



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.

**Despair, Hope and Confidence**

*...[Humanity's] present state, indeed even its immediate future, is dark, distressingly dark. Its distant future, however, is radiant, gloriously radiant—so radiant that no eye can visualize it.*

Baha'i Writings

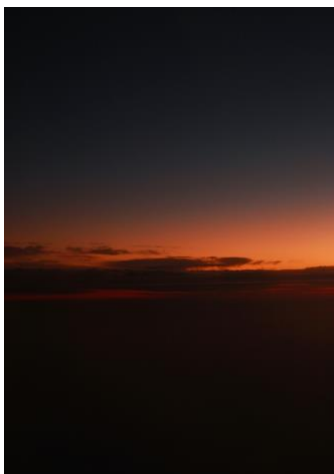


Photo by Soop kim on Unsplash

The content of this newsletter may heighten our despair about the state of the world but may also contribute to hope and even confidence in the future of humankind.

It contains several sobering articles that portray the dire state of our world, specifically the ones about *the unfolding food crisis* (p. 7) and *microbial extinction* (p. 9); and in the speech about his *Sustainable Development Goals Progress Report* (p. 10), the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres highlights the profound injustices in the current global order – or we might better call it disorder.

However, we can find signs of hope everywhere, reflected in interfaith efforts such as in the upcoming webinar about *Deep Sea Mining: Science and Spirituality* (p. 2), in the fascinating report about an ecumenical/interfaith gathering in Geneva *Caring for the Earth, Transforming Lives: Linking Faith and Natural Regeneration* (p.5), and in the practical ideas by Faith for Earth on how to *Help Tackle Plastic Pollution on World Environment Day* (p. 6).

We can also find hope in initiatives and visions for a sustainable future such as in the upcoming webinar *Communities for the Future: Spiritual Insights from Rural Living* (p.3) and the topics *Thinking*

about the Summit of the Future (p. 4), and *A Breakthrough for People and Planet: Effective and Inclusive Global Governance for Today and the Future* (p.4).

Hope is also provided when we begin to understand the underlying cause of the deterioration of human affairs. The article by IEF President Arthur Dahl explores *Why has environmental governance failed? GREED* (p. 12). Climate anxiety is directly addressed in *The climate crisis and mental health* (p. 13). This webinar report explains how we can productively use the energy from anxiety and highlights the world-wide efforts by Baha'is that align with these recommendations.

In the *World Happiness Report 2023* (p. 14), Chapter 4 is especially relevant as it emphasizes altruistic behaviour as a main source of happiness.

*Community Building and Social Action* (p. 4), an excerpt from a recent letter of the Universal House of Justice, and the compilation of excerpts from the Baha'i Writings on *Earth's Resources* (p. 3) provide guidance about the directions of our actions which leads to confidence for the future.

The article *United Nations System, Common Principles on Future Generations* (p. 15) concludes the newsletter with a constructive vision of how we can make the world a beautiful place for present and future generations.

## IEF Webinar

By IEF Webinar Coordinator Khela Baskett

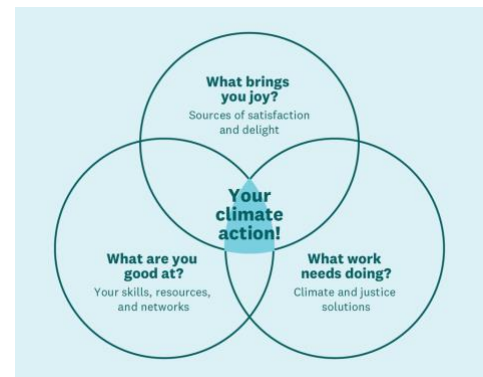
### 20<sup>th</sup> IEF Webinar

**Finding Your Calling for Environmental Work:  
How you – specifically you – can help with climate solutions**

**Saturday, June 3rd, 2023**

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

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



Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, an environmental scientist, activist, and educator, recommends a specific activity when anyone asks her what they should do to help the environment. She has spoken about and written up this activity, and we're going to do it together in this workshop. This is a process of thinking deeply about what your special talents and interests are, what brings you joy, and how you can use the nexus of these to contribute to the world we want to build. We will listen to Ayana introduce her activity, and then we will each do it ourselves, and discuss our insights. Print up [the venn diagram worksheet available on this website](#), or simply bring a pen and paper. In order to encourage maximum participation and discussion, this workshop will not be recorded.

## Spirited Seas: Science and Spirituality, an interfaith exploration of the environmental consequences of Deep Seabed Mining

Webinar on May 30-31

Through International Environment Forum participation in the Religion and Environment Working Group of the G20 Interfaith Forum, we are pleased to announce a Webinar on 30-31 May on **Spirited Seas: Science and Spirituality, an Interfaith Exploration of the Environmental**

## Consequences of Deep Seabed Mining.

**WEBINAR**

**Spirited Seas: Science and Spirituality, an Interfaith Exploration of the Environmental Consequences of Deep Seabed Mining**

**TUESDAY, MAY 30TH**  
Oalo 11:00 PM  
London 10:00 PM  
EDT 5:00 PM

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 31**  
PNG & Melbourne 7:00 AM  
Fiji 9:00 AM

Register for the Webinar at:  
<https://bit.ly/deep-seabed-mining>

Logos for IEF, Purdue University, and IF20 are visible at the top of the poster.

**Tuesday, May 30, 2023**

2pm PDT  
5pm EDT  
23:00 CEST

**Wednesday, May 31**

7am PNG and Melbourne  
9am Fiji

**Register here:**

<https://www.g20interfaith.org/2023-deep-seabed-mining/>

The presentation will examine Deep Seabed Mining (DSM) in the Pacific from the perspective of religion and spirituality.

### **Moderator:**

Dr. Arthur Dahl, IEF President

### **Panelists:**

Rosa Koian, a journalist in Papua New Guinea

Rev. James Bhagwan, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches

Dr. Husna Ahmad OBE, CEO of Global One 2015, a faith based International NGO focused on women

Dr. Helen Rosenbaum, co-founder of the Deep Sea Mining Campaign

Link to the announcement on the IEF website: <https://iefworld.org/node/1405>

## Communities for the Future, Spiritual Insights from Rural Living

**Webinar offered by the Association for Baha'i Studies Agriculture Working Group**

**Sunday, May 28** at 11am PDT, 1pm EDT, 19:00 CEST

**Speaker: Gary Reusche**, IEF member

We live in increasingly uncertain times. For many, this is a source of fear; for others, it is a source of inspiration. Our group observes, undertakes research, and discusses agricultural issues and the future. But agriculture is much more than just growing crops. The example of 'Abdu'l-Baha when he created and taught the community of 'Adasiyyah has inspired many of us. I call it a "cooperative". Cooperatives involve individuals in communities that work together.

If you would like to join this webinar, please visit the website of the Agriculture Working Group (AWG) of the Association for Bahá'í Studies: <https://agriculture-working-group.mailchimpsites.com> Scroll down and follow instructions under *Want to participate?*

## Earth's Resources

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, letters by and on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, and communications by and on behalf of the Universal House of Justice is available for free download on the website of Baha'i Publications Australia 2022 here: <https://bahaibooks.com.au/products/compilation-earths-resources-au>  
Compiled 1991; revised translations inserted 2022

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## Community building and social action

**Excerpt from the Universal House of Justice  
Ridvan Message 30 April 2023**

The international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith has issued its annual message celebrating the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. The following excerpt refers to community life and social action, including for the environment.

"In place after place, the initiatives being pursued reveal a population learning how to take increasing responsibility for navigating the path of its own development. The resulting spiritual and social transformation manifests itself in the life of a people in a variety of ways.... ...increasing attention needs to be given to other processes that seek to enhance the life of a community — for example, by improving public health, protecting the environment, or drawing more effectively on the power of the arts. What is required for all these complementary aspects of a community's well-being to advance is, of course, the capacity to engage in systematic learning in all these areas — a capacity that draws on insights arising from the Teachings and the accumulated store of human knowledge generated through scientific enquiry. As this capacity grows, much will be accomplished over the coming decades."

Link to this article on the IEF website: <https://iefworld.org/Ridvan2023>

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## Thinking about the Summit of the Future

**Global Governance Forum  
12 May 2023**

Arthur Dahl and Amanda Ellis, two thought leaders in their respective fields, discuss global environmental governance and gender equality, picking up two important themes in the recent report "Effective and Inclusive Global Governance for Today and the Future" prepared by the High-Level Advisory Board, ahead of the 2024 UN Summit of the Future.

To read the article, [go here](#).

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## A Breakthrough for People and Planet: Effective and Inclusive Global Governance for Today and the Future

**UN High Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism  
Report released 25 April 2023**

The High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism (HLAB) was established by the United Nations Secretary-General and builds on Our Common Agenda, a report released by Secretary-General António Guterres in September 2021 that calls for stronger governance of key issues of global concern. The HLAB was co-chaired by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former President of Liberia, and Stefan Löfven, former Prime Minister of Sweden, and supported by the United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR).

For more information: <https://highleveladvisoryboard.org>

On the IEF website, you can [read a summary](#) that includes excerpts from the final report on the environmental dimension of the HLAB proposals. The HLAB proposal on global environmental governance is based on the paper "Towards a Global Environment Agency Effective Governance for

Shared Ecological Risks” by IEF board members Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen and Arthur L. Dahl and gives the IEF website as the source. Three of the reports sourced by the HLAB were commissioned by the Climate Governance Commission coordinated by IEF member Maja Groff. IEF members made other submissions to the HLAB as well.

The report calls for Six Transformative Shifts for a More Secure and Sustainable Future: rebuild trust in multilateralism, people and planet, global finance, digital and data governance, peace and prevention, and anticipatory action. [Go here](#) to read about them.

## Commemorating Earth Day

### Webinar interview with Arthur Dahl

For Earth Day 22 April 2023, Bahá'í Blog recorded a video [Commemorating Earth Day - An Interview with Arthur Dahl](#) (33 min), in which the IEF President starts with his participation as a speaker at the first Earth Day in Washington, D.C. in 1970, discusses the significance of Earth Day, as well as contributing to public discourses surrounding climate change, and our need to work together.

Link to this article on the IEF website: <https://iefworld.org/node/1387>

## Caring for the Earth, Transforming Lives: Linking Faith and Natural Regeneration

### World Council of Churches, Geneva

On 12 May 2023, IEF President Arthur Dahl represented the International Environment Forum at a full day workshop on **Caring for the Earth, Transforming Lives: Linking Faith and Natural Regeneration** hosted by the World Council of Churches at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland, and online, in partnership with Right Livelihood and several other sponsors, with about 200 participants of different cultures and faith traditions from around the world. The workshop explored the role that religions and faith communities could play in addressing climate change and the loss of nature from the perspective of the rural poor, small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples who suffer the most.

The initial focus was the approach developed by Tony Rinaudo in Niger and other semi-desert parts of Africa on **Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration** while he was there for many years as an agriculture specialist and Christian missionary. Rinaudo, from Australia, had been inspired by the work of Richard St.Barbe Baker, the Baha'i forester and founder of Men of the Trees. After many failures in attempting to replant trees in the desert, Rinaudo realised that, when a tree was cut down, its roots often survived and reached deep down to groundwater. By carefully nurturing and pruning a few sprouts, the tree could gradually be restored, which cooled and changed the local climate, and allowed other vegetation to grow as well. Farmers could learn to do this themselves, see the desert turn green again, reestablish food production, and build a better future. This has now been adopted over millions of hectares in Africa.

One panel, on science and faith-based voices, explored caring for the Earth together, learning from deep traditions like those of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church that maintains forests around their churches, drawing on the realities and expertise of local communities, Earth trusteeship, and linking livelihoods, sustainability and faith. Another panel shared case studies of agro-ecological communities, with youth perspectives from South Africa, tribal women in North-East India, regeneration in the Niger Delta, community resilience in the Pacific Islands, sustainable yogic agriculture in India, and Baha'i experience from 'Abdu'l-Baha's village and Richard St.Barbe Baker to FUNDAEC in Colombia and youth restoring fisheries in Vanuatu (by Arthur Dahl). There were

discussions to share personal experience, and to explore wider cooperation among faith organisations to respond to the urgent need to regenerate and green the Earth in response to climate change and biodiversity loss. The experiences shared empowering local people were very close to those of the Baha'i approach to social action.

Link to this article on the IEF website: <https://iefworld.org/node/1407>

## Compassionate Era: Bahá'í Teachings on the Animal Kingdom

### Wilmette Institute Webinar with IEF Member Carole Flood

The recording of this webinar which took place on April 16, 2023 is now available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vMX1WjkUUI&t=3s>



Animals of all kinds co-exist with us, from pets to farm animals to wildlife and microscopic organisms. We know more than ever now about animal sentience and capabilities, even as we impact the animal kingdom more than ever before—from extinction and species decline due to climate change and habitat loss, farming practices, pet ownership, and more. What do the Bahá'í teachings say about animals? How can those teachings help guide us in our daily lives and as a society? What does it mean to be kind to animals?

Carole Flood has been an animal lover and Bahá'í from the beginning, and both of these loves have grown over time. Professionally, she has been an educator and an environmental advocate, often combining the two fields. (She holds two masters degrees: Educational Psychology and Statistics and Environmental Management and Policy.) Recently, she has taught environmental science at the college and high school levels and served as a sustainability coordinator at a private school; she has also worked at the Environmental Protection Agency and as an editor. She lives outside of Westminster, Maryland, with her husband, son, one dog, four cats, and lots of rural wildlife.

## Help Tackle Plastic Pollution on World Environment Day

[World Environment Day 2023](#) on June 5 is dedicated to exploring solutions to plastic pollution. The goals are:

1. Increase public awareness of the effective action pathways to reduce and overcome plastic pollution.
2. Encourage transformative action on plastic pollution by governments, cities and towns, business, faith actors, and finance because they can effect change at scale.
3. Build and nurture effective coalitions for future global environmental campaigns.

Here are some Actions for Faith Actors #BeatPlasticPollution:

### 1. Educate, activate, and inspire your faith community

Discover your scripture/teachings on stewardship and care for the earth.

Participate in an ecotheology online course on plastic waste. [Part one](#) and [Part two](#).

Describe how the plastic pollution is affecting you, your environment, and ecosystems.

Recite a speech, sermon, religious teachings, story at your local

mosque/temple/church/synagogue/etc.

Share this [Practical Guide](#) with your community.

Commit to celebrate a plastic-free ceremony, festival or event. Have a look at [Passover](#), [Plastic-Free Ramadan](#) and [Plastic-Free Lent](#).

Support initiatives in the community and co-create a plan of action to tackle plastic pollution in your town or city.

Join an online course or webinar to learn more about plastic pollution.

Enhance their capacity to mobilise congregations towards sustainable practices and reducing single-use plastic. You can [start here](#).

## **2. Work with faith leadership and the community**

Speak with your religious leader about the pollution and waste crises.

Involve the youth, women, and persons with disabilities in critical conversations, and in implementing solutions.

Support initiatives coming from your congregation by sharing them throughout the community and providing needed financial support.

Collaborate and partner with CSOs, FBOs, NGOs, and local businesses to promote local and traditional sustainable practices, including reducing plastic waste.

Partner with local and global initiatives such as the [Plastic Bank's Faith Program](#).

Get in touch with the UNEP's [Faith for Earth Coalition](#) and [subscribe to its newsletter](#) to collaborate with other faith groups and stay updated on how to contribute to the protection of our common home.

## **3. Advocate for the responsible use of resources, and care for our planet**

Advocate for ambitious changes within companies' policies to reduce plastic pollution.

Write letters as a group or individually to companies polluting your rivers, streams, and oceans.

Write a letter to your city or local authority informing them of an illegal dumpsite or the accumulation of waste in your neighbourhood, area, city.

You can register your event or activity and share it with the world here:

<https://www.worldenvironmentday.global/get-involved/register-activity>

Source: Faith for Earth, [UN Environment Programme](#)



## **The unfolding food crisis**

**Arthur Lyon Dahl**

The 1972 report to the Club of Rome on *The Limits to Growth* projected a probable collapse in civilisation at about this time with business as usual. While we already know about the climate and biodiversity crises, we are now facing a food crisis as well. Already last November, Secretary-General António Guterres told the G20 Summit in Indonesia that the “crisis of affordability” would create a “raging food catastrophe” in 2023. Rising prices place food beyond the reach of the poor, but food is not optional, we have to eat. The climate crisis is disrupting crop cycles and fisheries. Debt-burdened governments in the Global South do not have the fiscal space to help their people. This is a sustainability challenge with enormous human implications.

Now Professor Jem Bendell, in a chapter on food system breakdown from his upcoming book *Breaking Together* about societal collapse, has used interdisciplinary integrative analysis to

identify six hard trends which will drive a global food system breakdown. Cultural and institutional factors from our systems of capital and power, and the assumptions they are built on, create biases that are interfering with the needed radical change.

First, he says we are reaching the **biophysical limits of food production**. Despite the green revolution and all the technological innovations in farming, there have already been two years in this century when global food production fell short of demand, and the rate of growth in food production has declined to the point that demand could outstrip the supply of calories as early as 2027. The biophysical limits include the loss of agricultural land to soil degradation and conversion to other uses, the biological limits to plant and animal production, declining yields in industrial agriculture, the water crisis, and the emergence and spread of diseases.

Second, we are **destroying and poisoning the biosphere** that agriculture relies on. We have altered three quarters of the ice-free land surface, with half already converted to food production. Deforestation and the resulting loss of ecosystem services, loss of pollinators with collapsing insect populations, and overuse of water resources are some causes. The oceans have been both contaminated by urban, industrial and agricultural pollution and raped by industrial fishing fleets. Toxic pollutants and microplastics are now everywhere in the environment.

Third, current **food production relies on fossil fuels** that must be eliminated to stop global heating. The energy for farm machinery and irrigation, fabrication of fertilizers and agricultural chemicals, and processing, transportation, marketing and consumption of food produce more than a third of greenhouse gas emissions. Our industrial farming system cannot continue, but alternative agroecology systems or radical new food technologies cannot be put in place overnight, and rising prices will impact the poor and create social and political instability, as has happened already when some governments have (unsuccessfully) tried to reduce energy subsidies.

Fourth, food production is being constrained by **climate chaos**, with extreme weather, droughts, flooding, and changing seasons bringing uncertainty to planting and harvesting and driving food insecurity. Yields of staple crops, particularly grains, are falling around the world, with increasing risk of multiple crop failures and inadequate reserves. The oceans are warming and becoming more acidic, with serious impact on wild fisheries and a threatened collapse of marine ecosystems.

Fifth is the rapidly **growing demand for food**, both from population growth and increasing individual food consumption. Prosperity brings increasing meat consumption with environmental and climate impacts. The consumer lifestyle drives excessive consumption and waste, which the poor dream to emulate. On current trends, we would need to double global food production by 2050, now clearly impossible with a collapse in global ecosystem functions.

Sixth, the globalised food system **prioritises efficiency and profit over resilience and equity**, increasing the risk of system collapse. Despite abundant food today, nearly a billion people lack adequate food and many are starving due to unjust distribution and access; there are close to 800 million suffering from malnourishment. Financial speculation on commodity prices, corporate monopolies, long supply chains and reduced reserves contribute to supply disruptions and rising prices. The global capitalist system ignores the warnings identified by Bendell, so a tragedy of failing food supplies seems inevitable.

## Conclusion

If we want to avoid the “raging food catastrophe” the Secretary-General warned about, with all the knock-on effects on mortality, human security and well-being, urgent drastic action is called for to move to food systems that are localised, diversified, decentralised, autonomous, circular and transparent. From urban gardens to permaculture and restorative agriculture, there are alternatives that might help to navigate the coming food crisis, at least at the community level.

The Club of Rome, in its 50 year update of *The Limits to Growth* titled *Earth for All: A Survival Guide for Humanity* (2022) identifies five extraordinary turnarounds for global equity on a healthy planet, including a food turnaround. Building on many of the same concerns as Jem Bendell, this calls for



revolutionizing the way we farm, with no more expansion of agricultural lands, reversing the carbon footprint of farming to store carbon, enhancing the rich diversity of life on farms, restoring soils to good health, managing ocean and freshwater resources for resilience, and supporting more local food production and consumption. This means moving to regenerative agriculture and sustainable intensification. We also need to change our diets, and eliminate food loss and waste. We may need to pay more for food, so this also requires eliminating poverty and providing social safety nets so that everyone has access to nutritious food.

With all the inertia in the system, from the conservatism of farmers to the vested interests of the multinational agroindustry, the needed transformation will not come easily, and perhaps not in time to avoid the food system breakdown described above. The emphasis in the Bahá'í teachings on the importance of agriculture takes on a new significance. The more that can be done to build community resilience, to localise food production and support farmers, the better our chances of passing through whatever crises may unfold in the years ahead.

Link to this article on the IEF website: <https://iefworld.org/node/1389>

Another version of this blog with a governance slant is published on the [Global Governance Forum website](#).

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## Microbial extinction is happening

### Arthur Lyon Dahl's blog

Another extinction catastrophe has been signalled by an article by Graham Lawton in *New Scientist* in April 2023 describing the loss of microbial biodiversity. For a long time, microbes were assumed to be universally distributed through the air and thus common everywhere. It is only since 2007 with the development of DNA sequencing technologies that the true diversity of microbes, including bacteria, fungi and protists, has become apparent. There are at least 6 million species of terrestrial fungus, but only 140,000 have been fully characterised. For up to a trillion species of prokaryotes like bacteria, DNA-based microbial surveys are only beginning. Protists, complex unicellular organisms like slime molds, number 200,000. This represents the majority of the Earth's biodiversity.

Microbes are essential to life on Earth. A gram of soil can contain a billion single-celled organisms of tens of thousands of different species, and its fungal strands would extend for hundreds of kilometres. Microbes are the main decomposers, breaking down organic matter. They drive the cycles of carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, phosphorus and sulphur. Recent studies have shown that bacterial genomes vary by location, showing that they can evolve in isolation. A common wood-decaying fungus has been shown to have nine subspecies. Many microbes are specific to their host plant or animal, such as an endangered plant found to have six species of fungi only on its leaves. If the host goes extinct, so do all the associated specific microbes.

A large microbial extinction event may already be underway. Species of soil fungi that produce mushrooms have diminished by nearly half in the Netherlands over 30 years, and more generally by 45 percent across Europe in the past century. The main causes are probably air pollution, and intensive forest management that removes the food of wood-decaying fungal species. Since most species are undescribed, they will go extinct without our knowing it. Not only are fungi decreasing in abundance, but the same common ones come to dominate, and more exotic ones disappear, with intense homogenisation. Recent studies have shown that microorganisms are sensitive to the same pressures as higher organisms, including habitat loss, invasive species, pollution and wildfires. Warnings that the recent decline in insect populations would be catastrophic for planetary ecosystems, show that a microbial apocalypse would be even worse. You can't overemphasise the importance of microbes.

A first priority is to identify where microbial diversity is highest so that conservation efforts can be started. Then we need to include restoring microbial populations as part of efforts at soil regeneration and reforestation. When planting a tree, we need to plant the associated native microbiome. This has been shown to increase plant growth by an average of 64 percent. While fungi are getting more attention, other microbes are not yet the focus of conservation attention. As with the rest of biodiversity loss, we need to act quickly, as this may be our last chance to avoid catastrophe.

Link to this article on the IEF website: <https://iefworld.org/node/1404>

SOURCE: Graham Lawton, "The hidden extinction", *New Scientist* 258(3434):46-49. 15 April 2023.

## Sustainable Development Goals Progress Report

### Remarks of the UN Secretary-General

25 April 2023 (excerpts)

Halfway to the deadline for the 2030 Agenda, we are leaving more than half the world behind.

The [SDG Progress Report](#) shows that just 12 percent of the Sustainable Development Goal targets are on track.

Progress on 50 percent is weak and insufficient.

Worst of all, we have stalled or gone into reverse on more than 30 percent of the SDGs.

Unless we act now, the 2030 Agenda will become an epitaph for a world that might have been.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the triple crisis of climate, biodiversity and pollution are having a devastating impact, amplified by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The number of people living in extreme poverty today is higher than it was four years ago.

On current trends, only 30 percent of all countries will achieve SDG 1 on poverty by 2030.

Hunger has also increased and is back at 2005 levels.

Gender equality is some 300 years away.

At the same time, inequalities are at a record high, and growing.

Just 26 people have the same wealth as half of the world's population.

And our war on nature is accelerating.

Emissions continue to rise -- unbelievably.

Concentrations of carbon dioxide are at their highest level in two million years.

The extinction risk has increased by 3 percent since 2015. More than one species in five is now threatened with extinction.

Many developing countries cannot invest in the SDGs because they face a financing black hole.

Before the pandemic, the annual SDG funding gap was 2.5 trillion US dollars.

According to the OECD, that figure is now at least 4.2 trillion dollars.

And many developing countries are buried under a mountain of debt.

One in three countries around the world is at high risk of a fiscal crisis.

Developed countries recovered from the pandemic by adopting expansionary fiscal and monetary policies and have largely returned to pre-pandemic growth paths.

But developing countries were unable to do so, in part because their currencies would collapse.

Vulnerable middle income countries are denied debt relief and concessional financing. And the Common Framework for Debt Treatment is simply not working.

Turning to the financial markets, they face interest rates up to 8 times higher than developed countries.

Flows of Official Development Assistance are far below the long-standing commitment of 0.7 percent of GDP.

Last year, the International Monetary Fund allocated \$650 billion in Special Drawing Rights – the main global mechanism to boost liquidity during crises.

Based on current quotas, the countries of the European Union, including my own country, received a total of 160 billion dollars in SDRs, while African countries with three times the population received 34 billion dollars – and that was money created out of nothing.

Redistribution has been minimal.

Something is fundamentally wrong with the rules and governance of the system that produce such an outcome.

Climate finance is also far below commitments.

Developed countries have still not delivered the \$100 billion that was promised annually from 2020.

Despite the commitment made in Glasgow to double adaptation finance by 2025, we are far from parity in funding for adaptation and mitigation.

The agreements reached in 2015 in New York, Addis and Paris stand for peace and prosperity, people and planet. That promise is now in peril.

The litany of lost opportunities has many causes.

Chief among them is the fundamental inequality and injustice in international relations that runs from global institutions including the United Nations, through the international financial architecture, to private banks and credit ratings agencies.

These institutions reflect the global reality of 78 years ago. They are out of date – and out of time.

Because developing countries have had enough.

Enough of this two-track world.

Enough of paying for a climate crisis they did nothing to cause.

Enough of sky-high interest rates and debt defaults.

And enough of life-and-death decisions about their people that are taken beyond their borders, without their views and their voices.

The 2030 Agenda is an agenda of justice and equality, of inclusive, sustainable development, and human rights and dignity for all.

It requires fundamental changes to the way the global economy is organized.

The SDGs are the path to bridge both economic and geopolitical divides; to restore trust and rebuild solidarity.

Let's be clear: no country can afford to see them fail.

Link to this article on the IEF website: <https://iefworld.org/SDGprogress2023>

SOURCE: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2023-04-25/secretary-gene...>

## Why has environmental governance failed? GREED

Arthur Lyon Dahl's Blog  
7 May 2023

What is the five-letter word that everyone avoids: **Greed**. It is the value at the centre of the materialistic economic system. Hidden behind various euphemisms, it is endless profits and shareholder value for corporations. It is “development” behind the pursuit of eternal growth in GDP. It is at the root of environmental governance failures, where the rich and powerful defend their interests through lobbying, campaign contributions and corruption so that they can continue to rape the planet. It drives organized crime. It propels the military-industrial complex to prefer war or the threat of war over peace as long as it is somewhere else. It is the value of our animal nature that remains in a decaying society when there is no education to higher human values or purpose.

This is the greatest challenge to environmental governance today. The United Nations is founded on national sovereignty, at its most extreme in the veto of permanent members of the Security Council, where the national interest of the most powerful comes first. And behind “national interest” is not the common good of a nation and all its people, but the selfish interest of an autocratic leader, or corporate lobbies, or extreme ideologues, or theocratic clergy, or simply the desire of one group or party to retain domestic dominance over others. How many national governments truly give priority to the common good of all their inhabitants or the sustainability of their country, not to mention the good of the whole planet? There are rare exceptional leaders, but not enough to make a difference.

With respect to the environment, my own field of work for half a century, there is wide acknowledgement today that most of our efforts at global environmental governance are a failure. Major conferences, glorious declarations, hundreds of multilateral environmental agreements, endless promises by governments, appeals by civil society and faith-based organisations, have led to some progress but never enough to turn the corner on accelerating environmental degradation from climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution now heading for collapse. Why? The failure is in implementation. This is often blamed on a lack of political will, but what is behind this? What pressures are our political leaders subject to that prevent them from keeping their promises and protecting the common good of all as governments should? It is the greed of the major actors in society that are not subject to any global responsibility or governance, mainly the economic sector defending its narrow vested interests. Whether it be the multinational corporations of the neoliberal Western economy, the oligarchs and corrupt leaders of autocratic countries, the state enterprises of communist systems, even criminal syndicates and terrorist movements, all pull the levers of power to block any effective action that might hurt their selfish material interests. They resist all efforts at binding global legislation. They refuse any consideration of liability and compensation. They maintained the World Trade Organisation outside the UN system to ensure their voice was dominant. One could even say that this is behind the concept of environment itself, as something outside of us that is not central to human existence and can therefore be considered an externality to be left to someone else to worry about, unlike other world-views that see humanity as integral with the natural world.

The same could be said about the other major governance failures of our present world, including the persistence of widespread poverty despite ever-growing wealth; the capture of knowledge, science, innovation and culture as “intellectual property”; the continued exploitation of workers going as far as modern versions of slavery; the failure to see every human being as worthy of dignity and a potential contributor to general well-being; and the refusal to create truly participatory mechanisms for building community and governance in general. We may pay lip service to higher values, but greed still dominates.

As a systems scientist, I follow the advice of my late colleague Donella Meadows to look for the leverage points in a system, with values being the most fundamental level to work for system change.

All those today who are trying to fix a broken world, from leading scientists to the United Nations, admit that we need a rapid fundamental transformation in our present global system to avoid the catastrophes looming on every side. Greed is clearly the wrong value, but what might replace it? I suggest a one letter change. Let us turn "greed" into "green". Green has come to symbolise caring for nature, achieving sustainability, living moderately in a circular economy, walking lightly on the earth, considering the needs of future generations, building a better world for all of humanity leaving no one behind. Admittedly, it is not changing one letter in a word that will transform the world, but this can symbolise the effort we must all make to struggle against greed wherever it is operating and to start working for a positive environmentally-friendly future.

If we address today's many challenges at the level of values, all the other levels of transformation will come more easily. Otherwise, we risk continuing failures until it is really too late. The consequent suffering will probably still finally push humanity to adopt the world ethic and universal values so desperately needed, but do we have to go through all that? We can start now, among all those who are so motivated, to build more collaborative, caring and environmentally-responsible communities from the bottom up, mobilising the youth in positive action, engaging in meaningful conversations and public discourse, giving priority to those social and environmental actions most relevant to meet immediate local needs within a global ethical framework. This would both ensure some community resilience to the inevitable challenges coming, and provide a better foundation for rethinking governance at all levels. There are already communities around the world, such as the Bahá'ís, making efforts in this direction as an example of what is possible. It is never too late to start. Global governance of our sorely-tried planet can only benefit.

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Link to this article on the IEF website: <https://iefworld.org/node/1402>

Another version of this blog is proposed to the Global Governance Forum

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## The climate crisis and mental health

### Report on a presentation by Professor Britt Wray

The Frontiers Forum on Friday, 28 April 2023, included a presentation by Professor Britt Wray of Stanford University on the climate crisis and mental health, which leads to climate anxiety or eco-anxiety. She is the author of *Generation Dread*, describing her own experience overcoming climate anxiety.

There is climate anxiety from the vicious circle between climate change and mental health. How badly we feel interferes with our ability to build a better world. She said that the psychological effects of disasters are forty times their physical effects, with the most vulnerable being children, women, people on the front lines of disaster, the mentally ill, those living close to the land like ranchers, and indigenous groups. There are direct and indirect stressors in extreme events, physical effects on health, for example from extreme heat, and the stress of our awareness of what is coming. Even climate professionals suffer a psychological toll of outrage, depression, burnout, suppression and guilt, and need psychological help.

But climate anxiety is not a mental health condition but a legitimate reaction to external sources of danger. The climate anxiety continuum can lead to everything from panic attacks to avoidance, but also shows links to pro-environmental behaviour and activism, as experienced by teenage activist Greta Thunberg. It takes effort to align our actions with our values.

A global survey of 10,000 young people showed that 45% said climate anxiety interfered with daily life (70% in developing countries), 59% were very or extremely worried, 75% found the future frightening, 56% said humanity is doomed, and 39% hesitated to have children. They felt they have been betrayed by governments and lied to by leaders. The poor may also have climate concerns, but they

also have more immediate priorities.

In this context, what does she recommend to protect and promote mental health? This included win-win solutions: energy efficiency, active transport, green and blue spaces, reduce inequality, community cohesion, and governance based on trust, transparency and participation. We can respect our anxiety rather than fight it. While structural change to address the climate crisis still needs to be our main intervention, we can do a lot at the community level to build a sense of solidarity, community and belonging. Getting serious about fossil fuels and participating in climate activism can help. There are community-minded peer-led methods to strengthen psychological resistance, such as the <https://www.goodgriefnetwork.org/> offering a ten-step process among professionals. She cited <https://www.connectingclimateminds.org/> as another effort to develop a research agenda on climate change and mental health. Another resource is the existential toolkit for climate educators discussion series, on how to teach about climate change in schools: <https://www.uwb.edu/ias-news/january-2021/toolkit-climate-educators>.

Her proposals seemed very close to those of the Bahá'í community in fostering community cohesion, connectedness and participation, reducing inequality, increasing contact with nature, with shared goals building social capital, while undertaking social actions including to address environmental problems where we live.

It is important to work against feelings of helplessness, such as by listening to people who have overcome adversity, or find meaning in suffering, just as the Bahá'ís describe the spiritual growth that comes from tests and difficulties. Even if doom comes, there is no such thing as too late. Baha'is have a vision of the ever-advancing civilization to come after the difficulties ahead. This turns eco-anxiety from a stressor to a resource. Another approach is self-care, such as through mindfulness and connecting with nature. We can generate meaning and purpose, with a survivor mentality, to move toward positive survivor tipping points leading to the radical active hope that we need. She concluded that ecological grief and anxiety can be the start of a healthy response to climate change.

Link to this article on the IEF website: <https://iefworld.org/node/1396>

## World Happiness Report 2023

The World Happiness Report is a publication of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

Chapter 1. The happiness agenda. The next 10 years

Chapter 2. World Happiness, Benevolence, and Trust during COVID-19 and Beyond

Chapter 3. Well-being and State Effectiveness

Chapter 4. Doing Good and Feeling Good: Relationships between Altruism and Well-being for Altruists, Beneficiaries, and Observers

Chapter 5. Towards Reliably Forecasting the Well-being of Populations Using Social Media: Three Generations of Progress

Website: <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2023/>

Executive Summary: <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2023/executive-summary/>

Here, let us just have a brief look at **Chapter 4. Doing Good and Feeling Good: Relationships between Altruism and Well-being for Altruists, Beneficiaries, and Observers:**

A person is being altruistic when they help another person without expecting anything in return. Altruistic behaviours like helping strangers, donating money, giving blood, and volunteering are common, while others (like donating a kidney) are less so.

There is a positive relationship between happiness and all of these altruistic behaviours. This is true

when we compare across countries, and when we compare across individuals. But why?

Normally, people who receive altruistic help will experience improved well-being, which helps explain the correlation across countries. But in addition, there is much evidence (experimental and others) that helping behaviour increases the well-being of the individual helper. This is especially true when the helping behaviour is voluntary and mainly motivated by concern for the person being helped.

The causal arrow also runs in the opposite direction. Experimental and other evidence shows that when people's well-being increases, they can become more altruistic. In particular, when people's well-being rises through experiencing altruistic help, they become more likely to help others, creating a virtuous spiral.



## United Nations System Common Principles on Future Generations

In May 2023, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination endorsed *the Common Principles on Future Generations*, developed through the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) which approved the Principles at its forty-fifth session in March 2023.

This set of eight principles builds on the United Nations' long history of acknowledging the importance of future generations, dating back to the UN Charter including, in particular, the adoption in 1997 by UNESCO Member States of the Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations towards Future Generations. A key goal of these principles is to ensure greater clarity on terminology and agree on a set of common values across the UN system for use across various contexts.

### Preamble

Future generations are “all those generations that do not yet exist, are yet to come and who will eventually inherit this planet.” While children and youth are part of present generations and not future generations, their lives extend further into the future than that of adults and they will be more impacted by short-term thinking and poor decisions being made today than the adults making them. This proximity to future generations means that children and youth are oftentimes referred to as “future decision makers” or “future leaders”, but they alone should not bear the burden of representing future generations.

Just like present generations, future generations will include people of all ages from children and youth through older persons, and hence it is important to consider people's needs and rights across the life course.

Focusing on future generations does not imply a focus only on humanity – the lives of humans today and that of succeeding generations are intimately connected with the quality and integrity of the environment and earth's ecosystems. Humanity has a responsibility to strive for sustainable development that safeguards biodiversity and natural resources and respects planetary boundaries.

Concern for future generations does not imply less of a focus on present generations or efforts to address the Sustainable Development Goals. Upholding the rights and meeting the needs of present generations is a precondition for a better shared future.

The future cannot be predicted. The future may not look the same for people across the globe who, already today, face very different realities. This plurality, along with the impossibility of knowing what future generations may need or think, requires that the UN system embrace approaches that foster anticipation, adaptation and sustainability – including investing in participatory foresight and future-focused planning that allow for flexibility and adaptability.

These principles build on the UN's long history of acknowledging the importance of future

generations, dating back to the UN Charter including, in particular, the adoption in 1997 by UNESCO Member States of the Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations towards Future Generations and the 2013 report to the Secretary General which set out options for institutionalizing concerns for future generations at the UN, a number of which have been carried forward into Our Common Agenda. The UN has a unique history and mandate for promoting global, long-term governance, and this focus can help anchor long-term thinking as a guiding principle in the policy choices, programming and governance of all UN system entities to move forward in a context of multiple crises and heightened risks.

## Principles

### 1. Promote a vision for future generations based on human rights and equity

Human rights provide a universal vision and obligation to uphold human dignity and gender equality – for both present and future generations. The basis for our moral obligation to future generations and gender equality lies in the concern and respect that we owe to all humans regardless of where and when they may be born. The UN system should support the pursuit of a more explicit normative basis to strengthen rights-based approaches in legal frameworks that help safeguard the rights, needs and interests of future generations as well as of efforts to ensure equal legal rights and protections for women and girls in order to accelerate the attainment of gender equality.

### 2. Pursue fairness between present and future generations

Fairness between generations is embedded in the concept of sustainable development: the needs of presents generations must not be met at the expense of generations to come. Similarly, the needs of future generations should not be met at the expense of people living today and must not come at the expense of people living in poverty or who are otherwise vulnerable. The UN system should aim to promote an equitable and just distribution of benefits, risks, and costs in all sectors, including socio-economic, between present and future generations. International agreements, including those related to children, youth and older persons, call for ensuring an equitable distribution of resources and opportunities both within and between generations.

### 3. Recognize and foster an interconnected world

The world is complex and dynamic. The UN system should actively explore opportunities to recognize, strengthen, and foster an integrated and interdisciplinary approach throughout its work to maximize its contribution towards the interests and capabilities of future generations, particularly in advocating for the provision of global public goods and the management of global commons. Such an integrated approach will help accelerate support to urgently address the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution which undermine future generations' abilities to fulfil their needs and interests and threaten their survival. Fostering global solidarity and global responsibility are key values to ensure the UN system continues to reflect and respond to a changing world.

### 4. Think, plan and act with future generations in mind

Adopting a good ancestor policy would help infuse strategic foresight, long-term thinking and the precautionary principle into all stages of planning and programming from design and budgeting to implementation and evaluation. The UN system should pursue due diligence and therefore purposefully shift to a more systematic understanding of global risks and long-term trends; collect and leverage disaggregated data and use evidence-based modelling and scenario-based foresight for development of anticipatory policy; transform systems of national and global accounting; promote the use of rigorous future impact assessments and support Member States to plan and act for the future. Where uncertainties persist, the UN system should take a precautionary approach to risks – acknowledging that the actions of present generations can cause significant and irreversible damage to future generations and that a lack of scientific clarity on such risks should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent potential harm.



## 5. Ensure meaningful representation of future generations and their interests

The interests of future generations as rights holders must be reflected in present day decision-making processes. A variety of mechanisms and models for meaningful representation of the interests of future generations already exist in corporate, national and sub-national contexts. The UN system should explore such mechanisms and mainstream them across its work and decision-making processes, including governance, policymaking, and partnerships. These mechanisms should be inclusive of relevant stakeholders of all ages in the present that are thinking and acting with the interests of future generations in mind. The UN system should also aim to support Member States in developing mechanisms at the local and regional levels, to ensure the interests of future generations are represented across all levels.

## 6. Foster open science, data and knowledge for the future

The UN system should ensure its approach to future generations is firmly underpinned by science and innovation, treating data, education and knowledge as global public goods shared across generations. This means that the UN system should prioritize interdisciplinary knowledge including research into the long-term impacts of today's actions; build transparent, inclusive and accessible sources of scientific information about key global trends (including related to the environment, demographics, and technologies); foster open science, data and knowledge to reduce global digital, technological and knowledge divides; and link interdisciplinary knowledge more firmly to policy and action, enabling evidence-based programming and anticipatory policymaking that will strive to safeguard the interests of future generations and preserve their abilities to uphold their human rights. It also means the UN system should invest in transformative education policies that foster open knowledge as central to shaping more just, peaceful, and sustainable futures.

## 7. Foster a future-oriented organizational culture and capabilities

The UN system should seek to adopt a more future-oriented organizational culture and ways of working by developing diverse capabilities, including foresight and futures literacy, and systematically promoting long-term and intergenerational thinking at all levels. The UN system should seek to operationalize future fit governance and accountability including: reviewing and strengthening existing UN rules, policies and procedures to better identify and account for future generations; developing and strengthening tools that measure impact in terms of immediate and long-term objectives; designing institutions and processes that are agile and can evolve with changing circumstances and emerging risks and opportunities; and taking meaningful steps to include the views and needs of future generations at all stages of decision-making.

## 8. Strengthen inclusive partnerships and global cooperation

Recognizing the importance of multistakeholder collaboration to respond to the rights, needs, and interests of future generations, the UN system should play a role in systematically building partnerships centered on inclusion and meaningful participation. Partnerships to support the implementation of these key principles would enable the UN system to reduce siloes, incentivize joint long-term outcomes, and contribute to accelerating a broader societal shift towards better accounting for the needs and interests of future generations. Inclusive multilateralism and partnerships should leverage collaborations with a wide range of stakeholders including civil society and the private sector to foster a movement of change that is agile, diverse, responsive, and inclusive both within and beyond the UN system.

For the full article, go to the IEF website here: [https://iefworld.org/UN\\_future\\_gen](https://iefworld.org/UN_future_gen)

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