

What are the main challenges in ethics, responsibility and sustainability that I personally need to tackle when I return from this module? To what extent could partnership and/or leadership approaches enable me to address these issues? How has experiential learning from the residency informed my practice?

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Introduction

According to Pulker et al. (2018) there is no specific definition for Ethics, Responsibility and Sustainability (or ERS) within the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). It is due to this lack of established definition that the supermarkets are usually recognised for having *unprecedented and disproportionate power* while leading their businesses in the international food system (Hawkes, 2008, Pulker et al. 2018). However, in terms of implementing ERS through CSR, BiC (2020) states,

"A responsible business as one that puts creating healthy communities and a healthy environment at the centre of its strategy to achieve long -term financial value." (BiC, 2020)

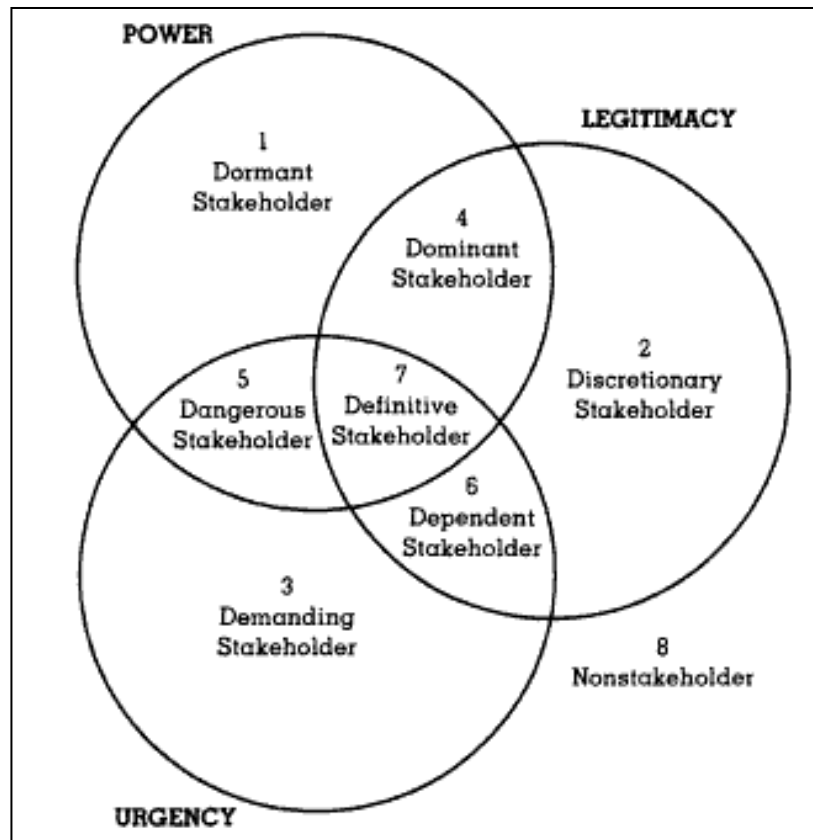
Based on this definition, it can be stated that the economic growth and financial stability of a business should remain highly dedicated towards the community services and ethical norms. Along with these aspects, there are concerns of maintaining legislative regulations and Acts meant for the wellbeing and safety of all the stakeholders, related to the particular business.

In this context, I aim to identify the challenges related to ethical concerns, matters of responsibility and sustainability as noted by *Sustainable Development Goals* of UN (2019).

In my company- Aldi Stores Limited (ASL), UK. My aim is to identify these challenges and resolve them through the improved leadership and management skills that I have gained from this module.

For this purpose, the identification of the stakeholders has been initiated through Mitchell stakeholder theory (see Figure below) -

Figure 1 Mitchell Stakeholder Theory



Source: Mitchell et al. 1997, p. 874

Ethical Issues: Aldi Stores Limited

In terms of ethical concerns, the reports of Oxfam (2018) have found that there exist significant issues that the company needs to handle in relation with its stakeholders. As per this report, Oxfam (2018) identified that there are millions of workers and farmers from the small-scale industries, who are involved in producing food for various supermarkets of the UK. The list includes Aldi Stores Limited (ASL). Following Mitchell Stakeholder theory, these farmers are identified as the dependent stakeholders of ASL, who are struggling for even their basic living standards and are practically trapped by intensive poverty and hunger. The research by Oxfam (2018) highlights that the food supply chains, where the workers are facing innumerable human rights abuses, which are ranged from verbal abuse, forced tests for pregnancy, exposure to a

massive amount of pesticides and without any access to toilets. In relation to Aldi, the Director of Campaigns, Oxfam, Matthew Spencer, suggests,

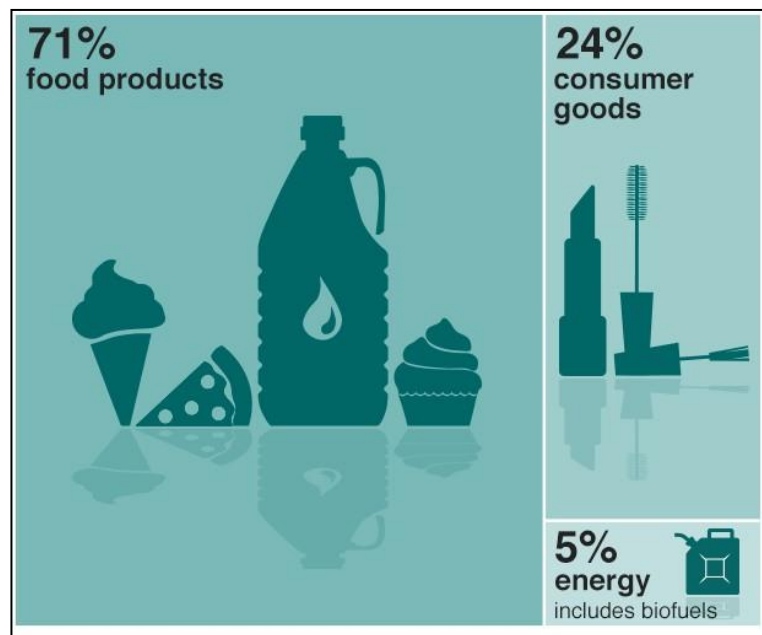
"We'd encourage Aldi to seriously raise their game so that they can reassure us that they are doing what they can to drive out suffering and hunger from their supply chains. This presents a win-win opportunity for Aldi – by committing to changes that benefit their poorest workers, they can reinforce the loyalty of their customers."

As reported by Bland (2015), the supermarket sector, especially in the case of Aldi, there is an *absolute mess*. The report adds that even though these supermarkets are worth billions of pounds, still they have the *manic obsession* for gaining a maximum within a short term. The stores like Aldi are coming up with substantial new discounters, yet the comparative pricing structure is still very higher than one can ever expect (Bland, 2015). Moreover, Jolly (2020) and Eley (2020) also stated that *Aldi topped £1bn* during the Christmas season.

These observations reflect that ASL is earning huge financial status, yet there are issues related to its supporting activities to the dependent stakeholders, farmers. Following these observations and suggestions, I, as a responsible manager at ASL will lead a team, which can take care of these dependent stakeholders in the most effective manner. The core objective of this team will be to offer necessary health care services to the farmers. For this, I will initiate the process of sanctioning adequate finance under the CSR provisions of Aldi, to construct toilets in their areas. Along with these constructions, my core aim will remain focussed in offering the basic hygiene related training to these farmer communities.

The next severe ethical concern is the use of palm oil by ASL. Aldi (2019) has clearly accepted that palm oil is used in the production of many foods as well as non-food items. Moreover, there is an increasing demand of palm oil in the global market. As a result of this, large rainforest areas are destroyed for the plantation of palm oil (see Figure below)-

Figure 2 Use of Palm Oil for various products



Source: Pickup (2019)

In order to manage this environmental concern of global warming, the company is selling palm oil-based products, under the regulation of RSPO (Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil) certification. Since, 1st of Jan 2019, the company has been certified under RSPO and since then it is using only those palm oil products, which are collected from deforestation-free certified sources (Aldi, 2019).

However, against all these initiatives, Aldi is still under the pressure of unethically using palm oil products. As reported by Pickup (2019) for BBC, apart from RSPO certification, there are four different kinds of certifications that the supermarkets should adopt for restricting the deforestation proceedings led by the increasing demands of palm oil. These certifications are related to Identity preserved, Segregated, Mass Balance, and Credits (see Appendix 1, for details). In the same report Pickup (2019) further adds that few renowned supermarkets of the UK - *Morrisons, Aldi and Lidl* have not yet provided any kind of data about using palm oil products. This makes the situation very critical. It affects the positive image of the company

and also creates a sense of mistrust among consumers for maintaining ethical concerns in accomplishing environmental responsibility.

As a manager at Aldi stores, I would instead initiate the proceedings for gaining the aforementioned certifications. However, in the meantime, I would make my staff aware of products that are using less or no palm oil at all. Emphasis on the selling of omega-9 healthy oils will be initiated. Since omega-9 healthy oils are free from trans-fat and comprise of the lowest amount of saturated fat, they will be more robust options for consumers by reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases. My focus will remain strict in offering suggestions for using omega-9 healthy oils in the restaurants of the UK (Johnson and Bradford, 2014). However, I also understand that alternatives for palm oil might appear expensive in some cases. As a manager, I would like to make the company authorities understand that sustainable palm oil should be refined so that its glycidylesters and 3-MCPD levels could be mitigated to incur additional costs in the process of production (Hinrichsen, 2016).

Effective Responsibility: Aldi Stores Limited

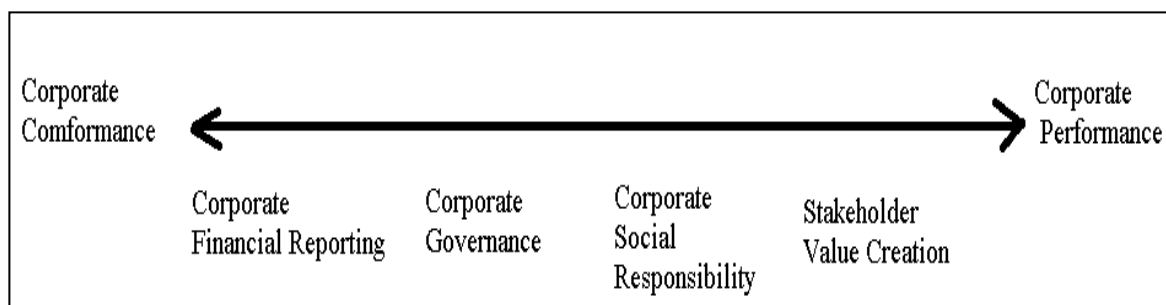
According to Sternberg,

“In order not to be ultimately self-defeating, a business must, therefore, be conducted with honesty, fairness, the absence of physical violence and coercion, and a presumption in favour of legality” (Megone and Robinson, 2002, p. 26).

In this context, the responsibility by a company, especially towards corporate governance and its stakeholders becomes highly sensitive. Being strictly adhered to various legal regularities and protocols becomes a matter of daily concern for many organisations. As well defined by Pinteá (2015), there is a very well-knitted relationship between the maintenance of Corporate Governance while dealing with CSR related issues. The objective of corporate governance

remains focussed in the implementation of legal regulations and rules by a particular business, especially while operating, regulating and controlling its supply chain management. The essence of leadership attributions in this frontier is subject to remain effective while managing both internal as well as external business factors, especially those affecting the stakeholders' interests. Pintea (2015) identified that that *corporate conformance* or compliance of all kinds of recommended regulations, standards, laws and rules; along with corporate performance must have CSR follow-ups. As noted in the figure below-

Figure 3 Conformance and Performance of Corporate Governance and CSR



Source: Pintea (2015)

From this theoretical explanation, it can be established that the leadership traits for managing supply chain within corporate governance, must have an absolute sense of legislative understanding and further systematic implementation of CSR proceedings. In this domain of corporate governance, Legislation.gov.uk (2015) has declared a mandatory law for generating Modern Slavery Act 2015. According to the Modern Slavery Act 2015, the Section 54 is inclusive of protective instructions for restricting any kind of human trafficking, instances of forced labour and above all exploitation of workers, within the supply chain of the business. In the case of ASL, these abuses are strictly restricted under the Aldi UK (2019 a). Aldi UK (2019 a) affirms that the maintenance of Social Standards in Productions are based on selected international policies, such as-

- The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises
- The International Labour (ILO) Conventions
- The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

However, against all these follow-ups in the supply chain, there are constant accusations over the process of supply chain management of Aldi. However, as established by Aschendbrand et al. (2018), it is the supply chain that is vulnerable to Ethics, Responsibility and Sustainability (ERS) risk, and the research shows that 75% to 80% of total managers considers that ERS as the highly risky frontier in a supply chain. This appeared absolutely true when recently Aldi has faced serious accusations from Transport Workers Union (TWU). According to some videos and images released by TWU, there are “*major safety problems at Aldi*” (Hogan, 2019). The concerns are also related to ‘underpaying employees, deaths on roads, deliberately offering harm ways to the employees, violation of laws in using heavy vehicle, terrible maintenance of transport fleet, silencing workers, and complete ignorance to their responsibilities within the entire process of the supply chain’ (Hogan, 2019).

Though against these accusations, Aldi and TWU are in court, yet it is difficult to believe that all the accusations are fake or irrelevant. There seems to be some relevance, as TWU (2019) claims, ‘*Unfortunately, Aldi would rather silence them in a court case than listen to their safety concerns.*’ It is severe to note that these accusations are clear examples of exploitation of workers as identified under Section 54, Modern Slavery Act 2015. Even though Aldi declares that it is working with its partners and has its effective initiations of *Stronger Together*, to ‘*deter, detect and deal*’ with any kind of human right issue within the supply chain, yet its challenges seem evident after the claims made by TWU (2019).

In order to resolve and further restrict such human right issues as mentioned by TWU, I personally would like to follow the PEAS Framework as forwarded by MSUCB (2020). By the

acquisition of this framework, I have realised that under corporate governance, it is the responsibility of Aldi to listen to the grievances of truck drivers who are working for Aldi. In order to prevent grievances of this order, from the transportation department employees of my unit, I would instead establish a more transparent communication with them. As stated by Pinteá (2015) for balanced corporate governance, the leader must have a particular direction, with an adequate amount of control as well as transparency with subordinates. It is my responsibility as a manager to be able to build an adequate amount of accountability among the subordinates. For resolving issues as stated by TWU, the first initiative that I would take is to have a face to face conversation with Aldi logistic employees and collect all their grievances. Based on the teleological approach for resolving an issue, I would rather focus on offering decisions in accordance with the anticipated consequences of the related grievances. I would follow the utilitarianism way of dealing with my employees who are in the logistic department, rather than having any direct talk with TWU. For the adequate amount of welfare of my employees, I would rather have transparent conversations with those truck drivers who are actually feeling insecure and left out with Aldi.

Though by implementing new technologically advanced automated freight system (Paddeu et al., 2019, see Appendix 3), many issues can be resolved immediately, yet on humanitarian ground, I would prefer to offer more humane solution. At the very initial stage, I would implement the strict follow up of provisions related to load security as declared by GOV.UK (2019) (see Appendix 2 for details). Then with local partnerships, I would arrange proper training and appropriate recruitment of only those drivers who have no criminal records. This process will emphasis on recruiting drivers from local communities under CSR provision. The objective of this step will remain focused on offering financial support to the needy families of those localities where Aldi is functioning its business. Right to education provisions and regular health treatment camps will be arranged for the welfare of children of the drivers of Aldi. This

will also serve one of the UN sustainable development goals. From here, the company can expect to have more loyalty from the drivers so that they offer the best of their services to the company. Following the deontological approach, I would try to develop Kantianism way of looking into moral judgments of the drivers, whereby they will feel that the consequences of any kind of wrong action can hamper the reputation of the company, which is actually supporting educational and health concerns of their children.

Sustainability Concerns: Aldi Stores Limited

For the sustainability of an organisation, it is necessary that the leaders remain very keen on meeting the megatrends of the global markets. The definition of megatrends as stated by Frost & Sullivan is -

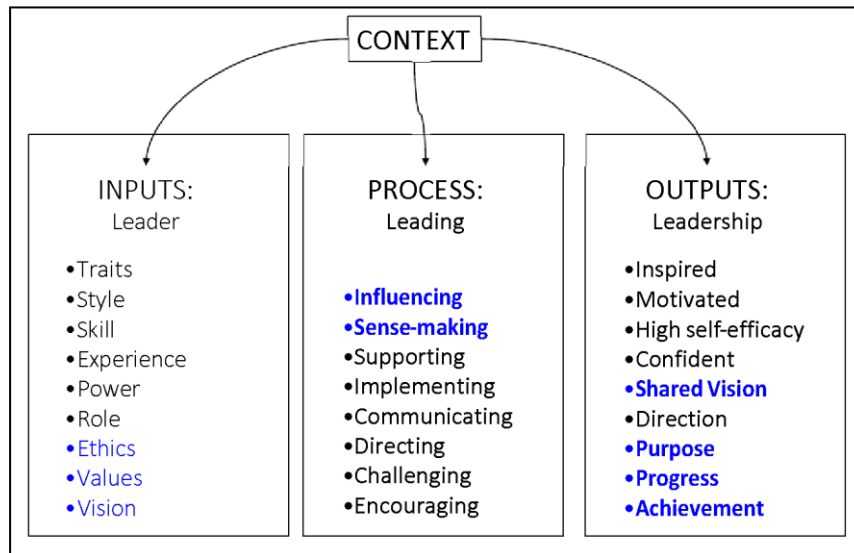
Megatrends are global, sustained and macro economic forces of development that impact business, economy, society, cultures and personal lives thereby defining our future world and its increasing pace of change"(2014, p. 2).

From the definition, it can be well noted that basically *macroeconomic forces* that are meant to make an organisational set up more adaptive to future changes. These megatrends comprise of all those aspects that are mentioned in UN sustainable development goals. On a more specific manner, these trends are identified as –

- Population Growth
- Climate Change
- Biodiversity loss / Ecosystem decline
- Urbanisation
- Material Resource Scarcity
- Rising Global middle class
- Pivot to Asia-Pacific markets
- Energy & Fuel
- Food Security
- Water Scarcity
- Deforestation

The implementation of these mega trends needs an absolute model of strategic sustainability measures, in the leader. The responsibility of the manager in this context gets more specific for connecting the global climatic concerns to the practically possible management practices, to achieve sustainability of the business. The primary leadership structure for making ERS possible through CSR facilities of the company, must comprise of the following features-

Figure 4 Leadership for ERS



For an effective application of the Inputs → Process → Outputs, I shall remain firm in generating values-driven leadership in me. Under this approach, I shall impose my vision towards the concerns of climate change. I will try to implement effective practices that will add sustainability scopes for restoring our environment. I shall try to develop ecological ‘value chains’ with my ‘work patterns and practices’, so that I can deal well with the *climate change*

and further contribute to *reshape many of the phenomena, interactions, and relationships* within my managerial job profile (Howard-Grenville et al. 2014, p.615).

As for instance, Aldi has declared that by 2022 it will make all its label packaging *recyclable, reusable or compostable*. This will reduce its use of plastic in the packaging process by 25% by the end of the year 2023 (Shrestha, 2020). This declaration has been made in terms of meeting the megatrends and the UN sustainable development goals for preventing dangers of harming the environment through the use of plastic. A drastic initiative has been noticed as Aldi assures that it is removing *'all-plastic applicators from its own brand tampons'* to make "unnecessary plastic" a success. As reported by Simpson (2020), Aldi even stated that it would *'Get rid of plastic wrapping on cabbages and cauliflower in some stores, and trial cardboard packaging on steak.'* Some of the basic promises made by Aldi in the domain of sustainability are remarkable (see Appendix 4 for details).

However, against all these promises and assurances, there is the challenge that Aldi is facing in a consistent manner. According to David Pinsky, Greenpeace Senior Oceans Campaigner,

"While the company might intend to make packaging recyclable or compostable, it does not mean that packaging will actually be recycled or composted. We encourage ALDI US to accelerate efforts to reduce throwaway plastics and build systems of reuse for the sake of our planet and communities impacted by the pollution crisis."

It is this particular challenge that I personally feel is very important to resolve. My core concern will remain in relation to cost-effective provisions for the company, especially in the domain of packaging without plastic. For this purpose, I will highly encourage, cost-effective eco-designs and biomimicry supplies for packaging various food items in my store. For sustainable development of the eco-friendly packaging system within my store, I shall definitely follow the *cardboard packaging* provisions, at least for packing the vegetables for the customers.

Moreover, I would consider compact egg carton bio pack by Bosnas that is made up of flour, cleared paper-pulp, starch and most importantly, legume seeds for replantation, which will prevent *throwaway plastics*.

Figure 5 Replanting Eggs Packaging



Source: Jewell (2019)

Conclusion

Eventually, it can be well established that this module helped me a lot in understanding the practical implementation of management strategies in order to develop Ethics, Responsibility and Sustainability (ERS) through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). It was also very useful in making me aware of maintaining better relationship with the stakeholders of Aldi Stores Limited (ASL). Hence, as a manager of Aldi, I shall concentrate on developing CST based ERS for my stakeholders. I shall attempt to construct hygienic toilets and camps for farmer communities, substituting palm oil, arranging education and health-related camps for the children of the truck drivers, and shall focus in changing the plastic packaging to eco-designed biomimicry provisions.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Four major certifications commercial use of palm oil products

- Identity preserved - involves palm oil that can be traced back to a single certified supplier
- Segregated - involves palm oil that can be traced back to several certified suppliers
- Mass balance - where sustainable palm oil from certified sources is mixed with ordinary palm oil throughout the supply chain
- Credits - where manufacturers do not necessarily use sustainable palm oil themselves but instead buy credits for a corresponding volume of oil from a sustainable source.













Source: Pickup (2019)

Appendix 2 Type of load security used

Defect category 1	Defect category 2	Defect category 3
No load securing	Up to 30cm gap between load and vehicle headboard, unless other means of preventing forward	Lashings on ropehooks (this is always poor practice, but there may be no other suitable attachment points)
More than 30cm gap between the front of load and vehicle headboard, unless other means of preventing forward movement have been used	Unsheeted load in bulk tipper or skip	Minor damage to headboard not affecting structural integrity
Unstable load affecting vehicle stability or likely to topple from the vehicle	Inadequate load securing leading to likely risk of harm	Unsuitable load securing
Severe structural damage to the headboard, or gaps in the headboard that would allow load penetration	Unsuitable stacking of load items likely to lead to risk of harm	Poor condition of securing equipment
Items loaded over the height of the headboard (unless it's a single indivisible item, in which case the headboard must support the item to the height of its centre of gravity)	Height of load likely to affect vehicle stability	Unsuitable vehicle for the load

Source: GOV.UK (2019)

Appendix 3 Inclusion of Automated Freight

Key Tech	Application across the supply chain and benefits					
	Air	Road	Maritime/port	Railways	Warehousing	Other
 Autonomous vehicles (AVs)  Platooning		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved safety Improved driver's working time Reduction energy and fuel consumption Reduced congestion and increased road capacity 				
 Drones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced congestion 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost savings Greater efficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced congestion
 3D printing						
 Agile port and efficient maritime terminal			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater efficiency of freight terminals 			
 Self driving or remote control units and stacking equipment			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater efficiency of freight terminals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater efficiency of freight terminals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater efficiency of freight terminals 	
 Timetable advisory system				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Energy savings of 3-5% 		
 Freight collaborative DM system				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater efficiency of freight terminals 		
 Mobile consisting applications				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater efficiency of freight terminals 		
 Driverless E-trains				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced staffing costs 		
 Digital signalling				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased network capacity 		
 'Rolling motorways' and automated Road/Rail Transshipment Systems				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modal shift from road to rail 		

● Long haulage
 ● Last mile deliveries
 ● Inventory management

Source: Paddeu, et al (2019, p.6)

Appendix 4 Aldi on Environmental Support

ALDI claims it has the ability to influence how its products are sourced, produced and brought to shelves because more than 90% of its range is ALDI-exclusive. The company is committed to working with its supplier community to achieve the following comprehensive goals:

By 2025, 100% of ALDI packaging, including plastic packaging, will have reusable, recyclable or compostable packaging;

By 2025, packaging material of all ALDI-exclusive products to be reduced by at least 15%;

By 2020, 100% of ALDI-exclusive consumable packaging to include How2Recycle label;

By 2020, implement an initiative to make private-label product packaging easier for customers to reuse;

Guide continuous improvement of product packaging by internal expertise and external evaluations.

Source: Holbrook, E. (2019)