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A Collective Sustainability Approach Based on the Bahá'í Principles

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Abstract Religion and sustainability initiatives have been at the forefront of academic debates with a number of differing perspectives. This chapter contributes to this emerging body of research and proposes a “collective sustainability framework”, drawn from the Bahá'í Faith. This framework enables an effective integration of various stakeholders, which benefits both the environment and the society at large, based on the scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith and practices of the Bahá'í community. Such a sustainability framework is built on the principles of justice for all, unity in diversity, unity between science and religion, high station of work, and cessation of war expenditure. The chapter concludes by proposing that such a collective sustainability framework can develop through a “value intersubjectivity” approach, to reflect the context and the environment it applies to. It can be employed in sustainability agendas as well as in organizational policy decisions and sustainability initiatives.

Keywords Bahá'í faith · Sustainability framework · Unity in Diversity · Justice · Peace and Universal Education · Value intersubjectivity

1 Introduction

The contribution of religion to development and sustainability initiatives has been the subject matter of academic debates since the last few decades (Taylor et al. 2016; Andregg, 2012; Adriance et al., 2010; Zagonari, 2021; White, 1989). While some scholars have highlighted the positive contributions of religion on existing sustainability discourses (Tomalin et al., 2019), others point to a divisive impact of religions and their myopic focus on the issue. For instance, Andregg (2012, p. 41) critiques the conflicts caused by “authoritarian law and militant religion” that creates contestations with science and reason. Rather, he necessitates a “civilizational religion” that could manage the planet and the people on it more humanely, instead of subjugating and exploiting them for short term benefit” (p. 41). On the other hand, Shogar (2011, p. 754) reviews various studies that attribute the recent ecological crises to the contemporary scientific paradigms “dominated by a secularist worldview” and necessitates the importance of spiritual values. Furthermore, Adriance et al. (2010, p. 1) explore the often-overlooked contributions of various religious leaders and their followers and argue that “preserving the earth’s biodiversity and fostering human well-being does not have to be a secular undertaking.” This debate between the benefits and harms of the contributions of science and religion remains a contentious subject, which has yet to reach a consensus.

In integrating the two schools of thought, Zagonari (2021, p. 5) conducts a multilayered analysis comparing *religious* and *secular* ethics in terms of household determinants of key environmental behaviors. He studied variables such as household waste management, organic food purchases, household energy conservation and ecological footprint. The study concluded that religious and secular ethics complement each other. Religious ethics impact *individual feelings* and contribute to solving local sustainability issues. On the other hand, secular ethics help to solve *collective action problems* and help in achievement of long-run sustainability. Adriance et al. (2010) observe the impact of collaboration between the secular scientific paradigms and religious groups in the case of Appalachian communities. They discuss how pairing various stakeholders including the environmentalists, artists, and religious groups, enhanced the viability, development, and implementation of sustainability programs toward protection of mountain ecosystems.

These multiple sources of evidence and empirical case studies have gradually evolved into local level partnerships between the religious groups and secular activists in collaboration toward sustainability. However, the issue of a “civilizational religion” as phrased by Andregg (2012) still persists, which looks for a unifying set of spiritual principles and institutions that would steer sustainability and development initiatives. This chapter explores the possibility of the contribution of the Bahá’í Faith to this call for a “civilizational religion” as a contemporary world religion, focused on the key tenets of unity in diversity, justice, and betterment of the world as a whole.

This chapter aims to articulate and suggest a generic framework for articulation and agreement on values in sustainable development, in organizations, based on the Bahá’í principles. It aims to enable the enactment and measurement of these values, as a potential inclusive, peace-oriented value system, established on the principles of oneness of humanity and focused on betterment of the world (with a collective approach). These principles are explored in detail, in the next section.

The chapter begins by analyzing the relationship between religious values and sustainability agendas in literature and then goes on to highlight the principles from the Bahá’í scripture and the novel perspective on sustainability they bring to existing literature. The chapter concludes with an analysis and discussion of ground-level initiatives informed by Bahá’í principles.

2 Religious Values and Sustainability Agendas

To enable effective partnership between religions and sustainability, some studies (Ives & Kidwell, 2019; Narayanan, 2013; Burford et al., 2013) have focused on existing “sustainability agendas,” which often lack any trace of religions and their principles or keep them to a minimum. Burford et al. (2013), however, argue that inclusion of religious principles and doctrines can enable the inclusion of “humane values” as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, along with existing dimensions of environmental, economic, and social sustainability. Values, here, are intended as “principles or standards of behavior” and “people’s judgments about what is important in life” (Burford et al., 2013, p. 3038). They evaluated the presence of “values” in existing sustainability agendas and found that the Commission for Sustainable Development’s (CSD) millennium declaration incorporated the

importance of values as “rooted principles,” which steer integrated development (Burford et al., 2013, p. 3039).

Despite this recognition, the final report of the Rio +20, the United Nations’ Conference on Sustainable Development, missed out on dealing with ethics and values altogether. It is notable that later, in 2015, the United Nations’ summit in New York, which resulted in 2030 Agenda for Sustainable developments, includes a variety of values including “values of peace, dialogue and international cooperation” (General Assembly, 2015, p. 12), diversity, physical and mental health, and economic and environmental advancements as some of its main goals. This indicates a significant improvement in comparison to previous sustainability agendas and sets the motion for a diverse world with collaborative citizenship. In relation to the goals focused on diversity, in Declaration No. 36 it says:

We pledge to foster intercultural **understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and an ethic of global citizenship and shared responsibility**. We acknowledge the natural and cultural diversity of the world and recognize that all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development. (General Assembly, 2015, p. 10)

The stress on diversity and its inclusion in the agenda is significant in providing a conducive platform for integration of secular and religious (various religions’) involvements, as well as broader variety of perspectives and experiences of multiple stakeholders. However, this constitutes only an initial step.

Singh and Clark (2016, p. 271) translate the focus of the 2030 agenda on the five Ps, namely, “planet, people, prosperity, peace, and partnership,” to the views of ten different religions and their potential contributions. They include Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Bahá’í Faith, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Lenape. These approaches, while having many similarities, offer differing perspectives and strategies, which is not surprising, since values are not universally defined and characterized in research and practice.

The inability to produce objective measures to evaluate values and their fulfilment has been considered as a barrier to the inclusion of values in previous sustainability agendas. Hence, to enable development of a framework for inclusion of values and collaboration between religious and secular efforts, a universal understanding of values and their implications is deemed necessary. To overcome this barrier, Burford et al. (2013) discuss “value intersubjectivity” to collectively conceptualize values through mutual agreement and define and measure them within specific contexts, which can, consequently, enable adequate definition and evaluation of values in sustainable development agenda. To enable value intersubjectivity, they suggest “a polycentric approach, based on the creation of multiple, diverse, peer-elicited, indicator sets and assessment tools” and “reference sets of indicators and survey questionnaires which can be used in their standard forms to generate national-level statistics but can also be tailored to local contexts” (p. 3050). They highlight that it requires a “transdisciplinary approach” in terms of “facilitating the deep participation of non-scientific stakeholders in research and the —direct application of scientific knowledge in both political decision-making and societal problem-solving” (Burford et al., 2013, p. 3053). This approach can enable adequate definition, inclusion, and evaluation of values in sustainable development agenda as well as organizational sustainability initiatives, through creation of

indicator sets and assessment tools in each conceptual, geographical, and organizational context.

Taking this approach to action, in relation to including religious followers and institutions as part of the “nonscientific stakeholders,” Taylor et al. (2016, p. 354) pose a question:

What are the signs and possibilities of an emerging civil earth religion or planetary civilization in which people with very different metaphysical understandings could find common ground, recast themselves as citizens of the Earth (whatever other identities they may hold), and sincerely work together to create sustainable and equitable societies?

To answer this question in the context of a “civilizational religion,” this chapter explores the principles of the Bahá’í Faith as a contemporary world religion, established in 1844 in Iran. Baha’i Faith aims to establish unity in diversity and prosperity of the world population (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1998). These principles include universal peace (with inclusion of members from all countries), availability of and access to education for all, unity of religions and recognizing their common purpose toward unity of humankind, equality of men and women, and a stop to war expenditures (Shoghi Effendi, 1991b, p. 203). This set of principles exhibit an attempt toward world citizenship with practical guidance on their achievements, including a path to this universal peace. For instance, elaborating on one of such steps on this path, these principles encourage establishment of a universal language. Shoghi Effendi (1991b, p. 203) explains that in a meeting with representatives from all nations and cultures, either a language be selected among the existing languages or one to be developed, in order that all people of the world learn the common language along with their mother tongues, so that the concept of stranger is gradually removed, in a global culture. This is one of such principles that can inform UN sustainability agenda toward a collective peace-oriented approach to sustainability.

3 The Thesis of the Bahá’í Faith and Recommendation for Inclusion of Values in the Agenda

The Bahá’í Faith is a contemporary world religion, with a monistic approach to existence of one God and progressive manifestations throughout time, as different stages in the history of one religion, while believing that the revelation of Bahá’u’lláh (1817–1892) is the most recent (not the last) one (Smith, 2000). The principles of the Bahá’í Faith are centered around unity and oneness of humankind; and the collection of values/virtues, the guiding principles and instructions, and its administrative system operate according to the same approach, while valuing human dignity and choice. For instance, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982b, pp. 299–300) introduces the unity of religions and states that religion “should be the cause of fellowship,” but if it causes “prejudice and enmity,” then “it is fruitless.” Similarly, followers are guided by Bahá’u’lláh (1992, p. 20), the founder of the Bahá’í Faith, as follows: “Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty.” Similarly, the administrative structure of the Bahá’í Faith does not have clergy and is elective, and the elective body is advised to take consult from the members of the community and serve with purity of motive, rather than taking an authoritative approach to protection and expansion of the religion (Shoghi Effendi, 1991a, 1970).

In this paragraph, I elucidate upon two main aspects of the Bahá'í Faith that contribute to the debate on sustainability, through the lens of the “civilizational religion.” One of these is the unity of religions, which takes a unifying approach to sharing values and appreciation of diversity, hence overcoming the divisive impact previously attributed to the contributions of religions. The second is the lack of clergy and the elective nature of the administrative body of the Bahá'í Faith, which establishes and encourages the spirit of consultation and collective articulation of values, their applications, and personal assessment as opposed to clerical approval of religiosity. The nature and experience of religion in this manner can create a platform for establishment of “value intersubjectivity” as addressed by Burford et al. (2013) and co-definition of the organizational value systems and their evaluation, collectively.

The following sections discuss the Bahá'í principals that have been found to have a direct impact on a sustainability approach. They include justice, unity in diversity, the value of work, and cease to war expenditure.

3.1 Justice Through Moderation and Share of Wealth

In Bahá'í Faith, individual responsibility is delegated to act with care and moderation. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1972, p. 153) states: “If it be right for a capitalist to possess a large fortune, it is equally just that his workman should have a sufficient means of existence.” So, the owners of capital are advised to be “moderate” in “withdrawal of profit” and concentrate on “the welfare of the poor.” Hence, they are encouraged to share their profit with the workmen and pay them enough salaries that they can save for their time of need (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990a, pp. 273–277). This value is unique in its focus and approach in relation to both religious and secular value systems. While looking after the poor has commonly been considered as a moral responsibility of the rich, in both religious and secular ethics, it is often rooted in charitable contributions and development activities. The above principle, however, encourages the owners of capital to undertake moderate and responsible withdrawal of profit as a part of their personal and social responsibility.

Accordingly, in relation to sustainability, this principle discourages excess in accumulation of wealth as well as its consumption (White, 1989). The latter is also advocated by many sustainability researchers (Koh & Lee, 2012; Assadourian, 2010; Mroz, 2010) on the grounds that it promotes sustainable consumption (Kurenlahti & Salonen, 2018). In recent years, there have been numerous references to ethical consumerism (Gillani & Kutaula, 2018) or sustainable consumption in the British press in their coverage of sustainability issues as well (Diprose et al., 2018). The emphasis on ethical and sustainable consumerism, similarly, discourages excess consumerism and indirectly points to moderation, although with a different justification. Notably, while excess accumulation and consumption of wealth is discouraged in existing sustainability literature, the responsibility of the owners of capital in their withdrawal of profit is unique to the Bahá'í principles and points to a level of responsibility that is deeply rooted in individuals’ consciousness and sacrifice and care for the welfare of the society, which is different from contributing excess profit to humanitarian causes.

3.2 Justice Through Equitable Distribution of Natural Resources

Shoghi Effendi (1991b, p. 203) discusses establishment of a “world commonwealth” that unites “all nations, races, creeds and classes,” while autonomy and freedom of the state members are maintained. Within the framework of a world commonwealth, he introduces a world legislature, a world executive, a world tribunal, and a world federal system, members of which are representatives of all nations and aim to safeguard and satisfy the needs of all the nations. In such a commonwealth, Shoghi Effendi (1991b, p. 203) states that the world legislature would “ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples”; and the world federal system would have control and “authority over its unimaginably vast resources,” would blend and embody “the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries,” and would be “bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet.” This commonwealth, being made up of all nations/countries and serving all nations/countries equitably, is in contrast to the operation of the United Nations (UN), the Conference of the parties (COP), the European Union (EU) in their very (membership) nature, being made up of member-countries and serving the interests of the member-countries, consequently, negating the principles of a universal social justice and discriminating the non-member nations.

In terms of equitable distribution of natural resources in a world commonwealth mentioned above, sustainability literature shows a great concern for their exploitation and distribution (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010; Agarwal, 1989). For instance, the impact of globalization on providing international access to natural resources has been challenged. Tu et al. (2019) explore the resilience of the system when multiple users harvest the same resources. They explain that a positive or negative impact of globalization depends on the interconnectedness of the network and its modularity. Hence, they recommend reciprocated trade (Tu et al., 2019). They state that major importers of food often only export small amounts of food, to a small number of countries, which indicates the “inequality in the global distribution and development of food resources relative to the population of each country” and decreases the resilience and sustainability of the system (Tu et al., 2019, p. 288). This discussion highlights the significance of a resilient and reciprocal system in access to national resources. However, it is different from the thesis of a “world commonwealth” as above, which proposes equitable access to and distribution of natural resources, in the interest of all countries, as the property of the commonwealth. This can contribute to addressing the issues of neglect/destruction of natural resources as well as equitable access, as ongoing causes of poverty (Addae-Korankye, 2014; Anderson et al., 2006).

From a different perspective, Ragnarsdóttir et al. (2012) employ systems analysis to assess the long-term sustainability of global supply and consumption of natural resources. They find that despite the recent technological advances in supply of resources, the inefficient consumption of energies and natural resources such as gas and oil are leading to unsustainability.

Accordingly, establishment of a reciprocal, responsible, and resilient system of access, distribution, protection, exploitation, and consumption of national resources in a world commonwealth is proposed in Bahá’í scripture, where individual responsibility and moderate consumption (Bahá’u’lláh, 1988) are coupled with equitable sharing of the resources (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990a, pp. 273–277), so that a collective justice can enable sustainability.

3.3 Unity Between Science and Religion

Another principle of the Bahá'í Faith in relation to sustainability is the consideration of a unity between science and religion, through which the two forces join in the service of the entire world (Shoghi Effendi, 1991b, p. 205). Technological and scientific advances have enabled mass production, development of the quality of crops and raw material (Singh et al., 2020; Pirzada et al., 2020), and reducing carbon emissions (Taheri-Najafabadi, 2013). However, responsible employment of technology is a challenge to sustainability movements, as production continues to be dictated by business interests. Fuchs (2008, p. 291) argues that achieving a sustainable society “demands a conscious reduction of profits by not investing in the future of capital, but the future of humans, society, and nature.”

This unity between science and religion adds another dimension to the “purpose orientation” and objectivity of philosophy of science (John, 2021), subjecting it to human dignity and well-being, morality, peace, and protection of “all” humankind and all planet citizens. This unity can, thus, channel the development and employment of purely business and commercial prerogatives of environmental initiatives, away from “value-free” science (John, 2021, p. 20), and embed them in a pro-environment framework.

3.4 Diversity

The principle of unity in diversity considers the universe as a greater whole, which requires appreciation and flourishing of all aspects of its diversity, to enable and protect the sustainability of its peace and growth. It focuses on access to opportunities for all (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982a, p. 29) resulting in an enhanced positive outcome, the same way that the “various-colored flowers of one garden” enhance the beauty of the garden (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1998, p. 25). Thus, unity and peace according to Bahá'í principles are interpreted as “unity in diversity.”

It is worth noting that diversity as addressed by scholars of sustainability or ecology is often focused on biodiversity (Díaz et al., 2020; Bennett et al., 2015; Adriance et al., 2010; Bishop, 1993) referring to “the variety of life” or “collectively to variation at all levels of biological organisation” (Gaston & Spicer, 2013, p. 16). In Bahá'í scripture, diversity refers to the variety of “races, tribes, and communities of the world,” but it further includes the “different and varied customs, habits, tastes, character, inclinations and ideas” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982b, p. 290). This articulation extends the definition of diversity to inclusion of habits, characters, and opinions as well, which goes beyond the dictates of nature, toward the evolving nature of diversity, including mental capabilities and psychological conscience (including ideas, thoughts, interpretations, meanings, fantasies, and values) often interpreted as “soul” or “spirit” (Giegerich, 2020). Such diversity, as stressed in Bahá'í scripture, requires systems and mechanisms to flourish and bear fruits (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1998, p. 25). Hence, in discussing diversity based on Bahá'í scripture, this chapter takes the broader approach to diversity, beyond biodiversity, and conceptualizes it as an essential precondition in sustainability planning and implementation, enabling all components of nature and cultures to foster and evolve.

3.5 Cessation of War and War Expenditure

Bahá'í scripture strongly discourage war and spending on warfare expenditure due to the loss of life, grief, destructions, and extreme financial expenses it causes ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1979, p. 10), which is supported by several development and sustainability studies as well (Smith, 1980; Deger & Smith, 1983). For instance, the US military expenditure in 2020 amounted to 766.58 billion US dollars (Duffin, 2022), and the UK defense spending in 2020/2021 amounted to 42.4 billion British pounds (Kirk-Wade, 2022). However, despite the amount of financial costs and loss of environmental, structural, and infrastructural resources, this factor has not gained a critical significance in sustainability debate.

Moreover, Bahá'í scripture discourages nationalism and promote a global outlook. Bahá'u'lláh (1988, p. 167) says: "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." This principle further supports the approach of the Bahá'í Faith to establishment of peace and unity as a means of sustainable citizenship. The debate on global citizenship versus national citizenship is still ongoing in media, political speeches, and in research, with opposing opinions (Buckner & Russell, 2013; Harshman, 2018). Zagonari (2021, pp. 11–12) aims to close this gap and states that global citizenship "does not require a single global ideology or a homogeneous world culture" and recognizes "religious or secular ethics, which differ among cultures, societies, and economies," an approach that further applies to organizational sustainability initiatives as well.

However, there are also contrary views on the idea of "global citizenship." For instance, Bowden (2003) argues against global citizenship on the basis that it causes "statelessness." He compares it to the condition of refugees, with no access to institutions one would belong to, as well as the lack of cultural pluralism in cosmopolitan perspective of global citizenship. Therefore, Bowden (2003, p. 360) argues that being a global citizen is a claim that only "modern, affluent global bourgeoisie" can make. However, the above articulation of being the citizen of the world is put forward based on a system of values and guidelines that aim for establishment of universal peace along with its supporting means and mechanisms (Shoghi Effendi, 1991b). These would be inclusive of all nations and tribes and aim to create equitable access for "all," especially the disadvantaged sections of society. In such a system, the army is not a means of conflict resolution, and a world tribunal would undertake a different role compared to that of a traditional army. This would take place in the broader framework of a "world commonwealth" (Shoghi Effendi, 1991b, p. 203).

3.6 High Station of the Work to Benefit Self, Others, and the World

Work has been regarded as worship in Bahá'í scripture, if done in the "spirit of service" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1998, p. 83). Hence, believers in the Bahá'í Faith are directed to avoid "idleness and sloth" and "engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like," which would benefit them and others (Bahá'u'lláh, 1988, p. 26) and "to serve the general good" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990b, p. 103). Hence, Bahá'ís consider engagement in activities that cast harm on the world as prohibited, such as serving alcohol in their premises (Bahá'í Forums, 2013), engagement in dealing drugs and in the armed forces, or similar activities that threaten human dignity or their physical, mental, or spiritual well-being. In sustainability debates, existence of and access to jobs is considered as an issue that has led to poverty and challenged sustainability for a long time, and governments constantly aim to

include them in their development objectives. For instance, this concern is evidenced in UK sustainability appraisal, which includes “jobs, economic growth, housing, transport, services” and various aspects of the rural and urban environment (George, 2001, p. 101). However, they are still on their long way to solving the unemployment problem. For instance, in the UK, the unemployment rate in 2022 is 3.8% of the population over 64, while employment rate of 16–64 is 75.5% (Office for National Statistics, 2022). This encouragement to engage in some form of occupation in Bahá’í scripture looks at the micro-individual aspect of access to jobs, which is further coupled with availability of job from the macro-perspective as the responsibility of the governments. Here, individuals are advised to maintain their religious service and devotion “along” with their occupation, as opposed to devoting all their time to the service of the Faith, which highlights the value of engaging in a profession in this approach, along with discouragement of “priesthood” and leading a single-sided life (Shoghi Effendi, 1988, p. 520). This approach to discouraging complete devotion of time to religious work is unique to this scripture, and encouragement of all individuals to engage in a profession can directly impact development and sustainability.

4 Value Intersubjectivity and Sustainability Agenda

The above discussions provide an interpretation of the Bahá’í principles in relation to sustainability and development. Considering these principles and the argument of “value intersubjectivity” by Burford et al. (2013) as discussed in previous sections, this section aims to suggest a framework to enable inclusion and development of values in development and sustainability agenda. In order for the agenda to be “based on” the framework of values, this chapter suggests that the value framework is defined, as the initial step, and then the agenda and goals are decided and planned accordingly, “established” based on the value framework.

The study by Burford et al. (2013, p. 3040) summarized “16 most frequent global values included in 22 international documents” as equality, responsibility, participation, cooperation, dignity, freedom, security, peace, protect, respect, dialogue, integrity, diversity, tolerance, justice, and solidarity. While the values identified based on the analysis of the Bahá’í writings support the above values, they expand the concepts and applications of the values that have not been considered before and further offer a focal point for employment of the values, objectives, plans, and efforts in a cohesive system. These values include a) “justice for all” through moderation in their withdrawals by the owners of capital; b) sharing the benefits of the company with the workers; c) equitable access to, and distribution and protection of natural resources for all through operation of a world commonwealth; d) “unity in diversity” through appreciation (rather than management) of diversity; e) respecting the high station of human and avoidance of consumption of drugs and alcohol, and instead, engagement in a profession and self-development; f) unity between science and religion; and g) cease to war expenditure.

The two core values of “unity in diversity” and “justice for all” operate as the focal points of this framework. Accordingly, this chapter suggests the following framework as a forum to be agreed upon, or changed as needed, at the initial step before developing any sustainability agenda.

Value framework, fostering unity in diversity and justice for all, includes:

- Values concerned with human dignity and well-being, supported by the establishment of a world commonwealth (equality and appreciation of diversity, universal education, work, physical and mental health and spiritual well-being, justice, and fairness for all (including the vulnerable population), prevention of violence, promotion of human rights, and equitable access to natural resources)
- Values concerned with global prosperity, supported by the establishment of a world commonwealth (peace, poverty alleviation, standard of living, shared responsibility and benefits, mutual care, service of humanity, moving beyond self and personal fulfilment, appreciation of diversity beyond biodiversity), a world tribunal and a world federal system that safeguards and satisfies the needs of all the nations, global monetary system, and global language
- Values concerned with the earth protection, supported by the establishment of a world commonwealth (which protects the nature and natural resources mindfully):
 - With animals' protection
 - With plants protection
 - With sea protection

This framework has been summarized in Fig. 1, which proposes establishment of a world commonwealth, or an organizational commonwealth, to enable intersubjectivity in development and agreement of a value system at the levels of earth protection, global prosperity, and human dignity and well-being.

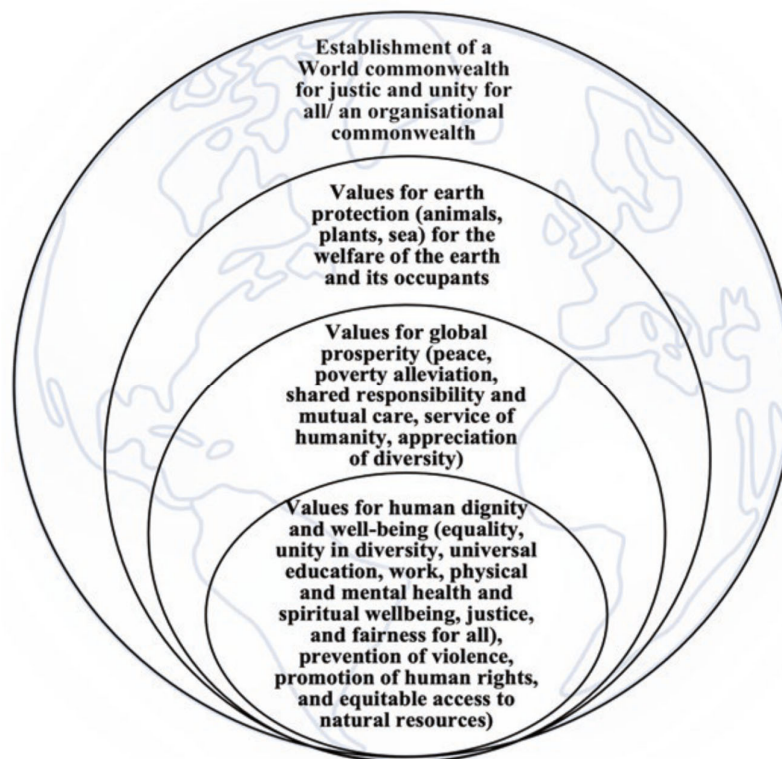


Figure 1 The value framework for development of sustainability agenda and organizational

value systems

Some of the virtues that underlie care and concern for the environment and the entire world include “tolerance, compassion, trustworthiness, kindness, willingness to sacrifice for the common good, humility” (Kavelin, 2008), which would require individual effort as well as formal and informal education to develop and enable a world citizenship approach. In terms of education, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1990a, pp. 8–9) articulates three kinds, namely, “material, human, and spiritual,” where “material education is concerned with the progress and development of the body,” “human education signifies civilization and progress,” and “divine education is that of the Kingdom of God.” He signifies all three aspects of education and encourages individuals to develop all aspects of their lives accordingly.

Education of values play a significant role in this framework, in terms of organizational initiatives toward sustainability as well as national and international programs. Burford et al. (2013, p. 3038) distinguish between the concept of values as standards and principles that guide our behaviors and “values as one’s judgment of what is important in life.” To enable instilment of each of these interpretations of values in education, it requires their definition and measurement mechanism, which could be facilitated by “value intersubjectivity,” through clarifying and specifying values in the contexts and with participation of involved members. This methodology has not been employed in formal education of values before and is recommended for further research. However, there are several case studies that have explored the involvement of the Bahá’í community in relation to spiritual education and sustainability, in various contexts and with various approaches, in their attempt to fulfil the principle of “universal education” as one of the core precepts of the Bahá’í Faith (Bahá’u’lláh, 1992, p. 162). These case studies are discussed below to enable refinement and conclusion of the discussions of this chapter.

5 Grassroot Level Initiatives Influenced by Bahá’í Principles

One example is Podger’s (2009) critical analysis approach in the study of the contribution of the American Bahá’í Community to education for sustainability (EfS), based on their focus on the oneness of humankind and development of spiritual qualities to enable individuals to offer service to society (as an outcome). These contributions that had been studied included partnership of the National Spiritual Assembly (NSA) of the Bahá’ís of the United States, the national elected administrative body of the Bahá’í Faith, in the US Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development (USPESD) and its impact on the USPESD’s efforts and plans. Podger analyzes the contributions to EfS in three themes of expansion of consciousness and identity to activate the potentiality for action, recognition of humanity’s spiritual nature and development of spiritual capabilities, and development of a service orientation to life. Podger (2009, pp. 67, 72) concludes that spirituality (as competencies of heads, hearts, hands, spirits) is found essential in the EfS, particularly in education of the children “toward becoming citizens capable of designing and maintaining sustainable societies” and in “motivating individuals and communities to engage in transformation towards sustainability.”

This case study indicates that sustainability requires long-term and short-term education of values among children and all members of society respectively, to enable employment of

“unity in diversity” as a guiding value to motivate individual and organizational contributions to sustainability.

Another case that comprises the impact of faith-based communities and organizations on the ecosystem services in Oceania (a geographical region including Australasia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia) has been explored. Here, some of the activities conducted by the Bahá’í community include planting indigenous trees on all the islands as part of the “Breath of Life” tree planting campaign; ongoing initiatives that focus on conservation education and training; projects to protect and restore the environment; use of the arts to inspire active commitment to environmental protection and development; and “advocacy for sustainable development at local, national, and international levels” (Rowland, 2019, p. 4).

The paper concludes that the Bahá’í community recognizes “humans as the stewards of the natural world” and views biodiversity as a blessing, “with science and religion as complementary aspects of human progress” (Rowland, 2019, p. 4).

Bahá’í perspective is a “combination of this organic understanding of the co-evolution of the spiritual and the material combined with a consciousness of the oneness of humanity” (Kavelin, 2008, p. 74). In the *Encyclopaedia of Peace Education* by Teachers College, Columbia University, Gervais (2008, pp. 1–2) lists a variety of Bahá’í initiatives on peace education, such as City Montessori School in Lucknow, Northern India, that was awarded the UNESCO 2002 Prize for Peace Education, and Bahá’í International Community (BIC)’s contributions to the UN, which was recognized by the United Nations as an international nongovernmental organization in 1948 and was granted consultative status in 1970 with ECOSOC and in 1976 with UNICEF.

These examples indicate that sustainability initiatives of the Bahá’í community go beyond environmental challenges to an overall objective of betterment of the world. These cases highlight the value of peace and unity and justice in sustainability initiatives of the Bahá’í community and further contributes to the value framework discussed in the previous section, with an emphasis on moral/spiritual education.

6 Conclusions

This chapter explored the approach of the Bahá’í Faith to sustainability and aimed to contribute to development of a value framework to operate as a starting point for intersubjective agreement on the initial values in an organizational context as well as providing a basis for sustainability agendas. Accordingly, it was discussed that the core principles concerning environmental and sustainability initiatives of the Bahá’í Faith are the principles of “unity in diversity” and “justice for all,” which enable care, compassion, and moderation, in desires, actions, and concern for others. In other words, it was found that sustainability, unity, and justice were interwoven, and its establishment and progress were dependent on both values.

The Bahá'í Faith further considers a unity between science and religion, through which one joins forces with the other in the service of the entire world. These principles consider the universe as a greater whole, where diversity is an integral part of, and its appreciation and flourishing enable the fulfilment of its full potential. At the same time, they argue that the natural resources in each country do not belong to a nation but to the whole world, and the benefits therefrom need to be shared among all citizens of the world equitably. This was discussed as a pillar in establishment of a world commonwealth, with members from all the nations, and its legislation, executive, and tribunal boards would be representatives of all nations and protective of their rights.

Accordingly, in this approach, sustainability arises as a case of cooperation, understanding, and appreciation and involvement of unity in diversity, in all social and economic systems. It also considers the processes and structures that may cast harm to the body or the soul of the environment, including physical harm, or social and emotional harm, to human beings or other habitants of the globe. It, thus, calls for every individual's conscience and efforts, to see themselves as a member of the body of the world, where if one part is hurt the whole body would be at unease, and all the mechanisms would endeavor to resolve the issue, in a collective effort. Hence, a value framework based on the Bahá'í principles was conceptualized in this chapter and was focused on promotion of well-being for all, with responsible and reciprocal participation of all individuals and societies. Such a framework would require representatives of all member nations to discuss, define, and specify the practical aspects of the values, agree on the developed framework, and develop the sustainability agenda based upon.

In an organizational context, this would interpret, in a smaller scale, to a platform in every organization to enable conversations about the organizational values established on unity, justice, and sustainability and to develop a collaborative organizational framework that enables well-being and growth of the employees, the environment, and the wider society, where the organization is involved with and is taking responsibility for.

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