





Connecting knowledge to action

11 December 2020
To the Members and member organisations of EFI

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Dear Colleagues,

The year 2020 is arriving at an end and I would like to thank you all; EFI staff, member organizations and member countries as well as EFI Board and Scientific Advisory Board for your commitment and support in a challenging year!

There is no doubt that the year 2020 will be remembered as one of the most traumatic years in modern history, and will become part of the collective memory of all of us. Hopefully, it will also be remembered as a transformative year. The year of the beginning of the end of a global economic model that fails to value and incorporate our most important capital, and the basis for human health and wellbeing: Nature. We reflect on that in a video prepared with His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales in the context of the Circular Bioeconomy Alliance.

In 2020, we also saw how in times of global crisis the world turned to scientists for answers. Probably this behaviour has been repeated throughout history but this year due to the scale of the problem, we have seen that attention and trust in scientists has grown, while trust in political and business leaders dropped in many countries. Unfortunately, too often scientists are only approached when we need answers in a crisis (we see it every summer with the problem of forest fires). Probably the greatest value of science is in stimulating the right questions so that we are wise enough to avoid certain crisis.

Addressing the above challenge not only requires changes in the way society values and engages with science, but also in the way science should evolve in the future. During the last century, science has developed exponentially through specialisation, yielding unprecedented results. At the same time such specialisation has made more difficult a dialogue between scientific disciplines, and between scientists and society at large, and policy makers in particular. All that in a moment when policy makers urgently need to connect the dots...

Erwin Schrödinger (Nobel Prize in Physics in 1933) already reflected about this in 1944 in his visionary book **What is life?**. "We feel clearly that we are only now beginning to acquire reliable material for welding together the sum total of all that is known into a whole; but, on the other hand, it has become next to impossible for a single mind fully to command more than a small, specialized portion of it. I can see no other escape from this dilemma than that some of us should venture to embark on a synthesis of facts and theories."

I think Schrödinger's reflection is more actual than ever before, and resonates with what we are aiming to do at EFI: generating and contextualising scientific knowledge for better informed decision-taking in the context of an increasingly complex world. 2020, for example, saw several EFI publications bringing together different disciplines and scientists from Europe and Russia as well as China, while our ThinkForest forum and Integrate Network tried to address in a holistic manner questions related to forest biodiversity and the bioeconomy in the context of the EU Green Deal. We will continue this work in 2021.

Happy holidays and hope to see you in 2021!

Marc

