



LEAVING A MARK FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Q-CONNECT'S CHARTER FOR
OUR ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY

VERSION MAY 2023



INTRO

For 25 years the Q-CONNECT brand has been Europe's brand of choice for affordable and reliable business supplies. We continuously strive to make the workday of our customers as productive and comfortable as possible. This also means that we need to adapt to new requirements, changing working environments and evolutions in our society.

Being a successful brand that is offered by leading distributors in Europe, allows us to serve a myriad of customers from students to SMEs and multinationals to the public sector.

Our position gives us the opportunity but also the responsibility to do well for the planet and help preserving it for future generations. Worldwide we are confronted more and more with the effects of climate change. Moreover, we are facing numerous social and economic challenges. **Therefore, we have decided to reposition our brand around sustainability. With a 360° view we focus on the whole supply chain. It is our ambition is to be a brand that is not only reliable, convenient and contemporary but conscious and fair as well.**

When embarking on such an ambitious and long journey, you need an experienced guide. **We have based ourselves on the United Nation's sustainable development goals to create our roadmap, making sure we stay on track.**

We have worked out this Q-CONNECT® charter as a guideline of our ecological and social responsibility journey. This document shows you our milestones and our future plans to become a fair and conscious brand.



EARTH

PLANET - #08

“Turning our 3,700 Q-CONNECT® branded products into an eco-responsible range is an ongoing process we started 10 years ago. Based on the Reduce-Reuse-Recycle philosophy, we have transformed our product range in various ways, but we want to go even further. Our ultimate goal is to become a sustainable brand of business supplies and to do our fair share of work to help preserve this planet for future generations. We have created this Ecological and Social Responsibility Charter so you can read exactly how we plan to achieve this.”



Jan Van Belleghem,
Managing Director Q-CONNECT®



Q-CONNECT® CHARTER
FOR OUR ECOLOGICAL AND
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

OUR VALUED PEOPLE
WILL CREATE GREAT
PRODUCTS TO BUILD A
BETTER PLANET.

OUR PLANS AND AMBITIONS ARE CENTRED AROUND 3 PILLARS:

VALUED PEOPLE

We integrate social responsibility throughout the value chain. It will be a principal element of our corporate mission. Specifically, it involves decent working conditions, quality education, and gender equality. We ask our suppliers to perform social audits screening the safety and working conditions of the current generation that works in our value chain. And to improve the chances of the next generations, we will support NGOs specialising in quality education and gender equality at work.

MEANINGFUL PRODUCTS

We aim to be a truly sustainable business supplies brand in terms of production, packaging, and transport. We will define sustainable standards and create a new product family based on those standards. In the future, we want the majority of our products to belong to this new product family. Moreover, we will reduce the amount of single-use plastics and pack all our products in the most sustainable way.

BETTER PLANET

First of all, we strive to select and utilise the best form of renewable/ecological energy for our offices and warehouses. Additionally, we will encourage our suppliers to manufacture our products in a more eco-responsible way, and ultimately make this a requirement.

All of these decisions are based on our common understanding and sum up the essence of our social and ecological responsibility charter.



OUR 3 PILLARS OF SUSTAINABILITY

HOW CAN OUR VALUED PEOPLE
PROVIDE MEANINGFUL PRODUCTS
TO BUILD A BETTER PLANET?



360° CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

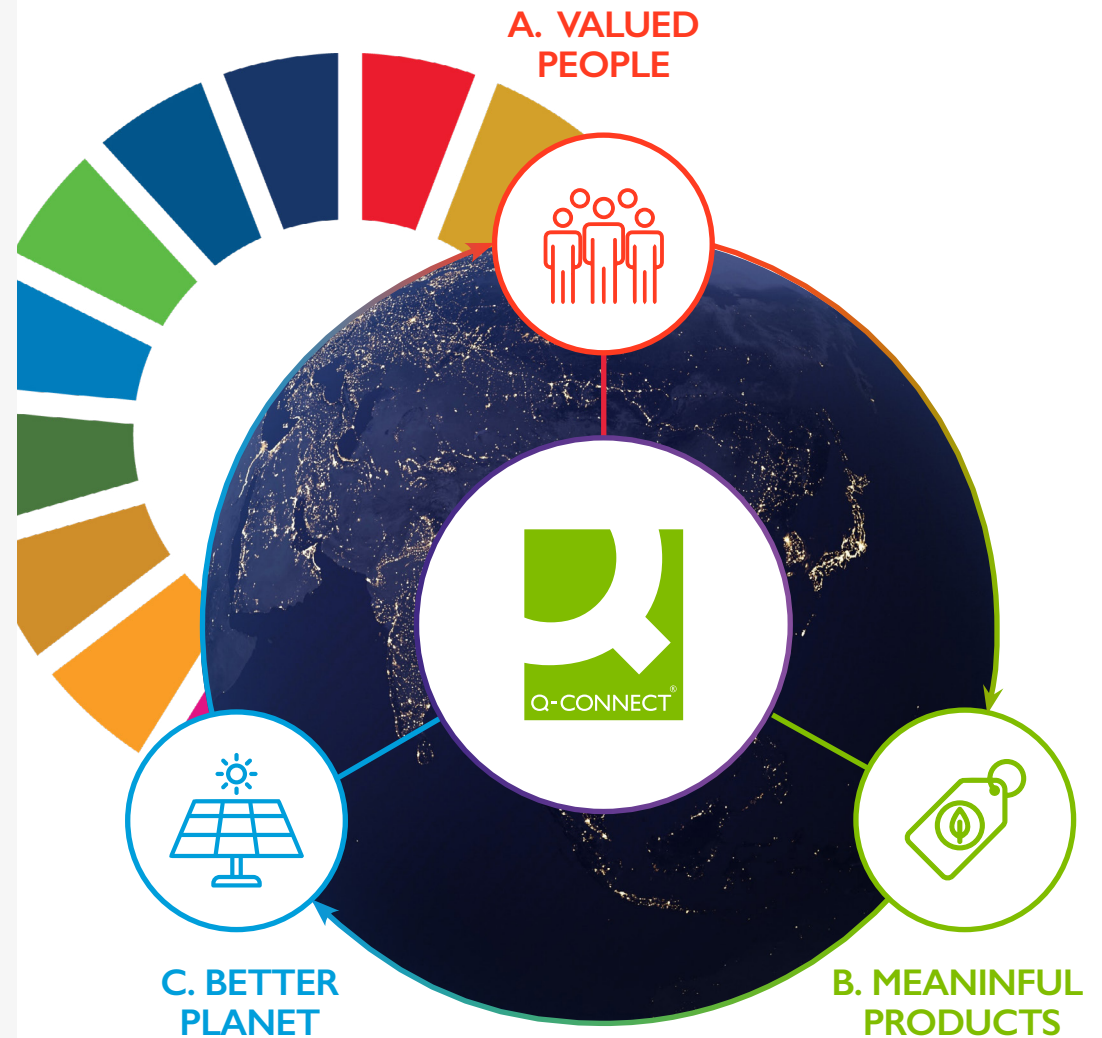
We believe sustainability needs to play a central role in our whole value chain, not just in parts of it. Every long-term solution towards a more sustainable future needs to combine those elements in order to be effective and comprehensive. We want to prove that economy and ecology are a great match for a better planet.

The match ecology - economy is the only proper brand strategy. CSR and economic success are the both-and story. It is the driving force for all alert entrepreneurs. And communicating well about it is a win-win. For it gives a meaningful boost to your brand and to the world."



Filip Bullens,
Brand Expert, Cojak

We are focussing our current achievements, as well as our goals in coming years, around 3 central concepts:





A. VALUED PEOPLE

People are the driving force behind every business, including ours. We couldn't do what we do without the dedication and talents of the people who help to provide our quality products at the best price. Our business model needs to be people-focussed, making sure everybody has what they need in order to thrive. Our targets are not limited to the employees in our value chain: we also look at the difference we can make in other people's lives. Because the only way forward is together.

OUR AMBITION:

We aim to integrate sustainability at the strategy level: it needs to influence our vision, mission, and values.

WHAT WE'RE ALREADY DOING:

Our separate companies have been working on a positive people policy for years.

- We established a **Suppliers' Code of Conduct** in 2008.
- Since 2015, every non-European supplier needs to provide **independent social audit reports**.
- In January 2022, INTERACTION became a **member of Amfori**. This allows the company to order its own **BSCI social audits**.



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



5 GENDER EQUALITY





A. VALUED PEOPLE

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION

Why this SDG?

Education is a powerful catalyst for individual development that creates endless possibilities in life. It sets people up for a successful career path that provides personal satisfaction on the one hand, and the opportunity to make a difference in their community on the other. Since Q-CONNECT® sells high-quality office supplies, we will make our products available in educational settings with limited resources. This allows us to stay close to our roots while taking responsibility and showing that we care. Hence, we have decided to join forces with recognised NGOs in the field of education on a yearly basis.

Q-CONNECT®'s initial targets

- We have provide **educational packages to Ukrainian child refugees** by working with an NGO in the field of quality education. Our engagement was be two-fold: we will provide study materials as well as financial support.
- From 2023 onwards, we will work with **World Bicycle Relief**, an NGO that provides rural communities in impoverished regions with bicycles. This way, schoolchildren can cover the distance to school and receive an education when the nearest school is not within walking distance from their home, and whole communities are mobilised.

COVID-19 HAS WIPED OUT 20 YEARS OF EDUCATION GAINS

AN ADDITIONAL 101 MILLION OR 9% OF CHILDREN IN GRADES 1 THROUGH 8 FELL BELOW MINIMUM READING PROFICIENCY LEVELS IN 2020



PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZED PRE-PRIMARY LEARNING INCREASED FROM 65% IN 2010 TO 73% IN 2019

NOW, MANY YOUNG CHILDREN ARE ENTIRELY RELIANT ON CAREGIVERS AT HOME

SLOW PROGRESS IN SCHOOL COMPLETION IS LIKELY TO GET WORSE



SCHOOL COMPLETION RATE	
PRIMARY	SECONDARY
2010: 82%	2010: 46%
2019: 85%	2019: 53%

WORLD

BASIC SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE TO BUILD BACK BETTER IS LACKING IN MANY COUNTRIES

PROPORTION OF SCHOOLS IN LDCs WITH BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE (2016-2019)



THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS REPORT 2021: UNSTATS.UN.ORG/SDGS/REPORT/2021/



Promote long-term, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



A. VALUED PEOPLE



SDG 8: DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Why this SDG?

The Q-CONNECT® value chain consists of various companies located on multiple continents. We are committed to making sure everybody who is involved in the value chain can work in a sustainable, inclusive environment, where they can discover their potential and develop their skills. This way, we want to improve and safeguard the wellbeing of employees across our value chain.

Q-CONNECT®'s initial targets

- In 2023 we want BSCI/SMETA social audit reports of factories representing 80% of the sales coming from our non-European suppliers
- Later on, we need a BSCI/SMETA social audit reports of all factories from our non-European suppliers.





A. VALUED PEOPLE

5 GENDER EQUALITY



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

SDG 5: GENDER EQUALITY

Why this SDG?

An important part of providing quality education is making sure every child has access to it, regardless of their gender. But gender equality also needs to be a reality in the workplace. Sustainability audits will help us analyse issues and come up with solutions. Currently, there is too little attention going towards this topic in audits, so we want to integrate it and lead the way.

Q-CONNECT®'s initial targets

- **Q-CONNECT® will perform Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) audits**, with the help of amfori, in order to make sure all employees have the same opportunities and rights, wherever they work in our value chain. Think of things like safe circumstances, the freedom to organise, and much more. The BSCI audits are based on the SDGs and help us find opportunities for improvement.
- **By supporting World Bicycle Relief**, we provide bicycles to children in third world countries where schools would otherwise be too far for them to reach. Both young girls and boys will get this way the privilege of education and this increases the chance to find a decent rewarding job afterwards.



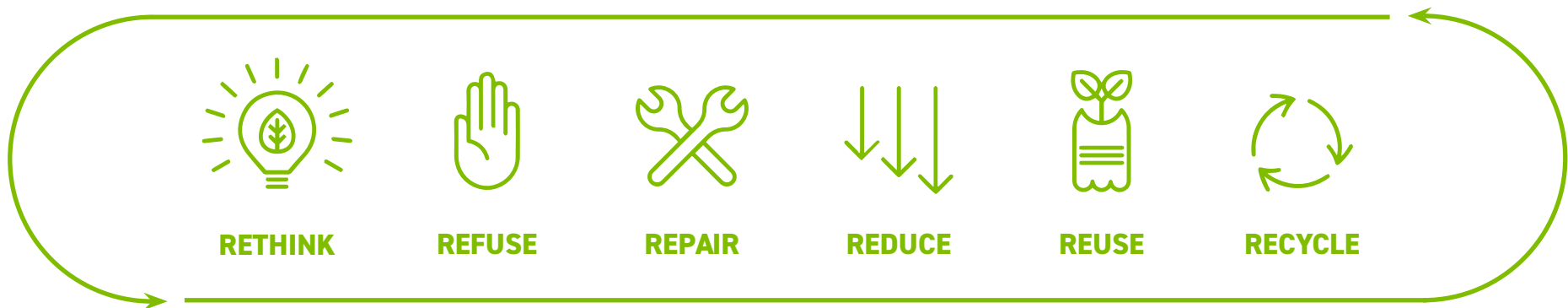


B. MEANINGFUL PRODUCTS

Our success is directly linked to the products we provide. In recent years, quality and pricing have been complemented by sustainability on the list of customer demands. Any ambitious brand that wants to leave a mark and stay successful, needs to take that into account when it comes to their product design, packaging and production process. As a leading brand of office supplies, Q-CONNECT® is ready for the next step in this impactful journey.



6 STEPS FOR RESPONSIBLE PROCUREMENT





B. MEANINGFUL PRODUCTS



OUR AMBITION:

Q-CONNECT® aims to be a truly sustainable European business supplies brand in terms of production, packaging, and transport.

WHAT WE'RE ALREADY DOING:

1. ENVIRONMENTAL CREDENTIALS:

- Over 240 paper based are certified with an eco-friendly label, like FSC, PEFC or Ecolabel, proving they have been harvested in an environmentally and socially responsible manner, or have been made from recycled fibres.
- More than 230 remanufactured toner cartridges and batteries are certified with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. These products meet high criteria in terms of health, environment, and quality.

2. REDUCING THE AMOUNT OF PLASTICS IN BOTH PRODUCTS & PACKAGING:

Since 2021 we have made 40 products completely plastic free, and for another 20 products the amount of plastic in the packaging has been reduced to an absolute minimum.

3. USE OF RECYCLED & RECYCLABLE MATERIALS:

More than 80 of our products containing plastics are made with between 20% and 80% recycled and recyclable materials.'

4. REPLACING PVC WITH ECO-FRIENDLIER PLASTICS:

PVC is a material that is hard to recycle, dissolves very slowly in landfills, and can be carcinogenic. That is why we have started to replace PVC in our products with alternative polymers. We always give the customer the choice to go for an alternative product made from plastics that are easier to recycle, like PET or PP.

5. RE-USE:

All our toner cartridges are remanufactured originals that we give a second life. We also offer refills for our most popular pens, so you can re-use the barrel several times. Some of these pens are made from recycled PET bottles.



B. MEANINGFUL PRODUCTS



SDG 12: RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

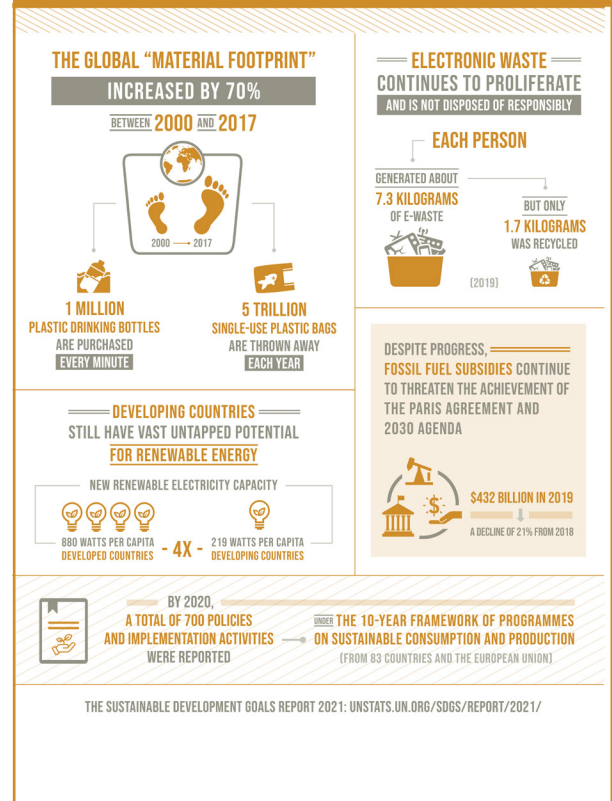
Why this SDG?

Companies that produce and sell products carry a large responsibility. Their business decisions have a direct impact on this planet, both in terms of production and waste disposal. Q-CONNECT® has been taking measures to reduce its ecological footprint, and we want to continue setting an example by creating more sustainable products and packaging. And that is a commitment we take very seriously.

Q-CONNECT®'s initial targets

- We have **defined the standards** a product needs to comply with in order to be considered sustainable. We have **created a product family** adhering to those standards, named Q-CONSCIOUS. To make this range known to our customers, we embarked on a pan-European sampling campaign.
- With this Q-CONSCIOUS range **we play a proactive role** in the sustainability journey of our customers.

Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts





Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

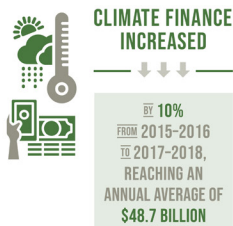
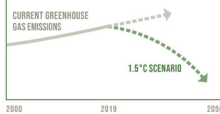
THE CLIMATE CRISIS CONTINUES, LARGELY UNABATED



2020 GLOBAL AVERAGE TEMPERATURE AT 1.2°C ABOVE PRE-INDUSTRIAL BASELINE

WOEFULLY OFF TRACK TO STAY AT OR BELOW 1.5°C AS CALLED FOR IN THE PARIS AGREEMENT

RISING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS REQUIRE SHIFTING ECONOMIES TOWARDS CARBON NEUTRALITY



125 OF 154 DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE FORMULATING AND IMPLEMENTING NATIONAL CLIMATE ADAPTATION PLANS



THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS REPORT 2021: UNSTATS.UN.ORG/SDGS/REPORT/2021/

13 CLIMATE ACTION



B. MEANINGFUL PRODUCTS



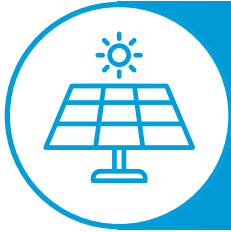
SDG 13: CLIMATE ACTION

Why this SDG?

Urgent action is needed to combat climate change and its devastating impacts. Therefore, we will focus on very concrete and specific changes we can make in our value chain that will have long-lasting positive effects on our planet.

Q-CONNECT®'s initial targets

- We want to **reduce single-use plastic** in packaging, use **packaging** in the **most sustainable way** and **reduce our ecological footprint by onshoring** where possible.
- **80% of all Q-CONNECT® products** will be part of the **sustainable product family Q-CONSCIOUS**, mentioned as a target under SDG 12.



C. BETTER PLANET

In the end, there is one thing we all share: the planet we live on. If we want to leave a livable, thriving planet for the next generations, we need to act now. We have agreed on an ambitious timeline with far-reaching goals for our premises and those of our suppliers.



OUR AMBITION:

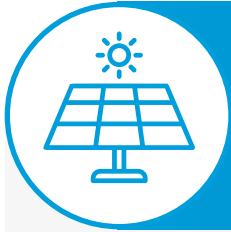
Moving forward, we strive to select and utilise the best form of renewable/ecological energy for our offices and warehouses.

WHAT WE'RE ALREADY DOING:

In recent years, the 6 Q-CONNECT® shareholders have each taken steps towards more sustainable measures.

- Several of them have installed **solar panels** on their office buildings and production sites.
- Some have invested in an **electric fleet of company cars**.
- In other countries, the **buildings are supplied with green energy**.





C. BETTER PLANET

SDG 14: LIFE BELOW WATER & SDG 15: LIFE ON LAND

Why these SDG's?

Life on land and below water is intrinsically connected. The oceans are filled with the plastic produced and disposed of on land. We need healthy waterways for sustainable, long-term forest management, healthy ecosystems, and to combat land degradation and biodiversity loss. As a brand that sells various types of quality office supplies, we want to focus on our production and encourage our suppliers to choose greener options.

Q-CONNECT®'s initial targets

- We have started encouraging our suppliers to make their production more sustainable, with the help of the **BEPI self-assessment tool** (Business Environmental Performance Initiative).
- At a later stage the use of the BEPI self- assessment tool will become mandatory for our suppliers.

14 LIFE BELOW WATER



15 LIFE ON LAND



Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

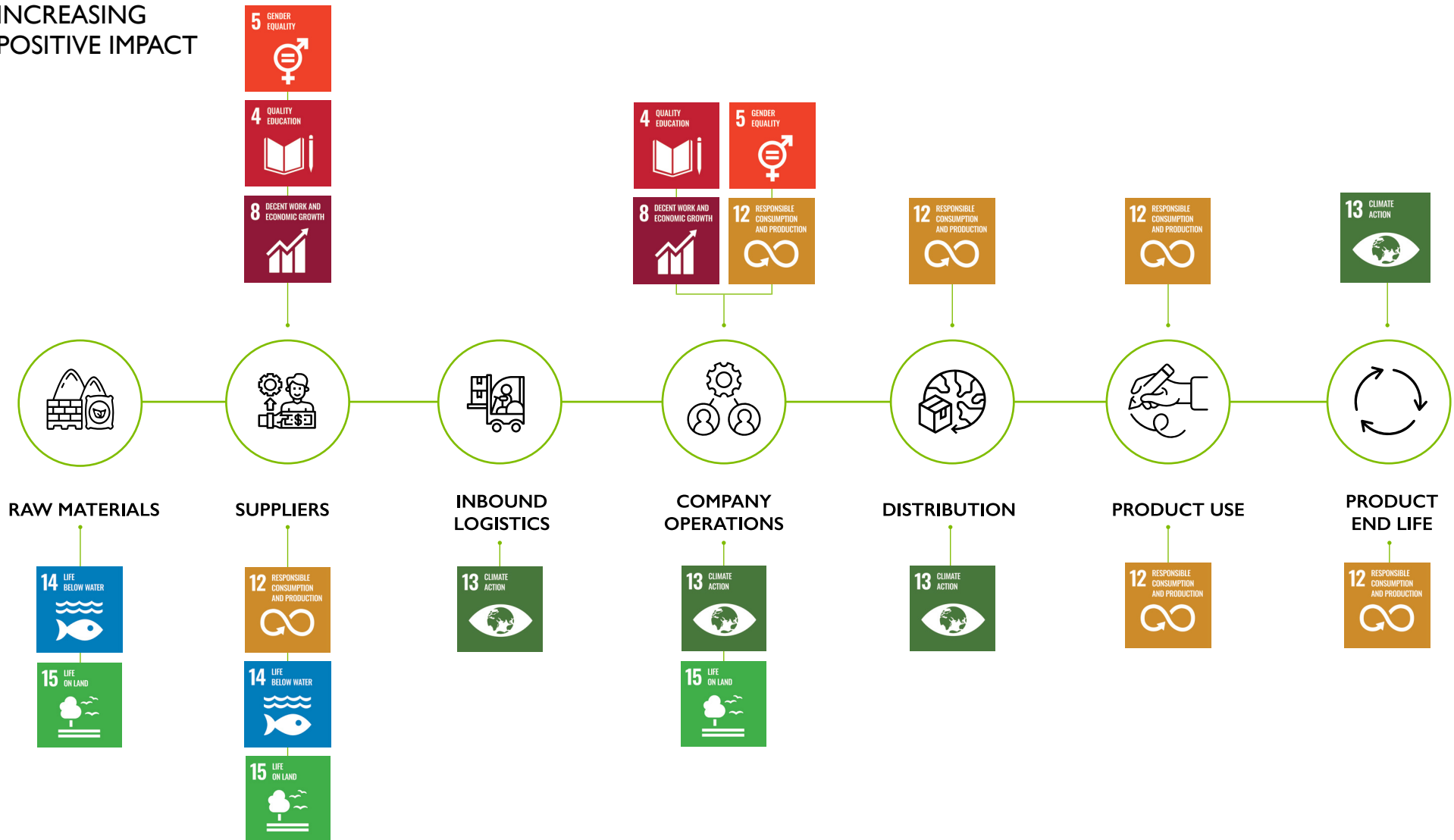
Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Q-CONNECT®



ENVIRONMENTAL AREA	HOT SPOTS	SELF-ASSESSMENT SCORE
Environmental Management Systems	15	23%
Energy Use, GHG and Transport	15	100%
Water Use	6	45%
Wastewater	10	100%
Emissions to Air	10	100%
Waste Management	9	100%
Pollution Prevention and Chemicals	5	100%
Major Incident Prevention and Management		80%
Contaminated Land/Soil and Groundwater Pollution Prevention		42%
Land Use and Biodiversity		36%
Environmental Nuisances	3	67%

INCREASING
POSITIVE IMPACT



MINIMIZING
NEGATIVE IMPACT



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