

Section 1 : Social and Economic Dimensions

Chapter 4 : Changing Consumption Patterns

A. Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption

Over-consumption is believed to be the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment. While lifestyles of the rich are considered unsustainable, the poor are unable to meet their basic needs.

Objectives

Changing consumption patterns requires a multi-pronged strategy to:

- understand over-consumption and move towards sustainable consumption
- meet the basic needs of the poor
- recognise the true value of natural resources.

Activities

Governments and local communities, particularly of developed countries, should:

- undertake basic research on consumption patterns, including:
- developing and improving databases of production and consumption
- understanding the move of modern industrial economies away from material-intensive economic growth
- identifying patterns of consumption worldwide which the Earth can sustain
- use new concepts of sustainable wealth and prosperity, instead of purely economic indicators, in national accounts and in measures of development.

Progress towards sustainable patterns of production and consumption should be regularly reviewed at an international level, and should be given high priority in the review of Agenda 21.

B. Encouraging changes in consumption patterns

Objectives

- promote efficient production and reduce waste.
- develop a policy framework which will encourage a shift towards sustainable patterns of production and consumption.
- reinforce values of sustainability and sustainable development.

Activities

National and local governments should:

- encourage "green consumerism" and labelling of products with environmental information
- review their own purchasing policies in the light of environmental concerns

- promote positive attitudes towards sustainable consumption.

Particular attention should be paid to the role of women and households as consumers and to the impacts of their purchasing choices on the environment and the economy.