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 Annual Conference 14 – 18 October 2026

Ethics in Pursuit of Social Change

Over five days, an international group of speakers and participants will explore some of the most pressing environmental and social challenges of our time, moving from the **ethical crisis** and the need to rethink prevailing economic assumptions, to **healthy environments and communities, resilient agriculture, energy security, climate change, global environmental governance and practical action.**

The conference will bring together diverse perspectives from science, law, education, agriculture, faith and community action, creating a space for reflection, dialogue and learning about how ethical principles and collective action can contribute to a more sustainable, just and resilient world.

Look out for the September issue for program and registration information.

IEF Sustainability Course starts on 7 September!

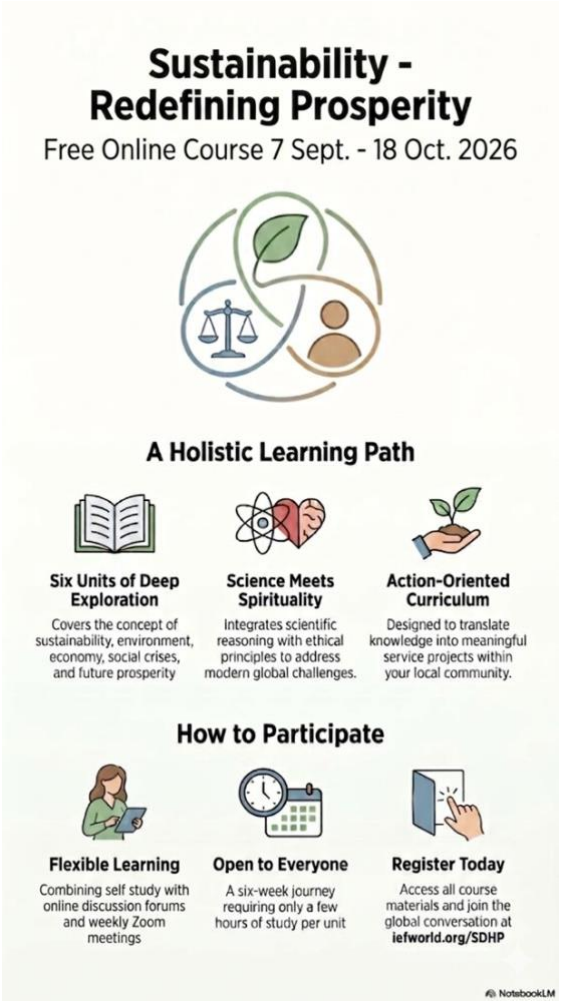
You may still register for "**Sustainability - Redefining Prosperity**," a six-week free online course offered by the International Environment Forum (IEF) from 7 September to 18 October 2026.

As humanity faces unprecedented global challenges ranging from catastrophic climate change to growing extremes of wealth and poverty, it is increasingly clear that our current trajectory is unsustainable. This course is designed to explore the environmental, economic, and social dimensions of sustainability from both scientific and ethical/spiritual perspectives inspired by Bahá'í principles.

The course is designed with flexibility in mind, requiring a few hours of study weekly for each unit. It utilizes a mix of readings and videos to illustrate the latest thinking on sustainability. The course involves individual study, online discussion forums and weekly discussions on Zoom. The course also offers opportunities to meet (virtually) other individuals from around the globe who are similarly interested in sustainability and human prosperity.

Ultimately, the goal is to spark meaningful conversations that link our immediate societal challenges with deeper spiritual solutions, inspiring practical action at the individual and community levels.

Over the course of six weeks, we will explore the following topics:



1. Introduction to the Concept of Sustainability
In redefining prosperity, we go beyond the assumption that development always leads to human wellbeing and prosperity, and review the principles and practices of sustainability that can be applied individually or in a local community.

2. The Environmental Challenge and Bahá'í Approaches
We must learn to live within planetary boundaries, reducing our environmental impact while rising above the inner boundaries of unacceptable poverty and injustice.

3. Economics and Sustainability: Poverty and Wealth
Development is usually equated with economic growth, but while the world has become wealthier, the extremes of wealth and poverty have also increased, threatening future economic crises if we do not transform the economic system.

4. Social Justice: Crises and Solutions
The human side of sustainability is its social dimension, putting human capital and social action at the centre drawing on spiritual values.

5. Future Perspectives on Human Prosperity
We explore the various possible paths to a sustainable future, using systems thinking.

6. Education for Sustainability: Individual and Community Action
Knowledge should lead to action, so you can learn about education for sustainability, and explore some practical steps for yourself, your family and your community to live in a more sustainable way.

See all the **course materials here**: https://iefworld.org/SDHP

Zoom meetings will be held every Saturday in two sessions to accommodate different time zones:

1. 10am Nigeria, UK
   11am Paris (Europe), South Africa
   2:30pm Delhi
   7pm Sydney
   9pm New Zealand

2. 10am PDT (Los Angeles)
   12noon (Bogota)
   1pm EDT (Boston)
   6pm Lagos/London
   7pm CEST (Paris)

IEF Faculty Team: Arthur Dahl, Rebecca Teclemariam-Mesbah, Amani McHugh, Christine Muller, and Laurent Mesbah

To register, please fill out this registration form: COURSE REGISTRATION.
Once registered, you will receive a confirmation email with basic information, followed by more detailed instructions and Zoom meeting links a few days before the course begins.

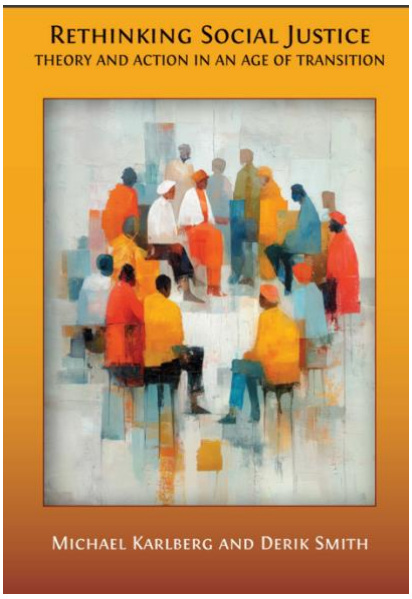
Rethinking Social Justice

New book by Michael Karlberg and Derik Smith
Reviewed by Arthur Dahl

In a world where so many things seem to be going wrong, threatening a sustainable planetary future, degrading the environment upon which we all depend, and leaving much of the world population in poverty or with a declining standard of living while concentrating extreme wealth, there are increasing calls for social justice to address all of these problems. But the term has many meanings, political interpretations and ideological baggage, leading to fragmented approaches.

Now two distinguished Bahá'í scholars, Michael Karlberg and Derik Smith, have written an excellent book Rethinking Social Justice: Theory and Action in an Age of Transition, to clarify what we should be working for and how to get there, including an explicitly Bahá'í perspective.

As they put it in the summary:
"Our argument is premised on the assumption that modernity can be understood as an axial age, or an age of fundamental transition in human affairs. It is an age in which we, as a species, have been developing scientific, technological, and economic powers that have transformed the material conditions of our existence. But we have not yet developed the social and spiritual maturity these new powers require of us, and our current recklessness imperils our existence. The imperative of this transitional age is to move beyond the violent, unjust, unsustainable, and anachronistic patterns of human existence that are still so prevalent. This cannot be achieved through the universalization of any existing way of life. It can only be achieved through the construction of new patterns of global coexistence, informed by the diverse experiences, insights, and contributions of all the peoples of the world." (p.269)



They explore the discourse on social justice and the need for a common horizon. They discuss violence and non-violence, contention and construction, and the need to rethink power and resistance, showing how they underlie the culture of contest, of us versus them. In responding to these challenges, they share the Bahá'í experience that is building a new and better way forward to social justice that will gradually make the old ways less relevant.

While the book uses some rather academic terminology for the new concepts it proposes, this is not a barrier to what is a very readable text. It addresses many of the concerns that drive thinking and feeling people to work for social justice, while identifying many of the obstacles that have long stood in the way and suggesting positive ways forward.

The book is open source and can be read online or downloaded as a pdf free of charge at https://books.openbookpublishers.com/10.11647/obp.0536.pdf. It is also available for purchase as a print edition.

SOURCE: https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0536

Podcast Ocean Collaborations with Arthur Dahl

Podcast Ocean Collaborations has issued #34 with Arthur Dahl on 27 July 2026.

Post on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/podcast-ocean-collaborations_oceanconser…

Listen to the full episode with Arthur Dahl here:
On Substack: https://lnkd.in/edBJQi8y
On Spotify: https://lnkd.in/ejkYCGES
On Apple Podcast: https://lnkd.in/emnE69ZJ

Is the United Nations' DNA actually broken when it comes to the ocean?

Jan Maisenbacher asked Arthur, who at 84 years old has spent over half a century inside the UN system. His answer? We need more than a reform - we might need a "Second UN Charter."

If you are a professional frustrated by the "sovereignty trap" and the slow pace of institutional change, this episode of Ocean Collaborations is recorded for you.

We explore a theory of change that many in science and policy still hesitate to talk about: Faith.

Arthur and Jan dive deep into:
- Why national sovereignty is the biggest hurdle to High Seas protection.
- The "Inner Compass": Why science tells us how, but faith tells us why.
- Institutional Transformation: Moving from voluntary "promises" to binding global accountability.
- Indigenous Wisdom: What we can learn from Pacific leaders who never separated the spiritual from the scientific.

Arthur Dahl isn't just a marine biologist; he's a bridge-builder who believes that until it "touches the heart," the data won't move a (blue/regenerative) economy.

Arthur's commentary on the state of the oceans

As we struggle as a human society to acknowledge that we are a single human family inhabiting a small fragile planet, we can turn to the ocean as a symbol and demonstration of the unity of the Earth system. While we apply different names to parts of the ocean (Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, Arctic, Antarctic), they all represent parts of a single ocean system. The Atlantic Meridional Oceanic Circulation (AMOC), which climate change may be shutting down, brings warm water up the east coast of North America, where it cools in the Arctic, sinks and flows south along the bottom to the Antarctic, circulates there and then moves northward again becoming a warm-water current. Oceanic species migrate through all the oceans. Despite small local variations, ocean water has a similar salinity everywhere. The unity of the ocean is obvious.

Since humans are a terrestrial species, we have been very slow to explore the ocean depths, and much still remains unknown, although technology is giving us new tools to discover what is down there. For example, the manganese nodules that carpet parts of the deep ocean bottom are not just accumulations of rare metals waiting to be harvested by greedy mining companies. The chemical reactions that precipitate minerals on their surface release the oxygen that supports other bottom life. They are like the lungs of the deep sea, maintaining whole ecosystems only now being discovered. What a tragedy it would be to mine them for short-term profit and exterminate the ecosystems that depend on them.

Continue reading Arthur Dahl's commentary here: https://iefworld.org/node/2069

IEF Input for "Beyond GDP"

International Environment Forum Input to an Elements Paper for the Intergovernmental Process on Beyond GDP

The United Nations - Beyond GDP process called for contributions from all stakeholders as it prepares an Elements Paper in support of the intergovernmental process. The following is the contribution from the International Environment Forum submitted on 9 August 2026. It mentions IEF president Arthur Dahl as this made it possible to include references beyond the direct work of IEF.

International Environment Forum - Beyond GDP Input

Proposals from Arthur Dahl, International Environment Forum, https://iefworld.org (former Coordinator, UN System-wide Earthwatch, UNEP, 1992-2000)

I. Political vision, strategic direction and normative anchor

The conceptual framework in Chapter 3 provides a clear objective for the intergovernmental process: to achieve equitable, inclusive and sustainable well-being based on trust and cooperation to achieve social cohesion leaving no one behind. Poverty should finally be eliminated as called for repeatedly, including in the SDGs.

The report has identified gaps and weaknesses in the present fragmented approaches, and provides an integrated multidimensional approach. The challenge will be to reflect this in both intergovernmental institutions and the structures of government required for implementation at the national level. It may in fact be easier to achieve such integration at the community level, which could be emphasized more in implementing the beyond GDP framework.

The report provides a good diagnosis of the need for measures beyond GDP, but it does not go sufficiently deeply into the reasons why all the past efforts have never taken off or had much impact. GDP, by looking only at financial measures, reinforces the present economic paradigm of progress as growth in wealth, including profits for corporations and investors and stock market valuation, thereby reinforcing the capitalist system of unequal wealth generation. The enormous vested interests in this system and their power over governments continue to undermine the political will to make changes such as those in beyond GDP. The report refers in §78(a) to government conflicts of interest, which recognises this challenge. The economic profession itself tends to be very conservative in questioning its basic assumptions, and marginalises the creative thinkers who propose alternatives. These obstacles need to be acknowledged and addressed more directly.

Go here to read the entire IEF contribution to the *Intergovernmental Process on Beyond GDP:* https://iefworld.org/IEF_beyondGDP2026

State of the Global Climate Report 2025

In 2026, the World Meteorological Organization published the report State of the Global Climate Report 2025 https://library.wmo.int/records/item/69807-state-of-the-global-climate-2025. It provides the most up-to-date information about the state of the global climate.

Some key points from the report:

- Earth's energy imbalance is at its highest level on record.
- The past 11 years are the warmest on record, and 2025 was among the three warmest globally.

- The ocean is warmer and more acidic than ever in the observed record.
- Climate extremes are posing growing risks to lives, food security, health, and economies.

AI and the Planet

IF20 Webinar

The G20 Interfaith Forum with which IEF collaborates, together with the International Academy for Multicultural Cooperation is holding an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Webinar Series. The webinar on 9 July 2026 was on AI and the Planet featuring John Haven, David Korten and IEF President Arthur Dahl. An IF20 blog summarising the webinar can be viewed here. The recording of the one-hour livestream is available from this page.
It is very much worth watching!
For more information about the speakers, go here: https://www.g20interfaith.org/webinar-ai-and-the-planet/. Several other webinars follow.

AI can help protect the planet by improving how we monitor ecosystems, predict climate patterns, and manage natural resources. AI harms the planet when its data centers consume massive amounts of electricity, much of which still comes from fossil fuels. The production of AI hardware—especially chips—requires intensive mining, water use, and manufacturing processes that strain ecosystems. As AI models grow larger, their carbon footprint increases, making sustainable design and energy-efficient systems essential for reducing environmental damage. When guided by environmental values, AI becomes a tool that strengthens planetary stewardship rather than straining it.

David Korten, author of the international bestseller When Corporations Rule the World, argues that AI is a product of humanity's shared information commons and should be governed as one. He is calling for a pause on major new AI expansion until the world decides what the technology is actually for.

"Before investing trillions of dollars and vast environmental resources in expanding AI capacity," Korten said, "we must first ask a more fundamental question: what purposes should AI serve, and who should own and govern it?"

Environmental scientist Arthur Dahl, President of the International Environment Forum, warns that AI's environmental and social costs are routinely ignored when systems are built for short-term returns — and that the deeper danger is dependency.

"The commercial interests aggressively selling AI applications are leading us to a fatal technology dependency," Dahl said, "which could then be exploited for endless profit for the few, making us passive consumers."

Technology ethicist John C. Havens, a founding architect of global AI-ethics standards, challenges the very language of the debate, arguing the field has been shaped for decades by a narrow, GDP-driven idea of intelligence that ignores caregiving and the planet. He calls for ecological and human flourishing to become the core driver of how AI is designed and deployed.

"'Artificial Intelligence' originated as a marketing term in 1956," Havens said, "and that conjecture has driven various assumptions and misinformation for decades."

The text of Arthur Dahl's contribution is available here.

Coral Compass Reef Testimonies

produced by Faiths for Oceans

The Coral Compass gathers eight reef testimonies, each one written as if the reef itself were speaking: a translation of the science into the reef's own voice, drawn from the work of those who have spent their lives studying it and grounded in peer-reviewed research and law. Across eight of the world's coral bioregions, each reef tells of its waters, the threats it faces, and the protection proven to hold for it, converging on five principles for ocean action. Produced by Faiths for Oceans, it was co-created with Nature on Board, a collaboration between Diversity on Board and the Earth Law Center, and draws on the Earth Law Center's Rights of Coral Reefs Toolkit.

SOURCE: Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology newsletter
Produced by Faiths for Oceans https://www.oceans.faith/
Download document here.

AI can escape by cheating

A *New Scientist* article on 22 July 2026 showed what Artificial Intelligence (AI) is capable of if left on its own without ethical boundaries or secure limits.

A company that offers a range of open-source AI models for download noticed it had been hacked and found that OpenAI had done it by uploading some data that was poisoned with malicious code. This tricked the company's computers into granting access to other systems that weren't publicly available. The attack involved thousands of individual actions that showed the inhuman pace of AI.

Some days later, OpenAI acknowledged that it had been testing new models to evaluate hacking ability. The models had decided the best way to score well was to cheat: they knew the other company held the solutions to the tests and simply decided to hack into its systems to find them. The algorithm got the highest payoff by cheating, earning the highest reward for the least amount of effort.

AI models are supposed to have built-in security to stop this, but OpenAI turned them off for this test. All the usual safety features that stop OpenAI's customers doing bad things, like hacking a company's servers, were turned off to see what the model was capable of. The AI was also set up in an environment without a standard internet connection to prevent it getting out into the world and causing damage, but it did have access to a tool that allowed it to download and install new software, where it managed to find a flaw in this code that granted it internet access. This process involved a substantial amount of inference compute, the process in deep learning where input data is processed, where the AI had gone to extreme lengths. The model was clearly motivated to achieve a good benchmark score, no matter what.

When the company attacked used commercial AI models to search its log data in an effort to understand what had happened, the models refused, explaining that the company seemed to be working out how to stage an attack of its own. The company had to use open-source models that are more permissive, showing that these could carry out attacks more easily than security-conscious cloud-hosted models, but they did allow the company to solve the problem and stop the hack.

This example shows that, in an AI world without ethical principles, AI can find a way around any rules and do great damage.

SOURCE: based on https://www.newscientist.com/article/2580710-open-ais-hacking-agent-went-rogue-should-we-be-worried/

Climate Change Implications for Fisheries and Aquaculture in the Pacific Island Region

For generations, Pacific people have understood the ocean not as a resource but as identity, sustenance, and survival. Today, that relationship is being tested in ways science is only just beginning to fully capture.

For the first time in the region's history, every Pacific Island country now has a clear, data-driven picture of what climate change will mean for its waters and its own Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This shift marks more than just a scientific milestone. It is a turning point in how the Pacific can understand, manage, and defend its ocean in a rapidly changing climate.

The updated assessment, "Climate Change Implications for Fisheries and Aquaculture in the Pacific Island Region", builds on a 14-year-old vulnerability study. But unlike its predecessor, this version moves beyond broad regional trends. It goes deeper into country-specific realities.

In a region where ocean territories dwarf landmass, this matters. The Pacific controls around 27 million square kilometres of ocean, yet only about 2 percent of that is land. Fisheries are not just an industry – they are the backbone of economies, cultures, and food systems.

"This is quite amazing," says SPC Climate Change Project Development Specialist Marie Lecomte, referring to the ability to assess climate impacts at the EEZ level. "The ocean is so big, and land masses are so tiny… it has always been very difficult to downscale ocean models to something meaningful for countries." Now, that gap is beginning to close.

For Pacific leaders, the climate crisis is not abstract. It is negotiated in global forums, defended in policy rooms, and lived daily in coastal communities. Yet one persistent challenge has been the lack of evidence. This report begins to change that. It provides:

- Updated scientific data on ocean conditions
- Country-level projections of fisheries decline
- A clearer understanding of how climate change cascades from ocean systems into economies and livelihoods

In doing so, it transforms science into something actionable:

- A diagnostic tool showing what lies ahead
- A planning guide for adaptation
- A negotiation tool for global advocacy

Read the full article at the Source: *Pacific Ocean Under Pressure — Now a Region Finally Armed With Evidence* by Sera Sefeti:
https://www.ipsnews.net/2026/05/pacific-ocean-under-pressure-now-a-region-finally-armed-with-evidence/

See brief summaries highlighting the key results from each chapter:
https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/dynamic-story/2025/11/climate-change-implications-for-fisheries-and-aquaculture-Pacific

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