



LEAVES, A Newsletter of the INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM
Volume 25, Number 03 --- 15 March 2023

Website www.iefworld.org
Article submission newsletter@iefworld.org
Secretariat Email ief@iefworld.org
President Email ief@iefworld.org
Postal address 12B Chemin de Maisonneuve,
Switzerland

Article Deadline April 10

Christine Muller, General Secretary
Arthur Lyon Dahl Ph.D.
CH-1219 Châtelaine, Geneva,

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.

IEF Webinars

By IEF Webinar Coordinator Khela Baskett

19th IEF Webinar

Book Club Style Webinar on Love of Nature

Saturday, 1 April 2023

10am PDT California
1pm EDT New York
6pm GMT
7pm CEST Central Europe

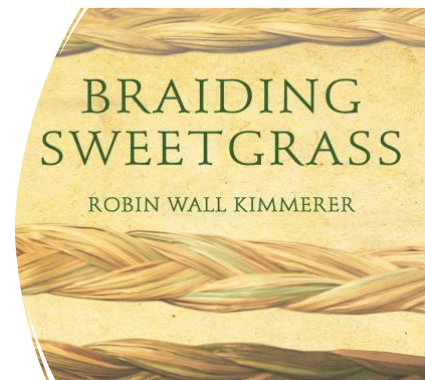
Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/IEF-LoveOfNature>

We'll be continuing with the "Book Club" format for our webinar this month, which is focused on member participation, discussion, and principles we can implement in our lives to live in harmony with our natural world.

We'll listen to Robin Kimmerer read the chapter "Epiphany in the Beans" from her book "Braiding Sweetgrass." This chapter discusses the deep love the author has for nature and presents a lens through which we can see nature the way she does.

You do not need to read ahead, as we will listen to the audiobook chapter together, but for your reference, [here's the book](#).

In order to encourage maximum participation and discussion, Book-Club Style Webinars are not recorded.



Global Solidarity Accounting Progress

Report on a year of activity
26 January 2023 online

Just over 12 months ago, IEF President Dr. Arthur Dahl, following COP26 in Glasgow, initiated a global citizen conversation on the urgent need to replace economic indicators like GDP driving carbon emissions and environmental destruction. He reached out to ebbf.org and the International Environment Forum. Jointly the Global Solidarity Accounting (GSA) project was initiated. GSA appeals to everyone: citizens, professionals, scientists and community members around the world. The aim is to identify indicators to measure progress in human and environmental solidarity and wellbeing and thus improve the lives of our fellow humans through social discourse and social action.

The project is led by three groups:

- a) Carbon, Biodiversity and Pollution working group.
- b) Human Wellbeing working group – minimum living standards, food, health, shelter.
- c) Social Accounting working group – work and service, knowledge and education, spiritual capital and values.

A plenary report by all the working groups was held on 26 January 2023 to gain insights into the progress made so far. A recording of the plenary can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_3ajZyAR14 (1hr 28min). A more complete description is at: <https://iefworld.org/accounting>.

Global Futures Forum

New York and online
20-21 March 2023

Civil society representatives will meet in New York this month to discuss joint recommendations for tackling global challenges and reforming global governance. It is the first major conference of this sort to be held in-person since the outbreak of COVID-19 three years ago.

Preparatory consultations in seven thematic tracks are already taking place online and at regional meetings. These will culminate in the two-day **Global Futures Forum**, to be held in a hybrid format and scheduled for 20-21 March 2023, where participants will deliberate on and prioritize proposals.

Discussions cover the global economic and financial architecture, human rights and participation, development and the Sustainable Development Goals, a global digital compact, environmental governance, peace and security, as well as innovating the UN and global governance.

The forum is organized by the Coalition for the UN We Need (C4UN), a network of civil society organizations interested in improving the UN's capacity to serve the world's people better and in accountable and legitimate ways. Years ahead of the UN's 75th anniversary in 2020, the forward-looking group formed to push for a global summit that would consider global governance reforms in this spirit. Due to COVID-19, the coalition had to move a conference online in early 2020 that adopted a "UN75 People's Declaration and Plan for Action".

In view of an escalating "global polycrisis" that underlines the need for more effective global collaboration and action, all eyes are now on a "**Summit of the Future**" that the UN plans to convene in 2024 to adopt a so-called "Pact for the Future". A ministerial meeting is planned for this September.

On their [website](#), the organizers of the Global Futures Forum write that the forum's purpose is to "explore the design, feasibility, and potential impact of wide ranging proposals, from the unique vantage point of civil society". A key objective, they say, is to "finalize and widely socialize a People's

Pact for the Future to feed diverse civil society ideas and insights into official discussions on the Pact for the Future.”

Since the UN’s 75th anniversary, a series of UN consultations with the public and civil society have taken place in various formats. Recently, an advisory panel set up by the UN Secretary-General to explore proposals for better management of global public goods and more effective multilateralism called for submissions, to which IEF members contributed. It will hand over its report to the UN chief in April 2023.

The latest episode in the UN’s consultations was an online meeting organized on February 15th by Germany and Namibia. The two countries are the UN-appointed co-facilitators of the “intergovernmental consultations on the preparatory process of the Summit of the Future”. Representatives of non-governmental organizations were given 2-minute slots to present their input. They were assured that “their voice will be heard”.

Those involved in the Coalition for the UN We Need hope that eventually there will be political momentum at the UN and among member states for far-reaching proposals to be decided and implemented. The Global Futures Forum is being organized to help identify which. “There is consensus that the status quo is untenable, but we need to understand the reasons why, and what is to be done,” said Daniel Perell, co-chair of the coalition and UN representative of the Bahá’í International Community based in New York.

In the field of improving the UN’s democratic and participatory character, proposals with broad civil society support so far include creating a UN Parliamentary Assembly and a UN World Citizens’ Initiative.

The International Environment Forum has been contributing actively to the preparations for the Global Futures Forum.

SOURCE: based on Democracy Without Borders
16 February 2023

<https://www.democracywithoutborders.org/26439/civil-society-to-gather-in-new-york-for-global-futures-forum/>

Wilmette Institute Climate Change online course

April 12 – June 5, 2023

This course provides a basic understanding of the causes and impacts of climate change, reflects on its ethical challenges from a Bahá’í perspective, and discusses fundamental social change.



In this course you will acquire a basic understanding of the causes of global warming and its impacts on the climate. You will reflect about the importance of applying the principle of the harmony of science and religion to the climate crisis, relating spiritual and ethical teachings to the fundamental challenges it poses. You will learn about the numerous practical actions and changes in lifestyle required to slow the warming. You will discuss the profound economic and social transformation that is vitally important to keep the Earth a livable planet for humans and all life. Perhaps most importantly, you will increase your capacity to engage in public discourse and social action.

For more information and to register, go here: <https://wilmetteinstitute.org/courses/climate-change/>

Faculty are all IEF board members: Christine Muller, Arthur Dahl, Laurent Mesbah

Confluence of Crises: Warnings by the UN Secretary-General

Arthur Lyon Dahl
21 February 2023

If anyone should have a clear view of the present crises and global governance failures, it should be UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, and he has recently provided the most damning critique of those failures in surprisingly undiplomatic language. In his 6 February 2023 [briefing to the General Assembly](#) on priorities for 2023, he warns about “a confluence of challenges unlike any other in our lifetimes. Wars grind on. The climate crisis burns on. Extreme wealth and extreme poverty rage on. The gulf between the haves and have nots is cleaving societies, countries and our wider world. Epic geopolitical divisions are undermining global solidarity and trust. This path is a dead end.”

Seven governance failures

While we know what to do, and that the cost of inaction far exceeds that of action, we are trapped in short-term thinking which he describes as deeply irresponsible and immoral. He calls for transformation through action in deep and systemic ways founded in human rights. Beyond all the issues of sustainability, the environment is near the top of his list, and he draws an important conclusion. We need to emphasize, as he does, the ethics of action. He lays out seven of the human rights concerned, summarized as follows.

Faced with wars and their enormous environmental impact, we must start with the right to peace, preventing conflict as proposed in his New Agenda for Peace. Faced with poverty and hunger, we require rights to social and economic development. He says there is something fundamentally wrong with our economic and financial system, requiring a radical transformation in our global financial architecture with priority to developing countries. To rescue the Sustainable Development Goals, the SDG Summit in September will be the centrepiece moment of 2023, providing the foundations for a New Social Contract.

The war on nature

As an environmental scientist, I was particularly struck by the language the Secretary-General used when he expressed his third priority as our right to a clean, healthy, sustainable environment. “We must end the merciless, relentless and senseless war on nature.” We are hurtling towards a deadly 2.8 degrees of climate change, a brutal, irreversible loss of biodiversity, an ocean choked with pollution, vampiric overconsumption of water draining the lifeblood of the planet, requiring disruption to end the destruction. We need climate justice to replace the bottomless greed of the fossil fuel industry. Fossil fuel producers should not be in business when their core product is our core problem, and countries should stop subsidizing fossil fuels. The language the SG has chosen is more that of radicals demonstrating in the street rather than diplomats in a conference room, but what else might catch attention when faced with government inertia and inaction before impending catastrophe? He calls for a Climate Solidarity Pact and a Climate Ambition Summit in September, and concludes that “climate action is the 21st century’s greatest opportunity to drive forward all the Sustainable Development Goals.”

One of the consequences of global heating is sea level rise, both from thermal expansion of water and melting ice on land. In a briefing to the UN Security Council on 14 February 2023, the Secretary-General warned that this was creating new sources of instability and conflict, and a threat multiplier, with low-lying communities and entire countries disappearing and [900 million people at risk](#). How can anyone of right mind ignore such dangers that can no longer be avoided? See a more complete report [here](#).

Social self-harm

Continuing with his briefing to the General Assembly, the SG’s fourth priority is respect for diversity and the universality of cultural rights, since culture is humanity’s heart and soul and gives our lives meaning. While universality and diversity are critical to cultural rights, they are under attack from all sides, with ethnic and religious minorities, refugees, migrants, indigenous people and others

increasingly targeted for hate. Mis- and disinformation are impacting progress on global issues, including the climate crisis. The fifth right is to full gender equality, with half of humanity held back by the most widespread human rights abuse of our time, and things getting worse. Gender equality is a question of power, and the patriarchy, with millennia of power behind it, is reasserting itself.

Sixth is civil and political rights as the basis of inclusive societies, but these rights are under threat as democracy is in retreat, with media in the firing line and the space for civil society vanishing. Finally, he raises the rights of future generations, to be addressed at next year's Summit of the Future with the aim of making peace with nature; ensuring an open, free, inclusive digital future for all; eliminating Weapons of Mass Destruction; and building more just and inclusive governance. He has created a UN Youth Office, and intends to bolster global action and build a United Nations fit for a new era – ever more creative, diverse, multilingual and closer to the people it serves.

While the Secretary-General points to the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the way out of today's dead end, we know that there are flaws in the system that have prevented reaching these high ideals. In particular, the destructive forces in society are clinging to national sovereignty as their rampart against interference with their selfish ways. Replacing this out-of-date paradigm with rich national autonomy within a globally unified system is an essential step forward. The IEF is working with other partners including the Global Governance Forum to prepare proposals for better global governance, including environmental governance, to fix this broken system in response to the diagnosis of the Secretary-General. Given the urgency of all these issues and their interrelationships, we have no time to lose.

Blog based on a similar blog for the [Global Governance Forum](#) on 21 February 2023.



Conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction – BBNJ

20 February – 4 March 2023
UN Headquarters, New York

The conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) has drawn international attention over the past 15 years, as mounting scientific information reveals the richness and vulnerability of such biodiversity, particularly around seamounts, hydrothermal vents, sponges, and cold-water corals. However, concerns are growing about the increasing anthropogenic pressures posed by existing threats including overfishing, mining, and marine pollution, and emerging activities such as bioprospecting in the deep sea.

Following more than a decade of discussions held under the United Nations General Assembly, the Assembly, in its resolution 72/249 of 24 December 2017, decided to convene an Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) to elaborate the text of an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the conservation and sustainable use of BBNJ. The IGC held its organizational session in 2018 and held four formal sessions in September 2018, March 2019, August 2019, and March 2022, after postponements occasioned by COVID-19 restrictions.

Unable to conclude their work at IGC-4, the IGC met for an additional fifth session, in an intense round of negotiations, in August 2022. This session was characterized by “informal-informal” talks, small group sessions, and bilateral and group consultations with IGC President Rena Lee (Singapore) to make headway on outstanding issues. Delegates based their discussions on two iterations of draft treaty text over the two-week meeting. The main elements under consideration are:

- marine genetic resources, including questions on the sharing of benefits;
- measures such as area-based management tools, including marine protected areas;

- environmental impact assessments;
- capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology, as well as cross cutting issues.

Although IGC-5 was lauded by many as the “the closest we have come to reaching consensus,” convergence around key issues remained elusive. At the end of the session, delegates agreed to resume IGC-5 in 2023. Many hoped this meeting would finally conclude in agreement on a new treaty to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity in the high seas.

At IGC-5.2, delegates based their deliberations on a ‘Further refreshed draft text,’ originally circulated on the last day of IGC-5. The meeting ran from 20 February – 4 March 2023 at UN Headquarters in New York and went more than 34 hours into overtime.

After delegates negotiated non-stop far past the scheduled finish time, President Rena Lee announced “The ship has reached the shore” on agreed text for a high seas treaty. A resumed meeting will be convened to adopt the final text at a date to be announced.

Source: IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin <https://enb.iisd.org/marine-biodiversity-beyond-national-jurisdiction-bbnj-igc5-resumed>

Stories of Transformations to Sustainability

Shared by the International Science Council

Climate change, environmental degradation and resource pressures have reached unprecedented levels worldwide. Achieving sustainability will depend on rapid and fundamental transformations in the ways we organize our societies and interact with the natural environment.

The [Transformations to Sustainability](#) programme funded 15 international research projects between 2016 and 2022 to study how social transformations to sustainability can be supported. The projects worked with communities in diverse places around the world to understand the complex relations between social structures, the material world and environmental and social change. The films and stories present insights from the projects and can be viewed here:

https://stories.council.science/transformations-sustainability/2/?utm_source=International+Science+Council&utm_campaign=28c8ade77b-February+2023&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_6e20810dfd-28c8ade77b-34370029&mc_cid=28c8ade77b&mc_eid=33927b0d83

Source: [International Science Council](#)

Regenerative Agriculture

Earth4All paper
Club of Rome 2023

Earth4All, the new program of the Club of Rome fifty years after *The Limits to Growth* report, has issued a new in-depth report by their modelling team on regenerative agriculture.

They report that regenerative agriculture holds great promise for addressing some of the most pressing challenges of our era, particularly as a sustainable alternative to conventional farming methods which are putting major pressure on planetary boundaries.

But a global-scale transition to regenerative agriculture won't happen overnight. This new paper conceptualises how this turnaround could unfold by considering potential social spreading dynamics that determine whether—and to what extent—farmers would adopt such practices.

Read the blog <https://www.earth4all.life/news/blog-deep-dive-transforming-our-food-sy...>

Read the deep-dive paper <https://www.clubofrome.org/publication/earth4all-schwarzbreier/>

Risks from sea level rise

UN Security Council debate

14 February 2023

Sea level rise poses ‘unthinkable’ risks for the planet, Security Council hears

Rising seas pose “unthinkable” risks to billions around the world, with profound implications for security, international law, human rights and the very fabric of societies, senior officials told the Security Council on Tuesday, as members held their first-ever debate on the phenomenon’s global implications.



“The impact of rising seas is already creating new sources of instability and conflict,” said UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who opened the meeting.

Noting that some nations’ coastlines have already seen triple the average rate of sea level rise, he warned that, in the coming decades, low-lying communities – and entire countries – could disappear forever.

“We would witness a mass exodus of entire populations on a biblical scale, and we would see ever-fiercer competition for fresh water, land and other resources,” he warned.

Sea sponges (shown here with corals) have yielded molecules that inspire treatments for COVID-19 and other diseases.

Credit: [Seaphotoart/Alamy](#)

Describing sea level rise as a threat multiplier, the Secretary-General said the phenomenon also jeopardizes access to water, food and healthcare.

Meanwhile, saltwater intrusion can decimate jobs and entire economies in industries like agriculture, fisheries and tourism, and it can damage or destroy vital infrastructure, such as transportation systems, hospitals and schools.

According to recently released data from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), global average sea levels have risen faster since 1900 than over any preceding century in the last 3,000 years.

It warns that, even if global warming is “miraculously” limited to 1.5 degrees, the planet will still see a sizeable rise in sea water levels.

Devastation evident

Mr. Guterres warned the Security Council that, under any temperature rise scenario, countries from Bangladesh to China, India and the Netherlands will all be at risk.

Mega-cities on every continent will face serious impacts, including Lagos, Bangkok, Mumbai, Shanghai, London, Buenos Aires and New York.

The danger is especially acute for some 900 million people living in coastal zones at low elevations –

one out of every ten people on earth.

Devastation is already evident in many parts of the world, he said, noting that rising seas have decimated livelihoods in tourism and agriculture across the Caribbean.

Sea level rise and other climate impacts are already forcing people to relocate in Fiji, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and elsewhere.

Against that backdrop, he called for action on several fronts, including broadening the global community's understanding of the root causes of insecurity, and addressing the impacts of rising seas across legal and human rights frameworks.

"People's human rights do not disappear because their homes do," he stressed.

Threats to world's 'breadbaskets'

Csaba Kőrösi, the current President of the General Assembly, also addressed the Council, recalling that climate change – "the greatest challenge of our generation" – was the issue most raised by world leaders during the Assembly's last high-level debate.

Citing projections that between 250 and 400 million people will likely need new homes in new locations in fewer than 80 years, he also warned of devastating impacts for the world's "breadbaskets," especially fertile deltas along the Nile, Mekong and other rivers.

Meanwhile, climate-induced sea level rise is also provoking new legal questions that are at the very core of national and State identity.

He urged the Council to recognize the significance of climate action as a key tool for peacebuilding, stressing that the data and frameworks to defend against the sea level threat already exist.

"What is needed now – as ever – is the political will to act," he said.

Made stateless by the sea

Bogdan Aurescu, Romanian foreign minister and Co-Chair of the International Law Commission Study Group on Sea-Level Rise, agreed that climate change-related sea level poses a real risk to over two-thirds of UN Member States.

Outlining a range of sea level rise implications, he said coastlines are being "pushed" inward, affecting baselines from which countries' maritime zones are measured and therefore threatening countries' access to resources.

While several actions are available to protect countries' coastlines, including physical barriers, their costs remain out of reach for many of the countries worst affected.

Mr. Aurescu emphasized the need to better harness international law to support countries most at risk from sea level rise, pointing out that the International Law Commission recently added the topic "Sea-level rise in relation to international law" to its agenda.

Among other threats, he said urgent efforts are needed to avoid possible situations of "de facto statelessness," including by preserving the fundamental rights and identities of people forced to flee their home countries as a result of climate change.

Impunity and inaction

Also addressing the Security Council was Coral Pasisi, Director of Climate Change of the Pacific Community and President of the non-governmental organization, Tofia Niue.

She warned that, by 2050 – "within the lifetime of our children and grandchildren" – sea level rise will have exceeded at least one metre for most small island developing States, a shift that will last for thousands of years.

Listing severe impacts already facing communities today, from coral reef bleaching to salt water intrusion, she decried the international community's continued flouting of responsibility and impunity in

failing to act to stop climate change.

“This is a security issue of paramount importance to the Pacific Region,” she said, emphasizing that the security fallout of unaddressed sea level rise will fall directly under the Council’s remit.

She also expressed her hope that the General Assembly will soon adopt a resolution, put forward by Vanuatu, requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the obligations of States vis-à-vis climate change.

SOURCE: UN News <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/02/1133492>

The other energy crisis (update)

Arthur Dahl's blog

Energy powers all systems from machines and cities to the planetary biosphere and all of life, including our own. Recent events have underlined how dependent we are on energy supplies and how vulnerable to price rises and shortfalls. And this is on top of the fossil fuel energy crisis due to the release of fossil carbon causing climate change. Yet there is little awareness of the other energy crisis that also threatens our future. Almost all our useful energy comes from the sun, whether directly received as solar radiation or through ancient solar energy stored in fossil organic matter.

Solar energy supports and powers planetary systems in two ways: one is the thermal heating that maintains the global environment within a temperature range suitable for life, that creates convection currents that power winds and weather, and that drives the water cycle of evaporation and precipitation. Today rising greenhouse gas concentrations threaten that thermal equilibrium, causing global heating and climate change. That energy crisis is well documented, even if our response is inadequate.

The other solar energy system is photosynthetic, where plant and microbial life use solar energy to build the carbon chains of organic compounds. These energy-rich materials flow through the extensive food chains that power all life, including our own. For hundreds of millions of years, the biosphere has evolved an ever-greater capacity to support life with increasingly complex ecosystems including forests, savannas, coral reefs, ocean plankton, and many other marvels of efficient energy capture. Only in a few remote and extreme places, such as hydrothermal vents in the deep ocean, are there communities of life that do not depend on solar energy. Before there were significant human impacts on the planet, much of the land was covered in lush vegetation, forests and prairies, supporting in turn abundant animal life. Many indigenous peoples learned to live in respectful balance with nature, drawing what they needed while preserving the richness that nature provided. The sea was similarly full of marine plants and phytoplankton at the base of rich food chains all the way up to abundant whales.

Today, our economic drive for endless growth by exploiting natural resources for profit without regard for the future is rapidly degrading the biosphere, its rich biodiversity, and the ecosystem services it provides, including all the energy to support life. The rapid destruction of tropical rainforests, the demise of coral reefs around the world, soil degradation and erosion, and the conversion of much of the land surface to human uses, with many other impacts, are destroying the photosynthetic capacity of the planet. I have not seen anyone calculate how close we may be to tipping points where the energy captured by plant life on the planet may no longer be sufficient to support the needs of all living things, including human society. We worry about food shortages and rising prices leading to famine, without looking beyond that to the biological capacity of the planet to feed us all, animals, microbes and humans alike. We need urgently to measure the rapid decline in ecosystem services like photosynthesis, and the speed with which we may be approaching an energy catastrophe even more fundamental than that precipitated by global heating and climate change.

Consider the difference in total productivity and standing stock of organic matter between a lush tropical rainforest and a field of soybeans plowed and left bare much of the year, producing feed for livestock with only a tiny fraction of the energy captured by a single crop arriving on your plate. Yet we only value the steak and not all that has been lost in the process of producing it.

Biodiversity conservation and restoration are certainly critical to preserve the fantastic diversity and efficiency with which evolution has endowed the planet, and the wonders of nature with all its beauties and benefits. Losing parts of these complex systems will trigger many other failures and cascading impacts. However, beyond this it is essential to maintain our continuing access to enough food energy and other organic matter to support our still-growing human population. This can only be done by protecting what still exists of the natural world and restoring much of what has been degraded, along with all the ecosystem services that nature has provided for millions of years. We need to rethink agriculture and fisheries to again become part of complex ecosystems with continuing high productivity and resilience. Only then can we ensure an adequate photosynthetic solar energy system to maintain the sustainability of the biosphere and its component ecosystems long into the future, and thus guarantee our own survival.

This issue, and the threat to global photosynthesis from geoengineering in space to reduce solar radiation at the surface and thus global heating was published in my [letter](#) to *New Scientist* on 4 February 2023.



Renewable Energy & the United Nations: A Green Spark for Peace in South Sudan

By Eugene Chen et Al.

Source: [Stimson Report](#)

South Sudan's future – and relief from its cycle of conflict – is linked to its reliance on fossil fuels, with limited but possible options for charting a new course. South Sudan's energy sector is deeply embedded in the country's conflict dynamics, from the economy's near total dependence on oil production and the accompanying patronage systems to the reliance on imported diesel for access to electricity.

Creative solutions could help South Sudan break this cycle, and in at least one area – renewable energy – unique opportunities exist for the government and its international and national partners to support the development of a new, more sustainable, and widely accessible electricity infrastructure.

You can read more [here](#).

