

Scientific and Spiritual Dimensions of Climate Change

Unit 7

Ethical Principles for Social Transformation

Section 1: The Oneness of Humankind

The oneness of humankind can be considered as the central teaching of the Baha'i Faith. Baha'u'llah wrote:

*So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.*¹

*It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.*²

*He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful, cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body.*³

In a talk on 31 March 1968, Martin Luther King said the following words in a context unrelated to climate change: *“Through our scientific and technological genius, we have made of this world a neighborhood and yet we have not had the ethical commitment to make of it a brotherhood ... We must all learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools.”*⁴

These words are also vital for climate change mitigation.

Lester Brown pointed out: *Recognizing the world as an ecosystem makes us all global citizens.*⁵

In a 2022 letter, the Universal House of Justice succinctly defined humanity's situation:

*The global challenges now facing humanity are a severe test of its willingness to put aside short-term self-interest and come to terms with this stark spiritual and moral reality: there is but one, interconnected human family and it shares one precious homeland.*⁶

A 1999 statement of the Bahá'í International Community explains:

*The central spiritual issue facing all people, whatever their nation, religion, or ethnic origin, is that of laying the foundations of a global society that can reflect the oneness of human nature. The unification of the earth's inhabitants is neither a remote utopian vision nor, ultimately, a matter of choice. It constitutes the next, inescapable stage in the process of social evolution, a stage toward which all the experience of past and present is impelling us. Until this issue is acknowledged and addressed, none of the ills afflicting our planet will find solutions, because all the essential challenges of the age we have entered are global and universal, not particular or regional.*⁷

Embracing the concept of the oneness of humanity will change our perspective of climate-change mitigation efforts in many ways. For example, some people and

governments in rich countries have argued that the costs for mitigating global warming are too high for their economy. That's easier to do when the first severely harmful effects of climate change are happening primarily in other countries. The urgency to stop and reverse climate change in wealthier nations will increase when they regard the world as just one country and humankind as one family. With such a consciousness we equally value the lives of people in other countries who may often be economically poor or of a different race.

In its letter of 1 March 2017, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

*The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity's collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected.*⁸

In its statement contributing to the 2015 COP21 Paris Climate Change Conference, the Bahá'í International Community emphasized the importance of planetary interconnectedness and the oneness of humankind:

... truly transforming individual and collective patterns of life will require a much deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness of the planetary biosphere. People and the environment are inter-connected aspects of one organically integrated system. At this point in history, neither can be accurately understood in isolation from the other.

*Implicit in this understanding is the organic oneness of the human race itself.*⁹

The Bahá'í International Community, in its statement *the Prosperity of Humankind*, explains how different the concept of the oneness of humankind is from the current notions that underlie human actions and institutions:

The bedrock of a strategy that can engage the world's population in assuming responsibility for its collective destiny must be the consciousness of the oneness of humankind. Deceptively simple in popular discourse, the concept that humanity constitutes a single people presents fundamental challenges to the way that most of the institutions of contemporary society carry out their functions. Whether in the form of the adversarial structure of civil government, the advocacy principle informing most of civil law, a glorification of the struggle between classes and other social groups, or the competitive spirit dominating so much of modern life, conflict is accepted as the mainspring of human interaction. It represents yet another expression in social organisation of the materialistic interpretation of life that has progressively consolidated itself over the past two centuries....

*... Only through the dawning consciousness that they constitute a single people will the inhabitants of the planet be enabled to turn away from the patterns of conflict that have dominated social organisation in the past and begin to learn the ways of collaboration and conciliation. "The well-being of mankind," Bahá'u'lláh writes, "its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."*¹⁰

The consciousness of the oneness of humankind is the prerequisite for global solidarity which is essential to gather the collective will for the huge scope of climate actions that are commensurate to the threat of climate change.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

*True peace and tranquillity will only be realized when every soul will have become the well-wisher of all mankind.*¹¹

The Universal House of Justice explained the importance of these words for our time:

*Humanity's crying need ... calls ... for a fundamental change of consciousness ... that the time has come when each human being on earth must learn to accept responsibility for the welfare of the entire human family.*¹²

The commitment to accept responsibility for the welfare of the entire human family can be described as global solidarity. Global solidarity is an expression of a deep belief in the oneness of humankind and seeks to translate this belief into action. The importance and need for solidarity are now increasingly recognized by many people, even in some secular circles, especially by farsighted leaders such as UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres who said:

*We must recognize that humanity's very future depends on solidarity, trust, and our ability to work together as a global family to achieve common goals.*¹³

The Universal House of Justice put the concept of solidarity into its wider historical context:

*Penetrating, indeed, is Shoghi Effendi's depiction of the process of disintegration accelerating in the world. Equally striking is the accuracy with which he analyzed the forces associated with the process of integration. He spoke of a "gradual diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity which is spontaneously arising out of the welter of a disorganized society" as an indirect manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh's conception of the principle of the oneness of humankind. This spirit of solidarity has continued to spread over the decades, and today its effect is apparent in a range of developments, from the rejection of deeply ingrained racial prejudices to the dawning consciousness of world citizenship, from heightened environmental awareness to collaborative efforts in the promotion of public health, from the concern for human rights to the systematic pursuit of universal education, from the establishment of interfaith activities to the efflorescence of hundreds of thousands of local, national and international organizations engaged in some form of social action.*¹⁴

Section 2: The Need for a World Federal System

The environmental crisis demands that all of humanity work together to implement 0

*The solution to climate change exceeds the capacities and resources of any one nation and requires the full cooperation of all nations, each according to their means.*¹⁵

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change asserts, "The global nature of climate change calls for the widest possible cooperation by all countries and

their participation in an effective and appropriate international response, in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities and their social and economic conditions.”¹⁶

“The international political response to climate change began at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, where the ‘Rio Convention’ included the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This convention set out a framework for action aimed at stabilising atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs) to avoid ‘dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.’ The UNFCCC which entered into force on 21 March 1994, now has a near-universal membership of 195 parties.

“The main objective of the annual Conference of Parties (COP) is to review the Convention’s implementation.”¹⁷ The first COP took place in Berlin in 1995. At COP3, the Kyoto Protocol was adopted. After decades of efforts, there finally was a breakthrough at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, on 30 November-11 December 2015. All 195 countries signed on to an agreement on the reduction of greenhouse gases necessary to prevent dangerous climate change. Although the critical voices are correct that much stronger goals are required to avoid a climate catastrophe, the Paris Agreement was a step in the direction toward global unification. Thinking about the general development of humankind, we can perhaps consider COP21 as a milestone on the path to the Lesser Peace – it was the very first time in human history that 195 countries unanimously agreed on action on any issue.

The Universal House of Justice commented:

*... at a time when nations have difficulty reaching agreement on many important issues, the governments of nearly every country on earth have reached political consensus on a joint framework, in the Paris accord, to respond to climate change in a manner that is anticipated to evolve over time as experience accumulates. More than a century ago, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá referred to “unity of thought in world undertakings, the consummation of which will ere long be witnessed.” The recently adopted international agreement on climate change, irrespective of any shortcomings and limitations it may have, offers another noteworthy demonstration of that development anticipated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The agreement represents a starting point for constructive thought and action that can be refined or revised on the basis of experience and new findings over time.*¹⁸

Despite the great accomplishment of the Paris Agreement, it marks only the very beginning of serious climate-change mitigation. Two challenging processes lie ahead: First, all the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) promised in this Agreement by the 195 nations must be implemented. That is not an easy task as it requires the full support of politicians and civil society, and progress so far has been disappointing. Second, the Agreement needs to be strengthened to result in much stronger reductions of greenhouse gas emissions.

At COP28 in Dubai, the nations of the world engaged in a Global Stocktake, a process to assess progress with the implementation of the Paris Agreement. A major breakthrough was that, for the first time, they agreed to transition away from “fossil fuels”.

At present the agencies of the United Nations are limited in their effectiveness because of an outdated system of sovereign nation states. There is a desperate need for global environmental governance. We need a strong international environmental institution, which has the authority to enforce environmental law on the global level.

Shoghi Effendi wrote already in 1936:

*The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.*¹⁹

Organizing and coordinating the affairs of humanity on a global level requires a new way of thinking, one that transcends the limits of nations. The Bahá'í teachings explain:

*The principle of the Oneness of Mankind ... is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. ... It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. ... It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world – a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units. It represents the consummation of human evolution – an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations.*²⁰

*Movement in this direction has barely begun. ... It will ensure the creation of binding legislation that will protect both the environment and the development needs of all peoples. Ultimately, the restructuring or transformation of the United Nations system that this movement is already bringing about will no doubt lead to the establishment of a world federation of nations with its own legislative, judicial, and executive bodies.*²¹

Such a world order is not only new in that it encompasses all of humankind, but also new in its underlying philosophy: The first priority is the well-being of everyone on the planet. National, regional and local interests are respected, but are considered in the light of humankind being one family. The representatives of people on the local, national and international level must be trustworthy and “regard themselves as the representatives of **all that dwell on earth.**”²²

*O ye the elected representatives of the people in every land! Take ye counsel together, and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind and bettereth the condition thereof.*²³

Bahá'u'lláh

A world order whose goal is to ensure the rights and well-being of all individuals and countries of the world must include global institutions and laws to mitigate global warming and effective measures to help economically poor people and countries adapt to the already unavoidable impacts of present and future climate changes.

The Baha'i International Community commented on the importance of a global institution that is informed by science and that considers the interconnectedness of environmental, social and economic issues:

*On an institutional level, a global entity with a strong scientific advisory capacity is needed to streamline reporting and decision-making processes, including the voices of non-state actors. It must coherently link environmental issues to social and economic priorities, for none of these can advance in isolation.*²⁴

Section 3: Decentralization and Empowerment at the Grassroots

Decentralization is an environmental necessity, especially for the food and energy systems.

Fertile lands need to be preserved for agriculture. As much as possible, food should be produced where it will be eaten. This helps food security as well as the reduction of carbon emissions with the avoidance of long transportation.

Decentralization is also the way to go for much of our energy production. Wind, solar and geothermal energy is used best in the area where it is produced. "Whereas fossil fuels helped globalize the energy economy, shifting to renewable sources will localize it."²⁵

Decentralization will make local communities more resilient to increasing climate change impacts.

The Bahá'í concept of a global order *"repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity..."*²⁶ *"Development must be decentralized in order to involve communities in formulating and implementing the decisions and programs that affect their lives. Such a decentralization need not conflict with a global system and strategy, but would in fact ensure that developmental processes are adapted to the planet's rich cultural, geographic, and ecological diversity."*²⁷

Here again is an excerpt from the Bahá'í International Community Statement *One Planet, One Habitation*:

In an age when global processes are felt equally within villages and across continents, sustained attention will need to be given to determining the appropriate locus of decision-making. Key in this regard is the principle that decisions should be made at the level at which optimum results can be obtained.

*Fidelity to this principle would imply, in many cases, a profound devolution of power and authority to local communities and governing institutions. Decision-making processes will need to become far more inclusive, local, and participatory in the coming years. Every population has the right and responsibility to mark out its own path of progress and each has a vital contribution to make in building a more sustainable civilization. Moreover, experience has demonstrated that without the commitment of those whose lives are affected, programs and policies struggle to take root in the populations on which their implementation depends.*²⁸

Section 4: Participation of the Local Population, Especially Indigenous People

People at the grass roots need to have a voice in the decisions that will affect their lives. Minorities and indigenous people must be especially empowered to take part in all plans for sustainable development. In its 2022 statement *One Planet One Habitation*, the Bahá'í International Community emphasized the important contribution of “diverse cultural understandings of humanity’s relationship with the natural world, especially those of indigenous peoples”:

Correcting such ills will require an honest reckoning, along with creativity, perseverance, and humility in response. The voices of those who have been disadvantaged by the current order will need to figure far more prominently into decision-making processes at all levels. Insight will need to be sought from populations sustaining more harmonious relationships with the natural world, many of whom live in areas other than urban centers. Diverse cultural understandings of humanity’s relationship with the natural world, especially those of indigenous peoples, can provide needed insights into the creation of more holistic and sustainable models for present and future generations.²⁹

In fact, development projects have proven to be much more beneficial if the knowledge and experience of the local population are incorporated.

The Bahá'í International Community wrote:

Top-down models of community development can no longer adequately respond to modern day needs and aspirations. The world community must move toward more participatory, knowledge-based and values-driven systems of governance in which people can assume responsibility for the processes and institutions that affect their lives. These systems need to be democratic in spirit and method, and must emerge on all levels of world society, including the global level. Consultation -- the operating expression of justice in human affairs -- should become their primary mode of decision-making.³⁰

The pathway to sustainability will be one of empowerment, collaboration and continual processes of questioning, learning and action in all regions of the world. It will be shaped by the experiences of women, men, children, the rich, the poor, the governors and the governed as each one is enabled to play their rightful role in the construction of a new society. As the sweeping tides of consumerism, unfettered consumption, extreme poverty and marginalization recede, they will reveal the human capacities for justice, reciprocity and happiness.³¹

Section 5: The Empowerment of Women

Women are disproportionately more affected by the impacts of climate change. They generally have less access to resources such as land, credit, decision-making bodies, agricultural inputs, technology and educational services that could help them to cope with or adapt to the changing climate. Their lives are also severely impacted by increasing water scarcity and diseases like malaria that are spreading to new areas because of climate change. “Women are ... more likely to die in disasters, and more likely to experience harassment as they flee, according to the Environmental Justice Foundation.”³²

The empowerment of women is not only a human rights issue, but also a key element to fight poverty and climate change. Experience has shown already that the participation of women in climate change mitigation efforts is vital. Women have always been leaders in working for the health and well-being of their families and communities.

“In Honduras, for example, the village of La Masica was the only community to register no death in the wake of 1998’s Hurricane Mitch. Six months earlier, a disaster agency had provided gender-sensitive community education on early warning systems and hazard management. Women took over the abandoned task of continuously monitoring the warning system. As a result, the municipality was able to evacuate the area promptly when the hurricane struck.”³³

And in Kenya, women’s groups are planting thousands of trees to reforest two mountain areas as part of the Green Belt Movement. This activity provides “poor rural women with a small income and some economic independence as well as capture some 350’000 tons of CO₂, restore eroded soils, and support regular rainfall essential to Kenya’s farmers and hydroelectric plants.”³⁴

The United Nations noticed that *development projects* work better where women are fully involved in decision-making. Here is just one example in the area of water security: “In most societies, women have primary responsibility for water supply, sanitation and health at the household level. Women have considerable knowledge about water resources, including location, quality and storage methods, and they are often the most motivated to ensure that water supply and sanitation work.”³⁵

The United Nations have recognized the importance of gender equality in climate change mitigation. In Bonn, Germany, in November 2017 at the annual Conference of the Parties (COP23), member states adopted a first-ever Gender Action Plan³⁶ to incorporate gender equality and women’s empowerment in climate change discourse and actions.

The Bahá’í International Community, in its statement to the 66th session of the *Commission on the Status of Women*, elaborated on these points:

*In a world where the impending risks of climate change press daily, a twofold reality presents itself—while women are disproportionately affected by climate change, they are uniquely situated to lead efforts in response. In the wake of climate-induced disaster, livelihoods directly dependent on stable and healthy ecosystems—often largely pursued by women—are upended. Many lose access to land, shelter, as well as financial support or recourse. Vulnerabilities deepen where societies already fall short of realizing the full potentialities of women. Yet, women are not simply victims. Their insights form the range of human experience and enable the construction of a fuller picture of reality. Often connected to large networks, women are an integral element of communal flourishing, community-based solutions, and mobilization. Whether as leaders in economic thinking, policymakers, climate activists, smallholder farmers, or through a multitude of other capacities, women worldwide are making significant contributions related to climate action, natural resource management, food security, and scientific innovation toward sustainable solutions. Young and old alike, the experiences of women offer profound insight into safeguarding humankind’s home, the present generation, and those still to come. Ensuring the potential of women is fully harnessed will require action on at least two fronts: increasing women’s presence in leadership roles and creating conditions for women to engage more meaningfully in community life.*³⁷

In addition, the status of women has a direct impact on population growth. Greenhouse gas emissions have only reached such a dangerously high level because of the large numbers of people living on our planet. Today, there are 8 billion people. The United Nations estimates that the world population is projected to reach 9.8 billion in 2050, and 11.2 billion in 2100.³⁸

UNFPA, an international development agency of the United Nations states: “The ability of women to control their own fertility is absolutely fundamental to women’s empowerment and equality. When a woman can plan her family, she can plan the rest of her life. When she is healthy, she can be more productive. And when her reproductive rights—including the right to plan her family in terms of birth timing and spacing, and to make decisions regarding reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence—are promoted and protected, she has freedom to participate more fully and equally in society.

“Where women’s status is low, family size tends to be large, which makes it more difficult for families to thrive. Population and development and reproductive health programmes are more effective when they address the educational opportunities, status and empowerment of women. When women are empowered, whole families benefit, and these benefits often have ripple effects to future generations.”³⁹

“Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor, including environment and development, will the moral and psychological climate be created in which a peaceful, harmonious, and sustainable civilization can emerge and flourish.”⁴⁰ The Bahá’í teachings say:

*The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals, or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced.*⁴¹

‘Abdu'l-Bahá

These words are echoed by the Bahá’í International Community as it applied them to the climate crisis:

Amidst mounting climate risks, it is becoming clearer how much humanity benefits when women’s leadership is embraced and promoted at every level of society, whether in the family, community, local government, corporation, or nation. Qualities of leadership typically associated with the masculine—assertiveness and competitiveness, for example—have proven limited when not tempered by those typically associated with the feminine, such as an inclination toward collaboration and inclusion, and a disposition toward care and selflessness. The tendency to prioritize longer-term interests, to consider the well-being of future generations, and to explore the human impact of policies more broadly are increasingly acknowledged as necessary tools in formulating environmentally conscious programs and strategies for building more resilient

*communities. Of course, these attributes can be manifested by leaders irrespective of sex. Yet, by increasing women's participation in leadership roles, these qualities more consistently inform the culture of leadership and characterize practical strategies.*⁴²

Section 6: Consultation

Consultation must replace confrontation and domination in order to gain the cooperation of the family of nations in devising and implementing measures that will preserve the earth's ecological balance.⁴³

In such a consultative process, "individual participants strive to transcend their respective points of view, in order to function as members of a body with its own interests and goals. In such an atmosphere, characterized by both candor and courtesy, ideas belong not to the individual to whom they occur during the discussion but to the group as a whole, to take up, discard, or revise as seems to best serve the goal pursued. Consultation succeeds to the extent that all participants support the decisions arrived at, regardless of the individual opinions with which they entered the discussion. Viewed in such a light, consultation is the operating expression of justice in human affairs. So vital is it to the success of collective endeavor that it must constitute a basic feature of a viable strategy of social and economic development."⁴⁴

*The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.*⁴⁵

*Consultation ... is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.*⁴⁶

Bahá'u'lláh

Policies to mitigate climate change or adaptation projects will be beneficial and effective when everyone affected can participate directly or with representation in such a consultative process. If the above principles are applied, consultation and decentralization can prevent human rights abuses, conflicts and violence, and ensure the well-being of everyone. People at the grassroots will be empowered and the actions taken will have a much greater chance of success because the knowledge and support from a wide diversity of people went into the planning of these projects.

Section 7: Trustworthiness – an Antidote for Corruption

Corruption is a major cause of both poverty and environmental degradation throughout the world.

“Anti-corruption measures are integral to fighting both poverty and climate change. Weak institutions, poor governance practices and the excessive influence of private interests will continue to undermine the best efforts to promote equitable and

sustainable human development, for which we need a vigorous, honest exchange of expertise and development cooperation between rich and poor countries.

“Hunger, child mortality and illiteracy cannot be eradicated as long as corruption continues to sap resources from the world’s poorest countries. One key lesson from the last 30 years of development efforts is that the progress in poverty alleviation in the world’s poorer countries with high level of corruption and weak institutions has not been substantial or sustained.

“Similarly, environmental regulation, including CO₂ controls, forest and biodiversity protection will not be effective as long as law enforcement and other decision-makers can be bought.

“The possibility of a world where all countries and all people can share in the wealth of the global economy hinges on fighting corruption, strengthening public institutions and improving governance and standards of accountability and transparency across the world.”⁴⁷

One form of corruption is Greenwashing. Greenwashing is used by companies to improve their reputation or to market a product at a higher price based on false claims of sustainability. “Greenwashing may involve cynical marketing ploys, misguided PR stunts, or simply changing the packaging of an existing product while continuing to use unsustainable ingredients or practices. It’s a way for companies to appear like they care while also increasing their profit margins, as they’re fully aware that eco-conscious people are willing to part with more money for sustainable products.”⁴⁸

Corruption needs to be eliminated not only in government and business, but also on the individual level. This is just one example: “Residents in Paris can rent a sturdy bicycle from hundreds of public stations and pedal to their destinations, an inexpensive, healthy and low-carbon alternative to hopping in a car or bus. Unfortunately, many of the specially designed expensive bikes are showing up on black markets in Eastern Europe and northern Africa. Many others are being spirited away for urban joy rides, then ditched by roadsides, their wheels bent and tires stripped.”⁴⁹

All religions call for a life of integrity, which means that our actions are in harmony with our spiritual and moral values.

*In truth, religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world, for the fear of God impelleth man to hold fast to that which is good, and shun all evil. Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness and justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine.*⁵⁰

Bahá'u'lláh

One particular moral value is *trustworthiness*. Trustworthiness is the antidote to corruption.

*Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it. All the domains of power, of grandeur and of wealth are illumined by its light.*⁵¹

Bahá'u'lláh

Section 8: Education

Universal education is a prerequisite to combating climate change. Children and youth comprise a large part of the human population. Their consumer choices will have the strongest impact on the climate. Also, young people can more easily change their habits. Moreover, their generation will have to shoulder the responsibility of mitigating and adapting to climate change in the very near future.

However, as immediate strong actions to mitigate climate change are required, education about climate change needs to extend to people of all ages. An informed public is a prerequisite for responsible policy decisions in a democracy.

The following three aspects of education are especially relevant in the context of climate change:

- *Environmental education* should be considered as part of basic education, equally important as literacy. In industrialized nations, emphasis should be on teaching the causes and impacts of climate change, and what each individual can do to mitigate it. In developing countries, it would be more meaningful to teach sustainable development (based on low or carbon free energy and sustainable agricultural practices), adaptation strategies, for example, agricultural methods (water saving irrigation techniques, different crops or seeds), malaria prevention, and the value of preserving forests and of planting trees.
- *Education to world citizenship* should be at the heart of the curriculum everywhere. Only when we view humanity as one human family will we have the motivation to take the strong and far-reaching actions needed to mitigate climate change.
- *Spiritual/moral education* is important throughout all grade levels. An ethical framework is a prerequisite for environmentally and socially responsible actions.

The *media* could play a meaningful role in education, but at present it is often a source of misinformation and of degradation of the human spirit. Imagine if the media served to educate people about climate change and the reality of the state of our planet, if it promoted a sense of world citizenship and discouraged extravagant consumption! It could spread scientific knowledge and practical know how to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The media has the potential to be a major tool in the transformation of society towards a sustainable way of life.

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