

Consultation and Collaboration

Social Action - Methods and Approaches

Issues for Social Action with Youth

Bahá'í Social – Social Action 10 consultation

From a Compilation by the Research Department of Universal House of Justice - August 2020

Consultation

O people of God! Give ear unto that which, if heeded, will ensure the freedom, wellbeing, tranquillity, exaltation and advancement of all men. Certain laws and principles are necessary and indispensable for Persia. However, it is fitting that these measures should be adopted in conformity with the considered views of His Majesty—may God aid him through His grace—and of the learned divines and of the high-ranking rulers.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pp. 92–93)

Consultation

Subject to their approval a place should be fixed where they would meet. There they should hold fast to the cord of consultation and adopt and enforce that which is conducive to the security, prosperity, wealth and tranquillity of the people. For were any measure other than this to be adopted, it could not but result in chaos and commotion.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pp. 92–93)

Consultation

The Great Being saith: The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.

Cooperation and Concord

If ye travel the countries of the globe ye shall observe on one side the remains of ruin and destruction, while on the other ye shall see the signs of civilization and development. Such desolation and ruin are the result of war, strife and quarreling, while all development and progress are fruits of the lights of virtue, cooperation and concord.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, par. 225.15)

Discussion

In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in harmony and with love and purity of motive, its result is light, and should the least trace of estrangement prevail the result shall be darkness upon darkness.... Discussions must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God and the exaltation of His Holy Word.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited by Shoghi Effendi in a letter dated 5 March 1922, in Bahá’í Administration, p. 22)

Consultation

Man must consult on all matters, whether major or minor, so that he may become cognizant of what is good. Consultation giveth him insight into things and enableth him to delve into questions which are unknown. The light of truth shineth from the faces of those who engage in consultation.... The members who are consulting, however, should behave in the utmost love, harmony and sincerity towards each other. The principle of consultation is one of the most fundamental elements of the divine edifice. Even in their ordinary affairs the individual members of society should consult.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §160)

Cooperation

Some of the creatures of existence can live solitary and alone. A tree, for instance, may live without the assistance and cooperation of other trees. Some animals are isolated and lead a separate existence away from their kind. But this is impossible for man. In his life and being cooperation and association are essential. Through association and meeting we find happiness and development, individual and collective.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), p. 48)

Cooperation

For instance, when there is intercourse and cooperation between two villages, the advancement of each will be assured. Likewise, if intercommunication is established between two cities, both will benefit and progress. And if a reciprocal basis of agreement be reached between two countries, their individual and mutual interests will find great development.... It is evident, then, that the outcomes from this basis of agreement and accord are numberless and unlimited.

Cooperation and Reciprocity

The supreme need of humanity is cooperation and reciprocity. The stronger the ties of fellowship and solidarity amongst men, the greater will be the power of constructiveness and accomplishment in all the planes of human activity. Without cooperation and reciprocal attitude the individual member of human society remains self-centered, uninspired by altruistic purposes, limited and solitary in development like the animal and plant organisms of the lower kingdoms.

Consultation

The Ancient Beauty, exalted be His Most Great Name, states: “The canopy of world order is upraised upon the two pillars of consultation and compassion,” and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in one of His Tablets asserts: “The purpose of consultation is to show that the views of several individuals are assuredly preferable to one man, even as the power of a number of men is of course greater than the power of one man. Thus consultation is acceptable in the presence of the Almighty, and hath been enjoined upon the believers, so that they may confer upon ordinary and personal matters, as well as on affairs which are general in nature and universal.

(Shoghi Effendi, 15 February 1922 to a Local Spiritual Assembly—translated from the Persian)

Consultation

For instance, when a man hath a project to accomplish, should he consult with some of his brethren, that which is agreeable will of course be investigated and unveiled to his eyes, and the truth will be disclosed. Likewise on a higher level, should the people of a village consult one another about their affairs, the right solution will certainly be revealed. In like manner, the members of each profession, such as in industry, should consult, and those in commerce should similarly consult on business affairs. In short, consultation is desirable and acceptable in all things and on all issues.”

(Shoghi Effendi, 15 February 1922 to a Local Spiritual Assembly—translated from the Persian)

Consultation

The principle of consultation, which constitutes one of the basic laws of the Administration, should be applied to all Bahá'í activities which affect the collective interests of the Faith, for it is through co-operation and continual exchange of thoughts and views that the Cause can best safeguard and foster its interests. Individual initiative, personal ability and resourcefulness, though indispensable, are, unless supported and enriched by the collective experiences and wisdom of the group, utterly incapable of achieving such a tremendous task.

(30 August 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

Consultation

There is nothing that can better ensure the success of your efforts than this close and continued consultation, and he would therefore advise you to adopt this method in all your future activities.

(30 May 1937 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers)

Collaboration

It is with such thoughts in mind that Bahá'ís enter into collaboration, as their resources permit, with an increasing number of movements, organizations, groups and individuals, establishing partnerships that strive to transform society and further the cause of unity, promote human welfare, and contribute to world solidarity. Indeed, the standard set by passages such as the above inspires the Bahá'í community to become actively engaged in as many aspects of contemporary life as feasible.

(Universal House of Justice, message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran)

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Collaboration

In this respect, they also take care not to overstep certain bounds with their colleagues and associates. They are not to regard any joint undertaking as an occasion to impose religious convictions. Self-righteousness and other unfortunate manifestations of religious zeal are to be utterly avoided. Bahá'ís do, however, readily offer to their collaborators the lessons they have learned through their own experience, just as they are happy to incorporate into their community-building efforts insights gained through such association.

(Universal House of Justice, message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran)

Unity through Consultation

In their reflections on how to contribute to the betterment of the world, Bahá'ís will undoubtedly recognize that demonstrations are not the only, or even the most effective, means available to them. Rather, they can learn and grow in capacity over time to help their fellow citizens to frame concerns in a way that rises above fissures, to share views in a manner that transcends divisive approaches, and to create and participate in spaces to work together in the quest to enact solutions to the problems that bedevil their nation.

(27 April 2017 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

Unity through Consultation

As Bahá'u'lláh stated: “Say: no man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.” In this light, justice is indeed essential to resist the vain imaginings and idle fancies of social and political machinations, to see reality with one’s own eyes, and to identify the requirements for an equitable social order. But then unity is essential—forged through consultative processes, including action and reflection—to achieve the power required for positive social change.

(27 April 2017 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

Consultation

Concepts and principles associated with Bahá'í consultation inform how the friends should interact among themselves and how they participate in social discourses and social action. Consultation provides a means by which common understanding can be reached and a collective course of action defined. It involves a free, respectful, dignified, and fair-minded effort on the part of a group of people to exchange views, seek truth, and attempt to reach consensus.

(29 November 2017 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to three believers)

Consultation

An initial difference of opinion is the starting point for examining an issue in order to reach greater understanding and consensus; it should not become a cause of rancor, aversion, or estrangement. By acting in unity, a conclusion about a particular course of action may be tested and revised as necessary through a process of learning. Otherwise, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, “stubbornness and persistence in one’s views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden.”

(29 November 2017 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to three believers)

Case Studies - Consultation

Social action projects include consultation as an essential component, both to ensure community participation and support, and to learn from successes and errors as the project moves forward. Here are some examples.

Zambia

In Katuyola village, Zambia, the community established a “village education team” that created spaces for consultation among various agencies and institutions, including schools, traditional leaders, and the Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly.



Zambia

Zambia

Through this consultative process, residents of Katuyola noted that many children were unable to continue their education beyond primary school due to the remoteness of secondary institutions, highlighting the necessity for a local secondary school, which they then established.

Zambia

Bahá'í institutions and Bahá'í-inspired organizations in Zambia gathered for five days in Lusaka to take an expansive view of the various educational undertakings in that country which had been unfolding over several decades. This seminar allowed agencies involved in promoting spiritual and material education in Zambia to come together for the first time and gain a deeper appreciation for the full spectrum of initiatives in the country, exploring possibilities for much closer collaboration in their efforts.



Zambia

Zambia

The dynamic discussions opened thrilling new vistas and enabled participants to see their endeavors as contributing to a single goal—to awaken the energies latent in the human soul and channel them toward the betterment of their neighborhoods, villages, and ultimately their society. They agreed that it was important to articulate a shared understanding of the journey of the burgeoning educational system thus far.

Zambia

In order to chart a path for the future, they looked at experiences with educational efforts for spiritual and moral empowerment, academic education, and educational initiatives related to social and economic development. They could see all these endeavors in one light, capturing insights and experiences from the past twenty years of effort. What quickly became apparent was that what has emerged was an educational system in a state of constant refinement.

Zambia

Attendees of the gathering saw how the moral empowerment programs of the training institute recognize and help to cultivate a desire for knowledge, education, and service.

Bahá'í World News Service, 2022

<https://news.bahai.org/story/1615/seamless-experience-charting-future-educational-journey-zambia>

Malaysia

After severe flooding, the spiritual principle of consultation was key to the relief efforts in Bahá'í communities throughout Malaysia. The culture of consultation that has emerged from the community-building process is what helped to plan and act immediately and to collaborate with organizations of civil society. Conversations were also initiated with different faith communities to combine strengths in the relief efforts.



Malaysia

Malaysia

Several youth groups in different neighborhoods quickly connected with one another to coordinate their efforts. After consulting with Bahá'í institutions, some of these youth arrived to assist different families.



Malaysia

Malaysia

Many people now saw themselves as part of an extended family, and not just as strangers, friends, or acquaintances who happen to live next to one another. This disaster showed that when individuals, the community, and institutions work harmoniously together, their power to contribute to the well-being of their society is greatly multiplied.

Bahá'í World News Service 2022

<https://news.bahai.org/story/1578/spirit-service-immediate-response-floods-malaysia>

Brazil

Similarly, the state of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil experienced its worst floods in 80 years, causing unprecedented destruction and significantly impacting the economy and public safety. The spiritual principle of consultation was essential to Bahá'í-inspired relief efforts. Consultation allowed the Bahá'ís to bring together diverse perspectives and make unified collective decisions.

Brazil

In these communities, where consultation is a lived principle, families had gained experience in welcoming many people into thoughtful discussions on collective development, drawing on the perspectives of young and old, women and men, and people of all backgrounds. In villages and neighborhoods in affected areas where Bahá'í community-building endeavors had taken root, the qualities and capacities for fostering strong bonds of friendship, a spirit of devotion, and a sense of oneness in periods of calm could be channeled into coordinated relief actions during the crisis.



Brazil

Brazil

During the crisis, these capacities allowed entire communities to understand their reality better, communicate effectively, resolve issues, achieve a sense of ownership, and tackle challenges efficiently.

Bahá'í World News Service 2024

<https://news.bahai.org/story/1741/brazil-capacities-built-in-times-of-calm-become-vital-during-flood-crisis>

Central African Republic

A years-long armed conflict in the Central African Republic (C.A.R.) has disrupted life across the country and displaced hundreds of thousands of people. In the midst of this crisis, the Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly has guided the Bahá'ís of the country in their efforts to contribute to social progress, drawing on a network of people engaged in community-building activities to channel assistance where it was most needed.



Central African Republic

Central African Republic

The country has faced serious challenges. There are places where people have been severely affected and have had to flee, abandoning their homes and losing their means of making a living. This is the condition in many regions. Despite these conditions, the Bahá'ís in these areas have helped to foster resilience and a vibrant community life that has endured through cycles of war.

Central African Republic



Central African Republic

An emergency committee was formed to assemble a team and it headed to identified areas to help in person. They drove hundreds of kilometers, stopping along the way to provide essentials, such as medicine for water-borne illness, to people who had returned from taking refuge in forest areas.



Central African Republic

Central African Republic

The emergency committee worked closely with Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assemblies in coordinating the distribution of relief packages among village residents. As soon as they arrived in a town, they sat down with the members of the Local Assembly, prayed together, and consulted about the needs, which they knew intimately.



Central African Republic

Central African Republic

Meeting and speaking with people who had been cut off for so long brought encouragement and helped build ties of unity as all saw that they are not alone in their challenges—like one family, there were others across the country who cared for them and walked with them.

Bahá'í World News Service 2021

<https://news.bahai.org/story/1512/enduring-cycles-war-resilient-community-fosters-hope-car>

Central African Republic

