



## Sustainable Consumption

### 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



*“By 2030, 193 Heads of State and Governments agree to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns throughout the world to support the needs of the present and future generations by –*

- *reducing waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse*
- *increasing resource efficiency – the efficient use of natural resources*
- *halving per capita global food waste – and –*
- *phasing out fossil-fuel and other subsidies by governments that encourage wasteful consumption and increase pollution”*

UN Sustainable Development Goal 12

**Good News:** Recent studies show that human happiness is not necessarily linked to high consumption or “retail therapy.”

**Bad News:** 1.3 billion tonnes of food is wasted every year. We lose up to \$20 Trn a year through unsustainable use of the planet’s US-\$125 Trn ecosystem services.



The human family is living beyond its means: we are drawing down the environmental resources of the planet too fast – creating a massive ecological over-draft. Every year, the Global Footprint Network publishes ‘Earth Overshoot Day’ – the day on which we use up our annual quota of environmental resources and go into over-draft. This year(2019) it was July 29th – the earliest ever(in 2000, we didn’t get there until Sept. 25th).

Sustainable consumption and production is about learning to live within our means – and the best way to do this is becoming more ‘resource efficient.’ In 1998, the Club of Rome (which earlier published the Limits to

Growth) published Factor Four – showing how to double your wealth and halve your resource use at the same time. Since then, scientists and economists have shown how we can get to Factor Ten – even Factor 20! Our generation should strive to achieve Factor 100 – so that every member of the human family can live enriching, fulfilled lives without increasing our ecological over-draft.



## Balance Sheet

### Achievements

A third of people in the UK identify as Vegan, Vegetarian or Flexitarian – up from less than 20% in 2012. It is mostly young people – millennials, with over 55s being the least likely to go vegetarian. (9)

Countries which have signed agreements like the Montreal Protocol have to report their progress on meeting the targets of those agreements. In 2018, **71 countries** reported on 303 policies related to sustainable consumption. [3]

**93%** of the largest 250 companies are delivering some kind of report on their sustainability initiatives. (2018) [2]

‘Material intensity’ is the amount of materials consumed per unit of GDP. This decreased in some regions between 2010 and 2017, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia as GDP in these areas increased.

### Work Left to Do

Only 5% of Americans say they are vegetarians, unchanged from 2012. 3% say they’re vegans, little changed from 2% in 2012. [10]

The ‘material footprint’, the natural resources extracted to meet demand, has risen by 70% since 2000 to 92 billion metric tons in 2017. This increase is happening far faster than for the global population. [3]

Consumption per person is around 13 times greater in high-income countries than in low-income countries. This suggests lifestyles in high-income countries depend on the resources from low-income countries. [3]

1.3 billion tonnes of food is wasted every year. At the same time, nearly 2 billion people do not receive sufficient food to remain healthy. [4]



## Achievements

A number of recent studies have suggested that **human happiness is not necessarily tied to high consumption** - we can live happy lives without consuming more than our fair share. [6]

Evaluations of various ecosystem services - those services the natural world performs for humans, such as providing food and medicine, or in regulating the climate - have found the figures to be huge. One report from 2014 estimated a **total value of USD\$125 trillion per year**. [12]

Indicators show that consumers are far more aware of the environmental impact of their purchases than earlier generations. Boycotts of products rose 123% in just 2 years between 2010 and 2012. Corporate Social Responsibility didn't exist as a concept 50 years ago. Now every large corporation spends resources on achieving it. Customers demand it. [13]

## Work Left to Do

3% of the earth's water is drinkable, yet it is being used faster than it is naturally replenished.

Losses due to environmental degradation or unsustainable resource extraction were estimated to cost USD\$4.3-20.2 trillion per year. This economic cost does not include the intrinsic value of ecosystems, or their social value. [7]

If everyone on earth was to consume like an average American, we would need 4 planets to support them. If they lived like the average citizen of Dubai, we'd need 5.4. [11]



## Sources

1. [UNDP - SDG12](#)
2. [SDGs Knowledge Platform - Goal 12](#)
3. [SDGs Report 2019 - Section 12](#)
4. [FAO Food Security Report 2019](#)
5. [World Business Council for Sustainable Development - Facts and Trends](#)
6. [Happy Planet Index](#)
7. [R. Costanza et al. \(2014\) Global Environmental Change 26: 152-58](#)
8. [The 2030 Agenda](#)
9. [The Guardian](#)
10. [Gallup Poll](#)
11. [Global Footprint Calculator](#) quoted by the [BBC](#)
12. [SDG15 - Life on Land](#)
13. [Business Green](#)

## Points to Ponder

- If so many people are aware of their environmental impact, and companies are taking action through Corporate Social Responsibility, why isn't consumption going down faster?
- Is it because governments are afraid to introduce the legislation?
- Is Advertising too powerful and compelling at encouraging our over-consumption?
- Do our Pension funds require companies to grow fast to keep our savings growing?
- What can be done about these?
- Given that over-consumption and these resource-shortages are global problems, do we need stronger global governance to conserve them??



## Take Action

- Do ALL the 50 things to do to save the Planet (see: [www.50waystohelp.com](http://www.50waystohelp.com)) use LED lightbulbs, turn off appliances at the mains when not in use, recycle everything you can, become a vegetarian, stop paper bank payments, use public transport or cycle, don't do long-haul flights – have stay-cations, buy locally-sourced food and clothing – and so on, and so on....
- Check everything you buy: buy only timber products sourced from sustainably managed forests; buy only fish caught in sustainably managed fisheries; buy organic and fair trade products as far as possible; resist buying anything packaged in single-use plastic – or unpack these goods into a paper bag at the check-out;
- Become a Green Economy / Sustainable Behaviour advocate: speak about it at your school; call a town hall meeting – join a local environmental group – Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Extinction Rebellion – or create your own.
- Start a vegetable garden in your school: contribute your produce to school dinner menus – and make sure that every food produced and/or on sale at your school is produced sustainably!

