

ENSURING SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION PATTERNS

Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12) – ensuring sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns promotes increased human well-being while decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation.

The SDG 12 targets cover a range of entry points required for promoting responsible consumption and production. The UN Environment is the custodian agency for 10 of the 13 indicators of SDG 12, under the following eight targets:

- ➔ 12.1: Implement the 10-year framework of programmes on SCP
- ➔ 12.2: Sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources
- ➔ 12.3: Halve per capita global food waste and reduce food losses
- ➔ 12.4: Environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes
- ➔ 12.5: Reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse
- ➔ 12.6: Encourage companies to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle
- ➔ 12.7: Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable
- ➔ 12.c: Rationalize inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies

- ➔ If current consumption and production patterns continue, the planet will need 183 billion tonnes of material every year by 2050. This is three times today's amount and impossible to sustain.
- ➔ Every year, 4.8 to 12.7 million tonnes of plastic are dumped into our oceans and over 40 million tonnes of electronic waste are generated (increasing annually by 4 to 5 per cent), causing severe damage to ecosystems, livelihoods and our health.
- ➔ Pollution is the largest environmental cause of disease and premature death globally, responsible for an estimated 9 million premature deaths in 2015 – 16 per cent of all deaths worldwide and three times more deaths than AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined.
- ➔ One third of food produced every year is wasted, yet food security is a growing concern.

Environmental dimension of SDG 12

The way in which societies use and care for natural resources fundamentally shapes the well-being of humanity, the environment and the economy. One of the core objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to decouple economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation, notably through improved resource efficiency.

The extraction of primary materials has tripled in the past four decades, which has led to severe environmental damage and depletion of natural resources, and inequalities have kept growing, both within and between countries. The richest countries alone consume on average 10 times as many materials as the world's poorest, and the efficiency of resource use at a global level is now falling as a number of emerging economies grow rapidly.

In order to respond to this situation, SDG 12 promotes SCP. This means using services and producing products that minimize the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations.

The shift to SCP patterns will enable countries and businesses to meet their needs and the

needs of individuals with less use of natural resources and less pollution and environmental degradation. However, this requires interventions along a number of entry points involving a range of actors. Public policies are required to create conducive environments and influence the market and economy as a whole, including sustainable public procurement policies and practices to drive sustainable innovation, and smart subsidies to divert investments away from environmentally damaging practices. A profound transformation of business practices along global value chains is also required. Significant steps have been taken but implementation at scale remains a challenge for the coming years, as well as our ability to grow and equitably distribute the socioeconomic benefits of this transformation.

UN Environment and SDG 12

The UN Environment Programme (UN Environment) has been promoting the shift to SCP patterns for the past two decades. Our work focuses on the following areas:

- ➔ Engaging with Governments in their transition to SCP patterns and inclusive green economies
- ➔ Fostering partnerships with business and industry to promote green investments and apply sustainable business practices across value chains

- Disseminating consumer information and promoting awareness and engagement towards sustainable lifestyles
- Strengthening and communicating the knowledge and scientific base for resource efficiency and SCP
- Supporting fiscal policy reform to be better aligned with inclusive green economies
- Strengthening the sound management of chemicals and waste by supporting parties to the multilateral environmental agreements to meet their respective obligations

UN Environment serves as the secretariat of the 10-year framework of programmes on SCP patterns (10YFP), a global framework of action to enhance international cooperation for SCP through multi-stakeholder programmes and partnerships, experience-sharing and facilitating access to technical and financial resources for developing countries. The 10YFP involves over 700 partners from Governments, local authorities, civil society, international organizations, scientific and technical organizations, and businesses. The six programmes of the 10YFP offer a range of advisory and technical support, including guidance, tools and solutions to Governments and other stakeholders. Specific multi-stakeholder programmes promote action on a range of SCP-related issues, including ones of direct relevance to the targets under SDG 12, such as sustainable public procurement, sustainable lifestyles and education, and sustainable food systems.

UN Environment also provides scientific information on natural resource use and “decoupling opportunities” as a basis for evidence-based policymaking through the work of the International Resource Panel. This includes a work stream on material flows that serves as a basis for contributions towards SDG target 12.2.

UN Environment hosts the secretariats for several waste and chemicals-related multilateral environmental agreements and promotes synergies between the conventions. It also has several initiatives targeting various types of waste, including solid waste, food waste and hazardous waste and chemicals, such as electrical and electronic waste, mercury and persistent organic pollutants.

In order to support reform on green fiscal policy, UN Environment has established the Green Fiscal Policy Network in partnership with the International Monetary Fund and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit. The Network facilitates knowledge-sharing and dialogue on green

Case study: Support for national SCP action plans

UN Environment continues to support countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Mediterranean region to develop SCP national action plans or to integrate SCP into existing national development plans or strategies. As of 2018, 45 countries have reported that they have in place national action plans or a similar overarching policy on SCP, mostly with the support of UN Environment.

In the Mediterranean region, eight countries have been assisted under the SwitchMed programme, with support from the European Union. A national coordination mechanism has been established at the country level under the coordination and guidance of the national focal points who are appointed by the Government. In most countries, two focal points – one from the Ministry of the Environment and one from the Ministry of Industry – led the implementation of SwitchMed at the national level. The processes were tailored to national needs and allowed for integration with national development plans and/or national sustainable development strategies. The national processes were inclusive, allowing for the participation of a large and diverse group of national stakeholders.

Given the difficulty of implementing the full range of SCP policies and instruments simultaneously, project countries select a limited number of priority areas to be addressed in their SCP national action plans, which contribute to poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability and the development of a green economy.

fiscal policy reforms, working with a number of associated partners.

UN Environment collaborates with the private sector in partnerships promoting innovation, technological solutions and financing to tackle our most pressing global environmental challenges. As part of its private sector engagement work, it also promotes and builds capacity in corporate sustainability reporting.

SDG 12 and the transition to sustainable and resilient societies

While considerable efficiency gains have been made over the past decades, they have been insufficient to offset a rapidly growing global population and rising middle class. Inequality is on the rise, with the billion richest people consuming 72 per cent of the world’s resources, while the 1.2 billion poorest are responsible for only 1 per cent of global consumption. Unsustainable patterns of consumption and production and the ensuing environmental degradation and social injustice are ultimately at the root of many cases of political instability, conflicts and social and health inequalities.

SCP therefore contributes to resilient societies in several ways:

- Its focus on resource efficiency aims to reduce resource use per unit of GDP, which in turn reduces vulnerability to resource scarcity and resource price volatility, while also ensuring future security of supply.
- It also aims to mitigate environmental degradation that leads to vulnerable societies, such as land degradation, water scarcity, pollution and toxic chemicals, and climatic impacts.

- It aims to protect human health and the environment from harmful effects of chemicals and waste by applying the life-cycle approach to the production, use, trade and disposal of chemicals and products containing hazardous substances.
- It promotes the environmentally sound management of hazardous and other wastes and their disposal, including efforts to prevent and minimize their generation and efficiently and safely manage that which cannot be avoided.

Policies addressing overconsumption, mitigating environmental and social impacts that disproportionately affect the poor and promoting social justice can create greater social cohesion, leading to greater stability and security within societies.

UN Environment stands ready to work with Member States and relevant stakeholders to ensure that SDG 12 is fully implemented. For further information or questions, please contact Lowri Angharad Rees, Science Division at UN Environment: lowri.rees@un.org.

