

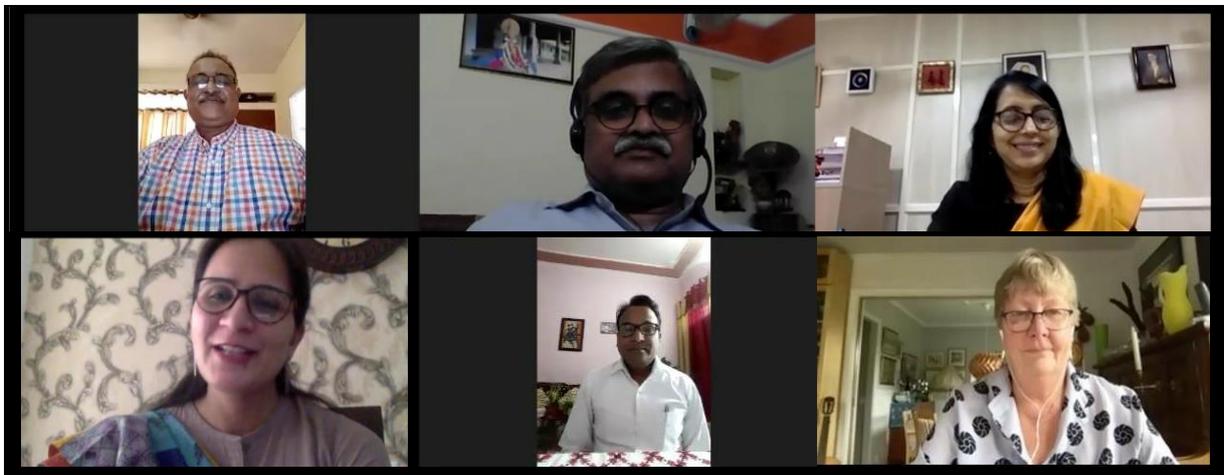
REPORT OF THE WEBINAR

SDG-12

Will the Pandemic Slowdown the Progress of Meeting the Target

26 August
2020

Wednesday
15:00 -16:00 Hours
(Indian Standard Time)



Background

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) # 12 “Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns” is about promoting resource and energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure and providing access to basic services, green and decent jobs and a better quality of life for all. Its implementation helps achieve overall development plans, reduce future economic, environmental and social costs, strengthen economic competitiveness and reduce poverty. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was launched in 2015 to end poverty and set the world on a path of peace, prosperity and opportunity for all on a healthy planet. The 17 SDGs demand nothing short of a transformation of the financial, economic and political systems that govern our societies today to guarantee human rights of all.

According to latest projections, the global population could grow to around 8.5 billion in 2030 and 9.7 billion in 2050. The equivalent of almost three planets could be required to provide the natural resources needed to sustain current lifestyles. Rising incomes and lifestyle changes and continued resource-intensive growth patterns are expected to further worsen resource depletion and ecosystem degradation. Concerted public and private action is needed to increase

resource efficiency, fundamentally shift consumption patterns and production processes, improve waste management systems and transition toward a more circular economy approach.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020 brings together the latest data to show us that, before the COVID-19 pandemic, progress remained uneven and we were not on track to meet the Goals by 2030. Now, due to pandemic, an unprecedented health, economic and social crisis is threatening lives and livelihoods, making the achievement of Goals even more challenging. However, the COVID-19 pandemic offers countries an opportunity to build recovery plans that will reverse current trends and change our consumption and production patterns towards a more sustainable future.

Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) organised a webinar on “SDG-12 “Will the Pandemic Slowdown the Progress of Meeting the Target”, using a virtual platform of Zoom, on Wednesday, August 26, 2020. It was attended by more than 100 participants from 23 states of India and 12 countries, including representatives of UNCTAD, UNEP, UN-ESCAP, ASEAN secretariat, civil society organisations and academics attended the webinar¹. The video recording of the webinar is available on CUTS [YouTube’s channel](#). George Cheriyan, Director, CUTS International, moderated the webinar. The following were the speakers:

1. Archana Datta, SWITCH-Asia RPAC Coordinator for India, UNEP
2. Eva Eiderström, Director, Department of Ecolabelling and Green Consumption, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC)
3. Dr. Usha Titus, IAS, Principal Secretary, Department of Environment, Government of Kerala
4. Dr. Joy Elamon, Director General, Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA)

Proceedings

Webinar commenced with the welcome by Amar Deep Singh, Senior Programme Officer, CUTS International and introduction by George Cheriyan, Director, CUTS International. Cheriyan explained about the Sustainable Development Goal # 12 “Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns” and the importance of this Goal.



He highlighted that the 70th Session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly held on 25th September 2015 adopted the document entitled “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” consisting of 17 SDGs and associated 169 targets. The 17 SDGs came into force with effect from 01st January 2016. The year 2020 marks the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals by the global community. It also heralds our stepping into the final ‘Decade of Action’. He further added, there are 11 targets in Goal 12

¹Some media coverage is available at <https://voiceofjaipur.com/2293> and <https://www.apnnews.com/despite-severe-impact-of-pandemic-on-sdg12-there-is-opportunity-to-rebuild-a-sustainable-future-says-experts/>

to measure the sustainable consumption and production patterns. A total of 14 indicators have been identified at the national level to measure and monitor the progress of these targets and data is available for only 3 indicators.

Cheriyen also said that the Asia-Pacific region is unlikely to meet any of the SDGs without concerted efforts by all stakeholders. Conditions in 2030 are predicted to be worse on 20% of SDG indicators than the status in 2015. The region is struggling to achieve progress in SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) and SDG 13 (climate action). In fact, the region is not even moving in the right direction.

The pandemic had brought “immediate relief” in areas related to SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 14 (life below water) and SDG 15 (life on land). Carbon emissions dropped 17 percent globally amid corona virus. First time after World War II, the global energy demand reduced. India had seen a 30% reduction in energy consumption. There was a drastic reduction in air pollution; Delhi NCR had seen a reduction of 79%. However, these gains were short-lived. The pandemic had resulted in tremendous increase in plastic consumption, the sale of global disposable masks increased from USD 800 million in 2019 to USD 166 billion in June 2020. Since education had gone online, the use of electronic gadgets increased tremendously, the sale of laptops in the state of Kerala itself increased by 400%. Use of personal vehicles, due to lack of public transport, including Metros and physical distancing norms, increased to more than the pre-pandemic levels. This increased consumption will have severe negative impacts on achieving the targets of SDG12, Cheriyen added.

Archana Datta, SWITCH-Asia RPAC Coordinator for India, UNEP, briefly discussed the Switch-Asia work on circular economy and SDG-12. She highlighted that COVID-19 Pandemic is an unprecedented global health, economic and social crisis and is threatening lives and livelihoods, making the achievement of SDGs even more challenging. To achieve long-term sustainability, we need to approach the environment, climate, economy and society in more equitable manner. Amid the corona virus pandemic, the SDGs are even more relevant today than ever before.



She said that India and its states are taking actions towards sustainable consumption and production (SCP) which is goal 12 of SDGs. However, many of those achievements are not being reported and this could be giving a wrong image of the nation’s merits and efforts towards SCP. She highlighted Switch Asia is actively supporting India on SDG12 monitoring and reporting. She further said that the pandemic has exposed our system's weaknesses and meeting targets of SDG is no more the responsibility of the government. Thus, it also shifts to the private players and the citizens of the country.

Eva Eiderström, Director, Department of Ecolabelling and Green Consumption, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, Stockholm, highlighted Sweden's economic situation after the pandemic. General consumption has declined by 10%. COVID-19 has had severe negative



impact on human health and the world economy. However, it also results in pollution reduction due to limited social and economic activities. It is important to preserve nature for achieving the SDGs. The emergence of COVID-19 has emphasized the fact that unregulated exploitation of natural resources, coupled with unsustainable food habits and consumption pattern, lead to destruction of system that supports human life. There is need to protect biodiversity.

She stated that climate change is the indicator of consumption patterns of society as a whole. It was also highlighted that circular economy still needs to be developed and institutionalized. Its focus also seems to be less on reduction of total use of resources and more on recycling. She stressed upon active dialogue with concerned stakeholders for sustainable use. She also said eco-labelling can play a key role in promoting responsible consumption. Eva concluded by highlighting that the SDG Goal 12 is the key for survival and we have to shape our systems according to that.

Dr. Usha Titus, Principal Secretary, Department of Environment, Government of Kerala, acknowledged that Kerala is top in overall SDG ranking, but is certainly not on top with regards to SDG 12. She gave a brief overview of various schemes and programs being successfully implemented within the state to address SCP. She also highlighted Kerala has taken a bold step with its ban on single-use plastics. Kerala is also planning to introduce Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) fee in the state.



During the discussion, she acknowledged that lack of coordination between various departments within the state acts as a major challenge in meeting the targets and collecting the SDG data. While few of the local Panchayats do implement successful SCP practices, it often goes unnoticed and unreported. Absence of nodal officers in each department to push the SDG agenda is also a major roadblock.

Dr. Joy Elamon, Director General, Kerala Institute of Local Administration, highlighted that, as the world fights the rapid spread of corona virus amid a massive lockdown, many people are confined to their homes. The effect of the pandemic is unprecedented. It is changing consumption patterns of people and may have a long-lasting impact on certain sectors. It is altering consumer behaviour on a massive scale. It is changing the way we think, work, read and relax on a daily basis. SDGs need to develop an interconnected model for sustainable growth. He further highlighted various schemes and programmes of the Government of Kerala.



He underlined the importance of empowering local governments and integrating various departments for achieving the SDG 12 targets. Local governments should not be seen as mere implementers of the agenda. Local governments are catalysts of change and the level of government best-placed to link the global goals with local communities. He also agreed that centralised and decentralised management both have their own advantages and disadvantages and what works

best depends on case-to-case basis. For instance, with respect to solid waste management, decentralised management works best. He also emphasised that behavioural change needs to adopt sustainable lifestyle.

Conclusion

George Cheriyan summarized the session and opened the floor for discussion. During the discussion, various queries were raised by the attendees, which were suitably answered by the panellists. Regarding a query on rebuilding after lockdown, a panellist underlined the need for a cautious approach in going forward, not with the 'business as usual' approach. The other important questions were:

1. The link between environment and health needs more attention and any policy enactment in the future cannot be just focused on economic and social development alone.
2. How can we increase awareness of environmental protection and sensitising people to environmental needs?
3. What are the implications of COVID-19 for the Environment and Sustainability?
4. How can awareness be raised about Sustainability standards and certifications?
5. What should be the five focus areas for citizens groups post Covid-19?

These questions were suitably answered by the panellists. Panellists also emphasized that there is a need for coordination among government departments for SDG 12 implementation in India. The issue of data related to SDG 12 was also discussed and it was observed that data availability for SDG 12 is a big challenge. Amar Deep Singh summed up the webinar by underline some key observations made by the panellists. Singh proposed a vote of thanks to speakers and participants.