



LEAVES, A Newsletter of the INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM Volume 22, Number 8 --- 15 August 2020

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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.

Important Reminder to All IEF Members

The 24th IEF General Assembly will be held on Saturday 22 August 2020 over Zoom.

Members and associates have received instructions via e-mail.

The election of the IEF Governing Board for 2020-2021 is now taking place by e-mail until 21 August (see article below). Members have received instructions via e-mail.

The Baha'i Approach in the IEF Governing Board Election

Currently, all the members of the International Environment Forum are called to participate in the election of the IEF Governing Board. The following is some important information about the election process and IEF. This explanation is necessary because last week the election call accidentally did not go out by blind copy which is normally done. This mistake enabled a new member who was not familiar with Baha'i standards to nominate himself for the Board.

A Baha'i election is fundamentally different from other electoral systems. It is a spiritual process guided by prayer in which people choose individuals considering not only their practical capacities, but especially their "purity of motive,

radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, ... humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience ...in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold."(1) Baha'i institutions are elected by secret ballot. There are no nominations, no campaigning, not even conversations among friends or family. As a Baha'i-inspired organization, IEF applies the same principles.

Many people may ask whether this system would work out in practice. It actually does! Baha'is all over the world, from the countryside in India and villages in Africa to big cities in the United States elect their Baha'i institutions with this method each year at the local and national levels. The system also works for the election of the Universal House

of Justice, the international governing council of the Baha'i Faith.

The question may arise how the voters would know whom to elect. Two aspects certainly play a role in that: First, there is no clergy in the Baha'i Faith. Everyone is responsible for their own spiritual development as well as for contributing to the community. When you are actively involved in your community you will get to know its members, you may also read about the activities of other members who may not live close to you. Second, voter participation is very high, therefore people will vote from all geographical areas and the collective voting will be successful.

How does this all apply to IEF? IEF is a truly international organization and its members are distributed all over the world, therefore only a few members are able to participate in person at IEF conferences. As a virtual organization, online voting is essential for IEF. Last year, IEF started to live stream its General Assembly. We hope for a strong online participation in this year's General Assembly which will take place via Zoom on 22 August. We also encourage all members to participate in the election of the Board. The voting closes a day before the General Assembly during which the election results will be shared. This assures the protection of the spiritual integrity of the electoral process. For details about joining the General Assembly and how to vote, please, look for the most recent Election Call in your e-mail with the subject line "International Environment Forum (IEF): Election of the Governing Board 7-21 August, and 24th General Assembly 22 August". This e-mail was only sent to members, not to associates.

For this year's General Assembly, the IEF board decided to expand the meeting to allow a deeper consultation with the members on future directions for IEF beyond the pandemic. In this year of UN75, one theme will be how to build local consciousness of the need for global governance. This could include what climate change does to people and its health impacts, as well as linking global environmental issues to local injustice, including its humanitarian, racial and gender dimensions. IEF Members Mojgan Sami (USA), Willy Missack (Vanuatu), and Sione Tu'itahi (New Zealand) will open the consultation by raising important questions about these topics.

Participating in the General Assembly is one way of getting to know other IEF members. The IEF board is also planning a webinar based on the consultation at the General Assembly which will be another means for members to get to know each other. You can also learn about members' activities in the monthly newsletter LEAVES.

The membership directory with close to 500 members is useful as a reference for looking up qualifications of specific members, but because of its size, it is not practical as a main source of information for the election.

The practice of this spiritual method of election can contribute to transform society to become more just and more caring about the well-being of all of humankind and all life on Earth.

(1) [Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha](#)

Members Corner - Welcome

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

New Members

Nat Yogachandra, USA
Aurora-Denise Ragston, USA
Roger Paul Neyman, USA
Phil Breuser, USA
A. Wendy Rayfield, USA
Shayda Azamian, USA
Pragalathan Ramasamy, Sri Lanka
Parag Tandale, India
J. K. H. Husain, Bahrain
Elga Agbaw, USA
Ms.R.V.Hemavathy, India
Emmanuel Afeonkhai, Nigeria

Saif Shahrukh, Bangladesh
Charles Olalekan Collins, Nigeria
Obidike Emeka Esae, Nigeria
Abdullah Al Fahad, Bangladesh
Barnabas Nehemiah, Nigeria

New Associates

Robert Chen, Malaysia
Matteen Kashef, USA
Pascale Hennessey, New Zealand
Jaya Butler, United Kingdom
Smile Garcia, USA
Paul Mantle, USA

Kaihaan A Jamshidi, United Kingdom
Khandakar Mohammad Abdul Qayum, Bangladesh
K. M. A. Abdualaziz, Yemen
Mohd Ashaq Malik, India
Prof. Blessing Lawal, Nigeria
Muhammad Shamsuddeen Yunusa, Nigeria
Waseem Akram, Pakistan
Prof. Ramesh H. Taxak, India
H. Erfani, Iran
Sohan Sethi, India

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

Capacity Building Drivers for Power Engineering Education to Deal with Climate Change

By IEF Member Rafael Amaral Shayani,

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Humanity is going through a period of maturing; increasingly, new perceptions are changing the degree of consciousness in society. The energy challenge facing humanity today differs vastly from past decades. With the increase of greenhouse gas emissions by various sectors of society, including the energy sector, there is a real concern with sustainable development and with the possibility of future generations not having the same resources that are available to the current society. At the same time, the maturing of mankind has evolved into an awareness that the actions taken should not only be evaluated as to whether or not they have achieved an end, but also how they collaborate with or damage other aspects of society. Such a view is portrayed in the great paradigm shift presented by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is that the goals are integrated and indivisible! Each goal is related in some way to several others, and it is not acceptable for one goal to be achieved over another. There is no more room for fragmented visions!

It is possible to identify some characteristics of the energy sector's current growth model:

- humanity requires increasing amounts of energy;
- currently, this energy comes essentially from fossil fuels;
- the growth of renewable energy sources is still lower than the growth of consumption, so there is a growing use of fossil fuels; and
- there is an increase in the emission of CO₂ by the energy sector.

This growth system, which has remained practically the same throughout the last decades with a prospect of little change for the future, can be explained by the fragmented conceptual model adopted by the sector's agents: generating energy is an end in itself. This fragmented conceptual model can be defined by the following characteristics:

- a mostly technical vision of energy resources;
- concern about energy security;
- planning to support the trend of energy growth;
- fragmented vision, where the generation of electricity is disconnected from its use and its impacts on society and the environment, which are treated as externalities; and
- energy systems designed primarily by engineers.

A holistic approach to overcome the faults with this model is essential as the impacts of the energy sector affect the planet as a whole by emitting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. The traditional view is based on the idea that more developed countries have coal-based energy sources and have emitted large amounts of CO₂ to ensure their economic growth. Therefore, by a principle of reciprocity, a country with a cleaner matrix than many other countries, would feel it has the right to increase its emissions to have the energy needed to grow, as long as it continues to emit less than more developed countries. The lack of a holistic approach, while maintaining a fragmented outlook, will give all developing countries the right to increase their CO₂ emissions, justifying the increased use of fossil fuels. A global vision, where national interests of energy security must give way to actions aimed at ensuring the sustainable development of society as a whole, challenges the current paradigm.

The current world energy system stands in the way of society's efforts towards a more prosperous, just and sustainable society. Table 1 presents a possible new paradigm and a comparison of the characteristics of the current planning paradigm.

Comparison of the characteristics of the current planning model and a possible new model

Current paradigm	New paradigm
Focuses on technology	Focuses on the human being
Seeks to generate energy needed for economic growth	Seeks economic growth, consuming less and less energy
National view of the problem	World view of the problem
Based on economic justice: to grow developing countries have the right to use fossil fuels, which are cheaper,	Based on social justice, seeking the best for society: all collaborate to reduce CO ₂ emissions
Economic vision that considers mainly the direct costs of power generation.	Economic vision that considers direct and indirect (environmental and social) costs.
Expenditures for climate mitigation and adaptation are externalities that should not be considered in the cost of energy	Adaptation and mitigation are considered in the cost of energy
Generating energy is an end in itself	Generating energy is a means of promoting the development of humanity
Based on traditional forms of power generation	Based on renewable energy sources

How can capacity building in undergraduate engineering students be achieved? The fact that the energy system has been practically the same since its inception is partly related to the traditional training that electrical engineering students receive at universities. That being said, the energy sector is planned and conducted essentially by engineers. Even though engineering is a traditional and important profession for ensuring the growth of infrastructure within a country, there is a need to modernize university programs so as to train professionals with new capabilities required by current demands.

Often students choose engineering programs because they have a desire to create something new that promotes the progress of society. They still do not know what they can do, but they hope that the university program will open up a range of possibilities that will enable them to achieve great deeds for humanity. In order for the electric sector to be able to align itself with the global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as well as search for social justice and world peace, it is necessary for electrical engineering students to be made aware of these problems and to study them during undergraduate programs as noble challenges to be overcome. A new professional profile must be formed to deal with new problems whose old solutions are no longer sufficient. In order for electrical engineering students to understand the challenges to be overcome, they need to know the effects of increasing greenhouse gas emissions, which are related to global warming. By understanding the social and environmental issues that relate to these problems, students can rescue their initial motivation that inspired them to study engineering and put their creativity and potential into the search for solutions for the betterment of the world!

In conclusion, traditional energy planning must give way to a new format focused on the human being and seek to meet the demands of society, not only in energy, but also in environmental and social issues. For this, an interdisciplinary study of energy is crucial, especially addressing the content of human and social sciences in electrical engineering programs. Only then can new professionals make a profound change of direction towards sustainable development in the electric sector.

This is a short version of a longer article which you can read on the IEF website here:

<https://iefworld.org/dshayani120>

New Mexico Should Grant Rivers a Right to Their Own Water

by Lena Hakim



Across the nation (America), and especially the Southwestern states, rivers are in dire straits. Evaporation, dams, and over consumption have put major rivers of the US in serious jeopardy. Coupled with lower snow falls and an overall decline in precipitation from global warming, many rivers are on the verge of complete collapse.

In New Mexico the mighty Rio Grande has been the lifeline for Colorado, New Mexico, and Mexico for centuries. In the past ten years the river completely dries in southern New Mexico, and seldom continues through to Mexico. This past year (2019) the river has dried in northern New Mexico, something which

has never happened in the history of the river. The enclosed photo captures this reality.

Think of all rivers in the world like veins in the human body. When we cut a vein and redirect the blood, then the entire limb or section of the body will become numb, die, or develop crippling pain to the point the entire body can no longer operate. That's how precious our rivers are, how they are linked to innumerable ecological services that allow life to happen. Rivers are the veins of the Earth.

Municipality diversions, dams, and evaporation (up to 60% in the arid Southwest) are the culprits. If you knew how mighty the Rio Grande ran only 25 years ago, the enclosed photo would shock.

In order to rectify looming disappearances of major bodies of fresh water, there is a grassroots push to return rivers to their natural states by removing all dams and diversions. It's called "living rivers", and the push includes returning riparian zones to natural ecosystems, returning indigenous burrowing species, and returning native plants and trees so as to retain water and replenish aquifers naturally. This movement includes documentaries ("DamNation" on Netflix and YouTube), articles, op-eds, and public lectures.

As Baha'u'llah said "Regard ye the world as a man's body, which is afflicted with divers ailments, and the recovery of which dependent upon the harmonizing of all its component elements." (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf. Wilmette, Bahai Publishing Trust, revised edition, 1979, page 55.)"

You can read Lena Hakim's full article as published in the magazine *Green Fire Times* here:

https://greenfiretimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GFT_March2020_WebV2.pdf

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Prairie Network Receives Rockefeller Foundation's Food System Vision Prize

Shared by IEF member Paul Hanley, lead author of the prize-winning project

Source: Prairie Food Vision Network – MEDIA RELEASE

A hopeful vision for the future of the prairie agrifood system has been selected as one of 10 finalists in the Rockefeller Foundation's Food System Vision 2050 Prize (<https://bit.ly/3guyZAU>). The finalists will share a US\$2 million prize.

kwayeskastasowin wahkohtowin – A 2050 Food System Vision for Treaty Four Territory was

chosen from more than 1300 submissions from around the world. It is the only Canadian recipient. While the vision is generally applicable to the wider prairie region, it is grounded in Treaty Four Territory, which spans portions of all three Prairie Provinces.

“The vision was shaped by a diverse group of people from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, including First Nations food experts, farmers, conservationists, writers, agricultural professionals, and researchers from various disciplines,” said lead author and applicant, Paul Hanley, of Saskatoon.

“We responded to an open request for proposals to reimagine the world’s food systems. The Rockefeller Foundation team had observed that most future visions in popular culture, such as those in films and novels, posit a dystopian future. They were looking for positive visions of the future, visions that might inspire hope rather than despair,” said Hanley.

The Cree phrase, “*kwayeskastasowin wahkohtowin*,” encapsulates the vision: “set things right by respecting the interconnected nature of relationships among people and natural systems.” The prairie submission envisions a future in which Indigenous land rights are reaffirmed, food sovereignty is established, diverse prairie ecosystems are restored, and sustainable, regenerative farming systems are the norm.

Transforming the agrifood system on the prairies will require a wide range of measures in six main areas: environment, economy, culture, technology, policy, and diet. The systems approach proposes 140 actions designed to make the food system secure, equitable, and sustainable. Some 75 examples of existing signals and trends ground the vision in the present.

“The Natural Systems Agriculture Lab at the University of Manitoba is acting as lead organization for the project,” said Dr. Martin Entz, head of the lab. “We will receive and manage the prize money, which will be used to support food sovereignty projects and other measures to share and expand the vision.”

The prairie vision documents are available at <https://bit.ly/3guyZAU>.

Project Background

It is 2050. A bird’s-eye view of Treaty Four territory, the heart of the northern plains, reveals the endlessly varied, fluid contours of a resilient prairie agri biome. Prominent now are expanses of native and restored grasslands and aspen parkland, linked by green corridors. Dotted by a million sloughs, the landscape is laced together by serpentine swales and creeks. Half the territory is now natural and restored ecosystems. Hedge-surrounded farmland traces the natural contours of watersheds. The features of intensive, well-treed

foodsheds stand out around cities, towns, and villages. The iconic grain elevators may be gone but the bison are back.

Still faintly visible is the checkerboard of fields and grid roads superimposed on the land 175 years ago. The Dominion Land Survey, launched in 1871, was a mechanism by which colonial forces cleared the plains of its Indigenous peoples and ecosystems. An influx of European settlers and invasive species replaced a sustainable economy with an extractive agrifood system that reflected the mechanistic mindset of Europe’s Industrial Revolution. Treaties, meant to foster peaceful coexistence, had been betrayed.

Productivist agriculture was facilitated by the construction of 250,000 km of grid roads, which crossed the landscape at one-mile intervals. Ironically, the roads that once segmented the landscape have become a means of reconnection. In the post-productivist era, some one hundred thousand kilometres of little used roads, road allowances, and abandoned rail lines have been repurposed as green connectors populated with native species.

Over the past 30 years, the social-ecological landscape of the prairies has been re-formed. It has been a remarkable and clearly visible transformation from dull monoculture to vibrant diversity; from disparity to common cause; from separateness to unity. We had come to understand that the ultimate goal of the agrifood system was not producing food; it was “the cultivation and perfection of human beings.”

With this ultimate goal in mind, we came to the understanding that the key to changing the system was changing ourselves. The real work was to replace the colonial mentality, the overt and subtle racism, the desire to dominate people and nature, with the recognition—long understood by the Indigenous population—that everyone and everything is related—*wahkohtowin*. At every level of society—in communities, neighbourhoods, schools, businesses, organizations, and governments—the people of Treaty 4 were working hard to make things right—*kwayeskastasowin*. To restore the land, the rights of the Indigenous people had to be restored. Today, the spirit of Treaty 4 is honoured.

Today, we are safe and we are secure. The forces that have torn our world apart—over the past two centuries and the past three decades—have schooled us, and we have drawn together as one people. United in our diversity, our unity is reflected

in our beautiful prairie land: what was frayed is being mended. The love that is our politics, our economics, our science, our religion is transformative. We see it reflected all around us.

What Just Happened?

Our vision formed in the context of a new global reality. The transformation of the prairies, including Treaty 4, was energized by two opposing global forces, one disintegrative, the other integrative. The fury of the disintegrative forces left us with little choice but to choose a new way forward. A cascade of social, economic, geopolitical, technological, and environmental events had broken the world's brittle social-ecological order. Humanity had been severely tested: the old world order had been rolled up and a new one spread out in its stead.

Although this storm had been forming for decades, a major shock was the first 21st century global

pandemic, in 2020. In a matter of months, our way of life was upended. A series of pandemic surges followed. Though immediately threatening, these were minor compared to the shocks triggered by climate change. Witnessing synchronous failure in multiple systems, we were forced to accept that, unless drastic changes were made, as quickly as possible, whole swaths of the planet, including entire nations, would become uninhabitable.

As strange as it sounds, the string of catastrophes turned out to be our salvation. We were forced to change and as difficult as the process was, our lives were now filled with meaning and common purpose. After the first 30-years of our collective effort to build a new order, we could already see signs of a new world, resilient, sustainable, equitable, just, and incredibly vibrant! Gross National Product may be down but Gross National Happiness was at a new high!

MAKING THE VISION REAL: MAIN FEATURES IN BRIEF

In brief, the critical consequences and choices made here and around the world since 2020 are:

A complex set of shocks disrupted the global food trade, requiring every nation and region to place its primary focus on local/regional production for local/regional markets.

With commodity markets drastically reduced, export oriented prairie agriculture has refocused on supplying the local/regional market. Exports continue at a reduced level, congruent with the carrying capacity of the land.

With an influx of immigrants from highly stressed areas, the population of the region has doubled. Initially challenging, the result has been a significantly larger and more diverse market and workforce. Immigrants bring new capacities, ideas, and vibrancy, contributing to a thriving agrifood economy.

An agroecological/regenerative approach to farming has largely replacing productivist, extractive agriculture. Local/regional production provides 85% of our food.

As it was understood that a sustainable agrifood system must occur in the context of a resilient ecosphere, we were inspired by the "Half for Nature" movement: conserves and restored grassland and aspen parkland ecosystems and wetlands now comprise 50 percent of the landscape. Biodiverse species are thriving. The controlled reintroduction of the plains bison had been a key to grassland restoration.

Indigenous people are the largest single segment of the population. Now, as a result of a difficult process of decolonization, they are spiritually, culturally, and economically emancipated and enjoying renewed physical and mental health.

The vast expanses of conservation lands create spaces for the resumption of aspects of the Indigenous economy and culture, providing a renewed source of country foods and medicines, and spaces for cultural renewal.

Towns, villages, and city neighbourhoods, are increasingly vibrant places for varied activities: entrepreneurial, cultural, educational, scientific, technological. Surrounding foodsheds provide nutrient-rich food, but also business opportunities and meaningful work.

The application of regenerative/agroecological farming systems has restored soil organic matter to pre-settlement levels. The prairie is now a major carbon sink, and carbon credits and other green fees have become significant income sources. This has been facilitated by the diversion of perverse subsidies to green payments to farmers. By reducing input costs, farmers are capturing a larger share of gross

income, making farming more lucrative. Ensuring that farms are “internally optimized” rather than “externally dependent” is the goal of sustainable agriculture.

Younger people are again attracted to farming. The rural community is thriving with new jobs in farming, conservation, energy production, tourism, and food/biomaterials processing. Distributed, renewable energy is now a major source of jobs and farm income.

Major public costs for medical care have been substantially reduced and mental health has improved through the adoption of healthier diets and lifestyles, and a closer connection to the land. The wealth diverted from repairing illness now supports enhanced public services.

Fostering self-sufficiency: FUNDAEC encourages local food production

Baha'i World News August 11, 2020

<https://news.bahai.org/story/1445/>



Images feature families working together. FUNDAEC, a Baha'i-inspired organization in Colombia, recognizing that the pandemic would have long-term ramifications, looked at how it could be of practical service to society at a time of dire need. Since March, it has assisted over 1500 people across the country to become engaged in almost 800 agricultural initiatives.



A family in Villa Rica, Cauca, Colombia, is using recycled containers to grow vegetables, herbs, and spices on their terrace. Various garden plants help attract bees and repel pests. They have shared their harvest with four other families and are helping others in their community to start growing plants in their own homes.



Field Members of a family in Puerto Eugenio, Córdoba, Colombia, plant crops on a “community learning plot” they started together with other members of their community and with the assistance of a group of young people studying FUNDAEC material as part of the [Preparation for Social Action program](#).



A family in Puerto Tejada, Cauca, Colombia made use of limited space by growing herbs and vegetables in recycled containers hung from a wall.

CALI, Colombia — As the pandemic took hold in Colombia, uncertainties about many aspects of life quickly set in. FUNDAEC, a Baha’i-inspired organization in the country, recognizing that the crisis would have long-term ramifications, looked at how it could be of practical service to society at a time of dire need.

Leslie Stewart, the Executive Director of FUNDAEC, explains how the organization swiftly directed its attention to supporting local food production initiatives. “The country’s economy has been severely affected, with more than 10 million people who are now unemployed.

“Given this situation, food production, which is a component of our different educational programs aimed at development, became a central issue at the start of the pandemic. Since March, FUNDAEC has focused on four broad areas in supporting initiatives aimed at food self-sufficiency: creation of home gardens, cultivation of larger farming plots, food processing, as well as distribution and commercialization.”

FUNDAEC (*Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias*) was founded in Colombia in 1974 and has been dedicated for over 40 years to developing capacity in people to contribute to the well-being of their societies. In this most recent undertaking, it drew on its decades of experience and research in the area of food production to create online workshops, assisting people to learn about different aspects of agriculture, for example seed selection, soil health, pest and disease management, and the harvest.

Ms. Stewart describes how FUNDAEC’s approach to development is inspired by the Baha’i principles of the harmony of science and religion, oneness of humanity, and selfless service to society. “In our efforts to contribute to social progress—in its material and spiritual dimensions—we believe there needs to be a dialogue between science and religion. Agriculture plays a crucial role in the building of civilization. It is important to the processes of community life, and should benefit from insights found in both religion and science.

“However, materialism, which has been directing the development of agricultural systems, has not been able to bring prosperity to all, and the issue of food is becoming central to that discussion. So how can spiritual principles help in the way we

understand development and food production? For example, we need to ensure that agricultural practices are based in fairness and cooperation, and that efforts are carried out with humility and appreciation toward the land and the environment.

“We have found that during this period people are naturally discovering a sense of common purpose—seeing that they can take an active role in transforming their adversity into an opportunity to be of service to their fellow citizens—and that our role as an organization has been to try and channel energies in a helpful way.”

In Aipe, central Colombia, a group of people collaborated with the Baha’i Local Spiritual Assembly to begin a small farm. Having developed relationships with the Mayor’s office and a local agronomist, this effort inspired some 13 families around the designated land to start their own gardens, leading to a first harvest that could be shared with over 70 people. In turn those individuals who benefited from the harvest have been drawn into the efforts and are finding great purpose in serving their community through food that is healthy, organic, and fairly distributed.

“The example that people are setting in producing food for their communities is contagious,” says Ever Rivera, a coordinator of FUNDAEC’s programs. “People who have not produced food before have the example, as well as the support and accompaniment, of those around them. Even the daily conversations between neighbors are generating local knowledge about food production.”

Arelys, a participant in the food production initiatives in Tuchín, has been struck by how people have started to connect with the land around them in a different way. She says, “Families have felt motivated realizing that they can produce food in spaces they already own, and people have seen what positivity can come from moments of crisis.”

Yesneyer from Aipe explains how in her town there is no culture of agriculture and food is generally imported from the countryside. However, FUNDAEC’s online courses have been helping people to look at their land differently. “We have realized the potential for planting seeds in virtually any piece of land where there is soil!”

In addition to the workshops, FUNDAEC has been producing and distributing a monthly bulletin that connects participants across the country to a

growing body of knowledge being generated from the local initiatives.

As part of its ongoing efforts, the organization also contributes to a discourse on agriculture among government officials, academics, and civil society organizations. “It is about opening a dialogue between the farmer who has this deep traditional knowledge and the student of agronomy who brings the best practices of modern science”, says Ms. Stewart. “This dialogue avoids, on the one hand, undue romanticizing about a ‘simpler way’ in the past, and on the other hand, uncritical acceptance of modern technologies. Instead it allows for the building of an alternative system that brings together the profound traditions of the farmer and spiritual principles—being thankful to nature and understanding the impact of one’s relationship with the land for future generations—with the insights and best practices from modern agronomy.”

Over 1,500 people across the country have now become engaged in almost 800 agricultural

initiatives facilitated by FUNDAEC since the pandemic. Reflecting on the initial harvests from these initiatives, Ms. Stewart states:

“Harvest time is a very special time. It invites reflection and allows people to appreciate that, just as the plants grow, we also grow in our capacities as people and as a community. Participants are seeing how certain spiritual qualities are essential in this effort. Unity is needed for a quick collective response to a need in times of crisis. Faith is needed to trust that the seeds planted will germinate. Patience is necessary to wait for plants to grow and develop, and to face the small setbacks along the way. Love, perseverance, and diligence are required in order to carry out the daily tasks.

“This period has been a time to be thankful for the ‘generosity’ of the Earth, by caring for it and protecting it.”

Four ways to make your house of worship eco-friendly

By UN Environment Program, 27 July 2020

Around the world, there are an estimated 37 million churches, 4 million mosques, 20,000 synagogues and hundreds of millions of temples.

Experts say many of these houses of faith could become models of sustainability by practicing eco-friendly worship, embracing green buildings, and offering environmentally-friendly sermons.

To help in that process, the United Nations Environment Programme’s (UNEP) [Faith for Earth Initiative](#) has just published [guidelines](#) for congregations that want to go green. The standards are designed to support the work of religious leaders who are already preaching the value of environmentalism to followers.

“We agree with faith leaders around the world that change starts at home,” said Iyad Abumoghli, director of the Faith for Earth Initiative at UNEP. “Our spiritual homes and sacred spaces are our houses of worship. All religions and spiritual traditions commit to live in harmony with nature, thus it is imperative that we practice what we preach.”

To read about the four things congregations can do to help the environment, go here:

<https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/four-ways-make-your-house-worship-eco-friendly>.

Leading experts offer new ideas for sustainable COVID-19 recovery in new publication issued by UN DESA

Scholars call for better tax cooperation, improved digital access, and sustainable natural resource management as starting points.

As world leaders in government, business and civil society grapple to contend with the urgency of the global COVID-19 pandemic, leading experts and thinkers are offering fresh new ideas that can prevent new pandemics while achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a new volume of policy briefs issued by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) today.

The collection of seven expert-written essays from members of the United Nations High-level Advisory Board on Economic and Social Affairs (HLAB) offers new guidance for rebuilding societies in a fairer, more inclusive way.

The volume, [“Recover Better: Economic and Social Challenges and Opportunities,”](#) provides outside-the-box thinking and new solutions to some of this era’s most pressing tests. The authors advance ideas on issues that include improving international tax cooperation, more equitable access to digital technological advances, and sustainable natural resource management that complement the broader recommendations of the Secretary-General regarding shared responsibility and global solidarity in responding to the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19.

Earlier this month, [the UN’s annual stocktaking report](#) on progress across the 17 Sustainable Development Goals showed that it is the world’s poorest and most vulnerable who are being hit the hardest by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. An estimated 71 million people are expected to be pushed back into extreme poverty in 2020 – the first rise in global poverty since 1998.

The observations and recommendations outlined in “Recover Better,” some of which offer region-specific suggestions, can inform COVID-19 responses so that countries build back better and avoid returning to a pre-pandemic pathway, where progress towards important objectives such as ending extreme poverty and limiting global temperature rise was not rapid enough.

Six board members—Cristina Duarte, former Cabo Verde Minister of Finance and Planning; José Antonio Ocampo of Columbia University; Jayati Ghosh of Jawaharlal Nehru University; Justin Yifu Lin of Peking University; Izabella Teixeira, co-chair of the International Resource Panel; and Kori Udovički, Founder and Chairwoman of the Center for Advanced Economic Studies—and Alicia Bárcena, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), contributed chapters to the report, which was edited by UN DESA. These briefs reflect and further the discussions the HLAB members have had on a wide range of development trends and issues of critical importance to achieve the SDGs and recover from COVID-19.

“These chapters represent ‘deep dives’ into various areas and differ in the topics that they cover and there is a shared message that stands out: the United Nations can play an important role in addressing global challenges and advancing sustainable development,” said Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.

[Access the new volume ‘Recover Better: Economic and Social Challenges and Opportunities’
Video of the Launch Event 22 July 2020](#)