



## SDG 12: Progress, gaps and recommendations for the UK

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As the world's economy and population continue to grow and with it the subsequent demand for resources, to achieve sustainable development by 2030 requires drastic changes in the way we consume and produce both goods and resources. For example, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)'s Living Planet Report in 2018 shows population sizes of wildlife decreased by 60% globally between 1970 and 2014.<sup>1</sup> This shocking finding has major implications for delivering the SDGs given that the natural world underpins our lives and economies. Human behaviour has driven this decline, and patterns of consumption and production are the major cause.

Decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation is one of the most critical and complex challenges facing humanity today, requiring political leadership that will effectively transform both business practices and individual consumption. Given its relatively high levels of wealth and income, the highly-industrialised nature of its society and its technological capacity to accelerate the development of greener technologies, the UK is in a unique position to champion sustainable consumption and production (SCP) worldwide. However, the UK government rarely refers to SCP domestically or internationally. The first and last time a definition for SCP was set out was in 2003.<sup>2</sup> This is despite the growing bank of evidence highlighting the effects our overconsumption is having and will continue to have on the environment, resulting in a growing demand from consumers for governments and businesses to act more sustainably.

Whilst the UK government has recently published two domestic SCP-relevant strategies, there is currently no recognition of SCP, or sustainability more broadly, within DFID's five headline priorities.<sup>3</sup> **Goal 12** is one of only two goals, along with **Goal 15**, that is not referenced in them.<sup>4</sup>

There is a worrying lack of prioritisation or even recognition of the benefits of taking action to address SCP, including the pivotal role DFID can play in achieving it globally through ODA spending and engagement in global multilateral institutions. The UK government, through DFID, should recognise the interlinked nature of **Goal 12**, whereby progress here can accelerate progress on other goals, such as decent economic growth (**Goal 8**) and climate action (**Goal 13**).

There is very little data publicly accessible on the work that the UK government has done since 2015 to help achieve **Goal 12** worldwide. One example of UK leadership in tackling unsustainable global consumption and production is a 2015 partnership between the UK and UN Environment to fund the Global Industrial Symbiosis Programme. This was designed to help participating countries increase their ambition in reducing emissions and help deliver actions under the 10 Year Framework for Programmes on SCP (10YFP).<sup>5</sup>

1. <https://www.worldwildlife.org/pages/living-planet-report-2018>  
2. <https://www.uksssd.co.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=12f0ad5f-7eb7-41b3-a9e5-125e38f42318> (Chapter 12)

3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/clean-growth-strategy>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-international-development-single-departmental-plan/department-for-international-development-single-departmental-plan-december-2018#dfids-objectives>

4. Ibid.

5. <https://www.international-synergies.com/projects/global-industrial-symbiosis-programme-gisp/>

### Target 12.1:

**Implement the 10YFP, all countries taking action, with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries.**

The 10YFP is a global commitment to accelerate progress towards achieving **Goal 12**, and the One Planet Network is a network designed to convene and mobilise action for implementation.<sup>6</sup> To date, no government department, neither DFID nor the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), has published comprehensive enough information about how the UK engages with the 10YFP.

Playing a leading role in building the strength of the 10YFP as a convening platform for stakeholders to share innovative solutions towards greater SCP would bring benefits for the UK, enhancing its global credibility and providing growth opportunities globally for British businesses and institutions using the technological capacity and expertise that exists within the UK. Upgrading the UK's role within the Framework should feature centrally within a newly published government action plan on SCP to unify national and global SCP incentives in a coherent way.

### Target 12.2:

**By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.**

The current model of economic development championed by DFID in its EDS does not pay sufficient attention to the role of natural resources and systems in underpinning economic activity, nor does it commit to ensuring that global patterns of consumption and production are environmentally sustainable.

Currently, the UK government's economic strategy is based on and facilitates an unsustainable economic system. DFID must build sustainability considerations more systematically into its EDS by recognising the overarching importance of ensuring the environmental sustainability of partner countries' development trajectories. Failure to do so will not only lock countries into outdated, unsustainable technologies and growth models, but will in turn severely hamper global progress towards many of the other SDGs, particularly **Goals 8 and 13**.

6. <http://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/who-we-are>

### Target 12.6:

**Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle; and Target 12.a: Support developing countries to strengthen their scientific and technological capacity to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production.**

The UK provides some of the world's most innovative ideas and technologies in the field of sustainability in British business and civil society. Using its financial support and political leverage, the UK government should prioritise the mobilisation of those organisations and institutions able to provide key technological and logistical support to help both governments and private sector companies develop more sustainable practices.

DFID funding can be hard for small businesses in the Global South to access, for example because of extensive due diligence requirements, and greater steps should be taken to ensure funding opportunities are accessible for smallholder producers to help improve their capacity to move towards SCP.

In conjunction with this, the UK government should make it a requirement that all large British companies report comprehensively on their sustainability impacts in line with the SDGs, given the global footprint of British businesses.<sup>7</sup>

### Target 12.7:

**Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities.**

Domestically, the government has implemented its Greening Government Commitments 2016 to 2020 policy, whereby government procurers "must ensure they buy more sustainable and efficient products and engage with suppliers to understand and reduce the impacts of their supply chains."<sup>8</sup>

While most procurement is done at the local level, its impact is felt internationally due to the globalisation of supply chains. The UK government must raise awareness of the global impact that supply chains increasingly have on the environment across its Whitehall departments, by requiring all public procurement measures to consider and report on their social and environmental sustainability. This should be

7. <https://www.ukssd.co.uk/measuringup>

8. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/greening-government-commitments-2016-to-2020/greening-government-commitments-2016-to-2020>

linked explicitly to the achievement of the SDGs, beyond just a footnote as in the recent Ministry of Justice 2018 Guidance Document, to ensure that the UK plays its part in driving sustainable public procurement practices worldwide that are critical to achieving Goal 12.<sup>9</sup>



### Target 12.8:

**By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.**

Recognising the importance of empowering individuals to make more sustainable consumption choices, the UK government should champion the uptake of initiatives, such as eco-labelling or certification schemes, that spread awareness of the impact a certain product or service has on the environment. The UK can take immediate steps on the global stage to accelerate progress towards this Target, by supporting existing initiatives that facilitate awareness on living in harmony with nature. These could include securing a global ban on cosmetics animal testing, promoting sustainable palm oil options in UK supermarkets and providing greater funding to Fairtrade certified farmers, as well as taking a leading role within the 10YFP's sustainable lifestyles and education programme.



### Target 12.c:

**Rationalise inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption by removing market distortions, in accordance with national circumstances, including by restructuring taxation and phasing out those harmful subsidies, where they exist, to reflect their environmental impacts, taking fully into account the specific needs and conditions of developing countries and minimising the possible adverse impacts on their development in a manner that protects the poor and the affected communities.**

The UK government continues to spend billions of pounds each year on fossil fuel subsidies, through official ODA finance as well as non-ODA sources, such as multilateral banks like UK Export Finance. For example, in 2015-16, the UK spent \$11bn in government support for the production and consumption of oil, gas and coal both at home and abroad.<sup>10</sup> The UK government should lead by example in the transition towards a more renewable energy-based society by addressing its continuing fiscal and public finance support to fossil fuels since the Paris Climate Agreement was signed

in 2016. DFID in particular should use its influence with MDBs, as well as other donors and financial institutions, to champion a shift in their portfolios towards investment in renewables, away from coal and other fossil fuels (see more in **Goal 7** and **Goal 13**).

As a member of the EU, the UK contributed to several EU policies and initiatives addressing SCP and Agenda 2030, such as the SWITCH to Green Initiative and EU Cities for Fair and Ethical Trade Award.<sup>11</sup> Following the UK's departure from the EU, we hope to see continued close alignment of sustainability policies in partnership with the Union, and that it continues to set and meet high-level standards for carbon emission reductions, green energy subsidies and other areas that will help achieve **Goal 12**.

#### To achieve Goal 12, the UK government should:

- Lead by example in the transition towards a more renewable energy-based society by ending fossil fuel subsidies. Instead fund renewable and sustainable energy sources.
- Require all large British companies to report comprehensively on their sustainability impacts in line with the SDGs, given the global footprint of British businesses.
- Upgrade the UK's role within the One Planet Network, formed to support implementation of the 10YFP, to play a leading role in the global transition towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns. Champion and create a supportive environment, through incentivisation and subsidies, for companies to spread awareness and empower consumers with information, through certification schemes and eco-labelling for example.
- Build sustainability considerations more systematically into DFID's EDS by recognising the overarching importance of ensuring that partner countries' development trajectories are environmentally sustainable.
- Amend funding and procurement opportunities to ensure they are accessible for smallholder producers in the Global South to help improve their capacity to move towards SCP.

This chapter is part of Bond's report, **The UK's global contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals**.

Access the rest of the report at [bond.org.uk/UK-global-contribution-SDGs](https://bond.org.uk/UK-global-contribution-SDGs)  
Bond is the UK network for organisations working in international development. [Bond.org.uk](https://bond.org.uk)

9. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ministry-of-justice-and-the-environment>  
10. <https://www.odi.org/publications/11131-g7-fossil-fuel-subsidy-scorecard>

11. <https://www.switchtogreen.eu/?p=128>; <https://www.trade-city-award.eu/>