

Transcript

Sustainability Day - 28 October 2020

What you need to know about carbon footprints – Jo Hand, Giki

Jo Hand: So thank you for having me here today. I am going to talk to you today about what is a carbon footprint. Why is it important? And what can we do about it. But before I start I just wanted to give you a brief introduction to Giki before I share some slides. So Giki stands for Get Informed Know Your Impact and I set it up with my husband James in 2017 to help everybody really understand and reduce their carbon footprint. That's what we try to do every day by providing information through an app and a web app, which I'll go into detail in a second, which helps you understand, track and reduce your carbon footprint in a way that's accessible and fun, which is clearly very important because actually the word carbon footprint can sometimes make us glaze over a little bit, but I promise it will be clear and non-technical.

So, I'm going to talk today about the work that we've put into how we've built Giki Zero and how that's relevant to you guys today. But to start with, what is a carbon footprint? In very simple terms it's a measure for the carbon that we produce and that we are responsible for as individuals. So carbon footprints actually cover quite a few different greenhouse gases which are responsible for climate change and global warming, but they are all measured in what's called carbon dioxide equivalent. They come from various different components of our lifestyle. At Giki what we've done is divide it up into 5 key components of our lifestyle. So the first is Services. So what do we buy? Things like insurance, that kind of thing. Next up is Purchases. So Services are services we buy, Purchases are stuff that we buy. Next up is What We Eat, that could be at home or when we go out. What about our Home, that can be quite a big chunk of our carbon footprint and I'll talk about that in more detail later. The 5th component is Travel. Again, quite a hefty chunk.

So all of these components together add up to make our own personal carbon footprint. Now in the UK the average UK footprint is about 9 tonnes per person per year. Now it's very difficult to get your head round the concept of what is a tonne of carbon. The good news is you don't really need to. The key thing that we need to focus on now and in the coming years is that we need to get from 9 tonnes to about 2½ tonnes by 2030 to be in line with what scientists recommend in terms of curbing the worst effects of climate change. So that is a big chunk and I'm going to show that in a bit more detail later.

But I think what's also really important to think about is that actually all of the environmental issues that we're becoming increasingly aware of like carbon emissions, but also plastic pollution, deforestation which also is linked to increased carbon emissions, and all the negative impacts that this is having on wildlife and nature and threatening animals with becoming endangered or indeed sometimes extinct. None of us want to be responsible for any of these things, but unfortunately they're kind of inherent in much of modern lifestyle and inherent in the lives that many of the 8 billion of us on earth today live. So what can we actually do about it and why is it so important?

So this graph shows how carbon emissions have gone up globally in the last 200 or so years, really since the Industrial Revolution which is when this huge increase started as a result of burning fossil fuels. So this is where we are today in terms of carbon emissions in the atmosphere and this is where we need to get to by 2030. Then down here by 2050, effectively no carbon emissions. If we look at this level in the graph, where we need to get to by 2030, that's about comparable with where we were around World War Two. So there's a lot of work to be done. There's no doubt that that needs to come from really every part of society. So policy is going to be massively important.

Businesses also are going to need to not only operate more sustainably, but also provide goods and services that are properly sustainable. But there's also a massive amount that we as individuals can do both within our own lifestyles and also encouraging change in broader society through, as Jen

said, our own connections and families, but also in encouraging politicians and businesses to change as well. So that's what things look like at a global level. But you might be thinking how does that actually relate to me.

So this graph here, I appreciate it's pretty busy and hard to read, but it encapsulates really what we're trying to do with Giki Zero which is to give you your own personal plan and pathway that you control and set to get towards net zero, which means that any carbon emissions that we are producing are then effectively at zero. So if we're producing a little bit of carbon, we might end up offsetting that with tree planting, for example. Just to put that in a bit more context, our approach at Giki is very much about avoid and reduce and then for the last element if we can't make some changes in our lifestyle which is kind of inevitable in the way that society is today and the way that we all live, then restoration and tree planting can be really powerful in the short term.

So all of these components at the bottom are changes that we can make to our life over a period of time. This does not happen overnight and also it's really important to find what actually works for you. It's got to work with your lifestyle, it's got to work with your budget. It's no good if you live in the middle of the countryside where you can't access anything without a car saying, 'Well I'm going to stop driving.', that's just never going to happen and it's not going to work for you. So it's about finding steps that actually stick for you and your lifestyle and are affordable as well. The good thing is often they actually help save money. So that's an additional benefit.

This really shows what we need to do globally and this shows one possible route that we can do at a personal level. There are loads and loads of different ways that we can make changes to our life and reduce our carbon footprint and it is about finding what's right for you. Before I go into a bit more nitty gritty I just wanted to give an example of a girl called Scarlett who we have done lots of work with, who was one of our first ever Giki Zero users and testers. She started using it and she chose quite a range of steps, some big in terms of impact like switching to renewable energy. She said she couldn't believe how easy that was and it didn't cost her any more.

Things like turning her thermostat down. If you just turn it down¹⁰ that can actually make quite a difference to the amount of gas or whatever your power source is that you need each year, and going red meat free. That was one that she was quite concerned about. But actually she says she had some friends round and she decided to make them a vegan dinner without telling them. They said it was amazing and asked what it was. When they'd all finished eating she told them it was totally vegan. They couldn't believe it and that gave her a bit more confidence that actually you can change your diet and it doesn't mean that you have to compromise necessarily.

Then some real simple ones like turning the power off on your appliances. I think what's really important and what Jen touched on earlier as well thinking about some of the steps that we can take can have a big impact. Some of them are much smaller, but a lot of it's about just adapting our mindset and thinking about things differently, reframing some of our decision-making and some of them take time to see the benefits. But often there are some that we wouldn't have even dreamt of. So what we've tried to do with Giki Zero is really make it as easy as possible to get your head round some of the complexities of what is a carbon footprint so you don't need to understand what a ton of carbon is, you don't need to be able to visualise it, you just need to be able to see where the big chunks are that you can then start thinking about what you can do. So the first stage with Giki Zero is actually understanding what your carbon footprint looks like.

So you can put in some very simple answers to questions that take just 5 minutes. Or you can get into much more nitty gritty depending on your appetite for putting in lots of information. So, for example, thinking about your diet is a really good place to start. You can either here put in the type of diet you have, or if you really love putting in data you can put in every single piece of food that you consume on a weekly or monthly basis. We love dogs, so we've also included favourite members of the family, we've carbon footprinted every dog so you can work out what your dog's diet contributes to in terms of carbon footprint. Then we also look at travel. For example, here you can put in every flight that you

might take, look at trains or tubes or whatever your mode of transport is, cars obviously, as well. The aim of this process is really twofold really. Firstly to start thinking about the different aspects of your life that have a carbon footprint, and dogs is an obvious one that we often don't really think about that. The second is actually once you've got your head round all of these aspects, it helps you identify how it all shapes up in the combination.

So if we look at the average footprint in the UK, and as I said it's around 9 tonnes, how does that actually break down. So if we start with Home, the big chunks here would be your electricity or your gas, or if you live in the country and you don't have gas you are on oil. Those are the really big chunks, but also things like waste, not food waste, but things like what you chuck out in the rubbish every week, home maintenance, those kinds of things would all sit within your Home. Then Food is about $\frac{1}{4}$ of your carbon footprint on average.

That's really everything that you eat wherever you are. There's been lots of coverage recently about the fact that if you reduce the amount of meat that you eat that can make a big impact on your footprint and it certainly can. We'll talk about that in a bit more detail later on. But I think it's definitely worth thinking about just how you can make smaller changes initially and you've got to work out what works for you. Transport this potentially again is a very big chunk. The biggest components here tend to be car or air travel. The smaller components, bike obviously pretty much carbon neutral. Trains are also very carbon efficient as well.

Then Purchases. So that's everything we buy. The points that were made earlier about the kind of immediacy of buying everything on Amazon. We're quite used now to buying a lot of stuff and over time that can mount up in terms of carbon footprint, but also broader environmental impacts.

Then Services. So that's really everything from our bank accounts, pension providers, insurance, all of these things that are just part of everyday life that we often don't really think about the impact that they might have on the environment.

So this is how things look on average. But I think what's also really important to remember is that footprints vary massively. So if, for example, you are a family that live in the countryside, don't tend to go abroad a huge amount for holidays but need to drive a lot around and live in a house that's old and draughty, your carbon footprint is going to shape up very differently compared to say a young couple who live in a flat in the centre of a city that's modern and well insulated but that travel a lot for holiday or for work. So I think it's really useful to understand how broadly people's footprints shape up.

Actually also it's so personal and not only is it personal how our footprints shape up in terms of is the biggest chunk Transport or Food or Home or if you buy tons and tons of stuff this Purchases bit could be much bigger. But it's also really, really personal in terms of what you can do about it. I think that's something that is really important to remember in this whole process, that some changes are just not going to work for some people, but they're going to be perfect for other people.

So the next crucial stage. Once you've actually understood what your footprint looks like what can you do about it? Within Giki Zero we've got around 120 steps that you can choose from, and you can filter them on the different areas of your lifestyle, but also in terms of their impact on the planet and how easy or difficult they are. The other thing that we also show for each of the steps is what the additional benefits are. What's really interesting actually is that about a $\frac{1}{3}$ rd of those steps help save money as well. That's often the case that actually being more eco can cost a bit less as well.

Not always and I know that there's often a concern that it costs more to be more sustainable. In some cases it does, but often it doesn't and that's a good thing. There are also often health benefits as well. So that's another one to remember. I think often we might feel if there's just one reason to do something that's not necessarily enough. But if there are some other reasons as well, that might just help push us over the line and make us really want to try something for the first time.

So the steps range really quite significantly in terms of how easy or difficult they are to much more complex ones. But here's a simple one to start with. Trying plant based milk for a week. The carbon footprint of dairy milk tends to be much higher than the carbon footprint of say oat milk. Again, this is just a kind of habit thing and one of the steps that we have in Giki Zero suggests that you try eating animal products, so meat, dairy, fish, eggs once a day, rather than in every meal of the day.

Something like that can make a really big difference. So for breakfast, for example, you might have a smoothie and some cereal with non-dairy milk, and then a bit of toast with margarine that hasn't got dairy in. Then for lunch a veggie sandwich or something like that and then for dinner you can have whatever you fancy, and that actually in terms of your carbon footprint over a year can really cut quite a big chunk off it. So much of it is actually about trying different steps and working out what's right for you.

Choosing a bank or building society that does not support fossil fuel companies. So this is a really big one actually. This is quite an effort, I'll be honest, but in terms of impact it can be really quite significant. So if we look at your average UK bank, if you have £100 in a bank account, approximately £2 in every £100 would be invested in fossil fuel companies. So when your money's sitting in the bank, or your pay cheque has just come in and you haven't yet spent it, in that period the money in your bank account will often be lent by the bank to a company that is a client of the bank and those clients are sometimes fossil fuel companies. So it's not something that we very frequently think about, but actually thinking that the money that you earn is then being lent before you spend it to support fossil fuel companies that obviously have a high carbon footprint. Once you think about that if that's not something that you're necessarily that comfortable with, the good news is there are options there. Triodos is a totally fossil free bank and also building societies as well don't operate in the same way as high street banks. So that can be a good option as well.

I wanted to just talk about one particular area that's relevant to all of us. Just to show in visual form really how 1 decision in terms of how we clothe ourselves can make quite a big impact in terms of our carbon footprint. Clothing has been in the press a lot in the last few years because of fast fashion, the impacts that it has on the environment from the perspective of pesticides, particularly in cotton farming where pesticides are used really extensively and have had lots of problems not only for nature, but also actually humans have been extremely badly affected by the use of pesticides, farmers working on those farms. But clothing also has a carbon footprint. So in the UK we buy well over 30 pieces of clothing or footwear every year on average.

So if we reduced that to 10 items or less then that would really cut quite a significant chunk. So we're looking here at almost a 1/5th of a ton of carbon off our footprint if we massively reduce the amount from the average amount of clothes and shoes bought every year. If you love your clothes and that doesn't sound so appealing, so you want to keep being able to buy new clothes, actually opting for second-hand clothes can make quite a difference because they're not being created from scratch, they're already there. There's a massive increase in the marketers of second-hand clothes, things like Depop and eBay and charity shops, all sorts of things popping up.

There's even some very high-end designer second-hand sites now. So there is loads of choice and actually it's much more aspirational than it used to be. Gone are the days of the jumble sales. There are some pretty nice second-hand clothes. So I think it's just thinking about what your options are and what's going to work best for you and understanding what the impact of those steps are and if they're actually worth doing from your perspective.

Now I just wanted to focus on some of the really big wins. If you're thinking at the end of today you really want to go big, and you want to make a big splash in terms of the steps, or the individual step or couple of steps you decide to do off the back of what you've heard today. So green electricity I would say is a total no brainer now because it is not any more expensive and it just makes a really big difference in terms of your carbon footprint because suddenly all of your electricity is being made by

wind farms largely in the UK, rather than the burning of fossil fuels. So that's a really good one. There's not really any downside on that one.

There is no feeling that you've got to make any changes to your life. The divest one, so this is talking about moving not only your bank account, but also potentially any savings like ISAs that kind of thing, or your pension, to fossil fuel free providers. What's really interesting actually is if you were say somebody in their 60s who's got a decent sized personal pension scheme, that might really be quite a significant chunk of their total carbon footprint, because it would have got quite big by that stage, many years of saving, and has got to see them through for a number of years. So that money all being invested on the stock markets could potentially have quite a big carbon footprint. So changing providers to somebody who's not investing in fossil fuels can be a really big win.

I also just want to just show from a diet perspective. There was quite a lot of discussion in the previous talk that Jen gave about veganism. Clearly that's not for everybody. What's really interesting about this chart is actually if you just decide to cut out in this case but even reducing red meat, that can make quite a big chunk of carbon savings. The reason for that is that cattle and lambs and sheep as well have high amounts of methane that they emit. Also all farm animals are fed on soy which can be farmed in areas that have previously been natural forests. So it contributes to deforestation as well. So there are lots of different components.

It's never 1 specific reason. But reducing or cutting out red meat can really make quite a difference. Then here we can see how the impact of just going mainly plants is a big one as well if you decide you want to go down that route. I just wanted to finish up by saying that we have been really heartened, and it's what we wanted to hear from 11 year olds who are using Giki Zero, and I think that shows that not only is that generation really into this kind of thing now, which is great, but also actually it's pretty simple to use. It doesn't mean it's simple to make all the changes in your life, but it is simple to use which is a really important first step.

It's also used by people at the totally opposite end of the spectrum. So we had a carbon accounting professor who'd spent 2 hours going through it, but also the UN Climate champions who are driving the COP event that's taking place in Glasgow next November are using it too. So I think that just shows that there's something in there for everybody and you can go as deep as you want, or you can keep it as high level as you want and you can use it in the way that hopefully works for you. The link is here. But I think on that note it would be great just to open up the discussion really and hopefully I can answer any questions that you have, but I think the main thing is just use it to do what you want it to do. Pick and choose to suit your lifestyle because that's what it's there for and that's the way it will work most effectively for you.

Lucy: I just wanted to mention that I've just popped the link to our internal page about Giki. So on there you can find out how to sign up. I went through and answered all the questions probably in about 10 or 15 minutes and had a pretty good idea of my carbon footprint and can start chipping away at the steps to start taking, which was really, really good. On that page where I've just popped the link in there is a form that we've asked people to just let us know that they've signed up because what that means is that we can then attach colleagues to our organisation or Giki and we can see how we're all getting on as a collective.

The way that we've done that at the moment is we are going to be breaking it down by Unit. So the nice thing is we can get an idea of where people are really succeeding in cutting their carbon footprint and get an idea of where people might be finding it a bit more tricky and some of the steps that they're trying but maybe need a little bit of support or encouragement and hopefully that can feed in to some of the stuff that we're doing with Go Green going forwards.