

# **Sustainable Development in a Changing World: Challenges? Opportunities?**

*Compilation of Reports from  
15 Open Space Sessions  
Held During the SED Seminar  
for Experienced Development Practitioners*

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**1. The apparent conflict in the Bahá'í Community between the core activities and SED. (How do you combine service to the community with the Institute Process?)**

**Convener:** Mark Granfar, Greg & Gayle Edwards

**Participants:** John Sobhani, Charlotte Chapman, Sheri Dressler, Mark Granfar, Gayle & Greg Edwards

**Discussion/Key Points/Insights:**

- How do we connect core activities with social action?
    - Engage Bahá'í Junior Youth and Youth in SED projects – volunteer, fundraise, etc.
    - Practice service principles of Ruhi books – serve! Put into practice what we believe.
  - UHJ is guiding us to maturity – we're at different levels in our communities. Building human resources to prepare for entry-by-troops. Core activities are building a strong foundation – giving us a framework for action. We understand that the UHJ will give guidance in 2009, which will involve external affairs. It is expected that it won't label SED in the traditional form, but will guide us to work in this field – it'll be an unfolding process and may focus more on community-based initiatives, rather than individually-based initiatives.
  - Service is at the core of SED projects and the core activities, so this is the common thread. Service to humanity is service to God.
  - Outside of North America, Bahá'í SED projects, are more part of the community – i.e., FUNDAEC started in Colombia, as did Ruhi.
  - A story of one UHJ Member was told – he said that They weren't asking us to stop what we were doing - the *emphasis* is on core activities. We shouldn't think dichotomously – we can be involved in the 5 Year Plan and work on SED projects – *integration!*
  - Our principles in action bring about social change.
  - \* The core activities, by their very nature, focus on social development.
  - The core activities build capacity, giving the community confidence. Through the core activities, friends are gaining the skills necessary to implement SED projects. Our communities will be ready for this work, thanks to the core activities, which will give us a greater opportunity for success.
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## **2. Sustainable Development and Disenfranchised Populations**

**Convener:** Oak Ritchie

**Participants:** Suzan Gould, Keli Lovejoy, Crispin Pemberton-Pigott, David Gould, Chahine Rassekh, Shamim Mohandessi, Arthur Dahl, Patrick Maloney

### **Discussion/Key Points/Insights:**

Conditions that disenfranchised populations tend to experience:

- Violence
- Frustration, feeling of powerlessness
- Concept of respect: “we have not been respected, therefore I will fight for my respect.”, which drives violence because we don’t know how to deal with conflict in other ways

### **Ways to Effect Change:**

- Empowerment a way to deal with powerlessness.
  - Recognition that the way to most efficiently reach indigenous populations is through the elements of the 5 Year Plan.
  - It takes time and commitment to be involved in the community enough to identify needs and familiarize with solutions to challenges. Acceleration of the process is possible through universal participation towards these goals.
  - “When there are very important things to do, you must set aside the important.” Understanding the systematic nature of the Jr. Youth empowerment program, among other elements of the Plan, rather than tangential projects and initiatives.
  - Examine the community and locate minority populations and develop teaching methods that speak to the grass-roots populations and embrace the fundamental validity of their experience and background. Developing the personal set of tools to approach the people in their environment.
  - The importance of working with the grass-roots and identifying the needs of that population while absorbing hands-on understanding of the culture.
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### **3. Agriculture and Community Development**

**Convener:** Owrang Kashef

**Participants:** Nancy McIntyre, Ian Holland, Charles Schiefelbein, Janet Cundall, Carl Stefan, Solange Hai, Rus George, John Krochmalmy, Owrang Kashef

#### **Discussion/Key Points/Insights:**

In our efforts to address issues related to community and agricultural programs from Bahá'í perspective we identified guiding spiritual principles needed to promote these activities:

- Agriculture is the foundation of community, foundation of the economy
- Love is the common denominator
- Believing in the capacity and nobility of people
- Humility for transfer of knowledge and for listening and inclusion of all
- Search for truth
- Recognition of the Age we are living in and the transitional processes
- Truthfulness, trustworthiness
- Justice
- Empowering people at local level
- Community building
- Service – purpose of our lives is service to entire human race
- Infusing knowledge with the spirit of the Revelation
- We are part of a global process of community building
- Individual initiatives, encouragement
- Core activities are a preparation to becoming more socially involved in transformation. Home visits nurture the spirit of love and fellowship. Prayer to make that connection with another human being to Creator. Faith in God, trust in God, believing in the invisible Hand in action
- Consultation, decision, action, reflection/ evaluation
- Consultation based on respect, fact finding, dignity,
- Creating a culture of unity, thought and action
- Creating a culture of learning
- Building capacities, capabilities
- Detachment

- Practical application
  - Service being a gift to society and being detached from our offerings
  - Find wisdom by being a humble learner
  - Speaking in the language of virtues, encouraging positives
  - Involving children, junior youth, youth in community
  - Developing volition to take care of ourselves, our families, others in community
  - Principle of equality of men and women, listening and respecting each others ideas, contributions, validation
  - Patience
  - Service – recognizing the noble concept of service which is what is needed to be done rather than what I need or want to do
  - Surplus should be given and not wasted (‘Abdu’l-Bahá)
  - Bringing in the elders as part of the process
  - Influence of spiritual life on material life
  - NY Times article on importance of agriculture is an example of the public discourse on these issues, what makes Baha’is different? Putting into action our spiritual guidelines?
  - Developing capacities or abilities to identify problems
  - Coming up with solutions, trying, refining solutions, process
  - Developing capabilities and capacities to engage in service
  - Identifying positive traditions/ cultural influence to help each other in our lives
  - Education that empowers participants to take ownership and carry on and pass on to the next participants
  - Perseverance under difficult conditions, enthusiasm, radiant countenance
  - Collective decision making process
  - Community has to have ongoing knowledge of its own to be able to generate its own knowledge in the future, it can’t all be knowledge given from outside sources, and education has to recognize that
  - Content of education should be relevant to the situation/ setting/ location
  - Site specific choices
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#### **4. Employee Shareholding Bahá'í-owned enterprises: Addressing the problem of the Haves and Have-nots**

**Convenor:** Crispin Pemberton-Pigott

**Participants:** Crispin Pemberton-Pigott

#### **Discussion/Key Points/Insights:**

Background: In South Africa there is an intense desire to redress the inequality of the past whereby people of Colour (non-white races) were systematically excluded from the ownership of enterprises and fixed property investments in the major urban, economically developed parts of the country. The concept of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) was introduced to create advantages in employment, the tendering process for public expenditure, and in particular to create Black shareholding in mining houses and major corporations. The process is similar to the advantages given to minority groups in some countries promoting a more representational mix in the corridors of power and the ownership of publicly traded companies.

This policy has been in place for 14 years and it is becoming clear that the creation of a hyper-rich small number of Black South Africans has transformed nothing much at all in the economy. The vast majority of people still own nothing and will never own anything unless they are handed it by someone else. The movement of the Left is agitating for the overthrow of this dominant paradigm as BEE has not transferred enough of the wealth (or visible signs of it) to the Black majority. The movement of the Right is calling for the ending of the BEE policy saying in effect that enough has been done.

There is no real possibility that this policy will lead to there being a significant portion of the economy ever entering the hands of the majority of the population. If the policies of the Right prevail, the status quo continues. If the policies of the Left prevail, ultimately the government will own the assets on behalf of the people.

Bahá'í economics calls for the recognition of the rights of both capital and labour. Capital might be the investment fund for people's retirement, it may be bank capital or personal loans from shareholders or employees. Labour is usually taken to be the workers who are not part owners. `Abdu'l-Bahá calls for not less than 20% of the shares to be set aside for the workers, that they should be written in their names.

“For instance, the owners of properties, mines and factories should share their incomes with their employees and give a fairly certain percentage of their products to their workingmen in order that the employees may receive, beside their wages, some of the general income of the factory so that the employee may strive with his soul in the work..”

“Also, every factory that has ten thousand shares will give two thousand shares of these ten thousand to its employees and will write the shares in their names, so that they may have them, and the rest will belong to the capitalists.”

`Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 43

Thus it is seen that the motivation of employees by direct proportional reward addresses several issues of fairness and balance.

Present labour law clearly separates management from shop floor workers with the definition being: someone who has the power to initiate disciplinary measures against another employee is in management. There is no provision in normal labour law for consultative management, nor for the rights of labour to be recognized in shareholding. The grand plan of labour activists remains to ultimately have the enterprise appropriated by the workers and operated for their mutual benefit.

It may be assumed that resistance to a plan to have a dramatic 'redistribution' of shares, wealth and enterprises will come from all quarters. The Right will oppose the presence of labour in the boardroom without having putting up the capital to buy the shares backing their votes. The Left will oppose on principle as a mere part-measure, the granting of rights to Capital and the limitation of the (free) profit share the workers.

It has been said that when both parties in a deal are 'sullen, but not rebellious' a viable deal has been reached.

If `Abdu'l-Bahá's system were applied to South Africa in 2009, what would it look like?

There would be a transfer of 20% of the capital assets in business to the workforce in the largest single block transfer in history, to workers, the majority of whom are Black. Everyone would benefit from this, not only an elite few. It would address the feelings of the ordinary workers that they are exploited for no additional gain, only the gain of the owners because the performance of the company would depend in part on their behaviour.

Demands for wage increases from the mineworkers when they are profitable are well known, but no corresponding offer of reductions are made when the market turns the other way. This could be addressed by a decision as to the minimum operational turnover needed to keep the company running, then giving a wage to everyone based on that, with a share of profits making up the rest of the package. The interminable conflict, agitation and sabotage of companies by those working within them would be stopped. It would weaken the hand of those who seek to mismanage labour relations for personal gain and bring all workers into the Boardroom.

Janet – Workers in a pre-school: Now, I give myself the money left over from expenses, repaying the debts incurred from start up costs. Profits could be shared. 20% of the profit now coming could be given to the teachers.

They have a wage increase coming. Would they accept a share instead of an increase? I will try it. If they split 20% (5% each) it is about the same as a planned increase. You have me thinking!

Crispin – It is my experience that Baha'is who own businesses are not very willing to discuss this topic, seeing it as a policy to be implemented at some future time. My own experience is that the workers in Swaziland have preconceived notions about business and how businesses function that are quite far from a Western understanding of the principles of cause and effect, of investment and return. They think there is a lot of money being made and it is secretly kept by the bosses. Implementing a profit sharing plan via the mechanism of share distribution would necessarily entail a strong educational drive to upraise the understanding of how commerce and trade work. In certain cases the laws of the country will not allow for a lower than statutory wage with a dividend share as a possibility. One might find oneself paying twice. This might be addressed by contract, or declaring everyone to be a partner. It remains an interesting subject. Share

distribution might confer spiritual protection on the company in the same way Huquq'u'lláh protects accumulated capital.

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## **5. Finding Your Heart's Desire. What do I want to be when I grow up?**

**Convener:** David F. Gould III

**Participants:** Rus George, Tom Mennillo, Patrick Mahoney, Charles Schiefelbein, Chahine Rassekh

### **Discussion/Key Points/Insights:**

- Need to fully investigate.
    - Adhere to the First Tajillat, that we should know ourselves and learn the means to our upliftment or abasement... and then for us means are needed, such means as are obtained from arts, sciences and crafts.
    - Use assessment tools and draw on consultation with community, family and friends.
  - Recognition that aligning your life with what you care about and identify with most fully will contribute to your success and well-being.
  - Have Faith that you will be guided-- “Verily whoso maketh efforts for us, verily We will in Our ways guide them”—and act accordingly, knowing that God’s guidance may not come in the form we expect.
  - Recognition that much of what we needed to know, we now understand better and that we should be offering assistance and mentoring to younger people.
  - The last issue led to extensive discussion about the importance of and effectiveness in guiding junior youth, because that age represents a period of latency in the development of life direction. In this connection:
    - Empowering junior youth and breaking down traditional sex-based roles to make healthier adults and families (e.g., young women needing to be empowered to be actors rather than passive followers).
    - The emphasis on service and delegation of responsibilities to junior youth (and youth) enabling them to become agents of change and in control of their lives (recognizing that present educational system and societal treatment discourages empowerment).
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## 6. What the Heck Are the Baha'is Talking About? Translating Baha'i Terms into Academic Terms

**Facilitator:** Keli Lovejoy

**Participants:** Ian Holland, Steven Krusnick, Solange Hai, David Smith, Peter Adriance, Trip Barthel, Carl Stefan

### Discussion/Key Points/Insights:

Concept: The idea of this session is to start a vocabulary list that helps Baha'is in academic or professional settings to translate commonly-used Baha'i concepts into academic terms. This can be very useful in professional and academic settings and can really help to introduce Baha'i concepts where it may have otherwise been inappropriate or poorly received. The participants in the session pulled from their personal experience and Baha'i-inspired international documents to generate the following list. These are, of course, only recommendations.

Baha'i Term	Academic Term
Advancement of civilization	International development
Consultation	Process of non-adversarial collective decision making
Eliminate prejudices	Facilitate understanding
Equality of men and women	Gender equality
Extremes of wealth and poverty	Income disparity; inclusive growth
Gross materialism	Materialistic inducements
Integration and disintegration	Globalization. Note: This term is used to mean various things that represent both what Baha'is recognize as the integrative process of the world coming together and also the disintegrative process of the world falling apart. If you are ever going to use this word to describe a Baha'i concept, use it with extreme caution and research what the various meanings and contexts of the word are beforehand.
New world order	The period following the fall of communism where free-market capitalism is the order of the global economy. This term was used by George Bush Sr. and is currently very politically charged.
Oneness	Common good
Oneness of humanity	Common humanity; citizens of different nations and of one world; local and national linked solidarity

Purity of motive; selfless service; selfless motive	Service to the common good; good faith; social responsibility; spirit of volunteerism
Sacred	Precious
Spiritual	Moral and ethical
Spiritual bankruptcy	Materialistic inducement
Spiritual growth	Sustained application of ethical principles
Universal participation	Community mobilization
Unity	Universal effort; social capital; social cohesion; inclusiveness; coordination among actors; integrated approach
Unity through diversity	Harmony with differences; common but differentiated responsibilities
Virtues; spiritual qualities	Values; moral principles; principles; principle-based; ethical standards
Most Great Peace	Positive peace
Lesser Peace	Negative peace

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## 7. How Can SED Projects Measure Changes in Values (Spiritual Principles in Action)?

**Convener:** Arthur Dahl

**Participants:** Solange Hai, Janet Lindall, Keli Lovejoy, Mark Granfar, David F. Gould III, Crispin Pemberton-Pigott, Nancy McIntyre, Shamim Mohandessi, Owrang Kashref, Carl Stefan, David Smith

### Discussion/Key Points/Insights:

Indicators are a useful tool to make value-based issues visible and to measure an organization's own progress according to its own priorities

We should use direct measures as well as indirect

With the challenge of cultural relativity, we need to find a deeper level of universal human values

There are different authorities for values: traditional culture, religion, materialism, individual decision, etc.

It may help to use indicators of outcomes, and relate them to the values producing those outcomes

We need different perspectives, within the organization as well as viewed from outside

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## **8. Embedding Baha’i Principles into the Design, Implementation and Evaluation of SED Projects.**

**Convener:** Trip Barthel

**Participants:** Patrick Maloney, David Smith, John Krochmalny, Charlotte Chapman, Ian Holland

### **Discussion/Key Points/Insights:**

- We discussed using ‘soft indicators’ to evaluate projects and how we can base the design of a project on them:
    - Unity in diversity
    - Equity and justice
    - Trustworthiness and moral leadership
    - Equality of gender and races
    - Independent investigation of truth
  - When we design a program, we can consider these 5 principles – first identify a need, then set a goal and look at the principle that best relates to that goal and is needed to achieve it (i.e., unity in diversity) and see what virtue is correlated with that principle.
  - We examined a project – Rural Electrification in Afghanistan – and identified that the main issue/problem in the country regarding project set-up and implementation was corruption. This was rephrased as ‘Positive Behavior’. The principle of ‘Trustworthiness and Moral Leadership’ therefore seemed the most appropriate.
  - Through discussion, we recognized the need to link training and education of the 1) public, 2) workers, 3) leaders in the organization.
  - We drew a diagram of the process of electrification in Afghanistan to identify possible points where corruption could/would take place – i.e., when the collector visited homes to collect payment. A solution could be to create a profit-sharing company where the community, so that if someone steals from one, they steal from all.
  - Recognized the need of enforcement – justice.
  - We concluded by recognizing the role of education in SED, where all of the stakeholders understand all of the aspects of a project, and as a result can provide effective management and oversight for the health of the project.
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## **9. How Do We Integrate the Idea of Sustainable Development into Baha’i Communities?**

**Convener:** Suzan Gould

**Participants:** Shamim Mohandessi, David F. Gould

### **Discussion/Key Points/Insights:**

Sustainable development is a concept that can be employed in finding solutions for problems that we as Baha’is are concerned about, whether they are in the environmental, educational, social, economic, health or political realm. On the local level, this concept can inform a process in choosing and implementing service projects and SED projects. This is sometimes a difficult concept to introduce to Baha’i communities which sometimes tend towards band-aid type service projects.

In order to prepare Baha’i communities to deal with and solve increasingly complex issues, the concept of sustainable development is very important. We identified characteristics and skills needed to plan and implement sustainable development projects.

- It is not against the “rules” to talk about issues in the Baha’i community.
- Baha’is can have discussions about policy and politics without engaging in partisan politics.
- We can engage the politicians and the policy makers in legitimate ways to change policy and solve problems.
- There is a difference between conflict and disunity. Conflicting ideas during consultation need to be allowed to find solutions to difficult problems and to allow for a diversity of people to feel free to participate.
- Don’t be afraid to be an agitator and speak your mind. Do be willing to allow people to choose their own path.
- When planning service projects or SED projects
  - Determine need by asking people you seek to serve
  - Look towards local needs
  - Use local services when possible
  - Do something that truly benefits people beyond immediate need

And, lastly...

- Strive to live a life in which your spirituality is linked with practical applications to living in today’s world.
  - Be inclusive
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## **10. Reaching and Teaching Non-Christian and Non-Moslem Populations in Developing Countries – Reaching Out to Traditionalists**

**Convener:** Crispin Pemberton-Pigott

**Participants:** Patrick Maloney, Solange Hai, Charles Schiefelbein, Janet Cundall, Keli Lovejoy, Alicia Cundall, Mark Granfar, Carl Stefan

### **Discussion/Key Points/Insights:**

- First Nations people do not need someone to come and save them
- The RUHI process as a written method does not fit well at all with the oral tradition of learning.
- African people largely still follow their traditional religion(s) especially concerning the relationship between us and the Concourse on High (ancestors who are considered virtuous, heroes or powerful individuals)
- In order to attract people to the core activities, it is necessary to create mutual respect for each other's religious traditions.
- The religion in Swaziland is monotheistic, has a Messenger Who returns, expects a new Revelation at any time there is a lot of trouble in the land, expects it to be a message to guide Mankind, and is widely accepting of other religious views and practices.
- The pattern of teaching native peoples in a great many countries has largely been based on extending the claims of missionaries regarding the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ, a position of belief that might not be as factually accepted as one might think.
- There are many problems existing between modern secularism or church activities and teaching, and the native peoples. This has created problems for Baha'is if they base their own teaching projects on the foundation laid by missionaries. It is akin to teaching *through* the missionaries.
- The Writings contain many topics of great interest to native peoples and these need to be brought to their attention in a suitable format.
- There is a perceptible fear in the Baha'i community that doing this will 'dilute' the Faith with strange and un-Baha'i beliefs, this dilution coming as a result of accepting that the religions of indigenous people come from God.
- We seem to be more comfortable with teaching people from the Judeo-Christian-Islamic line.
- The native peoples in North America are generally closer to understanding the mystical nature or mystical aspects of the Faith.
- The condition of native peoples is often such that it is necessary that outsiders (often from the dominant culture) state clearly that the validity of many traditional teachings is accepted and there is common ground which should be described in detail.
- If common ground can be established, it becomes possible to share devotional space and study of the Writings becomes easier, reflecting the topics and timing they prefer.

- It is hard to learn and share if one is in a teaching/giving mode.
  - Native peoples have a lot of knowledge and it seems they are waiting for someone to listen to them so they can share it.
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## **11. Integrating Spiritual and Material Principles for Development Policy and Practice**

**Convener:** Charlotte Chapman, Ian Holland

**Participants:** Arthur Dahl, Keli Lovejoy, Suzan Gould, Carl Stefan, Trip Barthel, Solange Hai; Oak Ritchie, Shamim Mohandessi

### **Discussion/Key Points/Insights:**

Getting the language and presentation of ‘spiritual principles’ right is important – is the world ready to hear them? In any case – what are they, how do we define them in tangible ways?

Studies in Development Theory convey that in terms of the evolution of principles for development that initially ‘economic principles’ and indicators would serve to help measure and alleviate poverty, promoting development. Following this, ‘human development principles’ emerged, along the lines of the MDGs. Perhaps the next stage is the adoption of more holistic principles of a more ‘spiritual’ (moral or ethical) nature.

The BIC has identified some, for example:

- Unity in Diversity
- Equity and Justice
- Trustworthiness and Moral Leadership
- Equality of i) gender; ii) races
- Independent Investigation of Truth

In the discussion, specific examples were referred to at the individual level and to organized Baha’i groups in putting these principles into practice:

At the individual level integrating material and spiritual principles could be achieved through an ongoing commitment to consultation with one’s partner, and to putting service to the Faith at the top of the agenda. This would serve the lifetime pursuit of being able to balance spiritual and material development within the individual and family.

At the thematic level, some Baha’i initiatives have been highly successful in founding, implementing and presenting how Baha’i principles can be put into practice through social action and contribution to general policy formulation in the ‘outside world’. For example, through organized networks of ‘practice’ in specialized areas, such as education

and enterprise: FUNDEAC, EBBF, the Tahirih Justice Centre and IEF. In the context of SED, the Ruhi book methodology emerged from learning that took place through the FUNDEAC programme.

Interestingly, as Baha'is promulgate the integration of these and other spiritually based values and principles, they are frequently requested to present these in public forums, as Baha'is appear to be trusted as partners and practitioners in the development process.

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## **12. How Can We Apply the Learning from the Institute and the Growth Processes into the SED Process?**

**Convener:** Chahine Rassekh

**Participants:** Bahie Rassekh, Emma Rahmani, Farzin Rahmani, Arthur Dahl, Charlotte Chapman, Gita Badiyan, Nancy McIntyre, Trip Barthel, Tom Mennillo, Crispin P-Pigott

### **Discussion/Key Points/Insights:**

Based on the quote from Ridvan 2008 message of the Universal House of Justice:

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has extolled “two calls” to “success and prosperity” that can be heard from the “heights of the happiness of mankind”. One is the call of “civilization”, or “progress of the material world”. It comprises the “laws”, “regulations”, “arts and sciences” through which humanity develops. The other is the “soul-stirring call of God”, on which depends the eternal happiness of humanity. “This second call”, the Master has explained, “is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like unto a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the lamp of the realities of mankind. Its penetrative power is the Word of God.” As you continue to labour in your clusters, you will be drawn further and further into the life of the society around you and will be challenged to extend the process of systematic learning in which you are engaged to encompass a growing range of human endeavours. In the approaches you take, the methods you adopt, and the instruments you employ, you will need to achieve the same degree of coherence that characterizes the pattern of growth presently under way.

### Learning from spiritual processes:

- Rebuilding sense of community
- Process systematic and sustainable within itself within the community (don't necessarily need people from outside for it to continue)
- Self-perpetrating; self expandable
- Do what we do in core activities to empower people to stay rather than migrate

- Outward-looking/all-encompassing
  - Training for our core activities: Training and action hand-in-hand
  - Sequence of training → Training change agents
  - Home visits can be used for education and hygiene
  - Holistic integration of spiritual and material development → We are essentially spiritual beings
  - Apply your training within the principles of the Faith
  - Learning mode: no fear of failure
  - Warren Buffet model
  - Study is a means to service and not an end in itself
  - Direct contact with Word of God
  - Letters of guidance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
  - Encouraging individual initiative with harmony and unity
  - And channelled by the institutions
  - Reflection and action and planning every 3 months and adjusting as necessary
  - Have buy-in from community
  - SED conference as forum of reflection for practitioners in the field annually
  - Iterative process that happens in the field → Making it more universal so practitioners have a way of systematizing their efforts
  - Reporting statistics and keeping track of statistics
  - Inclusiveness of all people and actions and initiatives
  - Misunderstandings need to be dissipated
  - Functioning at a geographically feasible scale (i.e.: a cluster) → Learning from geographic element of cluster
  - Coherence of approaches/methods/instruments: same ultimate goal of growth
  - Need a critical mass to get the coherent process growing
  - Get our energies from our Exemplar, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
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### **13. Education for Sustainable Development over the Internet**

**Convener:** Arthur Dahl

**Participants:** Charlotte Chapman, Shamim Mohandessi, Farzin Rahmani, Emma Rahmani, David F. Gould III, John Krochmalny, Suzan Neiger Gould, Chahine Rassekh, Bahie Rassekh, Gita Badiyan, Oak Ritchie

#### **Discussion/Key Points/Insights:**

A number of Baha'i inspired organizations are using the Internet for education, including FUNDAEC in Colombia, European Baha'i Business Forum, International Environment Forum, Baha'i Institute of Higher Education, etc., but much more could be done with the rapidly developing technologies to support social and economic development (SED). The Baha'i community will become younger as it expands, and be more computer literate.

There are distinct challenges in programme development (content) and programme delivery (technology).

The Baha'i Internet Agency at the World Centre, which helps with core competences, web site development and Internet security, could easily expand to help with distance learning platforms. There are many initiatives out there that need to be connected to share experience and build a more coherent educational activity. One need is for standards to ensure quality and avoid misuse.

Where there is a digital divide and low connectivity, complementary approaches like educational materials on CD-ROM can help to bridge the gap. Central locations where people can come for intensive education can be developed. A focus on information technologies should include alternative approaches so that no one is left out. The Baha'i community must be inclusive.

At present, most content is intended for higher education, so both the content and teaching approaches need to be adapted for a more appropriate level of SED. One example was training for the unemployed, to earn a university qualification as care-givers for the elderly. More could be done with open-source e-learning platforms to make Baha'i content available to wider audiences.

Blogging has great potential to become an educational tool if Baha'i bloggers become more strategic and coherent in the topics they blog about. They need access to resources on educational topics that they can translate for their particular blogging communities. Bloggers need to be trained to higher standards of wisdom, integrity and moderation, avoiding backbiting and criticism but emphasizing encouragement and elevation. Where problems arise, they should turn to the institutions for guidance.

Little thought has been given to indigenous traditional cultures, but they also could benefit from the Internet and new communications technologies to reinforce traditional

forms of communication: oral histories, story-telling, cultural transmission across generations, etc. The technologies are simply tools that people can use for their own needs.

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#### **14. Education in Bahá'í Principles in SED Projects**

**Convener:** Trip Barthel

**Participants:** Charlotte Chapman, Gordon Naylor, Táhirih Naylor, Ian Holland, David Smith, Alicia Cundall, Janet Cundall, Tom Mennillo, Chahine Rassekh

##### **Discussion/Key Points/Insights:**

This session was a continued discussion of the role of Bahá'í principles in SED. We were specifically looking at educating people involved in SED projects as a way to integrate the 5 foundational BIC principles.

The progression of the discussion for the past 2 days has gone from embedding principles into projects, educating people on the principles, identifying a core group who will work to promote the principles and identifying the principles prior to project invention.

We looked at a number of ways to educate people, including core activities and Ruhi. Developing a Ruhi book around SED was discussed.

The final understanding of using the principles resulted in incorporating them into the culture of the project at the initial stages with a core group of committed people.

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#### **15. Jr. Youth Groups – Who Needs Them, or Can 12 Year-Olds *Really* Save the World?**

**Convener:** Rus George

**Participants:** Oak Ritchie, Charles Schiefelbein, Tom Mennillo, Suzan Gould, David Gould

##### **Discussion/Key Points/Insights:**

Key Points:

People are at very different places in their experiences with the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program. The program challenges traditional paradigms and asks us to “let go” of previous perceptions of how to work with JY, and that they have a capacity

that is beyond what we often think. JYG's are beginning to have a concrete impact on the lives and quality of life within their communities.

Some of the participants expressed sorrow about “lost generations” of Baha'i JY who grow up and leave the Faith. The JY program is an effort to connect these members of our communities to their religion through service.

Individual efforts need to be linked to systematic development or they may lead to similar results, short term success, but less effective at achieving long term goals. We are working to develop long term goals. It is by being a part of the system that will bring about sustainable development.

JYGs are starting to bring about change at the community level, but this is only at the earliest stages. We need to continue to refine our understanding of this model and to learn how to apply it to community development.