

# Ensuring affordable, favourable and sustainable lifestyles for all



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## Defining the dissonance: quality versus sustainability of lifestyles in the 21st century

Lifestyles – how people live, eat, dress, travel, work, communicate, procure goods and services, and entertain themselves – have changed significantly in the half-century since the adoption of the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (the ‘Stockholm Declaration’) in 1972 (United Nations, 1972).

Today, we are at an inflection point and must review whether the Declaration’s principles have stood the test of time as the world transitioned from the 20th to the 21st century, and reframe those that need correction based on the lived experiences of the global population.

Both developed and developing countries<sup>1</sup> have decadal development trends in areas such as technology, industrialization, economy and trade. There are also differences due to political, cultural and religious values, and the social strata and income levels of consumers. A new and pervasive influence is hyper-accelerated globalization, driven by the advent of the Internet and social media into people’s homes and lives, and the rapid and deep integration of governance systems, commercial ventures, and services in and between communities and countries through digitalization.

It would be unfair to expect anyone to foretell how humanity would evolve, worldwide, after half a century. Scenario-based projections account for ‘known knowns’ and to some extent, ‘known unknowns’, but not the ‘unknown unknowns’ (Logan, 2009) – the transformative disruptions that overhaul how the world operates and its people behave.

The last 50 years have seen many such disruptions, starting with the **record doubling of the global population from ~3.7 billion in 1970 to ~7.8 billion in 2020** (Worldometer, n.d.), and its consequent impact on global resources. The Covid-19 pandemic brought the world to a halt in March 2020; two years since, it has infected 508 million people and taken more than 6.2 million lives (World Health Organization, 2022) – and has changed, forever, the way people live, work, travel and interact.

### BACKGROUND PAPER

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<sup>1</sup> For analytical purposes, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs World Economic Situation and Prospects Country Classification classifies all countries of the world into one of three broad categories reflecting their basic economic conditions: developed economies, economies in transition and developing economies (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2014). In this paper, the phrase ‘developing’ in the context of the world, countries or nations includes economies in transition plus underdeveloped and least developed countries.



Such experiences have led us to accept that **transformative change is, indeed, possible, but we need to be far more agile than we have ever been.**

The preamble of the Stockholm Declaration (United Nations, 1972, p. 1) states that, 'Man has constantly to sum up experience and go on discovering, inventing, creating and advancing'. It notes that this capability, if used wisely, could bring the benefits of development and opportunities to enhance the quality of life of people worldwide. Conversely, 'if wrongly or heedlessly applied, the same power can do incalculable harm to human beings and the human environment'.

There is ample evidence of both: ingenuity, innovation and intent have helped some countries make tremendous scientific, technological, economic and social progress. In others, the impacts of this lopsided progress have already led to catastrophic ecological damage, overexploited resources, economic hardships and widespread social distress.

Ironically, the crisis of unsustainable<sup>2</sup> lifestyles stems from the human nature to constantly discover, invent, create and advance. The Stockholm Declaration touches upon this trait but discounts **the human tendency to procure and consume not only for sustenance, but to achieve socio-economic affluence and comforts, and establish supremacy** beyond battlefields – via political and ideological constructs, thought and cultural leadership, property and possessions, and encompassing all these, the quality of life.

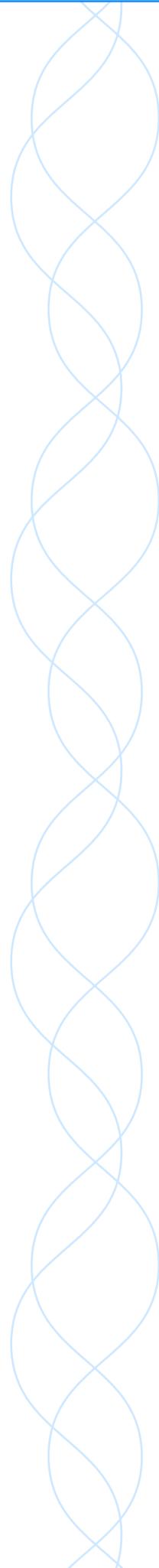
These competitions have existed for millennia between nations, tribes, communities and individuals, and today, separate the developed economies from the developing ones. Both have their elite steeped in excesses; however, it is **the median quality of life**, based on the 'Economic Situation and Prospects' of nations (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs), that defines lifestyles, and hence, the levels of consumption, and **differentiates the developed world from the developing one.**

Looking back, the Declaration's assumption – even *hope* – that all countries will equally and equitably share the fruits of their efforts, profits and progress, even as it defined in Principle 21 the sovereign right of countries to exploit their own resources as per their own environmental policies (United Nations, 1972, p. 5), is utopian.

Even more contentious is the expectation that it is **now a universal responsibility to correct**, through collective ownership and action, **the existing – and escalating – crises of environmental degradation, social inequities and the imminent exhaustion of resources** such as agricultural output, energy, water and critical minerals, caused by the excessive consumption of certain countries to support *their* standards of living. More so since there is no clear ownership by the developed economies of the consequences of their rates of resource consumption, nor commensurate commitments or actions towards reducing their usage and waste trajectories.

This dissonance is universal and trickles down *within* countries as well, permeating into communities and ecosystems, eventually impacting *everyone*.

<sup>2</sup> 'Unsustainable' is defined as 'not capable of being prolonged or continued' (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) at the current rate or levels.



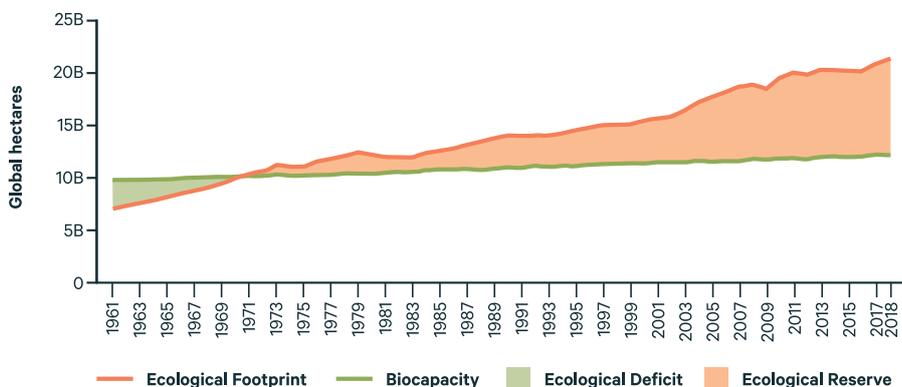
## Living beyond our means: socio-economic and ecological risks of running out of resources

The consequences of this unsustainable rate of resource consumption are evolving outcomes of the changes in lifestyles worldwide in the last two centuries, especially the past half-century. The transboundary impacts on the Earth's resources and its social and ecological milieu are, in some cases, already irreversible.

Principle 3 of the Stockholm Declaration (United Nations, 1972, p. 3) cautioned that 'the capacity of the earth to produce vital renewable resources must be maintained and, wherever practicable, restored or improved'. Principle 5 states that non-renewable resources must be used in ways that prevent their exhaustion, and insists that the benefits of such usage be shared by all.

Concerns arose when the global demand for natural resources (ecological footprint) started exceeding the ecosystems' capacities to regenerate (biocapacity) by the 1970s, leading to a 'global ecological overshoot' in 1979<sup>3</sup>. **The world today uses resources and generates waste that would need 1.7 Earths to sustain** (Figure 1) (Global Footprint Network, 2021).

Figure 1: The global ecological footprint overshoot the Earth's biocapacity in 1979 and has been rising since (Global Footprint Network, 2021).

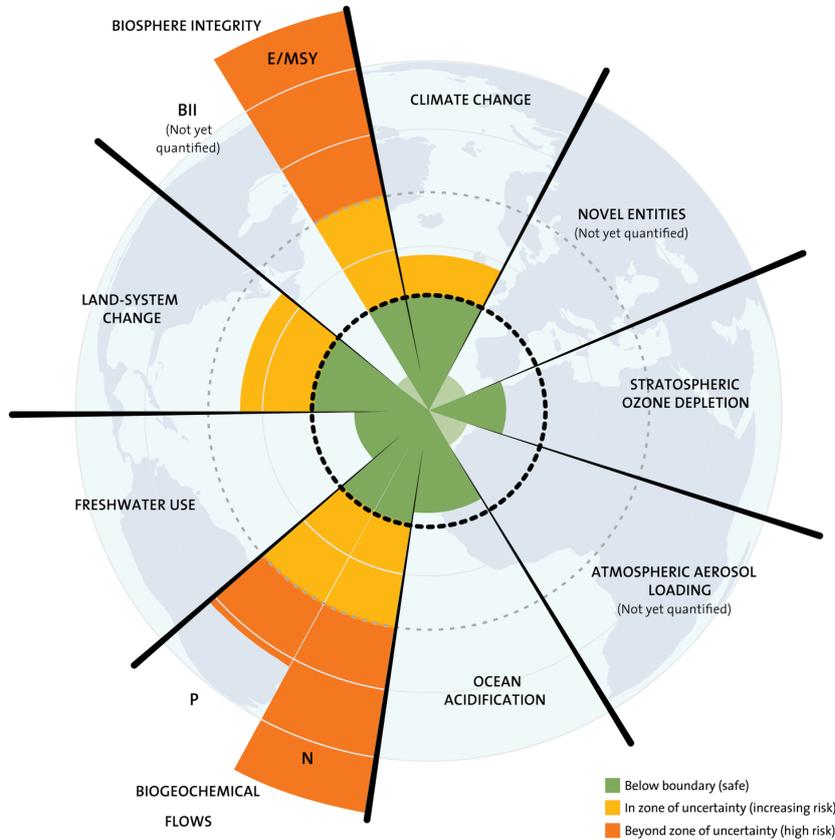


Global Footprint Network, 2022 National Footprint and Biocapacity Accounts

The planetary boundaries concept reflects this trajectory and posits 'a set of nine critical Earth-system processes – "planetary boundaries" – within which humanity can continue to develop and thrive for generations to come' (Rockström, et al. 2009). It states that exceeding these thresholds could cause catastrophic events and destabilize planetary processes. The world has crossed the thresholds for four processes: biosphere integrity (biodiversity loss and extinctions), biogeochemical flows (disrupted nitrogen and phosphorus cycles), land system change and climate change (Figure 2) (Stockholm Resilience Centre).

<sup>3</sup> Ecological footprint, conceptualized by Dr William E. Rees, assesses the amount of 'ecological assets a given population or product requires to produce the natural resources it consumes (including plant-based food and fibre products, livestock and fish products, timber and other forest products, space for urban infrastructure) and to absorb its waste, especially carbon emissions'. It is expressed in global hectares as well as 'Number of Earths' (needed to sustain human population for a given ecological footprint) (Global Footprint Network, 2021).

Figure 2: The critical planetary boundaries, showing already breached thresholds (Stockholm Resilience Centre).

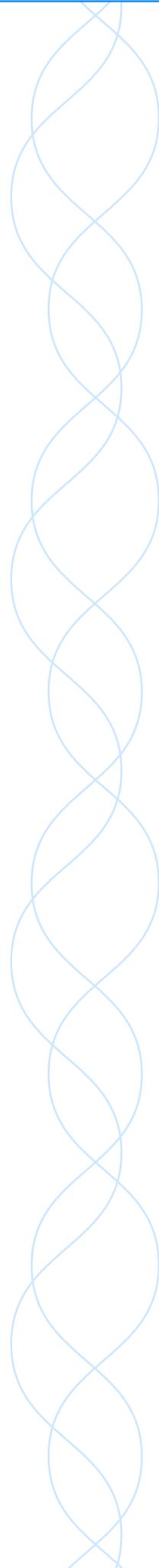


The share of greenhouse gas emissions is sharply skewed: **the top 10 countries emit over two thirds of the total emissions** (the United States, European Union and China together emit 41.5%), **while the bottom 100 countries emit only 3.6%** (Friedrich et al., 2020).

This cumulative data is even more skewed for historical emissions. For example, India, despite the recent rise in its emissions, has historically emitted just 3% of the cumulative emissions since 1751 (5% between 1990 and 2018). In comparison, the EU and US account for almost half, but have registered negligible emission reductions of 0.5% and 1.4% respectively between 2009 and 2018 (Friedrich et al., 2020).

**Per capita emissions of developed and developing countries also vary widely** (Table 1) – a reflection of the levels of sustainability of their lifestyles. China (9.3 GTCO<sub>2</sub>) and India (2.2 GTCO<sub>2</sub>) are the world’s first and third largest emitters, but accounting for their populations of 1.44 billion and 1.39 billion respectively, China ranks 12th and India 20th among the top 15 emitters. India’s emissions (1.58 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per capita) are only 10% of those of the US, and 17% of those of Germany (World Population Review 2022).

There is also great **inequity in individual emissions due to income**. The world’s richest 10% emitted 52% of global carbon emissions between 1990 and 2015, depleting the global carbon budget by almost a third. Of this, the richest 1% emitted 15% – over twice as much as the poorest half (Oxfam International 2020).



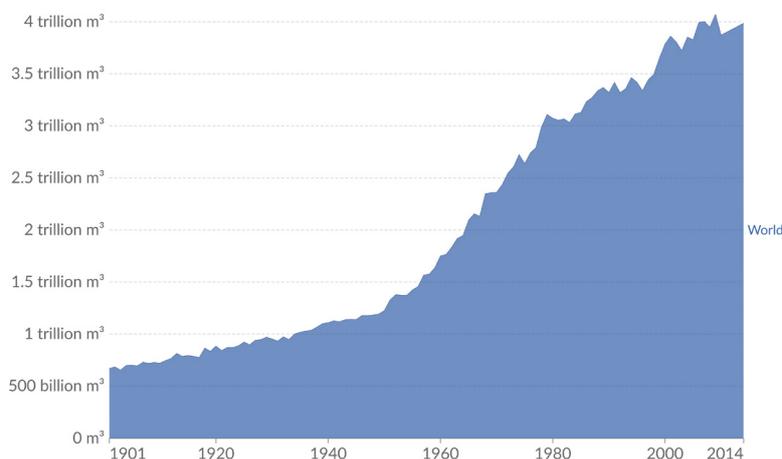
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Table 1: Carbon footprint by country, 2022 (World Population Review, 2022)

Country	Total Emissions	Per Capita Emissions	2021 Population
Saudi Arabia	531.46 Mn	16.85	35,340,683
Australia	380.93 Mn	15.83	25,788,215
United States	5.00 Bn	15.53	332,915,073
Canada	549.23 Mn	15.32	38,067,903
South Korea	585.99 Mn	11.58	51,305,186
Russia	1.47 Bn	10.19	145,912,025
Japan	1.14 Bn	8.99	126,050,804
Germany	729.77 Mn	8.93	83,900,473
South Africa	427.57 Mn	7.77	60,041,994
Poland	282.40 Mn	7.34	37,797,005
Iran	552.40 Mn	6.98	85,028,759
China	9.04 Bn	6.59	1,444,216,107
United Kingdom	389.75 Mn	5.99	68,207,116
Italy	330.75 Mn	5.45	60,367,477
France	290.49 Mn	4.37	65,426,179

Most resources follow similar trends. Global ‘water withdrawal’ – freshwater drawn from groundwater or surface water sources like lakes or rivers for agricultural, industrial or domestic use – has risen by about six times since 1900. This has accelerated since the 1950s due to the growing population and resource-intensive consumption (Figure 3) (Ritchie & Roser, 2018).

Figure 3: Global long-term freshwater use: withdrawals for agriculture, industry and domestic uses since 1900 (cubic metres (m<sup>3</sup>) per year) (Ritchie & Roser, 2018).



In 2017, India withdrew the most freshwater (760+ billion cubic metres per year), followed by China (600+ bcm) and the US ( $\approx$  480–490 bcm) (Figure 4) (Our World in Data, 2017). However, by population, the US withdrew 1543 m<sup>3</sup> per capita water that year, consuming about thrice as much as India (602 m<sup>3</sup>) and China (425 m<sup>3</sup>), and far more than African nations such as Kenya (75.6 m<sup>3</sup>) and Nigeria (74 m<sup>3</sup>) (Figure 5) (Our World in Data, 2015).

Figure 4: Annual freshwater withdrawals, 2017 (cubic metres (m<sup>3</sup>) per year) (Our World in Data).

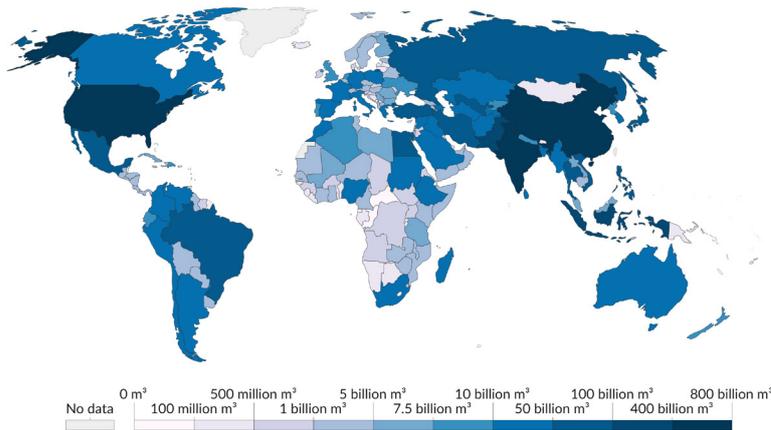
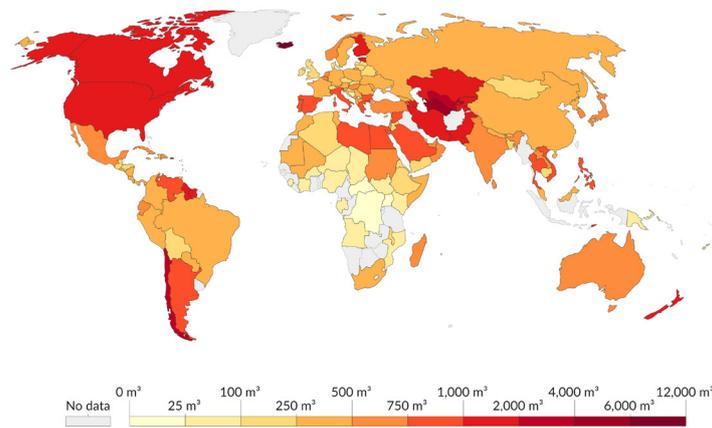
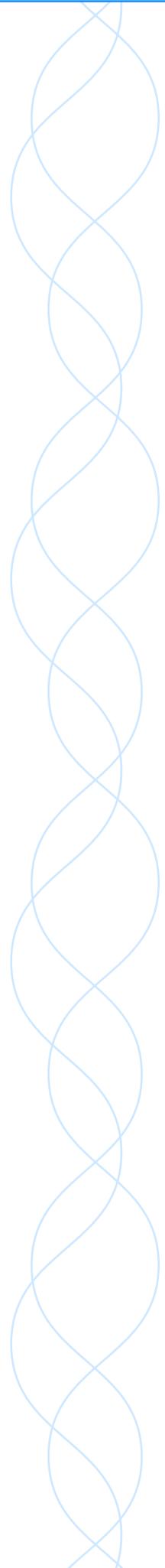


Figure 5: Water withdrawals per capita, 2015 (cubic metres (m<sup>3</sup>) per year) (Our World in Data).



While such data serve as hard indicators of consumption and emissions, we need to also accept that sustainable lifestyles are not merely about resource or ecological conservation, but also more intangible human development and social integration.

Principle 8 of the Stockholm Declaration (United Nations, 1972, p. 3) states that, ‘Economic and social development is essential for ensuring a favourable living and working environment for man and for creating conditions on earth that are necessary for the improvement of the quality of life.’



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Countries with higher Human Development Index (HDI) typically have higher ecological footprints (Figure 6) due to higher use of resources to sustain their lifestyles (Global Footprint Network, 2021). This correlates with the huge discrepancies in income levels and quality of lives of people in developed and developing economies, and, at an individual level, between the wealthy and the poor. The World Inequality Report 2022 notes that 10% of the world's population has 76% of its wealth, while the poorest 50% owns only 10% (Chancel, et al. 2021).

Figure 6: Human Development Index (HDI) versus Ecological Footprint (2017). Countries with high HDI typically have a higher ecological footprint (Global Footprint Network, 2021).



The Earth's finite resources have been inequitably and unsustainably consumed by the developed countries to fuel their industrial and social development for the past several centuries – including half a century *after* the Stockholm Declaration, and their various self-declared peaking years<sup>4</sup> (Levin & Rich, 2017).

Now, as developing countries increase their resource consumption to achieve similar industrial and economic growth – for example, by implementing developmental processes such as electricity access for the poor using conventional fuels – they are disparaged as 'unsustainable'. This leaves them vulnerable to coercion by multilateral organizations to accept collective ownership for cumulative historical and current resource use and ecological degradation.

**The definition of 'renewable' also needs to be revisited**, as the quantum of renewable resources available or usable at a given time is limited. For example, wind and solar energy are infinite resources, but the rate and extent of their exploitation are limited by variables such as access to adequate land in favourable locations; the ecological impacts of exploiting resources to manufacture, transport and maintain thousands of gigawatts' worth of equipment; and the large volumes of end-of-life waste of these plants. We also know now that circular economies of value chains have limitations – **nothing can be perpetually reused, repurposed and recycled.**

<sup>4</sup> The carbon peak year for a country is the one in which its greenhouse gas emissions will reach a maximum, before shrinking in each subsequent year.



## Consumers are the new royalty: weaving purchasing power into the ideals of democracy and freedom

The planetary boundaries framework shows that **the rate of consumption has exceeded the rate of regeneration** – of land, forests, water sources, heat sinks, wildlife and game populations – in both developed and developing countries. However, equating lifestyles with clinical parameters such as carbon emissions, rising temperatures, resource consumption rates or even direct climate risks oversimplifies the problem and takes us away from resolving the crisis.

The Stockholm Declaration (United Nations, 1972, p. 1) accepts this distinction by noting that ‘in developing countries most of the environmental problems are caused by under-development (while) in industrialized countries, environmental problems are generally related to industrialization and technological development’.

It is therefore necessary to address this issue differently in the two types of economies, interweaving the drivers of human development, economic equality and social dignity at the individual, community and national levels, rather than forcing one-size-fits-all prescriptions. But doing so brings the principles of the Declaration related to resource and ecological conservation and regeneration into conflict with those advocating the values of equitable socio-economic development.

This underscores the crux of the problem: in the post-World War II era of subdued military supremacy, **economic prosperity has become a key definer of the might of nations.**

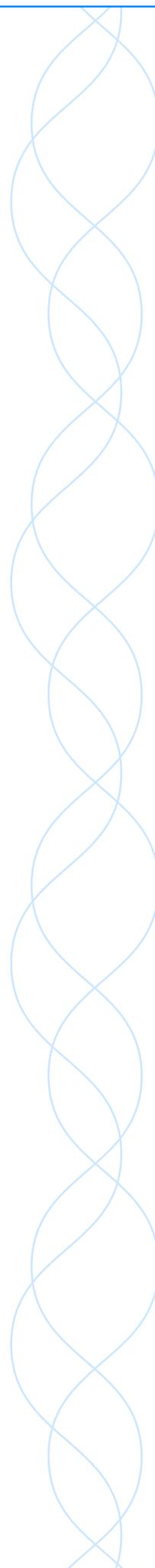
Several triggers have escalated this global fervour for economic prosperity: politico-economic governance models, physical and digital proximity causing diffusion of traditions and cultural values, and commercial machinations.

The collapse of the erstwhile Soviet Union and other ‘Iron Curtain’ countries accelerated the move towards free market-based economics. The oppressive and rigid, state-enforced, ration-based socialist economic regimes forced people into bitter austerity and deprived them of their desired goods and services – and hence, their desired quality of life. The near-universal renunciation of these regimes has been woven into the ideals of democracy and freedom: **financial empowerment and purchasing power are now linked with the personal prerogative to choose preferred lifestyles.**

The principles of democracy have brought much-needed freedom of thought, expression and enjoyment to the masses, but equating ‘capitalistic’, and even *hedonistic*, lifestyles with ‘democratic’ ones has trapped people on a relentless treadmill of excessive consumption as the epitome of personal choice and prosperity.

Another trigger is the emphasis of the United Nations and multilateral agencies on integrated banking and infrastructure creation, and enhanced international cooperation and global connectivity. This has brought diverse populations into closer contact than ever before, and has created interlinkages leading to increasingly homogeneous thought, behaviour and action – which is now peaking with the diffusion of the Internet and digital communication into all sections of societies.

The creation of the World Trade Organization, assorted trade agreements and credit schemes have given people unbridled access to previously rare and/or expensive goods and services including vehicles, appliances, electronics, clothing, foods and luxury products, allowing them to quickly adopt more consumerist lifestyles. China’s entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001 exponentially accelerated this transition with an



unprecedented proliferation of disposable consumer goods – often cheap imitations of high-end products that fed the popular demand for ‘branded goods’ as status symbols (Amiti et al., 2020; Boden, 2012).

These possessions-oriented lifestyles have been escalated by commercial machinations such as forced obsolescence of products, appropriation of religious and cultural occasions as consumption-centric events, and new types of consumerism like destination weddings and theme vacations. Celebrities and influencers are used cleverly to heighten consumers’ desires for aspirational goods and services, often heightening anxiety, frustration and depression.

This dominant capitalistic economic model aggressively propagates consumerism to sustain and enhance national prosperity. **Consumption patterns are driven by careful socio-economic engineering** that *tells* people what they should consume to be considered a part of their aspirational socio-economic segment (Abraham & Harrington, 2014; Leo et al., 2018). These generally mirror the types and levels of consumption that developed economies have defined as the metrics of human well-being and the quality of life to which everyone should aspire.

Such political and commercial interests influencing the definitions of consumer satisfaction are usually contrary to the natural tendencies of consumption. These frequently drive people to endanger themselves – financially through debt traps, emotionally through the (perceived or real) lack of achieving their aspirational goals and, overall, into unsustainable lifestyles.

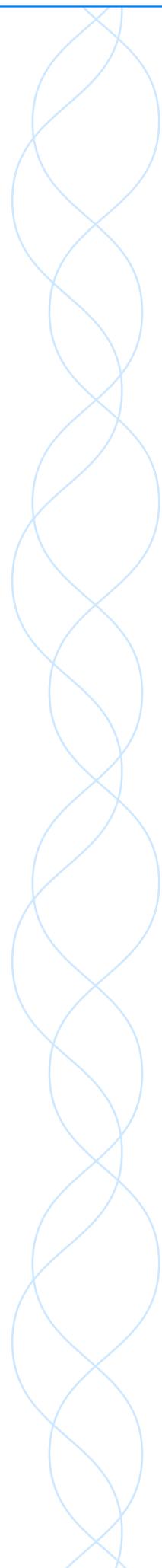
In parallel, the **rapid ceding of Indigenous traditions and cultural norms**, which are inherently sustainable to local geographies and demographics, in pursuit of a standardized global template of a ‘prosperous lifestyle’, is increasing stress on local socio-economic and environmental systems.

### Changing mindsets: the challenges of reorienting towards greater sustainability

The Stockholm Declaration (United Nations, 1972, p. 2) says that achieving environmental goals ‘will demand the acceptance of responsibility by citizens and communities and by enterprises and institutions at every level, all sharing equitably in common efforts’, and calls for ‘extensive cooperation among nations and action by international organizations in the common interest’.

This principle is being shunned at two levels. First, most citizens and communities have abdicated their individual responsibilities towards sustainable living, rejecting any onus on themselves to resist the delusional enticement of over-consumption, and have instead identified governments and corporates as the entities solely responsible for maintaining sustainability.

Second, the developed countries have made the developing ones a source of supplies (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs) to support their unsustainable lifestyles while socializing this crisis as a common cause and responsibility for all (Malyan & Chaturvedi, 2021; Prasad et al., 2021). This has, naturally, hardened the stance of the developing countries, most of which are deeply exploited and ecologically devastated due to the profligacy of their developed counterparts. They are now insisting on a ‘polluter pays’ principle, placing the financial and technological onus of creating more sustainable systems at the doors of the polluting countries.





The disconnect is obvious: defining environmental protection as a global responsibility and reducing emissions as a global imperative, citing the common cause of humanity, **needs the resources being consumed to be defined as common goods**, to be distributed equitably while accounting for historical usage, in the same way as wastes and emissions. It will be impossible to achieve global-scale change without **a global inventory of resources, and indexing of resource use**.

This contradicts Principle 21 of the Declaration (United Nations, 1972, p. 5), which says that 'States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental policies.' There is also a non-binding responsibility of countries to ensure that their activities do not damage the environment of other countries, or of areas beyond their national jurisdictions.

However, the last 50 years have seen growing exploitation of the mineral and energy sources of developing countries in Africa (Burgis, 2015) and South America by developed countries to fuel their own economies. These offending countries accept no responsibility for this misappropriation; on the contrary, they continue to use their political and financial might to deny the developing countries' rights to reparations for the loss and damage of their natural resources, habitats and environments.

Principles 10 and 11 of the Declaration (United Nations, 1972, p. 3) try to address these concerns, noting that 'stability of prices and adequate earnings for primary commodities and raw materials are essential to environmental management'. They declare that 'environmental policies of all States should enhance and not adversely affect the present or future development potential of developing countries, nor should they hamper the attainment of better living conditions for all'.

But in many cases, the sovereign right of developing countries to exploit their own resources is being subverted via multinational companies instead of overt dominion or colonization, much in the style of the erstwhile East India Company and its trade machinations. The stability of prices and earnings depends on parallel access to resources, energy sources, technological developments and industrialization – which were monopolized, over the past centuries, directly by colonial powers (which now constitute most of the developed economies) and then, post-World War II, through their companies. Some developing countries have learned these tactics and now have similar templates, such as China's aggressive ownership of mineral sources around the world, and its Belt and Road Initiative.

The United Nations has provided developing economies with some platforms to claim their share and space of these resources. But even today, developed countries are unilaterally defining and enforcing their domestic environmental policies and standards, and there is little inclination towards building consensus on global environmental policies that do not impede the attainment of better living conditions *for all*.

For example, developed countries often outsource polluting industries and activities, such as shipbreaking and the consequent direct transfer of waste and dumping of hazardous materials, to developing countries. In parallel, they are instituting systems such as the proposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, which would avoid even *derived* pollution in their own countries, while disproportionately burdening developing ones with the costs of addressing climate change, thereby obstructing their industrialization and socio-economic development.



Further, the **increasing emphasis on the individual** – also an emulation of the developed economies – is leading to the dissolution of joint families and tribal communities in developing ones. This is fuelling a rapid transition to individualistic lifestyle choices, propelling them to seek gratification with material goods instead of meaningful relationships, which is directly increasing the volume of consumption of goods per individual.

Up to the mid-20th century, emotional well-being was centred on fulfilling basic needs. People were satisfied once they reached those goals, which led to the creation of a stable middle class that used resources conservatively. The newer generations, in both developed and developing countries, are accustomed early on in their lives to that base level of personal security, comfort and satisfaction, and, hence, their aspirations have increased beyond necessities to now include luxuries.

There are other challenges to adopting more sustainable lifestyles. Once populations eschew traditional and cultural norms and lifestyles for solely materialistic pursuits, they become impervious to suggestions – or even mandates – to return to their original lifestyles, which they now perceive as regressive. For example, developed countries occasionally virtue signal about using bicycles in select areas as sustainable transport, but in developing countries, bicycles are seen as vehicles of the poor – those who cannot afford motorized two-wheelers or cars. The challenge, then, is not of mobility per se, but the status of owning and using a more expensive vehicle. Without understanding such nuances, one cannot expect nudges to translate into actions.

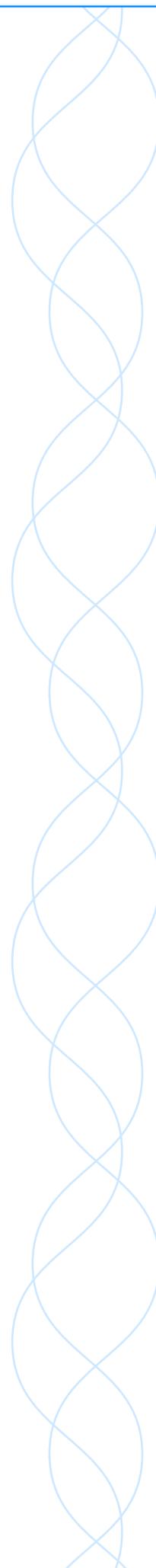
There are also deep financial implications of moving away from unsustainable lifestyles. The transition from consuming within income levels, to aspirational consumption drawn on credit-based systems constructed by countries to boost their economies, has fuelled unprecedented levels of feel-good (disposable) consumerism. Savings, once considered a priority, have plummeted in recent years as new generations invest in disposable goods and transient experiences that are resource-intensive but do not create reusable and long-term assets. Financial systems are now structured to feed into, and off these, consumerism-centric models; **moving away would lead to economic deceleration.**

This pull by consumers to attain items of lifestyle value, often beyond their means, combined with the push by sellers to create markets for their products, has led to an abandonment of ethics in resource purchase, with the motto being to sell – and buy – at any cost.

Therefore, we cannot impose sustainable life choices within the current political and socio-economic frameworks without impinging on the individual freedom to choose and express, or the sovereign prerogative to aspire to and achieve, the globally defined ‘good quality of life’.

### **Solving for sustainable lifestyles: deploying national and global solutions**

Devising solutions to correct unsustainable lifestyles brings up existential questions. The concept of equitable consumption goes against the human nature to accumulate goods and services as symbols of security and success. **All countries and all people are not considered equal**, and the difference between developed and developing economies is defined and maintained by their levels of affluence and consumption.





The developed countries are eager to push the responsibility of loss and damage due to their excesses onto all countries as common ownership of the global environment, but at the same time, they resist efforts to classify resources as common goods, citing their sovereign rights over their domestic resources as well as any others that they secure globally. In fact, a large part of this discussion is driven by the concern that certain emerging economies have started infringing on the consumption space of the existing major consumers.

However, it is **contradictory to continue capitalistic exploitation of resources while expecting corresponding altruistic management of the same resources.**

At the national level, initiatives towards sustainable lifestyles must be equitable, affordable, desirable, and have widespread utility for all strata of society. These solutions should be easy to understand, adopt and sustain by all demographics, and not be perceived as either elitist (e.g., expensive organic or 'sustainably sourced' foods) or dismissed as below-standard (e.g., low quality publicly distributed food grains). A good example are metro-rail systems, which are accepted as efficient, affordable and sustainable by all strata of society worldwide.

Governments, industries and civil society must cooperate to identify avenues for constructive change; tap into historic cultural examples of sustainable living; create awareness of global trends of sustainability and non-materialistic well-being such as yoga, fika<sup>5</sup> and ikigai<sup>6</sup>; and promote minimalism. While there are nudges like adopting sustainable vehicle fuel standards and pollution checks, subsidized public transport and energy efficient appliances, individual choices should ideally not be governed by the state beyond positive suggestion and empowerment. It is also difficult to implement and monitor, and consequently reward or punish, mass-level individual sustainable solutions.

Hence, these will likely not achieve the transformational change needed to keep emissions within the depleting global carbon budget, or achieve the required rate of regeneration of resources. There is not enough time for such incremental change through voluntary or mandated individual actions. Therefore, it is imperative to seek global-scale solutions.

One such solution would be to **redefine aspirational lifestyles universally** through exemplary actions led by the developed economies, as the current consumption patterns are based on their definitions of affluence and prosperity. This can be achieved at a global scale only by **measuring-and-managing sovereign consumption of resources**, rather than imposing individual choice alternatives.

Currently, national output is measured as gross domestic product (GDP) and has no provision to include sustainability as a parameter. The financial world is driven only by growth (captured through GDP and other profit-related metrics) that hinges on resource exploitation and consumption. In fact, to achieve growth, nations usually must do little more than increase consumption.

Therefore, one of the first steps for moving towards sustainable consumption would be to **integrate environmental, social and governance (ESG) norms with growth-and-consumption related finance to define a globally accepted 'Green GDP'.**

<sup>5</sup> Fika, in Swedish custom, is a break from activity during which people drink coffee, eat cakes or other light snacks, and relax with others.

<sup>6</sup> Ikigai is a Japanese concept referring to something that gives a person a sense of purpose, a reason for being. 'Iki' in Japanese means 'life,' and 'gai/kai' describes value or worth.



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The consonance of financial systems, ESG norms and Green GDP would account for growth driven by sustainable or ethical means. Countries with these parameters would be considered 'economically richer' than countries with non-green GDP. For example, borrowing for natural farming would be more desirable than borrowing to buy a bigger SUV. The rate of integration of ESG into financial metrics also needs to keep pace with the required rate of transition to sustainable systems.

A second global-scale solution to address the depletion of resources would be to **define a Global Budget of Resources**.

This would require defining per capita resource space through multilateral consensus, for example, by setting up a Conference of Parties on Utilization of Resources (CoP-UR). The CoP-UR would define essential needs, lifestyle-level consumption and national security priorities; create a ledger of country-wise per capita resource consumption using blockchain; and track transactions of budgeted resources between countries to avoid inequitable distribution and changes in the costs of resources. The CoP-UR would also define standards and protocols that level the playing field for product/service providers as, currently, sustainable offerings can be uncompetitive.

The CoP-UR should be empowered to set up a Global Commission with the mandate to demand accountability from – and censure – countries that do not follow these methods; regulate forced obsolescence of mass products; and monitor the recycling/repurposing of a fixed quantum of core resources (such as steel, rare earth elements or iron ore), by each country.

### **The time is now: the imperative of affordable, favourable and sustainable lifestyles for all**

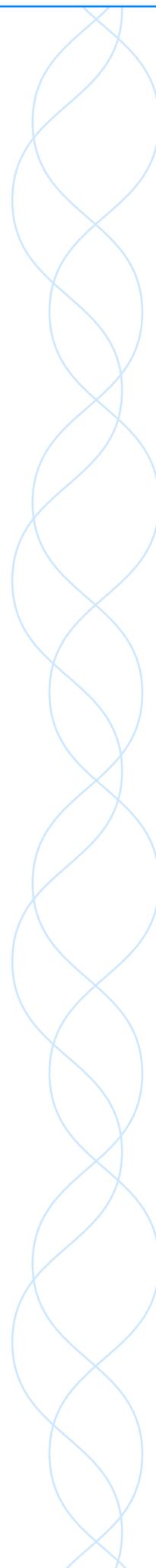
To move towards more sustainable lifestyles, we need to understand and accept that lifestyles are derivatives, and not the definers, of the global political, social and economic systems. Therefore, the **hyphenation of 'sustainable' with 'lifestyle' without redefining the latter will not be sustainable**.

However, we cannot define 'sustainable lifestyles' with the same parameters for everyone on this planet without **altering the basic formulation of the global economic structure** and what constitutes productivity or success.

We must also **develop a global, equitable, rules-based framework** to halt – and then reverse – the adverse impacts of the current rates of consumption and resource exploitation.

The time and space available for the diffusion of ideas, and consequent socio-economic changes, are rapidly shrinking. Existing policies are reactive and slow, frequently deeply divisive and contentious at the multilateral levels, and unable to keep pace with the rate of change.

Our desire for, and capacity to lead creative, productive, safe and meaningful lives depends on solving this existential imperative. The world must urgently unite and commit to constructive dialogue and result-oriented action to ensure affordable, favourable and sustainable lifestyles for all.





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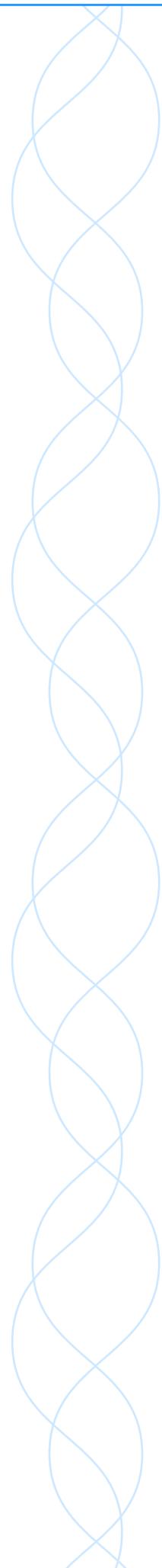
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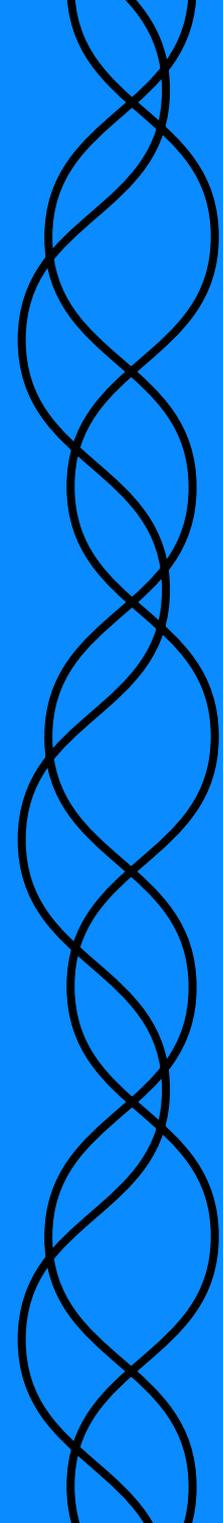
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