts to reduce both population growth and the total human population.

Most importantly, the 10 Year Framework of Programme needs to have the clearly stated goal of reversing the worsening social and ecological trends; indeed, its success—and the CSD’s generally—should be first and foremost assessed on these criteria.

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