



**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](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.

**IEF Lectures**

The IEF Board is excited about the personal initiative by IEF member Khela Baskett to organize these lectures for the IEF community and the public. The lectures are free, but you will need to register.

**Global Governance and Sustainability**

**Sunday, December 6th, 10:00am PT, 1:00pm EST, 19:00 CET, 23:30 India**

**Speaker: Arthur L. Dahl**

To register, go to <https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAKf-2oqz0qHdASjIRFzsvfOAxZhfo4nJR7>

Many of today's existential threats including climate change, biodiversity loss, resource depletion, and mass population displacements are interrelated and can only be managed effectively at the global level. Yet, present mechanisms for global environmental governance are woefully inadequate to the need for urgent action all around the world. The good efforts of some are neutralized if not reversed by the contrary actions of others. We shall explore recent proposals for global governance for the 21st century that could finally manage the necessary transition to sustainability while embodying the principles of world federalism and the oneness of humanity.

**Future Lectures**

**Exploring Barriers to Justice and Sustainability in Economic Systems: Discussion on Root Causes and Potential Remedies**

**Saturday January 23rd, 10:00am PT, 1:00pm EST, 19:00 CET**

Speaker: Joachim Monkelbaan

**Building Capacity in Undergraduate Engineering Students to Deal with Climate Change**  
**Saturday, February 20th 10:00am PT, 1:00pm EST, 3pm BRT, 19:00 CET**  
 Speaker Rafael Amaral Shayani

IEF members are invited to speak as part of this lecture series. Presentations on environmental action & issues should include the spiritual dimension or Baha'i social principles. They should be 20 to 50 minutes long, so there is time for questions and discussion afterwards.

To volunteer to present, or for questions, please contact Khela Baskett, the coordinator of the Lecture Series through the IEF Secretariat at [ief@iefworld.org](mailto:ief@iefworld.org)

### IEF Board Meeting



An IEF Board meeting generally consists in a virtual meeting and an approximately three-week long online consultation.

On Saturday, 7 November, the IEF Board met with IEF members Mojgan Sami in California and Willy Missack in Vanuatu to consult on the IEF mission and strategic plan and it will meet a second time in November for the other agenda items and to follow-up on the conversation.

### The International Tree Foundation Programmes by IEF Member Stephen Vickers

Are you interested in what the International Tree Foundation (ITF) is doing in its various programmes around Africa and the United Kingdom? Join a conversation with Watu Wa Miti/Kenya Manager, Teresa Gitonga and Programme Manager, Ricardo Romero. The meeting, to be moderated by IEF member Dr. Michael Richards, will offer a great way to get involved with ITF.

This virtual event will be held on **Saturday, 28th November at 7.30 pm GMT**. If you care about trees and people, then come and join us in what promises to be a thought-provoking and inspiring conversation.

The ITF was founded by Josiah Njonjo and Richard St. Barbe Baker in Kenya in 1922 (so in two years' time celebrates its centenary). The ITF, originally called Men of the Trees, was strongly encouraged by the late Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, who became its first lifetime member 90 years ago. If you would like to participate, please send an email to [stephen@vickers.education](mailto:stephen@vickers.education) by 26 November.

### ← Looking back, Looking forward → *New directions in Education for Sustainable Lifestyles*

A seminar of the UNESCO Chair on Education for Sustainable Lifestyles  
 at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences

Date and Time: **Tuesday, 8 December 2020 from 14:00-17:00 (CET)**

Location: Digitally live streaming from INN University, Hamar, Auditorium 3

Hosted by: The Faculty of Education and the Centre for Collaborative Learning for Sustainable Development (CCL) at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences

### **Background:**

UNESCO Chair on Education for Sustainable Lifestyles, Prof. Victoria W. Thoresen has been an international leader in Sustainability Education for the past three decades. During her distinguished career, Prof. Thoresen has achieved many notable accomplishments including the development of Norway's first curriculum on consumer education, the coordination of international research networks for over 15 years, and the development of international and national guidelines on Education for Sustainable Consumption, to name only a few. Prof. Thoresen's work has been celebrated for its pedagogical innovations, its ethical foundations, its active approaches to engaging learners, and its holistic perspectives and ability to connect between global, local and personal experiences. Victoria Thoresen is also an IEF member and serves on the IEF Governing Board.

On this occasion, we would like to honour Victoria's career, the outstanding contributions she has made to the fields of education and sustainable development, and her most recent appointment as a *Professor Emerita* at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences.

This seminar will explore the evolution of "education for sustainable lifestyles" and learning for sustainable development. We will look back at how this work has changed over the past decades, consider some of the current good practices, and draw lessons from this to reflect on ways forward to further strengthen and mainstream sustainability learning.

### **Registration:**

Due to current restrictions, there is limited space available for attending the seminar in person at the Hamar campus. Seats in the auditorium will be allocated on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The digital live streaming option is open to all persons to join and participate in the seminar online. You will receive a link for this session following your registration.

To join either the live and streaming options, you are kindly asked to register your intent at one of the following links:

In-person attendance: <https://nettskjema.no/a/170894>

Digital attendance: <https://nettskjema.no/a/167793>

*The first 35 minutes of the programme will be in Norwegian. International participants can choose to join the seminar digitally from either 14:00 or 14:30 CET.*



## **The Global Sustainability Challenge: A Systems View of Agriculture** by IEF President Arthur Lyon Dahl

A presentation to the Agriculture Working Group of the  
Association for Bahá'í Studies  
27 September 2020

Watch the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6gnvoMKRs&feature=youtu.be>

Adequate nutrition should be a basic human right, and ensuring food for all a moral responsibility, yet nearly a billion people still go hungry in a world where there is adequate food for all. The agricultural system is complex, with environmental, social and economic dimensions that must be addressed together.

With the human population growing rapidly for several decades, the need to increase food production led to the green revolution and today's highly intensive industrial agriculture. However future trends show ageing and even shrinking populations in wealthier countries, birth rates declining with increasing urbanization, and rapid population growth linked to poverty and lack of education. Food production will need to meet increasing demand in the near future and adapt to stable or shrinking demand later in the century.

Intensive agriculture for maximum short-term production is unsustainable. Of all the arable land on the planet, at least 36% has been degraded since WWII, an area equivalent to India and China combined (Montgomery 2007). The organic matter and microbial communities of the soil are degraded and soil erosion accelerated. Agriculture needs to move from soil destruction to soil restoration.

The biodiversity of the planet and the ecosystem services it provides are under threat. Half the species on Earth are at risk of going extinct. Agriculture also depends on biodiversity for everything from pollination and pest control to genetic resilience. The heavy use of pesticides has caused a massive reduction in insect populations, including those essential to pollinate crops. New forms of agriculture can help to restore functioning natural systems, including organic farming, permaculture, agroforestry and others yet to be developed.

The world is facing a crisis of water management with increasing droughts and floods, and much of the world facing water scarcity, while agriculture is the major water user and often polluter. As an activity largely dependent on water, there are both vulnerabilities and opportunities to rethink agriculture as a responsible partner in managing an increasingly scarce resource essential for life.

Climate change is transforming the planet, including for agriculture (Dahl 2007). Farmers can no longer assume that future growing conditions

will be the same as in the past, and increasing variability can easily bring crop failures. Adapting agriculture to a changing climate is an enormous challenge. Agriculture is also a major emitter of greenhouse gases, whether from deforestation and land clearing, methane emissions from cattle, sheep, or rice paddies, to carbon released by the breakdown of soil organic matter and the use of fossil fuels in agricultural machinery and food transport. Agriculture can also contribute to the solution, both by transforming to reduce emissions, and by restoring natural vegetation to areas no longer used for farming, by making more space for nature in agriculture, and by increasing soil humus for carbon capture and storage.

The economic dimension of agriculture is also critical to its future. Modern industrialized farming and livestock raising are driven by multinational agroindustries to maximize their profits. They develop patented varieties to control genetic resources, often privatising innovations originally created by farmers, while selecting varieties that depend on the fertilizers and biocides that they manufacture, making farmers totally dependent on their packaged solutions. Now they are using big data to control all the information on the food production system so they can tell farmers what to do and when while integrating along the whole chain from farmer to consumer. In Canada, they capture all the profits, keeping farmers on the verge of bankruptcy and totally dependent. They lobby for laws to protect their economic model and prevent competition from other approaches. A farmer I met in France makes a reasonable living from his organic farm processing the products himself and distributing them locally, but it is all illegal according to French and European regulations. In the USA, while farm cash receipts have increased over the past century from \$6 billion in 1910 to \$363 billion in 2018, production expenses rose just as fast, from \$4 billion in 1910 to \$359 billion in 2018, with no appreciable growth in the value of net farm income.

All this assumes continuing business as usual. There are many possible crises on the horizon, or already here with the pandemic, that could affect food production and trade in our globally-integrated system. A conflict between major powers or nuclear exchange, an economic collapse as the global debt bubble bursts, an accelerating climate catastrophe, or even a giant solar flare grilling everything electrical on the planet, could trigger a collapse of the material civilization upon which most of us are

totally dependent. In such a case, survival may depend on the ability of local communities to feed themselves through solidarity, collaboration and innovation. The Bahá'í approach to community building could be seen as one way of increasing local resilience in the face of an uncertain short-term future as we lay the foundation for the ever-advancing civilization to emerge.

'Abdu'l-Bahá used agriculture as the basis for defining some essential economic principles which are logical in an occupation where there are risks beyond the control of the farmer.

"The fundamental basis of the community is agriculture, tillage of the soil. All must be producers. Each person in the community whose need is equal to his individual producing capacity shall be exempt from taxation. But if his income is greater than his needs, he must pay a tax until an adjustment is effected. That is to say, a man's capacity for production and his needs will be equalized and reconciled through taxation. If his production exceeds, he will pay a tax; if his necessities exceed his production, he shall receive an amount sufficient to equalize or adjust. Therefore, taxation will be proportionate to capacity and production, and there will be no poor in the community." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 217)

This implies a guaranteed minimum income, a concept close to the universal basic income being discussed today.

There is also the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's village in the Jordan Valley, where he demonstrated how a community could innovate to demonstrate sustainable agriculture (Poostchi 2010; Hanley 2019).

These suggest some of the questions that could help us design agricultural systems for the future. How do we make rural life both attractive and rewarding? New information technologies can reduce isolation and provide access to knowledge and culture. Food prices need to be set to ensure an adequate income to farmers, complemented by the kind of guarantee that 'Abdu'l-Bahá described. Local Bahá'í institutions seem to be designed for small communities such as those appropriate to rural areas. Renewable energies are more distributed, and therefore more accessible to rural areas. There is no 'one size fits all'. Agriculture needs to be adapted to each local environment, geographic location and social situation. Communities need their own scientific research capacity to develop and manage the best agriculture for their local resources and coming changes. Each community also needs to find the balance between local self-sufficiency and integration into the global economy.

Agriculture is thus one essential component of the global human and natural system that is struggling to emerge from a system of competing nation states to an ever-advancing world civilization. But agriculture is only part of the system; change is also needed in the larger economic system and corporate structure, the operation of markets and trade relationships, taxation and wealth redistribution, and mechanisms to support and integrate rural communities. Agricultural reform needs to be part of broader systems change.

For Suggested Readings on the topic, see the IEF website here: <https://www.iefworld.org/node/1097>



## **Renewing Peace: Governance Befitting an Evolving World Bahá'í International Community launches UN75 statement**

### **Launch of "A Governance Befitting: Humanity and the Path Toward a Just Global Order"**

"A Governance Befitting", the Baha'i International Community's statement on the 75th anniversary of the creation of the United Nations on 24 October 1945, has at its heart the principle that cooperation between nations must deepen significantly if the world is to meet its pressing challenges in the years ahead. Anticipating the 75th anniversary, the Bahá'í International

Community (BIC) hosted an event on 22 October to launch the statement marking the occasion, drawing some 200 participants from across the international and diplomatic communities. IEF members Maja Groff and Arthur Dahl were among those contributing. You can view the video of the event (1:21:15) here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lFbmB3XZWg>.

### **Geneva Peace Week**

Again, for Geneva Peace Week on 2-6 November, the Bahá'í International Community prepared a one-hour video with a round-table discussion on the statement with economist Dr. Augusto Lopez-Claros, international lawyer Maja Groff, and environmental sciences expert Dr. Arthur Dahl, from the Global Governance Forum. The round-table explores the oneness and interdependence of the human family that is essential to global progress. Their discussion, with Simin Fahandej, Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations in Geneva, promotes an appreciation of diversity as the underpinning of unified action, the ability for the international community to learn together without fear of failure, the need to prioritise the common good over particular interests, and the moral assumptions that must be considered with every policy decision. The video can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HmaNDbTtVQ>, and on the Geneva Peace Week website at <https://eu.eventscloud.com/website/3030/digital-series-how-to-build-peace/>. See also the story of 11 November 2020 from the [Bahá'í World News Service](#).

The full statement *A Governance Befitting: Humanity and the Path Toward a Just Global Order* is [here](#). This short [film](#) is a brief introduction to the themes in that statement.

### **Thank God for Science**

On 25 October 2020, IEF member Dr. Ashiyan Rahmani of California State University, East Bay, gave a webinar on "Thank God for Science" as one of the weekly OZ Whitehead Firesides in the United Kingdom. Dr. Rahmani used the example of his own Ph.D. dissertation research in Fiji to illustrate how science and religion could be complementary and mutually reinforcing. His research looked at how modern communications technologies helped Fijian women to overcome their traditional isolation and lack of empowerment, and supported climate change resiliency and social change, in research inspired by the Bahá'í concept of gender equality. Through the Bahá'í community in Fiji, he was able to be accepted as more than an outside researcher. Many spiritual principles were incorporated into his research design and the interpretation of the results. The result was both academically interesting and of practical benefit to the women and communities concerned in a spirit of reciprocity. The video recording is available at

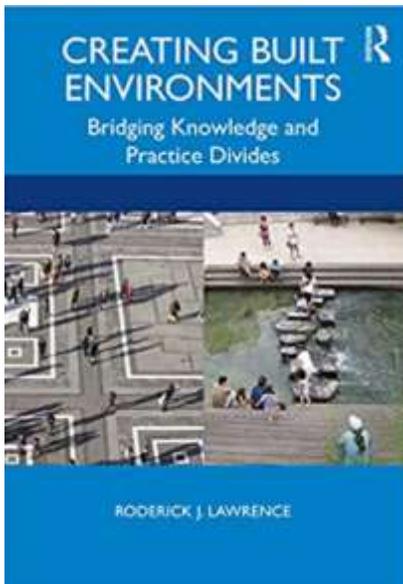
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tfj90kQYXY>

### **Recording of Bani Dugal at the Multi-faith action conference "Faith for Nature"**

As reported in the [last newsletter](#), the Icelandic government, together with the United Nations Environment Programme and partners around the world, including Religions for Peace as well as the Baha'i community of Iceland, convened a global conference entitled "Faith for Nature: Multi-Faith Action". Various speakers explored the important role that ethics and faith play as a complementary source of knowledge to science in generating respect for the natural environment and in motivating action.

During the conference, which took place 5 – 8 October, principal representative of the Baha'i International Community, Ms. Bani Dugal delivered a high-level address to the conference highlighting the role that faith can play in informing our relationship with nature and each other as well as its power to effect constructive change in behavior. This recording (13:10) is now available here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=138kgLJD2sE&feature=youtu.be>



## Creating Built Environments

***Creating Built Environments: Bridging Knowledge and Practice Divides***  
by Roderick J. Lawrence, New York and London: Routledge, 2021. 241 p.

### Book review by Arthur Dahl

With half the world population living in cities, one might think that we are good at building cities for people. Unfortunately, many of our social, economic, environmental and health problems are created or aggravated by poor urban design. Humans are among a small number of species that create their own living environment, along with coral reefs and colonial insects, so this is not something beyond our control. We have no excuse not to do better.

Finally, Professor Roderick J. Lawrence from the University of Geneva, Switzerland, has written a book that tackles this problem head-on.

In *Creating Built Environments: Bridging Knowledge and Practice Divides*,

Professor Lawrence has drawn on a lifetime of practical and academic experience to diagnose the causes of dysfunctional communities and to propose new transdisciplinary approaches to urban design and renovation bringing together designers, planners, academics, politicians and the people most affected, the urban inhabitants themselves. Importantly, he emphasises the moral and ethical dimension in ensuring the human right to good housing, good health and contact with nature. Today, too many decisions are taken for partisan or ideological reasons, to respond to the pressures of foreign investors, to maximise private sector profits at the expense of public services, or to inflate egos with prestige projects.

I have known Roderick for a quarter century, since I helped him initiate a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Sustainable Development at the University of Geneva, and it is rare to find someone in academia so attached to breaking down barriers between disciplines. In this book, he combines the approaches of systems thinking with many practical examples to show that, while many solutions must be site-specific, we already have most of the tools and processes to do a much better job of building cities and communities for people.

The first part of the book considers five strategic domains. In "**Constructing With Nature in Mind**", the importance of the environmental dimension and the role of nature in urban life are described, including the systems perspective and the role of fundamental values that I explored in my book *"The Eco Principle: Ecology and Economics in Symbiosis"* (Dahl, 1996), and as developed in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Practical examples in Malaysia, Singapore, Korea and Taiwan illustrate how nature can be incorporated into urban areas. The second domain is "**Planning for Health and Well-being**", taking a comprehensive approach to healthy cities and people-health-environment interactions, including adapting to the needs of an ageing population. Next is "**Food for Thought**" showing the impacts of an urban diet increasingly dependent on highly-processed industrialised food associated with non-communicable diseases like obesity, heart disease and cancer. It proposes urban farming and designing built environments for local food production, with social as well as health benefits. In "**Housing Matters for All**", the challenges of affordable housing and environmentally-sustainable building are reviewed, with case studies from Stockholm and Zurich. The final strategic domain, "**Creating Incremental and Radical Change**", addresses the dynamics of changing human needs in cities and the lessons learned from past failures such as large housing estates. It emphasises the social dimension which has often been ignored in past planning.

The second part of the book explores conceptual and methodological foundations, such as human ecology, bridging knowledge and practical divides, and transdisciplinary methods. Overall, Professor Lawrence delivers five key messages:

- **built environments and infrastructure in cities**, and all the activities they contain, are sources of persistent ecological, economic and social problems, but also have high potential for innovative change and alternative responses;
- **built environments are key components** of urban and economic development, both conventional production and consumption and innovation, and should address global challenges and implement the Sustainable Development Goals;
- **researchers and practitioners** in the field of the built environment should reconsider their core competences and their moral responsibility in defining effective responses to global challenges in specific situations and localities;
- **the growing number of achievements** by community associations, citizens and other enterprises in the associative sector are complementary to contributions by both the public and private sectors, and should benefit from the knowledge and know-how of practitioners and policy-makers as well as local populations;
- **sharing conceptual/theoretical frameworks** and methodological/practical approaches between researchers and practitioners will be beneficial for a broader understanding of, and coordinated response to, complex urban challenges.

*Creating Built Environments* should be widely read by all those - professionals, decision-makers and concerned citizens - who want to address the pressing urban problems of today and build for a better tomorrow.