

A framework for shaping sustainable lifestyles

determinants
and strategies



Acknowledgements

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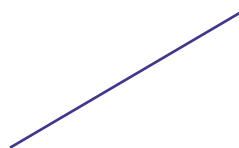
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Preface: Sustainable Lifestyles as an Engine for Change

Humans make hundreds of thousands of decisions during the course of their lives. For the lucky among us, those decisions will vary wildly. What food will I eat? what house will I live in? How will I get to work in the morning? What type of clothes will I wear? How will I spend my spare time? The list is endless.

No matter how we choose to answer these questions, the lifestyles we end up living – or, in some cases, are forced to live – have a profound impact on our planet, affecting everything from how our economies grow to the health of our environment.

Our consumption habits are putting our resources levels at great risk. The amount of stuff we use in order to live has exploded in many parts of the world, highlighted by the fact that the global extraction of materials has tripled over the past four decades, rising to an enormous 70 billion tonnes in 2010. If current trends continue, then this dramatic increase in the amount of material we consume will continue to rise as populations grow, the middle class expands, and incomes increase.

Today, cities are associated with 60 to 80 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions, consume 75 per cent of natural resources, and account for 50 per cent of all waste (UNEP, 2012). By 2050, the number of people living in urban areas is expected to reach 6.3 billion – roughly two-thirds of the global population. This will have a profound effect on what and how individuals and societies consume, especially when it comes to food, mobility, housing, consumer goods and leisure.

As a result, this urban shift carries with it immense social implications. The extra pressure these new urban consumers will place on the world's increasingly scarce resources will exacerbate existing tensions between the world's wealthiest 10 per cent, whose lifestyles contribute half of global carbon emissions, and the growing numbers of urban poor, who are responsible for only 10 per cent of carbon emissions (Oxfam, 2015).

If current trends continue, by 2030, humanity will need the equivalent of two Earths to support itself, according to some experts. This is clearly not viable in a world where climate change will make it even harder for the natural world to provide for our needs.

There are encouraging signs that society is beginning to understand the impact of our daily choices. Terms like “quality of life” and “sustainable lifestyles” regularly appear in the media, illustrating that people are already weaving sustainability into their daily

decision-making. Carbon footprinting, food waste reduction campaigns, urban gardening, vehicle sharing models, and surveys to understand the values and motivations of youth are all ways that are helping people to live more sustainable lifestyles.

Yet these actions, in general, are piecemeal. They are not yet framed within a holistic vision of what constitutes a sustainable lifestyle. Living sustainably is not just about individual choice: it is also about ensuring that governments and businesses enact policies that guide people towards these type of lifestyles. Often ignored is the role that public sector institutions can play in shaping better policy and the role of businesses in providing more sustainable goods and services.

Fortunately, sustainable lifestyles are now solidly anchored in policy. The COP21 Paris Agreement made it clear that sustainable lifestyles and sustainable patterns of consumption and production (SCP) will be key in the fight against climate change. The goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and intergovernmental processes like the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on SCP give further support to champions of sustainable lifestyles by acknowledging the powerful role they can play in lifting people out of poverty, ending hunger, and reducing inequality while protecting the environment. At least two of the eight themes at the World Economic Forum 2016 in Davos, Switzerland, highlighted the impacts of climate change on our lives and the effects of increasing wealth inequality on economic development. This clearly shows that sustainable consumption and lifestyles are growing in importance on the international stage.

With this solid foundation in place, it is now time to develop a more structured, life-cycle, and evidence-based understanding of sustainable lifestyles to facilitate global dialogue and measure progress. This will enable us to focus on the ‘hotspots’ on where critical action can be taken.


For individuals, this means understanding the impacts of their daily decisions and embracing more sustainable lifestyles. For governments, it implies setting a conducive regulatory context, facilitating and inspiring better citizen decision-making, creating market demand through sustainable public procurement, and supporting research, development, and innovation. For the private sector, it implies integrating sustainability into core business strategies to develop innovative ways to meet the needs of people while reducing the pressure on the world’s dwindling resources. This includes communicating about product

sustainability performance to enhance informed decision-making.

This publication contributes to this understanding. It reviews the current knowledge about what factors influence lifestyles and proposes strategies for assessing policies and developing necessary actions. The Refuse, Effuse, Diffuse (REDuse) framework, for example, facilitates individual actions and bottom-up initiatives. The Attitudes-Facilitators-Infrastructure (AFI) framework enables policymakers to assess policies and initiatives to develop sustainable lifestyles policies. Worksheets and examples illustrate how these approaches can be used to improve decisions related to the core lifestyle areas of food, mobility, housing, consumer goods and leisure.

We hope it will help policymakers, individuals, and other stakeholders understand what a holistic approach to lifestyle means and how different contexts require different lifestyle solutions. Sustainability is relative and it varies depending on geography and local conditions. As a result, this publication does not set out to define what “the” sustainable lifestyle looks like. Instead, it can help guide a range of initiatives that enable lifestyle choices that contribute to sustainability.

Simply put, if current trends continue, then the evidence says that there are not enough resources to meet the demands of consumers. So the vital question is: how can the way we live our lives – the hundreds of decisions we make every day as individuals and policymakers – be transformed into lifestyles that are sustainable? This publication is an evidence-based framework designed to engage in this dialogue.



Arab Hoballah



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