

#1 – “Contributing to Social Transformation:

Exploring Local Applications of 9 Year Plan Guidance”

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Major 9 Year Plan Themes... 5 UHJ Paragraphs on Social Transformation

3-part Framework for Action... Community-Building

“For the Betterment of the World” & other Resources

Paragraph 16: Inner & Social Transformation

Paragraph 17: Identifying Local Barriers... Examples

Paragraph 18: Social Action... Book 13 on Social Action

Paragraph 19: Public Discourse... Book 14 on Public Discourse

Paragraph 20: Like-minded Groups

Groups to Approach & How to Approach (Guardian’s Guidance)

Paragraph 36: Forces & Challenges Today

Public Affairs Taskforces & Related Agencies

Questions for Small-Group Exploration

#2 – Current ‘Nine Year Plan’: Major Themes

Section 1 – Introduction & Aim: *Release of the Society-Building Power of the Baha’i Faith*
(paragraphs 1-4, Universal House of Justice message Dec. 30, 2021)

Section 2 – The Movement of Clusters (paragraphs 5 -10)

Section 3 – Learning from the Most Advanced Clusters (paragraphs 11-15)

Section 4 – Contributing to Social Transformation (paragraphs 16 - 20)

Section 5 – Educational Endeavours & the Training Institute (paragraphs 21-27)

Section 6 – Raising Capacity for Administration at All Levels (paragraphs 28 - 37)

Section 7 – A Historic Mission (paragraphs 38 - 40)

#3 – ‘Releasing Society-Building Power’: Central Aim of 9 Year Plan

(from 3rd paragraph, UHJ Letter on Nine Year Plan, Dec 30, 2021)

...the Bahá’í world will be focused on a single aim:

the release of the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures.

The pursuit of this overall aim will require a further rise in the capacity of

the individual believer, the local community, and the institutions of the Faith.

These **three constant protagonists** of the Plan each have a part to play, and each one has capacities and qualities that must be developed.

However, each is incapable of manifesting its full potential on its own... by strengthening their dynamic relationships with one another...their powers are combined and multiplied. ...the more the qualities of **cooperation and mutual assistance** are manifested by a people, **“the more will human society advance in progress and prosperity”**. (‘Abdu’l-Baha)... ...in the Faith, this principle distinguishes and shapes the interactions of individuals, institutions, and communities... **endowing the body of the Cause with moral vigour and spiritual health.**

#4 – Themes of Paragraphs on Social Transformation

- 16 – We are called to improve both inner character & outer social conditions.**
- 17 – We can identify barriers to local spiritual & material progress.**
- 18 – We can generate a range of social action projects, from small to large.**
- 19 – We can contribute to prevailing discourses, applying Baha’i principles.**
- 20 – We can build on individual & organizational connections, widening our response.**

#5 – A Coherent 3-Part Framework for Action

- 1 – Community-Building** – cycles of expansion & consolidation, emphasizing the 4 Core Activities of the Ruhi Institute: Children’s Classes, Study Circles, Jr. Youth Spiritual Empowerment Grps, Devotional Gatherings.
- 2 – Social Action** – implementing principles of the Baha’i Revelation (such as service, compassion, generosity, justice) so as to improve social & economic conditions.
- 3 – Public Discourse** – sharing with others insights from the Baha’i Revelation, applied to various fields of knowledge & endeavor, as a contribution to the evolution of public thought & the shaping of public policy.

#6 – ‘Community-Building’: Baha’i Approach, Ruhi Institute

The Ruhi Institute is promoted by the Universal House of Justice – embodying & implementing the guidance of Baha’u’llah & Abdu’l-Baha – for our teaching & **community-building**: processes directed toward global unity.

It offers a positive alternative to classical education, as well as to secular methods of development, modernization & social change.

It **translates the Baha’i Revelation into action**, implementing Divine Guidance for today’s world, transforming both individuals & social realities.

It is **participatory & collaborative, egalitarian & consultative, an organic & intentional** community-building process.

It is **worldwide** in scope, but also **grassroots**, & virtually free of cost.
It is **scientific** in its method – that is, **evidence & results based**, both conceptual & applied.
It is both **spiritual & practical**, empowering & **capacity-building**, as well as **service-oriented**.
It is **intergenerational** – including almost all ages – **adaptable** to various learning-styles, cultures & arts; while generating processes leading to an ever-advancing global civilization.

#7 – “For the Betterment of the World” (2023)

Prepared by BIDO, Baha’i International Development Organization

Path Thus Far... Evolving Framework for Collective Learning...
Overview of Developmental Initiatives (incl Netherlands, North America,
Colombia, Dem Repub Congo, Uganda, India, Luxembourg)...
Areas of Action (incl Education, Youth, Agriculture, Health, Environment,
Economic Life, Women, Arts/Media, Humanitarian Relief)...
Systematization of Learning... Contributing to Discourse

#8 – Other Related Resources

READINGS: Abdul-Baha, *“The Secret of Divine Civilization”*

UHJ, *“Compilation on Social Action”*... BIC, *“The Prosperity of Humankind”*

Farzam Arbab, *“Promoting a Discourse on Science, Religion & Development”*

Paul Lample, *“Revelation & Social Reality”*... Sona Farid-Arbab, *“Moral Empowerment”*

WEBSITES: bahai.org ... bahai.org/action/involvement-life-of-society/social-action ... bic.org
globalprosperity.org ... news.bahai.org/socialaction ...
bahaiworld.bahai.org/special-collections/contributing-to-social-transformation/

#9 – From Paragraph 16: Inner & Social Transformation

The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh is concerned with the transformation of both
humanity’s inner life and social environment...

A clear sign that the society-building power of the Cause is being released in a cluster
is that efforts are being made by a growing band of its inhabitants...
to help **improve the spiritual character and social conditions** of the wider community...

The contribution made by Bahá’ís is distinguished by its focus on building capacity for service...
an approach founded on **faith in the ability of a population to become
the protagonists of their own development.**

#10 – From Paragraph 17: Identifying Local Barriers

As the intensity of **community-building** work in a cluster increases,
the friends... become **more conscious of social, economic, or cultural barriers**
that are impeding people’s spiritual and material progress...

In reflecting on such situations it becomes evident that, within clusters, expansion and consolidation, social action, and contributing to prevalent discourses are **dimensions of a single, unified, outward-looking endeavour...**

#11 – Examples of Local Barriers & Responses

- **Atrocities Against Indigenous Peoples –**
befriending 1st Nations people, ‘Truth & Reconciliation’
- **Prejudice Against Religion, Faith Tradition Illiteracy –**
interfaith education & cooperation
- **Racism & Hate Crime –**
restorative justice, diversity education & cooperation
- **Gender Inequality & Violence Against Women –**
public discourse & constructive resilience
- **Climate Change & Environmental Threats –**
earthcare policy based on scientific & civic consultation

#12 – From Paragraph 18: Social Action

The initial stirrings of **grassroots social action** begin to be seen in a cluster as the availability of human resources increases and capacity for a wider range of tasks develops.

Villages have proven to be notably fertile ground from which social action initiatives have emerged... but in **urban settings** too, friends living there have succeeded in carrying out activities and projects suited to the social environment, at times by working with **local schools, agencies of civil society... government bodies.**

Social action is being undertaken in a number of important fields, including the **environment, agriculture, health, the arts, and particularly education....**

Looking across the Bahá’í world, we are delighted to see how much momentum has already been generated.... through the encouragement and support of the **Bahá’í International Development Organization.**

#13 – Book 13 – “Engaging in Social Action”

Unit 1 – “Stirrings at the Grassroots”

- * how the Institute process leads to social action
- * how social action emerges at the grassroots
- * how some projects simple & short, others complex & enduring
- * how a shared conceptual framework brings coherence to a range of activities
- * how Assemblies can promote & support projects
- * how our capacity to read social reality must grow

Unit 2 – “Elements of a Conceptual Framework”

- * conceptual framework of the series of 5 Year Plans
- * viewing these Plans in light of social action

- * nature & scope of social action projects
- * foundational truths of humanity's social nature
- * spiritual principles to guide social & economic development
- * materialism & competition, justice & equality
- * science & religion as sources of knowledge
- * teachings on society & its evolution

#14 – From Paragraph 19: Public Discourse

At heart, (contributing to the discourses of society) is simply a capacity for participating in **a conversation about a matter that affects people's lives** and offering a perspective grounded in Bahá'í principles...

(I)t is a skill which many Bahá'ís have the **opportunity to practise almost daily**... in their studies or occupations, and... through involvement in institute courses...

(T)he work of **expansion and consolidation leads to increased consciousness** of an area's prevailing social problems, (and) the aspirations of its people to overcome them...

Over time, efforts to contribute to societal discourses become **more systematic**, and Bahá'ís become adept at helping those around them to engage constructively in a discourse and **find consensus**.

Opportunities are sought out to share the perspectives of the Faith with **community leaders and figures in authority**, and spaces are created in which... various groups and interests can be assisted to **reach a common point of view through consultation**.

#15 – Book 14 – “Participating in Public Discourse”

Unit 1 – “The Nature of Our Contributions”

- 1 – Expanding Our Conversation-Capacities on Social Issues
- 2 – Identifying Collaborative Discourses on Societal Betterment
- 3 – Levels & Spaces for Public Discourses
- 4 – Abdul-Baha: Principles for Progress
- 5 – Guardian: Weakness of Religion Leads to Moral Downfall
- 6 – Principles in “The Promise of World Peace” (UHJ, 1985)
- 7 – Baha'i Institutional Developments After 1985
- 8 – Distinguishing Social Action & Public Discourse
- 9 – Qualities & Attitudes in Our Public Discourse
- 10 – Aligning Our Understanding with Guidance
- 11 – Attitudes Toward Truth, Reality & Investigation
- 12 – Balancing Universal Standards & Progressive Developments
- 13 – Identifying Views of Human Nature in Systems & Policies
- 14 – Application of Principles to Economic Systems
- 15 – Understanding ‘Freedom’ & ‘Obedience’
- 16 – Understanding Various Media Approaches
- 17-19 – Eradicating Prejudices & All Their Varieties

#16 – From Paragraph 20: Individual Connections & Like-Minded Groups

We wish to stress that, historically and now, social action and efforts to participate in the prevalent discourses of society have emerged not only in the context of growth, but also as a result of **individual Bahá'ís** striving to contribute to society's progress in ways available to them.

As a **personal response to Bahá'u'lláh's summons to work for the betterment of the world**, believers have variously chosen to adopt certain vocations and have sought out opportunities to support the activities of **like-minded groups**...

Numerous **Bahá'i-inspired organizations** have been established by groups of individuals to work for many different objectives, and... to give attention to a particular discourse.

All of these efforts... have benefited from being able to **draw on the principles and insights** guiding the activities... of the worldwide Bahá'í community.

#17 – Groups to Approach: Guardian's Guidance (from ADJ p 51)

Systematic Outreach (in Book 6, Unit 3, Section 23)

- * **association with clubs, exhibitions, and societies**
- * **lectures on subjects akin to the teachings & ideals of the Cause, such as... morality, social welfare, religious & racial tolerance, economic cooperation, Islam & comparative religion**
- * **participation in social, cultural, humanitarian, charitable & educational organizations... which... will open up (the Baha'i) to a multitude of ways... (to) enlist successively the sympathy, the support & ultimately the allegiance of those with whom he comes in contact.**

#18 – Ways to Approach: Guardian's Guidance (from ADJ pp 51-52)

Discerning Receptivity (in Book 6, Unit 3, Section 23)

- * **while preserving the Faith's dignity & station, safeguarding the integrity of its laws & principles, demonstrating its comprehensiveness & universality, and defending fearlessly its manifold & vital interests**
- * **consider the degree of the hearer's receptivity, and decide... the suitability of either the direct or indirect method of teaching...**

#19 – From Paragraph 36: Forces & Challenges Today

- 1 – Engaging with previously antagonistic groups,
& helping them find unity through pursuit of a common goal.
- 2 – Putting aside inherited customs & attitudes belonging to humanity's adolescence,
& overcoming prejudices of all kinds.
- 3 – Guarding against viewing matters with cynicism or an eye for faults,
& instead sustaining an eager & constructive outlook.

- 4 – Overcoming gender inequality & injustice, putting equality of women & men into practice.
- 5 – Casting off inertia & apathy, through the exercise of individual initiative.
- 6 – Rising above feelings of personal preference,
by giving higher priority to plans for collective action.
- 7 – Avoiding the potentially enervating effects of modern technologies,
& harnessing their constructive powers.
- 8 – Transcending worldly interests, by prizing the sweetness of teaching & the joy of serving.
- 9 – Rejecting the opiate of consumerism, embracing opportunities for cooperation & service.
- 10 – Turning away from materialist ideologies & the worldviews they promote,
& fixing one’s gaze upon the bright beacon of the laws & principles of God.

#20 – Public Affairs Taskforces & Related Agencies

RESOURCES:

- * Office of Public Affairs (serving NSA) in Toronto & Ottawa, Andrea Salguero
(publicaffairs@bahai.ca)
- * “*LSA External Affairs Handbook*” – Government Relations (NSA)
- * Office of Public Discourse (at World Centre), Saba Detweiler
- * Baha’i International Community (at U.N. in NYC), Bani Dugal

PUBLIC AFFAIRS TASKFORCES:

- serving LSA in public affairs (external relations), outreach, publicity, proclamation,
inter-agency trust-building, making & monitoring website,
helping identify barriers & possible responses
- contact with MPs for NSA, contacts with news agencies, social media,
city government, public schools, like-minded groups
outreach to MLAs for MFSC (Multi-Faith Summit Council, mfscbc.com),
- contact with APIC (All-Party Interfaith Caucus), indigenous relations,
interfaith cooperation (World Religion Day), social action projects,
public discourses, inventory of Baha’i contacts & skills

#21 – Questions for Small-Group Exploration

- 1 – Please share your name, locality, & your primary community-building activities
or aspirations.
- 2 – What are some social, economic & cultural barriers in your locality –
that is, barriers to spiritual & material progress?
- 3 – What Social Transformation opportunities –
that is, opportunities for Social Action & Public Discourse –
are you aware of that could address these barriers?
- 4 – What Transformative Initiatives, if any, has your faith community considered
or taken in response to these barriers?
- 5 – What further steps – coherent with your community’s Core Activities –
now seem reasonable & feasible?