

## Sustainability – An Export Success?

Environmental protection and human rights:  
the international dimension

International cooperation Interview with Desmond Appiah

4851 503 ▶ EU

TURKEY  
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Mid. East  
21

CHINA  
1,286 ▶ 1,354 ▶ 1,392

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# The Oeko-Institut: the international dimension

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Much of our current thinking and work on the environment, climate and resource conservation relies on transnational cooperation. The international climate process, the sharing of ideas across borders about the risks associated with nuclear energy and appropriate phase-out strategies, energy efficiency standards at European level, knowledge transfer on the introduction of eco-labels in Asia: the Oeko-Institut's work already has an international dimension. We are engaged in intensive dialogue with colleagues from a range of disciplines – through our current research projects, through cooperation in intergovernmental bodies or at international conferences. We advise decision-makers who operate within democratic structures, but we also work on systems which have some way to go. And last but not least, we support groups which oppose government policy, assisting them to find ways of improving the environment and reaching the people for whom it provides a living space.

In other words, we already have a wealth of experience in this area, and I believe this aspect of our work will only intensify in future. Yes, it is laborious and time-consuming and requires a sensitive approach; it is also important to have – or to acquire – a good knowledge of the local situation. That's why we almost invariably work with people who are well able to assess the structures in place in their countries and regions and who, in most cases, have already spent a good many years working intensively on the issue at hand. We support them by sharing the knowledge that we have gained in broader project contexts and the experience that we have acquired by addressing problems at home, and we work with them to find consensus-based solutions. In this issue of *eco@work*, we explain how we did this in Ghana, Thailand and Kenya – and, closer to home, in the EU. We also talk to Desmond Appiah, tasked with restructuring the waste management system in Accra, Ghana.

We are pleased that you are joining us on this short voyage of discovery and hope you find the insights into our international engagement interesting.  
I wish you an enjoyable read.

Yours,

Michael Sailer

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## “We are united by the transfer of knowledge and a shared vision of a more sustainable world – irrespective of where we come from.”

Accra, the capital of Ghana, has a vast waste problem. Quantities of waste are rising rapidly, while the population is also growing. Disposal sites are stretched to the limit. Drains blocked by waste cause severe flooding. In Agbogbloshie on the edge of the city, electronic waste is recycled without regard for proper practice – with serious consequences for humans and the environment. Desmond Appiah plans to tackle these problems: the Mayor of Accra, Mohammed Adjei Sowah, has given him the task of restructuring the city’s waste management system. In an interview with *eco@work* Appiah talks about promising ways forward and his experience of working with European experts.

### Mr Appiah, how is waste management in Accra organised?

In 2016 the city introduced a “polluter pays” system to minimise the financial burden on the public sector. As a result, waste collection and coverage rates have gone up, but the private waste collection companies have still not been able to achieve 100% coverage. So at present around 25%-30% of the waste generated within the city is being collected by informal collectors. We need their services to cover the shortfalls, but we also need to manage their operations properly. The Metropolitan Assembly – the city’s administrative authority – is therefore registering all informal collectors, providing them with health and safety training and helping them develop their operations into formal or semi-formal businesses.

### What other plans do you have for managing waste?

With a team put together by the Mayor, I am analysing the whole waste management value chain – from generation, collection and transportation to pre-treatment and recycling or disposal. My tasks also include tracking the performance of the private waste management companies.

### What are the most effective ways of tackling the waste problems?

We need more stringent punitive measures that deter both citizens and companies from breaking the rules. In my view the most effective measures involve enforcing these rules and raising people’s awareness. Of course we also need investment in waste management infrastructure.

### How would you describe your experience of working with European sustainability experts?

The joint projects involved very effective and focussed collaboration. In many ways they have prepared me for my current task of making Accra a more sustainable city. The collaborations also enable me to extend my knowledge and they keep me well-informed about current trends and innovations. I enjoy engaging with colleagues who may have different perspectives from me, and sharing experiences with them. I seek their professional opinion even after the official projects are over. We are united by the transfer of knowledge and a shared vision of a more sustainable world – irrespective of where we come from.

### What should European experts know before they work in Ghana?

I believe the most important thing is for them to be aware of the massive cultural differences in the perception and understanding of sustainability. All the experts I have collaborated with have had excellent knowledge in this area.

### And what can the Europeans learn in Ghana?

I would simply say that we are all learning that there are many different ways to achieve the common goal of building a just and sustainable world. It may call for some readjustments in our perceptions but we are in it together.

### Thank you for talking to *eco@work*.

The interviewer was Christiane Weihe.



*Interviewed by eco@work: Desmond Appiah, Resilience and Sustainability Advisor to the Mayor of Accra and C40 City Advisor for Accra.*

# Cooperation across borders

## E-waste in Ghana

In Agenda 2030, the international community pledges to reach 17 goals for sustainable development. These Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) address various dimensions of sustainability – social, environmental and economic – and cover topics such as poverty, education, clean energy, and sustainable consumption and production. The Agenda is an appeal for collaboration for the benefit of people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership – areas of critical importance for humanity. In the Oeko-Institut's view, this global partnership must include working with developing countries and emerging economies on solutions to global challenges, such as sustainable waste management. Since 2009, Oeko-Institut researchers have therefore been engaged in a variety of projects to address the problem of e-waste in Ghana.

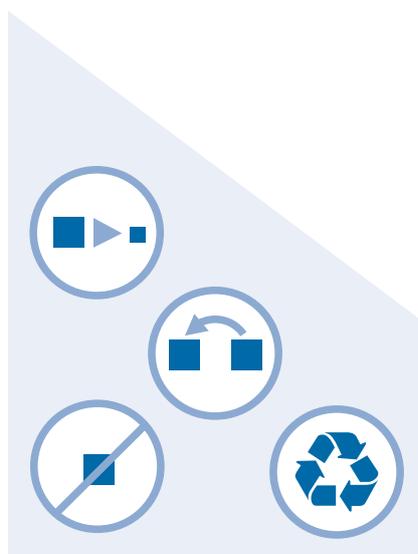
"Ghana is one of the African countries that are experiencing very rapid development," says Andreas Manhart, a Senior Researcher at the Oeko-Institut. "It also offers the right conditions for sustainability projects: it has a democratically elected government, a well-functioning administration and a free press." However, Ghana also faces major challenges, particularly in relation to waste management (see Interview with Desmond Appiah on p. 3). Conditions during the rainy season are often catastrophic: "During heavy flooding in June 2015, when the drains were blocked by

waste, a fuel leak caused an explosion in the capital Accra, killing at least 150 people," he recalls. But even without this type of disaster, there are challenges to be faced: "Waste disposal and recycling are largely unregulated and this causes all manner of problems for people and the environment. One example is the incorrect and therefore hazardous recycling of e-waste and batteries." This is the waste stream which is experiencing the highest growth rates worldwide.

### SUSTAINABLE RECYCLING INDUSTRIES

For almost 10 years, the Oeko-Institut has been advising Ghana's government and administration on managing electric and electronic waste streams and on possible pathways towards improved sustainability. "A great deal has happened in the meantime," says Andreas Manhart. "For example, in February 2018, Ghana's Environment Ministry (MESTI) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published Technical Guidelines on Environmentally Sound E-Waste Management in order to achieve continuous improvements in the sector." The Guidelines were produced as part of the Sustainable Recycling Industries (SRI) project, which also involved the Oeko-Institut – together with the Ghana National Cleaner Production Centre, the Mountain Research Institute and many other local partners. "The SRI project is funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and is designed for developing countries such as Colombia, Peru, India or in this case Ghana," Andreas Manhart explains. "The aim is to establish sustainable recycling systems in these countries and integrate small and medium-sized facilities. A key element of the project is intensive collaboration with governmental organisations, civil society and the private sector at the local level." SRI also included training events for auditors and recyclers in Ghana on issues such as plastics recycling and the correct disposal of lead-acid batteries.

The Guidelines, which have now been adopted, define binding minimum requirements for facilities that collect and recycle e-waste. "This is a particularly viable approach because it establishes requirements for recycling facilities that are in line with those that are widely accepted in Europe, but it does not overlook the key role played by informal workers in this context. Many people in Ghana earn a living from basic collection and recycling activities. If they want to register officially as e-waste collectors, the criteria they have to meet are fairly minimal." For that reason, it is especially important that informal collectors and recyclers are officially recognised as part of the recycling chain, that they benefit from registration – "this is still in the early stages" – and that training activities continue. "Training on types of special waste, such as glass from TV monitors or photovoltaic modules, is very useful. It is also a good idea to set up regular advanced training programmes so that there is no need to call on international experts in future," says Andreas Manhart.



**One of the targets set for SDG 12 – Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns – is to substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse by 2030.**

### NO SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

Projects such as SRI highlight the potential for sustainable development in Ghana. However, the Oeko-Institut expert also has a word of caution: there's still a long way to go. "There are always fly-by-night businessmen who promise supposedly simple and profitable solutions but are actually only interested in selling equipment," he says. "The inconvenient truth is that waste is mainly a problem, not a gold mine. And good waste management needs additional funding, for example from manufacturers' levies or waste charges."

Andreas Manhart's own projects also aim to improve the bases for sustainable waste management in Ghana. "We are supporting the government of Ghana on this issue and we will continue to be involved in a range of projects. At the same time, it's important to build civil society capacities, perhaps by providing systematic support for environmental groups," Andreas Manhart explains. "Sustainable waste management relies on cooperation among all stakeholders – and that's an insight that is as important for Germany as it is for Ghana."

*Christiane Weihe*



*How can social and environmental standards be guaranteed in highly complex global supply chains? This is a question for Andreas Manhart, who joined the Oeko-Institut's Sustainable Products and Material Flows Division in 2005. A geographer by training, he works mainly on recycling, raw materials and electrical and electronic goods. Topics include primary production of raw materials in mining and on plantations and the recycling of used batteries and e-waste.*

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# Learning from experience

## Sustainability criteria in ASEAN countries

Learning from others' experience: it's a useful approach that has stood the test of time. Over recent decades, Germany has gained a wealth of experience with a variety of strategies and tools that support sustainable consumption and production. The lessons it has learned in the process can benefit other countries – for example, on issues such as the introduction of sustainability criteria for products and services under eco-labelling schemes and public procurement. This is particularly worthwhile for countries which are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and are experiencing rapid growth: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Vietnam and the Philippines. Their surging demand for energy and resources means that swift action on sustainability is essential.

"The developed countries have already travelled a long way along the path to sustainability – why should the emerging economies have to repeat the experience?" asks Siddharth Prakash, a Senior Researcher at the Oeko-Institut. "They're in a position to make use of solutions and mechanisms that have already proved their worth." In his view, this includes minimum environmental standards and economic incentive schemes for climate protection, as well as the promotion of eco-innovations in the market, with a focus on both products and services. "Of course, not every policy that works well in Germany can be transferred one-to-one to other countries," he concedes. "It's about working with these countries to find solutions that are appropriate for the context and meet local needs."

## PROVEN CRITERIA

In the ASEAN countries, action on sustainable development is urgently needed as its primary energy demand has soared over the past two decades: from 273 million tonnes of oil equivalent (Mtoe) 18 years ago to 620 Mtoe in 2014. Projections indicate that primary energy demand will increase to 1,350 Mtoe in 2040. "Sadly, awareness of equitable and sustainable production and consumption is still in its infancy in these countries," says Siddharth. "And of course, economic interests often stand in the way of ambitious environmental and human rights protection, as happens in Germany too."

There is already major potential to save energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, provided that the right instruments are deployed. Refrigeration and air conditioning systems show how this can work. In Thailand, for example, they already account for around 25 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions, with 80 per cent of this coming from air conditioning. What's more, a threefold increase in emissions from this sector is projected for 2030. "These systems are very worrying from a climate perspective, also because of the harmful coolants that they use," says Prakash.



**Around 25 per cent** of Thailand's greenhouse gas emissions come from refrigeration and air conditioning systems.

Here in Germany, eco-labels, coupled with appropriate sustainability criteria, have proved their worth and can help to guide production and consumption along a more sustainable pathway. On behalf of the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) the Oeko-Institut – in partnership with HEAT GmbH – therefore carried out the Blue Angel for Stationary Room Air Conditioners project, establishing the bases for the development of a Blue Angel eco-label for indoor air conditioning units. "We established basic award criteria that are applicable not only in Germany but in the Asian markets too." And with success: "In March 2018, the first Blue Angel for an air conditioner with very low greenhouse gas emissions and high energy efficiency was awarded to a Chinese company," he says.

The aim of projects like these is to harmonise environmental standards not only in a few selected countries but across the board. "This also makes it easier for companies, as it means that they don't have to comply with a different set of standards for each country, so their investment is more secure," says Siddharth Prakash. "The long-term vision is the adoption of a single set of global eco-labels whose criteria have been developed collectively."

But it's not only about products: complex services are another area where, within the framework of the German Environment Ministry's Environmental Technologies Export Initiative, the Oeko-Institut – in cooperation with GIZ, Germany's development agency – provides advice to local decision-makers on developing environmental standards and guidelines for sectors such as energy services and retail. "Energy consumption in services is soaring in the ASEAN region, not least because of economic growth and ongoing urbanisation," says Siddharth Prakash. The Oeko-Institut sees Germany's Blue Angel eco-label as a trailblazer. The scheme has now developed various sets of award criteria for complex services in order to send a strong message about the need to counter the surge in energy demand. "That's why we are now looking at the suitability of ambitious Blue Angel standards for selected services in the ASEAN region," he explains.

## SHARING KNOWLEDGE

The Oeko-Institut's researchers do not just work on the basics. Since 2012, they have visited the ASEAN region several times a year to work on a variety of projects and share their sustainability expertise in-country. Some of these visits take place within the framework of the German Environment Ministry's International Climate Initiative (IKI) or the Environmental Technologies Export Initiative. "We run workshops on policy strategies and mechanisms for more sustainability, but also on practical methodologies. That enables us to share our experience in integrating social criteria, life cycle costs and eco-audits into public procurement, for example."

Another goal of the projects supported by GIZ is to identify and train key stakeholders locally, who will then apply their newly acquired knowledge and pass it on. Stakeholders include representatives of ministries, environmental agencies and national procurement bodies, as well as staff from eco-label organisations and industry associations. However, the knowledge-sharing and skills-building do not stop here: ideally, they should create a pool of skilled multipliers who can share their expertise and thus benefit many more people and institutions in future.

*Christiane Weihe*



*Siddharth Prakash joined the Oeko-Institut in 2008 and is a Senior Researcher in the Sustainable Products and Material Flows Division. His research work focuses mainly on sustainable production and consumption and the sustainable resource economy and addresses themes such as sustainable product assessment and labelling, and social and environmental standards in global value chains.*  
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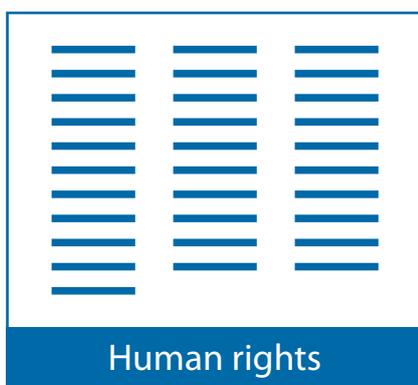
# Corporate responsibility

## Environmental performance and human rights

A dangerous pesticide long banned in the EU is on sale in other countries. Copper for German products is extracted at a mine where working conditions and safety standards would certainly be in breach of German law. In Bangladesh, a German ship is broken up in conditions which would never satisfy the requirements of any authority in Germany. German businesses operate around the globe: they have international supply chains and sell their products worldwide. And yet in many cases, they fail to comply with the social and environmental standards that apply at home. What are the consequences of this omission and how can companies be called to account?

In their international operations, German companies often rely on local legislation which falls a long way short of the social and environmental standards, obligations and limits that apply here in Germany. But does this mean that in the absence of proper rules, they are allowed to sell products or make use of services that put human health and the environment at risk? Certainly not, says Dr Nele Kampffmeyer, a Researcher in the Oeko-Institut's Environmental Law and Governance Division. "In addition to the various national provisions, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights have been in existence since 2011. In this document, the international community sets out 31 principles for human rights due diligence. They cover the state duty to protect human rights, the corporate responsibility to respect human rights, and access to effective remedy through judicial or other means for those affected." All states are encouraged to develop national action

plans to implement and disseminate the UN Guiding Principles. "Regrettably, in its action plan, the German government opted for an extremely loose arrangement which is based on voluntary commitment rather than binding rules," says Dr Kampffmeyer. "However, it is abundantly clear that voluntary solutions will not persuade the majority of companies to fulfil their human rights due diligence commitments in a consistent and comprehensive manner and take the strategic and management decisions that this entails. And companies that give no thought to sustainability will certainly not do so."



**Protect, respect and remedy –**  
**The United Nations has drawn up**  
**31 principles for human rights due**  
**diligence.**

#### RESPONSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The UN Guiding Principles are an important step towards a sustainable economy. "Unfortunately, there is still no comparable framework for environmental performance," Dr Kampffmeyer continues. Nonetheless, human rights due diligence is important from an environmental perspective as well. "A lack of environmental protection can lead to human rights violations," she says. "Many forms of environmental damage have a direct impact on the right to life and health."

An Oeko-Institut project, entitled Environmental protection guards human rights! The global responsibility of German businesses, therefore looked at how environmental and human rights

protection can be integrated more effectively into global supply chains. With reference to three case studies – ship-breaking in Bangladesh, copper mining in Peru and the international sale of pesticides that are banned in Germany – the project team drew up a set of demands for policy-makers and business. "Many vessels operated by German shipping companies are sent to Bangladesh for breaking, generally via middlemen. They are taken apart on the beach, without correct disposal of their components, exposing people and the environment to hazardous substances such as heavy fuel oil and asbestos," explains Cara-Sophie Scherf, a Researcher at the Oeko-Institut. "This is prohibited by international and European law – and it's time the German government enforced these rules more rigorously." Above all, she says, the shipping companies have a duty to address these violations, first and foremost by complying with the law but also by focusing to a greater extent on recycling standards in the leasing of ships. Dr Kampffmeyer is calling for firm action from policy-makers and companies on pesticides and copper mining as well: "For example, there should be an export ban on highly toxic pesticides that are not licensed in the EU," she says. "And as for copper mining in Peru, companies need to show active commitment and provide funding to improve conditions in the mining countries."

In addition to measures relating to each of the case studies, the working paper includes recommendations on cross-sectoral instruments. "We believe it is sensible to introduce legally binding due diligence obligations here in Germany, similar to those in place in France since 2017," says Dr Kampffmeyer. "The French legislation requires major companies to identify and prevent risks to people and the environment all along the value chain. If they violate this obligation, they face very stiff financial penalties."

#### MORE RESPONSIBILITIES, MORE RIGHTS

In another project for civil society members of the Partnership for Sustainable

Textiles, the Oeko-Institut looked at sustainability criteria for the garment industry. "We analysed how the Partnership's binding objectives can be implemented with a high level of ambition, showing why clear specifications for risk analyses, more transparency and measures that focus on the downstream supply chain, not only on direct business partners, are useful," she explains. The report, entitled *The Textiles Partnership: Ambitious and Transparent?*, also calls for more robust regulation: "The corporate involvement in this voluntary partnership is very welcome. This type of initiative is needed primarily in order to develop practical solutions. In the interests of fair competition, however, all the German garment companies should be obliged to comply with certain minimum standards." One of the Oeko-Institut's other key demands is access to justice for injured parties. "Anyone whose rights have been violated as a consequence of environmental damage caused by a German company, its subsidiary or a supplier should have the opportunity to seek compensation in accordance with German law before a German court," she says. "This will require the expansion of German corporate liability and easier access to German courts for injured parties from other countries."

*Christiane Weihe*



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