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Vocational training for rural women in India brings unexpected dividends



In the remote tribal village of Ojhar, 18-year old Dhedi stands proudly in front of a new sewing machine, purchased with money she won in a literacy learners contest in September. Dhedi learned not only to sew, but also to read and write at the Indore Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women.

A multi-faceted approach, which includes literacy, hygiene and moral training, gives rural women the tools to help uplift their communities

INDORE, India — For 18-year-old Dhedi, born and raised in a remote tribal village about 200 kilometers west of this central Indian industrial city, learning how to operate a shiny black pedal-powered sewing machine was the fulfillment of a dream.

Learning to read and write at the same time was an unforeseen fringe benefit that, she now realizes, may prove just as valuable.

"I've learned tailoring, but reading and writing is also important," said Dhedi, who came to the Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women here last May for a three-month training course that covered not only sewing, but literacy, hygiene and moral education. "When people come to me to get their clothes stitched, I can write their names and write the measurements."

Last September, Dhedi and another young and formerly illiterate trainee from the Institute won first prize in a song-writing competition sponsored by the International Task Force on Literacy in New Delhi. The two women wrote a song extolling the virtues of literacy and set it to a traditional tribal melody. Their competitors included newly literate people from 33 other such organizations in India.

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Change and Decision-making

Rapid change is perhaps the predominant feature of today's world. The transformations in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union provide some of the most dramatic examples. On virtually every other continent as well, the social, political and even the physical landscapes are being profoundly altered by forces ranging from the growing demand for democracy to the impending collapse of overburdened eco-systems.

The rate and scale of change places a heavy burden on decision-makers. Whether operating at the local, national or international level, in or outside of government, the quality of decision-making is critical to humanity's ability to manage the inexorable changes currently taking place.

Many of the currently accepted methods for arriving at decisions, whether political, legal or economic, are clearly struggling against the tide of change. Totalitarianism and authoritarianism, with decisions handed down from the top, have been thoroughly discredited. It is also clear that the Western adversarial systems of government and law are often over-taxed by, or are inadequate to deal with, the complexity and interrelatedness of today's most pressing issues.

For more than 100 years, Bahá'í communities have practiced a distinctive method of non-adversarial decision-making that reflects the best elements of diverse systems of governance and some important new principles. Known to Bahá'ís by the term "consultation," this method seeks to build community consensus in a manner that unites various constituents instead of dividing them. It encourages diversity of opinion instead of oppressing it. When carefully followed, the process also acts to control the all too common struggle for power.

Its practice encourages a new leadership style, one that emphasizes service and open-mindedness, instead of ceding power to the most aggressive, self-centered or manipulative participants.

The term consultation, of course, is widely applied to processes whereby additional information of advice is obtained. For Bahá'ís, however, the word has a quite specific meaning. It refers to a distinct set of guidelines and principles used in decision-making by Bahá'í communities at all levels, whether local, national or international.

These guidelines were outlined in the 19th century by Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. Their hallmark is the promotion of unity.

- A diversity of points of view should be welcomed and given every opportunity to be heard. Information should be gathered from the widest possible range of relevant sources, with a high value being placed on the advice of specialists — such as lawyers, engineers, physicians, or scientists — in

Perspective

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subject areas where such competence is important.

- During the discussion participants have the responsibility to be completely candid in sharing their views, while exercising moderation in tone and expression. Special attention should be given to ensuring that consultation draws on as wide a range of cultural perspectives as circumstances require and make possible.

- When an idea is put forth, it becomes at once the property of the group as a whole. It ceases to be the property of any individual, sub-group, or constituency. Although this notion sounds simple, it is perhaps the most profound principle of consultation. When followed, this principle reduces factionalism and egotism. It ends the individual's quest for power by removing the source of credit for success, and thus fundamentally

(Continued next page)



Techeste Ahderom, left, an educator and planner from Ethiopia, will replace Victor de Araujo, right, as the Bahá'í International Community's main representative to the United Nations in New York. Dr. de Araujo, 68, who retired on December 31, served as a United Nations representative for 23 years. Mr. Ahderom, 51, was general manager of the Ethiopian National Planning Institute before coming to New York. From 1979 to 1983, he was President of Asmara University in Northern Ethiopia. The author of more than 40 articles on planning and development in Africa, Mr. Ahderom will bring to the Bahá'í International Community offices a special expertise on social and economic development.

alters the process of decision-making as traditionally practiced.

- The group should strive for unanimity, but a majority vote can be taken to bring a conclusion and make the decision. An important aspect of this principle is the understanding that once a decision is made, the responsibility of the entire group is to act on it with unity — regardless of the size of the majority.

In this sense, no “minority” report or “position of the opposition” exists in Bahá'í consultation. Bahá'ís believe that if a decision is a wrong one, it will quickly become evident in its implementation — but only if the decision-making group and, indeed, the community at large, support it wholeheartedly. Without such support, it will never be clear whether the failure of a particular decision or program lay in the fault of the idea itself, a lack of community support, or—in the worst case—the obstinate actions of unconvinced opponents.

Although the relevant principles seem

simple, Bahá'ís have found that they provide a powerful method for making decisions — and for uniting the community.

In this issue of ONE COUNTRY, several stories touch on the practice of consultation as a technique for community organization and decision-making. At a vocational institute for rural women in India, young women are trained to apply the techniques of consultation in solving the problems in their villages. Likewise, the curriculum of a community development project in Bolivia offers training in consultation because of its usefulness in helping a community to organize and develop itself.

These principles can be adapted to a variety of decision-making needs. They can be applied to family or community life as well as to corporate management and national or international governance. They offer a distinctive model that decision-makers, as they face an age of rapid and globe-girdling transformation, might find worthy of careful examination. ☉



Andrés Fernández, left, and Rufino Tejerina stand beside a small structure built out of bamboo and banana leaves, which is designed to shade a new type of citrus seedling from Bolivia's intense sun. The two farmers learned about this technique through a study group organized by FUNDESIB, a rural development foundation in Bolivia that seeks to promote a new, non-adversarial model for community organization.

Rural development in Bolivia: a non-partisan approach aims at empowerment and self reliance

CAIGUA, Bolivia — At the far side of a dry riverbed where Andrés Fernández and Rufino Tejerina labor to grow peas, corn and tomatoes stands a waist-high bamboo frame, roofed with dried banana leaves.

The structure provides shade for several thousand citrus tree seedlings. The seedlings are an unusual crop for a pair of peasant farmers whose formal education ended at the fourth grade — especially in “the Chaco,” as this isolated region in southwestern Bolivia is called.

Few small farmers here have been successful at growing citrus trees. Many trees are killed by a fungus disease that attacks the bark. And most small farmers lack the technical knowledge required to make citrus orchards truly productive. The seedlings that Mr. Fernández and Mr. Tejerina are attempting to grow, however, are resistant to the fungus and easier to work with. They promise to give more fruit, in fewer years, than traditional varieties.

“We’re expecting to see results in about one year,” said Mr. Fernández, 31, who lives in a small two-room adobe-block house with his wife and eight children. By then, he said, they should be able to sell the seedlings to other local farmers at a solid profit.

The impetus for the experiment came from training received by Mr. Fernández and Mr. Tejerina through a study group organized by the Foundation for the Integral Development of Bolivia, known here by its Spanish acronym, FUNDESIB.

“Before the FUNDESIB training, I really didn’t know anything about farming,” said Mr. Fernández. “Now I have the impulse to do things and to learn more. I started this citrus crop to help improve my community and to do something different.”

In a rural development effort known simply as “the Chaco Project,” FUNDESIB is working with small community farmers like Mr. Fernández and Mr. Tejerina to suggest new ideas and techniques that will

improve productivity in this harsh and forbidding region.

Although much of the training provided by FUNDESIB is technical — such as how to grow fungus-resistant citrus trees, plant high-protein corn or vaccinate livestock — a special effort is made to provide supplementary training in community organization and grassroots decision-making techniques.

Community Self-Help

The underlying purpose of this supplementary training, say organizers of the Chaco Project, is to empower people so that they can begin a process of self-development. The goal is to create a level of self-sufficiency, through community awareness, that will reduce dependency on outside aid and advice.

“Our approach is rooted in the notion that we are all part of one human family,” said Ken Roedell, director of the Chaco Project for FUNDESIB. “We’re trying to stimulate local people to arise as servants of their own communities. This is our definition of a community leader: one who serves, rather than one who is served.”

In three years, FUNDESIB has established at least 18 study groups in 11 villages, or “communities,” as villages are called in the Chaco. The groups, which have from five to 15 participants, study a curriculum that ranges from agricultural techniques to community organization, from advice on health and hygiene to courses in nutrition.

So far, individuals or groups who have received training have initiated at least 13 local development projects. They range from campaigns against Foot and Mouth Disease which resulted in the vaccination of more than 1000 cattle, to the establishment of a year-round community vegetable garden in at least two communities. A campaign to promote a new variety of high-protein corn was initiated by a FUNDESIB study group in Macharetí. Another study group in the same community has launched a regional bimonthly newspaper aimed at serving community needs throughout the Chaco.

In addition, at least 12 literacy training groups have been set up in these same communities, taught by FUNDESIB-trained community volunteers.

Although these projects are small, they

receive no outside funding, relying entirely on grassroots support and manpower for their operation.

“This area is really poor, and usually people expect development projects to provide food or to construct health stations,” said Soledad Díaz, program coordinator for the project. “It’s a very paternalistic attitude. Unfortunately, the government and aid agencies simply can’t meet all the needs. What FUNDESIB is trying to do is give the people a certain kind of education so that they can help themselves.”

The FUNDESIB training work is carried out by a full-time staff of ten, including six trainers who travel to the communities to conduct the study groups. The Chaco Project itself is based in Villa Montes, a town of 10,000 people in the heart of the region. Currently, the project operates on about US \$ 85,000 a year, said Mr. Roedell. Funding sources have included the United States Government, through the Public Law 480 program, along with PACT (Private Agencies Cooperating Together), a New York-based consortium of private voluntary organizations, and the Washington, D.C.-based Inter-American Foundation.

Empowerment Without Politics

Although the idea of “empowering” people as a means to development is not unique among private voluntary organizations in Latin America, the FUNDESIB approach to community organization dem-

Below: The Chaco region, which encompasses regions of southern Bolivia, northern Argentina and western Paraguay, is known for its harsh climate and relative poverty.



“We try to encourage the spiritual qualities that are needed to help a community develop. If people are dishonest, training in bookkeeping will only allow them to practice their dishonesty more effectively. So we talk about honesty, about service, about the unity of the community.”
— Garth Pollock

onstrates several distinctive aspects. In particular, FUNDESIB uses a non-partisan, non-ideological approach to community organization that is modeled on the unifying principles of the Bahá’í Faith.

FUNDESIB was founded in 1982 by a group of native- and foreign-born Bolivian Bahá’ís. Its objective is to promote grassroots development in Bolivia, with a special focus on the needs of rural communities. It also established Núr University in Santa Cruz [See cover story in the last issue of ONE COUNTRY] and sponsors an environmental research in the Bolivian altiplano.

“Although FUNDESIB is not run by any Bahá’í institution, the principles by which we operate are based on Bahá’í teachings,” Mr. Roedell said. “In a nutshell, what this means is that in anything we sponsor, we ask first if it promotes the unity of the community and furthers the concept of service to the community.”

Other aspects of Bahá’í principles, as applied to the FUNDESIB training curriculum, include the promotion of “consultation” as a technique for community decision-making. Consultation is a specific technique for non-adversarial consensus-building that seeks to include a wide

diversity of ideas, information and individuals in any decision-making process. [See page 2 for a more complete explanation.]

“We try to encourage the spiritual qualities, if you will, that are needed to help a community develop,” said Garth Pollock, who was executive director of the FUNDESIB Chaco Project until April, and who remains on the board. “For example, if people are dishonest, training in bookkeeping will only allow them to practice their dishonesty more effectively. So in our curriculum we talk about honesty, about service, about the unity of the community.”

Mr. Roedell and Mr. Pollock noted this approach to community organization strictly precludes involvement in partisan politics. It stands in contrast to the approach of many other non-governmental organizations working in Latin America, which frequently define community organization in terms of the class struggle.

“Often, the fruit of ‘class’-oriented efforts at consciousness-raising are more disruptive than constructive,” Mr. Roedell said. “We do not believe that the answer lies in promoting civil disorder or civil strife. Rather, we want people to be able to stop and say: ‘We can solve our own problems. We can forge our own destiny.’” ☉

Some members of the Chaco Project staff confer in the FUNDESIB office in Villa Montes before heading out into outlying rural communities to conduct training sessions. Shown left to right are Leko Zamora, a field worker, César Quisberth, also a field worker, and Soledad Díaz, program coordinator.





Carlos Cortez, right, leads a FUNDESIB-sponsored workshop on community organization, leadership training and agricultural techniques in Villa Montes last July. A member of FUNDESIB's training staff for the Chaco Project, Mr. Cortez is shown discussing the "Why, How, Who and What," of a model community development project. Delfin Espindola, who is also quoted in the accompanying article, is sitting immediately to the right of Mr. Cortez.

The "Why, How, Who and What" of community development: a workshop

VILLA MONTES, Bolivia — The FUNDESIB approach to community development, with its emphasis on cooperation and self-reliance, was exemplified in a workshop held here last July.

About 20 young men and women had come from all over the Chaco, some traveling as long as eight hours by jeep, or, more likely, in the back of an open cargo truck, over the rutted dirt roads that crisscross the region, for a four-day training course in community organization, leadership training and agricultural techniques.

During one session, FUNDESIB trainer Carlos Cortez outlined the four elements of a successful local development project to the group, most of whom were poor farmers who had not gone beyond the fourth grade.

"Those elements are 'Why, How, Who and What,' Mr. Cortez said. He then divided the class into sub-groups and asked each to draw a poster illustrating how they would apply those four elements to a project.

The posters showed that the points were beginning to be understood. One group had illustrated the idea of starting a community vegetable garden. Another suggested the steps a community might take to build a water tank. A third group illustrated the steps to building a latrine.

Mr. Cortez followed up with each group by discussing the weak and strong points of

their approach. A community might decide to build a water tank, he said, because the vegetable garden is without enough water, not simply because they want a water tank.

One of the workshop's participants, Delfin Espindola, has participated in a FUNDESIB study group on and off for three years. A 23-year-old leather artisan and construction worker, Mr. Espindola believes it has helped him to view himself, his community and its problems with new eyes.

"I feel more awake," said Mr. Espindola of the FUNDESIB training. "I feel I have more knowledge. I always liked to study. But I like best the idea of being a promoter and helper of my community."

About two years ago, for example, Mr. Espindola helped obtain government assistance to combat the persistent lack of water in his community.

"Our problem at first was we didn't know where to go to get the help we needed, or what kind of help was available," Mr. Espindola said. "And because I was not a political leader, I did not think there was anything I could do."

After participating in several FUNDESIB workshops that emphasized the importance of serving your own community and outlined the possibilities for creating a self-help project, Mr. Espindola

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"I feel more awake. I always liked to study. But I like best the idea of being a promoter and helper of my community." — Delfin Espindola

The staff of the Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women, shown posing in front of the women's dormitory at the Institute's headquarters in Indore, India. Left to right in the first row are Sundai Bri; Sheelawanti Bai; Rajni Sharma; Bindu; Janek Palta McGilligan, the Institute's director, and Vijayalaxmi. In the second row stands Jimmy McGilligan, the Institute's coordinator and agricultural specialist.



Institute for rural women in India mixes lessons in sewing with training in literacy, hygiene and morals, bringing unexpected dividends

(Continued from page one)

"It is remarkable that these young women have become literate in three months," said J.S. Mathur, the District Collector of Jhabua, home district for many of the Institute's trainees. In India, the District Collector is the top government administrator at the district level. "Most government organizations have not been able to accomplish this, even in programs lasting a year."

Although initially conceived as a free vocational training center for village women, the Institute's success at promoting literacy among its trainees reflects how a multifaceted approach to rural education can produce significant results with a relatively small investment of time and money.

Moral Training A Key

The Institute has been effective, according to its director and others, because of its decision to focus on a specific underprivileged group — young women — and because its curriculum includes moral and spiritual training.

"Although literacy, vocational and health training are essential, we believe that one of the most important things we do at the Institute is to help these young women recognize their full potential as human beings," said Janek Palta McGilligan, the Institute's director.

"This is where the element of moral education comes into play."

The Institute is run by the Bahá'í community of India, and operates on the principles central to their beliefs. The curriculum emphasizes the importance of work, the equality of the sexes, the elimination of prejudice, and the dignity of the individual.

"Through training in both practical work and moral principles, tribal women become better equipped to play a leadership role when they return to their villages," said Rashmi Prasad, coordinator of social and economic development for India's national Bahá'í governing council. "It enables them to undertake their own development programs and projects, and to maintain a degree of self-reliance and self-sufficiency."

Women who receive training at the Institute are encouraged to return to their communities and share what they have learned, whether reading and writing, health and hygiene techniques, or, even, how to make better decisions as a group.

The women are also encouraged to consult with local Bahá'í governing councils, known as Local Spiritual Assemblies, when they return to their villages. The

"Although literacy, vocational and health training are essential, one of the most important things is to help these young women recognize their full potential as human beings." — Janek Palta McGilligan

connection to local Bahá'í communities provides the women with a ready-made network of support for their activities. In several villages in the Jhabua district, for example, Local Spiritual Assemblies are working with trainees from the Institute to establish pre-schools for village children.

"In India, as is well known, women are generally treated as second-class citizens," said Dr. Tahirih K. Vajdi, who helped to found the Institute and is a professor of economics at the University of Indore. "The woman is seen as someone to look after the home and bear children. But at the Institute, they receive a lot of love and attention, and come to understand the principle of the equality of men and women.

"We try to imbue them with self-confidence, so that they know they are very important as individuals, and that they can play an important role in improving their own homes and helping their villages to grow and develop," said Dr. Vajdi.

"We have found that, indeed, when these women return to their villages, they affect their entire communities," Dr. Vajdi added. "They bring back new ideas about health and hygiene. They promote the importance of educating children."

Since its founding in 1983, the Institute has provided training to more than 430 women. Although it operated on a shoestring for many years, recent grants from the Indian and the Canadian governments, as well as funds from the Bahá'í International Community, have recently enabled the Institute to construct a new dormitory with space for 20 trainees, an office and workshop building, and on-site housing for the Institute's director.

The Institute's operating budget of roughly US\$19,000 per year comes from both the Bahá'í community of India and from the Indian government, largely through the Council for Advancement of People's Action in Rural Technology (CAPART), an agency of the Ministry of Rural Development.

A Typical Day

The daily schedule for the most recent group of trainees provides a glimpse of how training in the practical and the spiritual are integrated. For the 20 young women who completed the three-month program running from May to August, the day began at 6 a.m., with two hours of work in the

Institute's model garden.

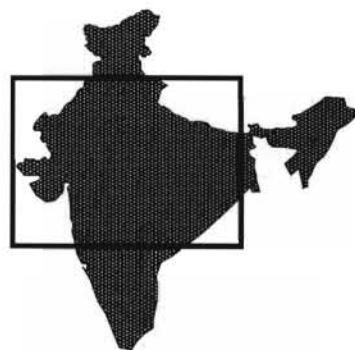
"These women are accustomed to starting their day in the fields, and we don't want them to lose sight of the importance of agriculture," said Jimmy McGilligan, who coordinates the agricultural training component at the Institute. "In the garden, we stress respect for the environment as well as improved techniques of irrigation and the growth of new and improved vegetables."

The women then return to the dormitory and prepare their own breakfast. "The girls plan their own meals and they eat tribal food while they are here," said Mrs. McGilligan. "We don't give them urban-type food. We don't want them to become reliant on foods that are not available in the villages."

From 9 to 11 a.m., the emphasis is on moral education and spiritual principles. This is followed by an hour on health and hygiene — a class which includes training in prenatal and postnatal care and the use of home remedies.

An hour of literacy training follows, with a break for lunch from 1 to 2 p.m. In the afternoon, the emphasis is on vocational training, which includes courses in sewing, weaving, crafts and home management. Instruction in the selection of locally available raw materials for such crafts and in the marketing of finished products is also provided.

"We try to imbue them with self-confidence, so that they know they are very important as individuals, and that they can play an important role in improving their own homes and helping their villages." — Dr. Tahirih K. Vajdi



"We try to spend an hour each day helping the women express their creativity through these crafts," said Mrs. McGilligan. "For example, when they are learning to sew, we encourage them to incorporate traditional tribal designs and patterns into their work. It's important for them to see that they can create designs that are beautiful. This helps them develop confidence that they are human beings of equal status with all other human beings."

In workshop sessions, instruction is also provided on building and using smokeless stoves, which burn scarce fuel more efficiently, and using solar cookers. Although these technologies are not always available in tribal areas now, the Institute seeks to make the women aware of such possibilities for the future.

Throughout the day, the women make their own decisions about what to eat, about what to do in the evening, and on other aspects of dormitory life. These decisions are made as a group, following principles of Bahá'í consultation. Consultation is a technique for non-adversarial decision-making that seeks to include a wide diversity of

ideas, information and individuals in community decision-making. It is the preferred technique for decision-making by local Bahá'í governing councils. [See page 2, for more on consultation.]

"We encourage pride in their own culture — so that the training here is a means to strengthen their heritage and not diminish it." — Janek Palta McGilligan

In the evening after dinner, the women sing or perform tribal dances or skits. "We encourage pride in their own culture," Mrs. McGilligan said, "so that the training here is a means to strengthen their heritage and not diminish it." ❁

Instruction in sewing and tailoring are the Institute's principle offering in vocational education. Classes are provided free to rural women. Shown are several trainees in the main workshop.



In Ojhar, changes come to the new generation

OJHAR, India — Throughout the tribal regions in the Jhabua District of Madhya Pradesh, where the Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women has focused its efforts, jobs are scarce. The economy is for the most part based on family farming of corn, millet, lentils and peanuts. Water is a precious and limited resource, however, and the farms are not very productive.

Although their sturdy adobe and wood frame homes often have electricity, the Bhilai tribesmen in the district still carry bows and iron-tipped arrows, an anachronism that reflects the degree to which most Bhilai remain outside the mainstream of Indian society.

According to the 1981 census, only about 7 percent of the rural population in the district is literate. Of that figure, 10 percent of the males are literate while just 3 percent of the women can read and write. In one recent survey of 335 tribal women in the region, none could read or write.

In those villages where women trained by the Institute have returned there has been a positive impact. In Dhedi's home village of Ojhar, many villagers now proudly show how they have learned to daily clean and keep covered their family water pots. Corn, millet and peppers are stored in neat piles within the homes, and there is a new emphasis on cleanliness.

Last summer, the Bahá'ís of Ojhar formed a Local Spiritual Assembly, providing the community with a new administrative structure for self-development. A decision has been made to start a pre-school for the village's young children, and Dhedi and another village woman who received training from the Institute at Indore will be offered jobs as pre-school teachers.

Dhedi's parents said they were very happy that their daughter was able to go to the Institute and come back with a vocation.

"She has learned a good work — how to sew clothes," said Bhur Singh, 50, Dhedi's father. "I'm quite happy with my daughter since the training."

Mr. Singh added that the other facets of Dhedi's training had begun to have a

positive impact in Ojhar. "The villagers have now learned to boil the water to drink," Mr. Singh said. "And Dhedi is teaching other people in the village how to cut their clothes and how to sew them."

Dhedi's mother, Khetla, 50, added: "She learned cleanliness. Now she keeps the water pots covered."



Both Mr. and Mrs. Singh said they found it difficult to fully accept many of the changes their daughter was proposing, however. They predicted it would take some time before they were adopted by everyone in the village.

One by-product of the village's association with the Institute, for example, has been a decision by the young men on the Local Spiritual Assembly to stop drinking. In the past, most of the young men in the village spent idle hours drinking *tapi*, a home-brewed intoxicant made from date palm sap. The result was much fighting and wife abuse. Women trained at the Institute advocated an end to drinking on their return to the village.

"For the older generation, it will be very difficult for them to change," Mr. Singh said. "But this has really affected the younger generation and they will be able to follow this throughout their lives." ☉

Dhedi, far left, stands with her parents and siblings in front of their house in the village of Ojhar, in the Jhabua District of Madhya Pradesh. Left to right are Dhedi; Bhaila; Raila; Balwan; Khetla, her mother; Shudi; and Bhur Singh, her father. By tradition, the tribal women in this district do not have last names.

International “Dialogue” explores the coming global transformation

The “Transition to Global Society” is examined in terms of culture, science, governance, and values at a conference in Switzerland

WIENACHT, Switzerland — More than 100 top scholars, scientists, executives and futurists gathered here for a five-day conference in September on the worldwide trend towards global integration.

Billed as the “First International Dialogue on the Transition to Global Society,” the conference focused on how humanity might best manage the multi-faceted changes that are resulting from the world’s rapidly increasing interdependence.

Held at the conference center of the Landegg Academy, an international educational institute operated under the auspices of the Swiss Bahá’í community, the meeting began with the assumption that globalism is an inexorable trend. In plenary sessions and workshops, this trend was then examined in terms of culture, science and technology, public governance, private management, ethics, and values.

“This first ‘International Dialogue’ is an attempt to bring diverse specialists together in an effort to develop a synthesis of ideas and a coherent vision that can help

humanity prepare for the transition to a global society — a transition that currently faces all humanity,” said Dr. Iraj Ayman, director of Landegg’s Institute for International Education and Development, which was one of the organizers of the Dialogue.

“The accelerating pace of change in the political, social, technological, economic, cultural and spiritual arenas of human affairs in Europe as well as other continents has created unprecedented challenges and opportunities for decision-makers in today’s world,” Dr. Ayman added.

The views that emerged were as diverse as the participants, which included Federico Mayor, the Director-General of UNESCO; Dr. Karan Singh, former Ambassador of India to the United States; Bertrand Schneider, Secretary-General of the Club of Rome; and Ilya Prigogine, the Nobel Prize winning scientist.

During the conference, which was held 3-9 September, 34 papers or talks were presented on various aspects of global transition. Each was followed by a group discussion, often leading to a lively exchange. Although the ideas presented were extremely diverse, there was a clear consensus that human society is indeed becoming more global in all its aspects.

Speakers were divided over whether the coming global transformation would be a positive or a negative experience.

Extrapolating from the ills of today’s global society, some participants drew a dark picture of the future.

“We must be aware that the pyramid of our affluent society in the West cannot grow infinitely,” said Ambassador Rudolf



Admou Ndam Njoya (standing), Ministre Plenipotentiaire of Cameroon, speaks at the First International Dialogue on the Transition to a Global Society, held at Landegg Academy in Wienacht, Switzerland in September. On the right is Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), who gave personal support to the Dialogue. On the left is Josef Jarab, president of Palackého University in Czechoslovakia.



The main building of the Landegg Conference Centre, where the First International Dialogue on the Transition to a Global Society was held. Landegg Academy, an international educational institute, operates under the auspices of the Swiss Bahá'í community and uses the Conference Centre for many of its activities.

Weiersmüller, co-ordinator of international refugee policy for the Swiss Government. "We must, in our own interest and with a look to the interconnected world and the welfare of mankind, find our way back to a new, more modest way of life."

Some participants were optimistic, suggesting that human ingenuity, the development of new resources, and an unfolding spiritual revival would work to make the transition to a global society a bright prospect.

"The Transition to Global Society is a transition into an entirely new kind of society, a transition as profound as those earlier grand transitions," said Dr. Ervin Laszlo, rector of the Vienna Academy for the Study of the Future, and a member of the Club of Rome. The Vienna Academy, along with the University of Maryland's Center for International Development and Conflict Resolution, were co-organizers of the conference with the Landegg Academy.

Mr. Mayor, who lent his personal support to the Dialogue, said he saw the United Nations playing a key role in the coming global transition.

"The changes in the world that have been accelerating over the past months have reached a new stage," Mr. Mayor said. "For the first time in the history of the United Nations, the Security Council has

acted against aggression with the full force of unanimity among its permanent members...

"I remain convinced that we stand at the threshold of a new culture of peace, with the improvement in the capacity of the United Nations to play its peace-keeping role," Mr. Mayor said.

The need for new values and new approaches to ethics, as well, was a recurrent theme in many of the sessions.

"Our destiny leads us upwards into the global consciousness, outwards into the global society and inwards into our deeper selves," said Ambassador Karan Singh, president of the International Centre for Science, Culture and Consciousness in New Delhi, India.

At a farewell banquet, participants announced their intention to create an Association for International Dialogue on the Transition to a Global Society. The Landegg Academy was asked to serve as the secretariat for such an Association.

"This important meeting," said Augusto Forti, director of the UNESCO European Office for Science and Technology, "will be, I hope, the beginning of a permanent, monitoring and research exercise to which the European Institute for East-West Cooperation and UNESCO will continue to bring their support." — *with reporting by Thor Henning Lerstad* ☉



INTERNATIONAL
DIALOGUE

"We stand at the threshold of a new culture of peace, with the improvement in the capacity of the United Nations to play its peace-keeping role." — Federico Mayor

In a game designed to teach basic environmental principles, school children in Taiwan play the "Listening Bats" game. In the game, which was presented recently in a workshop sponsored by the Bahá'í Community of Taiwan, the blindfolded child in the center pretends to be the bat, and the other child pretends to be an insect. Both make noises to simulate the bat's method of "seeing" its prey. This exercise helps illustrate the importance of all things in the food chain.



With children's games, environmental education in Taiwan gets a boost

TAIPEI, Taiwan — While visiting a village in southern Taiwan last summer, Stephanie and Roderic Maude taught the children there a simple game intended to teach about the environment.

In the process, the children of Chien-Ho Li revealed something about their own view of the environment, providing a telling anecdote that the Maudes are using in a series of conservation training workshops sponsored by the government and the Bahá'í Office for the Environment in Taiwan.

The game, called "The Breathing Trees," asks participants to pretend to be either a "tree" or an "animal." The animals must stand under a tree to breathe. Then, as a "woodcutter" moves through the imaginary forest and "cuts" down the trees, the animals are forced to run from tree to tree to remain alive.

By the end of the game all those pretending to be animals end up gathered around the last tree — illustrating the importance of trees in providing oxygen to animal and human life. In the Maude's experience, the game usually breaks up with everyone laughing and falling down.

However, when they introduced this game to the villagers of Chien-Ho Li, the children ended by hugging that last tree, as if to protect it from the woodcutter.

"Now I tell everyone about those children," said Mrs. Maude, who worked as a nature warden in the United Kingdom before coming to Taiwan in 1989 and is now co-manager of the Office of the Environment for the Bahá'í community of Taiwan with her husband. "I think they truly understood the importance of preserving our natural resources."

In October, the Taiwan Council of Agriculture renewed its funding for a distinctive nine-month, five-city environmental education project undertaken by the Bahá'í office here. The US \$12,000 grant will enable the Maudes to continue to train school teachers throughout Taiwan in environmental education techniques that can be used in the classroom to encourage "a profoundly caring" attitude towards the environment among Taiwan's elementary school students.

During the project's first phase, which ran for three months from March through May this year, the Maudes presented 38 workshops in seven cities. More than 750 people participated; most were teachers.

Together, both phases of the project are designed to improve the overall level of environmental awareness in Taiwan by providing teachers with the basic elements of a conservation education program, in-

cluding games and activities like the Breathing Trees game. "The fundamental background of all the activities is respect for living things," said Mrs. Maude.

The project has been welcomed by educators here. "Before these workshops, our teachers just taught the children the names of the trees, and never anything about the trees and their importance to the environment," said Mei-Tan Liu, principal of the Chung Shan Primary School in Taipei, where a workshop was given last spring to teachers, parents and children. "Not much notice was taken of the environment."

"Now, the children have a very deep feeling about the environment," said Ms. Liu, who is also a secretary of the Taiwan Childhood Education Association.

Taiwan has recently begun to wake up to the need to protect its environment. Rapid economic growth has made this island nation among the most prosperous on the Pacific Rim. The by-product, however, has been a serious degradation of the environment here.

The idea for the project grew from a small experience shortly after the Maudes arrived in Taiwan. Mrs. May Pong, a friend from the Taipei suburb of Hsin Tien, asked the couple to speak about environmental awareness to her mother's group.

One of the group's members, Mrs. Boa

Jih Wang, then asked the Maudes to conduct a two-day session for her organization, the Homemaker's Foundation. On the first day, about 25 people came. On the second day, two national television crews, five newspaper reporters and 110 people came.

"We were stunned," said Mr. Maude. "We didn't realize that what we'd done was new. But no one had been using games aimed at teaching conservation."

Ultimately, the success of this workshop led to an initial US \$3,000 grant from the Council of Agriculture and sponsorship of the national Bahá'í governing council of Taiwan for a three-month project. The grant provided for the Maude's traveling expenses, while the Bahá'í community of Taiwan provided a network of translators and local coordinators in each of the seven cities where the workshops were held.

Besides the workshops, the Maudes have written a 40-page booklet that covers many of the techniques and activities offered in their workshop series. It was translated and published by the Homemakers Foundation. All copies of the first printing have been sold out.

"Taiwan combines an educated population with considerable national wealth," said Mr. Maude. "If they can achieve an economic miracle, they can achieve an environmental one." — *by Robert Blum* ☉

***"The fundamental background of all the activities is respect for living things." —
Stephanie Maude***

Interfaith forum on environment and "spiritual traditions" founded in Brazil

BRASILIA, Brazil — A three-day interfaith seminar in December, designed to explore the relationship between the environment and religion, ended with the establishment of a new Permanent Forum of Spiritual Traditions and Environment.

Aimed at increasing the commitment of religious and spiritual groups to the conservation of Earth's resources, the Forum plans to present a statement at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which will be held in Brazil. The Forum's founding members also agreed to develop a curriculum which applies spiritual principles to environmental concerns and to prepare a national seminar on environment

and religion for next year.

The three-day seminar which led to the Forum was co-organized by the Spiritual University of Brahma Kumaris, the Theosophical Society, the City of Peace Foundation, the Brasilia city government and the Bahá'í community of Brazil.

Held 30 November–2 December, the seminar was attended by representatives from various spiritual traditions, including Tibetan Buddhism, Judaism, Catholicism, Islam, Taoism, and the Bahá'í Faith, as well as representatives from indigenous groups and ecological movements.

The Bahá'í community of Brazil has been invited to constitute the secretariat of the new Forum. ☉

The Bahá'í International Community sent five representatives to the 8th General Conference of the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace in Ulan Bator in September. Pictured left to right are: Yin Hong Shuen of Singapore, Nahid Mohajeri-Eng of Macau, Wytze Bos of Geneva, Han Ju Kim-Farley of South Korea, and Ali Merchant of India.



Buddhists and Bahá'ís explore points for collaboration in Mongolia

ULAN BATOR, Mongolian People's Republic — The fresh spirit of openness sweeping the Eastern bloc countries is bringing with it potential for new avenues of collaboration between religious non-governmental organizations in the East and West. This spirit was reflected in an international peace conference held here in September.

The Eighth General Conference of the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace (ABCP) drew non-governmental organizations from around the world, including the Bahá'í International Community. Conference topics ranged from the worldwide movement for peace to the United Nations Summit for Children, from education to the environment.

Possible areas of collaboration between the Bahá'í International Community and non-governmental organizations in Mongolia and the USSR were identified. They include an exchange of religious scholars and the potential for cooperation in addressing environmental problems in the Gobi Desert and around Lake Baikal.

"The importance of this conference, I think, is the opening of links between Eastern bloc religious organizations — especially in Mongolia — and religious organizations from the West," said Wytze Bos, who headed a five-member delegation to

the Conference from the Bahá'í International Community.

"It was also important for the exchange of viewpoints between Buddhists and Bahá'ís," Mr. Bos said.

Added Dr. G. Lubsantseran, the Secretary General of the ABCP: "The positive

"If we understand each other's teachings on such issues, it will help us to formulate a common approach. For example, both Buddhists and Bahá'ís have a strong commitment to peace and social justice." — Wytze Bos

input of the Bahá'í International Community delegation to the conference was very much appreciated. We are eager to continue the good relationship established here."

Mr. Bos said several areas of possible cooperation between Bahá'í and non-governmental organizations in Mongolia

emerged from the conference. They include these:

- Organizing a visit of environmental specialists to the Gobi desert, with the help of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of the Environment, who could consult with members of the "Gobi Movement" about environmental problems there.

- An offer from the Gandan Monastery in Ulan Bator to host a visiting Bahá'í scholar. The Monastery decided during the conference to establish a research center on Buddhism and peace.

- An informational exchange program between the Lake Baikal Foundation in Eastern Siberia and Bahá'í communities situated near other great lakes in the world.

"From our point of view, the conference provided an important venue for an exchange of perspectives on the problems faced by the world today," Mr. Bos said. "We learned much, for example, about the Buddhist approach to the environment, their respect for nature and the basis of love for all living creatures. And I believe that there was, likewise, a reciprocal increase in understanding about the Bahá'í approach to peace and the environment.

"If we understand each other's teach-

ings on such issues, it will help us to formulate a common approach," Mr. Bos said. "For example, both Buddhists and Bahá'ís have a strong commitment to peace and social justice."

The ABCP is an Asian Buddhist non-governmental organization headquartered in Ulan Bator. Founded 1970 at the initiative of Buddhist dignitaries from India, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, the USSR and Vietnam, the organization strives for "peace, amity, goodwill and compassion among all people in concord with the lofty ideals of Lord Buddha," according to literature from the ABCP.

More than 50 organizations were represented at the five-day general conference, held 18-23 September. A variety of papers and statements on the need for peace among the world's nations and religions were presented.

The Bahá'í statement, "The Common Goal of Universal Peace in Buddhism and the Bahá'í Faith," was presented in a plenary session by Mrs. Han Ju Kim-Farley, a member of the Bahá'í International Community delegation. The statement outlined points of common belief and practice between Bahá'ís and Buddhists. ☸

"We learned much about the Buddhist approach to the environment, their respect for nature and the basis of love for all living creatures." — Wytze Bos

The Gandan Buddhist Monastery in Ulan Bator, Mongolia, has offered to host a visiting Bahá'í scholar as a means of exchanging information about the two faiths. Founded in 1838, the monastery began as a religious center for Sutra-Tantra Buddhism and has since grown into the largest center of Mongolian Buddhism.



New Resolution on Human Rights Situation in Iran adopted at U. N.

UNITED NATIONS — For the fifth time in five years, the United Nations General Assembly has expressed its concern over the human rights situation in Iran including the persecution of the Bahá'í minority there.

Adopted by consensus on 4 December, the resolution renews for another year the mandate of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights (CHR) to continue its consideration of accusations of human rights violations in Iran.

The resolution makes specific mention of the case of the Bahá'ís in Iran, noting that in November the CHR's Special Representative on Iran reported extensively on the situation of the Bahá'ís in his report to the General Assembly.

The Special Representative, Prof. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, spent a week in Iran in October. In his report, Prof. Galindo Pohl said that while the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran has improved in recent years, there continues to be "evidence of discrimination, confiscation, rejection by universities, suspension of pensions, demands for the return of pensions earned and paid, denial of passports and other irregularities."

The report added that "it would seem that the attitude towards the Bahá'ís and their situation depends on the temperament and personal convictions of individual officials. This keeps the Bahá'ís in a perpetual state of uncertainty about their activities.

"The Government should therefore be requested to take effective action to ensure that these Iranian citizens enjoy the same civil and political rights as the rest of the population," the report concluded.

Since 1979, nearly 200 Bahá'ís have been killed or executed in Iran, and hundreds more have been imprisoned. Thousands of Bahá'ís have been deprived of jobs, property and/or educational opportunities. Over the last two years, however, the situation has eased. Most Bahá'í prisoners have been released and many of those who were deprived of jobs and businesses have been allowed to return to work. ☉

Briefs:

Advocates for African Food Security Urge Link Between Micro and Macro Policies

UNITED NATIONS — The fifth symposium of the Advocates for African Food Security focused on the link between micro activities and macro policies in addressing the role of women as producers of food in Africa.

Held 15 November in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium at the United Nations headquarters, the symposium featured a keynote address by Gloria Nikoi, chairman of the board of directors for the Akuapem Rural Bank in Ghana.

"It is estimated that 75 percent of the food produced in Africa is grown by women," Ms. Nikoi said, adding that she believes foreign trade, pricing, credit and other macro policies must take this fact into account so that the production of food by women at the micro level is not inhibited.

Credit policies and agricultural extension services, for example, should take into account the special needs of women farmers, she said. "The image of the farmer is 'male' and, therefore, such services concentrate on male tasks and improvement of such tasks," Ms. Nikoi said. "Basic policies in agriculture need to be oriented to women's role in food production."

The Advocates for African Food Security is a New York-based coalition that aims to raise awareness of the contributions that African women make to the production of food. Its members include representatives from non-governmental organizations, governmental organizations and United Nations agencies. The Bahá'í International Community is a founding member. ☉

Review: *Man of the Trees*

(Continued from back page)

that illuminates without intimidating.

The excerpts in *Man of the Trees* also reveal the deeply spiritual nature of Dr. Richard St. Barbe Baker's thinking. He embraced the Bahá'í Faith at the age of 37 and expressed the view that its teachings provided him with a new understanding of humanity's place in the natural world.

In 1956, Dr. Baker wrote that the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh tell of "the indebtedness of man to the earth, his dependence on it and his duty to it. "The principle of world economy enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, begins with the farmer and the care of the land, as this is the most important work." Bahá'u'lláh is the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

Starting from an understanding of the role of each tree in the ecosystem of a forest, Dr. Baker's vision of the environment expanded to envelop the entire planet, stressing humankind's responsibility as "caretaker" of the planet and the overarching spiritual understanding needed to foster and sustain this responsibility.

"At the moment the real issue facing the world is not whether this or that political system survives," Dr. Baker wrote in the 1970s. "The real challenge is to humanity as a whole. Are we fit to live? Are we fit to exist on the earth? Can we unite to stem the oncoming tide of destruction which, by our folly, we have let loose on ourselves? The answer to these questions will decide the future of our race — the human race." ☉

"Can we unite to stem the oncoming tide of destruction which, by our folly, we have let loose on ourselves? The answer to these questions will decide the future of our race — the human race."

— Richard St. Barbe Baker

A community development workshop in Bolivia

(Continued from page 7)

realized that he could organize his community around just such an issue.

"We used to have a problem during the dry season," he said. "The cows don't have enough water. The people don't have enough water to drink. The plants — corn and beans — they don't grow. Many cows and many animals just die."

"So I helped organize a group, because of the knowledge I gained through FUNDESIB training," Mr. Espindola said. The group then approached a regional development corporation sponsored by the government, and obtained a small cistern and tank truck deliveries to fill it.

Now, Mr. Espindola said, the community is working to gather the materials to build an even larger rain water holding tank, a project that should go even further toward alleviating water shortages during the dry season.

"Really, the people had not been open or awake to the the possibilities for solving problems before the FUNDESIB training," Mr. Espindola said. "And so I do not think this would have happened without FUNDESIB." ☉

Fiji pre-school guide stresses spiritual growth

SUVA, Fiji — The publication of an educational handbook, which promotes spiritual and emotional growth in addition to physical and intellectual development, was officially celebrated in a ceremony held at the Bahá'í community offices in Suva on November 4th.

These Children are Pearls is the fruit of a three year project by Patricia H. Cameron, Education Coordinator for the Bahá'ís of Fiji. Aimed at kindergarten teachers and parents, the handbook offers advice about how to organize lesson plans and suggests teaching themes and topics.

At the ceremony, Adi Davila Toganivalu, President of the Fiji Kindergarten Association, recommended that *These Children are Pearls* be adopted for use throughout the Pacific.

Hari Ram, Fiji's Permanent Secretary for Education, said the book would supplement the Ministry of Education's effort to produce quality materials for pre-school children. "The book is based on modern educational and religious principles," Mr. Ram said. ☉

Of the earth's "skin" and forest "societies"

*Man of the
Trees:
Selected
Writings of
Richard St.
Barbe Baker*

Edited by
Karen Gridley

Ecology Action

Willits,
California USA

Back in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, before the environment became a major international concern, the views of Richard St. Barbe Baker were often regarded as an eccentric and myopic preoccupation with trees and forests.

A forester and author of international renown, Baker spoke of forests not in terms of board feet of lumber or potential sources of plywood, but as "a society of living things." He often spoke of the earth itself as if it were a living organism — a concept that, at the time, seemed based more on mythology than science.

"The glorious rich, colourful, quilted covering of trees and vegetation is not there merely to feed and please us," Dr. Baker wrote in 1956. "Its presence is essential to earth as an organism. It is the first condition of all life; it is the skin of the earth."

Today, of course, such ideas are part of the common language of the environmental movement. The Gaia theory, recently developed by British scientist James Lovelock, also suggests that the earth itself is a living entity, with the forests, oceans and animal life understood as component systems of such a being.

Richard St. Barbe Baker anticipated many other present-day environmental concerns. During nearly six decades of professional life, from the 1920s through the 1970s, he traveled the globe, warning of the dangers of forest clear-cutting, of the wanton destruction of tropical rainforests and the greedy waste of resources. He talked about how deserts were encroaching on the world's forests and of the potential threat to the earth's oxygen supply.

Man of the Trees brings together some of the most far-sighted and insightful excerpts from the writings of Richard St. Barbe Baker, taken from seven of his best-known books. The book is organized in 10 chapters that catalog the major themes of Dr. Baker's work.

Those themes cover Richard St. Barbe Baker's understanding of the forests as a community, his theories about the interdependence of trees and animal life, his sense of the earth as a living organism, and his deep concern about the expansion of the

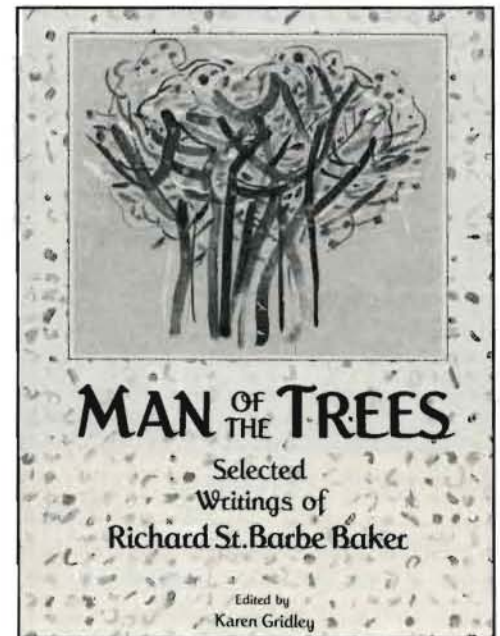
earth's deserts.

His concern about the destruction of forests was paramount. Writing in 1949, for example, Dr. Baker said: "Forest destruction in every country spells disaster in one form or another. Whereas, for instance, in Africa it brings erosion and deserts and in Switzerland avalanches, in Italy the rivers are turned into torrents and floods by deforestation."

He considered the earth's forest cover as its skin. In 1970, he warned: "If a man loses one-third of his skin, he dies; plastic surgeons say, 'He's had it.' If a tree loses one third of its bark, it dies... Would it not be reasonable to suggest that if the earth loses more than a third of its green mantle and tree cover, it will assuredly die?"

The 115-page book, published by Ecology Action, a California-based environmental group, also includes an introduction that catalogs the achievements of Dr. Baker's long and productive life.

Man of the Trees chronicles not only St. Barbe Baker's unique and as yet inadequately appreciated role as an envi-



ronmental prophet — it displays the talents of a writer who had the ability to weave complex scientific concepts into something that the average reader can understand. Readers will find themselves gently schooled in root structure, mycorrhizal association, "nurse" trees, clear felling, silvan economy, and micro-climates — in a style
(Continued on page 19)

Review