

Role of Consumer Organisations in Promoting SCP and Eco-labelling

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Consumer Organizations in Eco-labelling

Introduction:

Consumer organizations could play an important role within Eco-labelling:

- Consultation of policy design for Eco-labelling
- Stakeholder representation in Eco-labelling board
- Participation in criteria development
- Strategic partner in the promotion of Eco-labelling within public campaigns
- Competent and verification body
- Product testing of Eco-labelled products
- Consumer information, Education & Campaigning
- CSR and Eco-labelling

Consultation of Policy Design for Eco-labelling

- Consumer organizations often become part in the political process to set up adequate policy frameworks for eco-labelling.
- Consumer organizations often give the political stimulus to set up eco-labelling schemes.

Stakeholder Representation in Eco-labelling Board

- In most of the existing eco-labelling schemes consumer organizations are important stakeholders within the institutional setting of eco-labels, like eco-labelling board, committees, etc..
- There is clear evidence, that the success of an eco-label in terms of public recognition and reputation relies much on the presence and active involvement of consumer organizations in the decision-making process

Participation in Criteria Development

- Due to their special expertise consumer organizations provide valuable input into the criteria development process.
- Consumer organizations often function as good sources of information on critical impacts from products, based on own research, which are often not provided by industry.
- Consumer organizations assist in developing a good knowledge base for eco-labelling and serves to safeguard the required plurality of information.

Promotion of Eco-labels

- Consumer organizations often initiate public campaigns on eco-labelling or become an active part of governmental financed promotion activities.
- Due to their structure and networks, consumer organizations are good distribution channels for various issues related to eco-labelling.

Competent and Verification Body

- In some countries, like Austria, consumer organizations are the management body of the eco-label scheme, functioning as competent and/or verifying body.
- The eco-label itself forms part of the institutional structure of the consumer organization.
- Normally, the role to function as competent and verifying body is delegated by government (as owner of the eco-label).

Product Testing of Eco-labelled Products

- Consumer organizations play a key role in setting up independent product testing bodies.
- Independent product testing forms the backbone of consumer confidence.
- Without independent product testing it is difficult to obtain qualified information on the impacts and performance of products at the market, which is required to have a good baseline for criteria development or to verify the performance of eco-labelled products compared to other products in the same category (comparative testing).

Consumer Information and Education

- Consumer organizations are valuable partners in implementing complementary measures in the field of consumer information and education.
- Consumer organizations provide valuable tools and activities to help consumers to understand how eco-labelling functions.
- Consumer organizations are often contacted by consumers as a source of information on the various types of (eco)-labels available and provides a source of confidence for consumers.
- As outlined earlier the basic function of consumer organizations is to sensitise the general public on emerging issues and to mobilise political support through campaigning.

CSR and Eco-labelling

- In recent years consumer organizations have provided consumers with more transparent information on the CSR performance of public and private companies.
- Consumer organizations have developed their own award schemes or integrated CSR related issues as part of its activities, like product testing, education & campaigning.

Conclusion

- The role of civil society in moving towards Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) should be seen as crucial.
- Within policy making on SCP the role of civil society is often underestimated or not adequately addressed.
- To adequately address civil society within SCP policies a broader approach of empowerment is needed which goes beyond traditional environmental instruments.
- To increase the impact of SCP related policies the involvement of civil society/consumer organizations is key, either in the policy design or the implementation phases.
- Capacity building within these organizations is a requirement to improve sustainable consumption practices and to build strong strategic partnerships in the implementation of eco-label activities.
- Within eco-labelling the various functions of consumer organizations must be addressed more comprehensively and strengthened.



THANK YOU