



**LEAVES, A Newsletter of the
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International Environment Forum A Baha'i inspired organization addressing
the environment and sustainable development

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From the Editor, Request for information for upcoming newsletters

This newsletter is an opportunity for IEF members to share their experiences, activities, and initiatives that are taking place at the community level on environment, climate change and sustainability. All members are welcome to contribute information about related activities, upcoming conferences, news from like-minded organizations, recommended websites, book reviews, etc. Please send information to newsletter@ief.org

Please share the *Leaves* newsletter and IEF membership information with family, friends, and associates and encourage interested persons to consider becoming a member of the IEF.

IEF participation in the Justice Conference 2018

The 23rd annual Justice Conference was held at the de Poort Conference Centre in the Netherlands on 30 March-2 April 2018. The International Environment Forum (IEF) previously partnered with the Justice Conference as its annual conference in 2017 (<https://iefworld.org/conf21>), so a number of IEF members were present again this year, including Iko Congo, Arthur Dahl, Maja Groff (conference organizer), Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, Wendi Momen, Halldor Thorgeirsson, and David Willis. A side discussion on IEF over dinner allowed us to recruit some new members.

The theme of this year's conference was "Shining a Light of Illumination in Turbulent and Divided Times", with both plenary presentations and parallel workshops over the three days. The opening plenary was by Michael Karlberg on "Power and the Baha'i Community", and our turbulent and divided times were well illustrated by a presentation on the war in Yugoslavia, first-hand experiences of former Baha'i prisoners in Iran and Yemen, and the films "Mercy's Blessing" and "The Cost of Discrimination". This report focuses on the parts of the conference with direct IEF involvement.

IEF members Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, Assistant Professor of Public Policy at Wageningen University, and Halldor Thorgeirsson of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat, together with Sjoerd Luteyn of soul.com, presented a plenary panel on "The Talanoa Dialogue under the Paris Agreement - Reflections on the illuminating Power of the Reflection-Action-Consultation Cycle", as well as a follow-up workshop.



Justice Conference



Sjoerd Luteyn, Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, Halldor Thorgeirsson

Halldor introduced the concept of the Talanoa Dialogue in implementation of the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change. He has been responsible for organising the intergovernmental negotiations on climate change, and in particular the science-policy dialogue. The Paris negotiations revolved around a moral issue: how much global risk were governments willing to take to limit global warming to 1.5° or 2°C. These are indicators of different levels of global risk, with 2°C an existential risk for the most vulnerable countries. Do you give priority to the scientific necessity to minimize human impacts, especially on the poor, which is based on values and calls for justice, represented by the aspirational 1.5°C target, or do you favour economic and political feasibility, as an engineer would determine what is possible from empirical evidence, with an upper limit of 2°C? Reaching 1.5°C will require unprecedented rates of decarbonisation of the economy. The basis is the scientific assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) at the science-policy interface. Uniting on the necessity to limit warming to a responsible level should change feasibility and make the impossible possible, as the recent rapid expansion of the renewable energy sector is demonstrating. The big question is the legitimacy and efficacy of global arrangements based on national sovereignty.

The Paris Agreement represented the beginning of a new governance paradigm, with clear objectives and national stocktaking, national leadership coupled with action at all levels, and international transparency through binding requirement for reporting. An inclusive global, regional and domestic conversation, keeping justice at the centre as a moral compass, will ensure cohesion between global and the local action through multi-level governance. The Talanoa Dialogue, inspired by a Fijian concept of story-telling to build trust, calls for governments and other stakeholders to share positive stories that can encourage further ambition. It forms a bridge between the global and the national, considering three questions: where we are, where we want to be, and how we get there. The Talanoa Dialogue is the precursor to the first comprehensive global stocktake under the Paris Agreement in 2023. Halldor concluded by saying that climate change is testing the moral fabric of the global community and the strength of its commitment to the principle of the unity of mankind.

The Talanoa process is about the ambition of governments to reach the global warming target through a global process of reflection on past actions and what they have led to, future goals to reach and the steps to get there. Sylvia, in her presentation, explored the role of reflection to increase ambition, drawing on experiences from the Bahá'í community. The purpose of the Talanoa Dialogue is to share stories, and build empathy and trust, in order to advance knowledge through common understanding, encourage better decision-making for the collective good, and inform decision-making and increase ambition. It includes inputs to an online platform, and a face-to-face dialogue between government officials and non-state representatives in May, both reporting to the December Conference of the Parties. The method of learning in the Baha'i community includes cycles of reflection, consultation and action. The reflection meeting maintains unity of vision, sharpens clarity of thought and heightens enthusiasm, using a review of vital statistics to suggest the next set of goals to be adopted. The technique is used at multiple levels, enabling learning across the world. It is a process based on equality, containing careful analysis of experience through participatory discussions, providing an earnest and uplifting deliberation on all efforts of a community in an environment imbued with love, where shortcomings are overlooked with forbearance, obstacles are overcome with patience, and tested approaches are embraced with enthusiasm. She left it to the workshop to discuss how these criteria work in the Talanoa Dialogue.

Sjoerd Luteyn spoke on "From despair to hope or unlocking the will to act" in which he shared what soul.com has learned from applying Action, Reflection and Consultation in a corporate environment. Their aim is to transform companies into communities, creating a new mind. Too often a company tries to control its

workers so that less action is possible and there is less trust, with hope diminishing over time. If there is less effort to control the outcome, then it is possible to see more possibilities, increasing hope and then action, followed by reflection to identify progress, increasing hope even further. With less control, there is more trust. With a process of action, reflection and consultation identifying progress and seeing possibilities, there is growing trust, turning despair into hope and unlocking the will to act



Audience



Panel with Iko Congo

The panel was followed by a workshop moderated by IEF President Arthur Dahl, which started with participants sharing their own experiences with reflection. Reflection builds trust, and having a voice is empowering. Vision is a capacity to see what is happening, with a broad systemic approach, which makes it possible to decide on next steps in unity. It is an inclusive process requiring a change in mindset, and learning to be detached from failures, which are opportunities to learn. It should be non-confrontational and positive, building a collective vision from the differences within the group. Reflection must be coupled with action, including the next steps to be taken, and should be framed by a moral purpose such as achieving justice.



Workshop with panel



David Willis

Another workshop was led by longtime IEF member David Willis on “The Unity of Religions: ‘prefer all religionists before yourselves’” based on a statement from ‘Abdu’l-Baha as He was leaving America. David had seen in India how religion was something for everyday use, and the many schools devoted to moral education. He drew on different religions’ approaches to the importance of setting an example, and the common purpose of all the Messengers of God. He also linked prophecies of the native American peoples and their fulfilment in the Baha’i Faith. Consultation and compassion were two gifts that the Baha’is had to offer. The workshop explored what unity in religion meant, and the extent to which religious disunity was one of the causes of the breakdown of society.

Another keynote was by IEF President Arthur Dahl on “The Great Dichotomy: from Egoism to Altruism - from Love of Power to Love of Justice”. He noted that the media drown us in stories of turbulence and division. To find hope we need a wider perspective. A universal theme, the struggle between good and evil, can help us to make sense of our world. Good and evil are not equal forces pulling in opposite directions, but the negative as the absence of the positive, as darkness is the absence of light. We are born with self-love, but our higher human purpose is to grow out of this and bring light. Our individual dichotomy is self versus others, egoism versus altruism, with the ultimate love the love of God. Knowledge faces the same dichotomy, for selfish purposes or to serve others. In the collective dimension of social organization, the dichotomy is between power

and justice. Politics reflects the selfish side of human nature, where power corrupts individually and collectively. Justice is for the collective good, ensuring equity for everyone, and collective security for the world. Individual and collective transformation must go together with constant effort, changing ourselves and helping others to change. Our individual and collective problems come from the lack of love and justice, the wrong end of the dichotomy, showing us the direction of travel. The full paper is available at <http://yabaha.net/dahl/papers/2018c.html>.

The 2018 Justice Conference was another opportunity for IEF members to explore how ethical and spiritual principles combined with science can help us to make sense of the chaotic world we live in today.

IEF contributions to the Talanoa Dialogue – Motivating the transition at the grassroots

19 March 2018

United Nations Climate Change input for COP24

Topic: How do we get there?

Objective: Wider partnerships in public education about climate change

SUMMARY: It is easier for government to increase ambition if they have public support. Public education about climate change should combine scientific and ethical perspectives to motivate action, as demonstrated by a decade of experience with interfaith climate change courses available on line. In Vanuatu, a climate change course was prepared for use in rural training centres around the archipelago. Governments should partner with a wide range of stakeholders to spread values-based education about the science and ethics of climate change and to encourage practical actions everyone can take to build community resilience.

<https://unfccc.int/documents/65320> or https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/10_IEF_Contribution_Talanoa_Dialogue_e.pdf

The IEF is participating actively in the Talanoa Dialogue. The first IEF online submission is below and at <https://iefworld.org/Talanoa1>. Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen will take part in the face-to-face dialogue with governments in Bonn in May, and another proposal by IEF jointly with the Bahá'í International Community is pending.

The climate crisis demands large scale fundamental change at all levels, and increasing ambition from governments. Yet political leaders are often afraid to get too far ahead of their electorates and public opinion. One answer to the question “How do we get there?” is to build public understanding of, and support for, strong action at all levels.

Present incremental progress only slightly mitigates global warming without preventing catastrophic climate change. Courageous leadership is required to accelerate the massive changes needed in economic activities and energy systems, and to sustain the momentum for fundamental transformation. Yet around the world, most people are still not properly informed about the real threat of climate change, with some even confused by deliberate misinformation. The poor have more immediate priorities, while those better off are steeped in materialism and consumerism and in the expectation of continual economic growth.

The negative messages communicated by science do not motivate change in individual behaviour. What is needed is positive messages of a better world that can result from learning to live within planetary boundaries. This calls for a new kind of education that combines the science of global warming and the social, cultural and spiritual visions of a more just, equitable and humane world with no one left behind, as envisaged in the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. The best way to leave no one behind is to involve them in the process in ways they understand.

Only education of both mind and heart has the potential to bring about profound and widespread change in public attitudes. The International Environment Forum (IEF) has worked for more than 20 years to bring science, ethics and spirituality together. In 2009, alongside the faith-based action plans on climate change launched at Windsor Castle, and in preparation for its participation in COP15, IEF developed an Interfaith Study Course

“Scientific and Spiritual Dimensions of Climate Change” freely available online (<https://iefworld.org/ssdcc0.html>). The course has since been used by grassroots study classes around the world including the US, the UK, and Australia, and for COP21 it was translated into French and Spanish. The IEF also created more comprehensive online courses on climate change and on Sustainable Development offered annually by the Wilmette Institute. These online courses have included participants from many countries including Afghanistan, Cameroon, Laos, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Singapore. Such initiatives would be easy to scale up with other partners.

One important objective of these courses is to impart basic knowledge about climate change and how it exacerbates many other environmental and social problems. But, as recent social science confirms, knowledge is only an essential prerequisite, not the decisive factor in motivation for action. People often despair when they are confronted with the immensity of the climate crisis and the seemingly insurmountable efforts needed to mitigate it. Despair results in a paralysis of will, if not denial. From the beginning therefore, these courses have included a spiritual dimension from an interfaith perspective and discussed the ethical imperative for climate action and sustainable development. The faith perspective connects climate action with people's hearts, with their values and world view. It touches people's core, so that the motivation for action becomes strong and enduring. It also opens up a vision of a just, sustainable, and peaceful world, a goal worthy of effort and sacrifice.

Participants in the courses have taken many actions in a wide range of areas, starting with changes in their lifestyles. For example, they reported that they would reduce or eliminate meat from their diets, use their bicycles and walk more, help with community gardens, change to public transportation, install solar power, start to compost, reduce water and energy use, switch to green energy, divest from fossil fuel companies, and generally reduce their consumption.

Some participants became actively involved in environmental organizations such as Interfaith Power&Light and Citizens Climate Lobby or began to help their town become more environmentally sustainable. One student wrote letters to members of the US congress about taking action on climate change and letters to the editor of the local paper,

another one talked with the mayor. Some were able to use the inspiration from the courses in their professional lives, such as one participant in the US who was planning environmentally and socially sustainable housing developments. The Bahá'í Centre in Auckland, New Zealand, provided land for a community garden and now hosts bi-monthly sustainability meetings. A participant in Cameroon planted 40 trees and started a small business that up-cycles tires and used clothing and trains young women to sew.

Probably the most effective outcome of the courses has been the participants' initiatives to pass on their insights and encourage others to learn more and take action. Many participants reported hosting interfaith devotional gatherings with themes like climate justice and sustainable development. Many created talks, art projects, and presentations on climate change and presented them in a large variety of settings. Some facilitated the IEF interfaith study course in their local community. Especially significant are the efforts of participants to incorporate aspects of sustainability in teaching children's and youth classes. One group of participants created a special course for youth that helps them to free themselves from consumerism and lead a more meaningful life. The ripple effect of these educational efforts has the potential to reach many more people.

An IEF event at COP21 reported on Bahá'í-inspired grassroots education helping to build community resilience in Vanuatu (<https://iefworld.org/cop21>). In 2014, the non-governmental organization Vanuatu Rural Development Training Centres Association (VRDTCA) produced a climate change course for use in rural training centres around the archipelago. Topics covered by the course include causes and impacts of climate change, mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, hazard risks in Vanuatu, the importance of traditional knowledge in building community resilience, and the promotion of community action to prepare for climate change and disaster risk reduction. The basic aim of the course is to empower the participants to become agents of change in their communities, able to conduct awareness programmes and demonstrate practical techniques of mitigation and adaptation. Students learn how to present key concepts to village communities, do research to produce hazard risk maps, discover traditional techniques of weather prediction, food preservation and fishing, analyze the adaptive and coping capacities of communities, establish their own agro-forestry plot,

practice how to do coral planting to replace degraded reefs (using methods developed by an IEF member in Fiji), prepare action plans for building resilience to disasters, and take a two-day course in First Aid so as to be able to handle emergencies during hazard events (<https://iefworld.org/elcvanuatucc>).

While not directly covering spiritual topics, the course emphasizes participatory learning and promotes reflection and learning through experience. Interactions between students and communities are conducted with humility, with a focus on consultation between the parties concerned. Emphasis on fostering unity and coherence is paramount, since these attributes are

key factors in strengthening community resilience to hazards and climate change. All these courses aim to elevate the level of knowledge, capacity, and motivation to take effective climate action among increasing numbers of people and to empower them to become strong protagonists of sustainable development. Governments should reach out to the many partners in faith-based organizations, indigenous communities and civil society who can help to spread values-based education about the science and ethics of climate change. This can inspire positive action in communities to begin the transformation to a carbon-neutral sustainable society from the bottom up, while encouraging ambitious climate leadership from their governments.

International Day of Forests 2018 - Youtube



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

More people live in cities than ever before and by 2050, 6 billion people or as much as 70% of the global population is expected to live in urban areas. But rapid urbanization does not need to result in polluted urban sprawl. Trees and urban forests can make our cities greener, healthier and happier places to live by cooling the air, filtering out harmful pollutants and mitigating the effects of climate change.



International Day of Forests 2018: Forests and sustainable cities

17,729 views

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucXz3EqzRLo&feature=youtu.be>

On International Day of Forests,

FAO launches new forest and water programme

Eight West African countries explore ways of leveraging contribution of forests to water security



<http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/394351/icode/>

FAO is using this year's International Day of Forests celebration to discuss ways of enhancing the critical role of forests in providing water and food security.

21 March, 2016, Rome - FAO today launched a new programme aiming to enhance the critical role of forests in improving water quality and water supplies, on the occasion of the UN's International Day of Forests.

The programme, focused specifically on the close relationship between forests and water, will start off by looking at ways to improve water security in eight West African countries: Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Sierra-Leone. The agency will work with local communities to raise their awareness of the interactions between forests and water and help them to integrate forest management in their agricultural practices to improve water supplies.

FAO is using this year's International Day of Forests celebration to shine a spotlight on how forests can contribute to improving water availability, especially in countries facing scarcities of this precious resource which is becoming increasingly important in the face of climate change.

"The challenges are many, but the goal is very clear: to ensure the sustainable management of forest and water resources on the planet," said FAO Director-General Jose Graziano da Silva in his remarks at the IDF ceremony in Rome. "Promoting forest restoration and avoiding forest loss will require a significantly increased level of funding and innovative financing, including from private funds and traditional investors, in the coming years."

"FAO is committed to providing a neutral platform for negotiations and dialogue, to encourage greater interaction among all the parties working to achieve sustainably managed forests," he added.

Focus on improved monitoring

The programme kicks-off with a first focus on setting up a forest-water monitoring framework to help countries assess potential forest benefits in terms of water resources. This will involve developing a set of standardised monitoring indicators and field methods to identify which forest management interventions result in improved water quality and enhanced supplies. This data will be in turn used to develop better-informed practices and policies to unleash the full potential of forests in improving water supply.

The monitoring framework will be piloted in West Africa's Fouta Djallon Highlands, with field activities having kicked off this month. The project, funded by the Global Environmental Facility, is being jointly implemented by FAO, the [United Nations Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#) and [the African Union \(AU\)](#).

Forests and the water cycle

The water security of eight out of ten people in the world is under threat. Forests have an important role in providing and regulating water at the local and regional levels in a number of ways, from groundwater recharge and erosion control to promoting precipitation through evapotranspiration.

Forested watersheds and wetlands provide about 75 percent of the planet's freshwater resources, while over one third of the world's largest urban centres depend on protected forests for a significant proportion of their water.

In addition to boosting supplies, forests also maintain water quality: it is estimated that every \$1 spent on sustainable forest watershed management can save \$7.5 to \$200 in water treatment costs.

"The role of forests for water is becoming even more important in the face of climate change, with increased incidences of extreme climate events such as flooding and drought, and increased water insecurity," said FAO Assistant Director General of Forestry, René Castro. "The new programme that we've launched today aims to showcase that forestry is not always in competition with agriculture and urban development for water, but on the contrary can address water and food security issues and produce more resilient landscapes".

The International Day of Forests celebrates and raises awareness of the importance of all types of forests, and trees outside forests, for the benefit of current and future generations.

FAO also used the occasion of the day to highlight the major contribution of forests to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While SDG 15 addresses the need to sustainably manage forests and trees, forests also play a vital role in achieving those goals related to ending poverty, achieving food security, and ensuring sustainable energy, and in particular SDG 6 on providing clean water and sanitation.

TEDx Talk – Information: private property or public good?

On 15 February, Arthur Dahl gave a TEDx talk at the Institut National Polytechnique: École Nationale Supérieure d'Électrotechnique, d'Électronique, d'Informatique, d'Hydraulique et des Télécommunications (INP ENSEEIHT), Université de Toulouse, France, on the topic "Information: private property or public good?" The full series of TEDx talks that day in French can be seen on YouTube at TEDxINPENSEEIIHT. Arthur's talk is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gP4Kr2cYxdQ>. This article is the English translation of what he shared with the students in Toulouse with a few added quotes from the Bahá'í writings.

We are living in an information age, and corporations built on information technologies have become the wealthiest and most powerful in the world. But behind this is a fundamental problem that has not been properly debated. Should information be considered private property to be bought and sold, or a public good accessible to everyone like the air we breathe?

In 18th century England, the aristocrats decided to fence the pastures and make them their property, leaving peasants who formerly grazed their flocks there without resources. This was the privatization of the commons. Today we are experiencing a new privatization of the commons as knowledge and information that used to be freely available becomes the property of multinational corporations intent on managing it for maximum profit. With the medium of the new information technologies and social networks, we are all exploited to extract our information, which is assembled in "big data" without any benefit to us in return. On the contrary, our information is used to target us with the advertisements we will be most susceptible to, and the news that will reinforce our prejudices and confirmation biases.

This presents us all, and society in general, with an ethical challenge: where is the common good in all this? Two questions will illustrate the problem.

Is there a human right to access information, or is it normal that we have to pay for it? Perhaps we should distinguish between information to which we should have a right, such as news of the world, and other content, such as for entertainment that we should expect to pay for. And for those who cannot afford to pay for information, is it damaging for society that they do not have access? Inequality in access to information is as unjust as extremes of poverty and wealth.

"Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent.

Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone."
(Baha'u'llah)

Second, how should we reward the creators of information? Is profit the only motive for creation and innovation? What about scientific curiosity, the desire to help others or to advance civilization? Are we inherently selfish, or can altruistic motivations be more important? How do we encourage creation for the common good, for everyone's benefit? For individuals, an ethical education and spiritual motivation will be determinant. For corporations, which today are driven only by profit, we need to add a social motivation and responsibility to be of service to society. Profit should be one measure of efficiency among others, but not an end in itself.

A few cases will illustrate the problem. We have built a system for intellectual property rights, including patents, trademarks, and copyright, enshrined in national law and managed globally by the UN World Intellectual Property Organization. Patents are the foundation of modern industries, and are intended to make new discoveries public in exchange for a limited period (usually 20 years) of exclusive rights. There has always been a debate about whether intellectual discoveries should be considered property, and the WIPO tries to balance public and private interests. The system is legally cumbersome, with constant lawsuits that often benefit the biggest and richest, but it has serious drawbacks. For example, a poor sick person could be cured by a patented medicine, but he will die because it is priced to maximize dividends to the shareholders. For a new discovery that could improve the welfare of everyone, should we have to wait 20 years before all can benefit, while the rich enjoy it first?

Agriculture is an interesting case, because two parallel systems of innovation have existed since the mid-twentieth century. The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) coordinates research centers around the world that maintain seed banks for important crops and share seeds freely as they make crosses adapted to each

local situation. They were behind the green revolution of the 1970s that allowed India to go from a country of famines to a food exporter. Alongside this, the multinational agro-industries produce patented seeds, some with genetic engineering, adapted to their herbicides and other agricultural chemicals that they sell around the world for large-scale intensive agriculture, all designed to maximize their profits. In Canada, they so control prices that farmers are always close to bankruptcy, while all the profits of the agricultural sector are captured by corporate interests. Are monopoly monocultures or sustainable ecological diversity more in the common interest?

Even worse, with the new information technologies of remote sensing, drones and other instruments, the same multinationals can offer information services on the state of crops and the localized treatments needed. These help farmers to increase productivity, but all that information is captured by the corporations in big data that allows them to see the larger picture and to manipulate the whole agricultural system to maximize their profits, while farmers simply become passive consumers.

Another case is that of genetic information increasingly privatized by multinationals. For example the company that discovered certain mutations favouring breast cancer patented them, so that anyone wanting to know if they were carriers had to go to them for expensive testing. One woman whose results were inconclusive wanted a second opinion, but the company refused to give her the analyses, and only a long court case finally ruled that genes should not be patented.

Even access to scientific discoveries has largely been privatized, as the major journals have increasingly been bought up by multinational scientific publishers who protect everything by copyright and require payment to read each paper. Everything is available on line, but if you do not have access to an academic library that pays high subscription fees, you have to pay. I cannot even read my own publications, or those of my grandfather from a century ago, except for a high fee, up to \$50. Scientist in poor countries are thus excluded from access to much scientific information, except the too few open access journals.

Private property makes some sense for a scarce resource. If I eat a sandwich, you cannot eat it too. But information is not like that. It can be printed in a book (requiring payment for paper and printing but

readable by many people ever after), but also broadcast over radio waves or sent to a screen, at no cost increase for the number of users. In fact, information becomes more valuable the more it is shared, benefiting thousands or millions of people without diminishing the original information. With the internet, free access is universally possible as a public utility, although some companies would like to privatize it.

"A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvelous swiftness and perfect regularity." (Shoghi Effendi, 1936)

There are many benefits from the free access to information, from political transparency to health information and environmental warnings. It facilitates democracy and elections, and encourages public participation. It can also shed light on attempts to manipulate people, to incite hatred (as during the genocide in Ruanda), or even to wage cyberwarfare. It seems odd that the essential public service that journalism provides to keep us informed should largely be financed by advertising for things we do not need. The Guardian newspaper decided to make its articles freely available on line without ads, asking for contributions instead, and now receives more than it did from advertising.

"...in the sight of God knowledge is the greatest human virtue and the noblest human perfection. To oppose knowledge is pure ignorance, and he who abhors knowledge and learning is not a human being but a mindless animal. For knowledge is light, life, felicity, perfection, and beauty, and causes the soul to draw nigh to the divine threshold. It is the honour and glory of the human realm and the greatest of God's bounties. Knowledge is identical to guidance, and ignorance is the essence of error." ('Abdu'l-Baha)

What are some other options for rewarding innovation and the creation of information and knowledge? There are public subsidies and research grants, employment as researchers in universities or institutes, prizes for innovation, and crowd-sourcing. Even the present system of intellectual property could be modified to guarantee the free access to information and discoveries, with a requirement that any profits from the use of those discoveries be shared with the original creator.

From the perspective of system science, it is the exchange of information between the different components that allows the system to organize and function. The more highly evolved and productive a system is, the more developed and diversified are

its networks of communication and coordination. Limiting the circulation of information by privatizing it deprives the poor and slows the advance of our civilization.

Global biodiversity continues to decline, according to new reports from IPBES

<https://www.icsu.org/current/news/global-biodiversity-continues-to-decline-according-to-new-reports-from-ipbes>
March 23, 2018

At its meeting in Medellín, the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services released five new reports. Four cover biodiversity and ecosystem services in the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, Africa, as well as Europe and Central Asia. The fifth report is the world's first comprehensive evidence-based assessment of land degradation and restoration.



Photo: Iswanto Arif/Unsplash

In every region, with the exception of a number of positive examples where lessons can be learned, biodiversity and nature's capacity to contribute to people are being degraded, reduced and lost due to a number of common pressures – habitat stress; overexploitation and unsustainable use of natural resources; air, land and water pollution; increasing numbers and impact of invasive alien species and climate change, among others.

The extensively peer-reviewed IPBES assessment reports focus on providing answers to key questions for each of the four regions, including: why is biodiversity important, where are we making progress, what are the main threats and opportunities for biodiversity and how can we adjust our policies and institutions for a more sustainable future?

“Biodiversity and nature's contributions to people sound, to many people, academic and far removed from our daily lives,” said the Chair of IPBES, Sir Robert Watson, “Nothing could be further from the truth – they are the bedrock of our food, clean water and energy. They are at the heart not only of our survival, but of our cultures, identities and enjoyment of life. The best available evidence, gathered by the world's leading experts, points us now to a single conclusion: we must act to halt and reverse the unsustainable use of nature – or risk not only the future we want, but even the lives we currently lead. Fortunately, the evidence also shows that we know how to protect and partially restore our vital natural assets.”

The fifth report finds that worsening land degradation caused by human activities is undermining the well-being of two fifths of humanity, driving species extinctions and intensifying climate change. It is also a major contributor to mass human migration and increased conflict.

Download the Summaries for Policymakers for the four regional assessments and the report on land degradation:

Africa:	https://www.icsu.org/cms/2018/03/ipbes-6-l4_pdf_en.pdf
Americas:	https://www.icsu.org/cms/2018/03/ipbes-6-l5_pdf_en_finalx.pdf
Asia & Pacific:	https://www.icsu.org/cms/2018/03/ipbes-6-l2_pdf_en.pdf
Europe & Central Asia:	https://www.icsu.org/cms/2018/03/ipbes-6-l3_pdf_en_fi.pdf
Report on land degradation:	https://www.icsu.org/cms/2018/03/ipbes-6-l9_en.pdf
IPBES website:	http://www.ipbes.net

Story of Stuff: A Baha'i-inspired Program for Youth



by Christine Muller

<http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>

<https://storyofstuff.org/resources/bahai-inspired-program-for-youth/>

How are materialism and consumerism issues of justice? And how can we help our youth to understand the abstract concept of materialism and its numerous detrimental impacts?

We are excited to share with you the **Story of Stuff: A Baha'i-inspired Program for Youth**. These new study materials are based on the popular video *The Story of Stuff*. They help our youth cope with a culture of consumerism and to grow up to be responsible world citizens. The six session course assists young people to see the reality of the world we live in, reveals to them some of the many injustices underlying the old world order, and encourages them to respond in a spiritual way, to live with ethical principles, and to serve the common good.

The materials are based on the popular video *The Story of Stuff*, which literally explains the story of all the stuff we are using: Where does it come from? How was it produced, and at what cost to people and to the environment? Do we really need all that stuff? What happens to it after we throw it away?

The topics discussed in the course are tangible examples of exactly those issues raised by the Universal House of Justice in its *Comments on the Path to Economic Well-being* (1 March 2017).

The House reminds us to exemplify spiritual qualities such as contentment and moderation and then continues:

The forces of materialism promote a quite contrary line of thinking: that happiness comes from constant acquisition, that the more one has the better that worry for the environment is for another day. These seductive messages fuel an increasingly entrenched sense of personal entitlement, which uses the language of justice and rights to disguise self-interest. Indifference to the hardship experienced by others becomes commonplace while entertainment and distracting amusements are voraciously consumed. The enervating influence of materialism seeps into every culture, and all Baha'is recognize that, unless they strive to remain conscious of its effects, they may to one degree or another unwittingly adopt its ways of seeing the world.

The course materials aim to help youth to understand the abstract concept of materialism and put in practice the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

The Baha'i version of the course is based on the original Christian and Jewish editions. In addition to presenting the Baha'i perspectives, we have also made an effort to make the materials more user friendly. While the course lays out the Baha'i perspectives on the issue, it is interfaith in spirit and therefore lends itself especially well to be used with your wider community of interest.

Feel free to contact us for any questions that may arise or if you need assistance with the course at BahaiStoryofStuff@gmail.com. We are looking forward to your feedback and hope that many young people will enjoy the course.

Free online course on sustainable cities – just launched!

SDGAcademy@unsdsn.org

Half of the world's population currently lives in cities. These cities are collectively responsible for three-fourths of global economic output. As urbanization intensifies, how will urban communities be impacted by the global challenges and opportunities of sustainable development? In the SDG Academy course Sustainable Cities, explore the challenges currently faced by urban areas around the world – including poverty, unemployment, poor housing infrastructure, and constraints on productivity – and the extraordinary potential of these areas to enable change in the future. The course launched April 2, and learners can enroll anytime until the course end date. Enroll here: <http://bit.ly/citiescourse>

How do we sustainably feed the entire planet? Learn free of charge starting April 16

How do we ensure a healthy and sustainable diet for our growing world population? How should agriculture adapt – or stay the same – to support the Sustainable Development Goals? The free SDG Academy course Feeding a Hungry Planet: Agriculture, Nutrition and Sustainability, produced with the support of Rothamsted Research and Wageningen University, tackles these questions and more. In this course, you will take a deep dive into the agriculture sector, which is at the heart of issues such as food security, malnutrition, ecosystem management, and the responsible production and consumption of food. You'll also explore how food systems, technological advancement in food production, rural development, and more impact the mission of sustainably feeding the billions of people on our planet. Course content will be released starting April 16. Enroll here: <http://bit.ly/feedtheplanet>

What is resilience thinking for sustainable development? Free online course starts April 30

The term “resilience” is everywhere these days, from areas such as international development and humanitarian relief to urban planning and disaster management. Persistence in the face of challenges, adaptation to new realities, and transforming with fundamentally new paths for development are all means of resilience. And in sustainable development, these tools are imperative for understanding issues ranging from poverty to climate change. In Transforming Development: The Science and Practice of Resilience Thinking, learn how to apply the lens of resilience to the cross-cutting challenges raised by the Sustainable Development Goals. The course launches April 30, only at the SDG Academy. Enroll here: <http://bit.ly/T4devMOOC>

Justice

Justice is being fair in all that we do. We continually look for the truth, not bowing to others' judgments or perceptions. We do not backbite. We clear up problems face to face. We make agreements that benefit everyone equally. When we commit a wrong, we are honest in correcting it and making amends. If someone is hurting us, it is just to stop them. It is never just for strong people to hurt weaker people. With justice, we protect everyone's rights. Sometimes when we stand for justice, we stand alone.

"Thou shalt not be a victim. Thou shalt not be a perpetrator. Above all, thou shalt not be a bystander."
HOLOCAUST MUSEUM, WASHINGTON D.C.

The Practice of Justice

- I think for myself.
- I do not engage in prejudice or backbiting.
- I make fair agreements.
- I make restitution for my mistakes.
- I honor people's rights including my own.
- I have the courage to stand up for the truth.

*I am thankful for the gift of Justice.
It is the guardian of my integrity.*

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