

# TACKLING OVERCONSUMPTION

## INTRODUCTION

Is it time for philanthropy to acknowledge excess levels of material consumption as a driver of climate change and biodiversity loss, to be bolder in naming the problems associated with this, and more strategic in mobilising grants programmes in response?

This is a survey of foundation staff, leaders and boards, to gather baseline data on how the sector views the challenge of overconsumption. The more responses we get the more useful the findings are likely to be for the philanthropic community, so please do take 20 minutes to share your views.

The survey is comprised of a page with five short questions, followed by four more detailed questions, each with some 'context' and a 'proposition.' The context paragraphs and propositions relate to 'hot topics' in debates on overconsumption. This is followed by a concluding page that asks about your role and affiliation.

The survey can be completed anonymously, or there is an option to leave your contact details, which will enable us to send you the results directly, and to invite you to a webinar to share and discuss the findings with other funders.

## SECTION 1 (OF 6)

Here we ask your views on the importance of addressing overconsumption, for examples of any work you have supported on this theme, and for your thoughts on the barriers to supporting such work.

**Proposition: A sustainable future requires a fundamental shift away from the levels of resource consumption that characterise rich world economies and lifestyles.**

- Q1.** To what extent do you personally agree with this proposition? (1 = not at all, 10 = completely agree)
- Q2.** If you work with a philanthropic sector organisation (for instance, as staff member or trustee), to what extent do you think others working at your organisation agree with the proposition? *FULLY / PARTLY / NOT AT ALL / DON'T KNOW / NOT RELEVANT / OTHER*
- Q3.** [Optional question] If you have ever funded any work relating to overconsumption, please describe briefly what that involved (or provide links to projects) *TEXT BOX*
- Q4.** If your organisation is not yet active in funding work around overconsumption then what is it that holds you back, or makes this unappealing? If you are funding such work then what have you found to be the biggest challenges in

doing so? *THREE TEXT BOXES (BARRIER 1/CHALLENGE 1, BARRIER 2/CHALLENGE 2, BARRIER 3/CHALLENGE 3)*

- Q5.** [Optional question] Whether or not you agree with the proposition above, what barriers do you see to the philanthropic sector as a whole working more actively on overconsumption, and how might those barriers be overcome?  
*TEXT BOX*

## **SECTION 2 (OF 6)**

**Context:** “Sustainable living” tends to make us think of lifestyles based on renewable energy and electrified transport, especially in the Global North. But extraction of raw materials for the renewable energy transition is leading to severe social and environmental harm, especially in the Global South, with the United Nations predicting that extraction will increase 60% by 2060<sup>i</sup>.

**Climate justice requires rapid reductions in materials use in the Global North, to avert ‘green colonialism’ based on an extractivist model. Such a model can lead to significant harms being experienced by people who have done the least to cause the climate crisis, and who are least equipped to deal with its consequences.**

**Proposition:** In order to address social and environmental injustice, funders need to incorporate consumption reduction strategies (in richer populations) into their work.

**Q6.** On a scale of 1-10 (where 1 = strongly disagree and 10 = strongly agree) please let us know what you think about this **proposition**, by responding to these prompts. *1-10 GRID*

- a) I personally agree with the proposition
- b) Many funders and grantees agree with this
- c) Although funders are aware of this they cannot/do not want to focus on it
- d) We already fund groups working on this challenge
- e) I wish we could fund groups working on this challenge

Comments box:

## **SECTION 3 (OF 6)**

**Context:** For the richest 10% of the global population, limiting global heating to 1.5°C requires consumption emissions to be reduced to about a tenth of their current level by 2030, while the emissions of the poorest 50% could still increase by two to three times their current level, such that they can attain basic levels of wellbeing.<sup>ii</sup>

**Proposition:** Funders should demonstrate their commitment to fair and sustainable societies by supporting work on choice editing, pushing governments to restrict or ban environmentally harmful products and services, including private jets, mega yachts, second homes, excessive meat consumption, frequent flying, and fast fashion.

**Q7.** On a scale of 1-10 (where 1 = strongly disagree and 10 = strongly agree) please let us know what you think about this **proposition**, by responding to these prompts. *1-10 GRID*

- a) I personally agree with the proposition
- b) Many funders and grantees agree with this
- c) Although funders are aware of this they cannot/do not want to focus on it
- d) We already fund groups working on this challenge
- e) I wish we could fund groups working on this challenge

Comments box:

#### **SECTION 4 (OF 6)**

**Context:** There are currently few limits on an individual's right to emit carbon or use resources, although discussions about limits to consumption are gaining momentum. The need for carbon rationing is central to these discussions, because perceived fairness is essential for policy acceptance.<sup>iii</sup> Trials, testing, and research are needed to understand how carbon rationing could be effectively implemented, and how public acceptance could be secured.

**Proposition:** Philanthropic foundations should immediately invest in a global programme of research and experimentation to develop the concept of personal carbon rationing.

**Q8.** On a scale of 1-10 (where 1 = strongly disagree and 10 = strongly agree) please let us know what you think about this **proposition**, by responding to these prompts. *1-10 GRID*

- a) I personally agree with the proposition
- b) Many funders and grantees agree with this
- c) Although funders are aware of this they cannot/do not want to focus on it
- d) We already fund groups working on this challenge
- e) I wish we could fund groups working on this challenge

Comments box:

#### **SECTION 5 (OF 6)**

**Context:** In order to achieve the reductions in resource consumption needed to limit climate change and protect biodiversity it will not be enough to concentrate on improving the 'efficiency' of products and services, since we have known for more than a century that efficiency gains can easily be outweighed by increased consumption.<sup>iv</sup>

**Absolute reductions also require 'sufficiency' approaches which respect the limits created by planetary boundaries. This implies a profound shift in values, in which we replace society's emphasis on growth, profitability and material consumption with a**

**focus on true quality of life factors including safe and purposeful work, health care, and access to and participation in cultural activities and family life.**

**Proposition: There is a need to significantly scale up philanthropic support for work on sufficiency approaches, even if that means moving funding away from a focus on efficiency.**

**Q9.** On a scale of 1-10 (where 1 = strongly disagree and 10 = strongly agree) please let us know what you think about this **proposition**, by responding to these prompts. *1-10 GRID*

- a) I personally agree with the proposition
- b) Many funders and grantees agree with this
- c) Although funders are aware of this they cannot/do not want to focus on it
- d) We already fund groups working on this challenge
- e) I wish we could fund groups working on this challenge

Comments box:

## **SECTION 6 (OF 6): CLOSING QUESTIONS**

Through this survey we are exploring attitudes to overconsumption in the philanthropic community, and we hope to gauge interest in further work to reduce consumption levels. We are particularly keen to test assumptions about how attitudes towards tackling overconsumption may differ among funders located in different parts of the world, and between larger and smaller funders. We completely understand if you need to be anonymous to answer the questions candidly, your response is still extremely valuable to us. If you feel you can share information about your role, your organisation, and the country in which you are based, then that will help us to produce more useful insights for the philanthropy sector.

Sharing your contact details will allow us to send you the results directly and invite you to a webinar to share and discuss the findings with other funders from around the world.

**Q10.** Which best describes your role within your organisation? *RADIO BUTTONS*

- A) Staff member; B) Senior leadership team; C) Board member or trustee; D) Philanthropy adviser or consultant; E) Philanthropy network coordinator; F) High net worth individual/ donor; G) Other (please use comments box below to explain)

Comments box

**Q11.** [Optional question] Affiliation and contact information<sup>v</sup> *TEXT BOXES*

Your name:

Name of your organisation:

Country:

Email address:

Would you be interested in learning more about these issues alongside foundation peers? Y/N  
**RADIO BUTTON**

## **THANK YOU**

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer these questions, your responses are greatly appreciated. Please encourage your colleagues and other funder contacts to take part, but please do not share the survey with your grantees or the general public.

If you have shared your contact details, we will be back in contact with a summary of the findings in due course.

## **END OF SURVEY**

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<sup>i</sup> United Nations, *Global Resource Outlook* as reported here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/jan/31/raw-materials-extraction-2060-un-report>

<sup>ii</sup> Oxfam, (2020), “*Confronting Carbon Inequality in the European Union*” 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2020.

<https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/confronting-carbon-inequality-euro-pean-union>

<sup>iii</sup> Nathan Wood, Rob Lawlor & Josie Freear (2023) Rationing and Climate Change Mitigation\*, Ethics, Policy & Environment, DOI: 10.1080/21550085.2023.2166342

<sup>iv</sup> See for example: Jevons, W. S. (1866). The coal question; an inquiry concerning the progress of the nation and the probable exhaustion of our coal-mines. Macmillan; and Munyon, V. V., Bowen, W. M., & Holcombe, J. (2018). ‘Vehicle fuel economy and vehicle miles traveled: An empirical investigation of Jevon’s Paradox’ *Energy Research & Social Science*, 38, 19-27..

<sup>v</sup> We will use this information to analyse differences between countries, and between large and small organisations, and will delete this data once the project has concluded.