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"Sustainable Consumption Asia" project launched in Bangkok



A new United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) project has been launched to help make growing middle class consumerism in Asia more in tune with the environment. The US\$500,000 SC.Asia project aims to identify existing 'best practices' for promoting

sustainable consumption in Europe and Asia, and then build knowledge and capacity in government agencies for their implementation.

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"Richer, fatter, and not much happier" says Worldwatch Institute report on consumption



Consumer appetite erodes quality of life for rich and poor, concludes State of the World 2004, the annual report of the Washington based Worldwatch Institute.

The world is consuming goods and services at an unsustainable pace, with serious consequences for the well-being of people and the planet. Around 1.7 billion people worldwide - more than a quarter of humanity - have now

entered the "consumer class" adopting the diets, transportation systems, and lifestyles that were limited to the rich nations of Europe, North America, and Japan during most of the last century. In China alone, 240 million people have joined the ranks of consumers - "a number that will soon surpass that in the United States."

▶ *Continued on page 2*

(...) "Sustainable Consumption Asia" project launched in Bangkok

▶ UNEP, Consumers International, the Danish Consumers Council and the Centre for Environment and Development (Sri Lanka) will review approaches in Denmark, France, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The manual based on these findings will be published in English, Mandarin, Bahasa, Khmer, Thai, and Vietnamese and used to guide drafting national action plans for sustainable consumption in the 12 Asian countries.

The project is scheduled for completion by October 2005 and will help Governments meet their requirements related to sustainable consumption under the UN Guidelines on Consumer Protection.

With recent figures showing Thailand's stock market more than doubling its value in the past year and China officially projecting its economy to quadruple by 2020, UNEP says there are now more 'middle to high income' consumers - those earning more than US\$7,000 per annum - in Asia and the Pacific than in Western Europe and North America combined.

And if roads of the region's mega cities aren't crowded enough, UNEP points out 200 million new vehicles could be on the planet's roads - twice the number as those in the USA today - if India, Indonesia and China reach the average global car ownership figures.

The European Union funded project, called Sustainable Consumption Asia or 'SC.Asia', aims to transfer knowledge and experience of consumption issues from European to Asian countries.

According to the project manager, UNEP Bangkok-based Industry Officer Niclas Svenningsen, Asia would face an ecological disaster if consumption levels reached those currently seen in Europe or North America.

"As in many western countries, Asian shopping malls and brand boutiques are being driven by a mentality of 'shop 'til you drop, spend 'til you bend, and buy 'til you die.' Consuming is being touted as happiness and little attention is being paid to the life behind the product."

The negative effects of affluent consumption such as destruction of natural resources, waste generation, traffic congestion, power supply shortages are starting to prompt some Asian Governments to look

at sustainable consumption, says Mr Svenningsen, but most are focussed solely on economic growth and increasing private and public consumption without addressing its consequences.

Mr Svenningsen said governments face complex policy issues due to the wide disparities of wealth between and within countries of the region. For much of Asia a sustainable model would mean an increase in consumption to address poverty and ensure basic needs are met, but more affluent sectors would need to modify patterns and levels of consumption.

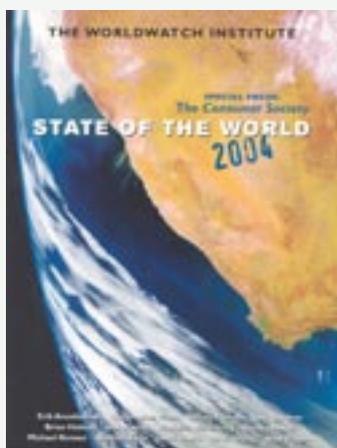
There are opportunities for countries to "leap-frog" some of the phases and mistakes of western countries by adopting practices such as recycling programmes, product testing, product labelling and information, public awareness campaigns based on social research, 'leading by example' and accountability by government and the private sector, and 'environmentally-friendly' laws and economic incentives, Mr Svenningsen said.

For more information please contact: Tim Higham, Regional Information Officer, UNEP, Bangkok, email higham@un.org, or Bas de Leeuw (UNEP Paris), at sc@unep.fr

(...) "Richer, fatter, and not much happier" says Worldwatch Institute report on consumption

▶ *"Rising consumption has helped meet basic needs and create jobs," says Worldwatch Institute President Christopher Flavin. "But as we enter a new century, this unprecedented consumer appetite is undermining the natural systems we all depend on, and making it even harder for the world's poor to meet their basic needs."*

The rising consumption in the US, other rich nations, and many developing ones is more than the planet can bear. At the same time growing dissatisfaction with current consumption trends has led consumer advocates, economists, policymakers, and



environmentalists to develop creative options for meeting people's needs while dampening the environmental and social costs of mass consumption.

The report points to a range of opportunities that are already available to governments, business, and consumers to curb and redirect consumption, including ecological tax reform, take-back laws, durability and personal responsibility.

"Higher levels of obesity and personal debt, chronic time shortages, and a degraded environment are all signs that excessive consumption is diminishing the quality of life for

many people. The challenge now is to mobilize governments, businesses, and citizens to shift their focus away from the unrestrained accumulation of goods and toward finding ways to ensure a better life for all."

The report contains a wealth of data, trends, practical case-studies, including boxes on some of UNEP's Sustainable Consumption activities (Life Cycle Initiative, Youth, Advertising, UN Guidelines on Consumer Protection).

State of the World 2004 can be purchased through the website or by e-mailing to wwpub@worldwatch.org

Worldwatch Institute is an independent research organization based in Washington, D.C., USA.

Link(s)
• [Worldwatch Institute](http://www.worldwatch.org)

Workshop on Life-cycle approaches to sustainable consumption to be held in Prague

A workshop on life-cycle approaches to Sustainable Consumption will be organised as part of the annual SETAC Europe conference, in Prague, Czech Republic, 21 April, 2004. The workshop will evaluate the feasibility and scope of LCA-based approaches to sustainable consumption. Recommendations for future research, development and implementation activities are expected.

The 2002 World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg called for a comprehensive set of programs focusing on sustainable consumption and production. According to world leaders, these programs should rely on life cycle assessment to promote sustainable patterns of production and consumption. While cleaner production is a well-established activity, policy makers do not yet know how to achieve sustainable consumption and how life cycle assessment might help them in this endeavour.

In this workshop researchers will present proposals for how to achieve sustainable consumption. These proposals will be discussed, and participants are asked for their feedback and critical evaluation. The proposals and the discussion will be input to the European Commission.

The workshop organisers are:
Professor Edgar Hertwich, Industrial Ecology Program, Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Professor Zbigniew Klos, Faculty of Machines and Transportation, Poznan University of Technology, Poznan, Poland

Abstracts can be sent to: edgar.hertwich@ntnu.no. Deadline is: 15 March 2004

Registration for participating: line.sommerfeldt@ntnu.no

Register for the SETAC-Europe meeting through www.setac.org

Link(s)

- [SETAC](#)

Welsh organisations call on Assembly to tackle consumption

"The feedback we get from consumers is that they are generally happy to do their bit, but in pressured daily lives other concerns often take precedence. There is a lot that the Assembly can do to make it easier for people, and when it publishes its new Sustainable Development Scheme in the Spring we are looking forward to seeing what new actions will be taken," says Vivienne Sugar, Chair of the Welsh Consumer Council.

The Welsh Assembly Government should take urgent action to make it easier for people to consume at sustainable levels.

In a paper published recently, a partnership of Welsh organisations has called on the Assembly to take action so that the amount of goods and materials we use in our daily lives causes less damage to the environment and to the livelihoods of people in less well-off nations.

At the moment, if everybody in the world lived like consumers in Wales we would need nearly three planets to sustain ourselves. But research shows that, although many people in Wales are keen

to live in a more sustainable way, there are numerous barriers preventing people from making different choices.

Eco-friendly and Fairtrade products are beyond the budget of many Welsh households. And among some there is a lack of understanding about the causes of climate change and other types of environmental damage.

The paper calls for the Assembly to take a number of practical measures, including among others:

- Providing every household in Wales with a kerbside collection scheme for recyclable waste;

- Offsetting the amount of climate-changing carbon dioxide produced in Wales each year, by planting trees in Wales or elsewhere in the world;
- Working with supermarkets and major retailers in Wales to encourage them to make it easier for consumers to buy green;

For further information please contact: Jennie Bibbings, jennie@wales-consumer.org.uk

Link(s)

- [Welsh Assembly Government](#)
- [Ecological Footprint](#)

Monique Barbut named Head of UNEP Division Technology, Industry and Economics

UNEP announced that it has appointed Monique Barbut (French) as director of UNEP's Division for Technology, Industry and Economics (DTIE). UNEP Executive Director Klaus Toepfer said Barbut's role in the agency will be a vital one, with the Division for Technology, Industry and Economics seen as key to global development of a framework for sustainable consumption and production.



The DTIE division also helps link public and private partnerships for development projects.

Barbut succeeds Mrs. Jacqueline Aloisi

de Larderel who retired last April. She has been officer-in-charge of the Division since September and previously worked as executive director of Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Ocean activities for the French

Development Agency, France's principal aid agency.

Link(s)

- [Press Release](#)

West Asia youth council to be initiated

One of the outcomes of an environmental global youth gathering, held in Dubai end of January, was a decision to initiate the establishment of a West Asia Youth Council.



The six day environmental global youth gathering, held from 16-21 January 2004, gathered over 80 young participants from all over the world who participated in a series of workshops and roundtables, allowing them to network and to build their capacity as youth leaders.

A founding committee was elected to prepare the guidelines for the West Asia Youth Council and to formulate a proposal accordingly.

The founding committee members are:

- Taha Al Hamri from UAE
- Khawla Al Muhannadi from Bahrain
- Tala Abu Rahmeh from Palestine
- Ahmed Hamwi from Lebanon
- Tala Al Momani from Jordan.

UNEP's TUNZA Youth Advisor from West Asia, Lara El Saad, might be involved as well.

The event was organised by Emirates Diving Association (EDA), under the

patronage of H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum; Crown Prince of Dubai, UAE Minister of Defence, with the sponsorship of the Naturalization & Residency Administration & Dubai Immigration, and in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme- Regional Office of West Asia (UNEP-ROWA).

For more information, contact Ibrahim N. Al-Zubi at edadiver@emirates.net.ae or Isabella Marras at sc@unep.fr

Upcoming Events

Research Workshop on "Indicators for Sustainable Consumption"

17 March 2004, Cambridge, U.K.

The workshop aims to analyse the problems in the current use of sustainability statistics and discuss new methodologies for the elaboration of sustainable consumption indicators.

For further info, contact Flavio Comim at fvc1001@cam.ac.uk

Communicating Responsibility and Building Trust

IPR/Judge Institute of Management CSR Conference

The IPR and the University of Cambridge's Judge Institute of Management will hold a half-day conference on Corporate Social Responsibility and sustainable development on 30 March 2004.

Email: GeraldC@jpr.org.uk

Sustainable Product Design Forum

Amsterdam, 30 & 31 March 2004

To benchmark with leading global companies through key note presentations, panel sessions and hear case studies from leading corporations.

Email: productdesign@gbgeurope.com

CSR Award

The US\$ 1 million Alcan Prize for Sustainability, organised with the International Business Leaders Forum,

is open to all not-for-profit and non-governmental organisations that have made and continue to make significant contributions that integrate economic, environmental and social sustainability for the benefit of present and future generations.

Closing date: 31 March 2004

European Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption and Production (ERSCP)

Bilbao, Spain, May 2004

Deadline for reduced registration fee is 15 March 2004.

Email: ana.salas@ihobe.net

UNEP is organising a workshop "Meeting consumer demand for sustainable products", 14 May

This explorative workshop will aim to provide some market research to show that there is an increased interest from consumers towards sustainable products and new lifestyles. For further information on the workshop, please contact Solange Montillaud-Joyel, email: solange.montillaud@unep.fr

Engineering Education in Sustainable Development, International Conference

Barcelona, Spain, 27-29 October 2004

The conference is planned as a 3-days activity with a selected number of interdisciplinary research projects on Sustainable Development

Email: eesd2004@cimne.upc.es

Is your diet sustainable?

The Environmental Council of Lower Austria has developed a test consisting of 7 questions regarding our nutrition. The "Oeko-check" (available in German language only) is also an itinerant exhibition in the form of big boards which can be set up anywhere.

Questions of the "do-it-yourself" checklist are:

1. Do you eat meat?
2. How much bio do you eat?
3. Do you eat local products?
4. Do you eat what's in season?
5. Do you eat fresh food or frozen?
6. What do you order in restaurants?
7. Do you cook energy-efficiently?



For more information (German language): oesterreich@umweltberatung.at

Link(s)

- Umweltberatung

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