

## **Valuing Spirituality in Development**

Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development A concept paper presented to the "World Faiths and Development Dialogue," hosted by the President of the World Bank and the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace, London, England  
18-19 February 1998

### **Table of Contents**

Abstract

I. A Baha'i Perspective on Development

II. Development Indicators: Their Value and Use

III. Spiritually Based Indicators for Development: Initial Considerations

IV. Spiritually Based Indicators: Five Foundational Principles

1. Unity in Diversity
2. Equity and Justice
3. Equality of the Sexes
4. Trustworthiness and Moral Leadership
5. Independent Investigation of Truth

V. Spiritually Based Indicators: Five Priority Policy Areas

1. Economic Development
2. Education

3. Environmental Stewardship
4. Meeting Basic Needs in Food, Nutrition, Health and Shelter
5. Governance and Participation

VI. Developing Spiritually Based Indicators: Three Examples

VII. Toward the Development of Spiritually Based Indicators: Possible Collaborative Steps

---

## Abstract

This concept paper focuses on the importance of creating measures to assess development progress through the perspective of spiritual principles. The paper begins by outlining a Baha'i perspective on development. It then touches on the use of indicators today and introduces the concept of *spiritually based indicators* for development. It considers, albeit summarily, five spiritual principles crucial to development and five policy areas in which these principles might be applied to generate goals and indicators to measure progress toward these goals. Three brief examples of how such indicators might be conceived and developed are then presented. Finally, a collaborative initiative to develop spiritually based indicators for development, involving the religions and a major international development agency, is suggested.

The actual development of these measures is far beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, the intent of the paper is, as the subtitle states, to offer *initial considerations regarding the creation of spiritually based indicators for development* with the hope that a consultative process might be launched in which the difficult, yet deeply rewarding, work of conceptualizing and developing such indicators would begin in earnest.

---

## I. A Baha'i Perspective On Development

Development, in the Baha'i view, is an organic process in which "*the spiritual is expressed and carried out in the material.*" [1] Meaningful development requires that the seemingly antithetical processes of individual progress and social advancement, of globalization and decentralization, and of promoting universal standards and fostering cultural diversity, be harmonized. In our increasingly interdependent world, development efforts must be guided by a vision of the type of world community we wish to create and be animated by a set of universal values. Just institutions, from the local to the planetary level, and systems of governance in which people can assume responsibility for the institutions and processes that affect their lives, are also essential.

Baha'u'llah teaches that recognition of the fundamental spiritual principle of our age, *the oneness of humanity*, must be at the heart of a new civilization. Universal acceptance of this principle will both necessitate and make possible major restructuring of the world's educational, social, agricultural, industrial, economic, legal and political systems. This restructuring, which must be ordered by an ongoing and intensive dialogue between the two systems of knowledge available to humankind - science and religion - will facilitate the emergence of peace and justice throughout the world.

Communities that thrive and prosper in this future will do so because they acknowledge the spiritual dimension of human nature and make the moral, emotional, physical and intellectual development of the individual a central priority. They will guarantee freedom of religion and encourage the establishment of places of worship. Their centers of learning will seek to cultivate the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness and will pursue as a major goal the participation of all peoples in generating and applying knowledge. Remembering at all times that the interests of the individual and of society are inseparable, these communities will promote respect for both rights and responsibilities, will foster the equality and partnership of women and men, and will protect and nurture families. They will promote beauty, natural and man-made, and will incorporate into their design, principles of environmental preservation and rehabilitation. Guided by the concept of unity in diversity, they will support widespread participation in the affairs of society, and will increasingly turn to leaders who are motivated by the desire to serve. In these communities the fruits of science and technology will benefit the whole society, and work will be available for all.

Communities such as these will prove to be the pillars of a world civilization - a civilization that will be the logical culmination of humanity's development efforts over vast stretches of time and geography. Baha'u'llah's statement that all people are "*created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization,*" [2] implies that every person has both the right and the responsibility to contribute to this historic and far-reaching, collective enterprise, whose goal is nothing less than the peace, the prosperity and the unity of the entire human family.

Baha'is are optimistic that such a future is inevitable and, indeed, already beginning to emerge. They are also realistic, understanding that progress toward this future will require of mankind an enormous amount of perseverance, sacrifice and change. The precise speed and cost of this progress will be determined largely by the actions, in the years immediately ahead, of governments, multilateral organizations, the private sector, organizations of civil society, and key individuals. In striving toward this future, all concerned must clearly understand what they are working for and must be ever vigilant through self-reflection and self-evaluation if they are to become constructive participants in this process. Therefore, clear goals, meaningful policies and standards, identified programs, and agreed upon indicators of progress are necessary if advancement toward humanity's common future is to be charted and regular corrections to that course determined and carried out.

While each of these elements - relevant goals, policies, standards, programs and indicators - is critical to efforts to craft such a future, this paper focuses on the importance of creating spiritually based indicators to assess and, ultimately, to help guide development progress.

## **II. Development Indicators: Their Value and Use**

The concept of indicators is defined in various ways, and the terms *criteria*, *benchmark*, and *indicator* are often used interchangeably, although they don't necessarily mean the same thing. For the purpose of this paper the term *indicator* will be used to refer to "a quantitative, qualitative or descriptive measure that, when periodically... monitored" [3] can show the quality, direction, pace and results of change.

Indicators can be assembled in various ways. For instance, topically related indicators measuring progress in health, education or agriculture might be grouped into a table of measures (a set of indicators). The same indicators might be compiled into an index and then presented as a single, composite measure such as a health profile index, an education index or a food security index. [4] Or, a broad spectrum of indicators related to various phenomena may be expressed in a single measure, such as the "infant mortality rate." [5]

Rarely can an indicator stand alone as a meaningful source of information. [6] Progress is not an event or a statistic, but a process - a trend made up of numerous factors. It cannot be expressed by one measure or by reference to a single point in time. Indicators must, therefore, be placed in a specific temporal context and correlated with measures of other related factors. [7]

Throughout the world, indicators are used by various actors, from United Nations (UN) agencies, governments and community groups, to businesses, educational institutions, policy groups and academicians. Indicators do not change reality, but they do help to shape the way we perceive it, and they serve to forge a common understanding of development. They are, therefore, of fundamental importance to a complex and rapidly changing world. For instance, they can be used to graph trends and indicate relationships, thereby helping to define issues and clarify challenges that confront a particular society. They provide information that may indicate a need for adjustments and corrections to policies, goals, priorities, programs, attitudes and behaviors. Indicators can be used to draw attention to particular issues, to create public awareness, commitment and activism around specific needs and challenges. They can suggest a more equitable allocation of limited resources, or trigger a shift of resources from one area to another where there is an identified, pressing need. Hence, in a real sense, "indicators don't just monitor progress; they help make it happen." [8]

On the other hand, there are numerous shortcomings and pitfalls associated with indicators. For instance, statistics, which serve as the basis of most indicators, can be subject to various configurations and interpretations. Many indicator sets are time static; others are very narrow in focus, yet they are taken to represent a community's state of well-being and progress. Furthermore, too often indicators are not paired with goals nor are they viewed through the lens of historical process.

## **The state of development indicators today**

Today, there are numerous notable efforts, many of which are still conceptual in nature, to extend the boundaries of what is valued and measured, to make development indicators more reflective of what actually constitutes individual and community progress. These efforts, which involve a diversity of organizations, institutions and individuals at all levels of society, are attempting to define and measure progress in terms of such concepts as *human capital*, *social capital*, *culture*, *social integration* and *community well-being*.

For example, the annual *Human Development Report* of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with its Human Development Index, has been instrumental in broadening the range and scope of development indicators that are considered within the UN system and by governments around the world. [9] The global action plans that came out of the major UN conferences of this decade [10] have helped shift the dominant view of development from that of a top-down, largely technically and economically driven process to one in which people and communities increasingly define and take responsibility for their own progress. These action plans have called for the creation and use of indicators that capture this emerging focus on people and communities. [11] In a series of Joint Occasional Papers recently issued by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the concept of cultural indicators, including individual and social well-being, and the ability of people to live together, is explored within various frameworks. [12] The World Bank itself has been at the forefront of developing the concept of *social capital* and of seeking ways to measure it. [13] Moreover, NGOs, foundations and community groups have initiated various indicator projects that seek to measure, and thus value, people- and community-centered development; [14] these projects often involve the community in conceiving and developing indicators.

As important as such efforts are, they are only preliminary steps in the process of charting a new direction for the human family. Not only do these efforts need to be greatly expanded, but new approaches to conceptualizing and measuring both the tangible and the intangible aspects of development need to be explored and developed. Notions of what constitute efficacious measures of development need to be closely examined to determine the extent to which they take into account that which is central to human purpose and motivation.

In the following sections, one such approach - developing spiritually based indicators for development - is considered. While the present tense is used in this section, it should be borne in mind that these indicators have yet to be constructed. Moreover, this paper is intended only as an initial exploration of some of the elements of such indicators, not as an attempt to fully construct them.

### III. Spiritually Based Indicators for Development: Initial Considerations

The idea of developing spiritually based indicators for development is timely. The initial ground is being prepared, in part, by a growing number of efforts to have spiritual values and principles seriously considered in development. "Moreover, the concept of spirituality and spiritual values, once almost taboo in most UN development-related deliberations, is now being articulated at the highest levels.

Spiritually based indicators assess development progress as a function of the application of spiritual principles. [16] These indicators are based on universal principles which are essential to the development of the human spirit and, therefore, to individual and collective progress. These measures emerge from a vision of development in which material progress serves as a vehicle for spiritual and cultural advancement.

Spiritually based indicators help to establish, clarify and prioritize goals, policies and programs. At the heart of their conceptualization is the understanding that human nature is fundamentally spiritual and that spiritual principles, which resonate with the human soul, provide an enormous motivational power for sacrifice and change. Therefore, the peoples of the world will be much more inclined to support policies and programs that emerge from the development of indicators based on spiritual principles than they would be to endorse objectives and initiatives which are based on a purely material conception of life. The use of these measures could, thus, help to transform not only the vision but the actual practice of development.

The components of a spiritually based indicator include a vision of a peaceful and united future; the selected principle(s) crucial to the realization of that future; the policy area addressed by the principle(s); and the goal toward which the measure assesses progress. The indicator is quantitatively or qualitatively measurable and verifiable, and it is adaptable within a wide diversity of contexts without violating the integrity of the principle(s) involved.

The following section explores briefly five principles that might be used in constructing spiritually based indicators of development.

## IV. Spiritually Based Indicators: Five Foundational Principles

Based on the vision of a just, united and sustainable global civilization, five spiritual principles [17] that are foundational to the realization of such a future are presented. While they are by no means the only principles necessary to consider, it is felt that these five contain a sufficient diversity of concepts to serve as starting point for this effort. In some cases, two closely related principles are paired. As the intent of this

section is merely to suggest some principles that might be explored, each is only cursorily treated. However, since these principles are the very basis of the indicators that would be constructed, it would be extremely important to clearly define them in the initial stage of the work. The five principles are

1. unity in diversity;
2. equity and justice;
3. equality of the sexes;
4. trustworthiness and moral leadership; and
5. independent investigation of truth.

## 1. Unity in Diversity

Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it [*the principle of the oneness of humanity*] seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world. It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided. It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity. [18]

The concept of *unity in diversity* is a way of expressing the principle of the *oneness of humanity*, as espoused by the Baha'i Teachings. Unity in diversity stands in contrast to uniformity. It cherishes the natural diversity of temperament and talents among individuals as well as humanity's variegated experiences, cultures and viewpoints, inasmuch as they contribute to the human family's progress and well-being. Much like the role played by the gene pool in the biological life of humankind and its environment, the immense wealth of cultural diversity achieved over thousands of years is vital to the development of the human race which is experiencing its collective coming-of-age. It represents a heritage that enriches us all and that must be permitted to bear its fruit in a global civilization. Acceptance of the concept of unity in diversity, therefore, implies the development in the individual of a global consciousness, a sense of world citizenship, and a love for humanity as a whole. In this regard, each individual needs to understand that, since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the human race is born into the world as a trust of the whole and that the advantage of the part in a world society is best served by promoting the advantage of the whole.

## 2. Equity and Justice

*Justice and equity are twin Guardians that watch over men. [19] From them are revealed such blessed and perspicuous words as are the cause of the well-being of the world and the protection of*

*the nations.* [20]

Equity is fairness, the standard by which each person and group is able to maximize the development of their latent capacities. Equity differs from absolute equality in that it does not dictate that all be treated in exactly the same way. While everyone is endowed with talents and abilities, the full development of these capacities may require different approaches. It is equity that ensures that access and opportunity are fairly distributed so that this development might take place.

Equity and justice are the twin guardians of society. Equity is the standard by which policy and resource commitment decisions should be made. Justice is the vehicle through which equity is applied, its practical expression in the life of the individual and society. It is only through the exercise of true justice that trust will be established among the diverse peoples, cultures and institutions of an increasingly interdependent world.

The Baha'i Teachings state that the pillars of justice are reward and punishment. Those who act justly deserve reward, whether tangible or intangible, for such behavior. Those who act unjustly are in need of appropriate sanction both to arrest the injustice and to safeguard their own spiritual well-being.

### **3. Equality of the Sexes**

*The world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly. Until womankind reaches the same degree as man, until she enjoys the same arena of activity, extraordinary attainment for humanity will not be realized; humanity cannot wing its way to heights of real attainment.* [21]

The principle of the equality of the sexes is fundamental to all realistic thinking about the future well-being of the earth and its people. It represents a truth about human nature that has waited largely unrecognized throughout the long ages of humankind's childhood and adolescence. Whatever social inequities may have been dictated by the survival requirements of the past, they clearly cannot be justified at a time when humanity stands at the threshold of maturity.

The denial of equality perpetrates injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which peace can emerge and a just and united world civilization develop and flourish. Therefore, a deep commitment to the establishment of equality between men and women, in all departments of life and at every level of society, will be essential to humanity's advancement.

### **4. Trustworthiness and Moral Leadership**

*[I]n the sight of God, trustworthiness is the bedrock of His Faith and the foundation of all virtues and perfections. A man deprived of this quality is destitute of everything. What shall faith and piety avail if trustworthiness be lacking? Of what consequence can they be? What benefit or advantage can they confer?* [22]

Of the manifold virtues in Baha'i Scriptures which the individual is exhorted to cultivate, trustworthiness is of the first rank. Baha'u'llah states that the tranquility and security of the world, the stability of every affair - of every human transaction, of every contract negotiated, of every endeavor promulgated - depend on it. Whether in the home, at work, in the community or in business or political affairs, trustworthiness is at the heart of all constructive interaction and engagement. It is key to the maintenance of unity between diverse

peoples and nations. Therefore, every development effort must include as a prime objective the inculcation of trustworthiness in the individuals, communities and institutions involved.

Those who wield authority bear a great responsibility to be worthy of public trust. Leaders - including those in government, politics, business, religion, education, the media, the arts and community organizations - must be willing to be held accountable for the manner in which they exercise their authority. Trustworthiness and an active morality must become the foundation for all leadership if true progress is to be achieved. *Moral leadership*, [23] the leadership of the future, will find its highest expression in service to others and to the community as a whole. It will foster collective decision-making and collective action and will be motivated by a commitment to justice, including the equality of women and men, and to the well-being of all humanity. Moral leadership will manifest itself in adherence to a single standard of conduct in both public and private life, for leaders and for citizens alike.

## 5. Independent Investigation of Truth

*[A]ll the nations of the world have to investigate after truth independently and turn their eyes from the moribund blind imitations of the past ages entirely. Truth is one when it is independently investigated, it does not accept division. Therefore the independent investigation of truth will lead to the oneness of the world of humanity. [24]*

*There is no contradiction between true religion and science. [25]*

Reality is one, and when truth is investigated and ascertained, it will lead to individual and collective progress. In the quest for truth, science and religion - the two systems of knowledge available to humankind - must closely and continuously interact. The insights and skills that represent scientific accomplishment must look to the force of spiritual commitment and moral principle to ensure their appropriate application.

Spiritual development involves investigating truth for one's self. Continual reflection, based on experience in applying this truth, is critical to the process of spiritual development. For collective investigation of truth and group decision making, consultation, [26] which draws on the strength of the group and fosters unity of purpose and action, is indispensable. Institutions and those in positions of authority would do well to create conditions amenable to the meaningful investigation of truth, while fostering the understanding that human happiness and the establishment of peace, justice and unity are the ultimate goals of this investigation.

## V. Spiritually Based Indicators: Five Priority Policy Areas

This section briefly examines five policy areas in which the principles identified above might be applied to generate goals and, eventually, spiritually based indicators to measure progress toward these goals. As with the spiritual principles discussed, these policy areas are interconnected and, in some cases, overlapping. Therefore, initiatives in one area will require action in others. The five areas briefly considered below are

1. economic development;
2. education;
3. environmental stewardship;



4. meeting basic needs in food, nutrition, health and shelter; and
5. governance and participation.

## 1. Economic Development

*Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor. If, on the other hand, it is expended for the promotion of knowledge, the founding of elementary and other schools, the encouragement of art and industry, the training of orphans and the poor - in brief, if it is dedicated to the welfare of society - its possessor will stand out before God and man as the most excellent of all who live on earth and will be accounted as one of the people of paradise. [27]*

Central to the task of reconceptualizing the organization of human affairs is arriving at a proper understanding of the role of economics. The failure to place economics into the broader context of humanity's social and spiritual existence has led to a corrosive materialism in the world's more economically advantaged regions, and persistent conditions of deprivation among the masses of the world's peoples. Economics should serve people's needs; societies should not be expected to reformulate themselves to fit economic models. The ultimate function of economic systems should be to equip the peoples and institutions of the world with the means to achieve the real purpose of development: that is, the cultivation of the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness.

Society must develop new economic models shaped by insights that arise from a sympathetic understanding of shared experience, from viewing human beings in relation one to another, and from a recognition of the central role that family and community play in social and spiritual well-being. Within institutions and organizations, priorities must be reassessed. Resources must be directed away from those agencies and programs that are damaging to the individual, societies and the environment, and directed toward those most germane to furthering a dynamic, just and thriving social order. Such economic systems will be strongly altruistic and cooperative in nature; they will provide meaningful employment [28] and will help to eradicate poverty in the world.

## 2. Education

*The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward. The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time. [29]*

The development of a global society calls for the cultivation of capacities far beyond anything the human race has so far been able to muster. The challenges ahead will require an enormous expansion in access to

knowledge on the part of individuals and organizations alike. Universal education [30] will be an indispensable contributor to this process of capacity building, but the effort will succeed only to the extent that both individuals and groups in every sector of society are able to acquire knowledge and to apply it to the shaping of human affairs.

Education must be lifelong. It should help people to develop the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills necessary to earn a livelihood and to contribute confidently and constructively to shaping communities that reflect principles of justice, equity and unity. It should also help the individual develop a sense of place and community, grounded in the local, but embracing the whole world. Successful education will cultivate virtue as the foundation for personal and collective well-being, and will nurture in individuals a deep sense of service and an active commitment to the welfare of their families, their communities, their countries, indeed, all mankind. It will encourage self-reflection and thinking in terms of historical process, and it will promote inspirational learning through such means as music, the arts, poetry, meditation and interaction with the natural environment.

### **3. Environmental Stewardship**

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions. [31]

Baha'i Scriptures describe nature as a reflection of the sacred. [32] They teach that nature should be valued and respected, but not worshipped; rather, it should serve humanity's efforts to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. However, in light of the interdependence of all parts of nature, and the importance of evolution and diversity "*to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole,*" [33] every effort should be made to preserve as much as possible the earth's bio-diversity and natural order.

As trustees, or stewards, of the planet's vast resources and biological diversity, humanity must learn to make use of the earth's natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable, in a manner that ensures sustainability and equity into the distant reaches of time. This attitude of stewardship will require full consideration of the potential environmental consequences of all development activities. It will compel humanity to temper its actions with moderation and humility, realizing that the true value of nature cannot be expressed in economic terms. It will also require a deep understanding of the natural world and its role in humanity's collective development - both material and spiritual. Therefore, sustainable environmental management must come to be seen not as a discretionary commitment mankind can weigh against other competing interests, but rather as a fundamental responsibility that must be shouldered - a pre-requisite for spiritual development as well as the individual's physical survival.

### **4. Meeting Basic Needs in Food, Nutrition, Health and Shelter**

In such a world society... [t]he economic resources of the world will be organized, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be coordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated ...The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral and spiritual life of the

entire human race. [34]

Issues of food, nutrition, health and shelter are central to the challenge of providing an adequate standard of living for all members of the human family. These issues cannot, however, be tackled solely as technical or economic problems. Eliminating hunger and malnutrition; establishing food security; providing adequate shelter; and achieving health for all will require a shift in values, a commitment to equity, and a corresponding reorientation of policies, goals and programs.

The technologies and resources exist to meet the basic needs of humanity and to eliminate poverty. Equity in the use of these technologies and resources, however, will come about only with certain understandings and commitments. While individuals must do their utmost to provide for themselves and their dependents, the community must accept responsibility, when necessary, to help meet basic needs. Access to development programs and their benefits must be ensured for all. The economics of food production and distribution will have to be reoriented and the critical role of the farmer in food and economic security properly valued. [35] With regard to health - the physical, spiritual, mental and social well-being of the individual [36] - access to clean water, shelter, and some form of cheap energy would go a long way toward eradicating the problems that currently plague vast numbers of individuals and communities. It must be acknowledged, however, that some illnesses reflect unwholesome human behavior. The inclusion of moral development in education would, therefore, help to reduce significantly certain current health problems.

## 5. Governance and Participation:

*Blessed is the ruler who succoureth the captive, and the rich one who careth for the poor, and the just one who secureth from the wrong doer the rights of the downtrodden, and happy the trustee who observeth that which the Ordainer, the Ancient of Days hath prescribed unto him. [37]*

Good governance is essential to social progress. While governance is often equated with government, it in fact involves much more. Governance occurs on all levels and encompasses the ways that formal government, non-governmental groups, community organizations and the private sector manage resources and affairs. Good governance is necessary if communities are to maintain their equilibrium, steer themselves through difficulties, and respond creatively to the challenges and opportunities ahead. Three factors that largely determine the state of governance are the quality of leadership, the quality of the governed and the quality of the structures and processes in place. There is an emerging international consensus on the core characteristics of good governance, especially in relation to formal government. These characteristics include democracy, the rule of law, accountability, transparency and participation by civil society.

This consensus must be enlarged, however, to encompass an appreciation of the role that governance must assume in promoting the spiritual and material well-being of all members of society. Governance must be guided by universal values, including an ethic of service to the common good. It will need to provide for the meaningful participation of citizens in the conceptualization, design, implementation and evaluation of programs and policies that affect them. It should seek to enhance people's ability to manage change and should offer opportunities to increase their capacities and sense of worth. It will need to provide mechanisms for equitable access to the benefits of programs and policies, to education and information, and to opportunities for lifelong learning. Moreover, it must help to ensure that the news media are active, vibrant and truthful. At the global level, a truly participatory system of governance will also need to be established.

## VI. Developing Spiritually Based Indicators: Three Examples

This section offers three brief examples of how spiritually based indicators might be constructed. Such indicators will, ultimately, be needed at all levels - local, national and global.

The first example of a spiritually based indicator explores the application of the principle of unity in diversity to educational policy. Beginning with a vision of development that accepts both the possibility and the necessity of a united and peaceful world, *unity in diversity* is identified as a spiritual principle essential to the realization of that future. A policy area is then chosen: in this case, *education*. By considering the principle [38] of unity in diversity in education, numerous possibilities for policies, goals and programs emerge, several of which might be pursued. In this exercise, however, consideration will be limited to just one goal: *to foster in students a global consciousness* - a consciousness inherent in the principle of unity in diversity.

An educational program to promote such a consciousness might include, but not be limited to, cultivating an appreciation for the richness and importance of the world's diverse cultural, religious and social systems, and nurturing the feeling of belonging to and responsibility toward the world community. It might also include study of the significant contributions that the nations of the world are making to humanity's collective progress through participation in such international fora as the United Nations, through such agreements as the numerous human rights treaties and UN global action plans, and through such international initiatives as the World Heritage Sites.

To assess progress toward this goal, one might measure the percentage of time - both in-class and in after school programs - dedicated to subject matter or activities which foster global consciousness. Another measure might be a content analysis of textbooks to determine the percentage of space dedicated to the same. Still another measure might be the prevalence of such subject matters in the curricula of teacher training institutes. Yet another might involve the attitudes and knowledge of students (and teachers) related to these matters, as gauged by surveys. This exercise could be taken further: several of these measures might be combined into a composite index, or they might be assembled as a set of indicators related to the goal of fostering a global consciousness in students. [39]

A second example of spiritually based indicators explores the application of the principles of equity and justice to economic development policy. By following the same process as in the first example, the guiding principles are identified as *equity and justice*; *economic development* is selected as the policy area; and the goal that is chosen is *to eliminate poverty within and among the nations of the world*. Obviously, this is a multi-faceted goal. For the purpose of this example, only the gap among nations will be considered, although distribution of wealth within nations must also be dealt with if world poverty is to be eliminated. Moreover, only poverty as it relates to income will be addressed. A premise of this goal is that there exist sufficient resources in the world to meet everyone's needs, but that eliminating poverty will require moderating consumption and accumulation, establishing just and equitable trade relations, and lifting the burden of excessive national debt.

There are available numerous income-gap measures which show where individual countries lie along a continuum. Most any of these could be used as measures, if taken over time, to determine if the gap between the most and the least economically prosperous nations is being reduced. A baseline of what constitutes economic poverty *vis-a-vis* national per capita income will have to be established in order to determine progress toward eliminating poverty. Another measure might weigh the economic benefits that accrue from trading opportunities that favor economically poorer nations. Still another measure might calculate, in terms of per capita income, the effects of steps taken by nations, whether individually or collectively, to reduce, if not eliminate, outstanding bilateral and multilateral debts held by the

economically deprived countries.

A third example of spiritually based indicators explores the application of the principle of independent investigation of truth to policy in the area of governance and participation. In this case *independent investigation of truth* is identified as the basic principle; the policy area selected is *governance and participation*; and the goal is *to foster the effective use of broad-based consultation in the formulation and implementation of development policies and programs*. Consultation is understood as a process of collective decision-making that maximizes participation by all segments of the community and seeks to arrive at the truth of a given matter. Achieving this goal will require that mechanisms be established and avenues be opened for community members to participate meaningfully in the conceptualization, design, implementation and evaluation of the policies and programs that affect them.

Progress toward this goal will be much more difficult to assess than progress toward the goals in the previous examples. Measures might include surveys to determine the extent of individual participation in all phases of development, and the degree to which individuals see their contribution to community progress as meaningful and on-going. This measure would have to factor in the percentage of the community involved and the degree of participation by those community members typically excluded, including women, minorities and the elderly. Another measure might assess the existence of formal and informal structures and processes that facilitate collaborative initiatives, and the number and frequency of meetings held, or the percentage of the community involved with any of these mechanisms.

Obviously, the examples above do not go into the detail necessary to put into operation the proposed indicators. For instance, all measures would need to contain standards for weighing the information and data that are collected. This information and data would also have to be assessed over time to give a meaningful picture of progress being made. Furthermore, it would be necessary to specify fully, and in advance, what constitutes success.

## **VII. Toward the Development of Spiritually Based Indicators: Possible Collaborative Steps**

This paper has presented a certain vision of the future and, based on that vision, has briefly examined spiritual principles that might be used in constructing indicators of progress toward this future. It has considered policy areas in which these principles might be applied in order to generate goals and, ultimately, indicators to measure progress toward these goals. Finally, it has given brief examples of how such spiritually based measures might be conceived and developed.

The approach taken in this paper does not follow the process normally associated with creating indicators. That is, indicator creation usually, though not always, follows the establishment of policies and goals. However, community groups and others are, increasingly, approaching indicator development by first creating a vision, then identifying the principles that underlie that vision, then looking at policy areas in which to create goals based on those principles, and, finally, constructing indicators to measure progress toward these goals. This is the approach taken in this paper. Once spiritually based indicators become commonplace, any number of approaches will arrive at the same purpose: infusing spiritual principles into our understanding, practice and assessment of development.

The actual identification of goals and the construction of spiritually based indicators for development might be undertaken as a collaborative process. In considering the following proposal, neither the steps, nor the principles, nor the policy areas suggested above would need to be taken as starting points.

The proposal is this: that representatives of the world's religions be brought together, perhaps under the aegis of the World Bank, or another international development agency such as the United Nations Development Programme, to begin consulting on spiritual principles and their bearing on individual and collective progress. The initial aim of this effort - which should be seen, from the outset, as substantive, time consuming and on-going - would be to reach understanding on a limited number of spiritual principles that are shared universally and a set of priority policy areas in which they would be applied. Based on these principles and priority areas, goals would be generated and indicators constructed to measure progress toward these goals. Other aims might be added as the consultations progress. To the degree that a common vision can be articulated, the endeavor will be strengthened. While the representatives would not have to be involved in technical aspects such as calculating quantitative measures - the development agency involved might assume this responsibility - they would need to review the indicators, once assembled, and be involved in any reworking called for after they have been tested. [41]

Religious differences should not prove insurmountable to such an initiative, for there exists an underlying thread of unity connecting the world's great religious traditions. They each propound basic spiritual truths and standards of behavior that constitute the very basis of social cohesion and collective purpose. The religions should, therefore, be able to collaborate on an effort that draws on and honors their deepest truths and holds such promise for humanity.

As this process advances, it might benefit by drawing on certain work that is already under way in the field of development, such as the global action plans from the recent series of UN conferences. In these action plans, the governments of the world have committed to "social, economic and *spiritual development*" [42] and to "achieving a world of greater stability and peace, built on ethical and *spiritual vision*." [43] They have acknowledged that their "societies must respond more effectively to the material and *spiritual needs* of individuals, their families and the communities in which they live - not only as a matter of urgency but also as a matter of sustained and unshakable commitment through the years ahead." [44] Moreover, they have affirmed that "development is inseparable from the cultural, ecological, economic, political and *spiritual environment* in which it takes place." [45] These same governments have also recognized that "individuals should be allowed to develop to their full potential, including healthy physical, mental and *spiritual development*," [46] and that "[*r*]eligion, spirituality and belief play a central role in the lives of millions of women and men, in the way they live and in the aspirations they have for the future." [47] (*Italics added for emphasis.*) [48]

These commitments, along with the policies, goals and programs suggested in these action plans, carry the weight of global consensus. In this sense, they represent the highest common understanding of development priorities and approaches that the international community has been able to reach. On the other hand, beyond general statements about the fundamental role and importance of spirituality, spiritual vision and spiritual development, these global agreements offer no coherent picture of what these terms mean, and current development measures - the determinants of "success" - by and large, fail to take spiritual factors into account. Still, it must be acknowledged that these action plans have recognized that spirituality is part and parcel of development and they do attempt to articulate certain principles such as tolerance and solidarity, some in greater detail and with greater success than others. Therefore, the consultations of the religious representatives could be deeply enriched by a study of these documents. Moreover, these consultations may very well generate policies and goals similar to those found in the global agreements and could, consequently, benefit from considering the prescriptions that the agreements contain. However, since the policies and goals developed by the religious representatives would be based on clearly identified spiritual principles, they would much more likely be supported by people than those based on predominantly material considerations.

By calling for the creation of development indicators in each of the global action plans, the United Nations has set in motion processes at the national and global levels for establishing appropriate measures of progress. The work on spiritually based indicators might, eventually, tie into these initiatives.

As these spiritually based measures are developed and put into use, consultative processes might be established nationally and locally in which communities would be encouraged either to adapt these indicators to their particular conditions, or to develop similar measures independent of this global initiative. The process of adapting or creating such indicators would, in and of itself, be enlightening and empowering for those involved. Moreover, the programs and policies that would eventually emerge from these processes would, in all likelihood, win the support of many people and draw formal endorsements from religious institutions and communities.

The creation of spiritually based indicators would not be the ultimate purpose of this initiative. Rather, it would be to place spiritual principles at the center of development, to use them in setting standards, policies and programs, and to draw on them to motivate individual and collective action. However, by demonstrating that the application of spiritual principles is both practical and measurable, the acceptance of spirituality as the very soul of development can be significantly furthered. Creating spiritually based measures for development is, therefore, not only timely, but essential.

## Notes

1. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks* (twelfth edition) (London, Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1995, page 9).
2. Baha'u'llah *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah* (Wilmette, Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1976, page 215).
3. *The Intergovernmental Seminar on Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management*, August 19 - 22, 1996, Helsinki, Finland; Background Report #3, Page 17.
4. See, for example, the *Human Development Report 1997* by the United Nations Development Programme.
5. This indicator, besides directly measuring infant deaths, also tends to reflect measures of income, education and public health expenditures, among others.
6. For example, an indicator that measures years of schooling will, alone, reveal little of the benefit of such schooling to society. As a case in point, a well schooled person lacking in morals will tend to be harmful to the community, whereas a person with little or no formal education but with a strong sense of morality will, by and large, prove to be beneficial to society (of course, better that the individual be both formally educated and morally trained).
7. Another way to view the interrelationship of factors is through the analogy of medical symptoms - such as fever, chills and swelling - that, individually, might mean many different things. It is only when seen together in a particular identifiable pattern by a competent physician that they can be diagnosed as a specific condition and a reasonable treatment can be prescribed.
8. *The Community Indicators Handbook: Measuring Progress Toward Healthy and Sustainable Communities*, 1997, Tyler Norris Associates, Redefining Progress and Sustainable Seattle, page 1.

9. The *Human Development Report* first appeared in 1990.

10. These include the 1990 World Summit for Children (the *World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children* and the *Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990's*); the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* and *Agenda 21*); the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights (the *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*); the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (the *Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development*); the 1995 World Summit for Social Development (the *Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action*); the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (the *Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action*); and the 1996 United Nations Conference on Human Settlements - Habitat II (the *Istanbul Declaration* and the *Habitat Agenda*).

11. Work on these indicators by governments, UN commissions and agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is proceeding. Such efforts are taking place, for example, under the aegis of many national governments and various UN bodies, such as the UN Centre for Human Settlements, the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Commission for Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women. NGOs and NGO coalitions are contributing to this work and are also undertaking their own initiatives in this regard.

12. *UNRISD News* No.16, Spring/Summer 1997, pages 14 - 15. The three joint occasional papers referred to are: *Towards a World Report on Culture and Development: Constructing Cultural Statistics and Indicators*; *Cultural Indicators of Well-Being: Some Conceptual Issues*; and *Cultural Indicators of Development*.

13. For an excellent exposition on social capital, see chapter 6, "Social Capital: The Missing Link?" in *Expanding the Measure of Wealth: Indicators of Environmentally Sustainable Development*, Environmentally Sustainable Development Studies and Monographs Series No. 17, The World Bank, Washington D.C. See also, *Confronting Crisis: A Comparative Study of Household Responses to Poverty and Vulnerability in Four Poor Urban Communities*, Caroline O. N. Moser, Environmentally Sustainable Development Studies and Monographs Series No. 8, The World Bank, Washington D.C.

14. These initiatives include the *Community Indicators Handbook: Measuring Progress Toward Healthy and Sustainable Communities*; the Bellagio Principles; and the New Indicators project of the New Economic Foundation.

15. These efforts include the work of numerous NGOs focusing on spiritual values and principles as foundational to progress, the ethical and spiritual values initiatives within the World Bank, and a number of research projects. Published reports include *Global Consciousness Change: Indicators of an Emerging Paradigm* (Duane Elgin and Coleen LeDrew, Awakening Earth, 1997); *Culture, Spirituality, and Economic Development: Opening a Dialogue* (William F Ryan S J, International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada, 1995); and the *World Values Survey, 1981-1984 and 1990-1993* (Principle Investigator, World Values Study Group, Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1994).

16. Spiritual principles, the Baha'i Writings state, are those essential truths given to mankind by that ultimate reality, that unknowable essence of essences called God. The religions brought to mankind by a succession of spiritual luminaries have been the primary link between humanity and that ultimate reality, and have galvanized and refined mankind's capacity to love, to comprehend reality and to achieve social progress.



17. Two spiritual principles that might be part of an extended list are *beauty* and *service*.
18. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah -- Selected Letters* (Wilmette, Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974 [second revised edition], pages 41-42).
19. In the Baha'i Writings, "*Man* is a generic term applying to all humanity." ('Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Baha during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912* [second edition] [Wilmette, Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982, page 76].)
20. Baha'u'llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette, Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1988 [new edition], page 13).
21. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Baha during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912* [second edition], page 375.
22. 'Abdu'l-Baha, "Trustworthiness," *The Compilation of Compilations, Volume II*  
*BIC-Document Number: 98-0218*