

Empowering Young Women to Improve Rural Lives
*The Story of the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women,
Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India*

A case study in Bahá'í Development

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“All the problems relating to the status of women are not only the problems, these are the symptoms of a disease, the root cause is one fundamental barrier, i.e., the attitude of discrimination against women and their devaluation on the basis of gender. To know what is ethical is not enough; the individual must put this knowledge into action in order to become a moral person.”

-Janak Palta McGilligan

Dhedi

For 18-year-old Dhedi, born and raised in a remote tribal village about 200 kilometers west of Indore, an industrial city in central India, learning how to operate a pedal-powered sewing machine was the fulfillment of a dream. Learning to read and write at the same time was an unforeseen benefit that, she soon realized, could prove just as valuable.

“I’ve learned tailoring, but reading and writing is also important,” said Dhedi, who came to the Bahá’í Vocational Institute for Rural Women in May of 1990 for a three-month training course that covered not only sewing, but literacy, hygiene and moral education. “When people come to me to get their clothes stitched, I can write their names and write the measurements.”

In September 1990, Dhedi and another young and formerly illiterate trainee from the Institute won first prize in a song-writing competition sponsored by the International Task Force on Literacy in New Delhi. The two women wrote a song extolling the virtues of literacy and set it to a traditional tribal melody. Their competitors included 500 newly literate people from 33 other such organizations in India.¹

J.S. Mathur, the District Collector of Jhabua, home district for many of the Institute’s trainees marveled at the level of literacy accomplished by these young women in just three months. “Most government organizations have not been able to accomplish this, even in programs lasting a year.”

The Institute has been effective, according to its director and others, because of its decision to focus on a specific underprivileged group — young women — and because its curriculum includes moral and spiritual training. “Although literacy, vocational and health training are essential, we believe that one of the most important things we do at the Institute is to help these young women recognize their full potential as human beings,” said Janak Palta McGilligan, director of the Institute. “This is where the element of moral education comes into play.”

In the Beginning...

The story of the Bahá’í Vocational Institute for Rural Women, now known as the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women, is, in fact, the story of Dhedi and more than a thousand young women like her whose lives have been transformed by their experience at the Institute. This story illustrates an approach to development that is based on the practical application of spiritual principles. The Institute is just one example of an emerging Bahá’í model of development.

¹ Dhedi’s story was first reported in the October-December 1990 issue of *One Country*, the newsletter of the Bahá’í International Community.

The Institute began in the council chambers of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís in India, the elected governing council for the Bahá'í community. Although Bahá'í experience in the field of development stretches back to the beginnings of the Faith in Iran more than 150 years ago, widespread involvement in social and economic development projects is a relatively new thrust for the Bahá'í world community. In 1983 the Bahá'í community of India decided to take part in a worldwide effort by Bahá'ís to create projects that would transform society through the systematic application of spiritual principles.

Guided in their consultation by Bahá'u'lláh's admonition,

“Be ye anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.”²

the Spiritual Assembly decided to address India's historic oppression of women:

“the world of humanity possesses two wings: man and woman. If one wing remains incapable and defective, it will restrict the power of the other, and full flight will be impossible.”³

The remedy prescribed for this inequality is education and equal rights for women:

“if woman be fully educated and granted her rights, she will attain the capacity for wonderful accomplishments and prove herself the equal of man.”⁴

So it was that the Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women was created.

Locating the Institute

Madhya Pradesh is one of India's largest, most populous, and poorest states. The tribal people, who comprise one third of the state's 66.18 million people, are the poorest of the poor, and the least valued among the tribal people are the women and girls. According to the Indian Human Development Report of 2001, female life expectancy in Madhya Pradesh was 57, the lowest in the country. According to statistics published by the National Commission for Women in 1994, only 92 of every 1000 tribal girls were literate; only 3 in every 1000 made it as far as middle school; and just 1 in every 1000 actually completed her secondary schooling.

Women are the primary cultivators of the land, yet they own very little of it, so they have almost no say in any decision regarding their environment or their own lives. The daily hardships associated with poverty, malnutrition, and environmental deterioration are compounded by the stigma of being female in a male-dominated society.

Jobs are scarce. The economy is for the most part based on family farming of corn, millet, lentils and peanuts. Water is a precious and limited resource, and the farms are not very productive. Although their sturdy adobe and wood frame homes often have electricity, the Bhilala tribesmen in the district still carry bows and iron-tipped arrows, an anachronism that reflects the degree to which most tribal people remain outside the mainstream of Indian society.

First Steps

In order to serve this population, the Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women was established in the city of Indore, Madhya Pradesh. The Institute began simply with short courses to train rural women in income-generating skills such as candle making and jute mat weaving. This training was accompanied by

² Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette, IL, 1976, p. 128

³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Wilmette, IL, 1982, p. 318

⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Wilmette, IL, 1982, p. 136.

lessons on such spiritual subjects as the acquisition of virtues as the key to happiness, progress and prosperity. Although the Institute did not function on a regular basis in the beginning, the response on the part of the villagers to the early programs was very positive.

Funding in the early days was provided exclusively by the Bahá'ís, and courses were taught by volunteers and part-time staff. However, as demand for courses increased, it became evident that the Institute would require permanent sources of funding and a full-time director to develop and run its programs. A grant from the Department of Science and Technology of the government of India in 1985 made it possible to recruit Miss Janak Dulari Palta from Chandigarh, Punjab, as director for the Institute.

Janak was the perfect person for the job. She had some experience in the field, but not too much, and she was eager to blend her religious beliefs with her chosen profession. Her own approach to development was driven by spirit, guided by strong values, and fueled by boundless reserves of love, energy, and optimism. When approached, she gladly resigned her post as a research fellow in rural and social development in North India, Chandigarh, moved to Madhya Pradesh, and went straight to work. Although she arrived to find no buildings, no equipment or materials, no infrastructure and no trainees, within 3 weeks, under the direction of the Institute's Policy Committee, Janak had started a residential program.

The curriculum and teaching methods developed at the Institute were tailored to the needs of the young women. In contrast to the rote memorization typical in many Indian schools, classroom instruction at the Institute was highly engaging, involving the women in games and discussion and practical hands-on experience. This experiential approach to learning was not only practical for women with little classroom experience, but it was fun, and it helped them develop confidence in their capacity to learn, to express their views, and to take initiative.

Within a year, a total of eleven courses -- averaging 10 days in length -- had been successfully organized. Through these initial courses, a total of 180 tribal women from 3 districts received training and returned to their villages.

Early Challenges

One of the major challenges in the early days was recruiting trainees. It was not easy to convince the parents to send their daughters 200 kilometers away with a person who was not known to them and who did not know their language. Trust was gradually developed as Janak learned their language, staying with them in their homes, eating with them, sometimes for days and weeks.

Another major challenge arose in 1988 when the director married a Northern Irish Bahá'í, Jimmy McGilligan, a land reclamation and drainage contractor who had come to India to help with the development work. With an Irish man on the staff, rumors ran wild in the villages that the girls would be sent overseas. Fears were quelled and trust re-established when the parents were invited to meetings at the Institute for three days at a time. The parents went back to their homes and spread the word about the genuine sincerity of the staff and the security and proper care that was being provided for their daughters.

As the courses lengthened from ten days to three months, the changes in the young women became more pronounced. Although they returned home happy and eager to apply what they had learned, their families were not always pleased with the transformations they saw in their daughters and wives. Now able to read and write and earn a living, accustomed to making decisions about their lives, the young trainees were not the same docile girls they were when they left home. This newfound confidence and assertiveness was sometimes perceived as a challenge to the authority of male family members.

To address this problem, the Institute established residential courses that allowed husbands and wives to explore together such principles as the equality of women and men and unity in diversity. Kami Chauhan,

who married after the 3-month course says, "When I first got married my husband drank and beat me. We then took family-life training at the Institute and I saw many changes in my husband. Now our family is a happy family. Without spirituality this is impossible." But the story doesn't end here. By studying and developing skills in consultation, young couples learned how to share decision making and resolve differences constructively. "Now," Kami says, "my husband works too, and I am teaching him to sew. We have a bangle shop in the center of the market, and the income is enough to support my husband, myself and my two children." Kami's message to others is "Live with unity. Do not use intoxicants, as they only cause violence. Working together we can get things completed much faster."

The Institute Today

Built on what was once a neglected 6-acre piece of land, the Institute is today an oasis of green surrounded by the dusty streets and noise of the city. It is home to more than a dozen peacocks and their families, squirrels, cuckoos and parrots and about 100 persons, of which 20 are permanent workers -- including the director, Janak Palta McGilligan, and her husband and Institute manager, Jimmy McGilligan. All these inhabitants enjoy themselves among mango, lemon, guava, jamun, sandalwood, tamarind, papaya, banana, and almond trees, and mulberry and henna bushes kept green by sprinklers using recycled water.

In September 2001, the Institute became independent with its own board of directors, taking the name The Barli Development Institute for Rural Women. It is currently accepting 75 trainees every six months: 60 learners, totally illiterate; and 15 school dropouts, who are simultaneously trained as trainers. They train the 60 with the help of master trainers who are former graduates, many of whom have gone on to higher education and have returned to serve at the Institute.

The training programs now typically last either six months or one year, although short-term workshops and training sessions are occasionally offered on select topics. Its programs continue to seek to overcome obstacles that have traditionally hindered the development of women, which in turn have hindered the development of all. In a special kind of educational experience, founded on respect and infused with spirit, joy and possibility, courses include literacy, tailoring, agriculture, artisan crafts-work, human rights, environmental awareness, self-esteem and personality development, social commitment, nutrition and health, and income-generating skills. Art, music, and dance are also incorporated into the curriculum.

The objective is that, once empowered with such training, the women can return to their home villages and become "pillars" of their families and communities -- agents for changing the social and physical environments. Indeed, "barli" is the local word for the central pillar of the house, and like the "barli," which supports the physical structure, the woman supports the structure of the family and the community.

Students are taught about planting and maintaining trees, finding local sources for seeds, and using environmental and energy conservation techniques such as composting, vermiculture, the use of biodegradable products, and proper waste management. The Institute does not believe in waste; everything is reused or recycled, including naturally fallen human hair, which is made into paintbrushes for waxing the fabric for batik printing.

Trainees learn conservation strategies by doing. At the Institute itself, rainwater is harvested and, in an innovative arrangement, used to re-charge the underground aquifer. Wash water is reused for irrigation. Gardens, tended by the trainees, provide most of the Institute's food. Trainees prepare meals using state-of-the-art solar cookers, and some become "experts" able to support the use of solar cookers in their villages.

Graduates receive a certificate through the National Open Schools program.

Developing Personality & Instilling Values

One unique aspect of the Institute's program is personality development and leadership training. Its purpose is to help them take initiative, and to show the importance of women's role in developing society, and in respecting and reinforcing the value of their culture. A scientific temperament and a spirit of inquiry are also cultivated. Through classroom training and daily interactions with Institute staff, volunteers and peers, ethical and human values like love, respect, and unity, freedom from prejudices of all kinds, the importance of educating children (especially girls), work as a form of worship and service as prayer, are both taught and modeled. The students become sensitive to social development problems and learn to mobilize and develop local resources to solve them.

Among the key values practiced at the Institute are consultation, responsibility, trustworthiness, self-reliance and service.

Consultation is both a principle and a technique for non-adversarial decision making. It seeks to include a wide diversity of ideas and information in order to discover what is best for the group as a whole. Throughout the day, using the principles of consultation, the women make their own decisions about what to eat, what to do in the evening, and other aspects of dormitory life. They plan in groups of four what they will do in the morning assembly. Trainees gain confidence as they learn how to express themselves in group discussions, how to listen, how to address an audience, and how to report

Responsibility and trustworthiness are necessary for success in every undertaking. The kitchen store, training materials, and garden store are controlled and managed by the trainees. They have the key, maintain the stock and learn to take responsibility. Gulab Alawa, who completed the three-month course in 1995, tells us of a surprising experience she had at the market. "When I asked the shop keeper for what I wanted, he was busy stacking the shelves. He told me to take what I wanted, put my money in the cash drawer, and take whatever change I needed. I said I would not and asked him why he trusted me. He said 'You have taken training at the Institute and they give education on truth and honesty, so I can trust you.'"

Self-reliance and service are combined to maintain the Institute. Everyone has her own work to do, and everyone participates in work groups of 8 to 10 that rotate responsibility for everyday tasks. That way no person feels over-burdened, and the work can be done easily and quickly. Work groups prepare food, clean the Institute, and do routine housekeeping chores. On Sundays there is no work in the fields, so all groups clean the whole premises of the institute. Trainees take care of the institute as if it were their own home, in a spirit of service and self-help.

Literacy

The empowerment of women is not possible without literacy. Literacy is incorporated into every aspect of the curriculum, supported by two hours of formal literacy classes a day. Some trainees rise from illiterate to the level of being able to sit for a National Open School theoretical exam at the end of the six-month course. The Institute provides each trainee with basic literacy in Hindi to enable her to understand herself and her world. She learns to read, write and understand simple forms, notices, messages, letters, signs, and simple books. She learns simple arithmetical calculations and how to measure length, weight and time.

In horticulture and gardening, the women learn to count the tools, trees, fruits and vegetables, to weigh them and to write their names. In health instruction, they learn to write the names of different diseases and preventive measures, and to take down body weight and height. They learn to understand and record time for immunizations and for pre-and post-natal care. The newly learned Hindi is immediately put to use in measuring cloth and taking measurements of the person for whom the garment is being made, as

well as making patterns, cutting and stitching according to those measurements. Trainees learn through practical experience to write a receipt, calculate stock, estimate costs, count cash and give change. They also learn to approach a bank or a local government official to apply for loans.

***Kokila* Newsletter**

The Institute newsletter serves a number of functions. The newly literate trainees are encouraged to write postcards to the Institute to keep them from falling back into illiteracy. All the news, views and stories of the graduates, plus some educational messages, are published in a monthly newsletter, *Kokila*, which is sent to all Institute graduates. *Kokila* is also left in the centers of the traditional weekly markets, where women can pick it up and share it with their friends. Environmental concerns, health suggestions, social issues, legal dilemmas, and success stories of Institute graduates are accompanied by song lyrics and black and white photographs. Undoubtedly, the 124 issues of *Kokila* published so far in a comprehensive, simple, and accessible manner, has reached the hands and hearts of thousands, as it circulates through homes and villages spreading the voices of women. Such engaging material has been instrumental in keeping the women reading, writing and staying connected. It is a source of inspiration as well to those who have not known the Institute through any other means, and it reminds the girl's communities of the value of their women.

Funding

By 1990, the Institute's operating budget was a mere US\$19,000 per year provided by the Bahá'í community of India and the Indian government, largely through the Council for Advancement of People's Action in Rural Technology (CAPART), an agency of the Ministry of Rural Development. That year a special infusion of funds from the Indian and the Canadian governments, as well as funds from the Bahá'í International Community, enabled the Institute to construct a dormitory with space for 20 trainees, an office and workshop building, and on-site housing for the Institute's director. The Institute now obtains funding from a range of sources, including the Bahá'í community of India, the Swedish International Development Agency, and the Two Wings Foundation, a private development fund.

A Day in the Life

A typical day for trainees begins at 6 a.m., with two hours of work in the Institute's model garden. "These women are accustomed to starting their day in the fields, and we don't want them to lose sight of the importance of agriculture," said Jimmy McGilligan, who coordinates the agricultural training component at the Institute. "In the garden, we stress respect for the environment as well as improved techniques of irrigation and the growth of new and improved vegetables."

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

The classes start at 9am with a morning assembly, where all the girls can practice coming forward to speak without any hesitation and shyness and can learn to convey their views in a correct manner. At the assembly they have wide latitude to contribute; they might chant prayers, tell a story, sing, do things they learned in the previous classes, or helping each other with studies.

From 9 to 10am, the emphasis is on moral education and spiritual principles. The students examine age-old caste, tribal, and class prejudices, in the light of Bahá'í principles such as the oneness of humanity,

equality of women and men, respect for diversity, and service to the community. The personality development class takes place from 10 to 11 a.m.

Next comes an hour of literacy training followed by an hour on health and hygiene — a class that includes training in prenatal and postnatal care and the use of home remedies. They break for lunch from 1 to 2 p.m. In the afternoon, the emphasis is on vocational training, which includes courses in sewing, weaving, crafts and home management, followed by an hour of literacy instruction from 5 to 6pm. Instruction in the selection of locally available raw materials for such crafts and in the marketing of finished products is also provided.

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

In workshop sessions, instruction is also provided in building and using smokeless stoves, which burn scarce fuel more efficiently, and in using and maintaining solar cookers.

During their free time, the trainees are encouraged to enjoy themselves bicycling around the grounds, chatting under a tree, or giggling over a shared secret. Happiness is itself considered a measure of development, and it is actively cultivated at the Institute.

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

Solar Technology

Bahá’ís see no conflict between science and religion. There is no fear of technology, but there is a real concern that technology be appropriate and sustainable. For the last 17 years, the Institute has been a leader in researching, experimenting with, and using solar cooking technologies. In the mid-1980s, it began using solar box cookers for some of its cooking and it actively promoted their use in the villages.

In May 1998, a 7.5-square-meter parabolic solar cooker was installed at the Institute; another was installed in 2000. Now, for approximately 250 days in a year, 100 percent of the Institute’s cooking is powered by solar energy. Trainees see for themselves the savings in time and money, as well as the benefit to the environment that the use of solar devices makes possible. And those who show an interest in the technical side can become the experts who adjust and maintain the solar cookers.

All trainees are encouraged to propagate the use of the solar box cookers, parabolic concentrating solar cookers, and other energy-saving devices in their villages. In addition to saving money and time, solar cookers can spare the women the risks of gathering firewood in isolated areas up to 15 or 20 kilometers from home, where rape is always a possibility.

Institute manager, Jimmy McGilligan, is currently manufacturing SK14 parabolic solar cookers, using a design developed in Germany for developing countries that relies on low-cost materials and basic technical knowledge. As the new designs made parabolic solar cookers more robust, lightweight, and easier to manufacture and operate, villagers began to embrace the new technology, which is capable of cooking for 10-12 people at once. With funding provided mainly by primary school children in Austria, the Institute has distributed approximately 50 of these SK 14 cookers, along with a simple operational manual in Hindi, to villages where trainees reside.

Enthusiastic users report that the food tastes good, takes less tending, and is less likely to burn than food cooked on fire. The pots don't get black, and some families report saving up to R's 350/monthly on fuel, now that they only have to buy small amounts of gas or firewood to use when it rains or is overcast. Sakaram Dawar, who works at the Institute and helps his wife with the cooking, says, "The solar cooker has made my life both better and easier. While cooking my dal or any other food, I can go to bazaar or take my child to school, and when I come back, the dal is already cooked." He clearly understands the ecological advantages. "If we cook on fire, we need wood for fuel, and if we cut the trees for the sake of getting fuel, it will affect the rains and our future will be darkened. We will get less trees, less rains, less water and less food. Nature has provided us with the sun and the moon. We should use the sunlight properly in order to cook meals."

Collaboration with Government and NGOs.

The Institute is sought out for collaboration because of its innovations in social work, education, science and technology. It collaborates actively with government officials and non-government organizations -- exchanging information, methodologies, and research information. It is a placement agency for four Masters degree students in Social Work from two colleges: Indore College of Social Work, and the Indore Mahavidyalaya. It works closely with the Central Institute of Vocational Education, and the Ministry of Education in Bhopal. It collaborates with M P. Energy Corporation and is the site of extension projects for the Bio Technology Department and School of Energy of Indore. Many engineering colleges come to see the practical work. Many other organizations like Stanford University in the US, Cooperative Cold Store, and Sahayata and professionals such as doctors, teachers, artists and designers come as volunteers to give assistance.

The Institute has been visited and honored by a wide range of government officials, university officials, leaders of political parties, UNICEF officials, representative of UN high commissions, media personalities, industrialists, business people, researchers, foreign diplomats, social and religious groups, NGOs, poets, artists, photographers, and writers.

Other Signs of Success

Over the years, the Institute has received a number of awards and citations for its work on the environment and development. In 1992, it was made a member of the United Nations Environmental Programme's Global 500 Roll of Honor for outstanding Environmental Achievement for its role in eliminating Guinea worm from 302 villages in the area surrounding the Institute. According to the citation, "When the program began 752 people were infected and 211,813 were at risk. Today, the district is completely free of Guinea worms." In 1994, the Institute was listed in UNESCO's INNOV database as one of 81 successful basic education projects in developing countries.

Institute training has had a measurable impact on the lives of graduates after they return to their communities. Although more than half the trainees are illiterate when they arrive, 99% leave fully able to read and write Hindi. Studies show that 96% of them use their income generation and related skills upon their return home and that 46% have established small businesses -- mostly sewing clothes -- and have started generating income, while 7-9% are employed in various jobs. Some 97% of graduates are using safe drinking water practices; some 70% now include leafy vegetables in their diet; and 41% are growing and selling vegetables.

Since its founding in 1985, the Institute has trained more than 1,300 young women and girls. Empowered by their training, graduates have not only improved their own lives, they have become agents for social change in their villages. They have shared by instruction and by example what they have learned about health and hygiene, education of children, and consultation for problem solving. Beena Sastiya, who at

18 completed the 6-month course, notes that being a positive role model isn't always easy. When she came back from the Institute, she said she tried to get people to keep their houses clean and send their children to school. They didn't pay much attention at first, but after people in the community began to see the changes in her own house, and the benefits that they brought, people began to listen to her more. Now all her siblings are at school, and she enjoys helping them learn in the evenings.

Many villagers now proudly show how they have learned to clean their family water pots daily and keep them covered. Corn, millet and peppers are stored in neat piles within the homes, and there is a new emphasis on cleanliness. By boiling the water they drink, villagers have been able to reduce the incidence of a number of diseases. In addition, women in five villages have planted approximately 2,500 trees.

Studies have shown that the women have indeed helped to create a new atmosphere of mutual respect and unity in their communities, helping to displace caste prejudices in tribal communities once notorious for their high crime rate and alcohol abuse. Beena feels her greatest achievement was stopping her father drinking alcohol, a goal she set herself on leaving the Institute. She says, "Now our family doesn't fight any more. We live in unity. Our lives are completely changed."

Bahá'í Approach to Development

According to the Bahá'í teachings, social and economic development is everybody's business.

*"All men⁵ have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization."*⁶

What's more, in this day, men and women must participate in this process as equal partners:

*"until woman and man recognize and realize equality, social and political progress here or anywhere will not be possible."*⁷

Bahá'ís view development as a global enterprise whose purpose is to bring prosperity to all peoples, an enterprise which is best understood in the context of the emergence of a world civilization. Humanity is in transition from its collective childhood to its collective maturity. The revolutionary changes that are occurring with bewildering swiftness in every department of life are the throes of our collective adolescence. The hallmark of the age of maturity will be the unification of the human race, which, in turn, requires the establishment of the principles of justice. To create a just society, in which all the earth's inhabitants are able to enjoy the fruits of a materially and spiritually prosperous global society, it is essential that people everywhere be empowered to participate in the constructive processes that will give rise to it.

The following are some of the key spiritual principles on which Bahá'í development is based: unity in diversity; equity and justice; equality of the sexes; trustworthiness and moral leadership; independent investigation of truth; and the harmony of science and religion.⁸

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 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*

⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that the term "man" is used by Bahá'u'lláh to refer to all humanity.

⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette, IL, 1976, p. 215

⁷ 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Wilmette, IL, 1982, p. 76

⁸ These principles are elaborated in "Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development," the Bahá'í contribution to the WFDD meeting at Lambeth Palace in February 1998. Available at www.bic-un.bahai.org/

calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race.... Its watchword is unity in diversity."⁹

Equity and justice: *"No light can compare with the light of justice. The establishment of order in the world and the tranquillity of the nations depend upon it."*¹⁰

Equality of the sexes: *"Women have equal rights with men upon earth; in religion and society they are a very important element. As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs."*¹¹

Trustworthiness and moral leadership: *"Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it."*¹²

Independent investigation of truth: *The first principle of Bahá'u'lláh is independent investigation of truth, that is, all 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.*¹³

Harmony of science and religion: *There is no contradiction between true religion and science. When a religion is opposed to science it becomes mere superstition: that which is contrary to knowledge is ignorance.*¹⁴

As a result of the development experience accrued by the worldwide Bahá'í community during the last twenty years, of which the Institute is a part, we see emerging a distinctively Bahá'í approach to development. The following are some of its organizational and operational elements.

Service to all: Proselytizing is prohibited, and development projects are not conducted for the purpose of public relations or as a means of converting people. They are driven by an overarching sense of service to humanity.

Strict funding guidelines: While funding for projects of a humanitarian nature can be accepted from government and donor agencies, Bahá'ís do not accept or use funds from outside sources for the progress of their internal community affairs.

Local control: It is the right of every people to trace its own path of development and direct its own affairs. Therefore, it is left to those directing a project to determine whether the capacity exists to use outside support constructively -- be it in the form of human or material resources.

Local initiative: Long-term success in development begins with natural stirrings at the grassroots of the community. Successful projects, like the Barli Institute, generally begin with a relatively simple set of activities that can be managed locally. Complexity emerges organically as participants achieve success, gain experience and increase their capacity.

⁹ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh -- Selected Letters* (Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974 [second revised edition], pages 41-42).

¹⁰ Baha'u'llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 29

¹¹ `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 1961 U.K. edition, page 161.

¹² Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, p. 37

¹³ `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Japan Will Turn Ablaze*, (Osaka, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974, page 35).

¹⁴ `Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, p. 141.

Organizational support: Organizational structures are needed to support such projects. In the case of the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women, a board of directors was eventually added to guide the Institute.

Spiritual principles: The application of spiritual principles is at the heart of all collective action. Spiritual principles not only point the way to practical solutions, but they also induce the attitudes, the will, and the dynamics that facilitate implementation of those solutions. At the same time, how to apply these principles to social transformation has to be learned.

Scientific methods: Science and religion work together as two complementary knowledge systems. Learning to apply spiritual principles to solve development problems implies experimentation, application, and the creation of systems and processes whose results can be validated through observation and the use of reason. Moreover, the advancement of civilization requires the multiplication of material means, like the solar cooker and improved methods of capturing water and increasing crop yields. These are generated and perfected through scientific endeavor.

Learning mode: Ultimately, development is a learning process that can best be described as action, reflection, consultation, and more action -- all carried out in the light of religious teachings and drawing on scientific knowledge.

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Postscript

In 2003, thirteen years after she won the song-writing contest, Dhedi continues to be an Institute success story. She continued her education, passing the 10th grade exam and the vocational exam for cutting and tailoring. Eventually she returned to the Institute to be a trainer in health, typing, and computer skills. Dhedi lives on the Institute grounds with her husband and 3-year-old son and is currently helping write the health curriculum.