

## PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract.** At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, world leaders agreed that eliminating unsustainable production and consumption is one of the three overriding objectives of sustainable development. Achieving that objective should have been a major priority for the WSSD Plan of Implementation. Increases in consumption and production over the past decade were largely responsible for the worsening environmental and social trends. Unfortunately, the negotiators of the Plan paid insufficient attention to the lessons from ten years of discussions about the concepts, the available policies and tools and their effectiveness, the impacts of those policies on developing countries, and the political commitment of countries in an era of globalization. Despite a promising proposal for a new ten-year work programme aimed at bridging the gap implementing the Agenda 21 commitments from Rio, Summit negotiators produced barely more than a muted echo of recommendations from the past which have yet to be taken seriously enough by the world's leaders in a comprehensive intergovernmental strategy. In the ten-year review of progress to achieve sustainable production and consumption, governments quickly skipped past the critical work of examining *why* things are getting worse, avoiding the task of identifying the obstacles (which in some cases were themselves) and in turn avoiding the commitment to time-bound measurable targets. If nothing else, the World Summit on Sustainable Development demonstrated that a global strategy to achieve sustainable production and consumption will come not from a UN consensus of world leaders but from a strategic alliance of responsible governments, civil society, and others with a vision beyond the next election cycle.

**Key words:** Sustainable development, sustainable production, sustainable consumption, World Summit on Sustainable Development, Agenda 21, Earth Summit

**Abbreviations:** CSD - Commission on Sustainable Development; CSE - Centre for Science and Environment; FOE - Friends of the Earth; ICSPAC - International Coalition for Sustainable Production and Consumption; OECD - Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development; Rio+5 - five-year review of progress on Agenda 21; Rio+10 - ten-year review of progress on Agenda 21; SPAC - sustainable production and consumption; UNGA - United Nations General Assembly ; UNDP - United Nations Development Programme; UNEP - United Nations Environment Programme; WSSD - World Summit on Sustainable Development

JEFFREY BARBER

## 1. Introduction

During the past decade, sustainable production and consumption became an increasingly important category of international development policy, referred to by government and other policymaking bodies as 'a key strategic approach to achieving sustainable development' (UNCSD, 1997a). 'All countries should strive to promote sustainable consumption patterns,' the UN General Assembly concluded at its 1996 Special Session review of progress since Rio, distinguishing between the responsibility of developed countries to 'take the lead' and that of developing countries to 'seek sustainable consumption patterns in their development process.' (UNGA, 1997). The UN Development Programme (UNDP) acknowledged that 'consumption patterns today must be changed to advance human development tomorrow.' (UNDP, 1998:1) 'The key environmental challenge for the future,' the OECD explained, 'will be to continue to further increase efficiency of resource use and to reduce the pollution intensity of consumption and production.' (OECD, 2002a:27). Finally, world leaders attending the World Summit on Sustainable Development referred to changing unsustainable production and consumption patterns as one of the three 'overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for, sustainable development.' (WSSD, 2002).

Despite this official recognition and improvements in ecoefficiency and consumer awareness, overall efforts to reverse the growth of unsustainable production and consumption patterns have been inadequate. The imbalance between rhetoric and effective action represents one of the critical 'implementation gaps' noted in the ten-year review of progress conducted as part of the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development played a two-fold role in progress towards this 'overarching objective' of sustainable production and consumption: (1) encouraging a review and critical assessment of progress in addressing unsustainable production and consumption patterns since Rio, and (2) calling for political commitments to move from rhetoric to effective action and implementation of commitments.

Of interest are questions about the results of that review and what the negotiators of the final Plan of Implementation did with the lessons from a decade of efforts to address this issue. A critical question is how the Summit process identified and addressed the constraints and obstacles which contributed to the implementation gap. Another set of questions focus on the role played by different players in the process, e.g., governments, intergovernmental organizations, industry groups, and civil society, what they contributed in shaping the policies and practices of past and future progress.

Finally, there is the question of whether the current commitments and plans now in motion, as reflected in the Plan of Implementation and its associated initiatives and partnerships, are adequate to the task of significantly slowing and reversing the trend of growing unsustainable production and consumption, or remain curtailed by the same obstacles and taboos undermining past progress.

## 2. Production and Consumption at Rio

### 2.1 A MATTER OF GRAVE CONCERN

As one of the outcomes of the 1992 Earth Summit, Principle 8 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development highlights the responsibility of nations to 'reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.' The principle clearly points out that this task is necessary 'to achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people.'

Chapter 4 of Agenda 21 explicitly identifies unsustainable production and consumption patterns, 'particularly in industrialized countries,' as 'the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment.' (UN, 1992: para 4.3) The situation is described as 'a matter of grave concern, aggravating poverty and imbalances.'

In responding to this concern, the chapter identifies two broad tasks:

- (1) focusing on unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and
- (2) developing national policies and strategies to encourage changes in unsustainable consumption patterns.

The first task involves (a) promoting patterns of consumption and production that 'reduce environmental stress and will meet the basic needs of humanity,' and (b) 'developing a better understanding of the role of consumption and how to bring about more sustainable consumption patterns.' The complexity of the challenge requires both a 'questioning of traditional concepts of economic growth' and 'new concepts of wealth and prosperity' reflected in 'changed lifestyles' as well as new indicators and systems of national accounts.

The second task places responsibility squarely on national governments to create the policies and strategies needed to encourage those changes. Governments in developed industrialized countries challenged themselves to design policies and strategies to encourage the 'reorientation of existing production and consumption patterns that have developed in industrialized societies.' This involved the following objectives:

- (a) Promoting 'efficiency in production processes and reducing wasteful consumption in the process of economic growth, taking into account the development needs of developing countries; '
- (b) Developing 'a domestic policy framework that will encourage a shift to more sustainable patterns of production and consumption;'
- (c) Reinforcing 'both values that encourage sustainable production and consumption patterns and policies that encourage the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries.'

Among the activities recommended for achieving these objectives, Agenda 21 encouraged: use of new and renewable energy sources (4.18d); recycling by industry and consumers (4.19b); reducing wasteful product packaging (4.19b); expanding environmental labelling and other environmentally related product information programmes designed to assist consumers to make informed choices (4.21); providing information on the consequences of consumption choices and behaviour (4.22a); making consumers aware of the health and environmental impacts of products, through such means as consumer legislation and environmental labelling (4.22b); reviewing and improving government procurement policies (4.23); using appropriate economic instruments to influence consumer behaviour

## JEFFREY BARBER

(4.25); promoting more positive attitudes towards sustainable consumption through education, public awareness programmes and other means (4.26).

### 2.2 COMMON BUT DIFFERENTIATED RESPONSIBILITIES

During the Earth Summit, discussions about population growth, particularly those concerned with the rates of growth occurring in developing countries, were frequently paired with critiques of the unequal environmental pressures resulting from overconsumption by industrial countries and consumers. The argument that 'one fourth of the globe's people consume 40-86 percent of the earth's various natural resources' (Durning, 1992: 50) became one of the more frequently heard points in discussions about production and consumption. Thus, the Agenda 21 objective of eradicating poverty became intertwined with the objective of achieving sustainable consumption and production, tying the question of achieving ecoefficiency to the more complicated question of economic *sufficiency*.

The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, defined in Principle 8 of the Rio Declaration, highlights the current imbalances in global patterns of consumption and production and the need for governments to specify their role and responsibility in establishing the proper balance. The chapter notes the need for policies and strategies to address unsustainability ranging from the excessive demands and lifestyles of the rich to the lack of access to food, clean water, healthcare, shelter and education by the poor. Understandably the difficulties in developing those policies and strategies are related to the difficulties in defining and agreeing upon those differentiated responsibilities.

### 2.3 DOMESTIC POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Agenda 21 asks each country to 'develop a domestic policy framework that will encourage a shift to more sustainable patterns of production and consumption.' (UN, 1992: para 4.17). This means more than calling governments' promotion of recycling or energy conservation education 'sustainable consumption policy.' A *national policy framework* on sustainable production and consumption implies an understanding and appreciation of the linkages involved in balancing demand- and supply-side approaches. Such a framework requires integrating various concepts such as product lifecycle, environmental space, ecological footprints, and environmental cost internalization into a concrete inter-departmental plan with measurable targets and timetables and indicators to monitor and report on progress.

### 2.4 REVIEWING PROGRESS

Agenda 21 specifies a number of times the importance of monitoring and assessment in the follow-up of the implementation of Agenda 21 (UN,1992). The authors stress that high priority be given to review progress in achieving sustainable consumption patterns' (para 4.9) as well as 'the role and impact of unsustainable production and consumption patterns and lifestyles and their relation to

## PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND THE WSSD

sustainable development (para 4.13). Further, 'due consideration' should be given to 'an assessment of progress achieved in developing national policies and strategies' (para 4.26) in the overall review of the implementation of Agenda 21 (UN, 1992).

### 3. Progress Since Rio

#### 3.1 INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME OF WORK

Following Rio, a number of international conferences, workshops, reports, education programs, and other activities were organized to implement the various recommendations made in Agenda 21 (ICSPAC, 2002; UNEP, 2001). In addition to ongoing discussion of production and consumption patterns by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), many governments, intergovernmental organizations, and nongovernmental organizations engaged in numerous activities exploring questions about awareness, lifestyles, values, policies, and strategies. (See Table 1).

<b>Table 1</b>		Following the Earth Summit, the OECD began its exploration of the relationship between production and consumption patterns and sustainable development (OECD, 1997). The Norwegian
<b>Follow-up activities on sustainable production &amp; consumption</b>		
1994	Soria Moria Symposium (Oslo)	
1995	Oslo Ministerial Roundtable	
1995	Clarifying the Concepts workshop (Rosendal)	
1995	Workshop on Policy Measures for Changing Consumption Patterns (Seoul)	
1996	Workshop on Patterns and Policies (Brasilia)	
1998	Workshop on Indicators for Sustainable Production & Consumption (New York)	
1998	Encouraging Local Initiatives Towards Sustainable Consumption (New York)	
1998	Consumption in a Sustainable World (Kabelvag)	
1999	From Consumer Society to Sustainable Society (Soesterberg)	
1999	Sustainable Consumption: Trends and Traditions in East Asia (Chejudo)	
1999	7th Session of Commission on Sustainable Development (New York)	
2001	Sustainable Consumption in Latin America and Caribbean (Sao Paulo)	
2002	Implementing Sustainable Consumption and Production Policies (Paris)	
Source: ICSPAC, 2001		

Government hosted a series of workshops and meetings on the topic, notably the Symposium on Sustainable Consumption (UNCSD, 1994a) and the Oslo Ministerial Roundtable (Norwegian Ministry of Environment, 1995). The latter meeting established the most commonly accepted definition of *sustainable consumption* as: 'the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimising the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardise the needs of future generations.'

These and other activities contributed to the mandate by the second and third sessions of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, 1994b, 1995a) to develop an international work

JEFFREY BARBER

## PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND THE WSSD

programme on sustainable production and consumption. The agreed-upon programme of work (UNCSD, 1995b) consisted of five tasks:

1. Identifying the policy implications of projected trends in consumption and production patterns.
2. Assessing the impact on developing countries, especially the least developed countries and small island developing States, of changes in consumption and production in developed countries.
3. Evaluating the effectiveness of policy measures intended to change consumption and production patterns, such as command-and-control, economic and social instruments, government procurement policies and guidelines.
4. Eliciting timebound voluntary commitment from countries to make measurable progress on those sustainable development goals that have an especially high priority at the national level.
5. Revising the guidelines for consumer protection, with regard to sustainable consumption.

Note that the first four tasks require collecting and compiling comprehensive information necessary to monitor and assess the stated trends, impacts, effectiveness of policies, and progress. Without this data, the CSD cautioned in its Third Session, 'policy-making is likely to be impaired.' (UNCSD, 1995a: para 39).

Some delegations and NGOs pushed, unsuccessfully, for commitments from countries to identify reasonable but specific time-bound and measurable targets, by which progress could be more easily assessed. Observing the Third Session discussions, *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* reported that 'while governments have been more willing to discuss changing production and consumption patterns and the relationship between trade and the environment, there is little concrete action to report.' These issues, they observed, 'constitute the key indicators of sustained political will.' (*Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, 1995)

At its Fourth Session, the CSD reported on two workshops organized to explore concepts and policy options: the OECD workshop 'Clarifying the Concepts' in Rosendal hosted by the Norwegian government (OECD, 1997), and the workshop 'Policy Measures for Changing Consumption Patterns' in Seoul hosted by the Republic of Korea (Republic of Korea, 1996). Reporting on the international work programme, the Commission admitted it was 'mainly research oriented' and that the 1997 review of the implementation of Agenda 21 would 'provide an opportunity for further directing the work programme towards a more action-oriented approach.' (UNCSD, 1996a).

### 3.2 RIO+5: MORE ACTION-ORIENTED ?

Five years after Rio, the Commission on Sustainable Development reported on progress implementing

JEFFREY BARBER

Chapter 4 (UNCSD, 1997b) followed by a General Assembly report on its five-year work programme to further implement Agenda 21 (UNGA, 1997).

While the CSD report painted a positive picture of what had been achieved by governments and stakeholders in responding to the Chapter 4 objectives, evidence of substantive change remained abstract or anecdotal, underlining the need for clear indicators, targets and timelines, and concrete data to measure progress. 'The most promising changes and developments can be observed,' the CSD announced, 'in the increased participation of non-governmental organizations, business, trade unions, local authorities and the academic community ... in particular, the ongoing efforts of the nongovernmental organization and academic communities to promote sustainable lifestyles.' (UNCSD, 1997b: para 24)

According to the report, progress was taking place in almost all the areas mentioned in Chapter 4 and in the international work programme – in understanding, awareness and policymaking by governments, industry, consumers and civil society organizations. Among governments, the Commission noted the leadership role taken by Australia, Brazil, the Netherlands, Norway and the Republic of Korea. Among international organizations, the Commission cited special efforts by the OECD, UNEP, UNCTAD, and UNDP. For business and industry, the World Business Council on Sustainable Development stood out in its efforts. Among nongovernmental organizations, the Commission singled out Consumers International, Friends of the Earth (FOE), and Global Action Plan (GAP) as examples of this increased participation and cooperation.

As to the many meetings and discussions taking place over the previous five years, the report claims 'a consensus that the most promising and cost-effective policy strategies are those that aim at cost internalization and improved efficiency in resource and energy use.' (UNCSD, 1997b: para 6)

Yet at the end of this largely optimistic report, some serious 'unfulfilled expectations' stand out (para 34). Most important is that the positive developments reported 'have been largely offset by larger volumes of production.' The result: 'many natural resource and pollution problems persist or continue to worsen.' One example is in the relentless rise of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. As to integrated policy frameworks, governments tended to 'shy away from additional eco-taxes and environmental regulations that intend to incorporate the cost of environmental protection into products and services.' (para 37) In turn, 'many governmental policies in sectors such as agriculture, economics, finance, trade, communications, tourism, energy and transport do not adequately reflect an appreciation of how they shape consumption and production patterns.' (para 36).

In the 1997 General Assembly's Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, the section on changing consumption and production patterns is not so much a plan for 'further implementation' as a restatement of many of the original recommendations and commitments in Agenda 21. Once again we hear that 'all countries should strive to promote sustainable consumption patterns,' that 'developed countries should take the lead' and 'developing countries should seek to achieve sustainable consumption patterns in their development process,' and that this requires 'enhanced technological and other assistance from industrialized countries.' (UNGA, 1997). The same call heard in Agenda 21 for a 'review of progress made in achieving sustainable consumption' returns, but without any recommendations on how this progress will be assessed. There is no mention of

## PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND THE WSSD

concrete, measurable targets and timetables for implementing these objectives, nor mention of appropriate indicators to assess countries' implementation efforts.

While a few policy recommendations from discussions since Rio do appear (e.g., producer responsibility, reduction and elimination of subsidies, consideration of a 10-fold long-term improvement in resource productivity and a factor-four increase in the next two or three decades), the majority of proposed 'action-oriented policies' are simply echoes of Chapter 4 with no new ideas or commitments on the implied 'further implementation.'

In some cases important ideas from Rio are missing, such as the recommendations for countries to develop a domestic policy framework on sustainable production and consumption. Instead, the 1997 Programme mentions only that 'the development and further elaboration of national policies and strategies ... are needed.' (para 28). The concept of an integrative *framework* has disappeared.

Also missing from the 1997 implementation programme is the controversial but significant questioning of 'present concepts of economic growth and the need for new concepts of wealth and prosperity' (United Nations, 1992: para 4.11) The concept of 'carrying capacity' is also missing along with the Agenda 21 requirement for a 'reorientation of existing production and consumption patterns that have developed in industrial societies and are in turn emulated in much of the world' (para 4.15).

Many of the civil society organizations who had been lobbying with like-minded government delegates for stronger language that would commit governments to concrete actions with targets and timetables were understandably disappointed albeit not surprised. Many also noted the absence of critical discussion and practical ideas about ways to overcome the obstacles to progress on sustainable production and consumption. Although the General Assembly admitted that 'trends are worsening' and that absolute increases in consumption and production had overridden relative gains in ecoefficiency and lifestyle improvements, analysis of the obstacles was replaced by statements that 'time is of the essence in meeting the challenges of sustainable development' and a renewed commitment 'to ensuring that the next comprehensive review of Agenda 21 in the year 2002 demonstrates greater measurable progress in achieving sustainable development.' (UNGA, 1997: para 6)

One significant precedent established by the General Assembly in its Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 was to establish production and consumption patterns and poverty as the 'overriding issues' to be integrated into the future themes of the Commission's 1998-2002 work programme. Consequent CSD sessions were tasked with integrating the goal of changing production and consumption patterns in the context of agriculture, energy, transportation and other issues.

### 3.3 CONSUMER GUIDELINES ON SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

In the International Programme of Work on Sustainable Production and Consumption, the task of revising the UN Guidelines on Consumer Protection, with regard to sustainable consumption, represents an important contribution to meeting the Agenda 21 objective of developing domestic policy frameworks. The evolution of these revised guidelines – their development, adoption, and use – offers useful insights in assessing governments' progress achieving the policy framework objective, not to mention the overall goal of promoting sustainable production and consumption patterns. The

JEFFREY BARBER

relationship between developed countries and the consumer guidelines is especially important, considering their obligation to 'take the lead.'

In 1985, the UN General Assembly adopted the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection. The Guidelines 'constitute a comprehensive policy framework outlining what governments need to do to promote consumer protection in the following eight areas: basic needs, safety, information, choice, representation, redress, consumer education and health environment.' (UNCSD, 1998a). Designed for countries to use in structuring and strengthening policies and legislation for consumer protection, the Guidelines especially targeted the needs of governments of developing and newly independent countries.

A decade later, the UN Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to extend the current Guidelines to the issue of sustainable consumption patterns. In January 1998, the Government of Brazil hosted the UN Inter-Regional Expert Group Meeting on Consumer Protection and Sustainable Consumption (UNCSD, 1998a), producing recommendations for revising the Guidelines discussed at the CSD's Sixth, Seventh and Eight Sessions and finally adopted by the General Assembly in December 1999.

In addition to specific policy recommendations on consumer information (e.g., on the impacts of consumption patterns and benefits of changes), education, ecolabelling, product testing, research on consumer behaviour, subsidy and tax reform, the Guidelines stressed the importance of government promotion of consumer empowerment and public participation in policy making. In particular, the revised Guidelines on sustainable consumption supported efforts to develop domestic policy frameworks on sustainable production and consumption shaped through informed partnership with all members of society.

In the report to the CSD's Sixth Session, the Experts Group co-chairs also stressed the need for 'a review and revision mechanism for these guidelines...under the aegis of the United Nations so as to assess progress in their implementation by Member States and to revise them as necessary' (UNCSD, 1998b).

### 3.4 RIO+10: THE IMPLEMENTATION GAP

In early 2001 at its 55th session, the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution mandating a ten-year review of progress achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21. The review process, led by the Commission on Sustainable Development but involving a wide-ranging series of national, regional and global preparatory meetings with inputs from governments, international organizations, business and industry, civil society organizations and other major groups, would culminate the following year in the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The Summit would integrate the 'lessons learned' and recommendations for further action into 'an integrated and strategically focused approach to the implementation of Agenda 21,' addressing 'the main challenges and opportunities faced by the international community in this regard.' (UNGA, 2001)

In *Implementing Agenda 21*, the UN report summarizing the overall results of the ten-year review of progress, the Secretary-General declared that, despite the various initiatives and achievements

## PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND THE WSSD

throughout the past decade, 'progress towards the goals established at Rio has been slower than anticipated and in some respects conditions are worse than they were ten years ago,' noting a 'gap in implementation.' (UNCSD, 2002: para 2). This gap is seen in the 'fragmented approach towards sustainable development' taken by policymakers, in the 'lack of mutually coherent policies' in finance, trade, investment, technology and sustainable development, and in the failure to provide the financial resources.

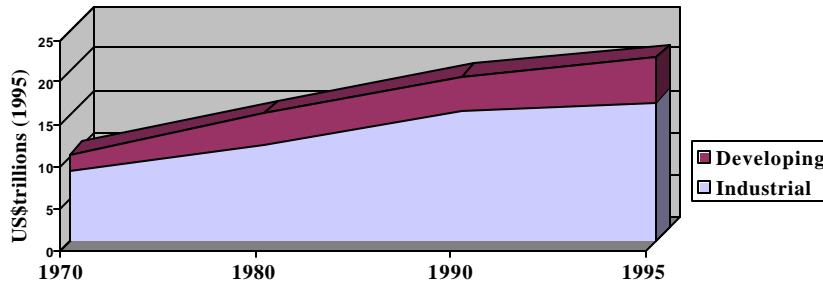
This gap is especially revealed in the lack of major changes in production and consumption patterns. For the Secretary-General, this situation reflects both the value systems driving the degradation of natural resources and the lack of political will to do what needs to be done. The developed countries were supposed to take the lead, but what gains they made were overridden by overall increases in consumption (UNCSD, 2002: para 83).

As to more specific Summit reports reviewing progress on changing production and consumption patterns, the Commission produced only a 'brief factual overview' (UNCSD, 2001), which referred back to the more comprehensive review that took place at the CSD's Seventh Session in 1999 (UNCSD, 1999). Other organizations also contributed their assessments of progress on production and consumption (UNEP, 2002d; OECD 2002b, 2002c; ICSPAC, 2002). Klaus Töpfer summed up the situation in his Foreword to the UNEP report *Consumption Opportunities* (UNEP, 2001): 'Since [Rio] progress on tracking consumption patterns, and devising the tools to change them, has been slow.'

### 3.4.1 Trends

The most significant trend in the ten-year review is the relentless global increase of consumption and production, particularly of energy and natural resources. According to the 1998 *Human Development Report*, global consumption expenditure doubled in the past 25 years (Figure 1), reaching \$24 trillion in 1998 (UNDP, 1998). This increase, linked with population growth and economic globalization, elicits mixed responses of celebration and alarm. From one point of view such growth indicates increasing economic prosperity and wealth, ultimately providing the financial resources to pay for environmental protection and social services.

**Figure 1. Global consumption expenditures in industrial and developing countries**



Source: UNDP (1998)

Another point of view laments the ecological degradation and social inequity accompanying blind economic growth. The report *Implementing Agenda 21* noted several areas of concern: the growing demand for water, especially in developing countries, with water use expected to increase 40 percent in the next two decades; the dramatic depletion of biological diversity, with more than 800 species already extinct due to habitat loss or degradation; a deforestation rate of 14.6 million hectares per year in tropical developing countries; destruction of coastal areas, with 27 percent of coral reefs lost due to human impacts and 32 percent threatened to follow in the next 30 years; and finally the increasing evidence of global warming, which may result in devastating changes in climate and weather, rising sea levels, and drought (UNCSD, 2002).

The 1999 CSD *Comprehensive Review of Changing Consumption and Production Patterns* already warned that 'if current trends in energy and fossil fuel consumption continue, by 2010 global energy consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will have risen by almost 50 percent above 1993 levels.' Currently, automobile use contributes 15 percent to global fossil fuel consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This sector grows by 16 million vehicles per year, with one billion vehicles projected to be on the road by 2025 (UNCSD, 1999).

When developing policies about particular changing production and consumption patterns, the interlinkages must be kept in mind (see Table 2). Fossil fuel use and policies are intertwined with the consumption and production of automobiles, which in turn is intertwined with the consumption and production of metals – the transportation sector using 70 percent of lead produced each year, 37 percent of steel, 33 percent of aluminium and 27 percent of copper (Worldwatch, 2002: 66). The mining industry is in turn a consumer of chemicals, water, land – and motor vehicles.

Table 2. Some global production & consumption trends

	1970	1980	1990	2001
<b>Cars produced (millions)</b>	22.5	28.6	36.3	40.0

PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND THE WSSD

<b>Carbon emissions from fossil fuel combustion (billion tons)</b>	4.0	5.2	5.94	6.55
<b>Metals mined (million tons)</b>	621	757	820	902*
<b>Oil spills (thousand tons)</b>	399.9	577.9	474.4	48.6*
<b>Global average temperature (degrees Celsius)</b>	14.02	14.16	14.36	14.43
<b>Source: Worldwatch, 2002</b>				
*Year 2002				

The 2001 CSD report *Changing Consumption Patterns* notes that, due to agricultural expansion to meet the growing demand for food, 'half of the world's wetlands area has been lost and grasslands have been reduced by more than 90 percent in some areas.' Intensification of farming practices has resulted in two-thirds of the world's farmlands afflicted by soil degradation. To further meet this growing food demand, 'nearly 70 percent of the world's major fish stocks are overfished' or being fished at their biological limit. On the other hand, growing demand for fresh water, as well as electricity, has resulted in dam production and fragmentation of the world's large rivers, leaving 20 percent of freshwater species extinct or endangered (UNCSD, 2001).

3.4.2 Impacts on developing countries

Two main points stood out in reviewing the impacts of changes in industrial countries' production and consumption patterns on developing countries. First, developing countries express concern about the financial and technical burdens, especially on small and medium enterprises, from ecolabels and environment standards on their products, undermining their ability to compete on the global market. These countries fear that strategies involving product lifecycle analysis, Extended Producer Responsibility, and ecoefficiency will reduce demand for their products, especially fossil fuels, minerals and industrial raw materials. (UNCSD, 1999; UNCSD, 2001).

Second, the growing demand of consumers in industrial countries for more sustainable products, such as organic produce, open up new and growing opportunities for developing countries ready and willing to respond. The evolution of the Fair Trade movement represents one example of a niche market demand for developing country exports (UNCSD, 1999; UNCSD, 2001; Robins and Roberts, 1998).

The CSD report *Changing Consumption Patterns* raised additional points about the impact of globalization on developing countries, particularly its capacity to 'spread unsustainable lifestyles,' promote increased consumption of natural resources and generation of waste, and whether global competition is undermining social and environmental policies (UNCSD, 2001: para 13).

Throughout the review process, the CSD, UNEP and many governments generally tended to avoid in-depth public discussion about the negative impacts of global media and advertising by promoting consumerism in developing countries and countries in transition. Many civil society groups directly criticized the export of western consumerism through global media and advertising, aggressively promoting unsustainable consumption values and lifestyles to the detriment of more benign traditional values and practices (Chaudhuri, 2002; Consumers International, 1999). The Centre for Science and

Environment in India, for example, highlighted major marketing and advertising campaigns by tobacco companies targeting developing countries – where cigarette consumption has increased by 50 percent (CSE, 2000).

However, the silence of the Commission and UN agencies about the negative impacts of advertising is contrasted by their apparent willingness to accept the advertising industry's assertion that there are no causal links between advertising and unsustainable consumption, particularly in developing countries. Such a link is "a misperception," concluded the UNEP report on the advertising industry as part of their industry survey for the WSSD (UNEP, 2002c). Instead of exploring this controversy in more depth, the tendency has been to simply avoid friction with industry, instead 'encouraging the media, advertising and marketing sectors to help shape sustainable consumption patterns' (UNGA, 1997).

### 3.4.3 Policy measures

On the policy side, governments have experimented with a range of instruments: process and product standards, ecotaxes, subsidy reform, consumer information such as ecolabels, among others. Applying the idea of product lifecycle analysis, some governments have made efforts to link these instruments into *integrated product policies (IPP)* to address the different phases of design, production, consumption and disposal. Integrated product policies also represent an important element in the cleaner production work of UNEP (UNEP, 2002a).

One ongoing policy trend has been the consistent priority given throughout by governments and the UN agencies to the concept of *ecoefficiency*. In *Implementing Agenda 21*, the Secretary-General identifies one main priority addressing the production and consumption issue, calling for 'major improvements in the efficiency of resource use...in both developed and developing countries' (UNCSD, 2002: para 224). Coined by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, its president Björn Stigson defines ecoefficiency as 'the delivery of competitively priced goods and services that satisfy human needs and bring quality of life while progressively reducing the ecological impact and resource intensity throughout the life cycle to a level at least in line with the Earth's carrying capacity' (Stigson, 1999).

However, the Rio+10 review concluded that the gains provided by this supply-side focus on promoting ecoefficiency in production are offset by trends on the demand-side – population growth and the desire for more goods and services. 'The international community has not yet fully come to grips with how to address the consumption side of sustainable development,' UNEP highlighted in its briefing distributed at the WSSD. According to UNEP, a 'lack of awareness and understanding has led to a relatively hesitant uptake of the required policies, sometimes based on misperceptions about the economic, social and cultural consequences' (UNEP, 2002b). Ironically, the World Business Council on Sustainable Development, in its 1996 report *Sustainable Production and Consumption: A Business Perspective*, had advocated that 'the definition of eco-efficiency...is quite similar to that of sustainable production and consumption' (WBCSD, 1996: 11). For many in the business community,

## PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND THE WSSD

ecoefficiency represents an uncontroversial way to improve competitiveness, popular with both business and consumers.

'The reality is that eco-efficiency policy has so far only led to a much more efficient but still disproportionately high use of natural resources in rich industrial countries,' Friends of the Earth (FOE) pointed out in their report to the WSSD (FOE, 2002a). Targeting the OECD's working programme on sustainable development, Friends of the Earth criticizes it for concerning itself 'almost exclusively with how a reduction in natural resource use can be achieved through economic instruments.' One of the reasons why the OECD and CSD have given less attention to sustainable consumption policy is the 'huge risk' that 'what is ecologically necessary will not be politically feasible.' The message that 'we must use far fewer natural resources and must pay more' is clearly an unwelcome message to public and politicians alike. Yet the problem and challenge remain of how to effectively balance sustainable production policies with politically feasible sustainable production policies that are not seen as an attack on people's living standards.

For years, civil society organizations have called into question the overriding importance given to ecoefficiency relative to other approaches and concepts, such as the equally important but neglected concept of *sufficiency*. In 1997, the NGO Caucus on Sustainable Production and Consumption highlighted this need and stressed 'moving beyond efficiency to sufficiency, promoting sustainable lifestyles and livelihoods for all' as a priority for the UN General Assembly's five-year review (SPAC Caucus, 1997). Yet the term 'sufficiency' received scant attention throughout the WSSD discussions and implementation plan.

### 3.4.4 National and local commitments

*Agenda 21* clearly states that its 'successful implementation is first and foremost the responsibility of Governments' (United Nations, 1992: para 1.3). Thus, a major part of the ten-year review understandably should focus on governments' efforts *as well as lack of effort* to implement Agenda 21. Considering that governments, following the five-year review, committed themselves 'to ensuring that the next comprehensive review of Agenda 21 in the year 2002 demonstrates greater measurable progress in achieving sustainable development' (UNGA, 1997: para 6), there is a serious problem with credibility. Yet the rhetoric of the World Summit on Sustainable Development is unabashedly filled with commitments and commitments, seeming to ignore the public record.

Such discrepancies call for more than lists of positive initiatives, projects, and best practices – many standing out as exceptions to the rules. To win credibility a thorough review and assessment is needed, with special attention to identifying and understanding the constraints and obstacles impede and block progress. Considering the reality of the so-called 'implementation gap' and the situation in which the social and environmental trends are getting worse, we need to know why.

The actual WSSD review skirted many of these key questions, particularly where the results would involve criticism of a government or industry. The CSD report for the Summit, *Changing Consumption Patterns* discusses only the first three elements of the International Work Programme on Sustainable Production and Consumption – trends, impacts on developing countries, and policy

effectiveness (UNCSD, 2001). However, the report avoids critical discussion of country commitments on production and consumption.

The Summit was not supposed to renegotiate Agenda 21 but focus on *implementation*, yet in many cases the interpretation of what is to be implemented leaves out serious parts of the original Agenda 21 programme. One of the most discussed examples concerns finance for sustainable development. Agenda 21 clearly states that 'the developmental and environmental objectives of Agenda 21 will require a substantial flow of new and additional resources to developing countries' (United Nations, 1992: para 1.4). The reality fell far short. In turn, in the conclusion of the five-year review, governments agreed to 'reconfirm the financial commitments and targets for official development assistance (ODA) made by industrialized countries at the Earth Summit, and call for intensified efforts to reverse the downward trend in ODA' (UNGA, 1997). By 2002 this recommitment also did not materialize.

Although Agenda 21 points out that 'national strategies, plans, policies and processes are crucial in achieving this [implementation],' little attention is given to the lack of national sustainable development strategies throughout most of the decade, nor the continuing reluctance of some governments to engage in such effort, particularly among the most developed countries (e.g., the United States).

For the Agenda 21 commitments to promote sustainable production and consumption, most nations had little to brag about for the ten-year review. While some countries had made efforts to promote the global discussion about the concepts, policies and practices needed (e.g., Norway, Brazil, Republic of Korea), overall implementation of Chapter 4 recommendations fell far short of what was needed to make a difference.

One measure of serious effort to promote sustainable production and consumption can be found in each country's record to develop a domestic policy framework. The revised UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection, highlighting policies for sustainable consumption, were designed to provide some help to this development. Thus, after their adoption of the revised Guidelines in 1999, how countries followed up in using these Guidelines offers insight into overall national efforts to develop a domestic framework of sustainable production and consumption policies.

#### *3.4.5 Consumer guidelines for sustainable consumption*

In addition to avoiding critical discussion of country commitments in *Changing Consumption Patterns*, the CSD report also leaves out any mention of follow-up to the revised UN Guidelines on Consumer Protection – one of the concrete achievements of the International Work Programme. The report concludes that 'a broader policy framework is required to address the scale pressures of current patterns, while encouraging efficiency improvements and promoting improvements in standards of living, particularly in developing countries' (UNCSD, 2001). For some reason the Guidelines are not considered by the CSD report as contributing to that framework.

For years civil society organizations promoted the revised UN Guidelines as a tool to aid governments in developing their national policy frameworks on production and consumption. In Soesterberg, Netherlands, at the 1999 conference *From Consumer Society to Sustainable Society*,

## PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND THE WSSD

NGOs encouraged support for the Guidelines as both an indicator and tool for national efforts promoting sustainable production and consumption (ANPED, 1999). The Guidelines mentioned several policy mechanisms which NGOs agreed to be key elements for national policies and strategies, such as right to know laws for better consumer information, reform of government subsidies, responsible state procurement policies, among others.

NGOs included monitoring the development and implementation of the Guidelines as part of the SPAC Watch initiative launched in Soesterberg and adopted by the CSD NGO Caucus on Sustainable Production and Consumption to monitor progress by countries in promoting sustainable production and consumption (SPAC Caucus, 2000a). Focusing on the Guidelines was also stressed in the NGO Statement presented January 30, 2002 at the multistakeholder dialogue at the Second Preparatory Meeting for the WSSD (ICSPAC, 2002: 74):

[NGOs] call upon governments to support and actively develop, implement and monitor national policy frameworks and plans of action to achieve sustainable production and consumption in partnership with civil society. The starting point for this should be the implementation of the UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection, with special emphasis on confronting barriers to change.'

Governments did not immediately respond to this call from the NGOs, but the UN Environment Programme and Consumers International took an important follow-up step to the adoption of the revised Guidelines, organizing a global survey from October 2001 to March 2002 of government familiarity and use of the Guidelines (UNEP, 2002d). The survey revealed that over a third of governments were not aware of the Guidelines before the survey, indicating the initial low priority given to concrete follow-up to the adoption of the Guidelines in 1999. On the other hand, the majority of governments contacted showed interest in learning more about the Guidelines. In conclusion, UNEP recommended launching at the WSSD a five-year programme 'aimed at comprehensive and integrated implementation of the guidelines at national, regional and international level[s]' (UNEP, 2002d: 58) The report also recommended various activities for raising awareness of the Guidelines and building capacity among governments.

### **4. Production, Consumption and the WSSD Plan of Implementation**

On 4 September 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development concluded. For many civil society advocates of sustainable production and consumption, the Summit was a big disappointment. The Introduction to the WSSD Plan of Implementation clearly identifies changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption as one of the three 'overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for, sustainable development.' With this in mind, one would expect the final plan for achieving this objective to build from the experience and lessons of the past, from the decade of discussion about the trends, concepts, policies and practices needed to address the problem, analyzed carefully in the ten-year review of progress that was the primary object of the previous year of national, regional, and global preparatory meetings.

#### 4.1 LESSONS FROM THE PAST

In the WSSD Plan of Implementation, Section III speaks to the objective of changing unsustainable production and consumption patterns. Despite the work that had been done on this over the years, the Section does not mention the previous Programme of Work, neither as something to build and expand upon or something requiring a whole new approach. It does not refer to any of the previous discussions about the trends, the impacts on developing countries or to the discussions about policy effectiveness and country commitments. The opening paragraph of Section III restates of Principle 7 on common but differentiated responsibilities, yet without acknowledgement of responsibility for the increasing unsustainable production and consumption patterns taking place over the past ten years. The paragraph also repeats the Agenda 21 admonition about 'the developed countries taking the lead.'

Despite the General Assembly's adoption of the UN Guidelines on sustainable consumption and the efforts made by UNEP, Consumers International, the NGO Caucus on Sustainable Production and Consumption and others to call attention to this important tool and achievement of the earlier Programme of Work, Section III does not even mention, much less encourage, using the Guidelines.

Neglect of the Guidelines calls further attention to the silent treatment given to the Agenda 21 commitment to develop domestic policy frameworks. The opening paragraph of Section III is symptomatic of the weakening of political will plaguing the Summit. Mentioning Principle 7 from the Rio Declaration, the text stresses that 'all countries should *promote* sustainable consumption and production patterns; however, no mention is made in the WSSD Plan of Principle 8, which more powerfully emphasizes 'States should *reduce and eliminate* unsustainable patterns of production and consumption' [emphasis added]. What was described in Rio as 'a matter of grave concern' requiring concrete actions to ensure the 'reorientation of existing production and consumption patterns' devolved in Johannesburg into a more polite and ambiguous 'promotion' of recommendations made a decade ago..

Disregard for the lessons and commitments of the past, mixed with avoidance of opportunities and strategies for measurable progress towards clear objectives permeates Section III. For example, Agenda 21 asked countries to encourage greater efficiency in the use of energy and resources, including the use of new and renewable sources of energy (United Nations, 1992: para 4.18d); the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 called on nations to promote 'international and national programmes for energy and material efficiency with timetables for their implementation,' with 'consideration of a 10-fold improvement in resource productivity in industrialized countries in the long term and a possible factor-four increase in industrialized countries in the next two or three decades' (UNGA, 1997: para 28f). Despite numerous ambiguous references in the Plan of Implementation to promoting renewable energy, the proposal by the EU and other countries to set a target and timetable to increase to ten percent the share of new renewable energy by 2010 did not survive the assaults by the United States and OPEC delegations (Parmentier, 2002).

Several voiced their disappointment with the Plan. 'The final document consists only of repackaged soft targets,' complained the Centre for Science and Environment, 'sometimes even more diluted than

## PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND THE WSSD

previous agreements' (CSE, 2002). Oxfam International described the Summit as 'a triumph for greed and self-interest, a tragedy for poor people and the environment' (Oxfam, 2002); Greenpeace called it 'a disaster in its official conclusions' (Greenpeace, 2002a); for Friends of the Earth the Summit was 'a betrayal' (FOE, 2002b). 'World leaders fail consumers,' Consumers International concluded in its press release (Consumers International, 2002).

### 4.2 TOWARDS A TEN-YEAR PROGRAMME OF WORK

When first announced, the European Union's proposal for a ten-year programme of work on sustainable production and consumption drew much attention and enthusiastic support by sustainability advocates. As initially proposed, this idea represented to many a solid commitment by governments to an institutional vehicle which could deliver the necessary targets, timetables, monitoring and assessment processes missing from the text, providing at least one concrete implementation mechanism.

Unfortunately, in the WSSD's final Plan of Implementation this idea was also watered down and rendered ambiguous (Barber and Danada, 2002). During the last days of the Summit, negotiators unhappy with solid commitment replace the initial phrase *develop* a ten-year work programme on sustainable production and consumption' with *encourage and promote* the development of a ten-year framework of programs in support of regional and national initiatives to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production...' [emphasis added](WSSD, 2002: para 14). Rather than helping develop a collective strategy and plan, the only requirement is for nations to show a positive attitude towards countries willing to act on their own. Although 'all countries should take action, with developed countries taking the lead,' the document fails to identify any mechanisms to coordinate, monitor or evaluate such actions or leadership.

As to implementing Agenda 21's call to give high priority to reviewing progress in achieving sustainable consumption patterns, the WSSD text loosely calls on governments to 'identify specific activities, tools, policies, measures and monitoring and assessment mechanisms...bearing in mind that standards applied by some countries may be inappropriate and of unwarranted economic and social cost to other countries...' (para 14a). It does not mention work already done developing indicators for measuring changes in production and consumption patterns (United Nations, 1998), of how such work could or should be continued to support the next ten years of efforts.

The text does cite certain actions as part of encouraging and promoting the ten-year 'framework' including: policymaking applying the polluter-pays principle (Principle 16 of the Rio Declaration); improving products and services by reducing their environmental and health impacts (e.g., using life-cycle analysis); developing awareness-raising programmes, particularly among youth and 'relevant segments'; developing consumer information tools; and increasing eco-efficiency.

Ironically, Agenda 21 recommended these and other actions ten years ago as elements for national policies and strategies. However, in contrast to Agenda 21's recommendation to assess progress achieved in developing these national policies and strategies, and in contrast to the aim of developing a plan to further implement Agenda 21, the WSSD delegates simply restated some of these initial recommended activities, weighed down by qualifiers and conditions.

JEFFREY BARBER

Another example of this erosion process is the Plan's treatment of consumer information tools. Agenda 21 stressed the need to 'encourage the emergence of an informed consumer public' by 'providing information on the consequences of consumption choices and behaviour so as to encourage demand for environmentally sound products and use of products' (4.22). The WSSD text, however, puts more emphasis on qualifying and limiting such efforts, insisting on such tools being adopted *on a voluntary basis*. There is no place here for mandatory mechanisms such as the community's right to know or legal protections against false and misleading advertising or any reference to Principle 10 access to information. Initially the paragraph on consumer information included a reference to *ecolabeling*, encouraged in Rio but in Johannesburg simply inspiring the added qualifier to 'not be used as disguised trade barriers.' By the Summit's end, ecolabeling disappeared, although the qualifier remains.

In spite of the ambiguity of paragraph 14, governments, international organizations, civil society organizations and others originally enthusiastic about the ten-year work programme will undoubtedly and voluntarily play a leading role in developing the ten-year 'framework.' The Summit did not specify an institutional vehicle for this framework, leaving the interpretation and implementation of this open.

Most likely, members of the European Union, UNEP, the NGO-oriented International Coalition for Sustainable Production and Consumption (ICSPAC), and others will through their own efforts lay the operational foundation stones that will shape and animate the proposed framework. Following the Summit, the European Union identified the ten-year framework for programmes on sustainable production and consumption as one of their five key targets (European Union, 2002). UNEP has also made the ten-year framework a priority, circulating at the Summit its own proposal of ideas for the work programme (UNEP, 2002e). This proposal will be discussed at the upcoming UNEP Governing Council meeting in 2003.

NGOs involved with the International Coalition for Sustainable Production and Consumption offered their ideas in the SPAC Watch report, *Waiting for Delivery* (ICSPAC, 2002). The SPAC Watch programme, one important contribution to the ten-year framework, was designed to foster collaboration and communications among civil society organizations around the world in monitoring and advocating progress towards sustainable production and consumption (Barber, 2002a).

#### 4.3 CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Since Rio, two new concepts have entered the official UN lexicon and discussion about sustainable development: globalization and corporate accountability. In the WSSD Plan for Implementation, *corporate accountability* appears in a number of places, notably in Section III on production and consumption (paragraph 17) and in Section V on sustainable development in a globalizing world (paragraph 45).

The concept of corporate *responsibility* appears throughout Agenda 21, mostly used to promote arguments for self-regulation and voluntary approaches by industry, in contrast to 'command and control' efforts to improve regulations and compliance. However, during the Rio+5 process, arguments highlighting the inadequacy of corporate responsibility arose, stressing the need to pair this concept

## PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND THE WSSD

with corporate accountability – referring to the legal obligation of a company to do the right thing (although there are efforts to reduce the meaning to corporate reporting). 'Just as individuals in society require both morals and laws to guide their behaviour,' argued the NGO Taskforce on Business and Industry during Rio+5, 'responsibility and accountability are both necessary to guide corporate conduct' (Barber, 1997). While corporate responsibility is behaviour that is encouraged, corporate accountability is behaviour that is required. In the 1997, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 introduced the concept of corporate accountability paired with responsibility (para 133e(i)).

In the WSSD Plan of Implementation, promotion of corporate responsibility and accountability appears in several places, although not without controversy and debate. In Section V, the heated debate on operationalizing this 'through the full development and effective implementation of inter-governmental agreements and measures...' continued up to the last day of the conference (Third World Network, 2002). For many NGOs, this paragraph was 'one of the most significant outcomes of the Johannesburg Earth Summit' (FOE, 2002c)

In the section on production and consumption, the text on corporate responsibility and accountability remained lopsided. While calling on governments to 'enhance corporate environmental and social responsibility and accountability,' the four actions identified are voluntary approaches (encouraging voluntary initiatives by industry; encouraging dialogue between enterprises and communities; encouraging financial institutions to incorporate sustainable development considerations; and developing workplace-based partnerships and programmes.) While corporate accountability mechanisms could play a major role in encouraging and ensuring sustainable production and consumption, none are mentioned. Even the reference to corporate reporting cites only a voluntary initiative, neglecting the accountability mechanisms called for in Principle 10 (i.e., access to information, redress and remedy) or Principle 13 ('States shall develop national law regarding liability and compensation for the victims of pollution') in the Rio Declaration. Again, the WSSD missed a possible step forward.

*Extended Producer Responsibility* (EPR) or product take-back, which encourages manufacturer investment in ecoefficiency, is a key policy that should have received attention in this section (Dutta, 2002). Although EPR has been highlighted throughout the various discussions and research of the International Work Programme, not to mention ongoing work by OECD, UNEP and others, the WSSD neglected even mentioning it. In many ways EPR is one of the important policy mechanisms linking corporate responsibility and accountability. The 1991 German Packaging Ordinance is an early practical example of this policy, emphasizing the producer's responsibility for the impacts of the product once it reaches the disposal phase of its lifecycle, creating incentives to the producer to engage in more efficient design and recycling methods to reduce the product's environmental impacts (OECD, 1998).

### 4.4 CLEANER PRODUCTION AND ECO-EFFICIENCY

The UN Environment Programme has been successfully operating its Cleaner Production Programme since 1989, in partnership with a growing network of organizations worldwide. The community of cleaner production centres is generally well-regarded as helping countries and enterprises in building

JEFFREY BARBER

capacity in cleaner production methods, to increase ecoefficiency and reduce waste and pollution. Paragraph 15 in the Plan of Implementation encourages governments to support, invest in and provide incentives for investment in cleaner production programmes and centres. UNEP's plans and proposals for further development of its cleaner production work also play a key role in their proposed contribution to the ten-year framework.

#### 4.5 OTHER PROPOSED ACTIONS

Having apparently abandoned the Agenda 21 priority of developing national policy frameworks, other parts of Section III encourage governments to 'integrate the issue of production and consumption patterns into sustainable development policies, programmes and strategies' (paragraph 16) and 'take sustainable development considerations into account in decision-making' (paragraph 18). Yet many governments apparently still have difficulty understanding the nature and significance of that 'issue.' What could have evolved as a useful integrative approach to address overriding cross-cutting issues fell victim to what WSSD Secretary-General Nitin Desai described as 'a fragmented approach towards sustainable development' (UNCSD, 2002: para 4).

Other actions mentioned in Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 received little more than token mention: internalization of environmental costs and the use of economic instruments, public procurement policies, capacity-building and training, and environmental impact assessment.

##### *4.5.1 Internalization of environmental costs*

The Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 described the objective of internalizing environmental costs of 'vital importance' (para 28a). To do this, it pointed out, required two actions – both missing from Section III: (a) 'shifting the burden of taxation onto unsustainable patterns of production and consumption,' and (b) 'a socially responsible process of reduction and elimination of subsidies to environmentally harmful activities' (UNGA, 1997). The WSSD Plan for this objective mentions no more than a vague reference to 'economic instruments' – again without targets, timetables or monitoring.

Earlier CSD reports already indicated 'little progress' and difficulties implementing economic instruments to internalize environmental costs; that 'governments shy away from additional eco-taxes and environmental regulations' (UNCSD, 1997b: para 37). However, the calls at that time for more analysis and attention to policy effectiveness were essentially disregarded at the WSSD, along with the point that 'cost internalization and eco-efficiency approaches are most effectively and efficiently implemented in combination with *specific time-bound targets and objectives*' [emphasis added](UNCSD, 1997b: para 10).

#### *4.5.2 Subsidy reform*

Government subsidies which ultimately encourage unsustainable production and consumption patterns represent a difficult political obstacle undermining and often blocking progress. It thus made sense for the 1997 General Assembly to recommend reducing and eliminating destructive subsidies as part of the production and consumption work agenda. Initially, subsidy reduction was included in Section III in the draft Plan of Implementation at the end of the Bali preparatory meeting, but removed in Johannesburg.

Reference to subsidy reduction does appear in other parts of the Plan, such as paragraph 19p and 19q (energy), 29f (illegal fishing), and 90b (trade). However, removing subsidy reform from Section III also discourages attention to the fact that government subsidies have been one of the driving forces encouraging unsustainable production and consumption. Section III thus abandoned the priority of developing an integrative approach and time-bound strategy to address this cross-sectoral problem of socially and environmentally destructive subsidies (e.g., to develop mechanisms providing greater public information and education needed to support reform efforts). The WSSD Plan appears more concerned with trade barriers than eliminating destructive consumption and production patterns. Note also that the proposal to include specific targets and timetables for phasing out fossil fuel subsidies was considered and supported, but ultimately deleted from the Plan.

Removing subsidy reform from the sustainable production and consumption work agenda reinforces the fragmented approach to sustainable development; it also takes attention away from the role of governments in encouraging unsustainable production and consumption (SPAC Caucus, 2000; Benekom, 2002). Once again, this action suspiciously looks like avoidance of responsibility, further reducing the vision and strategies required for effective policymaking on production and consumption.

The CSD acknowledged the strong political opposition to subsidy reduction, that 'the major beneficiaries of such subsidies are generally privileged and politically influential groups, which makes subsidy removal politically difficult' (UNCSD, 1999: para 40). The CSD then called for further work 'identifying effective measures' for removing subsidies. This further work could and should have been part of the WSSD Plan for addressing unsustainable production and consumption patterns.

Speaking directly to problem of political opposition to subsidy reform, ICSPAC pointed out in its contribution to the WSSD that 'civil society groups, committed to the public interest, can bring a greater level of transparency and directness to the search for solutions, especially when that search is blocked by powerful special interests' (Barber, 2002b: 10) NGOs can help mobilize public support for subsidy reform in situations where government's hands are tied.

#### *4.5.3 Public procurement policies*

Section III calls on governments to 'promote public procurement policies that encourage development and diffusion of environmentally sound goods and services' (WSSD, 2002: para 18c). Although OECD, UNEP, NGOs and a range of governments have experimented with green procurement policies and analyzed the lessons, as well as organized networks to collaborate and share their experience, the WSSD text does little more than echo the recommendation made a decade ago at Rio. There was no

JEFFREY BARBER

attempt to identify reasonable targets and timetables nor any effort to relay a sense of what progress has or has not been achieved since Rio and what could be done by WSSD participants to improve effectiveness.

## 5. Conclusions

In his Foreword to Agenda 21, Maurice Strong, then Secretary-General for the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, described the situation at that time whereby 'industrial countries continue to be addicted to the patterns of production and consumption which have so largely produced the major risks to the global environment.' (UN, 1992:1). Unfortunately, Strong's description of the addiction to unsustainable production and consumption remains valid for the world of 2002.

Ten years after the Earth Summit, the Secretary General for the World Summit on Sustainable Development cited the increase of unsustainable production and consumption patterns as one of the primary factors undermining progress towards sustainable development since the Earth Summit. At the same time, world leaders at the WSSD agreed that eliminating unsustainable production and consumption is one of the three main objectives of sustainable development.

One would thus expect to see states give much higher priority to designing a global strategy and plan, with reasonable targets, timetables and monitoring processes, to support national implementation of the Chapter 4 objectives. Unfortunately, many of the factors undermining major advances in such policies and strategies during the past decade prevented such outcomes at the Summit.

Despite an acknowledged worsening of social and environmental trends, due to the relentless global increase of production and consumption, all the discussions, conferences, research and policymaking over the past ten years were inadequate in changing those trends. Underlying the implementation gap was not so much a lack of political will but deliberate, stubborn resistance to the 'reorientation' that is necessary. As Consumers International put it, 'The world leaders are in a state of unsustainable procrastination' (Consumers International, 2002). On the one hand, the current President Bush continued to maintain his father's famous refusal in Rio to negotiate the American way of life – despite Colin Powell's insistence that the United States is committed to sustainable development. On the other hand, the OPEC nations continue to band together within the G77 to ensure their source of finance for development remains unthreatened. Likewise, the advertising industry spends hundreds of billions of dollars promoting around the world a consumer culture based on the American way of waste and wants. Part of the industry's investment flows to trade associations and political lobbyists committed to blocking or minimizing any regulations or constraints governments may be thinking about imposing. At the Summit, however, the advertising industry was welcomed as a partner in helping promote sustainable consumption values; criticism and talk of regulation verged on official taboo. Another taboo was military production and consumption, especially comparisons between the huge amounts spent for defense and the relatively little for sustainability and human security. Like other forms of addiction, the addiction to unsustainable consumption and production patterns is sustained through a large array of defense mechanisms – denial, rationalization, avoidance, deception, token efforts.

## PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND THE WSSD

'Rather than dwelling on the problems, what we must ask ourselves is *why* they persist,' WSSD Secretary-General Nitin Desai urged in his address to the Summit when it opened in Johannesburg. The purpose of the World Summit, he explained, was 'to tackle what has stood in the way of us making progress, and what can we do in order to get action, to get results' (Desai, 2002). With the Summit now over, that purpose and the question of *why* become more important than ever.

Before the Summit, ICSPAC produced a list of obstacles blocking progress towards sustainable production and consumption (ICSPAC, 2002: 10):

- Resistance by governments in developing national policy frameworks;
- Continued promotion of consumerism by the mass media and advertising;
- Erosion of accountability by corporations;
- Political influence of industries whose profits depend on unsustainable consumption;
- Political reluctance of government and intergovernmental organizations to criticize and more directly address cases where industry plays a negative role and influence in the problem;
- Lack of understanding of forces driving unsustainable production and consumption;
- Limited and unequal resources available to civil society for public education and political advocacy, compared with larger marketing and public relations budgets for industry promoting consumerism;
- Lack of public awareness of sustainable development as an alternative;
- Where there is awareness, the belief that sustainable consumption means a reduction in living standards and quality of life – rather than improvement.

A year before the Summit the General Assembly passed a resolution asking the CSD to 'identify major constraints hindering the implementation of Agenda 21, propose specific time-bound measures to be taken and institutional and financial requirements, and identify the sources of such support' (UNGA, 2001: para 15c). Nevertheless, world leaders at the WSSD produced few time-bound measures, made no major new commitments to increasing ODA, and paid minimal critical attention towards the constraints and obstacles to eliminating unsustainable production and consumption patterns.

Perhaps part of the problem is the consensus-based system of the United Nations itself, requiring agreement among the full body of member governments, despite all their differences. Often such a process, after all the deal-making and compromises, results in the lowest-common denominator, a repackaging of past promises not kept, with some of the most important new ideas and commitments watered-down, traded away or rendered ambiguous.

For those still committed to developing 'a plan of implementation focused on targets, timetables, goals and activities which can lead to concrete results,' as Secretary-General Desai stressed, this may have to wait for a more informal alliance of sustainability advocates coming together to develop the ten-year framework of programmes on sustainable production and consumption. However, to achieve progress will require a willingness to move beyond the taboos and the fog of rhetoric, to discuss and understand the various obstacles and find strategies to overcome them. Above all, sustainability calls for persistence.

JEFFREY BARBER

## PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND THE WSSD

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JEFFREY BARBER

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