

The Overarching Goal of Sustainable Production and Consumption

Institutionalizing the SCP goal

It is crucial for the UN and member governments to *re-affirm the commitment they have voiced over the years to the goal of sustainable production and consumption as one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. It is not enough to assume this aim will somehow be addressed through good intentions to “decouple” the negative impacts of growth, staying within “planetary boundaries.” Sustainable production and consumption targets and strategies indeed need to be formulated within individual SDGs; however, *a specific “SCP” goal and implementation mechanism is needed to support and monitor these efforts*. This mechanism is also needed to help clarify the overall direction and contributions of the 10 Year Framework of Programs now being developed.

Rather than forcing a choice between “a single, post-2015 goal devoted entirely to SCP” vs. “pushing for agreements on strong SCP targets and indicators under likely SD goals,” the case presented here involves *establishing SCP as an overarching, integrative goal which does not “stand alone” but specifically supports each of the other SDGs, highlighting and addressing the production and consumption drivers at the root of each SDG issue*.

Overarching and essential

Over the past four decades scientists and world leaders have identified the underlying drivers of environmental degradation, poverty and most of the global problems discussed in the Sustainable Development Goals discussion. Consequently, as highlighted in 1992 by Rio Principle 8:

To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.

In 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation identified “changing patterns of production and consumption” as one of the three “overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for, sustainable development.” To exclude SCP from the UN’s post-2015 set of SDGs would be a notable step backwards.

Addressing the drivers and interdependence

One of the benefits of institutionalizing the SCP goal is its *integrative function highlighting the interdependence among all the goals*, strengthening overall coherence in the policies and practices employed in effective national and regional programs and strategies.

The goal of sustainable production and consumption is “overarching” in *highlighting the specific production and consumption drivers* underlying the issues of environmental degradation, poverty, climate change and countries’ efforts to move towards sustainable agriculture, energy, water, transportation, buildings and cities in the overall transition to sustainable societies.

The goal of sustainable production and consumption does not compete with other goals but *helps establish an overall mutually supportive process*.

Implementation mechanism

In addition to identifying sustainable production and consumption as an “overarching objective,” the WSSD also called for development of an implementation mechanism, specifically the “10 Year Framework of Programs” (10YFP) in support of national and regional SCP initiatives, mandated by the UN General Assembly in December 2012. *Establishing the goal of sustainable production and consumption as part of the post-2015 agenda and SDG framework can in turn support and strengthen the 10YFP by integrating it as an essential part of the post-2015 development agenda.* To isolate the 10YFP outside the SDG process would be a loss to both.

The 10YFP could, in its turn, develop a program specifically designed to support SCP goal implementation, bringing together research (e.g., the Global Research Forum on Sustainable Production and Consumption, SCORAI, IGES, OneEarth, BioRegional, CSCP, Switch Asia and others) and policy experts to help strengthen efforts to address the production/consumption dimensions in each of the SDGs. UNEP and other 10YFP partners could facilitate research and dialogues on the role of SCP within each of the SDG domains. Rather than “drop SCP between the cracks of policy debate,” a 10 Year Framework program to support the SDG process could help (1) raise awareness of SCP, (2) identify and mobilize tools, strategies and resources relevant and useful to achieving SDG targets, and (3) integrate the 10YFP into the broader UN post-2015 agenda.

Measurement and monitoring

While many recognize the fact that production and consumption patterns often underlie and drive many of these issues, there remains the question of how best to define, achieve and measure progress towards this “overarching” goal within the framework of the SDGs.

Three additional functions of a 10YF program on the SDGs could be (1) monitoring various efforts to promote SCP within these different sectors (e.g., agriculture, energy, water, housing) and impact areas (biodiversity, climate, poverty); (2) highlighting and promoting efforts to establish appropriate measures and indicators to assess progress towards sustainability and human well-being; and (3) monitoring overall global and regional progress towards SCP, drawing upon and further developing operational indicators such as the oft-cited matrix linking the ecological footprint of countries with the Human Development Index (Figure 1).

Integrative support

In conclusion, rather than competing with the other SDGs as a separate issue and priority, the SCP Goal provides an integrative support function, emphasizing the interdependence of problems and solutions, achieving its aims, not by competing with other SDGs as a stand-alone goal, but contributing to and strengthening the capacity and efforts of other sustainability initiatives.

[Figure Ecological footprint and HDI](#)