

# *Workshop on Sustainable Consumption for Latin America & Caribbean*



## *Meeting report*

*12 – 13 November 2001, São Paulo, Brazil*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## 1. Introduction

The workshop was an initiative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), through its Regional Office for Latin America & the Caribbean (ROLAC, based in Mexico) and the Division of Technology, Industry and Economics, Production and Consumption Branch (DTIE, based in Paris), with the support of Carl Duisberg Brasil, part of the Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft group. This event was also made possible thanks to the support of the Brazilian Environmental Ministry, the São Paulo State Secretariat, the São Paulo State Environmental Agency (CETESB) and UNESCO Brazil. The workshop lasted two days and took place in the city of São Paulo, on the São Paulo State Environmental Secretariat's premises and had approximately 80 participants among professionals from academia, government, non-governmental organizations, the business sector, and media from 11 different countries from the Latin America and the Caribbean region, namely Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Jamaica, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Costa Rica and Colombia.

The main objective of the workshop was to promote discussions, gather information and establish a working plan on sustainable consumption issues for the region. The main findings of the meeting will be compiled together with other contributions from other parts of the world to integrate a global status report on the issue of sustainable consumption to be presented at the World Summit on Sustainable Development to take place in Johannesburg in 2002.

## 2. Executive Summary

The workshop “**Towards Sustainable Consumption in Latin America and Caribbean**” is part of UNEP's Regional Initiative on Sustainable Consumption. Its results will be included in the global status report that will be presented in September 2002 at the Johannesburg World Summit for Sustainable Development. The meeting was a UNEP initiative, organized by Carl Duisberg office in Brazil, and supported by the Brazilian and the Sao Paulo state governments, as well as by UNESCO Brazil.

The participants developed a Latin-American vision on the concept of Sustainable Consumption, which in their view should mean "responsible consumption". When addressing sustainable consumption in Latin America and the Caribbean, the interface between social and environmental problems must necessarily be recognized. Poverty eradication and good governance were among the priorities mentioned. "Not growth, but redistribution of income, is the main priority", according to the Governor of the State of Amapa in Brazil, Mr. Joao Alberto Capiberibe. He also stressed: "Building a sustainable society depends on political options and decisions that concern not only environmental issues, but mainly, production and consumption models".

As pointed out by Mr. Diego Masera, Regional Industry Programme Co-ordinator of the UNEP Regional Office for Latin America and Caribbean: *"It is paradoxical that a region that has abundant resources, and is consuming its resources rapidly, is still unable to*

*provide a decent living standard for the majority of its inhabitants”.*

The participants also emphasized the need to promote and enforce the principles and actions established by Agenda 21 and other international treaties regarding sustainable production and consumption patterns, as well as sustainable development. One major concern that became obvious among all the stakeholders and discussion session participants was the need to establish economic incentives, policies, laws and the necessary institutional framework, in all countries within the region. Another requirement was the need for genuine political commitment by governmental and non-governmental agencies, proceeding towards the common goal of developing sustainable consumption and production, which are considered by all, as important means of promoting sustainable development in the region.

The business community in Latin America and the Caribbean could, as was concluded, benefit from more attention to local knowledge and values and also from more knowledge about eco-design, a fundamental tool to link the technical world of cleaner production with society. As stated by Mr. Diego Masera: “In Latin America, the introduction of sustainable product development will enhance production, income, job generation and will promote environmental protection. Clean development is fundamental to guarantee future markets for the region’s products”. UNEP and the various National Cleaner Production Centres should play a central role in the promotion of those tools.

Mr. Fernando Almeida, Executive President of the Brazilian Business Council for Sustainable Development (CEBDS), advised: “*Unsustainable practices will cause the collapse of many companies if they do not respond to today’s increasingly demanding consumers. It is imperative that enterprises engage in sustainable production practices, invest in innovation and eco-efficiency, and face the challenge of sustainability, converting this challenge into business opportunities*”.

For Mr. Eduardo Ehlers, Vice-Director of SENAC Environmental Education Faculty (Brazil), one opportunity of sustainable production is the promotion of sustainable agriculture. And one of the challenges to achieve this was seen as the need to change the development focus, from land extensive and chemical intensive, to family and organic intensive production systems. Not only with environmental benefits, but also with the social benefit promoted by creation of jobs: “*In Brazil there are 4 million people working in family production systems, and only 500 thousand working in large agribusiness enterprises*”.

As sustainable production and sustainable consumption are two sides of the same coin, the collective power of consumer buying decisions can be a major force for change in market economies. This implies that information on social and environmental aspects of product and service life cycles should be made available. Not only is information necessary, but also the direct involvement of the communication sector (advertising and media companies) was seen as fundamental to promote sustainable life styles. This view implied that consumer awareness has to be sufficiently modified so as to effect the necessary changes in behavior.

Young people, women, academia, government agents, environmentalists, consumer organisations, journalists and different media professionals were identified among the major stakeholders and actors required to raise awareness about the need to change the current development paradigm into a more sustainable one and in acting towards that end.

Inspired by an emotional video-show demonstrating how advertising can also promote immaterial "human values" (such as friendship as opposed to anger and greed), which was presented by Mrs. Christina Carvalho Pinto (from the award winning Full Jazz Advertising Agency), many ideas for media campaigns were developed. MTV Brazil promised to explore the potential for ultra brief SC clips, delivering the message in not more than 10 seconds. Mr. Stefan Larenas, Consumers International (CI), based in Chile, presented CI's global survey of "how well governments have implemented the UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection", a joint project with UNEP. He was furthermore very successful in promoting a network to "keep the spirit alive" with other members of the group, and as a result saw the electronic list "2001sc-net" (for LAC members only) being launched within not more than one week after the meeting, with the support of Patricia Almeida Ashley, Rachel Biderman, Lisa Gunn, and Marcelo Sodr  from Brazil.

Among other participants' suggestions:

- a United Nations Prize on Sustainable Consumption that should be granted in a Festival organized for such purpose;
- discussion among journalists and media professionals and students; the promotion of specific training for media professionals;
- the creation of the "Sustainable Consumption Day" at the international, regional and local levels, to foster campaigns, media coverage, education initiatives;
- the setting up of regional indicators on sustainable consumption and production to evaluate the impact of current programs and projects.

### **3. Opening Remarks**

The workshop was opened by the Secretary of Policies for Sustainable Development of the Brazilian Ministry for the Environment, Mr. Sergio Braga, as well as by the S o Paulo State Environmental Secretary, Mr. Ricardo Tripoli, the President of the S o Paulo Environmental Agency (CETESB), Mr. Drausio Barreto, and the organizers of the event, Mr. Bas de Leeuw, Co-ordinator of the Sustainable Consumption Program at UNEP DTIE, Mr. Diego Masera, of UNEP – ROLAC, and Mr. Newton Pereira of Carl Duisberg Brasil.

The Brazilian authorities present at the session stressed the importance of the meeting and strongly complimented UNEP on the initiative, which they considered a fundamental step towards the implementation of Agenda 21.

Mr. Drausio Barreto, President of CETESB (S o Paulo State Pollution Control Agency), opened his remarks stressing the importance of the agreement recently reached in Marrakech, in the Seventh Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which he thinks is an important step towards establishing a

framework for sustainable consumption worldwide. In his opinion the Division of Technology, Industry and Economics of UNEP, responsible for the issue of sustainable consumption, should gain more importance within the United Nations system, given that the issues it deals with are of utmost importance. Given the stabilization of the Brazilian economy and the increasing purchasing power of Brazilian consumers, he stressed that policies towards sustainable consumption are extremely necessary. Also, according to Mr. Barreto, environmental education and the promotion of global citizenship are the basis for achieving sustainable development, and consequently, sustainable production and consumption patterns. He stressed the role of CETESB as a pollution control agency in the past 25 years as an important agent in shaping the path of sustainable production patterns.

Mr. Newton Pereira, Executive Manager of Carl Duisberg Brasil, thanked the presence of all participants. He described the effort of the United Nations in the field of technical cooperation, which began 50 years ago, and particularly described the initiatives of the German government since 1961 in promoting international technical and economic cooperation, which in 1999 was responsible for investments of circa 5 billion dollars in various cooperation projects worldwide, in over 70 countries. Among different cooperation institutions in Germany, in the field of human resources training, is Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft (CDG). CDG is an international institution, founded in 1949 in Cologne, Germany, with the objective to promote interchange and training of human resources at the international level. It is financed by private enterprise and federal ministries from Germany, has 16 offices worldwide with over 600 staff members, and manages a budget of over 100 million dollars. Three years ago CDG founded CDG Brasil to promote training programs for small and medium enterprises in the field of environment.

Mr. Diego Masera, Regional Co-ordinator of Technology, Industry and Economics of the Regional Office of UNEP for Latin America and the Caribbean, represented Mr. Ricardo Sanchez, Regional Director of UNEP. Mr. Masera, after thanking all the institutions involved in making the workshop possible, started the presentation on sustainable consumption by stating that, although the concept of sustainable consumption has been on the international agenda for more than a decade, very little has been achieved in the Latin America and the Caribbean region. According to Mr. Masera, "Sustainable Consumption" is a central element to achieve sustainable development. He emphasized the need for the region to design and determine its own future. He finally stated that to achieve sustainable consumption patterns, governments, NGOs, industries and consumers all together need to assume their own responsibilities. He also stressed the important catalyzing role the youth and advertising agencies could play. The new challenge, he said, is to work towards an improved quality of life for all and build a consumption model that goes beyond the material economic accumulation of the few.

Mr. Bas de Leeuw, Co-ordinator of UNEP's Sustainable Consumption Programme (based in Paris within the Division of Technology, Industry and Economics) and facilitator of the workshop, started his opening speech by welcoming guests and speakers and thanking the institutional support for the meeting on behalf of UNEP. He stressed the importance of Brazil for the UN, for UNEP, and for the promotion of "sustainability". He acknowledged the importance of the meeting in Rio in 1992 (UNCED) and stated that in 2002 the world will be analyzing what has been done with the words and promises that governments had

made in Rio de Janeiro. He stressed that the present workshop on sustainable consumption will be an important contribution to that process. As an input to the meeting in Johannesburg (Rio + 10), a Global Status Report will be produced on the status of changing consumption and production patterns in the world, and the results of this meeting will be included in the text. The purpose of this meeting is to show what has been done in the Caribbean and Latin American region on this subject and what the future plans are to promote sustainable consumption. He informed that UNEP has promoted discussions on this subject in other parts of the world, including Europe, North America, Africa, Asia, and further discussions are scheduled for Australia. In the current meeting in São Paulo, as in others around the world, UNEP has made efforts, jointly with local partners, to bring together all major parties involved in a multi-stakeholder dialogue to produce an Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption for the Latin American and Caribbean Region.

Mr. Sergio Braga gave special emphasis to the efforts of the Brazilian Ministry for the Environment in conducting a program on sustainable development in partnership with NGOs in the country, which started in a joint initiative with the Institute for Consumers Defense (IDEC – Instituto de Defesa do Consumidor). He stressed that the issue of sustainable consumption has not entered the Brazilian national environmental agenda. It is still a side question. The reason for this, he argues, is that consumers are not aware of this issue and do not create enough pressure. The business sector is slowly starting to engage in eco-labeling initiatives, on the other hand, but does not support a mandatory system. He also discussed the need for the establishment of eco-labeling rules in all the countries as a way to promote sustainable consumption and the need to engage consumer organizations in the process. He described the efforts of the Brazilian Environmental Ministry in establishing a discussion in Brazil on eco-labeling rules and practices in partnership with industry federations. The Ministry is promoting meetings and workshops in the country to show the business sector the advantages of engaging in environmentally sustainable practices and, particularly, adopting eco-labeling as a way to promote business. However, complex issues, such as cultural differences, the size of the country and imbalances in consumer power make this effort difficult. He strongly supports the adoption of eco-labeling as a means to promote sustainable consumption, since the consumer has to be informed of the advantages and consequences of his consumption habits. Also, the question of cost is important. Products that are produced in a more sustainable manner do not necessarily need to be more expensive. This has to be considered, otherwise sustainable consumption will not be feasible.

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