

Communities

Sustainable Development Goal 11

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Communities

Sustainable Development Goal 11

11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES



What is a Community?

A community is... a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families, and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 1996)

Human relationships in communities

...we need to redefine human relationships. Our present concepts of what is natural and appropriate in relationships -- among human beings themselves, between human beings and nature, between the individual and society, and between the members of society and its institutions -- reflect an understanding from earlier and less mature stages in our development.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §29)

Redefining human relationships

If humanity is indeed coming of age, if all the inhabitants of the planet are a single people, if justice is to be the ruling principle of social organisation -- then existing concepts from when we were ignorant of these emerging realities have to be changed.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §29)

New understandings

This will lead to a new understanding of the family and its members' rights and responsibilities. It will transform the role of women at every level of society. People will have a new understanding of work and the place of economic activity in their lives.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §30)

Spiritual dimension of human reality

Human nature is fundamentally spiritual. Communities are unlikely, therefore, to prove prosperous and sustainable unless they take into account the spiritual dimension of human reality and seek to foster a culture in which the moral, ethical, emotional and intellectual development of the individual are of primary concern.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World*, 1996)

Spiritual dimension of human reality

It is in such a milieu that the individual is likely to become a constructively engaged, service-oriented citizen, working for the material and spiritual well-being of the community, and that a common vision and a shared sense of purpose can be effectively developed.

(Bahá'í International Community, Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World, 1996)

Community-building

...community-building efforts will succeed only to the extent that they link material progress to fundamental spiritual aspirations, respond to the increasing interdependence among the peoples and nations of the planet, and establish a framework within which all people can become active participants in the governance of their societies.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World*, 1996)

Societal progress

...embracing humanity's oneness holds a wide range of implications for societal progress—that adversarial approaches to problem-solving, no matter how noble the cause they support, are limited in achieving enduring transformation; that differences of opinion are an opportunity to explore values and strategies from diverse perspectives; that every member of society has the capacity, right, and responsibility to contribute to the common good; and that a hopeful future is within reach, through conscious and dedicated effort.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Embracing Interdependence: Foundations for a World in Transition*, 2024)

Universal principles

Our challenge, therefore, is to redesign and develop our communities around those universal principles — including love, honesty, moderation, humility, hospitality, justice and unity— which promote social cohesion, and without which no community, no matter how economically prosperous, intellectually endowed or technologically advanced, can long endure.

(Bahá'í International Community, [Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World](#), 1996)

Here are seven principles for building communities:

Principles for Community 1

The protection of the **family** and the promotion of its well-being must become central to community processes. The family is the primary institution of society and the principle incubator of values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. When it is spiritually healthy, it contributes significantly to the development of happy and responsible citizens.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World*, 1996)

Principles for Community 2

The physical, social, economic, legal and political designs of our communities must serve all members of society, not just the privileged. A truly **just** and equitable society will require a citizenry which understands that the interests of the individual and of the community are inextricably linked; that the advancement of human rights requires full commitment to the corresponding responsibilities; and that when women are welcomed into full partnership with men in all fields of human endeavor, families, communities and nations will prosper and advance.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World*, 1996)

Principles for Community 3

Work is both a means of livelihood for the individual and a way of contributing to the prosperity of the community as a whole. As such, it helps give meaning to one's life. Therefore, community design must ensure that the creative energies of the individual have a channel of useful employment in which they can be expressed. For his or her part, the individual must assume responsibility in carrying out this trust. Progress in this area will lend great momentum to the elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty in the world.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World*, 1996)

Principles for Community 4

"Religion," the Bahá'í Writings state, *"is the greatest of all means for the establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein."* In every community, therefore, **freedom of religion** must be ensured, including the right to establish centers of worship. Places of worship provide a venue for prayer and meditation, acts of devotion through which the individual can come closer to the Creator, thereby strengthening his or her spiritual capacities for sacrifice and service.

(Bahá'í International Community, Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World, 1996)

Principles for Community 5

The promotion of **beauty**, whether natural or man-made, should become a guiding principle in community planning, for beauty can touch the heart and inspire the soul to noble sentiments and actions.

(Bahá'í International Community, Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World, 1996)

Principles for Community 6

Community development will need to incorporate principles of **environmental preservation** and rehabilitation, not only to bring our current civilization into a sustainable pattern of development, but also to respond to the human spirit's great need for close contact with the natural world. The primary role of the farmer in food and economic security also needs to be carefully considered in the design of all human settlements.

(Bahá'í International Community, Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World, 1996)

Principles for Community 7

The vast forces of **science and technology** must be harnessed to serve the material, intellectual, emotional and spiritual needs of the entire human family. This will require that all peoples be involved in generating scientific knowledge and determining its applications.

(Bahá'í International Community, Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World, 1996)

Principles for Community 7

As participation increases, technologies which have tended to desensitize and alienate, to make satisfying work and crafts redundant, to destroy the environment, and to cause sickness, infirmity or death, will, no doubt, be reconsidered, redesigned or abandoned.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World*, 1996)

Building Bahá'í Communities

In neighborhoods and villages around the world, tens, hundreds, and in some places, thousands of people, inspired by the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, are engaged in activities that aim to “build community.” In their efforts, we can already see signs of the emergence of new patterns of collective life....

(Gustavo Correa, *Community and Collective Action*, *The Bahá'í World*, August 2020)

Community and Collective Action

Much has already been learned about the early stages of community building: A group of people turns to the sacred Writings and the guidance of the Universal House of Justice and takes action within a framework defined by the growing experience of the worldwide Bahá'í community; it draws insights from the existing body of knowledge and reflects on experience; it has regular conversations in which questions are asked and ideas are clarified; and, as understanding advances, the group adjusts its plans, approaches, and activities.

(Gustavo Correa, *Community and Collective Action*, *The Bahá'í World*, August 2020)

Community building

There are many principles that are relevant to the process of community building. Foremost among these is the oneness of humankind. Shoghi Effendi... talked about the principle of oneness as “*the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh revolve.*” Having the principle of oneness in mind as the guiding and operating principle sheds light on the process of community building and gives direction to our efforts as participants.

(Gustavo Correa, *Community and Collective Action*, *The Bahá’í World*, August 2020)

Collective action - selfless service

The concept of selfless service also has implications for the manner in which we approach the acts of service we undertake and our various roles and responsibilities in a community. Serving with selflessness and diligence requires making choices, because... we have free will.

(Gustavo Correa, *Community and Collective Action*, *The Bahá'í World*, August 2020)

Community and Collective Action

To put the interests of the collective before our own and to devote ourselves to doing things with excellence; to be ready to collaborate; to prefer our brothers and sisters over ourselves; to orient ourselves toward that which brings about the well-being of the community; to move beyond the inertia that sometimes holds us back from working to the best of our ability—all of these are individual choices that have to be made consciously.

(Gustavo Correa, *Community and Collective Action*, *The Bahá'í World*, August 2020)

Community and Collective Action

The desire to do good is inherent in human nature because we are created noble. It is a capacity within us that can be developed and strengthened through constant effort, prayer, reflection, and the acquisition of knowledge. It is through faith and our spiritual alignment with the will of God that we are enabled to do this.

(based on Gustavo Correa, *Community and Collective Action*, *The Bahá'í World*, August 2020)

Collective Action – Universal Love

We draw on spiritual forces to assist us and to propel us forward, and the most powerful force binding us together is the force of universal love. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addresses us: *“Strive to increase the love-power of reality”* and *“to make your hearts greater centers of attraction and to create new ideals and relationships.”*

(Gustavo Correa, Community and Collective Action, *The Bahá’í World*, August 2020)



Zambia community activities

Bahá'í Communities

The House of Justice has... written about “vibrant communities,” describing them as being characterized by “tolerance and love and guided by a strong sense of purpose and collective will” and explaining that they provide an “environment in which the capacities of all components—men, women, youth and children—are developed and their powers multiplied in unified action.”

(Universal House of Justice, letter to the Conference of Continental Boards of Counsellors 26 December 1995)

Spiritual precedes Material

The greatest need of all peoples is for the Faith itself, so that they may know the destiny towards which they as individuals and as members of society must strive, and will learn from the teachings those virtues and methods which will enable them to work together in harmony, forbearance and trustworthiness.

(From a letter dated 8 May 1984, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

Spiritual precedes Material

The principle remains... that the spiritual precedes the material. First comes the illumination of hearts and minds by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and then the grass roots stirring of the believers wishing to apply these teachings to the daily life of their community.

(From a letter dated 8 May 1984, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

Universal Participation

The real secret of universal participation lies in the Master's oft-expressed wish that the friends should love each other, constantly encourage each other, work together, be as one soul in one body, and in so doing become a true, organic, healthy body animated and illumined by the spirit. In such a body all will receive spiritual health and vitality from the organism itself, and the most perfect flowers and fruits will be brought forth.

(Universal House of Justice, Wellspring of Guidance (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 39)

Consultation in Bahá'í Communities

Many of the initiatives carried out by Bahá'í communities begin with the creation of consultative spaces in villages or neighborhoods that invite members of their societies, irrespective of background or belief, to better understand their material and social reality, and devise appropriate responses to the challenges they face.

(Bahá'í International Community, [Embracing Interdependence: Foundations for a World in Transition](#), 2024)

Consultation in Bahá'í Communities

On numerous occasions, these spaces have given rise to short term social and economic development initiatives, such as educational campaigns, health projects, environmental awareness actions, or humanitarian assistance efforts.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Embracing Interdependence: Foundations for a World in Transition*, 2024)

Consultation

Bahá'í Conference
on Social and
Economic
Development
2005



Consultation

Central to redesigning the system of human relationships is the process that Bahá'u'lláh refers to as consultation. *"In all things it is necessary to consult,"* is His advice. *"The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation."*

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §31)

Truth through consultation

Seeking truth through consultation goes far beyond the kind of negotiation and compromise that we see in present discussions of human affairs. It cannot be achieved with the culture of protest that we see in present society. Debate, propaganda, seeing others as adversaries, taking sides and partisanship so common in collective action all harm its purpose: to arrive at a consensus about the truth of a given situation, the options and the wisest choice of action at that moment.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §32)

Consultation

Bahá'u'lláh calls for a process of consultation in which the individual participants rise above their personal points of view, to become members of a body with its own interests and goals.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §33)

Consultation

In an atmosphere of honesty and courtesy, ideas belong not to the individual to whom they occur but to the group as a whole, to take up, discard, or revise to best serve the goal of the group.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §33)

Consultation

Consultation succeeds when all participants support the decisions taken, regardless of their opinions before the discussion. This way a decision can be readily reconsidered if experience shows any problems.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §33)

Justice through consultation

Consultation is the working expression of justice in human affairs. The people on whose commitment and efforts success depends will only participate if consultation is made the organising principle of every project.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §34)

Justice through consultation

"No man can attain his true station", is Bahá'u'lláh's counsel, "except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation."

(quoted in Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §34)



Consultation, Talanoa Dialogue, UNFCCC, Bonn 2018

Building Bahá'í Communities

The work advancing in every corner of the globe today represents the latest stage of the ongoing Bahá'í endeavour to create the nucleus of the glorious civilization enshrined in His teachings, the building of which is an enterprise of infinite complexity and scale, one that will demand centuries of exertion by humanity to bring to fruition.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 2010)

Building Bahá'í Communities

There are no shortcuts, no formulas. Only as effort is made to draw on insights from His Revelation, to tap into the accumulating knowledge of the human race, to apply His teachings intelligently to the life of humanity, and to consult on the questions that arise will the necessary learning occur and capacity be developed.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 2010)

The Bahá'í Community Example

In the Bahá'í Community itself, the friends endeavour, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant. Moreover, these exertions will conduce to the preservation of human honour, so desired by Bahá'u'lláh. In the process and as a consequence, the friends will undoubtedly extend the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole, until all mankind achieves the progress intended by the Lord of the Age.

(based on Universal House of Justice, 20 October 1983)