

4th RIM Preparatory Meeting on Sustainable Consumption and Production: Informal Regional Meeting

30 November 2009, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Chairs Summary

The purpose of the meeting was to develop the contribution of the UNECE region to CSD 18 on the theme of sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns, and present them for further discussion at the Fourth UNECE Regional Implementation Meeting on Sustainable Development, on 1-2 December 2009. To do so, participants reflected on ongoing activities, priorities and challenges for achieving SCP, as well as lessons learnt and best practices gathered at sub-national, national, sub-regional and regional levels. The meeting also identified areas for further work on programmes and policies on SCP, whose design and implementation could be supported by the future 10 Year Framework of Programmes on SCP (the 10YFP). The conclusions of the discussion are summarized below.

As an overarching objective and prerequisite of sustainable development, SCP is an important priority for the UNECE region. There is a broad but unevenly distributed range of ongoing activities to promote SCP in the region, and it is important to continue and strengthen this work given the scale of what is to be done to decrease the negative impact of current consumption and production patterns. However, there are also cases of fragmentation and overlapping of these activities. Participants stressed the need to strengthen SCP policies and build sub-regional, regional and international cooperation. They also highlighted the importance of developing a common vision and a framework of programmes to promote SCP and a more efficient use of natural resources. The 10YFP could fulfill this need.

Many participants emphasized that the social pillar of sustainable development needs to be firmly embedded in SCP policies and programmes, including the 10 YFP. To date, SCP-related activities have focused on the challenges of decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation – in addition, SCP strategies, policies and programmes can make an important contribution to social development. The shift to SCP can create greener and decent jobs and support poverty alleviation, and this potential should be clearly communicated and realized.

Participants agreed that it is important to have an integrated approach when fostering SCP, working on both consumption and production sides, and using the Life Cycle Approach. It was recognized that promoting and implementing SCP requires a balanced mix of instruments (including regulatory, voluntary, economic and fiscal) as these instruments may not work effectively to achieve these objectives if applied individually.

Active involvement of key stakeholders groups, encompassing government, civil society, business and consumers is necessary. Close cooperation among these stakeholders is also necessary, including between key ministries, for example those of Environment, Finance, Industry and Social Affairs, to ensure integration and coherence in the design and implementation of SCP policies and programmes.

One key challenge which must be addressed is the “rebound effect” under which growing consumption outstrips efficiency gains and technological improvements. Working more effectively on the demand side to re-orient consumers’ behaviour and purchasing choices was suggested as a crucial means to address this challenge. This should be combined with policies to encourage innovation and promote transformational improvements in products and production processes.

Participants suggested building more cooperation among existing programs working on resource efficiency and SCP-related issues such as the International Panel International on Sustainable Resource Management, the Green Economy Initiative and the Marrakech Process.

Participants discussed in four working groups key programmes that could be included in the 10YFP. To do so, they used the mapping tool included in the “3rd Public Draft of the paper providing input to the CSD on the 10YFP”. Some participants discussed alternative structures of the mapping tool, and proposed clustering the programs in a number of focus areas.

The main outcomes of the working groups were as follows.

Approach for the 10YFP

- A clear vision of the principles, objectives and perspectives of SCP is required to provide an overall policy framework.
- An overall framework of incentives and policies should be developed to support the achievement of SCP.
- Social aspects should be embedded in work undertaken to promote SCP and to design the 10YFP. This would ultimately help governments and stakeholders in addressing the challenges of meeting basic human needs and alleviating poverty as well as creating decent jobs.
- The Life Cycle Approach should be used in constructing SCP programmes.
- Programmes delivering short, medium and long-term results, engaging all stakeholders should be developed.
- The 10 YFP should include a clear prioritization of programmes and activities, responding to specific needs of the region, sub-regions and national governments.
- More scientific assessment is required to inform the definition of policies and tools that promote the shift to SCP, including through joint work with the International Panel on Sustainable Resource Management.
- A balance needs to be maintained between the elements of the 10 YFP addressing production and consumption issues.
- Education and awareness-raising for sustainable consumption and to promote sustainable lifestyles will be critical elements in the 10 YFP.
- Develop policies which encourage innovation by the business sector, in dialogue with those stakeholders.

The following programmes and specific tools and activities to support the shift to SCP were suggested for inclusion in the 10 YFP.

- Assist in design and implementation of national SCP strategies and action plans at all levels and/or mainstreaming SCP in development plans and sectoral policies.
- Financial incentives and policies to encourage public and private investment for SCP, including elements such as ethical investments, financial schemes, and green fiscal reform.
- Support for eco-design to deliver more sustainable goods and services.
- Support for the design and application of user friendly eco-labels, and development of a common methodology to assess social and environmental impacts of products, with the aim of providing accurate and understandable information to consumers.
- Corporate Environmental and Social Responsibility, which could be linked to incentives for business to meet these responsibilities, and which could build on mechanisms such as the Global Reporting Initiative.
- Sustainable public procurement, providing guidelines and capacity building for governments.
- Education, awareness-raising and sustainable lifestyles. It was suggested that awareness-raising and education efforts should be cross-cutting, reaching producers, policy makers and high level decision makers, in addition to consumers.
- Provision of more science-based knowledge on SCP to serve policy makers, and
- creation of platforms to share information, ongoing activities, and good practices on SCP, taking into account models such as the SWITCH Asia programme.

Work on SCP involves a very large number of areas, which all need attention. However, participants identified a number of priority sectors, as follows: mobility/transport (including infrastructure, spatial planning, investment incentives); housing and construction (including sustainable use); food (including sustainable agriculture); waste management; and sustainable tourism.

This preliminary identification of possible programmes to support the shift to SCP in the UNECE Region can usefully inform discussions in the 4th RIM. The present Chairman's Summary, together with the outputs from the 4th UNECE RIM and the SCP expert meetings and RIMs in the other regions will be used to develop the 4th Public Draft of the paper providing input to the CSD on the 10YFP.