



LEAVES, A Newsletter of the INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM  
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Article submission

[newsletter@iefworld.org](mailto:newsletter@iefworld.org)

Secretariat Email

[ief@iefworld.org](mailto:ief@iefworld.org)

Christine Muller, General Secretary

President Email

[ief@iefworld.org](mailto:ief@iefworld.org)

Arthur Lyon Dahl Ph.D.

Postal address 12B Chemin de Maisonneuve, CH-1219 Chatelaine, Geneva, Switzerland

**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](mailto: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.

**24th CONFERENCE OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM**

**Online International Conference on Education for Social Cohesion**

A virtual event on 11-12 July 2020  
organized from India

**Overview and Synthesis of Content**

For its 24th conference, the International Environment Forum partnered in the **Online International Conference on Education for Social Cohesion** organized by IEF member Lesan Azadi of the Bahá'í Academy in Panchgani, India, with many other partners. The Conference addressed various dimensions of social cohesion and the role that higher academic institutions and teachers can play in promoting the same. These dimensions included:

**Theme 1:** Social disparities and discrimination, racism, gender equality, prejudices, unbridled nationalism, religious strife;

**Theme 2:** Economic disparities, extremes of poverty and wealth, role of women in poverty alleviation, inclusive development, spiritual indicators of development;

**Theme 3:** Universal education and role of teachers in laying the foundation of a new world order.

Participants came from 37 countries and 24 states of India, 71 universities and 200 institutions of higher education, with 12 main speakers, 21 panelists and moderators, and 1,500 registered attendees. The main

presentations were followed by panels commenting on implementation and responding to questions from the audience. IEF President Arthur Dahl was a speaker, and IEF board member Victoria Thoresen a panelist.

A detailed 10-page report of the 8-hour conference with the names and backgrounds of all the speakers and summaries of their comments is available on the IEF website:

<https://www.iefworld.org/index.php/conf24>

Here is a brief **synthesis of the main points** made at the conference:

The present period of transition in the midst of a pandemic requires to build trust and overcome suffering. Obstacles include prejudice, religious fanaticism, gender inequality and economic disparities. We can see the symptoms of social dissolution in the 6.1 million victims of violence each year, the high divorce rate of more than half the marriages, and the 25 million refugees, half under the age of 18. Economic disparities mean that more than half the world population is poor, and 33,000 girls are child victims of early marriages every day.

One major obstacle to social cohesion is **prejudice**. One theory explains that stereotyping involves simple fixed beliefs about a group, overgeneralizing and ignoring differences. In social identity theory, group identity is important, with us and them, in-groups and out-groups. Self-image is enhanced by seeing the negative in others. Racism is a specific case of prejudice towards an ethnic group. Education can play an important role in realizing the oneness of humankind in its beautiful diversity.

**Gender justice** for social cohesion and peace-building should be a focus of humanities and social sciences education. Gender equality is not a zero-sum game but a win-win formula to liberate women and girls.

There should be courses on **human rights** throughout the system. The equality of everyone must be acknowledged without any distinction, as a source of motivation for social interactions. Human rights should be taught from an early formative age.

We must be conscious that the **disparity between rich and poor** has increased. People who have to fight hunger develop anger, and poverty leads to no education. We need a **new economic system** that is socially just, altruistic and cooperative, that provides meaningful employment, and eliminates extremes of wealth and poverty with a more equitable distribution of planetary resources.

The culture of **materialism** has spread around the world with moral and social consequences producing social dissolution: Inequality, joblessness, migration, a family crisis, individualism, self-aggrandizement, corruption, extremes of poverty and wealth, a culture of contest and competition. The result is a culture that is socially unjust and ecologically unsustainable. We need to redefine prosperity as more than money. Individuals would then prefer materially simpler lifestyles with a focus on knowledge, science, art, culture, beauty, and harmony with the natural world.

**Values** reflect the most fundamental level of individual development and social organization, and are the best leverage points for transformation. We can inculcate universal human values in society through education.

**Education** can build a society for all and foster both personal growth and social progress. Today's education is often narrowly focused on employment. We need more **interdisciplinary education** for peace, good citizenship, tolerance and social cohesion to transform society. Higher education in the sciences does not address values, requiring transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches. Science and religion need to be used hand in hand for sustainable development.

The heart of the effort should focus on **celebrating diversity** and promoting pluralism, building trust among all stakeholders, both between citizens and the state, and between citizens themselves.

If we look at the moral and spiritual aspects of civilization, we see cooperation, mutualism and unity in diversity that have worked for millennia. Past civilizations were like separate ships on the ocean; today we all occupy rooms on the same ship without a captain to set a course.

Global governance is required, with collaboration, not competition between countries. **Education can make people citizens of the world with universal values**. We need to cultivate a **vision that is world embracing** rather than confined to our own selves.

It is important to apply the principle of oneness not

just to humanity but with all of **nature** to achieve sustainable development.

**The purpose of education** is to provide a climate for nurturing values and forming character, recognizing that each child is a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. **The goal of education** should be to fulfill our human potential or purpose, including physical, social, intellectual and spiritual dimensions, and to contribute to the endless development of human consciousness. Each individual has potential to contribute to the wellbeing of the whole if properly developed, and the more such individuals are included, the greater the collective wealth and wellbeing of the whole. The collective potential of the whole human race is maximized when everyone is empowered to develop their skills and abilities in service to society.

The old ways do not provide answers for today and tomorrow. **Innovative educational practices** include learning by doing, activities and games, group work, interactive theatre and service learning activities to address real-life situations, foster personal growth and promote social harmony. Then students become leaders of a new kind. The arts and community service are essential for a good education, and service learning should become part of all courses. Social cohesion increases when people who do not know each other collaborate in service learning.

Two examples of innovative education were provided:

1. The **BARLI Institute** works with tribal women involving 6,000 girls in more than 500 communities. Using holistic practices, it empowers girls and shows them how to develop their selves and their community while also providing them with useful skills. It also trains men in empowerment, "we two" rather than "me too". The girls become entrepreneurs with a capacity to earn, such as with tailoring, using solar cookers for tea stalls or safe drinking water. This is integrated with moral principles for self-confidence, how to be happy

in the family and at peace, with improved health and natural birth control.

2. The **Interactive Art for Social Cohesion**. Since 1998 in Russia, and now in 66 countries, they have trained 3,000 animators in interactive theatre often called the Happy Hippo Show. Ethically-based situations are acted out up to a critical moment, when the action stops and the audience is asked how to resolve the situation, which is then acted to a conclusion. This promotes facilitated discussion of constructive solutions to everyday life situations by thinking independently in a safe environment. It highlights moral principles, the oneness of humanity and the importance of service. The brain is programmed for stories rather than data, and this provides a practical tool to help young people. It has been used successfully in conflict situations in Eastern Europe and Kosovo, Sudan and Darfur, often in collaboration with UNICEF.

**Teacher education** is a multiplier of social change. It can bring changes in social interactions and build the skills of communication, cooperation, critical thinking and alternative solutions, and improve peace-building, self-respect, tolerance, acceptance, and solidarity. Teachers need to be role models, putting values into practice.

Education should be **free and compulsory** for all, with special attention to the children now out of school. It should also lead to lifelong learning.

The pandemic has shown us that **we can change our ways** overnight if we want to.

**Social cohesion** is a process on a spectrum which cannot be taken for granted and must be promoted and worked for. This includes social interactions, integration of minority groups, and building social harmony with love, trust and admiration. We must build connected, resilient, united communities, especially involving the youth. Women must be fully involved in the life of the community. All this means that we must redefine communities centred on love, justice and unity in diversity.

The **recording of the conference** is available on YouTube at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBAxJqvGZvfaWwMI7-DYztA>

## Beyond measure: The heart of humanity's crisis

By Daniel Perell  
NEW YORK—19 Jun 2020

Humanity today is facing numerous deep-seated and intersecting crises. From overt and covert prejudice to a breakdown in trust, from extremes of wealth and poverty to a disregard for planetary boundaries, the manifold challenges before us may better be conceived of as various expressions of a more fundamental malady.

In addition to being a concern in its own right, COVID-19 has served as an accelerant for many persistent vulnerabilities at every level of society, vulnerabilities that have often remained hidden behind economic indicators such as GDP that overlook central questions of equity, sustainability, and resilience. It has highlighted the shortcomings of current responses in bringing about enduring change, and it has unveiled the limitations of dominant assumptions and attitudes about the nature of human existence—the way we approach care, the state of our physical environment, and the nature of our relationships with our planet and each other. What is becoming clearer amidst the unfolding uncertainties is that humanity has been focused on tending to the symptoms of an ailing order without sufficiently addressing the root causes.

Notions of progress grounded in material gain and profit, and a reluctance to explore a moral or, more explicitly, spiritual dimension of existence have become commonplace. This approach is the result of centuries of conditioning, a product of the unquestioned pursuit of material goods. For the majority of human history, this accumulation was a necessity for survival and, as a result, the tendency towards in-group and out-group competitive thinking became dominant. Yet doing so has produced an outlook too materialistic to meet our full spectrum of needs. In a world where, for the first time, there is sufficient material goods for all and the capacity to equitably distribute them, perpetuating an accumulation mentality has proven counterproductive, leading to deepening inequalities and greater crisis.

Only recently is the limit of this approach becoming clear. Like never before, crises are global, impacts are linked, systems are interconnected, and our destiny is shared. Keeping competition as the

driving force behind progress is limited in terms of what it can achieve. As interdependence increases, we are confronted with a question for which we do not have a clear answer: how are we to behave—personally, as communities, and as institutions—in an interconnected world that is so vastly different to anything we have experienced before?

The deeper crisis, beyond COVID-19, climate change, and others, lies in the attitudes and assumptions which determine our norms and standards. Until we are able to shift our thinking beyond accumulation as development, our social and institutional systems will remain inadequate to respond effectively to global challenges. The systems guiding humanity were devised based on an assumption that one's advantage must necessarily come at the expense of another—present circumstances and challenges were not, and could not be, envisioned.

One clear example is the focus on financial or economic profit as an indicator of success, which has led to the prioritizing of certain industries, valuable though they be, far over others. Even when well-intentioned, decades of perpetuating this model have demonstrated its obsolescence. Yet we keep insisting on it. This materialistic paradigm is shaping global policies that reinforce the way work has come to be valued. This has a profound deleterious impact on healthcare, education, social work, and domestic work among others. Policy priorities and quarterly earning goals do not align with humanity's best interests. This flawed assumption has left us all vulnerable to a multitude of shocks. As inequalities deepen in every corner of the globe, we see the limits to such an approach more clearly than ever.

The suddenness with which COVID-19 struck humanity has cast a light on longstanding vulnerabilities. What is unique to this moment is that it has the potential to expand our consciousness, to help us rethink our priorities, to gain an appreciation of humanity's shared identity, and, ultimately, to reorder our societies based on that understanding. Principles such as unity, solidarity, concern for collective as well as individual wellbeing, and reliance upon good science and accurate information are not the ancillary or "soft" dimensions of humanity's response to this or any crisis. They represent, in

fact, our greatest tools for they have the potential to rise above even the most broken of systems and set humanity on a course for true resilience—both in times of hardship and prosperity.

COVID-19 will be followed by more profound crises if we do not learn the lessons we are being taught about harmful social and cultural legacies—racial prejudice, gender inequality, and materialism to name a few. The true disease is not COVID-19. Nor is it the other symptoms of a struggling order. The

disease is an insistence on an approach that does not speak to the deeper needs of humanity at this moment in history. It is the retention and perpetuation of outworn habits, attitudes, and institutions. Let us engage in collective exploration of the root causes of our current problems as vigorously as we seek a vaccine. For while the latter can stave off the pandemic, the former can help us develop patterns of thought and action that will result in just systems and collective flourishing, even in the face of future calamities.

Daniel Perell is a Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations

**Source:** <https://www.bic.org/perspectives/beyond-measure-heart-humanitys-crisis>

## Forum on Religion and Ecology Appoints Baha'i to its Advisory Board

The Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE, <https://fore.yale.edu/>), led by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grimm in the Yale University School of the Environment, is a leading academic center for research and dialogue about ecology and all forms of spirituality. Its mission is to inform and inspire people to preserve, protect, and restore the Earth community. The religions of the world transmit ecological and justice perspectives in their scriptures, rituals, and contemplative practices as well as in their moral and ethical commitments. FORE seeks to identify those perspectives in the service of finding comprehensive and collaborative solutions to our global environmental crises. In this spirit, it cultivates dialogue within religious/spiritual communities and in partnership with scientists and policy makers.

The International Environment Forum has had a long relationship FORE and its founders. IEF president Arthur Dahl and Mary Evelyn Tucker were the two featured speakers at the public meeting of the Parliament of the World Religions in Barcelona in 2004. When FORE edited the Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology in 2017, they invited former IEF board member and representative for sustainable development of the Public Affairs Office of the American Bahá'í Community Peter Adriance, together with Arthur Dahl, to prepare the chapter on Bahá'í. This led to the section on the Bahá'í Faith on the FORE web site, recently updated again by Arthur Dahl (<https://fore.yale.edu/World-Religions/Bahai-Faith>). Now FORE has appointed Arthur as a member of its Advisory Board, with one function among others to mentor a young scholar in the field to join the next generation of leaders on this topic.

## Wilmette Institute Online Course on Sustainable Development and Human Prosperity

The Wilmette Institute has expanded its course *Sustainable Development and Human Prosperity* to meet the standards of a university course. Everyone will be welcome in this course, not only college students! The course will be offered September 10 – December 9, 2020. Look out for more details in our August newsletter. If you are interested in taking the course for credit, you may like to begin the process of application now. For more information go here: <https://wilmetteinstitute.org/courses/sustainable-development/>

## A Shift in Mind Sets: Faith-based Solutions to Climate Action Obstacles - Implementing Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement at the Grassroots

**Summary of the 13 July 2020 Symposium for the UN High-Level Political Forum**

From 7 – 16 July 2020, the UN High-Level Political Forum discussed the theme of "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development". At the UN an emerging Climate Working Group within the Committee of Religious NGOs (CRNGO), which includes the Baha'i International Community (BIC), organised a parallel event on 13 July with 56 participants from all over the world representing many different religions. The topic of this event was ***A Shift in Mind Sets: Faith-based Solutions to Climate Action Obstacles - Implementing Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement at the Grassroots.***

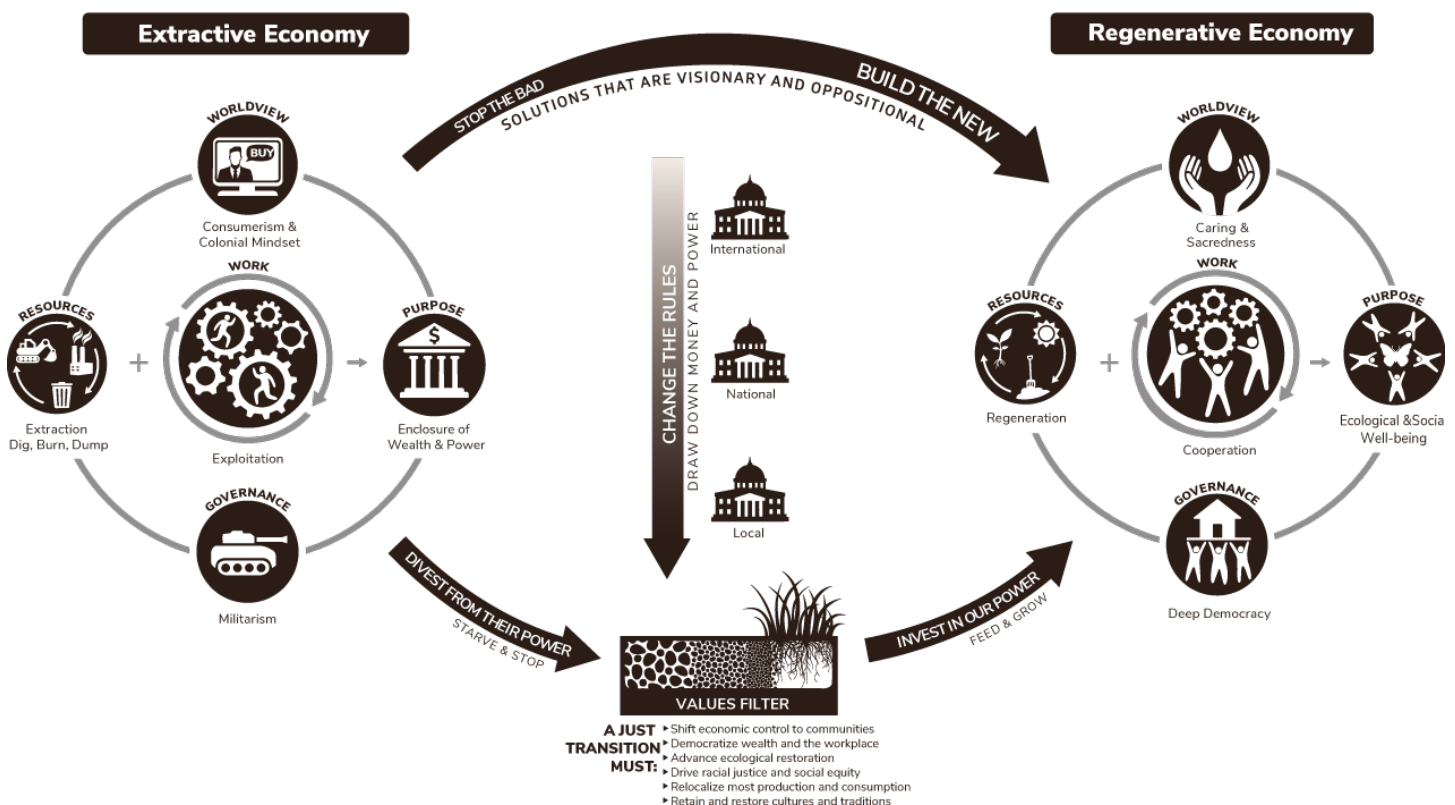
The [recording of the event is available here](#), and below is a brief summary.

**Mr. Gopal D. Patel**, director of the Bhumi Project, moderated the panelists and provided the setting for the conversation by emphasizing that ethics was at the heart of the climate change issue because the most vulnerable and marginalized people who contributed the least to global warming were suffering the most from climate change. He also reminded the participants of the extreme urgency of the issue by citing a recent study stating that the 1.5°C global warming target could be reached within the next five years. Patel then pointed out some major concerns: Disunity regarding climate action on the global level, a huge gap in necessary climate finances, and the rush to restart the economy.

**Ms. Huda Alkaff**, Founder and Director of [Wisconsin Green Muslims](#), highlighted the role of religion in helping people live in harmony with nature by quoting this excerpt from the Qu'ran:

*"... and God has set up the Balance (of Justice), in order that ye may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance: It is God Who has spread out the earth for all God's creatures." 55: 7-10*

She then elaborated on the importance of a just transition to a clean economy by introducing the [Just Transition Principles by the Climate Justice Alliance](#):



Ms. Alkaff also emphasized that access to solar energy was an issue of justice and that implementation of clean energy provided an opportunity for jobs, particularly for the training of women in the solar energy field.

**Rev. Susan Hendershot**, President of Interfaith Power & Light (IPL), elaborated on the three major areas of IPL's work:

1. Encouragement of personal actions (by lowering energy use and implementing clean energy),
2. Collective actions (through advocacy on local, state, and national levels), and
3. Voter mobilization.

Rev. Hendershot highlighted a few main points: lack of political will is the main obstacle to climate action at the necessary scale and speed; transition to a new economy needs to be centered on justice and equity; and faith speaks to the deepest values. She learned how to engage other faith leaders with climate action from her own experience being concerned about the problem of hunger. When she connected climate change with hunger, she became a climate activist. Rev. Hendershot encouraged the audience to bridge the conversation with faith leaders by connecting the dots between issues they were already concerned about, such as hunger or immigration, with climate change.

**Mr. Isaac Oindo**, youth representative in the Africa Coalition for Sustainable Energy and Access (ACSEA) Kenya chapter board, elaborated on several major challenges in Africa: Insufficient technology access, lack of finances especially for climate change adaptation, and insufficient capacity. Energy distribution is unbalanced, as many people do not have access to energy or cannot afford it. Also, rural to urban migration had caused high unemployment. However, biogas and briquettes as well as solar kiosks could provide jobs for young people.

Mr. Oindo closed his remarks by highlighting the successful Interfaith Youth Forum – Rise for Climate Justice under the umbrella of 350.org. Their campaign helped stop plans for the first coal-fired power plant in Kenya. Now, their campaign has moved to other parts of the continent that have planned to build coal plants.

**Dr. Iyad Abumoghli**, Founder and Director of the Faith for Earth Initiative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), was the last panelist. He pointed out the intersectional nature of the crisis; namely, dealing with a catastrophic loss of biodiversity, pandemic impacts on the health of both people and planet, and needing to come together as an interfaith community to address humanity's problems meaningfully and effectively.

He stated that Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals provided a clear road map for action, but he deplored the lag in achievement with only 23% of the goals on track and a lack of even basic data for 68% of them. Insufficient information was a key obstacle for achieving the goals. Another major obstacle was the political leadership of some major countries that blocked global unified action. Dr. Abumoghli also mentioned that religious statements such as *Laudato Si'* should become personal commitments. In addition, he felt that the lockdown could offer the potential to serve as a training/capacity building period, thereby providing an opportunity to build back better, to pursue alternative ways of gaining energy, and to improve manufacturing. The importance of unsustainable consumption cannot be overestimated. The deep values of religion are sorely needed in addition to a necessary behavioral revolution.

One of the highlights in the brief **Q&A section** was Ms. Alkaff's response to the question of what was needed to shift mindsets for effective climate action. She said that her community conducted climate conversations that focused on the heart, then engaged the mind, and then came back to the heart. This focus on the heart, she felt, was effective in changing people's mindsets.

**Overall, the symposium itself was an illustration of the power of religion to change hearts and bring people together from many different backgrounds so as to work for the betterment of the world.**

## Austin Bowden-Kirby and coral conservation

*An article in The Guardian 20 June 2020 and The Guardian Weekly of 26 June 2020, "Local tabu: an ancient ocean custom helps save reefs" acknowledges the life-long work on coral conservation of IEF member Austin Bowden-Kirby throughout the Pacific Islands and in Central America. With his help working with local communities, the ancient practice of tabu areas closed to fishing managed by local resource users has been revived and has been so successful that it has spread throughout Fiji, with 400 Locally Managed Marine Areas. Here is the whole article as it appeared in the Guardian:*

Mosese Vesikara and his uncle, Kinikoto Mailautoka, are on the reef collecting sea urchins for lunch. Beneath the shifting skiff, the swelling water is clear despite Fiji's bustling capital Suva sprawling along the next point, an easily walkable distance.

When out collecting Vesikara and the other fishers carefully skirt the tabu – pronounced TAM-bo – a no-fishing zone demarcated by barnacled pillars embedded into the reef floor.

These tabus are one tool of many for Fijian communities. Reintroduced to these waters after decades absent, they represent a return to traditional methods of reef and fishery management. The hope is that these traditional wisdoms, combined with modern science, can enable the growing village populations to subsist off the qoliqoli – fishing grounds – that they have for millennia.

Oblivious to the zoning, schools of electric blue fish thread through the beige and twinkling coral thickets below Vesikara's boat. The reef was not always so healthy.

In the late 90s throughout Fiji, and across the Pacific, fisheries hit crisis point. Colonial modes of management stressed centralisation, and commercial exploitation had overseen a steady decline in fish numbers.

"The fish were getting too small. The coral were dead because of the plastic pollution from Suva and the oil from boats," says Hemo Marvela, chairman of this marine protection area.

"You know the generation coming up. That's why we want to protect them. That's the only reason." As a result a renaissance of traditional community management techniques began, with responsibility for monitoring the health of the qoliqolis returned to the local communities that lived off them.

Austin Bowden-Kerby, a marine scientist who has spent a career in coral conservation in the Pacific and Central America, recalls how the idea of tabus was revived during a community consultation.

"There is one thing our grandfathers used to do that we haven't been doing – we would make a tabu area. We will mark the reef with sticks and a coconut leaf tied on it. And that means you cannot catch anything on that reef. That makes it sacred. For 40 or 50 years this had not been practised."

In Fijian tradition a tabu is the temporary closure of a section of a community's fishing ground for 100 days after a chief's death, before a memorial feast is held. The idea of the modern tabu is to extend that closure indefinitely.

And so, from this consultation, emerged a pilot of five permanent no-fishing areas.

"They said 'We are going to re-establish our culture,'" Bowden-Kerby says.

Word of the resulting increased catches spread from village to village. Today Fiji has a network of 400 communities known as the Fiji Locally Managed Marine Areas (FLMMA), which use customary management techniques that have often been ignored for decades.

Marvela is chair of a four-person committee that governs the Navakavu reef through the traditional chiefly system.

He says the reef is in robust health but there are still problems, in particular poachers. "They come at night – always at night. We want to reserve inside – where they [the fish] breed. These people are very smart but it's unfair."

The committee responsible for governing the reef's use struggles to monitor it. They had a boat to guard against poachers but it was stolen years ago. Marvela is fed up enough that he is looking to make Navakavu reef a gazetted marine protected area.



This means the police can be called on to stop poachers.

But it would also mean a government in Suva would again be managing their qoliqoli. Back at the village Vesikara and Mailautoka scoop out the sea urchin paste and eat them with sliced chilli and a squeeze of lemon. "These would cost about \$25 each down at Suva market," Mailautoka says.

With such a payoff, the allure – and risk – of poaching is obvious, and a shift in global tastes could spell fast devastation for the qoliqoli.

Already sea cucumbers, which clean and aerate the sands, have been fished to near extinction to satisfy the Asian market. Yet traditional wisdom reinforced by modern science could provide a bulwark to encroaching risks.

Perhaps then the lunch-pot might still be full for the next generation.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/20/cultural-tabu-how-an-ancient-ocean-custom-is-saving-fijis-reefs>

## **Professors should motivate students toward noble aims, high resolve, and intense endeavours**

by IEF Member Rafael Amaral Shayani,  
Professor of Electrical Engineering at University of Brasilia

The present pandemic has created a unique situation for all mankind and a challenge for professors of higher education such that they must adapt their classes when there is a lockdown. The world, as was known before, has changed, and professors' and students' attitudes must change too. This is the time to explore fundamental concepts and bold aspirations! Professors of higher education should not just transfer their regular lecture-based classes, where the professor is the main character, to the virtual environment. Instead, they should consider students, equipped with the knowledge that they have been learning at their university, as potential protagonists to explore new solutions that society demands.

Far from viewing the present period as simply a hiatus to be endured with patience, it is important to recognize that the state of the world has rendered the need for meaningful service to humanity more urgent. How can professors establish a link between the knowledge learned by students at university and the need for solutions to alleviate the suffering of society? Students are willing to learn this material.

A sense of extraordinary solidarity is being actively nurtured among souls sharing similar circumstances caused by the pandemic. A new awareness of social inequality has emerged, where we have realized that not everyone is capable of

protecting themselves from the Coronavirus. For example, how can communities that do not have a piped water supply wash their hands several times a day? In reality, engineering solutions are available to provide clean and renewable energy for pumping water. This is a practical application of the knowledge that engineering students learn in their coursework and which, when put into practice, can help save lives! For sure, students will study harder if professors can empower them with tools to change the world.

This is a time for noble aims, high resolve, and intensive endeavour. We must strengthen our resilience toward mighty challenges and make a constructive contribution to human affairs. Professors must make it possible for students to visualize the practical application of theory, so they will be able to propose solutions to new problems that are arising now. University education should not be an end in itself, but a better way to prepare each person to serve humanity. The motivation of each student should be to learn with dedication and joy.

All students should be encouraged to think from this perspective and to become engaged with renewed motivation in their assignments. The focus should always be to try and associate the content taught with a practical application that can contribute to the betterment of the world. This should also be the primary reason for the exchange of ideas between professors and students during the Coronavirus crisis and on into the future.

Society requires new ideas on how to restart activities in a more fair, humanitarian, and sustainable way. For sure, the innovative ideas of the new generation of professionals, the current university students, will be very important in

shaping the future. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), the son of the prophet founder of the Baha'i Faith, said: "Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind".

A slightly different Portuguese version of the above article appeared previously on the University of Brasilia web site.

## Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020

*The annual [Sustainable Development Goals Report](#) provides an overview of the world's implementation efforts to date, highlighting areas of progress and areas where more action needs to be taken to ensure no one is left behind. Below you find the Executive Summary, pp. vi - vii*

For the online Executive Summary with graphics go to <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/cac7505de9974f8c99b532071042d6dd>

For a recording of the launching on the Report on 1 July, go here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFrObr5vp5w> (1h 34min)

**Covid-19 will have severe negative impacts on most SDGs.** The world is facing the worst public health and economic crisis in a century. As of June 20th, 2020, around 463,000 people had died from Covid-19 across the world. The health crisis is affecting all countries, including high-income countries in Europe and North America. The necessary measures taken to respond to the immediate threat of Covid-19, including the shutdown of many economic activities for weeks, have led to a global economic crisis with massive job losses and major impacts especially on vulnerable groups. This is a significant setback for the world's ambition to achieve the SDGs, in particular for poor countries and population groups. The only bright spot in this foreboding picture is the reduction in environmental impacts resulting from declines in economic activity: a key objective will be to restore economic activity without simply restoring old patterns of environmental degradation. However, all long-term consequences of the pandemic remain highly uncertain at this point.

**All countries need to strengthen the resilience of their health systems and prevention programs.** Some countries have outperformed others in containing the pandemic, yet all remain at serious risk. No country has attained so-called herd immunity; all remain highly vulnerable to new outbreaks. In line with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), all countries need to "Strengthen the capacity for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks." The Covid-19 pandemic has shed considerable light on the vulnerability of health systems, notably in high-income countries that were thought best prepared to face epidemics. Besides greater investments, this crisis shows that better measures and reporting are needed to track prevention programs, healthcare system preparedness, and resilience to pandemics.

**The SDGs and the Six SDG Transformations can inform the recovery from Covid-19.** As the international community, regional organizations, and countries plan the post-Covid-19 recovery, it will be important to put the SDGs at the heart of policymaking. Covid-19 does not resolve the climate and biodiversity crises, and it is gravely amplifying income inequalities and other forms of inequality. It has also shown us that countries will only be able to protect themselves from global pandemics if health systems are strengthened in every country. The SDR2020 shows that significant progress has been achieved in many regions and on many goals over the past five years. Here we describe how the SDGs and the six SDG Transformations (Sachs et al., 2019a) can guide the immediate post-crisis recovery and frame long-term strategies towards more resilient and sustainable societies.

**Asian countries have made the most progress towards the SDGs since the adoption of the goals in 2015. Asian countries have also responded most effectively to the Covid-19 outbreak.** While the world as a whole has made progress on the SDGs, countries in East and South Asia in particular have progressed the most in terms of their SDG Index score. Countries in this region have also managed the Covid-19 outbreak

more effectively than in other parts of the world. While the situation is still evolving, the shift of the geopolitical and economic global center of gravity from the North Atlantic region to the Asia-Pacific region is likely to be accelerated by the crisis.

**Solidarity and partnerships are critical to address and prevent health, economic, and humanitarian crises.** Globalization and the destruction of wildlife habitats facilitate the rapid spread of viruses around the world. Yet rather than losing the vast benefits that globalization offers for economics, poverty reduction, technological advance, and the enjoyment of each other's cultures, it is important instead to make globalization more fair, sustainable, and resilient to shocks. Concerted international action by policymakers, business, civil society, and the scientific community can accelerate the identification of solutions to the immediate crisis and strengthen globalization for the long term. Stronger international and multi-sectoral partnerships can support mitigation strategies by sharing best practices, and help prevent future disruptive events. The health, economic, and social crises call for increased international collaboration and solidarity to support the most vulnerable countries.

Data gaps and time lags in official statistics require urgent investments in statistical capacity and increased coordination between governments and the private sector. The pandemic has taught us once again the value of real-time information, and the enormous costs of flying blind into a storm. Early detection of Covid-19 outbreaks can make all the difference between suppression of the pandemic and a full-scale outbreak. The same is true across many SDG indicators, where timing matters enormously to save lives, ecosystems, and effective governance. This year's edition of the SDG Index and Dashboards cannot integrate the impact of Covid-19 on the SDGs due to time lags in official statistics and reporting. This illustrates how crucial timely and disaggregated data are across the SDGs. Major efforts should focus on increasing data availability and reducing time lags in official statistics, and on leveraging the wealth of real-time data available from non-traditional sources,