

# For the Betterment of the World



The Worldwide  
Bahá'í Community's  
Approach to  
Social and Economic  
Development

Prepared by the  
Office of Social and  
Economic Development  
BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY



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# Introduction

**T**HE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY'S COMMITMENT to social and economic development is rooted in its sacred scriptures, which state that all human beings “have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.” Bahá'u'lláh wrote, “Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.” Fundamental to Bahá'í belief is the conviction that every person, every people, every nation has a part to play in building a peaceful and prosperous global society.

*And the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight...*

*How excellent, how honorable is man if he arises to fulfill his responsibilities; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages. Supreme happiness is man's, and he beholds the signs of God in the world and in the human soul, if he urges on the steed of high endeavor in the arena of civilization and justice.*

In traditional thinking about development, the role of religion in contributing to the betterment of the world has long been marginalized. “Religion,” a celebrated book from the early 1970s asserts, “should be studied for what it really is among the people: a ritualized and stratified complex of highly emotional beliefs and valuations

that give the sanction of sacredness, taboo, and immutability to inherited institutional arrangements, modes of living, and attitudes. Understood in this realistic and comprehensive sense, religion usually acts as a tremendous force for social inertia.”

Yet as we enter a new century, thinking in the field of development has been sobered by realistic assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the prevailing approach. Despite decades of rigorous effort and an enormous outlay of funds, no clear strategy has emerged. There is a pervasive sense of failure and despair of achieving development's high aims, even, indeed, of making progress beyond a few scattered and limited results. Social and economic development, it is now widely recognized, is a complex process, unresponsive to simple formulae that are based on raising income or the propagation of technological packages. Under intense pressure to find solutions, development thought has focused increasingly on people—their cultures, values, and worldviews. In such an expanded perspective, it has become abundantly clear that materialistic approaches alone will never succeed in building the capacity of individuals and communities to take action and in releasing their power. Rather the opposite:

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their tendency is to produce a debilitating effect. Interest has thus grown markedly in recent years in the potential contribution that spirituality and religion can make to development discourse. The aim is to bring religious insights to bear on the search for ways to harness the scientific, technical, and economic creativity of the modern world so as to improve the human condition and foster prosperity among the diverse inhabitants of the planet.

Bahá'í experience in the field of development stretches back to the beginnings of the Faith in Iran during the nineteenth century. In that country, the community of adherents were able, in just a few generations, to advance from a population consisting largely of illiterate villagers to one whose members were in the forefront of many areas of endeavor. By 1973, for example, Iranian Bahá'ís had achieved a 100 percent literacy rate among women followers under the age of 40, in contrast to a national literacy rate among women of less than 20 percent.

Widespread involvement in social and economic development, however, is a relatively new thrust for the Bahá'í world community; it rose in significance in the early 1980s, chiefly as a result of a substantial increase in the Bahá'í populations of many nations. The ensuing decade constituted a period of experimentation, characterized simultaneously by enthusiasm and trepidation, thoughtful planning and haphazard action, achievements and setbacks. While most projects found it difficult to escape the patterns of development practice prevalent in the world, some offered glimpses of promising paradigms of action. From

this initial stage of diverse activity, the community emerged with the social and economic development work firmly established as a feature of its organic life and with enhanced capacity to gradually shape a distinctly Bahá'í approach. This booklet describes the ongoing process of learning about development from the local to the global level, which is facilitated by fostering and supporting action, reflection on action, study, consultation, the systematization of experience, and training. We hope the booklet provides a vivid illustration of how Bahá'í social and economic development is being carried out in practice.

Office of Social and  
Economic Development

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# Concept

**B**AHÁ'ÍS VIEW DEVELOPMENT AS A global enterprise whose purpose is to bring prosperity to all peoples, an enterprise that must pursue its aim in the context of an emerging world civilization. Humanity, the Bahá'í writings explain, is experiencing an age of transition best described as a passage from collective childhood to collective maturity. The revolutionary changes that are occurring with bewildering swiftness in every department of life assume their real meaning in this light. During this period, the barriers raised by the thoughts, attitudes, and habits of the childhood of humankind are gradually being uprooted, and the structures of a new civilization that can reflect the powers of adulthood are taking shape.

The hallmark of the age of maturity will be the unification of the human race, which, in turn, requires the establishment of the principles of justice. The current disparity between rich and poor cannot be permitted to persist. All of the earth's inhabitants should be able to enjoy the fruits of a materially and spiritually prosperous global society. To create such a society, it is essential that people everywhere be empowered to participate in the constructive processes that will give rise to it. Building the capacity in individuals, communities, and institutions to contribute effectively to these processes is the primary task of development.

For the individual, this implies developing a number of interrelated capabilities—scientific, artistic, technical, social, moral, and spiritual. Individuals must be endowed with an understanding of concepts, knowledge of facts, and mastery of methods, as well as the skills, attitudes, and qualities required to lead a productive life. In terms of the community, capacity building entails fostering its development so that it can act as an environment conducive to the enrichment of culture. On the community rests the challenge of providing the milieu in

which individual wills blend, in which powers are multiplied and manifest themselves in collective action, in which higher expressions of the human spirit can appear.

Beyond the training of individuals and the cultivation of community life, development strategies have to pay attention to the strengthening of organizational structures. Institutions are needed at every level of society that can act as channels through which the talents and energies of individuals and groups can be expressed in service to humanity. One of the accomplishments in which the Bahá'í community takes particular pride is the erection over its 165 years of existence—sometimes under the most adverse circumstances—of a structure of elected bodies that operate at the local, regional, national, and international levels. This collective hierarchy devolves decision making to the lowest level practicable—providing thereby a unique vehicle for grassroots action—while at the same time conferring a level of coordination and authority that makes possible cooperation on a global scale. Bahá'í development efforts throughout the world benefit from the guidance and support supplied by this administrative order.

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Building the capacity of the world's peoples and their institutions to participate effectively in weaving the fabric of a prosperous civilization requires a vast increase in their access to knowledge. Given that such a civilization will have to be cognizant of both the material and spiritual dimensions of existence, development theory and practice must draw on the two basic knowledge systems that have propelled humanity's progress over the centuries: science and religion. Through these two agencies, the race's experience has been organized, its environment interpreted, its latent powers explored, and its moral and intellectual life disciplined. Together, they have acted as the real progenitors of civilization.

Bahá'ís reject the notion that there is an inherent conflict between science and religion, a notion that became prevalent in intellectual discourse at a time when the very conception of each system was far from adequate. The harmony of science and religion is one of the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í Faith, which teaches that religion, without science, soon degenerates into superstition and fanaticism, while science without religion becomes merely the instrument of crude materialism. "Religion," according to the Faith's writings, "is the outer expression of the divine reality. Therefore, it must be living, vitalized, moving, and progressive." "Science is the first emanation from God toward man. All created beings embody the potentiality of material perfection, but the power of intellectual investigation and scientific acquisition is a higher virtue specialized to man alone. Other beings and organisms are deprived of this potentiality and attainment."

A cursory survey of the historical forces that are shaping the structure of society should convince even the most avid defenders of today's global policies that unchecked material progress will never lead to true prosperity. From the heart of the great masses of humanity a dual cry can be heard. While it calls for the extension of the fruits of material progress to all peoples, its appeal for the values of spiritual civilization is no less urgent. For material civilization is "like a lamp-glass. Divine civilization is the lamp itself and the glass without the light is dark. Material civilization is like the body. No matter how infinitely graceful, elegant, and beautiful it may be, it is dead. Divine civilization is like the spirit, and the body gets its life from the spirit...."

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# Approach

**B**AHÁ'Í DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES ARE governed by certain underlying principles. In the Bahá'í Faith, proselytizing is prohibited, and development projects are not conducted for the purpose of public relations or as a means of converting people. In the appropriate context, funding for projects of a humanitarian nature can be accepted from government and donor agencies, but Bahá'ís do not accept or use funds from outside sources for the progress of their internal community affairs. As a religion it, of course, affords opportunities for people to learn about the precepts of the Faith and to join it; so too, there are a range of community activities, including those for worship and for education, in which all are welcome to take part. Development activities are, however, intended to involve Bahá'í communities in disinterested service to humanity.

Endeavors of social and economic development play a distinct function in the life of the Bahá'í community. They represent the efforts of individuals, groups, and Bahá'í governing councils to apply their religious principles to the achievement of material and social progress. They are intended not to serve Bahá'ís alone but people of all beliefs, and they strive to elicit the widest possible participation. Often projects are undertaken in collaboration with government agencies and organizations of civil society that share similar aims.

Because the Bahá'í community is global in scope, it transcends divisions prevalent in society today such as urban and rural, “North” and “South,” “developed” and “underdeveloped.” The process of capacity building that defines development has to be carried forward in every part of the world. In whatever country Bahá'ís reside, whether in their native lands or elsewhere, they are morally bound to participate in this process and contribute their talents to its advancement as members of that national community. Bonds of collaboration,

however, extend across national boundaries, and resources flow from the more materially prosperous countries to those with less. Bahá'ís believe that it is the right of every people to trace its own path of development and direct its own affairs. The Bahá'í global administrative structure safeguards this right. Thus, while outside support and resources may be readily available to a project, it is left to those directing it to determine whether the capacity exists to utilize such support constructively.

Progress in the development field, from a Bahá'í perspective, depends largely on natural stirrings at the grassroots of the community, and it is from such stirrings that it should derive its motivating force. In general, then, Bahá'í efforts in social and economic development begin with a relatively simple set of actions that can be managed by the local community itself. Complexity emerges naturally and in an organic fashion, as the participants achieve success, gain experience, and increase their capacity to make decisions about their spiritual and material progress and implement them. Local action

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gives rise to projects of a more sustained nature with more ambitious goals. Invariably, organizational structures are created to support such projects, and some of these nascent agencies possess the potential to evolve into fully fledged development organizations with the ability to undertake programs in a wide field of action.

The existence of such an organization in a region or microregion is imperative if significant progress is to be achieved. For while an isolated project can yield tangible results, experience worldwide amply demonstrates that fragmented activities in health, education, agriculture, and so on do not lead to sustainable development. No one discipline can offer solutions to all the problems besetting humanity. Effective development calls unequivocally for coordinated, interdisciplinary and multi-sectorial action. Organizational structures capable of dealing with increasing degrees of theoretical and administrative complexity are needed to integrate efforts across various fields and to provide the coherence required for consistent advance. The growing network of such organizations in the Bahá'í world community allows, too, for well-conceived methods and approaches that have emerged in one country or region to be shared with others, providing a natural channel for the flow of knowledge.

At whatever level they operate, the central theme of all Bahá'í development efforts is learning. As members of a religious community, Bahá'ís hold to a common set of beliefs and fundamental principles. Yet the wise application of these principles to social transformation is something that must be learned through experience. At the heart of

all collective action, therefore, is a concern for the application of spiritual principles. Not only do such principles point the way to practical solutions, but they also induce the attitudes, the will, and the dynamics that facilitate implementation. Equally important to the learning process are the content and methods of science, for by religious truth is not meant mere assertions about the esoteric, but statements that lead to experimentation, application, and the creation of systems and processes, whose results can be validated through observation and the use of reason. Further, the advancement of civilization requires the multiplication of material means, and these have to be generated by scientific endeavor. Development as a learning process, then, can best be described as one of action, reflection, and consultation—all carried out in the light of the guidance inherent in religious teachings and drawing on scientific knowledge.

The following pages offer an overview of the projects and organizations operated by Bahá'ís worldwide. Not discussed here, but no less significant, are the contributions to the development field made by thousands of Bahá'ís who, in their professional lives, are working within a host of agencies—in the public sector and in civil society—to bring about the betterment of humanity.







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# First Stirrings

**B**AHÁ'Í DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS ARE initiated either by the Faith's administrative institutions—local or national governing councils—or by individuals acting alone or in groups. Of the several thousand social and economic development activities worldwide, the majority are fairly simple grassroots endeavors of fixed duration. They are fledgling efforts of Bahá'ís in villages and towns throughout the globe to draw on the guidance of their Faith's spiritual and social teachings in order to address challenges faced by their local communities. Central to these teachings is the principle that individual potential finds fulfillment in service to humanity.

Consider, for example, a small group in Tanzania who gathered to study materials on the purpose of life, the spiritual nature of humanity, and the power of communion with God. Animated by their ongoing discussions, they broadened their collective efforts in a simple yet natural way, first to include literacy activities to better comprehend the materials under study and then to address vocational needs through tailoring classes. Most of the members of the group have had limited formal education. Now they testify to having acquired a strong sense of identity and to having attained new understanding and capacities. They feel galvanized by a desire to serve their communities. They have learned “how to study” and know “how to use their minds.” Their neighbors “look up to them” and “recognize them as people of capacity.”

The growing confidence and energies of individuals in thousands of such groups are channeled into action through consultation, a process of collective decision making prescribed in the Bahá'í writings. Rather than being a forum for negotiation, this consultative process is viewed as the collective investigation of reality. It calls for

the free exchange of opinion, detachment from personal views, and rational and dispassionate analysis of options. It promotes creative solutions to common concerns and the fair distribution of resources. It provides a voice for community members who have traditionally been excluded from decision making, most notably women, and nurtures such spiritual qualities as honesty, tolerance, patience, and courtesy. It produces agreement on the steps to be taken and a commitment to unified action.

The local initiatives that arise from individual motivation and group action represent the first level of experience by Bahá'ís in applying their religious teachings to the everyday life of their communities. A few examples of such initiatives are presented on the next two pages.

## Grassroots Initiatives

**A**NIMATED BY THE DESIRE to transform themselves and their community, individuals from Edea, Cameroon, form “common initiative groups.” The groups focus on learning about the spiritual nature of human beings as a foundation for addressing social and economic problems. To raise funds to support their efforts, the individuals involved plant produce and raise animals to sell.

*Brazil*



**A**GROUP OF JUNIOR YOUTH in Brazil, inspired to contribute to the well-being of others, consult on the needs they see around them. They decide to plant a vegetable garden to provide more nourishing snacks during school and make toys out of recyclable materials for the children in the lower grades to help create a friendly educational environment.

**I**N ORDER TO RAISE awareness among her peers about gender equality and violence against women, a Bahá’í youth from Gloucestershire, United Kingdom, holds biweekly meetings during lunch at her high school to discuss issues such as domestic violence, unequal pay rates, and trafficking in women and girls.



*Dar es Salaam, Tanzania*

**A**ONE-DAY SYMPOSIUM in Dar es Salaam is organized by the Bahá’í community of Tanzania and the Dar es Salaam University Students Organisation to examine the importance of strengthening families and empowering youth in their efforts to help communities prosper both materially and spiritually.

*Brazil*





**I**N ZAMBEZIA IN MOZAMBIQUE, where sixty-five percent of childhood hospital admissions are due to malaria, Bahá'ís participate in an interreligious endeavor called "Together Against Malaria" (TAM). TAM collaborates with the Ministry of Health and other organizations conducting anti-malaria campaigns to achieve advances in advocacy, awareness raising in the community, treatment access, and funding. Efforts initially focus on the two most populated districts in Mozambique, where more than half a million children and pregnant women lack bed nets.

**I**N AN EFFORT TO eliminate hazardous waste and to contribute to protecting the environment, Bahá'ís in Michigan in the United States participate in an annual Earth Clean Sweep in which 300 tons of "e-waste"—unwanted electronic equipment such as old television sets, computers, and VCRs—are collected and recycled.



*Michigan, United States*

**A** ONE-DAY WORKSHOP, attended by parents and grandparents, is organized by a Bahá'í of the Yishun community in Singapore to examine virtues important for individuals to develop for the promotion of strong family life.



*The Gambia*

**R**ECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF gainful employment to maintain a sense of dignity, Bahá'ís in the Gambia offer computer courses consisting of two sessions a week for three months to assist individuals in obtaining jobs. Participants range from adolescents to middle-aged individuals from many backgrounds.

**B**AHÁ'Í MOTHERS IN A VILLAGE on the island of Karkar, Papua New Guinea, determined to participate in the development of their community and inspired by the principle of the equality of men and women, decide to construct their own village medical post. The women put their plan into action, enabling over 3,500 residents to have access to a medical facility.



*Karkar, Papua New Guinea*





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# Sustained Projects

**A** PART FROM SEVERAL THOUSAND grassroots initiatives, Bahá'ís are engaged in over 550 ongoing projects that are larger in scope and more ambitious in their objectives. Some emerge from small efforts at the local level, while others are established from the beginning as structured projects. Sustainability is a natural feature of a project that emerges organically from a grassroots effort. Where a project is introduced into a community, particular care is taken to ensure that its scope does not exceed local capacity to sustain it. Projects, then, gradually grow in complexity over time and extend the range of their influence in keeping with experience and human resources.

The evolution of one project, an academic school in Panama, provides a helpful example. When it opened in 1993 in a small rented house on the outskirts of Panama City, the school had three teachers and a handful of students enrolled in prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade. At the outset, the focus was on gaining the support of the local community and establishing academic and administrative structures. Each year two or three grades were added, and eventually permanent facilities were acquired. With time, elements incorporated into the curriculum were able to infuse the learning atmosphere with such principles as the oneness of humankind, the equality of men and women, and the harmony of science and religion. Today the school offers a complete elementary education and has an ongoing teacher-training program to maintain the standard of excellence it has achieved. To strengthen family unity and promote parental involvement, it holds regular meetings for students' parents. As service to the community, it has opened its computer laboratory as a vocational center for local women.

Bahá'í projects, like all development work, have as their primary concern the visible improvement of some aspect of life. Depending on the size of the endeavor, its objectives may be modest or far-reaching. As action unfolds, and increasingly greater challenges arise, a project must be capable of learning from experience in order to bring about enduring change. Every Bahá'í development project—whatever its size or scope—serves as a center for learning that promotes material, moral, and spiritual progress. Thus, while it is appreciated that concerted action should lead in time to concrete results, success is measured chiefly in terms of the impact the action has on building the capacity of individuals and their communities to address development issues at progressively higher levels of complexity and effectiveness.

Bahá'ís have initiated sustained projects in a wide range of areas. The following pages provide a sampling.

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## Literacy

**B**AHÁ'Í LITERACY PROJECTS promote not only the acquisition of reading and writing skills but also the spiritual empowerment of individuals and communities. In Guyana, for example, the “On the Wings of Words” project builds preliteracy and literacy skills in children and junior youth aged 4 to 16 years, while helping them to reflect on issues significant to their lives. The project has trained more than 7,200 facilitators and reached more than 13,000 young people in both urban and rural areas.

The Uganda Program of Literacy for Transformation (UPLIFT), to take another example, is working with illiterate adults, mainly women. Its program stresses the necessity of promoting the equality of women and men and the importance of establishing proper relationships among family members. Materials discuss topics such as



*The Olinga Foundation for Human Development, Ghana*

community decision making, virtues, and health, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS and malaria. Over 6,000 individuals have benefited from adult basic education offered by UPLIFT.

Also in Africa, the Olinga Foundation in Ghana promotes literacy and moral education in rural areas. Through the Enlightening the Hearts Literacy Program, predominantly carried out in the west of the country, some 260 teachers in primary and junior secondary schools have assisted over 16,000 students in learning to read and write in their native language. Between 2002 and 2006, the program was able to reach young people between the ages of 8 and 15 in over 220 schools, increasing the literacy rates within this group significantly from year to year.

*“On the Wings of Words” project, Guyana*





## Schools

**B**AHÁ'Í EDUCATIONAL CENTERS range from simple tutorial classes to schools at both elementary and secondary levels. While all aim at academic excellence and place special emphasis on service to the community based on moral values and spiritual principles, each strives to meet the particular needs of the society in which it operates. A few examples from various parts of the globe illustrate how Bahá'ís are putting this ideal into practice.

The Santitham Vidhayakhom School in Thailand, founded in 1967, provides government-accredited nursery, kindergarten, and primary education to over 700 children from the surrounding rural communities. The school's character development program helps to prepare students for service to humanity. On the opposite side of the globe, the Nancy Campbell Collegiate Institute in Canada, an accredited private international school for boys and girls in grades 7 to 12, fosters academic achievement within a clear moral framework that incorporates 19 specific leadership capabilities.

In Lilongwe, Malawi, the Bambino Private



Schools reach some 1,100 students from nursery to secondary level. Students enrolled in the program aimed at the spiritual empowerment of junior youth participate in such service activities as planting trees in the neighborhood, looking after the children in the nursery, and visiting and assisting orphanages in the community. In neighboring Tanzania, the Ruaha Secondary School is providing instruction for grades 8 to 11, giving particular attention to the education of girls. In 2006, Ruaha began to offer a teacher-training program to a network of Bahá'í preschools in Tanzania in order to assist in meeting the educational needs of the country.

*Bambino Private Schools, Malawi*



*Santitham Vidhayakhom School, Thailand*



*Nancy Campbell Collegiate Institute, Canada*



*Ecole Mixte "La Splendeur", Central African Republic*

## Community Schools

**I**N COUNTRIES WHERE the national educational system does not reach rural areas, a number of Bahá'í agencies are working towards the multiplication of community schools to make preprimary and primary academic instruction available to youngsters. Much of the effort of these organizations is focused on developing programs for training teachers and raising awareness in local communities of the importance of education. It has been found that where a community has a sense of ownership of the school and supports its establishment, both in principle and in financial terms, better results are achieved.

The Nahid and Hushang Ahdieh Foundation in the Central African Republic has trained some 100 teachers using materials that discuss concepts related to a positive school environment and the qualities and attitudes of an effective teacher. Its outreach to residents and to communities has led to the establishment of 24 schools that serve over 1,200 children. Elsewhere in Africa, the Nosrat Foundation in Mali supports 13 rural community

schools through the provision of teacher training and the production of educational materials. Some of the teachers trained by the Foundation have gone on to start their own schools in the capital city as well; six such schools have been established so far.



*Teacher training, Philippines*

In the Philippines, the Dawnbreakers Foundation is applying the learning it has gained during its many years of experience supporting tutorial schools in order to systematically assist eight community schools in three regions in the country. The Foundation plans to further nurture the growth of community schools by establishing a regular program of teacher training, which is to be offered to existing teachers as well as those preparing to be teachers. In India, the promotion of village schools in the home communities of graduates of its Teacher Training Center is one of the major lines of action carried out by the New Era Foundation.



*Ecole Saint André, Central African Republic*



*New Era Teacher Training Centre students, India*



*Ecole Mona & Saint Joseph, Central African Republic*



## Moral Education

**M**ORAL EDUCATION is basic to the curricula of all academic schools operated by Bahá'ís. In addition, a range of programs have been developed that reach out to the wider community.

The Bahá'í Academy in India collaborates with institutions of higher learning to offer the Education in Universal Human Values Program, providing interactive courses and workshops on moral issues relevant to social progress and the development of the individual. As of January 2007, a total of 92 study groups had been formed at five college-level institutions.



*Bahá'í Academy, India*

Through its Golden Way (Altyn Iul) Program for Social Competence and Ethical Decision Making, the Association for Creative Moral Education (ACME) in Russia works to introduce moral education lessons into schools in the Republic



*Golden Way Program, Russia*

of Tatarstan. The program utilizes 30 video skits presenting conflict situations of varying natures, which form a basis for discussion. More than 2,500 students in 23 schools and other educational organizations have participated in the Golden Way Program.

In Haiti, Centre d'Apprentissage et de Formation pour la Transformation (CAFT) strives to foster positive change in the population it serves through teacher training and innovative educational programs. CAFT's teacher-training program, in collaboration with Plan International, UNICEF, Save the Children, and Yéle Haiti, has connected the organization with 170 schools and over 1,000 teachers. CAFT also promotes a program for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth, which involved some 800 participants as of June 2007.



The Royal Falcon Education Initiative in South Africa trains young people to offer classes in secondary schools that engage students in discussions on topics such as AIDS, community service, global consciousness, and the environment. Royal Falcon has reached over 5,000 individuals in 27 institutions in different parts of the country.

*Royal Falcon Education Initiative, South Africa*



Costa Rica

## Environment

**I**N THE FIELD OF environmental protection, Bahá'í projects generally take a community-based approach. An example is a program being offered in the Talamanca and Caribbean regions of Costa Rica among the Bribri and Cabecar indigenous peoples. "Community learning groups" study modules on environmental and moral leadership with the aid of a local tutor and initiate projects such as school and family gardens, fish farms, and poultry raising. Through their participation in the program, over 200 individuals, many associated with local organizations engaged in the conservation of natural resources, have been able to enhance their ability to contribute to the sustainable development of their communities.



International Environmental Forum conference

Besides such community-based initiatives, the International Environmental Forum operating in Europe links environmental professionals and activists worldwide. The Forum, whose membership is drawn from 50 countries, hosts an annual conference, promotes networking, publishes monographs, sponsors online courses on sustainable development, and provides mentoring to students and young professionals.

## Health

**B**AHÁ'Í ACTIVITIES in the health field take diverse forms including clinics, dispensaries, and medical and dental camps, as well as primary health care and health education. A notable example is the long-standing primary health education program in Zambia, through which over 1,600 individuals have participated in health education courses since 1998. Materials for the first level of the program aim at preparing men and women to be Family Health Educators, promoting sound health practices within their extended



Training demonstration for Community Health Educators, Africa

families. Topics in the first-level text include sanitation, immunization, malaria, and symptoms of common health problems, as well as the special needs of women, children, and the elderly. The second level builds the capacity of individuals to serve as Community Health Educators who can carry out activities such as mobilizing people in a village or town to participate in a government immunization campaign. Supplemental materials at the second level provide specialized knowledge and skills related to specific issues including women's health, HIV/AIDS, nutrition, disabilities, and alcohol and drugs.

Bahá'ís are also eager to respond to calls for assistance in the health-related endeavors of others. For instance, Health for Humanity, a Bahá'í-inspired nongovernmental organization in the



Health for Humanity representative in a hospital in Mongolia

United States, has been collaborating with agencies in Albania, Mongolia, and Cameroon to enhance eye care facilities, train eye care staff, and increase access to services in order to address blindness caused by cataracts, childhood diseases, and onchocerciasis. It also provides a channel for those in medical professions to offer their services to projects at home and abroad.



## Advancement of Women

**T**HE EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN is a cardinal principle of the Bahá'í Faith. Central to every project undertaken by Bahá'ís is a commitment to the goal of ensuring that men and women are allowed to work shoulder to shoulder in all fields of human endeavor—scientific, political, economic, social, and cultural—with the same rewards and in equal conditions. Specific programs aim at eliminating prejudices against women, at establishing mechanisms to protect their interests, and at providing the education they need to take their rightful place in society.

An example is the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women, which offers six-month and one-year residential programs for tribal women at its facilities in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. The program combines practical skills training with consciousness raising and the development of spiritual qualities. Recognizing that attitudinal change on the part of husbands, parents, and children is equally essential, the Institute continues to work with the women after they return home and conducts conferences and meetings in their villages. A number of extension centers have also been established in order to make the educational program available to an increasing number of women. More than 2,500 women in some 300 villages have taken part in the program since the Institute's inception in 1985.

In a different context, the Tahirih Justice Center in the United States offers legal, medical, and social services to immigrant and refugee women seeking protection from gender-based human rights abuses. The Center provides pro bono legal representation to foreign-born women and girls fleeing abuse through the Gender-Based Asylum Project, the Battered Immigrant Women Project, and the Protection for Victims of Trafficking and Other Crimes Project. A referral program makes available a range of social and medical services that assist women and children to rebuild their lives. In the area of public policy advocacy, the



*Barli Development  
Institute for Rural  
Women, India*



*Tahirih Justice Center, United States*

Tahirih Justice Center counts among its successes a campaign launched to end exploitation of foreign women by international marriage brokers, which led to the signing into law of the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act that enables foreign women to access important information that can protect them from violent abuse by men through the mail-order bride industry. Since its founding in 1997, the Center has helped well over 5,500 women and children.

## Community Banking

**M**ICROFINANCE PROGRAMS generally involve credit, savings, and related services for the less prosperous segments of society, depending on an outside lending agency and outside capital in order to operate. However, Education, Curriculum, and Training Associates (ECTA), a Bahá'í-inspired nongovernmental organization in Nepal, has developed a program through which groups of between 10 and 30 men and women form and manage community banks capitalized from their own savings. Loans from these banks are small at first, but interest earned on them remains with the members, divided proportionally according to the amount of savings each has on deposit. Further, a portion of the profits is put into a social and economic development fund for the benefit of the community at large. The banks provide their members with the opportunity to learn skills of sound financial management and encourage them to establish or expand their own businesses. More than just a savings and credit program, these community banks also serve to develop in their members attitudes and qualities vital to the task of managing financial resources—such as trustworthiness, cooperation, and a spirit of service—fostering consultation, solidarity, and unity within the group. ECTA's program began

in 2002 with five banks in the Morang district of Nepal and has since grown to include 60 banks operating in different parts of the country.



*A small business in Nepal*



*Bank meetings in Nepal*





## The Arts and Media

**T**Hemes such as unity, courage, optimism, trustworthiness, generosity, courtesy, and racial harmony form the basis of many Bahá'í programs that utilize arts and media. The Children's Theater Company, for example, works to incorporate such spiritual values into artistic performances by children and youth of different races in New York City, in the United States. The company has now been selected as the official speaker for the UNICEF/FOX Kids literacy and girls' education television campaigns. Also concerned with the well-being of the young, People's Theater in Germany has developed "stop and act" shows aimed at empowering youth to prevent violence in schools and was selected by Start Social—an association of German companies—as one of the 25 most promising social initiatives in the country in 2004 and 2005.

Meanwhile, Bahá'í-operated radio stations in Latin America and Asia provide a notable example of the role that media can play in contributing to the material and spiritual progress of society. Radio Bahá'í Ecuador, for instance, has served the Quechua- and Spanish-speaking inhabitants of the rural province of Imbabura and Pichincha and the urban areas of Otavalo and Cayambe since it began broadcasting in December 1977. The station promotes education, development, and community service through programs that nurture moral values and emphasize indigenous culture.



*Children's Theater Company, United States*



*People's Theater, Germany*



*Junior youth being interviewed on Radio Bahá'í Ecuador*









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# Development Organizations

**A**S BAHÁ'Í DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS grow and diversify, organizational structures evolve to ensure their long-term viability and to meet expanding needs. At present most Bahá'í development organizations fall into one of two categories. Some are agencies of Bahá'í governing councils and benefit from the legal recognition these enjoy. Others are initiatives undertaken by groups of individual Bahá'ís—often with like-minded colleagues—as nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations operating under the laws of their respective countries. Both types of organizations have as their aim the application of the Faith's teachings to one or more aspects of the process of civilization building. To this end, they systematically train human resources and manage a number of lines of action to address problems of local communities and entire regions in a coordinated, interdisciplinary fashion.

The seed of one such organization, for example, was planted when two doctors and their families decided to move to a remote region in Honduras and do what they could to help the progress of the indigenous population. To support themselves and provide a service to the wider community, the families established a small hospital with modest surgical facilities. From this simple beginning sprang a range of programs in such areas as health education and sanitation. After a decade of activity, a nongovernmental organization then was created to give formal structure to the programs offered in the region. Emphasis shifted to the larger problems of education, and a pilot project was launched to introduce a tutorial secondary program into local communities. With support from various agencies—the Kellogg Foundation, the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, and the Canadian International Development Agency—the organization successfully tackled the usual problems of implementation. Gradually student enrollment

increased. The program has since been formally recognized by the government, and upon completing it, students receive a fully accredited secondary diploma. The organization is now working to extend the program to other parts of the country.

The existence in a region of a development organization dedicated to the advancement of a population provides a coherent framework for actions of various kinds. Capacity is created to assess social forces and conditions, to build a vision of the future, to evaluate resources, and to devise well-defined strategies. As the organization systematizes the knowledge being generated through action and reflection in diverse fields, the learning that is a prerequisite for meaningful transformation occurs.

Today there are about 50 Bahá'í development organizations worldwide with relatively complex programmatic structures and significant spheres of influence, each at a different stage of evolution. Seven are described in the pages that follow.

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## Mongolian Development Centre

**T**HE MONGOLIAN DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (MDC) was established in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, in 1993. Working with local communities through programs centered on development and education, MDC contributes to a learning process aimed at the sustainable social, economic, and spiritual advancement of the country.

One of the organization's areas of focus has been an early childhood development program rooted in the conviction that every child is created noble and endowed with innate capacities and potential. As part of the program, a character development curriculum was created to nurture moral reasoning in children between 3 and 6 years of age, emphasizing service to humanity. Training is provided to assist teachers of kindergarten

classes in using the curriculum as a supplement to the existing preschool curriculum produced by the government. MDC works with over 110 teachers from 16 kindergartens and has offered training at a national level to teachers across the country who, recognizing the benefits of the approach, have asked that it be implemented in their districts.

MDC also administers a junior youth program to foster the empowerment of 12 to 14 year olds by assisting them to develop intellectual and moral capabilities that enable them to transform themselves and contribute to the upliftment of their communities. MDC began conducting the program in a few schools in 2005, and by 2007 the program had been adopted by 11 schools in Baganuur, Muron, Sainshand, and Ulaanbaatar, involving over 1,300 junior youth.

To empower individuals, families, and groups to bring about sustainable change in their communities, MDC has initiated a Community Capacity







Development Program that focuses on two initiatives. A gardening project offers courses in biointensive methods for growing vegetables and in social enterprise, which explores such areas as consultation, acquiring new skills, initiating action, and working in unity for the benefit of the whole community. The project blends theory with practice, enabling participants to study technological innovations on the basis of real experience gained in the field and to translate their learning into action. A second endeavor, the Community Banking Program, aims at increasing the financial resources available in a community and

building local capacity to manage these resources by combining spiritual principles with practical considerations. In 2007, there were six community banks with some 100 members operating in two different locations in Mongolia.

## FUNDAEC

**L**A FUNDACIÓN para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias (FUNDAEC) was established in Colombia in 1974. It is animated by two key concepts: first, that in order for a population to walk its own path of development, there must be institutions and structures that genuinely belong to the people; second, if people are to take charge of their own development, they must engage in systematic learning. To translate these principles into action, FUNDAEC has created the University for Integral Development—a framework within which learning processes can be set in motion in a given population. The processes include the search for alternative systems of production, the estab-

lishment of viable systems of formal education, and the strengthening of local economies.

Most notable among the results of this learning is a program now being implemented in several other countries in Latin America. Through years of research and action to address the needs of rural youth,

FUNDAEC has developed an alternative secondary tutorial school system, Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT), and a corresponding university-level teacher training program—both suited in content and method to rural populations. The SAT program, with its emphasis on the application of scientific capabilities to local contexts, has reached some 70,000 students in Colombia alone. To respond to the interest shown in SAT by an increasing number of Bahá'í-inspired organizations around the world, FUNDAEC has modified some of its curricular elements and assembled them into a program called Preparation for Social Action (PSA) for widespread distribution.

FUNDAEC has also developed the capacity—with the help of a postgraduate program called “Education for Development”—to enable other organizations to apply the approaches of the University for Integral Development to their programs and projects: to effectively foster people’s motivation and aspiration to take responsibility for their own development; to build local institutions, which are essential if rural communities are not to be swept away or assimilated by the process of globalization; to place the powers of science in the hands of rural people so they can become protagonists in the collective enterprise of generating and applying new knowledge; and to wed the knowledge systems of science and religion in the investigation of reality and the transformation of society.





## Badi Foundation

**T**HE BADI FOUNDATION, established in 1990, is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization based in Macau that creates and applies strategies for the development of human resources and designs curricula and methods for educational programs in China.

One of the Foundation's major projects is the School of the Nations in Macau, which has more than 260 students in its regular academic program, from preschool through the secondary level. The school's curriculum concentrates on the development of students' character and intellect and places a strong emphasis on fostering a spirit of social service within them.

The Foundation's Environmental Action Program aims at empowering individuals, in particular rural women in China, to apply their energies collectively to promote sustainable development in their communities. Through its training courses, participants deepen their understanding of environmental science, develop the skills needed to evaluate the sustainability of their own farm systems, and build the capacity to work cooperatively to improve agricultural production.

Additionally, the recently initiated Institutional Capacity Building Program serves to foster the development of grassroots organizations to support the long-term spiritual and material advancement of local communities. The human resources raised up through this endeavor either become trainers for a program focusing on the moral empowerment of junior youth or work towards the promotion of scientific learning and sustainable agricultural practices among rural women. Following their initial training, participants are assisted in establishing organizations suited to the conditions of their local communities and are supported through regular visits and continued training which makes use of materials that reflect the learning gained through similar efforts. In addition, courses have been created by the Badi Foundation to assist with the strengthening of a number of capabilities essential to the proper functioning of these organizations.



## CORDE and UniED

**I**N THE WAKE OF decades of internal conflict and civil unrest in Cambodia, two Bahá'í-inspired organizations grew out of the efforts of individuals striving to raise the capacity of the population to determine for itself a path of development. The first of these, the Cambodian Organization for Research, Development and Education (CORDE), began its activities in 1994 in the northwestern province of Battambang in an endeavor to address the educational needs of the country's predominantly younger generations. CORDE offers free tutorial classes to well over 1,200 students in several provinces, while volunteer teachers work with more than 600 students in its eight Centres of Learning (CCL).

Among the various agencies with which CORDE collaborates is the University for Education and Development (UniED), which was established in Battambang in 2002. UniED was created to contribute to rebuilding Cambodia by providing education that would enable groups of students to



gain the necessary skills, insights, and qualities to become involved in the social and economic development of their communities at the grassroots level. Students come from Battambang as well as neighboring provinces to enroll in the school's wide range of courses, which include economics, financial management, and community banking; the management of CCLs; environmental education; agriculture; and agribusiness. UniED offers a six-month certificate, a one-year diploma, an associate degree, and undergraduate degree programs in Education for Development, Community Development, and Human Resource Development. Integral to each course of study is a service component, which the participants must fulfill before they can graduate. Every student devotes a number of hours each week to assisting in the development of nearby communities by providing intellectual, moral, and spiritual education to children and junior youth. After completing their education at UniED, most graduates return home to contribute to the betterment of their local communities.







## New Era Foundation

**T**HE NEW ERA FOUNDATION was constituted in 2003 in Panchgani, Maharashtra State, India. It currently oversees three main lines of action: the provision of sound academic and moral education at the New Era High School; the training of schoolteachers by the New Era Teacher Training Centre (NETTC), awakening in them a desire to be of service to their communities; and the promotion of village schools in the home communities of the Training Centre's graduates.

Established in 1945, the New Era High School is one of the oldest Bahá'í schools in the world. Its more than 800 students are drawn from some 20 countries and from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. The school continues to give attention to infusing its curriculum with spiritual concepts and building and tapping the capacity of faculty and staff, while creating an uplifting environment in which students can live and study.

NETTC grew out of the extensive outreach efforts of the New Era High School to promote community development. For some two decades, thousands of rural youth participated in programs, both at a central campus and in their villages and towns, that provided them with skills and abilities to teach primary school and engage

in various vocations. Gradually, the vocational training programs were phased out and NETTC emerged, centering its activities on raising up schoolteachers dedicated to the advancement of their local communities. In addition to training individuals to teach the national educational curriculum, NETTC improves the English-language skills of its students and prepares them to offer materials that foster the intellectual and spiritual growth of children and junior youth. Students gain experience by teaching at surrounding schools and in villages during their training. As of March 2007, 1,800 pupils in 30 schools were engaged in the study of the materials with the assistance of NETTC students, while a further 1,200 children and junior youth in 30 villages were benefiting from similar study.





## Nosrat Foundation

**T**HE NOSRAT FOUNDATION was created in Mali in 2000 to address a pervasive need in the country, especially in rural areas, for primary education. The Foundation assists with the establishment, monitoring, and support of community schools; offers training sessions for preschool teachers and parents; and is involved in the development of educational materials.

In the first four years of its existence, the Nosrat Foundation helped to open 13 village preprimary and primary community schools in three regions of the country with a collective enrollment of about 900 students. The schools were established through consultations with the local communities, which selected individuals to serve as teachers, provided labor and some of the building materials, and committed to sustaining the operations of the schools by raising funds for the teachers' salaries. Each of these schools is owned by the community it serves, has an association of parents which oversees its management, and is officially recognized by the government. Representatives of the Foundation conduct training sessions for the teachers and visit the schools to observe classes and to hold consultative meetings with the teachers and parents. The schools are also assisted in meeting their infrastructure needs. In 2007, for example, the Foundation began to collaborate with a French nongovernmental organization, Eau Vive, to build six wells for schools that do not have easy access to water. Beyond its work in the rural areas of Mali, the Foundation has conducted trainings in the capital city, Bamako, resulting in the opening of six preschools in that locality.

Training modules have been created by the Nosrat Foundation to help teachers understand their role as spiritual and academic educators and to raise parents' awareness of the value of a sound education. Materials have also been developed for communities, addressing the importance of girls' education, introducing consultation as a tool for conducting school board meetings, and promoting trustworthiness as a basis for managing finances.



In addition, to further assist in providing for the intellectual and spiritual education of children, the Foundation is developing primary school curricular elements for grades 1 through 6 that emphasize moral concepts.

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# Systematization of Learning

**T**O FACILITATE LEARNING ABOUT development theory and practice within the Bahá'í community, the Office of Social and Economic Development (OSED) has been established at the Faith's world headquarters in Haifa, Israel. The agency helps to strengthen institutional capacity in every country to promote Bahá'í development efforts. It ensures that material resources become increasingly available to such efforts, coordinating the international flow of such resources and administering some of the funds intended for this purpose. OSED also offers general advice, technical and otherwise, in response to questions that arise.

The functions OSED performs provide it with the perspective needed to gather and systematize the learning about development taking place in Bahá'í communities around the world. When it identifies certain approaches and methodologies that are achieving particularly good results in some area of action, OSED arranges for pilot projects to be launched in different continents, the aim being to refine the content and methods and assemble them in a tested program. The program is then disseminated worldwide, so that national Bahá'í communities can adapt it to their specific needs. Four examples will help illustrate how the process unfolds.

In 1994, a group of educators were invited by OSED to analyze the experience gained by Bahá'í communities in promoting literacy. On this basis, pilot literacy projects were created in Cambodia, the Central African Republic, and Guyana. Consultations at the end of the projects' first year produced a refinement of strategy and the decision to extend the learning process to four other countries—Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Malaysia. Representatives subsequently met to share observations and reflect on achievements. It became clear that those most receptive to programs that enhance the power of

expression were junior youth, aged 12 to 15. The Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program was developed as a result. Beyond instructions in the simple mechanics of reading and writing, the program seeks to endow young people in this age group with the capabilities of reading with good comprehension and expressing thoughts clearly and eloquently. Emphasis is placed on the need for positive words and thoughts to be accompanied by pure deeds.

In 2002, OSED drafted a document describing the background, characteristics, and general parameters of endeavors aimed at the spiritual empowerment of junior youth. The dissemination of the document lent further impetus to the work with that age group worldwide, and a new stage in the process of learning opened. As projects for junior youth multiplied, OSED sponsored several continental seminars in which representatives from different countries could share their experience, receive training, and formulate plans. When a certain degree of capacity to sustain activity had been developed, the focus of the seminars shifted to the preparation of resource persons in each country who could be deployed to strengthen and enhance the quality of the program. New



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approaches to learning and dissemination of knowledge are now being explored.

Primary health care is another area of concerted effort. During the 1980s and early 1990s, a wide range of health-related projects were undertaken by Bahá'ís. In analyzing their experience, OSED noted that the most successful projects belonged to a network in East Africa that promoted primary health care, especially through the training of Community Health Workers. Those involved in the projects were brought together by OSED for consultations in 1996. What emerged was a program that aims at raising up human resources to bridge the gap between health needs at the grassroots and medical services of government agencies. Though in many parts of the world adequate medical provisions are in place at the local level, in countries lacking such infrastructure, the Primary Health Education Program can be used to develop the capacity in a region to address basic health issues. It is based on the premise that those at the grassroots can acquire progressively more complex skills and abilities, as well as scientific knowledge and spiritual insights. At present, it provides two levels of training, the first to prepare Family Health Educators and the second Community Health Educators.

The promotion of community schools is a third area receiving systematic attention. In the 1970s and early 1980s, simultaneous to the introduction by the Bahá'í community of large academic schools throughout the world, a global campaign was launched to promote tutorial schools—schools with modest facilities and simple overall structure, typically in rural settings, and

usually managed by local Bahá'í institutions. Numerous Bahá'í communities around the world were successful in establishing such schools. However, in the absence of institutional capacity at the regional or national level to support their continued progress, it proved impossible to sustain them. Over time, two Bahá'í development organizations emerged in Africa, one in the Central African Republic and the other in Mali, to promote community schools through the provision of a coherent teacher-training program. Informed by the experience accumulated by these two agencies, as well as previous insights gained over the decades, OSED has outlined elements of a strategy to assist, in a systematic way, the establishment of community schools in countries where the institutional and human resources exist to embark on such an effort.

A fourth area in which learning is being systematized is community banking. How spiritual principles can be applied to economic relationships in the world is clearly a complex issue that will require decades of thought and action. The Community Banking Program developed by Education, Curriculum, and Training Associates (ECTA) in Nepal represents a modest contribution towards such efforts. The program brings together small savings groups at the local level, and OSED has begun to explore how elements of the program can be applied in other settings. Among the questions under consideration at this early stage are what kind of institutional capacity is needed at the national or regional level to sustain an endeavor of this nature and what spiritual conditions make it propitious to introduce local banks into a village or town.

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# Contributing to Global Development Discourse

**F**OR THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY the expanding network of activities described in the foregoing has had significance well beyond the immediate benefits that have accrued. The experience of applying the principles in the Faith's writings to a highly diverse range of situations has progressively clarified the community's understanding of current challenges in the development field and equipped it to contribute ever more confidently to the global discourse taking place. That involvement, in turn, represents another important and continuing learning opportunity.

At the general level, the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) has participated in a number of major international summits and nongovernmental forums. Notable among them have been the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the "Earth Summit") in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing that same year, as well as the World Conference Against Racism in 2001 and the World Summit for Sustainable Development in 2002, both held in South Africa, and the 2005 Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Because of the worldview deriving from the Bahá'í system of belief, the community has taken a particularly keen interest in discussions that explore the contribution of religion to questions of development. These have included the World Faiths Development Dialogue Conference, cosponsored by the World Bank and the Archbishop of Canterbury held in Lambeth Palace, London, in 1998, and the Parliament of the World's Religions held in South Africa in 1999. Especially enriching has been the

involvement, from 1995 to 2000, in a project sponsored by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada, which explored the relationship between science, religion, and development.

The community has found in this series of activities welcome opportunities to give expression to the central conviction animating Bahá'í work in the development field. As early as the Earth Summit, a statement submitted by the BIC to the plenary session, on behalf of all religious nongovernmental organizations, concluded: "The profound and far-reaching changes, the unity and unprecedented cooperation required to reorient the world toward an environmentally sustainable and just future, will only be possible by touching the human spirit, by appealing to those universal values which alone can empower individuals and peoples to act in accordance with the long-term interests of the planet and humanity as a whole."

Two major BIC documents develop this conception at greater length: *The Prosperity of Humankind*, distributed at the World Summit for Social Development, and *Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development*,



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prepared for presentation at the World Faiths Development Dialogue Conference. The first of the two statements, which defines human prosperity in both spiritual and material terms, advances a frank analysis of the prevailing materialistic notions and practices in the development field, and proposes a development strategy aimed at empowering the generality of humankind in taking responsibility in the shaping of the planet's future. *Valuing Spirituality in Development* suggests five principles fundamental to the attainment of a civilization that is just, united, and sustainable: unity in diversity, equity and justice, the equality of the sexes, trustworthiness and moral leadership, and the independent investigation of truth. The statement goes on to focus attention on areas of work that it believes must command priority in the application of these principles: economic development; education; environmental stewardship; the meeting of basic needs in food, nutrition, health, and shelter; and governance and participation.

As the twentieth century drew to a close, Bahá'í institutions had reached the conclusion that a permanent forum was required for ongoing, in-depth exploration of these concerns. The result was the creation of the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, whose first initiative, in November 2000, was to sponsor a colloquium on science, religion, and development in New Delhi, India. The conference, devoted to the discussion of integrating religious values and scientific methods in development work, brought together more than a hundred representatives of nongovernmental organizations from all

regions of the country. Greatly encouraged by the success of the event, and the responses it evoked, the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity has set in motion a similar process of consultation with organizations of civil society in several other countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and in each a core group has begun to emerge that is seeking through various means to influence development policies and practices.

No serious observer can fail to appreciate the need for the massive investments of human and material resources that governments and organizations of civil society dedicate to promoting the well-being of the human race; nor indeed to value the intelligence and spirit of idealism that animates this work. Committed to the expansion of its own development programs, the Bahá'í community continues to refine its vision that the key to successful development is the building of capacity. Such a vision calls for engaging people everywhere in the generation and application of knowledge. Spiritual principles and the methods of science, together, can mediate such engagement. It is in sharing the learning thus acquired, the community believes, that its most useful contribution to the global discourse on development must ultimately lie.

# For the Betterment of the World

The Worldwide  
Bahá'í Community's  
Approach to Social and  
Economic Development

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