

What are the connections between the Sustainable Development Goals?



In 2015, all 193 UN Member States agreed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, focused around 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), calling for global action on issues such as poverty, gender equality, biodiversity and energy. From their conception, the [SDGs](#) were designed to be interconnected and indivisible. We cannot achieve ‘responsible consumption and production’, for example, if we have not achieved ‘gender equality’. Take the example of fast fashion. The fashion industry is responsible for around 10% of global carbon emissions (**SDG 7&13**), this is more than all international aviation and shipping combined ([EAC, 2019](#)). The lifecycle of one pair of jeans can use up to as much as 3000 litres of water (**SDG6**). Micro-fibres that are released from our clothes every time we wash them seep into water systems and are swallowed by marine animals and then spread around other parts of the ecosystem (**SDG 14&15**). These fibres have been found as far afield as the Arctic ([EAC, 2019](#)).

Garment workers who are linked to fast fashion supply chains often work in appalling conditions (**SDG 8, 9 &10**). In 2013, the Rana Plaza factory collapse killed over 1100 people, with unions at the time referring to it as ‘mass industrial homicide’ ([Safi & Rushe, 2018](#)). The garments that were being made in the factory have been linked to companies such as Primark and the Italian company, Benetton (**SDG 12**). Women comprise approximately 80% (**SDG5**) of the global garment workforce ([ILO, 2020](#)). Most recently, Covid 19 has shone a light on some of the illegal practices happening here in the UK. Factories in Leicester, linked to fast fashion chain, Boohoo, allegedly continued to force staff to work throughout the pandemic, even if they displayed symptoms of the virus ([Labour Behind the Label, 2020](#)) (**SDG3**). Those working there were reportedly receiving less than the minimum wage ([EAC, 2019](#)) (**SDG1&2**). More needs to be done to support citizens in the UK, the biggest consumer of fast fashion in Europe, to reflect on the impacts of their consumption choices and to empower them to do things differently (**SDG 4**). Alongside this we need robust national and international legislation that targets practices that are harmful to people and planet (**SDG 16&17**).

Recommendations for further reading:

- Meadows, D. & Wright, D. (ed.) (2008), *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*. Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company

References:

[Environmental Audit Committee, \(2019\), *Fixing Fashion: clothing consumption and sustainability*. House of Commons, London, Available from: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmenvaud/1952/1952.pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmenvaud/1952/1952.pdf)

[International Labour Organisation, \(2020\), *Gendered impacts of COVID-19 on the garment sector*. Available from: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_760374.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_760374.pdf)

[Labour Behind the Label, \(2020\), *Boohoo & Covid-19: the people behind the costs*. Available from: https://labourbehindthelabel.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/LBL-Boohoo-WEB.pdf](https://labourbehindthelabel.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/LBL-Boohoo-WEB.pdf)

[Safi, M. & Rushe, D. \(2018\), 'Rana Plaza, five years on: safety of workers hangs in balance in Bangladesh', *Guardian*, 24.04.2018. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/apr/24/bangladeshi-police-target-garment-workers-union-rana-plaza-five-years-on](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/apr/24/bangladeshi-police-target-garment-workers-union-rana-plaza-five-years-on)