



Federal Ministry  
for the Environment, Nature Conservation  
and Nuclear Safety



## **Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns – National Dialogue on the Follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development**

**(conference held in Berlin, Germany, 16–17 February 2004)**

### **Conference proceedings**

prepared on behalf of the

**German Federal Environmental Agency (Umweltbundesamt, UBA)**

and the

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## Introduction

This report summarizes the key outcomes of the Conference on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns – National Dialogue on the Follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which took place in Berlin on 16 and 17 February 2004. The conference, which was hosted by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) and the Federal Environmental Agency (UBA), aimed to launch a broad-based national dialogue process in order to open up perspectives for the reform of current production and consumption patterns towards sustainable development.

As Federal Environment Minister Jürgen Trittin underlined in his opening speech, this presents a challenge at both national and international level. International studies such as the recent Worldwatch Institute report highlight the dramatic increase in resource consumption worldwide, coupled with growing inequality in living standards. The decision adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002 to develop a 10-year framework of programmes in support of the shift towards sustainable consumption and production sent out an important signal at international level while underlining the developed countries' special responsibility to take the lead in this context. The International Expert Meeting organized by the United Nations in Marrakech in 2003 was the first step towards implementing this mandate.

As Minister Trittin made clear, the federal government is already pursuing measures in many sectors to promote more sustainability in production and consumption. Examples include regulations on producer responsibility, the “Blue Angel” ecolabel, and the adoption of environmental criteria in the field of public procurement policies. Trittin highlighted the importance of strengthening regional economic cycles, which present a particularly good opportunity to promote sustainable consumption, often helping to protect the environment while meeting the demand for high quality products. According to Minister Trittin, this must also be taken into account when setting the framework for the European internal market. As a further example of the importance of the EU level, Minister Trittin cited future-oriented measures in the field of product policy, such as the proposed framework directive on ecodesign of energy-using products; here, he called for the standards set by pioneering market players to be adopted across the board.

However, such initiatives can only achieve widespread success if they do not emanate solely from the state but are supported by society as a whole. For this reason, the Environment Ministry attaches great importance to implementing the Johannesburg mandate in dialogue with all social groups in Germany. Minister Trittin therefore emphasized that with the process launched by the conference, the BMU is seeking to stimulate such a constructive and results-oriented dialogue. To this end, initiatives will be pursued at both national and international level. To continue the dialogue at national level, Minister Trittin announced a series of follow-up events (see also Chapter 5 of this report) which will culminate in practical projects. For 2005, the BMU will host an international conference in Germany on sustainable consumption and production patterns.

More than 280 delegates from business, environmental and consumer associations, politics, the trade unions and churches, industrial, commercial and service companies, academia, education and other sectors took up the invitation to attend the conference which is the subject of this report. In order to facilitate an intensive exchange of views, three simultaneous forums took place on both days in addition to the plenary events. The purpose of these forums was to discuss specific aspects of the conference topic in more detail. On Day 1, the forums focussed largely on reviewing past experiences and discussing basic principles and challenges, while on Day 2, they explored future perspectives and specific methodologies. This report tracks the conference proceedings and presents the key issues and outcomes of the individual sessions. The final chapter outlines current thoughts on how to continue the process.

## 1 Sustainable consumption and production: Challenges for all social groups

### Panellists:

- **Carsten Kreklau**, Member of the executive board, Federation of German Industries (BDI)
- **Andreas Troge**, President, German Federal Environmental Agency (UBA)
- **Regina Wollersheim**, Head of Directorate-General 2: Consumer Protection, Food, Research, Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering, German Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture (BMVEL)
- **Angelika Zahrnt**, Chairperson of Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND) and member of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE)

Chair: **Volker Angres**, Environmental affairs editor at the ZDF television broadcaster

There is a close correlation between our production and consumption patterns and our society's general **value orientation**. Angelika Zahrnt, chairperson of BUND, placed particular emphasis on the need for a social consensus. Global justice and justice towards future generations must be the ethical basis for all political decisions. By comparison, a concept such as "justice based on vested interests" is forfeiting its ethical legitimacy. The protection of vested interests is seen as an impediment to the necessary change – a view also endorsed by UBA President Andreas Troge.

A social consensus, as outlined above, is extremely important, but in reality, a **culture of sustainability** has not yet been established as society's **cultural mainstream** (Troge). Speaking on behalf of the BDI, Carsten Kreklau stressed that in a liberal pluralist society, this culture cannot simply be imposed on people. Instead, what is needed is long-term persuasion and awareness-raising, as well as an ongoing social discourse and exploration process. In the BDI's view, one obstacle to this long-term approach is that many actors are generally required to produce tangible results fast.

Angelika Zahrnt underlined the importance of a **communication process** which, above all, must overcome the "blame culture" prevalent in relations between the various areas of social responsibility. From BUND's perspective, the Johannesburg Summit sent out a signal that the "production and consumption" nexus is first and foremost a political issue and that it is

not enough to leave the responsibility for this area to the individual – even though no one can be relieved of the obligation to evaluate the issue for himself.

The BDI also pointed out that together, consumption and production ultimately comprise the **full range of economic activity**. The efforts to achieve more sustainability must therefore take adequate account of the economic and social dimension. A key objective in this context is to safeguard competitiveness, jobs and know-how. The entire economic process thrives on permanent innovation, which enhances cost-effectiveness, performance and quality.

While the representatives of the business community therefore underline the **equal status** of the economic, social and environmental "pillars" of sustainability, Andreas Troge, on behalf of the UBA, stressed the **disparities** between these dimensions. In line with this interpretation, ecology is not a separate objective of sustainable development but an essential condition for economic and social development. Rather than referring to "pillars", a shipping analogy can also be used: environmental "buoys" – like those marking the edges of a navigation channel – provide some flexibility but still send out a signal when limits are breached. In order to navigate not only these limits but also the scope for appropriate innovation processes in economy and society, there must be an intensive **process of communication** within society about **shared visions and objectives**. However, a prerequisite in this context is that all actors must recognize the vision of sustainable development as a "regulatory ideal" (i.e. as a guide for their own action).

In this context, the importance of an **ethic of sustainability** was underlined. While Carsten Kreklau – like Federal Minister Trittin in his speech earlier – rejected the notion of a straightforward **ethic of renunciation**, Andreas Troge and Angelika Zahrnt stressed that the basis for an ethic of sustainability is the **freedom to choose between different options for action**. Restrictions in one area of life may be the prerequisite for gains in other areas, as summed up by the phrase "quality of life, instead of possessions" in relation to consumer behaviour. The social and individual debate about these different options for action should be regarded as the greatest challenge arising in the context of the Johannesburg mandate.

However, sustainability also has a practical dimension. A range of **instruments** is available to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns, and their application can and should be further expanded. From the BMVEL's point of view, it is essential to provide consumers with adequate **information** about products and production conditions to facilitate consumer choice on sustainable consumption options. Studies have shown that a large number of consumers in Germany are interested in this information. The planned Consumer Information Act is regarded as an important step in this process. On the issue of product labelling, the UBA spoke out in favour of expanding the use of energy consumption data that compare energy efficiency with other products in the same category. Others proposed providing the consumer with more detailed information as well, e.g. on the extent to which external costs are reflected, or the product's contribution to increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

As well as expanding and simplifying product labelling, BUND views changes in price relationships, through the internalisation of costs within the framework of the **environmental fiscal reform**, as an important starting point in promoting sustainable consumption. Angelika Zahrnt pointed out that the further development of the environmental fiscal reform has been agreed upon as part of the present federal government's coalition treaty. BUND and the UBA

also emphasized that important signals can be sent out through the system of **public procurement**. BUND was in favour of binding international environmental and social **standards**, whereas the BDI cautioned against making the level achieved in Germany the international benchmark.

The need for the **state to set a framework** for sustainable development was recognized by all groups in principle. However, there were different views on its relative importance and the required scope. The BDI cautioned against overregulation, arguing that it would restrict the scope for innovation and alternative solutions, whereas the UBA emphasized the state's role as a driving force for innovation. As Andreas Troge explained, "innovation" is not always positive: in the automotive industry, for example, increases in energy efficiency are generally used to enhance engine performance rather than to reduce consumption.

There were also different views on the extent to which **priorities** should be set in the various fields of action. The academic representatives called for a focus on those areas of consumption with the greatest environmental impacts, e.g. construction/housing, mobility and food, whereas other delegates stressed that improvements towards sustainability must be undertaken in many areas simultaneously. Other important starting points for setting priorities were identified in response to the question about the prospects of success of various activities, and the individual citizen's scope for action.

**For the coming decade**, achieving progress in the following areas was identified as an especially urgent task:

- Regional production cycles must be strengthened, and consumers made aware of the value of regional and seasonal products (Zahrnt);
- Prices must reflect true environmental costs (Zahrnt);
- There is a growing insight into the benefits of sustainability. Intensifying competition to achieve sustainable production and consumption patterns is essential, as is the availability of sustainable alternatives on the world market (Troge);
- More consumer information must be provided (Wollersheim);
- Sustainability must be an issue where citizens can play an active role (Troge);
- Companies and consumers, as much as policy-makers, must assume responsibility for sustainable development (Zahrnt);
- Priority must be given to achieving a high level of education and knowledge, increasing international competitiveness and safeguarding jobs in line with the Lisbon strategy, in which the EU pledges to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010 (Kreklau);
- Increasing competitiveness through positive framework conditions for innovation is essential (Kreklau);
- To ensure greater diffusion of sustainable production and consumption patterns in society than at present, all social groups must be involved in a shared development process. Therefore the dialogue process initiated should be intensified and expanded towards this goal (all delegates).

## 2 Status quo and challenges

### 2.1 Sustainable production and consumption – what benefit to us? Recognizing opportunities, identifying risks

#### Speakers:

- **Karl-Werner Brand**, Head of the Munich Project Group for Social Research (Münchner Projektgruppe für Sozialforschung)
- **Dietlind Freiberg**, Press officer, Otto (GmbH & Co KG) mail order company
- **Lucia Reisch**, Consumer Economics Section, Institute of Household and Consumer Economics, University of Hohenheim
- **Roland Schröder**, Detergents Division, Henkel

**Chair: Michael Angrick**, Head of Department “Production”, German Federal Environmental Agency (UBA)

Sustainable production and consumption – what are the benefits to us? In order to answer this question, it is essential to identify the opportunities, but also the risks, which will arise, or have arisen, for the different social groups in the move towards more sustainable patterns of production and consumption. On this basis, possible ways of exploiting the potential benefits for the individual stakeholders can then be identified, to mobilize their specific self-interests more fully.

For companies, the key prerequisite – if they are to adopt sustainable production methods and supply sustainable products – is that **economic efficiency** must be guaranteed. Ideally, taking account of sustainability considerations should also generate economic benefits, so no conflict of interests arises. In this scenario, the task is simply to assist companies to identify the potential benefits. In other cases, optimisation of production processes and organizational procedures can ensure that sustainable production is at least achieved cost-neutrally. For example, if companies are successful in transferring sustainable products from the niche market into mass goods, this automatically results in lower production costs. Increasing the demand for sustainable products is therefore essential. Here, retailers or retailer market can play an active role in generating appropriate demand. Success has already been achieved, for example, in relation to cotton textiles with the adoption of high environmental and social standards, where the production of retailer’s own brands has influenced supplier chains and resulted in benefits to customers (e.g. greater skin compatibility of products).

Better **product information** can also result in economic benefits for companies. For example, sustainability reports can help a company to position itself and develop a corporate identity. To achieve this positive impact on corporate image, not only the content of the information must be credible; its presentation must also be appropriate.

Some companies take the view that the **opportunities for sustainable production** have already been virtually exhausted for their sector. This applies, at least, to production *methods*; however, the extent to which the producer is also responsible for the *choice* of products manufactured by him remains contentious. There is still considerable scope for

improvement towards sustainability here, e.g. by dropping products such as softening agents, whose harmful impacts on the environment are far less contentious than their benefits for the consumer, but for which there continues to be a demand. In any case, the behaviour of consumers play a key role in ensuring the success of sustainable production, while whose preferences largely dictate the range of products available, play a key role in ensuring the success of sustainable production. Recognizing this, what are the starting points for changing consumer habits?

Most consumers' behaviour could be characterized as "patch-work" and multi-optional. They do not always follow the same pattern; instead, their decisions are guided by complex mechanisms. The selling argument that a product is environmentally friendly/sustainable is often not enough to encourage the customer to buy it. Here, using the concept of alliances of motives could be the key approach: often, there are other **positive qualities of sustainable products** – e.g. health, taste or quality – that attract the customer to purchase the product. In addition, customers often feel overwhelmed to behave in an environmentally friendly or "sustainable" way consequently; here, various obstacles exist, such as lack of information, poor product availability or social pressure. Therefore, strategies to promote sustainable consumption patterns must take into account people's different circumstances and the resulting constraints of daily life. So in order to establish sustainability more firmly in people's daily routines, differentiated approaches are required. However, one option which could also be considered is whether –as well as targeting the various consumer groups – it might be appropriate to launch a carefully managed campaign to "normalize" environmental themes as a way of achieving progress. As key elements of this "normalization" campaign, organic products could, for example, be supplied not only through specialist organic supermarkets or in designated organic sections of shops, but would be found, quite normally, on the shelves alongside the other products.

Product **image** might be another starting point in encouraging the consumer to adopt sustainable consumption patterns. In general, sustainability is difficult to market successfully as it is often associated with self-denial. In future, the aim should be to create positive emotional associations, thus possibly initiating new trends. This means, for example, that the debate should focus on quality of life rather than on renunciation. Communication projects in the environmental field should also focus to a greater extent, and in a targeted way, on the opportunities for the individual to improve their quality of life.

### **Conclusions: Status quo and challenges**

- Sustainable products must be freed from their "niche" existence: In some sectors, this has already been achieved, at least in part. How can the mass market be opened up for a wider range of sustainable products?
- Retailers can play an important role in influencing demand.
- Sustainability's image problem must be solved, e.g. by highlighting the benefits and quality of sustainable products. A successful strategy to improve the marketing of sustainability cannot be confined to a few specific aspects but requires a plurality of approaches reflecting the complexity of the factors influencing consumer behaviour.
- Strategies which aim to encourage people to adopt more sustainable patterns of consumption in their daily lives must take account of people's different circumstances,



firstly to overcome the various practical obstacles and, secondly, to identify positive points of reference (e.g. through a combination of motives) which highlight the opportunities that sustainability affords to improve quality of life.

- Information, communication and the motivation of actors play a key role in this context.

## 2.2 Responsibility for sustainability in consumption and production

### Speakers:

- **Eva Blatt**, Head of Section, Directorate-General 2: Consumer Protection, Food, Research, Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering, Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture (BMVEL)
- **Gerrit Schrammen**, Head of Transport and Sustainability Section, Federal Executive of the German Trade Union Confederation
- **Kristina Steenbock**, Board member, Germanwatch
- **Petra Warnecke**, Head of Political Communication, Berlin, Duales System Deutschland AG

**Chair: Martin Lichtl**, .lichtl Sustainability Communications

In the field of production and consumption, there is ongoing interaction between a range of actors whose various opportunities and responsibilities must be taken into account. For example, how far does corporate responsibility go, and what level of influence is exerted by the "sovereign consumer"? How can autonomous action by the individual social groups be reinforced, and when should the state take a role?

First, it is essential to differentiate further within the groups of actors. In the **private industry** sector, for example, a distinction can be made, firstly, between business associations and individual companies and, secondly, between large corporations and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Some companies have established best practice and demonstrate a high innovation dynamic. However, this trend is not yet as widespread as it should be and, among business groups in particular, has yet to penetrate to the necessary extent. Highly diverse communication strategies must be deployed for the various categories of companies: small and medium-sized companies are rarely receptive to abstract objectives and principles – such as "sustainability" per se – and need very specific action- and instrument-based incentives. Overall, there is a real need to coordinate the political and corporate "toolboxes" to a greater extent. Further progress could be achieved if non-government organizations were more constructive than is currently the case in monitoring the serious attempts being undertaken by some companies. Inter-company cooperation also offers untapped potential.

The role of the **trade unions** focuses on boosting the social components of sustainable development, although this is linked in many different ways to promoting environmental protection at company level. Codetermination in the context of companies environmental protection strategies has also been enshrined in the Works Constitution Act since 2001; it includes the right to have a say on product design, although this is confined to rights of information and rights of proposal as well as individual training in these areas. In many cases, the scope for trade union activities are not yet being fully exploited. Trade unions are

suitable partners for improving environmental protection at company level and in evaluating the voluntary commitments undertaken by companies.

Among the groups of actors discussed here, **consumers** are a special case. They are not organized and centralized to the same extent as politics and business. Consequently, their role as an autonomous group of actors is less pronounced. The extent of this group's responsibility and scope for action is therefore contentious. Often, consumers are overwhelmed by the range of – sometimes conflicting – information available and the demands made of them. Consumer information must therefore be prepared carefully and, if necessary, backed up by value judgements. Non-government organizations, especially consumer associations, can play a key role as mediators and translators. The provision of information by companies has limitations as it invariably reflects their commercial interests. The state's task is to guarantee independent consumer information; if necessary, it must enforce transparency even if there is resistance from companies and associations. However, one difficulty remains: how is "sustainable consumption" to be defined? How sustainable are organic foods which have been imported over long distances, for example? Here, consumers have to evaluate for themselves which cannot be decided by anyone else.

Besides the provision of information, **confidence** is essential in the relationship between consumers and companies. Some companies have found that many consumers doubt the honesty of their intentions even when they are making genuine efforts. In order to enhance the credibility of the corporate commitment, consumer organizations are proposing the establishment of a standardized management system for Corporate Social Responsibility and, in particular, for sustainability reporting, similar to that which exists for environmental management within the ISO and EMAS frameworks. Some companies point out that high-quality environmental and sustainability reporting can also take place outside such certification systems, sometimes going beyond the established standards. A key standard in the international context is the Global Reporting Initiative.

Some sides warned that communication should not merely be viewed too instrumentally, transferring only information as a means to implement an already a consensus on sustainability which can largely be taken as a given. What is missing, in this context, is the fundamental **debate about visions and objectives**. Where should "sustainable" development ultimately lead? Answering this question is a prerequisite for the long-term projection of joint activity. Besides policy-makers, the media in particular has a key role to play in creating an atmosphere conducive to this debate.

### **Conclusions: Status quo and challenges**

- Examples of innovative and responsible action already exist, both in large companies and in SMEs. Overall, however, this trend is not yet established to the necessary extent.
- In order to stimulate sustainable corporate behaviour, different communication strategies should be developed for the various categories of companies. The development of consistent approaches and instruments, which take better account of the needs and scope for action of the various types of company, is a key prerequisite in this context. Constructive cooperation between different social actors should be intensified, and cooperation at company level should be expanded further.

- There should be a greater focus on the social aspects of sustainability in the workplace context, and the available scope for action should be utilized more effectively. Cooperation (e.g. between companies and trade unions) in this field should be intensified.
- Improving communication is, overall, the key to successful utilization of the available instruments. In this context, it is essential to translate information from the language of experts into the language of users on the corporate and consumer side.
- Confidence-building and strengthening "consumer sovereignty" are important prerequisites to enable consumers to fulfil their responsibility. The development of appropriate support structures can help to enhance the necessary decision-making competence and action by consumers.
- It is the state's responsibility to guarantee the provision of information which is independent of economic interests. Non-governmental organizations can play a key role in mediating with consumers.

### 2.3 Globalization and regionalization – how do they go together?

#### Speakers:

- **Andrea Böhm**, Quality association of environmentally aware craft companies (Qualitätsverbund umweltbewusster Handwerksbetriebe)
- **Jörg Haas**, Desk officer for ecology and sustainable development, Heinrich Böll Foundation
- **David Harrison**, Governmental & Product Affairs, Bayer AG
- **Dieter Overath**, Managing director, TransFair

**Chair: Volkmar Lübke**, Member of Board of the federal executive of the Verbraucher Initiative e. V. (consumer initiative)

We live in an increasingly globalised world. In the debate about sustainable consumption and production patterns, the relationship between sustainable consumption and production patterns and globalisation therefore cannot be ignored. In this context, the issue of regionalisation should not be seen as a "counter-concept" to globalisation; on the contrary, the question is how a globalised economy and regional economic structures can be made compatible and which opportunities they afford for more sustainable production and consumption.

Globalisation has fundamentally changed the **framework conditions** for promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns. The increasing division of labour and the decreasing scope for action at national political level are key features of these changed conditions. In particular, the greater distances between the production site and the consumer result not only in a higher volume of traffic; they also mean that the impacts of individual consumption are no longer felt in the consumer's immediate environment. Attempts at national level to internalise negative externalities are generally viewed as a competitive

disadvantage in global competition. Moreover, as complexity increases, it becomes more difficult to create adequate framework conditions in the international arena.

Global competition has become a reality and in principle, it is also desirable. However, ignoring the concepts of social justice and environmental responsibility in this context is not envisaged; instead, we need further integration of these principles into competition. Key instruments, in this context, are **international standards to establish minimum social and environmental criteria**.<sup>1</sup> One problem is the frequent lack of transparency in the development of such standards. As a result, it is often unclear which actors are working together, when they are doing so, and by which methods. Safeguarding transparency within the development of these standards on the basis of participation is essential for their credibility, as is independent verification. At international level, the transnational corporations undoubtedly have a key role to play in establishing and complying with standards. Some of these corporations have already undertaken voluntarily to apply a set of rules in their production processes worldwide. Transnational corporations can also exert substantial pressure on their suppliers.<sup>2</sup> Ideally, it should be less about "educating" suppliers than "enhancing their development" through technology and know-how transfer. Some positive examples of initiatives to assist suppliers to meet international standards already exist. At the same time, however, it is essential to expand these activities further. One trend which makes it more difficult to control compliance with standards or undermines them entirely is the trend towards no-name products.

Within the context of globalisation a key question is on how an **economic and cultural identity in the region** – which can often contribute to the sustainability of consumption and production patterns – could be reinforced? One problem arising in this context is that regional produced products are perceived by consumers to a very limited extent. For this reason, raising awareness of their benefits is essential: appropriate methods and instruments must be defined for this purpose. Instruments such client-specific manufacturing could make a valuable contribution to intensifying the relationship between customer and producer, creating a lifelong relationship between the consumer and the product. The new media could also do much to improve the marketing of the regions. On the production side, initiatives such as Umweltpakt Bayern and Qualitätsverbund umweltbewusster Handwerksbetriebe are positive examples. Here, networking among a range of actors and more intensive PR work at various levels have helped to raise the participants' profile, especially in terms of their environmental commitment and innovation, compared with competitors, enabling them to withstand competition. The involvement of SMEs and integration into Local Agenda processes were key prerequisites in this context.

Partnership and cooperation are the key to establishing more sustainable consumption and production patterns not only within regions, but also between regions on a global scale. Here, the task is to develop and increase all stakeholders' willingness to engage in cooperation. "Fair-trade" projects can be seen as an important model of best practice in this context. One example is the TransFair label, which seeks to create new framework conditions that can benefit all stakeholders, including producers, retailers and consumers in North and South. A market has already developed for some fair-trade products – coffee being the best-known

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<sup>1</sup> See 3.2.

<sup>2</sup> See 2.1.

example – although there is still scope for expansion. Extending this approach to other products has proved difficult until now, due to an often poor supply combined with inadequate demand. In some sectors, this problem could be solved by stimulating broad-based demand through the use of public procurement policies.<sup>3</sup>

### **Conclusions: Status quo and challenges**

- The success of initiatives to promote more sustainable consumption and production patterns is often made more difficult or even obstructed by intense global competition and the associated pressure on prices. A key challenge is therefore to integrate social and environmental criteria into competition.
- International standards and ecolabels are crucially important if sustainability criteria are to be taken into account on the global markets. Participation and transparency should be given greater priority when developing these criteria.
- Strengthening regional production and consumption cycles is a key element in developing sustainable economic structures. To this end, it is essential to raise consumers' awareness of the benefits of regional or more sustainable products (e.g. quality and individual service).
- Regional structures can be strengthened by cooperation projects, which can improve efficiency, promote innovation, be utilized for publicity purposes, and strengthen cultural links.
- Partnerships between regions and the actors involved in production or retailers are an important way of promoting sustainable development in a globalised world. This includes fair-trade projects, as well as capacity-building by transnational corporations within the supply-chain.

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<sup>3</sup> See 3.3.

## 3 Searching new ways

### 3.1 Communication and the demand side

#### Speakers:

- **Verena Böttcher**, Director of the Federation of German Retailers
- **Annette Dieckmann**, Chairperson of the German working group on nature and environmental education
- **Helmfried Meinel**, Member of the executive board of the North Rhine-Westphalian consumer advice bureau
- **Leonard Sommer**, Management of Sommer+Sommer GmbH

**Chair:** **Matthias Teller**, <sup>f</sup>x Institute for Sustainable Economy

Communication in a comprehensive sense is a key factor in all efforts to promote and initiate sustainable consumption and demand-side behaviour. This calls for different forms of communication with a range of time horizons: While education and training develop their effect over the long term, product-focussed campaigns provide short-term impulses for consumer behaviour; the establishment of labels and of consumer advice structures are medium-term strategies. Furthermore, communication should not be understood as a “one-way road”: The exchange of information and feedback are important; this can take place through, for instance, alliances and cooperative arrangements.

A general problem within sustainability communication is that, despite the intensive debates that have taken place over recent years, different understandings of sustainability continue to co-exist. While there is consensus that certain forms of behaviour are more sustainable than others, there is as yet no agreement on whether products or lifestyles may be termed sustainable if they only fit a few sub-aspects of sustainability. In the same context, there is disagreement in the debate on **labels** as to whether sustainability should be demanded rather as a minimum standard, or should be employed as a competitive selling position. At all, it is crucial that labels build upon unequivocal and transparent criteria. On that basis, classifying labels such as those for the energy and water use of washing machines could provide new opportunities for product suppliers to shape their profile. It is critically important that consumers build up confidence on the labels; this can be promoted by, among other means, independent auditing. Similarly, labels should build upon international standards. Objective credibility does not yet in itself guarantee consumer confidence – it is often hard to convince consumers that companies mean their environmental commitment seriously.<sup>4</sup> Partners within cooperative arrangements, such as environmental NGOs and consumer advice bureaus, can act as mediators lending additional credibility to a company’s commitment. However, such co-operative arrangements can conflict with the concern of NGOs to maintain their own independence and neutrality vis-à-vis individual companies.

To some degree, those concerned with sustainability issues do not yet give sufficient consideration to the circumstance that sustainability needs professional presentation.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. 2.2.

Conversely, in fields such as marketing there is often little awareness of the importance of sustainability aspects. Insofar, there is a need for intensified communication between sustainability experts and communication experts. However, even among experts and practitioners there is by no means consensus on what is the “right” way to communicate sustainability. From the point of view of **advertising**, the sustainability “brand” lacks precise conceptual definition and suffers from a high degree of technical complexity. This presents a requirement for sustainability to position itself in a clearer and more unequivocal manner before it can be lived and communicated more effectively. However, it can be questioned whether advertising is at all a suitable channel by which to communicate a guiding social/political vision such as sustainability.

For efforts to establish sustainability as a relevant theme to resonate among audiences at all, it is a precondition that such audiences are basically open to the theme. This must be established over the long term through **training and education**, and includes efforts to internalise certain ethical principles. Related actions range from nurseries through to universities as well as manager training, and include education relating to leisure activities. To create a comprehension of sustainability, it is essential both to disseminate knowledge and address people at the emotional level. The often cited complexity and abstraction of the concept of sustainability does not necessarily stand in the way of an emotionalisation. The individual facets of sustainability, such as environmental protection and social or global equity, are well understood and are emotionally highly charged. There is thus a need to create suitable **educational and experiential spaces** at very different levels, that generate an understanding and comprehension of sustainability, foster concrete action-related competences and make it possible for people to experience the interconnections of sustainability in their everyday lives. Cooperative arrangements between the institutions responsible for both school and extra-curricular education and industry and retailers – can foster a setting in which the educational innovations towards an **education for sustainability** considered essential to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns.

There is a great potential to communicate sustainability in, for instance, the field of nutrition. Here there is a great array of potential points of leverage, such as provision of advice for parents, catering in nurseries and schools, education on nutrition, the establishment of information systems or the organization of visits to companies. In advertising measures, too, it is crucially important to provide hands-on experience of sustainable products and lifestyles. While the benefit and effect of major cost-intensive campaigns such as for the German Blue Angel ecolabel and the “Bio-Siegel” label are controversial, the retail sector reports positive experience with individual actions addressing customers directly.<sup>5</sup>

To put forward a stronger **emotionalisation** and **popularisation** of the concept of sustainability, actions could also make increased use of targeted presentations transporting concise, pithy messages and creating new images. The involvement of artists could ensure an improved presentation of sustainability themes. Cooperation with museums can open up new forms of access to the theme. Actions carried out in connection with the 2006 Football World Cup or other large-scale events could build awareness of sustainability issues among larger and new segments of society.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. 2.1 and 4.

In the same context, there is a continues lack of sufficient consideration of the **diversity of lifestyles**. In this regard, actions should focus increasingly upon specific target groups. Here there is a need for the findings of social science research to be channelled and made accessible to actors. One aspect frequently given insufficient attention is the fact of demographic change: Instead of concentrating primarily upon young people, sustainability communication should also target the elder generation which are financially better situated. A further key aspect is that sustainability communication must target not only consumers but also companies. There is a need to make plausible to companies how their commitment in this field can generate market benefits and image gains. To enhance the popular marketing of sustainability, it would be particularly useful to involve more closely the existing, widely known product brands.

On the other hand, regardless of the great number of target groups, it also appears necessary to develop a **common platform** with a uniform logo in order to concentrate diverse activities under the umbrella of the sustainability debate. In this connection, too little use is still made of existing approaches such as the national sustainability strategy and the “sustainable shopping basket”.

**Alliances and partnerships** can contribute significantly to attaining sustainability goals, while at the same time fostering the necessary exchange among groups in society. Moreover, cooperative arrangements provide a key basis for successful communication initiatives that achieve greater perception. However, a precondition to participation, particularly of business enterprises, is that concrete benefits are apparent to the partners. Where win-win situations are not immediately apparent, or advance inputs are necessary, it is essential to involve initiators and supporters. Here government bodies can adopt an important function. A further key precondition to the success of alliances is that there is robust confidence among the partners; this can be fostered by clear rules. It is further important to reach agreement on goal definitions and time horizons.

### **Conclusions: New ways to shape the demand side**

- The vision of sustainability has an image problem and needs more professional presentation.
- To do this, sustainability needs to be brought down from the abstract plane and must be made emotionally accessible. This applies to advertising, just as to education and training.
- Intensifying education for sustainability is a key element in efforts to raise the awareness of consumers and promote their competence to act. Educational innovations need to be advanced; besides opening up new educational and experiential spaces, such innovations also involve new forms of cooperation.
- Sustainability communication must take different approaches depending upon the specific target group. There is a need in this regard to increasingly disseminate and better use the results of social science, as well as to intensify dialogue between sustainability experts and communication experts.
- When designing sustainability labelling schemes, it is essential to base these on clear, readily comprehensible criteria. Establishing the credibility of a label in the awareness of



consumers requires long-term efforts to convince consumers through supporting communication initiatives.

- Alliances among different types of actors have great potential – both to establish agreement and understanding among each other, and to establish sustainability as an issue in the public mind. However, to tap this potential there is often a need for external (e.g. state) initiative and support.

### 3.2 Innovation in shaping products and processes

#### Speakers:

- **Marina Franke**, Manager Sustainable Development, Procter & Gamble
- **Rainer Griebhammer**, Member of the team of directors, Öko-Institut (Institute for Applied Ecology)
- **Jurij Poelchau**, f<sup>x</sup> Institute for Sustainable Economy
- **Christian Schweizer**, Environment officer at the Quelle AG / Neckermann Versand AG mail order company

**Chair: Konrad Saur**, Director of Five Winds

Activities aiming to shape products and processes could be seen as the “hardware” of sustainable production and consumption, namely the optimisation of products according to sustainability aspects. Besides considering the importance of ecodesign in product design, process design in a comprehensive sense plays a crucial role: This is a matter not only of production processes and life-cycle assessments, but also of organizational processes as well as functional and system innovation. Dematerialization through the strengthening of service components plays a particular role in this connection (extended service provision around the product, through to the substitution of products by services); catchphrases in this connection are “product-service-systems” or “from products to services”.

**Ecodesign** will only have a future if it is conceived as design for sustainability. This is a challenge taken up by, for instance, Product Sustainability Assessment (PROSA), a product assessment system taking not only environmental but also social and economic criteria into account. It is further crucial to the market success of sustainable products that customer wishes and requirements are anticipated and taken into account adequately in the design phase. To identify best practice and ensure its broad-scale implementation, there is a need to establish ways to measure performance oriented not only to environmental but also and above all to economic criteria.

Overall, some small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) find it easier than large companies to market sustainable products, as they occupy certain market niches. Consequently, while a need remains to build capacity among SMEs, attention must focus particularly on ways to ensure that larger companies, too, can increasingly develop and market sustainable products. One option would be to provide advance financing for the development of such products – this could be offset either by other branches of the company or through the later successful sale of the product. Local authority grants given to the

purchasers of certain products such as energy-saving appliances have also proven helpful, and have the further effect of increasing the sales of such products.

**Standards** are widely viewed as a purposeful way of shaping sustainable production processes.<sup>6</sup> To facilitate the application of standards, they need to be shaped in a way that is commensurate with needs and is sufficiently flexible. Furthermore, already existing standards should first be implemented in practice before new ones are created. Standards and benchmarks also need to be flexible in the sense of upward adjustment in step with the advancing development and dissemination of technologies.

To develop and apply **guidelines** and disseminate **best practice** there is a need to further elaborate the success factors and to develop methodologies. When seeking to exchange best practice, the need to preserve business secrets is a barrier that should not be underestimated. This will be the case when the presentation of best practice permits conclusions as to the specific processes or preparations employed.

Consideration of the entire **life cycle** of products within the context of life-cycle analysis (LCA) is one of the most important approaches towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production. In the case of a relatively simple product, the **starting point of its life cycle** is easy to monitor. Supplier audits can be used to review suppliers' alignment with sustainability criteria. In the case of complex products composed of several thousand components this is no longer so simple. Here, in addition to introducing international standards, partnership approaches extending along the value-added chain can deliver improvements. Such approaches comprise intensified communication among stakeholder groups in the precompetitive phase of the product life cycle as well as capacity building, particularly in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.<sup>7</sup>

There are diverse points of departure for optimising sustainability **within the production process**. For instance, internal waste recovery processes can recycle the greater part of wastes arising in production. A further approach is to tailor manufacturing to customer wishes early on during the production process and thus to deliver durable products that match requirements precisely.

A life-cycle perspective goes beyond the various stages of production. During the **use phase** of the product, it is important that consumers, too, gain a systemic perspective. The purchase costs of a sustainable product are frequently higher than those of a conventional one, but this generally pays back across the product's service life. However, the extension of product service life is not always unproblematic. Firstly, not all products are suited to service life extension; secondly, particularly in the case of electric appliances, products currently on the market are frequently far more resource-efficient in the use phase than the older models.

In efforts to "dematerialise" products and services through **new strategies of use**, consumer acceptance presents the highest barrier. It is therefore critical to put the satisfaction of customer needs at the centre of activities to conceive and communicate such products and services. Education on service concepts could start early on, in schools. Often this information is then passed on by pupils to their parents. In many cases, however, uptake of

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. 2.3.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. 2.3.

alternative options is also a question of lifestyle. If, for instance, having one's own car is necessary as a status symbol, use of a car-sharing service is out of the question. Regardless of his, new strategies of use and new services are not purposeful in all cases, or they need new supply structures and business models. There is a need for further analysis of these aspects in order to be able to better appraise the market prospects of new strategies of use as well as of the services backing up products.

In all the spheres noted here, **retailers** can play an important role. Their most important function in this connection can be seen in creating linkages between production and customer wishes. Normally the producer has no direct contact to the customer and is therefore reliant upon other feedback channels. Retailers can also influence product design through the production of house brands. One of the ways in which they can influence consumer behaviour is by providing information on the environmentally-relevant attributes of products.<sup>8</sup>

### **Conclusions: New ways in shaping products and processes**

- As regards ecodesign, the most important tools are already available. However, a need remains to apply these in a practically-focussed manner. In other fields, too, the implementation of available instruments appears more urgent than their further scientific development.
- Establishing a systemic perspective among actors (in the sense of an extended understanding of innovation) is a key precondition to sustainable production and consumption patterns. International standards for the auditing and certification of suppliers, in concert with intensified cooperation among actors along value-added chains, can deliver optimisation in pursuit of sustainability.
- Standards must be shaped in a manner appropriate to needs and in such a way that they are sufficiently flexible.
- To achieve more broad-scale dematerialization of products and services, in the sense of new strategies of use, there is a need for a better understanding of both their use value and symbolic value.
- It appears expedient to develop strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as for crafts enterprises, and to network SMEs.
- Sector-focussed approaches should be given preference over a quest for global solutions. In the same vein, activities should start wherever relatively substantial results can be achieved by simple means.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. 2.2.

### 3.3 State actions between ongoing tasks and new challenges

#### Speakers:

- **Christian Hey**, Secretary-General, German Advisory Council on the Environment (SRU)
- **Klaus Kögler**, European Commission, Directorate-General Environment
- **Volker Kregel**, Head of Environment and Health Department of the city administration of Bonn
- **Eckart Meyer-Rutz**, Head of the Product-Related Environmental Protection Division at the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU)
- **Lutz Cleemann**, Member of board of directors of the Allianz Zentrum für Technik GmbH technology centre

**Chair: Heino von Meyer**, Head of the OECD Berlin Centre

The tasks of the state are interlinked with the spheres of responsibility of the other actors in society: Where these end, the role of the state commences; where, conversely, state regulation is not considered expedient, the other actors must be placed in a position to exert their own control over processes in a viable manner. Consequently, the interface between the state and “other” actors must not be cast in only abstract terms, but must be considered in relation to concrete options to engage in product policy and promote sustainable consumption. In general terms, steps to shape the development of sustainable consumption and production patterns operate in the field of tension between state intervention, market mechanisms and self-organization on the part of the individual actors. This is a matter both of the scope of effect of state framework-setting, and of the pioneer role adopted by the state through public procurement.

When considering state action in the field of sustainable consumption and production patterns, it is important to first make a clear distinction between the various national and supra-national **organizational levels**. Stipulations set at the international level thus overlap with those established at the European or national levels. It further needs to be taken into account that, at the national level, specific approaches will be pursued within the various levels of a federally constituted state.

Important framework conditions determining the scope for action on the part of German policy are set at **European Union level**. Here sustainability is not viewed as a static concept, but rather as a never-ending process. By setting interim goals, developments are pointed in a certain direction, taking into consideration the various interconnections in society and involving relevant actors. The overarching guiding idea is to make Europe-wide economic growth compatible with ambitious environmental protection targets, also and particularly within the context of the increasing globalisation of economic activity. The European Commission views its task as being, in particular, to provide a clear definition of priorities through its Environmental Action Programmes, to elicit support for common interim goals on a broad stakeholder basis, and to harness and foster existing innovation potential in the interests of resource-conserving patterns of production and consumption.

Within the context set by European stipulations, but also within the framework of the international guidance provided in Johannesburg, in Germany the **federal government level** employs, when shaping the national process, on the one hand regulatory instruments such as product-related standards, prohibitions and restrictions. On the other hand, the federal government relies increasingly upon the cooperation principle and views itself as a moderator for the various actors. Here the question that arises is above all that of what the state can do in organizational terms in order to give stakeholders ownership of the problem-solving process and thus to ensure that the solutions found enjoy broad-based acceptance. These tasks include the comprehensive provision of information for the various groups, such as through specially tailored education measures, education provision or labelling systems, but also moves to bring relevant actors together and to moderate and support dialogue processes.

The state has the capacity to play a special role in the field of **public procurement**. This is above all a matter of the pioneer role of the state; more than 14% of gross domestic product is administered through public-sector contracts. Here the **local administration level** is even more important than the federal government level, as it is there that a large part of these investments are carried out. Positive impulses have already been given here, as the example of the city of Bonn shows: Nonetheless, there is scope for improvement. For instance, further public facilities such as schools, kindergartens and hospitals could be included in sustainable procurement programmes; this would provide at the same time particular opportunities to communicate directly with citizens. Similarly, state calls for tenders and the procedures for awarding publicly-funded project contracts could be aligned more closely to sustainability criteria. Here, too, the federal government and European Union levels have the task of setting framework conditions in a manner conducive to achieving the targets.

To date, the **successes of state policy** have been achieved above all on the production side. This is exemplified by product standards, as well as by cooperative models to identify the environmentally most advantageous production options. In contrast, no far-reaching successes have yet been achieved with regard to sustainable patterns of consumption. This is due partly to inappropriate market signals and negative liberalization effects (such as in the case of cut-price flights).

**In the view of industry**, in particular, the fundamentally most efficient approach is considered to be to harness market dynamics in order to trigger innovation and change towards sustainability. In order that market signals can drive developments in this direction, it is exceedingly important that the state sets reliable and transparent framework conditions. However, over-regulation or excessively complex stipulations can have a negative effect upon innovation potential. The effectiveness of voluntary commitments on the part of industry is viewed with some reservations, as there is a danger that they are used more to safeguard the status quo than to generate additional benefits for sustainability.

As a part of state activities to shape processes, **creating new partnerships and alliances** among civil society actors is a particularly important task. Here the state could further expand upon and give substance to its supporting role. Partnerships could be established in, for instance, spatial or thematic contexts. In all cases it is important that there is a link to concrete actions; abstract declarations of intent are not suited as a basis for partnerships. A further essential precondition is that all actors are willing to engage in dialogue and cooperation.

## **Conclusions: New ways of state action**

- Promotion of technology options that are already viable on the market;
- Focus on fields of action in which the probability of success is high;
- Provision of support for approaches at local level that already exist, by supporting local-level initiatives such as exchange rings;
- Setting by the state of goals and standards and dissemination of best practice;
- There is a need to improve in some instances the coordination of activities undertaken by state bodies, just as there is to cooperate more closely with private-sector actors;
- Feedback and performance monitoring with respect to the attainment of goals and compliance with standards are essential;
- Initiation and promotion of new partnerships and alliances.

## **4 Next steps: The perspectives of major groups in society**

### **Panel participants:**

- **Gerd Billen**, Executive director of the German Society for Nature Conservation (NABU)
- **Edda Müller**, Executive director of the Federation of German Consumer Organisations (Verbraucherzentrale Bundesverband, vzbv) and member of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE)
- **Klaus Wilmsen**, Head of department for quality assurance and environmental officer at the Karstadt Warenhaus AG warehouse company
- **Rolf Wurch**, Head of the centre for technology, association policy, standardization and external coordination at the Bosch und Siemens Hausgeräte GmbH appliance manufacturer

**Chair: Cornelia Quennet-Thielen**, Head of the Sub-Directorate for Strategic and Economic Aspects of Environmental Policy; Cross-sectional Environmental Legislation at the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU)

The conference has shown both the strong interest of numerous different actors to advance the establishment of sustainable consumption and production patterns, and the need for forums in which to engage in dialogue at various levels. Successful **communication** was generally stressed as a key condition for success. As a rule, deficits are seen less in the design of tools than in their application. In the opinion of many actors, the sustainability debate continues to be overly theoretical and couched in technical jargon for it to be understood by consumers and companies. Rolf Wurch (of Bosch/Siemens), among others, stressed the need to reduce complexity and frame the Agenda in terms of concrete, operational steps.

On the other hand, however, there are calls to develop visions, longer-term perspectives and interconnected strategies based upon clear priorities. Vzbv Executive director Edda Müller pinpointed in this connection the discrepancy between a consensus on sustainability presented in public and the actual agendas pursued by politicians and industry.

The conference participants view positively a **continuation** of the process initiated by the conference to foster sustainable consumption and production patterns. For this process to succeed, it is necessary in their opinion to give it a more permanent nature and to institutionalise it. In the opinion of the environmental and consumer associations, one way of doing this would be to make use of the process of updating the German National Strategy for Sustainability, which is due to take place this year. The proposal was made in this connection to take up consumption patterns and lifestyles in the National Strategy for Sustainability – both within a separate chapter and as a cross-cutting theme for the existing chapters. An important question is further that of how progress in changing consumption patterns can be made measurable in order to permit a monitoring of the process. Here the proposal made by the German Council for Sustainable Development to create an indicator for sustainable consumption could be taken up.

**Cooperative arrangements and dialogue forums** – particularly between the state and the private sector or between the private sector and non-governmental organizations – are generally viewed very positively by the conference participants. It would need to be considered in this connection how the capacities of NGOs to engage in dialogue can be strengthened. The possibility of establishing a fund to finance a continuous dialogue process was noted in this connection; this could be replenished by companies within the context of initiatives such as econsense or the Global Compact.

Klaus Wilmsen, the environment officer of the Karstadt warehouse company, stressed the **key role of trade** in mediating between manufacturers and consumers. He further reminded the conference that in many cases trading companies also operate as producers. It is a part of trade's responsibility to offer organic and fair-trade products at all in the first place. To increase turnover in these fields, it has proven useful to approach customers through targeted campaigns.<sup>9</sup> Such options notwithstanding, it is above all necessary to take the present economic situation into account when seeking to involve trade companies in dialogue processes. The attention of executives and staff alike is currently focussed particularly upon falling turnover, employment worries and concerns over economic viability.

The circumstance that the price is by no means the only and often not even the most important criterion for purchase decisions can be viewed as an opportunity for sustainable consumption – this varies, however, greatly between product groups. Often the time factor and thus the ready availability of products is the more critical aspect. In some cases, sustainable products even cost less than reference products. However, currently low environmental impact alone is no longer a sufficient sales argument. In the view of NABU executive director Gerd Billen, the theme of social responsibility is currently characterized by stronger dynamics. He underscored at the same time that **value orientations and awareness of responsibility** need to be conveyed by models in society. Instead, the elites in society have contributed in the recent past to making irresponsibility vis-à-vis people and

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. 3.1.

the environment an acceptable attitude; this dimension, too, must be taken into account in order to work against long-term trends such as “avarice is cool”.

Beyond the general expectations upon the dialogue process, priorities were also formulated for the own actions of participants and their expectations upon the actions of other actors during the coming years. NABU executive director Gerd Billen viewed it as a key challenge to convince the bulk of members of his own association of the benefits of environmentally sound and fair-traded products. He further noted the importance of large-scale events such as the 2006 Football World Cup or the Pope’s visit to the World Youth Day due in Bonn in 2005 as platforms on which to create broad-scale awareness of aspects of sustainable consumption. For instance, there are plans to advertise fair-traded textiles and footballs in connection with the Football World Cup. That the association organizes events of its own within the context of cooperative arrangements is also seen as an opportunity to raise public awareness of certain fields of action. Thus, for instance, it would be conceivable to follow up the “Sustainable washing” action day (10 May 2004) by launching a “30 degrees year”. This would centre on the importance of washing behaviour in terms of energy conservation, while at the same time expressing in its title the connection to global warming.

Vzbv Executive director Edda Müller called upon politicians to implement long-overdue steps. In addition to adoption of the German Consumer Information Act, she noted implementation of the CO<sub>2</sub> labelling scheme for cars required by the European Union, and a labelling scheme indicating the energy performance of existing buildings. She further noted the need to modify competitive structures that, as in the case of the electricity market, give neither consumer interests nor sustainability aspects equal standing with supplier interests.

Karstadt representative Klaus Wilmsen underscored the importance of the regional and municipal level for dialogue and partnership to foster sustainable development. It is essential to keep up Local Agenda processes in order to further improve the effectiveness of communication initiatives and initiate cooperative arrangements; other exemplary initiatives such as the “Umweltpakt Bayern” eco-pact in Bavaria should be replicated elsewhere. In other fields, he called for greater coordination and concentration of measures conducted by regional state authorities, for instance in the case of efforts to promote organic farming produce and to carry out educational activities in schools. Rolf Wurch argued in favour of an approach moving in small steps towards precisely defined targets. He highlighted the circumstance that sustainable production and consumption is a task inherent to the activities of companies, that it needs to be safeguarded through fair conditions of competition, and that credibility is a crucial economic factor for a brand company.



## 5 Outlook: Follow-up process

The unexpectedly high degree of interest in the conference and the commitment demonstrated by participants illustrate that there is a major potential in society that should be harnessed in order to launch, in accordance with the Johannesburg mandate, national-level activities involving all major groups in society. It became apparent at the conference that developing sustainable consumption and production patterns must be understood as a task involving continuous actions and that it will be essential within the process of dialogue initiated by the conference to move the debate from a more abstract and theoretical plane to concrete, manageable steps.

A number of **focal themes** have already been identified at the conference for this follow-up process:

- Quality – sustainability as a quality characteristic, quality as an additional benefit of sustainability,
- Education, information and communication strategies for sustainable production and consumption decisions,
- Strengthening regional cycles of production and consumption.

Focuses within the process will be formed not only by specific themes, but also by the roles of certain **actors** critical to the success of the process, such as

- Small and medium-sized enterprises,
- Retailers and
- Local authorities.

In view of such a concentration on specific actors or specific themes, the process will involve specifically tailored meetings which will be smaller, but will also involve a broad range of social groups, to be organized by the German Environment Ministry (BMU) and Federal Environmental Agency (UBA). Besides exchanging experience, the purpose of these meetings will be in particular to launch new initiatives in the specific fields. Such initiatives should preferably be supported not only by the federal government, but also and above all by social groups. Cooperative arrangements among actors will be sought explicitly.

Moreover, as a part of this national dialogue process for sustainable consumption and production patterns, the Federal Environment Ministry will host an annual cross-cutting event. At this event, the various actors shall report on their activities and experiences during the past 12 months, and elaborate proposals on how to further proceed.

To strengthen the international (Marrakech-) process for sustainable consumption and production patterns, and to highlight the role adopted by Germany in this process, the Federal Environment Ministry will organize in 2005 in Germany an international conference on sustainable consumption and production patterns. This shall provide an opportunity to look beyond the national horizon and reflect upon the progress achieved in fulfilling the Johannesburg mandate.