



No go without traffic light labelling

Sustainable consumption starts with shopping. That is why Prof. Edda Müller, former Executive Director of the Federation of German Consumer Organisations (vzbv) in Berlin, calls for strict obligatory labelling on all food products. This is the only way consumers can consciously decide what goes into their shopping basket.

The political debate on the ecological costs of consumption has been going on for decades. One of the results of this discussion was the emergence in 1978 of the Blue Angel environmental label. It is awarded to particularly environmentally-friendly products and services. But even if major inroads have been made in terms of sustainability, ecological overexploitation is still the norm. "The prosperity we enjoy is based on cheap everyday products to the detriment of development opportunities in the world's poorest countries", criticised Müller on Thursday evening at an event hosted by the Munich Re Foundation on "Consuming at the expense of others – Growth at any price?".

It is possible to generate growth for a certain time using technical advances and more efficient use of resources. "However, the question is whether this compensates for the environmental degradation that is taking place elsewhere", said Müller. Consumers play a key role here. For it is clear that "manufacturers will produce only what is bought". Müller cited South Africa as an example of the market power of consumers. "The apartheid system eventually collapsed, among other things due to the economic boycott by industrial countries over many years." Of this the former Executive Director of the Federation of German Consumer Organisations is convinced. It is therefore important to eliminate the problem of asymmetrical information between producers and consumers. Müller argued in favour of labelling products – similar to the recently discussed traffic light labelling of food – so that consumers are aware under what conditions and with what ecological consequences the goods were produced.

"Consumers are more powerful than you think", argued to Prof. Franz-Theo Gottwald, Chairman of the Schweisfurth Foundation in Munich. Every purchase means cooperation with the manufacturer; refusal to cooperate can happen anywhere. "Why should one buy salmon from non-sustainable sources of production when there are certified producers available." By withdrawing your approval, you are already venturing down a path that leads you step by step to another future. "I believe in taking small steps and actively supporting stronger governance structures. I certainly do not believe in the self-regulating forces of the market", said Gottwald.

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**Munich Re
Foundation**
From Knowledge
to Action

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Müller and Gottwald were guest speakers at this event, part of a series of dialogue forums which the Munich Re Foundation is staging in 2010. The fifth and current series of forums, “The world in flux – The forgotten billions”, focuses on future prospects for international development policy and the fight against climate change. The series is aimed at laypersons interested in entering into dialogue with experts. The next forum, entitled “Development 2.0 – The crisis as opportunity”, will take place on 29 April 2010. Application forms and further information can be found at www.munichre-foundation.org.

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