

# Utilising Material Means

## Social Action - Methods and Approaches

### Issues for Social Action with Youth

#### Bahá'í Social – Social Action 11materialmeans

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# Material Means

*Hold ye fast unto the cord of material means, placing your whole trust in God, the Provider of all means.*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 26)*

# Material Means

*In this day it is incumbent upon everyone to serve the Cause of God, while He Who is the Eternal Truth—exalted be His glory—hath made the fulfilment of every undertaking on earth dependent on material means.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §170)

# Wealth

*Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude.*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 29)*

# Wealth

*Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor. If, on the other hand, it is expended for the promotion of knowledge, the founding of elementary and other schools, the encouragement of art and industry, the training of orphans and the poor—in brief, if it is dedicated to the welfare of society—its possessor will stand out before God and man as the most excellent of all who live on earth and will be accounted as one of the people of paradise.*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Secret of Divine Civilization](#), p. 29)*

# Material Means

*Thou hast asked about material means and prayer. Prayer is like the spirit and material means are like the human hand. The spirit operateth through the instrumentality of the hand. Although the one true God is the All-Provider, it is the earth which is the means to supply sustenance. “The heaven hath sustenance for you” but when sustenance is decreed it becometh available, whatever the means may be.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §172)

# Material Means

*When man refuseth to use material means, he is like a thirsty one who seeketh to quench his thirst through means other than water or other liquids. The Almighty Lord is the provider of water, and its maker, and hath decreed that it be used to quench man's thirst, but its use is dependent upon His Will. If it should not be in conformity with His Will, man is afflicted with a thirst which the oceans cannot quench.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §172)

# Intention

*O servant of God! To ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, homelessness is home and the gloomy prison his nest. He seeketh a lofty mansion, but in the world of God; he desireth the Frequented Fane, but in the heavenly realm. An earthly edifice, even if raised as high as the heavens, will ultimately become a ruin, nay, a darkened tomb. Erecting edifices, palaces, mansions, and stately homes is acceptable and praiseworthy in the religion of God, but one should not become attached to them or set one’s affections upon them.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §173)

# Intention

*The intention should be the advancement of the world and the establishment of human civilization. A man of true knowledge and understanding will build public structures, that is, places that belong to all—a house of worship, a school to teach children of all ages, a hostel for travellers, a hospital—for every public building is a divine edifice, eternal and everlasting. Upon thee be greetings and praise.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §173)

# Charity

Charity, however, does not necessarily imply a project that would fall within the scope of development work; at its simplest, it suggests only the transfer of resources, whether financial or of another kind, from those who have plenty to those who have insufficient. The motive that prompts such a benevolent act is, of course, laudable—Bahá'u'lláh Himself declares that “charity is pleasing and praiseworthy in the sight of God and is regarded as a prince among goodly deeds.” Nevertheless, the manner in which it is carried out must be carefully considered. It is important, for instance, to avoid any hint of paternalism, and the giver should be conscious of the values implicit in any system of redistribution that he or she establishes.

(22 October 2012 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

# Attitude towards Wealth

The future civilization envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh is a prosperous one, in which the vast resources of the world will be directed towards humanity's elevation and regeneration, not its debasement and destruction.... Bahá'ís conduct their lives in the midst of a society acutely disordered in its material affairs. The process of community building they are advancing in their clusters cultivates a set of attitudes towards wealth and possessions very different from those holding sway in the world.

(Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

# Wealth Must Serve Humanity

The vision of Bahá'u'lláh challenges many of the assumptions that are allowed to shape contemporary discourse—for instance, that self-interest, far from needing to be restrained, drives prosperity, and that progress depends upon its expression through relentless competition. To view the worth of an individual chiefly in terms of how much one can accumulate and how many goods one can consume relative to others is wholly alien to Bahá'í thought.

(Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017 to the Bahá'ís of the World)

# Wealth Must Serve Humanity

But neither are the teachings in sympathy with sweeping dismissals of wealth as inherently distasteful or immoral, and asceticism is prohibited. Wealth must serve humanity. Its use must accord with spiritual principles; systems must be created in their light. And, in Bahá'u'lláh's memorable words, "No light can compare with the light of justice. The establishment of order in the world and the tranquillity of the nations depend upon it."

(Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017 to the Bahá'ís of the World)

# Material Means

Many social action projects, beyond simple volunteer activities, may require some material means, either finance or donations of materials, to be able to progress. To avoid creating dependence on outside sources that may threaten the future of the project, these should come largely from the community or stakeholders themselves.

# Canjavu, South Kivu, DRC

In Canjavu, Democratic Republic of Congo, the entire village came together to re-establishing a school. To provide the building materials and school supplies, the men began making baskets. The women used their sewing skills. This, along with small investments by some, supported the needs of the school and the teachers.



Canjavu, South Kivu, DRC



Canjavu, South Kivu, DRC

# Malaysia

When heavy rainfall caused severe flooding in different regions of Malaysia, the spirit of service and collective action that had been fostered through Bahá'í community-building activities in and near affected areas was immediately channeled toward relief efforts. Local Spiritual Assemblies moved to action, using Bahá'í centers as hubs for the collection and distribution of food, clothing, cleaning materials, and other essentials.



Malaysia

# Malaysia

One of the youth involved in the effort describes how the act of service by a few people can inspire yet more people to action, saying: “Our numbers were small, and we were very tired after the first day. That night, we sent out messages to people we knew, searching for more volunteers. More people came to help the next day, which allowed us to split up into a few different teams for cooking and packing meals, for distribution, and to assist families with cleaning their homes.”



Malaysia

# Malaysia

The response efforts of local Bahá'í communities involved many people of all ages coordinating their actions to provide shelter and to distribute supplies, including materials for school children.

Bahá'í World News Service 2022

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

# Barli Development Institute for Rural Women

Since 1985, the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women, in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India, builds resilient ecosystems and human resources for assisting rural communities to sustain and thrive. Sometimes this can be achieved through material means, such as providing relevant technology.



# BARLI DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE FOR RURAL WOMEN



*Empowering Women Since 1985*

180 Bhamori Indore-452010

[www.barli.org](http://www.barli.org)

**Barli, India**

# Barli Development Institute for Rural Women

The objective of the Institute, inspired by Bahá'í principles, is that, empowered by training in literacy, hygiene, nutrition, income-generation, and conservation, the young women can return to their home villages and become "pillars" of their families and communities - agents for changing the social and physical environments. The word "barli" is the local word for the central pillar of the house; hence the name of the Institute.

# Barli Development Institute for Rural Women

Fundamental to the rationale of the Institute is the concept that the education of women is paramount to their empowerment and consequently to community development. Women are the first educators of their children and this education affects the thought and behavior of a new generation of people, both men and women.



Barli, India

# Barli Development Institute for Rural Women

The Institute's free programmes have trained more than 1,500 young women and girls, coming mainly from indigenous or "tribal" areas in the western districts of Madhya Pradesh surrounding Indore. Much of the region is marked by chronic poverty and malnutrition, due in part to low crop yields, frequent droughts, a shortage of drinking water, and poor soil. Many of these problems have been compounded by extensive deforestation and erosion, partly as a consequence of the search for firewood.

# Barli Development Institute for Rural Women

Using solar energy for cooking in the remote districts of this central Indian state means saving time, money, and "personal" energy. Solar cooking means no longer doing things like scrubbing fire-blackened pots, searching for firewood, or worrying about children getting burned by the traditional cook fire. The institute provides household-sized SK14 solar cookers to these rural women.



Barli, India

# Barli Development Institute for Rural Women

What makes the program distinctive is its emphasis on extended training and motivation, and its focus on a specific population group: young rural women. The solar cookers distribution programme is one effort by the Institute to promote not only solar energy but environmental consciousness in general. Young women are seen as the key to promoting underlying social change, not only in terms of environmental practice, but also in the areas of health, nutrition, education, and moral development.

# Barli Development Institute for Rural Women

The Institute's solar programme entails placing the household-sized SK14 cookers in villages throughout the Institute's service area. The women pay 10 percent of the approximately US\$100 cost, with the rest funded by two non-governmental organizations. The cookers are sold only to women who have been through the Institute's training programme, that includes not only practical training in the use of solar cookers but also general instruction designed to promote an overall consciousness of environmental conservation.

LEARNING SOLAR COOKING



Barli, India

# Barli Development Institute for Rural Women

One of the significant components of the curriculum is theory and practical training in the use of renewable energy. They could easily give the cookers away to anyone, but their experience is that they wouldn't be used. So they require the people to have training - and that they pay 10 percent of the cost. Such training is an important factor in successfully introducing new technologies into rural areas. Too often, new technologies go unused if they are simply dropped in without adequate education.

LEARNING TO ASSEMBLE SOLAR COOKERS



Barli, India

# Barli Development Institute for Rural Women

Solar energy use is not the only element of environmental conservation that is taught at the Institute. Trainees learn that caring for the environment is a spiritual responsibility, as well as an important service to the community. Students are taught about planting and maintaining trees, finding local sources for seeds, and the use of environmental and energy conservation techniques such as composting, vermiculture, the use of biodegradable products, and proper waste management.

**ORGANIC FARMING AT BARLI**



**Barli, India**

# Barli Development Institute for Rural Women

The women have assisted in creating a new atmosphere of mutual respect and unity in their communities, helping to displace caste prejudices in tribal communities once notorious for their high crime rate and alcohol abuse.

<https://barli.org/>

Case Study: India Solar Cookers <https://iefworld.org/elcindiasolar.htm>