

Agriculture

Sustainable Development Goal 2

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Agriculture

Sustainable Development Goal 2

2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and **promote sustainable agriculture**



The earth

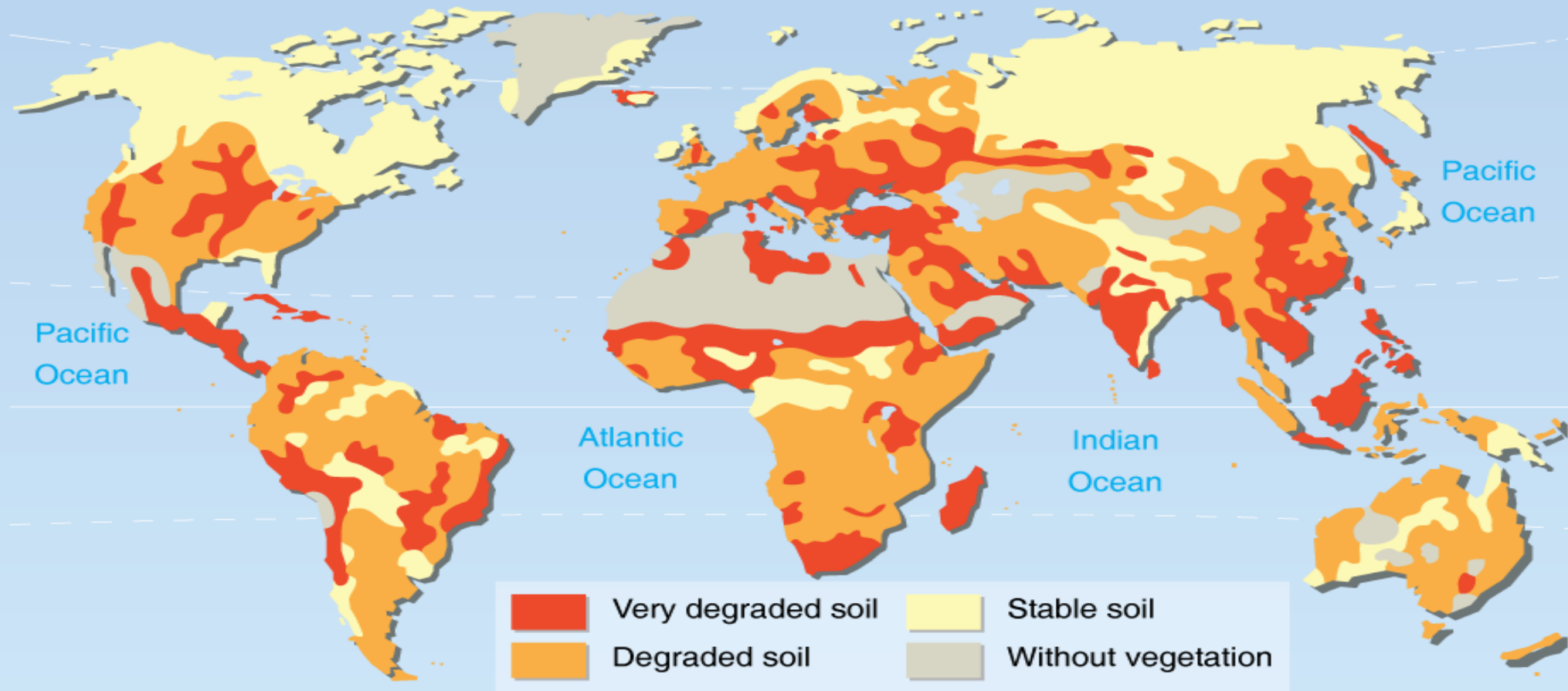
Every man of discernment, while walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men. There can be no doubt that whoever is cognizant of this truth, is cleansed and sanctified from all pride, arrogance, and vainglory....

(Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, p. 44)

Soil Degradation

- 75% of all soil has been degraded by erosion, desertification or salinization, impacting 3.2 billion people
- By 2050, 90% will be degraded
- Over 400 million hectares of former agricultural land can no longer produce food
- 10 million hectares more are degraded every year
- We are well past "peak soil"

Soil degradation



Source: UNEP, International Soil Reference and Information Centre (ISRIC), World Atlas of Desertification, 1997.

Philippe Rekacewicz, UNEP/GRID-Arendal

Impacts of Agriculture

- 33% greenhouse gas emissions generated by farming
- 60% biodiversity loss due to food production converting wild spaces to farmland
- 75% dryland altered by humanity, much by agricultural expansion
- 75% of freshwater use for agriculture
- 33% of food production is wasted

(UNEP at food systems summit July 2023)

Intensive
Agriculture



Agriculture Impacts

- 42 million hectares of tropical forest lost to cattle ranching in Latin America 1980-2020
- 6 million hectares lost to palm oil in Southeast Asia
- Agriculture employs 65-70% of African workers, supports 90% of livelihoods of Africa's population
- 470 million smallholder farmers experience post-harvest food loss with up to 15% reduced income, developing countries hit the hardest
- 37% estimated food loss waste in sub-Saharan Africa, 120-170 kg per year per capita

Reform of Agriculture

A core element of a strategy of sustainable development is the reform of agricultural policies and processes. Food production and agriculture is the world's single largest source of employment; nearly 70% of the poor in developing countries live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Although farming has been devalued by manufacturing and a rapidly expanding urban population, agriculture still represents the fundamental basis of economic and community life.

(Bahá'í International Community, [Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward As One](#), 2008)

Agriculture

Special regard must be paid to agriculture. Although it hath been mentioned in the fifth place, unquestionably it precedeth the others. Agriculture is highly developed in foreign lands, however in Persia it hath so far been grievously neglected.

(Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp.89-90)

Agriculture

Thou hadst made reference in thy letter to agriculture. On this matter He hath laid down the following universal rule: that it is incumbent upon everyone, even should he be a resident in a particular land for no more than a single day, to become engaged in some craft or trade, or agriculture, and that the very pursuit of such a calling is, in the eyes of the one true God, identical with worship. This rule was exemplified by the Baha'i community at the time when they were facing exile from Iraq, for, while they were making arrangements for their journey, they occupied themselves in cultivating the land; and when they set out, instructions were given for the fruits of their labours to be distributed amongst the friends.

(Baha'u'llah, from a Tablet to an individual believer. Research Department; Economics, Agriculture and Related Subjects, p.1)

Agriculture

The farmer is the primary factor in the body politic.

(‘Abdu’l-Baha, cited by Balyuzi in ‘Abdu’l-Baha, p.239)

Agriculture

The fundamental basis of the community is agriculture, tillage of the soil. All must be producers.

(‘Abdu’l-Baha, [Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), p.217)

Tillage
of the
soil



Agriculture

The question of economics must commence with the farmer and then be extended to the other classes inasmuch as the number of farmers is greater than all other classes, many many times greater. Therefore, it is fitting that the economic problem be first solved with the farmer, for the farmer is the first active agent in the body politic.

(‘Abdu’l-Baha, To an Individual Believer, October 4, 1912. Research Department, The Redistribution of Wealth--Some Specific Measures, p.4)

Women in Agriculture

Woman must especially devote her energies and abilities toward the industrial and agricultural sciences, seeking to assist mankind in that which is most needful. By this means she will demonstrate capability and ensure recognition of equality in the social and economic equation.

(‘Abdu’l-Baha, [Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), p.283)



Studying Agriculture

...thou art ready to enter an agricultural school. This is highly suitable. Strive as much as possible to become proficient in the science of agriculture, for in accordance with the divine teachings the acquisition of sciences and the perfection of arts are considered acts of worship. If a man engageth with all his power in the acquisition of a science or in the perfection of an art, it is as if he has been worshipping God in churches and temples. Thus as thou enterest a school of agriculture and strivest in the acquisition of that science thou art day and night engaged in acts of worship - acts that are accepted at the threshold of the Almighty. What bounty greater than this that science should be considered as an act of worship and art as service to the Kingdom of God.

(‘Abdu’l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu’l-Baha, pp.144-45)

Cultivation

If the earth is not cultivated, it becomes a jungle where useless weeds grow; but if a cultivator comes and tills the ground, it produces crops which nourish living creatures. It is evident, therefore, that the soil needs the cultivation of the farmer. Consider the trees: if they remain without a cultivator, they will be fruitless, and without fruit they are useless; but if they receive the care of a gardener, these same barren trees become fruitful, and through cultivation, fertilization and engrafting the trees which had bitter fruits yield sweet fruits....

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, page 7)

Sustainable Agriculture

‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself set an example of sustainable agriculture, buying the village of ‘Adasiyyah on abandoned land in the Jordan Valley, and bringing Bahá’í farmers from Persia to cultivate it. The food produced saved Palestine from starvation during World War I.

“The Baha’i farmers were given the task of implementing the processes of agricultural and rural development that were at the very heart of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s vision of a productive, developed ‘Adasiyyah. “

(Iraj Poostchi, ‘Adasiyyah: A Study in Agriculture and Rural Development. *Baha’i Studies Review*, Volume 16, pp. 61–105 (2010))



'Abdu'l-Bahá at 'Adasiyyah

Sustainable Agriculture

Almost all the farmers employed the practice of crop rotation to produce higher yields. Generally, a rotation involves growing a number of crops in sequence on the same piece of land over several crop seasons or years. Farmers use rotation mainly to improve soil fertility, eradicate weeds and break the pest and disease cycle. The normal rotation practised by the farmers in 'Adasiyyah using the rainfed system of crop production involved a succession of wheat, lentils, barley, chickpeas, vetch and white maize (corn). Barley was grown extensively to improve the soil structure. Vetch was also an important crop in the rotation system.

Sustainable Agriculture

Every farm household reared cattle, sheep, goats, poultry, and pigeons to produce the required amounts of manure for the season's crops. Forage crops are species or varieties of domesticated grasses or legumes such as clover or alfalfa/lucerne (members of the Leguminosae family) grown as fodder for animal feed. In fields allocated for rain-fed crops, vetch was grown on a regular basis. Vetch grains were used as food for pigeons and the straw was a nutritious feed for dairy cows, while decaying roots added nitrogen for the next crop and improved soil fertility. White maize was grown both for human consumption and poultry feed.

Sustainable Agriculture

For the most part the Baha'i framers grew a wide variety of vegetables such as eggplant (aubergine), cucumber, courgette, squash, marrow, pumpkin, tomato, broad bean, carrot, onion, okra, kohlrabi, cauliflower, cabbage, peppers, potato, chilli, cantaloupe melon, winter melon, watermelon, spinach, turnip, lettuce, beetroot and a popular local green vegetable called Jew's mallow.

(Iraj Poostchi, 'Adasiyyah: A Study in Agriculture and Rural Development. *Baha'i Studies Review*, Volume 16, pp. 61–105 (2010))

Bahá'ís
of
'Adasiyyah



Sustainable Agriculture

For many years between 1901 and 1921 'Abdu'l-Baha encouraged the Baha'i farmers to shift their system of agricultural production from that based purely on farm and vegetable crops to that of fruit-tree production. He specifically instructed them to grow table grapes, oranges, lemons, tangerines, grapefruits, limes and sweet limes, bananas and a number of other fruits. Sour oranges were also grown.

(Iraj Poostchi, 'Adasiyyah: A Study in Agriculture and Rural Development. *Baha'i Studies Review*, Volume 16, pp. 61–105 (2010))

Crisis

The crisis that exists in the world is not confined to farmers. Its effects have reached every means of livelihood. The farmers are in a sense better off because they at least have food to eat. But on the whole the crisis is serving a great purpose. It is broadening the outlook of man, teaching him to think internationally, forcing him to take into consideration the welfare of his neighbours if he wishes to improve his own condition. In short it is forcing humanity to appreciate the significance of and follow the precepts laid by Baha'u'llah.

(To an individual written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 2 March 1932. Research Department, Agriculture and Rural Life, p.2)