



Task Force 3:
LiFE, Resilience, and Values for
Wellbeing



PROMOTING A MASS SHIFT AWAY FROM UNSUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

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Abstract






The G20 comprises both developed and developing countries who are all expected to adhere to sustainable consumption and production (SCP). In practice, however, the adoption and implementation of SCP in G20 is varied, depending on factors such as availability of funding, technology, and natural resources. G20


countries have been striving to achieve the goal of SCP as per the capacity and capability of each member, but the imperative is greater cooperation and coordination. Developed countries need to ensure that appropriate funding and technological wherewithal are made available to developing countries within the G20 to achieve the goal of SCP.



The Challenge

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Healthy ecosystems are crucial for human well-being. At present, more than 60 percent of ecosystems and the services they provide are overused or extinct. Unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, which include the use of dangerous chemicals, are causing air and water pollution, deforestation, and excessive waste generation. With rising populations and economic growth, the current pressures on the planet's natural resources and life support systems will only heighten unless consumption and production habits become less harmful to the environment.


In a world where around 1.2 billion people in 111 developing countries live in acute multidimensional poverty, and where the human population is expected to rise from the current 8 billion to 8.6 billion by 2030, 9.8 billion by 2050 and 11.2 billion by 2100, it is imperative to address unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. It is essential to both eradicate poverty and hunger, and preserve and manage ecosystems and natural resources. This calls for an emphasis on resource value chains in tandem with the '9Rs' approach.

a. The 9Rs Framework

The 9Rs stand for “Rethink, Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repair, Refurbish, Remanufacture, Recover, and Recycle.” Together, they comprise a framework for sustainable resource management with emphasis on waste management, resource efficiency, and promotion of circularity. The 9Rs approach has received a lot of attention recently. Literature on the 9Rs has developed into an invaluable tool for people and organisations looking to lessen their environmental impact and promote sustainability. It includes reducing waste, conserving resources, and creating a more sustainable future. The circular economy is an economic model that aims to keep resources in use for as long as possible, minimising waste and pollution. The 9Rs method has been used in a variety of contexts, including lifestyles, seeking to minimise environmental impact and maximise the social value of human activity at every level—individual, household, community, organisational, and societal.

b. Contours of Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP)

Sustainable consumption is a crucial component of sustainable development.




It acknowledges that consumer behaviour has a big impact on the environment and society and that its adverse aspects can be lessened by making more responsible consumer decisions that support equitable access to resources and opportunities and strike a balance between the needs of the present and those of future generations. Reducing energy and water use, shifting to renewable energy sources, choosing environment-friendly products, proper waste management, and supporting local and sustainable food systems constitute some examples. But changing consumption patterns will call for a concerted effort from people, companies, and governments. Sustainable production is also equally important.

A resource value chain, a vital part of sustainable consumption and production, entails the creation and delivery of a product or service to the market. It involves a series of activities which can be divided into two categories: upstream and downstream. Upstream includes the processes of obtaining raw materials, manufacturing and distribution, whereas downstream comprises the processes involved in the consumption of the product or

service. The value chain concept has been applied in a variety of industries, including manufacturing, healthcare, and various services. Optimisation of both upstream and downstream activities can lead to a competitive advantage over other businesses. Sustainable resource management and the circular economy require optimising both the upstream and downstream elements of the value chain. A holistic approach to value chain optimisation can help decrease waste and emissions, improve resource efficiency, and advance economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

The 9Rs framework for sustainable resource management emphasises lowering waste and fostering circularity. This entails *rethinking* consumption patterns, *refusing* to use goods and services that are unnecessary or harmful, *reducing* resource consumption and waste production, *reusing* as much as possible, *repairing* items rather than throwing them away, *refurbishing* products to increase their lifespan, *remanufacturing* using recycled components, *recovering* useable resources from trash and *recycling* old belongings to produce new goods and using them. The circular



economy also involves the recovery of energy from waste and residues, which is an environment-friendly alternative to conventional waste management techniques. The 9Rs strategy is a crucial tool to promote sustainability.

Related to sustainable consumption is equitable consumption, which is the use of products and services that satisfy basic needs while having little or no negative impact on the environment, and is socially equitable and economically viable. Equitable consumption is consumption that is fair and just for all, including those marginalised, oppressed, or exploited by current production and distribution modes. Equitable consumption promotes democratic and inclusive methods of decision-making that guarantee the rights and interests of all parties involved. Sustainable consumption is far more important for developing nations, where significant environmental challenges are frequently encountered

and there are few resources available to address them.


Developing nations have the chance to advance towards more environment-friendly consumption habits. Supporting small-scale and sustainable agriculture, promoting renewable energy, encouraging sustainable tourism practices, and expanding access to sustainable goods and services all promote sustainable production, minimising resource use and environmental impact. By enacting laws and policies that support sustainable production and consumption, governments in developing nations can also contribute to sustainable consumption. Incentives for companies implementing sustainable practices, environmental standards for goods and services, and promotion of environment-friendly transportation methods are a few examples of how to do this.



The G20's Role

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The G20 has called for action to promote SCP through measures such as encouraging resource efficiency, reducing food waste, and improving sustainability of supply chains. It is a critical issue for the G20 as SCP can help achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the commitments outlined in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. The G20 has begun a number of initiatives to promote sustainable consumption, such as the G20 ‘Resource Efficiency Dialogue’ introduced in 2015. Its goals include promoting sustainable urban environments such as smart cities, low-carbon transportation systems, and green infrastructure, as well as encouraging sustainable production and consumption patterns, improving the transparency and traceability of supply chains, lowering greenhouse gas emissions, conserving natural resources, and fostering economic growth and social equity. In its 2016 circular economy action plan, the G20 vowed to support resource efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable supply chains. G20 members, businesses, and other stakeholders have formed the G20 Alliance for the Circular Economy. To address the issue of marine litter and


reduce usage of single-use plastics, the G20 adopted its Marine Litter Action Plan in 2017.

Although the G20 has made some progress towards promoting more sustainable practices, more needs to be done. The extent to which each G20 nation has carried out its pledge to promote SCP varies. Some have indeed implemented relevant laws and policies. For others, however, promoting sustainable consumption has remained a challenge; they continue to draw significant amounts of their energy requirements, for instance, from fossil fuels.

a. Challenges

Each G20 member country has distinct economic interests, some of which may be difficult to reconcile with SCP. In some nations, economic development and growth may take precedence over sustainability, making it problematic to reach a consensus on the laws and practices required to promote SCP.

Strong political will is also essential to put policies into action, since this involves overcoming challenges, taking difficult decisions, dealing with opposition from various stakeholders,



maintaining focus on the end result, and persevering in the face of difficulties.

Consumers play a crucial role in implementing SCP. Lack of consumer awareness could impede it. Through a variety of strategies, it is possible for low-income consumers to access affordable SCP. Governments need to enact laws that support energy efficiency and open up access to essential services, green jobs, and improved standards of living, reduce waste and pollution, increase resource efficiency, and create a new circular economy. They can offer subsidies for environment-friendly goods and services, alongside terminating subsidies for goods and services that are not. By favouring goods and services with lower carbon footprints and fewer adverse social impacts, consumers can also contribute to promoting SCP. Companies too, can implement sustainable practices and provide low-income customers with affordable sustainable goods and services.


b. Opportunities

The G20 countries should adopt sustainable consumption practices to meet their environmental objectives and contribute to global sustainability.

The G20 can promote circular economy principles, which include encouraging product redesign, recycling, remanufacturing, and closing the loop on waste in member nations. These will improve resource efficiency, create jobs, reduce emissions, and support sustainable development.

The Circular Carbon Economy (CCE) platform, introduced by the G20 in 2020 under Saudi Arabia's presidency, aims to promote the circular economy to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate the effects of climate change. The circular use of carbon in energy and agriculture is its main focus. The G20 has pledged to support the circular economy in additional areas too, such as waste management, sustainable consumption and production, and resource efficiency. These commitments are reflected in the G20 Osaka Blue Ocean Plan and the G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter.

The G20 countries could also enact green procurement policies, which prioritise the purchase of goods and services with minimal environmental impact. Such policies would increase demand for green technologies, stimulate the market for sustainable goods, and decrease waste. The G20



has focused on promoting sustainable lifestyles to achieve sustainable development, such as encouraging sustainable transportation, promoting energy efficiency, and minimising waste. To mitigate climate change, reduce pesticide use, and enhance food security, the G20 can support sustainable agricultural practices like agro-ecology that promote biodiversity, soil health, and water conservation.

‘Lifestyle for the Environment (LiFE)’ is an initiative by India, the current president of the G20, in June 2022, to encourage adoption of sustainable lifestyles and

promote pro-environmental behaviour. It aims to leverage social networks to influence social norms surrounding climate and transform individuals into “pro-planet people”. It is an important step towards promoting environmental consciousness and encouraging individuals to adopt sustainable lifestyles. Though still in its infancy, LiFE has received global attention, as it aims to create a global network of individuals undertaking simple climate-friendly actions in their daily lives.



Recommendations to the G20

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The G20 has made progress towards promoting SCP, particularly in creating a framework to boost resource efficiency and support initiatives to reduce food waste and promote sustainable food systems. However, to continue the effort, strong political leadership, cooperation among the world's largest economies, along with a persistent campaign to encourage more sustainable consumption patterns will be needed. Sustainable consumption is attainable, but it demands concerted effort from all stakeholders, including governments, corporations, and consumers.

There are further steps the G20 can take. It can set challenging SCP goals, such as lowering per capita consumption of natural resources and raising resource efficiency. The goals should be measurable, time-bound,

and in line with the SDGs. It can support the circular economy, with policies that encourage product reuse and recycling, cut waste generation, and increase product lifespan. It can promote further use of renewable energy, enhance resource efficiency, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and minimise the use of hazardous substances, while encouraging sustainable production practices by developing standards, regulations, and incentives. It can encourage cooperation and partnerships between corporations, governments, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders to promote SCP practices through public-private partnerships, knowledge-sharing platforms, and other cooperative initiatives. It can also inform consumers about the value of SCP and motivate them to make sustainable decisions through awareness-raising campaigns, labelling initiatives, and other educational programmes.

Attribution: Arvind Kumar, "Promoting a Mass Shift Away from Unsustainable Consumption," *T20 Policy Brief*, July 2023.



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