ONE COUNTRY
October-December 1993 Vol. 5, Issue 3 Newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community

"The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens"– Bahá'u'lláh

Inside:

UNIFEM/Bahá'í project strikes a responsive chord

In a departure from most development projects for women, the "Traditional Media as Change Agent" project seeks also to involve men. Both men and women attended training sessions in Nandoungué, Cameroon, shown above.

By involving men in women's problems and using traditional media to communicate the results, grassroots changes are effected

BADAN, Eastern Province, Cameroon — As theater, the skits performed here in the village square on market day last July by the residents of this small West African village were among the most basic of productions.

Consider the simple plot featured in one short play, written by the villagers themselves: After selling his crops, a peanut farmer hides the money from his wife and goes to a bar, where he buys drinks for all of his friends and then spends the rest on a woman.

When he comes home, his wife berates him for his excesses. Then his son falls deathly sick — but there is no more money for medicine. Fortunately, a compassionate doctor donates the needed drugs. In the end, the farmer realizes the error of his ways and resolves in the future to consult with his wife before spending their profits.

Despite the simplicity of the theme, the unprofessional acting and the absence of costumes or sets, this play and others like it have nevertheless been big hits in this remote and underdeveloped province.

Among the fruits of a two-year, three-country pilot project by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Bahá'í International Community, the plays depict situations that are familiar to the men and women here, striking a responsive chord.

(Continued on page 4)

ONE COUNTRY
is published quarterly by the Office of Public Information of the Bahá'í International Community, an international non-governmental organization which encompasses and represents the worldwide membership of the Bahá'í Faith.

For more information on the stories in this newsletter, or any aspect of the Bahá'í International Community and its work, please contact:

ONE COUNTRY
Office of Public Information
Bahá'í International Community – Suite 120
866 United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017
U.S.A.

Executive Editor:
Douglas Martin

Editor:
Brad Pokorny

Associate Editors:
Nancy Ackerman (Moscow)
Christine Samandari-Hakim (Paris)
Kong Siew Huat (Macau)
Guilda Walker (London)

Contributing Editor:
Arman Danesh

Production Assistant:
Veronica Shoffstall

Subscription inquiries should be directed to the above address.

ISSN 1018-9300

Printed on recycled paper

Men and Women as Partners

Our main story in this issue focuses on a ground-breaking development project aimed at promoting social and economic well-being by first seeking to uplift the status of women.

The project, which goes by the title: "Traditional Media as Change Agent," seeks to promote the equality of women in rural areas through the use of traditional songs, dances, and theater.

The use of such so-called "traditional media" as a means of communicating new ideas to illiterate populations is not new. Many projects have sought to promote better health and nutrition, among other concepts, through folk media.

Nor is focusing on the concerns of women a new idea in development. In recent years, development agencies worldwide have increasingly recognized that women play an important role not only in maintaining the family, but also in agriculture and the economy in general.

Perspective

Where the "Traditional Media as Change Agent" project breaks new ground is in its innovative combination of these two approaches — and that alone warrants the detailed examination of the project on these pages.

What is most distinctive about the effort, however, is its effort to include men as partners in a dynamic process to change attitudes about women and, thereby, uplift the entire community.

As development consultant Pamela Brooke noted: "Many projects for women involve just women, but it was the feeling of the Bahá'ís that change could be better fostered through a consultative process between women and men. Because if you just end up with angry women sitting in the corner, it isn't going to change anything."

As the world looks ahead to the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held under the auspices of the United Nations in Beijing, China, in September 1995, this simple insight offers a powerful idea for changing the way women are treated.

Indeed, it is increasingly recognized that the theme of partnership is the next logical step for the women's movement worldwide. And for the burgeoning men's movement. Because improving the status of women is not a women's issue — it is a human issue.

In the industrialized world, many feminists have realized that they have gone about as far as they can go in raising the consciousness of women, and that further advances cannot be made until the attitudes of men, too, are transformed.

In the developing world, where statistics show that women bear an even greater burden in terms of work load, poverty, illiteracy, inadequate health care and exclusion from decision-making, the need for a change in the attitudes of all is even more evident.

Although many in the world today have made the intellectual realization that women are deserving of equal rights, the hard facts about how women are treated by men in daily life — whether in the home, in the community, or at work — make clear that this principle has not yet found a place in most human hearts. This is true worldwide. And it is true even in the most enlightened quarters.

The key to genuine transformation lies not merely in the intellectual acceptance of the equality of women and men as a modern and progressive idea, but rather in the recognition that it is in fact a spiritual principle, one of the underlying themes of our age.

The "Traditional Media as Change Agent" project offers a detailed model for how human hearts — and especially the hearts of men — can be reached.

As our story indicates, the project is built around a three-step process for community transformation: 1) the promotion of activities that encourage a grassroots-level analysis of the situation between women and men; 2) the use of Bahá'í consultation and a deepened understanding of women's equality as a moral principle to sharpen and focus the analysis; and, 3) the creation of non-threatening media presentations to present the findings.

These three steps offer a general prescription that can be applied almost anywhere — even in urban and/or highly developed societies.

It is important to stress, however, that the key to genuine transformation lies not merely in the intellectual acceptance of the equality of women and men as a modern and progressive idea, but rather in the recognition that it is in fact a spiritual principle, one of the underlying themes of our age.

More than 100 years ago, Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, said: "All should know, and in this regard attain the splendors of the sun of certitude, and be illumined thereby: Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God."

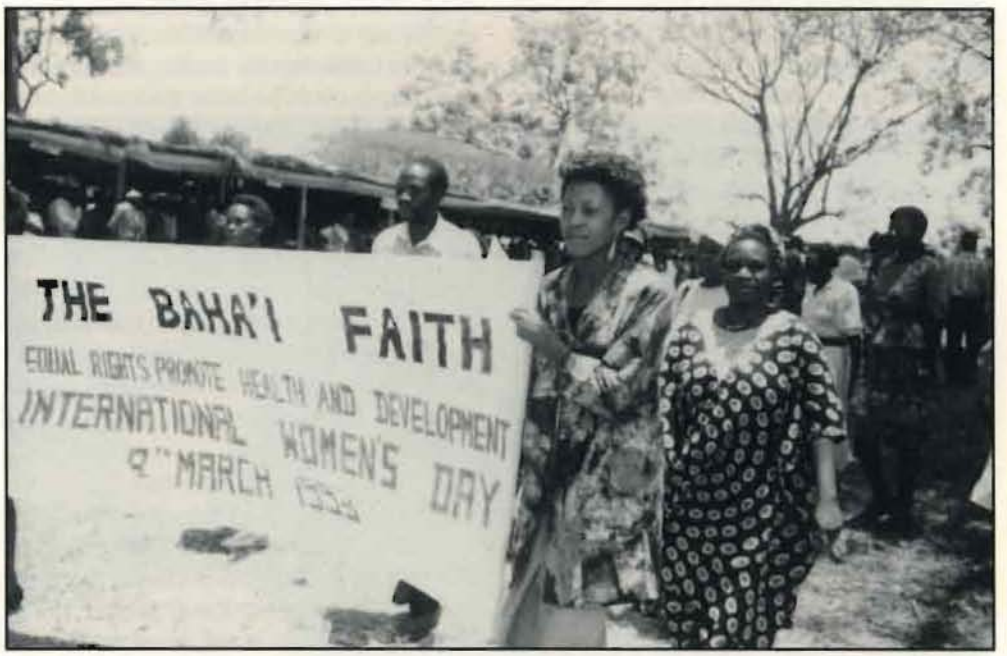
The spiritual importance of such a statement in the transformation of attitudes cannot be underestimated. Through that pronouncement, and others, the Bahá'í Faith became the first independent world religion to proclaim explicitly the equality of women in its sacred scripture.

Bahá'ís, accordingly, have long sought to promote this principle — and they have long recognized that equality for women cannot be expected to emerge in an atmosphere of conflict between the sexes. Rather, it can only be achieved through a partnership of women and men.

Such a partnership requires new attitudes and responsibilities on both sides of the gender gap. While women must strive to develop their capacities and step forward to play an active role in all endeavors, so men must also provide encouragement and support. They must do this by learning to value the contributions of women and by making room for them in the institutions of society.

Such a reevaluation and transformation of old attitudes and behaviors is difficult, and cannot be promoted merely by legislation, committee meetings, or ideological imperatives. What's necessary is true consciousness-raising. And that means that we must understand the spiritual dimension of this partnership. For it is the spiritual dimension of life that impels us to seek within ourselves what we know to be true and which subsequently motivates us to undertake a sincere and genuine transformation.✪

While women must strive to develop their capacities and step forward to play an active role in all endeavors, so men must also provide encouragement and support. They must do this by learning to value the contributions of women and by making room for them in the institutions of society.



In Uganda, Bahá'ís took part in a parade held in Mubende District to celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March 1993.

In Badan, Cameroon, participants in the project took what they learned about the equality of women and men and translated it into traditional songs and dances.

UNIFEM project to uplift women strikes a responsive chord

"What is ground-breaking about this project is that it is set up to involve men. Many projects for women involve just women, but ... if you just end up with angry women sitting in the corner, it isn't going to change anything."

— Pamela Brooke, development communications consultant

The project aims to stimulate improved social and economic development in the entire community by first uplifting the status of women through the use of traditional media presentations, such as theater, songs, and dances.

"There are many messages in this one simple skit," said Mona Grieser, the international technical director of the project. "There are messages about the responsibility of fatherhood, the importance of money management, and of family partnership. But most important, there were a lot of men in the audience. And it is men primarily that we hope to reach."

Although the UNIFEM/Bahá'í experiment, which is entitled "Traditional Media as Change Agent," is distinctive for its integration of well-respected ideas about development communication with the promotion of women's equality, its most distinguishing characteristic is the degree to which it strives to involve both women and men in the process.

"What is ground-breaking about this project is that it is set up to involve men," said Pamela Brooke, an independent development communications consultant who was contracted to provide technical assistance to the project in Malaysia.

"Many projects for women involve just women, but it was the feeling of the Bahá'ís that change could be better fostered through a consultative process between women and men," said Ms. Brooke. "Because if you just end up with angry women sitting in the corner, it isn't going to change anything."

With funding provided by UNIFEM, the project has been undertaken simultaneously in Cameroon, Bolivia and Malaysia, where well-developed national and local Bahá'í communities have provided on-the-ground resources and a network of motivated volunteers.

Signs of Success

The project seeks primarily to change attitudes. And even though attitudes, unlike efforts to provide concrete products like improved agricultural production or better vaccination rates, are hard to measure, there is nevertheless impressive evidence of success — both in anecdotal and

statistical terms.

Here in the Eastern Province of Cameroon, where the project has operated in seven villages, the men have begun to join women in the fields, they are consulting more with them about family finances, and they are allowing them a greater participation in community decision-making, according to surveys and outsiders who have visited the area.

"There is change," said Madeline Eyidi, senior program assistant at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Yaounde, Cameroon, who spent a week in the project area last summer. "The women have traditionally done the farming, but I saw the men starting to participate. They are helping the women. I think the project is wonderful."

According to Tiati à Zock, the national coordinator of the project in Cameroon, a survey done in early 1992 among some 45 families in each of the seven villages reported that the men made virtually all of the financial decisions alone. A follow-up survey, taken in 1993, indicated more than 80 percent of the families now make such decisions in consultation between husband and wife.

Another telling statistic: in Badan, the number of girls being sent to the village school has increased by 82 percent since the project started.

In Bolivia, the project is now underway in eight villages in the southern central province of Chuquisaca. In the village of Poqonchi, where the project has been going the longest, comments made in focus group discussions indicate that women are now participating more in community decision-making, are more willing to express their desire for education, and are receiving from men more help with their daily chores.

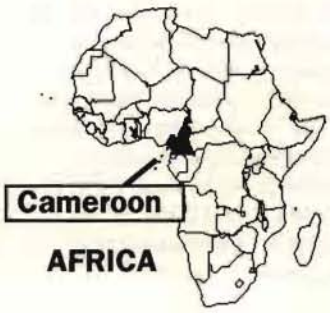
In addition, a woman was recently elected to the Poqonchi *sindicato*, a local political council. She is the first woman ever elected to the *sindicato* there and shortly after she was elected, the council passed a resolution urging greater attention to the concerns of women.

In Malaysia, where the project has operated in two villages and an urban community, there are also concrete signs that women are becoming increasingly involved in community decision-making and organization. (Indeed, in all three areas, the number of women elected to local Bahá'í governing councils has increased since the project began.)

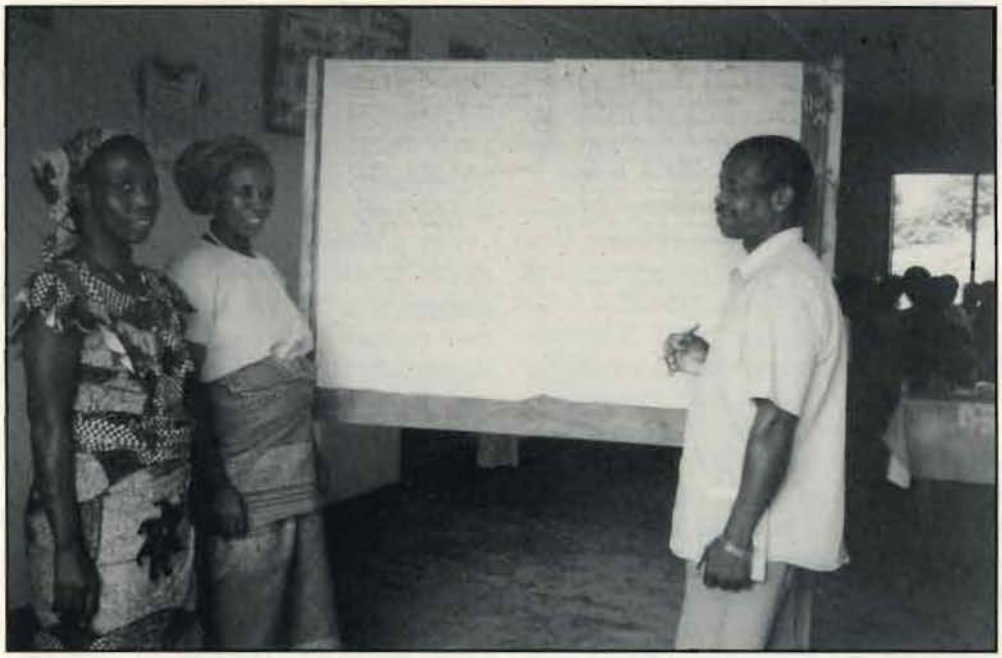
The biggest changes have come in Kampong Remun, a small and remote village in Sarawak, where the project has stimulated a variety of spin-offs. Using the project's methods for identifying community problems, the villagers there have started a vegetable garden, built new latrines, and established adult literacy classes, which are designed primarily for the women but are open to men.

All three efforts emerged from a consultative process that included men and women, said Joo Jong Kung, the national project coordinator for Malaysia. "In the

UNIFEM / Bahá'í Project Sites



In Kampong Remun, Malaysia, the project has stimulated a variety of activities. After analyzing the village's problems, residents have started a vegetable garden, built new latrines, and established adult literacy classes, which are designed primarily for women.



During project sessions in all three countries, participants were asked to list, side by side, the different tasks that women and men performed in their society. In almost every case, the list of women's tasks was longer — often providing some embarrassing and telling moments for the men. Shown at right is one such list made during a project session in Cameroon.

village community, you seldom get the men communicating and consulting together with the women, but the project gave the women an opportunity to bring up the problems they faced," said Ms. Kung.

The importance of including women in any development effort is, of course, being increasingly recognized around the world. Numerous studies and statistical indicators show that as women become more healthy, more educated, and more involved, the well-being of the entire family improves.

"We believe that as women in the developing world secure economic and social advancement and equality, everyone will benefit," said Marjorie Thorpe, the deputy director of UNIFEM. "It won't only improve the quality of life for women, but it will improve the quality of life for men, women, children, everyone."

A Distinctive Approach

The project takes a multi-faceted approach toward achieving this goal. While various elements of the project, such as the use of traditional media to communicate new ideas, have been tried before, the project is distinctive for its integration of ideas drawn from a wide range of sources — sources that include the Bahá'í teachings.

In essence, the project is built around the following components:

- It seeks to involve the people directly in analyzing their own problems, by first training them in the use of modern analytic tools like focus groups and community surveys, as well as in Bahá'í consultation;
- It then gives direction to that analysis by stressing the importance of a positive moral principle, in this case the equality of women and men;
- It seeks finally to promote change in the community by communicating the results of that analysis through traditional media, such as theater, songs, and dance, which are relatively non-threatening.

"The project," said Ms. Thorpe of UNIFEM, "starts with the premise that traditional media in non-literate societies — actors, dancers, puppeteers, ringmasters, singers — the message that they communicate is taken very seriously by the community and, therefore, if the message delivered could be one that enhances the status of women..., then it will be an opportunity to begin a dialogue with the entire community—but in a manner that is non-threatening."

Although the effort is organized by the Bahá'í communities in each area, it seeks to promote change in the attitudes of the entire population. "One of the advantages of working with the Bahá'ís is that they have very strong links with the grassroots," said Ms. Thorpe, explaining why UNIFEM chose to fund the project. "It is not an organization that is elitist. And because there are grassroots members of the Bahá'í movement, because the organization has a history of working at the grassroots, they provided a very effective, very useful link for us."

In general, Bahá'í communities are

"Actors, dancers, puppeteers, ringmasters, singers — the message that they communicate is taken very seriously by the community and, therefore, if the message delivered could be one that enhances the status of women, it will be an opportunity to begin a dialogue with the entire community—but in a manner that is non-threatening."

— Marjorie Thorpe, deputy director, UNIFEM

not isolated from the society around them; instead they are well integrated into the community at large. In the sites for the project, the percentage of Bahá'ís among the population range from less than one percent to about 10 percent.

The Process

In each country, the project began with training sessions at the national level to help local Bahá'í volunteers build on their own experiences in community-building.

First came a refresher course on the principles of consultation, a distinctive method of non-adversarial decision-making used by Bahá'í communities at all levels.

"Training in Bahá'í consultation helps teach respect for the opinions of others, and that is very important to women," said Lee Lee Ludher, a development consultant in Malaysia, "because many women feel that their opinion is not important."

Volunteers were also given training in modern data gathering techniques, specifically in participatory surveys and the use of focus groups as a means for identifying community needs. Training in assessment, record-keeping and organization were also given.

The newly trained volunteers were then sent back to their communities, where they organized similar training sessions at the local level.

The result was the creation of a core group of project volunteers in each village. This core group was usually built around the members of the local Bahá'í governing council, which is known as the local Spiritual Assembly. A locally elected body charged with overseeing the welfare of the community, Spiritual Assemblies have provided a ready-made body for the task of analyzing the community's needs and then consulting about a course of action.

After local training sessions, project volunteers went out to interview members of the community at large about their concerns. Video and Polaroid instant cameras were used in some cases during this data collection phase, since not every volunteer was literate.

In each country, the analysis was concentrated on how the women's equality (or the lack of it) related to local problems.

"One of the very simple diagnostic tools that was useful in helping these communities to analyze themselves was to ask that they list all of the daily tasks of the average woman in the area," said Dr. Richard Grieser, who was one of the initial trainers in Cameroon. Dr. Grieser is married to Mona Grieser and worked with his wife on most phases of the project.

"Then we asked them to list the daily tasks of the average man," Dr. Grieser said. "And the difference in the work load was always so striking. In fact, the men often got very embarrassed, because the list was never even half as long as that of the women."

Once the local problems had been identified, the community was asked to translate its conclusions into locally appropriate media, such as songs, dances, stories and plays. Local artists and performers were also encouraged to assist. These stories, plays, songs and dances were then presented to the larger community at various festivals, in special evening programs, and other gatherings.

The Same Problems Worldwide

The same basic problems were identified by participants early in the project at all three sites. Project participants, after consulting about the needs of their communities, gave the highest priority to addressing three basic problems: 1) illiteracy

At all three project sites, Polaroid instant cameras were used in an exercise aimed at helping residents identify community problems — and to show the differences in points of view between women and men. Divided by sex, two groups in each place were asked to take photos that illustrate some aspect of community life. Shown below is a photo taken by a Bolivian woman who participated in the project. It shows women carrying water, an arduous task undertaken by the village's women each day.

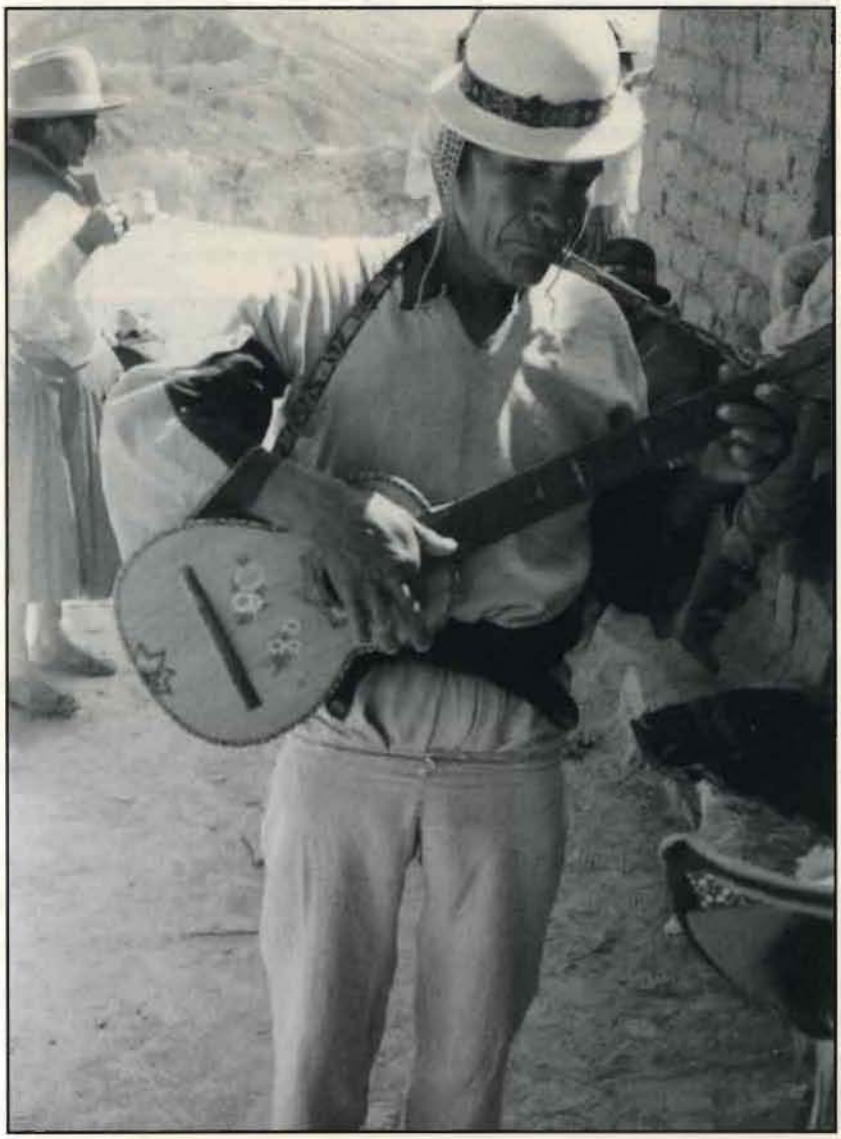
among women; 2) the mismanagement of family funds by men; and 3) the unfair burden of work on women.

"The people themselves, they are realizing not only that women have rights in society, but that they have important things to offer," said Mr. Tiati of Cameroon. "For example, many men now recognize that the woman has the ability to manage money, much better than men, who frequently spend too much on alcohol. And so one of the results of the project is that in most of the families that are involved, the woman is now taking custody of the money — or at least they are consulting about how the money is spent."

In Malaysia, similar problems were found. "One of the big problems that has been highlighted in Malaysia is the lack of education and opportunity for girls and women," said Ms. Ludher of Malaysia. "But since the issues have been highlighted in a non-threatening way, people now realize that this is a problem."

In Bolivia, also, unequal education and work emerged as issues in the focus discussion groups there.

In the village of Poqonchi, Bolivia, local musicians have written songs about the need to uplift the status of women. Comments made by villagers in focus group discussions indicate that women are now participating more in community decision-making, are more willing to express their desire for education, and are receiving more help from men in their daily chores.



The Next Phase

The idea for the project emerged from a statement by the Bahá'í International Community to the 32nd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. The statement addressed the need to change attitudes that reinforce acceptance of women's inequality and said that "a primary target for communication related to development projects for women may well be men."

Impressed by that idea, Ms. Margaret Snyder, then director of UNIFEM, approached the Bahá'í International Community about doing a joint project. After some three years of conceptual work, the project was initiated in October 1991. It completed its first phase in September 1993.

UNIFEM's total grant to the Bahá'í International Community for this initial phase of the project was for US$205,000 — a relatively small amount in the world of development funding, considering that the project had sites in three countries and ran for a period of two years.

The Community hopes not only to continue the project, but to expand it to other sites.

"Interest has been expressed already by participating Bahá'í communities in taking the project into another phase," said Mary Power, director of the Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women, which is administering the project at the international level. "These communities now have a cadre of trained Bahá'í consultants who can be drawn upon in their home countries, and who can be used as technical resources for other countries as well."

Indeed, the Bahá'í communities of Nigeria and Brazil launched their own pilot "Traditional Media as Change Agent" projects in concert with the UNIFEM funded effort. In addition, local Bahá'í communities in Malaysia, seeing the success of their neighbors, have recently started up their own media-based projects on the advancement of women. ✪

Around the world, studies have shown, women are generally expected to perform many more tasks each day than men. Not only are women expected to work in the fields or factories, but they are often also expected to cook, clean, and take care of the children. Shown at left is a participant in the UNIFEM project in Cameroon.

Comments by project participants in Cameroon:

The project has affected me. I didn't know that men can help women with the work in the house. Now I am happy that through UNIFEM, I help my wife. Our life is now better with less quarrels. I consult with my wife before spending money. Before the UNIFEM project I used to waste my money drinking alcohol. Now I can't beat my wife; in fact everybody in my village, knowing what the UNIFEM Project has taught, will not do it. *— Aoudou Jean, 31, a male primary school teacher in Badan.*

The project is good because now my husband helps me with fire wood. I am now respected by my husband because I can say something and he listens to it and does it; before he would not. The song and theatre brought to me all these new ideas. There was a play about a wife and husband working hand in hand, a theatre on education of girls and another one on how to spend money. — *Gbane Odette, 42, a farmer and mother of seven in the village of Yoko-Sire.*

At the beginning, the project did not mean anything to me. Later on I discovered the advantages of the project. Now I see that my husband, who was not helping me before the project, has now changed. We work together at home and in the field. My husband helps me more now with the housework that before he thought was the sole duty of woman. He carries the baby, cleans the dishes and clothes. I also learned the importance of children's education and that it is first my responsibility and now I try to take better care of them. I got those ideas through songs because through the songs I listened carefully to what was being said. — *Zongayina Delphine, 36, a farmer and mother of six in Ndokayo village.*

Here in the village men and women were not used to working together but through the project I was surprised to see that they are working hand in hand. I personally have witnessed a change in my way of life. Concerning the equality of man and woman I see also that there is a change in the attitude of men. Now they consult with their wives. And I do the same. Before the project it was very difficult to know what women do with their money, but now my wife consults with me. I also work with my wife in the same farm, and I help with cleaning the house, for example; things I have never done before. — *Dimessi Denis, 42, a male farmer in Ndokayo village.*

My husband now consults me before spending money; before he would just go spend the money on alcohol. My husband now helps me with work at home pounding *foufou* and getting firewood. I am now able to talk in public in front of a crowd and even act in a play!—*Nandiba Marguerite, 34, a farmer and mother in Badan.* ✪

In the poorer neighborhoods of Portici, Italy, the apartments are densely packed, and much of the daily life focuses on the streets. Shown above is a Bahá'í musical group, bringing a new message of peace and unity to area residents.

In Italy, tutorial assistance and spiritual support help young people find new horizons

The Bahá'í community of Italy was concerned that not enough was being done to address the underlying sense of hopelessness and rejection that are felt by many in Portici.

PORTICI, Italy — Sandwiched between a volcano and the Mediterranean Sea, this small Neapolitan city is famous for a glorious botanical garden, which was once part of a king's summer palace. Eight kilometers south of Naples, Portici still has its share of wealthy and blue-blooded residents, who live high on the hillside and enjoy a panoramic view of the Gulf of Naples.

Yet despite its aristocratic atmosphere, Portici also has the unusual distinction of being the most densely populated city in Europe. An estimated 140,000 residents are squeezed into an area of approximately four square kilometers.

That kind of population density is not without its consequences. While the wealthy live high on the hillside, the city's lower reaches are composed of crowded neighborhoods and the residents there are among the poorest in industrialized Europe.

Accompanying that poverty are the social problems that, worldwide, have come to be associated with urban ghettos: joblessness, under-education, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and alcoholism.

Although Italy has an extensive framework of social programs aimed at addressing such problems, the Bahá'í community of Italy was nevertheless concerned that not enough was being done to address the underlying sense of hopelessness and rejection that are felt by many in Portici.

The community has launched a pilot social and economic development project in Portici that seeks in a multifaceted way to promote a new sense of individual dignity and self worth among the city's down and out.

"Although the government strives to provide a network of services to the poor, in reality there are many gaps, and they are unable to provide psychological support," said Franco Ceccherini, the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy, the community's national-level governing council.

The local Bahá'í Center provides the focal point for the outreach. Since 1992, the Center has provided free tutorials in remedial literacy, classes for children in morals and ethics, and a place for troubled youth to gather in an atmosphere where there are no pressures to use drugs, drink alcohol or engage in sexual experimentation.

Its offerings have helped a number of Portici young people find new horizons.

Gianluca Buffo, a seventeen-year-old iron worker who was expelled from school for bad behavior, has set out to become a social worker since taking remedial classes at the Bahá'í Center. He said not only has the tutorial help provided by the Center stimulated his interest in getting a high school degree, but the atmosphere there has helped him to change his attitude towards others.

"I've become more trusting and more respectful towards others," said Mr. Buffo, explaining that before he began coming to the Center, he drank alcohol frequently and was often aggressive.

"But the Bahá'í program has made me discover the side of myself that wants to give help to others," he said. "Before, I did not think I had this capacity. I can't explain it very well. But I now feel I must give some value for my life."

Mr. Buffo said many of his former friends are still addicted to heavy drinking or even drugs, and he feels sorry for them. "They all work in very simple jobs," he said, "like carpenters or shop assistants in the fruit or vegetable markets. They have no future. But now, for me, I want in the future to become a social worker, so I can help people to study and advance themselves."

The Bahá'í community believes that the largest impediment to progress in Portici is a lack of self-respect and dignity. "People here live in a modern society," said Mr. Ceccherini. "They have television and radio. So they understand what the possibilities in life are. What we have helped them to do is to realize that they can in fact change their behavior and obtain a share of these things."

Eva Sangermano, too, has set out in a new direction in part thanks to the support provided by the Bahá'í Center. Although bright, the 21-year-old woman was limited in her prospects by the fact that she is a widowed mother with a seven-year-old daughter. Like many young adults in Portici, she felt that her life was drifting and she saw no hope for her future.

Over the last year and a half, however, she has begun remedial classes at the Center in the hopes of getting a high school diploma. Before her work began there, she said, "I was feeling without direction, like I was going here and there," said Ms. Sangermano. "Now I feel I have a direction and I feel much calmer about my life.

"Without this help, my life would be a

The local Bahá'í Center provides the focal point for the outreach. Since 1992, the Center has provided free tutorials in remedial literacy, classes for children in morals and ethics, and a place for troubled youth to gather in an atmosphere where there are no pressures to use drugs, drink alcohol or engage in sexual experimentation.

The focus of the project's activity in Portici has been the Bahá'í Center. Shown at right is a photo of the Center's dedication ceremony, held on 14 September 1991, which featured the presence of Dr. Luisa Barbin, the Vice Commissioner of Portici, and members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy, the national Bahá'í governing council.

mess," she said. "I would not be getting a degree. It would have been impossible. Because the environment here is not good. The outside world is just a place of chaos."

Outside observers say the Bahá'í community is on the right track in addressing the problems in Portici. Dr. Margherita Dini Ciacci, president of the Italian Regional Committee for UNICEF, is familiar with the community's work.

"The success of a group is estimated by the participation of the people in their programs," said Dr. Ciacci. "The fact that the Bahá'ís are pursuing the right road is demonstrated by the increasing demand on behalf of the population of Portici for these programs.

"Voluntary and religious organizations carry out a viable work within this territory, which is poor of cultural, social and recreational services," she added. "In particular, as the Bahá'ís are on the side of the children, they help to establish peace through solidarity and love." ✪

Thelma Khelghati, shown standing, was one of some 30 Bahá'í speakers who made presentations at the Parliament of the World's Religions. Ms. Khelghati's talk was entitled: "In Search of Spirituality: Soaring Wings and Practical Feet."

Parliament of the World's Religions brings together 7,000 from all faiths

CHICAGO — More than 7,000 people, representing virtually every major religion and coming from some 56 countries, gathered here for the Parliament of the World's Religions, held 28 August to 5 September.

Held in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, the event was aimed at promoting a new level of interfaith dialogue and understanding among world religions. Bahá'ís, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, and Zoroastrians, as well as representatives of indigenous religions and sub-sects of the major faiths came together for the 1993 gathering.

At the end, a special Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders came together to sign a "Declaration of a Global Ethic," a 5,000-word document that seeks to identify those moral principles shared by world's religions and promote them as the basis for a sustainable world order.

Stating that humanity is interdependent, the Declaration essentially re-states general religious commandments against killing, stealing, lying, and adultery, casting them in the modern terms of nonviolence, respect for the environment, solidarity, and the condemnation of sexual discrimination and exploitation.

Bahá'í participation in the event was vigorous. Bahá'ís presented some 30 workshops and talks, from the opening plenary to discussion of the ethics declaration.

"If warfare and strife be for the sake of religion, it is evident that it violates the spirit and basis of all religion," said Bahá'í International Community representative Wilma Ellis in remarks to the Parliament's opening plenary. "The fundamental truth of the Manifestions of God is peace. This underlies all religions." ✪

Human rights situation in Iran threatens the "peace and security" of the region, says United Nations panel

GENEVA — In one of the strongest expressions yet by a United Nations body concerning human rights in Iran, the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities said in August that it remains "deeply concerned" over "continuing human rights violations by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran" — including the "systematic repression of the Bahá'í community."

The Sub-Commission went so far as to say that the situation in Iran has "repercussions" which "spread beyond its national frontiers," jeopardizing the "peace and security" of other regions.

In a resolution passed on 20 August by a vote of 20 to 3, the Sub-Commission said the situation in Iran is marked by "arbitrary and summary executions, torture and other cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, the absence of guarantees for the due process of law," and "disregard for the freedom of religion and speech."

The Sub-Commission called for continued monitoring of Iran by the Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights, and it requested that the Special Representative "consider and recommend in his report the strongest measures which could be adopted within the framework of the United Nations to eliminate human rights violations" in Iran.

Noting that the situation of the Bahá'í community of Iran was mentioned three times in the resolution, Techeste Ahderom, the main United Nations representative of the Bahá'í International Community, expressed gratitude to the Sub-Commission for its careful consideration of the plight of Iran's 350,000-member Bahá'í community.

"The fact that the Sub-Commission made so many explicit references to the religious nature of the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran, despite the strained arguments of the Government of Iran that the persecution is not based on religion, is an important point," said Mr. Ahderom. "The Sub-Commission is, of course, composed of independent experts from many nations and its judgement accordingly carries considerable weight."

Mr. Ahderom noted, for example, that the Sub-Commission took pains to note in its resolution that it "rejects any cultural or religious justification of the breach of universal human rights standards."

"That seems to refer to the attempts made, during the World Conference on Human Rights in June, to dilute the protections given to religious minorities by international law under the pretext that due consideration be given to regional, cultural, and religious peculiarities," Mr. Ahderom said.

In recent months, Mr. Ahderom said, the Government of Iran has sought somehow to justify the oppression of Bahá'ís by claiming that the Bahá'í community of Iran is a political group, and that Bahá'ís are therefore undeserving of the protections for religious freedom enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international covenants.

"Attempts by the Government of Iran to portray the Bahá'ís as anything other than a peaceful and law-abiding religious community is disinformation and worse," said Mr. Ahderom. "Bahá'ís, by the very principles of their faith, are forbidden from participation in partisan politics, and from any resort to violence or subversion."

Since the 1979, more than 200 Bahá'ís in Iran have been killed and hundreds more imprisoned. Although the executions have slowed in recent years, a heretofore secret Iranian Government document calling for Bahá'ís to be treated "such that their progress and development shall be blocked" came to light early this year.

Drawn up by the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and signed by President Ali Khamenei, the 1991 memorandum also urged efforts to "combat and destroy the cultural roots" of the Faith outside of Iran.

In June, the municipal Government of Teheran dug up and removed the bodies of Bahá'ís from a Bahá'í cemetery, to make way for the construction of a cultural center. ✪

The United Nations Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities takes note of the "systematic repression of the Bahá'í community."

Mrs. Fatima Traazil, shown shopping with her trademark cloth grocery bag. On an island-city that is just beginning to develop a green consciousness, she is setting a powerful example of individual activism.

In Singapore, a "Green Housewife" shows what individuals can do for the environment

Her renown has come from a grassroots-oriented campaign to promote sound environmental principles, a campaign she has undertaken largely at her own expense.

SINGAPORE — When Fatima Traazil goes to the market, she takes the same cloth shopping bag she has used for eight years, along with several reusable plastic and metal containers. She often walks the 17 flights of stairs down from her apartment to save electricity by not using the elevator. And she and her friends exchange vegetarian recipes and try to avoid eating meat.

The importance of such everyday activities in helping to protect the environment is just beginning to be realized by the citizens of this Asian island city-state — a realization that Mrs. Traazil has helped to advance.

For her efforts, Mrs. Traazil has been called everything from "Green Housewife" to a "one-woman advocate for the green movement." Singapore Television featured her shopping routine — with her cloth tote bag and reusable containers.

In 1992, she was one of two recipients of the "Green Leaf Award" from the Singapore Ministry for the Environment. The Ministry recognized her for "her energy and enthusiasm ... in spreading the message of environmentalism."

Her renown has come from a grassroots-oriented campaign to promote sound environmental principles, a campaign she has undertaken largely at her own expense.

In 1990, for example, she created and printed (on recycled paper and in English and Chinese) 100,000 copies of a pamphlet entitled "Ozone, Pollution and You."

Later that year, Mrs. Traazil bought thousands of biodegradable plastic bags. The bags were produced, but not distributed in Singapore, and were unavailable to merchants. "I sold them to shopkeepers and lost a few dollars on every package of 500," she said. "But for the shopkeepers, it was the same price as the non-biodegradable bags."

Mrs. Traazil says it was "love for my children" that prompted her to embark on a campaign to "to begin cleaning up the mess I have contributed to making." She realized, she said, that they would inherit all of the environmental problems humanity is creating today.

Her campaign also began shortly after she became a Bahá'í. Mrs. Traazil says she saw a commitment to the environment as one way that she could serve mankind as a Bahá'í.

"Being a Bahá'í helps give you a vision, see things more clearly," she says. "I see my work with the environment as part of my relationship with God and with His earth."

And in many aspects of her work, Mrs. Traazil has enjoyed the assistance of the Bahá'í community of Singapore. Bahá'ís here have helped her to distribute the pamphlets

Green Housewife

(Continued from page 14)

she has printed, carrying them out into Singapore's many large apartment blocks.

After receiving the "Green Leaf Award" in 1992, Mrs. Traazil was appointed to the National Council of the Environment, a prestigious government-appointed advisory body whose other members include the chief executive officers of McDonald's and the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, as well as Singapore government officials. Mrs. Traazil is the only woman and the only "grassroots" member of the Council's board.

"In the sense that the other Council members are often looking at things from an industrial and commercial point of view, and considering that women are in fact among the main consumers now, I feel I have a certain contribution to give to them," Mrs. Traazil said. ✪

Review: Global Society

(Continued from back page)

mat and professor a the University of Cameroon, calls for the development of a new human-centered ethic for the public sector, saying that only by "stressing the importance of the human being in the context of the global society can we help to change the narrowness of vision among states and limit the phenomenon of the pursuit of short-term self-interest."

John Huddleston, an economist with the International Monetary Fund, who is also a Bahá'í, argues that a successful transition to a global future can only be made with a clear and concrete vision of how we want that future to be.

"A society needs vision because it is a powerful motivator for forward movement; conversely in the absence of vision a society can slip backwards toward disintegration," he writes, following with a quote from Proverbs: "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Noting that some 80 percent of the world's population is still strongly influenced by religion, he argues that only in the universal themes of religion can there be found a vision which is capable of bringing humanity together.

"Finding a new vision and an associated new system of values is a vital component of the process of evolving towards a peaceful global society," he concludes. "In searching for such a vision, there should be an objective analysis of what is offered by religious experience: the source of the great visions of the past."

In sum, the power and diversity of the opinions offered within the pages of *Transition to a Global Society* are extremely thought-provoking. As such, the volume is an important addition to the literature examining humanity's options for the future. In its call for new values for a new age, especially, it offers much in helping to show the way to a new world order. ✪

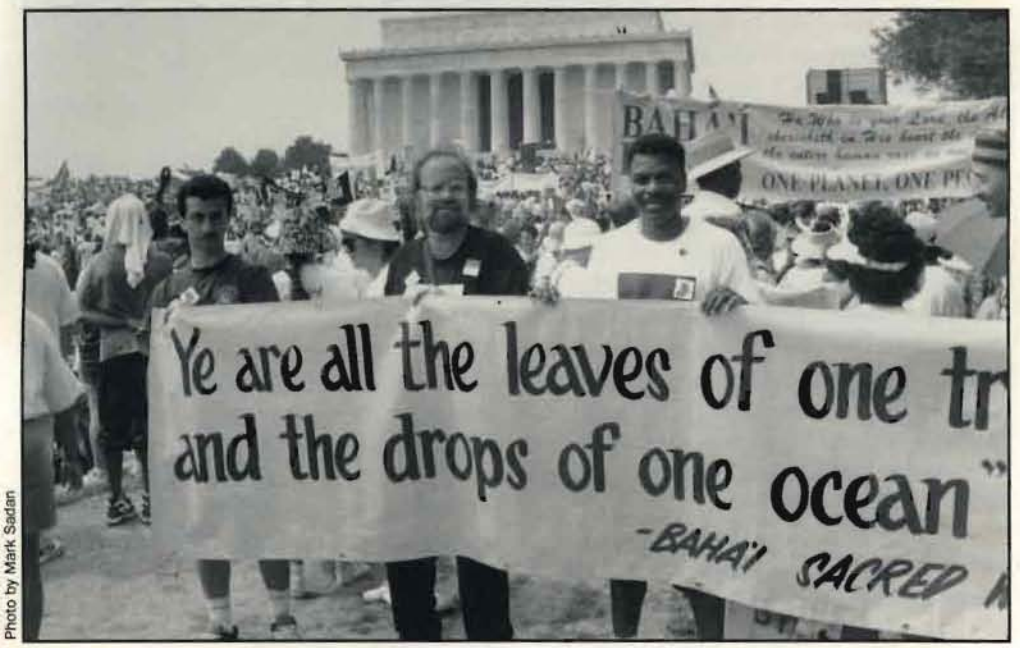


Photo by Mark Sadan

The Bahá'í community of the United States of America participated in September in the 25th anniversary of the civil rights' movement's 1968 March on Washington, which was led by Dr. Martin Luther King. Bahá'í participants are shown at left in Washington, D.C., holding a banner with the words of Bahá'u'lláh: "Ye are all the leaves of one tree and the drops of one ocean."

It's only one world—now how do we manage it?

Transition to a Global Society

Edited by Suheil Bushrui, Iraj Ayman & Ervin Laszlo

Oneworld

Oxford

Review

That the world is speeding headlong towards unity seems today an incontrovertible fact.

The contraction of distance, brought about by modern communications and transportation, the obvious interdependence of world markets and economies, and the indisputable interconnectedness of the earth's ecosystem are just a few of the phenomena that demonstrate the oneness of our world.

Recognition of this reality poses certain key questions, including: What sort of global society will arise from these trends, what would be the preferred structures of a united world, and how can we influence their creation?

In helping us to see the possibilities, *Transition to a Global Society* offers an important service — along with an extremely stimulating range of visions and ideas about how best to smooth the advance of globalism.

The book is a collection of papers presented by a gathering of top-rank thinkers at the First International Dialogue on the Transition to a Global Society, which was held at Landegg Academy in Switzerland in September 1990.

It is in the wide range of background and disciplines of the authors that *Transition to a Global Society* draws its greatest strength: a diversity of thought and ideas about how humanity can ease the potential dislocations that will inevitably be caused by its unification.

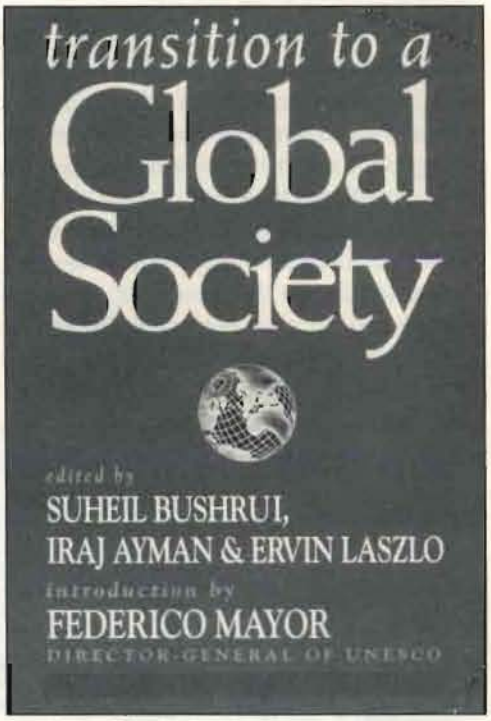
The authors range from Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine, who discusses the importance of systems theory in understanding the process of globalization, to Club of Rome member Bertrand Schneider, who analyzes the major obstacles facing the coming world civilization; from Dieter Tober, an international banker who discusses the role of world business in smoothing the transition, to poet Kathleen Raine, who describes the importance of the arts in helping us to forge a new universal reality.

Most of the authors approach the subject with optimism, suggesting that the move toward one world is a positive trend, and that the humanity's long-held dream of an era of peace, justice, and plenty for all is achievable.

However, such a transition will not likely come easily, the authors say. It will require significant and sometimes difficult changes in our collective ways of thinking. Indeed, despite the diverse points of view presented in this book, there emerges in this collection an important underlying theme: that humanity needs new values for a new era.

Bertrand Schneider, for example, writes that the "permanent quest of humanity for new values to permit an equitable and harmonious way of life for both societies and individuals is an essential part of the global *problematique*."

Volodymyr Vassilenko, a professor at the Institute of Foreign Relations and International Law at Kiev State University, says that the foundation for world unity must be based on the recognition of the principle of "diversity in unity and unity in diversity" as a basic principle of public governance in the



framework of any future global society. "Only unconditional compliance with this fundamental and universal principle of natural and social life will make possible the creation of a global society capable of securing social justice, solidarity, altruism, and respect for human rights and dignity of all peoples," he said.

Adamou Ndam Njoya, a former diplo-

(Continued on page 15)