

## CHAPTER 2

# Long-Term Sustainability and the Environment

“The slogan in the beginning of the twentieth century was progress. The cry at the end of the twentieth century is survival.”

—Muto Ichiyo, *For an Alliance of Hope*”

Let me begin with my personal perspective of the past sixty or so years. I grew up in Southern California, in a time of the rotary telephone and the radio. There was a refrigerator in our kitchen, but us scantily clad kids still hung out in front of a fan and a block of ice during the summer heat spells. Fewer than fifty years later, I now live in a world that communicates by satellite and e-mail. My relatives all lost their family farms to development and soybeans. I no longer sew my own clothes. My children, when younger, could not believe it when I told them that I was eight years old before we got a television. I came of age in a time of optimism—Kennedy and Camelot; women’s rights; and the magic of plastics, petroleum, and petrochemicals. Anything was possible, as we applied our new knowledge to technology. I inherited the benefits of an enhanced quality of life from these postwar technologies; I also inherited the costs. Atomic energy led to the atom bomb and atomic waste. An abundance of new land and sea farming technologies for food and oil led to the destruction of coral reefs and topsoil, as well as ocean oil spills. Transportation that connects people and products all over the world has contributed to the loss of ozone and glaciers and has increased global warming.

I am now a member of the top 2% of my country that holds a doctorate degree; my graduating students belong to the top 10% of the country’s population with masters’ degrees. We are members of the world’s minority: we have regular and easy access to safe drinking water, a real possibility of owning our own home, and jobs that give us access to health care and retirement programs.

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We have the luxury to seriously consider and affect the future of our children and of our children's children—and of our homeland, the planet Earth. And we must do so. Moreover, we baby boomers may be the last generation of Americans to share “an intimate, familial attachment to the land and water” as we grew up knowing farmland and forests at the edge of our suburban lives (Louv, 2005, p. 19). Research has led me to believe that we are at a fork in the road where to ensure such a future we must commit to creative thinking and take bold action. Crucial to this commitment is a deeper understanding of our interconnectedness with all systems, the finding of common ground between the physical world (science) and the spiritual one, and a shift toward sustainability in thinking about our institutions.

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SUSTAINABLE?**

There is no universal definition of sustainability but many different views on what it is and how we can achieve it. The natural environment has framed the idea, and the concept of sustainable development became a common term after the world's first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. In general, it refers to development that meets the current needs of the present generations without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). In 1972, the UN Conference on the Human Environment brought both developing and developed countries together to define the rights of people to a healthy environment. However, in the ensuing years, major threats to the environment became more apparent as information emerged on the ozone layer, global warming, desertification in agricultural areas, and the Chernobyl disaster.

In 1983, the World Commission on Environment and Development convened to focus only on environmental issues. After three years of hearings in countries all over the globe, the commission issued the Brundtland Report, which considered threats to global survival from a new perspective and indicated that a clear shift in thinking had occurred. The report discussed as interconnected problems of poverty; the global status of women; the degradation of the environment; political unrest caused by unequal economic development; repression of human rights; and the use of violence, terrorism, warfare, and nuclear threat. Recommenda-

tions for solutions could not be isolated but needed to be a panoply of integrated responses across major institutions. The 1993 Rio Earth Summit reaffirmed this interconnectedness. Recommendations from the summit also touched on changes in environmental policy and in economic, social, and political institutions.

Current thinking about sustainability clearly frames the definition more broadly than as a sole concern for the environment. Prugh and Assadourian (2003), two Worldwatch Institute associates, suggest four dimensions of sustainability, all of which are conditions that must be attained to ensure the continuation of all life on the planet: human survival, biodiversity, equity, and life quality. These dimensions are interconnected and imply that sustainability means living in harmony with fellow humankind, bird, beast, air, land, sky, and sea.

From all the definitions of sustainability, I believe that there are key principles or values of sustainability that apply to all institutions: an increasing value of human life and the lives of all species, fairness and equality or economic and social justice, decision making that involves participation and partnership, and respect for the ecological constraints of the environment. These principles that I have culled from the many recommendations of UN reports are congruent with the foundation principles of social work that are found in our code of ethics and our policy statements. They are also at the root of most major religions, and they are supported by decades of literature in social welfare on how to combat poverty and social ills. What follows in this chapter, then, is a discussion of the environment and the relevance of these principles to a sustainable perspective of our natural world. So, now on to Mother Earth.

## **SUSTAINABILITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT: FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY**

Until recently, the world was large and human activity and its effects on the health of countries were neatly compartmentalized within countries and within their various sectors (e.g., energy, trade, agriculture; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). But our knowledge and conception of the world has shifted. Nowhere is the need more evident for a change in thinking than in our relationship with our natural environment.

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We are bombarded daily with evidence of the effects of humans on our planet's ecosystem. Commenting on current studies on the connection between ocean and air currents and an increase in pathogens, the world-renowned biologist David Suzuki (2006, p. 1) suggests the following: "Climate change is not a simple process. Our atmosphere, our oceans, and all life on the planet are interconnected. Seemingly small alterations in one area can reverberate through the entire system, affecting the health of a tremendous variety of species—including us." But we do not respond as well to processes as we do to events. Consider the boiled-frog syndrome: "It takes an eruption or an earthquake or a weird belch from a poisonous lake . . . or the collapse of an ice sheet to rivet our attention. I once read of a teacher who illustrated this point with a frog. First, the teacher dropped the frog into a beaker of hot water. The frog jumped right out. Then the teacher put the frog in a beaker of cool water, and turned on a Bunsen burner. The frog kept swimming in the beaker and it boiled to death" (Weiner, 1990, p. 80).

We are, however, beginning to see the consequences of long-term processes. We are also beginning to realize that it is impossible to separate environmental threats from poverty and global inequality. Poverty drives ecological deterioration when desperate people compete for resources or exploit them, sacrificing their future to salvage the present. Immediate needs cause landless families to migrate or to stay and raze plots in the rain forest, plow steep slopes, and shorten fallow seasons. Poor women and children carry out most of this work of daily survival. Families grow larger to ensure the survival of the family unit, which contributes to population growth that a poor country cannot sustain (Mary & Morris, 1994).

Most economic aid has not helped in alternative local sustainable-development projects. In fact, paramount privatization, reduced social safety nets, and reliance on market-based strategies characterize the typical Western development strategy (UN Environment Programme [UNEP], 2002). Consumption patterns of developed countries, with the United States in the lead, have further fueled the poverty cycle. The richest 20% of the world's population, most of which lives in industrial countries, accounts for 86% of total private consumption expenditures and 58% of the world's energy use. And these consumption patterns are growing by leaps and bounds, as newly industrialized countries move forward on the road to a higher standard of living and economic

success, as defined by the example of the United States. China has now eclipsed the United States in the consumption of food, energy, and industrial commodities—meat, grain, coal, and steel. The United States still is ahead in the consumption of oil, but that is only a matter of time. The bottom line for Lester Brown (2006), world-renowned environmental scholar and cofounder of the Worldwatch Institute, is that in an economically integrated economy in which all countries compete for the same resources, the existing U.S. economic model is not globally sustainable.

These economic patterns create great global inequality. Peasants, the poor, and women disproportionately feel the ill effects of consumption gaps. Small landowners have been pushed off their land (World Commission on Economic Development, 1987). Where poverty is not a direct cause of environmental decline, it is a ticket to suffer the environmental abuses that others cause. Three-fourths of hazardous-waste landfills in the American Southwest are in low-income African American neighborhoods. In both the United States and developing countries, the rich get richer and the poor get poisoned (Durning, 1990). Thus, an essential characteristic of the current global environmental crisis is a lack of fairness and equity with respect to the production and consumption of the world's resources.

## **EVOLUTION OF RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**

How, then, have we arrived at a place where a significant number of interest groups and governments embrace an ecological perspective that acknowledges respect for the environment and the need to live in harmony with it? Several publications have well documented the place at which we have arrived—from Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), a public pronouncement regarding the effects of chemical toxins on the environment, to Ehrlich's concern for population trends, *Population Bomb* (1968), to the publication in 1975 of the first Worldwatch Institute report and the birth of environmentalism. Scientists have traced the forces of globalism, industrialism, and science and technology that have contributed to the multidisciplinary study of ecology, which is the relationship between living organisms and the environment (Sheldrake, 1994). We have become more enlightened in our connection to the universe. Moreover, we saw for the first time the earth

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from space. Some say this alone created a paradigm shift, as we gazed at a small blue ball from the beyond.

But why did humans consider themselves separate from their world for so many centuries? If we revisit the history of the relationship between humans and the environment, we can see an enormous split in Western consciousness between spirit and nature that occurred in the Middle Ages and persists to this day. We can point a finger at both religion and science for maintaining worldviews that sustain this split and thereby fueled environmental degradation.

Religion and science, until very recently, have sustained that as a species we are superior to other life forms, and therefore have a right to dominate and use nature to our own ends, which is also referred to as human chauvinism (Metzner, 1993). In the sixteenth century, Renaissance humanism, the Protestant Reformation, and the explorations of the Americas were contributing forces to this dominance paradigm. Pre-Christian European paganism and worship of the goddess, which had embraced the spiritual nature of the natural world, were eliminated. Exploration and Manifest Destiny further contributed to the devaluation of the material world through the extraction of natural resources and the subjugation and destruction of indigenous populations, whose relationship to the material world was worship in the form of animism, shamanism, or pantheism.

But in the age of connectedness, there is evidence of our new understanding of the interdependency with nature. But hey! Aren't we still the dominant, supreme species? Why should we care if species are extinct? This is part of natural selection, right? We respect human diversity. But is the diversity of all species so important? Edward Wilson, a world-renowned biologist says, "Yes, indeed."

First, we are far from knowing about all the species on our planet. Although 1.4 million species of life have been discovered thus far, Wilson (1992) estimates that the total number is somewhere between 10 million and 100 million. Second, it may be reckless to believe that biodiversity can diminish without threatening our own survival as a species:

It is fashionable, in some quarters, to wave aside the small and obscure, the bugs and weeds, forgetting that an obscure moth from Latin America saved Australia's pastureland from overgrowth by cactus, that the rosy periwinkle provided the cure for Hodgkin's disease and childhood lymphocytic leukemia, that the bark of the Pacific yew

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offers hope for victims of ovarian and breast cancer, that a chemical from the saliva of leeches dissolves blood clots during surgery . . . and so on down the roster. . . . Ecosystems enrich the soil and create the very air we breathe. . . . The life sustaining matrix is built with green plants with legions of microorganisms and mostly small obscure . . . weeds and bugs. . . . [But] without these the remaining tenure of the human race would be nasty and brief. (Wilson, 1992, p. 347)

Wilson asserts that the advances in evolutionary biology involve genetics and ecology. We evolved, with the rest of this life, on this planet; other planets are not in our genes. We must seek a balance. If we experiment in genetics with human stem cells, we cannot disregard the rest of life's web. It is quite likely that an organism that thinks only in terms of its own survival will inevitably destroy its environment and, thus, itself (Capra, 1982).

To summarize, the earth's social, ecological, and resource problems are interconnected. Increasing population growth and widening disparities between the rich and poor contribute to environmental degradation. The Western history of consciousness, which includes religion and the scientific revolution, has contributed to a view of nature and humankind wherein the role of humans is to dominate, procreate, and use nature to their own design. But a new respect for the symbiosis of humans and the natural world may be emerging.

So, where do we go from here with this awareness? Are there more sustainable approaches to living in harmony with the earth? New thinking may help us develop a personal identity with nature and a larger action plan for the global commons. Let's first look at the theory of Gaia and that of deep ecology, or voluntary simplicity, which leads us to live more simply on the earth.

## **VALUING ALL LIFE: OUR IDENTITY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MOTHER EARTH**

How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land, the freshness of the air and sparkle of the water? How can you buy them?

—Chief Seattle,

*"Reply to the President upon an Offer of a Large Area of Land"*

Studies of ecosystems over the past decades have shown that most relationships between living organisms are cooperative, characterized by interdependence and coexistence, so that the larger system is kept in balance. Congruent with new knowledge about the

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interconnectedness of systems, studies of the way in which the biosphere appears to regulate the chemical makeup of the air, surface temperature, and other aspects of the environment have led to the notion that we can understand these phenomena only if we regard the planet as a whole as a single living organism (Capra, 1982). This notion is referred to as the Gaia hypothesis, after the Greek goddess of the earth (Lovelock, 1979).

This systems view of the earth as a living organism sets forth two processes that keep the planet alive. One is self-maintenance, which includes self-renewal, healing, homeostasis, and adaptation. The other is that of self-transformation and self-transcendence; that is, the creation of new structures and new patterns of behavior. Sound familiar? This view is based on the work of scientists from various disciplines, among them the chemists Ilya Prigogine and Manfred Eigen, the biologists Paul Weiss and Conrad Waddington, the anthropologist Gregory Bateson, and the systems theorists Eric Jantsch and Ervin Laszlo (Capra, 1982).

A similar vein of thinking, deep ecology is a school of environmental thought that emerged during the 1970s. Its major premise is that there is no absolute separation between humanity and everything else. It seeks to “de-anthropomorphize our view of nature” (Bache, 2000, p. 16) and our view that we are the central point of reference of life on the earth, especially in discussions of the environment. Deep ecology views human beings not as independent of other life forms but in a web of relationships of all life forms. What are the implications for human behavior that arise from this shift in viewing the earth as a machine to viewing it as a living organism? Does it change how we see our behavior with respect to living in harmony with the environment?

Duane Elgin (2000), a social scientist, has studied the evolution of humans and their relationship with their world. He asserts that humans are evolving to a point at which we can accept a life plan of voluntary simplicity. The shift has occurred in four transformations in the evolution of our reality and our identity. The first was approximately 35,000 years ago when we awakened, or realized our consciousness, as evidenced in cave art, stone tools, and burial sites. The second shift was about 10,000 years ago, when we moved from nomadic to agrarian life. The third transformation was the scientific and industrial area, which affected all aspects of our paradigm, including our work, our relationships with others, and our perception of our role in society and our

place in the universe. We are now entering a new paradigm, at the heart of which is the idea that the universe is a living organism that encompasses all living creatures. A convergence of the knowledge about the material world and the world's spiritual traditions is informing this understanding (Elgin, 2000).

The basis of Elgin's idea of voluntary simplicity is that humans have a cosmic identity, as Russell Schweickart experienced from space. We are connected to the universe and interconnected to other species and life forms. In a dead universe, materialism makes sense. We can exploit that which is not alive because a lifeless object has no larger purpose or meaning, nor do we. However, with live objects, our every action and decision has consequences, for we are a part of an entire community that comprises past, present, and future generations.

Thus, we need to live lightly on the planet. Voluntary simplicity means "living in such a way that we consciously bring our most authentic and alive self into direct connection with life . . . in an ever changing balance" (Elgin, 2000, p. 76). Henry David Thoreau (1893) followed this worldview in his essay "Walden," as did Mahatma Gandhi (1948) and followers of Buddha. Evidence that this worldview is an emerging trend is apparent in surveys such as Ray's (1996) *The Integral Culture Study*, the World Values Survey (1990–91, qtd. in Rifkin 2004a), Gallup's Health of the Planet Survey (1993), and the World Environmental Law Survey (1998).

So how do we live simply? A simple life means sustainable economic development, with shifts in diet, transportation, consumer patterns, and increasing recycling of nonrenewable resources. It furthers economic justice by narrowing the gap between the world's rich and poor. It develops new kinds of community (e.g., eco-villages) with greater participation in politics that value self-reliance and cooperation.

If we live simply, our relationship and identity with the natural world shifts. What humans once considered apart from our realm of activity becomes an interconnected living organism with which we live in harmony. Domination shifts to a relationship of symbiotic stewardship. We become one with nature, and our stewardship extends to the planet as a whole. We cannot protect the environment in the United States but neglect it in developing countries. Political boundaries are arbitrary in the global commons. So how do we achieve global sustainability?

## DECISIONS TO MAKE: THE UN LOOKS AT GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY

The UNEP acknowledges this interconnectedness. *Global Environmental Outlook 3* (2002), a product of this group of thirty-seven collaborating centers—including universities worldwide, environmental groups, and public-policy research institutes—provides a retrospective analysis of environmental conditions and trends and policy responses. In the outlook section for 2002 to 2032, the group offers four future scenarios to ensure the future of our fragile world.

First, the markets-first approach essentially places trust in the globalization of corporate wealth and market-based approaches to create new enterprises and to ensure against or pay to fix social and environmental problems. The weakness of this approach is that it raises major questions about its sustainability and desirability. Many skeptics are concerned that under such an approach our children will inherit an impoverished and fragile world caused, in part, by the encouragement of lifestyles founded on individualism and greed, which seem to pervade a global consumer culture.

Second, the policy-first approach basically relies on governments, our public governing institutions, to specify environmental goals and plan and regulate them via treaties, tax breaks, and other incentives. The major limitation of this top-down approach is that it is highly technocratic and slow, and it has not “engendered a widespread shift in basic attitudes and behaviors” that may be necessary for sustainability (UNEP, 2002, p. 337).

Third is the security-first focus, which assumes a world in which vast disparities exist and conflict and inequality prevail. As a result, affluent communities and nations enhance their security by vigilant antiterrorism surveillance, military power, and the control of arms and financial flows. This approach does not target social and environmental concerns; therefore, tension increases around these disparities and creates an atmosphere in which more violence ensues. Poor people increasingly migrate to richer countries and “affluent groups respond with growing xenophobia and oppressive policing of borders” (UNEP, 2002, p. 342).

Fourth is the sustainability-first scenario, which evidences a new environmental and development paradigm supported by new, more equitable values and institutions (UNEP, 2002). This scenario is ripe with new-paradigm thinking, as it would involve collaboration across government, industry, and nongovernmental

organization sectors, as well as dialogues among small groups of interested citizens across regions. The scenario also recognizes the importance of partnerships, as regional efforts (e.g., the European Union) connect with others (e.g., the Russian Federation) to “form a web of global public networks,” such that “values of simplicity, cooperation and community begin to displace those of consumerism, competition and individualism” (UNEP, 2002, pp. 346–47). Traditional indigenous societies are called upon to educate others about the legacies of their own diverse cultures. Moreover, the scenario emphasizes a move away from reliance on exported raw materials toward producing more locally added value as well as actions to preserve biodiversity hotspots together with the involvement of indigenous groups.

Thus, at the global level, scientists in multiple disciplines and policy makers are looking at our environmental problems and proposals in a way that evidences new-paradigm thinking. This should be encouraging to us, especially since we are now barraged on a daily basis with new stories about environmental changes such as global warming or the thinning of glaciers in Greenland, which may have irreversible, long-term effects. In the short term, we can expect greater fluctuations in weather patterns and more frequent natural events such as hurricanes. The question is, how long is the long term when we can’t stop the collision course we’re on? At the very least we should be encouraged by the growing involvement of our own profession in this dialogue about the environmental world “problematique,” or set of crucial problems.

## **SOCIAL WORK AND THE ECOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE**

The good news is that over the past twenty years, social workers have begun to see the bigger, longer-term picture and to recognize a larger meaning of person-in-environment. Social workers have responded with practice roles and policy proposals that illustrate a new paradigm of thinking about our place in the natural world.

Carel Germain (1979) was an early pioneer in ecological social work who wrote about the importance of space and the physical environment, asserting that healthy environments create growth and adaptation. Berger and Kelly (1993) were among the first to refocus social workers’ attention on the environmental imperative with their call to action for social workers to embrace a new global

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ethic of global stewardship. They also offered social workers an ecological credo to help us expand our practice from an ecological perspective. Mary and Morris (1994) call for a global perspective on the interconnected problems facing our global village. In connecting environmental devastation with poverty and worldwide consumption patterns, they suggest that current environmental trends may present a greater threat to national security than that of warfare (we'll see a little later how warfare and military expenditures are connected to environmental deterioration).

Hoff and McNutt's *The Global Environmental Crisis* (1994), a groundbreaking work that addresses the environment and implications for social work, provides theory and frameworks for integrating the environmental crisis into our social work response and case studies to illustrate its relevance. Hoff contrasts the "industrial scientific paradigm" with the "ecological and feminist paradigm" (p. 21) and its emphasis on wholeness, diversity, sustainability, and balance. She notes that eco-feminist theory adds to the conclusion of social work scholarship that the dualistic worldview has led to environmental destruction. McNutt, in his assessment of social welfare models, suggests a new sustainable model that encourages locally oriented self-help organizations to achieve human-scale economic development, or the idea of small is beautiful. He suggests that social workers modify their roles to act as facilitators and activists in efforts toward sustainability; one model of practice could be a social development approach.

Katherine McMai Park (1996) also offers both macro and micro (i.e., individual or clinical) interventions in "ecological social work." Pointing out that the revised 1994 NASW policy statement on environmental issues commits us to action, she provides the following examples of practice arenas: environmental justice and civil rights arena, such as the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice; urban housing, such as housing and schools established on toxic sites; youth programs, such as fisheries and community gardens near Salt Lake City; and clinical practice in which wilderness programs and other nature outings help clients in their search for understanding.

Over the past twenty to twenty-five years, community-based initiatives have also provided fertile ground for social workers to help develop environmentally sound economic and social enterprises. For example, the Hawai'i Alliance for Community Based Economic Development (2007) has been a driving force since the early 1990s in encouraging community-based economic development. In a

more urban environment, Boston's Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (2007), conceived in 1984, has rebuilt the communities of Roxbury and North Dorchester through holistic community change efforts that focus on economic and social development that are congruent with environmental sustainability.

Perhaps the most encouraging movement in social work and the environment is the Global Alliance for a Deep Ecological Social Work. Participants at the first annual symposium of this alliance shared four principles that articulate the core, new-paradigm values of the initiative (Besthorn, 2001):

1. Expand our connections with the diversity of life, human and all life forms.
2. Reclaim a sacred relationship with the earth.
3. Honor and defend both human and earth communities.
4. Immerse our lives in hope.

These values clearly mirror the thinking of Capra and Steindl-Rast, Wilber, Berry, and many others (whose work we will explore in the next two chapters) in the understanding of the web of life and the need to reconnect the material with the spirit. As these ideas have been expanded, Coates (2003) articulates essential characteristics of an emerging paradigm toward sustainability and social justice, and new roles for social work, in *Ecology and Social Work*. In Coates's view, we have learned four lessons from our new knowledge of the universe and our place in it. First, everything is one; that is, we are interdependent and self-organizing. Second, each element has a unique place in a larger exocentric (living) community. Third, the universe is complex and diverse. Last, the earth's resources are finite.

In summary, the importance of the environment is by no means a new concern of social work. For most of the past century, we have used a person-in-environment practice perspective. However, the knowledge of the connection between the health of the environment and problems such as poverty, employment, and disparate consumption patterns has led us to consider new theories and new paradigms. Theories such as Gaia, voluntary simplicity, and deep ecology offer us, in varying degrees, new-paradigm thinking about our identity with and our responsibility for the natural world. This thinking has begun to translate into strategies in clinical, community, and policy practice (Coates, 2003; Derezotes, 2005; Hoff & McNutt, 1994).

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The primary implication of these theories for us, as social workers, is that the environment is no longer context. This may mean shifting our current emphasis on individual and personal development to one of the individual embedded in relationships with others in community with the natural world. It shifts from treatment to a meaningful relationship with others and with the planet (Coates, 2003). If we become stewards of the planet (Berger & Kelley, 1993), we cannot construct our interventions with families and communities apart from their effects on the natural environment that supports and nurtures them. Only through a support of communal goals will sustainability prevail.

In short, we can spend our time helping individuals move to more stable and comfortable deck chairs on the other side of the *Titanic*, but if this is all we do, we may prolong the inevitable sinking of us all. We must work together to build a stronger ship. A ship with no first-class cabins but livable ones for all passengers. An ark, if you will, that will carry all species while protecting the water, land, and air that sustain us all.

Should social workers not be talking about these things? Social workers can and should initiate dialogue in every arena about the need to live more simply. In today's world, especially in the West, the primary metaphor for human interaction is the marketplace and the primary role for people is as consumers. When we are depressed, feel alienated, or need entertainment, self-esteem, or child care, we do not turn to nature; we visit the mall. These ideas of living simply may be radical to some of us, but step-by-step, through dialogue and action, social workers may be able to play a part in personal and social transformation that helps avert the modernist path from destruction to survival.

#### **ADDITIONAL THINGS TO THINK ABOUT**

1. If we expand our HBSE worldview to consider ourselves as having a sacred relationship with the earth, how does this affect our approach to understanding human behavior?
2. Consider the professional mission of social work. To play a role in environmental sustainability, must we become geologists, biologists, or ecologists? What is our role and responsibility to the environment as a social worker?

3. Consider the following fields of practice. What is the relevance of a sustainable natural environment to the social welfare of these groups?
  - Elderly people with chronic conditions such as arthritis, cancer, or heart disease
  - People diagnosed with conditions of unknown etiology (e.g., spectrum disorders such as autism, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder)
  - People living in poverty in inner cities
4. You are a medical social worker at an HMO. Your responsibilities involve both direct client contact on various units and collaboration with other community agencies in community education and health promotion. How does the principle of sustainability of the natural environment relate to your job?
5. Social work with client groups who live in self-contained environments (e.g., nursing homes, juvenile detention centers, forensic mental hospitals) are often alienated from the natural environment. Can you see any benefits in trying to reconnect them with the natural environment? If so, how could you do that?
6. The ecological imperative is not new to many indigenous populations, which have been marginalized, are victims of industrial progress, and are now vulnerable to extinction. Can we connect such treatment of indigenous populations with our devaluing of diversity and inattention to environmental sustainability?
7. Imagine that you are a social worker who practices case management with people with developmental disabilities. Your responsibilities are primarily direct client contact, although it is expected that you help scan for needed resources, including support and educational services for clients. You have a caseload of clients who live under the flight path of a major international airport, and you have become aware of research studies that suggest that they are more vulnerable to birth defects, miscarriages, chronic respiratory conditions, and cancer than is the average population. Is there anything you can do to change this vulnerability within the purview of your job? Is there anything you can do outside of your job responsibilities?

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8. Duane Elgin suggests that we live in greater voluntary simplicity. Does this reading compel you in any way to reexamine your own relationship to the earth, such as your consumption patterns, transportation, or diet?

**MAIN POINTS**

1. Problems such as poverty, environmental degradation, political unrest, social injustice, and warfare are interconnected; solutions must sustain environmental, social, and political systems in the long term.
2. Sustainability involves the principles of valuing all life, fairness and equity, decision making that involves participation and partnership, and respect for the ecological constraints of the environment.
3. Long-term sustainability involves protecting the diversity of all life forms, as they are symbiotic.
4. Voluntary simplicity is an approach that involves living lightly on the planet.
5. The Gaia theory views the earth as a single living organism, with dynamics of self-renewal and self-transcendence.
6. The UNEP's sustainability-first approach to the future involves collaboration, partnerships, valuing the diversity of indigenous cultures, and preservation of local biodiversity.
7. Deep ecology suggests a new relationship between people and their natural environment in which the earth is sacred and entails humans to live in harmony with it.

**For Further Reading**

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