

Sustainability Sleuthing

Continuing the 2014 biodiversity series on the International Years (IY) of Family Farming, and Small Island Developing States.
By Jeanie Clark

This article considers all three 2014 United Nations (UN) events for their contributions to increasing our understanding of 'sustainability'.

Sustainability is a concept being applied across our lives and environment. What does it mean in your lifestyle and environment? Is this different for other experiences? How can we develop a broader, deeper understanding of such a concept?

Developing knowledge of concepts

Begin with brainstorming of your first-hand experience of, in this case, sustainable actions. From this, derive the concept's meaning for you. How similar is this to a dictionary definition? Check it out; for example, for 'sustainability', you may need to use its root word, the verb 'sustain'.

There may be other interpretations too, which can add depth and breadth to an understanding of the concept. Where can you find these? Some may be direct - for example, Googling the term. Others may involve some sleuthing and interpretation from its applications, as you have just done with your definition. After discovering further definitions, go back to your original one and see how you can improve it.

Let's apply this to sustainability, with meanings from family farming, island states and biodiversity.

IYFF - **Feeding the world, caring for the earth**
IYoSIDS - **Island voices, global choices**
UNDB - **Living in harmony with nature.**

Caring for the earth

Considering family farming first, 'caring for the earth' sounds like a meaning for sustainability, but it's a slogan. What does sustainability in agriculture mean? A collection of statements on this is at the sustainability means' webpage at <<http://enviroed4all.com.au>>.

How can you look for what is common in a list? Try a word cloud. It does the sleuthing for you with a free web program like 'Wordle', which makes a diagram where word size reflects its number of uses. There is one for sustainability in agriculture on the above webpage. Be careful, too - word clouds may not give good meanings as definitions, but rather a list of issues that come under that definition.

Island voices, global choices

The key event for the International Year of Small Island Developing States (IYoSIDS) was the conference in Samoa. What did some 2,500 people come to Apia to discuss? The theme was on the SIDS banners lining the streets - 'the sustainable development of SIDS through genuine and durable partnerships' [photo below]



The conference was organised into six major dialogues, or-discussion areas, as shown in the box below.

From each came a detailed statement about issues and aims for future partnerships.

- Sustainable economic development.
- Climate change and disaster risk management.
- Social development, health and non-communicable diseases, youth and women.
- Sustainable energy.
- Oceans, seas and biodiversity.
- Water and sanitation, food security and waste management.

Under food security, the main concern was that SIDS buy in more food than they export. This gave rise to questions such as:

- 1 What causes the need for food imports? Population growth; climate change effects; and competition from tourism and infrastructure for good agricultural land.
- 2 What problems follow? The availability and price of fresh and nutritious food; water and land quality issues, including fertilisers/chemical use.
- 3 What sort of partnership would help? Co-operatives which promote local healthy foods, and employ locals, especially women. ^[1]

Try this for your home: Are you also a net food importer? If so, answer the three questions for your food needs. If not, ask someone who is! These questions and answers reveal what has to be tackled for a sustainable food supply in many SIDS, and maybe here too. They give the sustainability concept much greater depth.

Sustainability on the island of Upolu, Samoa

At the local, individual level, a global problem like dependence on outside food may not apply. For example, when in Samoa as part of a church visit/partnership to a village, where we replaced computers lost in their last cyclone a couple of years ago, I saw family farming first-hand. In this community, it is

mainly providing its own food.

The island of Upolu is blessed by rich volcanic soils and a warm, wet climate. Food plants grow easily. Free-ranging poultry and pigs eat wastes and fertilise soil. Everywhere, traditional foods, such as coconuts, bananas, mangoes, breadfruit (photos above), taro, seafood, chickens and pigs, are growing as a part of daily life. The food is fresh and healthy, picked for that day's use, with scraps 'recycled' into the pigs and chooks. Being a village community, the food grown by the extended family is shared. (For more details, about Samoan family farming, see the snapshots page at <http://familyfarms.enviroed4all.com.au/>).

Looking at the SIDS questions, firstly, population growth was being solved by emigration. The climate had become wetter in the dry season, but was not a problem. There was no competition for land here as it was still held in 'customary' title. The problems did not apply. Partnerships already existed at the national scale: the organic farmers are certified and registered; the women's collective provides knowledge of new cash crops, like rambutan; and China already partners in experimental crop stations (see photo below).



Living in harmony with nature

How do you think plants and animals used for food will come under the aims of the UN Decade of Biodiversity? Aichi Targets 1,7,9, 13, 18 and 19 all relate to biodiversity in agriculture. For example, Target 13 states:

By 2020, the genetic diversity of cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and of wild relatives, including other socio-economically as well as culturally valuable species, is maintained, and strategies have been developed and implemented for minimizing genetic erosion and safeguarding their genetic diversity. ^[2]

Family farming- Samoan food gardens

The family farming that I saw in Samoa contributed not only to sustainability by feeding their local world,



and caring for their local earth, but also to living in harmony with nature. The biodiversity of traditional food plants is being maintained. Skills and knowledge are passed on to children. For example, a ten year old proudly showed me how he worked in his family food garden. He could plant three traditional food plants simply by pulling off a shoot and putting it into a new patch of soil (photo right). Thus these food plants continue in use (Aichi Target 13).



Do you think about biodiversity when you choose plants for your food garden? If you want to contribute to Aichi Target 13, then Google 'heritage' and 'heirloom' seeds for suggestions on which plants to use.

Global thinking

Why support biodiversity and sustainability? "They provide for food security, human health, and the provision of clean air and water. They contribute to local livelihoods, and economic development. They are essential for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, including poverty reduction."^[2]

While we all work at the local level, it is good to stand back occasionally for a global view. If you put some food plants into a tub or garden this spring, you are family farming. You are doing a sustainable action, caring for the earth, reducing your own needs for food from outside your home, and adding a little to living in harmony with nature. When people around the world choose to take similar sustainable actions then, collectively, the results become global.

How broad and deep is your sustainability definition now? The French use the word 'durable' where we use 'sustainable'. 'Durable' adds a layer of 'enduring' to it. The Samoan family farms are an example of enduring sustainability. They continue use of local plants and pass knowledge and skills to their young. Does your education program engender this sense of sustainability?

International Years aim to raise awareness of places, concepts and issues. Have you learnt more about, and from, an island nation and family farming in 2014?

Website references

¹ <http://www.sids2014.org/index.php?menu=1537>

² <http://www.cbd.int/doc/strategic-plan/2011-2020/Aichi-Targets-en.pdf>

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