

THE PROSPERITY OF HUMANKIND

Bahá'í International Community

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Introduction – Rethinking development

in simplified language

Prosperity of Humankind - 1

The future of our planet

The ideal of world peace is taking form. Obstacles have collapsed, conflicts have begun to be resolved through consultation, and military aggression is facing unified international action. This has awakened in both humanity and many world leaders some hopefulness about the future of our planet.

The desire for change

Intellectual and spiritual energies are seeking expression. The earth's peoples want an end to conflict and to the suffering and ruin that can happen anywhere. This desire for change can help to overcome the remaining barriers that block global peace. This cannot come only from calls for action against the ills affecting society. It requires a broad vision of human prosperity now possible through the spiritual and material well-being now within reach. All the planet's inhabitants must benefit without any conditions unrelated to the goal of reorganising human affairs.

Designing our future

History has recorded the experience of tribes, cultures, classes, and nations. Now that the planet is physically unified, making interdependent all who live on it, the history of humanity as one people is now beginning. The long, slow civilising of human character has been uneven and not shared material advantages equitably.

Nevertheless, the earth's inhabitants can now use the wealth of all the genetic and cultural diversity from past ages to take up, consciously and systematically, the responsibility for the design of their future.

The next stage in civilisation

The vision of the next stage in advancing civilization requires a re-examination of the attitudes and assumptions behind social and economic development. First are practical matters of policy, resource utilisation, planning procedures, implementation methodologies, and organisation. More fundamental are the long-term goals to be pursued, the social structures required, the implications for development of principles of social justice, and the nature and role of knowledge in effecting lasting change. Such a re-examination will require a consensus of understanding about human nature itself.

A strategy of global development

To develop a strategy of global development, we need to explore first the present beliefs about the nature and purpose of the development process, and second the roles assigned to those who will carry it out.

Materialistic assumptions

The assumptions in current development planning are essentially materialistic. The purpose of development is to achieve in all societies the material prosperity of certain regions of the world. There are some modifications for differences of culture and political system and responding to environmental degradation without changing the materialistic assumptions.

A widening gap

It is no longer possible to believe that the materialistic approach to social and economic development is capable of meeting humanity's needs. There is an ever-widening gap between the living standards of a small minority of the world's inhabitants and the poverty experienced by the vast majority of the world population.



Poverty

Economic crisis and social breakdown

This economic crisis and the resulting the social breakdown reflect a false concept of human nature. The response of people to the incentives of the present order are inadequate and irrelevant in the face of world events. Unless the development of society finds a purpose beyond material conditions, it will fail even these goals. That purpose lies in the spiritual dimensions of life and motivations above economics and the division of human societies into "developed" and "developing".

Redefining the purpose of development

In redefining the purpose of development, we need to look again at assumptions about the roles of all those in the process. The role of government is undeniable.

Future generations, however, will not understand how an age calling for equality and democracy in development planning should see people as simply receiving benefits from aid and training. We talk about participation but leave few decisions to most people to choose from offers from distant agencies with goals far from how they see reality.

Religious paternalism

Even established religion with traditions of paternalism seems unable to turn an expressed faith in the spiritual dimensions of human nature into confidence in humanity's collective capacity to rise above material conditions.

The peoples are mobilised

This misses what is likely the most important social phenomenon of our time. While governments are trying through the United Nations system to construct a new global order, the peoples of the world are mobilised by this same vision.

The peoples are mobilised

Their response is through countless movements and organisations of social change at local, regional, and international levels. Human rights, the advance of women, the social requirements of sustainable economic development, the overcoming of prejudices, the moral education of children, literacy, primary health care, and many other concerns are advanced by organisations in every part of the world.

The call of Bahá'u'lláh

This response of people to the urgent needs of the age echoes the call that Bahá'u'lláh raised over a hundred years ago: *"Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements."* This rapid transformation in the way that ordinary people are coming to see themselves raises fundamental questions about their role in planning our planet's future.



Urgent
needs of
the age