

Rethink consumption, production

Doris Viljoen

In the latter part of 2018 the world reached a significant milestone. For the first time in recent history, the poverty profile had somewhat widened.

Up to now, people living in poverty outnumbered those in the middle and higher-income brackets. This trend is expected to continue, with increasing numbers of people projected to reach middle income in the near future. Estimates of 4 billion by 2020 and 5,3 billion by 2030 are frequently cited.

Middle income is a special space in terms of consumer behaviour; it is the point where a person has discretionary income (a bit of extra money to buy stuff). Products that are high on the list of stuff to buy are cars, furniture, household appliances, more clothes, holidays, processed food and

technological devices.

This is exciting news for the providers of these products, but not for the earth. These new buyers will put significant extra strain on the resources of our planet.

At our current levels of consumption we are already using up more resources than what the earth can replace. Earth Overshoot Day is a calculation by scientists to indicate the day in a particular year when we have used up the resources that the earth can replace in one year.

In 2018, this day was on 1 August. Different societies use different quantities of resources. For instance, if everyone used resources the way



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Americans do, Earth Overshoot Day would have been on 15 March 2018, while if everyone used resources the way Jamaicans do, it would have been on 13 December 2018.

This follows from a collection of 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 and known as "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" or in short the "2030 Agenda."

With the focus on goal number 12, Responsible Consumption and Production, the Institute for Futures Research (IFR) at Stellenbosch University will be keeping its fingers on

the pulse of three emerging trends in this regard:

How business models will adapt: We are already seeing business models changing and leaders thinking about the longer-term environmental and social influence of their strategies.

How the single-use packaging space will develop: The reaction against the use of plastics and straws has cleared the way for a re-think of all single-use packaging. (Actually, we will and should re-think single-use EVERYTHING.)

How people decide to do less: This implies less processed food, fewer items of clothing per person, and fewer household items.

Both producers and consumers should increasingly focus on quality rather than quantity. So here's to doing less in 2019!

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