

Guidelines on Social and Economic Development Projects

The message of the Universal House of Justice dated 20 October 1983 to the Bahá'ís of the World clearly sets out the concepts, defines the objectives, enunciates the guiding principles of implementation, and envisions the unifying effect of Bahá'ís development projects.

In selecting a development project, it must be borne in mind that the aim should not be the feasibility of the project alone, but, far more importantly, what it may bring in the form of strength, hope, and spiritual upliftment of the Bahá'ís as well as the beneficial influence its implementation and final accomplishment might exert on the members of the Bahá'í community and those of the wider community.

It should be possible for Bahá'í communities, following the principles enshrined in the teaching of the Faith and the guidance provided by the message of the Universal House of Justice, to select and undertake development projects, in spite of the limited resources and the constraints imposed upon them by present circumstances.

The success of our projects will depend upon the degree to which we bring the spiritual teachings of our Faith to reflect upon all aspects of the selected project, its objectives, design, implementation, personnel, and evaluation. While we must take notice of what is current in development, we should be careful to avoid the danger of indiscriminate imitation.

National Spiritual Assemblies may wish to hold conferences at the national or regional level to explain the message from the Universal House of Justice, discuss with the friends the methods that may be adopted to implement its provisions, signs, and encourage them to consider and become oriented to the wider horizons now opening before us.

The friends at the local level may wish to sponsor a community development seminar or conference and invite Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í specialists to make presentations on areas of their specialization. These conferences would raise the prestige of the Bahá'í community and would be regarded as further evidence of the deep interest the Bahá'ís have in the improvement of the immediate environment, in the way of life of the people, and generally in social and economic development. The people who attend will benefit greatly from the consultation on education, health and hygiene, agriculture, and appropriate technology. Officials and institutions engaged in promotion of those activities will no doubt be happy to participate and will appreciate the efforts of the Bahá'í community who have made such a forum possible.

Some general guidelines are shared with you to assist you in your selection and planning of Bahá'í development projects. For information and interest, examples of such projects are attached as an appendix to this letter.

How Projects may be Initiated

1. Individual believers may, through their study, observation, and understanding of a particular problem, suggest a development project to the Local or National Spiritual Assembly.

2. Development projects may be selected by the local Bahá'í community. The Local Spiritual Assembly may wish to study the condition of the community to determine its primary needs, identifying services that are desirable and within their capacity to provide. The focal Spiritual Assembly should then decide on its priorities in consultation with the National Spiritual Assembly, its committees, or other designated agencies.
3. The National Spiritual Assembly may survey the local Bahá'í communities and assess their needs and requirements, thereafter consulting with selected Bahá'í communities to seek agreement and support for a particular development project. The Institutions must act in concert to give support to each feasible development project.
4. The World Centre may plan or suggest projects which are considered by the Universal House of Justice to have direct bearing on the spiritual growth and development of believers and communities in certain countries or localities.

Guidelines for Project Selection and Implementation

It is suggested that the following points be taken into account when considering the selection and implementation of a project.

1. Projects should be attempted or undertaken only where a relatively strong and united community of Bahá'ís exists and preferably where a potential for growth is evident, and where such a potential is most likely to be enhanced by collective participation in a development project.
2. Projects should be the subject of consultation at all levels— Local and National Assemblies, Auxiliary Board members, and Counsellors, and with the World Centre, where necessary. A consultative process must be initiated and fostered among all those concerned.
3. Projects should be suited to the local needs and the resources at hand. They should be directed toward meeting the immediate and perceived needs of the community. Usually they should not be based upon the introduction of ideas or technologies that are not of immediate relevance to the needs and capacities of the people they are Intended to serve.
4. Projects should be consistent with the aims and purposes of the local and national civil authorities. Care must be taken to ensure, as far as possible, that the projects will be well-received and given warm support by the non-Bahá'í community Service to the community must be the prime objective for selecting projects and this should be made clear to the local inhabitants
5. Projects should be seen as means of rendering assistance and hero. Through them, the participants should be able to gain in experience and confidence; In self respect and dignity. The concept of self-help should be a strong component in such protects.
6. Each project should have wall-defined aims and identifiable objective It should be simple and manageable It is advisable to start with modes: goals and add to them once a project is developing with success, and as the community's experience, ability and resources grow.
7. Great care should be taken to ensure that the number of people to be served corresponds to the resources and capacity of the Bahá'í community; that Bahá'í standards and values are applied at all stages so that no conflict may arise; ant, most importantly, that the cultural and

social setting In which the project is to be implemented is understood and incorporated into the plans.

8. Project should be considered for a community which has the will and desire to host a project and where there is reason to believe that members are committed to participate and support it in all stages of its implementation. It is essential that Bahá'í development projects grow from the grass roots, and not be imposed from the top. It is important to educate the friends of a community in the merits of a development project and deepen their understanding and appreciation of its implications.
9. Conscious and sincere effort must be made to ensure women's participation. Some projects may be entirely directed to the upliftment of the women; and in those projects, the participation and support of men must be assured.
10. The role of youth in development must receive the careful attention of the National Spiritual Assemblies, so that this valuable source of idealism and energy may be directed to the service of mankind.
11. Projects should be based upon ideas and techniques suitable to, and compatible with the culture and social setting and with the capacity and experience of the people they are intended to serve. Ideas and technologies that are of no immediate relevance or help to the people should be avoided.
12. Projects should be consistent with the aims of local and national civil authorities, and should be explained to non-Bahá'ís involved in order that the projects will be well received and will be given warm support by the non-Bahá'í authorities and community.
13. Trustworthy people who have an acceptable degree of managerial skill should be identified and if necessary given additional training to become better able to coordinate available human and material resources with care and understanding. The degree of skill required should correspond to the size and magnitude of a project.
14. Projects should aim at becoming self-supporting or only partly assisted by local or national Bahá'í resources and become independent of outside funds in the shortest possible time—especially as such financial resources are likely to become exhausted and as non-local personnel are withdrawn.

Evaluation of Projects

All types and sizes of projects require careful appraisal before commencement and constant monitoring during operations to ensure that the aim of the project is attainable and that maximum consideration is given to all the guidelines.

It is also worth remembering that; projects may need amendment to or alteration of their objectives as operational experience may show. The need for such changes can only be realized if constant monitoring is carried out and is accepted as a component part of the project.

The pre-appraisal, monitoring and final evaluation of each project will be carried out by people invited to perform this service either by the National Spiritual Assembly, or in consultation with the World Centre, depending upon the magnitude of the project and its constraints.

Financing of Projects

Generally, projects will come under one of the following categories.

1. Self-Financed

When the resources of the community are adequate to meet all expenses connected with the implementation of the project. In some cases it may be feasible for a group to form themselves into a cooperative for the purpose of financing a project. All cooperative arrangements must be clearly ascertained and proper agreements should be drawn indicating each party's responsibility. These steps should occur, preferably, under the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly or an agency designated by the National Assembly. Emphasis should be placed on sound business practices, honest contractual agreements and firm commitments.

2. National Fund-Financed

When the project is of national character, and comes directly under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly, the Assembly should study the project finances and carefully consider the implications of its commitment, taking into consideration: duration, possible expansion, available personnel, materials, and all other factors necessary to carry the project to a successful conclusion; or to continue indefinitely without becoming a drain on the National resources.

When a development project may be of special value to the community, but its financial resources are limited, the National Spiritual Assembly may, in consultation with the Counsellors, determine the extent of supplemental financial assistance needed and submit this to the Universal House of Justice.

The Universal House of Justice will consider such development projects referred to it by National Spiritual Assemblies, will determine how implementation may be carried out and will advise the National Assembly of its views and give the necessary directions.

In some instances it may be the wish of the Universal House of Justice to invite non-Bahá'í development agencies to participate in the financing or implementation of a project. For the time being, this action will be taken only with the approval of the World Centre and referred to agencies developed for this purpose.

The Teachings of our Faith are the mightiest and most powerful instrument created for the advancement of human society. We are now called upon to participate, as and when circumstances permit, collectively, in promoting social and economic aspects of human development and thereby placing the World Bahá'í community in the forefront of the progressive movements of the world.