

SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES & EDUCATION



Key insights

Sustainable lifestyles, including sustainable consumption patterns, are a key component of a global sustainability transition.

Sustainable lifestyles consist of innumerable personal decisions, but these choices are shaped and delimited by a range of factors that affecting attitudes, motivations, and the feasibility and accessibility of sustainable options.

Policy and business have abundant potential to support the uptake of sustainable lifestyles, guided by the AFI framework.

Photo by Patricia Vilchis Tella

A framework for policy-making to promote sustainable lifestyles

Lifestyles are shared patterns habits and patterns of behavior and consumption. They shape our choices, our identities, our relationships, our health – and our impact on the environment.

Daily life consists of innumerable personal decisions, and these choices are framed and guided by lifestyles. These lifestyles are in turn shaped and delimited by external factors: cultural, political, economic, historical, geographic, physical, social and environmental.

These external influences provide policymakers and businesses with many opportunities to support, facilitate and promote more sustainable lifestyles. Indeed, without their active help, transformative change to more sustainable consumption patterns and sustainable living is impossible.

This brief introduces a framework for understanding the factors that determine lifestyle choices. The framework can help to identify entry points for policies and measures that promote more sustainable lifestyles. The framework, called Attitudes-Facilitators-Infrastructure (AFI), was developed under the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP) Programme on Sustainable Lifestyles and Education.

Why promote sustainable lifestyles?

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.

Today, cities produce 60% to 80% of all greenhouse gas emissions, consume 75% of natural resources, and account for half of all waste (UNEP 2012b).

It has been estimated that by 2050, in a business-as-usual scenario, three planets' worth of resources will be required to support projected consumption levels (Global Footprint Network, n.d.). At the same time, inequality between and within countries is high and rising.

To head off looming environmental, resource and socio-economic crises, radical changes are needed in production-consumption systems. As part of that, lifestyles – particularly those of the urban middle class in industrialised countries, and increasingly elsewhere – must become more sustainable. This means minimising the use of natural resources and generation of pollution and waste, while supporting fairness and prosperity for all.

Creating sustainable lifestyles requires changes in social norms and in the design of the systems that support our lifestyles. It means rethinking our ways of living – including how we buy and organise our everyday lives. There are also implications for how we socialise, exchange, share, educate, and develop our identities. At the macro level, it is about transforming societies to better meet people's needs in balance with the natural environment.

Governments and institutions must provide the infrastructure and conditions to enable those sustainable choices and behaviours. At the same time, businesses have a key role to play in sustainable lifestyle transitions, by ensuring sustainable options are available, by taking responsibility for sustainability throughout the global value chain and in their marketing activities, and by working with consumers to introduce innovative business cases.



Photo by Patricia Vilchis Tella

Key lifestyles domains for a sustainability transition

A range of studies have identified three broad areas of economic activity responsible for the largest environmental and resource impacts: food and agriculture, housing and building construction, and mobility and transport. Studies have also highlighted the large footprints of consumer products and services, including those related to tourism and entertainment (UNEP 2016).

Based on this, we can identify five lifestyle domains that are priorities for sustainability. Water, energy and waste are cross-cutting elements that affect and are affected by almost every lifestyle domain. Table 1 summarizes the five domains and some of the most important factors (objective and subjective) that influence consumer choices.

| Domain | What's Included | Factors influencing consumers |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Food | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What we eat and drink • How it is produced, processed and provided • How we dispose of it | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost • Freshness • Health impacts • Presentation (e.g. packaging) Place of origin • Convenience, taste and culture |
| Housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where we live, • Building materials • How we heat, light and cool our living spaces • How we decorate and choice of fixtures and fittings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost and size of the building • Building characteristics • The neighbourhood and available amenities • Aesthetics |
| Mobility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The forms of transport we choose for day-to-day journeys and longer trips • How often we travel and the distance travelled, as well as the supporting systems and infrastructure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost • Preference • Traffic conditions • Convenience, time efficiency, Connectedness • Environmental impacts |
| Consumer goods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The types of product we buy • The type and quantity of materials used to produce goods • How we use goods • How often we replace them | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost • Convenience • Time • Peer competition • Aspiration • Cultural norms • Appearance • Function |
| Leisure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How we spend leisure time • Our choice of tourism destinations and activities • The facilities we use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost • Convenience • Time • Peer competition, Recommendations • Aspiration • Cultural norms |

Motivations, drivers and determinants of lifestyles

To have more effective sustainable lifestyles policies and practices, it is critical to understand what lies behind people's consumption choices and related behaviours – especially the external, contextual factors that might be responsive to policy. These influences are inevitably complex, overlapping and interlinked. One way to do this is to break these interlinked influences down into motivations, drivers, and determinants. Figure 1 illustrates these three categories and how they relate to each other.

Motivations are the immediate preferences and pressures that compel people and communities to take certain actions or make certain decisions; for example the desire to spend time with friends and family, or the appeal of an effectively marketed product. The motivations for consumption are generally to meet basic needs, to fulfil social expectations, and to satisfy values, desires and aspirations. They can be influenced by advertising and marketing, as well as peer relations and social expectations. However, motivations can also be shaped or frustrated by practical limitations; for example if there is poor local public transport access.

Drivers are the circumstances that support motivations, normalising or facilitating them; for example, cultural norms or marketing. Lifestyles and consumption are governed by a set of complex and dynamic drivers that reflect both the personal situation (e.g. income, identity, individual taste and values) and external socio-technical and economic conditions (e.g. culture, social context, peer pressure). There are also physical or natural boundaries that allow or constrain lifestyle options. Studies on consumer decision-making in several fields show that cognitive abilities; psychological, social, and economic factors; and policy and institutional frameworks all come into play, highlighting that driving factors behind lifestyles are interlinked, and sometimes contradictory.

Determinants are super-factors that determine the possibility of particularly lifestyles or consumer action. They can fall into three categories:

Attitudes. Attitudes are clusters of factors that contribute to a person's overall values and affect how likely they are to make certain consumption choices. They are influenced by, for example, education, religion, social norms, awareness campaigns, professional ethos, media, and the attitudes of family members and peers. Pro-sustainability attitudes tend to go hand-in-hand with other attitudes such as supporting animal rights and social justice. However, other attitudes and values, such as thrift, might also support more sustainable lifestyles.

The key stakeholders to target with interventions in this area include policy-makers, business leaders, communities, and individual citizens.

Facilitators (access). Facilitators are factors that contribute to the feasibility and accessibility of sustainable lifestyle choices. Institutional arrangements are critical facilitators, and include laws and regulations, administrative procedures, subsidies and rewards, and taxes and other penalties. Not only can they directly facilitate sustainable choices, they can also, for example, encourage businesses to develop and market more sustainable products and services at competitive prices, or employers to provide more sustainable workplaces. Individual purchasing power, availability of time, social networks, and cognitive and physical abilities are all factors that can contribute to access.

Infrastructure. In the AFI framework, "infrastructure" refers to the products and services being consumed, as well as the physical infrastructure and related services that can enable and support more sustainable behaviour. Infrastructure can be thought of as falling within each of the five key lifestyle domains described in the table above. It encompasses not just physical objects and systems, but also service delivery. Infrastructure around housing and transportation, for example, would need to be accessible, safe, comfortable and dependable.

In order for infrastructure to enable people to make more sustainable lifestyle choices, it must itself be as sustainable as possible. This includes materials and building methods, impact on natural ecosystems and communities, energy consumption, logistics and supply chains. e.

Because much infrastructure is built for long-term use, it tends to lock users into particular behaviour patterns. Thus, it represents opportunities for pro-sustainability measures with large-scale impact.



FACTORS INFLUENCING SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND LIFESTYLES



Figure 1. Motivations, drivers and determinants Influencing lifestyles and consumption

From framework to action

Armed with a better understanding of the factors that influence lifestyles, it is possible to design sustainable lifestyles interventions more strategically.

The AFI framework covers the range of determinants of sustainable lifestyle choices – system-level macro-factors that are largely beyond the individual's control: pro-sustainability attitudes, accessibility of more sustainable options, and the supporting infrastructure.

It can reveal many opportunities for top-down interventions that can have a major influence on the viability and

attractiveness of sustainable lifestyle choices. These interventions could be at the level of government policy, business models, and institutional arrangements. Their ultimate aim would be to “edit out” unsustainable options and to make sustainable lifestyles the default (Akenji 2014).

Figure 2 illustrates the AFI framework including key contributing factors.



Figure 2. The AFI framework

The AFI framework can help align policy objectives and interventions. AFI can also be used to develop actions corresponding to key domains where consumption has high

environmental impacts. Table 2 is an example of how the AFI can be used to support thinking and assessing interventions, including some examples.

| Lifestyle domain | Facilitator | Infrastructure |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Food | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taxation for unhealthy food products • Incentives for restaurants to combat food waste | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide spaces for peri-urban and community agriculture • Create local or farmers' markets (in prime locations) |
| Housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive pricing for sustainable options • Develop efficiency-based building and home renovation standards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning and urban planning laws to allow better coordination of residential, mobility, leisure and work services, and infrastructure • Provide spaces for peri-urban and community agriculture • Promotion of local (community) renewable energy |
| Mobility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toll and congestion charges • Incentives for cycling • Incentives for companies to promote home-office solutions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning and urban planning laws to allow better coordination of residential, mobility, leisure and work services and infrastructure • Prioritisation of railway systems and mass transit over infrastructure for private cars |
| Consumer goods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice editing: set minimum sustainability standards for products • Tighten credit card and abusive consumer loan schemes • Long product warranties and ensure reparability • "Non-eco" labels (red stickers!) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centres for repair and used-goods • Training centres for life skills (e.g. sewing, gardening, home repairs) |
| Leisure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of domestic/local tourism • Incentives for community activities, cultural activities/sports voluntary groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public green spaces and recreational centres |

However, top-down efforts to change lifestyles will only succeed if they are harmonised with and complemented by civil society efforts. It is therefore important to also support and promote bottom-up approaches (Heiskanen et al. 2011), including social innovation, social movements, grassroots experiments, and actions that directly empower individuals and households in their daily lives (and, indirectly, communities). Such approaches can help individuals to understand, create and/or choose more sustainable lifestyle options. City governments, for example, can set up these kinds of 'facilitators' to create more enabling environments for such efforts.

Finally, it is important to note that sustainable lifestyles do not always have to involve new ways of doing things. Any sustainable lifestyle intervention should as far as possible build on, respond to and interact with existing lifestyles, attitudes and structures. Traditional practices, older technologies, and fulfilling lifestyles with low levels of consumption can also be instructive in formulating large-scale solutions.

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For more information please contact: patricia.vilchis.tella@sei.org & sl@iges.or.jp

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