

Foreword

When UNEP launched the Green Economy Initiative in 2008, it did so out of the conviction that without a fundamental economic transformation, the goal of sustainable development will remain elusive. UNEP's Green Economy Report, published in 2011, demonstrated that investing in environmentally significant economic sectors is not only good for the environment but also, importantly, for economic growth, jobs and social development, compared to a 'business as usual' approach.

We all recognize, however, that despite this growing engagement with green initiatives, a number of major challenges still loom, such as ecological constraints, resource availability, economic and social inequality, environment-related ill health, and persistent unemployment. Growing global and local ecological constraints are compounded by a combination of economic crises, natural disasters, and social conflict. A stronger policy strategy is required to move economic systems beyond initial investments in key sectors into the development of an inclusive Green Economy – one that prioritizes jobs, innovations, research and development, and social equity, mindful of the ecological and resource constraints.

This book takes a closer look at an area that does not immediately spring to mind when we think about a Green Economy, namely waste management, but that in fact is critical to managing both circular flow and potential environmental risks and liabilities that an economy can generate. Until recently, waste was viewed as an unwanted by-product of consumption or production, a problem rather than a resource, and something best kept out of sight and out of mind. As a result, waste management often figured at the bottom of the political agenda at all levels, and in many countries was left to municipal authorities to manage on what was primarily an ad-hoc basis. 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' became the message as authorities worked to balance both the problem and the potential of waste management.

With the emergence of new technologies and the use of new materials, not only have quantities of waste increased, types of waste have also become more complex and often more hazardous. Although waste reduction remains the goal, and important gains have been made in resource efficiency, waste is also being seen more and more as a potentially valuable

resource for recovery and recycling of materials and energy, with significant implications for the global economy. This was formally recognized in 2011 by the governing body of the Basel Convention, the global treaty on waste management. Under the more familiar concept of ‘circular economy’, the practice of ‘urban mining’ – the extraction of precious materials from urban wastes – is a prominent example.

This book explores the hypothesis that turning wastes into valuable resources or energy might become a key area for greening the economy in a cost-effective and inclusive manner: industry could make a profit from environmentally sound resource and energy recovery from waste, provided that policies and laws at all levels facilitate the necessary operations while providing safeguards against abuse. Such an approach could also provide an incentive to invest in these operations, and thus to create decent and green jobs while protecting the environment, human health and livelihood.

Through contributions from legal, economic and technical experts in the field, the book offers an interesting range of perspectives on a key question: can waste be turned from a problem into an opportunity, and thus contribute to greening the economy? The analysis includes an assessment and experiences from Asia, a part of the world where wastes pose the greatest challenges but may also present the greatest opportunities in the future.

I would like to congratulate the authors for their efforts in bringing this important contribution to the discussion of managing waste as a scarce resource, strengthening the links that hold together a green and circular economy. By viewing the issue from the angles of law and policy, but also presenting opportunities and challenges of concrete methods and technologies, this edition will make a valuable contribution to our evolving views on waste, and the many-faceted roles it can play in advancing environmental sustainability.

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the United Nations