



The global voice for consumers

# Sustainable Consumption and Economic Growth – a Positive Relationship

*Anna Fielder, Brussels, 15 March 2005*





# Are the Objectives of SC & Economic Growth Compatible?

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- Yes, they **MUST** be
- The two are incorporated into the concept of sustainable development
- Existing frameworks and action plans:
  - Rio summit 1992: agenda 21
  - UN guidelines for consumer protection, section G on sustainable consumption, 1999
  - OECD environment strategy 2002: “decoupling”
  - AND WSSD Johannesburg plan of implementation, chapter III on sustainable consumption and production, 2002



# Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, Chapter III, 2002

“ *Encourage and promote the development of a 10-year framework of programmes in support of regional and national initiatives to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production to promote social and economic development within the carrying capacity of ecosystems by addressing and, where appropriate, de-linking economic growth and environmental degradation through improving efficiency and sustainability in the use of resources and production processes and reducing resource degradation, pollution and waste “*

# So the Question Now Is Not IF but HOW

- Not IF sustainable consumption and economic growth are compatible, but HOW to pursue the two effectively and responsibly
- We know what needs doing, but still missing a stronger and universal political will to do it
- The following examples show that there is much room for improvement

# Example – the Right to Know

The Dutch Consumentenbond conducted research into social responsibility and asked end producers and retailers for information on how their products were made (4 product categories). None could answer except the ethical companies. Consumentenbond is demanding 'right to know' legislation, but the government cannot or does not want to draw up such standards. Consumer organisations are unable to perform comparative social responsibility testing on the basis of the present information, so they cannot inform consumers, so consumers cannot influence the market.

# Example – Pay-as-you-throw

In an area of Barcelona, Spain, a successful pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) programme was implemented. Seven months after introduction, the council reported a 83% increase in the recycling rate and the number of recycling centre users has tripled. A change in the local government saw this program cancelled.

# Example – Tracking Progress

- In partnership with UNEP, Consumers International carried out in 2001 a survey of government awareness and response to the Section on SC of the UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection:
  - 38% of the respondents did not even know such guidelines existed
  - Only 56% promote research on sustainable consumption
  - Only 56% use relevant economic instruments, eg ‘green taxes’
  - Only 54% measure the progress of their nations towards more sustainable consumption patterns

# Promising Cases – Solar-Na-Klar

In Germany research showed consumer willingness to invest in solar thermal systems, but information was lacking. The solar-Na-Klar awareness-raising campaign was launched in 1999 and still ongoing, with strong government support and training for installers. In 2000 there was a market growth of 50% for solar heating. At the end of 2000 the total area of installed solar collectors in Germany was approximately 2.9 million m<sup>2</sup>

# Promising Case – Eco-responsible Administration

As part of its national sustainable development strategy, France's ministry of ecology and sustainable development put in place a comprehensive government procurement strategy 'eco-responsible administration' which includes web-based product information, training for procurement officers and clear targets. For eg recycling 60% of blank paper by 2008 and a target of 20% for clean vehicles bought at the time of renewal of the fleets (including 5% electric vehicles)

# Our actions

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- We have just updated the Tracking Progress report (soon to be published)
- CI and UNEP are working together on a set of training materials and best practices on sustainable consumption:
  - Today (15 March) a training kit '*Hands on SC*' is being piloted in Manila with 12 Asian countries in a regional seminar. This is part of the SC Asia Project and a key output will be the development of Draft National Action Plans for Sustainable Consumption



# Taking Responsibility

- European countries must take the lead in implementing sustainable development agreements, and following the “principle of common but differentiated responsibilities”
- The task of achieving sustainable development should be distributed properly between the provider, consumer and government

# Governments

- Recognise government is a key driver for SC policies and exercise leadership by for eg sustainable procurement policies, enforcing regulations, and using a mixture of economic and social instruments
- Minimise resource utilisation, eg waste generation, use of energy and resources, sound pricing
- Develop smart communication strategies and promote actionable information on impacts of consumer choices and behaviour, recycling, efficient use of materials
- Involve all stakeholders

# Business

- Invest in 'responsible' products and services
- Encourage innovation to make responsible consumption a real choice
- Provide reliable product information at the point of purchase (80% of purchasing decisions are made in store)
- Promote common labelling standards based on Life Cycle Analysis and overseen by an independent third party
- Ensure corporate responsibility by promoting 'right-to-know' legislation

# Consumers

Consumers have a right to a healthy environment, but also a responsibility to preserve and protect the environment by:

- Either 'consume less' (renunciation)
- Or 'consume better' (in a more ethical, ecological or socially responsible way), ie responsible consumption
- Or a combination of both
- But we need information about and access to such products and services. Consumer organisations and magazines have an important role to play