

# Bonds that Sustain

## Bahá'í Community-Building Efforts Through the Lens of Disaster Response

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*“Now our Local Spiritual Assembly<sup>1</sup> will meet and lead the reconstruction process for the community to follow. We know that we should not depend on aid donors, but that we should take charge of our own development. For the reconstruction process, we will use the same tools and instruments that we used for the expansion and consolidation of our community.”*

*—a resident of Namasmene village, Tanna island, Vanuatu*

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In 2014 the Universal House of Justice<sup>2</sup> highlighted the island of Tanna, in the South Pacific nation of Vanuatu, as an example of that pattern of collective life, “spiritual, dynamic, transformative,” that Bahá'ís and their like-minded collaborators everywhere are working to bring about. Groups for young adolescents were flourishing, “urged on by the support of village chiefs who see how the participants are spiritually empowered.” Youth were learning to dispel “the languor of passivity within themselves” and residents of all ages were being “galvanized into constructive action”<sup>3</sup>. A full third of the island’s 30,000 inhabitants were engaged in an expanding conversation about the significance of a local House of Worship<sup>4</sup> to be established in their midst.

Less than a year later, Tanna was decimated by the strongest cyclone<sup>5</sup> ever recorded, by wind speed, in the South Pacific. Ninety percent of all structures were damaged or destroyed. Communications were completely cut off.

Looking at the constructive responses to this devastation gives us a deeper understanding of the significance of the patterns of action to which Bahá'í communities everywhere have committed themselves through their community-building efforts.

In numerous parts of the world, as growing numbers contribute to processes of social transformation, they come to view themselves as protagonists in the ongoing advancement of society. And when natural disasters have struck some of these communities, they have applied what they have learned to response and recovery efforts. In the process, they have shown qualities of resilience, selflessness, resourcefulness, and creativity.

The Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office,<sup>6</sup> in addition to its engagement with various global fora, provides assistance and advice to national Bahá'í communities in the aftermath of major natural disasters. In recent years, it has

strengthened a global process of learning among national communities in light of growing experience in this area. The Bahá'í International Community seeks to facilitate exploration of the means by which Bahá'í communities' response to natural disasters can become more coherent with the framework for action guiding other major areas of Bahá'í endeavor. It strives to expand understanding of how communities can reflect and draw strength from key principles, among these: that a prospering society "must achieve a dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual requirements of life,"<sup>7</sup> that "social change is not a project that one group of people carries out on behalf of another"<sup>8</sup>, that "every member of the human family has not only the right to benefit from a materially and spiritually prosperous civilization but also an obligation to contribute towards its construction,"<sup>9</sup> that "the scope and complexity of social action must be commensurate with the human resources available in a village or neighborhood to carry it forward,"<sup>10</sup> that "access to knowledge is the right of every human being, and participation in its generation, application and diffusion a responsibility that all must shoulder in the great enterprise of building a prosperous world civilization,"<sup>11</sup> and that "every contribution Bahá'ís make to the life of their society is aimed at fostering unity."<sup>12</sup>

Efforts along these lines are still in early stages in many areas. Yet sufficient experience has been generated that a few initial observations, drawn from the work of the Office, can now be offered for consideration and further exploration.

## An ever-advancing civilization, a system of human resource development

For Bahá'ís, humanitarian efforts are grounded in a particular view of the future—namely, that spiritually and materially prospering global civilization called for by Bahá'u'lláh,<sup>13</sup> which infuses their endeavors with meaning and purpose. In this context, disaster response emerges as one field of endeavor, among many others, in which wider principles, methods, and approaches are to be applied and refined.

The contributions that Bahá'í communities are able to offer in various arenas stem foremost from their growing ability to advance the expansion and consolidation of the Faith itself. "Involvement in the life of society will flourish as the capacity of the community to promote its own growth and to maintain its vitality is gradually raised," wrote the Universal House of Justice.<sup>14</sup> This growth, it noted, is intimately connected with the maturation of the training institute,<sup>15</sup> a worldwide system of spiritual and moral education, open to those of every background, that seeks to "help populations take charge of their own spiritual, social, and economic development."<sup>16</sup> Structured in stages to meet the developmental needs of differing ages, this system tends to the moral education of children, facilitates the spiritual empowerment of young adolescents, and allows increasing numbers of youth and adults to explore the application of spiritual teachings to daily life and to the challenges facing society.

The organizing principle of this process is the development of capabilities for meaningful service to society. Assisted to undertake increasingly complex acts of service, participants gradually gain the vision, confidence, and skills necessary to begin offering activities to others with less experience than themselves. In this way, a sizable portion of those who enter the process as participants can go on to shoulder increasing responsibility for its perpetuation and expansion. Serving in voluntary roles

such as teachers of classes or facilitators of study groups, they become contributors and resources. And as their capacity grows, a percentage begin to coordinate the efforts of others, at levels ranging from the neighborhood to the nation.

Understanding of the nature of this educational process is evolving through growing personal experience with its initiatives and the continued progress of clusters of communities.<sup>17</sup> Appreciation is increasing, for example, that the acts of service it fosters “are not merely activities to be multiplied but fundamental aspects of Bahá’í community life intended for all.”<sup>18</sup> How, then, do these community-building efforts relate to more traditional conceptions of disaster response and recovery, a field which is often highly focused on technical elements of service provision and delivery?

## Community-building capacities in times of disaster

While the initiatives described above are not focused on disaster response or recovery, experience has demonstrated that the abilities these community-building efforts strengthen, as well as the patterns of thought and behavior they foster, can have a significant impact in times of natural disaster. Consider, for example, the experience of the Bahá’ís in Vanuatu as they worked to recover from the devastation of Cyclone Pam in 2015.<sup>19</sup> One community member wrote:

The qualities we have gained over the years and the capacities we have developed while serving the Cause [have] truly helped us in dealing with the aftermath of the cyclone. For example, being able to read the reality of a situation, collecting statistics, planning, consulting, reflecting, being systematic, report writing, all these have been instrumental in the effectiveness of the relief operation for the first two weeks after the cyclone.

Some of the ways that Bahá’í community building efforts have assisted local populations in responding effectively to natural disasters include the following.

### Systems of coordination and communication

The capacity to organize large numbers in coordinated action has clear implications for response efforts. As community-building activities grow to the point where hundreds of inhabitants are supporting the participation of thousands of their fellow residents, systems emerge to manage the growing complexity. In some cases, Area Teaching Committees<sup>20</sup> and their channels of support, Auxiliary Board members<sup>21</sup> and their assistants, and schemes of coordination associated with the training institute have found that the capabilities they have developed have enabled them to facilitate communication and organize efforts in crisis conditions.

Operating at the level of the cluster but connected both to the region or nation, and to the neighborhood or village, such institutions and agencies have, for example, gathered information about local needs and conditions. They have facilitated the movement of relief supplies and their input has helped tailor national efforts to the needs of local populations. In the process, they have influenced Bahá’ís’ view of themselves and their role in responding to the adversity at hand. Such dynamics were evident following the powerful earthquake that Haiti experienced in 2010. One report explains:

From their experience with their respective communities through the expansion and consolidation work, the Cluster agencies<sup>22</sup> were most familiar with the needs and nuances of their neighbors, and therefore would be in the best position to determine how the available relief aid should be distributed. ... Upon receipt of the supplies, each Cluster determined the method and process to be used for their distribution in the neighborhoods within their Cluster. ... The devolution of the relief response to the Cluster level proved to be empowering to the Bahá'í community. It was noted early on that the Bahá'ís, who themselves were “victims” of the disaster, were transformed into protagonists when presented with the challenge and opportunity of service, arising to action upon being given the opportunity and responsibility to deliver aid to their neighbors.

Organizational skills such as the ability to maintain basic statistics, to plan based on resources, and to operate in a mode of learning—characterized by regular reflection on efforts undertaken, results seen, and adjustments needed—similarly allow response efforts to expand as needed in scale and scope. The ability to gather accurate data and formulate actionable plans around it can be pivotal in disaster conditions. When eastern regions of India faced a powerful cyclone in 1999, the Bahá'í community did not have access to updated statistics, nor was it able to effectively utilize the data it did have. Response efforts were therefore coordinated primarily by individual Bahá'ís according to whatever information was personally available to them. When the same region faced severe flooding in 2011, however:

Relief and counseling were systematically provided through [cluster agencies]. Because updated data was available, there was a steady flow of information sharing, and intensive visits were made to the homes of those affected. No one was left alone. ... There was a growing realization, both among the Bahá'ís as well as among friends from the wider society, that they were witnessing a strong, united, and supportive religious community.

The ability to mobilize resources at the grassroots is, itself, a capacity of great value, and one that is well appreciated in humanitarian circles. “People are the central agents of their lives and are the first and last responders to any crisis,” wrote the Secretary General of the United Nations, asserting that efforts to reduce vulnerability and strengthen resilience must necessarily begin at the local level.<sup>23</sup> Generating broad-based movement within a population has been shown to be as much a matter of relationships, volition, and collective agency, as it is of funding, supplies, and logistics. In this regard, it is only natural that efforts to build unity of thought, vision, and action around the elements of the current series of global plans defined by the Universal House of Justice have assisted communities to draw more effectively on internal resources in times of need. In the flooding mentioned above:

... it was quite clear that the real strength lay in the Local Spiritual Assemblies. Their level of activity did not appear to be as great as compared to many NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and the resources that were available to the Local Assemblies were also limited. But they discovered that the real manpower was in the field, in the grassroots resources, which the Local Assemblies had. Although many outside relief agencies came in with food and other resources, they had no way to distribute these quickly. On the other hand, even the poorest

of Bahá'í Assemblies was able to mobilize efforts rapidly. One Local Assembly, in utmost poverty and with humility, arranged for food and distributed it to more than 600 people. They contributed ideas, gave guidance and participated in the relief work.

## Drawing on the power of consensus and unity

Fostering cooperation and a sense of shared endeavor across a diverse populace is another capacity that is intimately related to both Bahá'í community-building endeavors and disaster response initiatives. As effort is made to welcome increasing numbers into thoughtful discussion on the direction of their collective development, decision-making processes become more participatory. Perspectives of young and old, women and men, from diverse backgrounds are sought and considered—an approach that, in turn, attracts the participation of others. Throughout this process, Bahá'ís are learning how to help participants employ elements of the principle of consultation.<sup>24</sup> Among these: that the deliberative process must take as its goal the search for truth and exploration of relevant realities, rather than the promotion of personal interests and agendas; that the participation of each individual is to be characterized by qualities such as prayerfulness, humility, detachment, and patience; that while “the shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions,”<sup>25</sup> the “first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members”;<sup>26</sup> that once a view has been contributed, it belongs to the group as a whole, to use or set aside as best serves the issue at hand; and that once a decision has been reached, all members are to lend their full support to its implementation and fair-minded assessment.

As such dynamics take root in a community, the population becomes better able to make collective decisions about the allocation of limited resources. Moreover, it seeks to do so in ways that are unifying, supported by all, and reflective of true consensus, rather than simply the contested outcome of a majority of voices. This becomes invaluable when supplies are scarce and contact with the external world tenuous. Following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, many local Bahá'í communities provided relief equally to all or experimented with matching assistance to household size. But one community, in consultation with both the local population and a national-level Bahá'í task force, provided supplies first and most extensively to families whose needs were seen to be most urgent. Those involved understood that basing support on subjective judgments of hardship had the potential to create certain challenges, and tensions did arise at times. But the community was able to draw on consultative capacities to constructively resolve these differences. In this regard, one organizer noted that the distribution:

... was accomplished without fights and shouting, or appropriation by authorities at different levels, but with calm and understanding. Emerging jealousies were resolved with dialogue.

As a community gains capacity to both draw on the talents of all its members and to meet their needs, its ability to act according to the principle of the oneness of humankind is strengthened. Striving to serve others without distinction, its members learn how to discern the often-subtle dynamics that contradict the imperatives of unity. Bahá'í agencies in one coastal town in the Philippines, for example, noticed that while relief supplies generally reached population centers such as their own, a small

offshore island was largely overlooked. When Typhoon Haiyan struck in 2013, the Bahá'í community used its limited resources to help meet the needs of the residents of that island, most of whom were not Bahá'ís.

## Facilitating collective inquiry and action

The current series of global plans articulated by the House of Justice seeks to involve growing numbers in an informed exploration of the nature of human well-being and the means by which it can be advanced. This process is animated by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh but welcomes everyone of like mind. The House of Justice has written:

[E]very human being and every group of individuals, irrespective of whether they are counted among His followers, can take inspiration from His teachings, benefiting from whatever gems of wisdom and knowledge will aid them in addressing the challenges they face. ... Numerous groups and organizations, animated by the spirit of world solidarity that is an indirect manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh's conception of the principle of the oneness of humankind, will contribute to the civilization destined to emerge out of the welter and chaos of present-day society.<sup>27</sup>

Bahá'í communities around the world are discovering that working with those from the wider community in a spirit of collaboration and common enterprise allows far more to be achieved than would be by working alone. These habits of thought and qualities of spirit also prove fruitful in the realm of disaster response.

Bahá'ís in the eastern region of the Caribbean island of Dominica, for example, though numerically quite modest, facilitated a series of public discussions that delved into social and spiritual aspects of community health after Hurricane Maria in 2017.<sup>28</sup> Participants in one such discussion identified a sense of normalcy and stability as a central need for community members, particularly among the younger generations. The local school was functioning, but instead of the uniforms customary for the area, students were wearing whatever clothes were available, which many felt contributed to a general sense of disorder in the community. School uniforms were therefore identified as a priority, but one that would not likely be addressed by external relief agencies. Further discussion, however, revealed that what was truly needed was not uniforms, but rather fabric: many local residents knew how to sew, and those consulting together wanted the community as a whole to have ownership in the process of re-establishing the school. As clarity on these points emerged, a government official who had been observing the proceedings stood up and announced that the Dominican government was seeking means to inject capital into villages affected by the storm, in an effort to reestablish local economies. If fabric could be secured, he declared, he would find funding to pay community members to sew the uniforms.

## Engaging the institutions of society

The description above raises the issue of engaging the institutions of society. As community-building efforts multiply in an area and begin to exert an influence on the direction of community life, it is not uncommon for governmental agencies to reach

out to the endeavors underway, providing a local population with its first experience of collaborating with governmental authorities from a position of confidence and mutual partnership, rather than need or apprehension. But benefits can flow in the other direction as well, even in the fraught atmosphere of a natural disaster. As one Bahá'í in Vanuatu wrote:

After the cyclone, I decided, after consulting with a member of the National Spiritual Assembly, to offer my volunteer services at the Provincial Government Headquarters' Disaster Management Office. We had to organize the Disaster Management Office to respond effectively to the needs of the people by distributing the relief that was being donated by aid organizations. The Office had to collect statistics to be able to effectively distribute the relief supplies. We used the tools and instruments I had learned about while serving as a [training institute] coordinator. We divided Tanna into sectors and collected statistics according to infants, children, junior youth, and adults. We also introduced the Bahá'í principles of consultation, action, and reflection ... Many aid organizations approach us when they encounter an obstacle. We suggest to them to work with the chiefs and consult with the people at the grassroots. We also suggested that the Office begin its operation every morning with prayers.

## Tending to spiritual needs, drawing on spiritual powers

Around the world, Bahá'ís and their like-minded collaborators are working to strengthen the devotional character of their communities.<sup>29</sup> Reaching out to neighbors of all backgrounds, they seek to create, in the intimate setting of the home, spaces for shared worship, exploration of the deeper meaning of life, and purposeful discussion of issues of common concern. Such explicitly spiritual objectives might seem tangential to traditional humanitarian concerns. Yet in times of natural disaster, people the world over grapple with existential questions at the most fundamental levels. And communities where people worship together in a variety of settings, make a habit of visiting one another in their homes, and regularly engage in conversations of significance are better equipped to remain hopeful, to see meaning, and to persevere and recover when disasters occur. Communities in which social ties are strong and spiritual roots run deep are more resilient in the face of disaster.

Devotional gatherings are often simple and informal. Yet in some cases, spaces for shared worship have become a central element in more traditional service delivery and provision. During the flooding in India:

The relief committee along with the cluster development facilitator<sup>30</sup> visited homes of individuals and prayed with them. During these devotionals, they would see what help was required. In some instances, where homes were completely destroyed and they needed a roof over their heads, the relief committee was able to arrange for them to take temporary refuge in those few homes that had not been washed away. At a prayer meeting held at the local Bahá'í Centre ... relief was provided in the form of financial assistance to the friends. Although they also needed help, most of the Bahá'ís declined the money because they wished to save the funds of the Faith.

Tending to the devotional character of a community can also help local populations assess collective well-being according to a much fuller range of factors. In particular, it builds capacity to address spiritual and emotional maladies, as well as more obvious physical ones. In Dominica, after Hurricane Maria, it was seen that:

One of their concern[s] is that [a certain city] was the hub for fishing ... but now it seems like the fishermen are very depressed and not motivated to go out fishing. We had some discussion how they as a community [can] help these men and what are some simple steps that they can take. It came to the conclusion that they have the equipment, but they just lost motivation. ... [The community] agreed that they will look at the names of the fishermen and next time we meet we can all go in small group of 3 or 4 and meet with them and find out what makes them happy and how to bring back their spirit of joy in fishing.

Experience has shown that concern for the quality of devotional life, both individual and collective, helps members of disaster-stricken communities revive within themselves and others a spirit of joy and optimism about the future. It reinforces the will not only to survive, but to *live* in the highest sense of the term. When Cyclone Pam struck Vanuatu, for example, Bahá'ís were just days from Naw-Rúz,<sup>31</sup> the Bahá'í new year festival, and in the midst of a period of daily fasting. Many lost virtually all their material goods. Yet in locality after locality, Bahá'ís celebrated the new year with the wider community around them. As one individual recounts:

After the cyclone our Local Spiritual Assembly made a plan to celebrate Naw-Rúz. The chiefs and all the people of the village were invited to celebrate it with us. Many believers fasted during the cyclone, and the people at our Naw-Rúz celebration commented that next year they are going to join the Bahá'ís in fasting ... We are confident that whatever we have lost to the cyclone we will regain through the blessings of Bahá'u'lláh. During the celebrations we shared with the people that soon we will restart the spiritual educational process in the village—the children's classes, the junior youth groups, and the study circles.

## The path ahead

The Universal House of Justice has written that, as individual believers continue to labor at the level of the cluster, they will “find themselves drawn further and further into the life of society” and that “once human resources in a cluster are in sufficient abundance, and the pattern of growth firmly established, the community's engagement with society can, and indeed must, increase.”<sup>32</sup> As this process advances, Bahá'í communities are challenged to “extend the process of systematic learning in which they are engaged to encompass a widening range of human endeavors.”<sup>33</sup>

Disaster response is one such area, and exploration of its requirements must continue for years to come. How is knowledge about resilient communities to be created and by whom? What are “recovery” and “progress” understood to mean and entail? In what ways will relationships, assumptions, and arrangements common to contemporary discourse and practice need to shift? And how does the Person of Bahá'u'lláh, as well as the efforts of those working to put His teachings into practice, relate to the realities of traditional disaster response?



Insight into such questions will be gained incrementally, as capacity to sustain both transformative action and profound learning expands in more and more localities. Such a process will be driven in part by those who are working to apply the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh to the construction of communities “whose ways will give hope to the world.”<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the wider society is also recognizing the indispensability of principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh. For example, in 2016 the Secretary General of the United Nations convened the first World Humanitarian Summit, and in his report to that gathering he identified “unified vision” as a prerequisite for transformational change:

In a globalized world, this vision needs to be inclusive and universal and to bring people, communities and countries together, while recognizing and transcending cultural, religious or political differences. It needs to be grounded in mutual benefit, where all stand to gain. At a time when many are expressing doubt in the ability of the international community to live up to the promises of the Charter of the United Nations ... we need, more than ever, to reaffirm the values that connect us. Our vision for change must therefore be grounded in the value that unites us: our common humanity.<sup>35</sup>

Such clear affirmations of the oneness of humankind, the “pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve,”<sup>36</sup> suggest the potential for progress in humanitarian efforts and other fields. And as Bahá'ís and their friends work to realize this potential in more villages, neighborhoods, cities, and towns, they will be contributing their share to “the emergence of a united and prospering world that might truly deserve to be called the kingdom of God on earth.”<sup>37</sup>

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*“As we were approaching [the] village, we saw three Bahá'í youth ... walking in the opposite direction under strong sun. We asked where they were going, and they said they were going to a nearby village to conduct their children's classes and junior youth groups. Later, in the village, we saw that their houses were destroyed and still unbuilt.”*

*—member of a team assessing damage from Cyclone Pam, Isla village, Tanna island, Vanuatu*

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## Notes

1. A Local Spiritual Assembly is a nine-member administrative and spiritual body tasked with overseeing the affairs of the Bahá'í community of a particular locality. Local Spiritual Assemblies are elected annually in an electoral process free from nominations, campaigning, and electioneering. See <http://www.bahai.org/beliefs/essential-relationships/administrative-order/local-spiritual-assembly>.
2. The Universal House of Justice is the international governing council of the Bahá'í Faith, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh in His book of laws. It is a nine-member body, elected every five years by the entire membership of all national Bahá'í assemblies. See <http://www.bahai.org/the-universal-house-of-justice>.
3. Ridván 2014 message of the Universal House of Justice

4. Houses of Worship, also referred to as *Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs* (“Dawning Place of the Mention of God”), are places of worship that give expression to a pattern of community life that seeks to integrate communal prayer and devotion with acts of service for the betterment of society. Open to those of all religions, Houses of Worship are devoted to prayer, meditation, and reading of the Word of God. Each is also associated with institutions for social and economic development, such as schools, hospitals, orphanages. See <http://www.bahai.org/action/devotional-life/mashriqul-adhkar>.
5. “Cyclone”, “hurricane”, and “typhoon” will be used interchangeably, according to the nomenclature of each area.
6. See [www.bic.org](http://www.bic.org).
7. Riḍván 2010 message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world
8. *ibid.*
9. *Social Action*, A paper prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá’í World Centre, 26 November 2012
10. Riḍván 2010 message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world
11. *ibid.*
12. Riḍván 2017 message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world
13. See <http://www.bahai.org/bahaullah/>.
14. Riḍván 2010 message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world
15. See <http://www.bahai.org/action/response-call-bahaullah/training-institute>.
16. Riḍván 2016 message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world
17. A cluster is a geographic construct, defined in light of culture, language, patterns of transport, infrastructure, and the social and economic life of the inhabitants, that is intended to facilitate planning for the material and spiritual development of local communities on a manageable scale. Clusters are often comprised of a collection of villages and towns, but sometimes, a large city and its suburbs may constitute an area of this kind.
18. 5 January 2015 message written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States
19. See <http://news.bahai.org/story/1095/>.
20. An Area Teaching Committee is a small deliberative body that seeks to foster beneficial patterns of community life in a locality. It works to support those arising to offer acts of service in various areas, such as establishing spaces for shared prayer and elevated discussion at the local level or building a culture of community members visiting one another in their homes. Area Teaching Committees are supported in their duties from the regional or sub-regional level.
21. Auxiliary Board members are individuals of proven ability and character who have been appointed to facilitate the growth and development of the Bahá’í Faith within a defined geographic area. Auxiliary Board members seek to support, encourage, inspire, and assist those in their area of focus. While holding a position of moral leadership, they exercise no institutional power or formal authority. See <http://www.bahai.org/beliefs/essential-relationships/administrative-order/institution-counsellors>.
22. Cluster agencies are composed of individuals working within a small geographic area to coordinate the contributions of the Bahá’í community to the betterment of society, primarily through the strengthening of the institute process and the mobilization of those who are trained.
23. *One Humanity: Shared Responsibility*, Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit, 2 February 2016
24. For selected readings on consultation, see <http://www.bahai.org/beliefs/universal-peace/articles-resources/consultation-quotes>.
25. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, Bahá’í World Centre, 1982 lightweight edition
26. *ibid.*
27. Riḍván 2010 message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world
28. See <http://news.bahai.org/story/1250/>.
29. See <http://www.bahai.org/action/devotional-life/>.
30. A cluster development facilitator provides many of the functions of an Area Teaching Committee, supporting clusters at earlier stages of development until the level of activity grows to the point where a full Committee becomes necessary.
31. See <http://news.bahai.org/story/1159/>.
32. Riḍván 2010 message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world

33. *ibid.*
34. Riḍván 2012 message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world
35. *One Humanity: Shared Responsibility*, Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit, 2 February 2016
36. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991
37. October 2017 message of the Universal House of Justice to all who celebrate the Glory of God