



LEAVES, A Newsletter of the INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM
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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.

Turning Point in the Great Transition?

Arthur Lyon Dahl
President, International Environment Forum

The last few decades have seen two parallel processes at work. The dominant materialistic civilisation that has flourished and spread around the world since the end of World War II in 1945 has created unbelievable wealth and raised many out of poverty, but with the accompanying massive growth in the world population, we have hit planetary boundaries, and in recent decades wealth has become more and more concentrated at the top. Simultaneously, advances in science and technology have conquered some diseases, extended human lifespans, spread education around the world, and transformed lifestyles, at least for the better-off half of the world population. Today, we see an acceleration in two contradictory forces. Excessive materialism and self-centredness are eroding human values and precipitating the disintegration of the institutions that have held societies together, with rising hatred, fragmentation, xenophobia, populism and violence. At the same time, forces of integration have been building momentum, with information systems uniting the world as never before and empowering a sense of belonging to one human family. From the founding of the United Nations in 1945, to the end of the Cold War and the Millennium Summit in 2000, leading most recently to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals as well as the Paris Agreement on climate change, increasing numbers, particularly among the young, are working to overcome the forces that divide us and to lay the foundations for an emerging world civilisation. But while many know what is wrong, they struggle to imagine what should take its place.

Since the turn of the century, the forces of disintegration have been accelerating, beating back some of the progress made and threatening the future of world civilisation. There has been a resurgence of national sovereignty and a retreat from multilateralism, partly because of the injustices caused by its overtly materialistic and economic focus. We have reached a number of tipping points, where our future could go either way. These range from the accelerating death toll of the pandemic destabilising

societies, through the imminent climate catastrophe and the collapse of biodiversity, to the financial crisis threatening an economic collapse, and the United Nations teetering between marginalisation and renewal in its 75th year. For long it has seemed that the momentum of the dominant materialistic civilisation powered by fossil fuels and focussing on return on capital for the rich while trapping many in the consumer society and leaving out half of the world population, was unstoppable.

Suddenly, with the coronavirus pandemic, the brakes have been slammed on the economic system and its momentum is broken. The door may now be opening for a significant transformation in human society. A material lifestyle that seemed essential to many now appears superficial and meaningless, as more important human values and social relationships emerge. People that laboured invisibly in the lower reaches of our communities suddenly are appreciated for the critical services they perform. It is too early to predict how this will all play out, with possibly millions of victims as the virus spreads around the world, especially in poorer countries with inadequate health facilities. Then there will be the economic shock as the necessary shutdown of much economic activity to slow the spread of the virus threatens the most vulnerable while vastly increasing the borrowing necessary to fill the gap and meet immediate human needs regardless of the massive rise in debt levels. Even if an economic collapse can be avoided in the short term, a complete reimagining of the whole economic system may be necessary to start over on a more moderate and sustainable basis.

Alongside this crisis, we are in the midst of accelerating climate change representing an existential threat to our future, with parts of the world risking becoming uninhabitable within decades if we do not phase out fossil fuels and reduce environmental destruction in time. This was to have been the critical year to turn the corner on global warming, and governments still must ratchet up their commitments to greenhouse gas reductions by 31 December even if COP26 has now been postponed until next year. The collapse of global biodiversity is another imminent threat to our future, which was also to be addressed this year under the Convention on Biological Diversity, but that also has been put on hold. However the problems are accelerating, even if the action to address them has been delayed. The threats they represent have not gone away, although an economic collapse might buy us some time to address the environmental challenges and find better solutions.

What should be our priority faced with such challenges? Many of us are confined at home to prevent the spread of the virus causing Covid-19. Beyond assuring our immediate health and safety, there is a desperate need for positive ways forward. In part, these must be spiritual in nature, and the Bahá'ís with their core activities for community building, and others of good will, are helping people to rise to their higher human purpose. More generally, many around the world are questioning the basic assumptions underlying our materialistic economy and consumer society, and asking fundamental questions about what is really important in life. They are finding that much of what they considered necessities were not after all. At a time when they are cut off from normal human interactions they are discovering how important human contact and social relationships really are. A door is now opening for rapid and constructive change, the paradigm shift called for in the 2030 Agenda, a fundamental transformation in human society and the economy towards justice and sustainability.

At the same time, powerful forces are organising to hold on to their power and wealth, and to block any change in the status quo. Autocrats are seizing more power. The corrupt are spreading their corruption. Giant corporations are begging for massive government handouts to prevent them from going bankrupt so that they can return rapidly to business as usual. In this unprecedented situation, when the spread of the virus around the world is far from under control and could easily rebound, as the Spanish flu did in 1918, it is hard to predict the immediate future, but still necessary to plan for our emergence from the immediate health crisis. How do we resist the negative forces, and work for more cooperation, justice and a new more sustainable green and circular economy? What can we already do in our virtual interactions with family, friends, neighbours and the wider community to help them to see a higher human purpose, a more united and resilient community, and the more equitable world that lies ahead? How do we question the lifestyles that we took for granted, and determine to make lasting changes as we emerge from the immediate crisis? Can we already work on positive solutions at whatever level we have access to, from the local to the global?

Those who are reading this are probably already at the cutting edge of new thinking about a more

sustainable future. We do not have all the answers, but we have through our values a direction of travel and a willingness to learn. If we share openly, listen to each other in all our diversity, explore contributions from whatever source, act on the best ideas and reflect together on the results, we can move forward. In these dark times, we all need to rise to the occasion and to face the future positively and creatively.

Members Corner

Welcome

We warmly welcome the following new members and associates to the International Environment Forum:

New Members

Carol Adams (UK)
Mark R. Johnson (USA)
Wendy Wisniewski (Australia)
Aleja Orozco (Canada)
Amanda Topson (Spain)
Níamh Gallagher (Ireland)
Iscander Micael Tinto (Italy)
CH. Rama Krushna Chary (Kuwait)
Khondker Mustafiz Imran (Bangladesh)
Saqib Hussain (Pakistan)
Prof P M Pillai (India)
Padam Jee Omar (India)
Amrita Dutta (India)
Riyaz Husain (India)
Mrs Esther Ekanem (Nigeria)
Ademiluyi Raphael Oluwadamilare (Nigeria)
Noufal (Qatar)
S. Sreeremya (India)
Dr. Aruna Kumar Panda (India)
Ezeoke Favour Chibuikem (Nigeria)
Charity Kruger (Botswana)
Omkar Krishna (India)
Chamila Dias (Sri Lanka)



New Associates

Catherine Lamontagne (Canada)
Terry Edwards (USA)
Ash Hartwell (USA)
Prof. Syed Zafar Abbas (Pakistan)
Subhrajit Mukherjee (India)
Jesse Velazquez (USA)
Jahanzeb Butt (China)

We look forward to getting to know you better and invite your active participation with IEF!

IEF Facebook Page

The IEF Board thanks Mojgan Sami for her outstanding service managing the IEF Facebook page! Members and associates, please, check out and use this amazing resource:

<https://www.facebook.com/IEFWORLD>

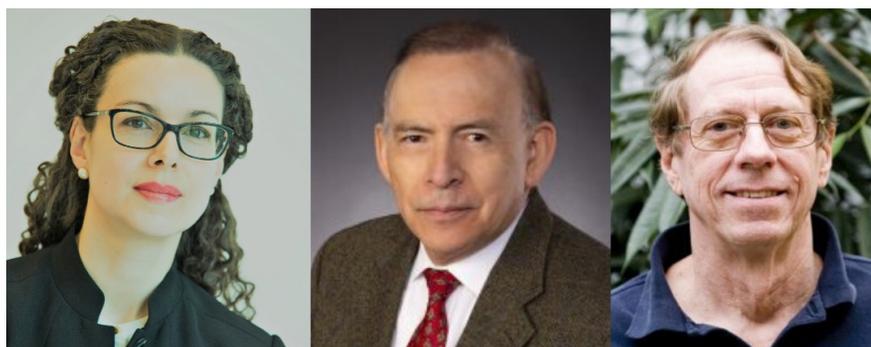
Postponement of IEF Conference to August

For its 24th annual conference, the International Environment Forum will organize a virtual event in the second half of August 2020, along with the IEF Annual General Assembly and election of the Governing Board. The conference and General Assembly will be held entirely on line, with voting to precede it by e-mail. IEF members will receive further details and the Annual Report by e-mail.

IEF members will still be contributing to the virtual conference being organized by its sister Baha'i-inspired organization, ebbf - Ethical Business Building the Future (ebbf.org) on 14-17 May 2020. The overall theme of that event continues to be **Rethinking Success: a way to save the planet and ourselves**, but with more emphasis on the impact of the pandemic on our concepts of success. IEF members who have made reservations for that conference can either participate in the conference as planned, request a refund or extend their reservation to the ebbf conference planned for Lisbon, Portugal, on 13-16 May 2021. The planned speakers for the virtual event this year include Avah Darling-Donnelly (Canada, 16 years old), Shane Tedjarati (China), Layli Miller-Muro (Tahirih Justice Center, USA), Sean Hinton (Open Society Foundations), Nishat Ruiter (TED Conferences), Arash Aazami (Netherlands), Dorothy Marcic (USA), Arthur Dahl (Switzerland), Halldor Thorgeirsson (Iceland) and Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen (Netherlands). The last three are IEF board members. Further information will soon be available at: [http://ebbf.org/event/ebbf30th-international-annual-learning-event-li....](http://ebbf.org/event/ebbf30th-international-annual-learning-event-li...)

Global Governance and the Pandemic

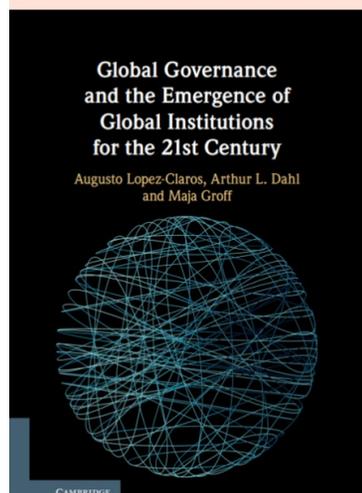
Two webinars with Maja Groff and Arthur Dahl



MAJA GROFF

AUGUSTO LOPEZ-CLAROS

ARTHUR LYON DAHL



Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century



Wilmette Institute

IEF members Maja Groff and Arthur Dahl participated in an ebbf - Ethical Business Building the Future webinar on 5 April 2020. They drew on their recent book *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century* (Cambridge University Press) to consider the governance failures during the COVID-19 pandemic and how their proposals could help to correct these for future global crises. The webinar can now be viewed on YouTube at [What is the role of global governance during a pandemic?](#) (53 minutes)

They were joined by the third book author Augusto Lopez-Claros for another web talk for the Wilmette Institute on 12 April on [Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century](#) which can be viewed on both [YouTube](#) (1:55:00) and [Facebook](#) (1:55:00).

The book can be ordered, or downloaded free as a pdf, from [Cambridge University Press](#).

The future we want - the UN we need

Webcast 24 April 2020

The Global Challenges Foundation and the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs are organizing a webcast online discussion about **a UN for the future** on the International Day of Multilateralism, 24 April 2020, from 1:00 pm to 2:30 pm CET (7:00 am-8:30 am EST). This will include a launching of the book by Augusto Lopez-Claros and IEF members Arthur Lyon Dahl and Maja Groff, *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century* (Cambridge University Press).

As the UN is entering its 75th year of operation, different global challenges than the ones that sparked its formation have emerged. Global threats such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, the onset of pandemics such as the Corona virus and the Arctic's accelerated ice melt share a commonality – they do not know or respect national borders. These threats are transnational by nature but we must ask ourselves if the governance structures required to meet them are strong enough.



The UN remains a key component in establishing a robust multilateral structure. Sweden and Qatar are jointly responsible for facilitating the intergovernmental negotiation on the Declaration for the Commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the UN. This declaration will be an important opportunity for the global community's efforts to meet these common challenges.

For the webcast, after opening remarks by Mr. Jens Orback, Executive Director of Global Challenges Foundation, Mrs. Ann Linde, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sweden, and Mr. Jean Asselborn, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Luxembourg, there will be two keynote addresses. Mr. Fabrizio Hochschild-Drummond, Special Advisor on the Preparations for the Commemoration of the United Nations' 75th Anniversary, will speak on: "What kind of UN does the people want? – Reporting on the global dialogue process The future we want – the UN we need". The second keynote by Dr. Augusto Lopez-Claros – co-author of *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century* and winner of the New Shape Prize organized by Global Challenges Foundation, will be on "Global Governance for the 21st Century – a reform proposal for the UN". This will be followed by a panel discussion with Fabrizio Hochschild-Drummond, Augusto Lopez-Claros, Mrs. Anna-Karin Eneström, Sweden's UN ambassador, Mrs. Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani, Qatar's UN ambassador, and Rosaline Marbinah, Chairman of the National Council for Swedish Youth Organizations.

The webcast link is <https://globalchallenges.org/events/the-future-we-want-the-un-we-need/> and questions can be sent to info@globalchallenges.org. Viewers will be able to ask questions via chat.

International Environment Forum contribution to UN75

A compilation of member contributions to a joint IEF contribution to UN75

What kind of future do we want to create?

In the future, we want to see a world where all people live in peace with each other and in harmony with the Earth, where all people consider the Earth as one country, and mankind its citizens. This will spread care from one country to others, and all the world will be a better place.

Local and national communities organize a system of governance to provide common services and meet basic needs for security, health, education and well-being. In a globalized world, we need to ensure that the same common services and basic needs are met for everyone on the planet, leaving no one behind. The pandemic has demonstrated that national borders have lost their importance and only a global approach can ensure everyone's health. The WHO needs a stronger mandate and adequate means to respond rapidly and uniformly to such global health challenges. The same is true for other global catastrophic risks.

Are we on track?

The present results are mixed. Some countries think only from a national point of view, but some issues are now clearly seen as global, such as climate change. We made some progress in the 1990s and at the Paris climate change conference, but more recently the trend is in the opposite direction with people closing their hearts, minds, and borders to people in need and ignoring the accelerating environmental crisis. Nationalism and populism are on the rise, and actions to mitigate climate change are far from commensurate to its enormous threat to human civilization. Many of today's problems such as the increasing gap of wealth and poverty, climate change, and the refugee crises are all interconnected and require a fundamentally new perspective. These challenges call for a change in the way we look at the world, at other human beings, and at nature. For too long, the rich have exploited other people and nature for their own personal gain. As long as we continue to only seek the best for our own selves or for our own nation, these global problems will exacerbate despite enormous efforts to address them.

Multilateral cooperation in particular has been under attack in recent years, with increasing social fragmentation within and between countries, governments losing trust and failing to meet the needs of their citizens, and increasing numbers of displaced persons and marginalized groups no longer under the protection of any government. Despite our technological progress, the world is today in an advancing state of disintegration, with the pandemic just the latest blow. The forces of progress and integration are still too weak to reverse the negative trends, both social and environmental, although the present crisis could weaken or remove some obstacles to change.

What action is needed to bridge the gap?

The lessons now being learned from the present crises should be used to take another step forward in global governance, at least as incremental improvements to the UN system. In particular, the mechanisms to focus scientific research, capture the emerging knowledge rapidly, and put it in action all around the world, need to be strengthened. Health is one obvious area, but the climate crisis and biodiversity loss are other areas where science must become a stronger driver of policy and action, with the common global good taking precedence over national sovereignty. If trust in global institutions can be built in these areas, then further steps towards UN reform may become possible.

One idea is to promote and develop a new consciousness by the leaders as well as by the citizens of all countries that humankind is one, that all people are created equal and no nation is better than any other nation, and that humanity is one big family with rich cultural diversity. People need to deeply understand that the well-being of each individual and each country is intricately interconnected with the well-being of society and all of humanity. We also need a holistic approach to make progress with the Sustainable Development Goals. Climate change mitigation and adaptation cannot be addressed in isolation, but need to be considered together with fundamental economic and agricultural changes to eradicate hunger and poverty. We humans are all interconnected with each other and with all other life.

Education is one key. The students all over the world must learn that they must take care of the entire world, and not only their own country. Students are often not motivated to study, with high drop-out rates in universities. It is possible to better motivate this generation if we empower them to tackle our global problems. Students must learn about UN SDGs and make a link between the knowledge they are learning and how they can apply it to achieve the SDGs. Instead of just learning mathematics, for example, how can anyone use this knowledge for the betterment of the world? This can be used in universities too! The high drop-out rate at engineering courses, for example, could be reduced if the undergraduate students could understand that they can apply this knowledge to help others around the world.

In recent weeks, we have seen a world-wide successful effort to raise consciousness about the importance of washing one's hands because of the coronavirus. Similarly we could create a new awareness that the Earth is one country and all its peoples one family. This concept could be shared, nurtured, and deepened in numerous and different ways. There could be media announcements, videos, concerts, and conversations from the local to the international level. The following words by Baha'u'llah, prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith, may provide the impetus and enthusiasm for this emerging consciousness: "Let your vision be world-embracing rather than confined to your own self." "The Earth is but one country and mankind its citizens."

Another opportunity opening up with the present crisis is to accelerate the needed paradigm shift in the economic system, away from an almost exclusive focus on return on capital and shareholder value with increasing inequality, towards a system founded on altruism and cooperation, creating meaningful employment for all and reducing poverty. Many vested interests in the present system are being weakened, and a financial collapse from excessive debt is a real possibility. This could remove blockages that have impeded progress on the 2030 agenda, allowing transformative change. Now is the time for the forces for international reform to organize and prepare to move forward, before we slip back into business as usual, as we did after the 2008 financial crisis.

This movement forward should combine the best efforts of willing governments with a much larger circle from science, academia, civil society and progressive businesses.

ebbf Online Conference 14 – 17 May, 2020

Rethinking Success - a Way to Save the Planet and Ourselves

ebbf stands for Ethical Business Building the Future. ebbf is also a Baha'i-inspired organisation. This is an up-date of their conference announcement:

At this time of crisis, we welcome you to a three-day expedition to rethink success. We are all feeling the stress, the uncertainty, in some cases the fear and the loss. We felt it more important than ever to offer this ebbf annual event, to slow down, to make sense of what is happening, to understand the current and future needs for us as individuals, for our workplaces, for our communities and for the wider economic systems.

We are looking to come together to build a more resilient future that will also address our personal and collective present. It is evident that chasing the wrong kind of success has created many of the issues we are facing today.

In this specially designed three day online expedition we will encourage universal participation, each of you will explore together and create new kinds of success factors, better ways to work together, to understand what is really needed.

Most importantly we are coming together, with a special group of individuals from all over the world. We the international events team who is co-creating this event, felt so uplifted, energised and just so much better after coming together to re-design this event from a physical to a virtual event: We feel that this coming together is exactly what we all need.

For more information and registration, go here: <http://ebbf.org/event/ebbf-30th-international-annual-learning-event-lisbon/#ebbf>

Baha'i Blogcast with Halldor Thorgeirsson

If you want to get to know better one of the members of the IEF Governing Board, Halldor Thorgeirsson of Iceland, Rainn Wilson has recorded a podcast with him on his Baha'i Blog. You can listen to it at <https://www.bahaiblog.net/2020/01/bahai-blogcast-with-rainn-wilson-episode-41-halldor-thorgeirsson/>.

Hear how a boy from a remote Icelandic fishing village discovered the Baha'i Faith, was drawn by his love of nature to become a biologist studying the carbon cycle, was sent by his government to negotiate the Kyoto Protocol, and ultimately joined the Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, helping to organize the negotiations that led to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in 2015. Now retired back in Iceland, Halldor is a wonderful addition to the IEF Governing Board helping to guide our organization forward in these challenging times.



An Appeal from Yemen to Improve the Environment - Combating climate change as war proliferates

by a valued IEF member in Yemen

This is an edited version of three blogs.

In Yemen, a protracted war has been ongoing since 2015 producing a major negative impact on the environment. Much farmland has been burned and/or abandoned, and disease outbreaks have occurred as a result of garbage tossed between homes and on the streets. The climate has also changed dramatically. Local people have not experienced winter in the Sana'a Governorate as in past years because it has been unusually warm. Something needs to be done to remedy this disaster in the making.

Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) have offered some support. They have delivered humanitarian and development assistance in circumstances such as war, conflict, and natural disasters, to the most vulnerable: children, women, and people with specific needs. For example, NGOs have rehabilitated a considerable number of water projects to provide safe drinking water; they have participated in projects that renovated health facilities so that emergency, primary, and secondary health services could be provided. NGOs that have adopted environmental protection as a key factor with these humanitarian relief and development interventions have produced sustainable solutions by applying green and clean energy power systems. Nevertheless, both of these interventions could result in harmful environmental impacts due to the waste materials produced from rehabilitation or due to the location of these projects in lush and green areas.

Recommendations to avoid any negative environmental impacts from humanitarian assistance have been highly appreciated and have helped ensure that environmental preservation was practiced even in the most difficult of times with people unable to obtain basic services.

However, more support voices are needed to foster environmental conservation awareness so as to save the environment during the present conflict or future natural disasters.

What might a minimum required level of environmental protection to help deflect climate change in Yemen look like?

Adopting positive environmental behaviours is crucial in order to conserve our lovely environment. Especially during human conflicts or natural disasters when basic services such public cleaning services are unavailable, hygienic practices among Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and host communities are required.

Photo: Huswah Nature Reserve in Aden, Yemen, Credit: Murad Abdo/Xinhua



This recommendation is based on the piles of garbage dumped and spread randomly along roads and around homes in both host communities and IDP camps or camp-like settings. This littering could lead to global warming and to propagation of an unhealthy environment that could facilitate epidemic and disease outbreaks, such as cholera, affecting children in particular and society as a whole.

In addition, an unhealthy environment has been shown to increase Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) among children less than five years of age. To help overcome this, NFDHR (an NGO) has been assisting

600 SAM cases in Wald Rabi' and As Sawma'ah Districts of Al Byadha'a Governorate, Yemen. Thus, continuously practicing the desired environmental behaviours that secure a healthy life as well as limit global warming, even during human conflicts or natural catastrophes, is highly recommended.

I have asked myself several times if am I doing what is required at the moment and what people really need! Is joining IEF a correct decision? The answer coming from my subconscious mind is: "Yes, do what you believe in, serve in the area that others neglect, and try to set a good example by your performance. Sincere efforts will remain even after a person has passed away."

In spite of all the obstacles that stand in front of anyone who would like to confront climate change during a war that destroys all that is beautiful in Yemen, I have raised my hand to call for the preservation of our beautiful environment even in the most severe conditions! Will you raise your voice with me?

Together we can protect Yemen's lovely environment even in a time of war!

The COVID-19 Pandemic and higher education: stumbling block or stepping stone for progress?

**By IEF member Rafael Amaral Shayani, Professor in the Department of Electrical Engineering
at the University of Brasilia, Brazil**

The Coronavirus pandemic created a formidable challenge for educational institutions around the world. Suddenly, classes were interrupted, and new alternatives had to be quickly offered to students in the form of recorded classes, home activities, or live broadcasts. A positive aspect of this global crisis has been the rapid dissemination, among almost all teachers and professors on the planet, of possibilities for using digital tools in education and thereby modernizing the traditional lecture-based class. However, this circumstance could be better explored if we tried, as professors, to best contextualize how the subjects taught at the university relate to the crisis. Then, students could be empowered to propose solutions using techniques they learned at the university.

Motivation is key! It is possible to take advantage of this crisis to motivate students to learn better, to show that theoretical classes make sense, and to say that they can effectively change the world! Many courses have high dropout rates. Engineering is an example: many students do not understand why they have so many theoretical classes pertaining to physical and mathematical concepts. They often drop these courses because their initial expectation of solving problems has been frustrated by complex conceptual, theoretical classes without any apparent direct application. But what if students realized that this knowledge allowed them to act as protagonists presenting viable solutions for the world with a strong technical and scientific basis? Here are two examples to consider:

1) There is a high demand for mechanical ventilators in hospitals around the world. Considering the electrical engineering program, classes of Energy Conversion and Control are essential for quality manufacture of these ventilators. Fluid Mechanics, which is related to mechanical engineering, is very important too. When students better understand the relevance of these applications, it may become clearer why these subjects in the course curriculum must be studied: they help to save lives!

2) The lockdown is reducing greenhouse gas emissions. There is a strong socio-centered environmental movement in progress advocating that when activities resume they should be done so in a different, more sustainable way and not just with business as usual. This theme is directly related to the energy sector, which is one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases in the world. Structural change in this sector is necessary, and engineering is crucial for proposing new sustainable solutions. Thus, there is an urgent demand for creative and bold students to propose new perspectives to society. Students can and should be challenged to do this!

The Brazilian National Engineering Curriculum Guidelines prescribe that the engineering student must have a holistic and humanistic vision; must be critical, reflective, creative, cooperative, and ethical; must be able to research, develop, adapt, and use new technologies with innovative and entrepreneurial performance; must adopt multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspectives in their practice; must consider global, political, economic, social, environmental, and cultural aspects; and must have other praiseworthy and outward looking characteristics. When professors contextualize the teaching more specifically, empowering the student with this knowledge that will give them the necessary tools to propose solutions that help save lives and improve the world, the student will tend to be more motivated to study and develop a true desire for knowledge.

Therefore, although the abrupt interruption of classes initially appeared to be a stumbling block, it could be used as stepping stones for progress with professors having the opportunity to inspire their students to seek knowledge that would help our suffering world. The fact that this Coronavirus attacked the entire world has created an interesting opportunity to work with students on the importance of considering global aspects in their analyses. As Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892) said, "The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens". It is paramount that professors take advantage of this educational opportunity.

Does the Pandemic have a Silver Lining?

Arthur Lyon Dahl

Should we thank God for the Pandemic? It may seem weird to be thankful for a catastrophe. Human suffering is never something to be sought or revelled in. But the pandemic now sweeping the world, with its ultimate outcome still uncertain, may be a blessing in disguise or a cloud with a silver lining. Let me explain.

We have been working for decades to identify and address social and environmental challenges and to make plans and set goals for a sustainable society across the planet. I have personally been involved since the first Earth Day in 1970 and have contributed to many constructive processes, leading most recently to the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the Paris Agreement to address climate change.

However, along side this, governments have given priority to their national sovereignty, multinationals to their profits, and many world leaders to their inflated egos. Wealth is increasingly concentrated alongside growing inequality. Governments are failing to meet the needs of their people as they succumb to political fragmentation undermining democracy, when not already subverted to nativism, racism, corruption and despotism. A corporate stranglehold on the economy, feeding off a materialistic consumer culture, has escaped from all regulation or control. It is plundering the planet's resources while driving us to a climate catastrophe and the collapse of world biodiversity as we drown in pollution. Nothing that we have done on the positive side has slowed this headlong drive to destruction.

As a systems scientist, I have often asked myself what it would take to slam on the brakes and slow the momentum of this material society out of control, before it takes us so far beyond planetary boundaries that it leads to the complete collapse of civilization. In our rapidly globalizing world, our economic, social and environmental systems have become increasingly interconnected, and while this has greatly increased human productivity and interaction, it also raises our vulnerability to a complex systems failure, with one problem precipitating many others like falling dominos.

For a triggering event, a third world war is an obvious possibility, but not very desirable, with most of the world's population dying in atrocious circumstances. The Doomsday Clock has recently moved closer to apocalypse than it has ever been as reckless leaders re-arm in their desire for global greatness or domination. If nuclear arms are used, this could precipitate a nuclear winter and leave much of the planet uninhabitable for the survivors.

My preference leaned towards a financial collapse, as government, corporate and consumer debt grew into a giant bubble after the 2008 financial crisis. If currencies lost their value and global trade shut down, that might save us from a climate catastrophe and give us time to move to renewable energy sources.

A global pandemic was always another option, something resembling the Spanish Flu of 1918, but the emergence of such a threat, while probable at some point according to the World Health Organization (WHO), was unpredictable. Suddenly, it has happened. The situation could be worse if the coronavirus behind Covid-19 was more lethal, although it could still kill millions before it runs its course. The knock-on effects could be much worse, as populations are forced into isolation in an effort to slow the spread of the virus. Millions are losing their jobs and incomes. Education is interrupted. Whole sectors of the economy are frozen and driven towards bankruptcy. Supply chains are broken, including for essential medicines. Governments are doing everything they can to protect their populations, shore up their overloaded health systems, and preserve their economies. With such obvious priorities, worries about expanding debt are left for later. While it is too early to predict where all of this will ultimately lead, it is clear that the world will never be the same.

The challenge now, as we struggle through the immediate crisis, is not to plan to go back to business as usual, as most governments seem to be doing. We should see this as an opportunity to fix what is wrong in society. People are being forced to rediscover the benefits of a strong local community, with solidarity for those more vulnerable. Our addiction to material things and the consumer lifestyle is being broken, as we learn that getting along with much less in a simpler material lifestyle is not necessarily a disaster. The forced shift to digital communications technologies is stimulating creative new ways to maintain social ties and economic activities. Behind all of this is the need to rethink our basic values and our ultimate purpose as human beings. This period of forced isolation is a unique opportunity to read, study, reflect, pray and meditate on what kind of future we want for ourselves, our families, our communities, our nations and the whole world. With modern communications, we can still hold meaningful conversations with others, and help them to see the positive side of what we are going through.

We are also being forced to see the necessity of global cooperation and a multilateral approach to governance. A virus respects no borders. No country can solve this problem by itself. The rationale for an effective system of global government has never been clearer. We take it as normal that a national government has legislative, executive and judicial functions that apply to everyone. Our ministry or department of health is at the centre of national mobilization to fight the virus, and extreme measures can be imposed immediately for the common good. Yet governments have failed to give the WHO this capacity at the global level to organize a coherent approach to the crisis, and many lives will be lost as governments fumble to find the best way forward. As we move beyond this crisis, reforming global governance should become a priority. (1)

We also will be forced to reimagine how the world economy should work. We were on the verge of a major debt crisis before the pandemic started. The financial effort necessary to respond to immediate needs will leave an unmanageable level of debt behind. Many businesses of all sizes will be bankrupt. A financial system based on endless borrowing was never sustainable in the long term, and its collapse

now seems inevitable. What will we put in its place? Should we go to a world currency? Should businesses be chartered to serve society rather than just their shareholders? How do we create meaningful employment for everyone? What mechanisms for the more equitable distribution of wealth would meet everyone's basic needs and eliminate poverty?

Perhaps you now see why I am positive about the opportunities that the pandemic should ultimately open up. This could be the chance we need to make the paradigm shift called for in the UN 2030 Agenda and to accelerate our transition to a just, sustainable, climate-friendly civilisation in harmony with nature. Beyond the immediate crisis I see hope. (2)

1. See our book *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century* <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/global-governance-and-the-emergenc...>

2. *In Pursuit of Hope: A Guide for the Seeker* <http://www.grbooks.com/george-ronald-publisher-books/social-and-economi...>

Global Social Health

A new platform, Global Social Health www.globalsocialhealth.org, has been launched by the Foundation "Terry Madison for Virtues and Social Health" based in Bulgaria. It shares many of the same values as the International Environment Forum.

This platform was created at a critical moment in contemporary history – in the midst of the global corona virus pandemic essentially closing down much of our planet. The platform opens space for dialogue with young people, as well as all thinking people, regarding the role of each of us in these intensive processes. It emphasizes practical approaches, based on meaningful communication, spiritual values, and a reasonable aspiration toward justice – approaches that develop character and a sense of responsibility, offer a concrete vision, and develop skills for citizenship in an independent world.

The Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology

The Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology maintains an extensive web site of information on this topic of great interest to the International Environment Forum. It includes a page of resources on the Bahá'í Faith first prepared eight years ago in collaboration with the IEF. This page has just been updated, again with our assistance, and can be viewed at <https://fore.yale.edu/World-Religions/Bahai-Faith>.

We are sure that IEF members and others will find the whole web site a useful resource in their collaboration on environmental issues with other faith-based organizations.

Applying the hard lessons of coronavirus to the biodiversity crisis

Jamison Ervin
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27 March 2020

I attended one of three major biodiversity planning meetings this February, originally scheduled for China, but relocated to Rome. The day I arrived, there were three cases of the coronavirus COVID-19 in northern Italy. Two days later there were 21, and five days later there were 229. I left the fifth day, without even attending the primary workshop. A colleague teased me, and I worried that I had overreacted. From my early training in public health, I suspected this was not just a distant wave, but an unstoppable tsunami that would soon crash upon the world. A few short weeks later, the magnitude of this tsunami became clear, a once-in-a-century crisis that threatens to upend every society on earth.

This year was supposed to be a 'Super Year for Nature,' with a number of global meetings; a World Conservation Congress, a UN Ocean Conference, and a UN Nature Summit – all culminating in a global biodiversity conference that would agree on a decade-long 'Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework'. This was supposed to be the year that launched the Decade of Restoration, and that finally acknowledged nature-based solutions in climate negotiations. But COVID-19 had other plans. We must learn and adapt faster than ever, and the virus has lessons that apply to the global crises of biodiversity loss.

Exposing societal weaknesses

Complex, interconnected systems are as vulnerable as their weakest links. COVID-19 has exposed societal weaknesses around the world—in health care, homelessness, and inequality. Health care systems depend on vulnerable global supply chains for vital equipment. I had the luxury of returning from Rome early to purchase a modest stockpile of necessities and hunker down, but 80 percent of humanity lives on less than US\$10 a day and will face this pandemic with no social or economic safety net whatsoever. These weaknesses both exacerbate, and are exacerbated by, a global pandemic.

Change can be complex and unpredictable. As I watched the numbers of cases escalate in Rome, it was clear that this was an exponential growth curve, a pattern that we tend to dramatically underestimate. It was also clear that there are tipping points; early actions have exponential benefits, late actions are exponentially more difficult, and actions beyond the point of no return may have little or no benefit at all. Our responses to change must be smart and proactive. Countries with strong and early measures for testing and isolating in order to 'bend the curve' of the pandemic are seeing the lowest death rates. The timing of our response is everything.

The pace and degree of transformative change can surprise us. Powerful business-as-usual interests want to maintain the status quo, but a crisis challenges these dynamics. Actions that seemed impossible yesterday seem possible today and could seem inevitable tomorrow. A Wuhan-like shutdown seemed impossible in Italy, an Italy-like shutdown seemed impossible in New York. Now shutdowns seem inevitable in cities around the world.

How can we apply these lessons apply to biodiversity?

1. Create a nature-based planetary safety net by strengthening the weakest links in our global systems

Nature and our economic systems are inextricably interwoven. Our global food system, for example, is vulnerable to biodiversity loss - as go the pollinators, so goes 35 percent of our global crops. With a million species at risk of extinction, including pollinators, we must shore up natural ecosystems as a planetary safety net for humanity.

2. Select dense, multi-dimensional solutions that solve complex, multi-dimensional challenges

We must be as efficient as possible in simultaneously solving multi-dimensional challenges in nature and development. There is already a growing call for green COVID-19 rescue plans. A good start would be to commit to massive inclusive investments in agroforestry, regenerative agriculture, mangrove restoration, and more. Such solutions help stem our biodiversity crisis, mitigate more than a third of greenhouse gases, prevent disasters, and buffer the more than two billion people in poverty who directly depend on nature for their livelihoods.

3. Commit to action now

We must be willing to take smart, strategic action. This means challenging the status quo, and the powerful interests that will resist change. We must listen to science, and understanding and avoiding nature's tipping points. This means using the best available spatial data to make informed decisions about land use. As with COVID-19, taking steps to prevent species extinctions and ecological collapse is largely a matter of timing. I wondered if I had overreacted by leaving Italy too soon, until I read "everything you do before a pandemic seems overreacting, and everything you do after seems too little, too late." The stakes for humanity have never been higher, and now is the time to act.

4. Craft a bold Marshall Plan for nature

We must act as one planet to solve our biodiversity crisis by crafting a bold, coordinated, comprehensive plan. The draft post-2020 biodiversity framework is not nearly transformative enough to change the trajectory of biodiversity loss. It is time for a Marshall Plan for nature, one that sufficiently invests in the protection, restoration and sustainable management of biodiversity, and that repositions nature at the heart of sustainable development. To do anything less is to succumb to a slow-moving crisis that will eventually have far more consequences for humanity than COVID-19. Like nearly everything else, this year's biodiversity events have largely been postponed, many until next year. However, if we can learn hard lessons from COVID-19 and apply them to the existential crisis of biodiversity loss as we head into recovery, 2020 just may well turn out to be a 'Super Year' for nature after all.

Source: <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2020/applying-the-hard-l...>

Make COP26 the Conference for a Green Recovery

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2020 was supposed to be the year of climate ambition. While the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement established ambitious long-term objectives, the emission reduction contributions countries have so far put on the table fall far short of what would actually be necessary to achieve these objectives. Instead of keeping the rise in the global mean temperature since the start of industrialisation well below 2 degrees Celsius or even below 1.5 degrees Celsius, the pledges made by the countries so far – the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) – would take global warming to between 3 to 4 degrees Celsius.

According to the rules of the Paris Agreement, countries are required to present new or revised NDCs by 2020. The climate conference in Glasgow this November **was supposed to be** the culmination point of an intensive diplomatic process on ratcheting up climate ambition.

The Corona crisis has now cast all plans into disarray. COP26 has been postponed to a date that is yet to be determined. Preparatory meetings have similarly been pushed back substantially.

The first order is now to protect the health of as many people as possible. But after relief, there will be recovery. Planning the further climate policy process and staying engaged may seem difficult as long as the new date for COP21 is not set. However, while the conference has been shifted, the deadline for submitting NDCs has not. And the progress of climate change is not going to wait for the resolution of the Corona crisis, much of the Northern hemisphere just had its **warmest winter on record**. Policy-makers therefore must not lose sight of the long-term climate crisis while dealing with the Corona crisis.

The Corona crisis demonstrates that governments are indeed able to take far-reaching action on short notice. Governments are now preparing vast economic stimulus packages to cushion the impacts of the Corona crisis. The question is, what will these stimulus packages look like? Will they try to re-establish old structures, or will they be used as an opportunity to chart a new course? The IEA and other experts have **urged** governments to put clean energy at the heart of these stimulus plans. The Wuppertal Institute has developed a **three-phase model** for dealing with the Corona pandemic.

Could COP26, and global climate governance in general, play a role in promoting a green recovery? **Oberthür et al. (2017)** identify five functions international governance institutions may perform in general to help tackle a certain problem. Go here to read more:

<https://lists.iisd.ca/read/messages?id=111183>
