

Learning and Systematic Action

Social Action - Methods and Approaches

Issues for Social Action with Youth

Bahá'í Social – Social Action 9 learning

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Purpose of Learning

The purpose of learning should be the promotion of the welfare of the people....

True learning is that which is conducive to the well-being of the world, not to pride and self-conceit, or to tyranny, violence and pillage.

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian, Social Action §142)

Breadth of Learning

... the happiness and greatness, the rank and station, the pleasure and peace, of an individual have never consisted in his personal wealth, but rather in his excellent character, his high resolve, the breadth of his learning, and his ability to solve difficult problems.

Promote Knowledge

There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God.

To promote knowledge is thus an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, pars. 97.1–97.2)

Intellectual Investigation and Research

All blessings are divine in origin, but none can be compared with this power of intellectual investigation and research, which is an eternal gift producing fruits of unending delight.... Therefore, you should put forward your most earnest efforts toward the acquisition of science and arts. The greater your attainment, the higher your standard in the divine purpose.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), pp. 67–68)

Intellectual Investigation and Research

The man of science is perceiving and endowed with vision, whereas he who is ignorant and neglectful of this development is blind. The investigating mind is attentive, alive; the callous and indifferent mind is deaf and dead. A scientific man is a true index and representative of humanity, for through processes of inductive reasoning and research he is informed of all that appertains to humanity, its status, conditions and happenings. He studies the human body politic, understands social problems and weaves the web and texture of civilization.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), pp. 67–68)

Intellectual Investigation and Research

In fact, science may be likened to a mirror wherein the infinite forms and images of existing things are revealed and reflected. It is the very foundation of all individual and national development. Without this basis of investigation, development is impossible. Therefore, seek with diligent endeavor the knowledge and attainment of all that lies within the power of this wonderful bestowal.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), pp. 67–68)

Bring Reforms

The present condition of the world—its economic instability, social dissensions, political dissatisfaction and international distrust—should awaken the youth from their slumber and make them enquire what the future is going to bring. It is surely they who will suffer most if some calamity sweep over the world. They should therefore open their eyes to the existing conditions, study the evil forces that are at play and then with a concerted effort arise and bring about the necessary reforms—reforms that shall contain within their scope the spiritual as well as social and political phases of human life.

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

Systematization

Systematization ensures consistency of lines of action based on well-conceived plans. In a general sense, it implies an orderliness of approach in all that pertains to Bahá'í service, whether in teaching or administration, in individual or collective endeavour. While allowing for individual initiative and spontaneity, it suggests the need to be clear-headed, methodical, efficient, constant, balanced and harmonious. Systematization is a necessary mode of functioning animated by the urgency to act.

(Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván 155* (1998) message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Learning

If learning is to be the primary mode of operation in a community, then visions, strategies, goals and methods have to be re-examined time and again. As tasks are accomplished, obstacles removed, resources multiplied and lessons learned, modifications have to be made in goals and approaches, but in a way that continuity of action is maintained.

(The Institution of the Counsellors, prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 2001, p. 24)

Systematic Action

One of your primary concerns will be to strengthen appreciation for systematic action, already heightened by the successes it has brought. To arrive at a unified vision of growth based on a realistic assessment of possibilities and resources, to develop strategies that lend structure to it, to devise and implement plans of action commensurate with capacity, to make necessary adjustments while maintaining continuity, to build on accomplishments—these are some of the requisites of systematization that every community must learn and internalize.

(Universal House of Justice, 27 December 2005 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

A Culture of Learning

This evolution in collective consciousness is discernable in the growing frequency with which the word “accompany” appears in conversations among the friends, a word that is being endowed with new meaning as it is integrated into the common vocabulary of the Bahá’í community.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010 message to the Bahá’ís of the World)

A Culture of Learning

It signals the significant strengthening of a culture in which learning is the mode of operation, a mode that fosters the informed participation of more and more people in a united effort to apply Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to the construction of a divine civilization, which the Guardian states is the primary mission of the Faith. Such an approach offers a striking contrast to the spiritually bankrupt and moribund ways of an old social order that so often seeks to harness human energy through domination, through greed, through guilt or through manipulation.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

A Culture of Learning

In relationships among the friends, then, this development in culture finds expression in the quality of their interactions. Learning as a mode of operation requires that all assume a posture of humility, a condition in which one becomes forgetful of self, placing complete trust in God, reliant on His all-sustaining power and confident in His unfailing assistance, knowing that He, and He alone, can change the gnat into an eagle, the drop into a boundless sea.

(Universal House of Justice, Rīḍván 2010 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

A Culture of Learning

And in such a state souls labour together ceaselessly, delighting not so much in their own accomplishments but in the progress and services of others. So it is that their thoughts are centred at all times on helping one another scale the heights of service to His Cause and soar in the heaven of His knowledge. This is what we see in the present pattern of activity unfolding across the globe, propagated by young and old, by veteran and newly enrolled, working side by side.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

A Culture of Learning

Not only does this advance in culture influence relations among individuals, but its effects can also be felt in the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith. As learning has come to distinguish the community's mode of operation, certain aspects of decision making related to expansion and consolidation have been assigned to the body of the believers, enabling planning and implementation to become more responsive to circumstances on the ground....

(Universal House of Justice, Rīḍván 2010 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

A Culture of Learning

Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is vast. It calls for profound change not only at the level of the individual but also in the structure of society. “Is not the object of every Revelation”, He Himself proclaims, “to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions?”

(Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

A Culture of Learning

The work advancing in every corner of the globe today represents the latest stage of the ongoing Bahá'í endeavour to create the nucleus of the glorious civilization enshrined in His teachings, the building of which is an enterprise of infinite complexity and scale, one that will demand centuries of exertion by humanity to bring to fruition.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

A Culture of Learning

There are no shortcuts, no formulas. Only as effort is made to draw on insights from His Revelation, to tap into the accumulating knowledge of the human race, to apply His teachings intelligently to the life of humanity, and to consult on the questions that arise will the necessary learning occur and capacity be developed.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010 message to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Process of Learning

Numerous, of course, are the questions that the process of learning, now under way in all regions of the world, must address: how to bring people of different backgrounds together in an environment which, devoid of the constant threat of conflict and distinguished by its devotional character, encourages them to put aside the divisive ways of a partisan mindset, fosters higher degrees of unity of thought and action, and elicits wholehearted participation;

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

Process of Learning

how to administer the affairs of a community in which there is no ruling class with priestly functions that can lay claim to distinction or privilege; how to enable contingents of men and women to break free from the confines of passivity and the chains of oppression in order to engage in activities conducive to their spiritual, social and intellectual development; how to help youth navigate through a crucial stage of their lives and become empowered to direct their energies towards the advancement of civilization;

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

Process of Learning

how to create dynamics within the family unit that lead to material and spiritual prosperity without instilling in the rising generations feelings of estrangement towards an illusory “other” or nurturing any instinct to exploit those relegated to this category; how to make it possible for decision making to benefit from a diversity of perspectives through a consultative process which, understood as the collective investigation of reality, promotes detachment from personal views, gives due importance to valid empirical information, does not raise mere opinion to the status of fact or define truth as the compromise between opposing interest groups.

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

Process of Learning

To explore questions such as these and the many others certain to arise, the Bahá'í community has adopted a mode of operation characterized by action, reflection, consultation and study—study which involves not only constant reference to the writings of the Faith but also the scientific analysis of patterns unfolding. Indeed, how to maintain such a mode of learning in action, how to ensure that growing numbers participate in the generation and application of relevant knowledge, and how to devise structures for the systemization of an expanding worldwide experience and for the equitable distribution of the lessons learned—these are, themselves, the object of regular examination.

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

Process of Learning

The overall direction of the process of learning that the Bahá'í community is pursuing is guided by a series of global plans, the provisions of which are established by the Universal House of Justice. Capacity building is the watchword of these plans: they aim at enabling the protagonists of collective effort to strengthen the spiritual foundations of villages and neighbourhoods, to address certain of their social and economic needs, and to contribute to the discourses prevalent in society, all while maintaining the necessary coherence in methods and approaches.

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

Evolving Conceptual Framework

Central to the effort to advance the work of expansion and consolidation, social action, and the involvement in the discourses of society is the notion of an evolving conceptual framework, a matrix that organizes thought and gives shape to activities and which becomes more elaborate as experience accumulates. It would be fruitful if the elements of this framework ... can be consciously and progressively clarified.... Perhaps the most important of these is learning in action; the friends participate in an ongoing process of action, reflection, study, and consultation in order to address obstacles and share successes, re-examine and revise strategies and methods, and systematize and improve efforts over time.

(24 July 2013 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

Process of Learning

The Bahá'í approach to the questions you have raised is one which will be worked out over time through patient and persistent effort and by the process of learning in which the Bahá'í community is engaged. This process will be augmented by research and discussion and by attempts to correlate the teachings with modern thought, including the identification of similarities and distinctions between the teachings and contemporary social constructs. Involvement in the discourses of society by believers in various social spaces will sharpen the insights gained.

(21 January 2014 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

Process of Learning

Ongoing study of the teachings and systematic endeavour to translate Bahá'í principles into action by engaging in the processes of community building, education of children and youth, and social action will assist in refining our grasp of Bahá'u'lláh's intention for humanity in all areas of life. In the years ahead, the ability of the Bahá'í community to contribute to thought-shaping social change will increase, and answers to questions that appear to be unsolvable today will become apparent through a process of organic change, rather than as a result of imposing particular perspectives.

(21 January 2014 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

Capacity for Learning

In many ways, the communities that have progressed furthest are tracing an inviting path for others to follow. Yet whatever the level of activity in a cluster, it is the capacity for learning among the local friends, within a common framework, that fosters progress along the path of development. Everyone has a share in this enterprise; the contribution of each serves to enrich the whole.

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

Capacity for Learning

The most dynamic clusters are those in which, irrespective of the resources the community possesses or the number of activities being undertaken, the friends appreciate that their task is to identify what is required for progress to occur—the nascent capacity that must be nurtured, the new skill that must be acquired, the initiators of a fledgling effort who must be accompanied, the space for reflection that must be cultivated, the collective endeavour that must be coordinated—and then find creative ways in which the necessary time and resources can be made available to achieve it.

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

Capacity for Learning

The very fact that each set of circumstances presents its own challenges is enabling every community not simply to benefit from what is being learned in the rest of the Bahá'í world but also to add to that body of knowledge. Awareness of this reality frees one from the fruitless search for a rigid formula for action while still allowing the insights gleaned in diverse settings to inform the process of growth as it takes a particular shape in one's own surroundings.

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

Capacity for Learning

This entire approach is completely at odds with narrow conceptions of “success” and “failure” that breed freneticism or paralyse volition. Detachment is needed. When effort is expended wholly for the sake of God then all that occurs belongs to Him and every victory won in His Name is an occasion to celebrate His praise.

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

Learning for Action and Discourse

... the capacity for learning, which represented such a priceless legacy of previous Plans, is being extended beyond the realm of expansion and consolidation to encompass other areas of Bahá'í endeavour, notably social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society.

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

Zambia

Bahá'í material and spiritual educational initiatives have brought a transformation in Zambia over the past four decades. They have promoted an educational process that helped build the capacity of communities to take charge of their own development. The aim of the range of Bahá'í educational initiatives in that country was to offer a seamless, coherent experience from early childhood into adulthood.



Zambia

A notable moment in the development of Bahá'í educational efforts in Zambia was when a Bahá'í training institute concerned with moral education was established in 1983. These efforts have been promoting moral and spiritual principles, enabling people of all ages to channel their energy toward the betterment of neighborhoods and villages throughout the country. It has since been decentralized into four institutes serving the many regions of Zambia.



Zambia

Zambia

Over time, the educational programs created spaces where participants could explore concepts such as the essential oneness of humanity, the elimination of prejudice of all kinds, the equality of women and men, and the power of consultation as a tool for achieving collective vision and harmonious action.



Zambia

Zambia

Their intent was to enable 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. This created additional educational imperatives, namely those concerned with academic education, as well as initiatives related to social and economic development.



Zambia

The operating principle of all these initiatives is faith in a population's ability to be the protagonist of its own material, spiritual, and intellectual advancement, not just recipients or mere participants.



Zambia

Zambia

Bahá'í-inspired primary and secondary schools were established by people who have been trained by the Inshindo Foundation. These community schools nurture a thirst for academic excellence in students and orient them toward service to their fellow citizens. Since the mid-2000s, a network of 63 schools has emerged in that country, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas, where educational opportunities for young people have historically been limited.



Zambia

Zambia

These community schools are typically formed in places with capacity to sustain large numbers of Bahá'í community-building activities. Such communities enable schools to be established on firm foundations, with support from parents, trained teachers, and Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assemblies, in collaboration with community leaders, and in some cases with government agencies and civil society organizations.



Zambia

Zambia

The Banani International School established in 1992 offers quality secondary education to Zambian girls focused on moral and intellectual excellence. The school is learning to combine an international curriculum with a character development programme that draws on Bahá'í educational materials.



Zambia

Zambia

As experience with these programs grew, several complementary initiatives took root, such as the Preparation for Social Action (PSA) program, a Bahá'í-inspired endeavor that raises capacity in young people to apply scientific knowledge together with spiritual principles for the development of their communities. They apply knowledge drawn from both science and religion for the development of their communities in areas including education, agriculture and sustainable food production, health, and the environment.



PSA participants, Zambia

Zambia

Participants of the PSA program come to see the development of their community as something they can shoulder. They are not waiting around for help from people outside. They identify needs and they take action to address those needs. They learn to initiate agricultural projects, establish preschools, design environmental health campaigns and activities, and start small businesses.



PSA participants, Zambia

Zambia

In Katuyola village, graduates of the PSA program, known as “promoters of community wellbeing,” have contributed to the improvement of local health practices in collaboration with nearby clinics. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these clinics drew on the promoters of community wellbeing to assist with public health initiatives.



Zambia

Zambia

The impact of these various educational initiatives has extended to many aspects of community life. As participants applied spiritual principles to address material challenges, their collective actions began to reshape local infrastructure.



Zambia

Zambia

For instance, in Katuyola village, 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. Through this consultative process, they 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.



Zambia

Zambia

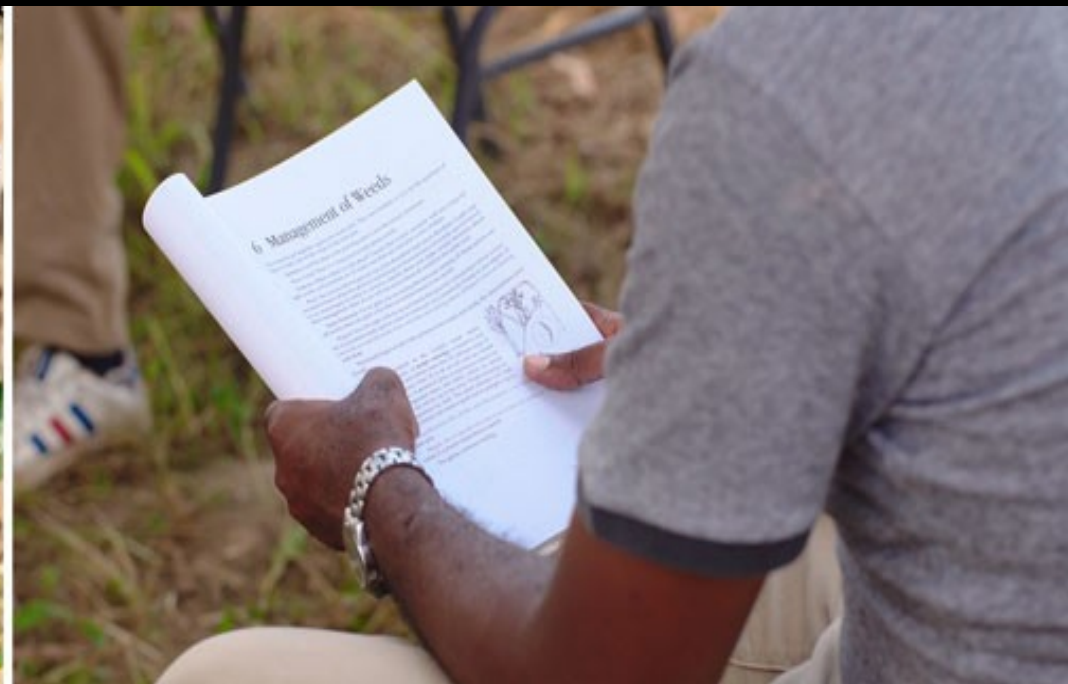
A number of women were very keen to help and they said that they would do everything they could to see to it that a secondary school is established within the village, because they have seen how the programs that their children are engaged in have really transformed them. The community's unified action led to the establishment of a school that provides local youth with access to secondary education without leaving their village.



Zambia

Zambia

Katuyola village saw itself as one. Its residents realized that... having gone through this journey, their powers could really multiply and that there was so much that they could do.



Zambia

Zambia

As young people approach tertiary education, some require additional academic assistance to excel in their university studies. A tutorial program provides students with complementary classes in science, mathematics, and English. It also provides students with career advice, accompanies them through vocational training schools, colleges, and universities, and assists students with pursuing professions that allow them to give back to their community.



Zambia

Zambia

Upon entering tertiary education, the youth who have gone through these educational initiatives experience an ever-deepening desire to understand social reality in light of Bahá'í principles. The Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity offers undergraduate seminars, which acquaint university students with a Bahá'í perspective on issues relevant to social progress. Among the aims of these seminars is to assist participants to see their university education as integral to their efforts to contribute to the transformation of society.



Zambia

Zambia

What has emerged is an educational system in a state of constant refinement. It includes educational efforts for spiritual and moral empowerment, academic education, and educational initiatives related to social and economic development.



Zambia

Zambia

These educational imperatives—developing spiritual and moral capabilities, promoting academic excellence, and raising capacity for social action—are enabling young people to channel their creative and intellectual abilities to enrich the social, economic, and spiritual life of their society.

Zambia

They are learning about living a coherent life—that studying while serving their fellow citizens is possible. Upon completing their tertiary education, they come back to contribute to the development of their communities through their profession.

[Bahá'í World News Service, 2022, 2025](#)

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

<https://news.bahai.org/podcasts/insights-from-the-field/1796/insights-field-educational-initiatives-zambia-empower-communities-reshape-future>



Zambia