

Navigating the Urgent Challenge Toward Sustainability

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International Environment Forum (IEF)

<https://iefworld.org>

Wilmette Institute Webinar

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We have multiple interconnected crises

- Environment
- Health
- Economy
- Governance
- Religion
- War

Are the four horsemen of the Apocalypse here?

The pestilence of COVID-19 with its
dead and social chaos

The climate and biodiversity
catastrophes are leading to
widespread death of man and nature

Famine is on the horizon

Now we have war too

The environmental crises

Overshooting planetary boundaries

- Climate change, few years to turn the corner
- The collapse of biodiversity: 80% of insects in Europe; 60% of vertebrates in the world, 1 million species in danger
- Land degradation, deforestation, water shortages
- Plastic pollution, chemicals, urban air pollution

Economic Crises

- poor hit by rising prices
- need to transform energy systems
- growing unemployment
- increase in extreme wealth while failing to address poverty

Crisis from unregulate business

- giant multinational profit-driven corporations
- great power and monopoly position
- no international regulation
- block progress with powerful lobbies
- feed widespread corruption.

Social Crises

- failures of trust and trustworthiness
- fragmentation and loss of social cohesion
- racism
- failure to achieve gender equality
- neglect of marginalized groups
- manipulation by political extremists and populists

Health Crises

- pandemic
- private gain over public health
- a single global system where national borders have lost their meaning
- only global solidarity can save the world from drawn-out suffering

Technology Crises

- innovations support bad and good ends
- social media connect us all
- industry leaders free to trap us for profit
- online world of superficial pleasure and distraction
- confirmation bias and manipulation

Crisis in Governance

- failures in governance
- governments sign up to beautiful promises at the UN and fail to deliver
- widespread corruption
- loss of trust
- retreat of peace and security

Crisis in multilateralism


Maintaining the paradigm of absolute national sovereignty means that free-riders will always undercut even the most enlightened multilateral action.

Multiple Interacting Crises

Religion was intended to bring love and fellowship, but is used instead to fan hatred.

Now we are plunged into war as well.

All these express fundamental failures in ethics, values, morality and spirituality.



This is an ethical and spiritual challenge

- Population and carrying capacity
- Overshooting planetary boundaries
- Fault of the affluent
- Unjust economic system
- Consumer culture
- Need a fundamental transformation

We were warned over 100 years ago

The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men.... The day is approaching when its flame will devour the cities...

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLXIV, p. 342-343)

A population problem?

The population has tripled in one lifetime, but despite the great increase in wealth, half the people struggle to make ends meet.

It is poverty that drives rapid population growth. Reduce inequality and population stabilizes.

What is wrong?

We have overshoot the planet's carrying capacity and are rapidly degrading the natural environment and resources upon which our future and that of future generations depend.

Excessive consumption leads to catastrophe

Scenarios from *Limits to Growth* – 1972 (Meadows et al. (1992) *Beyond the Limits*)

SCENARIO 1

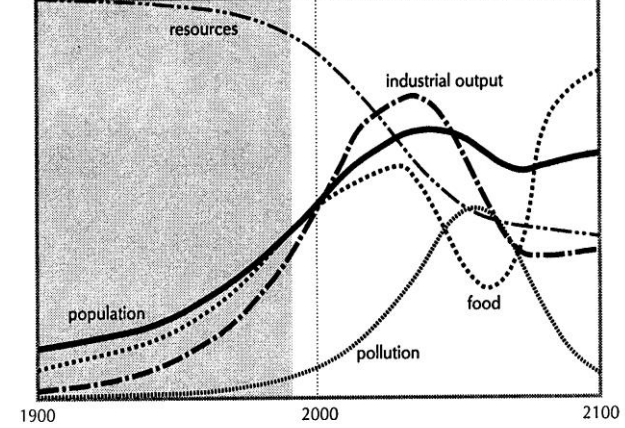
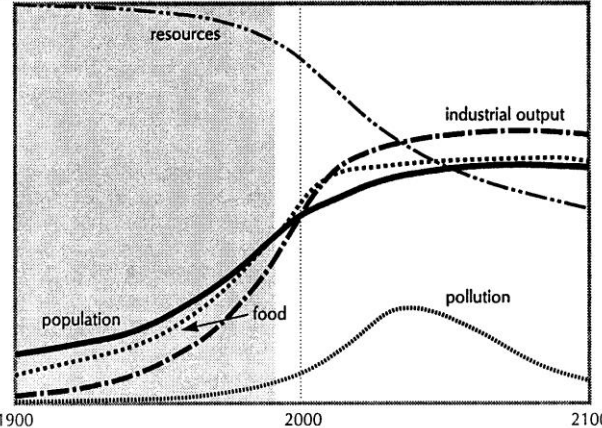
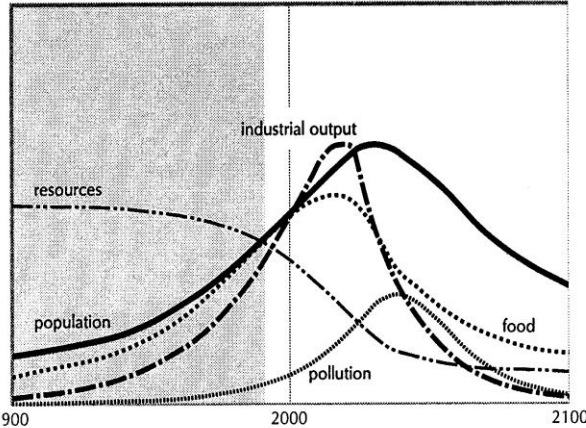
SCENARIO 10

SCENARIO 12

State of the world

State of the world

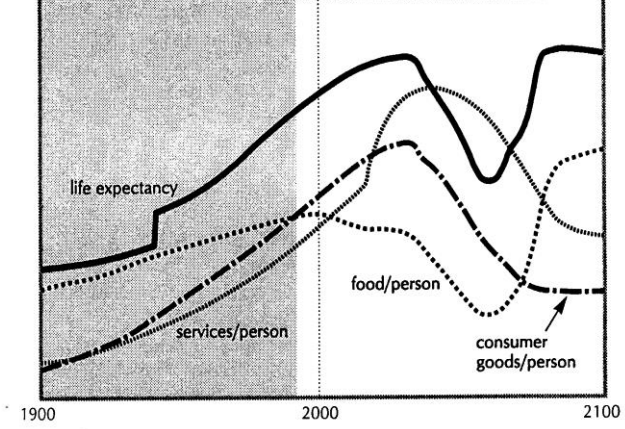
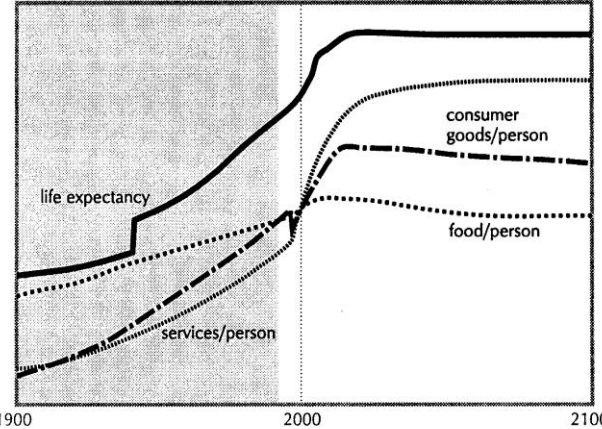
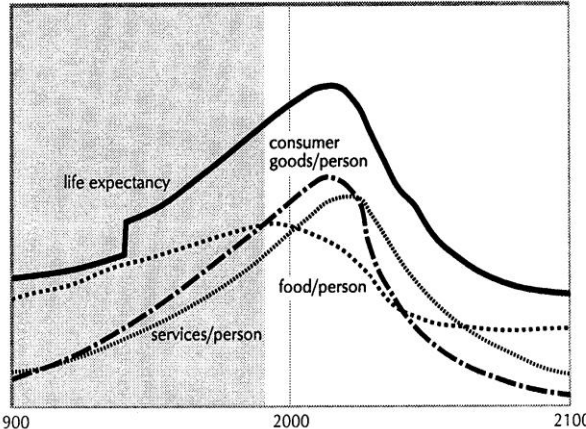
tate of the world



Material standard of living

Material standard of living

Material standard of living



Business as usual

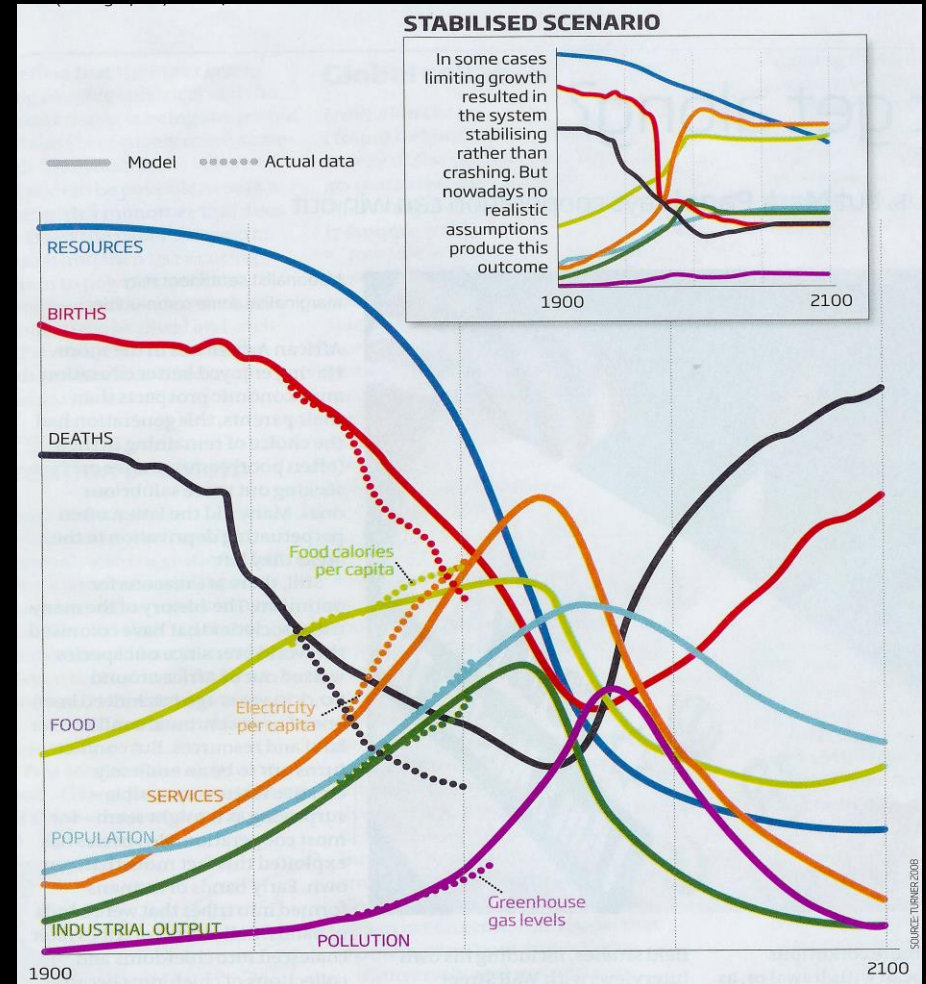
Transition 1995

Transition 2015

Limits to Growth

Where are we now?
Right on track
to collapse

MacKenzie, Debora. 2012
Doomsday Book. *New Scientist*,
7 January 2012, pp. 38-41.



Scientists' Warning on Affluence

The most significant impact on the environment and sustainability comes from the wealthy and our society of abundance. Our materialistic consumption is not compensated by advances in technology. The only way we can avoid the climate and biodiversity catastrophes is through a significant reduction in our lifestyle and GDP in Western economies, with all the losses in employment and changes in our economic model that this implies. We must rethink our communities from the bottom up and simplify our ways of living.

(based on Thomas Wiedmann et al. (2020) Scientists' Warning on Affluence. *Nature Communications* 11:3107
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-16941-y>)

Unjust market system

Having penetrated and captured all significant centres of power and information at the global level, dogmatic materialism ensured that no competing voices would retain the ability to challenge projects of world wide economic exploitation.

(Universal House of Justice, *One Common Faith*, 2005, p. 5)

All too many of these [man-made] ideologies...callously abandon starving millions to the operations of a market system that all too clearly is aggravating the plight of the majority of mankind, while enabling small sections to live in a condition of affluence scarcely dreamed of by our forebears.

(Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, 1985, I, p. 6-7)

Injustice

The economic life of humanity has recently embroiled so many people. Injustice is tolerated with indifference and disproportionate gain is regarded as the emblem of success.

Need for Justice

And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are justice and right. Until these are realized on the plane of existence, all things shall be in disorder and remain imperfect. The world of mankind is a world of oppression and cruelty, and a realm of aggression and error.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 227, p. 304)

The consumer culture

- Materialism's gospel of human betterment produced today's consumer culture pursuing ephemeral goals
- For the small minority of people who can afford them, the benefits it offers are immediate, and the rationale unapologetic
- The breakdown of traditional morality has led to the triumph of animal impulse, as instinctive and blind as appetite
- Selfishness becomes a prized commercial resource; falsehood reinvents itself as public information; greed, lust, indolence, pride - even violence - acquire not merely broad acceptance but social and economic value

(based on Universal House of Justice, *One Common Faith*, 2005)

Hopelessness

Today the world is assailed by an array of destructive forces. Materialism, rooted in the West, has now spread to every corner of the planet, breeding, in the name of a strong global economy and human welfare, a culture of consumerism. It skilfully and ingeniously promotes a habit of consumption that seeks to satisfy the basest and most selfish desires, while encouraging the expenditure of wealth so as to prolong and exacerbate social conflict. One result is a deepening confusion on the part of young people everywhere, a sense of hopelessness in the ranks of those who would drive progress, and the emergence of a myriad social maladies.

(Universal House of Justice, To Baha'is in the Cradle of the Faith, 2 April 2010)

Materialism

The time has come when those who preach the dogmas of materialism, whether of the east or of the west, whether of capitalism or socialism, must give account of the moral stewardship they have presumed to exercise.... Why is the vast majority of the world's peoples sinking ever deeper into hunger and wretchedness... ?

Market Economics?

- neoclassical economic paradigm of the market
- cultivates the consumer society
- environmental and social issues are externalities
- in market everything is property to generate profit
- favours those with the ability to pay, rich over poor
- consumes natural resources by the rate of return, not regeneration
- economic accounting ignores human wellbeing or what people really care for
- result in extreme concentration of wealth
- half the world population struggles, persistent poverty

Greed Institutionalized

- the principal measure of success is wealth, personal wealth or national wealth measured as GDP
- corporate success is profit, return on capital and stock market valuation that generate wealth

While we condemn individual behaviour that is so greedy, selfish and aggressive that it injures others, we do not see as easily how these values are incorporated in our institutions, particularly traditional corporations.

Corporate Greed

- corporate greed is institutionalized to maximise profits
- the ends justify any means
- such institutions have no conscience, moral framework or sense of humanity to restrain them
- they drive climate change, biodiversity destruction, massive pollution, human exploitation, extremes of poverty and wealth, the arms race, the privatisation of knowledge and science, and most other ills that have escaped from any control

Greed Institutionalized

- governments should ensure the common good
- corporate lobbies and corruption now control most governments
- there is no global governance for non-state entities like corporations
- multilateral cooperation among states for human rights and environmental sustainability fails in implementation
- no influence over those with real power today in the economic system

Market Values

...certain approaches to obtaining wealth--so many of which involve the exploitation of others, the monopolization and manipulation of markets, and the production of goods that promote violence and immorality--are unworthy and unacceptable.

(Universal House of Justice, To Baha'is in the Cradle of the Faith, 2 April 2010)

No going back

What is clear is that there is no going back, and the past is no guide to the future. That future is yet to be invented.

World Scientists' Warning

The scientists call for immediate action to change course in six areas:

- (1) **energy**, eliminating fossil fuels and shifting to renewables;
- (2) **short-lived air pollutants**, slashing black carbon (soot), methane, and hydrofluorocarbons;
- (3) **nature**, restoring and permanently protecting Earth's ecosystems to store and accumulate carbon and restore biodiversity;
- (4) **food**, switching to mostly plant-based diets, reducing food waste, and improving cropping practices

World Scientists' Warning

(5) **economy**, moving from indefinite GDP growth and overconsumption by the wealthy to ecological economics and a circular economy, in which prices reflect the full environmental costs of goods and services

(6) **human population**, stabilizing and gradually reducing the population by providing voluntary family planning and supporting education and rights for all girls and young women.

All transformative climate action should focus on **social justice** for all by prioritizing basic human needs and reducing inequality.

Source (2021): <https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biab079>

Imagine the future we want



Question our assumptions

Are we really inherently aggressive and competitive in the struggle to win out over others?

Is life a zero-sum game where winning means that someone else must be the loser?

What about our gender stereotypes?

Identities based on racism, nationalism and religious bigotry have deep roots in our subconscious.

We inherit so much without questioning that it

Things to consider

The physical characteristics of the world we want to build and live in

How our human systems will relate to and integrate with the natural systems of the biosphere

The qualities of our communities

The systems of organization and governance required from the local to the global levels

Things to consider

How would the economy function?

What would be everyone's rights and responsibilities?

Most fundamentally, what would be the underlying principles and values to guide this ever-evolving system?

Things to consider

What wisdom from older generations might be useful?

What new wisdom of a very different world can we bring to our discussions?

Is there a role for religion?

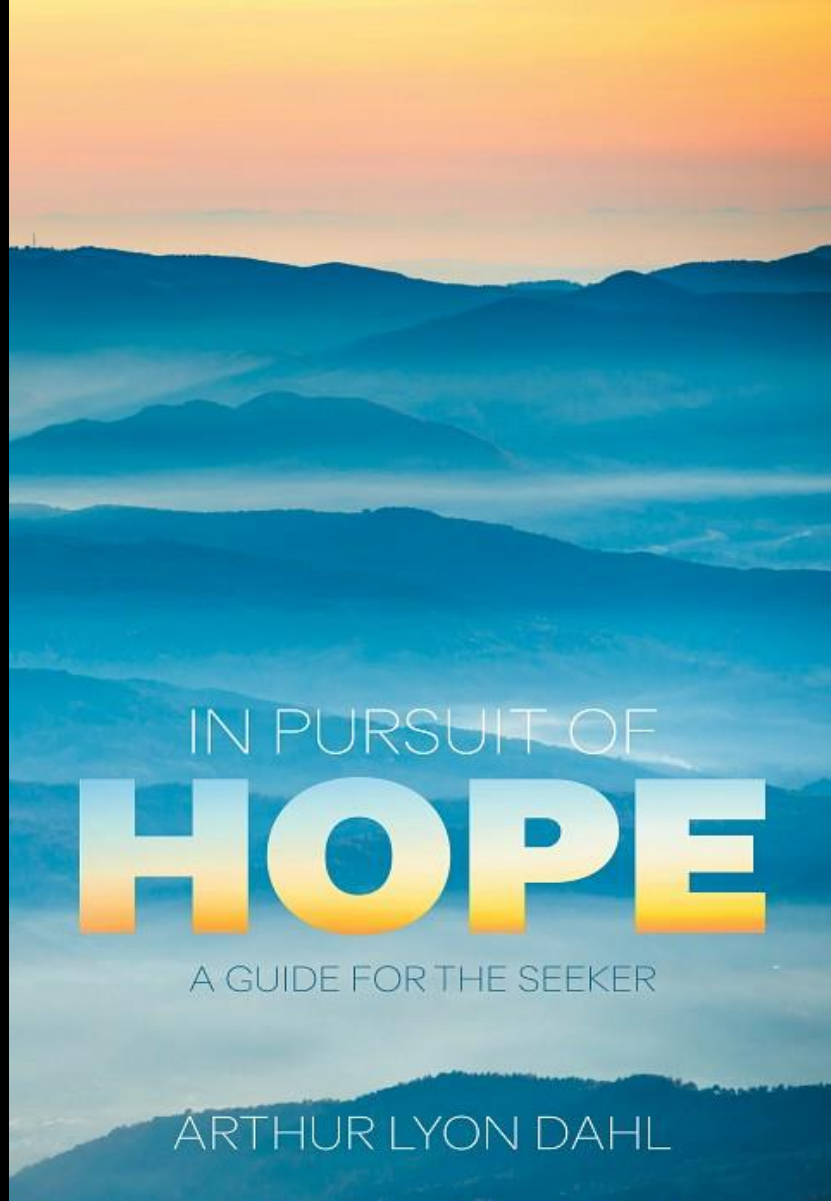
What future do we want to invent?

Disintegration and Integration

- we face real difficulties
- the immediate future looks grim
- no immediate end of crises and catastrophes
- the negative side of human nature dominates our economic, political and social frameworks
- the processes of disintegration continue
- but new forces of integration can pick up momentum
- building now will speed the transition and make it less painful

Focus on Hope

- focus on hope, a rare commodity today
- be positive, full of creative imagination
- draw on the fantastic potential hiding within all of us
- youth are the hope of the future
- today will only be a start
- tomorrow is already the future
- the more we build forward, the more that future will open up



For a deeper discussion
of hope:

<http://www.grbooks.com/george-ronald-publisher-books/social-and-economic-development/inpursuitofhope-1557910160>

<http://yabaha.net/dahl/hope/hope.html>

A spiritual approach - values

To alleviate a variety of problems born of the economic inequalities so prevalent in the world today, social and economic development will require, especially among the younger generations, a fundamental shift in perspective, one that changes the way in which certain essential concepts are viewed--the true purpose of life, the nature of progress, the meaning of true happiness and well-being, and the place that material pursuits should assume in one's individual and family life.

(Universal House of Justice, To Baha'is in the Cradle of the Faith, 2 April 2010)

A spiritual approach - values

Social justice will be attained only when every member of society enjoys a relative degree of material prosperity and gives due regard to the acquisition of spiritual qualities. The solution, then, to prevailing economic difficulties is to be sought as much in the application of spiritual principles as in the implementation of scientific methods and approaches.

(Universal House of Justice, To Baha'is in the Cradle of the Faith, 2 April 2010)



Rethinking Economics

A Bahá'í Perspective

A vision and shared ethic

There is an inherent moral dimension to the generation, distribution, and utilization of wealth and resources. The stresses emerging out of the long-term process of transition from a divided world to a united one are being felt within international relations as much as in the deepening fractures that affect societies large and small. With prevailing modes of thought found to be badly wanting, the world is in desperate need of a shared ethic, a sure framework for addressing the crises that gather like storm clouds.

(Universal House of Justice, To the Baha'is of the World, 1 March 2017)

A vision and shared ethic

The vision of Baha'u'llah challenges many of the assumptions that are allowed to shape contemporary discourse—for instance, that self-interest, far from needing to be restrained, drives prosperity, and that progress depends upon its expression through relentless competition. To view the worth of an individual chiefly in terms of how much one can accumulate and how many goods one can consume relative to others is wholly alien to Baha'i thought.... Wealth must serve humanity. Its use must accord with spiritual principles; systems must be created in their light. And, in Baha'u'llah's memorable words, "No light can compare with the light of justice. The establishment of order in the world and the tranquillity of the nations depend upon it."

Rethinking Economics

Society must develop new economic models....
Resources must be directed... to furthering a
dynamic, just and thriving social order. Such
economic systems will be strongly altruistic and
cooperative in nature; they will provide meaningful
employment and will help to eradicate poverty in the
world.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development*. A concept paper written for the World Faiths and Development Dialogue, Lambeth Palace, London, 18-19 February 1998)

Individual and community example

The economic life of humanity has recently embroiled so many people. Injustice is tolerated with indifference and disproportionate gain is regarded as the emblem of success.... Nevertheless, there are certainly practices anyone could eschew, such as dishonesty in one's transactions or the economic exploitation of others. There should be no contradiction between one's economic conduct and one's beliefs. By applying in one's life principles of fairness and equity, each person can uphold a standard far above the low threshold by which the world measures itself. Humanity is weary for want of a pattern of life to which to aspire; we should aim for actions in our communities which will give hope to the world.

Individual and community example

The members of the younger generation would do well to ponder the difference between gaining wealth through earnest effort in fields such as agriculture, commerce, the arts, and industry, on the one hand, and, on the other, obtaining it without exertion or through dishonourable means. Let them consider the consequences of each for the spiritual development of the individual, as well as the progress of society, and ask themselves what possibilities exist for generating income and acquiring wealth that will ensure true happiness through the development of spiritual qualities, such as honesty, trustworthiness, generosity, justice, and consideration for others, and the recognition that material means are to be expended for the betterment of the world.

Starting in local communities

The community, a building block of the global arena, can provide a space where alternative, inclusive, and cooperative ways of life can find expression, where men wholeheartedly come to see women as equal partners, and all are empowered to develop leadership abilities....

Through moral educational programs, attitudes of unity and fellowship are instilled from a young age so that participants come to view each other as valued allies working for the well-being of their communities.

(Bahá'í International Community, The Heart of Resilience: The Climate Crisis as a Catalyst for a Culture of Equality, 2022)

Starting in local communities

Central to this process is the concept of capacity-building—of enhancing the ability of participants to better understand the material, social, and spiritual realities of their societies and to devise next steps as they collectively chart their own path of progress, deriving fulfilment through service. Toward this end, spaces have organically emerged for individuals to reflect together on their challenges, identify constructive responses, and explore deeper questions related to the meaning of life. These spaces can serve as arenas where hope in times of difficulty finds expression, and bonds of solidarity can strengthen. The... capacities, attitudes, and qualities characterizing a community can reinforce its resilience in the face of extreme events or ongoing environmental burdens.

The background is an abstract, textured composition. It features a central area of bright yellow and orange, surrounded by various shades of green and blue. The bottom right corner has a prominent red and purple area. The overall texture is grainy and painterly, suggesting a mix of colors and materials.

Governance

Our Common Agenda

The governance problem

- National sovereignty: war is the final recourse to impose one state's will on others
- International anarchy, no rule of law
- Struggle for power and world domination
- Push back against multilateralism
- Warfare increasingly dangerous to the survival of the human race
- Multinational corporations out of control
- World filled with ego, corruption and aggression
- Rise of reckless political leaders and autocrats

Governance

- society needs good governance for justice and the common good, building unity and concord
- at local, national, global levels
- too much politics today is based on self-interest, fragmentation and conflict
- failures of governance cause many of today's problems
- national sovereignty becomes a shield to hide leaders' misdoings and corruption
- politics dominated by established elites, rich and powerful, corrupt kleptocrats and especially old men

Governance of corporations

- governance gap in the corporate sector
- escapes from national government control
- need a global legal framework for business and the corporate sector
- non-state economic actors such as corporations should be required to include in their legal charters an obligation for social and environmental responsibility to perform some useful service for society, in addition to profit as a measure of economic efficiency
- this would empower them to be effective partners in the system-wide challenges facing the world

The forces of global integration

- How do we encourage the forces of integration?
- We need ethics, values, goals and perspectives of a better future
- A vision of a more just and equitable world
- Able to motivate positive actions
- Can an ethical, even spiritual, perspective help us to change our lifestyle and consumption patterns?
- The UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals can give us a framework for action
- We need institutions of global governance for global problems



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

1 NO
POVERTY



2 ZERO
HUNGER



3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY
EDUCATION



5 GENDER
EQUALITY



6 CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND
CLEAN ENERGY



8 DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10 REDUCED
INEQUALITIES



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES



12 RESPONSIBLE
CONSUMPTION
AND PRODUCTION



13 CLIMATE
ACTION



14 LIFE
BELOW WATER



15 LIFE
ON LAND



16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



17 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS



SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS



Our Common Agenda

Report of the Secretary-General

10 September 2021

Our Common Agenda

First, now is the time to re-embrace **global solidarity** and find new ways to work together for the common good.... ...it must include urgent and bold steps to address the triple crisis of climate disruption, biodiversity loss and pollution destroying our planet.

Our Common Agenda

Second, now is the time to renew the **social contract** between Governments and their people and within societies, so as to rebuild trust and embrace a comprehensive vision of human rights. People need to see results reflected in their daily lives. This must include the active and equal participation of women and girls, without whom no meaningful social contract is possible. It should also include updated governance arrangements to deliver better public goods....

Our Common Agenda

Third, now is the time to end the “infodemic” plaguing our world by defending a common, empirically backed consensus around **facts, science and knowledge**. The “war on science” must end. All policy and budget decisions should be backed by science and expertise....

Our Common Agenda

Fourth, now is the time to correct a glaring blind spot in how we **measure economic prosperity and progress**. When profits come at the expense of people and our planet, we are left with an incomplete picture of the true cost of economic growth. As currently measured, gross domestic product (GDP) fails to capture the human and environmental destruction of some business activities. I call for new measures to

Our Common Agenda

Fifth, now is the time to think for the **long term**, to deliver more for young people and succeeding generations and to be better prepared for the challenges ahead.... We also need to be better prepared to prevent and respond to major global risks.

Global Governance?

Our world is increasingly globalized and interconnected, but there is no effective mechanism for governance, law and collaboration at the scale of global challenges and catastrophic risks, whether economic, social or environmental.

How can we address the vacuum in global governance?

Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century

Augusto Lopez-Claros
Arthur L. Dahl
Maja Groff

Cambridge University Press, January 2020

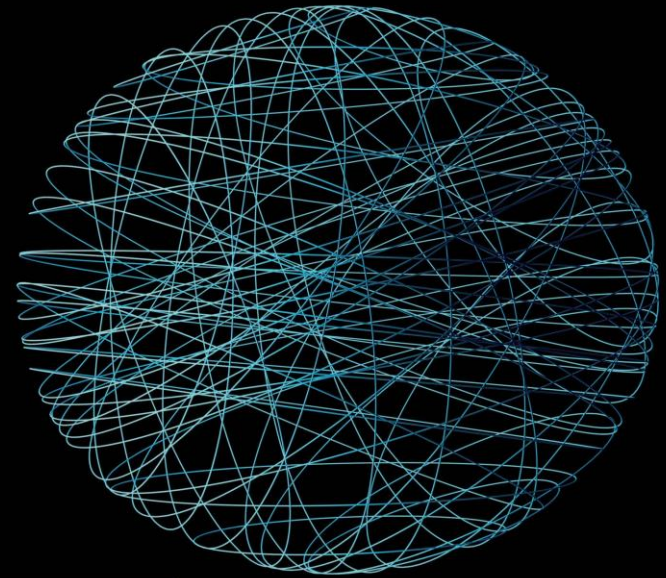
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/global-governance-and-the-emergence-of-global-institutions-for-the-21st-century/AF7D40B152C4CBEDB310EC5F40866A59>

Global Governance Forum

<https://globalgovernanceforum.org/>

Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century

Augusto Lopez-Claros, Arthur L. Dahl
and Maja Groff



CAMBRIDGE

The approach

- effective governance requires legislative, executive and judicial functions
- nations will only give up right to make war in exchange for effective mechanisms of collective security and peaceful settlement of disputes
- gradual development of relevant international institutions and processes
- build confidence in their effectiveness in reducing national insecurity
- carefully coordinated disarmament
- trust that justice will be done
- States also have to become trustworthy
- collective sense of moral responsibility

Environmental Governance

International environmental governance
started 50 years ago in 1972

Many things have been accomplished

We still have not turned the corner

UN Conference on the Human Environment

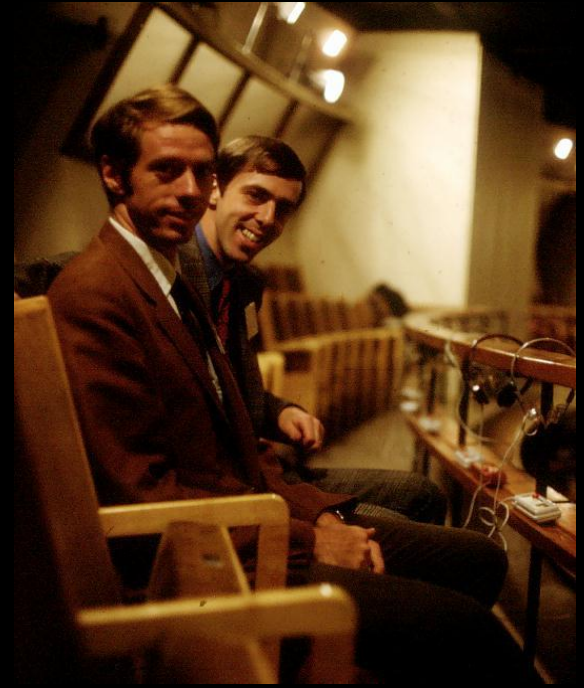
Stockholm 1972



UN Conference on the Human Environment Stockholm 1972

Start of Global Environmental Governance

Delegation of the Baha'i International Community ↓



Human Right to a Healthy Environment

On 8 October 2021, the UN Human Rights Council approved the Human Right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment

Making Peace with Nature

The United Nations Environment Programme's first Synthesis Report, *Making Peace with Nature*, is a scientific blueprint for how climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution can be tackled jointly within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Making Peace with Nature: A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies. UNEP: Nairobi, 2021.

<https://www.unep.org/resources/making-peace-nature>

Global Environmental Governance

- Stockholm+50 on 2-3 June 2022
- Rethinking Global Systems Accounting to replace GDP as the primary measure of progress https://iefworld.org/ddahl_accounting
- Climate Governance Commission
<https://globalchallenges.org/initiatives/partnerships/climate-governance-commission/>

Global Environment Agency

Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen

Arthur Lyon Dahl

for the

Global Governance
Commission

<https://globalchallenges.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/FINAL-%E2%80%93-Towards-a-Global-Environment-Agency-2021-11-03.pdf>



Climate Governance Commission

Towards a Global Environment Agency Effective Governance for Shared Ecological Risks

SYLVIA KARLSSON-VINKHUYZEN AND ARTHUR LYON DAHL

Trust and trustworthiness

- States must trust that decisions are really taken in the common interest
- People must trust that their human rights will be protected
- Everyone should be able to develop their full potential to contribute to society
- Governments must be trustworthy
- Everything founded on justice for all
- Sacrifices should be shared equitably
- No one should be left behind

Norms & Values for Transformation

Against the backdrop of climate change, environmental degradation, and the crippling extremes of wealth and poverty, the transformation from a culture of unfettered consumerism to a culture of sustainability has gained momentum.... it is a transformation that will require an earnest examination of our understanding of human nature and of the cultural frameworks driving institutions of government, business, education, and media around the world. Questions of what is natural and just will need to be critically re-examined. The issue of sustainable consumption and production... will need to be considered in the broader context of an ailing social order—one characterized by competition, violence, conflict and insecurity—of which it is a part.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism*, 2010)

Ethical foundations of change

Progress at the technical and policy levels now needs to be accompanied by public dialogue—among rural and urban dwellers; among the materially poor and the affluent; among men, women and young persons alike—on the ethical foundations of the necessary systemic change. A sustainable social order is distinguished, among other things, by an ethic of reciprocity and balance at all levels of human organization.... Within such an order, the concept of justice is embodied in the recognition that the interests of the individual and of the wider community are inextricably linked. The pursuit of justice within the frame of unity (in diversity) provides a guide for collective deliberation and decision-making and offers a means by which unified thought and action can be achieved.



If you are interested to know more

International Environment Forum <https://iefworld.org>

Global Governance Forum
<https://globalgovernanceforum.org/>

Climate Governance Commission
<https://globalchallenges.org/initiatives/partnerships/climate-governance-commission/>