



**CHANGING SOCIAL NORMS AND INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIORS:
CULTIVATING REGENERATIVE VIRTUES
THOUGH EDUCATION AND NGO OUTREACH**



- We are in the sixth mass animal extinction.
- The IUCN notes that our current rate of animal extinction is between “1000 and 10,000 times higher than the ‘background’ or expected natural extinction rate.”
- The 2019 UN Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) warned that one million species of flora and fauna are threatened with extinction. Some may be lost within decades.
- Most of Africa’s iconic species are imperiled and are undergoing sharp population declines.



- What's the difference between this extinction event and the previous five animal extinction events? **This one is largely human-caused:**
 - Climate Change
 - Habitat Loss
 - Poaching and Illegal Wildlife Trafficking
 - Human-Animal Conflict
 - Overhunting and overfishing



Cascading Effects

- **Climate Change:** WMO's 2019 Report, *The State of the Climate in Africa*, notes that in 2019, the global mean surface temperature was approximately 1.1 C degree higher than the pre-Industrial average with the consequent effects of warmer temperatures (2019 was one of the three warmest years on record for Africa), increased rainfall in some regions and drought in others, warming oceans with the consequent effect of rising sea levels, and more "high impact events." Taken together, climate change will create food insecurity, "population displacement," create health challenges, and disrupt livelihoods.

Cascading Effects

- **Biodiversity Loss:**

- Elephant population is estimated to be fewer than 400,000
- Lion population is around 20,000+.
- The cheetah population has dropped to approximately 7,000.
- Rhinos number about 25,000.
- Fewer than 100,000 giraffes remain in the wild.
- In the past 30 years, vultures have declined by about 62%. Most of the 11 species are imperiled.
- African wild dogs number around 6,600 and are listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List.
- Consequences: loss of livelihoods (ecotourism) and changes to the natural environment.





- The science is clear: Human behavior is facilitating biodiversity loss and climate change. We are not living in balance with the natural world, and we will face catastrophic consequences if we do not alter our way of living.
- *And yet*, we are **not** making the behavioral changes necessary to create thriving economies and ecosystems.



How do we facilitate individual and social change?

WORKING HYPOTHESIS:

MORAL IDENTITY IS A CENTRAL DRIVER IN INDIVIDUAL + SOCIAL CHANGE

- “If the value of nature is not purely economic, what is it? And what makes an environmental issue evoke strong moral considerations? We believe the answer has to do with identity-how we define ourselves, others, and nature" (Clayton and Opatow, p. 5).

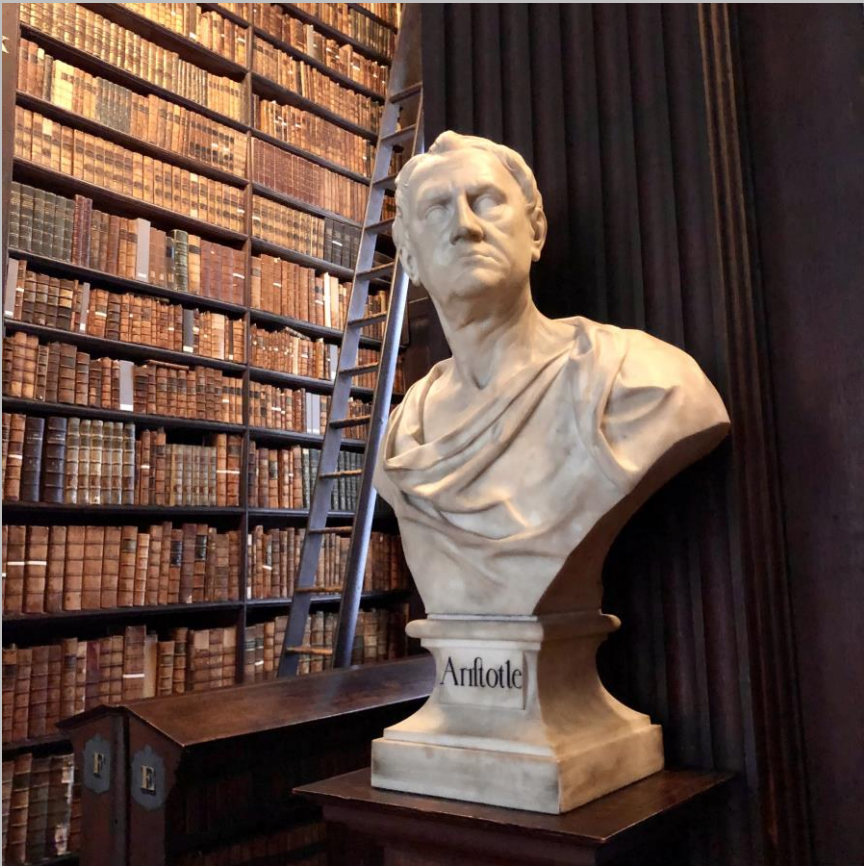
WHAT IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL MORAL IDENTITY?

- A sense of self or a shared communal identity that enables individuals and communities to view the natural world and nonhuman animals *as worthy of moral consideration*.

HOW IS IT DEVELOPED?

- This has been a driving question behind much of Dr. Peter Kahn's (Professor of Psychology) research with children.
- His cross-cultural studies revealed that children exhibit "biocentric reasoning"-the ability to make moral judgments based on broader ecological considerations of which humans are only a part (Kahn, p. 116).
- The children (in the studies) shared concerns about animals and the natural world that were not merely utilitarian. In other words, the children viewed the environment and nonhuman animals as worthy of moral consideration.
- Kahn concludes that the origin of biocentric reasoning is derived from "psychological necessities"-humans need clean air, clean water, trees, etc.
- **Nevertheless, culture plays a role in developing "biocentric reasoning."**

A MODEST PROPOSAL: ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF VIRTUE PROVIDES A FRAMEWORK FOR CULTIVATING AN ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY



- Why Aristotle?
 - Virtue theory, unlike modern ethical theories, concerns itself with the characterological development of the moral agent and not simply making a moral judgment.
 - Virtue theory “presupposes natural tendencies and inclinations in human beings” (Copleston, v.1, p. 333). It is therefore able to cultivate an environmental identity by building on pre-existing, if latent, concerns for the environment and nonhuman animals.
 - Interesting Side Note: Kahn noted the emergence of “an Aristotelian orientation” (with respect to ideal functioning) in his cross-cultural studies with children (p. 120).
 - Virtue theory focuses on finding balance and living in moderation. These seemingly old-fashioned ideas have new resonance in an age of imbalance, one in which there resource exploitation in many developed countries and stark lack in many parts of the developing world.

VIRTUE THEORY AND THE PURPOSE OF HUMAN LIFE

- The purpose of human life is happiness (*eudaemonia*).
 - *Eudaimonia*, while not precluding pleasure, is **ultimate happiness**. It is “worthy of pursuit” for its own sake and not because it will enable us to get to the next level of happiness (Aristotle, p. 1734).
 - It is an “activity of the soul in conformity with excellence” (Aristotle, p. 1735).

VIRTUE THEORY: HOW IT WORKS

- If you want a well-lived life, you must cultivate the **virtues** that will bring happiness.
- A virtue is akin to excellence in a skill:
- If you want to be good at something, you must practice certain behaviors over and over again until they become your disposition to act (i.e., your second nature).
- If you want happiness, you must practice moral virtues over and over again until they become your disposition to act (i.e., your second nature).
- Note again, the aim of virtue theory is characterological: to obtain happiness by becoming a particular kind of person through achieving excellence in certain behaviors.

MORAL EXCELLENCE/VIRTUE AS THE GOLDEN MEAN

VICE OF
EXCESS

**VIRTUE:
THE MEAN BETWEEN
TWO
OPPOSING
VICES**

VICE OF
DEFICIENCY

Moral excellence “is a mean between two vices, the one involving excess, the other deficiency, and that is such because its character is to aim at what is intermediate in passions and in actions” (Aristotle, 1894/1995, p. 1751).



“[I]t is no easy task to be good. For in everything it is no easy task to find the middle...”
(Aristotle, 1894/1995), p. 1751).



Cultivating Regenerative Virtues in Education

Katherine Baxter, Ph.D.

A monarch butterfly with orange and black wings is perched on a dark branch. The branch also holds several green, elongated fruits, possibly banana blossoms, which are slightly out of focus. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural, outdoor setting.

Back to our question: How do we facilitate individual and social change?

“The materialist doctrine that (wo)men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed (wo)men are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is (wo)men who change circumstances and that the educator him(her)self must be educated.” - Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, 1845

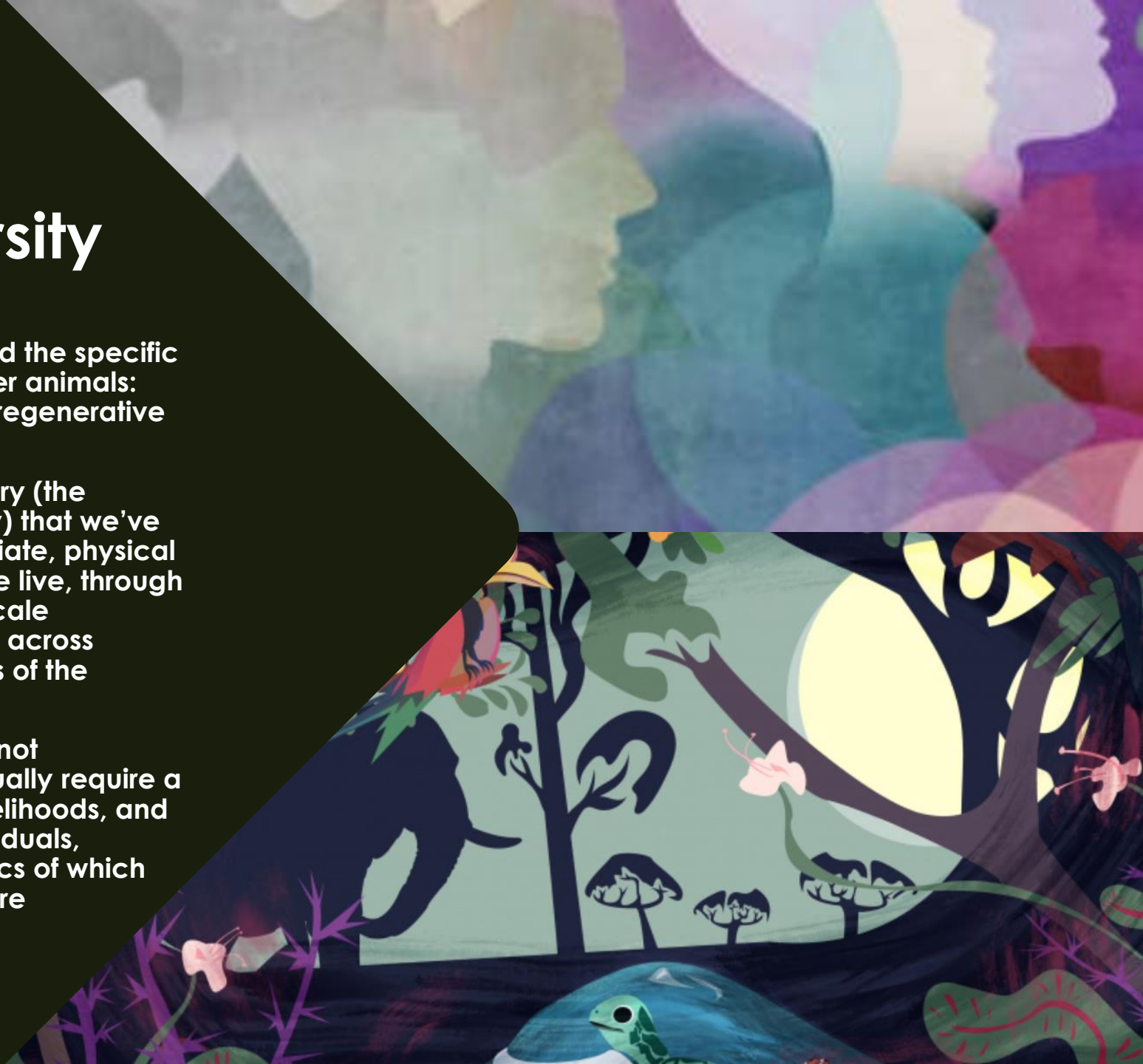
Bridging Universality and Diversity



- Universality gives us the language and framework necessary to understand our shared global challenges, applicable to all humans regardless of culture, religion, ethnicity, geographic location (ie the universal need for clean air, water, food, etc) (Tsing, 2010)
- Diversity gives us the specific contours along which to craft regenerative educational solutions to these challenges in specific places, with specific people, rooted in specific local ecologies (ie within particular belief and meaning-making frameworks and particular human-animal-land relationships and corresponding livelihood/economic options)

Connecting Cultural Diversity and Biodiversity

- Each unique human culture has evolved around the specific features of the surrounding environment and other animals: Indigenous cultural practices often examples of regenerative co-evolution
- It's only been relatively recently in human history (the Industrial Revolution in England, late 18th century) that we've been able to displace ourselves from the immediate, physical realities and constraints of the places in which we live, through the advent of technologies that facilitate large scale economic redistribution of energy and resources across geographic locations --> a shift in the rootedness of the means of production (Polanyi, 1945)
- Whilst advantageous in many ways, this shift is not sustainable, nor is it regenerative, and will eventually require a rethinking of the relationships among culture, livelihoods, and natural resource use, and correspondingly, individuals, education, and economies – the current dynamics of which have long been feeding into a global monoculture (Fraser, 2015)



Harnessing Education to Cultivate Regenerative Virtues

► Education as a mechanism of directing human experience and potential (Dewey, 1940).

► The tension between universality and diversity presents opportunities in educational contexts to cultivate regenerative virtues, if the balance can be struck.

► Regenerative virtues give us a framework in education to fuse the universal capacity for the development of an environmental moral identity (Hahn p116) with diverse, culturally specific, place-based education practices and pedagogies.



MORAL EXCELLENCE/VIRTUE AS THE GOLDEN MEAN:

VICE OF
EXCESS

**VIRTUE:
THE MEAN BETWEEN
TWO
OPPOSING
VICES**

VICE OF
DEFICIENCY

Moral excellence “is a mean between two vices, the one involving excess, the other deficiency, and that is such because its character is to aim at what is intermediate in passions and in actions” (Aristotle, 1894/1995, p. 1751).

REGENERATIVE VIRTUES: CULTIVATING AN ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY

VICE OF
EXCESS: NO
SENSE OF
SELF; NEGLECT
OF SELF

VIRTUE 1:
RECOGNIZING
INTERDEPENDENCE

VICE OF
DEFICIENCY:
INDIVIDUALISM

"You can't force people to care about our natural environment, but if you encourage them to connect with it, they just might."

-Jennifer Nini

REGENERATIVE VIRTUES: CULTIVATING AN ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY

VICE OF EXCESS:
ABSORBED BY
BAD NEWS +
TRAUMA

VIRTUE 2:
BEARING
WITNESS

VICE OF
DEFICIENCY:
DENIAL

"When the suffering of another creature causes you to feel pain, do not submit to the initial desire to flee from the suffering one, but on the contrary, come closer, as close as you can to he who suffers without harming yourself, and try to help him." - Leo Tolstoy

REGENERATIVE VIRTUES: CULTIVATING AN ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY

VICE OF EXCESS:
THOUGHTLESS
INDULGENCE

VIRTUE 3:
MODERATE +
MINDFUL
CONSUMPTION

VICE OF
DEFICIENCY:
JOYLESS
ACESTICISM

*"Infinite growth of material
consumption in a finite world is an
impossibility." - E.F. Schumacher*

REGENERATIVE VIRTUES: CULTIVATING AN ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY

VICE OF EXCESS:
ILLUSION,
FANTASY,
SUPERSTITION
MAGICAL
THINKING

VIRTUE 4:
WONDER +
AWE

VICE OF
DEFICIENCY:
REDUCTION OF
EVERYTHING
VALUABLE TO
MEASUREABLE
PHENOMENA

"If you want to build a ship, don't herd people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea." -Antoine de Saint Exupéry

REGENERATIVE VIRTUES: CULTIVATING AN ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY

VICE OF EXCESS:
SELFISHNESS, SELF-
CENTEREDNESS,
EGO-DRIVEN

VIRTUE 5:
SELF CARE AND
COMPASSION

VICE OF
DEFICIENCY: SELF-
NEGLECT,
BURNOUT, POOR
HEALTH,
UNHAPPINESS

*"Compassion for other
creatures begins with
kindness to ourselves."
-Thich Nhat Hanh*

Regenerative
Moral
Exemplars In
Education and
Non-Profit
Work



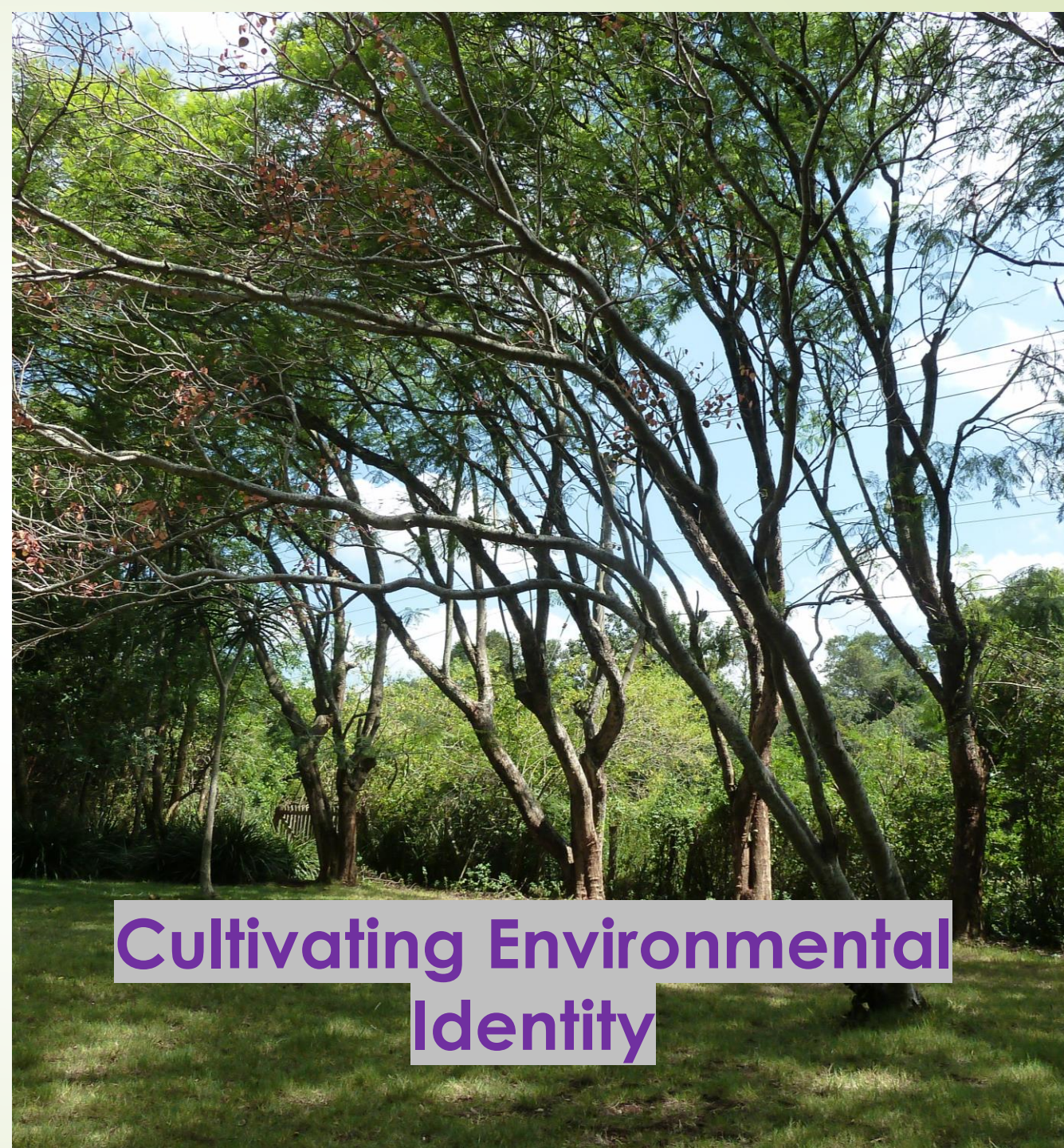
**In the few minutes I have I will
emphasize the importance of
environmental education to all
stakeholders.**

We are all in this together.

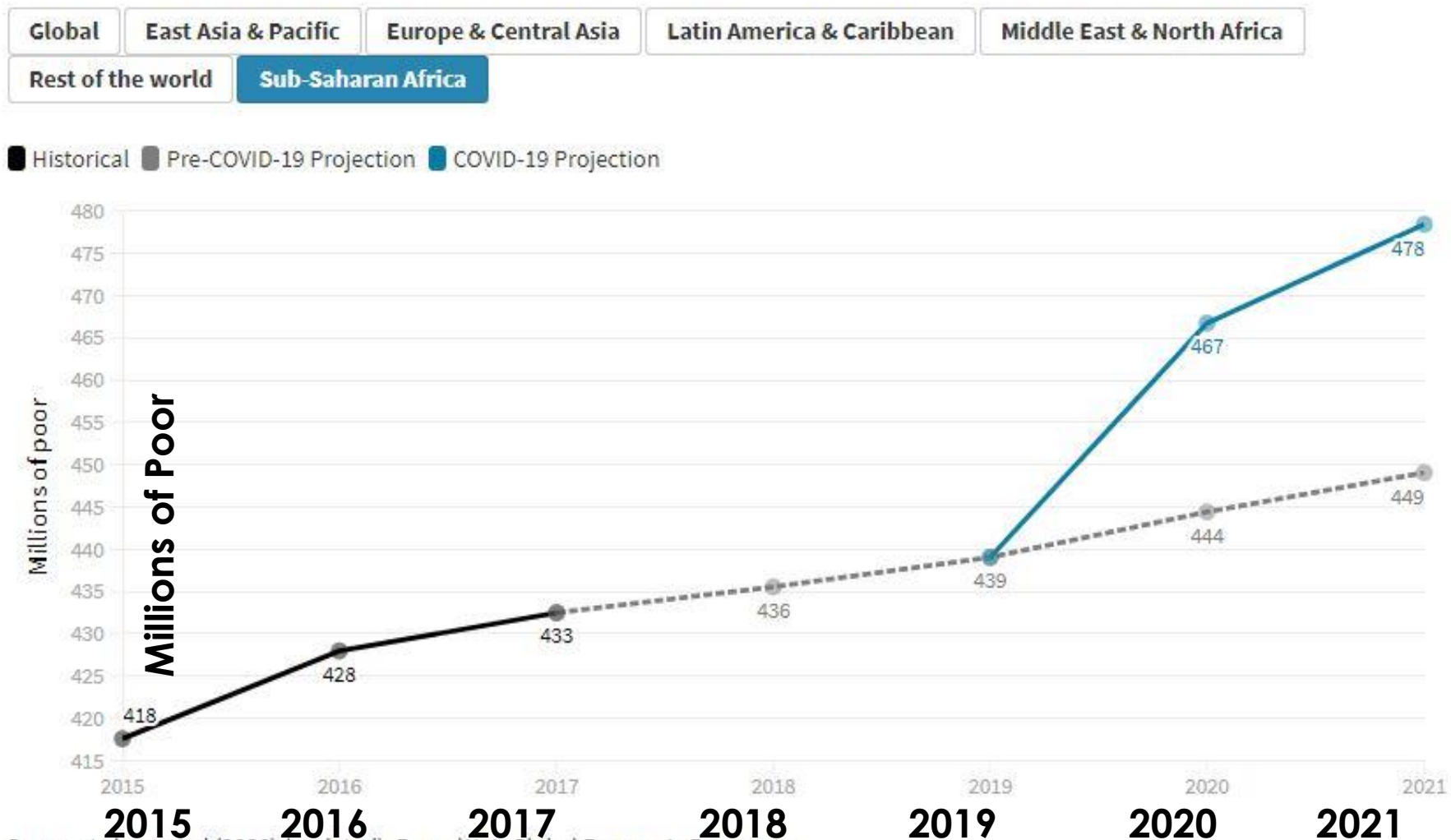
- **We need new forms of social organization.**
- **There is benefit in emulating successful organizations.**
- **Environmental identities depend on our ability to create social institutions that not only support environmental identities but recognize and affirm them.**

Striving to achieve regenerative virtue:

- Interdependence, One Health,
- Bear witness, Role Models
- Practice Moderate and Mindful Consumption
- Wonder & awe for the creation and all life
- Care and Compassion recognize our self-interest,



**Cultivating Environmental
Identity**



Source: [Lakner et al \(2020\) \(updated\)](#), [PovcalNet](#), [Global Economic Prospects](#).

Note: Extreme poverty is measured as the number of people living on less than \$1.90 per day. 2017 is the last year with official global poverty estimates. Official poverty estimates are available for East Asia & Pacific, Europe & Central Asia, Latin America & Caribbean, and rest of the world for up to 2019, and for Middle East & North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa up to 2018. Regions are categorized using PovcalNet

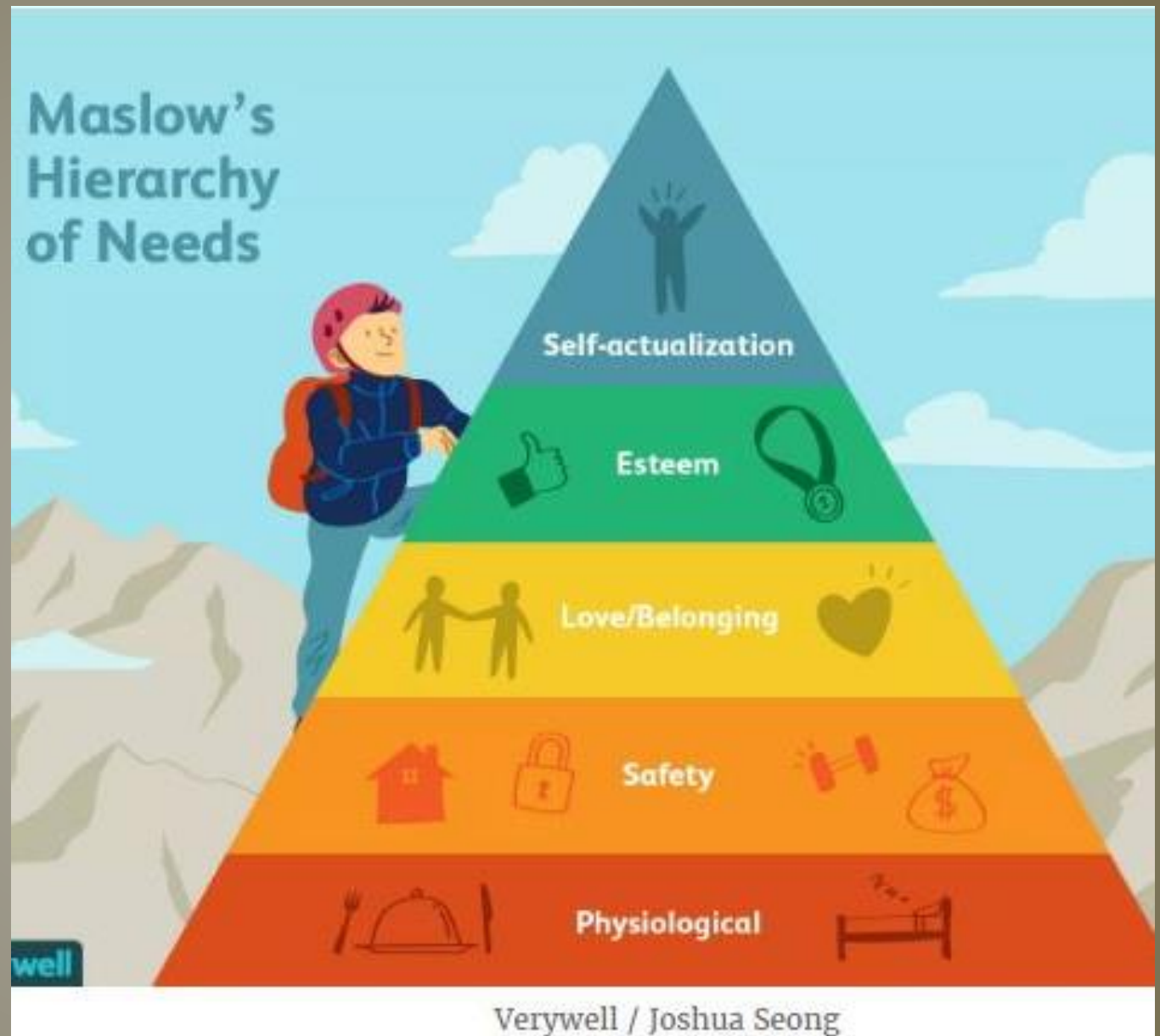
Will it bring an end to poaching?

How to satisfy human needs
without destroying the
environment?



Consideration for the the here and now. LOOKING FOR VIRTUE

- Self-aware, personal growth
- Sense of being valued, making a contribution
- Friendship, Romance, Attachment, Family, Community, Religious organization
- Financial Security, Health, Wellness, Safety
- Food, Water, Breathing, Shelter





➤ **Generally, to live a virtuous life we need to provide for the basic essentials of life.**

➤ **We require resources for ourselves, our families, to satisfy our obligations. We need remunerative work. We need a job to do.**

"We Are What We Do"

We are in early stage of achieving environmental identity, the balance between vice of excess and vice of deficit. The challenge is scaling it up into main stream society before climate change destroys life as we live it.

This ethos for environmental identity is something we do every day, and there are many examples.

We stand on the shoulders of our ancestors.



We Stand on the Shoulders of: Conservation Heros Organization Initiatives Story Telling

- **Wangari Maathai**
- **Jane Goodall and Rosalie Osborn**
- **Twiga Foods**
- **WeFi (Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative)**
- **Chinua Achebe**



**Care and
Compassion:**

Wangari Maathai

**The Green Belt
Movement**



**Bearing
Witness:**

Jane Goodall

**Roots and
Shoots**



Wonder & Awe:

Rosalie Osborn

**Establishing the
Riverine Nature
Reserve Trust,
headquarters for
the Africa Network
for Animal
Welfare**



Mindful Consumption: Twiga Foods

Twiga Foods buys produce from small-scale farmers and sells it to local vendors using a mobile phone app removing the middleman. The result is a fair price paid to the farmer and a lower cost to the vendor.



Interdependence: WeFi Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative

We-Fi supports women entrepreneurs by scaling up access to financial products and services, building capacity, expanding networks, offering mentors, and providing opportunities to link with domestic and global markets.



Bearing Witness

Chinua Achebe

**Things Fall Apart,
Hopes & Impediments,
Beware Soul Brother**



In the End

- Identity: educating for an environmental identity is an essential ingredient to social change.
- It is individual.
- The value of nature is not purely economic. It is personal.
- Nature transcends monetary exchange for wonder and awe witnessed in the cumulative way people live and die in life.
- One of the answers to saving the planet is to educate the examples/exemplars that honor life well lived.

An NGO Example – Lifewater's Regenerative Community WASH Strategy

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Professor – NGO/Nonprofit Management

Regis University – www.regis.edu



Global Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) Needs

- **771 million** people lack basic water services
- **1.7 billion** people lack basic sanitation services
- **2.3 billion** people lack basic hygiene services

Lifewater Vision of a Healthy Village



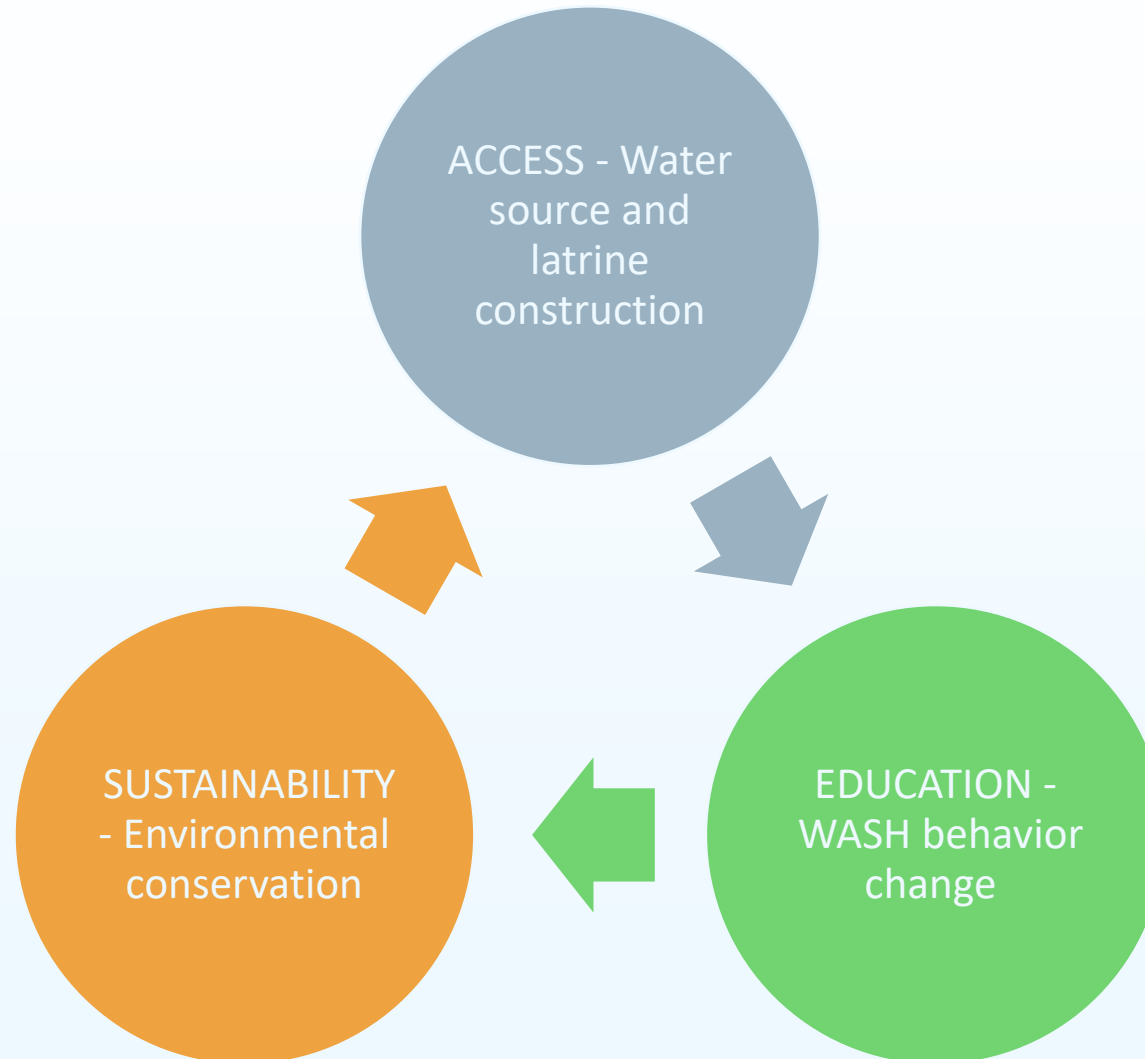
Focus – Healthy Villages

Goal - Every child has access to safe water and sanitation

- Households / Homes
- Schools / Institutions
- Villages / Communities

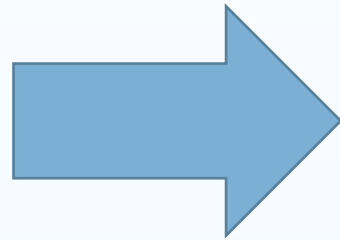


Vision of a Healthy Village



Social Behavior Change

LI Sponsored
community
WASH
Facilitators



Community-driven change

- Community-led total sanitation
 - Toilets, wash stations
 - Behavior change competitions
- **Training** – for motivations
 - House-to-house
 - Community conversations

Focus on Sustainability / Regeneration

- Sustainability strategies for water, latrines, environment - appropriate to local context
- Community-based monitoring - sustain equipment & WASH behavior change



Inclusion

Lifewater is intentional about including the most vulnerable members of society

- Conducts activities that specifically target vulnerable households
- Includes the concerns of vulnerable groups in standard activities



Virtues - Motivation & Process

Facilitate Individual & Social Change

- **Interdependence** – Partnerships - with communities - meet needs
- **Witness** – Create awareness - Billions without access to WASH
- **Mindful Consumption** – For family and community wellbeing
- **Awe & Wonder** – Appreciate what the community has and develop it
- **Selfcare & compassion** – Start with the worth of the person and the community – spiritual goals

love WELL.

www.lifewater.org

