Harnessing eco-innovation for sustainable development

Rising global resource consumption, alarmingly high levels of resource depletion and environmental pollution from current production and consumption patterns are pushing the limits of sustainability. Multi-dimensional and profound transformations are required to realign development towards a more resource efficient, green economy. This implies the creation of new strategies, products, processes and practices as well as shifts in consumption models.

Eco-innovation holds the potential for systemic change through creating and meeting a demand for sustainable goods and services. This is particularly important for developing and transition economies with growing manufacturing sectors. In many of these economies, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of society responsible for up to 70% of GDP. While their participation in this transformation is of fundamental importance, SMEs often face a number of challenges to adapt to new greener and resource efficient practices and to remain competitive in global market.

RELATED EXPERTISE

This Project builds on work that UNEP and the EC have carried out on green economy, sustainable consumption and production, including:

- the Eco-Innovation Action Plan of the EC,
- the UNIDO-UNEP Resource Efficiency and Cleaner Production (RECP) Programme,
- the UNEP 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP) adopted after Rio + 20.

UNEP & Eco-innovation

In 2012, in partnership the European Commission, UNEP established a four-year project, which sets out to promote Resource Efficiency and Eco-Innovation in developing and transition economies. The project specifically aims to engage SMEs in an eco-innovation process by addressing enabling conditions that are conducive to systemic innovation and developing local resources and expertise. Important conditions include: the willingness and readiness of the company, the value chain, the market, national and regional policy frameworks, and the extent of Research & Development capacity within the country and the company.
RETHINKING BUSINESS STRATEGY

Eco-innovation starts at the strategic level of a company with the objective of mainstreaming a holistic life-cycle approach throughout all company operations. This includes activities beyond the company gates, involving and influencing the supply chain. It is centred on enhancing positive sustainability impacts, gaining ultimate efficiency and reputational benefits as well as reaching new markets, all leading to a competitive advantage. In sum, eco-innovation provides a win-win solution for job creation, improved competitiveness and sustainability.

A PATH TO ECO-INNOVATION

The UNEP Eco-innovation project entails activities that will address:

The Business Case for Eco-innovation

- The Business Case for Eco-Innovation publication will outline the key business drivers to implement an eco-innovation strategy. It builds on company examples spanning sectors across the globe that generated significant business benefits from eco-innovation.
- In conjunction, a technical eco-innovation manual is being developed for RECP business service providers to identify opportunities and implement eco-innovation strategies. The manual will contain supplements for the food processing, chemical and metals sectors.
- The manual approach will be validated through a number of regional expert meetings to confirm the eco-innovation approach in different countries and contexts. It will then be piloted through demonstration projects engaging over 30 companies in 6 countries from Africa, Asia Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Policy & Technology Context

- The Mainstreaming SCP Policy for Eco-Innovation guideline aims to inform RECP business service providers about proactive ways to support a policy framework that will stimulate sustainable production and consumption through eco-innovation. National level action planning will be carried out in 6 countries and based on country policy assessment studies.
- The technology dimension will also be highlighted as part of the conducive framework for eco-innovation. The publication Moving Ahead with Technologies for Eco-Innovation will include an assessment of the ‘enablers’ for the uptake of technologies based on insights and lessons learned. In turn, this will support the RECP service providers in assisting SMEs in the adoption and development of technology for eco-innovation. The role of eco-Industrial parks will also be evaluated.

Upscaling Eco-innovation Lessons

- A final compendium of best practices and lessons from pilot demonstration projects will be compiled. The project’s experience will be widely shared and disseminated.