



**International Environment Forum** A Baha'i inspired organization addressing  
the environment and sustainable development

## **IEF contributions to post-2015 dialogue**

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International Environment Forum contributions to UN online consultations on the post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, January-July 2013

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### **Equality and Youth**

It is increasingly acknowledged today that inequality of opportunity is particularly affecting the young. They are more aware of the rising cost of climate change; the erosion of biodiversity and the wealth of nature; the destruction of soils, forests and water supplies; the contamination of the planet by wastes and pollution; and the profligate wasting of the limited supplies of fossil fuels that created wealth in the immediate past while threatening the future. An emerging generation that sees growing extremes of wealth and poverty and that faces prospects much worse than their parents risks being driven to social unrest. The economic crises and social movements that have shaken many countries in the last few years underlie the desperate search of young people for hope and meaning in the face of environmental threats, lack of employment opportunities, shrinking economies and social disruption.

To resolve the economic inequalities and their consequences in the world today, the younger generations must re-examine certain relationships and fundamental concepts that currently sustain society and its structures, such as the relationships amongst and between nation states and the very concept of sovereignty itself; the true purpose of life; the nature of progress; the meaning of true happiness and well-being; the place that material pursuits should assume in one's individual and family life; and the role of youth as contributors to planetary well-being.

Social justice will be attained only when every member of society enjoys a relative degree of material prosperity and gives due regard to the development of spiritual capabilities. The solution, then, to prevailing economic difficulties is to be sought as much in the application of ethical and spiritual principles as in the implementation of scientific methods and evidence-based approaches that ensure material prosperity.

A host of negative forces, generated by the materialism and corruption so widespread in the world, present a challenge in upholding standards of ethical and moral conduct with

respect to financial affairs. Everyone, particularly the youth, would do well to ponder the difference between gaining wealth through earnest effort on the one hand, and, on the other, obtaining it without exertion or through dishonourable means. To counter rampant corruption and deceit, the youth of the world should distinguish themselves through a moral rectitude of conduct so refined that it will radically transform the unjust relationships that perpetuate global poverty and the concentration of wealth by a few. They should explore possibilities for generating income and acquiring wealth that will ensure true happiness through the development of spiritual qualities, such as honesty, trustworthiness, generosity, justice, and consideration for others, and the recognition that material means are to be expended for the betterment of the world.

Today the world is assailed by an array of destructive forces. Materialism has now spread to every corner of the planet, breeding, in the name of a strong global economy and human welfare, a culture of consumerism. It skillfully and ingeniously promotes a habit of consumption that seeks to satisfy the basest and most selfish desires, while encouraging the expenditure of wealth so as to prolong and exacerbate social conflict. One result is a deepening confusion on the part of young people everywhere, a sense of hopelessness in the ranks of those who would drive progress, and the emergence of a myriad social maladies.

The key to resolving these social ills rests in the hands of a youthful generation convinced of the nobility of all human beings; eagerly seeking a deeper understanding of the true purpose of existence; clear in the view of science and religion as two independent yet complementary systems of knowledge that propel human progress; conscious of and drawn to the beauty and power of unity in diversity; secure in the knowledge that real glory is to be found in service to one's country and to the peoples of the world; and mindful that the acquisition of wealth is praiseworthy only insofar as it is attained through just means and expended for benevolent purposes, for the promotion of knowledge and toward the common good.

Transitions in the past have been led by wise statesmen. With new information technologies and social networks, the next transition will probably be led by young people, who are losing hope in the present system, and have the idealism and energy to put a new one in its place. The pressures from educated but frustrated youth are already rising in various parts of the world, and the post-2015 agenda should be their agenda. They should be more involved, and take ownership. Beyond 2015, the youth of the world should prepare themselves to shoulder the tremendous responsibilities that await them, immune to the atmosphere of greed that surrounds them.

Reference: adapted from "Youth need reasons to hope from Rio+20". International Environment Forum/ebbf joint statement to UNCSD, June 2012, <http://iefworld.org/iefRio20youth>. and a comment on the report of the High Level Panel, <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/352542#comment-57125>, July 2013

International Environment Forum contribution to UN online consultation on Environmental Sustainability:  
<http://www.worldwewant2015.org/sustainability2015>



## Building Community Resilience

While international economic imbalances need to be addressed, the focus of poverty alleviation linked to environmental sustainability should be at the local community level. The poor are usually the first victims of environmental mismanagement, whether globally through climate change or in the exploitation of natural resources. The poor should be empowered to address their own priorities in meeting their needs, reducing their vulnerability and managing their environment, rather than building dependence on outside assistance or charity.

Progress in the development field depends on and is driven by stirrings at the grass roots of society rather than from an imposition of externally developed plans and programmes. Communities should be empowered through processes of action, reflection and consultation to address their own priorities in meeting their needs, while reducing their vulnerability and managing their environment. It is necessary to increase local communities' and individuals' awareness of the needs and possibilities and of their capacity to respond. Different communities will likely devise different approaches and solutions in response to similar needs. It is for each community to determine its goals and priorities in keeping with its capacity and resources. Given the diversity of communities around the world, it is important to encourage innovation and a variety of approaches to the environment and development appropriate to the rhythm of life in the community.

The foundation of human development is our inherent capacity to learn. Education is fundamental, starting with mothers who are the first educators of their children, and who are most directly engaged with environmental resources through food production, collecting water and fuel, and waste disposal and sanitation. Capacity building in the community should include exploring the relationship of humans to the environment, and learning to engage in acts of service related to environmental sustainability. Community processes should be set in motion to agree on collective goals, to reinforce a spirit of solidarity, to involve the community, and particularly the youth, in the education of children, and to build the capacity to manage local problems for the benefit of all. Involving youth in caring for the generation that will follow them can become a self-sustaining process of community advancement.

Science and technology should be accessible to everyone in the community through appropriate education. Most technological development today is driven by market forces that neither reflect nor respond to local needs. To be able to contribute to sustainability, everyone should be empowered within their capacity with the tools and approaches of science: evidence based reasoning, understanding cause and effect, experimentation, thinking in terms of systems in a long-term perspective, and learning adaptive management in a time of dynamic change. The natural and social sciences, crafts, and local and indigenous knowledge are based on similar processes of observation and experimentation, so all can contribute to sustainable community development. Institutional capacity and learning processes should be developed within communities to create and apply knowledge in ways that address their specific needs.

A new focus is needed on science at the community level. Community and neighbourhood educational programmes should stimulate community consultation on the science and ethics of environmental responsibility, local vulnerability to climate change, sustainable use of energy and resources, and local environmental management. Science and indigenous knowledge systems should be integrated in defining sustainable environmental management adapted to local conditions and cultures and to community needs. These community processes should be supported and encouraged by regional centres of

research and training for sustainable development empowered to create technologies addressing locally defined needs and priorities that take into account both the material and moral prosperity of the community.

Communities should also take a more direct role in preventing poverty by providing for those locally in need, such as through a village storehouse or fund that would receive a graduated percentage of local production surpluses and provide for the poor and those unable to work. This could also compensate farmers whose crops have failed, and cushion the impact of the increased variability caused by climate change.

Reference: adapted in part from "Science and Technology for Community Empowerment", International Environment Forum statement to UNCSD, June 2012, <http://iefworld.org/iefRio20science>

International Environment Forum contribution to UN online consultation on Environmental Sustainability: <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/sustainability2015> and <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/sustainability2015/local#comment-53981>

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## Education for Sustainability

Building a sustainable society will require new human capacities and an enormous expansion in access to knowledge for individuals and organizations. Universal education will be an indispensable contributor to this process of capacity building, and should ensure that individuals and groups in every sector of society are able to acquire knowledge and to apply it to their affairs.

"Education must be lifelong. It should help people to develop the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills necessary to earn a livelihood and to contribute confidently and constructively to shaping communities that reflect principles of justice, equity and unity. It should also help the individual develop a sense of place and community, grounded in the local, but embracing the whole world. Successful education will cultivate virtue as the foundation for personal and collective well-being, and will nurture in individuals a deep sense of service and an active commitment to the welfare of their families, their communities, their countries, indeed, all mankind. It will encourage self-reflection and thinking in terms of historical process, and it will promote inspirational learning through such means as music, the arts, poetry, meditation and interaction with the natural environment." (BIC 1998)

Education for sustainable development should empower everyone to participate in the advancement of society within planetary boundaries. Poverty eradication must go beyond school enrollment to create a society in which the production, diffusion and application of knowledge influences all human activities. This requires interventions at all levels including child-rearing practices that foster questioning; equal educational opportunities for boys and girls; development of independent media sources; bridging language barriers; and the promotion of innovation and scientific research. Knowledge of the local environment, combining science and traditional knowledge, should be linked to global environmental, social and economic challenges and opportunities. People must be free to know, to innovate, to devise solutions to complex problems.

The shift towards sustainability requires profound changes in the minds of people and in the structures of society. The programme of education must be based on a clear vision of the kind of society that we wish to live in, and the kind of individuals that will bring this about. This means reflecting on the purpose of life, stepping out of one's own cultural reality to develop alternative visions and approaches to the problems at hand, understanding the consequences of one's behaviour, and adjust one's lifestyle accordingly.

Schools must become participants in this social transformation. The curriculum should go beyond teaching knowledge and skills, to aim to develop the potential inherent in each student to better their communities and to advance society as a whole. Education should build the level of consciousness and the deep spirit of service and collaboration required to transform individual behaviors and institutions in the direction of sustainability. There are now values-based indicators of education for sustainable development that can make the success of such education more visible and encourage its further development (<http://www.esdinds.eu/>).

A special focus in sustainability education should be the early adolescent years (say 10-14) when individual characters are being moulded, values adopted, and lifestyle patterns set. Education should include a values component that empowers young people with the capacity to act and the confidence that they can bring positive changes in society. Youth can take on a measure of responsibility to aid the spiritual and social development of those around them, especially ones younger than themselves. In an age consumed by self-interest, reward and personal satisfaction, youth in their mid-teens and twenties can learn

to resist the aggressive materialism with which they are targeted and to put the needs of others before their own. Their consciousness of the failings of society can motivate them to work for its transformation, not to distance themselves from it. They will refuse to pass by inequity in its many incarnations, whatever the cost, and will labour, instead, for ideals of justice, unity in diversity, and community solidarity.

Reference: Bahá'í International Community. 1998. *Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development*. A concept paper written for the World Faiths and Development Dialogue, Lambeth Palace, London, 18 February 1998  
<http://www.bic.org/statements/valuing-spirituality-development/>

<http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/342413#comment-52576>

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## Environmental migration and resource security

With accelerating climate change, sea level rise, resource degradation and water shortages, the projected scale of forced environmental migration in coming decades will exceed anything previously experienced. This will be traumatic for those displaced, and represents an enormous challenge for the receiving countries and communities where immigration is presently a major source of political, economic and social tension and human rights violations.

To prepare the public for this growing challenge, governments and civil society organizations should initiate wide public discussion of environmental migration, the imperative of showing solidarity with victims of climate change and other environmental changes based on underlying ethical principles, the advantages of immigration for receiving communities, and the means to build unity among peoples of diverse origins and cultures. Faith-based groups should explore the implications of their teachings about welcoming guests and strangers. The aim should be to replace the present rejection of immigrants by solidarity with the victims of climate change and other environmental disasters, and a welcoming of displaced persons as new protagonists in building diverse and sustainable communities.

It is essential to be proactive to prevent increasing humanitarian crises, widespread human suffering and additional environmental impacts. The international community should begin now to organize an appropriate international response to forced environmental migration, including its institutional, financial and humanitarian dimensions.

One priority is to undertake scientific assessments of the human carrying capacity of different regions of the world and anticipated changes in that capacity with climate change to determine which regions and countries will be unable to support their present or projected populations and which areas have the space and resources to receive environmental migrants.

The United Nations should initiate negotiations for an international legal framework for environmental migrants comparable to that already functioning for political refugees, to recognize their status as displaced persons, often with no possibility of return, and to protect their human rights. Provision could be included for migration in groups or as whole communities to assist in preserving social relationships, community structures and cultures.

Ultimately it will be necessary to establish a mechanism under the United Nations to facilitate the free movement of people, similar in function to the World Trade Organization encouraging the free movement of goods in trade. This intergovernmental mechanism would negotiate a lowering of barriers to immigration, and facilitate the settlement of environmental migrants among countries able to receive them. There should be a financial mechanism to ensure that the costs of resettlement are equitably shared by the international community.

Another threat to peace that is widely acknowledged is the increasing risk of conflict as we reach planetary limits to food production, water supplies, essential minerals and energy supplies. Market mechanisms fall short, because rising prices may distribute scarce resources more efficiently, but the poor always lose out. Global mechanisms should be put into place now to ensure the equitable distribution of resources essential to peoples' survival and well-being, before we risk widespread social unrest and mass starvation.

Reference: adapted in part from "Preparing for Environmental Migration", International Environment Forum statement to UNCSD, June 2012, <http://iefworld.org/iefRio20migration>

International Environment Forum contribution to UN online consultation on Environmental Sustainability: <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/sustainability2015>

## Establishing an international ethical and regulatory framework for business

Much of today's wealth is in the private sector; governments are stuck in their national sovereignty and have less and less control over the globalized economy. As more wealth creation escapes from national taxation, the principal mechanism for wealth redistribution to meet social needs breaks down.

In the rise of the private sector over the last two centuries, the creation of the limited liability company separated investors in the capital of a company from any moral responsibility for its use. While governments may legislate social and environmental norms, there is no legal framework beyond national jurisdictions, and multinational corporations easily escape from their fiscal, social and environmental responsibilities. While individual corporate leaders with moral scruples can make a significant difference, they are trapped in an institutional framework that leaves them little margin for manoeuvre with respect to shareholder interests in maximizing profits.

The result is an international private sector that, in the name of a strong global economy and human welfare, has created a culture of consumerism. It skilfully and ingeniously promotes a habit of consumption that seeks to satisfy the basest and most selfish desires, while encouraging the expenditure of wealth so as to prolong and exacerbate social conflict. Injustice is tolerated with indifference and disproportionate gain is regarded as the emblem of success. Business profits are built too often on the economic exploitation of others and on ignoring environmental externalities. Companies play off one government against another to push social and environmental standards to the lowest common denominator. A number of today's directors of financial markets, executives of multinational corporations, and chiefs of commerce and industry, justify any means in order to achieve their goals.

To achieve sustainable development, the private sector needs to be transformed from a principal cause of unsustainable resource consumption and pollution, to a driver for sustainable economic behaviour. Voluntary measures have largely failed to extend effective corporate social and environmental responsibility beyond a limited number of exemplary companies. In the interest of fairness and equity, governments need to agree on an international regulatory framework that would establish minimum social and environmental standards, ensure that corporations pay their fair share of taxes, and prevent companies becoming so large that they have a monopoly position and are more powerful than governments, or too big to fail.

Such measures would give businesses the level playing field they need at the international level in order to ensure fair competition. It would then be obvious that there is a competitive edge in environmental responsibility, driving innovation to meet the requirements for sustainability. There are calls for a new institutional architecture to make corporations more responsible by 2020 (Pavan Sukhdev, Corporation 2020).

An employer and employee, for example, are normally bound by the laws and conventions that regulate their work, and each is expected to carry out his or her responsibilities with honesty and integrity. At another level, however, justice requires that the prevailing norms be reassessed. For example, the relationship between minimum wage and the cost of living merits careful evaluation, especially in light of the contribution workers make to a company's success and their entitlement to a fair share of the profits. The wide margin, often unjustifiable, between the production costs of certain goods and the price at which they are sold likewise requires attention, as does the need to generate wealth through measures that enrich the generality of the people. Businesses need to avoid the

exploitation of others, the monopolization and manipulation of markets, and the production of goods that promote violence and immorality.

In theory, a perfect market requires access to perfect information. In a highly competitive market situation, this is rarely the case. The market mechanism would work better if it became more cooperative and encouraged a free and fair consultation between buyers and sellers in the search for a just price. Beyond 2015, the increasing use of market mechanisms should be accompanied by the development of a global regulatory framework for the business and financial sectors to ensure planetary sustainability.

<http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/342412#comment-53018>

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