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Miscommunication of harms? A critique of SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production implementation in the food sector in Northern Ireland

Abstract

Food is an area of concern for the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, which makes a critical evaluation of the current strategies for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation on that front timely and necessary. Moreover, the role of communication around the SDGs implementation deserves further academic attention. The chapter provides a critique of the communication surrounding the implementation of SDG 12 by looking at a case study of the Northern Irish leading poultry producer, Moy Park. Adopting an original lens of green criminology, the chapter argues that communication of the achievement of the SDGs masks the negative effects on the environment and society produced by those doing the communication. Such 'miscommunication of harms' ultimately results in 'greening' of the capitalist ethos of capital accumulation that is not sustainable in the long term and contradicts the idea of sustainable development in general and the ethos of the SDGs more specifically.

Introduction

Food is vitally important for human subsistence. The dimensions of its production and consumption provide an insight into the inner workings of the global economy and politics. Food is also an area of concern for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda. FAO (2019) makes a claim that food and agriculture constitute the backbone of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sustainability-related topics in general are relevant in the food sector, where pressure has been building up to address the existing flaws of global food production and re-orient it towards a more sustainable, ecologically sensitive model (Zanasi *et al.*, 2017). Thus, it is important to critically evaluate the current strategies for the SDGs implementation to determine their effectiveness. Food production provides a perfect lens for such evaluation.

SDG 12 aims to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns and thus also encapsulates the issue of food production. The need to ensure sustainable patterns is more germane for some sectors of food production than for others. For instance, livestock production demands a significant amount of resources: the sector uses large amounts of land, water and nutrients. Reforming it can make a substantial contribution to meeting the targets of SDG 12 (FAO, 2018). As a result of this, the intersection of meat production and the SDGs is the focus of this chapter.

Provided that the levels of global consumption of animal products remain unchanged, some estimations predict that it will increase by seventy percent between 2005 and mid-century (Alexandratos and Bruinsma, 2012). Using this argument, some countries decided to significantly increase domestic livestock production and Northern Ireland is one of them. In 2017, it was reported that Northern Ireland experienced a sharp increase in the number of intensive pig and poultry farms

(farms housing at least 40,000 poultry birds or 2,000 pigs grown for meat or 750 breeding pigs¹). The number of farms went up by 68% from 154 in 2011 to 259 in 2017 (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 2017). This trend is often linked to the adoption of the Going for Growth (GfG) in 2015, an industry-led strategy that endeavoured to expand the agri-food sector and set out a vision of ‘growing a sustainable, profitable and integrated Agri-Food supply chain, focused on delivering the needs of the market’ (Agri-Food Strategy Board, 2013, p. 11). Moy Park, the country’s largest poultry meat producer, has been particularly successful since the strategy implementation, increasing its production by twenty percent since 2015 and now supplying thirty percent of the total UK poultry market (Moy Park, 2018). However, increasing production through intensification is associated with adverse environmental and social impacts (Goodman and Redclift, 1991; Ruhl, 2000; Harvey, 2016) and therefore needs to be weighed against the sustainability objectives laid out by the SDGs.

Communication of sustainability commitments by a business is reported to give an insight into the business strategy (Reilly and Hynan, 2014), thus allowing assessment of the sustainability ethos of a particular company. Yet, sustainability communication can also be tinged with greenwashing (Lyon and Maxwell, 2011; Lyon and Montgomery, 2013), i.e. communication that presents a misleadingly positive view of a company’s environmental performance, thus concealing harms from production. Therefore, communication around the SDGs implementation needs to be critically assessed to understand whose interests it serves – the interests of the planet or the interests of the companies who may increase their profit margins from embracing the SDGs and communicating a more environmentally friendly image to the public and their stakeholders.

This chapter, therefore, provides a critique of the communication surrounding the implementation of SDG 12 by looking at a case study of the Northern Irish leading poultry producer, Moy Park. Grounded in the green criminological perspective, the chapter argues that communication of the achievement of the SDGs masks the negative effects on the environment and society produced by those doing the communication. Environmentally and socially adverse effects do not feature in the communication due to a disproportionate amount of power wielded by the supporters of the current production system and protection of their vested economic interests. Such ‘miscommunication of harms’ ultimately results in ‘greening’ of the capitalist ethos of capital accumulation that is not sustainable in the long term and contradicts the idea of sustainable development in general and the ethos of the SDGs more specifically.

The chapter begins by introducing the theoretical perspective used here – green criminology – and also discusses environmental communication. It follows to introduce SDG 12 and discuss its targets. Furthermore, the chapter presents the implementation of SDG 12 using the case of Moy Park and critically analyses ‘selective disclosure’ of information released by the company. It concludes by stating that, in the case of this chapter, selective communication around SDG 12 implementation strategies reinforces the green image that allows the company to pursue economic sustainability at the expense of environmental and social sustainability.

Green criminology

The green perspective within criminology emerged in the 1990s and created space for criminologists to discuss and critically evaluate environmental problems and solutions (Lynch and Stretesky, 2014). In a nutshell, it is concerned with studying environmental crimes as well as harmful behaviours

¹ As determined by the EU Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) guidelines. See http://eippcb.jrc.ec.europa.eu/reference/BREF/irpp_bref_0703.pdf

positioned beyond the realm of the existing legal frameworks that affect eco-systems, lives of human and non-human animals and the biosphere (Brisman and South, 2018). Considering the current concerns around unsustainable use of the earth's resources addressed by the SDG framework, the spectrum of issues explored by green criminologists is wide. Some of the issues include pollution (air and water), issues surrounding animal welfare and animal rights, harm from global warming, agricultural crimes and harms, harms caused by the illegal disposal of toxic waste (Brisman and South, 2018), etc.

Green criminology has engaged with the issues of production and consumption directly through the Treadmill of Production (ToP) theory (Schnaiberg, 1980) that examines political economic forces behind relations of production and consumption. ToP underlies the dependence on economic growth and argues that this dependence results in 'ecological disorganisation' where 'human preferences for organizing economic production consistent with the objectives of capitalism are in inherent contradiction with the health of the ecological system' (Lynch et al, 2013, p. 998). ToP also prioritises the analysis of relations that shape production over the relations behind consumption to make sure that the analysis of power relations in the political economy is not obscured (Gould, Pellow and Schnaiberg, 2003). There are several reasons behind it. First, consumers can only consume that which is first produced. Second, processes of production are in direct relationship with ecosystems (since the resources for what will be produced must be first extracted from natural ecosystems), while the relationship between consumption and ecosystems is indirect (Gould, Pellow and Schnaiberg, 2003) and therefore has a less significant impact on ecological sustainability. Echoing this argument, Brisman (2009, p. 348) argues that 'whatever environmental benefits are achieved with certain decisions and practices, they may be offset by their limited availability to certain categories of people, and that these exclusive attitudes and behaviours fail to affect other pressing environmental and human health problems'.

Moreover, criminological attention has also been directed towards food production and consumption. Gray and Hinch (2015) regard food as a medium of understanding multifaceted links between humans and ecosystems. Once the concept of food crime was introduced by Croall in 2007, avenues for research included food fraud, food poisoning (Tombs and Whyte, 2010), food mislabelling (Croall, 2012), trade practices and environmental law (Walters, 2006), food pricing, exploitation in food production (Tombs and Whyte, 2007), and cruelty to animals (Agnew, 1998; Yates, 2007). Additionally, critical analyses of harms woven into the fabric of food production have also been analysed by criminologists, including some green criminologists (White, 2012; Gray and Hinch, 2015; Sollund, 2015; Rodríguez Goyes and South, 2016). Regarding food consumption, Agnew (2013) discusses 'ordinary', normalised acts of consumption (such as consuming meat on a regular basis) as contributing to the depletion of the global sustainability fabric. The ordinary nature of such acts ensures their regular repetition. Moreover, as they are deemed acceptable and even desirable, their cumulative effect aggravates environmental problems.

It is evident that green criminology engages with the issues of production and consumption and analyses the impact of current systems of production on sustainability of ecological systems as well as the planet on the whole. Its critical focus makes it a suitable framework through which the implementation of SDG 12 in meat production sector can be examined. Moreover, green criminology also addresses the interplay between sustainable development and communication. Green criminologists have engaged in analysing how experiences of environmental harm are represented and communicated through perspectives of humans and the environment both in reality (Natali and Mcclanahan, 2017) and in fiction (Brisman and South, 2014).

Moreover, green criminologists also take interest in how environmental harms are concealed or miscommunicated and how, while companies allege to be acting in a responsible manner, violation of laws in respect to pollution and use of environmental resources occurs (Nurse, 2014). Considering that environmentally harmful actions are often inseparable from economic development policies and corporate growth (Brisman, South and White, 2015), it is often in the interests of both the state and corporate actors to diminish the seriousness of harm. Considering their powerful position in society, the state and corporate actors also possess all the necessary resources for doing that, and control over communication is one of such resources. For instance, Bradshaw (2014) demonstrates how the American government implemented a regional blackout of media communications in various capacities to hide the environmental impact of the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill. Some criminologists intersect green criminology and communication by examining the discourses used to legitimise corporate harm. For example, Schally (2017) examines the role of discourse in production and reproduction of environmental harm in the case of a large US agribusiness, Tyson Foods. She shows that the discourse developed by Tyson Foods provides a cultural legitimisation of harmful consequences of intensive livestock production and reinforces corporate power wielded by the company. In other cases, the analysis of the strategies for diminishment the seriousness of harm is based on Sykes and Matza's (1957) neutralisation techniques, which include denial of harm or responsibility over that harm, denial of seriousness of harm and reproaching or blaming the victims of harm. Use of neutralisation techniques results in continuation of harm and perpetuation of the status quo.

It has also been established that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the move towards the SDGs are often intertwined (Moggi, Bonomi and Ricciardi, 2018). Some green criminologists review corporate communication on the subject of sustainability through the lens of the CSR. Brisman, South and White (2015) conclude that CSR is employed to enhance the image of the harmful projects by drawing attention from serious problems to projects with a development character. CSR can also be the most common tactic in the food industry to make companies appear responsible while precluding any radical change that is needed to cement sustainable development. As a result, Nurse (2014) encourages that CSR principles be implemented in the legal and regulatory justice system to ensure greater accountability.

Green criminology, therefore, serves as a suitable lens to provide critique of the SDG implementation at the intersection of sustainable development and communication. Green criminology uses a critical approach towards understanding of sustainability as well as communication, thus helping to assess whose interests are prioritised in the implementation of SDG 12 agenda. Blaustein et al. (2018, p. 768) argue that criminologists should contribute to the SDGs agenda by playing both a supportive and a critical role in the process of implementation of the goals. This chapter, thus, hopes to address the critical role of criminologists in their engagement with the SDGs.

Environmental communication

Environmental communication is a thematic subdiscipline that can be distinguished within the field of communication for sustainable development (Lie and Servaes, 2015). Fraser and Villet (1994) suggest that communication for development should change people's lifestyles through awareness and social communication methods to pioneer attitudinal changes. Sustainability implies an equilibrium between economic growth, social equity, and the natural environment, and communication is reported to play a decisive role in creating this equilibrium (Lie and Servaes, 2015). Environmental communication, predictably, creates awareness about environmental problems and aims to bring a positive change in one's living conditions. It has been noted that environmental communication

scholarship is often linked to mass media production and consumption (Hansen and Cox, 2015), and a close link to journalism has also been identified (Lie and Servaes, 2015). Environmental journalism has a particular importance in the face of climate change and other ecological challenges, and its role in enhancing public understanding of environmental issues is crucial (Smith and McGreavy, 2018). Tong (2015) suggests that investigative environmental journalism constructs an antagonism against state capitalism. Environmental journalism (and investigative journalism in particular) holds the state and corporate actors accountable for environmental destruction and increases transparency around environmental problems. The issues of accountability and transparency are crucial; environmental communication can advance the sustainable development agenda if it is based on sufficient and reliable information and is circulated freely (Zikargae, 2018). The notion of reliability is pertinent for this chapter, as I argue that communication around SDG 12 flowing from the corporate actors may be misleading and not contributing to achieving sustainable development agenda. As it was stated above, CSR can be an important communication tool and can apply to environmental communication. Yet, it needs to be deconstructed, considering that companies may be able to misrepresent themselves as environmental stewards in their own communication (Kingsmith, 2012). Additionally, such communication can perpetuate the elite communication of environmental problems and is, therefore, one-way. The question arises what can replace the elite environmental communication and how one can advance sustainable development agenda through communication. Brulle (2010) suggests that environmental communication needs to aim at developing procedures that involve citizens directly in the policy development process and enhance civic engagement and democratic decision making. Therefore, the role of environmental communication in fostering either elite, one-way communication or a democratic process of change needs to be explored in more depth, and this chapter intends to examine this.

SDG 12

The United Nations (UN) adopted a set of 17 SDGs in 2015 to lay foundations for the Global Agenda 2030. The SDGs galvanise governments, businesses and civil society to take action around a common set of priorities to ensure environmental, social and economic sustainability. The 17 SDGs echo the challenges that humanity faces today (such as ending poverty and hunger) and condenses them into tangible targets and indicators to make sure they can be acted upon.

As it was specified above, SDG 12 aims to consolidate sustainable consumption and production patterns. Discussions on sustainable consumption and production have been appearing on the UN agenda ever since 1972 (Gasper, Shah and Tankha, 2019). Sustainable consumption and production, as determined by the Oslo Symposium in 1994, refer to 'the use of services and related products, which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimising the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of further generations' (United Nations, 2019).

SDG 12 is operationalised through the following 8 targets:

- 12.1 Implementation of the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production;
- 12.2 Achievement of the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources;
- 12.3 Halving per capita global food waste and reducing food losses in production and supply chains;
- 12.4 Achievement of environmentally sound management of all wastes in production cycles and reducing their emission into air, water and soil;

- 12.5 Reducing waste generation;
- 12.6 Encouragement of adoption of sustainable practices in large and transnational companies;
- 12.7 Promotion of sustainable public procurement practices;
- 12.8 Increasing awareness around sustainable development in the general public (United Nations, 2019).

Additionally, the goal features three targets related to the Means of Implementation.

In relation to food, SDG 12 works in conjuncture with other goals. Pohlmann et al (2019) showcase that sustainable production ensures employment, thus addressing SDG 1 to eliminate poverty. Sustainable food production may also have potential to eradicate hunger and achieve food security (the agenda of SDG 2) and through that promote good health and wellbeing, tackling SDG 3 (Pohlmann *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, sustainable food production may imply sustainable management of water (SDG 6) and generation of clean energy (SDG 7) (Pohlmann *et al.*, 2019). The latter is particularly relevant for this chapter in the light of the critique of the anaerobic digestion (AD) technology that utilises poultry waste to generate biogas (which will be discussed later). Pohlmann et al (2019) also discuss interrelations of SDG 12 in the context of food production with SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 15 (life on land), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) and SDG 17 (partnership for the goals). Moreover, sustainable production and consumption create interlinkages between the inherently complex integrated dimensions of sustainable development challenges, such as climate change (SDG 13) (Akenji and Bengtsson, 2014). This is particularly relevant in the light of this chapter's focus on meat production, as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has estimated that animal agriculture is responsible for eighteen percent of the total greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change (Steinfeld *et al.*, 2006).

This chapter examines the element of production, rather than consumption, in the implementation of SDG 12, and there are several reasons for it. The goal focuses heavily on the issues of production rather than consumption (with the exception of the target 12.3 that aims to reduce food waste on the consumer level), thus encouraging corporations to see sustainability as a business opportunity rather than a global challenge (Gasper, Shah and Tankha, 2019). SDG 12 places a particular focus on production efficiency that can be achieved through technological innovation. Moreover, ambiguous language of the targets and indicators appears to diminish the importance of regulation in achieving sustainability and prioritises voluntary action instead. The latter serves the interests of producers rather than consumers since producers' goal of profitability clashes with the costs of compliance (Nurse, 2014), and this chapter aims to examine the effects of it.

When applied to food production, SDG 12 is concerned with sustainable consumption and production and aims to 'do more and better with less': the aim is to increase gains from all economic activities, while reducing the amount of resources used, and at the same time lowering environmental degradation and pollution (FAO, 2018). More importantly, FAO (2018) states that a key SDG 12 target is improving efficiency in natural resource use in production processes. FAO (2018) recommends that natural resource efficiency in meat production can be enhanced by adopting productivity improvements, e.g. improvements in animal health, feeding, reproduction practices, manure management and grazing management. However, resource efficiency is primarily associated with better economic opportunities for profit maximisation and it is evident that the philosophy behind SDG 12 prioritises economic sustainability, while environmental sustainability is seen as a beneficial complementary measure rather than a priority. This trend reflects the direction of the global political economy driven by 'growth fetishism' (Kramer and Michalowski, 2012) where economic development is prioritised over social and environmental sustainability. Therefore, implementation of SDG 12 needs

to be analysed more closely, and, as it was stated above, sustainability-related communication enables examination of the relationship between economic and environmental sustainability in more detail. Sustainability-related communication needs to reflect the cross-cutting nature of sustainability issues and communicate changes (Janouskova *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, sustainability-related communication can have a transformative potential: Servaes and Malikhao (2007) state that communication strategies for the implementation of sustainable development can be classified as behaviour change communication, advocacy communication or communication for social change. It is, thus, vital to assess whether current communication around SDGs possesses this transformative potential.

Northern Ireland and Moy Park

As it was stated earlier, Northern Ireland has significantly increased its domestic meat and poultry production, which makes it a suitable case study for analysing how SDG 12 is being implemented by looking at the issues surrounding production. The Going for Growth agri-food strategy aimed to develop a strategic approach to the agri-food sector, drive exports to grow food sales outside Northern Ireland and encourage greater integration of the food supply chain through closer partnership between the industry and the government (Agri-Food Strategy Board, 2013). The strategy was premised on the productionist paradigm and emphasised the importance of efficiency and economies of scale and its ecological and economic sustainability have been called into question (Foord, 2017).

Moy Park, the largest poultry meat producer in Northern Ireland and one of the 15 biggest food companies in the UK, fully embraced the strategy and also developed one of its own – Plan to Grow. For instance, 150 new facilities to house broilers² were built in 2014-2015, with another 100 expected to be built (Moy Park, 2015), and farmer producers were actively encouraged to expand their businesses (Haenlein, 2014). Moy Park intended to build 400 poultry houses by the end of 2016 (Clyde Shanks, 2015). Simultaneously, Moy Park repeatedly emphasised that an active approach was and is being taken to reduce their environmental impact stemming from production. The latter resonates with the implementation of the SDGs in general and SDG 12 in particular.

Northern Ireland responded to the call for implementation of the SDGs by submitting several case studies for inclusion in the Northern Ireland reporting to the UK Voluntary National Review Process and summarising the list of projects undertaken by the NGO sector³. On the subject of SDG 12, Business in the Community NI is reported to be delivering a ‘Circular Economy Business programme which aims to support companies in reducing waste, adopting sustainable use of natural resources, and contributing to local economic growth’ (DAERA and NIEL, no date, p. 5). Business in the Community NI also delivers the annual Northern Ireland Environmental Benchmarking Survey, which assesses how environmentally friendly practices have been embedded in the corporate strategies and encourages improvement in resource efficiency, waste reduction and energy consumption. Businesses participating in the survey are required to provide evidence and analysis of their ‘green credentials, environmental management approach and performance’ (Farming Life, 2017).

In 2018, Moy Park was awarded a Platinum award, the highest-ranking award in the survey. Moy Park has participated in the survey every year since its inception in 1998 and has been achieving Platinum status for the last six years (Belfast Telegraph, 2018). The company announced that ‘as a top UK food company and leading European poultry provider, one of Moy Park’s key responsibilities is to

² The term ‘broiler’ refers to chicken that is bred and raised for industrial meat production.

³ UN Sustainable Development Goals – NI Case Studies

<https://globalgoalsni.org/blog/2019/03/15/un-sustainable-development-goals-ni-case-studies/>

demonstrate best practice and leadership. Part of this is helping to drive forward sustainable practices to minimise environmental impact and make a positive contribution to the way people live' (Belfast Telegraph, 2018). Overall, their sustainability agenda includes measures such as 'reducing energy usage and the resultant greenhouse gas emissions; decreasing water consumption and the discharge of effluent; and recycling or diverting waste away from landfill' (Moy Park, 2015, p. 29). In 2017, for instance, when receiving the Northern Ireland Environmental Benchmarking Survey Platinum award Moy Park announced that their electricity intensity was reduced by eight percent, water use intensity was reduced by four percent and the achievement of zero waste to landfill was maintained (Farming Life, 2017).

It is evident that Moy Park is articulating its commitment to sustainable development and projecting a green image through the Environmental Benchmarking Survey. Yet, it is also important to emphasise that the company sponsors the survey (Belfast Telegraph, 2018). Therefore, Moy Park consolidates their green reputational capital (Aras and Crowther, 2012) not only through financially backing the survey, but also through getting a top-ranking award in it. Sponsorship of the survey grants Moy Park the power to construct the reality of its environmental performance for the public and other stakeholders and enables the company to continue to exercise material and structural power over ecosystems (Gould, Pellow and Schnaiberg, 2003). In addition to general sustainability-related commitments, those addressing specifically SDG 12 and Moy Park's production practices need to be analysed.

The company's website lists Moy Park's corporate responsibility commitments, including environmental commitments. They include commitments on climate change, water consumption, and materials and solid waste. SDG 12 is featured in the latter category where Moy Park pledges to 'play our part to reduce food waste by half, in accordance with UN Sustainable Development Goal 12.3.' (Moy Park, 2019b). Additionally, although without mentioning it, they also address the target 12.4 through committing 'to manage organic waste responsibly, with the medium / long term objective to drive opportunities to convert it to energy' as well as the target 12.5 through minimising 'waste by optimising use of packaging resources' (Moy Park, 2019b). Moy Park reports to regularly monitor resource efficiency and hold strategic reviews to assess how to enhance these initiatives and develop their business in a sustainable and ethical way (Belfast Telegraph, 2018). While the rhetoric of commitment to the SDGs is being developed, it is important to analyse the substance behind this rhetoric.

In relation to food waste, Moy Park reported to 'have donated more than 100 tonnes of surplus food to those in need, enough for over 250,000 meals' (Moy Park, 2019b) since 2015 as well as having implemented smarter packaging to reduce food waste at home. However, the effectiveness of both of those strategies can be critically evaluated. Devin and Richards (2018) suggest that while donating food can be beneficial to those in need, it does not address the structural problems of the supply chain that drive up waste in the first place. Thus, food donations serve as a smokescreen for concealing the inherently wasteful nature of modern-day food production. Moreover, food waste may also increase a company's financial costs and it is in businesses' strategic interest to cut those costs while also managing their public reputation and projecting an environmentally-friendly and socially responsible image (Devin and Richards, 2018). The latter is related to large companies' ability to appear green to prevent any radical change that can threaten their business interests (Lynch and Stretsky, 2003). Similarly, in the case of minimising packaging waste, Moy Park (2019a) reports packaging optimisation measures to reduce the amount of packaging and communicates its commitment to sustainability. However, minimisation of packaging waste is also a business opportunity – DEFRA (2009) reports that packaging optimisation can offer cost-saving opportunities for business and recyclable packaging is

also deemed to maximise returns on packaging waste. Economic sustainability, thus, may take priority over environmental and social sustainability.

Moy Park, therefore, may use its desire to embrace the SDGs as an opportunity for increasing profit, thus allowing the production based on an unsustainable economic growth model to continue (Gould, Pellow and Schnaiberg, 2003). The image of sustainability can also be used for convincing the stakeholders that the company is contributing to delivering good for the environment (May, Cheney and Roper, 2007). The importance of the latter is emphasised by Moy Park: 'many external stakeholders value outstanding sustainability performance so we believe it's important to continually strive for industry leading practices which go above and beyond mandatory or self-set targets' (Belfast Telegraph, 2018).

However, projection of a green image may also be employed as a strategy for covering the actual activities that are damaging for the environment and thus compromising long-term environmental and social sustainability, as a number of authors researching the greenwashing phenomenon point out (May, Cheney and Roper, 2007; Lyon and Maxwell, 2011). Ultimately, greenwashing is about 'telling the truth, but not the whole truth' (Lyon and Maxwell, 2011, p. 9). The case with Moy Park's waste from production illustrates this point.

On the subject of managing organic waste from production, Moy Park aims to increase efficiency by seeking ways 'to use organic waste and implement a commercially viable solution(s)' (Moy Park, 2019b). Around 270,000 tonnes of poultry litter are produced in Northern Ireland every year, and most of it comes from farmers for Moy Park (Macauley, 2019). Moreover, the government predicts that this number can go up to 400,000 tonnes if the industry expands (DAERA, 2014).

It is important to emphasise that waste from agricultural production (animal manure in particular) is already a pressing problem in Northern Ireland. Ammonia emissions from agriculture present a particular challenge. Ammonia is an air pollutant which is known to have a damaging impact on biodiversity as well as human health (DAERA, 2019). When released into the air, ammonia is later deposited onto land and water surfaces in the form of nitrogen. Most of Northern Ireland, including designated sites and other priority habitats, are receiving levels of nitrogen which are significantly above their 'critical load' - the concentration at which significant ecological damage occurs. Critical levels of ammonia from animal manure are exceeded at 90% of the protected habitats in Northern Ireland (DAERA, 2019). Moreover, ammonia emitted from animal manure mixes with other pollutants in the atmosphere, creating small particles known as particulate matter. Particulate matter is associated with human health impacts – it can be harmful to the lungs when inhaled (DAERA, 2019). Therefore, a strategic implementation of SDG 12 is required to make sure that both environmental and social impacts of expanding production are addressed.

One of the solutions for dealing with waste from the industry proposed by Moy Park is anaerobic digestion (AD) technology. Two large anaerobic digestion plants have been built with financial backing from the Northern Irish government to help address the waste problem: near Ballymena in County Antrim and outside Ballybofey in County Donegal, over the Irish border (Macauley, 2019). AD is a process in which organic matter (pig or cattle slurry, poultry litter, energy crops such as grass silage, and food waste) is broken down by micro-organisms in an oxygen-free environment to make biogas and digestate. Biogas can power on-farm operations or supply the grid while the digestate can be applied straight to land as a replacement for artificial fertiliser.

However, while anaerobic digestion is communicated to be the solution to managing waste from Moy Park's production operations, its environmental impact has been called into question. A report from

the Northern Irish Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) indicates that anaerobic digestion does not result in the much-needed reduction of ammonia emissions. While the pollution potential of the final product of AD, the digestate, is less than that of the original feedstock, it is still very high (Northern Ireland Fresh Water Taskforce, 2018). As a result, AD plants, while creating renewable energy, are reported to increase ammonia emissions in Northern Ireland, primarily through the storage of digestate, and the spreading of digestate on agricultural land (Bell *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, an investigation conducted by Source Material (2018) found that those living in close proximity to anaerobic digesters complained about the 'vinegary smell' from the plant and pointed out that their eyes and throats became irritated when the plant was in operation.

It is assumed that technological solutions do not stimulate environmental and social change needed for the effective implementation of the SDGs: they simply 'green' capitalism, thus diverting any form of ecological critique (Gould, Pellow and Schnaiberg, 2003). Power interests safeguard the doctrine of sustainable development, with economically efficient use and management of resources at its core, but manage to dismiss the inherent contradiction between economic production in capitalism and nature, where capitalism must cause ecological disorganisation by polluting nature (Lynch and Stretesky, 2014). Technology might mitigate the harmful impacts of production expansion, but does not challenge or alter the unsustainable nature of the practice.

As it was stated earlier, communication of business performance categorised as greenwashing includes communication of environmentally-friendly actions to deflect stakeholders' attention from less ethical business practices (Siano *et al.*, 2017). The case of Moy Park addressing SDG 12 demonstrates a so-called 'selective disclosure' of information, when positive information about dealing with food waste and minimising packaging is openly communicated, while negative information about waste from production is withdrawn (Lyon and Montgomery, 2015). Moreover, technological solutions proposed by Moy Park may not serve their purpose of mitigating environmental externalities adequately. Instead, it may be merely contributing to the image where communication of environmentally friendly actions obscures less ethical business practices, thus being an aspect of marketing (Nurse, 2014, 2016) rather than a genuine commitment. Finally, the strategies for implementing SDG 12 in Moy Park's case prioritise economic sustainability over environmental and social sustainability, which ultimately serves the interests of profit rather than the planet or people.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a critique of SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production implementation using a case study of a poultry-producing company Moy Park. It revealed the tension between corporate communication about the SDGs and their prioritisation of economic sustainability at the cost of environmental and social sustainability. This tension also reflects the ethos of the goal itself where economic sustainability serves as the dominant narrative, which is not surprising considering the parameters of the global political economy.

While Moy Park's ambition to increase poultry production within the paradigms of the current economic system may clash with the needs of the environment and society, Moy Park endeavoured to develop an argument that reconciles the polarities between economic growth and environmental externalities. Part of that argument is them addressing SDG 12 and communicating their achievements on that front in relation to reducing food and packaging waste and managing waste from production. However, a closer look at the latter reveals how sustainability rhetoric does not correspond with reality and how environmental externalities associated with the increase in production cannot be

eliminated through the use of technology. Therefore, selective communication around the implementation of SDG 12 is not contributing to sustainable development but sustains and reinforces the 'green' image that Moy Park projects to stakeholders and the general public. The latter ultimately enables them to safeguard economic sustainability and continue profit accumulation. The current 'efficient' mode of poultry (and other meat) production lends itself to profit accumulation, but its negative effects can be concealed through a 'scene-stealing argument' (Myerson and Rydin, 1996, p. 194) of sustainable development. Corporate communication, thus, may serve as an enabler for the pursuit of economic sustainability at the cost of environmental and social sustainability. The latter fulfils the ultimate goal of a corporation where 'the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits' (Bisschop, 2010, p. 349).

While there's a danger that economic sustainability may be high-jacking environmental and social sustainability in the SDGs as there are 'direct profit interests in going green' (Bisschop, 2010, p. 356), alternative pathways need to be thought of where economic development is not the dominant paradigm. I suggest that the implementation of the SDGs needs to be critically scrutinised without taking the corporate reporting of it at face value. The broader context in which the implementation of the goals takes place also needs to be further assessed to better understand the goals of all actors involved and the means available to them to achieve those goals. SDGs implementation may benefit from being assessed from a perspective of local communities and organisations familiar with the local community perspective. Furthermore, corporate voluntary action towards the implementation of the SDGs needs to be supplemented with rigorous regulation (Nurse, 2014) to avoid 'deep greenwash' - a strategy advocating for corporate self-regulation at the expense of government policies (Góngora and Lucía, 2013). More regulation around the SDGs will transcend the imprecise and ambiguous language of its targets and indicators, and hopefully contribute to a more balanced idea of sustainability.

The chapter also demonstrates that corporate communication is not an effective medium to achieve sustainable development since it is not aimed at structural social change and, therefore, does not possess the transformative potential. Moreover, such elite environmental communication does not allow for civic engagement and public dialogue. Instead, voices advocating for structural transformation should be given a priority in communication for sustainable development. Considering intersectionality of the goals, advocacy around other SDGs can serve as a powerful tool for transitioning towards more sustainable food systems in general and meat production in particular. Such advocacy can also originate in investigative environmental journalism. In this chapter's case, investigations carried out by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism and Source Material were vital for uncovering the discrepancy between corporate communication in the form of CSR and the reality of the implementation of SDG 12.

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