THE FUTURE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY  Adnan Z. Amin
WOMEN OF ENERGY  Kristen Graf
COMMUNICATING THE ENERGY REVOLUTION  Zachary Shahan
The SGI Quarterly aims to highlight initiatives and perspectives on peace, education and culture and to provide information about the Soka Gakkai International’s activities around the world. The views expressed in the SGI Quarterly are not necessarily those of the SGI. The editorial team (see above) welcomes ideas and comments from readers. For permission to reprint material from this magazine, please contact info@sgiquarterly.org.
Renewable energy is defined as energy derived from natural resources that are replenishable, such as sunlight, wind, rain, tides, biomass and geothermal heat. It thus fundamentally differs from fossil fuel-based energy or nuclear energy. The Industrial Revolution was fueled by excessive mining and burning of fossil fuels, causing an undesirably sharp rise in the concentration of carbon dioxide in Earth’s atmosphere, which in turn has caused global warming and climate change.

The second half of the 20th century saw considerable, incremental efforts toward conservation, the use of clean technology and renewable energy, and environmental protection. Now, renewable energy sources and their attendant technologies hit the headlines on a daily basis as more secure solutions for providing renewable energy are found.

Energy lies at the heart of all human development—advances in energy production have powered industrial economies—yet currently, some 1.6 billion people live without access to modern energy services such as electricity. By providing affordable, renewable ways to generate electricity, the renewable energy sector is helping to realize the United Nations Millennium Development Goals for poverty reduction. And as more people become producers of energy, powering their homes and businesses themselves, the economic and social fabric of society will also change. Rural communities with closer geographical access to renewable energy sources may also become the suppliers of energy to the urban sector.

Will we be able to supply all of the world’s energy needs with renewable energy this century? What is certain is that if we do not take action to further promote the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency solutions, we will limit the prospects for our future and those of succeeding generations. The question of energy is therefore not simply a technical one, but one that has profound ethical implications.

The traditional wisdom of the indigenous Iroquois people of North America urges us to act having “always in view not only the present generation but also coming generations . . .”

The teachings of Nichiren—the 13th century priest whose teachings form the basis of the Buddhism practiced by SGI members—encourage us to try to prevent the negative realities of society from being passed on to future generations. The pursuit of renewable sources of energy is one way we can meet present needs while fulfilling our responsibilities to the future.
SGI Quarterly: Why is it important that we make a transition to renewable sources of energy?
Adnan Z. Amin: We are living in an era of fast moving global change. In less than 40 years, the global population is projected to grow from seven billion today to an estimated nine billion. This will have far-reaching implications, such as an expected 33-percent increase in global energy demand, particularly in fast developing and populous countries, and a 60-percent increase in global power demand. These trends, as well as the need to reconcile them with environmental concerns and the threat of growing greenhouse gas emissions, are sharpening global focus on the necessity for a transition to a clean and secure energy paradigm. Renewable energy represents a truly unique opportunity to simultaneously tackle these issues.

Realizing the poverty alleviation potential of sustainable energy, the United Nations Secretary-General established the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) initiative in 2012, with the aim of achieving universal access to modern energy services, doubling the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency and doubling the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix. The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) has been nominated as the Renewable Energy Hub for the SE4All initiative across these three interrelated objectives.

SGIQ: What role do you see IRENA playing in promoting cooperation to alleviate energy poverty in developing countries?
AA: Since our formation in 2011, IRENA's global engagement has expanded to over 165 countries. Through this rapid membership growth, as well as our work to develop knowledge and tools, we are becoming a hub for cooperation for the international community.

Renewable energy and decentralized solutions represent a readily available and reliable solution to address the fact that even today over a billion people globally lack access to modern energy services. Successful deployment approaches exist, but there is a need to substantially upscale these by creating the enabling conditions necessary to extend electricity access rapidly and sustainably, especially in rural areas, as well as to involve the private sector, and in particular local enterprise. Seeing an area which could benefit from IRENA's convening power and expertise, the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) Regional Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE) and the Alliance for Rural Electrification (ARE) co-organized the first ever International Off-Grid Renewable Energy Conference (IOREC) in Ghana in November 2012. After the success of this event, we are working to organize a second conference in the Philippines in June this year.

Adnan Z. Amin is the director-general of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Founded in 2011, IRENA’s mission is to promote the widespread adoption of renewable energy. See www.irena.org/dgbiography/dg.aspx.
More broadly, as the international community’s understanding of potentials, technologies, costs and successful business models increases, so does the uptake of renewables across the globe, and this is where I see IRENA making a substantial contribution. To enable easy access to this information and data, we are developing an online portal—a global renewable energy knowledge gateway—to serve as an entry point to our work as well as that of our partners and membership.

SGIQ: What is the role of efficiency in creating a sustainable energy future?
AA: The cheapest and cleanest source of energy is the energy which is not used in the first place. More efficient systems, technologies and demand-side management regimes can all effectively create new sources of energy that can be diverted elsewhere to enable more sustainable growth and development. There is also a necessary and inseparable link between renewables and energy efficiency, and together they will play a vital role in both reducing and sustainably meeting energy demand. Under the umbrella of the SE4All initiative, IRENA is working with Denmark in their capacity as an Energy Efficiency Hub to help achieve the initiative’s objectives.

SGIQ: How can renewable energy targets be integrated into the post-2015 development agenda and how vital are these targets for our transition to a low-carbon economy?
AA: Renewable energy target setting is an important process for countries to undertake, and in recent years there has been a considerable increase in the number of countries recognizing the potential of renewable energy and the importance of establishing targets. In 2005, at least 43 countries had a national target for renewable energy supply, including all 25 European Union countries, whereas by 2013 the global number had risen to over 138 countries. This clearly attests to the growing global recognition of the essential role that energy plays in development. This is due, in part, to the megatrends which I spoke of earlier, but also to the mainstreaming of renewables through a virtuous cycle of fast learning rates and significant, sometimes rapid, declines in costs. This change has also been driven by a greater appreciation of the socioeconomic benefits of renewables. Therefore, the global position has shifted to a place where people believe that any elaboration of the global development agenda for the post-2015 period, which has sustainable development as its core, must include sources of sustainable energy, and therefore renewable energy.

Yet, while renewable energy targets have been effective for setting aspirational goals in countries around the world, they cannot alone drive explosive renewable energy growth. To reach those targets, additional policy and regulatory mechanisms such as tax incentives or tariffs will encourage investment and increase the uptake of renewable energy.

SGIQ: What do you see as the greatest impediments to more rapid development of renewable energy?
AA: Each market and each technology
faces its own set of challenges and opportunities. For some markets the primary challenge is a lack of capacity or mobilizing the necessary finance, whereas for others it could be the lack of a framework capable of enabling and encouraging deployment. But these are all challenges that can be overcome. IRENA works to support countries to identify and act upon both the areas that are restricting deployment and the actions that can help advance the deployment of renewables.

SGIQ: What do you see as the most encouraging advances in technology, financing and implementation mechanisms that offer hope for competitively priced renewable energy?

AA: Please let me start by saying that renewables already supply the least cost electricity source in a growing number of settings. For example, where oil-fired generation is the predominant power generation source, such as on islands and in off-grid situations, a lower cost renewable solution almost always exists today. Further, hydropower and geothermal electricity produced at good sites still remain the cheapest ways of generating electricity out of all generating sources. With technology prices continuing to fall and innovation improving, considerable gains still exist for renewables to make. The trajectory of technological innovation is one of the game changers evident within the industry.

Also interesting is the democratization of energy that is taking place. It is fundamentally transforming the power production system as we know it. It is an amazing thing to witness electricity consumers become producers and sell electricity back into the very grids they used to buy it from. Understandably, this is adding to the waves that the accelerating deployment of renewables are already creating throughout the industry, and with numerous examples such as this taking place across the world, it is clearly not an outlier, but instead affirms the existence of sweeping change.

Facts about Climate Change

Because Earth is much cooler than the sun, it emits energy as infrared, or thermal, radiation. Although most of Earth’s infrared radiation does eventually escape to space, some of it is blocked by greenhouse gases. Greenhouse gases trap heat in the lower atmosphere before it can reach the stratosphere. As these gases increase, more infrared energy is trapped in the lower atmosphere, further warming Earth’s surface. This phenomenon is referred to as the greenhouse effect. The burning of fossil fuels is considered to be a major contributing factor to the increasing level of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), in Earth’s atmosphere.

It is considered that the CO₂ concentration in Earth’s atmosphere has risen due in large part to the burning of fossil fuels. Because CO₂ is a greenhouse gas, elevated CO₂ concentrations have compounded the greenhouse effect, which have in turn led to higher average global temperatures. The rise in the concentration of CO₂ over the last 200 years is remarkable. In 1769, the concentration of CO₂ stood at about 280 parts per million (ppm), while in 2013, the CO₂ level rose to about 400 ppm. The correlation between the CO₂ concentration in Earth’s atmosphere and the average global temperature over the last 800,000 years has been well demonstrated. The US National Academy of Sciences reported in 2010 that 97–98 percent of the most active climate researchers support the reality of human-caused climate change.

The global average temperature is estimated to have risen 0.6 degrees Celsius, or 1.1 degrees Fahrenheit, over the course of the 20th century; the rate of warming varies from year to year due to natural variability.

2001–10 was the warmest decade on record. Global average temperatures above the 1961–99 level dominated every year of the decade.

A change of half a degree Celsius may not seem like much when it comes to the daily weather. However, over at least the past 1,000 years, the global temperature has varied by less than one degree Celsius.

* Information courtesy of UNEP/The World Meteorological Association
Women of Energy
An interview with Kristen Graf

SGi Quarterly: How did Women of Wind Energy start?
Kristen Graf: Women of Wind Energy is focused on finding ways to bring more women into the renewable energy field. In 2005, there were three women who had a particular interest in this and started to raise money from friends, colleagues and companies with the intention of bringing students and recent graduates together at a wind power conference in Denver, Colorado. They were expecting 20 or 30 people to turn up, but instead they got about 120 people. Our first chapter was launched in Portland, Oregon, and following that there were others established all over the country. The aim of our national program is to recruit more women into the renewable energy field. We work with both women and men to support their skills and training so they can leverage their voices to promote renewables all over the country.

In most technical fields in the US there are not as many women as there are men. Wind energy and renewable energy are in the same boat in this regard. I really think that having a successful renewable energy industry means we must have as many diverse perspectives as possible. Our strength lies in bringing more women to the table.

SGIQ: Do you think women can advance more quickly because this is a new industry?
KG: There is hope for that. I would love to see the entire industry take the initiative early on so that it can grow in an intentional way by bringing together as many people from as many different perspectives, genders and backgrounds as possible.

SGIQ: Do you always look to promote women to leadership positions?
KG: We are interested in seeing women advance across the industry. Some of that is about recognizing women who have the skills and opportunities to get into leadership positions. Sometimes it is about getting them through the door of the industry in the first place, and working with companies to make sure they are recruiting more women.

SGIQ: Is there any common factor between the women you work with?
KG: Everyone has specific training and expertise, but most of the women I work with are extraordinarily passionate and excited about the success of renewable energy, especially in their respective countries and throughout the world. From my own perspective, it is exciting because it is so innovative, and there is so much new technology with regard to renewable energy. The key is to develop future technology.

SGIQ: Is Women of Wind Energy a role model for how to kick-start renewable energy projects?
KG: From the very beginning we were a national organization, but it was the growth of the chapters that contributed to our local strengths. The value of our local chapters lies in our ability to connect and meet in person. I do not think that this can be underestimated. We have 35 chapters around the US and Canada, as well as a large number of individual members.

SGIQ: Do you see yourself as a resource or model for similar projects around the world?
KG: While for now we are primarily focused on building our successful model within the US and Canada, we have been excited to see a lot of interest from women around the world who have been participating with us online, including a sister organization that started up in Germany. We believe lifting the voices of the experts in our network and the resources we have to help build demand for renewable energy and climate action around the world is an important part of our work and we are regularly looking for great partners and organizations making headway in this space. One great example is the Women’s Earth & Climate Action Network (wecaninternational.org).
One of the most urgent needs of our time is to find a way to create development that is not dependent on fossil fuels. Both developed and developing countries will need to confront this challenge if we are to avoid the looming disasters of climate change. A switch to renewable energy is of course one of the priorities for achieving this goal. All sectors of the economy will need to be deeply engaged in the effort to meet this challenge, and civil society will play a key role.

The Earth Charter

The Earth Charter is an international declaration of ethical principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society. The seventh principle of the Charter, which promotes responsible patterns of production and consumption, urges that we must “Act with restraint and efficiency when using energy, and rely increasingly on renewable energy sources such as solar and wind.” Increasing our reliance on renewable energy is one of our most pressing global challenges. It is a technical challenge, an economic challenge, a political challenge and, most importantly, an ethical challenge.

At the Earth Charter International Secretariat in Costa Rica, there is a keen focus on working with youth. We have a network of youth groups around the world that are carrying out a variety of initiatives to build a more sustainable, just and peaceful society. This is in line with our twelfth principle: “Honor and support the young people of our communities, enabling them to fulfill their essential role in creating sustainable societies.”

Youth Innovation

Among civil society actors, youth can really make the difference. Currently, nearly 50 percent of the developing world population is made up of youth and children. There are 1.2 billion 15- to 24-year-olds in the world, and 1 billion of these live in developing countries. Furthermore, it is projected that by 2015 there will be 3 billion people under the age of 25. The enthusiasm of youth and their ability to generate innovative ideas that challenge the status quo can be a powerful force for creating a sustainable future.

Our youth program is focused on inspiring and empowering youth leaders to carry out sustainability projects in their local contexts, connecting youth and enabling them to share their experiences, offering capacity-building to young people through face-to-face and online education programs, collecting best practice narratives and case studies, and partnering with youth-led organizations.

Auldridge Chibbwala, a youth leader in our network, has used the Earth Charter to develop renewable energy projects in his home country of Zambia. Auldridge participates in the Zambia Community Action on Poverty and Environment (COPE) project, a partnership between the Workers Education Association of Zambia (WEAZ) and the Earth Charter US (ECUS), which pursues the goal of lifting rural villages out of poverty without them having to participate in the carbon economy. He and 20 young persons committed to seeing a change in their communities started this project after they discovered the extent to which natural forests were being devastated in order to provide charcoal and firewood for household use.

The project uses solar technologies for cooking and water pasteurization, the process of heating water to 65 degrees Celsius in order to kill germs and viruses. It also provides waterless toilets. As well as creating a healthier and cleaner environment, the solar technologies free up long hours needed to collect wood; time that can now be devoted to other valuable activities such as education.

At the Earth Charter International Secretariat we see every day how youth around the world are bringing about real change in their schools, communities, and countries—youth who are moved by the call of the Earth Charter for urgent action based on respect and care for the community of life.

For more information see: www.earthcharterinaction.org
SGI Quarterly: What are the positive expectations we can have of renewable energy?

Nasir El Bassam: There are two key issues. First, nuclear energy and fossil energy supplies are based on limited resources, while renewable energy resources are unlimited. The resources available from solar, biomass and wind can provide several thousand times more energy than any foreseeable future energy demand, even if the distribution of solar, biomass and wind resources does not comply with the present distribution of the population worldwide.

Second, we should be prepared to meet challenges in the future through a change from exploiting resources to developing technology that harnesses renewable energy. The countries that invest in renewable energy technologies and endorse these technologies will be the winners in the future because the development of renewable energy is essential to ensuring the supply of energy to humankind.

For instance, there has been considerable development of technology in Germany to ensure the reduction of industrial pollution and boost the supply of renewable energy. This ensures employment in different fields. Germany is the biggest economy in Europe, and now gets 25 percent of its energy from renewable energy resources, including bioenergy, solar energy, wind and biomass. The sector also employs 430,000 people!

SGIQ: Are there any specific examples of where you feel this switch is already taking place effectively?

NEB: India has been the world leader in terms of family-size biogas plants for decades and is today among the world’s top 10 performers in terms of wind energy because it has a manufacturing sector. India is better positioned than the industrialized nations to take advantage of the emerging transformation. It has little to lose. Its infrastructure needs fixing badly. In terms of population, more than 300 million people in India have no electricity. The rest have intermittent supply. Yet in India only 1 percent of the total energy supply is produced by renewable energy. Other countries around the world that are investing in renewable energy include Ethiopia, China, Kenya, Mali and Burkina Faso.

The share of the world population without access to the power grid is increasing because the population grows faster than the construction of new power grids. Renewable energy is now spreading, not necessarily for idealistic reasons, but because it is the only available option. For many developing countries, the import of fossil fuels already represents 50 percent or more of their foreign trade balance. In the future, with the increased costs of oil and gas, it is realistic that energy imports will not be affordable for many low-income countries. The population will suffer accordingly. Energy investments are for 20- to 40-year periods, which means that a renewable energy project can ensure long-term price stability.

SGIQ: How does the switch to renewable energy work in terms of centralized or decentralized power supply?
Rural and urban areas have unique issues and needs. Usually, urban areas have an energy grid already set up that can be utilized, but in some rural areas there is no grid, and therefore there is a different set of problems and solutions that entails a shift from centralized energy to decentralized energy. Solar panels can be installed on every building, biomass is available from agriculture and wind turbines can be constructed where there is wind. Rural communities and regions will become energy producers and suppliers instead of remaining as the energy consumers they are now. In this way, new income will be generated at the local level. To collect the economic benefits, local communities must own the energy generation equipment. State-guaranteed loans for local investments can pave the way for new rural prosperity. In the future, the rural sector will supply cities with power and other forms of energy.

In unserved areas with no power grid, which is about 25 percent of the world population, off-grid systems will be the norm in the future. Considering that lamps and appliances use less and less power, investment in large generation capacity and national power grids can no longer compete with individual and local power production and distribution. Costs of photovoltaic (PV) and wind energy have been reduced by a factor of three to five during the last 10 years, while costs of fossil fuel-based electricity are constantly increasing.

In industrialized countries, households have so far delivered renewable energy to the public grid using feed-in tariffs. This is changing now because home power production is becoming cheaper (up to 40 percent) than power from utilities. When using solar PV and small battery storage, an average German family can produce 60 percent of its annual demand for electricity with the balance coming from utilities. So renewable energy can exist in tandem with the existing system, which will make it easier to build up renewable energy supplies and slowly move away from finite energy.

Renewables will be a long-term solution that constantly lower costs, ensure security of supply and therefore lead to a more peaceful world.
The resources available from solar, biomass and wind can provide several thousand times more energy than any foreseeable future energy demand.

**SGIQ: To what extent do you think that the revolution in renewable technology is also a revolution in development?**

**NEB:** The need for proper financial schemes and programs is huge. Innovative financial schemes that match the situation of the rural population and the decentralized character of renewables can be seen in Bangladesh. Grameen Shakti is a successful organization that has provided hundreds of thousands of citizens with electricity from solar power for basic energy needs at affordable costs. Many other countries can adopt similar solutions which, however, are often blocked by vested interest in conventional energy supply and lack of information among the population. The Indian All Women’s Conference is trying to establish biogas plants on the home scale—there are millions of them in India. Those involved are poor, but they have idealism.

In the future, we will see a wide variety of technologies combined in many different ways, depending on income, consumption patterns and resources available. In most African countries and rural parts of India, Bangladesh and other countries, less than 10 percent of the population have access to modern energy services. In a West African village, a 150 Watt PV panel and a truck battery supply the school or the clinic with lighting for four hours per day. This may be the first but very important and affordable step toward providing electricity to those who are currently without it.

In more developed communities, a combination of solar, wind and biomass energy can form a reliable local power supply.

Aid for developing countries was very good until the first oil crisis in 1973. The aim of world leaders was once to really assist, develop and help, and then after 1973 there was a shift in the developed world toward controlling rather than simply giving aid. That is very sad.

At the moment, many countries feed renewable energy to the grid with some small benefit to the consumer. National governments have also been trying to develop their economies, but it is also their duty to listen to other voices. There are so many intelligent people in India and Africa investigating and publishing research—but the leaders are busy with other things. They are preoccupied with how to keep control, to continue, to govern, and so on.

**SGIQ: How feasible is it to provide the two billion people currently without access to modern energy with renewable energy?**

**NEB:** I think that in the short term this issue cannot be addressed. It will take many years and significant commitment to provide renewable energy to the two billion people without access to modern energy. But, in the short term, efforts to do so can be started—even if only on a small scale. Implementation of renewable energy will continue to spread because finite sources of energy will be depleted sooner than we think.

During the last two decades, a wide variety of advanced renewable energy technologies has emerged which did not previously exist. These technologies have also become cheaper. Just as legislation paved the way for conventional energy forms with colossal public subsidies and infrastructure, a change to clean decentralized energy forms will require massive public involvement as well. While fossil fuels will be exhausted during the coming decades and cause enormous damage to the environment and climate, renewables will be a long-term solution that constantly lower costs, ensure security of supply, and therefore lead to a more peaceful world. A great proportion of the military costs incurred by many countries can also be avoided as a result of less conflict to secure the remaining fossil fuels.
Everyone thinks of California as a “green” state. It is true that in the US it has led the way for a number of years in environmental regulations designed to tackle the environmental problems the state faces, including heavy vehicle usage, water distribution issues, air pollution and energy usage issues.

Despite these and other efforts, however, last year the world saw the quantity of CO₂ in the atmosphere rise to above 400 parts per million (ppm) for the first time, significantly above the globally recognized target of 350 ppm. The latter figure is widely seen as likely to produce an increase of approximately two degrees Celsius, enough to generate climate changes that are significant, but which can be responded to without disastrous disruption.

I work for the Environmental Stewardship Department of a large regional bank in California, which was set up in 2009 with the goal of reducing the bank’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to 9 percent below 2008 levels by 2013. To achieve this goal, we have had to work with a number of departments in the bank to reduce our electricity and natural gas usage. One of the good things is that our department is not unique; most of the big US and international banks have teams working to reduce their environmental impact. We just met our five-year reduction goal and are working on developing the next one.

The state of California has realized that reducing the amount of energy used in buildings is an important concern. Roughly 50 percent of the state’s GHG emissions come from energy use related to buildings, so developing programs to reduce the impact of these buildings is a logical goal. To help focus those efforts and have something to work toward, California set itself two major GHG reduction goals: first, to reduce its GHG emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, and second, to reduce these to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

California has brought in a variety of regulations and codes that require more energy efficient design and practices. Among them are new building codes requiring improved energy efficiency for all new construction and rebates for energy efficient equipment and appliances. In addition, the state is planning to introduce new regulations to ensure that future buildings will be “net zero” energy users, meaning that they produce at least as much energy as they consume.

California has struggled to get traction to upgrade old buildings to make them more energy efficient. A number of programs have been implemented, including those for family homes as well as commercial properties. Both have worked to an extent, but there is much more to be done if California’s GHG reduction goals are to be met.
By 2020 the US has the potential to consume 23 percent less energy per year, which would yield savings of up to $1.2 trillion.

Investment in energy efficiency in US buildings has the potential to increase to $28-30 billion per year by 2020.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that, worldwide, the building sector alone could achieve annual CO₂ emissions reductions of 8.2 billion tons by 2050 through energy efficiency improvements.

Billions of dollars of private financing from banks and other private institutions will be needed.

A recent study by the Environmental Defense Fund points out that the US could reduce emissions of GHG by almost 40 percent by 2030 through increased efficiency alone. This is where the bank I work for, and other banks, are starting to be involved.

The bank believes that the energy efficiency and renewable energy markets are potentially large and profitable in California. To date, however, growth in the market for improving energy efficiency in existing buildings has been slow. There are many factors involved, such as the fact that energy costs are typically only a small part (approximately 3 percent) of the cost of doing business. Building owners often have only limited knowledge about energy efficiency upgrades, and large initial capital costs can make it hard to justify the upgrades. Likewise, many financial institutions have little experience funding such programs, and because this is a relatively new market, there is a lack of data available to show how the market will perform over the long term.

A specific issue currently being addressed by the state is what is known as “split incentives,” meaning that, while upgrade costs may be covered by the landlord or tenant, the benefits may be reaped by the party not funding the work. Because the owners of commercial buildings often lease their buildings out to tenants, they do not directly benefit from energy efficiency improvements unless these can be used to justify higher rental prices. Tenants, for their part, are reluctant to pay for such improvements because their leases are not long enough to get an adequate return on their investment through reduced energy costs. To overcome this, California and other states in the US are using innovative energy efficiency financing tools such as On-Bill Repayment (OBR). The idea in both of these cases is that the building occupier—whether the tenant or the landlord—pays the loan back for as long as they occupy it, but if the building changes hands, the new owner will make the payments. This is designed to remove the “split incentives” issue.

The figure below shows an example of how using an OBR plan can result in reduced monthly outlays for a tenant who is paying for an energy efficiency upgrade.

Another innovative solution that is being used to increase the prevalence of solar electricity panels on residential properties involves solar companies leasing solar electricity systems to homeowners with the understanding that if they sell the house, the new owner will keep paying for the lease. The lifetime of a solar electricity system is approximately 25 years, and in California most homeowners move every six years, so under this system the homeowner only pays for the system while they live in the house. In California, solar has been a big success with more than 43,000 jobs created in 2012 alone. This is another area where the bank is keen to make a difference.

The energy efficiency market has the potential to create a large number of green jobs for people in the state. Many of the workers needed to undertake energy efficiency projects come from the construction industry. The recession hit construction jobs particularly hard, and the industry is only now starting to see improvements.

As a state, California is striving to achieve its GHG reduction goals with the involvement of public and private bodies. This is potentially a very positive outcome, but there are still a number of hurdles slowing the growth of the energy efficiency market. I am personally confident that these can be surmounted and that we will see California achieve its 2020 and 2050 GHG reduction goals.

$144
$57
$240
$144

ON-BILL REPAYMENT CAN HELP LOWER ENERGY BILLS

Energy Bill Loan Repayment

Monthly Energy Costs (USD)

Before Energy Upgrade After Energy Upgrade

By 2020 the US has the potential to consume 23 percent less energy per year, which would yield savings of up to $1.2 trillion.

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The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that, worldwide, the building sector alone could achieve annual CO₂ emissions reductions of 8.2 billion tons by 2050 through energy efficiency improvements.
In an age of increased disparities, few income-generating opportunities are created for the poor. The lack of opportunities means that the rural poor are unable to shape their own livelihoods, which leaves them with no other alternative but to migrate; this inevitably leads to overpopulated cities.

Many of the world’s problems today, whether social unrest or environmental degradation, are related to poverty, and more specifically to energy poverty. While the growth engine of many developing countries is moving at a fast pace, millions of people are being left behind, creating an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor.

The lack of access to electricity prevents the poor from creating sufficient employment opportunities and enterprises. The poor have little chance of being anything more than part of a cheap labor force.

Many of the needs of the poor have been misunderstood, and the solutions provided are more often than not developed from a “one size fits all” approach. There is an underlying assumption that the poor are a homogeneous group and that they need standardized technology-focused solutions. The reason for favoring standardized energy solutions is that they can bring down costs, making them affordable to the poor, but the definition of affordability needs to be challenged in my view.

**Linking Energy to Livelihood**

Decentralized, sustainable energies like solar power, when effectively linked to livelihoods, can act as a catalyst to empower the poor to create assets for themselves. Today, solar power is only
being used for lighting, but there are numerous other ways that solar power could benefit the poor.

Over the past 18 years, SELCO has pioneered these linkages, implementing innovative financial, business and technology models that create avenues for the poor to improve their livelihoods. The models and linkages described here can be replicated throughout the rest of the world.

Technological interventions are frequently carried out without properly assessing the needs of the communities they are intended to benefit. For this reason, many projects have created false expectations with negative consequences.

SELCO maps the needs of the poor at the level where the solutions are implemented. For example, we focus on industries directly related to people’s livelihoods (such as agriculture, silk production and the home-based garment industry) and formulate technology interventions that have the potential for integration with renewable energy. An efficient small sewing machine, for example, can run on solar for home-based tailoring units. But we are not shy of coming up with other technological solutions that may also be required by the community; for example, there may be a soldering iron that needs to be modified so that it can be used by a local entrepreneur to repair mobile phones.

In cases where technology already exists, SELCO pilots and modifies the technology according to the needs and expectations of the targeted community. SELCO is responsible for coming up with appropriate business and financial models for renewable energy technology solutions which are distributed in a holistic manner by conducting pilot projects in selected areas and replicating successes in other areas.

**Key Lessons**

For the overall development of society to take place, it is critical that poverty be alleviated. For poverty to be reduced in a sustainable manner, the poor need income-generating activities to become owners, employers and asset creators. Energy provides the key to this.

Studies show that more than two billion people in the world lack access to electricity (so-called “off-grid” communities) and that three billion people still use forms of dirty fuels for basic cooking. These figures have not changed over the past 20 years.

However, the United Nations has declared 2014–24 as the Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, which has given impetus to the movement of providing people with access to energy. Many stakeholders globally realize that equity is necessary for social sustainability, and lack of access to energy is a key factor preventing the equitable distribution of wealth.

The numerous models that have sprung up with the aim of providing energy access to the poor, though well-intentioned, often suffer from fatal flaws. The lessons can be summarized as follows:

First, there needs to be a specific link between energy access and livelihoods. Many of the models equate energy access with simply providing lighting. While this may be adequate for some communities, it is not enough for others.

Second, in many of the models, the poor are still considered to be the end-beneficiaries, not the primary players or owners.

Third, a certain ecosystem needs to exist for mature markets to flourish. Often, this is missing, as there is an underlying assumption that the poor are a homogeneous group based on an economic pyramid with divisions between income streams such as very high income, high income, middle income and poor without any differentiation within groups.

### The Missing Ecosystem

The economic pyramid as defined today is too simplistic. If the poor are to be lifted out of poverty completely, a well thought-out ecosystem needs to be in place for sustainable implementation of solutions that link energy services to livelihoods. Solutions should be customized for the different levels of the economic strata.

The ecosystem that holds everything together has many parts. SELCO puts together the parts of the ecosystem by, for instance, creating appropriate market linkages; appropriately adapting technology; developing site-specific and segment-specific financing; capacity building in terms of skilled human resources, as well as giving access to appropriate financial resources for enterprise funding for the poor.

Each part of the missing ecosystem is interconnected. For example, a solar-powered sewing machine can be a reliable solution, but the end user needs to find ways to pay for the system with his or her available cash flow. The end user of a technology should be viewed in conjunction with the market. Solar-powered sewing machines should be evaluated once the market for the end product is defined. Otherwise, the technology will become a debt burden on the poor.

There are very strong connections between renewable technologies such as decentralized solar power and improved livelihoods. As seen above, many of the challenges are huge, but the solutions are highly replicable. Presently, the partnership between the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and SELCO emphasizes the utilization of technologies such as solar, not from an environmental point of view, but from a livelihood and development point of view.
The idea for our book came out of the Deliver group, an acronym for a London-based group of mainly nongovernmental organizations and research institutions working on energy delivery issues, which felt the need to build a coordinated platform to better discuss the delivery of energy services in developing countries. Such services are inherently necessary for the achievement of all the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

Technology is just one aspect of project design, and there is a wide range of other equally important issues that must be taken into account in order to build a sustainable market system, such as production, distribution, maintenance and payment structure, as well as the capacity and skills needed for the development of a supportive policy environment and financing opportunities.

Scaling Up Energy Services in Developing Countries

Unlike many other development activities, energy projects can often more easily be set up as profitable ventures. In this sense, they are closer to mainstream businesses than other development activities, and should therefore be designed as such. This requires people to include all factors that support profitable business models which meet the needs of end users, even if they are poor and remotely located. The book aims to highlight the opportunity to move away from unsustainable traditional “aid” approaches, which are dependent on public funding, toward financially sound models. These models can then be replicated and scaled up in every country, although this is not to say that initiatives to increase energy access do not require some form of subsidy in the short term.

Even the most basic human needs such as eating (producing, processing, transporting, preserving and cooking food) and drinking (pumping, filtering, desalinizing and distributing water) are not possible without sustainable energy supplies.

In the current era where climate change needs to be addressed more urgently, the world’s traditional energy resources are going to gradually become more expensive and scarce.
Financing Clean Energy Technologies

Financing of cleaner energy technologies is on the increase globally. It is mainly focused on large-scale systems or businesses, such as wind and solar photovoltaic farms, as well as dams for generation of hydroelectric power or geothermal power plants, and on electrification through grid connections. Although important, they only represent one facet of energy solutions, and are only accessible to and affordable for a limited number of people in most developing countries. Direct investment in smaller watt- or kilowatt-scale systems is still uncommon, as many financiers find the technologies or the businesses to be too risky, and the scalability or profitability of the systems to be insufficient to justify investment. In developing countries, rural market access is often a challenge for producers or distributors of systems and services. Limited geographical reach and information, lack of standardized goods and services and the limited capacity of many entrepreneurs all contribute to the difficulty in providing energy services, such as electrification, heating and mechanical power, to poor consumers.

Most financial institutions, including development banks, limit their investments to large-scale projects and insist on only funding formalized businesses with favorable credit ratings and track records. However, small and medium enterprises in many developing countries have yet to reach this level of maturity, so they are not able to attract such investment.

Informal financing can be quick and simple and is especially important for the poor, who are often illiterate.

Most on-grid systems are large, requiring financing that can only be accessed through formal channels. Formal financing often comes at a lower overall cost in the long term and allows small businesses to develop a favorable credit history so that they may obtain loans to grow their businesses. It is important, therefore, to develop ways of providing off-grid energy companies and end users with more informal financing to provide the poor with access to their services.

In the process of enabling the poor to access a range of energy systems and services, the relationship between providers and consumers is extremely important. Many providers must absorb a considerable share of the financial risks associated with reaching poor consumers. Thus, unlike the traditional product sale model, a provider of electricity, or energy systems such as solar lanterns or improved cookstoves (which use about one third of the energy used by other cookstoves), must be able to gain the trust of the consumers prior to providing their services or systems. As poor consumers are often unable to finance the upfront cost of goods or services, it is often the provider who requires access to finance from financial institutions, government or donor subsidies, in order to help the end users. At the same time, consumers need to be able to pay regular payment installments. Case studies show that when there is a good relationship between the energy provider and the consumer, the business is more sustainable and has greater impact.

Government Target-Setting

It is important for governments to set achievable targets for clean energy services derived from renewable sources. A well-defined renewable energy target for a country may result in more focused policies and regulations, which will increase confidence for potential investors. Governments must be able to quantify the financial and economic benefits of their targets in order to understand the number of jobs that can be created, as well as such aspects as the environmental benefits of reduced deforestation and better health from improved household cooking technologies.

Developing clear national targets based on clearly defined datasets, as Kenya has done with its Kenya Vision 2030, is an important way of helping to ensure that the delivery of energy services is prioritized, and of attracting investment, both through donor funding and the private sector. The falling costs of renewable-based technologies have made them more competitive with fossil fuel-based technologies and have enabled many
The clean tech movement is about a shift toward a more peaceful world, a world in which there is more respect for others and in which our ways of living leave a smaller environmental footprint. Clean energy is not just about cleaning our air, preserving our water supplies and helping to protect our climate; it is also about democratizing the energy sector.

When I started blogging about clean tech some four and a half years ago, solar and wind energy were growing fast. That growth has subsequently picked up at an exponential pace. Choosing which 15 or so stories to cover each day on my website has become one of my biggest challenges.

With CleanTechnica.com, Solar Love and the other sites I run, I view “communicating the renewable energy revolution” and further stimulating that revolution through such communication as my prime objectives. There are two things I love about the phrase in quotation marks. First, this is a revolution—there is no doubt about it. Second, communication is a very interesting matter. There are many subtleties to communication that we generally overlook. We often say things, knowing where we are going next with our thoughts (and with our own cultural and knowledge background deeply influencing how we view those thoughts), without realizing that our words may have unforeseen effects or be heard in ways that we do not intend.

One example concerns the debunking of myths. It is very common to communicate a myth before debunking it. Research has shown, however, that presenting the myth first is more likely to ingrain the myth in the listener’s head in the medium to long term. Counterintuitively, this is actually even more so if you debunk the myth in great detail.

A democracy is based on information being available, shared and acted upon, yet there is a massive amount of misinformation about clean energy, and therefore a great need for independent voices and analysts to inform more people of the actual facts. Misinformation and a simple lack of awareness are probably now the largest barriers to the clean tech revolution. Transformation occurs through information sharing—blogging about clean tech countries to increase their renewable energy targets. Many Pacific island nations such as Fiji, Tonga and Kiribati are even predicting targets that will enable them to become carbon neutral in the near future.

Achieving Targets

Feed-in tariffs, a means by which governments can subsidize the private sector to promote investment in renewable energy, are a powerful and relatively cheap policy instrument available to governments that create a favorable and enabling environment for energy enterprises. By guaranteeing stable and trusted future income, they provide new energy businesses with the confidence to obtain greater private investment and scale up their operations. In Thailand, a series of initiatives were undertaken, and as a result, from 1992 up to the present, the country has been able to foster the rapid expansion of bio-refineries. Run mostly on sugarcane and rice residues, these have led to significant development benefits and increased levels of sustainable energy generation.

Diversification of energy inputs into the grid, including those derived from wind, solar, bioenergy and biomass, through promotion of renewable feed-in tariffs, facilitates the positive effect of load stabilization. If the wind is not blowing in one place, there will be sunshine or rice husk burning in another to compensate. A range of resource inputs also allows energy systems to become more resilient.

Our book puts forward a model for understanding and assessing each energy delivery system to ensure that all factors are taken into account. For instance, in Peru, Practical Action’s sister organization, Soluciones Prácticas, was able to use this approach to install wind and micro-hydroelectric power systems in very remote locations that provide electricity to households, community services and small businesses. They set up local enterprises and involve community groups and local government departments to ensure that the systems are maintained and operated by the communities themselves without the need for continued external support.

Communicating the Energy Revolution

By Zachary Shahan

The clean tech movement is about a shift toward a more peaceful world, a world in which there is more respect for others and in which our ways of living leave a smaller environmental footprint. Clean energy is not just about cleaning our air, preserving our water supplies and helping to protect our climate; it is also about democratizing the energy sector.

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A democracy is based on information being available, shared and acted upon, yet there is a massive amount of misinformation about clean energy, and therefore a great need for independent voices and analysts to inform more people of the actual facts. Misinformation and a simple lack of awareness are probably now the largest barriers to the clean tech revolution. Transformation occurs through information sharing—blogging about clean
energy and connecting the topic to millions of people is an important part of that.

Solar Power and Wind Power

Solar power has been a dream for ages. In 1931, Thomas Edison wrote, “I’d put my money on the sun and solar energy. What a source of power! I hope we don’t have to wait until oil and coal run out before we tackle that.”

The energy potential from sunshine for one single year is far greater than the energy potential of all known coal, oil, uranium and natural gas reserves combined. The circles in the chart shown here represent annual potential for renewable sources.

The potential is amazing. The solar energy hitting the state of Texas each month is greater than the total amount of energy the Texas oil and gas industry has ever produced.

Importantly, while sunshine is free, the solar panels needed to collect the energy in that sunshine and convert it into electricity are not. However, solar panels today are over 100 times cheaper (per watt) than they were in 1977. Since 2011, the cost of solar panels has dropped by approximately 60 percent, and growth has also been a big part of the stimulus for the cost drops. It is a virtuous circle. The growth curve for the solar panel market over the past few years is steep and resembles that of a plant shooting out of the earth toward the sun!

Solar power is now cheaper than retail electricity for millions of households. In the developed world, it can save countless homeowners tens of thousands of dollars. Meanwhile, all across the developing world, solar power is actually cheaper than power generated from fossil fuels. Just as many people in the developing world leapfrogged from no phones to cell phones, these populations will leapfrog from no electricity to electricity from solar panels.

The cost of wind power came down much earlier than the cost of solar power. In many regions of the world, wind power is currently the cheapest form of renewables-based electricity available—and also cheaper than electricity generated from coal, natural gas, nuclear power and oil, even if related health and environmental costs, which are staggering in themselves, are not taken into account. And costs continue to fall. The cost of wind turbines has fallen by approximately 29 percent since 2008.

In 2012, more wind power capacity was installed in the US than for any other power source. Wind is also routinely at the top of the global charts for annual power capacity additions.

Democratizing the Energy System

One of the major implications of solar power growth, electric vehicle growth and wind power growth to some extent (wind turbines are great additions to farms and small communities) is that they are essentially democratizing our energy system. They decentralize ownership and provide more societal power and more money to common citizens and small businesses. They create more energy independence and security for families, cities and nations, which I believe will ultimately contribute to greater peace in the world.

Also, there has got to be some positive psychological effect from people realizing that they are no longer burning the bones of dinosaurs (among other fossils!) for their energy needs, but are instead using renewable sources of energy such as sunlight and wind.

A democracy is based on information being available, shared and acted upon, yet there is a massive amount of misinformation about clean energy.

Zachary Shahan is the director and editor of CleanTechnica.com, which, like other websites he runs, provides news and commentary on solar power, wind power, energy efficiency, “clean” transport and other renewable or “clean” technologies. The site aims to build a community of world citizens that enables humanity to move forward in a positive direction.

See www.sgiquarterly.org for a full-length interview.
Changing the World Where We Are

By Daisaku Ikeda


To many people, sustainability evokes images of various constraints being imposed upon individuals and societies. But such a narrow approach will not give rise to the kind of transformative ripple effects that are required.

Although physical resources are finite, human potential is infinite, as is our capacity to create value. The real significance of sustainability is, in my view, as a dynamic concept in which there is a striving or competition to generate positive value and share it with the world and with the future.

The key here is our sense of responsibility to those with whom we share the planet, our sense of responsibility toward the future.

“The real significance of sustainability is as a dynamic concept in which there is a striving or competition to generate positive value and share it with the world and with the future.”

Although many people, confronted with news of horrific events in different parts of the world or of the dire threats to the global ecology, are pained and feel compelled to take action, the cumulative effect of the ceaseless flow of such news can be a deepening sense of powerlessness.

To avoid becoming overwhelmed by these feelings, it is crucial to be grounded—to find a standpoint from which one can sense the impact of one’s actions and feel one is making concrete progress in transforming reality. This, in my view, is the role of the local community. A sense of responsibility toward the world or the future is not something that can be developed overnight, in isolation from the realities of daily living. If we cannot establish this within our immediate relationships and environment, we cannot hope to do so relative to the entire planet or the distant future.

The word “responsibility” indicates the ability or capacity to respond. It is through the persistent effort to strengthen and forge our capacity to respond to the evolving realities of the community that a sense of commitment toward all those with whom we share the planet and toward future generations is developed.

Moved to Action

The Green Belt Movement was started by the Kenyan environmental activist Dr. Wangari Maathai. It illustrates how a community-based people’s movement can foster a sense of responsibility toward the future in each individual.

Dr. Maathai held seminars in the communities where the movement was active and encouraged people to identify the problems facing them. She would ask them what they felt the source of the problems was, and most would blame the government. While acknowledging that was largely the case, she stressed that nothing would change as long as people attributed all responsibility to the government.

She said to them: “It is your land. You own it, but you are not taking care of it. You’re allowing soil erosion to take place and you could do something about it. You could plant trees.”

Rural women, who initially came to Dr. Maathai seeking access to fuel and drinking water, grew confident as they gained experience. They began to exercise leadership in their communities, eventually assuming responsibility for community-wide projects such as managing tree nurseries, collecting rainwater and securing food resources.

This kind of community-based empowerment ignites courage and wisdom in individuals, inspiring them to take action and exercise leadership in order to improve their situation.

In a book published 100 years ago, founding Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who dedicated his life to the research and practice of humanistic education, similarly urged that education be rooted in the lived realities of the local community.

He sought to encourage children to develop in the course of daily living a sense of the indissoluble bonds between people and the land, to foster appreciation for the seen and unseen ways in which the local community makes our existence possible.
and to encourage a way of life in which this sense of appreciation gives rise to concrete action.

Makiguchi saw the local community as the place where the various principles by which society and the world operate come together in directly observable form. He did not consider the local community in the narrow sense of one's hometown or native place, but rather, more broadly as the foundation for one's present life—the place where one walks and lives, where one sees and hears and is moved by various events. Makiguchi understood our sense of belonging and rootedness as members of a local community to be the foundation for a consciousness of global citizenship: “To know that our life extends to the entire world. The world is our home, and all the nations within it are the field of our action.”

One aspect of global crises is that they arise from destructive spirals that impact different localities, gaining seemingly unstoppable momentum. Conversely, unless we can effectively respond to global crises, we cannot hope to protect local communities from the dangers and threats they face. This is the significance of the local community: it is a place where people can recognize small changes as the symptoms of larger issues and can, by framing this in a greater scheme of meaning, convert a sense of distress into determination and action. By protecting our respective communities and expanding solidarity among them, we can confront even the most pressing global threats. And we can engage in the kind of patient community building that will open a broad path to the sustainable global society of the future.

**Contributing to Transformation**

It is education and learning that will turn the limitless possibilities possessed by all people—[what Aurelio Peccei, cofounder of the Club of Rome, referred to as] “the unequalled patrimony of our species”—into a wellspring of energy for meeting the unprecedented challenge of building a sustainable global society.

Learning can take place anywhere, whatever people come together; it is something in which we can all take part. And even when its results are not immediately apparent, it takes deep root within society and exerts an increasingly positive influence as it is passed from one generation to the next.

This is the reason the SGI’s efforts to promote the resolution of global issues are always focused on the idea of empowerment—by, for and of the people. As the titles of the exhibitions we have organized to stimulate consideration and dialogue about paths to a sustainable future—“Seeds of Change” and “Seeds of Hope”—indicate, we firmly believe that planting the seeds of a new awareness in the hearts of people is the most effective means of transforming the world.

It has been my honor to develop a friendship with Amadeu Thiago de Mello, one of Brazil’s foremost poets who has worked for years to protect the Amazonian rainforest, “the lungs of the world.”

I would like to offer, as a coda, an impromptu verse that the poet shared with me when we met in Tokyo in April 1997.

**I live armed with love,**
**to perform my work singing,**
**to construct a new day.**

**Love gives everything**
**without holding back.**

**Sharing hope,**
**I plant the light of new life.**

**Once they tried to silence**
**the cry of my heart’s fraternity**
**in the peaks of the Andes**
**ablaze with flames.**

**But I rose above those flames**
**and continue to sing.**

**There are no new paths,**
**only new ways of walking them.**

**With the pain of the dispossessed,**
**the dark dreams**
**of the child who sleeps with hunger—**
**I have learned:**
this Earth does not belong to me alone. And I have learned, in truth, that the most important thing is to work, while we still have life, to change what needs changing, each in our way, each where we are.

**Learning can take place anywhere, wherever people come together.**

Full proposal at: [www.daisakuikeda.org](http://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/resources/works/props/)
The little tree was laden with fruit, the branches almost touching the ground, lovely red apples, looking healthy and juicy.

“This is the first time in 16 years since I have been here that this tree is bearing any fruit,” our new neighbor explained in amazement. Sharing her joy, I am leaning over the fence, starting a conversation with her since she has been reluctant to talk to us newcomers, the townies who bought a two-hectare block of overgrazed bare farmland.

“A true benefit!” an SGI-New Zealand member exclaimed when we made the move, since a dream had come true for me. A longing to be able to take care of a substantial size of land, to plant trees, to establish gardens on a big scale and to live sustainably, including to generate one’s own energy.

Born in Germany, I was introduced to Nichiren Buddhism in New Zealand after my search for a spiritual home made me travel all over the world. With almost instant effect my life became enriched and happy, and I met a wonderful man.

Nature has always played a big part in my life. Trees are “sacred” to me. I could never bear to see them cut down, especially unnecessarily. The wonder of a single little seed becoming a plant amazed me as a child gardening on the third-floor balcony of our apartment in Frankfurt.

Over the years, this passion of mine to look after the planet has brought me to join all kinds of groups and political organizations. This deep wish to sustain, protect and regenerate has also caused me to become at times quite angry and frustrated.

After chanting for several years, I realized more and more that my Buddhist practice is a very positive factor that can help me change and heal many things. It also makes it possible for me to channel the energy of my anger into positive action to better the world around me.

In his 2012 Environment Proposal entitled “For a Sustainable Global Society: Learning for Empowerment and Leadership,” SGI President Ikeda reminds us of our power: “I would like to focus on the kind of empowerment that brings forth the truly limitless potential we all possess. It is important that a sense of leadership be fostered within each individual, generating waves of transformation within our communities and societies. Only then can we realize the goal of a sustainable global society in which the inherent dignity of life is given paramount importance.”

My partner and I now live in Wairarapa. It has a wonderful atmosphere, and the land gives us the potential to plant trees, grow our own food and develop and build an “eco house” that, through smart design and a range of green technologies, can produce its own power. Our focus is now on the study and practical implementation of a sustainable lifestyle and the development of a business that advises others on building eco houses. In this way, we would like to inspire and empower others to take practical steps themselves to better the environment.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed and powerless in the face of the global problems we are facing. But when we overcome these feelings, take action and bring our potential for goodness to bloom, we help others blossom into action too.

Like the little tree laden with fruits, for 16 years of its life there was not much else around. No bee would travel to pollinate its flowers, but when an adjoining bare piece of land was brought to life with the planting of 500 trees, including apple trees, it started to attract the bees, and that allowed it to thrive.

The wonder of a single little seed becoming a plant amazed me as a child gardening on the third-floor balcony of our apartment in Frankfurt.
began practicing Nichiren Buddhism in 1985 when I was a young and inexperienced elementary school teacher. I was struggling with the new challenges of my job and was often physically and mentally exhausted. In particular, there was a young girl in my class whom I worried about a great deal. She was always unhappy and kept to herself, but, try as I might, I could not get her to open up. The person who introduced me to Nichiren Buddhism told me that I could use the practice to transform my life and bring about a positive change in my environment. I wanted, more than anything, to change myself and to see that young girl in my classroom smile. I decided that I would try chanting for her and, when I did, feelings of warmth welled up from within me.

SGI President Ikeda states, “Truly humanistic education begins with a teacher’s deep concern for their students. A spirit of love and a compassionate wish for the happiness of children is its starting point.”

I energized by a new sense of hope and enthusiasm, I exerted myself to put this spirit of humanistic education into practice. In time, the girl in my class began to smile, a highlight of my career as a teacher at a time when I felt the most joy and satisfaction.

As a child, I grew up surrounded by cypresses, or the names of the grasses and flowers growing alongside the path on which they walked to school. This is one of the reasons I later decided to become involved in environmental education.

There is nothing more heartening than the delight in the voices of children when they discover something new in nature, like the first time they see a firefly. Discovering new things brings bright smiles to children’s faces, and once they hold an interest, their eyes sparkle. You could say that this has been my source of inspiration as a teacher for the past 20 years.

I believe in the importance of observational learning and have made efforts to provide students with as many opportunities as possible to learn from nature. At school, for example, I helped create a “science dream corner” where students could observe fish and living creatures inside an aquarium we built. The students also learned how to breed larvae of fireflies and dragonflies.

In the community, we helped build a wooden staircase down to the embankment of a nearby river. By making access to the river possible, I was able to teach children how to fish and how to protect fireflies living by the river.

As a result of such efforts, our school received national recognition from the Sony Education Foundation, which led to our participation in the 2004 EcoAsia event, as well as the 2005 Junior Eco-Club National Festival.

In March 2009, we received an award for the results of our research on freshwater algae in the town’s lake that were presented at an international science conference in Japan.

I am also the president of a nature preservation group in my community, and our organization is currently engaged in a project to protect fireflies in a local park. We created a firefly observation society for people in the community, especially for children, with a focus on teaching the importance of environmental protection.

I believe that these opportunities have encouraged my students to “think globally and act locally” right at their desks. My goal is to continue applying the principles of humanistic education expounded by SGI President Ikeda in my classroom, opening children’s eyes to the wonder of the world around them and to their role as guardians of their environment.
Between September and December 2013, the Soka Movement in France held a series of interfaith conferences titled “The Economy in Question, the Contributions of Spiritual and Religious Perspectives,” which focused on the generation of human values needed to rebuild the economy.

The first conference was held at the Domaine Saint Joseph in Lyon on September 29. Over 100 people attended, and speakers included representatives from the Jewish, Islamic, Protestant, Catholic and Buddhist faiths. Several speakers stressed the tradition of giving in Islam and the Christian emphasis on sharing with the poor, and representatives of the different faiths spoke about their work to contribute to society.

On November 3, the second conference was held at the SGI European Training Center in Trets, with 220 participants and six speakers who focused on the experiences of people facing economic difficulties and the kind of support and encouragement given to practitioners of different religions at such times. The conference brought together Rabbi Nissim Sultan of Aix-en-Provence; the Reverend Christian Barbéry, representing Protestantism; and Mohammed El Mahdi Krabch, Imam of Avignon, as well as representatives of Catholicism and the SGi. Professor Philippe Langevin, an expert in economics from the University of Aix-Marseille, also participated, providing an overview of the current global economic situation.

The third conference, held on December 1 at the Soka Culture Center at L’Opera in Paris, brought together speakers including Tarik Bengarai, a researcher in law and Islamic finance and spokesperson for the Independent Committee of Islamic Finance in Europe (ICIFE); Serge-Christophe Kolm, economist at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS) in Paris and author of Happiness-freedom (Deep Buddhism and Modernity); and Edmond Lisle, president of the Fraternité d’Abraham. The moderator was Paula Kasparian, philosopher and president of Artisans de Paix.

SGI-USA cosponsored the Second Annual Special Assembly of the Greater Los Angeles Chapter of the US National Committee for UN Women at its Culture of Peace Resource Center in Santa Monica, California, on January 11, 2014. As part of the UN Women’s Safe Cities Global Initiative, the theme of the assembly was Safe Cities: LA, how to make Los Angeles a safer and more equitable city for women and girls. Some 100 people, including community organizers, entrepreneurs and exhibitors attended.

With the ultimate goal of laying the groundwork for a future when Los Angeles is declared a UN Safe City, the assembly featured presentations, short films, performances and a panel discussion of speakers involved in community development and safety at various levels. Participants also broke into smaller groups to discuss topics such as exploitation and human trafficking, bullying in schools, access and agency, urban environments and health, and emotional well-being and creative expression.

Highlights of the event included Santa Monica Mayor Pam O’Conner’s declaration that January 11 be made UN Global Safe City Day in Santa Monica, as well as the sharing of personal stories of confronting the dangers of urban life. In one short film about Blank Noise, an India-based community project which aims to confront street harassment, citizens were shown making “Safe City Pledges” to take personal action to stop street violence and make cities safer. Following the film, attendees were also invited to write their own Safe City Pledges.

UN Women, short for the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, launched the Safe Cities Global Initiative in 2010 to develop, implement and evaluate tools, policies and comprehensive approaches on the prevention of and response to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces.

The SGI-USA Culture of Peace Resource Center opened in 2005 to serve as a hub for expanding an informational network and civil education to support the UN’s Culture of Peace project based on the UN International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-10).
SGI Participates in Events Calling for Abolition of Death Penalty

An event calling for the abolition of the death penalty in Japan was held at the Italian Institute of Culture in Tokyo on October 29, 2013. Sponsored by the Community of Sant’Egidio, a Christian lay movement based in Italy, and the European Commission, the event was organized as part of the Community of Sant’Egidio’s “No Justice Without Life” campaign to raise public awareness against the death penalty around the world.

Speakers included Domenico Giorgi, ambassador of Italy to Japan; Hans Dietmar Schweisgut, ambassador of the European Union to Japan; and Mario Marazziti, president of the Commission for Human Rights of the Italian House of Representatives and cofounder of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty.

Speakers examined the value placed on human life in contemporary society, stressing the fact that 140 countries have abolished the death penalty and only 57, including Japan, retain it. The discussion highlighted a lack of interest in this topic in Japan, and that while high levels of public support for the death penalty are said to exist, closer examination shows that this may not be the case. Participants were unanimous in calling for further debate on the issue.

SGI Executive Director for Peace Affairs Hirotsugu Terasaki was among invited panelists who voiced their opposition to the death penalty. Other panelists included the Reverend Ryuji Furukawa of Seimeizan Schweitzer Temple in Fukuoka Prefecture; Ms. Hideko Hakamada, whose brother Iwao Hakamada has been on death row in Japan for 47 years; as well as several lawyers, scholars and journalists specializing in this issue.

Mr. Terasaki clarified the SGI’s opposition to the death penalty, stating: “Our core teachings are deeply rooted in the fundamental value of unfailing respect for the dignity of human life. Our organization therefore has maintained an uncompromising stance against the death penalty. Capital punishment is an issue deeply concerned with the broader theme of respect for life, and the state’s rationale for killing cannot be accepted as an exception.”

On November 29, a representative of SGI-Italy was among panelists invited to participate in a conference calling for the abolition of the death penalty held at the University of Teramo in Teramo, Italy. The conference was sponsored by the local chapter of Amnesty International. Other panelists included Antonio Marchesi, president of Amnesty International Italy, and a representative from the Community of Sant’Egidio.

Relief Efforts for Typhoon Victims in the Philippines

On November 8, 2013, Super Typhoon Haiyan (locally known as Yolanda) wreaked havoc across the central Philippines, killing more than 6,000 people and leaving millions of people displaced.

Representatives of the Soka Gakkai in Japan visited the Embassy of the Philippines in Tokyo on November 13 and pledged a financial donation of US$50,000 in support of relief efforts in a meeting with Minister of Cultural Affairs Angelica C. Escalona.

The SGI-Philippines headquarters in Quezon City also began gathering relief goods such as bottled water, canned food, clothes, blankets and medical and sanitary supplies from members across the country. These goods were then sent to public agencies such as the Philippine Red Cross, a local TV station and the SGI-Philippines Cebu Community Center. The center is located in the hardest hit Visayas region that encompasses Tacloban City, Samar and Leyte, and serves as the organization’s center for relief operations. Young men’s group members and exchange students from Soka University of Japan participated as volunteers.

A local disaster management committee was also set up based at the SGI-Philippines Cebu Community Center to enable members to communicate closely with each area and gather the latest information on the region.

Members of the SGI in Malaysia and Thailand also collected funds in support of relief activities in the Philippines.
I would like to offer thoughts on how we can redirect the currents of the 21st century toward greater hope, solidarity and peace in order to construct a sustainable global society, one in which the dignity of each individual shines with its inherent brilliance.

In light of the increasing incidence of natural disasters and extreme weather events in recent years, as well as severe humanitarian crises caused by international and domestic conflicts, there has been growing stress on the importance of enhancing the resilience of human societies. In the broadest sense, resilience can be thought of in terms of realizing a hopeful future, rooted in people's natural desire to work together toward common goals.

Reforming and opening up the inner capacities of our lives can enable effective reform and empowerment on a global scale. This is what we in the SGI call human revolution. Its focus is empowerment that brings forth the limitless possibilities of each individual. The steady accumulation of changes on the individual and community level paves the path for humanity to surmount the common issues we face.

The challenge of value creation is that of linking the micro and the macro in ways that reinforce positive transformation on both planes.

Education for Global Citizenship
I would like to offer specific proposals focusing on three key areas critical to the effort to create a sustainable global society. The first relates to education with a particular focus on young people.

A summit slated to take place in September 2015 will adopt a new set of global development goals, widely referred to as sustainable development goals (SDGs). I urge that targets related to education be included among these: specifically, to achieve universal access to primary and secondary education, to eliminate gender disparity at all levels and to promote education for global citizenship.

An educational program for global citizenship should deepen understanding of the challenges facing humankind; it should identify the early signs of impending global problems in local phenomena, empowering people to take action; and it should foster...
the spirit of empathy and coexistence with an awareness that actions that profit one's own country might have a negative impact or be perceived as a threat by other countries.

Another area that should be a focus of the SDGs along with education is empowering youth. Specifically, I suggest the following guidelines be included in establishing the SDGs:

- For all states to strive to secure decent work for all;
- For young people to be able to actively participate in solving the problems facing society and the world; and
- For the expansion of youth exchanges to foster friendship and solidarity transcending national borders.

Youth exchanges, in particular, help nurture friendship and ties that serve as a bulwark against the collective psychologies of hatred and prejudice. As such, their inclusion in the SDGs would be of great significance.

**Strengthening Resilience**

Second, I would like to propose the establishment of regional cooperative mechanisms to reduce damage from extreme weather and disasters, strengthening resilience in regions such as Asia and Africa.

Disaster preparedness, disaster relief and post-disaster recovery should be treated as an integrated process. To this end, I would like to suggest that neighboring countries establish a system of cooperation for responding to disasters. Through such sustained efforts to cooperate in strengthening resilience and recovery assistance, the spirit of mutual help and support can become the shared culture of the region.

I urge that the pioneering initiative for such regional cooperation be taken in Asia, a region that has been severely impacted by disasters. A successful model here will inspire collaboration in other regions. A foundation for this already exists in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which has a framework for discussing better cooperation. I call on countries in the region to establish an Asia recovery resilience agreement, a framework drawing from the experience of the ARF.

Further, efforts to strengthen resilience through sister-city exchanges and cooperation provide an important basis for creating spaces of peaceful coexistence throughout the region. I strongly urge that a Japan-China-South Korea summit be held at the earliest opportunity to initiate dialogue toward this kind of cooperation, including cooperation on environmental problems.

**Abolition of Nuclear Weapons**

The third area I would like to discuss regards proposals for the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons.

The Final Document of the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference and the Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons held in Oslo, Norway, last year have helped encourage efforts by a growing number of governments to place the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons at the center of all discussions of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation.

Since May 2012, these governments have repeatedly issued Joint Statements on this topic, and the fourth such statement, issued in October 2013, was signed by the governments of 125 states, including Japan and several other states under the nuclear umbrella of nuclear-weapon states.

I have repeatedly called for a nuclear abolition summit to be held in Hiroshima and Nagasaki next year in 2015, the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings of those cities. Specifically, I hope that representatives of the countries that signed the Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons, as well as representatives of global civil society and, above all, youthful citizens from throughout the world, will gather in a world youth summit for nuclear abolition to adopt a declaration affirming their commitment to bringing the era of nuclear weapons to an end.

Concurrent with this, I would like to make two concrete proposals. The first is for a nuclear weapons non-use agreement. This would be a natural outcome of placing the catastrophic humanitarian effects of nuclear weapons use at the center of the deliberations for the 2015 NPT Review Conference, and it would be a means of advancing the implementation of Article VI of the NPT under which the nuclear-weapon states have committed to pursuing nuclear disarmament in good faith.

The establishment of a non-use agreement, in which the nuclear-weapon states pledge, as an obligation rooted in the core spirit of the NPT, not to use nuclear weapons against states parties to the treaty, would bring an enhanced sense of physical and psychological security to states that have relied on the nuclear umbrella of their allies, opening the way to security arrangements that are not dependent on nuclear weapons.

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Please describe the nature of your work.

Ana Filipa Fernandes: A year ago, I cofounded a studio with an architect friend. The main focuses of our work are environment, architecture and local sustainability. Through interventions in the urban environment, our work is aimed at improving the quality of life in cities for and with people. For example, in developing plans to improve sustainability in neighborhoods, the focus may include accessibility, conservation of green areas, alternative transportation systems and the local economy. We work with local institutions, community organizations and private companies or corporations, since these are the key stakeholders of the city and we believe they should all be involved.

Erick Vargas: My work involves providing practical solutions to the challenges of conservation and sustainability. In 2007, I founded Sustainable By Nature, a small international consulting office that works with governmental institutions, conservation entities, development agencies and organizations, the private sector, cooperatives and so on. Biodiversity and consultation facilitation around conservation area management is one field of expertise. We have also done extensive work on ecotourism and sustainable tourism, working with youth, women, farmers and cooperatives in the design and implementation of local initiatives. Another area of work is sustainable agriculture.

Why did you choose this line of work, and what do you aim to achieve through it?

Erick: I love nature and people, and I strongly believe that we should be able to build happy societies based on respect, reverence and compassion for the natural environment and all the species that share this world with us.

My aim is to promote dialogue and understanding among people through discussing the challenges of development, poverty alleviation and the sustainable use of biodiversity and nature in general. I also want to contribute to identifying good practices with positive environmental, social and economic results, and inspire people to adapt them to their own particular challenges.
Ana: Portugal, like other southern European countries, doesn’t exactly model great sustainable planning practices. Planning has a strong influence on social behavior—for example, the massive reliance on cars can lead to a diminished sense of community.

If our cities became more sustainable, I believe this will inspire new possibilities for the people living in them and open up a new era for Portuguese cities. Sustainable planning would incorporate and enhance the community’s natural and cultural values and assets.

How has your Buddhist practice influenced your approach to your work?

Erick: Dealing with conservation and sustainability issues is a far from romantic task. Often, people have conflicting visions of how societies should organize to conserve and use biodiversity and natural resources. Reaching understanding and agreement can be a difficult, painful and sometimes impossible process.

My daily Buddhist practice allows me to be aware of my responsibility of listening to and understanding a diversity of views, even if I do not agree with them or if they conflict with my own values and beliefs. Through my practice, I try to draw out wisdom, common sense and compassion from within. These are indispensable in my work.

Ana: From the moment I decided to cofound this studio and work in this field, my Buddhist practice has enabled me to manifest the courage and persistence to continue to seek new opportunities to develop our approach, to rethink ways of addressing the stakeholders, and to value each little step we take. There’s a quote from SGI President Daisaku Ikeda that inspires me daily: “We can say with confidence that the most pressing need of our times is for world citizens who will respond with courage and imagination to the deepening global crisis of human dignity.” I try to use my Buddhist practice in order to make this guidance a reality through my work.

Has Buddhism changed your perspective on the environment?

Ana: Buddhism teaches that the environment and the individual are not separate. It also teaches that life has unlimited potential. What changed was my realization that life is everywhere and, therefore, potential is everywhere. I try to view things from this perspective, especially when that potential is not clearly visible.

Erick: Buddhist philosophy has strongly influenced the way I look at the environment and environmental issues. The Buddhist concept of “the oneness of self and the environment” explains that our natural and social surroundings are a reflection of our inner lives. What this means is that environmental issues are ultimately about the human heart. Change must begin with ourselves. When we destroy nature, we also destroy our own lives. The opposite is also true: by enriching our heart, we can enrich and enhance our surroundings.

How would you characterize a healthy, sustainable environment?

Ana: From my perspective, a sustainable environment is much more than the predominance of green areas over built elements or economic activities. A sustainable environment results from a fair and accurate balance between economic, social and environmental factors. Streets that are walkable for everyone, a community that shows a willingness to participate, diverse public spaces, a strong local economy—all are signs of a healthy, sustainable environment.

Erick: Indicators of the health of the environment, such as clean water, clean air, soil preservation, the number of species preserved in an ecosystem, etc., are the results of people’s values, capabilities and behaviors. That’s where the focus should be. People are an indivisible component of the environment, and social issues such as poverty alleviation or economic prosperity ultimately cannot be solved at the expense of the environment. In the end, poor environmental quality and less biodiversity result in poorer societies and more suffering.

What has your work taught you?

Ana: The greatest lesson I’ve learned is that this kind of work requires lots of patience and persistence. The approach that we’re trying requires a change in both politics and the community’s perspective—a willingness on the part of communities to collaborate and be involved.

Erick: Societal change starts first with people’s inner transformation. We can only have a positive impact on those around us through our own inner transformation and constant perseverance in our efforts to empower other people and change society.

Are you optimistic about the future of our environment?

Ana: Absolutely. I believe that there is no other option than to transform our fundamental attitude, from government to the individual, regarding use of resources that we now know are limited. What makes me optimistic is also the fact that communities are becoming more aware of the potential of their actions, and there’s an increasing awareness at the local level of ways of conserving resources.

Erick: SGI President Ikeda has said that the 21st century will be a century of change. I am optimistic. As he says: “What we need most is to restore and revive our humanity. We must create a society where people can live with dignity, a society where people can live in peace and happiness. . . . It may seem like a long and distant path, but I am convinced that the 21st century must see a movement to sow the seeds of peace, happiness and trust in every person’s heart. The seeds of a truly humane way of life. I am convinced this is the only path.”
The Parable of the Wealthy Man and His Poor Son

Overcoming our limitations, getting out of our comfort zone and breaking through the deadlocks in our lives requires courage and belief in our potential. It can be difficult to let go of the limitations we impose on ourselves and imagine greater possibilities for our lives.

The Lotus Sutra contains seven key parables, some told by Shakyamuni and some by his disciples. The parable of the Wealthy Man and His Poor Son is the second parable in the Lotus Sutra; it is told by four of Shakyamuni’s senior disciples to express their joy at having recognized and broken through their complacency.

The story begins with a young man who runs away from his father’s house and wanders from place to place, growing old and poor. After searching for his son for many years, the father eventually settles in a certain city. The father’s household is very wealthy, but he feels uneasy as he has no heir to leave his immense fortune to. One day, the son happens to pass by his father’s mansion. He is so intimidated by the grandeur of the mansion and the wealthy man who lives there that he turns to flee. Just then, the wealthy man recognizes that this poor man is his son.

Filled with joy, the wealthy man wants to immediately bequeath his fortune to his son, but seeing his son flee, he realizes he is not yet ready to embrace his true identity. So the father sends two poorly dressed servants to offer his son a job doing menial cleaning work for twice the usual salary. The son happily accepts. Soon after, the father dresses in ragged clothing, approaches his son and begins to develop a relationship with him. Over time, the son takes on positions of greater responsibility.

Many years pass, and the wealthy man becomes ill. At his request, the son begins to carefully manage the father’s entire estate. Eventually, the son revises his former low opinion of himself and comes to hold high ideals. Realizing that his end is near and that his son is ready to understand the truth of who he is, the father finally announces that he is his son and heir and transfers his entire fortune to him.

Like the poor son, many of us limit our potential or become complacent, unwilling or afraid to strive in our personal development. In this parable, the poor son represents ordinary people who wander around in spiritual poverty, unaware of their true inheritance—the boundless possibilities of their Buddha nature. SGI President Daisaku Ikeda states: “Satisfaction with one’s accomplishments might seem like humility, but to underestimate life’s potential is actually great arrogance.”

The wealthy man represents Shakyamuni, whose sole desire is to awaken people to the wealth of their inherent Buddhahood. As an expedient means, the Buddha first expounds lesser teachings in order to prepare his disciples’ minds to grasp the complete truth of his message expressed in the Lotus Sutra. SGI President Ikeda explains: “Everyone alike possesses this unsurpassed jewel of life. This most precious of all things ‘has come to us unsought.’ It comes down to whether we can recognize it as such. And the Lotus Sutra enables us to most profoundly perceive and recognize the treasure of our lives.”

This parable stresses the need to always have a seeking spirit for continual self-development, regardless of our age, achievements or present circumstances. The Lotus Sutra teaches a dynamic way to live amidst life’s challenges; it emphasizes a lifelong seeking spirit for self-development—to challenge our limitations, break through deadlocks and expect to experience the boundless potential of our lives. As SGI President Ikeda succinctly states, “Not advancing is retreating.”
Nichiren Buddhism Online Library

The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a worldwide association of 93 constituent organizations with membership in 192 countries and territories. In the service of its members and of society at large, the SGI centers its activities on developing positive human potentialities for hope, courage and altruistic action. Rooted in the life-affirming philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism, members of the SGI share a commitment to the promotion of peace, culture and education. The scope and nature of the activities conducted in each country vary in accordance with the culture and characteristics of that society. They all grow, however, from a shared understanding of the inseparable linkages that exist between individual happiness and the peace and development of all humanity.

As a nongovernmental organization (NGO) with formal ties to the United Nations, the SGI is active in the fields of humanitarian relief and public education, with a focus on peace, sustainable development and human rights.