

Development Decade

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The Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the International Development Strategy, submitted by the Secretariat to the 41st session of ESCAP, elaborates the well-known fact that little progress has been achieved so far in realizing many of the goals and objectives of the Third United Nations Development Decade. For example, the establishment of a self-sustaining process of development in the least developed countries, ensuring broadly-based participation, remains more an aspiration than a reality. And gross disparities in living standards and inequalities of wealth persist, both between countries within the Asian and Pacific region, and between this region and more developed regions of the world.

There is ample reason to address the issue raised in a statement by the international governing council of the Baha'i- Faith outlining the political, social, economic and spiritual requirements for the establishment of world peace. This statement was recently issued to mark the International Year of Peace. The statement explains why, in the Baha'i- view, the vast majority of the world's peoples is "sinking ever deeper into hunger and wretchedness when wealth on a scale undreamed of by the Pharaohs, the Caesars, or even the imperialist powers of the nineteenth century is at the disposal of the present arbiters of human affairs." We would like in our intervention to outline some of the points made in this statement, and on this basis, to recommend from the Baha'i- perspective a few steps that can be taken to promote implementation of the Strategy for the Third Development Decade, as well as the Substantial New Programme of Action for the 1980s for the Least Developed Countries in the ESCAP Region.

Baha'i-s are convinced that successful development efforts require, above all, a spirit of cooperation and collaboration among the participants in the development process. The absence of such a spirit of common endeavour up to the present time -- within local communities and nations as well as between countries -- constitutes in our view the main reason for the limited success of the Third Development Decade and the persistence of gross economic inequalities. Baha'i-s believe that the required higher level of cooperation can only be motivated by a sincere appreciation for the unity of all human beings. Only on such a basis can prejudices related to nation, race, religion, sex, and other prejudices that hinder determined and equitable development activities be eradicated. The importance of cooperation at every level is underscored in the statement on peace to which we referred earlier:

The inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering, keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war. Few societies have dealt effectively with this situation. The solution calls for the combined application of spiritual, moral and practical approaches. A fresh

look at the problem is required, entailing consultation with experts from a wide spectrum of disciplines, devoid of economic and ideological polemics, and involving the people directly affected in the decisions that must urgently be made.

This quotation raises a number of points about cooperation. First, cooperation should be aimed at eliminating human suffering and at ensuring every individual the fulfillment of his basic human needs. We fully agree with the Development Strategy that "the development process must promote human dignity." In the Baha'i- view, man has been created as a noble being by God and it is each individual's right and duty not only to fulfill his own potential, but to develop the nobility of his character by working to ensure the same dignity for other human beings. For these reasons, we believe that particular energy must be devoted to improving the plight of the poorest of the ESCAP countries, and to augmenting their already-existing programmes aimed at improving health and nutrition and reducing the infant mortality rate.

Second, in the Baha'i- view, close cooperation among the local population manifesting itself in participatory groups and organizations is a crucial requirement for the success of community development efforts of a sustainable and equitable nature. We believe that development can only be successful and self-sustaining if it draws upon -- and thereby enhances -- the creative energies, potential and initiative of individual men and women. It must function primarily as a local process, and rely on the full participation of community members in all aspects of this process. The development of a sound local economy through community involvement would help to reduce the problems of unemployment and urban migration that continue to plague so many countries in the Asian and Pacific region. Our conviction that a participatory system can succeed is based on practical experience which Baha'i- communities in this region have gained in implementing projects based on local participation and initiative.

Third, we are convinced that women must participate actively in this local development process. For this reason, we welcome such initiatives as the Project on Women in Agriculture in Asia, described in last year's Report on Secretariat Activities in Support of the Substantial New Programme of Action. Moreover, Baha'i-s believe that while a high priority should be given to all education efforts, the education of women and girls should be accorded first priority. This is because -- and we quote again from the statement on peace -- "it is through educated mothers that the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society." Further, such an educational focus is an essential component in enhancing local-level self-reliance and self-sufficiency, since women constitute a crucial but often neglected element in the family and local economy. We suggest accordingly that ESCAP examine ways to increase further its efforts to improve the education of women in all areas of knowledge, including health, nutrition, agriculture, trades and professions.

Finally, cooperation between countries is essential in eradicating the gross

inequalities among nations that continue to destabilize the world. A new level of conscious recognition of world community must be brought about in order for developed and developing countries to be willing to cooperate in eradicating non-tariff and other trade barriers, for developed countries to meet and surpass the Strategy's goals for official development assistance, and for technologically advanced nations to share their technology and expertise with less developed countries.

The development of an attitude of cooperation at all the levels to which we have referred requires, we believe, universal education in the truth of human unity. Education in the concept of local, national and world citizenship should be a priority of development efforts and should be aimed at all sectors of society. An increasing number of Baha'i--sponsored educational activities in Asian and Pacific countries and other nations around the world are already offering this type of education to children of all faiths and backgrounds.

To conclude, we applaud ESCAP's important efforts to facilitate and coordinate the implementation of the Development Strategy. The goals of the Decade will also continue to be a high priority for Baha'i- communities in the region as they work to enhance cooperative and development efforts at every level.

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