

## Critical Analysis of SDG Twelve By Teagan Lee

### **Goal Twelve: Sustainable Consumption and Production.**

#### **Target 12.3**

Sustainable development goal (SDG) 12 focusses on sustainable consumption and production. The main objective is to reduce resource use, degradation and pollution. The goal is split into varying targets. I have chosen to review target 12.3: *By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses*

This year the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) published the following food waste facts:

- Each year, an estimated one third of all food produced finds its way to consumer and retailer garbage, or spoils due to poor transportation and harvesting practices,
- Yearly, 3 billion tonnes of food are wasted while virtually 1 billion people are undernourished and another 1 billion are hungry.
- Misuse of natural resources through land degradation, declining soil fertility, unsustainable water use, overfishing and marine environment degradation have impacted the ability of the natural resource base to supply food.

My thoughts and feelings are in line with FAO's statement. I have witnessed the impacts of unsustainable practices at home and abroad. Food waste and food loss is especially devastating for vulnerable populations from aboriginal Canadians in the far north to citizens in developing nations.

#### **Zambia: A Closer Look at a Developing Country**

A Times of Zambia article stated that Zambia grapples namely with the challenge of food waste. The most affected parts in the country are rural areas where there are no roads or grain storage facilities. In addition, when villages do have access to such amenities the high cost of transport and fuel greatly affect farmer's incomes. The increased pressure on farmers to produce more for less impacts the cost of the final product creating food scarcity. During my time here, I have witnessed how hikes in food prices and limited food reserves affect people's lives.

Another factor to consider is the plethora of insects and microorganisms thriving in Sub-Saharan climates. Just the other day, I found some lovely worms in my flour and baking soda bringing an end to any thoughts of banana cake.

When food cannot be sold it ends up in the garbage because things spoil quickly. In fact, a lot of food spoils before it even reaches the market. Thus further food loss comes from a lack of food preservation. Efforts to preserve food are minimal partially because traditional foods are not typically sundried or canned. Moreover, most Zambians do not have access to refrigeration. Thus most available foodstuffs must be used before they go to waste, and the excess is left to expire.

### **Tackling Target 12.3 in Canada**

As a developed country, Canada has a responsibility to mitigate climate change and preserve the environment. In regards to target 12.3, we need to concentrate on food loss and food waste not because we can't prevent food spoilage but because we are excessive and unrestrained when wasting food.

Livia Bizikova and Peter Denton stated in their paper "A Global Call to End Wasteful Consumption and Production", that Canadians need to reduce waste through prevention and continue to "reduce, reuse and recycle". In addition, they argue that Canadians need to "improve the environmentally sound life cycle management of what we produce." As a Canadian, I feel the atmosphere trends towards "greening" our food. Groceries stores carry organic and low carbon options, yet the majority of the population opts for products that save the bank not the environment.

Bizikova and Denton also state that global waste production has increased in the past few decades while recycling rates have decreased. The David Suzuki Foundation estimates almost half of all global food production is wasted. In North America, food waste accounts for approximately a third of food grown, produced or transported. In addition, the foundation highlighted that single-family households in the Toronto area discard about 275 kilos of food yearly.

When it comes to sustainable consumption and production, Canada does not have a good track record. Take the Alberta tar sands for instance. They are an ongoing environmental disaster and, although the tar sands produce oil rather than food, they can show the legislative and systemic process of making a product for consumption in Canada. Legislation regarding the tar sands does not favour sustainable practices or the environment.

Canada lacks strong sustainable consumption and production legislation as well as any system for tracking current national data on waste management. As Bizikova and Denton stress, problem areas are difficult to identify. Yet, Canada holds a unique position when it comes to addressing goal 12. We can mitigate and avoid most food waste. We simply need to plan to prevent waste and improve our food storage skills.

### **Different Directions: Canada and Zambia Navigate the Road to Goal 12**

Sustainable consumption and production differ greatly between developed and developing countries. Canada is able to act on issues that would not be considered in Zambia. For instance we are able to run recycling plants or roadside cleanup programs. Such programs would require resources that Zambia does not have. The SDGs are designed to involve all participating countries. Goal 12 shows how dramatically different the overall aims of each country can be.

### **In Sum**

Target 12.3 aims to halve global food waste and reduce food waste. Over-consumption is the main issue in Canada. We have so much food that we throw almost half of it away. In Zambia food waste or loss is due to inefficient production systems and a lack of knowledge around food preservation. If we want to improve the quality of life for all people then we need to find ways of using resources efficiently, generating less waste and encouraging a more

equitable standard of living. Whether in a developed or developing nation sustainable consumption and production requires a change in social understanding of waste. Social behaviours, mores and norms need to shift from encouraging food waste to minimizing it.