



*Industry as a partner
for sustainable development*

10 years after Rio:
the UNEP assessment



UNEP

*A contribution to the World Summit on
Sustainable Development*



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First published in the United Kingdom in 2002.

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ISBN: 92-807-2197-6

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Design by Beacon Creative

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About the report

This report documents industry's progress, unfinished business and future challenges in implementing Agenda 21. It contributes to the global preparatory activities for the World Summit on Sustainable Development by providing recommendations for sustainable business practices.

The report builds on a multi-stakeholder process facilitated by the Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (DTIE) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). This process has been possible thanks to the generous financial contribution of the French Ministry of the Environment.

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Executive summary

Through a multi-stakeholder process facilitated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as a contribution to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) 22 industry-sectors, ranging from aluminium production to chemical manufacturing, from tourism to finance, have developed global sustainability reports. It is the first time that business and industry have formed a partnership with the United Nations (UN) in consultation with labour and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to report on sector-specific progress in implementing Agenda 21 on a global scale, integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Like any first time initiative, it has not been easy. But despite the difficulties, participating industry sectors and stakeholders have generally felt the process to have been positive, contributing to better mutual understanding needed in moving forward. It has helped in identifying leadership initiatives and progress, but at the same time pointed out areas where improvements have to be made.

This publication provides an overview of industry achievements and unfinished business in implementing Agenda 21 and moving towards sustainability, identifies key gaps and stakeholder concerns, summarises industry-specific challenges, goals and commitments, and provides UNEP recommendations on the way forward. The overview covers economic aspects, environmental performance, social issues, tools for sustainability and integration for sustainability.

Economic importance of industry sectors

Much attention has focused in the past on the economic pillar of sustainable development, so only a brief overview of the economic importance of industry sectors is provided in terms of sector global production, projected growth, and worldwide employees.

It is worth emphasising that:

- A company or industry has to be economically sustainable if it is to contribute to sustainable development. Its role, however, is about more than providing jobs and generating wealth.
- Sustainability depends on local conditions and context. A community may wish to give priority to one or other of the three pillars in order to meet specific development needs, but ultimately, economic sustainability will not be achieved if local environmental and social needs are continually put on the waiting list.
- In an increasingly interdependent world, industry's contribution to sustainable development has to consider global as well as local economic, environmental and social aspects.

Sector-specific environmental performance

Significant efforts have been made by participating industries in reducing their environmental footprint. Increased awareness and improvements in the application of management tools have resulted in reduced energy consumption, emissions and toxic releases, and greater resource and water efficiency. Consequently, performance in these areas have received more attention in the sector reports than other more difficult to measure impacts, such as biodiversity or the environmental impacts of product use, that will require more attention in the future.

New legislation and regulation requirements, business self-interest in reducing costs related to raw materials and treatment of emissions and wastes, and growing public concerns are frequently credited as the main drivers for these achievements. International conventions, such as the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, have also been a key driving force in motivating industries to

invest in new technologies that have less environmental impacts. Cleaner production (and associate, preventive concepts such as eco-efficiency) has moved from a few, multinational corporations to wide acceptance as a first option of choice, promoted by industry associations as best practice.

Key gaps and stakeholder concerns

- **Lack or incomparability of data.** It is difficult to measure real progress globally. There are significant differences in what is measured, how it is measured (relative or absolute reductions), and the time period used, making it difficult to determine whether environmental progress is real or simply a result of economic downturns or geographic shifts in production.
- **Impacts of product use and consumption.** For many products, most serious environmental impacts (energy consumption, air emission, water pollution, etc.) occur during the use of the products. Industry needs to do much more in adopting full life cycle, product stewardship and eco-design practices, in partnership with its stakeholders.
- **Cleaner production or end-of-pipe?** It is also difficult to know whether pollutant and waste reductions are achieved through real cleaner production techniques (at-source prevention) or merely shifted between air, water and soil through end-of-pipe

their environmental impacts are still largely unmet, despite years of identifying SMEs as a priority.

- **Developing countries.** To some degree, developing countries and countries undergoing economic transition have been able to 'leapfrog' over the past environmental mistakes of industrialised countries, integrating cleaner production early into industrial development and taking a more integrated approach to sustainable development. However, much remains to be done in recording and reporting progress in these countries to get a better sense of areas of real progress and need.
- **Global shift of production.** There is a global shift of manufacturing production towards poorer countries that often do not have the resources or capacity to manage the accompanying environmental, health and safety impacts.

Social aspects

There is growing awareness among business and industry that the social side of global sustainable development needs to be taken into account alongside environmental and economic aspects. Leading edge companies and industries are trying to better understand the direct and indirect social implications and contributions of their activities.

Many are finding that companies that choose

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