



Sustainable consumption and production: From “resource-efficient” status quo to social transformation



There is increasing recognition today of the need to address a worsening climate crisis and a slew of ecological concerns, from the use of natural resources beyond planetary limits, plastic pollution, to the issue of waste disposal, among others. A prospective agenda to shift to sustainability has already been articulated and re-articulated in terms of a policy response.

What is now called the agenda for sustainable consumption and production (SCP) has marked conversations at the level of international bodies such as the United Nations (UN) since the late 20th century. Shifting away from unsustainable patterns and practices is of rising relevance, amid today’s urgent climate and pollution concerns as well as worsening inequalities, compounded by another lingering economic downturn.

While there is general acknowledgment that human activity accounts for different forms of environmental deterioration, there is need for precision in tracing the contours of today’s unsustainable patterns in production and consumption. This requires looking at the policy assumptions, the political-economic processes and actors that continue to shape the unsustainable status quo. In particular, dominant production and consumption patterns that have contributed to today’s broader ecological crisis need to be examined.

Unsustainable patterns are political as well as rights issues, especially given the people's right to development. Identifying current obstacles to the realisation of the people's right to contribute to and participate in development processes, and to enjoy the fruits of development, means asking

questions of power, access and control. This makes it necessary to examine relations among states (e.g., between the "global North" and "global South") when it comes to trade and investment, and relations between governments, big business and people's organisations.

THE CHALLENGE OF SCP

Shifting away from unsustainable patterns of production and consumption has been a major part of the discourse of sustainable development, as early as the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, or the UN Conference on Environment and Development. It was recognised that "the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment are the unsustainable patterns of consumption and production."

Prior to this the 1987 "Our Common Future" report had set the tone in defining sustainable development as "meet[ing] the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This is aside from recognition that environmental, economic and social concerns are linked, amid an interlocking crisis of the environment, development and energy.ⁱ

SCP has been defined in 1994, at the Oslo Symposium on Sustainable Consumption and Production, as the use of goods and services to "respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life" while also "minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants" to not "jeopardize the needs of future generations".ⁱⁱ

Succeeding turning points subsequently created the policy frameworks for sustainable development and SCP in particular. The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development initiated the drafting of a 10 Year Framework of Programmes (10YFP) for SCP; the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) adopted the 10YFP; and the 2015 UN General Assembly for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).ⁱⁱⁱ

SCP IN THE INTERNATIONAL POLICY LANDSCAPE OF TODAY

Sustainable consumption and production, and the broader call for sustainability, has entered current mainstream development conversations today through the Agenda 2030. Aspects of SCP, from resource-efficiency to environment-friendly economic growth, have been built into different targets of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). There is SDG 12 on "ensur[ing] sustainable consumption and production patterns." This Goal is framed along the lines of "green" growth, aiming to "decouple economic growth from resource use and environmental

degradation, notably through improved resource efficiency, while improving people's well-being."^{iv}

This drive to lessen resource use in production is also found in other SDGs such as SDG 8 on sustainable economic growth and decent work: with a target to "[i]mprove progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation" with "developed countries taking the lead."^v

Implementing SCP

How will the mainstream SCP agenda be implemented? The One Planet Network was created to implement the contemporary SCP agenda. The network is a “multi-stakeholder” partnership open to national governments, civil society, scientists’ organisations and businesses (including multinational corporations). Forty percent of the network’s membership is comprised of civil society, 19% businesses and 17.5% national governments^{vi} — but the quantitative presence of civil society is faced by qualitative challenges such as the trend of shrinking civic spaces.

By 2018, Goal 12 on SCP has the least resources among the SDGs, and faces concerns regarding fragmented implementation.^{vii} Basing on information available from the One Planet Network, only 3.3% of the almost 2000

reported SCP-related activities from 2013 to 2018 were related to SCP policy instruments; and only 2.6% are related to SCP monitoring and reporting. Forty-one percent of activities were about “outreach and communication for SCP”; knowledge resources and tools which comprised 27%; and SCP trainings at 16 percent.^{viii}

Moreover, some have raised concerns regarding the targets and indicators of specifically SCP-related Goal 12. These range from vague articulations of targets, to targets that are narrow in focus or else are inadequate for structural reforms. Concerns have also been raised on indicators that could be inadequate to measure progress, show low ambition, or are otherwise unclear.^{ix}

SCP: Macro- and micro-level changes?

Sustainable consumption and production must be framed around macro-level issues and shifts. Conventional thinking on SCP points to the responsibility of individual consumers, with the assumption that consumer demand for “green goods” will influence producers. But consumption is always located within broader social organisation, and “takes place through particular systems of production, distribution, and exchange.”^x

There are actors in current SCP rhetoric that do refer to macro-level changes. For

example, the One Planet Network refers to SCP as being “about systemic change.” It, however, qualifies its notion of systemic change, as “decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation” and “taking into account all phases of resource use in order to do more and better with less.”^{xi} The goal of “decoupling growth from resource use” talks of a need for certain policies, physical infrastructure and markets^{xii} – and this is where governments and private sector actors come in.

Governments in the current SCP agenda

SDG 12 recognises the role of governments in the necessity of “strong national framework[s]” to actualise SCP. There are 108 countries so far that supposedly have SCP-“relevant” policies.^{xiii} This must be matched with qualitative discussions on the state of play of SCP at country-level, however. A 2019 research tackling three country cases, Indonesia, Kenya and the Philippines, show

different aspects of how current SCP policies could be limited in both policy rhetoric and practice (see *Box 1*).

The extent of macro-level “solutions” presented by states for SCP, such as during sessions to evaluate SCP progress at the 2018 High Level Political Forum, have been related to decoupling: from “shifts” to economies

that reuse waste for later production instead of disposal (“circular economies”),^{xiv} new business models, the “transformation” of multinational corporations’ practices

along global value chains. Otherwise, there remains the push for micro-level changes to “sustainable lifestyles”.^{xv}

Box 1. SCP policy in Indonesia, Kenya and the Philippines

As shown in a research coordinated by IBON International with local people’s organisations, Indonesia, Kenya and the Philippines have managed to have SCP-related legislation. These, however, face implementation issues, or coherence with their own states’ economic and social priorities that remain tied to unsustainable production and consumption.

Indonesia, considered a leader in SCP in the region, has a national strategy on SCP based on the 10YFP. However, the government plans to expand palm oil production despite adverse impacts on communities and local biodiversity. The trans-boundary haze produced by burning forests to make way for oil palm plantations causes health and economic problems for Indonesia and its neighbouring countries.

In the case of Kenya, the government has initiated a Green Economy and Strategy and Implementation Plan (GESIP) 2016-2030, embedding sustainable development principles, including SCP, into the country’s overall growth strategy. But Kenya has also enacted a mining policy which purportedly promotes “sustainable mining.” The impacts of such a policy on so-called sustainable mining to the industry, its workers, and communities remain to be seen.

The Philippines is also known for its laws on the environment and its implementation of international commitments, including SCP, in national laws. The government, however, continues to promote foreign large-scale mining and coal-fired power plants while the people resist social and environmental impacts. The liberalized mining industry and the lack of downstream industries enable the extraction of more than 90% of the country’s mineral production for export, while mining companies are also taxed at a very low rate of 2 percent.

Source: IBON International. 2019. *People-powered sustainable consumption: A visioning and mapping study.*

“Decoupling”: Systemic change or corporate “solutions”?

The rhetoric of decoupling economic growth from resource use is related to the “circular economy,” where supposed waste would be used as inputs in another production cycle. This is in contrast to a “linear economy” where waste disposal is the end-phase before starting another chain of resource extraction. Countries’ boosting of their service sectors are also endorsed in the decoupling rhetoric, with the assumption that “services” use less material resources.^{xvi} Decoupling is also presented as a possibility amid technological changes, with digitalisation allowing businesses to manage production more efficiently.^{xvii}

Other than techno-fixes that would remain inadequate in responding to a problem of political economy and policy, mainstream

articulations on SCP-as-decoupling portray resource-efficiency as an agenda for businesses to take upon so that they could continue capital accumulation. Decoupling is seen as a means to continue business growth albeit using lower amounts of resources, while also providing new market opportunities for corporations, aside from improving the public trust and image of corporate actors.^{xviii}

The mainstream SCP agenda of “decoupling” still calls for a “profound transformation of business practices along global value chains.”^{xix} But how significant should changes in business practices be, in order to be “profound”? The extent and limits of the supposed “fundamental changes” forwarded in the current agenda of SCP can also be described through SDG 12.

The details of SDG 12 point to a target specifically for multinational and transnational corporations (MNCs and TNCs), which should be encouraged to “adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle”^{xx}. Measuring achievement on this target would be through counting the number of companies publishing sustainability reports. Concerns have already been raised about this,^{xxi} since corporations’ self-reporting of their sustainability is far from securing shifts in actual business practices, let alone a “profound transformation”. In addition, these leave room to openly interpret and contest what counts as “sustainable” business practice.

The One Planet Network has since formulated a strategic plan to implement SCP, in One Plan for One Planet 2018-2022. In this plan, businesses are lauded in how they “can help identify solutions that address both environmental and social aspects and bring positive net impact through radically new solutions.” Without being precise whether such priorities refer to which kinds of businesses, it leaves open spaces for TNCs and MNCs to continue profit-seeking activities amid rising inequalities.

Indeed, years since the SDGs have been launched, multinationals have adapted in different ways to claim that they are contributing to sustainable patterns in production and consumption. According to a KPMG study on corporate reporting in relation to the SDGs, 55% of reporting companies have made claims in relation to SDG 12 (as well as SDG 8 and 4).^{xxii}

Chevron, for instance, is claiming that in line with SDG 12, “more than 99 percent” of water used in its Permian oil and natural gas basin in the United States (US) is comprised of recycled water sources, and that it has been “supporting sustainable energy technologies.”^{xxiii} At the same time it is among the corporations that have

released historically large greenhouse gas emissions. Chevron also has a history of responsibility for toxic waste contamination of land and water resources as well as destructive pipelines and different cases of rights violations in Southern countries.^{xxiv}

Historically unsustainable production and consumption patterns are actually linked to corporate giants especially from developed states. Historical trends of widening inequality brought by corporate dominance were accompanied by increasing resource extraction, especially by high-income countries (as will be discussed in the next section).

The decoupling agenda also faces issues of policy coherence at the international level. For instance, through investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) clauses in bilateral and multilateral “free trade” agreements, corporations have gained the power to sue governments for affecting profits. This has been the case even when measures restricting corporate activity were implemented to protect resources. For example, in the case of OceanaGold Corporation against the government of El Salvador, the government issued a moratorium that prevented the issuance of environmental permits, due to the issue of mining-related water pollution.^{xxv}

These raise questions about the significant roles reserved for TNCs and MNCs in current conversations. Why are mainstream conversations on SCP not founded on recognising accountability of governments and corporations in perpetuating unsustainable patterns? Is it really possible to craft an SCP agenda without changes in current neoliberal rules? Further, is it impossible to envision a “future we want” without corporations as protagonists?

Where are the people in the SCP agenda?

In contrast to how big business and governments are regarded, the general public is primarily presented as consumers within mainstream SCP discourse. These translate to prescriptions for the public that are at the level of the individual consumer household. Priorities for consumer information so that individuals choose sustainable brands of goods and services, as well as shaping and educating consumer behaviour toward environmentally-friendly lifestyles, are included in main SCP policy documents such as the 10YFP and the One Planet Network programme. The UN Environment even led the push for a set of personal actions that are

supposedly aligned to support the SDGs, which they dubbed the “Goodlife Goals.”

In line with the people’s right to development, however, it is crucial to establish that people’s organisations and communities are active participants in shaping sustainable practices. In practice, people’s organisations and communities are already exercising sovereignty in transforming production and consumption. This could be shown in cases of people’s assertions of rights against big mining interests in the global South, or farmers’ resistance to chemical-reliant and corporate-led agriculture.

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS AND THE IMMENSE CHALLENGE TO SCP

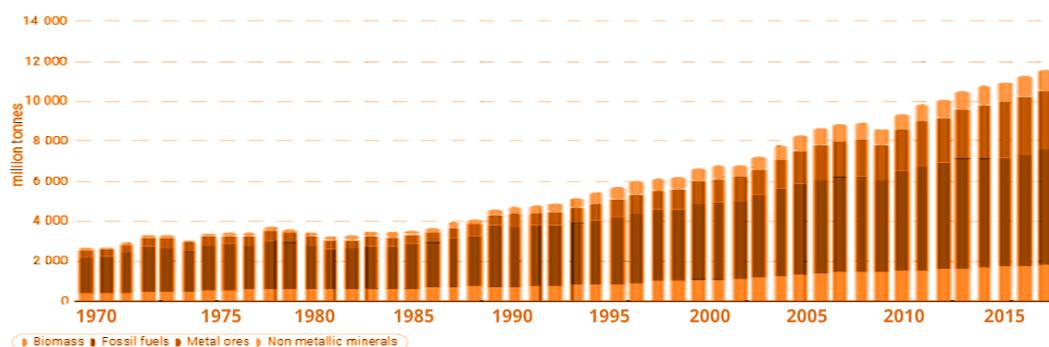
People’s actions for sustainability nevertheless face structural barriers. A systemic view of current unsustainable patterns must consider matters of political-economic power and international relations, and how these pose obstacles or pathways to realising the full scope of people’s rights, including the right to development. A systemic view allows a broader picture of the immensity of the challenge to shift to SCP. It also shows where states and corporate giants, as crucial actors in today’s world economy, fit in the picture.

SCP must consider a circuit of economic activity — extraction, production, exchange and circulation, consumption, and the processing of waste and scrap. SCP discussions must therefore discuss today’s issues of trade and investment, of concrete

production networks in global value chains, the trade in material resources and even scrap, along with related policy issues and economic trends.

There has been a historical increase in the extraction in material resources, in four categories of raw materials: biomass (crops, wood, fish, etc.), fossil fuels, metals and non-metallic minerals. From 27 billion tonnes in 1970, extraction of these resources ballooned to 92 billion tonnes in 2017, according to a 2019 report by the UN Environment Programme and the International Resource Panel (IRP). Fossil fuels comprise half of exports in 2017, followed by metal ores, biomass (e.g., agricultural goods) and non-metallic minerals (see *Figure 1*).

Figure 1. Global trade in materials, four main material categories, 1970-2017 (in million tonnes)



Source: UN Environment Programme and International Resource Panel. 2019. “Global Resource Outlook 2019: Natural Resources for the Future We Want.”

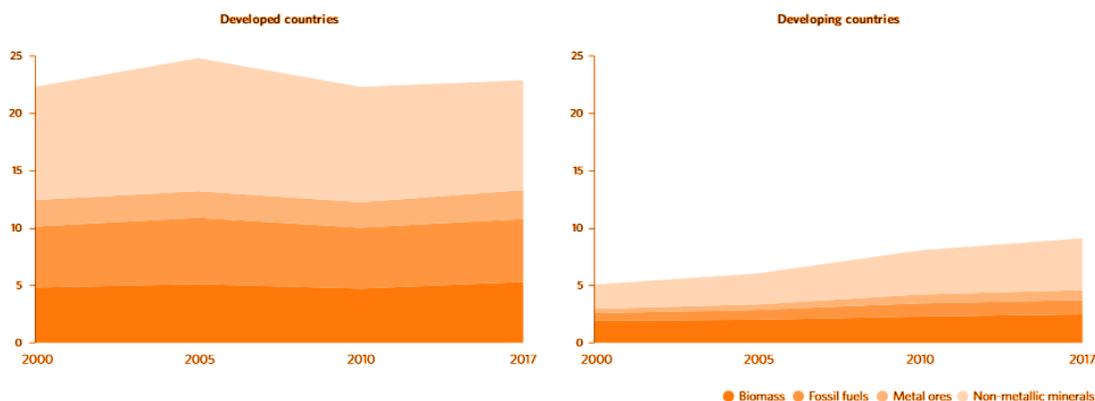
The 2019 UN Environment and IRP report speculates that contemporary resource extraction has been driven by a two-fold process: the rapid industrialisation in cases such as China was accompanied by high-income countries' outsourcing of the more material-intensive (and labour-intensive) phases of the production process to lower-income country groups.^{xxvi}

Historically, the outsourcing of production occurred with and through the drive to implement neoliberal deregulation and liberalisation in Southern economies. Through outsourcing, high-income countries import finished goods that are partly or wholly produced in different countries in the production chain (e.g., middle-income countries in Asia). Outsourcing uses labour

and resources of these countries (e.g., land, fossil fuels, water resources, minerals, etc).

Indeed, "the total amount of mobilised resources for the production chain can be substantially larger than the weight of the end product, as waste is created during manufacturing, primary processing or the extraction of materials."^{xxvii} This "material footprint" of developed countries, or all the resources extracted and mobilised along the way, is significantly large compared to those of developing countries (see Figure 2). In 2017, high-income countries consumed 27 tonnes of material resources per capita, in contrast to 2 tonnes per capita for low income countries.^{xxviii}

Figure 2. Material footprint per capita, by type of raw material, 2000-2017 (in metric tonnes per capita)



Source: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2018. "The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018."

Corporations and unsustainable production and consumption

As these production networks or "global value chains" (GVCs) became the norm, the world's top 2000 TNCs ballooned in their assets, equivalent to 230% of world GDP for 2011 to 2015. By 2013, 80% of the world trade is linked to these production networks dominated by corporate giants. As the production processes of high-income countries' TNCs were outsourced along a

chain, there has been an accompanying "outsourcing" of the possible impacts. These could include climate change impacts, health impacts and strains on water- and land-use with associated biodiversity losses. These have been largely from high-income countries' activities that mobilise large amounts of resources from low- and middle-income countries.^{xxix}

Unsustainable patterns in extraction, production of primary materials

As already hinted above, trade plays a decisive role in the processes of material extraction and the flows of resources across states' borders. Trends show that high-income countries dominated the trade in biomass, fossil fuels, metal and non-metal minerals in 2017, as they account for the transfer of 11.8 billion tonnes of "primary [resource] extraction from elsewhere in the world."^{xxx}

Thus "economic activity in high-income group of countries depends on very large and increasing levels of extraction of primary materials in other countries, which are effectively 'imported' in virtual form¹ and embodied in traded commodities." This would be equivalent to 9.8 tonnes of material resources extracted for each person in high-income countries.

Box 2. Extractive industries and the global South: Neoliberal restructuring

The neoliberal restructuring of Southern economies throughout their "integration" into GVCs, and the rise of multilateral and bilateral trade and investment agreements, resulted to a decline in manufacturing and also tilted developing economies towards extractive industries, with exports from extractives rising from 12.8% of gross exports in 1995 to 18.4% in 2011.^{xxxi}

This was matched by increasing shares of profits of extractive TNCs among the world's top 2000 TNCs: 13.1% in a five-year period of 2011-2015, from 9.3% during 1996-2000.^{xxxii}

These indicate how mining giants from industrialised states, for instance, have extracted and traded minerals and raw materials from Southern countries, at the expense of communities' rights to determine use of their resources, and their right to development, while increasing their vulnerability to climate impacts (e.g., related impacts of soil erosion).



Source: Kohler, Pierre and Cripps, Francis. 2018. "Do Trade and Investment (Agreements) Foster Development or Inequality?"

Extraction and processing of natural resources make up 50% of greenhouse gas emissions.^{xxxiii} Today's unsustainable economic chain could be clearly seen in the case of fossil fuels. The historical and contemporary reliance on fossil fuels particularly from West Asia,^{xxxiv} have resulted to a large portion of historical emissions that have contributed to the climate crisis (which for some, is urgent enough to call it a "climate emergency"). Seventy percent of emissions since 1988 are attributable to the operations of a relatively small number of corporations. Forty percent of greenhouse gases from 1751 to 2010 are from 81 private- and state-owned corporations.

However, peoples in the global South would bear 75% of the costs of climate change while not significantly contributing to the crisis. Fossil fuel corporations of developed countries — from Chevron and ExxonMobil of the US, BP from Great Britain, the Dutch-British Shell, and French corporation Total — have certainly benefitted from unsustainable extraction, production and distribution of fossil fuels, and they together allot at least USD 201 million in lobbying to stifle climate policy today.^{xxxvi}

¹This only means that in measuring resource extraction, we include, for example, both the processed metals transferred from a country, as well as the resources extracted and used before the act of mineral export such as the fuels used in the mineral processing, and the parts of the ores set aside after processing.

Unsustainable production: From pesticides to plastics

Considering the roles of corporations in shaping unsustainable production patterns, or in the production of unsustainable consumer goods, is also crucial in assessing barriers to a structural change towards SCP. For instance, agriculture around the world today is a highly centralised and concentrated industry, with four corporations capturing 71% of the agrochemical market and 67% of the seed market.^{xxxvii} This includes corporate giants with unprecedented market power, three of which formed out of mega-mergers

of recent years — Syngenta-ChemChina, Bayer-Monsanto, the Dow-Dupont agricultural division Corteva Agriscience — and long-time firm BASF.^{xxxviii} The dominance of chemical-intensive agriculture translates even to the production practices in Southern countries, intersecting with issues of workers' rights (see Box 3), and threatens food sovereignty.

The chemical giants Dow, Dupont (now merged as DowDupont), Monsanto and

Box 3. Sumifru in Southern Philippines: Corporate-driven agriculture and people's resistance

Sumitomo Corporation, the 250th biggest corporation in the world,^{xxxix} has operated since 1963 in Mindanao, the southern island of the Philippines, following import liberalisation of bananas in the country. Through its associated company Sumitomo Fruits (Sumifru) Corporation, 30% of bananas entering Japan come from southern Philippines. The company boasts a plantation as large as 10,000 hectares in Mindanao island and in supposedly employing around 20,000 manual workers.^{xl}

Despite the corporation's claims to the contrary,^{xli} unionised agricultural workers under the Nagkahiusang Mamumuo sa Suyapa Farm (NAMASUFA) have raised concerns regarding the conditions of production in the province of Compostela Valley. NAMASUFA workers have launched strikes in 2015^{xlii} and 2018. Their 2018 strike demanded regularisation of long-time workers and their right to living wages, as well as vehemently opposed union-busting especially after a violent dispersal of the strike in October 2018.^{xliii}

Workers have raised the issue of their exposure to chemical inputs, such as to the post-harvest pesticide Omega, as they are not provided adequate protective equipment (except through workers' personal spending). Resulting impacts ranged from issues in vision, respiration, skin diseases and even infertility.^{xliv} For the workers, these health effects from exposure to agricultural chemicals are compounded by violations of their rights in a history of violence and persecution against unionists, union-busting, 12 to 18-hour working days and average incomes of USD 6.8 a day — amid the corporation's Php 19 million daily gross income.^{xlv}



Source: Centre for Trade Union and Human Rights. "Bananas and Bullets." / Sumitomo Corporation. High quality bananas are maintained through 'Cold Chain system'"

BASF have also shaped post-World War II production and promotion of plastics, now considered a major waste issue around the world.^{xlvi} A critical juncture in this history would be the commercial production of German firm BASF of polystyrene in the 1930s.^{xlvii}

Today, there is acknowledgment that the problem of plastics is tightly linked to fossil fuel emissions and climate change, as “over 99% of plastic is derived from fossil fuels.”^{xlviii} The whole chain involved in the life cycle of plastics — from extraction of fossil fuels for plastic production, to the actual plastic manufacturing, to incineration — all contribute large emissions.

In 2017, 29% of world plastic production happened in China, 18.5% in Europe, and 17.7% in the countries of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (US, Canada and

Mexico).^{xlix} However, the boom in the “fracking” method to extract underground fossil fuels in the US, led by oil and petrochemical giants such as ExxonMobil, Chevron and Shell, is said to be a “major driver of plastic production and related greenhouse gas emissions in the decades to come.” Merely 24 US facilities producing ethylene, used in plastic production, resulted to emissions worth 3.8 million vehicles in 2015.^{li}

Plastic production and incineration in 2019 have resulted to emissions equivalent to 189 coal-fired power plants (850 million metric tonnes of greenhouse gases). This will certainly harm prospects towards curbing the global temperature and the effects of the climate crisis. By 2050, plastics production and incineration would be equivalent to 615 coal-fired power plants.^{lii}

The unsustainable processing of scrap and waste

Seventy-nine percent of plastics today have not been recycled, but rather end up in landfills.^{liii} How goods are handled after consumption also has a political dimension — developed countries such as the US and the United Kingdom (UK) have years of exporting scrap plastics^{liv} and electronic waste^{lv} to Southern countries for recycling and disposal, in an international trade in scrap.

The US signed but not ratified the Basel Convention of 1989, on the “Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal.” This opened up opportunities for the country to “export” plastic and electronic scrap to other countries particularly in the global South. For instance, between January to November 2018, the US is the top exporting country of plastic waste, followed by Japan, Germany, the UK and Belgium. By 2019, a legally-binding agreement to curb flows of plastic waste to developing countries, a deal binding even for the US, was decided at the 14th Meeting

of the Conference of Parties to the Basel Convention — which nonetheless remains to be seen in practice.

The case of electronic scrap trade shows rich countries shifting the burden of scrap processing to less technologically-advanced countries, with an accompanying effect of toxic threats to the workers in the scrap yards and nearby communities. In Accra, Ghana, the area of Agbogbloshie has gained international attention in the last decade for its electronic waste dump, with thousands of people reliant on processing scrap coming from Europe and other states. The toxic fumes resulted to health issues among people in Agbogbloshie, amid low incomes. Even the local food chain is affected as poultry grazing in Agbogbloshie lay eggs with high toxicity levels.^{lvii}

FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE SCP

Altogether, the previous section attempted to show the immense challenge to SCP in relation to structural barriers related to the dominance of monopolistic corporations, neoliberal policy and the unequal relations between Northern and Southern countries.

A comprehensive response to the call for SCP must therefore address the interplay of the three dimensions of sustainable development: the environmental, economic and social. It means responding to issues such as those raised above: the links of corporate giants, neoliberal policy, and developed states when it comes to extractivist industries and offshoring; to the international trade of goods including primary products such as biomass, fossil fuels, metals and non-metallic minerals; the unsustainable production practices from agriculture to plastics manufacture; and even to the processing of waste and scrap materials.

If the SCP agenda indeed revolves around the promise of systemic change, it must address the structural barriers posed by corporate power as well as policy issues in historically unsustainable production and consumption patterns and along today's global value chains. There must be comprehensive assessments of environmental and rights impacts for dominant practices: from prevalent extractivism and mining plunder, corporate-led production models, as well as offshoring and the patronage of "flexible", informal, or irregular labour subcontracted in the Southern countries. In addition to these are the social and ecological effects of fossil fuel-reliance of governments and corporations, and that of scrap materials trade, to communities and to populations.

A transformative, people-powered sustainable consumption and production agenda could be built on the following principles, among others:

- **People's rights are protected and advanced in the whole production and consumption chain.** People's rights are at stake in the current prevalence of unsustainable production and consumption patterns: of indigenous

peoples to their ancestral domains, of workers to nationally-appropriate living wages and safe workspaces, of farmers to land, of the right to make use of domestic resources, among others. A transformative SCP agenda must begin with the premise of protecting and creating conditions for the realisation of these rights.

- **Self-sufficiency from the community to the national level is promoted through people's sovereignty.** Self-sufficiency through people's sovereignty points to the necessity for the people to have decision-making power in utilizing limited resources for people's needs. This does not refer to economic isolationism, but rather production and exchange of resources and materials away from the profit-driven processes that concentrate wealth and resources to a few, and therefore constrain the provision of people's needs.

For instance, shifting away from food systems driven by corporate agriculture and food distribution, and towards asserting food sovereignty, is an important step to sustainable consumption. This is at the same time moving away from pesticide-reliant agriculture that could destroy soil fertility as well as pose health concerns. People's sovereignty is also manifested in people's campaigns to reverse neoliberal trade and investment agreements that favour corporations, including ISDS rules. These are premised on the influence and decision-making power of peoples and their organisations in development processes.

- **Social innovations and community actions toward SCP are encouraged and supported.** In contrast to the usual notion of the public as individual consumer households, the roles of peoples, community and sectoral organisations must be affirmed in shaping SCP policy and related decision-making processes in the matter of sustainable development. On the one hand, this means that SCP must be driven by grassroots initiatives and actions premised on people's sovereignty – such as farmers' collective farmland cultivation

practices to reclaim lands in Brazil and the Philippines. On the other hand, this could also include people's assertion that state actors be held accountable, and for governments to exact accountability of businesses, in cases of proven rights violations and detrimental impacts.

- **Accountability of corporations and governments is demanded and ensured.**

National governments do indeed bear the duty to shift policy trajectories for SCP. Effective policy shifts to sustainability, for instance in environmental regulations, must be coherent with economic priorities. A necessary aspect of this would be moving away from decades-old policies of trade and investment liberalisation and deregulation. Elite-led Southern governments incentivise investment by allowing anti-union practices and unsafe working conditions. Peoples in the global South must lead

their governments to shift away from incentivising corporations, and hold state actors accountable when necessary. On the other hand, peoples in high-income countries and the North should drive their states towards the reversal of the dominance of monopolistic corporations in world production.

SCP as systemic change, and sustainable development, in this sense fulfils its promise when it fosters transitions away from economic policy favourable to corporate giants, and away from economies reliant on corporate-driven production networks. Sustainable development, and environmentally-friendly patterns of production and consumption, instead affirms the roles of peoples and their organisations exercising the right to participation in development processes and enjoyment of its outcomes.

12 RESPONSIBLE
CONSUMPTION
AND PRODUCTION



Sustainable Consumption and Production

SCP has been defined in 1994, at the Oslo Symposium on Sustainable Consumption and Production, as the use of goods and services to “respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life” while also “minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants” to not “jeopardize the needs of future generations”

SDG ensures the inclusion of SCP in Agenda 2030. However, although SDG 12 recognizes the role of governments in actualising SCP, current SCP policies could be limited in both policy rhetoric and practice. Moreover, TNCs and MNCs are given central role in implementing SCP; whilst they remain the biggest culprits in the climate crisis.

For a Transformative Sustainable Consumption and Production

1

People's rights are protected and advanced in the whole production and consumption chain.

2

Self-sufficiency from the community to the national level is promoted through people's sovereignty.

3

Social innovations and community actions toward SCP are encouraged and supported.

4

Accountability of corporations and governments is demanded and ensured.

ENDNOTES

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