PEOPLES’ SUSTAINABILITY TREATY ON
CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION:
Transforming Livelihoods and Lifestyles
for the Wellbeing of All

1. PREAMBLE

Twenty years ago, in Rio, the UNCED Agenda 21 stated that “the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, which is a matter of grave concern, aggravating poverty and imbalances.” Ten years ago, in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, governments decided to develop a 10 Year Framework of Programmes to support sustainable consumption and production. Now, ten years later, this framework is still under-developed and poorly represented in the Rio+20 document, “The Future We Want.” In various regions of the world national action plans or programs were developed; but none of them made a significant difference towards changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns. No country can demonstrate that it has significantly decoupled economic growth from environmental pressures. Social conditions have improved among some of the poorer countries but deteriorated in many cases. The world is struggling to find a way out of multiple financial crises; among several of the industrialised countries, and in developing countries, dissatisfaction is growing, some of it registered through public unrest and radical political and social movements. All of this in a world where economic growth is been promoted further and levels of consumerism are rapidly rising; and where austerity is imposed this has disastrous consequences both for wellbeing and sustainability. Still, one of the major elements of the currently Western-dominated sustainable consumption and production discourse is to encourage consumers to play their roles as active market actors and to take responsibility to buy green or more sustainable products. This is what a so called green growth would be built of. Such an approach reflects a weak sustainable consumption concept we can no longer accept.

The future WE, the global civil society, want is different! We reject both the notion of a blindly growth-based economy and that of the conventional approach to calls for austerity—usually taken to represent cuts in social spending. We argue, instead, that an economy based on sustainable consumption and production—that is to say, using less stuff and generating less waste—offers an alternative and more desirable way of alleviating the current dilemmas we face. Calls to change the systemic causes of unsustainable consumption and production are long overdue, as these are keeping poverty alive on earth and are triggering adverse planetary biogeochemical processes such as climate change.

The envisioned greening of the economy will only become more than a buzz word when such a Green Economy will be a Sustainable Economic System. Here, the core idea of Sustainable Economies should be to implement sustainability as in wellbeing of all people and to create social and economic systems that ensure social equity, protect the ecological balance and create economic sufficiency; thus enabling the flourishing of sustainable lifestyles and livelihoods on earth based on sustainable consumption and production patterns. In such a systemic transformation, sustainable technologies and policies mainly based on the promotion of a true efficiency (making more from less) are necessary, but cannot be enough. Paradigm changes, including the absolute reduction of natural resource use, achievement of sustainable land use as well as changes in lifestyles and values are just as necessary, which also includes deep economic reforms as well as legally binding tools in...
media and advertising. Much of this envisioned change will be led by social movements; small-scale experiments, and higher order learning at the level of the individual are just as important as system-level innovation and top-down policies. More and more people – whether organized or just as engaged individuals – have started to develop new ways of experiencing and experimenting with sustainable lifestyles based on a strong form of sustainable consumption. The fate of future generations and their wellbeing relies on the mindfulness of current generations, irrespective of alignment with North or South, rich or poor, powerful or weak. We, the people in a world of global human rights and global human responsibilities, will work together towards ensuring a good life for all. We raise our voice and call for all levels of governance to seriously support what is flourishing on the grassroots level so it can diffuse widely.

2. PRINCIPLES

We emphasize our commitment to already evolved principles that promote sustainable lifestyles such as the ‘Mother Earth Principle’ including the ‘Planetary Boundaries Principle’, the principles for societies and social rights which includes the ‘Dignity Principle’ as well as the ‘Justice Principle’, and the principle of ethics in governance including the ‘Precautionary Principle’, the ‘Resilience Principle’, and the principle of ‘Equal and Differentiated Responsibility’. We further propose the following principles for strong sustainable consumption and production governance:

Principle #1: Equitable Consumption

A fair but limited share of resources for everyone on earth and at a fair and just distribution of wealth are the basis of the societies we are striving for. Such a society would be based on a limiting of the economy, which needs to remain within socially just and ecologically balanced boundaries.

Principle #2: Well-being

Governments must provide the conditions for fulfilling basic needs, which is necessary (but not sufficient) for a good life. For the different consumption patterns we like to see, people have to be enabled through changes in infrastructure and choice opportunities which should be mainly engineered by government actions and investments. Based on this, conscious consumption would allow enjoying more quality of life and less environmental cost, through a better way of 'choosing and using' from the part of confident and educated consumers. Moreover, those who actually benefit from consumer-driven societies also have to consider an appropriate pattern of well being-driven consumption, which means better appreciating how each person’s well-being is influenced by civic, cultural and religious aspects as well as by natural beauty. Fortunately experiences such as being with family, dancing, laughing, chatting with friends, contributing to the flowering of one’s community and spending time in the natural environment are most joyful and less energy consuming. As human beings, we know this to be true, and our call is to act accordingly.

Principle #3: Efficiency

Efficiency is important in our transition towards a sustainable system of consumption and production. Up to now, and mainly, more efficient use of resources is promoted in a strategic approach to changing wasteful consumerist behavior. This approach attempts to green the consumption habits of the consumerist society, especially in the industrialized rich countries. Of course, it is a necessary contribution that consumers strive for commodities and services produced according to efficient ecological and appropriate social requirements. However, it is an insufficient first step toward the quantum leap needed from today’s unsustainable consumption and production
patterns, toward a global and truly sustainable society. An actually efficient consumption and production system must also provide relief for that half of the world’s poor who currently lack adequate access to resources, goods and services. Efficiency usually falls in the trap of the rebound effect, due to which the saved resources finally end up being used for other purposes, resulting in an increase in terms of absolute resource use. Moreover, the world’s poor need equitable opportunities to attain at least their basic needs before being called upon to consume smartly.

**Principle # 4: Sufficiency**

To complement the emphasis on the efficient use of resources, the idea of sufficiency becomes key. This is achieved through mindfulness, sharing, and local sourcing. Sufficiency extends to a sharing and caring society, which thus transcends into holistic approach towards sustainable living. It brings in critical elements of living sustainably on earth: adequacy, self-reliance and contentment. Living according to the principle of sufficiency means to understand how to live within the resource limits of planetary carrying capacity, commit to it and become content and happy with life by being mindful of those around us. Living within the context of sufficiency means searching for a more natural freedom and societal integrity – to engage in life from a sense of personal wholeness rather than a desperate longing for materialistic greed and mindless accumulation of wealth. Finally, we need to be aware that our consumption also affects the well-being of the non-human inhabitants of this world, especially farm animals. Humans carry the responsibility, also through our patterns of consumption, to protect their welfare.

**Principle #5: Sustainable Societies**

The approach towards creating a sustainable economy should be the replacement of the current economic order of inequity, destruction and greed that has kept half of the global people in poverty and created a potential climate change catastrophe. A sustainable economy is integrated in a concept of sustainable societies, which ensures social equity, protects the ecological balance and creates sufficiency. Sustainable Societies appreciate all those contributions to well-being which are generated outside the markets through household production and voluntary work and provide the floor for re-valuing the commons. Sustainable societies promote sustainability, conceived of as the wellbeing of all people and the diverse arrays of non-human life. Thus it helps to develop product service systems that promote the access to knowledge and use for all of consumption goods rather than the overproduction and personal property.

**Principle #6: Decentralized Governance**

Governance for sustainable development essentially needs to be viewed as a decentralizing process of action. While policy can be made and rule of law be established at the international, regional and national levels, the implementation of sustainability will remain a make-or-break vision of reality at the community levels. While global economies and national economies define themselves in terms of “growth,” “green” communities that are not trapped in the compulsion of consumerism will determine sustainability. Sustainable consumption and production governance essentially needs to be viewed from a locally or grassroots-driven process as this is where resilience will be proved, rather than as a mechanism of control at the international or national level, with its focus on international governance frameworks and national mechanisms.

### 3. COMMITMENTS

We propose that Civil Society Organizations make clear commitment to mobilize civil society to claim their rights as citizens for restructuring the world’s economies towards more sustainable ones. These commitments are:

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to promote sustainable lifestyles by setting examples, for instance in transportation, food supply, housing, leisure, and financial management

- to campaign for sustainable lifestyles, and to criticize the existing modes of advertisement and media promotion of wasteful and materialistic living

- to be actively engaged in politics and policies at all levels of governance

- to influence business to behave more sustainably, through buyers actions showing good examples, policy tools, through which sufficiency respecting ecological limits, promoting policies, and through direct actions and influencing campaigns.

We urge that Governments make clear commitment to, and establish effective regulatory and economic incentives to ensure that the necessary systemic changes are encouraged. These include budget reforms, raising taxes on resource use, capital, and financial transactions, as well as the promotion and implementation of economic and regulatory measures aiming for an absolute reduction in resource use. Practically, local and regional level initiatives have to be taken for

- more and better public transport and bicycle infrastructure,

- local food availability, more vegetables, fruits and plant protein (instead of meat and dairy), humane animal products and

- higher energy efficiency of buildings (esp. heating and cooling).

At the same time, country performance measures must demand clear content-related targets, timetables and benchmarking procedures towards a more equitable sustainable consumption and production system. Here, it is especially important that these targets are based on resource availability figures and clearly point out what a fair share for everyone means.

We call on the Scientific Community to develop such targets and to strive for adequate mechanisms to implement and monitor them. More research is required to especially address

- systemic issues such as revealing the impacts of the current pattern of resource use on environment and society, and at the same time develop scenarios regarding the tools needed to ensure resource-use reduction, and to track the consequences such a reduced resource use will have on the environment and society

- the conditions necessary for the rapid upscaling of successful socio-technical experiments

- empirical research on what works and what does not, in order to reach a deeper understanding of the interconnecting issues of technology, culture, lifestyles, habits, economics, ecological system, resource use and psychology.

In addition, sharpening a distinctive Southern perspective is needed to avoid proposals that are biased through dominant Northern framings (such as the ‘green economy’). Finally, the interface between disciplines as well as between research and practice needs to be further developed and investigated. In this context the independence of research from commercial funding is crucial to avoid implicit conflict of interest.

From the UN System and other International Governmental Organisations we demand that sustainable consumption and production Governance be made the cornerstone of a new institutional framework for sustainable development. This is not to simply reform the UN agencies to manage global sustainability projects and programmes, but to reform the institutional approaches that are failing to address the worsening conditions on earth. This includes

- establishing a Global Forum on SCP (as a Stakeholder Mechanism) with a mandate to select representation on the Global SCP Mechanism

- including into the Global Forum an Intergovernmental SCP Committee (operated within the annual CSD member states and Bureau mechanism) to lead and oversee the global SCP governance process

- establishing an Intergovernmental SCP Committee

- establishing an International Secretariat for SCP Governance
• establishing a coordination office for the 10YFP on SCP.

In this context National Governments are called to establish National Committees on SCP (operated within the National Council for Sustainable Development) with a mandate to advise all national agencies working on SCP and national representatives on the Intergovernmental SCP Mechanisms.

We ask that Business alter investment policies away from production processes which are environmental harmful and socially unacceptable and to stop throwing on the market unsustainable products and finally to start promoting economies of services, which include community used products/gardens/cars and emphasizes using services a product provides instead of owning products. This starts from products with hazardous effects on people, animal and on the environment and reaches out to products designed on the principles of planned obsolescence.
4. SIGNATORIES

We, civil society organizations pledge to honour the agreed principles, commitments and action plans;

1. Sylvia Lorek, Germany, Sustainable Europe Research Institute
2. Lewis Akenji, Japan, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies
3. Katalin Ujhelyi, Hungary, Association of Conscious Consumers
4. Janis Brizga, Latvia, Green Liberty
5. Anna Golubovska-Onisimova, Ukraine, Mama-86
6. Uchita de Zoysa, Sri Lanka, Centre for Environment & Development
7. Jeffrey Barber, US, Integrative Strategies Forum
8. Philip Vergragt, US, Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative
9. Leida Rijnhout, Belgium, The Northern Alliance for Sustainability
10. Faiz Shah, Thailand, Asian Institute for Technology – Extension
11. Ashwani Vasishth, Ramapo College
12. Vanessa Timmer, Canada, OneEarth
13. Luis Flores, Brazil, Consumers International
14. Veronika Kiss, Hungary, CEEweb
15. Karine Danielyan, Association for Sustainable Human Development
16. Arman Vermishyan, Armenia, ‘Burg’ Youth Environmental Center
17. Mohan Munasinghe, Millennium Consumption Goals Initiative (MCGI) and Munasinghe Institute for Development (MIND)
19. Ashwani Vasisht, USA, Center for Sustainability, Ramapo College of New Jersey
20. Leonard Sonnenschein, USA, World Aquarium and Conservation for the Oceans Foundation
21. Leida Rijnhout, Belgium, ANPED – Northern Alliance for Sustainability
22. Guido Guerra, Canada, Université de Montréal
5. ANNEXURES

I. PROPOSED ACTION

A countless number of people have started on their path towards sustainable consumption and production getting engaged in food co-operatives or public gardening, the provision of services with explicit sustainable character, neighborhood centers, and alternative, local currencies. These are the social innovations where the important incentives for strong sustainable consumption are coming from. They are development projects for the sustainable global future. Doing so they inspire a new narrative where a satisfied feeling of contentment builds the mental and emotionally basis of experiencing a good life for everyone; where caring and taking responsibility are the underlying values instead of claiming rights. We as the NGO community are taking up the task to support their further development with all our power. Depending on the respective strength of each organization this support actually covers a broad range of activities.

Short Term (2012-2015)

- Promote sufficiency-based national policies and programmes to enhance wellbeing and prosperity of all, respecting ecological limits
- Designing and implementing sustainable livelihood projects to eradicate all forms of poverty
- Shape activities and projects consequently towards strong sustainability
- Actively support civil society organisations in the South in their fight for sustainable lifestyles and livelihoods
- Engage deeper with research for science based actions
- Develop tools for CSOs to start the systemic change in a more holistic way than the dominant discrete-issue based approach
- Consequently embed system thinking in our approaches and projects to overcome the limitations of discrete-issue based approaches
- Actively develop a new narrative of sustainable lifestyles and livelihoods and how we can properly act within it
- Actively develop new models how CSOs can support the seeds of sustainable economies, e.g. through the rise of sharing economies
- Lobby government on green budget reform as well as on promoting and implementing policy tools aiming for absolute resource use reduction
- Promote green public procurement
- Support and promote fair trade in practical consumer decisions as well as a political approach for trade in general

Medium Term (2012-2025)

Action #1

Stop appealing to consumerist and materialistic values and frames (e.g. economic growth, nationalism) for reasons of short-term gain, knowing that these short-term tactics potentially create long-term harm by reinforcing the currently dominant culture of materialistic consumerism.

Action #2

Engage and provide opportunities for a wide participatory dialogue around a new narrative of SCP. The new narrative for a sustainable world has to be co-created by millions of people who shall be empowered to develop shared leadership. Future civil society campaigns will gain from more participatory processes and the notion of shared leadership.

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Action # 3
Develop internal capacity within all organizations for a new economic thinking and integrate this into our strategies and visions.

Action # 4
Get involved in new forms of public and truly participatory engagement as a more open ended process rather than mere advocacy, or trying to persuade everyone to share a single, pre-determined point of view.

Action # 5
We will support local initiatives and facilitate learning exchange for the new economy.

Action # 6
We will cooperate much more actively with successful change agents who can be found at all levels and who are developing the seeds of the new economy and require support for their innovations to be spread and institutionalised.

Action # 7
Within the broader framework of the Peoples Sustainability Treaty on Sustainable Consumption and Production, we identify “Millennium Consumption Goals (MCGs)” as a novel method of correcting the unsustainable patterns of consumption, production and resource exploitation.