Many initiatives around sustainable consumption draw insights from the United Nations work on this topic. Although this work is very valuable, its focus is on holding *governments accountable* for putting appropriate policies in place to regulate and dictate business and consumer behaviour, especially UN initiatives. The global movement for corporate social responsibility focuses on holding big *businesses accountable* to make production more sustainable. The green, ethical and anti-consumerism movements do focus on the consumer side but assume that people will still perceive themselves as consumers.

This strand is about encouraging home economists to rethink how they understand sustainable consumption. The purpose of this workshop is to stretch your thinking about sustainable consumption by turning things around so the focus is on holding consumers accountable, bringing a human responsibility focus to the discussion of sustainability and introducing the notions of participatory and transformative consumerism.

IMPORTANT This paper, which was prepared for the conference proceedings, only sets out the main ideas that will form the foundation for the content and context of the workshop. Those who attend will get to work with these concepts to see if they can shift their approach to sustainable consumption. Our goal is to come up with a new set of practice principles to place us on the vanguard of the sustainable consumption movement. Only ideas or information are presented in this paper. No attempt is made for synergy or transformation.

United Nations Sustainable Consumption

The UN initiative for sustainable consumption is housed in the production and consumption branch of the environmental programme, as of 1999. Sustainable Consumption (SC) is advising governments and business to build on the consumers' growing awareness about environmental and social issues by reducing the inequities growing in our *existing system*. Dealing with these inequities means making it easier for developing countries to consume but not at the Northern standard. It also means that government has to change its consumer and corporate policy frameworks so consumers are not locked into unsustainable behaviour. Consumption is supposed to continue, it just has to be sustainable (do not harm environment or future generations). There is little mention of what consumers have to do to be accountable; the onus of this initiative is government activity.

Housing sustainable consumption in the environment and production branch tells me that the UN assumes that these two activities are inherently with consumption. It also suggests to me that there may not be a place for social justice, human rights etc. So, I dug further. I was right. The focus on the UN initiative for sustainable consumption is an ecological perspective rather than a human rights, social justice perspective. There is a product and service life cycle initiative designed to ensure optimized consumption and production systems that are contained within the capacity of the ecosystem. Furthermore, it focuses on what steps *government* should take to ensure sustainable consumption through consumer protection policies rather than what consumers should do (Bentley, de Leeuw & Fielder, 2004). This is not a bad thing; it is just not enough. Especially since Bentley et al. found that only one third of the 150 governments they

approached bothered to respond to their tracking survey. And, one third of those governments had never heard of the UN Consumer Protection Guidelines. Of those who had heard of the guidelines, one half did not have anyone designated to implement the sustainable consumption guidelines.

Cooperate Social Responsibility Movement

Corporate social responsibility CSR) is a familiar concept emerging in the last past decade. Every aspect of business has a social dimension. CSR means open and transparent business practices that are based on ethical values and respect for employees, communities and the environment. It is designed to deliver sustainable value to society at large, as well as to shareholders (Corporate Social Responsibility Forum, 2000). A recent study of 25,000 "citizens," in over 20 countries on six continents, revealed that, when forming impressions of companies, people are now focussing on corporate citizenship and social responsibility rather than just brand reputation or financial factors. They want companies to contribute to broader societal goals and expect companies to play a broader role in society than they have in the past. Sixty percent identified factors related to broader corporate responsibilities, for instance labour practices, business ethics, attitudes to society at large, and environmental responsibility, as key in shaping their view of particular companies (Environics International, 1999).

Indeed, for different industries, responsible business practice involves different issues. However, there are a number of key themes with which all sectors can identify: (a) human rights, labour and security; (b) enterprise and economic development; (c) business standards and corporate governance; (d) health promotion; (e) education and leadership development; (f) human disaster relief; and, (g) environment (Corporate Social Responsibility Forum, 2000). This movement may face challenges in the future given that the Environics International (1999) poll also found that, while consumers are holding corporations more responsible, the same consumers are <u>very sceptical</u> that corporations can assume this role, rating non-government organizations and governments four times more likely to meet the accountability standard.

UN Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan's challenged world business leaders to "embrace and enact" a set of 9 principles that cover topics in human rights, labour and environment in their individual corporate practices (Global Compact, 2000). The corporate Global Compact is not a regulatory instrument or code of conduct, but a value-based platform which utilizes the power of transparency and dialogue to identify and disseminate good practices. These practices are based on nine universal principles drawn from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Labour Organization's Fundamental Principles on Rights at Work and the Rio Principles on Environment and Development (see http://www.unglobalcompact.org/Portal/Default.asp The UN Global Compact asks companies to act on these principles in their own corporate domains. Thus, the Compact promotes good practices by corporations; it does not endorse companies. The Global Compact is not a substitute for effective action by governments, but an opportunity for firms to exercise leadership in their enlightened self-interest. Consumer groups were not involved in this project and the principles are not directed at consumers' actions.

Also, there is the Corporate Social Accountability, SA8000. The SA8000 is a voluntary, international standard that businesses can adopt to ensure ethical sourcing of goods and services. It sets standards for child labour, forced labour, health and safety of workers, freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, discrimination, working hours and compensation. It was developed in response to growing concerns among consumers about labour conditions around the world (behind the label initiatives) (SAI, 2002).

Consumer International Sustainable Consumption

Consumers International (CI) (2001) is holding consumers accountable but by this it means consumers need to hold business accountable, *not themselves* (assuming, rightly so, that holding business accountable is one aspect of ethical consumption):

> Consumer Accountability - If corporate citizenship poses challenges for global business, it also raises issues for consumers. Consumers must be conscientious in their response to the demands they are making of corporate actors. Corporations will quickly defect from efforts to alter their conduct toward good corporate citizenship if those efforts are not recognised by the market. Individual consumers must *use their power of purchase* in ways that contribute to the social good. Price and quality are still the key determinants of daily shopping decisions...but ecological and social criteria must become increasingly relevant. Consumers cannot change company ethics until they *put their money where their morals are* (italics added). (CI, 2001, web citation)

This online book by CI has a section on new lingo but the concept of consumer accountability is absent (corporate accountability and global governance are noted). To be fair, the book does mention the concept of global citizen but does not develop it to any extent.

Green, Ethical and Anti-consumerism Movements

There is a strong anti-consumerism movement with four strands. Colins et al. (1995) make a useful distinction between green consumerism, ethical consumerism and anti-consumerism. There is also a voluntary simplicity movement:

> GREEN CONSUMERISM is where people purchase or participate in goods or services which attempt to replace existing ones with something designed to be 'friendlier' and less damaging to ecosystems and natural planetary defences.
>
> ETHICAL CONSUMERISM is a development of green consumerism which considers a variety of wider issues than just a product's green credentials, such as whether or not the manufacturer invests in the arms trade or has supported oppressive regimes. Through a comprehensive monitoring of the behaviour of modern business, ethical consumerism aims to encourage trade to be as responsible as is possible within the current economic system.
>
> ANTI-CONSUMERISM, however, challenges many of the assumptions about what is needed in contemporary society. Taking the view that the rich nations of the world are fundamentally damaging the planet and themselves in the pursuit of material acquisition, it raises the question, "How much is enough?" Rather than just buying green or ethically produced goods, different ways of living, trading and working are advocated in order to 'live more lightly' on the Earth and be less dependent on buying things to feel good about ourselves.

Again, as with government and corporation movements, there are problems with the consumer movement strands. None of the literature on these consumer movement strands makes reference to consumer accountability. Rather, consumers are being charged with holding governments or businesses accountable. The green consumerism movement tries to find consumption and production solutions to the ecological problems we face. One of the critiques of green consumerism is that it looks to consumerism to solve ecological problems. From an ethical consumption angle, NGOs are urging consumers to *buy* ethically and environmentally sound products, an example of the shop with a conscience message. In fact, green and ethical consumerism are closely intertwined in that they encourage trade to be as responsible as is

possible within the current economic system. They do not necessarily advocate that the system be changed.

A closer ally for holding consumers accountable is the anti-consumerism movement. This group maintains that the power gained from challenging the assumptions about living in a consumer society leads to confidence, thereby allowing people to take control of their choices and direct them towards creating a sustainable and just world. Also, the voluntary simplicity movement strives to get consumers to work towards a new society based on ecological and cultural diversity, sustainable economies and real community participation by simplifying one's lifestyle.

Human Responsibility Movement

It is a sense of responsibility that makes people accountable for their actions (Arias, 1997). But, the concept of responsibility is complex. Someone can be said to "bear" responsibility for something meaning they sustain without flinching or they can be said to "accept" responsibility meaning they receive it with consent. Also, responsibility can be perceived as a negative thing, as a weight or as a positive, enlightening, empowering thing. The former implies culpability and the latter implies recognition of successes and the "attempt." Also, three conditions have to be present for someone to be act responsibly: (a) there must be a condition to which one perceives the need to respond, (b) the belief that it is in one's power to respond, and (c) the belief that responding is not only in one's power but is to one's benefit. Conversely, a person's lack of "response" - "ability" could be a breakdown in any one or all of these steps (Jones cited in "Thoughts on responsibility", 1998).

There are three global initiative related to human responsibilities that I want to refer to in this paper: the 2003 United Nations Human Rights Commission, the 1998 UNESCO sponsored Valencia initiative and the 1997 Interaction Council.

United Nations Human Rights Commission

Miguel Alfonso Martinez's (2003) Declaration of Human Social Responsibilities is premised on principles of social ethics. There are 29 articles in this declaration. Three of the articles relate to government's role, none specifically to the obligations of corporations, save for an inferred reference in Article (20 (do not abuse economic power). The government is charged with creating the international social order within which responsibilities can be enacted, with ensuring development of Southern countries and with not supporting initiatives that contravene the responsibilities set out in the Declaration.

Specific mention is made of media's responsibility and of the supra-responsibility of those involved in human rights work (two articles). There are seven generic articles with two referring to the inability to opt out of being responsible and to not being able to have rights without responsibilities. Notions such as globalization, the common good and families as democratic units are mentioned.

The rest of the articles (17 of them) are directed to "every person." People are tasked to take actions that ensure that rights can be respected. They are charged to take their own initiatives and to cooperate with State authorities as each promotes, brings into effect and protects human rights. Individuals are said to have a duty to make sure a principled human rights process is followed. All are charged with creating international peace, with supporting the common good, protecting against terrorism, and with being friendly and brotherly with others. Every person is tasked with intergenerational ecological sustainability, with respecting religious doctrines and with being politically involved in their community. Every person has a duty to be responsible with their economic power (to ensure human solidarity and progress) and to protect

and contribute to the vulnerable in society. People are to strive for a conflict free, harmonious coexistence and to foster and protect their cultural heritage. They are supposed to find gainful employment (to work as permitted by their abilities) and to strive to reach their full potential. Finally, every person has a duty to respect their partner and to provide for, and meet the basic needs, of their family, the basic democratic unit in society.

UNESCO Sponsored Valencia Initiative

This 1998 initiative was developed and adopted by a high-level group chaired by Richard J. Goldstone under the auspices of the city of Valencia, Mexico and UNESCO. It was initiated and organised by ADC New Millennium Partners with the Foundation Valencia Tercer Milenio. They agreed to 10 global community responsibilities/duties (political, moral, ethical and legal duties) and 10 individual/personal moral responsibilities/duties. These are tendered in a comprehensive text that emerged consisting of a preamble, 12 chapters and 41 articles (Goldstone, 1998).

Community responsibilities:
• Cooperate to ensure no violence or war
• Promote global peace through security mechanisms and disarmament
• Address actual and potential impact of new technology, scientific development and the process of globalization on human rights and freedoms
• Get rid of international organized crime and corruption
• Promote participatory government
• Promote and protect diversity in the human family
• Work towards eradicating discrimination
• Protect children and elders
• Ensure adequate standard of living and quality of life
• Ensure education
• Prevent and provide remedies for human right violations

Individual responsibilities:
• participate and cooperate in the life of our communities
• care for children, elders, poor and infirm
• live peaceably and in solidarity
• live lives with dignity and self-respect and hold dignity of others in high regard
• honour diverse cultures
• reject threats, coercion and violence in our relations with other members of human community
• be just and equitable when dealing with others
• avoid discrimination and intolerance
• seek redress for wrongs
• honour obligations to society and citizens
• keep promises, live honestly and without deception or criminal intent

The Interaction Council

The InterAction Council (1997), formed in 1983, comprising some 30 former heads of government or state from all continents and different political orientations. Their objective is to balance human rights with human responsibilities. They spent many years delineating the meaning of responsibilities relative to rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, proposed by the InterAction Council (1997) comprises 19 articles, divided into

six main topics: (a) fundamental principles of humanity (4 articles); (b) non-violence and respect for life (3 articles); (c) justice and solidarity (4 articles); truthfulness and tolerance (4 articles); mutual respect and partnership (3 articles), and, as with human rights, the final article says that no one can take any one of the responsibilities out of context and use it as an excuse to violate other responsibilities in the Declaration, and that every single person, group, organization and government is responsible for making the Declaration *work.*

In more detail, the principles of humanity relate to treating everyone in a humane way and to the notions of self esteem, dignity, good over evil, and the Golden Rule (do unto others as you would have done to you). Non-violence and respect for life also encompass responsibilities related to acting in peaceful ways, and respecting intergenerational and ecological protection. Justice and solidarity encompass honesty, integrity, fairness, sustainability, meeting one's potential and not abusing wealth and power. Truthfulness and tolerance embrace the principles of privacy, confidentiality, honesty, and a respect for diversity and these apply to all people, politicians, business, scientists, professionals, media, and religions. Finally, the responsibility of mutual respect and partnerships includes caring for other's well-being, appreciation and concern for the welfare and safety of others especially when it comes to children and spouses but also to all men and women in partnerships. At its 22nd meeting, 2004, the Interaction Council again called for world leaders to bring forward to the United Nations their Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities. I am trying to find out if they are aware of the UN HRC initiative.

Consumer Accountability as a Concept

Accountability measures are needed wherever there are concentrations of power in society (Democracy Watch, 2002). In most developed countries, consumers spend over two thirds of the GDP relative to business and government (70% in the US). This is phenomenal collective power implying that accountability measures should be in place. Even though Northern consumers (Western and European) comprise about 20% of the world's population, they consume more than 86% of the world's resources to support their consumer society. This is awesome power and these consumers should be held accountable. Also, the richest 20% of the world's population consume 86% of everything sold in the global marketplace: they have 87% of all cars, 74% of all phones lines, 84% of all paper, 58% of all energy, eat 45% of all fish and meat and get 94% of all bank loans. In contrast, the poorest 20% consume 1.3% of everything sold in the world's marketplace (UNESCO, 2002).

Accountable consumers would strive for the goal of a society in harmony with ecological rhythms, capacities and tolerances, including those of our own human nature. This agenda emphasises, for example, *sufficiency,* rather than open-ended demands. It stresses personal and collective *responsibility* and *duty,* rather than the egotism and self-indulgence characteristic of consumerism and me-centred politics. It advocates *common standards* and *values,* rejecting the 'politically correct' tendency to treat everything as equally valid and purely a matter of personal preference. It prioritises *regional self-reliance* and *community enterprise,* instead of increasing dependence on the world market. It demands *caution,* leaving what works well alone, instead of dashing ahead with dangerous innovations like genetic engineering or clearing away functioning communities to make way for 'development'. It favours an ecologically appropriate use of technologies like solar energy and organic farming. It stands for *real security* from environmental and economic devastation, harnessing the resources now devoted to military aggrandisement. Around such assumptions, a new foundation for decision-making can be laid (Birley, 1994).

There are many good reasons to take individual responsibility. By taking individual

responsibility, one: (a) "walks the talk," setting a positive example and bringing legitimacy to the call for change on the part of others; (b) enhances one's own commitment, and prepares oneself to take that commitment to another level; and (c) makes a real contribution which, **collectively**, can make a difference (Alan, 2002). But, as well, to meet the challenge of our times, human beings will have to develop a greater sense of *universal responsibility*. Each of us must learn to work, not just for his or her own self, family or nation but, for the benefit of all mankind. Universal responsibility is the real key to human survival. It is the best foundation for world peace, the equitable use of natural resources, and through concern for future generations, the proper care of the environment. Adopting an attitude of universal responsibility is essentially a personal matter (His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, 1990).

Individuals can make a difference by modifying their personal consumption, advocate for global sustainability and equity, contribute time and money, and more. And, some problems call for different kinds of individual actions - those that we make through the political process, and those that we make through professional careers (Alan, 2002) - therein lies your challenge. Holding one another accountable for acts of devotion, worship, compassion, and justice will enable us to overcome our isolation by shifting from competition to covenant as a basis for relationship. Intentionally practicing the means of grace will counter the habits of consumerism (Carder, 2002). In the final analysis, each of us is accountable for choices concerning the virtues to which we aspire in life.

Participatory/Transformative Consumerism as a Concept[1]

One of those virtues is participating in one's community. I think we can agree that we have a global *community of consumers*. From a moral perspective, "We shouldn't feel bad about consumption unless we are consuming badly. We need to understand how [and why] we are consuming and not get hung up about the fact that we are consuming" (Pye-Smith, 1999, p.25). One way to ensure this self examination is a new concept I am developing called participatory consumerism. It draws from the long standing literature on participatory development and action research (Mikkelsen, 1995).

Participatory consumerism would be about personal and social transformation for the liberation of oppressed people in their consumption role. People are so indoctrinated into the logic of the market that they cannot 'see' anything wrong with what they are doing. Because they do not critically challenge the market ideology and the concept of consumerism, they actually contribute to their own oppression (slaves of the market) and the oppression of others who make the goods and services and the ecosystem. Strong, unsustainable consumption behaviour patterns develop, having been formed and unchallenged over a long period of time (paraphrased from Freire, 1985).

Participatory consumerism would involve people creating new knowledge drawn from deeper insights into their mind and their heart about why they are consuming. These insights involve reflection, value clarification and socially responsible decisions that take into account known and unknown social, ecological and generational consequences. Reflection entails exploring one's own experiences in a conscious manner in order to acquire new understandings and new behaviour patterns (Suojanen, 1998).

Participatory consumerism would entail a compassionate culture in addition to the

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[1] The material for this concept is taken from an earlier 2000 conference paper on this topic (Mcgregor, 2001).

existing consumer culture, maybe someday replacing it. The intent of participatory consumerism would be equitable communities and societies that maintain, for the time being, a free market structure characterized by justice, peace, security and freedom. Eventually, those practicing participatory consumerism would strive for an economy of care, a moral economy.

People would be the essence of participatory consumerism not just money and profit. It is recognized that we all have to consume in order to meet daily, basic needs. But, we do not have to do this at the expense of our soul, others or the ecosystem. To reiterate, participatory means a state of being related to a larger whole by taking part, sharing and contributing. Consumerism from this perspective would embrace ethical and moral issues, spiritual wellness, ecological soundness and both rights and responsibilities.

Transformational participation entails sustainable results that will continue when the initiative is completed. Transformational participatory consumerism would involve an evolution wherein people would see themselves as world citizens first and consumers second. As Gabriel and Lang (1995) so aptly phrased it, a citizen is "a responsible consumer, a socially-aware consumer, a consumer who thinks ahead and tempers his or her desires by social awareness, a consumer whose actions must be morally defensible and who must occasionally be prepared to sacrifice personal pleasure to communal well-being" (pp.175-176). Hence, the notion of participatory citizenship is relevant in this discussion of participatory consumerism. This approach involves discussion among people about public issues shaped by listening, talking and acting such that the world changes for the better. In regards to consumerism, this public discourse would involve the implications of current consumption behaviour on the lives of others, future generations and the integrity of the ecosystem. Topics would include human rights, the environment, justice, living and working conditions, peace, security, freedom, and cultural sensitivity. This consumer dialogue goes a long way towards augmenting the current narrow consumer dialogue about how to get the best buy and value for dollar spent and how to protect the rights of the domestic consumer (safety, information, choice, redress etc) while at the same time ensuring profit for the firm and an appropriate regulatory role for government; that is, how to balance consumer, business and public interests.

Participatory consumerism would involve active reflection prior to, during and after purchase decisions. Reflective participation (Newmann, 1989) entails dealing with uncertainty while knowing that choices have to be made and action has to be taken (this action could be a decision not to purchase). Moral issues have to dealt with, referring to disagreements people may have about values that justify personal consumption actions. Reflective participation in the marketplace would also involve consciously deciding what one is going to reflect upon, appreciating that the main focus is to formulate a position on a purchase decision and then win support for it, internally and externally. Gaining this support involves being accountable to mutual interests as well as self-interest. Reflection allows one to step back from the immediacy of a situation and examine one's beliefs, attitudes and past behaviours in a dispassionate manner (Jackson, 1990). This detached reflection flies in the face of the need for instant gratification and material accumulation, features of the prevailing consumer society. Nonetheless, participatory consumerism would involve the dynamic process of action-reflection-revised action. The reflective moment may be prolonged for one type of consumer good or service and short lived for another but the mere act of reflection negates thoughtless purchasing decisions.

Ongoing, active participation in consumption would help people to be ever curious, to take risks in their decision climate of uncertainty, to gain a better understanding of complicated realities comprising the global marketplace, and to gain enough power to work for improvement

in their consuming role, and by association, the well-being of global citizens (paraphrased from Smith et al., 1995). Indeed, one can be a consumer while disagreeing and criticizing the marketplace in their role as citizen. An increased sensitivity to one's connectedness to others in the world's marketplace could be referred to as conscientization - gaining a conscience. This personal growth involves becoming more fully human, not just a more efficient consumer. To take us back to the beginning, participatory consumerism involves unveiling the world of oppression of the everyday citizen in their consumer role and expelling the market myths created and perpetuated by free market proponents.

The results will be a conscientious citizen participating in their role of consumption with the interests of themselves balanced with the interests of society, future generations and the ecosystem. Perceiving citizens as participating consumers is a powerful way to extend the current dialogue of sustainable consumption, a movement concerned with sustainable management of resources, considerations for the natural environment and societal processes of change, the promotion of human dignity, quality of life and the perspective of interdependence referring to the interplay between people and environments and the relationships between economies, nationally and internationally (Lafferty, 1994).

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