

Community Development and Movement of Population

The Nature of Bahá'í Social and Economic Development

Bahá'í Social – Social Action8 - Community

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

Houses of Worship

O people of the world! Build ye houses of worship throughout the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions. Make them as perfect as is possible in the world of being, and adorn them with that which befitteth them, not with images and effigies. Then, with radiance and joy, celebrate therein the praise of your Lord, the Most Compassionate. Verily, by His remembrance the eye is cheered and the heart is filled with light.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, par. 31)

Interdependence

... all the members of the human family, whether peoples or governments, cities or villages, have become increasingly interdependent. For none is self-sufficiency any longer possible, inasmuch as political ties unite all peoples and nations, and the bonds of trade and industry, of agriculture and education, are being strengthened every day. Hence the unity of all mankind can in this day be achieved.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, par. 15.6)

Mashriqu'l-Adhkár

Although to outward seeming the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a material structure, yet it hath a spiritual effect. It forgeth bonds of unity from heart to heart; it is a collective center for men's souls. Every city in which, during the days of the Manifestation, a temple was raised up, hath created security and constancy and peace, for such buildings were given over to the perpetual glorification of God, and only in the remembrance of God can the heart find rest.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, par. 60.1)

Mashriqu'l-Adhkár

The edifice of the House of Worship hath a powerful influence on every phase of life. Experience hath, in the east, clearly shown this to be a fact. Even if, in some small village, a house was designated as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, it produced a marked effect; how much greater would be the impact of one especially raised up.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, par. 60.1)

Dependencies

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is one of the most vital institutions in the world, and it hath many subsidiary branches. Although it is a House of Worship, it is also connected with a hospital, a drug dispensary, a traveler's hospice, a school for orphans, and a university for advanced studies. Every Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is connected with these five things.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, par. 64.1)

Dependencies

My hope is that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will now be established in America, and that gradually the hospital, the school, the university, the dispensary and the hospice, all functioning according to the most efficient and orderly procedures, will follow. Make these matters known to the beloved of the Lord, so that they will understand how very great is the importance of this "Dawning-Point of the Remembrance of God." The Temple is not only a place for worship; rather, in every respect is it complete and whole.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, par. 64.1)

Cooperation and Mutual Aid

The foundation of life and existence is cooperation and mutual aid, whereas the cause of annihilation and deterioration is the cessation of aid and assistance. The higher the realm of existence, the stronger and more vital this weighty matter of cooperation and assistance doth become. In the realm of humanity, therefore, cooperation and mutual aid are in a greater degree of completeness and perfection than that which prevaieth in the other realms of existence—so much so, that the life of humanity dependeth entirely upon this principle.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §130)

Cooperation and Mutual Aid

Among the friends of God, in particular, this strong foundation must be fortified in such wise that each soul may help the other in all matters, whether pertaining to spiritual realities and inner truths or to the material and physical aspects of life. Such is especially the case with regard to the founding of public institutions that benefit all people, and, in particular, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, which constituteth the greatest of divine foundations.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §130)

Responsibilities of Assemblies

The responsibilities of the members of the Spiritual Assemblies that are engaged in teaching the Cause of God in Eastern lands have been clearly laid down in the holy Texts.

(Shoghi Effendi, letter of 30 January 1926 to the Local Spiritual Assemblies of the East—translated from the Persian, Social Action §131)

Responsibilities of Assemblies

These bid them to work towards the improvement of morals and the spread of learning; to strive to eradicate ignorance and unenlightenment, eliminate prejudice, and reinforce the foundation of true faith in people's hearts and minds; to seek to develop self-reliance and avoidance of blind imitation; to aim to enhance the efficient management of their affairs, and observe purity and refinement in all circumstances; to show their commitment to truthfulness and honesty, and their ability to conduct themselves with frankness, courage and resolution.

(Shoghi Effendi, 30 January 1926 to the Local Spiritual Assemblies of the East—translated from the Persian, Social Action §131)

Responsibilities of Assemblies

They similarly enjoin them to lend their support to agricultural and industrial development, to consolidate the foundations of mutual assistance and co-operation, to promote the emancipation and advancement of women and support the compulsory education of both sexes, to encourage application of the principles of consultation among all classes, and to adhere in all dealings to a standard of scrupulous integrity.

(Shoghi Effendi, 30 January 1926 to the Local Spiritual Assemblies of the East—translated from the Persian, Social Action §131)

Villages

There are, at the present time, many villages in India, the Philippines, Africa, Latin America, etc., where the Bahá'ís form a majority or even the entire population of the village. One of the goals of the... Plan... is to develop the characteristics of Bahá'í community life, and it is, above all, to such villages that the goal is directed.

(27 July 1976 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, Social Action §132)

Villages

The Local Spiritual Assemblies of such villages must gradually widen the scope of their activities, not only to develop every aspect of the spiritual life of the believers within their jurisdiction, but also, through Bahá'í consultation, and through such Bahá'í principles as harmony between science and religion, the importance of education, and work as a form of worship, to promote the standards of agriculture and other skills in the life of the people. For this they will need the assistance of Bahá'í experts from other lands. This is a major undertaking, and is being started gradually wherever and whenever possible.

(27 July 1976 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, Social Action §132)

Opportunities

When the Bahá'í community in a village is a significant proportion of the population, it has a wide range of opportunities to be an example and an encouragement of means of improving the quality of life in the village.

(25 July 1988 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

Opportunities

Among the initiatives which it might take are measures to foster child education, adult literacy and the training of women to better discharge their responsibilities as mothers and to play an enlarged role in the administrative and social life of the village; encouragement of the people of the village to join together in devotions, perhaps in the early morning, irrespective of their varieties of religious belief; support of efforts to improve the hygiene and the health of the village, including attention to the provision of pure water, the preservation of cleanliness in the village environment, and education in the harmful effects of narcotic and intoxicating substances.

(25 July 1988 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

A Community

A community is of course more than the sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress. Since Bahá'ís everywhere are at the very beginning of the process of community building, enormous effort must be devoted to the tasks at hand.

(Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván 153* (1996) message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

A Community

...the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behaviour: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly are manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth. This calls for the integration of the component elements—adults, youth and children—in spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities; and their engagement in local plans of teaching and development.

(Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván 153* (1996) message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

A Community

It implies a collective will and sense of purpose to perpetuate the Spiritual Assembly through annual elections. It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá'í centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.

(Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván 153* (1996) message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Social Action at the Grass Roots

...often in a rural cluster made up of villages and perhaps one or two towns, while the pattern of action associated with an intensive programme of growth is being established, the efforts of the friends are confined to a few localities. Once in place, however, the pattern can be extended quickly to village after village.... Early on in each locality, the Local Spiritual Assembly comes into existence, and its steady development follows a trajectory parallel with, and intimately tied to, the fledgling process of growth unfolding in the village. And not unlike the evolution of other facets of this process, the development of the Local Assembly can best be understood in terms of capacity building.

(Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

Social Action at the Grass Roots

What needs to occur in the first instance is relatively straightforward: Individual awareness of the process of growth gathering momentum in the village, born of each member's personal involvement in the core activities, must coalesce into a collective consciousness that recognizes both the nature of the transformation under way and the obligation of the Assembly to foster it. Without doubt, some attention will have to be given to certain basic administrative functions—for example, meeting with a degree of regularity, conducting the Nineteen Day Feast and planning Holy Day observances, establishing a local fund, and holding annual elections in accordance with Bahá'í principle.

(Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

Social Action at the Grass Roots

However, it should not prove difficult for the Local Assembly to begin, concomitant with such efforts and with encouragement from an assistant to an Auxiliary Board member, to consult as a body on one or two specific issues with immediate relevance to the life of the community: how the devotional character of the village is being enhanced through the efforts of individuals who have completed the first institute course; how the spiritual education of the children is being addressed by teachers raised up by the institute; how the potential of junior youth is being realized by the programme for their spiritual empowerment; how the spiritual and social fabric of the community is being strengthened as the friends visit one another in their homes.

(Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

Social Action at the Grass Roots

As the Assembly consults on such tangible matters and learns to nurture the process of growth lovingly and patiently, its relationship with the Area Teaching Committee and the training institute gradually becomes cemented in a common purpose. But, of still greater importance, it will begin to lay the foundations on which can be built that uniquely affectionate and genuinely supportive relationship, described by the beloved Guardian in many of his messages, which Local Spiritual Assemblies should establish with the individual believer.

(Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

Social Action at the Grass Roots

Clearly, learning to consult on specific issues related to the global Plan, no matter how crucial, represents but one dimension of the capacity-building process in which the Local Spiritual Assembly must engage. Its continued development implies adherence to the injunction laid down by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that “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.”

(Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

Social Action at the Grass Roots

Its steady advancement requires an unbending commitment to promote the best interests of the community and a vigilance in guarding the process of growth against the forces of moral decay that threaten to arrest it. Its ongoing progress calls for a sense of responsibility that extends beyond the circle of friends and families engaged in the core activities to encompass the entire population of the village. And sustaining its gradual maturation is unshakable faith in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assurance that He will enfold every Spiritual Assembly within the embrace of His care and protection.

(Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

Social Action at the Grass Roots

Associated with this rise in collective consciousness is the Assembly's growing ability to properly assess and utilize resources, financial and otherwise, both in support of community activities and in discharging its administrative functions, which may in time include the judicious appointment of committees and the maintenance of modest physical facilities for its operations. No less vital is its ability to nurture an environment conducive to the participation of large numbers in unified action and to ensure that their energies and talents contribute towards progress.

(Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

Social Action at the Grass Roots

In all these respects, the spiritual well-being of the community remains uppermost in the Assembly's mind. And when inevitable problems arise, whether in relation to some activity or among individuals, they will be addressed by a Local Spiritual Assembly which has so completely gained the confidence of the members of the community that all naturally turn to it for assistance. This implies that the Assembly has learned through experience how to help the believers put aside the divisive ways of a partisan mindset, how to find the seeds of unity in even the most perplexing and thorny situations and how to nurture them slowly and lovingly, upholding at all times the standard of justice.

(Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

Social Action at the Grass Roots

As the community grows in size and in capacity to maintain vitality, the friends will... be drawn further into the life of society and be challenged to take advantage of the approaches they have developed to respond to a widening range of issues that face their village. The question of coherence, so essential to the growth achieved thus far, and so fundamental to the Plan's evolving framework for action, now assumes new dimensions. Much will fall on the Local Assembly, not as an executor of projects but as the voice of moral authority, to make certain that, as the friends strive to apply the teachings of the Faith to improve conditions through a process of action, reflection and consultation, the integrity of their endeavours is not compromised.

(Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

Social Action at the Grass Roots

Our Riḍván message described a few of the characteristics of social action at the grassroots, and the conditions it must meet. Efforts in a village will generally begin on a small scale, perhaps with the emergence of groups of friends, each concerned with a specific social or economic need it has identified and each pursuing a simple set of appropriate actions. Consultation at the Nineteen Day Feast creates a space for the growing social consciousness of the community to find constructive expression.

(Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

Social Action at the Grass Roots

Whatever the nature of activities undertaken, the Local Assembly must be attentive to potential pitfalls and help the friends, if necessary, to steer past them—the allurements of overly ambitious projects that would consume energies and ultimately prove untenable, the temptation of financial grants that would necessitate a departure from Bahá'í principle, the promises of technologies deceptively packaged that would strip the village of its cultural heritage and lead to fragmentation and dissonance.

(Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

Social Action at the Grass Roots

Eventually the strength of the institute process in the village, and the enhanced capabilities it has fostered in individuals, may enable the friends to take advantage of methods and programmes of proven effectiveness, which have been developed by one or another Bahá'í-inspired organization and which have been introduced into the cluster at the suggestion of, and with support from, our Office of Social and Economic Development. Moreover, the Assembly must learn to interact with social and political structures in the locality, gradually raising consciousness of the presence of the Faith and the influence it is exerting on the progress of the village.

(Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

Social Action at the Grass Roots

What is outlined in the foregoing paragraphs represents only a few of the attributes which Local Spiritual Assemblies in the many villages of the world will gradually develop in serving the needs of communities that embrace larger and larger numbers. As they increasingly manifest their latent capacities and powers, their members will come to be seen by the inhabitants of each village as “the trusted ones of the Merciful among men”. Thus will these Assemblies become “shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are shed abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction.”

(Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

Centres of Intense Activity

From this landscape of thriving activity, one prospect deserves particular mention. ...in clusters with an intensive programme of growth in operation, the friends... endeavour to learn more about the ways of community building by developing centres of intense activity in neighbourhoods and villages. ...even in clusters where the programme of growth has not yet achieved intensity, efforts by a few to initiate core activities among the residents of small areas have demonstrated their efficacy time and again.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2013 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Centres of Intense Activity

In essence, this approach centres on the response to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on the part of populations who are ready for the spiritual transformation His Revelation fosters. Through participation in the educational process promoted by the training institute, they are motivated to reject the torpor and indifference inculcated by the forces of society and pursue, instead, patterns of action which prove life altering. Where this approach has advanced for some years in a neighbourhood or village and the friends have sustained their focus, remarkable results are becoming gradually but unmistakably evident.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2013 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Centres of Intense Activity

Youth are empowered to take responsibility for the development of those around them younger than themselves. Older generations welcome the contribution of the youth to meaningful discussions about the affairs of the whole community. For young and old alike, the discipline cultivated through the community's educational process builds capacity for consultation, and new spaces emerge for purposeful conversation. Yet change is not confined merely to the Bahá'ís and those who are involved in the core activities called for by the Plan, who might reasonably be expected to adopt new ways of thinking over time.

(Universal House of Justice, Riqdán 2013 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Centres of Intense Activity

The very spirit of the place is affected. A devotional attitude takes shape within a broad sweep of the population. Expressions of the equality of men and women become more pronounced. The education of children, both boys and girls, commands greater attention. The character of relationships within families—moulded by assumptions centuries old—alters perceptibly. A sense of duty towards one's immediate community and physical environment becomes prevalent. Even the scourge of prejudice, which casts its baleful shadow on every society, begins to yield to the compelling force of unity. In short, the community-building work in which the friends are engaged influences aspects of culture.

(Universal House of Justice, Rīḍván 2013 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

House of Worship

A House of Worship is, of course, an integral part of the process of community building, and its construction represents an important milestone in the development of a community. It is the hope of the House of Justice that the friends in ... will, through the zeal and determination with which they pursue the essential activities of the Five Year Plan, hasten the day when it will be timely for a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to be built in your country.

(12 December 2013 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

Collective Movement

Underlying the process even from the start is, of course, a collective movement towards the vision of material and spiritual prosperity set forth by Him Who is the Lifegiver of the World. But when such large numbers are involved, the movement of an entire population becomes discernible.

(Universal House of Justice, Rīḍván 2014 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Collective Movement

This movement is especially in evidence in those clusters where a local Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is to be established. One such, by way of example, is in Vanuatu. The friends who reside on the island of Tanna have made a supreme effort to raise consciousness of the planned House of Worship, and have already engaged no less than a third of the island's 30,000 inhabitants in an expanding conversation about its significance in a variety of ways.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2014 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Collective Movement

The ability to sustain an elevated conversation among so many people has been refined through years of experience sharing the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and extending the reach of a vibrant training institute. Junior youth groups on the island are particularly thriving, urged on by the support of village chiefs who see how the participants are spiritually empowered. Encouraged by the unity and dedication that exist among them, these young people have not only dispelled the languor of passivity in themselves but have, through various practical projects, found means to work for the betterment of their community, and as a result, those of all ages, not least their own parents, have been galvanized into constructive action.

(Universal House of Justice, Riqdán 2014 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Collective Movement

Among the believers and the wider society, the bounty of being able to turn to a Local Spiritual Assembly for guidance and for the resolution of difficult situations is being recognized, and in turn, the decisions of the Spiritual Assemblies are increasingly characterized by wisdom and sensitivity. There is much here to indicate that, when the elements of the Plan's framework for action are combined into a coherent whole, the impact on a population can be profound.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2014 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Collective Movement

And it is against the background of ongoing expansion and consolidation—the thirtieth cycle of the intensive programme of growth has recently concluded—that the friends are actively exploring, with the rest of the island’s inhabitants, what it means for a Mashriqu’l-Adhkár, a “collective centre for men’s souls”, to be raised up in their midst. With the active support of traditional leaders, Tanna islanders have offered no less than a hundred design ideas for the Temple, demonstrating the extent to which the House of Worship has captured imaginations, and opening up enthralling prospects for the influence it is set to exert on the lives lived beneath its shade.

(Universal House of Justice, Riqdán 2014 message to the Bahá’ís of the World)

The Spiritual Centre

... a House of Worship is to be the spiritual centre of a community and, together with its dependencies that will be created, contributes to a flourishing pattern of collective life. Currently, the first Houses of Worship of each continent serve as the national Temples of the countries in which they are located, and they also serve the communities in their vicinity, playing a significant role in local activities.

(26 January 2015 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

The Spiritual Centre

As the process of growth unfolds, Temples will increasingly be raised at the national and local levels, and much will be learned about their nature and how they contribute to the community-building process. The many aspects of the functioning of this institution will then gradually be manifest. As Shoghi Effendi wrote, “None save the institution of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár can most adequately provide the essentials of Bahá’í worship and service, both so vital to the regeneration of the world.”

[\(26 January 2015 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer\)](#)

Significant Local Participation

In some of the clusters where growth has advanced to this extent, an even more thrilling development has occurred. There are locations within these clusters where a significant percentage of the entire population is now involved in community-building activities. For instance, there are small villages where the institute has been able to engage the participation of all the children and junior youth in its programmes. When the reach of activity is extensive, the societal impact of the Faith becomes more evident.

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

Significant Local Participation

The Bahá'í community is afforded higher standing as a distinctive moral voice in the life of a people and is able to contribute an informed perspective to the discourses around it on, say, the development of the younger generations. Figures of authority from the wider society start to draw on the insight and experience arising from initiatives of social action inspired by Bahá'u'lláh's teachings.

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

Significant Local Participation

Conversations influenced by those teachings, concerned with the common weal, permeate an ever-broader cross section of the population, to the point where an effect on the general discourse in a locality can be perceived. Beyond the Bahá'í community, people are coming to regard the Local Spiritual Assembly as a radiant source of wisdom to which they too can turn for illumination.

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

Significant Local Participation

We recognize that developments like these are yet a distant prospect for many, even in clusters where the pattern of activity embraces large numbers. But in some places, this is the work of the moment. In such clusters, while the friends continue to be occupied with sustaining the process of growth, other dimensions of Bahá'í endeavour claim an increasing share of their attention. They are seeking to understand how a flourishing local population can transform the society of which it is an integral part. This will be a new frontier of learning for the foreseeable future, where insights will be generated that will ultimately benefit the whole Bahá'í world.

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

Transforming Social Reality

... as the work in thousands of villages and neighbourhoods gathers momentum, a vibrant community life is taking root in each. The number of clusters where the system for extending this pattern of activity to more and more locations is becoming well established—enabling, thereby, the friends to pass the third milestone along a continuum of development—has grown markedly.

(Universal House of Justice, Rīḍván 2018 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Transforming Social Reality

And it is here, at the frontiers of the Bahá'í world's learning, particularly in the movement of populations towards the vision of Bahá'u'lláh, where not only are large numbers coming into the widening embrace of Bahá'í activities but the friends are now learning how sizeable groups come to identify themselves with the community of the Most Great Name. We are seeing the Faith's educational efforts take on a more formal character in such places, as children move seamlessly through the grades year after year and one level of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme reliably succeeds another.

(Universal House of Justice, Riqdán 2018 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Transforming Social Reality

In these places, the training institute is learning to ensure that sufficient human resources are being raised up to provide for the spiritual and moral edification of children and junior youth in ever-increasing numbers. Participation in these foundational activities is becoming so embedded in the culture of the population that it is viewed as an indispensable aspect of the life of a community. A new vitality emerges within a people taking charge of their own development, and they build immunity to those societal forces that breed passivity. Possibilities for material and spiritual progress take shape. Social reality begins to transform.

(Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2018 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Vanuatu

The island of Tanna, in Vanuatu in the South Pacific, has become a leader in community building through social action. During the coronavirus epidemic, they said: “We cannot sit idly and do nothing about it. We need to actively arise and serve our society.” Young people learned to apply knowledge drawn from both science and religion for the development of their communities.



Vanuatu

Participants took steps to not only maintain food supplies for their fellow citizens, but also to encourage others to do the same. They expanded personal gardens and planted crops that could be harvested quickly, so as to create reliable sources of food over the months of uncertainty.



Tanna, Vanuatu

Vanuatu

Vanuatu is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to natural disasters. The country has been struck by devastating storms such as Cyclone Harold, while Tanna has experienced volcanic ash-fall that has damaged crops. Nevertheless, the degree of unity and collective action fostered through the educational activities of the Baha'i community has enabled many people to respond swiftly and to begin rebuilding and replanting.



Tanna, Vanuatu

Vanuatu

One student on Tanna said: “I feel it is our responsibility to share our knowledge and experiences. You know, it is easy to lose hope, for example, during a cyclone or because of the coronavirus. We need to be a source of courage and hope to the other members of our community so that they do not focus too much on these challenges, but think of what they can do to move forward. It brings me a lot of joy to serve my fellow brothers and sisters.”



Tanna, Vanuatu

Vanuatu

One result has been the erection in Lenakel, Tanna, of one of the five first local Bahá'í Houses of Worship in the world, and first in the Pacific, dedicated in November 2021. Some 3,000 people from across Vanuatu, in some cases as entire villages, gathered in Lenakel on the island of Tanna for the dedication ceremony. Also called a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, meaning “Dawning-place of the Praise of God”, it is a sacred space open to all, a place where prayer and contemplation inspire service to society.



Tanna, Vanuatu



Dedication, Tanna, Vanuatu



Tanna, Vanuatu

Vanuatu

The Universal House of Justice wrote: “This sacred edifice shines out as a beacon of light. May it become a centre from which spiritual forces radiate, may it diffuse the illumination of the Lord, and like unto the resplendent rays of dawn, may it brighten the horizon before you.”

The Prime Minister said: “Birds of all kinds, of all colors, come to the banyan tree, eat its fruits, and take shelter under its shade. In the same way, this House of Worship is open to people of all religions, beliefs, and backgrounds. All are welcome to benefit from it.”





Vanuatu

The temple reflects aspects of Ni-Vanuatu culture and tradition. The shape of the House of Worship itself is reminiscent of a volcano, and the nine wings of the roof represent the land and valleys, and the riverbeds that run between them. Other elements of the roof also reflect the feather worn by the head chiefs of tribes, and the dancing sticks used by toka dancers, which point to the apex of the temple's dome as a sign of respect.



Tanna, Vanuatu



Tanna, Vanuatu

Vanuatu

As one leader put it: “In our culture when a person—child or adult—wishes to find peace, he or she takes shelter under a banyan tree. This House of Worship provides us a place where we can meditate deeply about our spiritual reality. This is where an individual makes a spiritual connection with God. The House of Worship is where an individual listens to his or her soul.”



Tanna, Vanuatu



Tanna, Vanuatu

Vanuatu

Since the first Bahá'ís in Vanuatu accepted the Faith in the early 1950s, today, over 5,000 people in Tanna are participating in Bahá'í community-building activities, with youth at the forefront. As one young person from Tanna stated: “We must render service to our society in a spirit of selflessness and with prayerful devotion. This is the idea that this House of Worship has rooted deeply in our hearts. We’re so encouraged to return to our communities and put these ideas into action.”



Tanna, Vanuatu

Vanuatu

One chief referred to the Tannese tradition that our people, like separate canes, will one day be bound together into one bundle. You can break one cane, but you cannot break a bundle. Another traditional belief is that one day the people of Tanna will pray together in one house. Many songs and stories of the people of Tanna speak of a new way of living, when all enmity will be gone, and peace and harmony will come.



Tanna, Vanuatu

Vanuatu

The desire to contribute to a culture of peace is being fostered through Bahá'í educational programs that build capacity for service to society, for example, through the moral education of youth and children. Many are undertaking activities for social action, such as agricultural initiatives concerned with food security. Such efforts allow different people to come together, consult, and work collectively to address different social issues in their communities.



Tanna, Vanuatu

Vanuatu

The Bahá'í temple points to a great change that is taking place on the island spiritually and materially.

Bahá'í World News Service

<https://news.bahai.org/story/1550/first-local-bahai-temple-pacific-opens-doors>

<https://news.bahai.org/story/1530/chiefs-vanuatu-reflect-temple-unifying-role>

<https://news.bahai.org/story/1515/temple-arrival-new-dawn-heart-pacific>

<https://news.bahai.org/story/1373/milestone-vanuatu-temple-uplifts-galvanizes-island>

<https://news.bahai.org/story/1414/providing-food-security-global-health-crisis>



Tanna, Vanuatu