



HOW CAN CIRCULAR ECONOMY LEAD TO MORE CLIMATE PROTECTION?

Sufficiency As A 'Strategy Of Enough'

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Environmental crises are associated with inequalities and injustices - between and within countries. These inequalities relate both to access to environmental resources and to the causes of environmental crises. People in different regions of the world are affected very differently. The ability to adapt is also very different, partly due to local and economic characteristics. The resource-intensive consumption of the global middle and upper classes is the main cause of environmental crises. The richest 10 % of the world's population own around three quarters (76 %) of global wealth and emit almost half of CO₂ emissions. Financial wealth is still heavily concentrated in industrialized countries, while a significant proportion of humanity lives in difficult economic circumstances. Almost 700 million people live in extreme poverty and are unable to meet their basic needs. Inequalities also exist between the generations. It is mainly the younger and future generations who will suffer from the negative consequences of environmental crises, even though they have done little or nothing to cause them.

In contrast to most efficiency and consistency measures, sufficiency offers the opportunity for real transformation. The potential negative effects of high and rising energy and resource demand in the Global North are associated with local acceptance problems. The high demand for energy and resources in the North thus contributes to the fact that the environmental situation in poorer and resource-rich countries is becoming increasingly difficult, without the affected countries benefiting adequately from this. Sufficiency policies can bring enormous benefits, both through locally limited measures and through more comprehensive society-wide changes.

The United Nations reports that only "17 per cent of the SDG targets are on track, nearly half are showing minimal or moderate progress, and progress on over one third has stalled or even regressed". Environmental strategies pursued by governments, industry and the public have largely focused on 'efficiency' (less input per output) and 'consistency' (more environmentally friendly inputs). Circular economy is seen as an important means of reducing dependence on critical raw materials. These strategies are essential to limit ecological damage. However, they will not be sufficient to overcome the ecological crises. In many areas, sufficient decoupling of energy and raw material consumption from harmful environmental impacts has not been achieved.

Current trends point to an increasing risk of dangerous ecological changes on the planet, while the time left to act is getting shorter and shorter. This leads to a difficult situation for society, especially as suitable solutions have not yet been implemented to the extent required.

