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# RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



## ENSURE SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION PATTERNS

**Sustainable consumption and production is all about promoting resource and energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure and jobs that provide access to basic services, decent work and a better quality of life for everyone.** When we consume and produce sustainably, we are trying to do more with less. It involves consumers, producers, policy-makers, researchers and media making informed choices along the course of the supply chain. Reducing our waste, establishing environmental protection policies, supporting the development of sustainable businesses and educating the public are all ways we can help improve our consumption and production.

## TARGETS

- Reduce the amount of global food waste per person by half, for individuals and businesses.
- Ensure that the soil, air and water are protected through the upholding of international agreements for handling harmful chemicals.
- Reduce the generation of waste by reducing, reusing and recycling.
- Ensure large companies' practices are responsible, transparent and environmentally sound.
- Support and develop public information and education to promote sustainable lifestyles.

“Only when the last tree has died and the last river been poisoned and the last fish been caught will we realize we cannot eat money.”

**Alanis Obomsawin**  
Abenaki-Canadian  
filmmaker and activist



## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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- 1** Learners will understand and be able to communicate how lifestyle choices influence social, economic and environmental development.
- 2** Learners will understand the roles, rights, and duties of different actors in production and consumption.
- 3** Learners will be able to communicate the need for sustainable strategies and practices regarding consumption and production.
- 4** Learners will be able to plan, implement, and evaluate sustainable consumption-related activities.
- 5** Learners will be able to challenge cultural and societal trends in consumption and production.

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

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### Media

What is the role of the media in perpetuating overconsumption? How can we become more aware of, or change, this?

### Environment

How can we influence our culture to value environmental sustainability?

### Poverty, wealth and power

How does wealth and power effect relationships between producers and consumers?

### Indigenous Peoples

What is being done to support remote Indigenous communities to combat inflated prices of consumer goods?

### Oppression and genocide

How has consumption influenced oppression and marginalization?

### Health and biotechnology

What is overconsumption doing to our health?

### Gender politics

How is consumption a gendered issue?

### Social justice and human rights

How are consumption patterns and social justice connected?

### Peace and conflict

How does consumption of certain goods support ongoing conflict? (e.g.: Mining and resource extraction in the Democratic Republic of Congo)



# THE BIG QUESTIONS

## 1 Where did it begin?

- When you grab an item off the shelf, you are at the midway point of a product's life span. What extends behind you are all the different organizations, people and resources involved in transforming different **natural resources** into a finished product. What stands before you are the ways that product will impact the world around it and how it will ultimately need to be disposed. Consumers are the end of the **supply chain**, or the sequence of processes and actors involved in the production and distribution of a particular good.
- Western industrial revolutions in the 18th and 19th century pushed consumption and resource extraction into overdrive. The use of technology and **fossil fuels** to improve the efficiency of mass production led to an expansion of global consumer culture.
- In the 20th and 21st centuries, environmental costs associated with material benefits were brought to the global stage as awareness of human-induced **greenhouse** effects from forest clearing, pollution and fossil fuel use grew.<sup>1</sup>
- Sustainable consumption and production was defined in 1994 at the Oslo Symposium on Sustainable Consumption.<sup>2</sup> They described it as the use of services and products which respond to our basic needs and bring better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials, and emissions of waste and pollutants to not jeopardize the needs of future generations.
- In order to achieve sustainable consumption, we need to first increase the efficiency of consumption through technological and **eco-efficiency**, and secondly, change and reduce our consumption patterns in general through consumer and **stakeholder** action.

## 2 Why does this issue matter?

- **Companies need to be responsible for their practices**  
**Land degradation**, declining soil fertility, unsustainable water use, overfishing, and marine environment degradation all lessen our ability to provide food for ourselves. We can extract natural resources sustainably, but businesses need to make sustainable choices, remain transparent and encourage sustainable consumer behaviours.
- **We need international agreements and enforcement to properly handle harmful chemicals**  
Pollution can't be contained by the borders of any one country. The harmful effects of spills, air pollution, **water pollution** and contamination extend to areas beyond the country where the pollution originated, making efforts to control pollution complex. Bad management, poor government organization and lack of will are the biggest barriers when it comes to monitoring emissions, corporate enforcement and managing contamination. We need strong social, economic and political policy direction and enforcement to hold businesses and governments responsible for their impact.



- **We need to reduce our food waste**

Each year about one-third of all food produced—equivalent to 1.3 billion tonnes worth around \$1 trillion—ends up rotting in the bins of consumers and retailers, or spoiling due to poor transportation and harvesting practices.<sup>3</sup> Producers, suppliers, consumers and governments all have a part to play in reducing our food waste and improving transportation efficiency.

- **We need to inform and educate the public**

Households consume 29 per cent of global energy and contribute to 21 per cent of resultant **CO2 emissions**.<sup>4</sup> For example, if people worldwide switched to energy efficient lightbulbs, the world would save US\$120 billion annually on energy costs. Consumers need to know how they can make the sustainability switch and make ethical choices in the products they buy and how they use them. Reduce, reuse, recycle and turn off those lights while you're at it!

### 3 Who and what are affected?

- **Consumers**

Increased growth in various sectors of the African economy have seen an expansion in the middle class—with consumer spending expected to grow from \$860 billion in 2008 to \$1.4 trillion by 2020.<sup>5</sup> Increases in disposable income mean increased demand for consumer goods and merchandise beyond the essentials. In order to make prosperity a two-way street for consumers and our environment, we need to encourage consumption patterns to value sustainability and ethical practices.

- **Businesses**

Businesses can benefit from new solutions that enable sustainable consumption and production patterns. A better understanding of the environmental and social impacts of products and services is needed, both of product life cycles and how these are affected by use within our own lifestyles. Businesses can also use their innovative power to design solutions that can both enable and inspire individuals to lead more sustainable lifestyles, reducing impacts and improving well-being.

- **Our Environment**

Our environment is the fuel and the vehicle for human consumption and production. We extract natural resources to make goods, while we also dispose of the goods we don't need. The problem with this system is that we live on a planet with finite resources and a sensitivity to the waste we produce. This means there is only so much to go around and we're not cleaning up our mess properly. If we over-consume, pollute or produce goods that cannot be disposed of in a responsible manner, we are damaging our ecosystems and the ability to use and enjoy them in future.



## 4 What needs to be done?

- Governments need to rethink regulations and provide incentives that support sustainable consumption and discourage harmful practices. Education and promotional efforts in schools encouraging sustainable practices such as organic and more sustainable diets, will highlight options for students to take action. Measuring policy success should go beyond **gross domestic product (GDP)** to incorporate social and environmental achievements.
- Companies need to try out new ways of conducting business to improve our impact on the planet. We also need leadership that considers the environmental and social impacts of production. Enforcing sustainable production and **human rights** are necessary throughout the supply chain. Finding new ways to fulfill customer needs with minimal environmental impact is the name of the game.
- **Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** play a key role in educating the public. Encouraging communication on wasteful heating, air conditioning, and household energy usage, as well as sustainable lifestyle choices, will help empower consumers to make informed decisions and collaborate on solutions.
- Consumers can hold governments and producers accountable to their promises and potential when it comes to sustainable production and regulation. Voting with our dollar, buying fair trade mobilizing our community, raising our voice and taking a stand against unsustainable practices are the best ways to change the course of our future from where we stand.

“ Adopting and promoting sustainable production practices require concerted effort, something which in practice is too often missing or insufficient. Making the shift at the scale required demands forward-looking leadership in the public and private sectors alike. ”

**Helen Clark**

Former Prime Minister of New Zealand and former administrator of the United Nations Development Programme



## CONNECTION TO THE OTHER GOALS



Encouraging decent work and economic growth requires a dynamic and responsive cycle of production and consumption. There are clear connections between fair trade practices, ensuring decent work and responsible production and consumptions and reduced inequities around the world.



Ensuring the present and future health and well-being of our environment, both on land and in the sea, requires us to make some changes. We need to make our industry and infrastructure more efficient so we don't take more than we need, while research in innovative production methods will provide new solutions to our sustainability problems. Responsible production and consumption must include consideration of the effects of industry on both life on land and below water.

“ Sustainable development—development that does not destroy or undermine the ecological, economic, or social basis on which continued development depends—is the only viable pathway to a more secure and hopeful future for rich and poor alike. ”

**Maurice Strong**

Canadian businessman and diplomat



## Consequences of Inaction

- At our current rate of consumption, we will need the resources of two Earths by 2030 to provide for our growing population.<sup>6</sup> **Overconsumption** happens when our use of resources outpaces the sustainable capacity of our ecosystems. If we don't do something to curb our consumption and make our production more sustainable, we are going to degrade our environment to a point of no return.
- Growth in population, urbanization and wealth over the next decades will increase waste and pollution volumes. Electronic waste management is also a growing problem, locally and internationally, with the rise of consumer electronics and computers. If we do not take action on these issues, our health and the health of our planet will suffer.

## REFLECTION AND ACTION QUESTIONS

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- 1 How do you feel about the issue now that you know more about it?
- 2 How might this issue have been prevented? What could have been done differently?
- 3 How has this problem changed over time? Where do you see it going in the future?
- 4 What questions do you still have?

“ Making conscious choices about what we eat, based on what the earth can sustain and what our bodies need, can help remind us that our whole society must begin to balance sustainable production with human need.”

**Frances Moore Lappé**

American author of “Diet for a Small Planet”



# RESOURCES

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## How to take action

- **Reduce your waste.** Packaging is a huge waste and takes up valuable real estate in our landfills for centuries. Bringing your own containers, reusing glass and plastic containers and sharing them with your community are great ways to go zero waste. Buy what you need and reduce your food waste of perishable foods. Bring your own shopping bag, take fewer napkins and donate what you don't use.
- **Raise your voice.** Businesses and governments have the power to make huge changes in sustainable policies, attitudes and behaviours. It's our job to hold them to their promises and inform them of their harmful practices. Use your social media voice and the strength of your community network to fight for sustainable production.
- **Buy and eat locally.** Invest in the livelihoods of those who surround you while cutting down on transportation and production emissions. Buying and eating locally produced food can help create a more sustainable production and consumption cycle, making our communities more sustainable while addressing economic and environmental concerns.
- **Start a fashion revolution.** Bring attention to the unequal working conditions some factory workers face in the clothing industry. Join the movement to demand safe working conditions, more transparency from large factories and parent companies, safety and respect for workers and protection of our environment by asking "who made my clothes?" Host a movie night and screen [The True Cost](#), hold a clothing swap, shop locally and have an inside out day to showcase your clothing tags. You can also host an [Ethical Fashion Show](#) in your community or at your school, showcasing fair trade items.
- **Learn more about Fairtrade's work** and bring the initiative to your community! Learn where the products you use have come from, what is involved in the process, and ensure that those workers and their communities are being protected socially, environmentally, and economically through the fair trade approach. Host an officially designated Fairtrade event, become a Fairtrade Ambassador, or become a Fairtrade Campus, Town, School, Faith Group or Workplace. Find more information [here](#) or contact [Fair Trade Manitoba](#) for assistance.
- **Shop smart.** Not only can you know if your food and clothing products are made ethically, you can also do the same for jewelry. Investigate the companies you buy from and understand where that gold, silver or diamond came from, how it was mined and how its production impacts people around the world.





## Educational resources

- Visit the World's Largest Lesson for Goal 12 for multiple lesson plans, corresponding PowerPoints, and visual materials. [Exploring the Circular Economy](#) (ages 12 to 19) focuses on comparing living systems with man-made systems and investigating an alternative economic model. [Understanding Sustainable Living](#) (ages 11 to 14) explores the concept of sustainability, using the Global Footprint Network to track current lifestyle choices and explores alternative options.
- Learn about how stuff gets from a clump of raw materials to your mall in this series called the [Story of Stuff](#). Their videos are informative and challenge consumers to make responsible choices.
- Learn how to make changes in your school's waste and sustainable practices through the [Manitoba Ministry of Education](#). Explore teaching resources, case study resources and much more.
- Learn about sustainable food production and reducing waste through lifestyle choices from the [Sustainable Table](#) initiative from GRACE Communications Foundation. Learn more through teaching materials and opportunities that encourage a deeper understanding of what makes a food system sustainable.
- Bring simulation activities into the classroom to help students understand the processes of production. Christian Aid's [Chocolate Trade Game](#) (ages 11 to 18) traces the journey of the cocoa bean from tree to chocolate bar with students acting as farmers, companies, supermarkets, shoppers, and journalists. Oxfam's [The Clothes Line](#) (ages 7 to 11) teaches about fair trade, the textiles industry and the livelihoods attached to the clothes on our backs.
- Have students fill out the [You Are What You Wear](#) worksheet from Climate Change Connection and discover their impact on the environment through their wardrobe.
- Did you know that November 25th is Buy Nothing Day? Since the early 1990s, [Buy Nothing Day](#) has worked to inspire individual and collective action against consumerism. They encourage consumers to be considerate of the impact of their needs and desires, while trying to provide for themselves and reduce our burden on our environment by reducing, reusing and recycling. Engage your students, school, and community through this initiative and learn more about consumption patterns.
- [Fairtrade](#) is an initiative that ensures better prices, decent working conditions and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers. Fairtrade represents a form of responsible production and consumption by supporting small-scale farmers and workers as they work to improve their lives and communities. A product that is marked as Fairtrade certified ensures the producers have met Fairtrade social, economic, and environmental standards to protect workers' basic rights, protecting the environment, and improving their economic standing through ownership, minimum pricing and a Fairtrade premium. Go to Fairtrade Canada for [materials and resources](#) for your classroom and school, including posters, brochures, merchandising material and more. You can also [contact MCIC](#) for Fairtrade materials, workshops and displays.



## CASE STUDIES

### 1 Intermarché

French supermarket [Intermarché](#) is taking a stand against the 20 to 40 per cent of produce that is wasted because of its perceived imperfections. While just as nutritious, these lumpy lemons, curly carrots and obscure oranges are getting their moment in the sun and are sold to customers at lower cost to encourage reductions in food wastage. The surprise rise in consumption of these “inglorious fruits and vegetables” has encouraged other retailers to look at ways they can improve their production and reduce waste.

### 2 Rwanda Environmental Management Authority

Plastic is not biodegradable. When it ends up in landfills or as litter in our ecosystems, it can take hundreds of years to decompose, releasing toxins into the soil and water in the process. Additionally, producing plastic bags requires millions of barrels worth of oil and natural gas, only to be thrown out after a single grocery trip. As a means to make consumption more sustainable, the [Rwanda Environmental Management Authority](#) has banned the use of plastic bags in the country. Many other municipal, provincial and national governments, including China, Kenya and Denmark, have banned or taxed the use of plastic bags in the effort to help clean up cities and decrease **non-renewable resource** dependency.

### 3 FoodCloud

Globally, 1.3 billion tonnes of food is wasted per year, using farmland the combined size of China, Mongolia and Kazakhstan combined to grow food that is never actually eaten. To reduce this, Iseult Ward and Aoibheann O'Brien co-founded [FoodCloud](#), a food redistribution app available in Ireland and the United Kingdom. When a store has food they cannot sell, they upload a description of the food using their in-store scanner or the smartphone app. Local organizations such as breakfast clubs, homeless shelters and family support services are then notified that food is available for collection. It's a win-win-win: stores are connecting with their communities, local organizations receive adequate food for their programs and everyone is working toward reducing the negative social, economic and environmental impacts of food waste.

### 4 University of Manitoba Student Life Development

The [University of Manitoba Student Life Development](#) group is working to reduce food waste through food dehydration in El Salvador. This project will process surplus locally sourced fruits using food dehydrators, providing employment for 30 youth living in the Provinces of Usulután and San Miguel. By doing this, their project will help reduce waste and generate economic opportunities.



## 5 Mennonite Economic Development Associates

[Mennonite Economic Development Associates](#) is working to improve the crop yield and income of organic farmers producing bio-fertilizer. Using organic bio-fertilizer has increased coffee and cocoa yields by up to 50 per cent in Peru. This project assists local cooperative Divisoria to scale up commercial production and sale of organic bio-fertilizer to 850 coffee and cocoa farmers in the regions of Huanuco, Ucayili and San Martin.

## 6 Tearfund Canada

[Tearfund Canada](#) is working to improve the **food security** of families in the Malyo region of Northern Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This project helping improve the livelihoods and food security of vulnerable rural families in eight communities by building the capacity of 600 farmers to use **sustainable agricultural** practice. Farmers are provided with tools and improved seeds and are supported in forming small farming associations.

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### End notes

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-Unq3R--M0>

<sup>2</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sustainableconsumptionandproduction>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-consumption-production/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-consumption-production/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://borgenproject.org/growing-consumer-class-africa/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1320419/Humans-using-half-planets-worth-resources-need-Earths-2030.html>