

Arts, Media, and Technology for Social Action

Themes for Social and Economic Development

Issues for Social Action with Youth

Bahá'í Social – Social Action 16 Media

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Study Sciences and Arts

It is permissible to study sciences and arts, but such sciences as are useful and would redound to the progress and advancement of the people. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Ordainer, the All-Wise.

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

Arts of Advantage to Man

At the outset of every endeavour, it is incumbent to look to the end of it. Of all the arts and sciences, set the children to studying those which will result in advantage to man, will ensure his progress and elevate his rank.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 168)

New and Wondrous

Erelong shall We bring into being through thee exponents of new and wondrous sciences, of potent and effective crafts, and shall make manifest through them that which the heart of none of Our servants hath yet conceived.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 52–53)

Arts Uplift

Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 26)

Handicrafts are Worship

Blessed is he who in the days of God will engage in handicrafts. This is a bounty from God, for in this Most Great Dispensation it is acceptable in the sight of God for man to occupy himself in a trade which relieveth him of depending upon charity. The craft of every craftsman is regarded as worship.

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §238)

Write with Tact and Wisdom

Whatever is written should not transgress the bounds of tact and wisdom, and in the words used there should lie hid the property of milk, so that the children of the world may be nurtured therewith, and attain maturity. We have said in the past that one word hath the influence of spring and causeth hearts to become fresh and verdant, while another is like unto blight which causeth the blossoms and flowers to wither. God grant that authors among the friends will write in such a way as would be acceptable to fair-minded souls, and not lead to cavilling by the people.

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic and Persian, Social Action §239)

Useful Arts Uplift

Would the extension of education, the development of useful arts and sciences, the promotion of industry and technology, be harmful things? For such endeavor lifts the individual within the mass and raises him out of the depths of ignorance to the highest reaches of knowledge and human excellence.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Secret of Divine Civilization](#), p. 17)

Beneficial Articles and Books

It is therefore urgent that beneficial articles and books be written, clearly and definitely establishing what the present-day requirements of the people are, and what will conduce to the happiness and advancement of society. These should be published and spread throughout the nation, so that at least the leaders among the people should become, to some degree, awakened, and arise to exert themselves along those lines which will lead to their abiding honor.

Beneficial Articles and Books

The publication of high thoughts is the dynamic power in the arteries of life; it is the very soul of the world.

Thoughts are a boundless sea, and the effects and varying conditions of existence are as the separate forms and individual limits of the waves; not until the sea boils up will the waves rise and scatter their pearls of knowledge on the shore of life.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Secret of Divine Civilization](#), p. 127)

Proven Usefulness

Observe for instance that in other countries they persevered over a long period until finally they discovered the power of steam and by means of it were enabled easily to perform the heavy tasks which were once beyond human strength. How many centuries it would take if we were to abandon the use of this power and instead strain every nerve to invent a substitute.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Secret of Divine Civilization](#), p. 131-132)

Proven Usefulness

It is therefore preferable to keep on with the use of steam and at the same time continuously to examine into the possibility of there being a far greater force available. One should regard the other technological advances, sciences, arts and political formulae of proven usefulness in the same light—i.e., those procedures which, down the ages, have time and again been put to the test and whose many uses and advantages have demonstrably resulted in the glory and greatness of the state, and the well-being and progress of the people.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 131-132)

Proven Usefulness

Should all these be abandoned, for no valid reason, and other methods of reform be attempted, by the time such reforms might eventuate, and their advantages might be put to proof, many years would go by, and many lives. Meanwhile, “we are still at the first bend in the road.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Secret of Divine Civilization](#), p. 131-132)

Teach Crafts and Arts

In this new and wondrous Age, the unshakable foundation is the teaching of sciences and arts. According to explicit Holy Texts, every child must be taught crafts and arts, to the degree that is needful. Wherefore, in every city and village, schools must be established and every child in that city or village is to engage in study to the necessary degree.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, par. 109.1)

On the Stage, in Art and Literature

The day will come when the Cause will spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings will be presented on the stage or in art and literature as a whole. Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing, especially among the mass of the people.

(10 October 1932 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, Social Action §244)

Wide range of material

With regard to the ... magazine, ... he suggests that more emphasis be laid on the number and quality of articles, and that the latter be written not only on specific Bahá'í subjects, but should cover a wide range of material, whether social, religious or humanitarian. The science section is, no doubt, very important and has a special appeal to the young and the newcomers.

(30 May 1935 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, Social Action §245)

Press Freedom

The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded.... The press will, under such a system, while giving full scope to the expression of the diversified views and convictions of mankind, cease to be mischievously manipulated by vested interests, whether private or public, and will be liberated from the influence of contending governments and peoples.

(Shoghi Effendi, 11 March 1936, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 203–204)

Front ranks of arts and crafts

Imbued with this excellence and a corresponding humility, with tenacity and a loving servitude, today's youth must move towards the front ranks of the professions, trades, arts and crafts which are necessary to the further progress of humankind—this to ensure that the spirit of the Cause will cast its illumination on all these important areas of human endeavour. Moreover, while aiming at mastering the unifying concepts and swiftly advancing technologies of this era of communications, they can, indeed they must also guarantee the transmittal to the future of those skills which will preserve the marvelous, indispensable achievements of the past.

(Universal House of Justice, 8 May 1985 to the Bahá'í Youth of the World)

Surge in social evolution

The scientific and technological advances occurring in this unusually blessed century portend a great surge forward in the social evolution of the planet, and indicate the means by which the practical problems of humanity may be solved. They provide, indeed, the very means for the administration of the complex life of a united world. Yet barriers persist. Doubts, misconceptions, prejudices, suspicions and narrow self-interest beset nations and peoples in their relations one to another.

(Universal House of Justice, October 1985 to the Peoples of the World)

Competing Forces

It is useful to bear in mind that the Internet is a reflection of the world around us, and we find in its infinitude of pages the same competing forces of integration and disintegration that characterize the tumult in which humanity is caught up.

(9 April 2008 on behalf of Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, Social Action §249)

Responsive to Reality

The capacity of the institutions and agencies of the Faith to build unity of thought in their communities, to maintain focus among the friends, to channel their energies in service to the Cause, and to promote systematic action depends, to an extent, on the degree to which the systems and instruments they employ are responsive to reality, that is, to the needs and demands of the local communities they serve and the society in which they operate.

Responsive to Reality

In this connection, we are instructed to provide a word of warning: The use of technology will, of course, be imperative to the development of effective systems and instruments ...; yet it cannot be allowed to define needs and dictate action.

[\(30 March 2011 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, Social Action §250\)](#)

How to use Technology

There is no doubt that modern technologies can be valuable instruments in the great enterprise of building a prosperous world civilization. Surely, however, as an individual committed to rural development, you are aware of the potentially destructive forces unleashed by a naïve implementation of technology in the name of modernity and globalization.

(30 December 2014 on behalf of Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, Social Action §251)

How to use Technology

For example, the introduction of the agricultural practice of monoculture in rural areas, intended to increase efficiency and yield for small landowners, has in some instances actually cost them their land; even if there is, ultimately, merit in moving toward modern agricultural practices, one cannot be blind to the tremendous cost in human suffering that may occur, and which might be mitigated by a change in approach. The statement in the letter was a reference to these negative tendencies, and not a general condemnation of technological development and progress, which are upheld by the teachings of the Faith....

(30 December 2014 on behalf of Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, Social Action §251)

How to use Technology

Bahá'ís involved in projects for social and economic development recognize that there are both benefits and pitfalls involved with the use of technology. The key question is, therefore, not whether to use technology, but how to use it. Approaches to development centred on the donation of goods and services, so characteristic of well-intentioned traditional religious charity and the programs of the welfare state, are known to have debilitating effects.

(30 December 2014 on behalf of Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, Social Action §251)

How to use Technology

The initial allure of the promised technologies often proves ephemeral. It is to this phenomenon that the phrase “technologies deceptively packaged” refers. It is hoped that the friends in the development field will weigh the technical issues and social forces involved and bring to bear a profound understanding of both science and religion, so that they may contribute to a sound approach that avoids the extremes of blind faith in materialism and a romantic attachment to tradition.

Danger of unintended influence

As you know, technological advancement is integral to the emergence of a global civilization. Indeed, the Internet is a manifestation of a development anticipated by the Guardian when, in describing the characteristics of a unified humanity, he foresaw that a “mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity.” Yet, learning to utilize the Internet in a manner conducive to material and spiritual progress is an immense challenge.

(9 October 2015 on behalf of Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, Social Action §252)

Danger of unintended influence

However, given that the Internet allows for the instantaneous dissemination of content among growing multitudes, wisdom and self-discipline are required lest the significance or dignity of the Teachings become compromised by an unbecoming, inaccurate, or trivialized presentation....

(9 October 2015 on behalf of Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, Social Action §252)

Danger of unintended influence

For example, while it may be beneficial to reflect on the nature and form of the core activities, especially in the context of the experience of a cluster or region, certain problems arise in attempting to create a site that aims to speak to Bahá'ís worldwide about the subject. Such an approach could lead to the cultural norms and values of a particular population being promoted to a universal audience—a pattern all too prevalent in the world today.

(9 October 2015 on behalf of Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, Social Action §252)

Danger of unintended influence

There is also the danger of exerting an unintended influence on the process of learning unfolding at the grassroots, where individuals, communities, and institutions are acting as protagonists of their own growth and development.

(9 October 2015 on behalf of Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, Social Action §252)

Danger of unintended influence

The perspectives offered in the following extract from the message dated 12 December 2011 from the House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies—although in the specific context of artistic endeavours and supplementary educational materials—are especially relevant to aspects of culture mentioned above:

[\(9 October 2015 on behalf of Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, Social Action §252\)](#)

Danger of unintended influence

Propelled by forces generated both within and outside the Bahá'í community, the peoples of the earth can be seen to be moving from divergent directions, closer and closer to one another, towards what will be a world civilization so stupendous in character that it would be futile for us to attempt to imagine it today.

(9 October 2015 on behalf of Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, Social Action §252)

Danger of unintended influence

As this centripetal movement of populations accelerates across the globe, some elements in every culture, not in accord with the teachings of the Faith, will gradually fall away, while others will be reinforced. By the same token, new elements of culture will evolve over time as people hailing from every human group, inspired by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, give expression to patterns of thought and action engendered by His teachings, in part through artistic and literary works.

(9 October 2015 on behalf of Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, Social Action §252)

Danger of unintended influence

We long to see, for instance, the emergence of captivating songs from every part of the world, in every language, that will impress upon the consciousness of the young the profound concepts enshrined in the Bahá'í teachings. Yet such an efflorescence of creative thought will fail to materialize, should the friends fall, however inadvertently, into patterns prevalent in the world that give licence to those with financial resources to impose their cultural perspective on others, inundating them with materials and products aggressively promoted.

(9 October 2015 on behalf of Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, Social Action §252)

The manner of communication

One of the most significant developments that mark the unfoldment of the Divine Plan at this time has been the advancements at the level of culture that the Bahá'í community has experienced and to which the House of Justice has in several of its messages referred. These advancements deserve profound reflection. Every devoted believer will surely wish to guard and further foster them. Accordingly, the friends must pay heed to their manner of communication which can do so much to impact the community's culture.

(4 April 2018 on behalf of Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, Social Action §253)

The manner of communication

They must aim to raise consciousness without awakening the insistent self, to disseminate insight without cultivating a sense of celebrity, to address issues profoundly but not court controversy, to remain clear in expression but not descend to crassness prevalent in common discourse, and to avoid deliberately or unintentionally setting the agenda for the community or, in seeking the approval of society, recasting the community's endeavors in terms that can undermine those very endeavors.

(4 April 2018 on behalf of Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, Social Action §253)

Hope through Art

The Yuyay Project in Otavalo, Ecuador, is enabling families to weave concepts from Bahá'í moral and spiritual educational programmes into artistic expressions that resonate deeply with Kichwa cultural traditions. The Yuyay Project—“yuyay” means “to reflect” or “to think” in Kichwa —has evolved from small theatrical performances by several youth in 2014 into a growing endeavour where families have moved from being spectators to active participants in both the creative and learning processes.



Indigenous artistic expression in Ecuador

Hope through Art

Entire families create short films, dance and theatre pieces, and music that explore themes of service to society and collective progress. Through various artistic forms, families explore the challenges they face and the aspirations they share. They learn to articulate these insights together, allowing families to reflect on their experiences in the community-building process. The project has evolved from isolated artistic activities to sustained processes that integrate with broader community life.



Indigenous artistic expression in Ecuador

Hope through Art

Many participants serve simultaneously as children's class teachers, youth group animators, or facilitators of other moral and spiritual educational programmes, integrating their artistic work with broader community-building efforts. The initiative has fostered an atmosphere where people of different ages and backgrounds feel welcome and valued.



Indigenous artistic expression in Ecuador

Hope through Art

These activities are revitalizing cultural identity and a sense of belonging. They help participants value and respect community traditions but also value and respect the traditions of other cultures present in the region. Through this process, art emerging from community-building initiatives becomes more than performance. It becomes a means for personal and collective progress and a bridge between generations. It is a way for the community to feel part of something much larger.



Indigenous artistic expression in Ecuador

Hope through Art

The spirit of the initiative extends beyond neighborhoods to other settings. A teacher who integrates Yuyay videos in her classroom has seen students reflect on scenes drawn from everyday situations and grow in perseverance, responsibility, and consideration at home.



Indigenous artistic expression in Ecuador

Hope through Art

For many youth, their involvement has enhanced how they relate to their community, seeing their social reality with more empathy and responsibility, focusing on the importance of unity, constant effort, and service.

Bahá'í World News Service 2026

<https://news.bahai.org/videos/social-action/ecuador-indigenous-families-foster-hope-artistic-expression>



Indigenous artistic expression in Ecuador

Youth Film Project

In Germany, a group of youth produced a short film about fostering true friendship amidst digital interactions, screened at local cinema to inspire community reflection.

The youth were deeply conscious of how social media affects their relationships. They wanted to explore this theme through film to help other young people recognize the difference between friendships and online connections.

Rather than only discussing their concerns about social media, the youth chose to engage with these questions in an artistic medium, allowing them to explore and express their insights through visual storytelling in a way that could resonate deeply with their peers.



Youth Film Project in Germany

Youth Film Project

One youth said “Through our film project, I learned that when you’re constantly using your phone, you miss opportunities to truly take part in life. You miss out on meaningful experiences and building real connections with others.”

The group learned to engage with technology thoughtfully rather than either rejecting or uncritically embracing it. They discovered how to foster meaningful relationships while applying digital technologies toward purposes that align with their higher aspirations for individual growth and community well-being.



Youth Film Project in Germany

Youth Film Project

The Bahá'í principle of harmony between science and religion suggests that when technology is guided by spiritual principles and aligned with the higher aspirations of humanity, it can become a powerful tool for advancing civilization.

Technology and digital media can either distract from or enhance humanity's spiritual and material development. They can inflate irrelevant distractions and make them desirable, but their conscious use can also strengthen and support efforts to serve society.



Youth Film Project in Germany

Youth Film Project

As the youth reflected on their relationship with technology, they became aware about the values embedded within these tools that draw them in. They came to realize that the way they are using their phones is not healthy, yet they struggle to resist the attraction.

This struggle highlights a larger challenge faced by many today—how to engage with technology in a way that nurtures, rather than undermines, human well-being. For the participants, the project reinforced the importance of moderation and consciousness in their use of technology.



Youth Film Project in Germany

Youth Film Project

The film depicts young people's experience of being absorbed in social media and then discovering the joy of friendship through meaningful interactions that arise when they come together with the common purpose to serve their community. One said "In our youth group, I learned to differentiate between true friends and negative influences. Through studying together and serving our community, we discover common interests and aspirations. That's how real friendships develop." Another said, "Phones and social media often give us the feeling that we are happy and have many friends, but this feeling isn't real. Nothing can truly replace real friends in life. In our group, we learn what true friendship means and what really brings us joy in life."

Youth Film Project

From Bahá'í World News Service

**Youth explore friendship and online interactions
through film**

<https://news.bahai.org/story/1761/germany-youth-explore-friendship-and-online-interactions-through-film>

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