

SUNDAY OBSERVER

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World Environment Day on June 5

Only One Earth

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In the universe are billions of galaxies. In our galaxy are billions of planets. But there is #OnlyOneEarth. Let's take care of it.

This is the message of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for the World Environment Day (WED).

Led by the UNEP and held annually on June 5 since 1974, the WED is the largest global platform for environmental public outreach and is celebrated by millions of people across the world. This year it is hosted by Sweden. "Only One Earth" was the slogan for the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972. This put sustainable development on the global agenda and led to the establishment of World Environment Day. Fifty years later, Sweden is hosting Stockholm+50 from June 2 to 3 and the WED on June 5.

Heating up

According to the UN, our Planet Earth faces a triple planetary emergency: The climate is heating up too quickly for people and nature to adapt; habitat loss and other pressures mean an estimated one million species are threatened with extinction; pollution continues to poison our air, land and water.

The way out of this dilemma is to transform our economies and societies to make them inclusive, fair and more connected with nature. We must shift from harming the planet to healing it. The good news is the solutions and the technology exist and are increasingly affordable, such as solar power.

#OnlyOneEarth is the campaign for World Environment Day 2022. It calls for collective, transformative action on a global scale to celebrate, protect and restore our planet.

According to the UN, We are using the equivalent of 1.6 Earths to maintain our current way of life, and ecosystems cannot keep up with our demands.

Our lifestyles are associated with two thirds of all greenhouse gas emissions - studies show that sustainable lifestyles and behaviour could reduce our emissions by 40 to 70 per cent by 2050. Sustainable consumption and production can drive economic development, mitigate climate change, positively impact health and pollution, and help alleviate poverty - potentially increasing incomes by an average of 11

percent in low- and medium-income countries by 2060, and 4 percent in high-income countries.

Time is running out, and nature is in emergency mode. To keep global warming below 1.5°C this century, we must halve annual greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Without action, exposure to air pollution beyond safe guidelines will increase by 50 percent within the decade and plastic waste flowing into aquatic ecosystems will nearly triple by 2040.

We need urgent action to address these pressing issues, making "Only One Earth" and its focus on living sustainably in harmony with nature, as pertinent as ever.

Truly transformative options towards sustainability need to be available, affordable and attractive for people to make better daily decisions. Key areas for transformation include how we build and live in our homes, cities and places of work and worship, how and where our money is invested, and what we do for fun. But others of greater magnitude also include: energy, production systems, global trade and transport systems, and protection of biodiversity.

Many of these options can only be created by larger entities: national and sub-national governments, financial institutions, businesses, international organisations, and other organizations with the power to rewrite the rules, frame our ambition and open up new horizons.

Nevertheless, individuals and civil society are pivotal advocates, awareness-raisers and supporters. The more we raise our voices, emphasize what needs to be done and point out who is responsible, the faster change will come.

By supporting World Environment Day (WED) 2022 and the #OnlyOneEarth campaign, you can help ensure this unique and beautiful planet remains a comfortable home for humanity. Moreover, the WED launched the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030 to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean. Restoration can help to end poverty, combat climate change and prevent a mass extinction. It will only succeed if everyone plays a part. You

ACCORDING TO THE UN, WE ARE USING THE EQUIVALENT OF 1.6 EARTHS TO MAINTAIN OUR CURRENT WAY OF LIFE, AND ECOSYSTEMS CANNOT KEEP UP WITH OUR DEMANDS. OUR LIFESTYLES ARE ASSOCIATED WITH TWO THIRDS OF ALL GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS - STUDIES SHOW THAT SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES AND BEHAVIOURS COULD REDUCE OUR EMISSIONS BY 40 TO 70 PER CENT BY 2050. SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION CAN DRIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE, POSITIVELY IMPACT HEALTH AND POLLUTION, AND HELP ALLEVIATE POVERTY - POTENTIALLY INCREASING INCOMES BY AN AVERAGE OF 11 PERCENT IN LOW- AND MEDIUM-INCOME COUNTRIES BY 2060, AND 4 PERCENT IN HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES.

can find out more about ecosystems and the UN Decade, and join the global movement to restore our world.

But most people believe that it is the Governments alone that can keep our environment and ecosystems clean. But we have to remember that they can only do so much to keep our cities and the environment clean. They are doing their part and we have to do ours as per the WED theme this year. But how can we do that? First, we have to minimise household waste. If you have four persons in your household, but cook food for six persons, chances are that you will end up throwing away the excess food.

Now there is a movement in many countries which calls for minimum consumption according to



one's daily needs. We should also think along similar lines. There are two options here. One is to prepare more or less the exact amount of food required by the household for a given meal. The other is to keep the extra food in the refrigerator for the next meal.

Positive contribution

I regularly do this in case there is extra food. This way, not a single morsel of food is wasted. Some foods can also be deep frozen for a week or even two weeks, thawed, reheated and then consumed with no loss of flavour or quality. Of course, there is some waste generated during the preparation stage itself, for which there is an ideal solution.

It is called composting and tallies well with organic agriculture practices. There are special composting bins available in the market, but you can also make compost without specialist equipment. You can learn from numerous videos on YouTube and TikTok on this subject.

Composting is the ultimate solution to food waste that everyone can do with a minimum outlay and effort. Your plants and soil will love the compost and you will save a bundle on chemical fertiliser too. You need a home garden but even those living in apartments can use the compost on plants grown in pots.

There are many other ways in

which we can make a positive contribution to the environment around us. In this context, the 3R concept is worth a mention.

It means Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. Reducing consumption automatically leads to less waste and you save money too. For example, we should reduce the use of plastics and better still, give it up altogether. The Government has already banned many types of polythene and single-use plastics to aid this effort. Where possible, we should opt for alternative products made from environment-friendly materials. Sometimes these may cost a little more, but the long-term benefit to the environment is immeasurable.

The concept of reusing various materials is well entrenched in our society. Instead of using sili-sili bags at the supermarket, why not use a cloth bag which you can use many times over and over again? There are many things that we can re-use in our day-to-day lives, from clothes to cups. Re-using everyday things has many benefits, including, of course, saving our hard-earned money.

Recycling may be a relatively recent addition to the lexicon, but we have been practising it for decades. Can you remember the days when you had to hand over an empty soft drink bottle to get a new one? (Well, that means you are really old.) That is recycling in action. Can you also remember the paper "gotu" (funnel) that mudalalis sold everything in, from sugar to dhal?

Recycling initiatives

This era came to an end with the introduction of the dreaded PET bottles and sili-sili bags, which are throwaway plastic ones. This has led to a massive strain on the environment. But now, there is a sort of a renaissance in

consumer recycling, with the likes of glass bottles back in vogue.

The key is to identify things that can be 'recycled' at home level (such as glass bottles) and at commercial level in recycling centres (such as empty cans of fish).

The problem with most commercial recycling programs here in Sri Lanka is that they begin with a lot of fanfare amidst the glare of TV lights but fade out without a trace a few months down the road. Many cities have recycling bins for paper, glass, plastic and other materials such as metal cans and tins but they no longer seem to be cleared regularly.

The relevant Local Bodies must immediately spring into action and reactivate these recycling initiatives. Similarly, a program was started recently to recycle the millions of toothbrushes and ballpoint pens thrown away daily in Sri Lanka, but this should be given more publicity in the media as no one knows how to participate in this worthy venture. Also, with the Government finding it difficult to supply power 24/7, those who can afford the initial outlay should opt for solar power. And once the ban on car imports is lifted, buyers should look for electric cars since we are experiencing the adverse effects of relying too much on fossil fuels such as petrol and diesel.

It will also be worthwhile to explore the possibility of recycling the millions of surgical and KN95 face masks thrown away daily for a non-hygienic use.

There are many other ways to keep the environment safe and clean. But it is mainly up to us to take the initiative instead of expecting the Central Government or Local Bodies to do everything. As outlined above, many of these steps won't even cost a Rupee. It is our duty to keep the environment clean and secure for posterity.

BY SUPPORTING WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY 2022 AND THE #ONLYONEEARTH CAMPAIGN, YOU CAN HELP ENSURE THIS UNIQUE AND BEAUTIFUL PLANET REMAINS A COMFORTABLE HOME FOR HUMANITY. MOREOVER, THE WED LAUNCHED THE UN DECADE ON ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION 2021-2030 TO PREVENT, HALT AND REVERSE THE DEGRADATION OF ECOSYSTEMS ON EVERY CONTINENT AND IN EVERY OCEAN. RESTORATION CAN HELP TO END POVERTY, COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND PREVENT A MASS EXTINCTION. IT WILL ONLY SUCCEED IF EVERYONE PLAYS A PART. YOU CAN FIND OUT MORE ABOUT ECOSYSTEMS AND THE UN DECADE, AND JOIN THE GLOBAL MOVEMENT TO RESTORE OUR WORLD.

