



LEAVES, A Newsletter of the INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM
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From the Editor, Request for information for upcoming newsletters

This newsletter is an opportunity for IEF members to share their experiences, activities, and initiatives that are taking place at the community level on environment, climate change, and sustainability. All members are welcome to contribute information about related activities, upcoming conferences, news from like-minded organizations, recommended websites, book reviews, etc. Please send information to newsletter@ief.org

Please share the Leaves newsletter and IEF membership information with family, friends, and associates and encourage interested persons to consider becoming a member of the IEF.

IEF Matters

Welcome to our new Members and Associates:

Member

Jorge Conte (Panama)

Associates

Dr. Sakshi Arora (India)

Cheryl Winchell (USA)

Salahuddeen Mohammed, Shitu (Nigeria)

Miriam Kurland (USA)

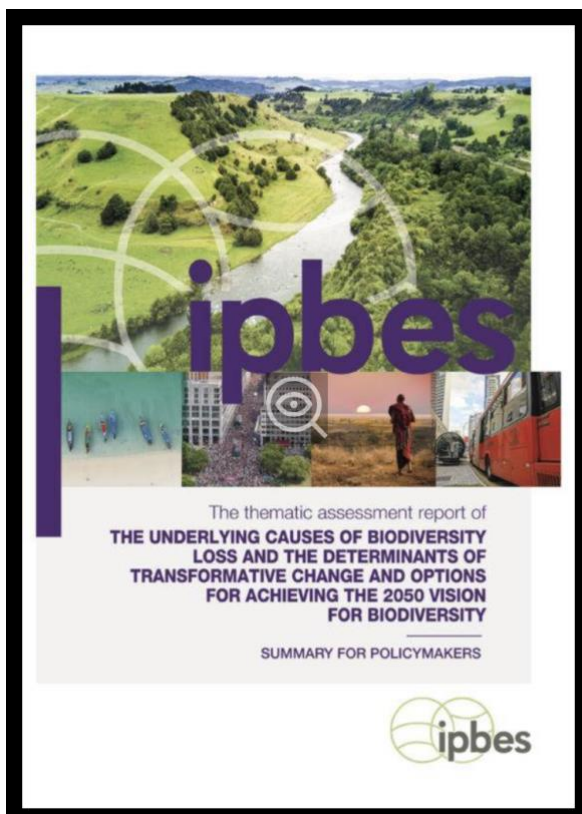


Let's spread the word about the International Environment Forum!

The IEF is a hidden treasure! Let's tell the world about it! ☺ You are welcome to use the slides which IEF secretary Christine Muller prepared for the Ottawa Environmental Café a few weeks ago. The topic was *The International Environment Forum: Applying Scientific Knowledge and Spiritual Values in Addressing the Environmental Crisis*. After the presentation there was a lively conversation. People were very interested in the IEF! Since then, Christine adapted the presentation for general use. You can customize it according to the interests of your audience and the time available, for example you could shorten it by deleting slides 4 – 19). You can download the slides [as pdf](#) or [as pptx](#). A recording of the 27 min. presentation is [here](#). Any question? Write to ief@iefworld.org.

IPBES Transformative Change Assessment

The new Transformative Change Report by the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) warns that deep, fundamental shifts in how people view and interact with the natural world are urgently needed to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and safeguard life on Earth.



Prof. Karen O'Brien (Norway/USA), co-chair of the assessment said:

“Transformative change for a just and sustainable world is urgent because there is a closing window of opportunity to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and to prevent triggering the potentially irreversible decline and the projected collapse of key ecosystem functions.

“Under current trends, there is a serious risk of crossing several irreversible biophysical tipping points including die-off of low altitude coral reefs, die back of the Amazon rainforest, and loss of the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets. Transformative change is also necessary because most previous and current approaches to conservation, which aim to reform rather than transform systems, have failed to halt or reverse the decline of nature around the world, which has serious repercussions for the global economy and human well-being.”

The report defines transformative change as fundamental system-wide shifts in **views** – ways of thinking, knowing and seeing; **structures** – ways of organizing, regulating and governing; and **practices** – ways of doing, behaving and relating. Current dominant configurations of views, structures and practices perpetuate and reinforce the underlying causes of biodiversity loss and nature's decline. Transforming them is central to delivering on the global commitments for a just and sustainable world.

This scientific assessment corresponds completely to the Bahá'í principles and vision of the path to a just and sustainable future. IEF President Arthur Dahl [compiled Baha'i texts](#) following the outline of the assessment's Summary for Policymakers.

For a summary of the report, go here: <https://iefworld.org/IPBEStransformative>

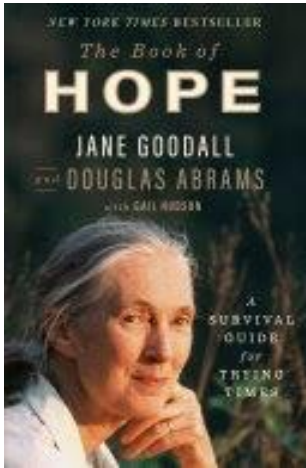
For the Bahá'í compilation based on the IPBES Transformative Change Assessment, go here: https://iefworld.org/TransformativeChange_comp

For a presentation combining the assessment outline and the relevant Bahá'í texts, go here: https://iefworld.org/fl/yDiscourse_Transformation.pdf ?

Summary for Policymakers: <https://ipbes.canto.de/v/IPBES11Media/album/ROLPU>

SOURCE: <https://www.ipbes.net/transformative-change/media-release>

Reasons for Hope



[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.
Shoghi Effendi, [The Promised Day Is Come](#)

Jane Goodall who is well known for her important work with chimpanzees wrote a book* explaining why she still has hope for the future of humanity despite ominous scientific predictions about the climate and the Earth's natural systems on which we all depend.

She gave four reasons for her hope:

Reason 1: The Amazing Human Intellect

“Even though chimpanzees, our closest living relatives, can perform super well at all kinds of intelligence tests, even the brightest chimpanzee could not design that rocket from which crept a robot that was programmed to crawl around the surface of the Red Planet – Mars – taking photos for scientists on Earth to study. Humans have done such incredible things ...” (p. 45)

Reason 2: The Resilience of Nature

“There is a kind of built-in resilience – as when spring brings forth leaves after a bitter winter of snow and ice, or the desert blooms after even a tiny amount of rain falls. And there are seeds that can germinate after lying dormant for many years. They contain that tiny spark of life waiting for the right conditions to release its power. It's what Albert Schweitzer – one of my heroes – called the will to live.” (p. 80)

Reason 3: The Power of Young People

“It actually makes me angry when people say it will be up to young people to solve [humanity's problems]. Of course, we can't and shouldn't expect them to solve all our problems. We've got to support them. And I truly believe the young people of today are rising to the challenge in a most remarkable way. Once they understand the problems and are empowered to take action – well, they are changing the world as we speak.” (p. 127)

Reason 4: The Indomitable Human Spirit

After sharing stories of societies and individuals that have overcome huge obstacles, the interviewer asked Jane: “But when it comes to the grim environmental situation we face today, do you think we could all come together and use this same energy and determination to tackle climate change and loss of biodiversity?”

Jane responded: “There is no doubt in my mind that we could. The trouble is that not enough people realize the magnitude of the danger we are facing – a danger that threatens to utterly destroy the world. How do we get people to heed the dire warnings of the people on the ground who have been fighting this danger for so long? How do we get them to take action?” (p. 159)

Jane Goodall then explains that this is the reason why she has travelled around the world “trying to wake people up, make them aware of the danger, yet at the same time assure everyone there is a window of time when our actions can start healing the harm we have inflicted.” (p. 159)

Dear reader, you are invited to share your views about Jane Goodall’s reasons for hope as well as any thoughts they may have triggered. What are your reasons for hope? What are some Baha’i perspectives about the topics raised? What are you practically doing that may inspire others for similar actions and provide hope?

If possible, your comments will be incorporated into next month’s Sustainable Living Conversation. Please, send them to cmuller@wilmetteinstitute.org within the next two weeks.

* *The Book of Hope* by Jane Goodall and Douglas Abrams

SOURCE: Wilmette Institute January 2025 Newsletter, [Sustainable Living Conversation](#)

Climate Change and Goals for the Next 10 Years

**By IEF Member Rafael Amaral Shayani,
Professor of "Engineering and Climate Change" at University of Brasília**

Although it seems that nations have been advancing in the dialogue on climate change, actions have remained practically stagnant due to governmental use of outdated paradigms. The practice of setting goals to be achieved only in the next 10 years may have seemed positive, but it merely reduced the urgency of the moment.

Climate change has been denied for a long time, and when science predicted that global warming would drastically affect our way of life, governments still considered it a problem for future generations to deal with, thereby allowing short-term actions to be postponed.

However, climate change has knocked on the planet’s door and entered without delay. Extreme weather events have become more common, causing both material damage and loss of life. Despite this, countries have insisted on the view that only long-term actions would be sufficient.

For example, climate financing, the main focus of COP29, was conceived in 2009 during COP15 in Copenhagen and designed to start 10 years later. This did not happen with debate on this matter continuing today. It has been very convenient to present vague goals of zero emissions for 2050, which would be a date when most politicians have retired and would not be accountable for the promised results. As of today, Brazil itself has failed to meet the greenhouse gas emission reduction targets for 2025, which were promised 10 years ago in the Paris Agreement. In the meantime, at COP29 Brazil presented an even more ambitious target of a 67% reduction in emissions by 2035 (about 10 years from now).

One aspect of greenhouse gas emissions, that could have extremely serious consequences, has not caused any concerns yet. Even if zero emissions targets for 2050 were set today and achieved (though current indications have not reflected this possibility), extreme weather events are projected to worsen year after year until 2050. Thus, even with lower emissions, greenhouse gases would be continuously released into the atmosphere causing an increase in the planet’s average temperature. This would require immediate action for drastic emission reductions and not promises for 10 years from now.

Another aspect that would neutralize any action of many countries would be the traditional view that emission reductions impact economic growth--something undesirable for all governments. In speeches, many have supported the ideal of product reuse and recycling, but in practice, the stimulus has been for society to increase consumption to generate economic growth and jobs. If people reused and recycled more, they would buy fewer goods which could cool down the economy. Thus, governments have not encouraged setting or meeting these goals.

It is not enough to just discuss climate financing. The current way of life demands more from the planet than it can support. If there is no change in the mindset of the people, technology with its clean energy systems, will not be able to solve the whole problem. Unbridled consumerism needs to give way to moderation, where a more cooperative society will consume fewer goods, generate less waste, and create new markets, especially in recycling; thereby making the circular economy generate new jobs.

Global citizenship is necessary to address climate change. As long as countries continue to compare their emissions with those of China and the United States, they will always find a justification not to take the necessary measures to reduce their own emissions. It is as if a student scored 3 on a test worth 10 and boasted about doing better than the students who scored 1 on the same test.

Nevertheless, not everything is negative. Climate change has created a conducive environment for nations to come together, year after year, and think of the Earth as one country and mankind its citizens. This tremendous climate challenge facing humanity enables the world to take a step forward towards global unity, which is also essential in addressing various other global ills, such as hunger and poverty. This is the opportunity that presents itself to governments: to rethink the world thereby promoting justice, peace, and unity!

Climate Change and a Just Transition

UNRISD 2024

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) has published in November 2024 "Reducing Inequalities in Development Policy and Practice: Climate Change and Just Transition", as one of its sectoral guidance notes for reducing inequalities.

It discusses the three dimensions of sustainable development and their interlinkages, the links between climate change and inequality, key types of climate policy for mitigation and adaptation, political economy considerations, and key recommendations for influencing climate policy and a just transition. The following is a summary of some of the key points.

Climate change, environmental destruction and biodiversity loss have significant impacts on livelihoods, health and productivity. Climate change magnifies existing inequalities, both within and between countries. Within countries, populations at greater risk of adverse effects include disadvantaged and vulnerable populations, some Indigenous peoples, and local communities dependent on agricultural or coastal livelihoods, whereas regions at higher risk include Arctic ecosystems, dryland regions, small island developing states, and Least Developed Countries. Economic inequalities between the world's richest and poorest nations have reportedly widened by 25 percent due to global warming.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation offer the possibility to reduce inequalities when policy foregrounds the needs and perspectives of low-income and vulnerable groups and

places. Climate change unduly affects vulnerable populations, exacerbating existing social disparities, since extreme weather events, natural disasters and resource scarcity, often hit marginalized communities the hardest.

The concept of just transition, which lies at the heart of equitable climate change policy, acknowledges the potential adverse socio-economic impacts the move away from fossil fuels can have if not well managed. When done well, a just transition can accelerate much needed decarbonization while tackling root causes of injustice and challenging systems of exclusion and discrimination. By pivoting toward green sectors, countries can transition toward sustainable economies that benefit a wider populace, particularly underserved communities.

Inclusive economic development strategies that prioritize access to these emerging sectors, alongside the “greening” of traditional sectors, can bridge socio-economic divisions, thereby reducing inequality. By tackling concentrations of power and wealth, they not only have the potential to diminish the influence of entrenched interests that benefit from the status quo but also to amplify the voices and interests of the marginalized communities who are most affected by climate change.

Climate justice involves envisioning fundamentally different futures rooted in social and solidarity economies which tackle different dimensions of existing injustices and inequalities together, emphasizing principles such as mutual aid, voluntary cooperation and democratic decision making, in contrast to the individualism underlying market economies. These principles find expression in new economic models that are based on the primacy of people and social purpose in the distribution and use of profits.

There is much more on specific policies and recommendations in the full guidance note linked below.

SOURCE: <https://cdn.unrisd.org/assets/library/papers/pdf-files/2024/2024-sector...>

International Court of Justice advisory opinion on climate change

Submissions 2024

On 29 March 2023, the UN General Assembly requested the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to provide an Advisory Opinion on States' obligations regarding climate change. The ICJ has now, for the first time in history, the mandate to clarify the legal obligations of States with regard to climate change under multiple sources of international law.

An unprecedented number of States and international organizations have participated in the proceedings, with the Court receiving a record 91 initial written submissions and 62 in the subsequent comments phase, when States and international organizations that provided initial input could comment on one another's written statements. Following the completion of the written phase, the Court held two weeks of oral hearings, from 2 to 13 December 2024, in which a record ninety-six States and eleven international organizations participated.

The hearings raised key legal issues central to climate justice, including but not at all limited to:

- law governing State obligations in relation to climate change;
- equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities;

- human rights of present and future generations, in particular, the right to self-determination and the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment;
- duty to prevent transboundary harm;
- legal consequences comprising of cessation of climate-destructive conduct guarantees of non-repetition and the provision of full reparation;
- State responsibility for cumulative present and historical emissions;
- the right to remedy and reparations;
- effective regulation of corporate conduct exacerbating the climate crisis;
- the equitable phase out of fossil fuels.

To continue reading this article, go here: <https://iefworld.org/ICJadvisory2024>

Corals on the Edge

Blog by Arthur Dahl

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, announced at the Climate COP in Baku on 13 November 2024, shows that 44 percent of reef building coral species globally are threatened with extinction. This was based on an assessment of the conservation status of 892 warm-water reef-building coral species. Climate change is the main threat, along with pollution, agricultural runoff, disease and unsustainable fishing. Severe coral bleaching events have been reported around the world.

For example, Staghorn coral (*Acropora cervicornis*) and Elkhorn coral (*Acropora palmata*) are two Critically Endangered species in the Caribbean that have experienced significant declines due to increased warming, water pollution, hurricanes and the severe impacts of coral diseases. When I was working on reefs in the Caribbean in the 1970s, they were the most common and important reef-building corals.

To save corals from extinction, we need to cut greenhouse gas emissions, accompanied by actions to address other threats, and to strengthen species' resilience. Selecting and protecting the most heat-adapted corals, as IEF member Austin Bowden-Kerby is doing in Fiji, may help, as will research to see if corals can adapt.

Drylands now make up 40% of land on Earth

**based on Fiona Harvey, Environment editor
The Guardian, 9 December 2024**

An area of land nearly a third larger than India has turned from humid conditions to dryland – arid areas where agriculture is difficult – in the past three decades, research has found.

Drylands now make up 40% of all land on Earth, excluding Antarctica. Three-quarters of the world's land suffered drier conditions in the past 30 years, which is likely to be permanent, according to the study by the UN Science Policy Interface, a body of scientists convened by the United Nations.

Africa lost about 12% of its GDP owing to the increasing aridity between 1990 and 2015, the report found. Even worse losses are forecast: Africa will lose about 16% of its GDP, and Asia close to 7%, in the next half decade.

Ibrahim Thiaw, executive secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), said: “Unlike droughts – temporary periods of low rainfall – aridity represents a permanent, unrelenting transformation.

“Droughts end. When an area’s climate becomes drier, however, the ability to return to previous conditions is lost. The drier climates now affecting vast lands across the globe will not return to how they were, and this change is redefining life on Earth.”

Some crops will be particularly at risk: maize yields are projected to halve in Kenya by 2050, if current trends continue. Drylands are areas where 90% of the rainfall is lost to evaporation, leaving only 10% for vegetation. Two-thirds of land globally will store less water by mid-century.

To continue reading this article, go here: <https://iefworld.org/node/1652>

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/dec/09/drylands-now-make-up-40-of-land-on-earth-excluding-antarctica-study-says>

Land Degradation Threatens Food Supplies

Convention to Combat Desertification UNCCD COP16 December 2024 FAO on Salt in Soil

After two weeks of intense negotiations on how to tackle land degradation, desertification and drought, the largest and most inclusive United Nations land conference wrapped up in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The nearly 200 countries convening at the 16th Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) committed to prioritize land restoration and drought resilience in national policies and international cooperation as an essential strategy for food security and climate adaptation. Nations also made significant progress in laying the groundwork for a future global drought regime, which they intend to complete at COP17 in Mongolia in 2026. In the meanwhile, more than USD 12 billion were pledged to tackle desertification, land degradation and drought around the world, especially in the most vulnerable countries.

UNCCD estimates that at least USD 2.6 trillion in total investments are needed by 2030 to restore more than one billion hectares of degraded land and build resilience to drought. This equals USD 1 billion in daily investments between now and 2030 to meet global land restoration targets and combat desertification and drought.

The conference acknowledged a significant shift in the global approach to land and drought issues, highlighting the interconnected challenges with broader global issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, food security, forced migration, and global stability.

To read the entire article, go here: <https://iefworld.org/node/1657>

The following sections cover:

- Greater voice for Indigenous Peoples and other non-state actors
- Global food production at increased risk from excess salt in soil

SOURCES: <https://www.unccd.int/news-stories/press-releases/united-nations-confer...>
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/dec/11/global-food-product...>

Harnessing science to tackle global crises

The Fifth Element

22 October 2024

Our world faces a convergence of complex, interconnected challenges. Climate change, biodiversity loss, armed conflicts, rising inequality, and mass migrations of humans and animals are combining to create a global polycrisis. The wealth of scientific knowledge that humanity possesses could be a true asset in effectively addressing these challenges, however, the true potential of science remains untapped at the time we need it the most.

In a paper published in *PLOS Sustainability and Transformation*, an international team of researchers looked at how science could play a more active role in managing crises. The paper builds on the outcomes of the international conference “What Role for Science in Crisis Times? Outlook in the Health, Environment, and Agriculture Interconnected Areas”, held in Montpellier in 2022.

To enhance science’s contribution to crisis management, the paper emphasises the need for interdisciplinarity, where science is integrated across disciplines, and transdisciplinarity, which incorporates various societal actors and stakeholders. By co-designing and co-producing solutions with scientists, policymakers and affected populations, transdisciplinary science can contribute to integrated and cooperative decision-making.

“We are now living in a polycrisis world, where science should be playing a more engaged and active role,” says Paul Shrivastava, Co-President of The Club of Rome, Professor of Management & Organizations, The Pennsylvania State University and the lead author of the paper. “It should be more fluid, timely, and integrated with social and political decision-making.”

The paper summarises the key actions to harness science to tackle crises, which include implementing interventions on both global and local scales, engaging the public, democratising science, adopting new governance frameworks, and integrating community engagement. It also highlights the importance of aligning science-based interventions with cultural norms and increasing engagement with countries suffering from unequal access to science.

The authors stress that the effort needs to come from both directions—political leaders need to proactively engage with scientists and rely on evidence-based solutions, while scientists need to seek access points to connect with crisis responders and affected populations. The latter could be encouraged by rewarding scientists for their real-world contributions within the academic system and increasing funding for research with a direct crisis impact.

“Science has identified the existential threats we face, but this knowledge is often ignored, contested, or slowly acted upon. It’s time to flip the science model and mobilise significant resources for the benefit of people and the planet,” says Carlos Alvarez Pereira Secretary General of The Club of Rome and co-author of the study. “That is why The Club of Rome and partners established the Earth-Humanity Coalition — a global network that encourages transformative research and action at all levels.”

This paper underscores the vital role of science in navigating crisis-ridden times and urges decision-makers to view scientific input as crucial for fostering sustainability and transformation. By harnessing the transformative power of science, transcending traditional

boundaries, and cultivating collaborative solutions, we can chart a course towards a sustainable future in an equitable and healthy world for all.

REFERENCE: Shrivastava P, Jackson L, Ghneim-Herrera T, Caron P, Correa C, Alvarez Pereira C, et al. (2024) Science in crisis times: The crucial role of science in sustainability and transformation.

PLOS Sustain Transform 3(10): e0000132. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pstr.0000132>

SOURCE: <https://thefifthelement.earth/news/harnessing-science-to-tackle-global-...>

