

Consumerism

by **Simisha Pather-Elias**, BotSoc

COP 17 has now come and gone. With no legally binding agreements between countries on carbon mitigation having been decided on, the responsibility lies with us to start living sustainably.

For that reason, we at the BotSoc Head Office have decided to bring you a new segment in every issue of *Veld & Flora*: the Sustainability Corner. Here we aim to offer you handy tips on what you can do in your own lives to make a difference, and invest in the future. For this first segment of Sustainability Corner, I have decided to broach the topic of consumerism.

This is, in my opinion, the main driver of our unsustainable lifestyles, but it is still one of the easiest to tackle, considering that we hold all the power to control our needs and make meaningful purchases. Globally, as more people move into the consumer class, the appetite for convenience and luxury goods increases. This consumption imposes high pressure on the natural environment, where resources are mined and harvested, using mostly unsustainable methods.

These methods lead to pollution, leaving the communities that depend on those ecosystems vulnerable. In addition, the environmental footprint incurred in the entire supply chain (from manufacture, transport, sale, use and disposal) needs to be accounted for.

With so much to take into account, the first question you should be asking yourself is, 'Do I really need it?' Let's face it, ethical consumerism comes with a big lifestyle change, so if the minimalist lifestyle does not attract you, there are still several alternative options you can consider.

As a consumer, you need to realize that you have the power to demand environmentally friendly goods, simply by making positive choices.

Here are a few questions that you should consider when shopping:

- Is the product produced locally?
- Is the method of production sustainable? Before purchasing, check the goods for environmental certifications, such as Biodiversity and Wine Initiative (BWI) wine, Forest Stewardship Certification (FSC) wooden products, organic food products, free range meat and Fair Trade coffee.
- Is it healthy? Is the food fresh, unprocessed and chemical-free, or is it genetically modified?

Send us your best shot. Email info@botanicalsociety.org.za.



Glittering plains

Spring flowering vygies, *Mesembryanthemum aquosum*, on a gravel plain in northern Namaqualand.

Eugene Moll, Department of Biodiversity and Conservation Biology, University of the Western Cape

- Have the products been tested on people and animals?
- Do the products require large amounts of energy or electricity, or are they energy efficient?
- What is the life span of the product - will it require regular replacements?
- Has it been made with recycled material, and can it be recycled or is it biodegradable?
- Does the manufacturer or supplier engage in corporate sustainability projects?
- Are you supporting corporate giants or small community markets?
- Are you supporting green companies by investing in them?

Notice how many of these criteria also offer cost saving incentives for you. Know that with every choice you make you can contribute to the environment and communities in an enabling or destructive way.



ABOVE: Are you supporting corporate giants or small community markets?

For more information please visit:

Ethical Consumer:

<http://www.ethicalconsumer.org>

Beauty without Cruelty: www.bwca.co.za/

Fair Trade South Africa: www.fairtrade.org.za/

GreenChoice: <http://www.wwf.org.za>.

eLabel: www.elabel.co.za.

My Planet

A big thank you to all members who responded to our request for support of the My Planet application form. We are in the process of finalizing the applications. Watch this space to see how you can further support the BotSoc and SANBI National Botanical Gardens, helping us engender a sense of joint custodianship of our botanical treasures.

Green money

Nedbank Greenbacks points can be donated to BotSoc via the My Greater Good SA link, found on the Greenbacks website. Greater Good South Africa connects givers with good causes and encourages the public to give responsibly. More information can be found on their website www.myggsa.co.za.