

# **The Evolution of Institutional Capacity for Social and Economic Development**

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Bahá'í social and economic development focuses on increasing the capacity of the friends to make decisions about the spiritual and material progress of their communities and then implement them. While such development activities provide services that lead to a visible improvement in some aspect of life, their ultimate success is measured by the degree to which they enhance the ability to address issues of development at increasingly higher levels of complexity and effectiveness. This applies not only to individuals and communities but also to institutions. As development efforts grow, organizational structures should evolve to meet new challenges and opportunities.

The role of Bahá'í institutions in this process of social and economic development begins at its earliest stages. Local projects are initiated and administered directly by Local Spiritual Assemblies. A National Spiritual Assembly may appoint a national social and economic development committee, which, in the context of its work to stimulate grassroots efforts, also initiates a few projects. An education committee may start a tutorial school, or an institute process may expand by including training sessions in agriculture or health. In each of these cases, the institution or agency involved gains experience and provides guidance necessary to ensure the project's success. This is the first level of institutional support for social and economic development.

Over time projects become more complex. As development efforts evolve, local and national communities need to increase their institutional capacity to deal with them. In examining Bahá'í social and economic development projects around the world, the Office of Social and Economic Development has identified two types of organizational arrangements which are noteworthy. Both enhance institutional capacity and either increase the maturity of existing agencies or encourage the establishment of new ones capable of guiding development processes.

The first organizational pattern has emerged from the evolution of Bahá'í institutes for the development of human resources, on the one hand, and of Bahá'í schools for the formal

education of children, on the other. Initially, in an effort to meet the demands of expansion and consolidation, national communities conduct deepening classes or organize weekend “institutes” for new believers. From among these somewhat random activities there emerge some with a more systematic form as regular training sessions are scheduled and series of courses on specific topics are developed. Eventually, one or more of these may lead to the creation of a permanent institute that serves either the entire country or one of its regions in the development of human resources. At this level of operation, the programs of the institute include a number of courses that build on one another to help enrich the spiritual life of the participants and enable them to perform specific acts of service such as engaging in teaching activities, giving deepening courses, teaching children's classes, and activating Bahá'í community life. Acts of service related to social and economic development, such as literacy, health and agriculture, may also be included. Training is not only provided at a central location, but teachers associated with the institute also travel to localities throughout the region or country and organize appropriate training activities.

In the early stage of its development, the permanent institute is often managed by a committee of the National Spiritual Assembly. However, as institute activities and programs become more complex, a National Spiritual Assembly may find it useful to give its institute an administrative structure that enjoys more continuity and autonomy by creating a board of directors to be in charge of it. The National Assembly formulates the vision, articulates the needs, establishes general parameters of action, and then allows the board to have a degree of independence to plan and to see that the work of the institute is carried out. The National Assembly provides support; the institute keeps the Assembly regularly informed of its activities. In this way, the Assembly and its committees do not become overburdened with the planning and monitoring of the institute's programs.

This structure of the permanent institute increases capacity to engage in social and economic development projects of reasonable size and complexity. The heart of the institute's programs continues to be the development of human resources. Yet in order for human resource development not to be isolated from the practice of community development, the institute itself may be required to become involved in the management of actual projects. For the institute to have relevance to the Bahá'í community, it must, in all cases, carry out its projects in collaboration with the responsible administrative institutions.

The same organizational arrangement has emerged in national communities when a school for the formal education of children is established. In order to move beyond rudimentary forms of schools, institutional capacity is needed to deal with the development of specific curricula, the acquisition and maintenance of adequate facilities, the management of qualified staff, and the administration of educational processes. Again, the National Assembly may appoint a board to oversee the affairs of the school with a reasonable degree of independence.

A second type of organizational arrangement emerging for the enhancement of institutional capacity relates to the creation of Bahá'í-inspired agencies by groups of believers who share a common vision of service. Such an agency can be established as a non-governmental, non-profit organization for social and economic development. Regarding initiatives of this kind, a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice states:

*As a national community grows, the activities undertaken by its members also increase in number and diversity. Some of these activities will be initiated and administered by the Bahá'í institutions. Others will fall in the realm of private initiative. When an initiative is in the form of a private business venture undertaken by an individual or a group, the institutions of the Faith have little reason to interfere with its daily affairs. In general, only if difficulties arise among the friends involved in such an enterprise, if their activities could damage the good name of the Faith, or if they misrepresent their relationship to the Faith, would a Local or National Spiritual Assembly intervene. Bahá'í institutions should, of course, welcome any effort by such private ventures to apply the Teachings to their operations and to use their position in society to further the interests of the Faith. Spiritual Assemblies would do well to offer them guidance as requested or as circumstances require, and to help them develop their potential for the advancement of the Cause....*

*The private initiatives of believers need not, however, be limited to business ventures. The laws of most societies allow for the establishment of non-profit organizations which, while private, are subject to special regulations and enjoy certain privileges. Customarily a board of trustees is responsible for all the affairs of such an organization and must ensure that its income is spent for the purpose stipulated in its by-laws. This board also oversees the functioning of the projects of the organization and the work of those who are in charge of them. An increasing number of believers around the world are taking advantage of this possibility and creating organizations dedicated to the application of Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings to the analysis and resolution of important social and economic issues. The House of Justice looks with keen interest on this growing phenomenon in the Bahá'í world. It only cautions the friends that in establishing such organizations they should exercise care not to become a burden on the institutions or unduly divert the contributions of the believers from the essential and primary tasks of supporting the Funds of the Faith and the activities of the institutions. It also expects them to conduct their affairs according to Bahá'í moral and ethical principles.*

*A question that often arises in relation to private organizations dedicated to social and economic development is whether they are "Bahá'í" or not. Such a question cannot be answered by a simple "yes" or "no". Clearly, the fact that they have their own management structures puts them in a different category from projects and organizations administered by Bahá'í institutions. In that sense they are not "Bahá'í" enterprises. In another sense, to the extent that they are owned and directed by Bahá'ís and strive to apply the Teachings and serve the purposes of the Cause, they may indeed be regarded as "Bahá'í". It is important to avoid the impression that participating in the projects of these organizations does not constitute legitimate service to the Cause. Otherwise sincere and devoted believers will be discouraged from engaging in activities that are "Bahá'í" in nature.*

In creating agencies dedicated to social and economic development administered independently as Bahá'í-inspired organizations, the friends need to be concerned with the preparation of at least two types of documents.

One document, the by-laws, establishes the legal status of the organization. While suited to the specific legal requirements of a country, by-laws generally contain a statement of basic principles, the purpose or aims of the organization, the general methods by which the organization will accomplish its purpose, and the means to perpetuate the governing body. Since by-laws are basically created to achieve legal recognition, they may or may not directly associate the organization with the Bahá'í Faith and its Teachings, depending on existing circumstances.

In the case of organizations under the aegis of a National Spiritual Assembly, if it is found necessary for them to have a separate legal status, a similar document is needed. In these cases, it would be desirable for an agreement to be made between the National Assembly and the board stating that, while having the legal right to replace its own members according to its by-laws, the board will present its candidates to the Assembly for approval before doing so.

The second document with which the friends need to be concerned in both cases is a statement of purpose and philosophy, one that describes the principles and mission of the organization. Such a document needs to be written in the early stages of an organization's establishment. The statement of purpose and philosophy, which is specifically for sharing with the public or with other institutions, makes explicit references to the Bahá'í principles on which the organization is founded. Examples of such documents are attached, representing the Badí' Foundation from Macau, Health for Humanity from the United States, and the Ruhi Institute from Colombia.

Attachments 3

# The Badí' Foundation

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## *General Purpose*

Humanity is in a state of ferment as it advances towards a new and higher order of social evolution in a rapidly uniting world. In order to attain the goal of a new social order which guarantees justice and well-being for all, it will be necessary to develop new institutions, procedures, and relationships, and to acquire new concepts and attitudes. The Badí' Foundation has been created to contribute, however modestly, to this evolution. It hopes to increase awareness of processes of change, to discover effective and appropriate strategies that will facilitate transition to a new society, and to participate in activities which promote the well-being of peoples. Special emphasis is being placed on service to the Chinese people.

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## *Conceptual Framework*

The founders of the Badí' Foundation have been inspired by their conviction that the principles, concepts, and counsels contained in the writings of the Bahá'í Faith provide humanity with an invaluable source of wisdom in its search for a true path of development. Accordingly, they have adopted a set of basic premises which may be summarized as follows.

The purpose of development is the well-being of the people. The concept of well-being is understood in its broadest sense to refer to material, intellectual, social, and spiritual fulfillment. It is clear that man, while possessing certain characteristics in common with animals, also has a higher, or spiritual, nature. This higher nature encompasses such human qualities as the capacity for selflessness, compassion, sacrifice, dedication, loyalty, and service to others. It distinguishes man from animals, and it must be fully developed in order for man to dominate and control his lower tendencies toward self-centeredness, individualism, greed, overindulgence, violence, and falsity. Man's true wealth resides in those qualities, capabilities, and actions that emanate from his spiritual nature and that represent the sources of social and cultural progress.

It is clear that all facets of human well-being are interrelated. As important as material well-being may be, it cannot be achieved while such negative qualities as self-centeredness and individualism are dominant. On the other hand, positive qualities cannot be fully developed unless due consideration is also given to the material welfare of the society. Moreover, man's individual development cannot be fostered in isolation from the institutions and structures of the social environment. In fact, it is solely through commitment to the enrichment and progress of society and the welfare of other human beings that an individual can achieve personal development. Effective social and individual progress requires, in addition to commitment, a unified vision of the individual and the society, as well as knowledge of their relationships and

governing principles. With such commitment, vision and knowledge, people can set in motion social processes that address the material and spiritual aspects of life in an integral way. Together, such processes impel development. Development, therefore, can never be a product that is created outside of a region or a people and then delivered to them. It is a process that can only be envisioned in the context of the participation of people and their institutions, who must consciously tread their own path of individual and social progress.

The definition of participation in social and economic development has evolved through the years from the mere voicing of needs by beneficiaries to include other aspects such as the contribution of labor in economic production, and involvement in planning and evaluation. A more complete approach to participation must also include measures to enable people to sustain and direct their own process of change. This enabling process, for the Badí' Foundation, is linked to the strong conviction that every human being possesses infinite potentialities. The challenge is to find paths of action that will translate this potential into reality and create possibilities for people to contribute to viable plans of development. While recognizing the vast potentials of man, it is necessary to avoid falling into idyllic romanticization or an uncritical faith in man's intuition and unschooled opinions. A candle cannot express its potential unaided; alone, it cannot light itself. Only an appropriate educational process, which integrates the intellectual, spiritual, and social aspects of human culture, can develop and direct man's potentialities for service to the family, the community, and society at large. As these potentialities are liberated, institutions and instruments must be perfected or created to provide channels and means by which each individual contribution can be received and combined with the total collective effort of carrying forward an ever-advancing civilization.

In light of these considerations, it becomes clear that development cannot be a process of imitating the so-called "developed countries". Indeed, in these countries, the excessive emphasis placed on the material aspects of life has led to the accelerated disintegration of moral values, and to the decline of such cherished legacies as respect for authority, strong family structures and the integrity of human bonds in general. Such development, which has proven to be possible for only a minority of the world's people, is undesirable and unworthy of emulation.

The Badí' Foundation, then, aspires to participate in programs that try to follow new paths of development. These programs, it is hoped, will evolve in the context of a search for a scientifically and technologically advanced society in which educational, economic, administrative, and cultural structures are centered on the integral nature of man and not merely on his material aspirations. Development will therefore be assessed in terms of the increasing capacities of both the people and their institutions to address the spiritual and material needs and aspirations of the populations they serve.

### *The Development of Human Resources*

The Badí' Foundation is a small institution; its effectiveness must come from its adherence to the principles and concepts that are appropriate for the stage of social evolution in which mankind now finds itself. Its efforts are greatly enriched by the experiences of similar organizations in

other parts of the world with which it has contact, especially South America, India, and Africa. It believes it can make useful contributions by focusing on the creation and application of strategies for the development of human resources, as well as the accompanying methods and contents for appropriate educational programs. Enlightened, motivated, dedicated, and well-trained individuals are precisely the resources that are most needed by communities and institutions in their efforts to create a society which guarantees the well-being of all its citizens.

Although the development of human resources implies both research and practical involvement in the actual processes of social and economic development, the Badí' Foundation will be careful not to assume responsibility for the implementation of large-scale development projects that are the domain of larger institutions, nor will it devote its energies to research as a purely intellectual pursuit; rather, it will utilize the resources it generates in efforts that will enhance the capacities of individuals and institutions having the knowledge and attitudes necessary for the continual advancement of society.

While restricting itself to actions which emphasize the development of human resources necessary for social progress, the Badí' Foundation will not limit its activities to a few specialized fields, but will consider projects which address many aspects of life, society and culture. This decision stems from the conviction that the needs and aspirations of any group of people are interrelated and must be addressed in an integral way.

The Badí' Foundation has profound faith in the nobility of the human being and the vastness of human potential. This faith implies for the foundation that programs should not be limited to training people in a few skills or transmitting mere information; beyond these they should be centered in the development of attitudes and capabilities. By attitudes is meant the underlying values and moral concerns that direct the manner and methods with which the individual responds to specific situations. Capabilities transcend skills. They include the mastery of principles and concepts that permit the creative application of talents for the enhancement of culture and society.

The individual is not an isolated element, but rather an integral part of the institutions and organizations which surround him and form his social environment. His capabilities, attitudes, skills, and knowledge must be acquired and formed in the context of his participation in and contribution to the continuing development of the social structures that conduce to the well-being of all. This development of the individual is enhanced when the responsibilities of establishing goals, strategies, and methods are shared with participating populations and their institutions. This emphasis on the sharing of responsibility implies that the Badí' Foundation can only determine the goals and methods of a project through a process of interaction with people from among the populations and institutions with which it cooperates. At the outset of a project the foundation will not enter with blueprints or predetermined goals. Projects will be developed through a consultative procedure which involves a profound and continuous exchange of ideas and opinions. Frequently a project will take the form of assisting groups and institutions to develop, express, and realize their own initiatives.

The implementation of a development project is an organic process which depends upon existing capabilities and talents; the process, itself, should be designed in such a way as to carry

institutions and individuals to new levels of achievement. The imposition of projects that interfere with such an organic process always has a demoralizing effect on the participants. Therefore, the Badí' Foundation will bear in mind that, generally, projects which arise from the consciousness and the will of the people, and which enhance their capabilities, will proceed according to their own rhythm which can be enhanced and fostered but not accelerated beyond natural limits.

The Badí' Foundation considers all forms of contention, destructive criticism, violence, and conflict as additional afflictions heaped upon an already overburdened and tormented humanity. Approaches that emphasize conflict are counterproductive to the goal of achieving increasing levels of well-being, tranquillity, and unity that are prerequisites for the flowering of a new civilization. Therefore, all activities will be carefully and conscientiously examined to ensure that they do not contribute either to conflict or disunity.

In light of the foregoing considerations, it is possible to establish certain criteria for the identification and development of projects consistent with the goals and aims of the Badí' Foundation. Such projects will be chosen according to the extent to which:

- they are in accord with the principles of the Bahá'í Faith and with the unity of the human race as the principal requirement for the creation of a new world civilization
- spring from the aspirations of the participating populations and institutions
- consider the existing capacities of the participating populations and institutions, and assist them to increase their capabilities
- concentrate primarily on the liberation of human potential through educational processes
- seek greater degrees of self-reliance and interdependency, and avoid relations of dependency
- provide for the permanent and systematic exchange of ideas and opinions among all participants
- consider not only the material aspect of life but also the social and spiritual components
- recognize the interrelation of social structures and the individual, and work simultaneously for the development of the individual and the improvement of the social environment
- utilize the fruits of advanced science and technology, and operate in accordance with the highest standards of human and cultural values and wisdom
- are conducive to the best interests of society, and not to the vested interests of a few individuals or groups
- do not entail responsibility for the implementation of large-scale development plans, but do enhance the capability of peoples and institutions to participate in such plans
- contribute to the strengthening of unity and harmony and avoid any relationship with divisive forces or movements

**promote cooperation and  
mutual assistance, and do not  
engender a competitive spirit**

# Health For Humanity:

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## *Statement of Philosophy*

Health for Humanity is a not-for-profit charitable corporation, created to enable all interested professionals to offer their services for the promotion of community health throughout the world. Through this organization they can assist, albeit in a small way, the emergence of health for all humanity and thereby promote the oneness of mankind and world-encompassing peace.

The founders of Health for Humanity are inspired by the vision of the organic oneness of humankind presented in the Bahá'í Faith. It is evident that the problems confronting humankind are no longer merely regional. The crises people encounter in this age, whether economic, environmental, political, social, or spiritual, are global in nature and require a vision and solutions that are world-embracing in scope. As humanity adopts the organic unity toward which it is inevitably struggling, new perspectives, attitudes, and institutions will emerge- the principles of which are in harmony with this evolutionary process. As nations and peoples develop new relationships of interdependence, institutions with global consciousness, which also value the unique contribution of each individual, can make possible a peaceful passage through this tumultuous time. Emerging global unity occurs amid two simultaneous processes: the disintegration of obsolete institutions which have supported a fragmented world view, and the growth of new institutions in harmony with mankind's social evolution toward a new unified stage of maturity.

Since Health for Humanity seeks to be at the forefront of this unifying process, it has embraced four central principles which guide its internal organization and the projects it undertakes:

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## *Nobility of Humanity*

Humankind has the capacity for great feats of heroism and self-sacrifice. At the same time, it has baser tendencies toward materialism, greed, and violence. For humanity's nobility to emerge, its qualities of trustworthiness, compassion, selflessness, dedication, loyalty, sacrifice, and service need to be nurtured and gain ascendancy over its selfish, baser impulses.

Every individual and every culture has the capacity for manifesting this inherent nobility. It is crucial, therefore, to facilitate the unique contribution each part can make to the whole- in particular, the development and empowerment of women. The rich diversity of humankind is precisely what gives the emerging unity its spectacular beauty and power.

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### *Group Consultation*

The realization of one's nobility is an empowering experience. It leads to the recognition that answers to the problems confronting humanity are available within each individual. One vehicle through which those answers are discovered is group consultation, a process of frank and open discussion, conducted within a supportive atmosphere of common, agreed-upon goals.

Given the diversity of cultures and their unique circumstances, it is clear that addressing health problems requires a tailored approach in each locale. No single solution can be applied to all situations. It is essential that the identification of needs and the development of programs to address those needs be derived from group consultation at the local level. The most appropriate decisions will be the result of diverse participants analyzing the situation in an atmosphere of receptivity and mutual respect, then ardently searching for a meeting of minds regarding a solution. In such an atmosphere, differing- even conflicting- points of view can be harmonized.

The role of Health for Humanity is not to impose preconceived ideas of health development on local communities. Rather, it is to facilitate problem solving, to organize resources and expertise, to assist the local emergence of capability, and to advise on the introduction of technology appropriate to the culture and economy of the region. In this way, a relationship characterized by interdependence and dignity develops. Such intense involvement of local professionals in decision making encourages their development, commitment, and participation in ongoing programs.

The spirit of true consultation requires the same cooperative approach with other aid agencies and government offices. As a result, Health for Humanity will avoid any activities that are divisive or politically partisan in nature.

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### *Unified Service*

Humanity's inherent noble nature emerges with actions taken in service to humanity. Once the particular needs of a locality have been identified and solutions devised, Health for Humanity may provide the services of its members in direct health care delivery, education and training, health administration, and the application of appropriate technology. The organization serves as a resource for services delivered in accordance with locally determined objectives. These actions, which arise as a result of consultation and are carried out in a spirit of service, are, by themselves, creative processes that can lead to dramatic progress. They permit both the local community and Health for Humanity volunteers to derive lasting benefit from this dynamic exchange.

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### *Comprehensive Health*

True health extends beyond physical well-being. For an individual and a community to be healthy, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical well-being are all required. For this reason, the projects sponsored by Health for Humanity will tend to be multidisciplinary in approach. The

participation of a wide variety of professionals who can assist in the development of the general health of the community is essential.

Together, these four fundamental principles- affirming the inherent nobility of humankind, solving problems through group consultation, taking unified action in a spirit of service, and nurturing comprehensive health (which, in turn, affirms humankind's nobility)- constitute a dynamic continuum, each step reinforcing the next. As understanding of these fundamental principles evolves, we will grow in our ability to address developmental challenges facing our global family. It is ultimately this growth for all involved that is the lasting benefit of this undertaking.

# The Ruhi Institute:

## Statement of Purpose and Methods

The Ruhi Institute is an educational institution, operating under the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Colombia, which dedicates its efforts to the development of human resources for the spiritual, social, and cultural development of the Colombian people. Although its center is in the town of Puerto Tejada in the department of Cauca, its area of influence includes the majority of the rural areas of Colombia and is being gradually extended to several other countries in Latin America.

Like any other institution involved in the process of education for development, the Ruhi Institute has formulated its strategies within a special framework and a philosophy of social change, development and education. In this case, that understanding has emerged from a consistent effort to apply Bahá'í principles to the analysis of social conditions.

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The Bahá'í Faith sees the present state of human affairs as a natural stage in an organic process which will finally lead to the unity of the human race within one social order. Humanity as a whole has gone through evolutionary stages similar to those experienced by an individual; having passed through infancy and childhood, it is now experiencing the difficult culminating moments of a turbulent adolescence. The present state of confusion, doubt, and belligerence is simply to be understood as the condition of an adolescent who strongly desires growth and maturity, but is still attached to childish attitudes and customs. Yet the moment is ripe for this adolescent to take a final step and enter the constructive and dynamic but balanced state of maturity and adulthood.

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In analyzing the rapid changes occurring in the world today, Bahá'ís identify two parallel processes operating at all levels- village, town, nation, and global society. On the one hand, it is clear that human society is suffering from a process of disintegration that manifests itself in wars, terrorism, chaos, physical and psychological insecurity, and a widespread condition of material poverty. On the other hand, forces of integration are moving individuals and groups toward the adoption of new values, new forms of organization, and appropriate structures that can lay the foundation for the establishment of a new social order. The Ruhi Institute defines its basic aim as that of becoming a channel for the spiritual forces of our time to be applied to the lives of the masses of humanity, empowering them to contribute to the establishment of a new world

civilization.

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In its efforts to understand and contribute to a process of social change, the Ruhi Institute tries to avoid two sets of theories that have dominated the discourse on development and change for too many decades. On the one hand, it disagrees with concepts of social change that are entirely individualistic in their outlook, which analyze society only in terms of the psychological make-up, the skills, and the behavior of the individual, and which assume that social structures somehow will change by themselves once the individual is saved or correctly trained through religious conversion or secular education. On the other hand, it also rejects theories that consider the human being entirely as a product of society, and claim that no improvement is possible unless social structures, especially those related to political and economic power, are changed first. There are too many examples of participation by the “righteous” and the “highly trained” in the structures of oppression to allow any objective observer of social processes to accept proposals of change based entirely on the redemption of the individual without direct attention to social forces and structures. At the same time, history has already shown the evils of systems that deny individual freedom and derive their moral and social codes from a perception of the necessity of change in the structures of power, a change their proponents believe should be achieved at any cost.

The Ruhi Institute tries to understand the process of the transformation of human society in terms of a far more complex set of interactions between two parallel developments: the transformation of the individual, and the deliberate creation of the structures of a new society. Moreover, just as it does not view the human being as a mere product of interactions with nature and society, it does not identify structural change only with political and economic processes. Rather, it sees the necessity of change in all structures- mental, cultural, scientific and technological, educational, economic and social- including a complete change in the very concepts of political leadership and power. It is understood that individuals, all of whom possess a more or less developed spiritual nature, may be illumined by divine teachings, even under the influence of the most oppressive social forces. These individuals, then, by no means perfected, try to walk the path of social transformation, a path which, nevertheless, is not one of individual salvation but one which implies a constant effort to create and strengthen the institutions of a new social order. These new institutions, even when designed perfectly, may not function perfectly at first, but they do make it possible for an increasing number of human beings to walk further along the path of spiritual growth and transformation. This continuous interaction, between the parallel processes of the spiritualization of the individual and the establishment of new social structures, describes the only dependable path of social change, one that avoids both complacency and violence and does not perpetuate the cycles of oppression and illusory freedom that humanity has experienced in the past. According to this vision of social change, the Ruhi Institute directs its present efforts to develop human resources within a set of activities that conduce to spiritual and intellectual growth, but are carried out in the context of each individual's contribution to the establishment of new structures- for now, mostly, in villages and rural regions.

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Yet another important element of the conceptual framework of the Ruhi Institute is the concept of participation. Although by now most programs concerned with development and change accept the importance of participation by the local community in its own path of development and most try to avoid imposing their own projects and ideas, there usually is little clarity and agreement as to the nature, the form, and the extent of this participation. The Ruhi Institute, following the ideas presented in the previous paragraphs, asserts that effective participation which will not easily degenerate into political manipulation requires a systematic learning process within each community and region so that the community itself experiments with new ideas, new methods, and new technologies and procedures, rather than being the object of the social experimentation of others. Thus, one of the first steps in establishing participatory development processes in a region is to promote intensive participation by an increasing number of individuals in learning, in a constant effort to apply knowledge to improve the conditions of community life and to create and strengthen the institutions of a new world order.

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Guided by universal participation, both as a principle and as a goal, the Ruhi Institute tries to design and carry out educational activities that combine classroom learning and personal study with acts of service in the community. Each educational activity is to be, in itself, an enabling experience which helps participants develop further the qualities, attitudes, capabilities, and skills of a new type of social actor whose energies are entirely directed towards promoting the well-being of the community, and whose actions are inspired by the vision of a new world civilization which will embody in all its structures and processes the fundamental principle of the unity of the human race.

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At the Ruhi Institute, the design and implementation of educational activities are always guided by a profound conviction in the basic nobility of the human being. The Bahá'í Writings state:

*Man is the Supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education; by yet another word his station and destiny were safeguarded. The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.*

Education, then, is not simply seen as the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills, but also in terms of the development of vast and powerful potentialities inherent in the very nature of every human being. Again, the development of these potentialities and talents, which is considered a God-given right and responsibility of the individual, attains fruition when it is pursued in the spirit of service to humanity and in the context of creating a new world civilization.

Each participant in the programs of the Ruhi Institute acts as a student in certain educational activities, and as a tutor in others. The institute, then, uses the term “collaborator” to refer to all who take part in its programs. Based on the conditions and the needs of the population served by the institute, courses are designed along a series of “paths of service” which a collaborator follows according to personal interests and capacities. At the beginning of each path of service collaborators mostly learn and develop new concepts and skills. Later on, they participate in courses that prepare them to act as tutors of the earlier courses, thus creating a unique and dynamic environment for the development of human resources.