



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.

Members Corner

What's happening behind the scenes at IEF?

- Preparations are underway for the next IEF online course on the topic of **Sustainability**, planned for 7 September – 18 October 2026. Participants will explore environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainability.
- A **conference planning team** has been formed. The tentative plan is to have a virtual conference in the second part of October.
- An **Orientation meeting** for new members and associates is planned for 21 February.

Hidden Treasures on the IEF Website

Case Studies

The IEF website contains numerous hidden treasures. Here we highlight the Case Studies – examples of environmental actions from the grassroots that are directly or indirectly inspired by the Baha'i Teachings. You can find the Case Studies by clicking on **SOCIAL ACTION**. Then choose **CASE STUDIES** in the selections of topics on top of the page.

You will be inspired reading about the wide diversity of mostly small but meaningful actions in communities from China to Northern Ireland.

The page also features the case studies presented at the last IEF conference in the UK:

[Agricultural Project in China](#)

[Chiswick Community Gardening](#), London, UK

[The Power of Community Gardens, experiences from Sarajevo](#)

[Abingdon Carbon Cutters \(ACC\)](#), UK

[The “1001 Tomatoes” Biodiversity Project](#), at the German Baha’i House of Worship

[COP26 Pledge in Glasgow, Scotland, UK](#)

[How to Survive Rapid Inflation](#), Northern Ireland

[Learn and Grow Project](#), Response to Food Insecurity affecting Junior Youth, London, UK

[My Sustainability 'Journey'](#)

[Lifelines - Hedgerow Planting in London, UK](#)

IEF members and associates are invited to send us their case studies for the IEF website!

IEF Member and Associate Activities

Climate Change Theatre Festival

In the [January newsletter](#), IEF member Nava Sarracino shared her interesting experiences with the "[Climate Change Theatre festival](#)". Later we received pictures of her theatre in action.



Environmental Action at the Community Level in Pakistan: Gaps Between Policy and Reality

By IEF Associate Rehan Ullah

Climate Literacy Pakistan has expanded its reach to **Lower Dir**, addressing the gap between theoretical climate education and real-world application. Students and community members participate in workshops and project-based activities focused on local challenges, including heatwaves, deforestation, and water management. The program equips participants with practical skills and knowledge to implement solutions in their communities, fostering environmental stewardship and sustainability.

Go here to read the blog by Rehan Ullah: <https://iefworld.org/node/2000>

Addressing the Debt-Climate Nexus

IF20 Environment Working Group
20 January 2026

The IF20 Environment Working Group, part of the G20 Interfaith Forum, prepared a 2025 Policy Brief **Addressing the Debt-Climate Nexus** for the G20 meeting in South Africa, which can now be viewed on the IF20 website at <https://blog.g20interfaith.org/2026/01/20/if20-environment-working-group-2025-policy-brief-addressing-the-debt-climate-nexus/>.

The Working Group is chaired by IEF President Arthur Dahl, and includes IEF member Monica Maghami as well as experts from various faith traditions.

The following is the Introduction to the policy brief.

Addressing the Debt-Climate Nexus

- Since COP27 the worldwide debt problem, which is especially problematic for low-resource countries, has been increasingly discussed in relation to the climate crisis at UN climate conferences.
- Climate change is an existential problem. Climate disasters fall disproportionately on poor, indebted countries, which have meagre resources to adapt and build resilience to the rapidly warming climate catastrophe.
- Poor countries are spending more on servicing debt payments than they are on life-saving public services, including responding to the climate emergency (UNCTAD 2025). They receive meagre assistance from high-income countries whose emissions have caused global warming, and are spending twice more in debt payments than what they receive in financial assistance to fight the climate crisis (IIED 2024). For many of them, debt servicing is equivalent to half of combined food import bills and public health spending. This results in obligations to repay large sovereign debt rather than spending on government programmes for people's health and education, and a healthy environment.
- At the same time, when a climatic disaster hits, poor countries are pushed to more borrowing to assist affected communities and to fund reconstruction, trapping them in a vicious cycle of indebtedness.
- Addressing the debt-climate nexus is a moral imperative that high-income countries must address and find ways to alleviate so the low-resource countries that are most harmed by climate change have the resources to care for their people and the environment.
- In this policy brief, we examine the debt-climate nexus in detail, and then present an alternative integrated framework.

Read the policy brief here: <https://iefworld.org/IF20climate2025>

Reconsidering Development Assumptions: Reflections from Rural Kenya

Perspective from Daniel Perell
Bahá'í International Community
21 January 2026

Last year was one for challenging long-held assumptions — a healthy practice, especially given the shifting sands of the world around us. For my part, I have been reflecting on a three-month sabbatical I was able to take in rural western Kenya. One thing I noticed was that development efforts in that particular village, located outside Matunda, were focused on a conception of prosperity that seeks to advance social cohesion and spiritual progress alongside material development. While such approaches are not unusual around the world, the lessons they produce rarely receive the same degree of attention in the wider discourse.

The community that my family and I lived with, in an agricultural heartland, has been pursuing for years both material and spiritual development — both the tangible (like livelihoods) and the intangible (like relationships) — built on the community's own capacity to determine and walk its own path to prosperity. They have done so through a learning approach of acting, reflecting, and refining through consultation.

Consider one example. The farmland around Matunda today suffers from soil erosion and water scarcity. Eucalyptus trees planted decades ago — as part of a well-intentioned reforestation effort—consume disproportionate amounts of water and have spread across the region, drying streams and reducing crop yields.

Rather than simply removing the trees immediately, which would undermine certain economies that have developed over time and on which many families depend, the community has been seeking alternatives that allow for locally driven, sustainable reforestation. One community elder and leader emphasized to me the importance of broad-based consultation to address a collective challenge: “We have an urgent problem — so we need to take two years to consult all the neighbors alongside the stream to determine what to do.” In other words: an urgent crisis requires a community-driven process to devise long-term solutions.

This example, and others like it, suggest that we have a lot to learn about our starting development assumptions.

- *On urgency and timelines.* Development practitioners often emphasize short-term results to demonstrate impact and address urgent concerns. Yet careful systemic approaches may unfold slowly through consultation and trust-building. Where urgency drives rapid implementation, there is a risk of dependency, unintended consequences, or fractured relationships. **The question emerges: might our emphasis on demonstrable short-term outcomes sometimes compromise long-term sustainability?**

- *On expertise and capacity.* International development often positions external actors as bringing necessary expertise, technology, and experience. **In Matunda, the onus of the development process begins with local actors. They draw on deep contextual knowledge, innovative capacity, and established relationships to devise solutions suitable to their particular context.** This raises questions about how we define expertise,

who leads a development process, and whether reliance on external methodologies sometimes overlooks indigenous capacity for problem-solving.

- *On motivation and resources.* Development programs typically assume that material incentives drive action and that change requires financial resources. Yet enduring motivation arises from strong relationships—parents sacrificing for children, neighbors supporting each other—and connection to a larger purpose. **People can give time and energy not only for payment, but for those they care about helping.** This suggests that while resources matter, we may underestimate the motivating power of meaning, service, and social bonds.
- *On competition and collaboration.* In development discourse, competition is considered a driver of progress—the best ideas rising to the top in a competitive arena. **However, shared endeavor generates knowledge and strengthens cohesion in ways that seem to enable more adaptive, context-appropriate solutions.** Competition, by setting actors in opposition, can risk undermining the social fabric necessary for sustainable change.
- *On scale and intimacy.* "Scaling up" is frequently presented as the path to maximum impact, with small isolated projects viewed as insufficient. **Yet meaningful change benefits from personal transformation within a wider context.** This may begin with one person, one community, one endeavor at a time. This work, slow at first, gains organic momentum, involving individuals, communities, and the institutions of society. Perhaps the question isn't exclusively "how do we scale?" but also "how do we deepen?"
- *On setbacks and learning.* Development programs are often evaluated by their lack of difficulties, with setbacks interpreted as shortcomings. But, in fact, setbacks are a natural feature of a learning process. **In an environment where difficulties could be consulted upon in community, challenges can become opportunities for new understanding and adaptive capacity.** Perhaps there are times when our metrics for success—which often define achievement as the absence of problems—might actually limit a population's ability to learn and strengthen resilience.
- *On youth engagement.* Young people are often included in development efforts to mitigate potential problems such as unemployment or unrest. **But youth, when engaging alongside all other members of society, can be vital sources of transformation, bringing fresh perspectives less constrained by existing systems.** Their keen sense of justice opens possibilities that might not have occurred to older generations. **This reframes youth participation from problem prevention to possibility generation.**
- *On spirituality and development.* International development often treats religion as a purely personal matter, separate from community advancement. **Yet for many around the world, spiritual principles are a driving force for collective action — a source of motivation, hope, and cohesion that inspires engagement where other social forces might not.** This raises questions about whether secularized development frameworks sometimes miss crucial motivators for change.

SOURCE: <https://www.bic.org/perspectives/reconsidering-development-assumptions-...>

Global Water Bankruptcy

UN University Report January 2026

Water is fundamental to sustainable development, human well-being, and planetary health. When water systems fail, the effects are swift and far-reaching: harvests decline, energy systems are disrupted, public health is endangered, cities become increasingly unlivable, livelihoods are lost, communities are displaced, tensions escalate, and the foundations of peace and stability are undermined. In the context of climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, and growing inequalities, water insecurity has emerged as a systemic risk that increasingly constrains progress across the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH) has just issued a major report, **Global Water Bankruptcy: Living Beyond Our Hydrological Means in the Post-Crisis Era**, warning that the water crisis is already upon us. You can read about its major conclusions here:

https://iefworld.org/index.php/Water_bankrupt

10 key climate science 'insights' from 2025 Article from CarbonBrief

Every year, understanding of climate science grows stronger.

With each new research project and published paper, scientists learn more about how the Earth system responds to continuing greenhouse gas emissions.

But with many thousands of new studies on climate change being published every year, it can be hard to keep up with the latest developments.

Our annual "10 new insights in climate science" report offers a snapshot of key advances in the scientific understanding of the climate system.

Produced by a team of scientists from around the world, the report summarises influential, novel and policy-relevant climate research published over the previous 18 months.

The insights presented in the latest edition, published in the journal Global Sustainability, are as follows:

- Questions remain about the record warmth in 2023-24
- Unprecedented ocean surface warming and intensifying marine heatwaves are driving severe ecological losses
- The global land carbon sink is under strain
- Climate change and biodiversity loss amplify each other
- Climate change is accelerating groundwater depletion
- Climate change is driving an increase in dengue fever
- Climate change diminishes labour productivity
- Safe scale-up of carbon dioxide removal is needed
- Carbon credit markets come with serious integrity challenges
- Policy mixes outperform stand-alone measures in advancing emissions reductions

In this article, we unpack some of the key findings.

To read the article, go here: <https://www.carbonbrief.org/guest-post-10-key-climate-science-insights-from-2025/>

The Report is available here: *Ten new insights in climate science 2025*

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/global-sustainability/article/ten-new-insights-in-climate-science-2025/8273DE03FB570A1C5EB88D0112AFE37D>

Ocean seaweed signals regime change

**Based on a paper in *Nature Communications*
and a report in *The Guardian* 19 January 2026**

Scientists report that global floating seaweed blooms are expanding in the oceans, with possible serious consequences. In the past two decades, both microscopic algae, such as phytoplankton, and seaweeds or macroalgae, have increased in certain coastal and open ocean waters.

To address this at the global scale, 1.2 million satellite images were analysed with computer artificial intelligence to quantify macroalgal mats and microalgal scums in global oceans between 2003 and 2022, covering an area of 43.8 million km². A deep-learning model was employed to detect signals of floating algae. Macroalgae blooms in the tropical Atlantic and western Pacific both expanded at unprecedented rates, amounting to 13.4 percent per year since 2003, with the most dramatic increases occurring after 2008. Before 2008, there were no major blooms of seaweed reported except for sargassum in the Sargasso Sea. The best-known example, the Great Atlantic Sargassum Belt, is visible from space, stretching from the Gulf of Mexico to the mouth of the Congo. Other blooms include a ring around the Chatham Islands off New Zealand and the “red tide” that surfaced off the coast of Florida.

This shift could darken the waters below, changing their ecology and geochemistry, and may also accelerate climate breakdown. The rapid growth of huge mats of seaweed appears to be driven by global heating and excessive enrichment of waters from farming runoff and other pollutants.

While seaweed such as sargassum have thrived in some regions, phytoplankton have not shown similar responses to the changing environment, suggesting seaweed growth may be more sensitive to shifts in temperature and eutrophication. The annual expansion rate of microalgae scums, although slower, is also statistically significant at 1.0 percent per year since 2003. This study provided the first global picture of algae floating in the world’s oceans. Most increases in both floating macroalgae and microalgae scums occurred in the recent decade, in line with the accelerated global ocean warming since 2010. There were tipping points in 2008, 2011 and 2012 for three types of seaweed in different oceans.

Such trends are likely a result of ocean warming and eutrophication, warning of a possible regime shift from a macroalgae-poor ocean to an macroalgae-rich ocean with specialized species of microalgae. These findings have broad implications for ocean ecology, carbon sequestration, environments, and the economy. If a regime shift in oceanographic conditions has already occurred to favour macroalgae, this will have profound impacts on radiative forcing in the atmosphere and light availability in the ocean, as well as on carbon sequestration, ocean biogeochemistry and upper ocean stability.

SOURCES: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/jan/19/scientists-seaweed-...>

Original paper: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-025-66822-5>