



SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES

options & opportunities

Take actions together to minimize footprints
and maximize impacts



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SUMMARY

This publication offers proven actions for creating and inspiring more sustainable lifestyles. Based on research and project work in Bogota and Marrakech, it provides the rationale, resources and ideas for developing initiatives that cover core lifestyle areas of food, mobility, housing, consumer goods and leisure as well as in general sustainable lifestyle areas. This publication prioritizes high level impact options and suggests low effort actions to get started and move things in the right direction.

Lifestyle initiatives can also help set the foundation for deeper changes required in policy and infrastructure contexts to design and deliver more sustainable living opportunities for people. The following lifestyle options are not standalone efforts but are an important first step to engage and create the needed momentum for greater change. Governments can, for example, implement carbon and consumption taxes to redirect spending, support collaborative innovation and enhance public transit systems and sustainable urban living approaches. The private sector can design and deliver more holistic sustainable options, such as models around sharing mobility, housing and consumer goods. Individuals can encourage governments (and business) to do the ‘heavy lifting’ to forge a more sustainable society.

This publication is written for people designing and running initiatives with limited resources who want maximum impact. We welcome you to explore these proven ideas and to create initiatives that work in your context — because what works in Brazil is different from what works in Morocco.

This publication begins with a brief background on sustainable lifestyles, the rationale for how and why options are included, and points to consider when designing initiatives. Each chapter provides an annotated listing of suggested actions with example references. Use the list of options to get started in general lifestyles initiatives and/or in the core areas of food, mobility, consumer goods, housing and leisure. For the best impact, link options together, build on existing activities, and partner with others.

Of course, this is not a complete list — add your own ideas! We invite you to join the One Planet Network, which is an implementation mechanism of Sustainable Development Goal 12. Share your experiences, ideas and activities on the knowledge platform on Sustainable Consumption and Production — [the One Planet Network website](#) — so that we can all learn together how to advance sustainable lifestyles in more effective ways.



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ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This publication provides a sample of opportunities that can be tailored and applied at the city level to introduce and promote more sustainable lifestyles. Its aim is to enhance understanding of what are more sustainable ways of living and to raise awareness of what can be done, including actions inspired by efforts in the field.

The focus is on actions, campaigns and initiatives with high potential to reduce harmful ecological impacts through collective action taken by groups of individuals within neighbourhoods or through workplaces. Options focus on changing individual footprints and on changing the context within which people live, such as increasing biking infrastructure or shifting business practices to support reuse of consumer goods — thereby indirectly catalyzing the actions of decision-makers in public and private sectors.

The target audience is urban level intermediaries developing sustainable lifestyle initiatives and campaigns who have limited resources but are looking for maximum impacts to build a foundation for future efforts. Hence, options highlight lower effort actions to build momentum in the five key sustainable lifestyle domains — food, mobility, housing, consumer goods, and leisure — as well on sustainable lifestyles in general. This is not a comprehensive list but provides a sampling of activities to serve as inspiration.

Any city actor interested in advancing sustainable ways of living can find this document useful because it focuses on start-up efforts, and it can support building the capacity for deeper and more profound changes.

Please note the companion publication “Sustainable Lifestyles: Options and Opportunities through the Workplace,” is a list of actions that can be taken by employers (or employees) to support workers in their daily life practices (UN Environment, One Earth 2018).

Global Context and Methods

There is growing international interest and action on sustainable lifestyles. This publication is a UN Environment contribution to the One Planet Network on Sustainable Consumption and Production, specifically the One Planet Network Sustainable Lifestyles and Education programme.¹ In a broader context, it contributes to the 2030 agenda and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12 — Target 8 which states ‘that by 2030 we ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.’

UN Environment acts as a secretariat and implementing partner of the One Planet Network. The One Planet Network is an implementation mechanism for Sustainable Development Goal 12, and multi-stakeholder partnerships that provides tools and solutions, and leads the shift to sustainable consumption and production. The One Planet Sustainable Lifestyles and Education Programme specifically addresses lifestyles and contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 12: Sustainable Consumption and Production.

The Ministry of Environment of the Government of Japan through the One Planet Network Sustainable Lifestyles and Education Programme financially supported this work as part of two related projects: 1) How emerging urban youth can be an engine for more low-carbon, sustainable lifestyles: beginning in Bogotá, Colombia²; and 2) Sustainable Lifestyles in the Workplace³. Each project worked at the urban level to promote the development of lifestyles initiatives and was based on



¹ www.twitter.com/SEIresearch; www.facebook.com/Lifestyles10YFP; www.scpclearinghouse.org/sustainable-lifestyles-and-education

² 'How emerging urban youth can be an engine for more low-carbon, sustainable lifestyles' www.oneplanetnetwork.org/initiative/how-emerging-urban-youth-can-be-engine-more-low-carbon-sustainable-lifestyles-beginning

³ 'Sustainable Lifestyles in the Workplace' www.oneplanetnetwork.org/initiative/sustainable-lifestyles-workplace-bogota-and-Marrakesh



global scoping studies of current efforts underway elsewhere. The scoping studies fed into the project activities to support local actors as they developed their own initiatives. The project teams contributed their experience on what was effective as well as the efforts they developed.

This listing of opportunities was prepared by combining case study and literature reviews, an analysis of ecological and carbon footprint data, and a synthesis of expert insights. In addition, the authors and UN Environment reached out to their network of global experts to share action ideas, insights and review drafts.

WHAT ARE SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES?

“To achieve sustainability, we need to make it easy, attractive and affordable for people everywhere to lead whole sustainable lifestyles – not just green buildings, but wider infrastructure and products and services as well.”

— SUE RIDDLESTONE AND POORAN DESAI, BIOREGIONAL, ONE PLANET LIVING

The practices and habits that make up our daily ways of living have ecological impacts and shape our economies and societies. Cities can play a critical role in transforming what we eat, how we live, how we move around, how we relax, and what we buy to become more sustainable.⁴ Sustainable ways of living are more complex than we may think and are not only about individual behaviour change.

There are many definitions of sustainable lifestyles, for example:

A “sustainable lifestyle” is a cluster of habits and patterns of behaviour embedded in a society and facilitated by institutions, norms and infrastructures that frame individual choice, in order to minimize the use of natural resources and generation of wastes, while supporting fairness and prosperity for all.⁴

Ultimately, minimizing natural resource use and waste production is not enough. Here is another definition that takes this into account:

Sustainability implies living well more equitably within the means of nature. Thus a “sustainable lifestyle” implies any pattern of individual consumption and social behaviour that could be shared by everyone while still maintaining ecological integrity; it is facilitated by institutions, social norms and infrastructures that frame individual choices and actions while ensuring that the aggregate rates of biophysical resource use and waste generation are within the regenerative and assimilative capacities of ecosystems.⁵

Research on promoting sustainable lifestyles and sustainable living practice highlights the following:

People do not intentionally set out to create harmful environmental impacts; these impacts are an unintended consequence of people’s efforts to fulfill their needs and aspirations.

Sustainable living is also about social justice and equity. Any meaningful discussion of sustainable lifestyles must address fair sharing of the world’s ecological and economic output and solutions.

It’s not only about the actions of individual people. Our everyday lives and behaviours are shaped by our context including:


- Identity, learned aspirations and expectations, social norms, and cultural influences;
- Culturally-shaped unconscious habits and practices; and
- Societal systems around us — including the physical layout of our neighbourhoods and cities, policies, markets, infrastructure, institutions, legal and financial systems, and cultural context.

There is no one universal sustainable lifestyle — sustainable ways of living can be as diverse as we are, provided we remain within the ecological capacities of natural ecosystems.

Nor are lifestyles static. They evolve with society, technological advances, and because of personal circumstances.

⁴ Source: Akenji, L, H. Chen et al. (2016). A framework for shaping sustainable lifestyles: Determinants and Strategies. United Nations Environment Programme

⁵ William E. Rees, 2018



Change is hampered by current media representations and urban myths around sustainability which imply that sustainability is complicated, an eco-niche and about being deprived, suffering, and paying more. The doom and gloom/idealistic approaches need to be replaced with actionable messages that are accessible, fun, irresistible, inspirational and/or cool. Accessible goes beyond how easy it is to get a point across — it also means that there should be targeted messages aimed at people with different levels of consumption — including those who do not have their basic needs met.

WHY DO PEOPLE CONSUME?

- To meet basic needs (e.g., nutrition and subsistence, health, housing, mobility);
- To fulfill social functions/expectations (e.g., convenience, connectedness, maintaining relationships, traditions);
- To 'advertise' personal social status and / or political and economic power;
- To satisfy personal desires, preferences and tastes (e.g., leisure, food preferences, consumer goods);
- In response to social media and advertising/marketing (e.g., creation of new product markets such as pet food and cosmetics, planned obsolescence, or enhanced functionality such as mobile phones that do more than make calls); and
- Because they have no choice (e.g., lock-in design of mobility infrastructure favours private car use or urban zoning laws and administrative procedures make urban agriculture difficult).

Adapted from: Akenji, L, H. Chen et al. (2016). A framework for shaping sustainable lifestyles: Determinants and Strategies. United Nations Environment Programme

PRIORITIZING ACTIONS TO ADVANCE SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES

Transforming how we live our daily lives is essential for achieving global sustainability: living well and more equitably within the capacity of Earth's life support systems.

There are many sustainable lifestyles options — so how can we prioritize? We can start with the numbers: We are in global ecological overshoot. The annual demand of the human enterprise on our planet's resources exceeds what the Earth can produce in a year and there are not enough bio-resources and services to meet projected consumption demands. With climate change, natural resource depletion and scarcity, and growing waste, we need to focus on actions that drastically change the ecological footprints of our lifestyles.

A key priority is living our lives within our ecological means.

Based on ecological and carbon footprint data, we can identify priority lifestyles areas that contribute to ecological impacts. Consumption patterns dominate modern economies and consumer culture shapes our understanding of progress. Household consumption is "responsible for up to 60 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions and between 50 and 80 percent of total land, material, and water use."⁶

Most impacts are in five lifestyle domains: food, mobility, housing, consumer goods, and leisure. Changes in these areas depend on individual behaviour and habit changes as well as contextual shifts — changes in the economic, social and cultural conditions and infrastructure that enable people to meet their needs and aspirations.

Sustainable living is also about better living for all. In many ways, these ecologically sustainable ways of living can be more attractive because they ensure ecological stability, provide hope for future generations and because they help individuals tap into common values such as belonging, security, joy, intergenerational care, and good health. In short, sustainable living can bring needs and aspirations more in line with ecological wellbeing.

⁶ Ivanova, D., Stadler, K., Steen-Olsen, K., Wood, R., Vita, G., Tukker, A. and Hertwich, E. G. (2016), Environmental Impact Assessment of Household Consumption. *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, 20: 526–536. doi:10.1111/jiec.12371

DEFINING LIFESTYLE IMPACTS: ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT DATA

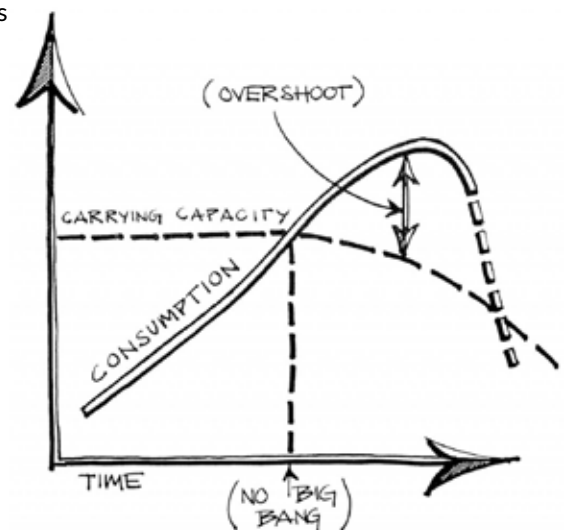
The world is in global ecological overshoot, consuming the equivalent of 1.5 times the resources and fossil energy our planet can sustainably produce. This means we are living by depleting essential 'natural capital' — soils, fish stocks, forests, etc. — the very definition of unsustainability. Achieving one-planet living implies an absolute reduction in energy/material use of about 50% even as population and incomes (consumption) increase.⁷

Though sustainability addresses social as well as ecological concerns, ecologically focused approaches to address impacts are the focus of this report. Work is needed, and piloting is underway, on broadening impact assessment to address social issues and lifestyles. As such, this publication focuses on environmental impacts, with social aspects noted where available.

Ecological footprint analysis was created by Dr. William E. Rees in the 1980s and further developed methodologically in the early 1990s with then PhD student, Dr Mathis Wackernagel.⁸ Wackernagel went on to found the Global Footprint Network, an invaluable resource for sustainability planners, policy developers and ordinary citizens dedicated to achieving sustainability.

Defining Ecological Footprint — The area of land and marine ecosystems we use to meet our material needs is called an "ecological footprint". More specifically, it is an estimate of the physical area of productive land and water ecosystems that an individual, population or activity requires to produce all the bio-resources it consumes and to absorb the (mostly carbon) waste it generates, using prevailing technology and resource management practices. Think of your personal ecological footprint as an index of your individual demand for nature's goods and services. Sometimes analysts refer to the 'ecological footprint' in its short form as 'eco-footprint', 'footprint' or its acronym, 'EF'.

Our carbon footprint is only one component of our ecological footprint. Carbon dioxide is the greatest waste product by weight of industrial/high-income countries and is active in the global carbon cycle. Ecological footprint analysis therefore accounts for carbon dioxide emissions in its calculations. While it is possible to estimate the footprints of individual production activities, the EF generally reflects final consumption, i.e., *population demand at the consumer level*.



Eco-footprint analysis enables us to maintain an **ecological balance sheet** because it is the currently available, commonly used sustainability indicator that facilitates the comparison of human demand with nature's supply. The method tracks the human exploitation of, and availability of, six categories of productive ecosystems: cropland, grazing land, fishing grounds,

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