Building Vibrant Communities
Book 10 Unit 3
Dynamics of Service on
an Area Teaching Committee
Here, in the third unit of this book, we will consider some of the joyful opportunities for service that present themselves when we are called to take on a degree of administrative responsibility as a member of a consultative body.

Section 1  pages 5-7

“Service on the institutions and agencies of the Faith is indeed a tremendous privilege, but not one that is sought by the individual; it is a duty and responsibility to which he or she may be called at any given time.

We do not seek positions on the administrative institutions of the Faith, but when we are called to serve in such a capacity for a period of time, through election or appointment, we treasure the opportunity with the requisite humility.

...on behalf the House of Justice in 1978 underscores the relevance of the concept of spiritual excellence to service:

“The House of Justice hopes that all the friends will remember that the ultimate aim in life of every soul should be to attain spiritual excellence—to win the good pleasure of God. The true spiritual station of any soul is known only to God. It is quite a different thing from the ranks and stations that men and women occupy in the various sectors of society. Whoever has his eyes fixed on the goal of attaining the good pleasure of God will accept with joy and radiant acquiescence whatever work or station is assigned to him in the Cause of God, and will rejoice to serve Him under all conditions.”
“It is clear that in this day, confirmations from the unseen world are encompassing all those who deliver the divine Message”; and “He will come to your aid with invisible hosts, and support you with armies of inspiration from the Concourse above”

Images come to his mind of the classes that were formed for the spiritual education of children, of the visits to homes that were made to share the teachings, of the families that accepted the Faith, and of the meeting that was held to elect the Local Spiritual Assembly the previous Ridván, which brought such joy to everyone. And all throughout he sees the faces—of his own group of friends who joined the Faith together with him, of the youngsters now participating in the junior youth program, of the children singing Bahá’í songs, and of their parents, in whose hearts the light of certitude had dawned.

“O Lord God! Make us as waves of the sea, as flowers of the garden, united, agreed through the bounties of Thy love. O Lord! Dilate the breasts through the signs of Thy oneness, and make all mankind as stars shining from the same height of glory, as perfect fruits growing upon Thy tree of life.

One day, ...receives a telephone call from... the Secretary of the Regional Bahá’í Council. .. explains that the Council is heartened by the rapid development of the cluster ...have already begun to meet to reflect on their experiences and to make some basic plans for future efforts. .. the Council feels that the time has come to name an Area Teaching Committee to nurture the cluster’s burgeoning activities.
...some newly convened Area Teaching Committees have initially focused on one activity,” adds M. “In that case, the key is to remember that the purpose is not to reduce the work of the Committee in the cluster to the promotion of a single line of action. It is simply to allow that agency to begin to act in earnest and gain experience.”

...the institute process raises capacity for a broad range of undertakings; from the earliest courses, participants are encouraged to visit their friends at their homes and study a prayer together or share with them a theme from the Bahá’í teachings. Arrangements for supporting the friends in these endeavors, which may have been largely informal, eventually prove inadequate, signaling the need for an Area Teaching Committee to appear. Its principal focus is the mobilization of individuals, often through the formation of teams, for the continued spread of the pattern of activity in a cluster. Its members come to see everyone as a potential collaborator in a collective enterprise, and they appreciate their own part in nurturing a spirit of common purpose in the community. With a Committee in place, the efforts already under way to convene gatherings for worship, to carry out home visits, and to teach the Faith can now expand considerably.”

Section 3 pages 9-11
The Area Teaching Committee is rising to new levels of functioning. It is engaged in a more thorough reading of circumstances in the whole cluster: on the one hand, accurately assessing the capacities of the community and the effects being produced by sustained growth, and on the other, understanding the implications of various social realities for community building in the long term.

In the plans it makes each cycle, the Committee relies heavily on those shouldering the greatest share of the work of expansion and consolidation, but given that the number of those connected in some way with the pattern of activity is now large, a variety of questions become more pressing: how to mobilize the entire company of believers in support of teaching goals; how to organize systematic home visits to the friends who would benefit from deepening and discussions that connect them with the community.
...how to strengthen spiritual bonds with the parents of children and junior youth; **how to build on the interest of those who have shown goodwill towards the Faith but have yet to take part in its activities.** Promoting the widespread holding of devotional meetings is another concern, **so that hundreds of people, eventually thousands, are engaged in worship** in the company of their households and their neighbors.

**Immerse yourselves**
in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hidden in its depths.

As already noted, much of the learning that was propagated was about practical issues, for example, **how to administer an intensive program of growth, how to organize teaching teams in campaigns, and how to analyze data.** But the most crucial lessons transferred were related to direct teaching, perhaps the area in which the most significant advances in learning were made.

*“Attaining the dynamics of growth” ITC April 2008 p. 5*

In managing the complexities involved in its own work—**which includes gathering and analyzing statistical data, as well as a diversity of other tasks**—the Committee draws on the help of individuals beyond its own members. These complexities also require increasingly close collaboration with Local Spiritual Assemblies.”

**Ultimately, of course, the Committee looks to continually extend the reach of the community’s endeavors so that more and more souls become acquainted with the message of Bahá’u’lláh.**
“But in our case,” L. notes, “we already have a fair amount of experience, and I think we should do our best from the outset to attend simultaneously to devotional gatherings, home visits, and individual and collective teaching activities...”
“From another perspective one thinks in terms of the three-month cycles of activity through which a community grows—the burst of expansion experienced as a result of intense action; the necessary period of consolidation during which increases in ranks are fortified as they, for example, participate in devotional gatherings and the Nineteen Day Feast and receive visits at their homes; and the opportunities designated for all to reflect and plan. The question of teaching among receptive populations moves to the foreground in this light, and the challenge of seeking out souls who are willing to engage in a conversation about the world around them and participate in a collective effort to transform it comes into focus.

...it becomes clear to the Committee members that the second perspective mentioned by the House of Justice will need to be kept uppermost in their minds as they set about their work—that is, the three-month cycles of activity, which create “the rhythmic pulse” of a program of growth in a cluster.
Increasing numbers of participants...helping to embrace the Faith...depending on confirmations.

Sec 5  pages 11-13

“The precise objectives of each expansion phase vary, of course, depending on conditions in the cluster and the circumstances of the Bahá’í community. In some instances, its main aim is to increase participation in the core activities; in others, readiness to enroll in the Faith is discovered. Conversations about the Person of Bahá’u’lláh and the purpose of His mission occur in a variety of settings, including firesides and visits to homes.

As experience grows, the friends become more adept at discerning when they have found a hearing ear, at deciding when to be more direct in sharing the message, at removing obstacles to understanding, and at helping seekers to embrace the Cause. The approach of working in teams allows the friends to serve together, offer mutual support, and build confidence—but even when carrying out actions individually, they are coordinating their efforts to greater effect.

“Their focus and investment of time endow this short but decisive phase of the cycle with the intensity it demands. This spirit of high resolve serves to multiply the community’s powers, and in each cycle the friends learn to depend more and more on the potent confirmations from the divine realm that their actions attract.”
Your group may wish to discuss the dynamics generated by working in teams during the expansion phase of a cycle of activity. Think specifically about the ways in which this approach allows “the friends to serve together, offer mutual support, and build confidence”. The members of your group should have enough collective experience working in such teams to give practical examples that offer insight into the desired dynamics.

Thus, in addition to their ongoing consultation throughout the expansion phase, the members of a team may come together at the end of that phase to reflect on the insights they have gained and the lessons they have learned. Imagine a team that has focused on a specific task during the expansion phase, say, undertaking a direct teaching effort in a neighborhood or initiating conversations with youth who may be eager to carry out acts of service in the community.

Now think of the cluster in which you reside—or one with which some members of your group are familiar—and describe it at its present stage of development, bearing in mind both the opportunities for growth within it and the availability of human resources. Then try to sketch out what the next expansion phase might look like.
ATC to continue Institute Process and assure level of intense activities.

“Today as we observe the workings of those clusters which are in a robust state of growth, we note that in every one of them the friends have continued to strengthen the institute process, while learning to mobilize their expanding nucleus of active supporters of the Faith, to establish an efficient scheme for the coordination of their efforts, to weave their individual initiatives and collective endeavors into an effective pattern of unified action, and to draw on the analysis of pertinent information in planning the cycles of their activities. That they have found the means for carrying forward the work of expansion and consolidation hand in hand—the key to sustained growth...”

What is important to remember in this connection is that intensity has degrees. It is not an all-or-nothing state of being—either one is intense or not intense. Consider the individual. There are times when an individual may labor with a high degree of intensity and others when he or she is serving less intensely. The same holds true for collective action. An Area Teaching Committee, then, in consultation with the institute coordinators, would want to make sure that the level of activity does not drop sharply during the consolidation phase.
With this thought in mind, your group may wish to end this section by reading the passage below, an excerpt from the Ridván 2007 message, and by discussing what it means for the work of expansion and consolidation to go “hand in hand” and how the three-month cycles of activity allow this to occur.

“Today as we observe the workings of those clusters which are in a robust state of growth, we note that in every one of them the friends have continued to strengthen the institute process, while learning to mobilize their expanding nucleus of active supporters of the Faith, to establish an efficient scheme for the coordination of their efforts, to weave their individual initiatives and collective endeavors into an effective pattern of unified action, and to draw on the analysis of pertinent information in planning the cycles of their activities. That they have found the means for carrying forward the work of expansion and consolidation hand in hand—the key to sustained growth—is demonstrable. Such evidence will surely inspire every devoted believer to remain resolute on the path of systematic learning that has been set.”
"Key to the progress of an intensive program of growth is the phase dedicated to reflection, in which the lessons learned in action are articulated and incorporated into plans for the next cycle of activity. Its principal feature is the reflection meeting—as much a time of joyous celebration as it is of serious consultation. Careful analysis of experience, through participatory discussions rather than overly complex and elaborate presentations, serves to maintain unity of vision, sharpen clarity of thought and heighten enthusiasm."

We will think more about the purpose and nature of cluster-wide reflection gatherings later in this unit. For now, consider the periodic meeting of reflection that has taken place in a cluster with which you are familiar. No doubt it has evolved over time as experience has accrued. Call to mind those consultations that were particularly effective, and write down some of the factors that contribute to making a reflection meeting fruitful.
“Just as the training institute works closely to guide and accompany the friends who initiate children’s classes, junior youth groups, and study circles, the Area Teaching Committee can encourage and support many individuals to carry out other acts of service, such as hosting devotional gatherings, undertaking home visits, and teaching the Faith.

The teaching work is broad in scope, encompassing personal efforts as well as collective projects, selected neighborhoods as well as sundry localities, chosen populations as well as chance acquaintances, firesides as well as core activities.
For this reason, **prayer and devotional** meetings are **but a part of an integrated pattern** of community building in the Five Year Plan.

As to the inseparability of worship and service, **Shoghi Effendi** wrote:

‘. . . Bahá’í worship, however exalted in its conception, however passionate in fervor, **can never hope to achieve beyond the meager and often transitory results** produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or the communion of the passive worshipper. **It cannot afford lasting satisfaction** and benefit to the worshipper himself, much less to humanity in general, **unless and until translated and transfused into that dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity. . . .”**

You may find it fruitful to imagine a conversation between two friends on the nature of devotional gatherings which clearly indicates a **deep appreciation of the significance of the conception of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár.**
The group’s consultation soon turns to the topic of home visits and the capacity to engage in meaningful and uplifting conversation. “I am so glad that the systematic promotion of home visits is one of the main pursuits of the Committee and that we will consider it from the very start,” says Martha. “If it weren’t for such visits, I certainly would not be sitting here.

What do you think are the causes of this alarming situation? Clearly, the way current technologies shape interactions between people is partly responsible. But to blame technology alone for this phenomenon does not seem to go to the heart of the matter. You need to think more profoundly about the direction these societies are taking, as they sink further and further into materialism. They insist on organizing themselves around the idea that every individual should follow his or her personal preferences and maximize his or her satisfaction. Yet they fail to see the relationship between the ills that afflict them and adherence to this materialistic principle. In this context, you should examine how the community-building efforts, now under way in villages and neighborhoods throughout the world, will preserve and, when needed, bring back the warmth of human association and solidarity.
It would be useful for you to glance through the unit again and identify in your group some of the features of the visits described that render them systematic. Try to go further and think about what kind of organization would be required on the part of the Area Teaching Committee, in collaboration with the relevant institute coordinator, to ensure that a systematic pattern of such visits expands in the cluster...

Committee would need, for instance, to maintain a list of newly enrolled believers and liaise with the teams involved to monitor the progress being made through the set of themes. Once you have formulated a conception of “systematic home visits”, write a short paragraph about each of the following:

**Systematic visits to parents** whose sons and daughters are participating in the program offered by the institute for their spiritual empowerment:

**Systematic visits to the homes of youth** who are becoming engaged in acts of service:
As a person cultivates the habit of study and deep reflection upon the Creative Word, this process of transformation reveals itself in an ability to express one’s understanding of profound concepts and to explore spiritual reality in conversations of significance. These capacities are visible not only in the elevated discussions that increasingly characterize interactions within the community, but in the ongoing conversations that reach well beyond—not least between the Bahá’í youth and their peers—extending to include parents whose daughters and sons are benefiting from the community’s programs of education.

...think about some of the themes that invariably arise in a discussion held in each of the visits mentioned below. Together with the other members of your group, identify portions from relevant courses that offer content for a discussion of each theme.

a. Visit to a home as part of a direct teaching effort, in which the essentials of the Faith are presented plainly and explicitly:

b. Visit to the home of a few newly enrolled believers to help them deepen their knowledge of the Faith:

Given the wealth of experience that the members of your group surely enjoy, you should have no difficulty in citing occasions in which the following occurred in conversations held most notably, though not exclusively, during visits to a home. For each one, describe the circumstances and discuss how the conversation achieved the desired end. What was said on each occasion, and what were some of the points addressed?
We will conclude here our account of the significant meeting intended to help the newly formed Area Teaching Committee embark on the initial stage of its work. Let us do so by reading the following words of Universal House of Justice and by each engaging in a simple, personal reflection:

“The rich insights arising from clusters, and from centers of intense activity within them, where the dynamics of community life have embraced large numbers of people deserve special mention. We are gratified to see how a culture of mutual support, founded on fellowship and humble service, has quite naturally established itself in such quarters, enabling more and more souls to be systematically brought within the pale of the community’s activities. Indeed, in an increasing number of settings the movement of a population towards Bahá’u’ílách’s vision for a new society appears no longer merely as an enthralling prospect but as an emerging reality.”

You may find it helpful to make a list of the various actions you take—ranging from the simple act of mentioning the Faith and its teachings in conversation with people you meet to your participation in collective activities undertaken in the context of the Plan—and note down for yourself how each contributes to the movement of the population of the cluster towards Bahá’u’ílách’s vision of a new World Order.
The three members of the Area Teaching Committee leave the meeting of consultation we have described filled with enthusiasm but also somewhat overwhelmed. “Step by step” is the phrase they find themselves repeating often.

The first task before them is to organize a gathering that will launch the upcoming cycle of activity in the cluster. Unfortunately, time is short and preparations have to get under way quickly. So they decide to draw up a list of all the friends in the cluster and ensure that everyone receives an invitation. They remind themselves that the gathering is to be imbued with love and a spirit of fellowship: presentations and discussions are to be interspersed with prayers, songs, and uplifting stories.

It soon becomes clear to the Committee members, however, that their analysis should go far deeper. They accept that there are no simple answers; the challenge that they face is to learn to effectively mobilize the energies of the friends in the cluster. They agree to explore this theme in future meetings... The expansion phase of the first cycle of activity is looming large before them, and their attention must now focus entirely on the challenge of organizing this two-week period of intense activity.
As the group explores the opportunities that lie ahead, the air of disappointment with which the meeting began disappears. Everyone agrees that, given how hastily the expansion phase of this first cycle of activity was organized, the results have been encouraging indeed. Still, they realize that they are in need of discovering the secrets of mobilizing the energies of larger and larger numbers of friends as the community increases in size, and they decide that they should now take the time, as R. suggested, to review the content of Book 6 in two to three meetings, together with a few other friends fully engaged in the process of growth.
“When training and encouragement are effective, a culture of growth is nourished in which the believers see their duty to teach as a natural consequence of having accepted Bahá’u’lláh. They ‘raise high the sacred torch of faith,’ as was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wish, ‘labor ceaselessly, by day and by night,’ and ‘consecrate every fleeting moment of their lives to the diffusion of the divine fragrance and the exaltation of God’s holy Word.’ So enkindled do their hearts become with the fire of the love of God that whoever approaches them feels its warmth.

Book 6 reminds us that, when conversing with others, we are to draw not only on the knowledge we have acquired to provide clear and coherent explanations but on the force of love. Once again, then, we are challenged to think about the interconnectedness of “being” and “doing.” In the context of teaching, conversation should create and strengthen bonds of love between the hearts of the participants through which can flow noble feelings and lofty ideas.

They strive to be channels of Dynamics of Service on an Area Teaching Committee the spirit, pure of heart, selfless and humble, possessing certitude and the courage that stems from reliance on God. In such a culture, teaching is the dominating passion of the lives of the believers. Fear of failure finds no place. Mutual support, commitment to learning, and appreciation of diversity of action are the prevailing norms.”
A pattern of behavior diametrically opposed to the one described in the passage above is associated with the notion of complacency. The House of Justice makes reference to it in the following way:

“A small community, whose members are united by their shared beliefs, characterized by their high ideals, proficient in managing their affairs and tending to their needs, and perhaps engaged in several humanitarian projects—a community such as this, prospering but at a comfortable distance from the reality experienced by the masses of humanity, can never hope to serve as a pattern for restructuring the whole of society. That the worldwide Bahá’í community has managed to avert the dangers of complacency is a source of abiding joy to us.”

You may wish to review the concepts and attributes explored in this and the preceding section and discuss in your group how they have helped the worldwide Bahá’í community to avert the dangers of complacency.
“What should be understood in this respect is that such visits are not isolated acts. A visit to a home should be seen as one element of a coherent pattern of action that seeks to enable specific populations to contribute to the construction of the society envisioned by Bahá’u’lláh. At the heart of the matter, then, is how a campaign of teaching the Faith by visiting homes relates to the other activities being undertaken in a neighborhood.

The experience in the present Plan demonstrates that a pattern of action that is able to embrace large numbers comes chiefly from working to bring more neighborhoods and villages....
“I recently heard someone saying that every cluster has to have a memory, so that what is learned is not forgotten and continuity of action is maintained. I think, to some extent, the Area Teaching Committee serves as the keeper of that memory. For learning to advance in a cluster, the Committee has to remember the approaches that were adopted at various stages of growth and the friends that contributed their share to the process. The pool of human resources available to the community is its greatest asset, and it should be drawn upon liberally and wisely.

“We cannot help noticing, however, that achievements tend to be more enduring in those regions where the friends strive to understand the totality of the vision conveyed in the messages, while difficulties often arise when phrases and sentences are taken out of context and viewed as isolated fragments. The institutions and agencies of the Faith should help the believers to analyze but not reduce, to ponder meaning but not dwell on words, to identify distinct areas of action but not compartmentalize. We realize that this is no small task. Society speaks more and more in slogans. We hope that the habits the friends are forming in study circles to work with full and complex thoughts and to achieve understanding will be extended to various spheres of activity.”
Our purpose in treading alongside the Area Teaching Committee during the initial weeks of its existence has been, on the one hand, to gain insights into the way such a Committee can go about discharging its responsibilities and, on the other, to catch a glimpse of what it means to be a member of a consultative body of the Administrative Order.

...your group may wish to go back and read the passage quoted in Section 1, in which the Universal House of Justice stresses that those serving in any administrative capacity are to carry out their functions with the realization that “an ethos of loving service pervades Bahá’í institutional identity”.

Not every one learns or responds at the same rate
They accept that they are responsible for different dimensions of the same sacred purpose; they understand and welcome the efforts of others and consult with them whenever necessary; and they stand ever willing to cooperate and share knowledge and resources. They appreciate the interconnectedness of the lines and areas of action that comprise the work of the Administrative Order and take great care not to introduce into it fragmentation, in action or at the level of thought.

“It can therefore be deduced that the importance of the Bahá’í administration is its value in serving as a facilitator of the emergence and maintenance of community life in a wholly new mode.... It acquires collective, transformative force in the normal functioning of a community. In this regard, the institutions of the Faith stand as channels for the promotion of this salient characteristic.”
Community working within paradigm of administration.  Section 22  pages 56-57

“... irrespective of the level of complexity, the administrative mechanisms in place represent a response to the desire of an increasing number of friends who are eager to express the ardor of their faith in action; these provide them with the support needed to participate in teaching teams, to host devotional meetings, to conduct children’s classes, to form junior youth groups, and to establish study circles. That the institutions and agencies involved are able to maintain such a responsive form of administration testifies to the high degree of organizational skill and flexibility they have attained.”

What seems essential to emphasize here again is the attitude adopted by Committee members when present on such occasions. While its individual members might certainly introduce concerns held by the institutions at appropriate moments, as well as offer shared insights, in no wise would they take on an air of authority.

What the members of an administrative body do and say in their interactions with the friends has, in the final analysis, profound implications. As a community, we are working within a paradigm of administration that eschews many of the habits so prevalent in society today. New habits of thought and patterns of behavior are taking root and being propagated from one generation to the next.
“As learning has come to distinguish the community’s mode of operation, certain aspects of decision making related to expansion and consolidation have been assigned to the body of the believers, enabling planning and implementation to become more responsive to circumstances on the ground. Specifically, a space has been created, in the agency of the reflection meeting, for those engaged in activities at the cluster level to assemble from time to time in order to reach consensus on the current status of their situation, in light of experience and guidance from the institutions, and to determine their immediate steps forward.”

We have said that, far from planning every detail of what needs to be done and making sweeping announcements to the community, the Area Teaching Committee needs to develop the capacity to foster a consultative process at the grassroots that continually grows in intensity, in depth, in the range and scope of topics addressed, and in the number of people who participate in it. We know as well that, in the Faith, collective decision making is governed by the principle of consultation. Clearly one of the most important spaces for giving shape to an expanding consultative process at the grassroots is the quarterly reflection meeting.

This sense of collective ownership becomes more apparent from cycle to cycle—the force released by a united body of people taking charge of their spiritual development over generations to come. And as they do so, the support they receive from regional and national Bahá’í institutions and their agencies is experienced as an unceasing flow of love.”
One source of such information is the body of statistics maintained by the Area Teaching Committee on various dimensions of the growth process advancing in the cluster. We will not discuss the question of statistics in detail here. You should be aware, however, that there is a sizable effort in national communities everywhere, being coordinated from the Bahá’í World Centre, to create a worldwide system for gathering and sharing statistical data, so that at all levels of decision making—from the local to the international—pertinent information is accessible. As you can imagine, advances in computer technology are being used to the fullest possible extent, while taking into account the enormous diversity of technological capabilities present at this point in the thousands of clusters in which the community-building process is under way.

.. plans devised during the reflection phase should take into account, as the House of Justice explains, “increased capacity in terms of the human resources available at the end of the cycle to perform various tasks, on the one hand, and accumulated knowledge about the receptivity of the population and the dynamics of teaching, on the other. When human resources increase in a manner proportionate to the rise in the overall Bahá’í population from cycle to cycle, it is possible not only to sustain but to accelerate growth.”

It would remain attentive to the movement of the inhabitants in the cluster, from within the overall population, through the various circles that helped us envision such a movement—this, with the aim of ensuring that the size of each one was constantly growing. What kind of information would the Committee need in order to understand how this movement was progressing and how it could accelerate its momentum in close collaboration with the institute coordinators? How would it go about obtaining this information?
The thoughts of members of a community distinguished by this culture are “centered at all times on helping one another scale the heights of service to His Cause and soar in the heaven of His knowledge.” It is a community in which “souls labor together ceaselessly, delighting not so much in their own accomplishments but in the progress and services of others.” In this community, “teaching is the dominating passion of the lives of the believers”, “fear of failure finds no place”, and “mutual support, commitment to learning, and appreciation of diversity of action are the prevailing norms.”

As the spiritual foundations of such a community are fortified, “the level of collective discourse is raised, social relations among the friends take on new meaning, and a sense of common purpose inspires their interactions.” The pattern of activity in this community is “propagated by young and old, by veteran and newly enrolled, working side by side.” The members of the community are striving to “assume a posture of humility,” become “forgetful of self,” place “complete trust in God,” and be “reliant on His all sustaining power” and “confident in His unfailing assistance”. These represent but a few of the features of a culture that defines growing, vibrant communities. How would the lack of attention on the part of an Area Teaching Committee to cultivating them impede a cluster’s development?
Pitfalls and hindrances in the planning

Section 26  pages 66-70

• Let us think of some of the pitfalls they will have to avoid. How much progress will they make if, after formulating a vision:

• they merely draw up a wish-list of goals?
• they prepare a list of perceived problems in the cluster and formulate detailed lines of action to solve each of them?
• the group plans without any reference to the availability of human and other resources?
• they consider the pool of human resources upon which they can draw today, but their plans do not address how to expand it?
• the group does not keep constantly in mind the statement of the Universal House of Justice “Let them strain every nerve to ensure that the system which they have so laboriously erected does not close in on itself but progressively expands to embrace more and more people”?
Expanding human resources and multiplying number of core activities. Section 27  

Underlying the various consultations we have described in this unit, including the one in the preceding section, has been the conviction that the process of growth in a cluster has to be viewed from the two perspectives encouraged by the Universal House of Justice:

one in which the educational process assumes prominence and the other in which the cycles of activity take on significance.

In other words, the training institute will have to learn to raise up an ever-expanding pyramid of human resources, with more and more friends reaching the higher level courses, making it possible to multiply the number of core activities, cycle after cycle.
Having briefly considered some of the tasks involved in building capacity for the provision of training and for accompanying the friends in the field of service, we now turn our attention to the capacity for expansion—particularly as it pertains to the work of the Area Teaching Committee.

- Promote efforts to reach more and more young people
- Encourage the multiplication of devotional meetings
- Maintain a steady stream of visits to homes in a neighborhood or village
- Identify neighborhoods and villages where there are receptive populations and take the first steps to establish core activities
- Read the circumstances in the cluster, assessing accurately the capacities of the community and the effects being produced by sustained growth:
- Place the immediate tasks in which the friends are engaged in larger and larger contexts: in the context of the growth of their communities, in the context of the development of the Faith, in the context of the unfoldment of human history
The long-term process in which we are engaged to develop capacity has no less a purpose than to release the society-building power inherent in the Faith. Section 28  page 77-79

“What we have described in the preceding paragraphs and in so many messages over the last decade and a half can best be viewed as the latest in a series of approaches to the growth of the Bahá’í community, each suited to specific historical circumstances.

“Referring to the development of the global Bahá’í community, how often did the beloved Guardian encourage the friends to remain resolute in their purpose and persevere in their endeavors. ‘Conscious of their high calling, confident in the society-building power which their Faith possesses,’ he noted with satisfaction, ‘they press forward, undeterred and undismayed, in their efforts to fashion and perfect the necessary instruments wherein the embryonic World Order of Bahá’u’lláh can mature and develop.’
Action, reflection, consultation and study—are understood by the individual, the community and the institutions of the Faith. Section 28 page 77

“During this period, the adoption of an evolving framework for action has enabled the friends to progressively nurture and refine essential capacities, giving rise to simple acts of service at first, leading to more elaborate patterns of action, which in turn demanded the development of capacities still more complex. In this way, a systematic process of human resource development and community building has been started in thousands of clusters—and, in many of them, become far advanced.

...countless believers have acquired to share accounts of Bahá’u’lláh’s life and discuss the implications of His Revelation and peerless Covenant; in the growing contingents of souls who, as a result, have been attracted to His Cause and are contributing to the achievement of His unifying vision; in the ability of Bahá’ís and their friends, at the very grassroots of the community, to describe in eloquent terms their experience of a process capable of transforming character and shaping social existence; in the significantly larger numbers of those indigenous to a country who, as members of Bahá’í institutions and agencies, are now guiding the affairs of their communities.
• ...mounting appreciation for what it means to give effect to the Teachings through social action; in the multiplying opportunities being sought and seized to offer a Bahá’í perspective on discourses prevalent in society; in the awareness of a global community that, in all its endeavors, it is hastening the emergence of divine civilization by manifesting the society-building power inherent in the Cause; indeed, in the friends’ growing consciousness that their efforts to foster inner transformation, to widen the circle of unity, to collaborate with others in the field of service, to help populations take charge of their own spiritual, social, and economic development— and, through all such efforts, to bring about the betterment of the world—express the very purpose of religion itself.”