



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.

Editor's Reflections

We are overwhelmed by world-wide human suffering and environmental destruction and despairing about the scientific projections for the future and the ever-darkening political developments that are exacerbating the crises. The International Environment Forum believes that the cure for humanity's ills can be found in making decisions based on science and according to the spiritual guidance received from the Creator of the universe, especially from the most recent divine teacher, Baha'u'llah.

This newsletter will cover this whole spectrum of topics. You can read about the new and truly alarming findings from climate science in the article *Latest on Climate Science* (p. 2) and about future risks in *Current climate policies risk catastrophic societal and economic impacts* (p. 9).

Fortunately, there are positive developments to report: The new statement by the Baha'i International Community *Strengthening Solidarity: Social Cohesion as a Driver of Development* (p. 3) explores the foundation for a socially healthy society. The ABS Agriculture Group will offer a webinar on *Understanding Transformations in Food Systems Through Process Relational Perspectives* (p. 4), and you can find valuable resources for positive social change in the article about *The Coalition for the United Nations We Need (C4UN)* (p. 5). We can deepen our understanding about "planetary phase shifts" in the article *Transforming Civilisation* (p. 7) and learn about the ecological parameters for an environmentally sustainable world in *Post-growth: the science of wellbeing within planetary boundaries* (p. 8). And finally, a spiritual perspective can help us not to lose hope as suggested in *Reasons for Hope Part 2: Baha'i Perspectives* (p. 5).

IEF Matters

Plans for the IEF's 29th Annual Conference

The IEF Board is currently exploring a possibility for an in-person conference in the United Kingdom at the end of June, pending final approval of the location. There will likely be some hybrid component to a part of the program. Look out for further news in the next newsletters.

Welcome to our new Members and Associates:

Member

Frank Adiga (United Kingdom)

Associates

Gita Badyan, Canada

Mohammad Maksudul Hassan (Bangladesh/Japan)

Rae Lewark (USA)



Image: Tropical greenhouse, University of Rhode Island, 10 Feb. 2025

We look forward to getting to know you!

Latest on Climate Change

February 2025

If you already were worried about climate change, the latest news is even worse. Leading climatologist James Hansen published a significant paper on 3 February 2025 explaining why IPCC reports have underestimated the speed of global warming, which doubled from 0.2°C to 0.4°C annually in the last two years. New regulations on highly-polluting fuels used by shipping cut their pollution of pristine ocean air from 2020. That pollution created aerosols and denser clouds that reflected sunlight back into space, producing cooling that offset some global warming. With that cooling reduced, overall global warming accelerated. This showed that climate sensitivity to CO₂ in the atmosphere is higher than previously assumed, not 3°C but 5°C for a doubling of CO₂ concentration.

Hansen said: “The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defined a scenario which gives a 50% chance to keep warming under 2°C – that scenario is now impossible. The 2°C target is dead, because the global energy use is rising, and it will continue to rise.” He adds that global temperatures are likely to reach 2°C by 2045. It is estimated that this will trigger a rise in sea levels by several meters, the melting of polar caps, and irreversible damage to critical ecosystems around the world.

On 2 February, the day before Hansen’s report, the North Pole experienced temperatures 30°C above average for that time of year, an unprecedented event that could have massive global consequences. This is not just about the ice melting, but impacts marine ecosystems

and affects the entire global climate system. This extreme and sustained warming is not only unprecedented but also accelerating.

The wide-ranging impacts of climate change have surprised even the scientific community, and are creating a humanitarian crisis. Between 2010 and 2020, 83 percent of all disasters caused by natural hazards were linked to climate extremes – especially floods, storms, droughts and extreme heat. Together these disasters affected 1.7 billion people, killing 410,000. In 2022, 70 percent of refugees and asylum seekers fled from highly climate-vulnerable countries. In 2023 climate extremes drove 72 million people into crisis or emergency levels of hunger and triggered over 20 million new internal displacements. Growing stress on water resources and shifting weather patterns are compounding people’s vulnerability in many hazard-prone locations.

Continue reading this article here: <https://iefworld.org/node/1676>

This is a link to the recording of the 4 February 1-hour webinar with Jim Hansen and his team about the paper: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6wOjk2OCZQ>

Sources:

Hansen, James, et al. (2025). Global Warming Has Accelerated: Are the United Nations and the Public Well-Informed? *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 67:1, 6-44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00139157.2025.2434494>
<https://www.ipsnews.net/2025/02/wfp-fao-warn-severity-climate-crisis-fo...>
<https://www.wfp.org/publications/wfps-updated-climate-change-policy-2024>

Strengthening Solidarity: Social Cohesion as a Driver of Development

New statement explores spiritual dimension of human prosperity

BIC New York, January 23, 2025

Human prosperity depends as much on social, moral, and relational factors as on technological, material, and financial ones, says the Bahá’í International Community (BIC) in a statement released ahead of the upcoming 63rd session of the Commission for Social Development, which will be held in February at the United Nations headquarters in New York City.

The statement, titled “Strengthening Solidarity: Social Cohesion as a Driver of Development,” emphasizes how the roots of numerous global challenges lie in how human beings view, value, respond to, and relate to one another.

“At the heart of addressing these challenges is the recognition of humanity’s shared identity and essential oneness,” says Cecilia Schirmeister, a representative of the BIC’s New York Office.

Drawing on experiences of Bahá’í communities worldwide, the statement explores how qualities such as trustworthiness, honesty, generosity, and cooperation serve as building blocks for creating more cohesive and prosperous communities.

“The statement highlights that meaningful social development is ultimately impossible without cultivating spiritual qualities that strengthen the social fabric and without developing a sense of responsibility for the collective well-being,” says Ms. Schirmeister.

She adds: “When we look at places where Bahá’í community-building activities have taken root, we see how these qualities are contributing to establishing constructive patterns of individual and collective life that support both material and spiritual progress.”

Ms. Schirmeister explains that, over time, new patterns of interaction emerge, including greater collaboration between youth and older generations, more pronounced expressions of gender equality, and an enhanced ability for constructive dialogue and consultation. All this strengthens bonds of unity and builds trust and confidence among diverse groups of people.

The statement draws attention to experiences that demonstrate how communities can, through their own efforts, become more cohesive and inclusive.

“What we are learning,” explains Ms. Schirmeister, “is that when spiritual principles permeate social interactions, communities not only become more integrated but also develop greater capacity to advance their own social and economic development aims and attain higher levels of prosperity.”

The statement, which can be viewed [here](#), is part of the BIC’s ongoing contribution to the discourse on social development and the advancement of human prosperity in its fullest sense.

The statement is also available on the IEF website [here](#).

Source: Baha’i International Community <https://www.bic.org/news/bic-statement-explores-social-cohesion-driver-development>

Understanding Transformations in Food Systems Through Process Relational Perspectives

ABS Agriculture Group Webinar

The Association for Baha’i Studies will offer a webinar about *Understanding Transformations in Food Systems Through Process Relational Perspectives* on

Sunday, February 23 at 10:00am PST / 1:00pm EST / 7pm CET.

Speaker: Anil Singh

How to join the webinar: Subscribers to the ABS Agriculture Group Mailchimp page will receive an announcement with the link the week before presentations. People are free to unsubscribe at any time. Sign up here to receive a link: <https://agriculture-working-group.mailchimpsites.com/>



Addressing the complex challenges facing food systems requires a shift in how we understand change and transformation. A process-relational perspective sees food systems not as static structures but as dynamic networks of relationships—between

people, environments, technologies, and ideas. Change emerges from the interactions within these relationships, with certain patterns, or “attractors,” stabilizing systems, while others create openings for new possibilities. This approach encourages us to focus on how relational dynamics shape systems over time, highlighting the potential for transformation

from within. For example, dominant attractors in agriculture, education, or governance may perpetuate inequities, but alternatives—grounded in collaboration, justice, and sustainability—can reconfigure systems to foster resilience and well-being. Such a perspective resonates deeply with Bahá'í teachings, which emphasize the oneness of humanity, justice, and the harmony of science and religion. By understanding transformation as an ongoing, relational process, we can better discern pathways for constructive change that unite material and spiritual dimensions.

Suggested Reading:

[Turning the Tide, Reducing Biodiversity Loss and Restoring Decimated Ecosystems](#)

The Coalition for the United Nations We Need (C4UN) - a valuable source of information and insights

by IEF Board Member Victoria W. Thoresen

IEF is one of many civil society organizations around the world concerned with sustainable development and trying to contribute to changes that will lead to greater cooperation and unity. To do so, IEF has, among other things, engaged with other civil society organisations and supported initiatives that seek to strengthen the United Nations system. The Coalition for the United Nations We Need is such an organization (<https://c4unwn.org/>). C4UN works on many levels, but one that is worth noting is its information service and series of virtual fireside chats and podcasts. These interviews share insight and knowledge from such experts as Stefan Løvén and Stephen Heintz: <https://www.youtube.com/@coalitionfortheunweneed78>.

Originally known as the UN2020 Campaign, the Coalition for the U.N. We Need was established in 2017 as a platform to enable greater civil society impact on the work for increased multilateral collaboration and improved global governance. The Baha'í International Community has been an active member of the Coalition, with Daniel Perell from BIC's New York office as co-chair of the C4UN steering group. IEF members have participated in many of C4UN's initiatives.

C4UN's vision is "To transform the UN system by promoting inclusive people-centred multilateralism in partnership with civil society, governments, and the UN." Focusing on the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations, C4UN assisted in spreading the document "Our Common Agenda", and preparing the U.N. Summit of the Future which was held in September 2024. Implementation of the Pact for the Future, adopted at the Summit, remains a challenge for civil society as well as governments and the private sector.

Reasons for Hope, Part 2: Bahá'í Perspectives

by IEF Board Member Christine Muller

Last month, in [part 1](#), we presented the reasons for hope shared by Jane Goodall in her book, [The Book of Hope](#). In this part 2, we will discuss reasons for hope from a Bahá'í perspective.

Just to recap, Jane Goodall's reasons for hope are:

- The Amazing Human Intellect
- The Resilience of Nature

- The Power of Young People
- The Indomitable Human Spirit

I find all these reasons valid, and they certainly contribute to my hope as well. However, looking at the scope of the destruction of the natural world, at the alarming scientific projections for the future about climate change and the loss of wild plants and animals, at the mounting toxic pollution, at the slow pace of human action, at the distraction, paralysis, and disunity of humanity, and at the numerous social problems that are exacerbating the threats, these reasons are not sufficient to give me hope.

We need a fundamental transformation of society and of our conception of our human purpose. Bahá'u'lláh brought spiritual teachings that provide us with guidance in today's existential crisis, and a vision for a spiritual civilization that is peaceful, just, and in harmony with nature. These words of Bahá'u'lláh give me all the hope I need:

“Each one of the ordinances We have revealed is a mighty stronghold for the preservation of the world of being.” (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh / 6. Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih (Words of Paradise))

The following Bahá'í teachings may be among the most important ones for preserving “the world of being” or, in other words, rescuing the natural world which, of course, also includes humans:

- the oneness of humankind
- a world federal system
- objective investigation of the truth and using science
- consultation
- spiritual development
- moderation and leading a simple life
- justice
- equal value of all humans regardless of the color of their skin or their cultural background
- gender equality
- interconnectedness of everything in creation
- importance of education
- using spiritual principles (religion) to guide all our decisions on all levels of governance and in our individual and community lives

There is no space here to discuss how we can apply these and other Bahá'í teachings to the environmental crisis, and how we can use them in public discourse and in our personal and community actions. Therefore, let's just briefly reflect about one core Bahá'í teaching.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh XLIII)

This is the age-old spiritual path we humans have been called upon to take by the Prophets of the past: to overcome the ego and to dedicate our lives to serve the common good. What is new is that Bahá'u'lláh expanded the common good to the planetary level: All humanity is our family. These words motivate us to be [mindful of our actions](#) and consider their impacts on the environment. They guide us to think about the impacts of our daily life on the climate, on plants and animals, and on human beings around the world. We will *care* about the well-being of all and not just our own personal desires; therefore we will literally be

more *careful* with the use of energy and transportation, with our food choices, with all our purchasing decisions, and with handling our waste.

Moreover, not only each individual, but governments are specifically called to consider the well-being of all of humankind:

O ye the elected representatives of the people in every land! Take ye counsel together, and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind and bettereth the condition thereof. (The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 90/93)

Most environmental problems are global in scope. For example, the carbon pollution from each country has an impact on the global climate. Imagine if the governments of the world created binding laws and regulations that would put the well-being of all people and the planet before national interests and profit!

To read about one more reason for hope and the conclusion of this article, [go here](#).

You can read about other Bahá'í teachings and their application to environmental issues in the freely available study course [Scientific and Spiritual Dimensions of Climate Change](#). Perhaps you can have conversations about these topics in your community. The IEF website also offers a [compilation of Bahá'í quotations on environmental sustainability](#).

Source: Wilmette Institute [February 2025 Newsletter](#)

Transforming Civilisation

The Club of Rome

Based on a blog by Nafeez Ahmed
9 January 2025

Nafeez Ahmed, member of The Club of Rome and the Earth4All Transformational Economics Commission, has published a blog on 9 January 2025 showing that civilisation could leap into a new era of superabundance – but only if humanity commits to protecting the earth.

He starts with the planetary boundaries framework that tells us how we are disrupting the safe operating space that permits life on earth. We have now breached six out of nine boundaries and are at risk of abrupt and irreversible changes to the Earth System. He says what is missing is the looming obsolescence of the industrial order which is part of a civilisational-scale metamorphosis in which a whole new Human System is emerging.

His main point is that humans are not outside the earth system, but part of the intersection between human and earth systems. He has published a new peer-reviewed paper, “Planetary phase shift” as a new systems framework to navigate the evolutionary transformation of human civilisation’, in *Foresight: The Journal of Futures Studies*.

The concept of a ‘planetary phase shift’ suggests that the entire human-earth system is in a state of fundamental transformation – that a new human-earth system is emerging. It is a fundamental reality that human civilisation is undergoing a comprehensive systemic transformation, although the shape of the emerging system is unclear. It could still become a range of different things, positive or negative, evolutionary or regressive.

Ahmed develops a new transdisciplinary theoretical model to scientifically understand and track this planetary-scale systemic transformation, so that we can make better choices about

how to respond. At the centre of the paper is the 'adaptive cycle'. This is a four-stage life-cycle of growth, stabilisation, breakdown and renewal which can be seen operating across all natural systems – including social systems, economic systems and civilisational systems. He explores how the adaptive cycle operates at a civilisational scale. He also draws on 'phase transition' theory, which looks at how systems change abruptly at chemical and biological levels. Disruptive technologies track the key material phase transitions at play right now. Organisational change allows us to explore the interplay between technology and society. The result is a big picture vision of how industrial civilisation appears to be moving through the last two stages of its current life-cycle: breakdown and renewal, or what could be termed release and reorganisation.

To read the entire article, go here: <https://iefworld.org/node/1670>

SOURCE: based on <https://www.clubofrome.org/blog-post/ahmed-civilisation-superabundance/>

Post-growth: the science of wellbeing within planetary boundaries

Giorgos Kalis et al. 2025
summary by IEF President Arthur Dahl

Kalis, Giorgos, Jason Hickel, Daniel W O'Neill, Tim Jackson, Peter A Victor, Kate Raworth, Juliet H Schor, Julia K Steinberger, and Diana Urge-Vorsatz. 2025. Post-growth: the science of wellbeing within planetary boundaries. www.thelancet.com/planetary-health, vol.9(1):e62-78. January 2025.

All the leading experts on alternatives to continued economic growth have combined their efforts to review post-growth research, replacing the goal of increasing GDP with the goal of improving human wellbeing within planetary boundaries. This is part of planetary sustainability science including ecological economics, Doughnut and wellbeing economics, steady-state economics and degrowth. Most of these make proposals within the capitalist system while viewing GDP as a poor measure of progress, while the latter two emphasise a democratic transformation of the economic system to reduce ecological impact and inequality and improve wellbeing.

Starting with **ecological, social and economic limits to growth**, and building on the 1972 *Limits to Growth* report which predicted overshoot and collapse about now, the review discusses whether technology could offset resource scarcity and higher prices, which is difficult to predict, and whether collapse could come from scarcity or from pollution affecting regenerative capacity. More recently, resource scarcity has been replaced by planetary boundaries defining a safe operating space, including greenhouse gas emissions, material use and other global ecological impacts. Given the recent projections of higher economic costs of climate change, the review suggests taking a precautionary approach.

The second issue is the **decoupling controversy**, whether it is possible to achieve green growth by decoupling GDP from carbon emissions and material use. The evidence shows that GDP remains coupled to resource use because of the rebound effect, when declining cost leads to increased demand. While high-income economies shift to services, they rely on imports, so the engines of the economy remain energy, materials and human labour. Scenarios showing that decoupling can meet climate goals rely on hypothetical large-scale negative emissions technologies that are unrealistic. On the other hand, greening the economy can be an engine of growth if the social and environmental impacts of a clean

energy transition with enough energy for other societal uses can be managed. Energy and material use can only be reduced, never brought to zero.

The review then considers **human wellbeing and social limits to growth**. Above a certain level of income, GDP growth does not improve human wellbeing, as the costs of growth (pollution, mental health, social upheaval) offset the wellbeing benefits. Decreases in GDP are correlated with reduced happiness, but increasing GDP shows no relation to happiness. Countries with full employment policies, social safety nets and decommodified public health programmes and other public services exhibit increased life satisfaction, and human relations have a much stronger effect on personal wellbeing than income once basic needs are met.

Continue reading this article here: <https://iefworld.org/post-growth2025>

SOURCE: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(24\)0031...](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(24)0031...)

Current climate policies risk catastrophic societal and economic impacts

Institute and Faculty of Actuaries

16 January 2025

The global economy could face a 50% loss in GDP between 2070 and 2090 unless immediate policy action on risks posed by the climate crisis is taken, warns a new report by the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries (IFoA).

Current climate targets accept large amounts of largely unrecognised nature and societal risk. This includes accepting triggering multiple tipping points where climate change thresholds, once crossed, may be irreversible and limit our ability to control climate change. There is currently no realistic plan in place to avoid this scenario.

Climate and nature risks are driven by human activity and must be addressed now to ensure the security and wellbeing of society. Populations are already impacted by food system shocks, water insecurity, heat stress and infectious diseases. If unchecked, mass mortality, mass displacement, severe economic contraction and conflict become more likely.

'Planetary Solvency – finding our balance with nature', commissioned in partnership with the University of Exeter, develops a framework for global risk management to address this and show how this approach can support future prosperity. It also shows how a lack of realistic risk messaging to guide policy decisions, has led to slower action than is needed.

The report proposes a novel Planetary Solvency risk dashboard, to provide decision-useful risk information to support policymakers to drive human activity within the finite bounds of the planet that we live on.

Sandy Trust, Lead author and IFoA Council Member, said:

"You can't have an economy without a society, and a society needs somewhere to live. Nature is our foundation, providing food, water and air, as well as the raw materials and energy that power our economy. Threats to the stability of this foundation are risks to future human prosperity which we must take action to avoid.

"Widely used but deeply flawed assessments of the economic impact of climate change show a negligible impact on GDP, rendering policymakers blind to the immense risk current policy trajectories place us in. The risk led methodology, set out in the report, shows a 50% GDP contraction between 2070 and 2090 unless an alternative course is chartered."

Professor Tim Lenton of the University of Exeter said:

“Current approaches are failing to properly assess escalating planetary risks or help control them. Planetary solvency applies the established approaches of risk professionals to our life-support system and finds it in jeopardy. It offers a clear way of seeing global risks and prioritising action to limit them.”

Kartina Tahir Thomson, IFoA President, said:

“Actuaries are experts at dealing with risk and the collaborative nature of our profession means we work for the greater good of society. This new report shows that now more than ever we need to continue working with policyholders, governments, scientists and other stakeholders, to come up with a solution that will address this emergency, for the benefit of all of society.”

Summary Risk Outlook

Increasingly severe climate and nature driven impacts are highly likely, including fires, floods, heat and droughts. This is a national security issue as food, water and heat stresses will impact populations. If unchecked then mass mortality, involuntary mass migration events and severe GDP contraction are likely.

Planetary Solvency defines Catastrophic impacts as:

- Economic contraction, GDP loss of over 25%.
- Mass human mortality events resulting in over 2 billion deaths.
- Warming of 2°C or more, triggering high number of climate tipping points.
- Breakdown of some critical ecosystem services and Earth Systems.
- Major Extinction Events in multiple geographies.
- Ocean circulation severely impacted.
- Severe socio-political fragmentation in many regions, low lying regions lost.
- Heat and water stress driving mass migration of billions.
- Catastrophic mortality events from disease, nutrition, thirst and conflict.

Policy Recommendations

It will be overwhelmingly positive economically to avoid Planetary Insolvency. An urgent policy response is required as our current market led approach to mitigating climate and nature risks is not delivering.

This should include:

1. Implementing annual Planetary Solvency risk assessments, leveraging the RESILIENCE principles, reporting to the UN Security Council.
2. Creating a function with responsibility for producing Planetary Solvency assessments, housed in an appropriate body such as the IMF or OECD.
3. Considering the need for systemic risk officers at supra-national, national and sub-national levels to enhance systemic risk management capability.
4. Rapidly implementing policy recommendations to reduce risk such as National Transition Plans, Nature Positive Pathways and alternative economic models.
5. Developing appropriate tracking of delivery of solutions to mitigate risk, including oversight of progress, clear accountability and near-term action.

LINK TO REPORT Planetary Solvency – finding our balance with nature
<https://actuaries.org.uk/document-library/thought-leadership/thought-le...>

SUMMARY: <https://actuaries.org.uk/planetary-solvency>

SOURCE: <https://actuaries.org.uk/media-release/current-climate-policies-risk-ca...>

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