

# Earth Day

April 22, 2018

## Sustainable Development Goals Series #8

The Canadian Federation of University Women continues the series on significant days to facilitate the conversation about the Sustainable Development Goals. Our purpose is to overlay a recognized Theme Day with the SDG lens in order to shine a light on, and bring the conversation to the grassroots level.

### Earth Day...

This is the eighth feature in the series of nine Theme Days (Mother's Day, Father's Day, World Day to end Human Trafficking, International Literacy Day, International Day of the Girl Child, National Day of Remembrance of Violence Against Women – Canada, International Women's Day, Earth Day, and 50/50 Day). This initiative provides a critical opportunity to discuss the interconnectedness of the SDGs to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. As well, we aspire to highlight the intersectionality of women's issues and the need to engage all stakeholders in the conversation.

Achieving the 2030 Agenda is a challenge to all, and requires action at all levels. Recognizing that the priority theme of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) was "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls", our contributors have focussed on experiences of women in rural areas. We hope you can connect to and extend the conversation beyond your circle.

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## **Thoughts for Earth Day**

We are not kind to this planet we call home. As a society, we have developed a disposable lifestyle. Every year, we now produce 300 million tons of plastic, half of which is for single use purposes. Of this, 8 million tons is dumped in our oceans. (plasticoceans.org) You could say we are literally drowning in plastic. Even the blue box program is becoming unsustainable as reported by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) on March 27, 2018. When first initiated, the material in the blue box was mainly newspaper, but now that news is increasingly being disseminated on-line, it is plastics that have become the most common material in the blue box and plastic is more difficult and more expensive to recycle. Municipalities are finding that recycling is becoming an increasingly expensive proposition.

We need to look for ways that we can reduce our use of plastics. Earth Day is on Sunday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>. On that day, why not be a little kinder to our planet by challenging yourself to see how many ways you can eliminate the plastic in your life. Here are two suggestions to start your list: carry reusable grocery bags including mesh bags to pack those loose fruits and vegetables. Use reusable cups and drinking straws instead of those take-out cups that cannot be recycled because they are lined with a plastic material. If everyone does a little bit, we will all be better off.

**Valerie Hume, CFUW New Market, Member of the IRC**

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## **Political Correctness**

Earth Day is now described as the largest environmental event in the world celebrated in over 192 countries. It was not always so. In 1970 when the first celebration of this annual event on April 22 began, I was teaching in a very conservative area of North Carolina. As a young professor with an 8 month old child, I was in-

trigued by the whole idea and planned to attend the events on campus and urged my students to do the same.

To my astonishment, I got a notice from the President of the University sent to the whole faculty. It explained that this new movement was Communist propaganda and no professor should attend any of the events! Any professor who failed to teach their assigned classes that day would be docked one day's pay. Several years later, when a history of that university was published, Earth Day was mentioned as an annual event celebrated and supported by the University administration.

Unfortunately, there are still people today nearly 50 years later, who strongly believe that the dangers to the environment are over-exaggerated, that jobs and the economy are much more important; that Earth Day is a result of political correctness or left wing radicalism. We all must do our best to point out the scientific basis for a healthy environment being economically advantageous in the long run. The dangers are well known and ignorance must be opposed by education both here and abroad.

The internet gives many suggestions both on how to celebrate Earth Day, as well as ways to reduce our carbon footprint. I would like to suggest that all club members resolve to follow at least five of those suggestions on Earth Day.

And remember Mahatma Gandhi's statement:

*"Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed."*

**Nancy Mayberry, Ph.D., CFUW St. Thomas, Member of the IRC**

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**We asked Sizani Ngubane two important questions on climate change and here is what she shared...**

### **1. What is the impact of climate change on women in rural areas in South Africa?**

Lack of water has a devastating impact on girls and women: in some parts of KwaZulu Natal province women and girls wake up at 1:00 AM to go dig holes in the sand on the side of the rivers and wait for unclean water to come out. It takes between 7-8 hours for girls and women to get a 20-25 litres of water.

By waking up so early in the morning, in the rural areas where we don't have electric lights, women and girls are at high risk of being attacked. We are faced with a terrible problem - young women are being attacked, trafficked and killed mainly by their boyfriends and unknown murderers. Some young women are brutally killed, or raped because of their sexual orientation.

In the areas where coal mining companies have been imposed by traditional leaders, without consulting communities on their own ancestral land, women report that some of the coal mining companies have diverted water from big rivers into their mines and fenced women out. Which means women cannot access water.

Women cannot practise the old culture of rainwater collection because their roofs are always covered with black soot from the coal mine.

Livestock is dying because the grass they eat is always covered with black dust and the land is very dry due to a serious drought that has lasted 3 years.

A direct result of lack of water for women is that they cannot grow food in their gardens. In a country where more than 18-million people are dependant on social grant, food in the supermarkets has gone up by between 30-50%.

When the rain came this year we had floods in Johannesburg, Durban and some rural areas. As a result people drowned and others lost their houses and properties.

## **2. What are some of the marked differences over the past 15 years?**

We used to have snow in winter. The last snow fall was in 2005 and researchers noted that we had not had snow for 40 years prior to the 2005 snow which fell for only one day and one night.

**Sizani Ngubane, UNCSW62 Woman of Distinction, Founder of Rural Women's Movement South Africa**

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### **Reflections on Earth Day**

In the beginning, Earth was a cooling ball of fire.

The nickel-iron molten outer core remains, above which is the mantle and on top the fragile crust providing sustenance for life.

The core erupts from time to time to remind us of the fragility of the globe. The crust is subject to its own pressures from atmospheric and physiographic processes. These too are becoming more frequent and resulting in more natural disasters abetted by humankind in its search for new technologies and economies for gain.

Earth Day, coming in the early spring of the year in the northern hemisphere, brings to mind the wonder of natural creation and biodiversity. In the cool Mediterranean Climate of SW British Columbia, bulbs have come and gone through snowdrops, crocuses, and tulips to name the most obvious ones. Early cherries have bloomed with many other flowering shrubs. Rhododendrons accompanied by other tree blossoms will continue until early June. The native camas, once food for the indigenous people, will bloom in the garry oak meadows, a fragile and endangered ecosystem unique to this part of the world (SW British Columbia, Canada).

A glimpse outside to the bird feeder reveals a procession of feathered friends - flickers, downy woodpeckers, blue jays, and so many more. Soon the swallows will be here and robins will be nesting.

After the dreary winter, Earth is resplendent in its rebirth. However, all is not well. Recent reports have indicated that our planet is on the brink of catastrophe - billions of people are adversely affected by unsafe water or diminishing supplies of fresh water, agricultural land is degrading, species are declining and becoming extinct, the oceans and lakes are dying, permafrost and icecaps are melting, extreme weather events are more common.

Rachel Carson alerted Earthlings with her work in the 1960s to the dangers of pesticides and some countervailing steps were taken. Since then, situations have accelerated in some spheres. Reduce, reuse and recycle became the mantra for those concerned with the problems of waste. How much have we reduced? Our waste, deemed reusable, is being rejected by Africa - or often being burned, if it is accepted, thus adding to carbon emissions; China is turning back containers of waste. What is to be done? Consumerism and planned obsolescence have become the bane of 21st century life. We have to radically rethink "use" and "reuse" and find a balance between excessive consumption and scarcity if our planetary ball is to survive. We have to come to grips with climate warming and living with natural disasters; our social policies and fights for human rights will be for naught if we cannot sustain life for the billions on Earth.

Will we be able to say with Keats: "The poetry of the earth is never dead."?

**Audrey Thomas, CFUW Victoria, Member of the IRC**

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## **Impact**

Each year on Earth Day we pause to reflect upon the impact that we are having on the planet and what we need to do about it. However, it isn't just once a year that we should do this. It is each and every day. As Jane Goodall once said, "You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make." What we do in our daily lives makes a difference to the health of our planet. What we so often fail to realize is that environmental issues also

have direct impacts on people and the quality of their lives. Environmental issues are also social justice issues. For example, effects of climate change are felt most severely by rural women and children in developing countries. They are the most vulnerable to climate change's impacts on water availability, food security, and human health and yet they have the least access to resources to lessen those impacts.

The [United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) reflect the connection between environment and social justice. At the core of the SDGs is poverty eradication. Tackling the root cause of poverty through sustainable development creates positive change for both people and the planet. This Earth Day, when we commit to creating a healthier planet, let's also commit to creating a better life for all of the people on it.

**Dr. Shelley Ball, CFUW Perth and District, Member of the CFUW Climate Change Committee**

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## **Easter Sunday**

She looked out the window and across the fields. The wind whipped the dust into a series of eddies. He hadn't come home last night. She knew he was drinking. Perhaps he had stayed in town with a friend. Maybe she could risk going to Church. It was Easter after all. He would eventually find out. He always did. But it was Easter Sunday. Maybe just this once.

Upstairs she put makeup on the bruise. It was fading now. Just a slight yellow tinge around her eye and across her cheek. No one would notice, she thought. Back downstairs she put on her coat. Her right arm was still sore. It was hard to get it through the sleeve. It had never healed properly. She had not gone to the clinic to have it set. How could she get there? He had taken the truck right after and left. He stayed away for a week. When he came back, things between the two of them were better. For a while.

This was the third year they wouldn't plant a crop. There was no rain. The ground was unforgiving. There was no money. There was no work. They would lose the farm. There was no end to this.

She walked to the end of the lane and onto the gravel road. With no boots, her feet were already cold. She pulled her thin coat tighter and adjusted her scarf to cut the relentless wind. It would take an hour to walk to the Church. When she got there, she would pray for rain. She would pray for the resurrection of the land. She would pray that he would find work. But she could no longer pray for herself.

**Sandra Shaw, CFUW Perth and District, Member of the Social Justice Committee**

N.B. Rural women are most likely to suffer the effects of climate change. From this imagined narrative, one can see how climate change can exacerbate the intersectionality of poverty, abuse, lack of transportation, and lack of services.

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## **Where the River Runs Dry**

Mother, Mother, Mother

Will you provide oxygen when I need to breath?

Will you provide rain when I need water to drink?

Will you provide cold when I need the lake to freeze so I can travel to safety?

Will you provide food so I can nourish my body?

Will you coordinate the seasons so I can plant in spring and reap in the fall?

Will you provide materials to build my house?

Will you be there for my grand children?

Will you still be shelter for the animals?

Will the plants have a garden to grow in?

Mother, Mother, Mother I am sore

We have been greedy children

We have been selfish children

We have not honoured your laws oh so green

Can you trust us to change our behaviour?

We squandered the opportunities to show we care

Can you to give us another chance to start again?

My sister who lives on the rural plain will guide us because she knows you best

She knows when the winds change direction

She hears when the birds stop chirping

She feels the sun because there is no canopy to shade her walk

She sees the water hole dry up

I bet if we spent a fortnight with her we would learn more about your aching soul

Can you forgive our debt or is it too late to save a fist full of dirt for that acorn yet to fall?

**Cheryl Hayles, VP International Relations - CFUW, Vice President North America - IAW**