

Inequality

Sustainable Development Goal 10

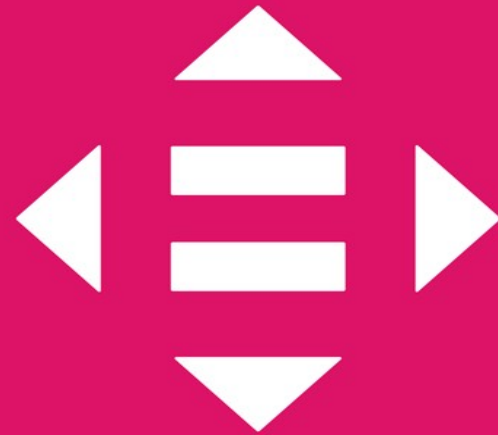
Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Inequality

Sustainable Development Goal 10

10. Reduce **inequality** within and among countries

10 REDUCED
INEQUALITIES



Sustainable Development Goals

10. Reduce *inequality* within and among countries

All too many of these ideologies...callously abandon starving millions to the operations of a market system that all too clearly is aggravating the plight of the majority of mankind, while enabling small sections to live in a condition of affluence scarcely dreamed of by our forebears.

Why is the vast majority of the world's peoples sinking ever deeper into hunger and wretchedness when wealth on a scale undreamed of... is at the disposal of the present arbiters of human affairs?

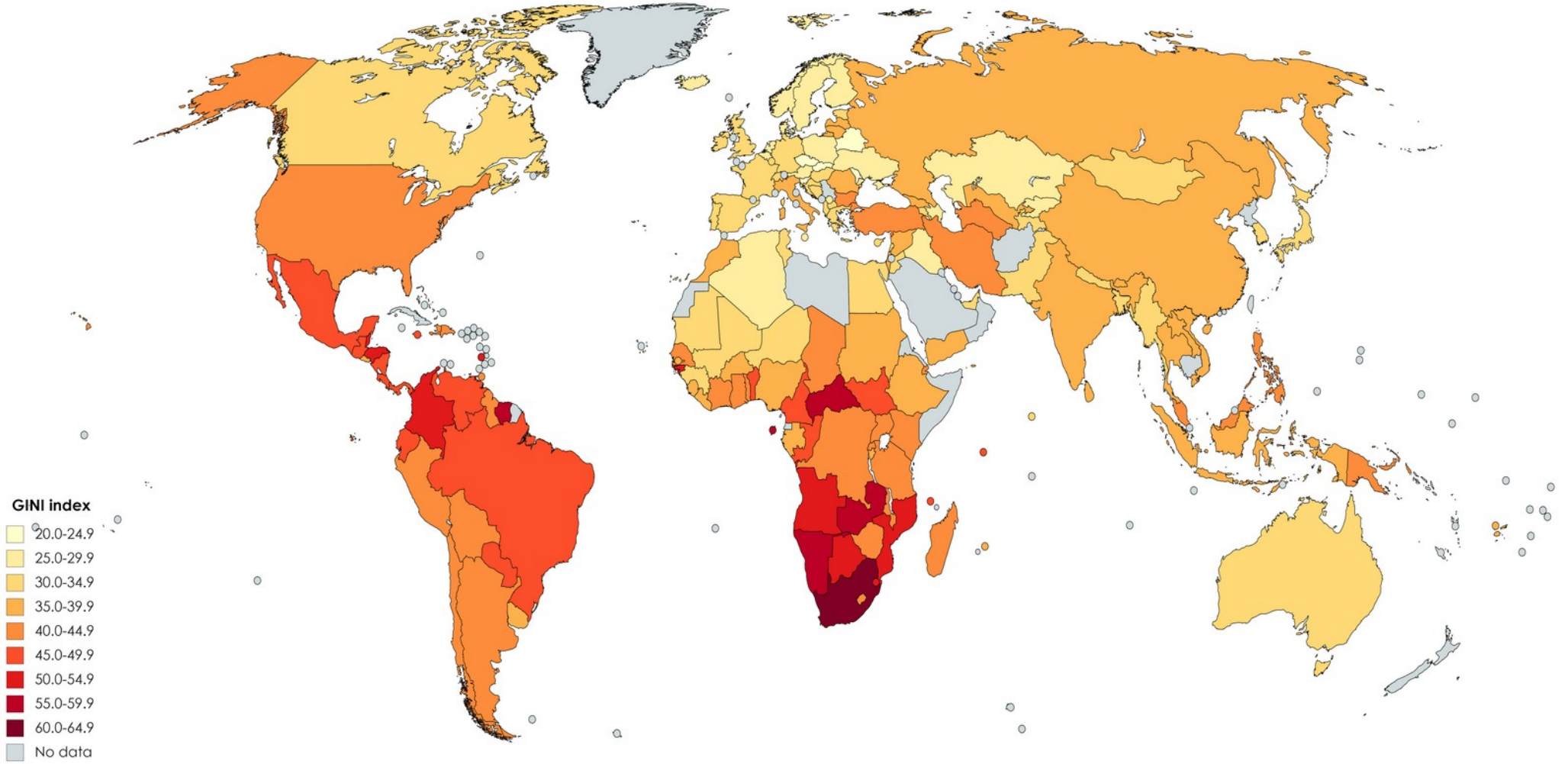
(Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, 1985, I, p. 6-7)

...it is the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few that is in urgent need of attention.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward As One*, 2008)

Inequality

Inequalities based on income, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, class, ethnicity, religion and opportunity continue to persist across the world. Inequality threatens long-term social and economic development, harms poverty reduction and destroys people's sense of fulfillment and self-worth. This, in turn, can breed crime, disease and environmental degradation. We cannot achieve sustainable development and make the planet better for all if people are excluded from the chance for a better life. ([United Nations](#))



GINI Index of inequality



Inequality

The effects of social inequalities are apparent on all sides: apathy, alienation, social unrest, violence and the erosion of trust between individuals and the institutions of governance, to name but a few.

Inequality has become more and more visible in poverty, related to gender, income, education, employment, productive assets, basic freedoms, and the like, exacerbating a host of social, environment and economic problems.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, [Beyond Balancing the Scales: The Roots of Equity, Justice and Prosperity for All](#), 2012)

Causes of Inequalities

Society remains enmeshed in norms of conflict and competition: political systems are organized as contests for power; legal systems as contests of legal advocacy; economic systems as contests of capital accumulation; and educational systems as contests of intellectual achievement and recognition.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *Beyond Balancing the Scales: The Roots of Equity, Justice and Prosperity for All*, 2012)

Causes of Inequalities

Such structures promote separation into opposing groups of “we” and “they”—groups that fight, compete, negotiate across their separateness. These norms exacerbate the many categories of “otherness” that distort human relationships and perpetuate injustice.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, [Beyond Balancing the Scales: The Roots of Equity, Justice and Prosperity for All](#), 2012)

Origin of Extremes

The dominant model of development depends on a society of vigorous consumers of material goods. Endlessly rising levels of consumption are cast as indicators of progress and prosperity. This materialistic worldview, which underpins much of modern economic thinking, reduces concepts of value, human purpose and human interactions to the self-interested pursuit of material wealth. The inevitable result is an unfettered cultivation of needs and wants which has led to a system dependent on excessive consumption by the few, while reinforcing exclusion and poverty for the many.

(Bahá'í International Community, Initial considerations regarding the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth, 2011)

Origin of Extremes

We have an economic system that generates extreme inequality. Many assume that such inequality, while undesirable, is necessary for the generation of wealth. If the process by which wealth is accumulated is characterized by the oppression and domination of others, how, in such an environment, can we hope to mobilize the material, intellectual, and moral resources needed to eradicate poverty?

(Bahá'í International Community, Initial considerations regarding the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth, 2011)



Be anxiously concerned...

Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity: Bahá'u'lláh's Responses to Mánikchí Şáhib and Other Writings* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2006), par. 1.4; Compilation on Social Action §10)

From Poverty to Wealth

It behoveth the loved ones of God to occupy themselves under all circumstances with that which is conducive to the edification of human souls, the advancement of the world of being, and the exaltation of the Word of God.... Well is it with them that strive to render service to the world of humanity. The influence of these souls will lead the world from hardship to comfort, from poverty to wealth, and from abasement to glory.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Compilation on Social Action* §11)

Helping the Poor to End Inequality

How can one see one's fellow men hungry, destitute, and deprived, and yet live in peace and comfort in one's splendid mansion? How can one see others in the greatest need and yet take delight in one's fortune? That is why it has been decreed in the divine religions that the wealthy should offer up each year a portion of their wealth for the sustenance of the poor and the assistance of the needy. This is one of the foundations of the religion of God and is an injunction binding upon all.

Inequity

The root cause of these difficulties lies in the law of nature that governs present-day civilization, for it results in a handful of people accumulating vast fortunes that far exceed their needs, while the greater number remain naked, destitute, and helpless. This is at once contrary to justice, to humanity, and to fairness; it is the very height of inequity and runs counter to the good-pleasure of the All-Merciful.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, §78)

Extreme Wealth and Poverty

Thus you can observe, on the one hand, a single person who has amassed a fortune, made an entire country his personal dominion, acquired immense wealth, and secured an unceasing flow of gains and profits, and, on the other, a hundred thousand helpless souls—weak, powerless, and wanting even a mouthful of bread. There is neither equality here nor benevolence. Observe how, as a result, general peace and happiness have become so wanting, and the welfare of humanity so undermined, that the lives of a vast multitude have been rendered fruitless!

Extreme Wealth and Poverty

For all the wealth, power, commerce, and industry are concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, while all others toil under the burden of endless hardships and difficulties, are bereft of advantages and benefits, and remain deprived of comfort and peace. One must therefore enact such laws and regulations as will moderate the excessive fortunes of the few and meet the basic needs of the myriad millions of the poor, that a degree of moderation may be achieved.

Unjustified equality

However, absolute equality is just as untenable, for complete equality in wealth, power, commerce, agriculture, and industry would result in chaos and disorder, disrupt livelihoods, provoke universal discontent, and undermine the orderly conduct of the affairs of the community. For unjustified equality is also fraught with peril. It is preferable, then, that some measure of moderation be achieved, and by moderation is meant the enactment of such laws and regulations as would prevent the unwarranted concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and satisfy the essential needs of the many.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, §78)

Transforming Inequalities

We need a framework capable of transforming oppressive relations, reforming structural inequalities, and embodying the highest aspirations of all people, particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *Beyond Balancing the Scales: The Roots of Equity, Justice and Prosperity for All*, 2012)

Equality

The principle of equality is an important element of social organization, including the equality of men and women, the equality of diverse peoples and nations, and the equality of all people before the law. This expresses, not possessions or conditions, but certain attributes of the human being. Dignity, reason, and conscience are qualities common to every member of the human race. Equality, then, is more than just a desirable condition to be achieved for the good of society. It is a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, [Beyond Balancing the Scales: The Roots of Equity, Justice and Prosperity for All](#), 2012)

Equity

A conception of society without an “other” is essential to the maturation of the human race. This requires the redefinition of human relationships within the context of a single social body, animated by bonds of mutualism and reciprocity. It calls for an organic change in the structure of society on an unprecedented scale. It requires that the oneness of humanity become the operating principle of our collective life.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *Beyond Balancing the Scales: The Roots of Equity, Justice and Prosperity for All*, 2012)

Growing Inequality

Poverty eradication programs have generally focused on the creation of material wealth. While these measures have improved living standards in some parts of the world, inequality remains widespread. The United Nations has highlighted the growing chasm between formal and informal economies, the widening gap between skilled and unskilled workers, and the growing disparities in health, education as well as in opportunities for social, economic and political participation. The focus on growth and income generation has not necessarily translated into significant social improvements, and growing inequality has rendered the global community increasingly unstable and insecure.

Elimination of Extremes

The problem of the extremes of poverty and wealth concerns itself, in essence, with the *nature of relationships that bind individuals, communities and nations*. Today, most of the world's people live in societies characterized by relationships of dominance - whether of one nation over another, one race by another, one social class by another, one religious or ethnic group by another, or one sex by another. In this context, a discourse on the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth presumes that societies cannot flourish in an environment that fuels inequitable access to resources, to knowledge, and to meaningful participation in the life of society.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Initial considerations regarding the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth*, 2011)

Elimination of Extreme Wealth

While the goal of poverty eradication is widely endorsed, the notion of eliminating extremes of wealth is challenging to many. Some fear that it could be used to undermine the market economy, to stifle entrepreneurship, or to impose income equalization measures. To be sure, material wealth is of critical importance to the achievement of individual and collective goals; by the same token, a strong economy is a key component of a vibrant social order.

(Bahá'í International Community, Initial considerations regarding the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth, 2011)

A Knowledge Revolution

The eradication of the extremes of poverty and wealth will require no less than a knowledge revolution. Such a revolution will need to redefine the role of every individual, community and nation in the generation and application of knowledge. It will need to acknowledge both science and religion as two complementary systems of knowledge, which throughout history have made possible the investigation of reality and the advancement of civilization. As these processes unfold, they will help to transform the quality and legitimacy of education, of science and technology, as well as patterns of consumption and production.

(Bahá'í International Community, Initial considerations regarding the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth, 2011)

Local Capacity for Technology

The masses of the world's people cannot continue to be regarded only as consumers and end-users of technology originating in industrial countries. The development of local capacity to identify technological need, to innovate, and to adapt existing technologies is vital. Such capacity would serve to break the unbalanced flow of knowledge from North to South, from urban to rural, and from men to women. It would help to expand the concept of "modern" technology to one characterized by locally defined needs and by priorities that take into account a community's material and spiritual well-being.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, Initial considerations regarding the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth, 2011)

Overcoming Inequality

The injustices evident in the current global framework will require more than skilful methodologies and technocratic solutions. Well intentioned as they have been, such “solutions” have so far failed to alter the basic inequities in the way the fruits of human endeavour and prosperity have been distributed. No longer can people of good will be content with the goal of providing for people’s basic needs.

(based on Bahá’í International Community, *Beyond Balancing the Scales: The Roots of Equity, Justice and Prosperity for All*, 2012)

Overcoming Inequality

Only as all members of the human family are invited to make their contribution to the betterment of society, and only as the distribution and use of resources are arranged in a way that permits each to do so, will progress against the age-old spectre of inequality and inequity be possible.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, [Beyond Balancing the Scales: The Roots of Equity, Justice and Prosperity for All](#), 2012)