



While much of Europe is still suffering the effects of economic recession, a new report argues that efforts to increase prosperity should not damage the environment. Indeed, Europe's economy depends on a healthy environment, including the materials and services provided by the natural world, according to the new edition of Signals from the European Environment Agency (EEA).

Signals is an annual publication which aims to explain complex environmental issues for a non-expert audience. The 2012 edition explores the environmental impacts of our consumption and production patterns, and ways these can be changed to reduce their effect on the environment. This subject was chosen because it is a significant component of a 'green economy', one of the main focuses of the Rio+20 sustainable development Summit which will take place in Rio de Janeiro later this month.

"Almost all environmental problems, from climate change to the extinction of species, can be traced back to the way we consume natural resources," EEA Executive Director Jacqueline McGlade said. "Europe is currently at a turning point, where we have the opportunity to move towards a more equitable, greener economic model. Changing the way we live, produce and consume will open a whole world of new opportunities."

One story explores what cotton cultivation in Burkina Faso means for the rest of the economy

and the society as a whole. Cotton cultivation requires large volumes of water and the pesticides can harm the workers. The report asks: Do the shelf prices of textiles we consume in Europe reflect the environmental costs of cotton production in Burkina Faso?

Another story draws the links between consumption of electronic gadgets and environmentally damaging mining around the world. The report also looks into waste and recycling as other stages in the lifecycles of many of the products we buy. The current economic system prioritises short term gain, risking the natural systems which underpin the economy, while a more equitable, greener economic model would help ensure Europe's long-term prosperity, the report says.

The report argues that sustainability is ultimately a matter of choices: policy choices, business choices and consumer choices. Global supply chains mean that the decisions of manufacturers, retailers and consumers in Europe can significantly affect the lives of people as far away as Burkina Faso. Consumer choices can generate employment and earnings, but can also lead to over-exploited water resources and poisoned local people and ecosystems.

Video competition awards ceremony

Today, the EEA also celebrates World Environment Day with an awards ceremony for the Generation '92 video competition, which invited young people from across Europe to submit two-minute videos on their vision for a sustainable future.

A total of 32 videos from 16 countries were submitted to the competition. There were five winners: the three best videos were awarded cash prizes and a fourth was given a special mention for its powerful message. A fifth won the 'Buzz Prize' which was decided by public vote. You can see the [Generation '92 winners here](#) .