SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production Transcription

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**Introduction**

Welcome to the introductory lectures for youth engagement on the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. I like to use the opportunity to welcome introduce a speaker of today Mr. Cillian Lohan, Vice President of Communication of the European Economic and Social Commission and myself my name is Lichia Yu, President of CSEND. Welcome I will accompany you today during the particular lecture and interview.

**Speaker**

Let me say a few words about Cillian, besides being the Vice President for Communications of the European Economic and Social Commission, he's also being active and work extensively in both the corporate and environmental sectors. Cillian has been delegate to the United Nations working on initiatives such as the COP, the COP climate negotiations as it's Conference of Partners and the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development but it not only engaged in the Communication and Economic and Social Affairs. Cillian is also a non-leader in the field of the circular economy and was the inaugural chair of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform that is wrong word that he's also the CEO and the founder of Green Economy Foundation and this Foundation has been a key driver in terms of promoting green economy and also circular economy and more can be found on the internet when you go and look at it.

**The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)**

I like to take this moment just to say a few words about the European Economic and Social Committee because it is not probably not as well known outside of the European context. It is an important voice of organizing Civil Society in Europe,

members of the group which is not only nominated by the member state of the country but it's also sort of representing different stakeholders such as employers, trade unionists and representatives of social occupational economic and cultural organizations in Europe. So it is a very important pillar of the society in terms of looking into the future how social and Sustainable Development can be developed.

**Lecture Overview**

Today's topic will be focusing on the SDG 12 Ensuring Sustainable Consumption and Production patterns. It is a very complex discussion and I'm glad that we have Cillian here to explain to us and to introduce us into this topic so without further do let me just give a few outline in terms of the key points that we would address today.

We will just lectured and this the talk will be focusing on the overview of the SDG 12 and also looking to and reflect on the current state of implementation and progress and particularly the challenges confronting us all in achieving SDG 12. What are the key issues that we need to give pay more attention to and how could different parts of the society from government to business, to individuals and communities can do differently and we would like to also hear from Cillian in terms of his thoughts about how young people could get into the action.

**Q1a**

So without waste this a few words let me just start with the first questions. **What is this SDG 12 ? What is Sustainable Consumption and Production patterns?**

Thank you Lichia and I'm delighted to join you for this for this series and it's really interesting SDGs to think about and to talk about particularly because as you mentioned it talks about Sustainable Consumption and Production and patterns

and I always think that these things are take such a lot of negotiation to come up with the specific wording that usually every word is important in that. So it's important to think of the last word in this SDG the patterns that we're trying to create and then when it goes into the detail of what is below this headline objective and there are 11 targets that are set specifically on this topic and then there are 13 indicators to try and help us and to measure those. So to give an overview of well firstly of the headline SDG sustainable consumption and production patterns, I mean we could talk about that for an hour very easily saying what is a Sustainable Consumption, what is Sustainable Production, what do the processes look like and so on but I think what maybe the one important thing to consider on this is the use of the word “Sustainable”. And it's in the title of all of them the Sustainable Development Goals.

And we have a word Sustainable which has a meaning in the English language of something that can be continued and prolonged and that word is used in everyday discourse but it's also used to describe certain behaviors.

That is different to the word Sustainable in the context of Sustainable Development

and everywhere I see policy now I try to replace the word Sustainable with Sustainable Development, and the difference is that when we talk about Sustainable Development we're talking about balancing the environment, we're talking about including people in this and in the context of an economy that serves both the people and the environment. So sustainable consumption in that sense and sustainable production in the headline of this SDG must be about ensuring that we're consuming and producing and living within an economy that is not doing damage or harm to the environment basically.

And then of course it goes into the specific targets that promote of that and these include things like wanting to implement a 10-year framework programs on Sustainable Production and Consumption patterns and we can go into some detail on that. By 2030 we want to achieve sustainable management and an efficient use of natural resources. This is what I just referred to that all of the natural resources we use, we're managing them properly and we want to have a cut in half a global food waste by 2030. We want a good management of chemicals and harmful substances that are already in circulation within our economy and we want to reduce waste substantially reduce waste generation and reduce it through prevention. So preventing the waste happening in the first place as well as doing some recycling and reuse, we want to improve according to this Sustainable Development Goal, public procurement that's where governments and regional governments are spending money.

This is a huge part of the economy if you think about your local government or your national government and the amount of money they spend on contracts that they have

but equally just on furnishings for offices or uniforms for example then this whole procurement area is really big.

And last week I was speaking with the European Defense Agency and that's a sector that you don't normally think of when you think of sustainability or environmental practices. In fact historically they have been the defense sector has been excluded from the regulations and they have a pass that they don't have to adhere to them that's now changing and they're looking at becoming more circular in their practices. And at first I thought this is a very unusual kind of side thing but when you think about the public procurement from the defense sector for equipment, for clothing, for buildings for everything and of course there's they have a huge role to play. So that public procurement practices is Target number 7 within the Sustainable Development Goal number 12.

There's also by 2030 that we want to improve the amount of awareness and information that people have we know information is power and understanding is power and I'm glad to see that there's a focus on that within this goal also.

And then there's a focus on supporting developing countries to strengthen scientific and technical capacity so that they can move forward using these more sustainable patterns of production and consumption.

And finally well sorry second to last there's a mention of sustainable tourism very important for many regions within the world.

And then finally a very important one this Sustainable Development Goal refers to fossil fuel subsidies and this is a very tricky area but it's one that is mentioned specifically within Goal 12. So it covers a huge area as you see and then of course further to that there are indicators how we measure how we're achieving those. But this is really the circular economy, Sustainable Development Goal. It's about making more responsible use of the natural resources that we have available to us, to help us live our lives and function as a society and function as an economy.

Well Cillian that indeed is a very broad coverage this SDG12 because what I heard it is going from what the national government needs to do, which is about a policy a national plan but also in terms of a procurement practice and I'm very happy that you highlighted this particular aspect. Because I think the public procurement is really a major part of the economy which goes sometimes depending on the national budget but it goes it could go into 30 or 40 percent especially when you think of not just about defense but the schools for example. And the offices the public hospital and all the public institutions that the procurement indeed can be a major driver in terms of changing the at least the supply. But I also thought it's very important to hear from you that the use of natural resources and the sort of the tracking and the accounting is also very important, I just record the there's a Swiss initiative which is about global footprint looking at how does our natural capital or natural resources actually are being consumed and in relation to its sustainability. So I thought this is a very comprehensive but also very complex SDGs than many others. And I wonder **what's your thoughts in terms of the one of the target above corporate reporting on their sustainability and what is your thought in terms of the current practice** whether the cooperation are indeed using this reporting as a way to regulate and mitigate their behavior so at least they can achieve.

Yeah that's a very interesting piece to focus on really because we know that we need large corporates to change their behaviors and their practices and reporting on it is the best way to measure how this is doing. I would say that initially when we had these Sustainable Development Goals in line with some other policies that were coherent with them, corporate reporting began as a very small additional part of the annual corporate reporting. The resources went into the financial reporting and then on the side somebody wrote a little extra piece about sustainability and now we're trying to reduce the use of paper in the office and we turn the lights off in the bathroom when we leave are very small I would say insignificant things.

I would also say that the audience importantly for those end-of-year reports, corporate reports were not particularly interested in the sustainability reporting part of the of the annual report, shareholders for example were not particularly concerned.

I'm talking now in in the last five to ten years that has changed very significantly and very quickly actually in the last two years or so. Partly because of the Sustainable Development Goal and because of its mentioning here but implementation of this goal has been facilitated by other policies that have been developed so within the EU there are other policies coming from the EU institutions and then adopted nationally on Sustainable Financial Reporting on the corporate social responsibility. And these other pieces of legislation and that are putting obligations on the corporates to do their reporting on the sustainability in a way that is at the same level as the financial reporting. So we kind of are familiar with the idea that if you have a company you have to do your accounts at the end of the year and they have to be checked by your professional accountant and they have to be signed off and show that you're doing your business in a proper way and you're paying your taxes and you're paying your staff and so on.

And now the Sustainability Reporting is achieving a similar status and this is happening I see this happening in a practical way in real life it's not just the policy. Investors who want to invest in companies want to now see your Financial Reports to show that the finances are in order but they want to see your Sustainability Report also. Because it's becoming increasingly important and it doesn't make sense for somebody who if is investing to put their money into a company that is not going to be adhering to these rules and regulations. So now for the first time people who maybe don't care about the environment, maybe they don't care about circular economy, they don't care about sustainability what they care about their investment and they care about their investment being clever and making money for them. They now want to see Sustainability Reporting to a high standard and to a standard that's checked by people with professionalism in that particular space so that's an area that has certainly improved in the last couple of years and we can see it and we can measure it through the financial markets and the type of investments that are in there.

You mentioned a very important point and I just wanted to verify, are you suggesting that dual diligence practice is also now applied to the sustainability reporting ?

Yes within the EU, it's in the early stages but the directives and have been written some of them are still being negotiated in the building behind me here in the European Parliament and then they will go to the European Council. And but because the legislative signal is so strong, even where it's not in law yet or completed yet, the signal is so strong the political will is so strong that this is coming into practice that already in the investment sector is suddenly ringing me, ringing people like me and saying we want to understand how this works and we want to ensure that our Sustainability Reporting is a standard that is that will be approved.

Also alongside this there is a fear of being accused of green washing because we've seen that from a number of big corporates who say we're going sustainable going to try and do this and then of course some environmental NGOs or some experts in the area say no what you're doing is not is not sustainable and for various different reasons.

And I go back to my first comment that what they mean is this is not sustainable according to Sustainable Development and the principles of Sustainable Development. So there's that that drive for a corporate reporting to not be accused of greenwashing, there's the fear of that. But then there's the draw that we want more investment and we want to make sure that we are going to do our Due Diligence on the environmental side of things just as much as on the social side of things or on the financial side of things.

Well this is indeed a very important development in from a regulatory point of view and of course the compliance will be a very interesting development to watch later on and also start to think up to ask the question whether this regular regulation is indeed effective. Maybe I could this moment like to switch the attention just a little bit and to see **what are the challenges that we're confronted with** because IPCC written recently announced or sounded alarm and we have the COP 27 coming up in a few months time. **What are really the key stumbling blocks in terms of reaching sustainability globally that we could we need to think about and where are the challenges ? And who are the corporate in terms of dragging the process ?**

Yeah it's that also is a very big area for discussion but I would think the single most important thing is when we understand the type of economy that we have at the moment, the type of society we have at the moment and that is described as the linear economy. Okay some parts of it are changing but in general this is the direction where we extract everything from nature, we produce goods and services and they're sold, they're used and they're thrown away and they become waste and then we go back for more. And our energy system is exactly the same we extract energy from the ground, from for the most part from fossil fuels, we use them to power things and then of course they pollute the atmosphere and create a bigger problem and we need to go back and extract more of them. This is a clearly an issue and a problem and the circular economy initiative dating back within the EU from 2015 and seek to address that. And this Sustainable Development Goal seeks to address that.

But the biggest problem or the biggest barrier is all of the powerful actors along this line and that's usually the people who are most successful thanks to this linear model,

they want to create little circles within the line, they don't want to turn the line into a circle, they want to introduce elements of sustainability elements of circularity but make sure that it's as little disruption as possible to the business as usual model.

And of course those people are very powerful because they through their success and through their having large financial backing, they can influence a lot of things, they can influence public opinion through the media, they can influence government policy through funding political initiatives and through having huge resources going into lobbying.

And we see that very clearly with the fossil fuel industry for example, and the current hearings that are happening in the US Senate, we see internal documents being leaked now from the big fossil fuel companies and we see that this is not and this wasn't accidental this was their strategy and their policy. How can we take this desire from society and from the public for things to change and how can we give the appearance of change without actually changing? So that's a very very fundamental a problem with the world that we live in and put it to one that's important to understand because it's a barrier to the implementation of this Sustainable Development Goal.

The detail sorry but yes that's the all of the other barriers that we have come under the context of that particular problem.

This sounds to me like privatizing the profit and outsourcing or outplacing the cost right? Because the profit that we can see is increasingly conculcated and concentrated on the top. Why are the issues about environmental deterioration climate related catastrophe and then the secondary social impact seems to be shouldered by most of the actually the poor people so that seems to me in the discussion about the Sustainable Consumption and Production patterns that we have this something implicated the issues about equity and fairness.

Yes absolutely and also that is reflected in an element of the Sustainable Development Goals which I personally really don't like and that is when we take the SDGs and we translate them into individual action. Of course individuals we can all do something, we can all try and make a difference and we should do as much as much as we reasonably can but the chain to the changes that we need are systemic changes and we need to change the systems and how they function and in order to create the kind of shift that is required and that is going to be transformative. So if we… and so I always rally against interpreting the Sustainable Development Goals into individual action unless at the same time we're going to talk about how we need the systemic change.

And I have to say the previous part of our discussion on the Financial Reporting, the Sustainability Reporting that is one key tool for systemic change because that shifts the whole focus of what the priorities are and what the objectives are and I see all of these things as kind of levers towards change.

The other barrier that goes along with all of this is how we measure what success is and some of that is a cultural shift some of that is something that as people we should talk about and there we can be very powerful and change the mindset and change our cultural perception of what it means to be wealthy or what it means to be to be rich.

And but equally how we measure that in a very practical way using GDP and the limits on GDP are a barrier to implementation of this Sustainable Development Goal and circular economy because for at the moment we say we measure whether a country is in recession or not based on GDP and based on growth rates and that needs a lot of activity that needs a lot of things happening. So for example if there is an activity that is damaging to the environment but it makes money then that is positive for GDP and overall we say oh this is good news, this is positive but equally it goes even more ridiculous that if we had a… For example outside my office window if there was a car crash and the ambulance had to come and the people were taken to hospital and there was disruption, all of that activity in it contributes positively to GDP but it's not going to make the individuals in the collision feel better, it's not going to make people who witness it feel better, if you witness something unpleasant during your day, maybe you don't have such a good day, maybe you're not as happy as you would be with. So all of these things we don't capture. If I go on my way to the office this morning, I walk through the park and that was a very positive nice thing,

I'm very pleased to have the privilege to be able to do that but that's not measured in in any way that is no value. And it goes back to poorer people in society and very often it goes back to a gender issue as well which is linked to this SDGs where the value added to society by people who are raising children for example in the home which is more usually women and that doesn't that doesn't contribute to GDP that's seen as a cost and a burden on our system when it's probably the most valuable thing you can do to raise individuals properly and give them a set of values and help them learn and grow and feel loved and feel safe so they grow up to be nice people who interact with the world. These are hugely important issues and we call all of that together the well-being economy where we have an economics system that includes well-being, it includes the type of things that are normally pushed to one side and switching away from a narrow view of a successful country and economy from GDP to something that is more inclusive of all of these other elements is also a part of a barrier to achieving this SDG and something that we need to examine and we do we do work on that here already also.

Well as you just made a very important reminder for us that the monetary measurement is not the only thing but instead we also need to look at how the wealth is created and how the wealth impact individual society and the environment. And so that we should take all this into consideration and as a way to understand whether the quality of the wealth, I think that's what you're highlighting. So GDP it's a very useful and has been a very important measure in terms of progress but single item or single indicator is not enough for us to capture the quality of our life and the well-being. And in this context you also mentioned that individual alone is not sufficient but we need to look at systemic issues and start thinking how collectively we can make a difference. **I wonder whether you have some thoughts based on your own personal experience,** starting initiating so that green economy have to land that actually allows people to do experiments in terms of green economy and circular circularity and move into stakeholder platform and now you are at the community. **I was wondering what's your thought behind all this and how could young people also take the example and do something not just about improving their own private life but it's also contributing to the collective improvement?**

Yes yeah that's maybe the most important thing for us to share today because understanding what the SDGs is you can get it from a book or you can get it online. I'm showing my age referring to books but you can you can just read what the targets are what the indicators are, what really driving the change is what is inspirational and what we need the different people to do.

And really I've seen it first time that the youth movement particularly this next generation coming into adulthood now have started to change the world and they have put climate and sustainability at the top of the agenda and it really is a top of the political agenda in many countries at the moment and it has a much higher status than it had for the 20 years previously when I was involved with it where it was seen as very fringe. And there are still problems with it, with the youth movement has really helped to drive it forward in the first place.

In my experience of how to harness that energy how to make a contribution myself and how to get in to make the change and I took the option of becoming involved in the system. I'm now part of the institutional system within the EU, this institution that I'm Vice President of the European economic and social committee is very special as you described in in the beginning because it brings Civil Society rather than politicians into the decision-making process. But at the same time it's set up by the treaties on the foundation of the EU and it we're very much within the system.

There's the option of going this way or equally being outside on the street and marching and being disruptive and forcing these changes and both of these things are important. But I'll talk a little bit about my experience within the system, one thing I did was to set up this European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform. And you said that at the start it's a very catchy name but this is when things are negotiated between institutions everything, nothing is catchy let's say let's put it that way.

But that Stakeholder Platform was a way of bringing together people who are not normally part of the decision-making process, and local governments, youth organizations and businesses who were working and small but small and medium enterprises and bigger businesses who are trying to change to in this case circular economy and activities. And they are living in the real world let's say and not in the political world and they're saying we're trying to do this change but we have barriers and we can't make the difference. And I thought we should bring those people into a room together, we should ask them clearly what do you need in a practical way and then we can go because we have this privileged connection to the big decision makers here in the EU. We go to them and we say look we need you to be a partner in this platform because you need to hear from these people directly, not to a filter of lobbyists or not through a filter of political different interests but directly from them.

And so that has helped to create a change, it's difficult to measure what exactly came from this but this stakeholder platform has become a partnership between our institution and the European Commission and it's now used not only all over Europe but all over the world as a best practice example of how to bring stakeholders together.

We recent last year had a new circular economy action plan as part of the green deal within the EU and a lot of the specific practical points that were made from the platform now appear in the policy. For example, one brief example is equal design and where if you want to have a circular economy you need your products to be designed in a way that they can be and easily repaired and fixed and reused.

Yeah that's now part of the Eco-design program whereas previously the Eco-design policies at least were very very narrow, they were very limited and they weren't going to create a kind of change that we need and that we've just discussed.

So in my experience that's one kind of practical way of being able to make the change and that is within that platform and we have “Generation Climate Europe” which is the largest coalition of youth-led networks on climate and environmental issues at the European level and that is young people who decided to join a local organization and become part of a network and get involved. And then find the avenues to get into the people who are making the decisions and increasingly this level of participation, participatory democracy is how we can create those changes. Understanding how it works and then using the avenues that are available and they exist because they have to exist these access points to the decision makers but you have to turn on the light and look for them because it suits business as usual, it suits the state of school if we don't know that they're there and if we don't raise our voices and if we don't get involved. So if to make the change you need to get involved, you need to find those avenues to get access and you need to hope that there are people within the system that you're trying to change who from within there are also trying to pull you in and try to help you to make those changes. And I can tell you that from within the system there are people working very hard on creating those kind of changes and those kind of transformations, big transformations. But it needs also people from a civil society to come together and to engage because we don't have loads of money, we don't have loads of power but we do have loads of numbers and there are enough of us and if we work together and if we become coordinated in what we're doing then we can take on everybody, we can move mountains and we can challenge the big huge corporate interests, we can change the system. Because systems change and civilizations change and they move and it's sometimes hard to imagine if we're working together, all of us together then we can find a common interest. And what a wonderful thing to be involved in during your lifetime to say let's come together and find where we have things in common and not focus on our differences and let's create a better future and a safer world for everybody. I think that's something that's good enough to make us we want to get involved, I hope so it keeps me going anyhow.