

Take action,  
enter a new era



Sunrise over Himalaya in Pedhi, Nepal 20 12 by Eugenia Arribas

## FOREWORD

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“2. We are at a historic crossroads, and the directions we take will determine whether we will succeed or fail on our promises. With our globalized economy and sophisticated technology, we can decide to end the age-old ills of extreme poverty and hunger. Or we can continue to degrade our planet and allow intolerable inequalities to sow bitterness and despair. Our ambition is to achieve sustainable development for all.”

“12. However, we also know that these problems are not accidents of nature or the results of phenomena beyond our control. They result from actions and omissions of people – public institutions, the private sector, and others charged with protecting human rights and upholding human dignity.

13. We have the know-how and the means to address these challenges. But we need urgent leadership and joint action now.” \*

\* Extracts from the Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Agenda, *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet*

This is a short version of **Take action, enter a new era**.

For references, see full version, Bibliography

Website: <http://takeaction-enteranewera.webstarts.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/119702951714013/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=8385007>



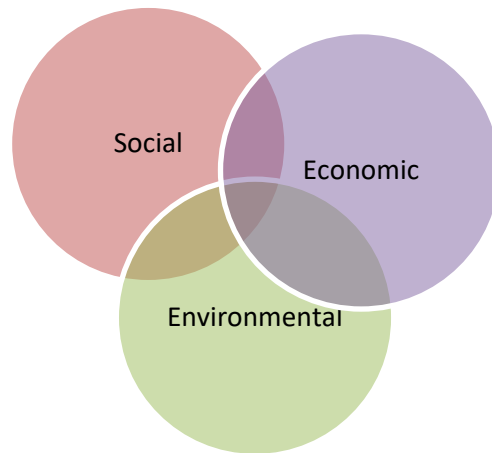
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Editors: Elisabeth Eames and Selin Tamer

# INTRODUCTION

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## DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET



Sustainable Development is the relationship between environmental, economic and social development. All three dimensions are interlinked so that one depends on the other two; they act together for wellbeing for today and tomorrow!

Sustainable development has been defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from Our Common Future, also known as The Brundtland Report:

*"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."*

In chapter six on Sustainable Development Goals we will see how the three dimensions merge and become one circle with 17 integrated goals for a sustainable future.

There has been an accelerated economic growth, especially in the last 50 years. More people are wealthier, healthier and living longer lives. But the way we develop is not sustainable. This growth is coming at a high cost for the environment and some people are left out. If we continue this same way (BAU, "Business As Usual"), we risk losing the progress we have made.

We call people around the world to join in asking: "Hey, wait a minute! Where are we going? There's got to be a better way!"

The aim of this booklet is to contribute to sustainable development by inspiring people to take action on critical sustainability issues. We try to explain complex issues in an easy way and we give suggestions of **what we can do** to bring about change. This is a short version of the Booklet. Hope you like it and will read also the full version.

**The future is in our hands. We must act and act now!**

# 1. CLIMATE CHANGE

## WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE?



To some people, a warm planet might be considered nicer than a cold one. However, global warming creates serious changes in the ecosystems as well as in the climate. This results in more extreme weather events like flooding, super storms and summer heat waves that threaten lives and destroy costly infrastructure. High as well as low income countries are affected. Low and middle income countries are especially vulnerable because they are less prepared and are likely to experience destructive effects on agriculture, fisheries, infrastructure, human health, local livelihoods and biodiversity. More people will migrate from most affected communities and countries.

Also in southern Europe and northern Africa, current conditions (high temperatures and drought) are projected to worsen in regions already vulnerable to climate variability. All these changes are caused by the increase of greenhouse gases (GHG) present in the atmosphere. In the full version of this booklet we see how the global warming - that leads to climate change - is driven by the increase of GHG. We will explore the reasons for this increase and, most importantly, what we can do about it.

Some of the changes that we can experience if we continue to increase the GHG are listed below.

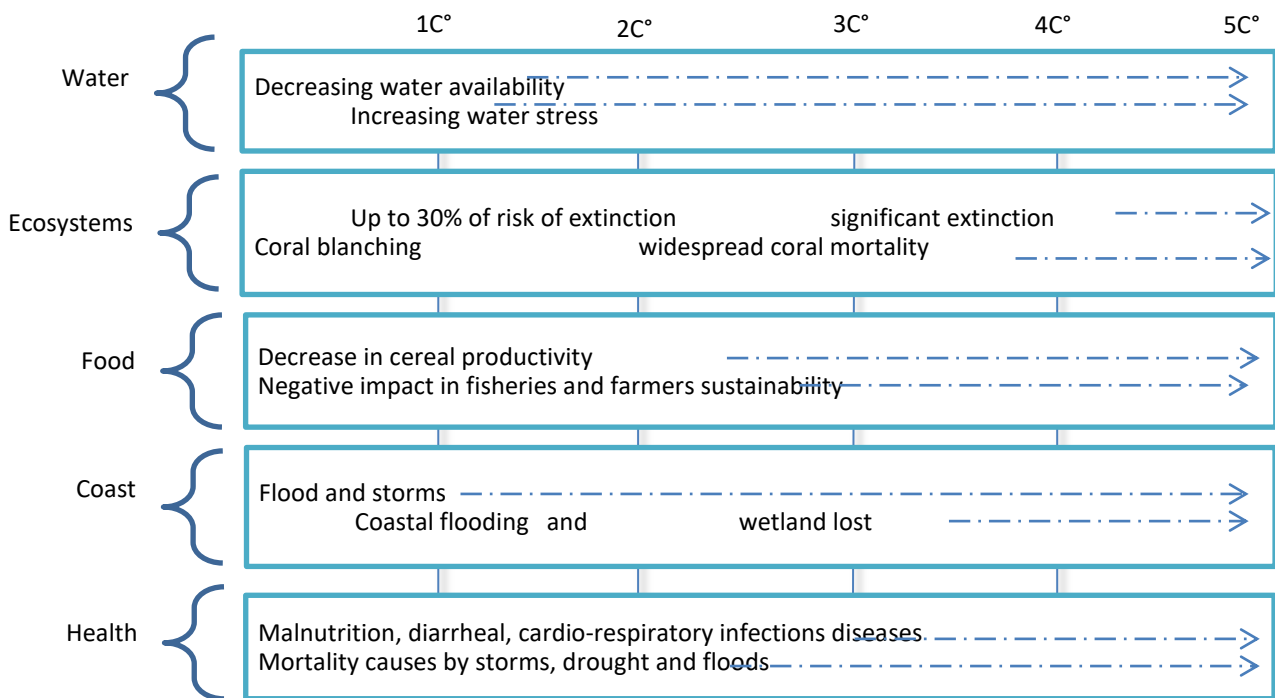


Figure 1. modified from REF (10). Illustrative examples of global impacts projected for climate change

## What Can We Do?

The effects of climate change can be reduced by decarbonization; gradually replacing coal and oil with clean energy. In 2015 all countries committed to the Paris agreement; to stay below 1.5 to 2°C increase in global temperature. Adopt a low carbon lifestyle and request your government to comply with their commitment.

## 2. PLANETARY BOUNDARIES

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In 2008 a group of international scientists identified nine limits within which our planet would still have capacity to sustain our human population and activities. It is in our interest as individuals and as a global society to avoid crossing those boundaries.

The good news is that we have the tools to maintain these limits and it is now up to us to implement them to make the planet a safer place where humanity can thrive in harmony with all that surround us, down to the smallest bee.

By now, and due to human activity, four (4) of these boundaries have already been crossed:

1. **Biodiversity boundary:** The Living Planet Index, which measures all living species on the planet, shows a 30% decline of species since 1970.
2. **Nitrogen and phosphorus flows:** Nitrogen constitutes 78% of our atmosphere and it's a basic component of the proteins that all organisms require to live, including humans. One way to produce synthetic fertilizers is to convert normal nitrogen (N<sub>2</sub>) into reactive nitrogen. The extensive use of fertilizers destabilizes the natural nitrogen and phosphorus flows in the environment leading to soil acidification and release of greenhouse gases, pollution and acid rain. Additional nutrients from fertilizers, in the water systems can also lead to algae bloom, which deprives water of oxygen and creates extensive dead zones in the oceans, where nothing can live.
3. **Fresh water resources:** Only 3% of the water on the Earth is fresh water, 2% of which is stocked in glaciers, ice and snow that partially melt in warm seasons to provide water all year around. The rest is stored underground and in lakes, streams and the like. Yet the world's fresh water supply is steadily decreasing due to agricultural, industrial, recreational activities... activities that change river flows, pollute water reserves and damage natural systems that clean water. Fresh water is a limited resource, essential for our survival. It is projected that by 2025, 1.8 billion people will be affected by absolute water scarcity.
4. **Land System Change.** We are today almost 3 times more people on the planet than in 1950! The demand for food and natural resources has increased. Forests and wetlands have been turned into (mostly low yield) agricultural land. The last remaining forests, 31% of the planet's land area, are critical for biodiversity, water flows and natural cycles including the storage of CO<sub>2</sub> which affects climate change. We need the services our forests produce, but *we are losing forests the size of 36 football fields EVERY MINUTE due to deforestation.*

In this chapter we will show the important role planetary boundaries play in sustainable development.

### What Can We Do?

The suggested critical issue for **Planetary Boundaries** is to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. We propose to promote and practice **sustainable consumption**, and convince others to do the same. Request and buy certified products. Promote introduction of certification if not available. All boundaries are interconnected, like our human lives. Making a positive impact in one of the boundaries will also impact the others. .... please join us!!



Extinct Giant Turtle- Longsome George

### 3. POVERTY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

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Mandela-2008  
Wikimedia

*“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, **it is an act of justice.** Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. You can be that generation. Let your greatness bloom.” Nelson Mandela*

As we outlined in the introduction, **sustainable development** is the relationship between environmental, economic and social development.

In this chapter we look at poverty and social inclusion; key issues in social development.

The world has been successful in combating poverty over the last 30 to 40 years. Poverty is decreasing rapidly. People live longer, healthier lives, and more people have access to opportunities to continue to progress.

The middle class in the fast growing countries Brazil, Russia, India and China is estimated to increase by 1.6 billion people between the years 2000 and 2020! This new middle class had access to healthcare and education and they have been able to benefit from economic growth. However, some people, mainly those living in extreme poverty, are left behind. Development is not inclusive.

**Social inclusion** is when **all people have access to opportunities, independent of their social and economic background.** An inclusive society is an open society with a welfare system that provides economic and social security and opportunities for mobility and the possibilities to progress.

Just as we experience climate change and environmental degradation when we do not respect the environmental boundaries, we experience instability, violence and massive migration when development is not socially and economically inclusive. People become frustrated and many are trapped in poverty.



UN Photo Child in slum#451877

Of the 7 billion people living on our planet, **2.2 billion still struggle to survive on less than \$2 USD per day.** Millions and millions of people go to sleep hungry every night, children and adults alike. Three out of four people in **extreme poverty** live in **South Asia** or in **Sub-Saharan Africa.** It doesn't have to be like this. We have the means and knowledge required for everyone to live a good life.

There are several reasons that people remain in poverty, depending on the country and the local situation. We will see in this chapter how human development - education from childhood and especially for girls - is a necessary condition for economic growth to take place.

#### What Can We Do?

**We suggest for each chapter ONE critical collective action.**

For the Poverty and Social Inclusion chapter this action would be: focus on education for all; promote through social media and relevant organizations/institutions a minimum of secondary education, especially for girls and for children living in poverty.



UN Photo Leading African Girl #161797

## 4. SUSTAINABLE CITIES

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Waterfront Walkway Burlington, Ontario, Canada

- Sustainable cities are cities that can meet our present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs.
- Sustainable cities are environmentally sustainable, and economically and socially inclusive.
- Sustainable cities offer opportunities and integrate all inhabitants, while preventing poverty and eradicating extreme poverty.

Before the Industrial Revolution, the world's population was 1 billion people and 10% lived in the cities. Now the world population is 7 billion, more than 50% live in cities and the urban population is expected to further increase with **2.5 billion more people between 2014 and 2050**. An estimated 90% of this increase will be in low income countries which have faster economic growth and urbanize more rapidly than high income countries.

In addition to the direct challenges related to this rapid growth, we should consider that:

- **80% of the global energy** is consumed in the cities, and **70% of carbon dioxide emissions** (the most critical gas for climate change) are produced in cities.
- **Social inequalities** in cities are increasing. There are people living in extreme poverty and others in extreme wealth. If this is not addressed, more than one billion people will live in slum conditions in 2030. This leads to suffering, injustice, instability, and violence.
- Urban inhabitants on an average have **a more unsustainable lifestyle**. Some studies suggest 30-50% of food to be consumed in the cities is wasted. With the city growth, an increasing number of people will adopt this same **lifestyle**. It is urgent to introduce **a culture of sustainable living**.

By looking at these trends, we can see that a considerable part of the sustainability challenges (and also opportunities, if they are well addressed) come to bear in the cities.

**Cities have the capacities and resources to take the lead for sustainable development!**

In this chapter we will see how we can, run our cities with electricity produced with **clean energy**, invest in **smart, energy-efficient infrastructure**, and open opportunities for everybody to progress, **leaving no one behind**.

### What Can We Do?

The critical issue we suggest for sustainable cities is **to be a leader for sustainability**. **Join your peers and develop and spread an inclusive, sustainable lifestyle and culture**. *People in cities can play a key role for sustainable development: change is spreading from the cities to the rest of the country.*

# 5. ECONOMIC GROWTH



WE HUMANS, TOOK A LONG JOURNEY SINCE FIRE



NOW, WE LIVE IN AGE OF MODERN HUMANS SHAPED BY SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL

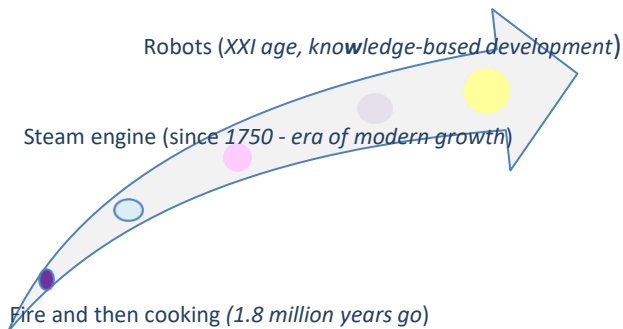


Figure 1, Timeline, Ivona Sak

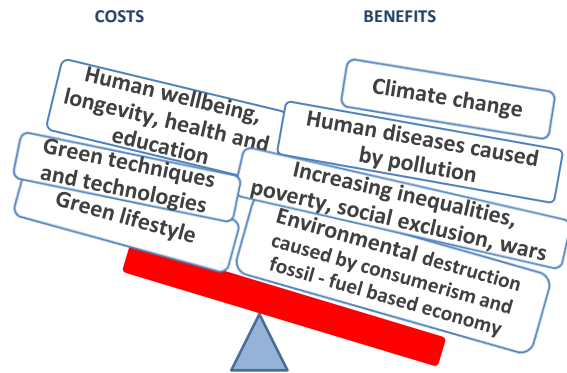
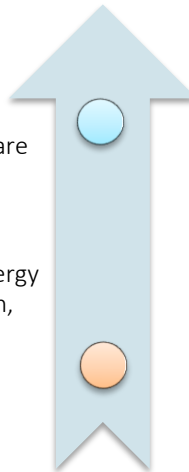


Figure 2, Advantages and disadvantages, Ivona Sak

## What Can We Do?

As individuals we can

- ^ use clean energy
- ^ make and request products and services that are climate/environmentally friendly
- ^ use energy and resource-efficient machines, techniques and technologies
- ^ be "carbon neutral" during transit to clean energy offset/compensate for our emissions (production, airplane etc.)
- ^ explore and promote measures of economic growth other than GDP; measures that consider environmental and social costs



As businesses we can

- ^ request and initiate the transfer towards low-carbon, climate resilient, resource efficient, and socially inclusive business, measuring socio-economic progress by indexes that consider the environment and the society in addition to other economic factors
- ^ comply with sustainability regulations and standards
- ^ support contacts and stakeholders to become environmentally concious and to respect the environment and people

## What Is There To Gain?

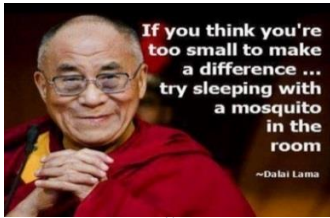
- **Human health and wellbeing;** good living conditions, good quality of air and food, clean environment that contributes to human health, both physical and mental; social and economic inclusion; respect of the human rights of all people; stability and prosperity.
- **Good conditions for conducting business;** shared values for both consumers and businesses; good business environment; stability and profits; reduced costs for business; energy security, stability of assets and business activities; access to natural resources and healthy workforce.
- **Planetary benefits:** Nature recovers, water cycles and climate stabilize, resource security; life balance for remaining species. Nature continues to provide goods and services; fiber, energy, food and raw materials.



Figure 3, Profits and benefits, Ivona Sak



# 6. DEVELOPMENT GOALS



HH the Dalai Lama<sup>11</sup>

## Sustainable Development Goals 2016-2030

*The Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs are our roadmap, our goals towards Sustainable Development.*

The SDGs or the Agenda 2030, as they also are called, cover all three dimensions of sustainable development; the social, environmental, and economic. These three dimensions merge and become one circle with 17 goals, for a sustainable future (see below). The circle illustrates the interdependence of the goals, so that the success of one goal affects also the success of the other goals. They guide development within the countries and also between countries.

SDG 7 is on clean energy and SDG 13 is Climate Action. These goals make reference to the Paris Agreement to hold the increase in the global average temperature **well below 2 °C** above pre-industrial levels. Several SDGs, including SDG 12 are on sustainable consumption, production. For a full list of the SDGs and the targets, see [here](#).

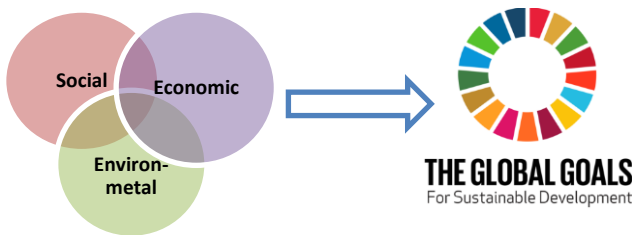
Since the Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN in 1948, good experience and achievements were gained in human development. The social development revolution in health and education that took place during the last 30 years laid the ground for the economic development we have today.



Camels bringing vaccines in iceboxes to remote areas.

Social development is something we made happen through interventions; finding new vaccines and medicines, and developing government policies and structures that reached out to the most remote areas. Behind the successes, there have been, at times, heroic efforts by highly committed people, while implementing these policies in challenging environments.

We have now an even bigger task but we should learn from this experience and mobilize governments and civil society for the transition towards an inclusive social and economic society that is peaceful, safe, just and within the planetary boundaries of our planet. The SDGs are our roadmap for **the transition** to enter a new era of sustainability.



### What Can We Do?

As our collective action, let's spread the word about the importance of these goals and let's closely **follow and adopt their implementation at all levels**, also in our personal life.

## CONCLUSION AND ACTION

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In six chapters we have given a basic background on environmental, social, and economic development. We have presented facts, challenges, opportunities, and most importantly, suggestions for action. This is a reduced version of the Booklet. We recommend you read the full version, slowly, and discuss it with friends, chapter by chapter. Please keep us informed about how it is going and give your comments.

Over the last 50 years we, the humans have made fantastic progress in many areas but our planet is in bad shape. The ecosystem is out of balance; the air, water, land and oceans are being polluted, forests cut down, many living species are facing extinction, and the climate is changing with devastating consequences. We have extreme poverty and extreme wealth, increasing frustration, migration, violence, and war.

We wrote this booklet because we are convinced we can turn this around, save the planet, continue to progress and be healthy in a more sustainable and just world, leaving no one behind; a world free of poverty, hunger, and disease and where all life can thrive, a world in which humanity lives in harmony with nature and nature can continue to provide services to humans and to all other living species.

We face the most serious challenges humankind ever confronted. Governments will play an important role for the transition to a new era of sustainability, but **the success will depend to a large extent on us** as individuals; that we actively participate; request, suggest and ensure change takes place in our communities and beyond. Internet and social media open new possibilities to communicate and mobilize at local, national and global levels.

We conclude this booklet by putting **the critical actions** together. These are actions we are not accustomed to take but they strategically address key issues for the crucial changes we need. Our action is urgent.

The collective critical actions below are followed with suggestions on **what we can do in our daily life**. It is not enough to save the sick person; you must also ensure the person stays healthy. We are 7 billion people on this planet. We have to start to live like one family, respecting each other; ensuring that there will be enough and a fair share for everybody and that the house is well in order.

### 1. Collective Action Towards Sustainable Development

During the consultations for this booklet we were asked for the most critical actions to take for sustainable development right now.

Each chapter concludes with **one critical issue** for our collaborative action for **achieving sustainable development**:

1. **The single most important issue right now for us and our planet** is in *Climate Change*; to stay below 1.5 to 2°C increase in temperature. This affects all other sustainability issues. **All countries must initiate as soon as possible the required measures to ensure that CO<sub>2</sub> and other human endorsed GHGs get to 0 by 2070!**  
See Chapter 1 in the full version: *How can I help decarbonize the planet?*

2. The critical issue we suggest for *Planetary Boundaries* is to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. We propose to promote and practice **sustainable consumption**, and convince others to do the same.

Request and buy certified products. Promote introduction of certification if not available.

3. For *Poverty and Social Inclusion* the overarching aim is to **leave no one behind** and the most critical issue we suggest in this chapter is that all children, especially girls and children living in poverty, complete at least secondary education.

Follow progress and trends, and take action for inclusive education in your community and in your country in a way that is possible for you.

4. In the *Sustainable Cities* Chapter we see how the 3 dimensions; social, environmental, and economic development, are interlinked and can overlap in a sustainable city.

Cities can be **drivers for sustainable development**. The critical action we suggest for sustainable cities is to **develop a culture of sustainable lifestyle**. Be a leader for sustainability, join your peers and develop and spread an inclusive, sustainable lifestyle and culture.

5. *Economic Growth*. Progress is currently measured in economic growth (GDP) that does not consider sustainability and social and environmental costs. The consequences are leading us in an unsustainable direction. A critical issue is to explore and promote **alternative measures of progress** where economic growth is only a means and **wellbeing is the final goal**.

We suggest you join groups and networks, **engage yourself in the discussion and share your insight and concern in our Facebook and LinkedIn**.

6. The *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* are the goals and targets towards sustainable development to be achieved by all countries, rich and poor over the next 15 years. You find all goals and targets on this page: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics>.

We should all take the **SDGs** as the framework for global, national, and local development, promote and participate in its implementation, follow progress, and question delays.

Please, discuss and share this booklet with friends and on social media. Be part of a global movement for sustainable development.

We also look forward to discussing these issues and the booklet with you in [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/groups/119702951714013/) (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/119702951714013/>) and you are welcome to our [LinkedIn group](https://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=8385007) (<https://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=8385007>).

For references see the Bibliography in the **full** version of Take action, enter a new era.

## 2. What Can I Do In My Everyday Life?

We were also asked for suggestions for applying sustainable practices to everyday life. You have probably seen some of these before, but we all must continue to work on them so they become part of our culture.

- **Reduce, reuse, and recycle.** Reduce greenhouse gases that are produced when extracting/growing, manufacturing, and disposing of new products.
- **Use water efficiently.** Water your land and garden as little and as efficiently as possible; repair leaks and do not let water run while washing the floor, shaving, or brushing teeth. Take short showers; limiting water use, particularly by taking shorter showers, reduces energy consumption from pumping, treating, and heating the water.
- **Balance your diet and do not waste food.** When people throw away food, all the resources that have been used to grow, ship, package, and process that food are wasted, including the massive amounts of water involved in the process of growing, producing and transporting the food.  
**For meat lovers, have meat free days in the week. Discover great vegetable dishes and eat locally grown food.**
- **Turn off the vehicle motors when stopping for more than 2 minutes. Try to use fuel-efficient, low-greenhouse gas vehicles** and public transportation. Walk or bike when possible. Leaving your car at home just two days a week can reduce your greenhouse gas emissions by an average of two tons per year. For longer distance travel, it is better to take a train than it is to take a bus or a plane.
- When shopping and at work/school, ask people, when relevant, to produce **less waste** and to use less packaging, especially **plastics**.
- **Improve the heating and/or cooling systems in your home, use low energy bulbs and low energy machines. Remember to turn off equipment when it is not in use.** Use a minimum of energy and ask shops, buses, and public buildings to do the same. Have your heating and/or cooling equipment maintained, and remember to seal and insulate your home (research double glazed windows in cold climates).
- Please add your own suggestions.

**We hope this little booklet has inspired you,** that you will join us to take action, that you will share the booklet and your insight with others and become a leader for sustainable development in your society. Together, we can save the planet and continue to progress. It is urgent, it is human and it is what we want. The future is in our hands. Nobody will do it for us. We must act and act now!

'it is about us' [www.itisaboutus.org](http://www.itisaboutus.org)