

# Sustainable Consumption

## Before you Begin

World consumption has expanded at an unprecedented pace in the twentieth century. Some benefits of this consumption have ensured people are better fed, housed and have a longer life span. However, increasing consumption that too at fast pace is undermining the environmental resource base. The report of the Sustainable Europe Research Institute (SERI), “Over Consumption? - Our use of the World's Natural resources” mentions that natural resources including materials, water, energy and fertile land are the basis for all life on land. However, humanity's rapidly growing consumption of these resources is causing severe damage. Our climate is changing, our fresh water reserves, fish stocks and forests are shrinking; fertile land is being destroyed and species are becoming extinct. In order to continue to thrive on this planet, our lifestyle will need to become more sustainable, so that we are able to protect our natural resource base and the fragile ecosystem on our planet.

The case examples highlight how consumerism is changing the way people look at resource consumption. It is important that individuals take responsibility for consuming goods and services in a sustainable manner.

In the age of convenience consumerism, we may waste as much as we consume. We may pay more for the packaging than for the product. There needs to be a shift in what and how much we consume; is it really a need or a want? What are the better alternatives to the packaging? If we do not address today's problem of overconsumption, the status of the natural resource base will only worsen and impact quality of life.

### Case Example 1

A sustainable past

In the good old days, there was the cloth shopping bag. We took it to the shops hundreds of times till it was torn. We did not have the plastic bags to use once and throw away. We drank tea in china cups or steel tumblers; no paper cups to litter a place. We did not have soft drink fountains with their disposable cups, we used bottles instead. An empty milk powder tin remained on the kitchen shelf for years as a store for sugar or gram. Milk was bought in clean glass bottles which were returned the next day; no plastic pouch or cartons to be thrown into the bin the next day. We had handkerchiefs washed and rewashed till they were torn; no paper napkins to throw away. Babies wore clean cloth diapers (usually made from grandmother's old soft cotton sarees), washed and rewashed; no throwaway diapers. Those days we did not waste.

## Case Example 2

### New Plastic Economy

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation report “The New Plastics Economy” details the scale of the packaging waste problem. In 2013, industry produced 78 million metric tons of plastic packaging worldwide. Of that, 40 percent was landfilled and another 32 percent was “leaked” to the environment, polluting land and sea. Only 28 percent of the plastic, the report says, was collected for further use. Half of that was incinerated for energy. The other half was recycled.

**Source:**

<https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/programmes/systemic-initiatives/new-plastics-economy>



# I am a “Consumer”



## INTRODUCTION:

Everything that we consume leads to pressure on Earth’s resources. Consumption is a result of many factors higher income levels being one of them. Consumerism is defined as a social and economic order and ideology that encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-increasing amounts. With the industrial revolution. In the 20th century, mass production and increasing competition has led to overproduction that has led manufactures to plan product obsolescence and advertising to increase consumer spending.

Each product that we use has an impact on environment. The mining of resources is destroying forests and improper waste disposal during production, transport and after consumption pollutes or air, water and soil. The lesson encourages students to look at their own consumption and research the difference between them and other countries.

## Objective:

Students will be able to

- review individual consumption habits.
- create awareness of environmental impacts due to “students consumerism” - through exchange of information with students internationally.
- analyse student consumerism across different countries - exchange learnings - share your work with students from two other countries.
- analyse consumption in the form of an article/ video documentation.

**YRE steps:** Investigate, Research Solution, Report, Disseminate

**Curriculum Linkage:** Science/ Environmental Studies/Social Science



15-18  
Years

## Time required/ Duration:

- **Classroom Session 1:** 45 minutes to set the context and brainstorm with students.
- **Home Assignment 1:** One week for individual student consumption audit.
- **Classroom Session 2:** 45 minutes classroom discussion to facilitate compiling the results of the student study prior to students writing articles.
- **Home Assignment 2:** One week time for background research, analysing, discussion and to pen down an article or a photo-story/infographic based on inputs received from the counterpart investigator.
- **Classroom Session 3:** 45 minutes to summarise and discuss.

## Resources Required:

- Writing material
- Observation sheet Resource 4 (student consumption checklist).
- Camera to record photographic evidences of the various products used during the week.
- Response from the counterpart student investigation partners.



# Activity

## Classroom session 1

- Give a background introduction and organise discussions to help students understand sustainable consumption.
- Brainstorm with students to prepare a list of different types of products we consume.
- Communicate with the YRE National Operator, for counterpart schools in another country for joining the discussion.
  - Visit: [www.fee.global](http://www.fee.global) for list of National Operators for different countries.

## Home Assignment 1

**Note you will have to approach a student counterpart through the YRE National Operator for your country.**

- Assign time to the students to complete the following tasks
  - prepare a personal consumption checklist; Resource 4 (Student consumption checklist) should be used for this.
  - take photos of the different products used; also make a note of the packaging, share the same too as part of twinning.
  - make a note of what was done with the products after their use.
- Ask students to share their individual consumption checklist with other student investigation partners from two other countries
  - Share the list, photographs of the different products consumed, how these were packaged, how long did you use them for, and finally what did you do when they were no more useful to you.

## Classroom session 2

- Facilitate students to analyse and compare their lists with those obtained from other student counterparts in different countries (1-2 students from two different countries).

## Home Assignment 2

- Students should be provided one week time to pen down their investigation in the form of an article/ video/photo-story.
  - For article: Refer Lesson Plan 1 from chapter “Learning to be an Environmental Journalist”
  - For photo: Refer Lesson Plan 4 from chapter “Learning to be an Environmental Journalist”
  - For video: Refer Lesson Plan 5 from chapter “Learning to be an Environmental Journalist”

# Activity

## Classroom session 3

- Reports by some students should be shared in the class and a discussion surrounding these should be organised. This will serve as an evaluation tool.
- Discuss with students the difference in the type of products used by students from different countries - whether used multiple times or disposed after a single use.
- Brainstorm on what influences these choices and how these choices impact the environment.

### Evaluation:

Ask students to ascertain whether they understand that their choices as a consumer affect the environment and ascertain whether they are willing to change their choices and reduce impact on the environment.

## Resource 4

### Student consumption checklist

Fill in the observation sheet to note your individual consumption pattern (over a period of a week)

Day of the week	Types of products used/ purchased		
	Food and Drinks	Clothes	Stationery
Day 1	Cookies packet	T- shirt, Jacket, Jeans, a pair of sneakers	Ball-point pen Highlighter Eraser Glue Stick
Day 2	Bottled water		
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			

### References

<https://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/overconsumption.pdf> - Over Consumption Report

<https://cen.acs.org/articles/94/i41/cost-plastic-packaging.html> - The cost of plastic packaging

[https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/assets/downloads/EllenMacArthurFoundation\\_TheNewPlasticsEconomy\\_15-3-16.pdf](https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/assets/downloads/EllenMacArthurFoundation_TheNewPlasticsEconomy_15-3-16.pdf) - The New Plastic Economy