



Conference on Resource Efficiency

23-25 April 2008, Paris, France



CONCLUSIONS BY THE CONFERENCE CO-CHAIRS

by
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and
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Ladies, Gentlemen,

The OECD and UNEP co-organised this international Conference on Resource Efficiency on 23-25 April 2008 in Paris. We are very grateful for their initiative. This conference was particularly timely, as many countries (e.g. China, Germany, Japan), the international community (e.g. OECD, UNEP, G8), and key leading companies (e.g. mining, manufacturing, recycling, distribution companies) are aiming to improve resource efficiency, at a time of changes in international materials markets (e.g. increasing international flows, new geography of supply and demand, increasing prices, recycled materials trade) and related environmental concerns.

The Conference explored how improved resource efficiency can reduce negative environmental impacts of resource exploitation, transportation, use and disposal, while at the same time securing adequate supplies of materials to sustain economic growth and reduce poverty. The meaning of resource efficiency in the context of developing countries was highlighted, including the implications of changing material flows in our global village. The conference addressed economic efficiency and environmental effectiveness of resource use, corporate environmental responsibility as well as the related development aspects. The Conference emphasised the need for systemic thinking and approaches. This is of utmost importance to help reach environmental, economic and social goals.

Interest in resource efficiency and resource related trade is growing and there is an increasing body of knowledge and information to draw on at the national, regional and international levels. There is also much innovation and the different concepts and approaches are converging: 3Rs (reducing, reusing, recycling waste), sound material-cycle society, circular economy, integrated or sustainable waste management, sustainable consumption & production, life-cycle management and sustainable materials or resource management, all aim at similar objectives and require similar action by the various stakeholders.

Capacity building and awareness raising are needed to improve resource efficiency. Differentiated solutions are called for at the local, regional and global levels. Developing countries have specific needs. In addition to capacity building they need access to technologies, information, financing, and enhanced institutional capacity. They also need improved skills in resource-related assessments, management and governance. Poor people should be involved as partners in waste management and recycling.

There is a need to develop a common vision about resource efficient societies, and communicate this vision to broader groups of stakeholders. There is a need to advance work on decoupling, indicators and statistics, development and dissemination of best practices in both industrialised and developing countries. This applies, inter alia, to recycling, "urban mining" and waste management, including e-waste. Target-oriented approaches should also be developed at company and territorial levels, possibly in association with action plans and voluntary initiatives.

The conference stressed the need to move towards sustainable manufacturing based on a holistic, system-based approach. Good practices in the private sector are growing, as are industry led voluntary initiatives. More efforts are needed to spread these good practices to the SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises).

Resource efficiency is now higher on the policy agenda than ever before. Improving resource efficiency is a shared responsibility of governments, the private sector, IGOs/NGOs and citizens/consumers. Resource efficiency information is already being used in policy design. Further action is now feasible and needed to ensure that appropriate framework conditions are in place, including those related to markets, competition and innovation. The use of economic instruments should be encouraged more broadly. Wider use of benchmarking could also provide an incentive for progress.

The conference highlighted the importance of information and education as powerful policy instruments for both producers and consumers. Governments need to explore drivers for consumption patterns, the rebound effect and to better understand how to influence the demand side of the market.

Next steps

We as co-chairs, listening to presentations and debates, have perceived a sense of urgency and a commitment to immediate action. Many presentations indeed reported on action taken, conveying confidence in the availability of solutions. Our conclusions may serve as an input to the G8 Environment Ministers' Meeting (24-26 May 2008, Kobe). We would also like to transmit our conclusions to the OECD Environment Ministers' Meeting (28-29 April 2008, Paris), the next meeting of the UNEP International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management (19-20 May 2008, Rome) and the Governing Council of UNEP.

Regarding the way forward, we consider that the following is important. Measuring resource efficiency requires operational indicators. There is a need to support statistical agencies in setting up the monitoring systems. Governments need to expand the use of economic instruments. Efforts on sustainable mining, waste management and recycling need to be strengthened, including through international co-operation. Continuing support is needed for the UNEP/UNIDO network of National Cleaner Production Centers, which assist SMEs in addressing resource efficiency. There is finally a need to foster co-operation and partnerships on resource efficiency at the international level involving the OECD, UNEP, G8 and others.