



**LEAVES, A Newsletter of the  
INTERNATIONAL  
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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](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.

### **21<sup>st</sup> IEF International Conference and General Assembly de Poort, The Netherlands, 14-17 April 2017**

As previously announced, the International Environment Forum is partnering with the Justice Conference in de Poort, The Netherlands, on 14-17 April, for its annual conference (see <https://iefworld.org/conf21>). The theme of the Justice Conference is "From Disintegration to Integration: navigating the forces of our time". The conference will start at 15:00 on Friday 14 April, and end at noon on Monday 17 April. The IEF contribution to the programme will be the following workshop: "Environmental Changes as forces for disintegration and integration."

The annual General Assembly of IEF will be held on Saturday evening 15 April at 20:30 CET, when the election of the IEF Governing Board for the next year will take place. All IEF members will soon be receiving the Annual Report and election call, with information on how to vote electronically for the Governing Board, so even those who cannot be present can still participate in the life of IEF. We shall also try to arrange for those members who are interested to follow and participate in the General Assembly over the Internet via Skype or another platform. If you would like to be included, please send a message to [info@iefworld.org](mailto:info@iefworld.org) with your Skype address. Depending on the numbers, we shall see what platform may be the most efficient, and inform all those signed up accordingly.

### **Social Conditions and Economics**



A summary and commentary on the Message of 1 March 2017 from the Universal House of Justice by Arthur Lyon Dahl

A significant new message from the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice, dated 1 March 2017, contains many perspectives relevant to the work of the

International Environment Forum. The following summary and commentary extract some points that are of general relevance, apart from sections addressed specifically to the Baha'is of the world.

The first theme is a diagnosis of the illnesses represented by the social conditions of so many people, blighted by inequity, discrimination and exploitation, leading to the prolonged suffering of so many, with economic impacts from deep-seated, structural defects in society.

The message goes on: "The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity's collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours' or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected. A stubborn obstruction, then, stands in the way of meaningful social progress: time and again, avarice and self-interest prevail at the expense of the common good.

Unconscionable quantities of wealth are being amassed, and the instability this creates is made worse by how income and opportunity are spread so unevenly both between nations and within nations. But it need not be so.... There is no justification for continuing to perpetuate structures, rules, and systems that manifestly fail to serve the interests of all peoples."

### **The forces of materialism**

It is the prevailing modes of thought, reflecting the forces of materialism that are at fault. These include the common assumptions that happiness comes from constant acquisition, the more one has the better, and 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, and entertainment and distracting amusements are voraciously consumed.

The enervating influence of materialism seeps into every culture. Unless you strive to remain conscious of its effects, you may to one degree or another unwittingly adopt its ways of seeing the world. The message warns that even very young children absorb the norms of their surroundings. For junior youth, the call of materialism grows more insistent. Adulthood brings a responsibility not to allow worldly pursuits to blind one's eyes to injustice and privation. We need to see past the illusions that, at every stage of life, the world uses to pull attention away from service and towards the self, and manage our material affairs in keeping with the divine teachings.

The extremes of wealth and poverty in the world are becoming ever more untenable, and unconscionable quantities of wealth are being amassed, while income and opportunity are spread so unevenly, deepening the fractures that affect societies large and small.

### **The moral dimension**

There is an inherent moral dimension to the generation, distribution, and utilization of wealth and resources. The vision of Baha'u'llah challenges the materialistic assumptions that self-interest, far from needing to be restrained, drives prosperity, that progress depends upon its expression through relentless competition, and that the worth of an individual depends chiefly on how much one can accumulate and how many goods one can consume relative to others. The message insists that wealth must serve humanity and be used in accordance with spiritual principles. "No light can compare with the light of justice. The establishment of order in the world and the tranquility of the nations depend upon it." (Baha'u'llah)

### **The reorganization of human society**

The only solution is the reorganisation of human society, starting with the individual. Collective prosperity can be advanced through justice and generosity, collaboration and mutual assistance. Every choice one makes—as employee or employer, producer or consumer, borrower or lender, benefactor or beneficiary—leaves a trace, and the moral duty to lead a coherent life demands that one's economic decisions be in accordance with lofty ideals, that the purity of one's aims be matched by the purity of one's actions to fulfil those aims. We can all make our own individual and collective contributions to economic justice and social progress wherever we

reside. Every local community has the responsibility to find ways of addressing the root causes of the poverty in its surroundings.

### **The spiritual reality of man**

At the most fundamental level, the message reaffirms the spiritual reality of humanity, and the nobility inherent to every human being.

Economic life is an arena for the expression of honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, generosity, and other qualities of the spirit. The individual is not merely a self-interested economic unit, striving to claim an ever-greater share of the world's material resources. The message quotes Baha'u'llah: "Man's merit lieth in service and virtue, and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches." "Dissipate not the wealth of your precious lives in the pursuit of evil and corrupt affection, nor let your endeavours be spent in promoting your personal interest." By consecrating oneself to the service of others, one finds meaning and purpose in life and contributes to the upliftment of society itself. Contentment and moderation, benevolence and fellow feeling, sacrifice and reliance on the Almighty are qualities that befit the God-fearing soul.

### **The higher purpose of economic activity**

The message concludes by emphasizing the higher purpose of economic activities, that ordinary economic activities have the potential to add to human welfare and prosperity. It quotes the son of the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, 'Abdu'l-Baha: "Every person must have an occupation, a trade or a craft, so that he may carry other people's burdens, and not himself be a burden to others." "Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts... in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes." "Wealth is most commendable provided the entire population is wealthy."

While the focus of the message is on economic activity and the tribulations that a conflicted world must confront in the future, it is significant from an IEF perspective that it emphasises the suffering that comes from pursuing economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected, or from the thinking that worry for the environment is for another day. Only a transformation of the economic system will remove the pressures so destructive to the environment today.

For more extensive excerpts of general interest on economics from the message, go to [Social Conditions and Economics](#) on the statements page of the IEF web site.

## **"The Story of Stuff" for Baha'i Youth**

Submitted by Christine Muller

We are excited to share with you new study materials for Baha'i Junior Youth on the popular video The Story of Stuff at <http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>.

This six session course is a grassroots effort to provide supplemental materials to the Ruhi Junior Youth Empowerment Program addressing the specific needs of youth in the industrialized world. There is a tremendous need to help our youth cope with a culture of consumerism and to help them grow up to be responsible world citizens. The 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.

This link will bring you to all the materials of the course, the Introduction and the Lesson Plans for Sessions 1 to 6: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0BwY9hsngOdVGZnZpZFdGZmp1Vk0>

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 of Economic Well-being (1 March 2017) (download at <https://app.box.com/s/17h33xnfri9ok2friqvokgur7tue8xp6>). The Story of Stuff illustrates how our world is interconnected and sheds light on "the social conditions of every people" and "their circumstances". 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 acquisitions; that the more one has the better; and 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 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 which can be found at <http://storyofstuff.org/resources/>. 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.

This is the first edition of the course. We are asking you to help spread the word about it. When you use it, please, provide us with feedback. What worked and what didn't? How would you like to see the course improved? We invite feedback from youth, facilitators, youth animators, parents, teachers, and others by the end of July 2017. We will then review and improve the course and send it to the people of the *Story of Stuff* website where it will be published and accessible to everyone. Once published on their website along the Christian and Jewish versions, we hope that the course will also contribute to meaningful public discourse. Feel free to contact us for any questions that may arise or if you need assistance with the course at [BahaiStoryofStuff@gmail.com](mailto:BahaiStoryofStuff@gmail.com). We are looking forward to your feedback and hope that many young people will enjoy the course.

## Environmental fasting



Submitted by Charles Boyle

From 1-19 March is the 19 day period of fasting for the Baha'i community during which we avoid eating and drinking etc. between sunrise and sunset. The mild discomfort this produces can be thought of as a little companion running alongside you through the day as a reminder to attend to spiritual attitudes and habits and to make the appropriate adjustments (you can't manage what you don't measure).

Each year, my wife and I also undertake elements of environmental fasting: we use the same daily mechanism of reminder to reduce our power and water consumption, minimizing waste and unnecessary packaging, eating food produced as locally as possible and using public transport where possible. We minimize our shopping and seek to use up what we have in the house playing "pantry bingo" - creating recipes from whatever comes to hand. Thus we might become better aware of both our spiritual and environmental habits, and can make appropriate adjustments.

We also then come to appreciate the advantages we have by way of running water and sanitation, heating and lighting, food security and accessibility which serves to strengthen a willingness to respond to the needs of those without as well as the impact we have on the planet thus making it a spiritually meaningful and environmentally beneficent time.



## The Ocean Conference, 5-9 June 2017, New York

<https://oceanconference.un.org/>

The high-level United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development will be convened at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 5 to 9 June 2017, coinciding with World Oceans Day, to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14. The Governments of Fiji and Sweden have the co-hosting responsibilities of the Conference.

The Conference aims to be the game changer that will reverse the decline in the health of our ocean for people, planet and prosperity. It will be solutions-focused with engagement from all.

The Conference shall:

- Identify ways and means to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14;
- Build on existing successful partnerships and stimulate innovative and concrete new partnerships to advance the implementation of Goal 14;
- Involve all relevant stakeholders, bringing together Governments, the United Nations system, other intergovernmental organizations, international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions the scientific community, the private sector, philanthropic organizations and other actors to assess challenges and opportunities relating to, as well as actions taken towards, the implementation of Goal 14;
- Share the experiences gained at the national, regional and international levels in the implementation of Goal 14;
- Contribute to the follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by providing an input to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, in accordance with resolutions 67/290 of 9 July 2013, 70/1 of 25 September 2015 and 70/299 of 29 July 2016, on the implementation of Goal 14, including on opportunities to strengthen progress in the future;

The Conference shall comprise plenary meetings, partnership dialogues and a special event commemorating World Oceans Day.

The Conference shall adopt by consensus a concise, focused, intergovernmentally agreed declaration in the form of a "Call for Action" to support the implementation of Goal 14 and a report containing the co-chairs' summaries of the partnership dialogues, as well as a list of voluntary commitments for the implementation of Goal 14, to be announced at the Conference.

The President of the General Assembly convened a two-day preparatory meeting, on 15-16 February 2017, at United Nations Headquarters in New York, chaired by H.E. Mr. Alvaro Mendonça Moura, Permanent Representative of Portugal to the UN, and H.E. Mr. Burhan Gafoor, Permanent Representative of Singapore to the UN, the two co-facilitators, with a view to considering the themes for the partnership dialogues and elements for a "Call for Action".

Mr. Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations is the Secretary-General of the Conference. Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel is the special advisor to the Presidents of the Conference on oceans and legal matters.

## Closing gender gaps essential to sustainable development

<http://web.unep.org/stories/story/closing-gender-gaps-essential-sustainable-development>



This year International Women's Day theme – *Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030* – is putting the spotlight on the gender pay gap, which has slid backwards in terms of progress:

According to World Economic Forum's 2016 Global Gender Gap Index, South Asia is projected to close their gender gap in 46 years, Western Europe in 61 years, Latin America in 72 years and

Sub-Saharan Africa in 79 years. Globally, it would take us another 170 years to achieve gender pay parity. None of those timelines suit the very specific targets and broader goals set out in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, which the world's governments agreed on in 2015.

Humanity has 14 years to steer a course for sustainable, equitable development as spelled out in the 17 goals, with gender featuring in many of the targets that refine those goals.

### Improving the lives of rural women in developing countries

In developing countries, agriculture remains the most important source of employment for women in low-income and lower-middle-income countries, and a vast majority of this is subsistence agriculture.

In Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, over 60 per cent of women are employed in agriculture, often in time and labour-intensive activities, which are unpaid or poorly remunerated.

This is significant in sub-Saharan Africa, where women comprise 30 to 80 per cent of the agricultural labour force, yet produce about 4 to 25 per cent less in the value of agricultural produce per unit of cultivated land than their male counterparts.

The gender gap in agricultural productivity exists because women often have unequal access to crucial agricultural inputs such land, labour, knowledge, fertilizer and improved seeds. This has implications for the income, health and nutrition of both women and children.

In these contexts, relatively simple interventions can make big differences to the lives of women, including providing them greater income security, giving them more time to devote to income-generating activities and community leadership.

Women from Sengerema district in Northern Tanzania, on the edges of the magnificent Lake Victoria, have discovered precisely this. The installation of biogas plants and modern cook stoves in 10 households has brought significant changes to their lives.

The biogas installations are fed with animal and human waste, and provide energy for household cooking, heating and lighting.

"I use the waste from the biogas to grow crops around the homesteads, which has led to increased agricultural productivity and enhance income generation," Maama, an elderly lady from Nyampande village, explained. With bio-slurry applied to the fields, soil fertility and agricultural outputs are on the rise while the application of chemical fertilizers is reducing. This is good news for the environment and boosts food security and income for poor households.

If scaled up, the intervention could contribute to closing Tanzania's gender gap in agricultural productivity. This gap is estimated to cost the country \$105 million every year. If bridged, 80,000 people could be lifted out of poverty and 80,000 more adequately nourished, while crop production could increase by at least 2 per cent.

The joint Poverty-Environment Initiative of UN Environment and UNDP, which supported the installation of biogas plants and 10 cook stoves, works closely with research institutions, civil society organizations and district councils in Tanzania to document the experiences and use these to inform the integration of poverty, environment and gender linkages in development plans and budgets.

These efforts are part of a larger effort to support the Government of Tanzania's interest in scaling up pilot projects to further local economic development.

Recognizing the positive impacts of renewable energy, the country's new National Five Year Development Plan (NFYDP II) aims to promote renewable green energy technologies including biogas.

The plan involves evaluating local development initiatives like the Sengerema project to examine how they can be further replicated.

In the meantime, the project has already been attracting interest from neighbouring farmers, who have been inspired to install their own biogas plants after watching the pilot programme's beneficiaries reap a host of other benefits, too.

The women saw their health improve immediately, the eye infections and coughs caused by conventional cook stoves' smoke disappearing. And because they spend less time foraging for fuel wood, they're less exposed to sexual violence.

Women and children say the stoves saved them more than three hours a day to gather fuel wood, which they can now devote to income-generating activities, such as agriculture, or community work, recreation and going to school.

This was in part due to a surprising change in gender roles, too, because the new devices made cooking easier.

"Boys are now participating in cooking, unlike in the past, which has given me ample time to participate in women group initiatives," said 60-year-old Bibi from Nyampande village.

### **Getting to gender equality needs much more work in all areas**

Many projects and initiatives around the world aim to empower women, reduce their vulnerability, ensure their inclusion in decision-making, and advocate for them to be remunerated for their current "unpaid labour". Yet fundamental, long-standing gender gaps continue to exist in both developed and developing countries across the world. These range from lack of access to social protection to the lack of women in leadership positions.

It is estimated that economic gender parity would add an additional \$240 billion to the GDP of the United Kingdom and \$2.5 trillion to that of China by 2020, and that East Asia and the Pacific stop losing between \$42 billion and \$47 billion annually due to women's limited access to employment opportunities.

"Men also benefit from gender equality and women's empowerment. Having two incomes in a household reduces pressure on the traditional economic provider and men should also have the opportunity to be at home with the children. It is about changing mindsets," said Regional Adviser, UN Environment Moa Westman, who manages projects under the joint Poverty-Environment Initiative.

Given the urgency and magnitude of the global challenges that face the world, we must do better at harnessing the leadership, ability and aptitude of women, recognizing their unpaid care and domestic work, and ensuring gender-responsive economic policies for job creation, poverty reduction and sustainable, inclusive growth.

## Women in Agriculture: The Agents of Change for the Global Food System



<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/03/07/women-in-agriculture-the-agents-of-change-for-the-food-system>

Photo: Dasan Bobo/World Bank      March 7, 2017

Using climate-smart agriculture techniques, Mercy Wairimu has expanded her poultry farm in Kenya into a thriving, sustainable business. The extra profits enable her to send her three children to school and university.

Women are the backbone of the rural economy, especially in developing countries. They make up almost half of the world's farmers, and over the last few decades, they have broadened their involvement in agriculture. The number of female-headed households has also increased as more men have migrated to cities. As the primary caregivers to families and communities, women provide food and nutrition; they are the human link between the farm and the table.

As the global community works toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) -- among them, SDG2, which aims to end hunger and malnutrition by 2030 -- women can be the key agents of change in agriculture, nutrition and rural development. With better access to information, training, and technology, women can alter food production and consumption so that land and resources are used sustainably.

For International Women's Day, the World Bank is shining a spotlight on women who exemplify this year's theme: #BeBoldForChange. In field visits and projects, we have met women who *are* the change agents in their villages and communities. Whether they work on a farm or in a lab, women around the world are transforming agriculture to be more resilient and sustainable.

### Kenya

Thanks to training programs that teach climate-smart farming practices, Kenyan farmers like Mercy Wairimu and Catherine Akinyi Owiti have been able to expand their farms into thriving, sustainable businesses. Wairimu has been a poultry farmer for 10 years. "I used to have a few small indigenous chickens here and there, running around my compound," she explains. "But then the Kenya Agricultural Productivity and Agribusiness Project (KAPAP) came. It expanded my mind and my business. I now have 1,000 birds." With the profits from her farm, Wairimu is able to send her three children to school and university.

Owiti chairs a women's group that manages a farm where the community comes to learn climate-smart farming techniques that increase their harvests and their resilience to a changing climate. At her own personal quarter-acre farm, the mother of five now produces six times more food than before by using climate-smart techniques.

### Samoa

Two out of every three Samoans work in the agricultural sector, rearing livestock, growing crops, or a combination of both. After a large drop in the country's calving rate, new cattle were imported to boost numbers and improve the genetics of Samoa's livestock. Agnes Meredith, Chief Veterinary Officer at the Ministry of Agriculture of Samoa helped managed the project, which was the first time ever that cattle have been flown in from Australia "I think [this project] is going to boost the calving rate up to 60 or 80%, hopefully in the next five years," said Agnes Meredith. "We're making progress and this is a new start, getting these cattle in. It's really good for our farmers."



## Bolivia

Rozzana Medina has managed the laboratory of in vitro culture at Bolivia's National Institute for Agricultural Innovation and Forestry (INIAF) for almost ten years. Her lab stores the entire collection of Bolivian Andean tubers, among other crops. "We women show equal or even better capabilities for agricultural research compared to our male counterparts when we have the opportunity," says Medina. "Increasing the numbers of women at INIAF will enrich the work of the institution."

## Benin

In Benin, Eugénie Faïzoun manages a multipurpose farm that is innovating agricultural and fish farming practices. With 21 years of experience, Faïzoun is renowned for her expertise in fish farming, and she works with several institutions to train future fish farmers. "I have already trained 227 individuals under projects financed by Japan and the World Bank," she says. Faïzoun, who also chairs the *Union régionale des coopératives de pisciculteurs de l'Atlantique*, recently launched a project to expand her production facility.

## Senegal

"I am not a farmer myself, but I come from a region where farming is very important and employs many women," says Fatoumata Bineta Diop, a coordinator for Senegal's National Board of Women in Livestock Farming. Through events and training programs, Diop works to attract young women and men to jobs in the agriculture sector. "It is important that older generations of farmers pass down their knowledge to new ones, and that new generations bring additional knowledge and techniques to keep the sector alive and profitable."

## Côte d'Ivoire

Fufu, a starchy dish often made with cassava and plantain flour, is a staple food in Côte d'Ivoire and other West African countries. Gnagne Hadiouwe Eliane, a biochemist at the Université d'Abobo-Adjamé recently invented a banana plantain flour for making fufu that has a longer shelf-life than others, is safe to eat and easier to cook. Eliane is just one of many agricultural scientists in West Africa working to develop new technologies and techniques to boost agricultural productivity and food and nutrition security.

## 'Great world war for water' may be looming, Pope Francis says



<https://www.rt.com/news/378581-pope-francis-water-war/>  
February 25, 2017 RT (Reuters News)

Water scarcity may cause conflict and the whole globe may be on its way to a great world war over water, Pope Francis has warned, adding that the situation is very "urgent."

*"The right to water is essential for the survival of persons and decisive for the future of humanity,"* Pope Francis said during a meeting with international experts participating in a 'Dialogue on Water' at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on February 24, as cited by [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).

*"All people have a right to safe drinking water,"* he said, adding *"I ask [myself] if in this piecemeal third world war that we are living through, are we not going toward a great world war for water?"*

Pope Francis said that the figures on water published by the United Nations cannot leave the world indifferent. *"Every day, a thousand children die of illness linked to water and contaminated water is consumed by millions of people every day... This situation must be stopped and reversed. Fortunately, this is not impossible, but it is urgent,"* the pontiff said, as cited by ANSA news agency.

A February 2017 report from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) states that *"groundwater sources are being depleted rapidly,"* citing *"water scarcities"* as one of the major problems.

*"Mankind's future ability to feed itself is in jeopardy due to intensifying pressures on natural resources, mounting inequality, and the fallout from a changing climate,"* it said.

In 2016, UN Water released a report saying that about 663 million people *“lack ready access to improved sources of drinking water, while the number of people without reliable access to water of good enough quality to be safe for human consumption is at least 1.8 billion.”*

Since Catholic cardinals elected him as pope in March 2013, Pope Francis has become known for his liberal approach and emotional, caring statements that reach out to the poor and sexual minorities.

In 2015, Pope Francis warned that those harming the environment and the *“powerful of the earth”* will face the wrath of God if they don't protect the environment and make sure everyone has enough to eat.

During a UN summit in 2015, he stated that helping the poor and excluded is part of saving the planet. Without referring to any specific countries or individuals, the pontiff blasted a *“selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity,”* leading to *“both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and disadvantaged.”*

### **Climate change major driver of conflict, hunger: UN Secretary General in Nairobi**

<http://web.unep.org/stories/story/climate-change-major-driver-conflict-hunger-un-secretary-general-nairobi>  
March 9, 2017



Climate change is the biggest “mega trend” endangering millions of lives across the planet, and UN Environment has a key role to play in building resilience and helping people and nations to adapt.

This was the message put forward yesterday by newly appointed UN Secretary-General António Guterres in an address to UN Environment's governing body in Nairobi, Kenya.

On the back of a visit to see the devastating effects of climate change and conflict in Somalia, which faces its third famine in 25 years, Mr Guterres spoke to UN Environment's Committee of Permanent Representatives and emphasized the link between their work on the environment and peace, security, sustainable development and human rights.

“We are seeing a tremendous change in the capacity of entire regions of the world to sustain human life”, Mr Guterres said, while highlighting UN Environment's global perspective and achievements in creating the conditions needed for communities and societies to become more resilient.

“[This] will only be possible if we can tame climate change and other factors that make competition for resources a key factor for destabilization,” added Mr Guterres.

A significant milestone of progress toward this goal will be made in December, when the UN's 193 member states and other key stakeholders will meet in Nairobi for the Environmental Assembly – the world's highest-level decision making body on the environment – to discuss environmental “mega trends” and how to move toward a pollution free world.

### **Stark pictures show a ravaged land and desperate people as Somalia and East Africa face new famine**

<http://web.unep.org/stories/story/stark-pictures-show-ravaged-land-and-desperate-people-somalia-and-east-africa-face-new-famine>  
March 8, 2017



*Pastoralists in the Ufeyn region of Puntland are walking further and further to find water for their livestock.*

*Photo: @WFP/K Dhanji*

Somalia is facing its third famine in 25 years. As crops fail and livestock collapse, people are already recalling with fear the famine of 2011 when nearly 260,000 people died. This time, more than 6 million – or around

half the total population – are in need of aid.

“People are dying. The world must act now to stop this,” said Secretary General António Guterres in a tweet shortly after arriving in the capital Mogadishu to see the situation first hand.

The drought is a major priority for Somalia’s incoming and first democratically elected government and is unfolding amid widespread poverty and long-term internal conflict.



*One of the last camels left alive after drought sweeps a pastoralist community in Yadan Yobil, Puntland.*

*Photo: @WFP/K Dhanji*

Somalia is one of four countries – including Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen – for which the UN has launched a US\$4 billion appeal to avert famine. But the effects of drought are being felt all across the east coast of Africa – from Ethiopia, where failed rains have affected 80% of the country’s crops, to South Sudan, which has already become the first country in five years to declare an official famine; and from Kenya, which

has declared a national emergency, to Zimbabwe and even South Africa.



*Women and children at a newly created informal settlement in Baidoa. Children, women and the elderly are often the most affected during periods of drought and food insecurity. Photo: @WFP/K Dhanji*

### **The effects of climate change**

The current drought is the region’s severest in decades, but it is far from unprecedented. In fact, climate change is making frequent droughts almost inevitable.

In pre-1970s Kenya, there was a serious drought around once every ten years. By the 1980s, this had doubled to once every five years. Today, there are droughts almost every other year.

Kenya’s meteorological office has confirmed the signs of climate change – including measurable changes in the seasons and more sporadic and unpredictable rain, leaving farmers unsure when to plant their crops in order to catch the rains when they do come.

Most Africans are extremely vulnerable to these changes, since an estimated 70% rely on rain-fed agriculture.



*Aerial view of a dry riverbed and the arid landscape between Dollow and Wajid in southern Somalia, taken from an UNHAS humanitarian aircraft in February. Photo: @WFP/K Dhanji*

Things are set to get worse. Temperatures are predicted to rise in Africa by 2 degrees or more by 2050 and by as much as 6 degrees by 2100. The continent also faces higher levels of rising seas than the global average.

These changes will put ever-more lives at risk and have a devastating effect on inland farming and coastal economies.

### **A web of problems**

In some countries, conflict is a major cause of hunger, such as in South Sudan, where the famine is fiercest in areas with fighting. But in all affected countries, climate change is making things a lot worse and fueling a vicious cycle. Extreme temperatures, reduced rainfall, land degradation and falling yields lead to greater competition for the remaining fertile land and accessible water – and this in turn brings greater conflict.



*Pastoralists dig trenches to prevent soil erosion and create water catchment areas as part of a WFP programme in Jabaaque, Somaliland. Drought has affected the north in the last two years, affecting farmland, water reserves and pastureland for livestock. Photo: @WFP/K Dhanji*

We are also seeing fundamental changes in local ecosystem. For example, Acacia trees now store more water in their trunks and roots rather than in their branches, reducing food supplies for giraffes. These kinds of changes also threaten livestock and food crops.

As ecosystems come under increasing stress, global experts – including UN Environment’s Chief Scientist – predict that we may be reaching a “tipping point” from which it will be hard to reverse the catastrophic effects of climate change.



*Pastoralists who have lost the majority of their livestock and livelihoods register for assistance with WFP in Iskushuban, Puntland. Photo: @WFP/K Dhanji*

### **New approaches**

The effects of climate change are here to stay and we need fresh ways of dealing with this new reality. These include changing the way people farm to make it sustainable and drought proof, boosting farm profits with green technology for storing and processing crops, and diversifying away from traditional pastoral farming to give people back-up options.

UN Environment is at the forefront of helping governments design policies to increase resilience and protect citizens against natural disasters. We are also helping to bring the latest technology to bear for farmers to adapt to climate change.

Across Africa, we have been looking at environmental trends as part of the Global Environmental Outlook Regional Assessment, which includes Somalia. We are also promoting energy security and more resilient livelihoods by reducing the unsustainable production, trade and use of charcoal.

In Kenya, we have helped produce apps that link farmers to markets by connecting them with businesses who can offer cheap loans. We are also bringing the private sector, government and farmers together to pilot farms that use green technology to boost yields and reduce emissions.

### **About UN Environment**

UN Environment as the leading global environmental authority sets the global environmental agenda and promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development. For over 40 years, UN Environment has been supporting countries to promote smart environmental laws, policies, and strengthen institutional frameworks. UN Environment also builds capacities of judiciaries and other legal stakeholders at global, regional and national levels.