

Agriculture for Social Action

Themes for Social and Economic Development

Issues for Social Action with Youth

Bahá'í Social – Social Action 14 Agriculture

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The Advancement of Mankind

Whilst in the Prison of 'Akká, We revealed in the Crimson Book that which is conducive to the advancement of mankind and to the reconstruction of the world. The utterances set forth therein by the Pen of the Lord of creation include the following which constitute the fundamental principles for the administration of the affairs of men:

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas pp. 89–90)

The Advancement of Mankind

First: It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice to promote the Lesser Peace so that the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures. This matter is imperative and absolutely essential, inasmuch as hostilities and conflict lie at the root of affliction and calamity.

(Bahá'u'lláh, [Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas](#) pp. 89–90)

The Advancement of Mankind

Second: Languages must be reduced to one common language to be taught in all the schools of the world.

Third: It behoveth man to adhere tenaciously unto that which will promote fellowship, kindness and unity.

(Bahá'u'lláh, [Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas](#) pp. 89–90)

The Advancement of Mankind

Fourth: Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other occupation, for the training and education of children, to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice.

Fifth: Special regard must be paid to agriculture. Although it hath been mentioned in the fifth place, unquestionably it precedeth the others.

Agriculture

Thou hadst made reference in thy letter to agriculture. On this matter He hath laid down the following universal rule that it is incumbent upon everyone, even should he be resident in a particular land for no more than a single day, to become engaged in some craft or trade, or agriculture, and that the very pursuit of such a calling is, in the eyes of the one true God, identical with worship. This rule was exemplified by the Bahá'í community at the time when they were facing exile from 'Iráq, for, while they were making arrangements for their journey, they occupied themselves in cultivating the land; and when they set out, instructions were given for the fruits of their labours to be distributed amongst the friends.

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §201)

An Efficient Farmer

And if, as you pass by fields and plantations, where the plants, flowers and sweet-smelling herbs are growing luxuriantly together, forming a pattern of unity, this is an evidence of the fact that that plantation and garden is flourishing under the care of a skilful gardener. But when you see it in a state of disorder and irregularity you infer that it has lacked the training of an efficient farmer and thus has produced weeds and tares.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, First Tablet to The Hague)

The Science of Agriculture

Strive as much as possible to become proficient in the science of agriculture, for in accordance with the divine teachings the acquisition of sciences and the perfection of arts are considered acts of worship. If a man engageth with all his power in the acquisition of a science or in the perfection of an art, it is as if he has been worshiping God in churches and temples. Thus as thou enterest a school of agriculture and strivest in the acquisition of that science thou art day and night engaged in acts of worship—acts that are accepted at the threshold of the Almighty. What bounty greater than this, that science should be considered as an act of worship and art as service to the Kingdom of God.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, par. 126.1)

Agriculture a Noble Science

Since thy dear child is taking his examinations, my fervent wish at the divine Threshold is that, by the grace and favour of God, he may meet with success, and that in the future he may go on to study agriculture and master its various branches, practical and theoretical. Agriculture is a noble science and, should thy son become proficient in this field, he will become a means of providing for the comfort of untold numbers of people.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §204)

Agriculture as Service

Commerce, agriculture and industry should not, in truth, be a bar to service of the one true God. Indeed, such occupations are most potent instruments and clear proofs for the manifestation of the evidences of one's piety, of one's trustworthiness and of the virtues of the All-Merciful Lord.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §205)

Farmers Better Off

The crisis that exists in the world is not confined to the farmers. Its effects have reached every means of livelihood. The farmers are in a sense better off because they at least have food to eat. But on the whole the crisis is serving a great purpose. It is broadening the outlook of man, teaching him to think internationally, forcing him to take into consideration the welfare of his neighbours if he wishes to improve his own condition.

(2 March 1932 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

Food in the pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in Colombia, FUNDAEC, a Baha'i-inspired organization in the country, looked at how it could be of practical service to society at a time of dire need. It swiftly directed its attention to supporting local food production initiatives, since the country's economy had been severely affected, with more than 10 million people unemployed.

Food in the pandemic

FUNDAEC focused on four broad areas in supporting initiatives aimed at food self-sufficiency: creation of home gardens, cultivation of larger farming plots, food processing, as well as distribution and commercialization. It drew on its decades of experience and research in the area of food production to create online workshops, assisting people to learn about different aspects of agriculture, for example seed selection, soil health, pest and disease management, and the harvest.



FUNDAEC

Food in the pandemic

Agriculture plays a crucial role in the building of civilization. It is important to the processes of community life, and should benefit from insights found in both religion and science. However, materialism, which has been directing the development of agricultural systems, has not been able to bring prosperity to all, and the issue of food is central to that discussion.

Food in the pandemic

Spiritual principles can help to understand development and food production by ensuring that agricultural practices are based on fairness and cooperation, and that efforts are carried out with humility and appreciation toward the land and the environment. During the pandemic people naturally discovered a sense of common purpose—seeing that they could take an active role in transforming their adversity into an opportunity to be of service to their fellow citizens. FUNDAEC tried to channel these energies in a helpful way.



Food in the pandemic

A group of people collaborated with their Baha'i Local Spiritual Assembly to begin a small farm. This effort inspired some 13 families around the designated land to start their own gardens, leading to a first harvest that could be shared with over 70 people. In turn those individuals who benefited from the harvest were drawn into the efforts and found great purpose in serving their community through food that is healthy, organic, and fairly distributed.



Food in the pandemic

People started to connect with the land around them in a different way. Families felt motivated realizing that they could produce food in spaces they already owned, and people saw what positivity could come from moments of crisis. In one town there was no culture of agriculture and food was generally imported from the countryside.

However, FUNDAEC's online courses helped people to look at their land differently. They realized the potential for planting seeds in virtually any piece of land where there was soil.



FUNDAEC

Food in the pandemic

They opened a dialogue between the farmer who has deep traditional knowledge and the student of agronomy who brings the best practices of modern science. Rather than romanticizing about a ‘simpler way’ in the past, or uncritically accepting modern technologies, they built an alternative system that brings together the profound traditions of the farmer and spiritual principles—being thankful to nature and understanding the impact of one’s relationship with the land for future generations—with the insights and best practices from modern agronomy.

Food in the pandemic

Harvest time was very special. It invited reflection and allowed people to appreciate that, just as the plants grow, we also grow in our capacities as people and as a community. Participants saw how certain spiritual qualities were essential in this effort. Unity was needed for a quick collective response to a need in times of crisis. Faith was needed to trust that the seeds planted would germinate. Patience was necessary to wait for plants to grow and develop, and to face the small setbacks along the way.

Food in the pandemic

Love, perseverance, and diligence were required in order to carry out the daily tasks. This period was a time to be thankful for the 'generosity' of the Earth, by caring for it and protecting it.

Bahá'í World News Service 2020

<https://news.bahai.org/story/1445/self-sufficiency-fundaec-local-food-production>

Uganda

Participants identified families from two villages to engage in conversations about agriculture. Before going out to visit these families, participants reflected on a range of questions including their role in accompanying the families, goals and objectives, skills and capacity they are helping the families to develop, how to ensure that the community members are seeing the benefits of participating in these activities, how and when to start involving these families in the core activities of the Faith.



Tutors studying agriculture in main hall, Uganda

Uganda

The excitement on the faces of the participants after visiting 20 families was an indication that the home visits were a success. One participant wrote: “Indeed all the families are so happy and excited about their involvement in Backyard Garden activities and slowly by slowly the communities of Bukutira East and West have started showing glimmerings of collective transformation...” It was evident that the families wanted this kind of collaboration to continue.



Visiting Mzee Kalisiti, Uganda

Uganda

Families shared their own experiences with farming and the challenges around them. For instance, lack of seeds was one of the challenges that most families mentioned. Joseph had prepared a garden but he had not planted because of lack of seeds. He was excited to hear that the participants are planning to establish a seed bank where the community members will be borrowing seeds and paying a small interest instead of buying seeds which many farmers cannot afford and sometimes are expired.

Uganda

The Kimanya-Ngeyo Foundation for Science and Education in Uganda carries out agricultural experiments with a goal of generating knowledge in areas such as soil and water conservation, pest and disease management, and diversification of genetic resources. With its assistance, local farmers, drawing on both traditional farming systems as well as the findings of modern science, have advanced a process of action-research focused on developing diverse, sustainable, high-yielding, and ecologically sound production systems that are appropriate to local realities.

(BIC, One Planet, One Habitation,)