

VIDEA – Youth Voices in Development

Topic Four: Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

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1) Choose one of the targets of Goal 12. Based on your observations, discuss ways in which your host country could work to meet this target from where they are now.

2) Compare this to how you think this target would need to be tackled in Canada: do your host country and Canada face the same challenges in address this target?

When we discuss sustainable consumption and production, and sustainable development in general, we're really discussing a whole host of things related to the root causes of poverty and underdevelopment. Mostly our minds jump to energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure, climate management, and green economies. But when we focus in on consumption and production, we're truly forced to reflect on the specific ways our human societies interact with, engage, and exploit the environment around us. And since space is constrained here, I'm grateful to be able to focus in on just one of the targets within Goal 12 - Target #5 that states "By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse". This one also gives me a chance to discuss a topic that has been weighing on my mind since I first arrived here in Tanzania - that of the overall life cycle of the goods and materials we consume and use every single day! No matter where we live.

It's necessary to first look back on post-independence Tanzania in the 1960's and 70's when socialist inspired policies saw borders closed to many foreign goods and a burgeoning national textile industry with 4 main suppliers doing considerably well within the nation's borders. At this time there was great hope, enthusiasm, and the promise of work and production for the nation's youth, many of whom started migrating to the cities in search of better livelihoods. The 1980's then saw trade liberalization and neoliberal economic policy as mandated by the World Bank and IMF through debt servicing agreements and the Structural Adjustment Programs. After that, much of the national industry died, textile, meatpacking and plantation industries included, and the nation's borders began to be flooded with cheap, non-taxable, second-hand goods from abroad. This neoliberal policy combined with urbanization, resulted in the rapid growth of the informal market sector. A previously non-existent sector that now dominates 80% of the national economy and employs a vast portion of the Tanzanian population. This sector is also noticeably marred by a severe lack of regulation and proper taxation, poor infrastructure, low-profit, and high rates of human rights abuses towards women and other disadvantaged populations.

Jumping back to today, one can barely travel 1km within the city of Dar es Salaam and not see stall after stall of informal market stands selling "mitumba", or second hand clothes, shoes, bags, electronics, and all matter of other things that are rejected hand me downs sent from abroad. And while yes, they provide some form of income for many, the unfortunate part is that when these supplies hit the borders they're considered no value charity products and do not contribute to the national economy by being taxed in any significant way. Not only do they not contribute, they also serve to destroy any chance of local industry growth within these sectors. Recently elected Tanzanian president, John Magufuli, often states just how frustrating it is to see people within a country that is a leading producer of cotton and sisal continue to wear second hand clothes when it could be making its own. "We're exporting raw cotton," he says in the Gaurdian Oct 19th 2015, "to countries where they make clothes and

wear them and later they send us the used clothes back”. And it’s true, the amount of opportunity cost associated with the hundreds of thousands of tons of used items that East African countries continue to receive every year from abroad, has negative repercussions long beyond what the average person has ever considered.

Meanwhile, back in Canada... we’ve all bought something we didn’t quite wear, donated bags and bags of lightly used items to charities we don’t know much about, thinking they’ll land in good places and that we’re contributing to poverty alleviation in some way. Contributing indeed, but in a positive way? And I’d easily estimate that over 30% of people I see here in a day are wearing one of those free t-shirts we’ve all received from schools, conferences, charity events - the same ones you now have five of for each and every year you participate, and whose relevance is outdated just as fast as they leave the box. To charities at home, please STOP making those useless t-shirts every single year! Spend your money on something more sustainable, please. Most of us have no idea how long the life-cycle and impact of our consumption habits truly are.

Sustainable consumption and production will never be successful if we don’t all reconsider the ways we purchase, use, and dispose of our everyday items. We really need to consider the full economic implications of the activities involved in our corporate consumer culture that insists we have the newest, shiniest model every single year. Because where does last year’s go? It goes to the developing world in the form of garbage that is rarely managed in a sustainable or environmentally considerate way. We’ve all seen pictures of the garbage dumps in China and beyond where our electronics go to poison local waters, soils, and ultimately people. Please remember those images when you feel the need to buy the next best thing one week later. There is a huge need for every one of us around the world to focus on local, sustainably produced food, garments, and other supplies in order to avoid the environmental and economic impacts of not only shipping goods and garbage all over the globe, but also of the knock-off effects these goods have on industrial development and livelihoods in so many developing countries around the world.

And while I can’t say that Canada and Tanzania face the exact same challenges in this regard, I know the issues are so interrelated beyond what we can truly comprehend. Hence why it is so important that the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals really are taken as a global effort, for everyone to be involved with, and not just a problem of the developing world. Our waste is their waste, and it doesn’t just go away on its own. It always goes somewhere.