

Anthology of
Sustainable
Consumption

Foreword

Humanity faces interlinked social, environmental and economic challenges of a magnitude not experienced before, and which are now compounded by the socioeconomic challenges brought by COVID-19. A degraded natural resource base and fragmented social webs are being further tested through the impact of climate change and the loss of biodiversity. These are not sustainable patterns. Any transition to sustainable consumption cultures must focus on consumption and production systems within planetary boundaries and on reaffirming social values of community and solidarity.

In recognition of this need for a dual focus, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) works with more than 40 organisations around the world to bring about change at various levels – from policy and regulation to sparking an individual and collective (re)connection with nature and the ecosystems that sustain our lives. The perspectives outlined in this Anthology of Sustainable Consumption illustrate some of the work done on four continents in this regard.

The organisations engaged in this work, often in partnership with others, fight for consumer rights, showcase innovative technologies, support the revival and scaling up of sustainable practices, undertake the necessary research to provide science-based evidence for advocacy, and design practical models for a sustainable future, among other objectives.

We are proud to support some of their projects and collaborate in the annual Green Action Week, a global campaign that aims to ignite cultures of sustainable consumption.



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Secretary General

The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation

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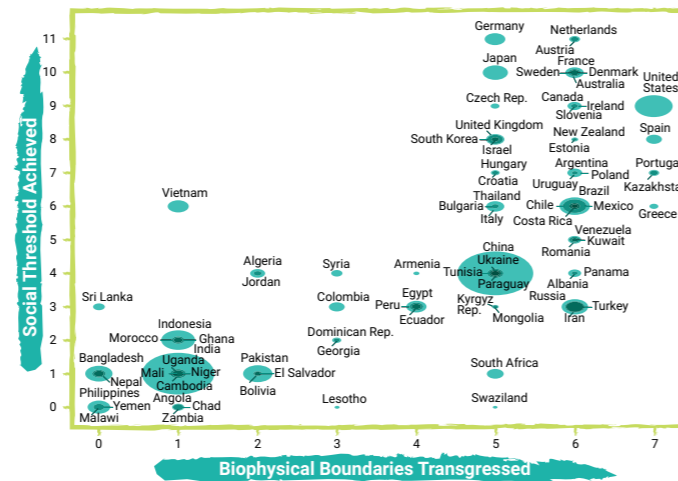
Building a sustainable future

We will not realise the dream of a world in which all people enjoy a 'better and more sustainable future' as outlined by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) unless we quickly improve our relationship with the Earth, including making our production and consumption patterns sustainable.

About 60% of the natural systems that regulate the climate, provide clean air and water, and sustain food, fibre and animal feed production are degraded or lost.¹ Our modern and highly inefficient food systems generate significant volumes of food waste.² One hundred gigatons of new material goes into the global economy each year – of which only 8,6 gigatons are recycled.³ And the global economic system is still powered by fossil resources that drive climate change, air pollution and biodiversity loss. This degradation of the environment does not equate to a better quality of life for all. About 1,3 billion people live in multidimensional poverty out of which 803 million live in a household where someone is undernourished and 687 million lack electricity.⁴

The graph alongside⁵ illustrates the status of selected countries' achievements against social indicators and transgression of biophysical boundaries. In a sustainable world, all countries would be in the top left hand side corner of the figure.

We, the contributors to this Anthology, have worked together to understand the concept of sustainable consumption and production in our varied contexts. On our own and through partnerships, we help build 'Sharing Communities' characterised by a spirit of collaborative action that generates social benefits while reducing impacts on the planet. The contributions in this Anthology represent the views of the organisations themselves and are drawn from both the Global North and South. It is hoped that they illustrate the need for a sustainability transition to encompass diverse perspectives and that they emphasise the urgency with which we need to act to bring a better world for all into being.



The biophysical boundaries are carbon dioxide emissions, phosphorus, nitrogen, blue water, the resources used for net primary production, and ecological and material footprints. The social indicators are life satisfaction, healthy life expectancy, nutrition, sanitation, income, access to energy, education levels, social support, democratic quality, equality and employment.

Supportive policy frameworks

There is often a lack of integrated policy frameworks and lack of knowledge in institutional structures of cross-cutting issues. The contributions by Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) from India (p 3), Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) from South Africa (p 7) and Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor (IDEC) from Brazil (p 11) highlight the need for innovative, cross-disciplinary policy formulation designed to generate social and ecological justice.

Empowered consumers

Known barriers to sustainable consumption are lifestyle habits and a lack of access to sustainably produced goods and to credible, relevant information. People do not, however, always make sustainable choices even when they know that they should. In its contribution, Consumers International stresses the importance of making sustainability the 'easy option' (p 15).

Transformative education

Education plays a key role in raising awareness of the need for sustainable lifestyles and in developing the skills required to address the challenges. Centro Ecológico from Brazil (p 19) and IBON Foundation from the Philippines (p 23) illustrate transformative educational approaches that work to build equitable systems that are value-led and that build collective consumer agency.

A (re)imagining of a culture of sustainable consumption

Culture can be understood as distinctive collective perceptions of the world that shape individual and community norms of social behaviour, including values and lifestyles. The contributions by Sustaining the Wild Coast in South Africa (p 27) and IBON International Foundation Inc. in the Philippines (p 31) illustrate the need to assert the rights of traditional peoples and share their sustainability knowledge and community-level innovations.

Creative action

There is a need to bring individuals into active engagement with issues of sustainable consumption to encourage self-initiated action that goes beyond the sphere of private consumption to include civic action. The contribution by SSNC describes how a seemingly simple activity like clothes-swapping can be an entry point to a deeper transformation of values and norms as a space for co-creation of a new future (p 35).

1 International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). n.d. 'The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.' [Online] Available: <https://www.iucnredlist.org>.
2 Action against Hunger. 2021. 'World hunger statistics.' [Online] Available: <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/world-hunger-facts-statistics>.
3 Circle Economy. 2021. 'Circularity Gap Report 2021.' Amsterdam: Circle Economy.
4 United Nations Development Programme and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. 2020. 'Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2020' [Online] http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2020_mpi_report_en.pdf.
5 O'Neill, D.W., Fanning, A.L., Lamb, W.F. & Steinberger, J.K. 2018. A good life for all within planetary boundaries. 'Nature Sustainability' 1:88-95.

Overcoming Obstacles to Policy Implementation

A contribution by CUTS

CUTS works to support consumers around the world, particularly the most vulnerable, to achieve rights related to basic needs, sustainable development and good governance. Headquartered in Jaipur, India with programme centres in Jaipur, Chittorgarh (Rajasthan), Kolkata (West Bengal) and an advocacy centre in New Delhi. It also has affiliated centres in Zambia, Kenya, Ghana, Vietnam, Geneva and Washington D.C.

➔ www.cuts-international.org • www.cuts-cart.org



Working towards consumer sovereignty

Started as a rural development communication initiative in 1983, CUTS is now at the forefront of India and other countries' consumer movements and is a leading Global South voice on issues of trade, regulation and governance. Our work focuses on bringing about consumer sovereignty in a framework of socioeconomic justice and environmental balance, both within and across borders.

Enabling sustainable consumption means understanding the interlinkages with and between production patterns and poverty. We work both at the policy advocacy level and at grassroots to understand and support the implementation of

sustainable alternatives across a range of sectors from organic food production to waste recycling. To this end, we need to understand and identify obstacles within policy frameworks that shape production and consumption patterns.

Exploring how SDG 12 is understood in policy circles

We undertook an in-depth study to better understand India's progress towards SDG 12. This is a critical goal because it is intricately linked with many of the other goals, and unsustainable production and consumption undermines any progress towards meeting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The study focused on



The government of Chhattisgarh, India is actively supporting the establishment of Gothans (p 6) to support organic farming and an agriculture economy. © Creative Commons Licence

the national scenario and drew on fieldwork undertaken in five states: Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. These states were selected as representative of different regions, and on their overall ranking in the 2018 SDG Index Report. We visited the targeted states to gather information about the status of SDG 12 and related indicators, the consumer perspective and best practices in this regard.

Key findings included that India is unlikely to achieve any of the SDG 12 targets and conditions related to the indicators may well worsen by 2030 due to COVID-19. As India has the second largest population in the world, it needs to play a leading role in driving attainment of the SDGs, particularly SDG 12. The study, however, also identified some of the obstacles to India making the contribution that it could to SDG 12. These include lack of awareness and coordination and lack of data that all prohibit the sharing of achievements. Even among government officials, there is a significant lack of understanding of the SDGs, their purpose and

related objectives and indicators. Government departments, such as urban development, and local bodies are responsible for implementing related policies but not SDG 12 specifically. And others, such as environment and planning, are only tasked with monitoring outcomes. There is no interdepartmental coordination. This, coupled with a lack of funding and a shortage of technical staff, results in inadequate monitoring and reporting on the indicators. These appear to be the most significant challenges at the state level regarding SDG 12 implementation.

Lack of understanding and coordination at the government level of SDG 12 hinders the transition to sustainable consumption and production patterns.

This study enabled us to better understand sustainable consumption from the consumer perspective. It has given us an

advocacy tool to call for the streamlining of policies and more dedicated support for sustainable practices. It has also led to the development of a replicable policy and practical model that can be used elsewhere. We actively shared the study findings through a national consultation with representatives of government departments and relevant organisations. We continue to disseminate the study results to bring greater awareness to SDG 12 and will organise further consultations in the five states as the COVID-19 pandemic subsides.

A focus on evidence-based advocacy

CUTS concentrates on projects that provide an evidence base for its advocacy work on sustainable consumption. We have documented 15 traditional sustainable practices in different regions in India that potentially could be replicated at the urban level. This study identified three core areas related to sustainable practices and their potential to 1) alleviate poverty, support gender parity and promote democratic rights and equality for all; 2) to generate business opportunities



Innovative natural cooling building techniques, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India. Credit: CUTS

related to social entrepreneurship; and 3) meet modern demands in an innovative way, such as traditional air-cooling practices.

Key role of state interventions

In the state of Chhattisgarh, there is an ancient tradition of keeping cows in 'Gothan' – a daycare cow shelter. All cows in a village are kept in the Gothan with one person paid a nominal fee by the animal owners to take care of them. The state government is now supporting the Gothan model by paying the wages of the caretakers. The Gothan has become a part of the 'Narva', 'Garwa', 'Ghurwa' and 'Badi Yojana' (canal, cattle, manure pit and kitchen garden) scheme.

This state-initiated scheme aims to revive the agricultural economy through collective action to conserve water, farm livestock, use compost and cultivate food.

In its first phase, 1 286 Gothans were built with 3 926 planned for the second phase; 1 996 have been completed to date. The plan is that every 'Gram Panchayat' (village council) builds a Gothan on three acres of land with pasture available for cows, goats and poultry. The resultant organic manure will be sold to farmers to promote organic farming. The construction of the Gothan helps to connect farmers to income-orientated activities, like vegetable production, fisheries and livestock farming. It is hoped

that this state intervention – the provision of wages to Gothan caretakers and purchasing of cow manure for processing into compost, dung lamps and fertilisers – will support the uptake of organic farming in the state. It also encourages women to start organic vegetable farming. Successes to date include:

- About 60 000 participants in the scheme have earned incomes from producing vegetables and making vermicompost and cow dung lamps, among other products.
- Associated self-help groups have made more than 71 000 quintals (7 100 tons) of vermicompost from cow dung to date.
- Gothan committees have paid INR 80 crore (United States \$10 million) to cattle farmers for their cow dung at INR 2 per kilogram.

If managed well, Gothans have significant potential to promote and support the adoption of organic farming, while also protecting the environment. The government is undertaking initiatives to encourage public participation in this scheme.

Evidence-based Advocacy for Food & Climate Justice

A contribution by SAFCEI

SAFCEI is a multi-faith organisation that supports Southern African faith leaders and communities in growing awareness of and acting on eco-justice, sustainable living and climate change. Based in Cape Town, South Africa with activities undertaken in 11 African countries.

➔ www.safcei.org

Advocating for ecologically and socially just policy frameworks

SAFCEI, established in 2005, works with a broad diversity of faiths, including African Traditional Healers, Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Quaker communities, and a wide range of Christian denominations. Our members also include indigenous knowledge holders who identify as Khoi and San Traditionalists. We speak out on issues of eco-justice, encourage ethical action in this regard, and call on those in positions of authority to govern ethically on matters concerning our common home. We advocate

for policy implementation, policy change or policy intervention in a range of sectors that is both ecologically and socially just, that considers the context in which it will be applied, and that aligns with our ethos of caring for the Earth. Policy must spur on restorative action and support adaptive responses, as well as stipulate living within ecological boundaries.

All faiths share a common mandate to 'care' for the Earth. This implies a responsibility to maintain and enhance the resource base on which all life depends.



Multi-faith gathering at SAFCEI policy conference 2019, Johannesburg, South Africa. Credit: Elkan Butler Photography

Policy frames production and consumption behaviour

Patterns of production and consumption cannot be viewed in isolation. They are driven by a profit-oriented economic system that favours extractive resource use to the detriment of ecological health and social wellbeing and the promotion of a consumerist culture that takes us further away from our spiritual connection to Earth and the web of life it supports.

The destruction of the natural resource base and of the knowledge systems held by smallholder farmers and rural communities is disrupting the fabric of our society and irrevocably damaging Earth's life support systems. One of these consequences is climate change, which will further compound issues of poverty, injustice, food and nutrition insecurity, and inequality. Climate change will affect everyone, but not equally.

Those countries where people consume less or often not even enough to support dignified lives typically have less capacity to adapt to climate change. Policy on climate change and related aspects therefore becomes a critical sustainability lever.

Policy to mitigate or adapt to climate change needs to consider social and ecological justice issues, both within and between countries.

Unpacking food and climate justice frameworks

Food customs and practices are deeply embedded in communities as cultural and ritual practices and are linked to faith traditions and cultural identity. Faith communities uphold the wholeness, divinity and sanctity of food and life, remembering that the physical intake of food has a spiritual dimension. SAFCEI recognises that the right to food is a human right, enabled through the ability to produce or to buy food. The right to food is inextricably linked to the right to life and dignity. Food should therefore be available, accessible and adequate to all without discrimination.

Climate change compromises this already unmet or fragile

right. In sub-Saharan Africa, climate change is starting to and will increasingly affect the ability of both commercial and smallholder farmers to grow food. Droughts and floods will devastate homes, public infrastructure and agricultural production.

The increase in average temperature, faster in Africa than many other places in the world, is already reducing yields. In particular, the poor and most vulnerable will have even less access to nutritious food than they do now. This will perpetuate the cycle of poverty and malnutrition. Less food in the market will drive prices up making it even more unaffordable for the economically marginalised. This will deepen the food and nutrition crisis on the continent. A drop in calorie availability in Africa – because food is not available or affordable – will result in an estimated 11 million more children being malnourished in the coming decades.⁶ It will also affect the quantity and quality of food purchased by households, and influence how food is allocated within households, with negative implications for women and children. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change notes

that most people and communities in Africa are directly reliant on the natural environment for survival and livelihoods, and do not have the necessary safety nets to adapt to climate change. We need sustainable food systems that build resilience to climate change, and that are socially just. This relies to a significant degree on having appropriate policy frameworks.

Disjointed policy framing and frameworks

We undertook an analysis of food and climate change governance structures in South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe to generate evidence to support our campaigns and calls for policy

A sustainable food system in a context of climate change will produce a range of nutritious foods that are accessible and affordable to even the most vulnerable, farm animals ethically, empower women, and restore the health and diversity of life on Earth.

change. All four countries have signed the Paris Agreement and submitted nationally determined contributions. They have set up structures to monitor and respond to the impacts of climate change.

While policies are in place, there is little capacity and funding provided for implementation and coordination of food and climate justice concerns. The countries are not inclusive of civil society voices and their ideas on how to solve the intimidating interlinked challenges of climate change and food and nutritional insecurity.

In addition, there is no focus on dismantling the industrial agricultural model that is driving greenhouse gas emissions, polluting water and air bodies, destroying on-farm and wild biodiversity and marginalising the traditional knowledge that we will need more than ever before to adapt.

There is no mention, for example, of agroecology at the governance level or of any alternative approach to food production, distribution, marketing and retail that would support a transition to more sustainable production and consumption patterns.

A call for systemic change, starting with policy

We work with faith leaders across Southern Africa through our Faith Leaders Environmental Advocacy Training to help them reorient values of consumption within their communities based on our evidence-based understanding of the policy frameworks that determine unsustainable production and consumption.

Shifts in consumption values towards more Earth-friendly practices that both build social cohesion as well as the web of life can only take us so far. It is often the system itself that prohibits a sustainability transition.

SOUTHERN AFRICAN
FAITH COMMUNITIES'

safcei

ENVIRONMENT
INSTITUTE

⁶ Zewdie, A. 2014. Impacts of climate change on food security: a literature review in sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Earth Sciences Climate Change* 5(8):225.

Policies for and by People

A contribution by IDEC

IDEC is a non-profit and independent consumer association with a mission to guide, raise awareness, defend ethics in consumer relations and fight for the rights of consumer-citizens. Based in São Paulo with representatives in Rio de Janeiro and Brasilia.

➤ www.idec.org.br

A systemic approach to syndemic problems

Discussions around sustainability permeate and interconnect different fields, including food systems. Despite the complexity and diversity of views that surround the topic, there is at least one consensus: the hegemonic food system has been unable to guarantee health and sovereignty to people nor does it respect planetary boundaries. It needs to change – urgently and radically.

This consensus has been made evident in reports and publications by the most respected organizations and institutes. We highlight two valuable contributions made by The Lancet research committees, which help us to reflect on

the predatory impacts of how we produce and consume. They are the 'Global Syndemic'⁷ triggered by the junction of three pandemics: obesity, malnutrition and climate change, which interact with and feedback into each other and 'Food in the Anthropocene: healthy diets through sustainable food systems'.⁸ The latter illustrates the causal relationship between increasing mass consumption of meat and animal products, supported by increased production of animal feed, and consumption of ultra-processed products and worsening health outcomes, greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss.



Farmers in Florianópolis, South Brazil, use sustainable agroforestry practices to restore the environment and produce pesticide-free food. Credit: IDEC

Different countries, but especially those in the Global South, have been dealing simultaneously with lack of access to food and excessive exposure to unhealthy products, in a context of escalating climate change. These global fractures are visible in our country realities. In Brazil, for example, 9% of the population is hungry while 26.8% of the adult population is living with obesity.

In addition, agriculture and land use account for 23% of greenhouse gas emissions, caused by deforestation, animal husbandry and the use of chemical agricultural inputs, associated with the reduction of biodiversity. But it is about more than numbers, we are talking about people and a society that is suffering from the consequences of this production and consumption model.

It is from this lens that IDEC makes a call to structurally and systematically confront “political inertia” and profoundly transform food systems into those designed for the community, guaranteeing rights and social and climate justice.

This political inertia is understood as the set of harmful products and practices of the food industries, especially pesticides and ultra-processed products enabled by the absence of effective global and national governance structures.



Farmers plant a 'muvuca' (assortment) of tree seeds and green manure vegetable seedlings as part of an agroforestry initiative in South Brazil. Credit: IDEC

The double burden of ultra-processed products: diseases and poisons

At the end of 2019, based on the Lancet research committee's evidence of a correlation between the consumption of ultra-processed products and obesity and non-communicable chronic diseases, IDEC decided to

investigate whether these products were also contaminated with pesticides. It seemed likely as they are largely composed of agricultural commodities such as soybeans, corn, wheat and sugar cane that receive most pesticide applications in the field. We selected 27 products from different brands, divided into 8 categories: soft drinks, juices, soy drinks, breakfast cereals, packaged snacks, salt biscuits, stuffed biscuits and wheat bread. With the exception of the first two categories, we found pesticide residues in all other 6 categories.

Of the total, 59.3% of the products had residues of at least one pesticide and 51.8% had residues of glyphosate and glufosinate, the most used agricultural chemical used in Brazil and in the world. It is classified as potentially carcinogenic to humans. Even after a long process from harvesting, transporting, intensive industrial processing to shelf life in supermarkets, pesticide residues remain in consumer products.

There are no simple solutions to complex problems. Given the magnitude of the challenges, different actors in society can, and should, put themselves at the service of the necessary

transformations. We warn though that reductionist approaches and practices will continue to perpetuate food system structures that generate inequalities, diseases and environmental hazards. These approaches tend to portray food as a commodity or as an individual responsibility instead of as a human right.

It is important, however, that we have concrete elements to analyse specific situations. IDEC's research builds on a vast body of evidence linking consumption of ultra-processed foods with obesity and correlated diseases. Through the confirmation that pesticide residues are present in these products, we make visible a relationship between them and a production system that generates negative environmental and social externalities.

Our work in this regard reinforces the need for a shift in public policies to promote truly healthy and sustainable food systems produced by people and for people.

idec
Instituto Brasileiro de
Defesa do Consumidor

7 Swinburn, B. et al. 2019. The Global Syndemic of Obesity, Undernutrition, and Climate Change: The Lancet Commission report. *Lancet* 393(10173):791-846. DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32822-8

8 Willett, W.M.D. et al. 2019. 'Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT-Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems.' JDOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31788-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31788-4)

Co-creating a sustainable future

We need to use different approaches to promote the transition to the world we want. Street fairs – especially the ones marketing organic foods – are vivid and vibrant environments that gather producers and consumers in a culture of exchange. The transactions that occur at street fairs are far more than commercial in nature – they are relationship-building transactions that pave the way for dialogue about the issues that matter. The nature of the space, which transcends the asymmetrical power relationships found in formal retail outlets and malls, and the organic nature of the goods on offer align with the values of wellbeing, sovereignty and sustainability.

IDEC identified these spaces as key intervention points for a communication platform in the form of a searchable map that would address several food and nutrition-related challenges in Brazil. We have mapped more than 1,000 initiatives all over Brazil. More than 1.5 million people have accessed the map.

We do this work in partnership with civil society organisations and stakeholders from the different states and municipalities as well as consumers, farmers and fair owners from all over the country. These direct linkages are critical to the emergence of a sustainable food system – one in which producers are valued for the work that they do to produce food in a way that does not harm the planet and where consumers are able to access healthy food affordably. It therefore serves both ecological and social justice needs.

Sustainable Consumption Must Be the Easy Choice

A contribution by Consumers International

Consumers International is the membership organisation for consumer groups around the world and works with more than 200 members and partners in over 100 countries. We empower and champion the rights of consumers, and ensure they are treated safely, fairly and honestly. Head office based in London, United Kingdom.

➔ www.consumersinternational.org



Supporting consumer rights

The consumer movement has grown from a pioneering group of founding members in 1960 to an incredibly diverse and powerful global network in 2021. We are the voice of our members and partners in international policy-making forums and the global marketplace to ensure they are treated safely, fairly and honestly.

Consumers International continues to build a powerful international movement to help protect and empower consumers everywhere.

Our members' primary objective is to protect and promote the eight principles related to consumer rights endorsed by the United Nations. The realisation of these rights, which encompass all lifestyle aspects,

are intrinsically linked to enabling sustainable consumption. These rights are:

- Satisfaction of basic needs: access to essential goods and services, such as food, shelter, water, education, healthcare and public utilities.
- Safety: to be protected against hazardous products, production processes and services.
- Being informed: to be able to make an informed choice and be protected against dishonest or misleading advertising and labelling.
- Choice: to have a choice between a range of products and services at competitive prices for satisfactory quality.



Sustainable consumption needs to be the easy choice aligned with the principles of consumer rights. Source: Shutterstock

- Being heard: to have consumer interests represented in the making and execution of government policy and in the development of products and services.
- Redress: to receive a fair settlement of just claims.
- Consumer education: to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to make informed choices, while being aware of basic consumer rights and responsibilities.
- A healthy environment: to live and work in an environment that is non-threatening to the wellbeing of present and future generations.

Central to sustainable consumption lies the principal of 'doing more with less', however this must also sit alongside supporting and championing the rights of vulnerable consumers to access quality goods and services that enable a high quality of life. Any transition to sustainable consumption must therefore also focus on creating a 'just transition' that offers safe, high-quality and sustainably produced

products, along with enabling and motivating people to consume sustainably. It is essential that policymakers, financiers and businesses not only support and mobilise consumers, but that they also take the necessary pragmatic steps to transforming supply chains and production models.

Consumers are clearly key to a sustainability transition in that they play a central role in the marketplace and can influence marketplace transformation. They should not, however, bear the sole burden of responsibility for the transition.

The role of consumers

We are all consumers, every day, everywhere. We place our trust regarding the safety, ethical production and sustainability of goods and services in the

hands of companies and governments. And when things go wrong, we pay the price. Sometimes that price is something small, sometimes the price can be our health, our rights, our lives. Too often consumers are left at a disadvantage with the companies and governments they encounter, leaving them exposed to unsafe, unfair, or unethical practice.

The current approach to sustainable consumption assumes that given enough facts, people will make sustainable choices. The reality is that consumers can be faced with unclear, misleading and confusing information, making sustainable consumption a difficult choice. This approach also neglects the deep inequalities in how and why people access certain markets. There are also power dynamics at play in that consumers, alone, often do not have the power to influence corporations and the governments that regulate them towards more sustainable production, distribution, marketing and retail value chains.

Unlocking consumer agency

We believe that understanding and unlocking consumers' ability to influence the system will help to deliver faster and more meaningful change. However, global collaborative efforts are needed to ensure the consumer-rights lens is applied throughout all decision-making processes. Consumers International is a co-lead of the United Nations Environment Programme's Consumer Information Programme for Sustainable Consumption and Production, one of six programmes under its One Planet Network and the implementation arm for SDG 12. This programme supports the provision of quality information on goods and services, and works with many global actors including civil society, businesses and government towards creating a global shift to sustainable consumption and production. We focus our efforts on sectors in which consumers are end-users (such as water, energy, packaging and food) and where consumer organisations can highlight the real-life experiences of consumers. These realities must be recognised at an international level as we continue to advocate for policies and regulations that enhance accountability and oversight of these sectors.

What do consumers need?

Consumers need both access to information and to the spaces where decisions are made that impact on their choices of products and services. They need the social infrastructure provided by governments alongside public-private partnerships to enable the conditions for sustainable consumption. This includes access to affordable and safe low-carbon public transport, household heating and cooling from renewable electricity sources and labelling that clearly communicates the climate impact of goods and services. We focus, through our global network, on making sure that producers, retailers and policymakers put consumers at the centre when making products safe, durable and resource-efficient, and that they supply clear information to enable consumers to make informed, safe and sustainable choices.

There have been inspiring collaborative wins and moments of impact over the past 60 years from having the United Nations adopt guidelines on consumer protection in 1985 (updated in 1999 and 2015) to having the G20



Labelling must be honest, transparent and easy to understand to facilitate sustainable consumption. Source: Shutterstock

develop international principles on financial consumer protection. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the consumer advocacy movement called for a focus on the protection and empowerment of individuals in the marketplace based on consumer rights, and for coordinated strategies across nations and intergovernmental bodies to build fair, safe, resilient and sustainable economies through consumer protection.



Knowledge and Practice as Sustainability Levers

A contribution by Centro Ecológico

Centro Ecológico works to make sustainable advances in agricultural production feasible guided by philosophies of environmental preservation and social justice. Based in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil with offices in Ipê/Serra and the North Coast.

➤ www.centroecologico.org.br

Knowledge and practice as sustainability levers

Centro Ecológico has worked with family farmers to support them in producing, processing and marketing organic food for more than three decades. In 1985, we initiated the Vacaria Project in Ipê to showcase the technical and economic feasibility of agroecological agriculture. A 70-hectare rural property was transformed into a demonstration centre and the staff spent considerable time connecting with family farmers. Our mission was to demonstrate the feasibility of family farming while preserving natural ecosystems based on the need to defend life.

At this time Brazil was under a military dictatorship and experiencing the negative social and environmental consequences of the widespread adoption of the Green Revolution. Social unrest was growing aligned with the call for (re)democratisation. The time was ripe for systemic changes. Pastoral Rural, an arm of the Catholic Church, was very vocal on these issues aligned with the philosophy of liberation theology. They raised awareness of the need to change to fairer systems contributing to interest in more sustainable and equitable farming and food systems. Our link with this movement was key to our initial success.



Celebrating seed as a basis of production at farmer cooperative workshops and events. Credit: Black Sheep 2019

Both knowledge and demonstration of viability are needed to support shifts in behaviour. Without both, it is difficult for people to understand both the need for a transition and the ways in which to do it.

Working in partnerships

The partnerships established over the decades have led to the formation of many Associations of Ecological Farmers (AAEs) able to find markets for their produce and artisanal products. In 1991, with the widespread adoption of agroecological farming techniques in the region, we turned our attention to supporting and monitoring the AAEs.

We have progressively through our activities and achievements contributed decisively to establishing agroecology as a concrete possibility for thousands of family farmers in Brazil and other Latin American countries. The structure of the AAEs – small community-led associations – is an important contribution to the consolidation of agroecological principles and practices.

The role of our organisation developed alongside the capacity

of the farmers we support. By the late 1990s, we were able to move our focus beyond production techniques to broader aspects of agroecological farming – such as the enhancement of farm-level biodiversity and the social relations that dictate economic prosperity. Our success is linked to the networks we have created and the movements with which we have aligned. Some notable collaborations include the Ecovida Agroecology Network, Future of the Earth/Framtidsjorden and the National Articulation of Agroecology. It would not have been possible to promote, establish and maintain ‘new’ ways of being without these strong relationships, particularly when opposed by vested corporate interests.

In the past two decades we deepened our focus on consumers as critical actors in sustainable food systems leading to the formation of consumer cooperatives.

This work has contributed to other organisational missions of building solidarity through fair, transparent relationships between the different agents involved in food production and strengthening the autonomy of people to improve their own quality of life and that of their communities. A highlight achievement has been the certification of organic products through participatory mechanisms, and we are a leading organisation in this field. Participatory guarantee systems are gaining traction around the world as a transparent way of gaining credible organic assurance of the production process and of the final product.

Iterative learning and adaptation

We are constantly learning and putting new-found knowledge and understanding into making our work more impactful in efforts to bring about a solidarity economy in Brazil and elsewhere. A solidarity economy comprises economic activities that put social outcomes over financial returns.

Given our understanding that both knowledge and practical demonstrations are needed to shift mindsets, we have turned our attention to reaching children through story playbooks.

The books provide both the information that they will need to become sustainable producers and consumers, and methodological-based activities that enable them to obtain critical thinking skills. The books support interdisciplinary learning – a critical skill, and address curricular needs such as reading, including comprehension skills, and mathematics.

To support a sustainability transition, there is a need to combine scientific and popular knowledge and disseminate it in accessible mediums that not only provide the ‘why’ of change, but also the ‘how’ to change.



Empowering women

Consumption and its effects are not gender neutral. There are different contributions and impacts in countries with large gender inequality gaps. Women’s unique experience in managing consumption of material goods and natural resources is under-valued, and thus under-used in decision-making circles. There can be no sustainable development – and therefore sustainable production and consumption – until gender inequality has been addressed.

In Brazil, the Working Group of Women of the National Articulation of Agroecology adopted the motto “without feminism, there is no agroecology” to promote reflection and action to build fair, equal and balanced relationships among people and between them and nature. Women play a key role in ensuring household food security, hold valuable knowledge, perform many services and generate household income, yet this work is often ‘invisible’ and held in little regard. The Ecovida Working Group on Gender works with rural and urban organisations on making women’s social and economic contribution more visible. This heightened awareness of their role deepens the debate on gender issues in the country, highlighting the need to act against the sexual division of labour and domestic violence. The Working Group has established partnerships with social movements, such as the Peasant Women Farmers organisation. It has also expanded the institutional articulation of issues inherent in rural development models by sensitising and influencing the public sector about gender disparities.

Our work continues to support the transition to sustainable production and consumption with family farmers, consumers and children with an emphasis on empowering women using a combination of awareness raising and education to emphasise the ‘why’ we need to change and practical tools to demonstrate the ‘how’ we can change.

Transformative Education and Collective Action

A contribution by the IBON Foundation

The IBON Foundation is a research, education and information NGO based in Quezon City, Philippines. Since 1978, we have worked with social movements and grassroots organizations to bring about inclusive socioeconomic transformation. Our international department was spun-off into the stand-alone IBON International in 2007.

➤ www.ibon.org



Preconditions for sustainable consumption

There can be no sustainable consumption if people and planet are not placed at the centre of economic models. We promote 'People Economics' where the natural resources, labor, and production of the economy is most of all geared to improving the lives and welfare of the majority rather than merely enriching a few. An economy built on solidarity and cooperation – instead of compulsion and exploitation – is the only way to have sustainable patterns of production and consumption. This includes upholding the right to self-determination and protecting traditional ways of life.

We are deeply embedded in peoples' movements in the Philippines. There is no other way for our work to genuinely come from the perspectives of peoples' rights and aspirations. And more than that, there is no other way for ideas to become a material force for social change and transformation.

Transforming the economy requires us to work at the policy level. The economy is the result of conscious policy choices and it is so important to ensure that these are choices for the better interest of the many instead of just the profits of a few. We study current policies and propose alternatives. But this is not enough – we also have to work with producers and



The Lumad people have set up their own schools to teach youth sustainable ways of being in the world. Credit: Kenneth Cadiang/ALCADEV

consumers, workers and farmers, informals and small entrepreneurs, women and youth, and allies in government. The equitable and sustainable systems that we want must be shaped by all those who have a stake in a better future.

IBON Foundation has been taking up environmental issues since the mid-1980s. Since the early 2000s, we have worked more deeply on issues of sustainable consumption and production rooted in the knowledge that Filipinos are not consuming enough – far too many still merely live on the margins of subsistence. Our recently updated ‘State of the Philippine Environment’ report that explains the structural roots of environmental problems and the basis for optimism has been a long-standing reference for advocates.

We identified two important pre-conditions for sustainable consumption and production. First, the production of goods and services must not just be environmentally-friendly but also equitable. Income has to be distributed fairly and justly. This enables people to make their preferences felt in markets and, by reducing their desperation, gives them more freedom to assert control over their lives at the local and national levels.

Second, communities need to be organized to have the strength to challenge the inequitable structures of economic and political power that do such harm to the planet and people’s lives. Communities working together provide the greatest chance that they will be able to determine their own futures. Our societies must become more democratic.

Our support for schools organized by indigenous people themselves in remote communities of Mindanao island, in the southern Philippines, illustrates our work to build sustainable production systems and collective consumer agency.

Education for sustainability

Millions of Filipinos are deprived of even basic education because they cannot afford schooling, it is of poor quality, or there is outright none available. The Lumad (“born of the Earth”) people comprise 18 indigenous groups that have historically been marginalised and denied education. State-sanctioned mining and logging companies have exploited this to encroach into their ancestral lands.

To defend themselves, the Lumad communities set up their own schools with the help of religious and civil society organisations and other education advocates. We support these initiatives of the Lumad. The schools go far beyond merely educating youth to overcome individual poverty –they are oriented towards the communities determining their own future through collective action and in ways aligned with their traditional values.

IBON Foundation recognises education as a critical enabler of the sustainability transition if it is value-led and supports the aspirations of the people.

Youth are taught traditional and modern agricultural skills to support food production, along with literacy, mathematics, and critical thinking about society. There is an emphasis on learning that values

natural resources, that honours the labour of people, and upholds the ideals of sovereignty and liberation.

We brought together educators, researchers and artists to work with teachers and students at schools such as the Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development. The educated and empowered Lumad youth showcase the power of education to support the transition to sustainable consumption by fulfilling the preconditions of equitable production and democracy. We documented and were inspired by the transformative learning taking place, often under very difficult conditions of militarization and displacement.

Outside our work with Lumad schools, IBON Foundation has organised 16 national teachers’ conferences and about 230 international conferences and activities in 40 countries. Our IBON Partnership in Education and Development works with more than 300 schools to help create future generations of sustainable and empowered producers and consumers.

Commonalities and particularities of the sustainability struggle

We drafted the song ‘Together’ through an immersive process with some of Brazil’s landless people. It speaks to the commonalities and particularities of the struggle for land and food for all in the Philippines, Brazil and many other countries. The more people that call for better lives for all, the more effectively is change forged – from minute shifts to significant waves upon waves.



Together

In the eyes of a child
Once again we were shown
How the world is abundant with gifts
But as many stories go
There is a problem about
[How a powerful few want more than
what they need (2x)]

Chorus

Share our stories
We have our common worries
That make our hearts bleed more
than we can bear alone
But since that light shone
Bound our hearts and our dreams
How can we not achieve what we
believe we could
Together

And then again in the eyes of a child
Once again we were shown
How the world is abundant with gifts
And as many stories go
Hope is always around
[When the people of the world
work hand in hand (2x)]

Chorus

Should a spark disappear
Or the light put out
Persevere, persevere
and do not forget

Let us Bring Back our Heritage

A contribution by Sustaining the Wild Coast

Sustaining the Wild Coast supports the struggle of the Amadiba people to protect their land and land-based livelihoods. Based in Eastern Mpondoland, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.

➔ www.swc.org.za



Consumption within a complex cultural web

Consumption is not an isolated topic. It sits within a complex cultural web that determines both access to goods and services – and the accompanying resource base – and which ones are valued or not. Increasingly the community-level cultural web is influenced by the forces of modernity and globalisation, shaping perceptions of value.

It is critical that indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world are acknowledged and asserted or when necessary (re)awakened and their message amplified to act as a framework for a sustainability transition that supports both ecological and social justice.

(Re)affirming the value of local culture

Sustaining the Wild Coast is known as Masibuy'emasisweni ("Let us bring back our heritage") in the Amadiba community where it works to support the community's commitment to protecting their land, livelihoods and culture against the destruction and disruption that would accompany government-imposed megaprojects of mining and highway construction.

Our work focuses on documenting and elevating the status of indigenous knowledge systems through awareness-raising activities and training youth in land custodianship to encourage them to value and protect the heritage of their land and land-based livelihoods on which their families have depended for centuries.



Mangeswa Gushede practising traditional weaving techniques in the Mpondoland region, South Africa. Credit: Carlos Francisco

A shifting consumption culture

Like many other indigenous communities, the Amadiba have not been spared the impact of Westernisation on their culture, particularly their food systems. Nowadays, people, especially the youth, aspire to eat Western foods and enjoy a 'modern' lifestyle.

Over the past 30 to 40 years, local diets have shifted from locally grown, nutrient-dense foods to processed foods supplied through supermarkets. The food system is also being shaped by the South African government's adoption of the industrial farming system, which includes the use of commercial fertilisers, pesticides and genetically modified seeds.

The industrial system erodes smallholder farmer and community ownership and safeguarding of the means of production – such as indigenous and farmer seeds and chemical-free soils – and the knowledge about them that has been built up over centuries.

It is critical that the valuable arable land in this region is kept in the protective custody of resilient farming families to support local food and nutrition security. To a large degree, this will rely on protecting and sharing the indigenous knowledge systems and practices that have built the resilience of households and communities in the past.

Documenting, sharing and valuing traditional knowledge and practices

The Amadiba have much to teach the modern world regarding sustainable food production and consumption. Their knowledge challenges us to reconsider dominant development models and to critique the way in which the notion of modernity destroys social fabrics and devastates the natural environment.

We wanted to expose and enthuse youth about the rich history of their communities, to document and archive this knowledge for outside researchers, and, importantly, to inspire young people to

Indigenous knowledge is traditionally passed down orally. It is important to collect and share this knowledge within communities, and beyond them.

re-imagine their future. Fifty-one young people have been trained to record and transcribe stories from community elders about how they used to farm when they were young, what crops they grew and food they consumed.

Six young people are being trained in participatory video, which is a methodology that uses videography to facilitate community empowerment and social change. The youth make and screen the videos in the community to spark debate around various topics of interest. Their nutrition video has raised local awareness of the need for nutritious diets and how indigenous vegetables contribute to that.

These videos make visible the food system to those operating in it and those affected by it. Making visible the previously unseen empowers people to take control of their food system, and the productive resource base on which it relies.

Putting knowledge into practice

It is difficult to attract young people to farming. In one of our projects, we focused on supporting 90 young people to farm a hectare of the traditional staple crops of sweet potatoes and amadumbe (wild yams). They received training on healthy nutrition and eating indigenous crops with higher nutritional value.

We have also supported the establishment of farmers' forums in seven villages to facilitate

the sharing of knowledge and information between farmers, and to enable learning exchanges with the outside world. The forums have received training that affirms indigenous farming practices and builds on them with new agroecological/permaculture knowledge. These spaces have hosted several discussions related to concerns about industrial farming and genetically modified crops.

We are working to establish a resource centre in which the rich history and indigenous knowledge of the Amadiba people can be curated and shared with the wider world. We hope that this centre will become a place of learning and inspiration for local people and visitors from all over the world.



Traditional farming practices provide insights into how to build socially and ecologically just food systems (Nkuxa Ndovela above, Athi Mdukisa below). Credit: Carlos Francisco



"We fish and farm. We have cattle for weddings and traditional rituals. We are not among the quoted one out of four South Africans who go hungry to bed."

Nonhle Mbuthuma, resident of Sigidi village

Sustaining the wild Coast
mazibuy'emasisweni

Promoting People's Rights for Sustainability

A contribution by IBON International Foundation Inc.

IBON International Foundation Inc. works with social movements and civil society constituencies to build consensus on development issues and bring these to global attention. It has special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. Based in Metro Manila, Philippines and works through regional hubs in Kenya and Senegal. It operates a representative office in Brussels, Belgium.

➔ www.iboninternational.org

The need for a people-centred, rights-based framework

The dominant economic model is characterised by unbridled corporate resource extraction and production, a historical reliance on emission-heavy fossil fuels, and wastage. People's rights have been eroded in this paradigm of monopolistic capitalism. This includes the rights of indigenous peoples to their ancestral domains that are under siege from state and corporate land-grabbing practices. With neoliberal norms of trade and investment, deregulation and privatisation influencing many governments, production and consumption patterns remain heavily

entangled with corporate power and the dominance of foreign capital and elites in the countries of the Global South.

People-powered sustainable consumption and production

To shift from unsustainable patterns of consumption and production that pollute and destroy ecosystems and violate people's rights requires addressing systemic issues including trade and investment rules, economic structures and national development policies. Moving towards systemic sustainability requires looking at



The Ogiek of the Mau Forest in Kenya are working to defend the forest and assert their rights to their ancestral lands. Source: Alamy

the relationships of governments, corporations, civil society and people's organisations, and how exploitative relations could change.

Sustainable consumption and production is about a lot more than resource-efficient economic growth, it must also be about the defence, assertion, upholding and realisation of people's rights.

People-powered sustainable consumption and production encompasses government's accountability to the people, including adhering to their mandate to hold corporations accountable. It also includes a focus on people sovereignty that promotes self-sufficiency from the local through to the national level, including support for the innovative community practices that support sustainability. Our work with communities in Kenya and the Philippines provides

valuable lessons regarding the need to assert people's rights and of the primacy of people's power and initiatives.

Case study: The Aeta-Hunguey of Capas, Tarlac, Philippines⁹

The indigenous Aeta-Hunguey people in Capas, Tarlac are fighting the construction of the 9,450-hectare New Clark City, which has been promoted as a grand showcase of 'sustainable' and 'environmentally friendly' urban living. This project, initiated by the Bases Conversion and Development Authority in 2013, is masterminded by the Asian Development Bank and state actors from Japan and Singapore. This so-called 'sustainable' city project has already displaced farmers and Aeta communities in the Tarlac and Pampanga provinces. The project has vested interests, including the Armed Forces of the Philippines that is entitled to a portion of project revenue in commercial development of these reservation areas. The principle of 'Free, prior and informed consent' was not followed; military presence in and control of the area serves to intimidate and repress residents

in their opposition to the project. Intensive excavations have deforested mountains and rerouted river systems to make way for highways. Construction has destroyed ecosystems and pushed entire communities off their land, resulting in them losing access to their banana plantations and fruit-bearing trees. The loss of access to natural resources and introduction of the wage system is destroying the Aeta communal way of life.

The Aeta and small-scale farmers have not taken the theft of their rights lying down. They have undertaken mass protests, set up barricades and entered dialogues with relevant government units. Farmers are using broadcast seeding to quickly cover large swathes of land that has been bulldozed and grow new palay (rice) saplings. This guerrilla farming strategy is a form of political assertion. Resistance to the project continued in 2020 despite the very difficult living conditions brought about by a repressive government response to COVID-19. The community asserted their rights through *bungkalan* – collective land reclamation and cultivation by farmers in situations of agrarian dispute. This enabled

the community to feed itself in a time when people had lost their jobs and could not afford basic food staples. The steadfast resistance to encroachment on the Aeta's way of life has inspired others to join their cause to help them fight eviction, hunger and government neglect and repression.

Case study: The Ogiek of the Mau Forest, Kenya

Since colonial times, there have been numerous attempts to evict the Ogiek living in the Mau Forest in western Kenya. The Ogiek describe this heritage of pain and torture as *kanyalilet*. A community member notes that while Kenya gained its independence from colonialism, the Ogiek never got theirs. The Mau Forest has been under government ownership for decades and it has deteriorated significantly. Trees are cut down to make way for plantations, large-scale farming, logging and human settlements. The Ogiek have been systematically evicted and removed to the fringes of the forest. Their traditional way of life is at risk of extinction. They long for the days when they were stewards of the Mau Forest, which was then whole and alive.

*"Now, where is the
medicine from the forest?
Where are the bees?
Even those wild animals,
where are they now?"*
Kiplang'at, community elder,
Mau Forest, Kenya

While deprived of their ancestral domains, the Ogiek have adapted by engaging in other forms of livelihoods, while still working to defend the forest. They took up farming and livestock production while still maintaining traditional practices of beekeeping and honey production and applied indigenous knowledge to manage their natural resources. Beekeeping is integral to the Ogiek livelihood and way of life, as honey is used in traditional ceremonies, as medicine, food and a source of income.

The Ogiek have won a legal battle to be recognised as indigenous peoples in the African Court of Justice and in Kenya's High Court. And they continue to actively advocate for their rights to their ancestral domain now and for the future generations of the Ogiek peoples.

Protecting rights is not enough

In both communities, the elements of people-powered consumption and production are in place. The assertion of people's rights is illustrated in their valiant struggles for access to their ancestral domains, and for food sovereignty. Both attempted to hold governments and corporations accountable and promoted self-sufficiency, community action and the development of innovative practices. Their experiences highlight the link between sustainability and the promotion of community and people's rights. Their ability to shape their own reality, however, is threatened by systemic barriers, such as land ownership models, corporate dominance and state-sponsored violence and militarisation. There needs to be drastic systemic changes to support ongoing people's initiatives towards people-powered sustainable consumption and production.

⁹ IBON International. 2020. 'Rights for Sustainability: Community-led practices on people-powered consumption and production.' [Online] Available: iboninternational.org/download/rights-for-sustainability-community-led-practices-on-people-powered-consumption-and-production.



Small Steps Towards Meaningful Change

A contribution by SSNC

SSNC works with 40 organisations around the world to disseminate knowledge, shape public opinion and influence decision-makers to bring about change. Based in Sweden with 24 county branches and 270 municipality subdivisions. It has more than 200 000 members.

➔ www.naturskyddsforeningen.se

Can swapping clothes transform societies?

It is morning, you have just gotten up and are making breakfast. You are feeling good about yourself because you recently have switched to using organic coffee and have started eating more vegetarian meals to cut your meat consumption. You put your plastic in the recycling bin and compost your organic waste. These actions have all become routine in your daily life. You want to do your part – and it is relatively easy. Then you open your closet and your self-esteem fades. It's filled to the brim, but still doesn't give you the options you need. This motivates you to buy something new, something brighter, something to echo how you are feeling about life right now. On

your way to the shops and as the sun hits your face, you reflect on the unseasonably hot weather and lack of rain. Is this climate change you think to yourself? Increasingly, your fellow citizens are viewing climate change as a severe problem and are changing their lifestyles accordingly. They are eating less meat and are starting to travel less – even before COVID-19 put an end to many common lifestyle practices.

What hasn't changed though is that people continue to buy clothes – not because we need to, most in the Global North have plenty, but because we feel we have to.



SSNC has organised clothes-swapping events since 2010, providing a space for the re-circulation and ongoing use of previously loved items. Credit: SSNC

Consequences of clothing consumption

Global value chains enable a world of consumption right at our fingertips. The negative environmental impact of this model is enormous. And while having an 'exploding' closet might be appealing, the consequences, as usual, are felt by the natural environment and the world's poor – the textile workers producing our clothes and the farmers working in pesticide-infused cotton fields.



Clothes swapping is gaining popularity around the world. Credit: SSNCC

The clothing and textile industry contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions. Producing and processing textile fibres consumes an enormous volume of water, and this water is often drawn from countries already suffering water shortages.

A casual purchase of a new cotton T-shirt 'here' can equate to 2 600 litres of water from 'there'.¹⁰

Global clothing production has roughly doubled since 2000 – and only 1% of all clothing is recycled into 'new' textiles; one garbage truck of clothes is burned or landfilled every second.¹¹ Fast fashion, produced and consumed at an incredible speed, is a response to high levels of sensitivity to changing fashion trends and it amplifies inferior quality throughout the value chain.

When fast-changing fashion trends make you throw away clothing, there is an unnecessary loss of valuable materials. There is a clear need to find more efficient ways of organising the delivery of the service that clothes provide, transforming our behavioural patterns and business models to support production that delivers long-lasting, repairable and recyclable clothes. This is where clothes swapping comes in.

A focus on bottom-up change

We know that small-scale actions can lead to greater change. SSNC has worked to encourage consumption of organic products, helped to rid laundry detergents of pollutants and has contributed to banning several toxic pesticides from Swedish and European fields. We have also arranged clothes swapping events in Sweden since 2010. In just nine years, this initiative grew from 36 events in Sweden to 305 in the Nordic countries. Our most recent event saw 58 000 garments receive new owners, saving 43 tons of chemicals, 406 tons of carbon dioxide and the equivalent of 400 000 filled bathtubs of water. Clothes swapping is starting to gain popular appeal; it strengthens advocacy for a circular and sustainable fashion industry and raises awareness of smarter ways of consuming clothes.

Small-scale change creates ripples and ripples become waves shaping popular opinion.

A need for both efficiency and sufficiency

There is a tendency to prioritise efficiency solutions in policy focused on sustainable consumption. Policy formulations also need to focus on the value of sufficiency. Rebound effects – also known as the Jevons paradox – mean that any efficiency gains, resulting in lower prices, will concurrently grow consumption if sufficiency is not integral to policy and messaging around sustainable consumption. But who is responsible for the unsustainable production and consumption of clothing? How can consumer behaviour shift in a value-driven rather than guilt-driven way?

"I brought my 12-year-old and very reluctant daughter to a clothes swap. But once there, she found a pair of jeans of a brand that we couldn't afford to buy new. That was a shift for her and now it's imprinted in her mind that swapping is a possibility."

Karin, clothes swapper

The small steps matter. We need to rethink and re-evaluate our roles, not only as consumers but as citizens, to understand that how we consume might have a bigger reflection of our identity than what we consume. We can play a transformative role in a much bigger system through what goods we purchase and how. We can make sure that what we consume is circulated back into the system. Clothes swaps are mechanisms to circulate – and then recirculate – clothing. They are the first steps for many into a world of sufficiency and sustainability.

Children today live in a tension created by a constant influx of 'influencer content' and the ever-increasing risks posed by climate change. They must navigate the need to fit in and to take on the responsibility for the environment that has been unfulfilled by previous generations. Clothes swapping has the potential to reduce the consumption of new clothes, but it also serves as a powerful vehicle to raise awareness of the patterns of unsustainable production and consumption in a creative and fun way. By shifting the perception of unwanted clothes from 'trash'

to something with value for someone else, clothes swapping events are an entry point to new consumption behaviours. And since the goal is to use, not to own, these events open up a world of possibilities in challenging norms around satisfaction, ownership and consumption.

Being part of something bigger creates a sense of belonging leaving one with a sense of accomplishment. This is how transformation happens.



Swedish Society
for Nature Conservation

¹⁰ World Wildlife Foundation. 2013. 'The impact of a cotton T-shirt.' [Online] Available: <https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/the-impact-of-a-cotton-t-shirt>.

¹¹ Ellen MacArthur Foundation. 2017. 'A new textiles economy: redesigning fashion's future.' [Online] Available: <http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications>.



GREEN ACTION WEEK

We, the contributors to this 'Anthology of Sustainable Consumption', along with many other organisations around the world, are calling for sustainable systems that simultaneously tackle both global and contextual social and environmental inequalities.

We collaborate with many other groups in demonstrating that sustainable alternatives are possible. Along with more than 50 other groups in 30 countries as part of the global campaign Green Action Week, we implement grassroots activities aligned with the theme 'Sharing Community'.

"If we look after the Earth, the Earth will look after us."

Sinegugu Zukulu, resident of Baleni village, Pondoland, South Africa

Our contributions give insight to the need for cohesive, integrated policies that support a transition to sustainable consumption, examples of transformative educational approaches, the importance of empowering consumers – both through the upholding of consumer rights and

through activities that enable them to actively participate in the transition, and the need to build on existing and generate new sustainability knowledge.

Participants in Green Action Week host seed sharing, consumer education and income-generating upcycling events, as well as support community kitchens and other community-specific innovations. The lessons learned have the potential to spark transformative system change.

To follow are just some examples of the work undertaken over the past few years.

A sharing community is one in which people collaborate and share goods and services. It generates social benefits while reducing environmental impacts. A sharing community works for both people and planet.



Asociación Peruana de Consumidores y Usuarios (ASPEC), Peru

To promote their new online platform for sharing books, toys and other items, ASPEC used cartoons and music videos that they released through social media such as TikTok. "Cartoons allow us to express a story or thought in a single picture ... and by including humour, we reach different age groups."

Centro Ecológico, Brazil (p.19)

Their activities focus on illustrating how sharing enables a better life. They host seed swaps and workshops to repair and even re-invent clothes, hold cooking demonstrations to share knowledge about little-known food plants, and support service-swapping systems. These all encourage an ethos of reducing, recycling and re-use.

Consumer Council of Fiji

The Council connected older and younger generations through storytelling and song, and enabled income-generating opportunities for older women to pass on traditional basket weaving, which helps to reduce plastic pollution. "Consumers have developed a renewed sense of optimism that damage done to the environment is reversible."

CUTS, India (p.3)

To combat staggering volumes of e-waste, CUTS established pilot sites to collect e-waste in the city of Jaipur, India. This project has since been replicated in various other Indian states. This has helped reduce volumes of e-waste and grow awareness of the need for responsible e-waste recycling.

Consumers Association of Penang (CAP), Malaysia

CAP launched multilingual guides and events and used newspaper articles to grow awareness of the benefits of urban organic gardening. "With more time spent at home amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Penangites have found an interest in urban gardening and gotten serious about making healthy choices as consumers..."

IBON Foundation, Philippines (p.23)

They hold annual fairs and forums to raise awareness of the need for sustainable production to address basic needs and to trade, sell and share merchandise, crafts and products. They also collaborated on an album that featured original works by Filipino farmers, indigenous peoples and cultural works. The album was launched at an exhibition titled 'Organic food and farming for all'.

Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor (IDEC), Brazil (p.11)

IDEC has hosted online roundtables, one of which focused on solidarity actions related to food during the COVID-19 pandemic. A series of workshops passed on the knowledge and skills needed to empower people to become conscious consumers in their own homes. This included making natural cleaning products, establishing home gardens and making compost.

Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM), Uganda

PELUM established a seed bank and hosted a seed swapping event in Uganda's Mpigi District to highlight the role that seed sovereignty plays in building community resilience to climate change. Smallholder Olivia notes that "Owning my own indigenous seeds is a source of pride to me".

SAFCEI, South Africa (p.7)

They host training and seed swaps to encourage community-level agroecological food gardening, and have hosted online food garden training for Southern African faith leaders. This empowers them to encourage and train their faith communities to set up and maintain community gardens to combat food insecurity. "The growing and sharing of food is a cultural and spiritual celebration."

More stories and information can be found at www.greenactionweek.org
Green Action Week is an initiative led by SSNC and carried out in coordination with Consumers International and CUTS International.



Green Action Week

Join us in action...
www.greenactionweek.org



More than 50 civil society groups in more than 30 countries take part in Green Action Week.



This 'Anthology of Sustainable Consumption' presents a collection of viewpoints, experiences and case studies from both the Global North and South. It is hoped that these illustrate the need for a transition to sustainable consumption and production to encompass many perspectives from many contexts and that they emphasise the urgency with which we need to act to bring a better world for all into being.



Swedish Society for Nature Conservation

The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) is the largest environmental organisation in Sweden and a popular movement having stood up for nature since 1909.

We disseminate knowledge, shape public opinion and influence decision-makers – locally, nationally and globally.

Climate, forests, agriculture, environmental pollutants, freshwater, oceans, marine ecosystems and sustainable consumption make up our key focus areas. Bra Miljöval (Good Environmental Choice) is our ecolabel and Sveriges Natur (Swedish Nature) is our membership magazine.

You are welcome to become a member, get involved or make a donation. Together, we have the power to bring about change.

