

Sustainable consumption and global equity: issues, key challenges and questions

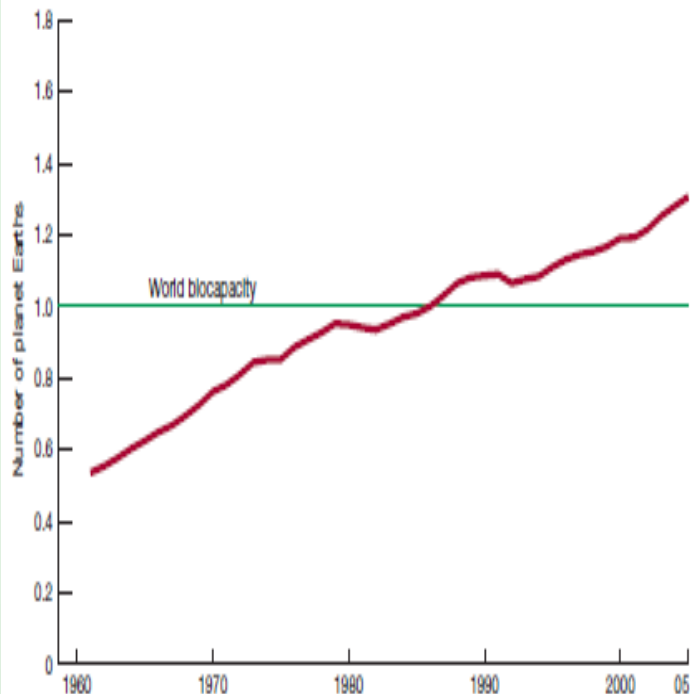
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**Stephen Spratt, Head of Sustainable
Markets, IIED**

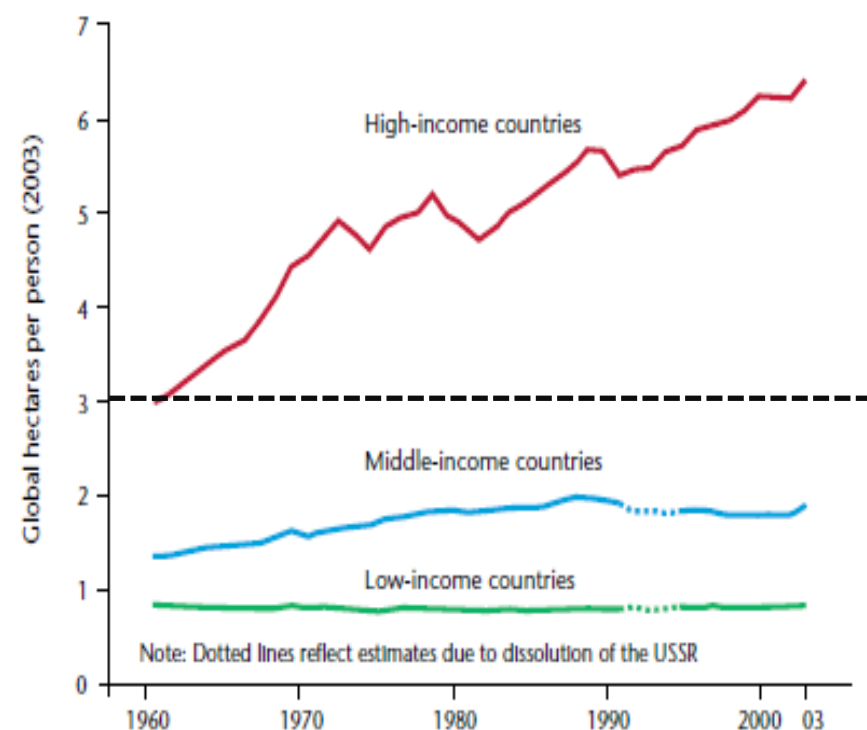
(un)sustainable consumption is breaching ecological limits

Fig. 2: HUMANITY'S ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT, 1961-2005



Source: WWF (2008)

Footprint by national average per person income, 1961-2003



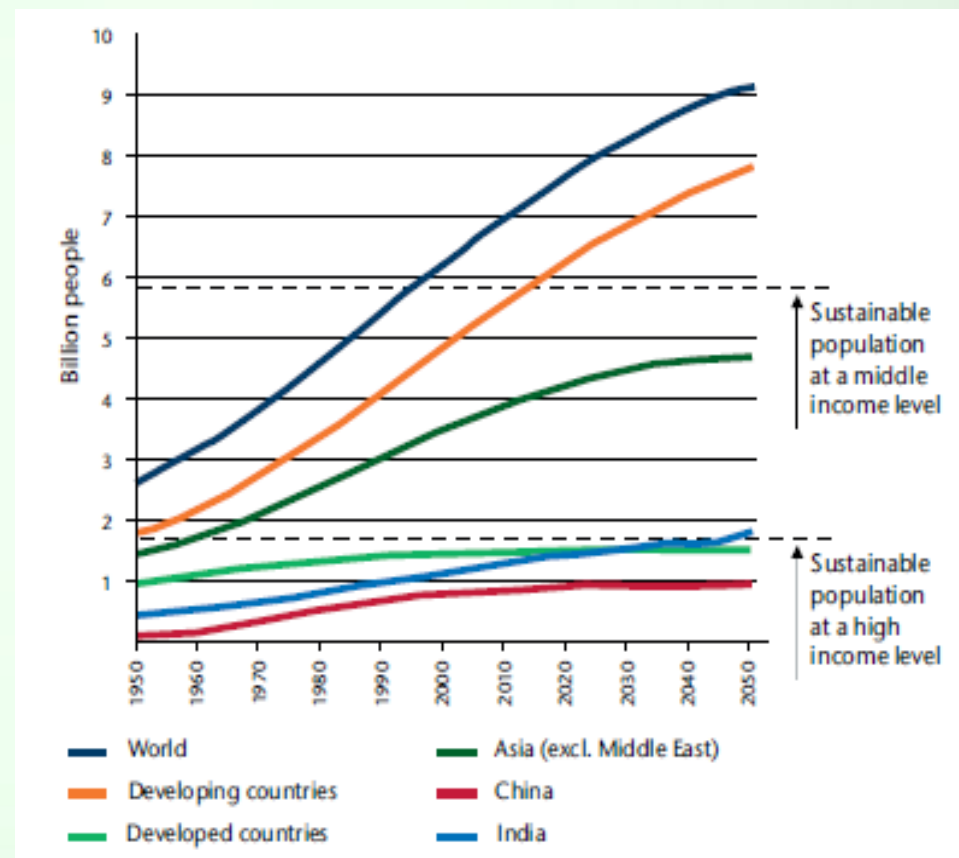
Source: WBCSD (2008)

The environmental foundations of MDGs are insecure

- 1: Eradicate poverty and hunger – **sustainable NRM**
- 2: Universal primary education – **sanitation / water / fuelwood**
- 3: Gender equality and empower women – **NR access**
- 4: Reduce child mortality – **sanitation / water**
- 5: Improve maternal health – **water / fuelwood**
- 6: Combat major diseases – **wat-san / biodiversity / climate**
- 7: Ensure env sustainability – **rights / accountability**
- 8: Global partnership – **manage global public goods (BD, CC)**

Over & under-consumption

- 400 million are obese, while almost a billion are undernourished
- Life expectancy in developed countries is about 80, in sub-Saharan Africa it is 52.
- MDGs targets on poverty, education, maternal mortality, sanitation and environment all likely to be missed



Source: WRI (2008)

“Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law”

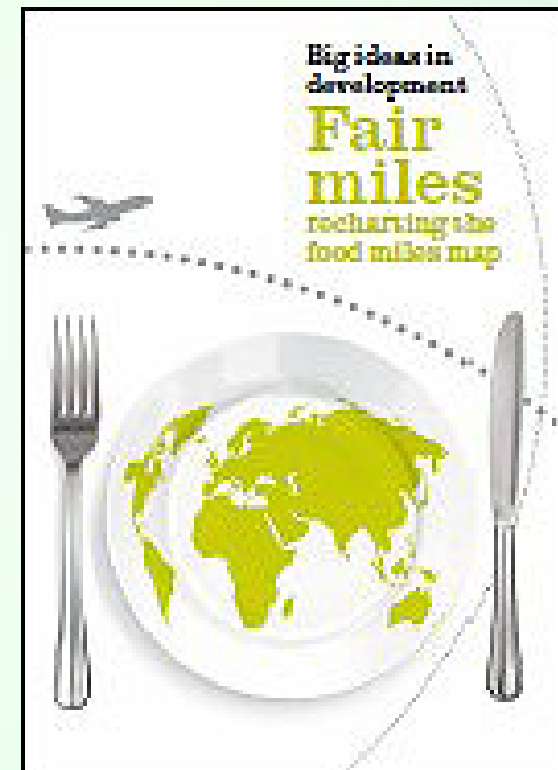
The ‘Categorical Imperative’ of Immanuel Kant, 1775
Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals

Tinkering is not enough

- ‘Sustainable consumption’ = real needs are met for everyone and **all** can aspire to the same standard of living
- Not possible with current production techniques
- ‘Relative decoupling’ shows no signs of becoming ‘absolute decoupling’
- The *Jevons Paradox* holds
- Developed economies are not reducing consumption
- We seem to be locked into a model of ever increasing energy and resource-intensive production and consumption

Unilateralism = unintended consequences

- ‘Sustainable consumption’ debate has been very Northern-focused
- The focus on reducing consumption seen as environmentally damaging can harm producers in developing countries
- But it is a global issue that goes to the heart of countries’ economic and social arrangements and interdependencies



Global problems need coordinated solutions

- 'Trickle down' global growth based on fossil-fuel powered energy and resource extraction not sustainable for people or the planet
- Finite resources need to be more equally shared
- We need international mechanisms to manage this if we are to avoid a 'grab' for resources
- And people need to participate fully in decision-making, locally, nationally and internationally
- *The invisible hand of the market is not enough; it needs the guiding hand of society (Adam Smith)*

Towards a 'green economy?'

- Growing sense that different economic model is needed to reorient away from consumption towards sustainable investment, 'green growth' and 'green jobs'. 5 Themes:
 1. Investment in low-carbon energy, transport, infrastructure
 2. OECD/G20 recovery packages and green investment
 3. Financial/corporate reform (financial/banking regulations, 'socially useful' finance, green markets; new business models/CSR)
 4. Intergovernmental strategies, studies, guidance on Green Economy (OECD, UNEP, UNDP, ILO, EC)
 5. NGO/think-tank visions and wellbeing measures

Sustainable consumption and a global green economy?

- As with the sustainable consumption discourse, green economy has been very Northern-centric
- Consumption needs to be sustainable globally – meeting needs and aspirations equitably within ecological limits
- Change may require a shift to a ‘green economy’ model:
 1. **Economic resilience**
 2. **Biosphere protection**
 3. **Equity and social justice**
- **... and accountability for 1-3 above**
(Green Economy Coalition)

Some (huge) unanswered questions

1. With finite resources, does more consumption in some countries automatically imply less elsewhere?
2. By what mechanisms can the enormous changes this implies be coordinated and realised, and how can global equity be enhanced and protected in the process?
3. Is this possible within our current economic arrangements, or is a coordinated shift to 'green economies', which reflect local priorities, needed?