

Three Pillars of Sustainability Performance Measures: Case Study of HUL

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Abstract

Sustainable development is a fundamental break that is going to reshuffle the entire ecosystem. "India is presenting a plan to coordinate the three dimensions of sustainable development: social, environmental and economic, by 2030". In pursuit of its commitment to global goals by shaping plans related to development action with proper monitoring and evaluation and has started to promote one word 'LIFE' which means lifestyle for environment encouraging proper utilization instead of mindless consumption. The purpose of this case study is to highlight how the Indian Inc is responding to the country's commitment towards UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and meeting the sustainability pillars: Economic viability, environmental protection, and social equity (EES). The case study presents sustainability measures adopted at one of the FMCG leaders, Hindustan Unilever Limited. The researchers have referred to secondary sources available in the public domain.

Keywords: Sustainability, performance measures, sustainability development goals, triple bottom line

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability in supply chain means that how much effort a company is investing while considering the human and environmental impact in the journey of their products throughout the supply chain that is starting from the sourcing of raw material, producing and outsourcing the product, storage, delivery, returns and every link between it [1].

Some of the sustainable goals refer to minimizing the harm to the environment caused by wastage or excessive use of water, energy and increasing the positive impact on people and communities as companies are part of society only. Companies around the world are taking initiatives to reduce the carbon emissions as logistics is one of the sectors which releases maximum amount of CO₂; in India, CO₂ emissions in 2020 was 277 Mt.

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Importance of sustainability in supply chain refers to going beyond green. By using sustainable resources and techniques it helps to improve the productivity while saving money at the same time. Customers tend to lose faith or reuse the products of an organization if they believe that company being a part of society is not being able to meet social and environmental matters.

Sustainability in supply chain is important because supply chain is one of the industries which includes energy intensive production and transportation; therefore, companies can make a big difference by making changes in supply chain of their business rather than just concentrating on

operations. It is the responsibility of company to include sustainability into a wider space by encouraging and helping suppliers to become more environment conscious and seeing that they follow sustainable practices on continuous basis.

GROWTH OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

India has climbed the ladder of steady progress towards achieving UN's sustainable development goals in areas of energy, health and infrastructure and India's overall score has grown from 60 in 2019 to 66 in 2021 due to improvements done across the nation in 'affordable and clean energy' and clean and sanitized water' (Figure 1).

India is committed to global goals by shaping plans related to development action with proper monitoring and evaluation and has started to promote one word 'LIFE' which means lifestyle for environment encouraging proper utilization instead of mindless consumption.

The economic survey of 2021–2022 told importance of conservation; ecological security and environmental sustainability should be balanced with rapid economic growth [2]. The survey stated that renewable energy of India increased by 2.9 times and solar energy by 18 times [2].

Green energy corridors have been initiated which aims at synchronizing electricity produced from renewable resources like wind and solar with conventional power stations in the grid.

Company Background and what it does for Sustainability

Hindustan Unilever identified that the sustainable business model which they will use would be the one in which all stakeholders would be benefitted along with planet and society. They have been working on SDGs in their work premises as well encourage their partners to transform and help billions of people to have access to their products and services which will improve living standards, environment and societal wellbeing (Figure 2).

From past one decade, HUL is working on Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP) and is working towards welfare of people, planet and society.

PLANET

The environmental pillar of sustainability.

Greenhouse Gases

HUL is working towards halving the GHG footprints in hair wash, a cup of tea and laundry by the end of this decade (2030) by involving extensive R&D expertise, innovation and partnering with suppliers to find solutions of lower carbon emissions for everyday products.



Figure 1. The global goals.

Source: Global Goals, n.d. [3].

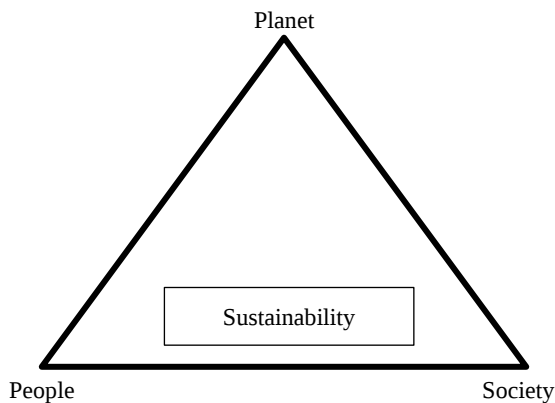


Figure 2. Sustainable business model.

A good progress in carbon emissions has been seen in food and refreshment and home care sector by 30 and 37% respectively due to proper disposals, portfolio changes and in home care due to reduction in phosphate in laundry products. There has been an increase in 10% carbon emissions in beauty and personal care products due to acquisition of brands with high greenhouse gas emission and continuous use of hot water.

Technology and innovation play a vital role in addressing climate change and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; an excellent example is 100% use of renewable energy source in HUL operations.

HUL has targeted to become carbon positive by end of 2030 as they want to generate more renewable energy than they consume and make the surplus energy available to the markets they operate.

They are working towards designing eco-friendly products with fewer ingredients but high performance as liquid detergents have less carbon footprints than powdered detergents; so, HUL is working towards market development in this sector as they clean better in lower temperatures. Products like Surf; Persil washes clothes at low temperature and reduces GHG emissions by 50%.

HUL is working towards reduction in CO₂ in transportation by using alternate means of transport such as rails, ships and lower emission vehicles along with improving efficiency across warehouses. For roads they are using biofuels, EVs, CNG and LNG and thermal blanket temperature controlled trucks.

As HUL is the largest producer of ice creams it was very important for them to start working on sustainability of this area; so, they started using climate friendly hydrogen refrigerators; these refrigerators also increased 50% energy efficiency (Figure 3).

When it comes to climate action, every carbon tonne counts; that is why it is necessary to carefully measure carbon footprint and reduce it to decarbonize the business (Table 1). The GHG are emitted from their factories, research centres, offices, and distribution centres, yet as they have direct control over it, so they are trying to remove it [4].

They have targeted to achieve 100% reduction in the GHGs by 2030 which is covered in their scope 1 and 2 of operations. These scope 1 and 2 emissions come from energy and refrigerators used in own operations and they are trying to transform their factories by investing in new technologies like hydrogen, increasing energy efficiency and switching to renewable source [5].

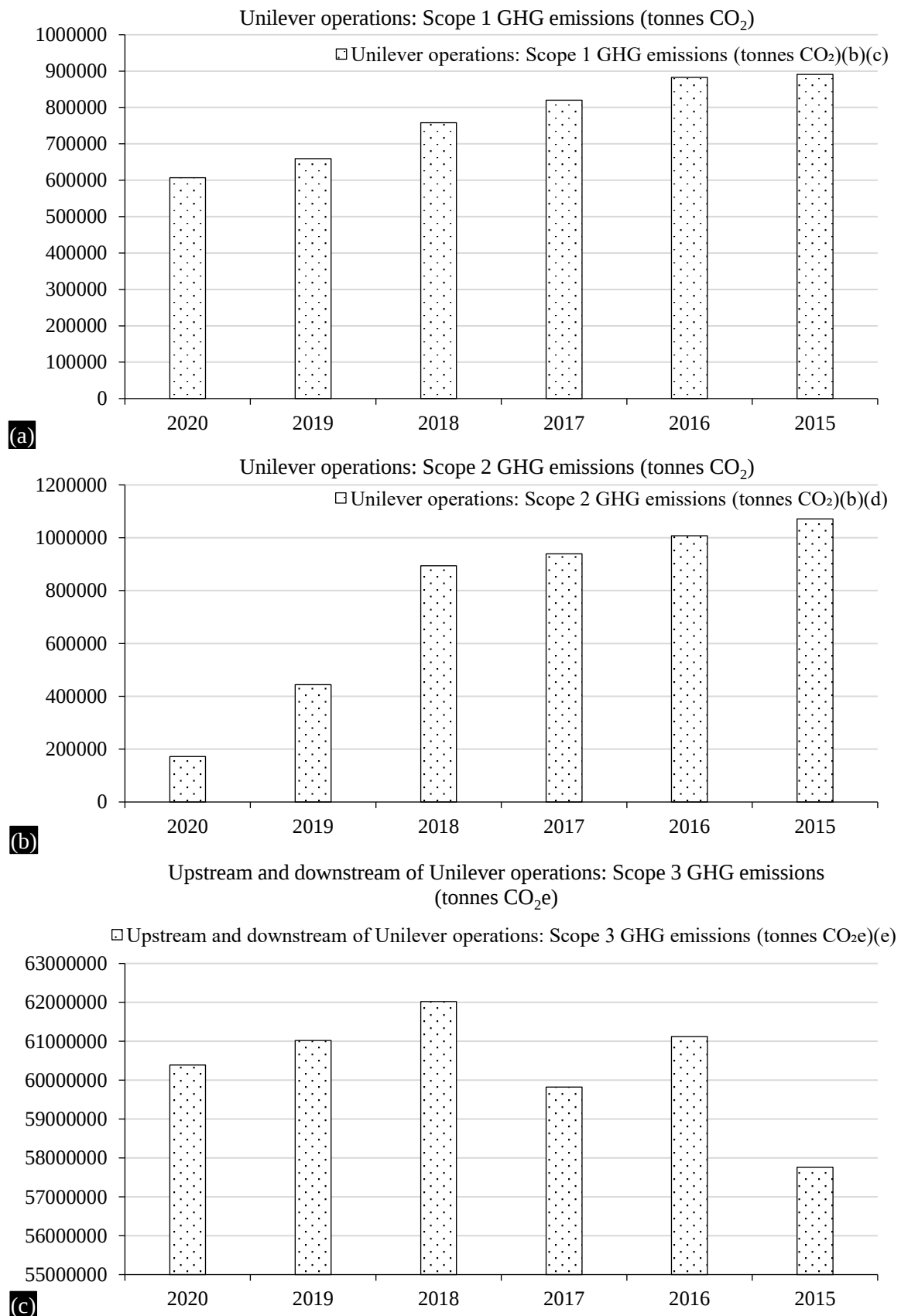


Figure 3. (a–c) Scope of GHG emissions.

Source: HUL website (Unilever Planet and Society, Sustainability Report [6]).

Table 1. Climate action.

Value chain GHG emissions ^(e)	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Unilever operations: Scope 1 GHG emissions (tonnes CO ₂) ^{(b)(c)}	606,771	659,028	758,232	820,355	882,973	8990,801
Unilever operations: Scope 2 GHG emissions (tonnes CO ₂) ^{(b)(d)}	171,906	443,897	8993,825	938,944	1,007,953	1,071,076
Upstream and downstream of Unilever operations: Scope 3 GHG emissions (tonnes CO ₂ emissions)	60,388,592	61,020,357	62,017,585	59,823,314	61,118,867	57,758,578
Ingredients and packaging:	14,239,918	14,897,174	15,367,491	16,539,559	17,903,182	17,083,186
Ingredients	11,270,833	11,782,483 ^(f)	12,416,204 ^(f)	13,409,638	14,534,101	13,787,055
Primary packaging	2,326,021	2,389,655	2,246,471	2,379,938	2,436,180	2,343,797
Secondary packaging	376,701	462,671	464,440	522,212	553,198	596,911
Inbound transport	266,363	262,365	240,376	227,771	379,703	355,423
Distribution and retail:	4,055,333	4,379,729	4,368,626	4,089,568	4,137,010	4,002,856
Distribution	1,661,608	1,602,885	1,553,549	1,115,600	1,136,666	1,115,609
Retail	2,393,726	2,776,845	2,815,077	2,973,968	3,000,344	2,887,247
Consumer use:	42,093,341	41,743,454	42,281,468	39,194,187	39,078,675	36,672,536
Consumer use	40,039,217	39,730,117	39,895,946	38,780,510	38,664,422	36,263,698
Disposal	2,054,124	2,013,337 ^(a)	2,385,522 ^(a)	413,677	414,253	408,838

As from the chart, we can clearly see that emissions in scope 1 have clearly been reduced by 64% since 2015. Now their target is to reduce it by 70% till 2025 for which the above mentioned steps are being done.

Most of their sites require a lot of energy; so, along with buying renewable energy they also need to produce it on site; so they are switching to wind, solar and biomass. They were able to produce 3% of their energy onsite as on 2021. They are planning to reduce their food waste to halves by 2025 by working with engineering department to convert it into biomass.

Sourcing

HUL wanted to source 100% sustainable raw material from agriculture in 2020 but after in-depth review of their sourcing strategy they found out that they will not be able to meet these targets as there is lack of scale to achieve sufficient change across all crops that they source and due to length and complexity of some supply chains it is very difficult to develop a line of sight on farmers and ensure that they use sustainable practices [7].

So, to find a solution to these, they prioritized their top 12 raw material crops which constitutes of 2/3 of their total volume of raw material in agriculture. HUL started to work upon regenerative agricultural practices so as to empower farmers to help them to focus on nourishing the soil, improving water quality, increasing farm biodiversity and also helping to improve livelihoods.

HUL is planning to achieve deforestation free supply chain for its key raw materials, that is, palm oil, tea, soy, paper and board and cocoa. They wanted to increase the traceability by including the smallholders and focusing on sustainable sourcing. They are working on satellite data, AI and geolocation to find new ways for monitoring and traceability.

By the end of 2020, 94.3% of palm oil was sourced by physically certified sources from third parties and 5.3% through independent certificated smallholders. And for the paper and board, 96% of it came from sustainably managed forests or recycled material. For the soy oil, 100% of it was sustainably sourced. Regarding the tea, it comes from 64% rainforest allied certified sources and 22% from trustea. They are working towards taking action to improve tea farm conditions by improving women's safety and promoting better diets and sustainable farming practices.

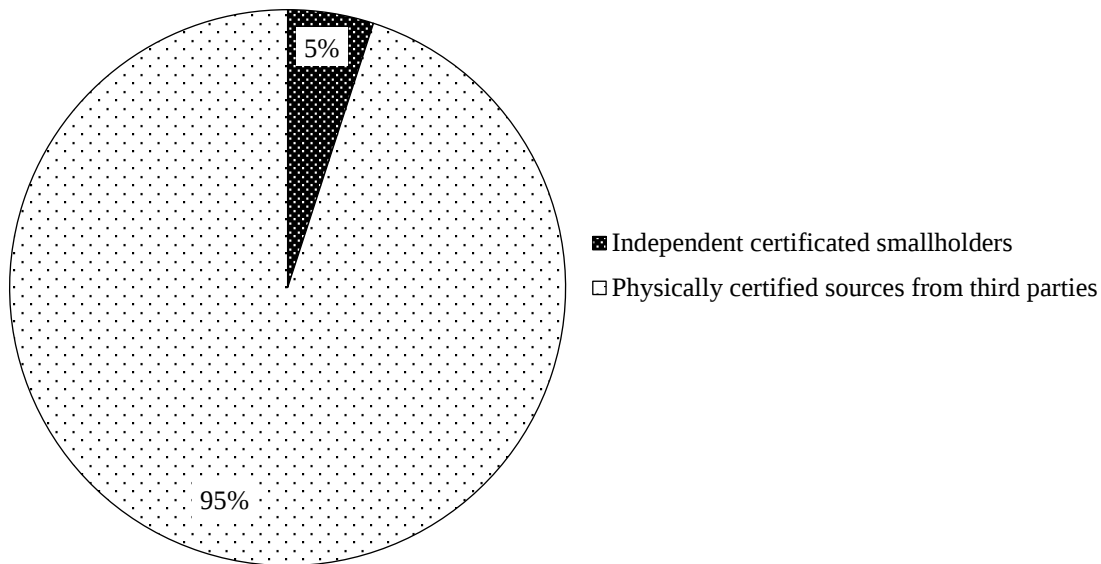


Figure 4. Sustainable sourcing (Palm Oil) [8].

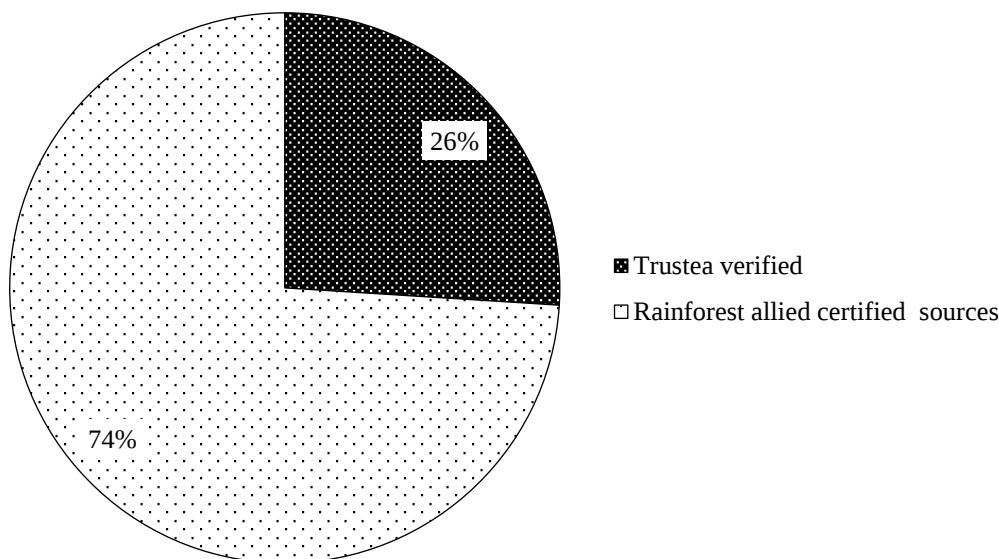


Figure 5. Sustainable sourcing (Tea).

As there are diverse fruits and vegetables used; so, they prioritized 13 most crucial fruits and vegetables like tomatoes, pumpkins, onions, mushrooms, peas etc. and by the end of 2020, they all were sourced sustainably. 100% of the paper used in office is sourced from sustainable sources (Figures 4 and 5). All the suppliers sign certificate of compliance and HUL continuously monitors their practices.

Target was to produce 79% of all the dairy products sustainably by end of 2020 but this target was not achieved due to presence of many suppliers and their complexity. So, HUL is working towards Dairy Sustainability Framework (DSF) from regional perspective.

Waste and Packaging

HUL achieved zero non-hazardous waste to landfill across their global factory network by end of 2014 and they have been maintaining this throughout the year (Figure 6).

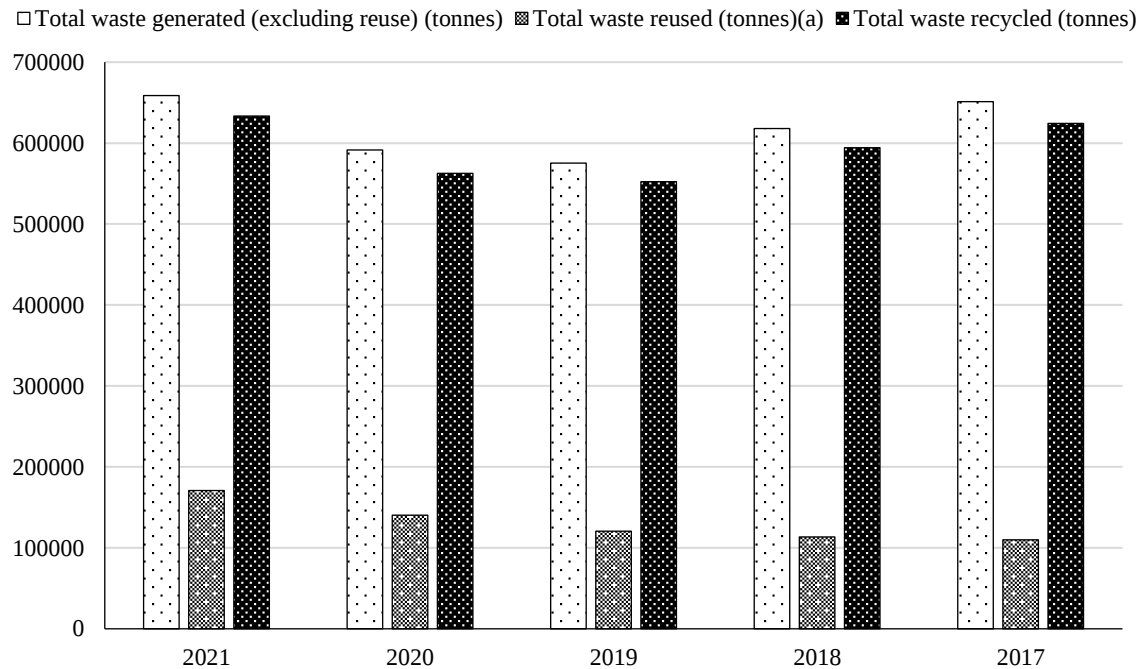


Figure 6. Waste and packaging.

Source: HUL website (Unilever Planet and Society, Sustainability Report [6].

By 2025, all of their plastic packaging will be reusable, recyclable or compostable plastic packaging; they are continuously working towards this as magnum became first ice cream brand to use recycled plastic in its packaging. HUL is also working towards installing refillable stations for products like vim liquid and surf; as one size fits all container does not work, so, experts are working on R&D, test, learn and refine different approaches.

They are also aiming to reduce weight of packaging to one third by using lightweight materials, optimizing structural and material designs, developing concentrated versions of their products and eliminating unnecessary packaging [9]. They fall short of their target due to acquisitions of various brands. Reducing the amount of materials just a few grams makes a huge difference; example is aerosol deodorant cans, conversion of bottles into flexible refill pouches and smart use of design strategy to reduce layers within the sachets.

Whenever HUL uses plastic, they are aiming to choose better options like recycled or recyclable plastics; and by 2025, they are aiming to increase the recycled plastic material content in their packaging to 25%. They are facing challenges in this due to infrastructure, public policy and consumer engagement. Furthermore, they have committed to collecting and processing more plastic packaging than they sell in order to jumpstart more material recycling. As India is a developing market, HUL is finding it difficult to get availability of high quality of recycled waste material. To sort this issue, HUL is working towards setting up local collection and sortation facilities and building technical and commercial viability of reprocessing them at large scale.

Problem with small sachets of products is that they are single use plastics with multiple layers, yet consumers use them only due to their affordability; the challenge for company is that these sachets are not recyclable. It is a technical challenge with no easy solution, so company is working towards collection and using biodegradable solutions. Company is trying to find solutions by using single material to make sachet instead of multiple layers which makes it easy to recycle. There is no usage of PVC (polyvinyl chloride) in packaging, in case it comes with any business acquisition, it is dealt swiftly.

By 2025, they have made some targets:

- Ensure 100% of plastic packaging is designed to be fully reused, recycled or composted.
- Assist in collecting and processing more plastic packaging than they sell.
- Reduce the amount of virgin plastic used in packaging by half to save over 100,000 t of plastic.
- Increase the percentage of post-consumer recycled plastic in packaging to at least 25%. Since 2018, they have collected and disposed of 1.2 lakh tonnes of post-consumer use plastic waste and 100% of their non-hazardous office waste generated is recycled and factory waste is landfilled.

They are using circularity of waste and using it for bio plant which lights 20 streetlights in Haridwar, saving 2.4 kW energy per day since February 2021. In order to fulfil their pledge of halving the use of virgin plastic in packaging, they are resizing their sachets of hair and homecare portfolio by reducing the thickness of aluminium cans of deodorants. HUL has achieved plastic neutrality in 2021, i.e., by maintaining industry-leading standards for balanced pan-India collection, they are able to recover more plastic packaging than they send to the market.

For maintaining a circular economy, plastic packaging needs to be recycled in environment friendly ways; so, redesigning of products was very necessary; some examples are Surf Excel bottle is made up of 50% HDPE, Rin and Comfort of 25% HDPE, even the blister packs of toothbrush and beauty care are made of 80% recycled PET. Now they will start it for shampoo sachets. All the factories of HUL have been equipped with pre-processing facilities for waste segregation and waste reduction at source.

Water Management

HUL was not able to meet their targets to reduce the water impact per consumer due to continuous acquisitions and changes in product portfolio since 2010, water footprint is very high due to products like shower, bathe and wash clothes with HUL products. There is some amount of reduction in skin cleansing and fabric solutions water footprint due to smart innovations such as Rin bar using foam technology which halves the water needed for rinsing.

There has been reduced water abstraction in manufacturing sites and they have attained all their targets early by continuous improvement in all to reduce, reuse and recycle water; they have achieved it through low/no cost techniques and specific projects and investments related to water.

In Asian countries, innovative products like Rin is used which uses less water to rinse whereas in countries like UK, love home and planet dry washes are used where only 0.02% water is used due to dry wash sprays.

They have formulated plans with their suppliers and partners to reduce the water to grow crops by collecting irrigation data and encouraging them to use sustainable agricultural practices by ensuring proper water infrastructure which helps in improving water efficiency and conservation; for example in India, drip irrigation is used to grow tomatoes for Kissan ketchups.

Most important aspect of sustainable sourcing was launch of renewed sustainable agriculture code in 2018 which included guidance on climate smart agriculture and water management (Table 2). To support farmers, they also developed water footprint calculator which complements carbon footprint calculator.

According to reports, India will face a 50% water shortage if current water usage patterns continue, and 60% of our districts are already water scarce. The water pillar of the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP) contributes to a number of UN SDGs (SDGs). HUL's "water for public good" program has made efforts to improve and manage local rural communities' water resources, as well as to improve farm-based livelihoods through the use of judicious water-use practices. In India, HUL has

supported grassroots interventions in 53 districts and 23 NGO partners in 4300 villages. The results of the following were:

- *Water conservation:* More than 980 billion litres of water conserved through improved supply and demand management.
- *Crop yield:* Over 9,60,000 t of additional agricultural and biomass production generated.
- *Livelihoods:* More than 10 million employment days created through water conservation and increased agricultural production.

HUL aims to create an additional 1.5 trillion litres of water potential for India by 2024 by continuously engaging with partners, driving programs, and remaining committed to safeguarding water resources.

From the Table 3 and Figure 7, we can clearly see that use of renewable energy has been increasing every year and HUL has eliminated usage of coal across its operations and switched to alternatives such as biomass and biofuels. HUL has collaborated with green fuel suppliers and local farmers to ensure proper supplies.

Table 2. Water management.

Water Consumption	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Total water usage in our manufacturing sites (megalitres)	30,024,50	29,506,02	30,090,46	34,144,75	36,782,33
Water abstracted (m ³ /tonne of production) (water intensity metric)	1.57	1.52	1.58	1.67	1.80
Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD) effluent load discharged from manufacturing sites (t)	17,551	16,695	17,295	19,620	22,990
Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD) effluent load discharged from manufacturing sites (kg/t of production)	0.92	0.86	0.91	0.96	1.13

Source: HUL website (Unilever Planet and Society, Sustainability Report) [6].

Table 3. Use of renewable energy in HUL.

Manufacturing energy use and GHG emission ^(b)	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Total energy use (GJ)	23,547,483	23,932,970	25,907,758	26,507,528	27,267,621	27,080,563
Energy (GJ/tonne of production)	121	125	127	130	134	135
Renewable energy use (GJ)	12,220,132	10,967,332	9,495,335	8,899,486	8,616,568	7,663,799
Share of renewable energy use (%)	52%	46%	37%	34%	32%	28%
Total CO ₂ from energy (tonnes)	717,398	969,498	1,438,042 ⁽ⁱ⁾	1,567,328	1,705,569	1,770,973
CO ₂ from energy (kg/tonne of production) ⁽ⁱ⁾	36.94	50.76	70.46	76.77	83.52	88.49
NOx from direct energy use (tonnes)	1,867	1,924	2,143	2,271	2,384	2,386

Source: Author's own compilation based on secondary sources.

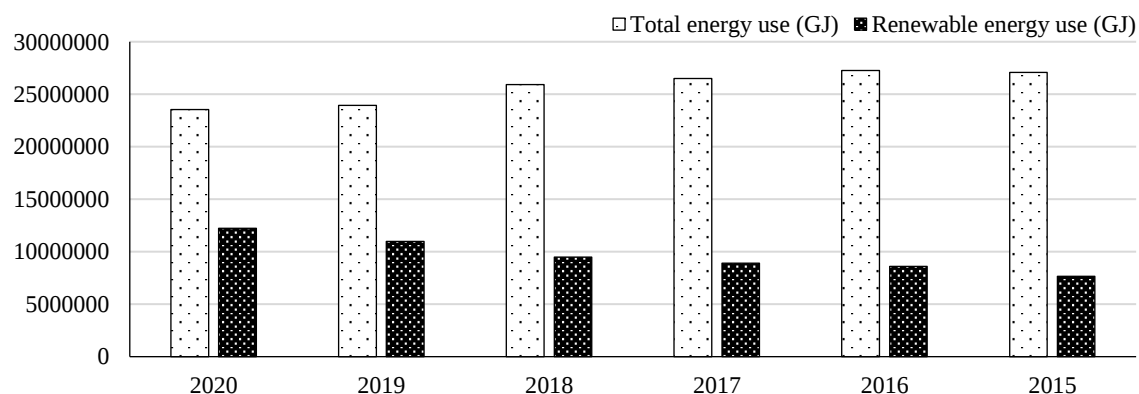


Figure 7. Use of renewable energy in HUL.

Source: HUL website (Unilever Planet and Society, Sustainability Report) [6].

The shift from coal to renewable resources has led the company to savings; for example, in home care plants of HUL, 4 million kgs of CO₂ has been reduced which led to savings of Rs. 3.5 crores in fuel savings. It is a great milestone as the company has targeted to achieve zero emissions by 2030 in their operations. It not only increases green footprints of the company but also enhances quality of air across factories and increases income of farmers by purchasing biomass. HUL's Nashik branch has already purchased three offsite wind turbine generators in addition to onsite solar energy.

PEOPLE

Practices which benefit the employees of the organization: HUL's safety performance measured as total recordable frequency rates improved to 0.63 accidents per million working hours in 2020 as we can see from Table 4. By the end of 2020, 100% of the direct employees were paid at or above the living wage. By 2021, they had expanded their living wage ambition by committing to ensuring that by 2030, everyone who directly provides goods and services to Unilever would earn at least a living wage or income. During COVID-19, their employee assistance programme also supported employees throughout the pandemic. Safe working environment was provided to people and contractual workers in everyday working situations [10].

Table 4. Safety at work.

Safety at work	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Total recordable frequency rate (TRFR) ^(a)	0.63	0.76 ^(a)	0.69	0.89	0.01	1.12
Fatal accidents total	3	4	1	1	4	2
Contractors on site	2	2	0	0	3	1
Employees on site	0	0	1	0	0	0
Employees off site	1	2	0	1	1	1
Lost-time injuries frequency rate (LTIFR)-direct employees ^(a)	0.29	0.38	0.37	0.53	0.51	0.59
Lost-time injuries frequency rate (LTIFR)-contractors ^(a)	0.43	0.50	0.47	0.56	0.57	0.63
Occupational illness frequency rate (OIFR)-direct employees ^(a)	0.41	0.58	0.58	0.78	0.6	0.53

Source: Author's own compilation based on secondary sources.

During COVID-19, they have to quickly stand in support with the nation to tackle this situation, their priority was to ensure safe working conditions for their employees and keep the factories running to supply the essentials. They scaled up their production and brought their fleet of drivers to fore to ensure their products continued to reach the needy.

SOCIETY

The practices followed by the company which benefit the people outside the organization as company is part of society: HUL is committed to expanding its business while remaining socially responsible (Figure 8). Over last 10 years, USLP has been working towards making a positive impact on environment and society in which they operate. They focus completely on multi stakeholder model which is embedded in their business. HUL is focusing on following actions now:

- Improving the health of the planet.
- Improving the health, confidence and wellbeing of people.
- Contribute to fairer, more socially inclusive world.

HUL's CSR activity works on the following principle:

- They are committed to conduct operations with integrity, in interest of stakeholders and in line with code of business principles.
- They work on business model to deliver sustainable growth in which inputs are their brands, people and operations and outputs are sustained growth, lower environmental impact and positive social impact.
- They collaborate and engage with stakeholders including, government, NGOs, suppliers, farmers and distributors to tackle the challenges faced:

1. HUL is working towards WASH (water, sanitization and hygiene) initiatives; for example, lifebuoy 'help a child reach 5' on ground hand washing behaviour changed rate of diarrhoea from 36 to 5% from 2013 till 2020 in Madhya Pradesh.
2. HUL being largest producer of processed food quests for sustainability by making their products reach nutritional standards. In India, 50% of company's food portfolio meets nutrition standards [6].
3. Project Shakti helps women in rural area to become financially independent and develop entrepreneurial mindset. Nearly 1.20 lakh women micro entrepreneurs across 18 states have helped generate income by selling HUL's products, thereby creating positive impact on livelihoods of women [6].
4. During pandemic, HUL pledged an amount of 100 crores to help fight corona virus. They donated kits, hygienic products, ventilators, etc.
5. Hindustan Unilever Foundation (HUF) was founded in 2010 to find solutions for water challenges in India, 'water for public good' programme reaches 11,500 villages across 10 states along with NGO partners to create awareness regarding water conservation near river basins and hydrogeological zones focusing on three pillars:
 - *Know more*: build water numeracy to help and quantify availability, budget and allocation of water usage.
 - *Save more*: promote scientific citizen-led water conservation and governance efforts.
 - *Use less*: drive behavioural change for responsible water use in agriculture.
6. Project Prabhat helps in managing the demand and supply of water in agricultural practices with help of Paani Panchayat and has benefitted 21,471 farmers and a total of over 56 billion litres of water has been conserved.
7. HUL has been awarded with CSR shining star award for their work during COVID.

- Community investment: Sustained involvement with a community organisation to tackle issues that are strategically aligned to our strategy
- ▨ Commercial initiatives in the community: Activities that primarily promote the commercial interests of the business by supporting community causes
- Charitable donations: 'One-off' or occasional donations in support of charitable and community organisations that do not support any strategic imperative related to the business

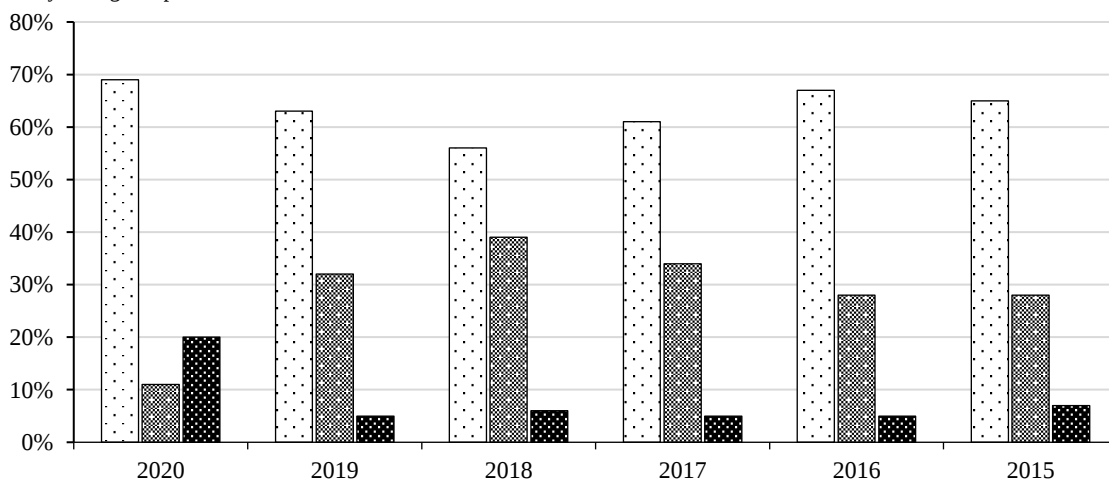


Figure 8. Sustainable practices for society.

Source: HUL website (Unilever Planet and Society, Sustainability Report) [6].

Suggestions

- HUL needs to work more upon consumer awareness regarding sustainability by educating them more about refillable containers of products like Surf, Vim, Rin, shampoos and invest more in making these refillable stations available at supermarkets, so that it has maximum reach to consumers.

- Their transportation system works on two pillars, reducing the kilometers they need to travel and greening the kilometers they have to travel; as in foreign countries, we have seen how trucks move on filling their trucks more efficiently and shrinking the distance travelled across network, HUL should adopt the policy of using different height pallets and find best ways to load their trucks.

CONCLUSION

HUL being one of the largest producers of FMCG goods in India is doing great in sustainability practices by covering three pillars of sustainability, that is, people, planet and society in which they cover all aspects of operations, waste, packaging, sourcing, water, renewable energy, safety at workplace, etc. We have seen how they are investing in new technologies of sustainability from the point of origin of raw material to distributing it to end consumer vigorously. They are in fact partnering with the suppliers who are practicing sustainability at their end so as to encourage sustainability in full fledge. We have seen that how they are helping farmers to adopt sustainable farming practices in terms of agricultural practices by using proper water management techniques, sustainable sourcing. They are also working towards empowering rural women by project Shakti which helps them to become financially independent. We have also seen how HUL has worked during pandemic times to provide essentials to the nation and has been awarded with CSR shining star award for their work during COVID.

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