

Bahá'í International Community

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The Baha'i International Community wishes to thank the UNEA President for his invitation to submit written proposals on how to further develop the draft outline document on the theme of the UN Environment Assembly, "Strengthening actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals".

The current draft provides numerous vital concepts and recommendations which will, no doubt, serve to enhance the relationship between humanity and the environment and we are grateful for the work completed thus far.

The recommendations provided below fall into three broad categories: framing, theory of change, and participation.

Framing:

1. It would be helpful to provide greater context for the necessity of this conversation. Humanity, like never before, is interconnected and interdependent in all fields: peace, human rights, and development (social, economic and environmental). The range of crises we face all owe their root causes to certain notions of progress and success - largely based on materialistic indicators. Though these understandings have brought us far, they are reaching (or have reached) their limits in terms of utility. Nature is often one of the first systems to be negatively impacted by current approaches to development.
2. Likewise, because the root causes are common, truly sustainable solutions cannot be expected through approaches that treat only one or the other symptom. What is needed is an approach that takes into consideration the cascading impacts of ill-conceived policy. In light of this, the UNEA outcome document should concurrently situate the environmental crisis within the broader context and speak to the benefits which would accrue from wise policies associated with environmental sustainability.
3. Finally, just as the natural world itself is a product of millions of years of iteration and experimentation (through evolution), and has resulted in tremendous webs of interconnection and interdependence, it may be helpful if one of our first nature based solutions is actually to turn to the natural world to understand organic processes of growth, development, iteration, and problem solving.

Theory of Change:

4. In this draft, there is an assumed link between science and policy. Perhaps explicitly stating that policy, especially in this field, must be grounded in scientific evidence would encourage greater evidentiary approaches to the environment.
5. While the United Nations is a Member-State-led organization, it must still respond to the reality of global interdependence. There are limits to even the best domestic policy if it negatively

impacts others outside their borders. Explicit consideration of extraterritorial, even global, impacts of domestic policies may be helpful to reference.

6. Many UN spaces are organized around “events” (such as UNEA), yet we have come to learn that solutions can best be derived through iterative processes. Just as these are profoundly complex problems, they will require complex solutions which will be arrived at through processes of action, reflection, evaluation, and new action. Experimentation and mistakes should be welcome provided they are seen as opportunities for further growth and learning.
7. In many spaces, there is an assumption of a kind of knowledge hierarchy, where university knowledge is favored over experiential knowledge, for example, or where high-technology innovation is preferred over low-technology innovation. Experience has demonstrated that knowledge hierarchies are not conducive to finding appropriate solutions and that each of these kinds of innovations can serve to advance humanity in different contexts.

Participation:

8. Pursuant to the point made above, it would be helpful to highlight the role and value of diverse stakeholders representing different types of knowledge (indigenous, local, religious, scientific, United Nations, etc.) in this process to provide their input and perspectives in an environment conducive to consultation and genuine seeking of truth. If such an approach can be highlighted, then the most appropriate means can better be arrived at. We are aware that UNEP and UNEA have a rich tradition of seeking knowledge from many different sources and we would merely encourage the explicit mention of this reality.
9. Specifically on the importance of local and traditional sources of knowledge in informing efforts and approaches, it may be helpful to incorporate language that would encourage promoting awareness at a more grassroots or individual level recognizing the profound impact of individual choices as consumers and encouraging sustainable patterns of both individual and collective life. One way to put this into action would be by taking policy decisions that acknowledge local communities' agency and capacity for constructive action, and that reinforce and empower their efforts to take responsibility for the health and sustainability of their local natural environment.