

Sustainability and Sustainability *Light*:

What Does Modern Slavery
Have to Do With It?

“The ecological crisis offers humans the opportunity to understand themselves in a new, more expansive way.”

---Christopher Uhl

The Five Sustainability Principles

Originally from Christopher Uhl, "Green Destiny: Universities Leading the Way to a Sustainable Future," *BioScience* 51, no 1 (2001): 36-42. Currently in Uhl's *Path to a Sustainable World: Developing Ecological Consciousness*.

Governments, organizations, and households seeking to become sustainable behave in accord with the following core principles:

Respecting life and natural processes. Sustainability commits us to explicit consideration of the effects of our decisions and actions on the health and well-being of the entire community of life.

Living within limits. Sustainability involves an awareness that the natural resources upon which all life depends—forests, fertile soils, fisheries, pure water, and clear air—are finite endowments to be used with care and prudence, at a rate consonant with their capacity for regeneration.

Valuing the local. Sustainability commits us to show respect for the nature components of our neighborhoods and bioregions; to preservation, restoration, and use of local knowledge; and to creation of strong, self-reliant local economies.

Accounting for full costs. Sustainability requires that we become aware of the costs generated by our products—from “source to sink”—to the environment and society. Product prices must reflect this awareness.

Sharing power. Sustainability demands we recognize that we are all interconnected—people, biota, and physical elements. Problems are solved by each individual assuming a share of the responsibility.

"Arguably, then, every student who graduates from an institution and remains committed to living an indefensible consumer lifestyle—fancy cars, multiple credit cards, extensive brand-name wardrobes, expensive gadgets—constitutes a failure for that institution."

--Derek Owens, *Composition and Sustainability: Teaching for a Threatened Generation*

"But there is no secret about the engine driving this vicious cycle: it is us—the consumer culture of the rich north. Shrimp, fish, gold, diamonds, steel, beef, sugar, and the other fruits of slavery and environmental destruction flow into the stores of North America, Europe, Japan, and, increasingly, China."

--Kevin Bales, *Blood and Earth: Modern Slavery, Ecocide, and The Secret to Saving the World (Blood and Earth)*

“The fact that millions continue to be trapped in exploitative and dehumanizing conditions is a terrible stain on modern society.”

--Nisha Varia, *Human Rights Watch*

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“The supply chain that reaches from the Bisie mine to the phone in your pocket has around eleven steps, the last two being the retailer where we buy our goods and ourselves, the ultimate consumers of the cellphones, laptops, and everything else. Since most businesses don’t want slavery in their products, the lies told to hide slavery cluster most thickly at the beginning of the supply chain. The sense of guilt or responsibility for the origin of the base materials fades at every step on the chain—until it is completely extinguished in the minds of many consumers.”

--Kevin Bales, *Blood and Earth*

From Free the Slaves

<http://www.freetheslaves.net/about-slavery/survivor-stories/>

*Like many, I've been concerned with the potential of global problems to overwhelm students. I've believed that information and discussion must be structured so that hope predominates, thereby encouraging students to engage with threatening issues. However, I have realized that some approaches to global problems promote sustainability light. They soften this urgent understanding: that how we live **enslaves others**.*

*Shocked by Kevin Bales' *Blood and Earth: Modern Slavery, Ecocide, and The Secret to Saving the World*, I now believe that climate change (although part of that complex problem is due to slavery) is not as important as people suffering **now**, people living lives governed by violence due to first world countries' demands for raw materials. As Bales (2016) estimates, some 35.8 million people are slaves. That means they are beaten, raped, and often worked to death.*

Bales want us to know what it means to hold a phone or other object from our mostly safe world—that there are people suffering daily for how we live. Consequently, this presentation considers the pedagogical balance of teaching for activism, alongside how modern slavery is too often an unrecognized part of our world, an unexamined aspect of truly diverse and just sustainability.

Impact Achieved (from Free the Slaves)

The increased focus on measurement at Free the Slaves has already helped improve our ability to assess impact. In 2014, we were able to record the following aggregate results from our programs:

- 2,265 people freed from slavery.
- 82,583 villagers educated on how to protect their families from traffickers.
- 1,977 villages and neighborhoods supported to protect their residents from slavery.
- 1,281 government officials trained on how to more effectively stop slavery.
- 163 traffickers and slaveholders arrested.

“Pedagogy for restoration is composed of three elements: Pedagogy of basic needs, pedagogy of identity, and pedagogy of purpose.”

--David Krzwesni, *Pedagogy for Restoration: Addressing Social and Ecological Degradation Through Education*

Thank you!

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