

UM Professor: Consumers 'key part of solution' to global warming

October 16 2009



(PhysOrg.com) -- Consumers can have a major impact on the world's efforts to reduce global warming, a major report has concluded.

The research is led by Professor Mohan Munasinghe, Director General of The University of Manchester's Sustainable Consumption Institute and one of the world's leading thinkers on energy, sustainable development and [climate change](#).

The report will be presented to ministers and high level decision makers at the United Nations Copenhagen Climate Change summit in December.

It estimates that [consumers](#) are responsible for 75% of UK greenhouse

gas emissions and their action could leverage major reductions within a few years.

The report calls for stimulation of consumer demand for low-carbon products and services, using a range of tools such as tax incentives, public procurement decisions and targeted marketing.

He said: “Consumption transcends national boundaries; businesses serve consumers, operate globally and can work quickly.

“So the opportunity is there for consumers working with businesses, to lead a green revolution that will help governments achieve more ambitious emissions reduction targets. Our report shows how this can be achieved.

“We stress that consumers are fundamental to the solution, although they are often seen as part of the problem.”

Professor Munasinghe shared the 2007 Nobel Prize for Peace with former US Vice President Al Gore and others, as Vice Chair of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC-AR4), which is the world’s leading scientific body on climate change.

He added: “Consumption is directly linked to greenhouse gas emissions through fossil fuel power sources, the use of carbon-based materials in manufacturing and large [greenhouse gas emissions](#) from agriculture.

“Business and Government must empower consumers by removing the many individual barriers they face when trying to make low-carbon choices.

“If we consider the countries in which goods and services are consumed, and allocate emissions accordingly, the findings are striking.

“For example, nearly 20% of China’s emissions are produced on behalf of other countries. Conversely, emissions from the US would be 8% higher when counted by consumption.

“We need new and innovative solutions, because with conventional mitigation methods, people in developed countries are unlikely to accept the sort of reductions in their standards of living that would be needed to deliver emissions reductions on the required scale of 80% by 2050.

“Similarly, people in developing countries will not be prepared to forego the benefits of economic development in the name of mitigating climate change.”

Major recommendations of the report include:

- Stimulating consumer demand for low-carbon products and services, using a range of tools such as tax incentives, public procurement decisions and targeted marketing.
- Business action to reduce emissions focusing on all stages in the process: primary production, manufacture, distribution, consumer use and disposal.
- Governments developing internationally agreed measures of the carbon content and impact of products and services. Applying international accountancy standards would make the pursuit and adoption of these measures more efficient and accessible.
- Consumers being empowered to make greener choices by using better pricing and information.

Provided by University of Manchester ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: UM Professor: Consumers 'key part of solution' to global warming (2009, October 16)

retrieved 10 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2009-10-um-professor-consumers-key-solution.html>

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