Towards more sustainable ICT[1]-products: a snapshot of policies and first indicative evaluation results

Abstract

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Most of our work is based on background material that was produced in the framework of the ”Policy Dialogue between Japan and Germany to combat Climate Change” and a workshop that the Wuppertal Institute convened together with the Japanese Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES).

Despite the current negative economic trend of the ICT industry, **t**he number of internet participants is still growing at an impressive speed. Meanwhile, most experts expect the merger of various communication and information services and the internet. Some experts already speak of the internet revolution. Whatever the right term, there can be no doubt, that this merger of technologies will have huge social, economic and ecological impacts.

Because of the enormous potential effects of this development, an assessment of the environmental impacts appeared to be an obvious necessity. A closer examination reveals that these impacts can be divided into two very different categories. There are first significant environmental impacts that result from setting up, running and maintaining the ICT equipment that sustains the internet. A completely different set of environmental impacts will result from the use of internet applications.

In our paper the focus is on the direct environmental impacts from production and operation of ICT-products. We will illustrate by examples (chemicals in general, lead and Green house gases in particular) that the use of ICT- products leads to an “environmental intervention” that is contributing to climate change.

Since we are convinced that there can be no sustainable development without sustainable products, we will investigate steps that can be taken to reduce the environmental strain that results from production, use and disposal of ICT equipment. In order to do so, we will first present an overview of the environmental impacts. As a second step we will adopt the point of view of a policy maker. We will ask which policies are suitable to bring about improvements. The paper includes, third, a case study on energy efficiency standards and a case study on Eco-labels and Green Procurement. We will look at the interplay between technological progress and environmental policy making and how to raise consumer awareness. And,

[1] ICT - Information and Communication Technologies

finally, we will explore the framework conditions that policy makers should take into account when designing policies for this sector of industry.

Keywords: Climate change, climate policy, internet technology, sustainable ICT

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