

## **From Footprint to Handprint** **Our personal action for sustainable development**

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Climate change is real and requires attention from all of us. The immense challenge can make one feel helpless and overstrained - but that does not need to be that case. Every little contribution towards climate protection and sustainable development is helpful. Sustainable use of resources does not necessarily mean giving up on comforts and conveniences, but being judicious about what and how we do things. Riding in a car or using electricity is not wrong. Using energy carelessly and wastefully is wrong. Each of us has to be smart and sensible about the choices we make and the lifestyle we choose.

This is because climate change is closely linked to consumption. Consumption involves exhaustive use of materials and energy. This is linked with our lifestyles: what we buy, how we use our energy resources, which transportation we choose and how we live. How can we know how much materials and energy each of us utilizes to maintain our lifestyle? And what can we do to help reduce the pressure on the earth's resources?

The Footprint and the Handprint are two complementary concepts that help people like you and me to find their own best way to lead a more sustainable lifestyle that would contribute towards a sustainable society and planet.

The Ecological Footprint is a measure of human pressure on earth's resources. Every human being has an ecological footprint. It is the lifestyle that determines how small or big an individual's footprint is.

Handprint is a measure of what we can do individually, and together, to restore the balance between consumption and the planet's carrying capacity.

“We often hear about our negative impact on the planet – our environmental footprint. But footprints are only half the picture. The other half is just coming into view. It's called a handprint, and it measures the positive impacts we can make, simply by changing the way we do things, at home, and at work.”

Handprinter.org, 2011, <http://www.handprinter.org/what-ishandprinter/>  
accessed October 5, 2012

### The Ecological Footprint

Invented by William Rees, University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, and his student Mathis Wackernagel in 1992, the Ecological Footprint is a tool to analyse humanity's demand and use of natural resources. A country, a company or a private person can analyse how much pressure it applies to the nature by using a footprint calculator.

Different footprint calculators are in use today. The original calculates the number of planet Earths that human society would need, given everyone followed a certain lifestyle. This is measured with areal calculations and has as unit. One can calculate the own footprint and access more detailed information at [www.footprintnetwork.org](http://www.footprintnetwork.org).

Other calculators analyse the CO<sub>2</sub>-footprint and inform you about your personal per capita greenhouse gas emissions and your individual contribution to climate change. Science suggests that a personal CO<sub>2</sub>-footprint should not extend 1,5 tCO<sub>2</sub> equivalents per year and person in order to limit climate change effects to manageable levels. The CO<sub>2</sub>-footprint calculator tells you whether you are below or above this average level and indicates where you can save greenhouse gas emissions.

The indicators used in these different footprint calculators for personal use are similar. When calculating the footprint, one analysis his/her lifestyle and consumption patterns in terms of housing, electricity use, transportation means, food habits, general consumption and hobbies, etc. A detailed result provides you with information about your performance in the different aspects. You understand which behaviours and habits of your daily activities are already sustainable, and which can be improved. For example, a person might already follow a vegetarian diet which would indicate a lower footprint, but chooses to use a personal car over the public transportation which would raise the footprint.

#### The Handprint

The world today recognizes the need to reduce the ecological footprint. The need of the hour is 'positive action'. The analysis of the footprint calculator shapes the basis of understanding where more positive action is possible in one's daily behaviour. This serves as a good basis for the Handprint. The Handprint is a measure of an individual's

action which supports measurable change of behaviour towards environment and sustainable development. Everyday actions of individuals add up and have a global influence, both positive and negative. Positive actions impact on the three aspects of sustainability: environment, society and economy, and improve the conditions for life on our planet today, and in the future.

The Handprint is a symbol of, measure for, and commitment to positive action towards sustainability. It reflects the spirit of hope, enthusiasm and commitment to action on the part of the global community.

The icon that symbolizes the Handprint concept is that of 10 year old Srija from Hyderabad, India. She was one of the students participating in a project to take action for sustainability in 2005. This was a part of one of the School Programmes of the Centre for Environment Education, in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Subsequently, the Handprint became the symbol for sustainability action projects that the children everywhere did in their schools and in the community.



The concept was shared internationally in 2007 by Centre for Environment Education (CEE) at UNESCO's 4th International Conference on Environmental Education held at Ahmedabad, India.

As an open concept, free for anyone to use, adapt or develop further, the Handprint concept has grown, as people who use it add new meaning to it. It is no longer confined to schools but has come to represent positive action, more generally, towards sustainability.

The concept has taken on different meanings for different actors and different contexts. It is seen as:

- a tool to calculate the extent of education for sustainable development (ESD) action being taken and the positive impact of our actions on sustainable development,
- a symbol of commitment through a pledge to act,
- extending a helping hand in caring for the planet and all life on it,
- joining hands for the common goal of sustainability on Earth—the only known living planet.

Some examples of the different applications of the Handprint concept:

#### **Handprinter, USA**

It calculates environmental footprint which gives an idea about environmental impact

It offers suggestions about simple actions which one can take to lower environmental

Impact It allows spreading/sharing ideas, recommending others (and if they sign on) would increase handprint.

<http://www.handprinter.org/what-ishandprinter/>

#### **National Green Corps India**

The main objectives of this programme are to educate children about their immediate environment and impart knowledge about the eco-systems, their inter-dependence and their need for survival, through visits and demonstrations. The programme helps to mobilise youngsters by instilling in them the spirit of scientific inquiry into environmental problems and involving them in the efforts of environmental preservation. The NGC programme has demonstrated excellent examples of the application of the Handprint concept of positive environmental improvement action, starting with a small student group initiative and engaging the entire school as well as larger community.

[http://envfor.nic.in/divisions/ee/ngc/index\\_ngc.html](http://envfor.nic.in/divisions/ee/ngc/index_ngc.html)

**Paryavaran Mitra, India**

Paryavaran Mitra project reaching out to schools across India demonstrates the use of the handprint concept to inspire transformative education for environmental leadership in students. The programme engages students through curriculum linked activities and action projects. It facilitates the process towards positive change in behaviour and action, taken at individual, family, school and community levels.

<http://paryavaranmitra.in/>

**Handprint Resource Books, South Africa**

These link the curricular concepts with practical ideas to implement sustainability practices at school and in the local community. They provide teachers with and locally relevant knowledge resources and cases studies, as well as practical teaching learning activities.

Handprint has inspired not only practitioners from the field of education for sustainable development, but also the international community of thinkers and policy makers. The Intergovernmental Conference Tbilisi 35, in 2012, mentions the Handprint amongst its recommendations: "...Further promote good practices.... including through building on the 'Handprint' concept which encourages tangible positive ESD actions." (Final Communiqué: Point 35).

**From the International to the Individual**

While the Handprint concept is being adapted and applied in many different ways, this is one concept which has equal, if not more, relevance at the individual and personal level. The Handprint helps analysing personal sustainable action, and to reach out to others around us. It asks which daily behaviours we follow for ourselves, in our family and household, with our neighbours and the surrounding community. Also, it looks at our lifestyle choices in our home, school, university and working space; in our village, town or city, and helps to take stock how we impact our home planet, for better or for worst.

To start with here are some small things that each of us can do to make a difference.

**Save Electricity**

Whenever we use electricity we put Green House Gases (GHGs) into the air. By turning off lights, TV, computer when not in use, you can help a lot. It saves energy and of course money.

**Bus, Bicycle, Walk**

More cars driving on the road lead to more GHG emissions. Try to car pool. Take a bus or train whenever you can. Bicycle or walk wherever you can.

**Drive the Change**

Get parents to change their driving habits to drive gently, and within speed limits, to keep the vehicle regularly serviced and tuned. When planning to buy a new vehicle, survey the market for more fuel efficient and environment-friendly vehicles.

**Become Resource Savvy**

Conserve energy at home and school

Save water, save paper

Prevent waste – Recycle, Reuse, Refuse what you do not need. (plastic bags, extra packaging)

Do not burn waste

Compost biodegradable waste

Keep electrical appliances in good condition ensure that air filters on air conditioners are clean, fridge coils and tubelights dust free. Depend less on artificial aids for cooling and heating and more on nature... sunlight and natural ventilation.

### **Buy Local**

Buy your food fresh from local markets. Avoid packaged, preserved and imported goods. Trucks and planes bringing goods from far away – from within or outside the country – use huge amounts of fuel for transportation, and more energy goes into their storage.

### **Be a Concerned Customer**

Choose products and services that use environment friendly technologies and energy efficient practices. Why not consider a solar water heater or cooker? No fossil fuels, no emissions, just pure sunlight!

### **Save a Tree, Plant a Tree, Maybe More**

Trees are great for absorbing carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas, from the air. Every tree you prevent from being cut, or that you plant, and nurture till it's grown, will serve through its life-time in absorbing carbon dioxide, even while it provides beauty and shade, shelter and food, and keeps the soil firm and healthy.

Let us all take a pledge to Increase our Handprint and Decrease our Footprint.

Learn more at [www.handprint.in/abouthandprint.html](http://www.handprint.in/abouthandprint.html)