

TAFF roadmap contribution - Baha'i International Community

To the COP 30 Presidency

Esteemed colleagues,

The transition away from fossil fuels, particularly in a just, orderly, and equitable manner, is a critical element of putting humanity on a more sustainable relationship with the natural world. The Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office is therefore pleased to offer the following thoughts in relation to the Presidency's development of a roadmap on that theme.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of these perspectives further, should it be desired.

With warmest regards and gratitude for your efforts,
Daniel Perell

(a) What are the most critical barriers — whether physical, economic, financial, institutional, technological or social— preventing a transition away from fossil fuels?

One of the most fundamental barriers that stands in the way of this necessary transition is humanity's conception of success and progress. What are the qualities by which a nation, corporation, community, or person are judged successful? For what are they commended and appreciated? So long as growth and profit—pursued through speed and ease—are central objectives, it will be difficult to make a significant and lasting transition away from fossil fuels.

Principles such as moderation, sufficiency, and contentment, which find little place in growth-driven paradigms, will have to be reclaimed and expanded in global economic arrangements. Patterns of life that have come to be associated with extreme wealth—devotion to convenience and luxury, for example, or high levels of consumption—will need to be set aside.

A related barrier is the various forms of path dependency that have been established around the production, distribution, and consumption of fossil fuels. While removing this barrier will involve a variety of technological aspects and challenges, the deeper challenge is fundamentally one of a collective action. Ultimately, such paths are a product of human beings making choices in the context of other human beings making choices. In this sense, the relational challenges before us are as salient as the technical ones. Overcoming them will require significant strengthening of a range of collaborative capacities such as the ability to build consensus across diverse stakeholders, to articulate a shared vision of the future according to key values held in common, to equitably distribute both benefits and burdens, and to organize coordinated action and overcome setbacks with resilience.

It also seems clear that approaching the conversation about fossil fuels as a strict all-or-nothing dichotomy will hinder important opportunities for transition. There are places around the world where leaving fossil fuels behind would, in the near-term, provoke tremendous economic disruption—beyond a level that can be reasonably requested. On the other hand, there are places where attachment to fossil fuels is more a product of ease than necessity. The reality of circumstances is neither universal nor simple, and collapsing the conversation

to a binary choice tends to promote argumentation and bickering, and foreclose avenues for meaningful action.

(c) What country, regional or sector roadmap experiences, best practices, and lessons learned can be shared?

Transitioning a globalized economy from one set of core energy sources to others is not, of course, something with which humanity has replicable experience. Nevertheless, insights have been gained at the local level that have resonance at national, regional, and international levels. Many of these have to do with the path by which a given population (diverse in its backgrounds, views, priorities, and aspirations) is able to mobilize large segments of its overall membership in coordinated action to advance concrete aspects of the common good—and do to so even when such collective transformation might require effort and sacrifice.

Such examples do exist in the world, and they represent a valuable reservoir of experience worthy of serious consideration. One feature of areas that are creating entirely new patterns of individual and collective life—more beneficial and more sustainable—is a widespread ethos that permeates them of service to a cause beyond and above one's own limited interests. What that cause is can take a variety of forms, but it is expansive and extends the bounds of consideration and care. Oftentimes this commitment is expressed geographically, in regards to communities beyond ones' own immediate surroundings, or temporally, to generations yet to come. This orientation of service to a higher cause allows growing numbers of individuals and eventually entire communities to commit their energies to endeavors that are generational in scope and impact—efforts that transcend not only political and funding cycles but the human lifecycle as well. In this way, people are willing to give of themselves and their resources in pursuit of goals that may well be fully realized only after their lifetime. Sparking such an orientation and sense of commitment is critical to transitioning societies onto a truly sustainable footing.

(d) How can a just, orderly and equitable transition best reflect the diverse realities of countries at different stages of development and with different degrees of dependence on fossil fuels?

A just transition away from fossil fuels at a global scale will need to be based on a framework for action that accommodates a diversity of approaches and responses to local realities, yet simultaneously allows many distinct efforts to learn from one another, reinforce one another, and cohere together into one coordinated movement forward. Such a framework stands in contrast to a rigid uniformity of approach that insists on applying given approaches in all cases, on the one hand, and a chaotic profusion of efforts so diffuse and unorganized as to preclude meaningful impact on global-scale problems, on the other.

Such a framework is built on consensus around high-level strategies, approaches, and general modes of operation. The particular expression of these foundational elements can then be determined through iterative action undertaken in each given regional, national, or local context. Similarly important are the values, priorities, and vision of the preferred future that harmonize the many approaches potentially undertaken within the framework for action. In this way important qualities such as diversity, creativity, and experimentation can be harmonized with equally important qualities of organization, structure, coordinated effort, and building off of experience gained and lessons learned.

A framework of this kind both supports and benefits from a mode of operation that is oriented first and foremost around learning and the generation of knowledge. As mentioned above,

transitioning a global civilization from one source of energy to another, in ways that are just and sustainable, is not a feat that has ever been previously attempted, much less accomplished. No nation or segment of the global population can claim to have particular insight into how such a task will finally be accomplished. It is a goal that humanity as a whole will have to learn its way toward, together.

Willingness to learn is easy to support at the level of rhetoric, but adopting it as a primary objective of endeavor—and not merely a welcomed byproduct—will require significant changes in approach and attitude. For example, quick and simplistic designations of “success” and “failure” will need to be set aside in favor of far deeper reflection on the impacts and outcomes of efforts undertaken. Concerns for blame and credit will need to be replaced by the shared search for understanding and insight. Mistakes and setbacks will need to be embraced as natural parts of the process of exploration, experimentation, and trail-and-error. And planning, consultation, action, and the assessment of action will need to be iterative, systematic, and motivated primarily by concern for the common good.