Mainstreaming sustainable consumption and production policies and circular models: Best practices and recommendations

Online consultation with the United States, 29 October 2020
UNEA-4 Resolution 1 Innovative pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production

1. Agenda

The agenda of the online consultation with the United States was structured as follows. First, UNEP provided an introduction of the mandate of the UNEA-4 Resolution on sustainable consumption and production, followed by a presentation of the objectives of the consultation and the key questions to be answered.

Examples of product policies and good examples of design practices of products and services in the North American and pan-European regions were then given by CEPS (Centre for European Policy Studies) as part of an overview of the research done so far. Two case studies, one from the textile and one from the electronics sector were presented in more detail.

The final part of the online consultation was participatory discussion. The following questions were put forward to all participants:

I. Product policies
How have product policies in your country been instrumental in preserving the environment?
What are the enabling conditions for higher impact of product policies?
How to create further coherence among product policies?

II. Innovative design practices
How is your country performing in identifying and taking up innovative design practices of products/services, which minimize harmful environmental impacts?
What are the requirements to implement, replicate and scale up such design practices?

III. Role of the international community
What role should UNEP, the UN system and the wider international community play in addressing gaps and challenges highlighted during the above discussions?

2. Participants

Representatives from the US Environmental protection Agency (EPA) as well as the US State Department's Office of Environmental Quality and Transboundary Issues (EQT).

The list of participants is found in Annex 1.

3.   Proceedings

The online consultation was held using the Microsoft Teams platform.

3.1 Welcome

Welcome remarks were given by Jason Jabbour, Regional Coordinator and Senior Science Advisor, UNEP Regional Office for North America, followed by a presentation of the objectives and methodology of the consultation by Claire Thiebault, Associate Programme Officer, UNEP Economy Division.

3.2 Inventory of product policies

Vasileios Rizos, Head of Sustainable Resources and Circular Economy at CEPS presented examples of <u>coherent product policies</u> identified so far, the summary of which is shown in the graph below, covering both the North American and pan-European regions.

Country	Policy framework	Product policies
Flanders (Belgium)	Circular Flanders	Circular purchasing, financing instruments for circular projects, development of circular toolkit for entrepreneurs, circular city applications
Netherlands	Circular Economy Programme for the Netherlands, 2050 (priority sector plastics)	Use of recycled content in design, reducing production and consumption, and recycling of waste
Netherlands	Circular Economy Programme for the Netherlands, 2050 (priority sector construction)	Circular procurement, strengthening of transparency and information exchange
Finland	More from less – wisely	Eco-labels, pilot-projects on sustainable housing and eating, green public procurement, economic incentives for material efficiency audits
France	Circular Economy Roadmap	Legislation on extended producer responsibility, single use of plastics
Sweden	Strategy for sustainable consumption	Lowering VAT for certain repair, consumer campaigns, phasing out harmful chemical
Scotland	Making Things Last - A Circular Economy Strategy for Scotland	Focus on avoiding waste, design, reuse, repair, remanufacturing, and recycling
Germany	National Programme on Sustainable Consumption (NPNK)	Sustainable public procurement, strengthening of environmental and social labelling, promotion of sustainable ICT products, ambitious eco-design
Georgia	Waste Management Code	Extended producer responsibility scheme gradually introduces in packaging, tires, vehicles, batteries and accumulators, WEEE, used oils
Albania	National Strategy and National Plan on Waste Management 2010-2025	Objectives to develop markets for recycled materials and provide waste minimization advice to businesses
Canada	Federal Sustainable Development Strategy (2016-2019)	Voluntary and partnership agreements, economic instruments in the form of taxes and levies and eco-labelling programs and toolkits.
Canada	Canada-Wide Action Plan for Extended Producer Responsibility (2009)	Extends industrial producers' responsibility of a product to the post-consumer stage.
Canada	Canada-Wide Strategy for Sustainable Packaging	Builds on the Action Plan for Extended Producer Responsibility and includes voluntary certifications, eco-labelling and reduction agreements.
United States	EPA Sustainable Materials Management Program Strategic Plan (2017-2022)	Voluntary standards, information sharing and guidance and technical assistance. Focus on waste reduction through source reduction, reuse, recycling and prevention.

Regarding the <u>good design practices,</u> Vasileios Rizos presented two examples: the cases of *Teemill* and *Fairphone.*

3.3 Results

The main messages and comments raised by the participants are summarized below.

a) **Coherent product policies**
   How have product policies in your country been instrumental in preserving the environment? What are the enabling conditions for higher impact of product policies? How to create further coherence among product policies?

   • In the United States, policies related to sustainable consumption and production are developed at both Federal and State level, with the regulatory floor being established federally and additional policies varying across States. For example, California will require all new cars to be sold by 2030 to be zero-emission vehicles, which can have **significant impact beyond the State** as it represents the 5th largest economy in the world.

   • There is a long history of **federal purchasing programs, which uses the federal purchasing power to establish a framework that institutional and local purchasers can follow**. Federal procurement in the US represents 2.5 % of the country's GDP and thus has potential to influence the market and other institutional procurers.

   • Over the last 20 years, the Federal Government largely relies on **voluntary standards developed by the private sector in their procurement,** often focusing on one specific hotspot (such as Energy Star). Eco-labels or expanding on the private sector initiatives are also used to meet satisfactory levels of requirements.

   • Ideal product policy-story include **lifecycle-based standards, clear eco labels for purchasers incorporated in procurement systems, robust third-party certification and clear sense of environmental benefit.**

   • The use of the EPEAT label for procuring IT products and solar panels was raised as a good example of a federal policy initiative which **has had a significant impact by creating a market for EPEAT products and which has been taken up by other purchasers**. This voluntary consensus-based standard relies on a multi-stakeholder space. It is continuously updated based on the availability of new data, making the criteria more rigorous.

   • Harmonization of standards and product criteria can be a key enabler. A **higher impact could be achieved through better and more collaboration across governments in developing and harmonising standards**. Engaging with others, like the European Union (EU), contributes to a larger impact **as the combined purchasing power is bigger.**

   • Green Guides have been developed by the Federal Trade Commission to **help companies determine the accuracy of claims made in the marketplace in terms of environmental performance.**

- **Many US initiatives are developed by the private sector, often driven forward by companies themselves and by consumer demand**. For example, the US Green Housing Council has developed a certification system for green buildings.

- After decades of work using life-cycle analysis, there is a realisation that much of greenhouse gas-emissions originate higher up in the supply chain, which is starting to be reflected in the product policies developed.

- It is important to take into consideration the different approaches to sustainable product policies around the world. **The US emphasis on private sector solutions and voluntary standards can foster innovation and be a positive compliment to other policy approaches**.

- **Searching for the perfect approach can become the "enemy of the good"**. It can be necessary to move forward despite uncertainty of what is the most sustainable approach. More research is required to understand potential environmental impacts, based on a lifecycle basis.

- Another challenge is to **build consensus around standards and to ensure all key stakeholders are participating in their development**. **Participating in these processes can be time consuming** and smaller and non-profit actors may not have the resources. To overcome this challenge, efforts are made to facilitate participation and increase awareness on the importance of participation.

- **Competing standards can create confusion among policy makers seeking** to find an appropriate standard. However, this competition can also result in both standards improving.

- There is the challenge **of greenwashing, which harms the process of developing sustainability standards**. This makes the work to assess and recommend standards and labels for Federal purchasers even more important.

b) Innovative design practices
How is your country performing in identifying and taking up innovative design practices of products/services, which minimize harmful environmental impacts?
What are the requirements to implement, replicate and scale up such design practices?

- The Federal Government has an **innovation and research grant program for small businesses,** to help them get their innovation on the market, covering various sustainability topics.

- **Industry actors look to US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for guidance on which environmental objectives to reach for** and how to best demonstrate environmental impact. This is complimented by voluntary programs that recognize innovation that is taking place.

- **Innovation is driven forward through standards**. Federal actors can support this by developing an initial standard for a product group and bringing all key players together, as demonstrated by the development of the EPEAT standard.

- In the United States, **awards are used to identify innovative design practices** within the different industries and sectors. One such example is the [Sustainable Materials Management (SMM) program](), which awards commitment to sustainable materials management and responsible recycling of electronics.

- Other award programs are [Safest Choice Partner of the Year program](), Green Power Partnership Award Program, Energy Star Annual Award Program, [Green Chemistry Award Program]().

- An example of how the Federal Government supports sustainable product innovations is the Sustainable Technology Evaluation and Demonstration Program (STED) within the US Department of Defense that aim to **identify sustainable technologies and prove these in operational environments before they are procured** across the Department and Government-wide.

- The National Science Foundation is convening a workshop under the Convergence Accelerator Program to **join private sector and academia to solve specific societal challenges through cross-cutting partnerships.**

c) **Role of the international community**
What role should UNEP, the UN system and the wider international community play in addressing gaps and challenges highlighted during the above discussions?

- The convening role of the One Planet Network and the sharing of best practices is helpful.

- The work done by UNEP through this Resolution highlight specific actions to follow through with.

- UNEP can play an important role in convening and helping to create linkages between initiatives by connecting key partners to learn from each other to avoid duplication of efforts.

- International organizations can address gaps by working towards a harmonized set of criteria and build acceptance around these as international standards.

Next steps

Claire Thiebault thanked the participants for their contribution to the consultation and indicated that it would still be possible to send contributions and information. To do this, she asked the participants to:

Share details on **national and/or state/city product policies**. Share details and/or relevant reports by email with Vasileios Rizos, CEPS, [vasileios.rizos@ceps.eu]()

Share **good examples of design practices,** and send supporting material/link/contact details to Vasileios Rizos, CEPS, vasileios.rizos@ceps.eu

Submit **written inputs to the key consultation questions**: Claire Thiebault, UNEP Economy Division, Claire.Thiebault@un.org; Jason Jabbour, UNEP North America Office, jason.jabbour@un.org ; Hilary French, UNEP North America Office, Hilary.French@un.org

Annex 1

List of participants

- **Alison Kinn Bennet**, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention

- **Jarrod Bridge**, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Land and Emergency Management

- **Kimberly Cochran,** U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Land and Emergency Management

- **Victoria Collins**, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Land and Emergency Management

- **Holly Elwood**, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention

- **Patrick Huber**, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of International and Tribal Affairs

- **Rachel Matney**, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of International and Tribal Affairs

- **Liz Nichols**, U.S. Department of State

- **Maxwell Torney**, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of International and Tribal Affairs

- **Josephine Andersen**, Intern, CEPS (Centre for European Policy Studies)

- **Julie Bryhn,** Researcher, CEPS (Centre for European Policy Studies)

- **Vasileios Rizos**, Head of Sustainable Resources and Circular Economy, CEPS (Centre for European Policy Studies)

- **Clayton Adams,** UNEP North America Office,

- **Hillary French,** UNEP North America Office

- **Jason Jabbour**, Regional Coordinator and Senior Science Advisor, UNEP Regional Office for North America

- **Claire Thiebault**, Associate Programme Officer, UNEP Economy Division