

Attaining  
 the dynamics  
 of growth



*Glimpses from  
 five continents*







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Bahá’í World Centre



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To the delegates attending the Tenth International Bahá’í Convention

In just a few years, the intensive programme of growth has emerged as a powerful

means for the expansion and consolidation of the Faith on a large scale. Leading the

process of learning that impels progress are scores of clusters where the friends have,

through painstaking, systematic effort, come to understand how best to implement

the cycles of activity that constitute such a programme. So instructive is the experience

of these clusters, we asked the International Teaching Centre to choose one example

from each continent and prepare a document that would demonstrate at once the

diversity of conditions in which the believers everywhere are labouring and the

coherent vision that unites them as they advance the process of entry by troops. The

document consists of five case studies and a closing analysis. It is inspiring indeed,

and we commend it to your study.

While the case studies offer an impressive account of the activity in each cluster,

you will, we hope, not be content only to read the narrative but will try to identify

the principles, qualities, and approaches that have made possible the progress

achieved. What should become clear to you is how aptly the friends and institutions

in the clusters have managed to exploit the framework for action referred to in our

27 December 2005 message to breathe the spirit of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation into places

as diverse as the crowded city of London and the tiny island group of Kiribati.

Immediately apparent from the description of all five clusters is the degree to which

the friends have relied on the power of divine assistance; this has fortified them in

the field of action and enabled them to persevere in the face of inevitable difficulties.

Equally evident is the sense of purpose that animates their endeavours—a purpose

complemented by the attitude of learning they have espoused. Even more striking,

however, is the way these attributes are perpetuated in the body of believers as it

grows in size, for in all cases they have come to characterize not only individual

action but also the community’s as a whole. So focused is the collective energy of

the friends as they carry out the central tasks of the Five Year Plan, whether in

taking individual initiative or participating in organized campaigns, that they are

catching the first glimpses of what it means for their powers to be multiplied in

unified action.

In reading the case studies, you will note how the approaches adopted and the

system of administration employed serve as means for facilitating the dynamics of

such unified action. In every cluster, fellowship and support are the watchwords in

this respect. Whether they are paying a visit to a family’s home to draw them into

a conversation about the Faith or helping one another to perform acts of service as

part of their study of the institute courses, it is the joy of accompanying other souls

on their spiritual journey that motivates the believers.

This same motivating force guides the institutions and agencies operating in the

cluster in their efforts to administer the intensive programme of growth. Clearly the

complexity of the coordination schemes in the five clusters varies to some extent.

Yet, 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 ardour 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.

In the closing analysis, the International Teaching Centre examines the strategies

being employed to transfer the experience gained in advanced clusters, such as

the five described here, to those in earlier stages of growth. The effect of such

transference has been remarkable. What sometimes required several years for the

friends in one cluster to accomplish can now be learned in another in a relatively

short span of time. Often within a matter of months, as pointed out by the Teaching

Centre, a dynamic pattern of activity, reflecting the equal emphasis placed on

the twin processes of expansion and consolidation, can be established. Invariably,

the believers take immediate ownership for the programme of growth, and unity

of thought is soon reached. As they begin to put into practice what they have

learned through the study of institute courses, especially related to direct teaching

methods, they see their efforts confirmed and preconceived notions about the lack

of receptivity fall away. Their commitment to the process of growth is raised to

higher and higher levels as they are drawn into decision making at the reflection

meeting. Plans laid down by the institutions and agencies serving the cluster

become increasingly effective as their ability to interpret the experience acquired

by the friends is gradually sharpened. They are able to think strategically, to set

priorities, and to use resources judiciously. Moreover, they identify believers capable

of shouldering added responsibilities in pursuit of plans and channel the energies

of growing numbers in service to the Cause. The community thrives as it lovingly

embraces new believers. In short, the process of capacity building in the three

protagonists of the Plan accelerates at a tremendous rate. It is this development

that heartens us most and which gives us confidence that the potential of the Five

Year Plan will be realized.

The Universal House of Justice

Riḍván 2008

[Photograph]

**London**

*United Kingdom*

The experience of the

London cluster is a lesson in

mobilizing teaching teams

and transforming attitudes

to the expansion of the

Cause in what was deemed

an “unreceptive” area.

Like many other large cities, London had long

been seen as a place where it was especially difficult

to teach—in spite of the fact that a direct teach-

ing project undertaken in the Hackney borough

between 1992 and 1997 clearly showed heightened

receptivity among the Afro-Caribbean, Turkish,

and Kurdish populations. Unfortunately, the

project lacked adequate means to deepen newly

enrolled believers and build community life.

Without enough active teachers and effective

strategies, only a handful of the significant num-

bers of individuals and families that entered the

Cause developed a strong Bahá’í identity.

In 2001, at the outset of the Five Year Plan,

London was divided into seven clusters. One

that showed particular promise for growth was

London City east, which included the site of the

Hackney project. Following consultations with

the Counsellors, the institutions and agencies

there decided to address the deficiencies of the

earlier teaching project by taking a campaign-

like approach to raising up human resources

and by making specific plans that would allow

every willing individual to join a study group and

progress rapidly through the sequence of institute

courses. In that way, new believers would imme-

diately assume a sense of responsibility for the

progress of the Faith and would themselves arise

to become active teachers.

When this approach was presented at a reflec-

tion meeting, the idea of an intensified effort met



**Cluster at a glance**

∎ Area 1,610 square kilometres

∎ Largest city in western Europe:  
population 7.5 million

∎ over 40 percent of inhabitants belong  
to “minority” groups, especially  
Africans, Caribbeans, and Indians

∎ City divided into 33 boroughs  
(local municipalities)

∎ Bahá’í community numbers around  
1,000 with a high proportion of  
friends from Iranian background

∎ local Spiritual assemblies in 29 boroughs

∎ Second intensive programme of  
growth in Europe (April 2005)

∎ First Bahá’í in London was Mary Virginia  
Thornburgh-Cropper, a member of the  
first Western pilgrim group in 1898

∎ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited in 1911  
and again in 1912–13

∎ Site of the resting place of Shoghi effendi

[Photograph]

with a strong positive response . Within a few months, a company of some

30 believers, many of them young people, had successfully engaged friends of

the Faith in neighbourhood children’s classes, devotional meetings, and home

visits. This experience led the way for other clusters in London where the

believers were beginning to see the transforming effect of the institute process

on the work of expansion and consolidation.

## Preparing and launching the intensive programme of growth

In early 2005, the decision was taken to amalgamate London’s seven clusters

into one, the combined resources of which now made launching an intensive

programme of growth possible. The focus of the new Greater London cluster’s

first reflection meeting, held in preparation for the programme’s launch, was

twofold: to carry out a campaign of home visits and to identify potentially

receptive friends, family members, neighbours, and co-workers. The ground-

work that was laid in this preparatory period proved critical to the success of

the programme’s early cycles.

Only weeks before the launch of the intensive programme of growth, a

cluster-level scheme of coordination was established. The Bahá’í Council for

England, in consultation with the Counsellors, appointed an Area Teaching

Committee, consisting of five friends with experience in the institute process.

A cluster institute coordinator was then named, as was the first children’s class

coordinator for the cluster.

Time was short, and much work lay ahead. To begin the programme,

friends who had completed institute courses would need to be strategically

mobilized. There had been some experience with seekers in core activities in

the past but not on the scale required. Would efforts to mobilize the friends

in the intensive programme of growth meet with success? The excitement felt

by members of the Area Teaching Committee was mixed with considerable

anxiety—feelings heightened by the knowledge that theirs was only the second

programme of growth in all of western Europe. There would be no examples

to follow along the way.

The results of the first cycle of activity far exceeded expectations. More

than 150 believers participated in some way in the expansion phase, a note-

worthy accomplishment, given how few had previously considered themselves

teachers of the Cause. The confidence of the friends was greatly boosted, and

the spirit at the well-attended reflection meeting was elevated, determined,

and galvanic.

The objective of the institutions and agencies serving in the cluster had been

to increase substantially the number of seekers involved in core activities, to learn

about teaching, and to witness some growth. The number of the friends of the

Faith engaged in core activities rose dramatically from 40 to 133, and six enrolled

as Bahá’ís. Without doubt, the possibilities for growth were significantly greater

than anticipated. But beyond the measurable results, it was clear that the friends

were becoming increasingly audacious in reaching out to people, using the tools

acquired from the training institute courses such as home visits and teaching

teams to shape their endeavours. As the account of their victories reverberated

in far off lands, the friends in London were further confirmed in their efforts.

## Learning about teaching teams

From the outset of the intensive programme of growth in London, teach-

ing teams have played a pivotal role in propelling the process. In general,

teams have focused on inviting people to core activities, which, of course, has

involved them in sharing the Message, to a greater or lesser extent in each case.

Much work was undertaken to prepare the initial teams for the first cycle of

activity in order to ensure success.

Like military strategists mobilizing an army, the cluster agencies with

the assistance of the Auxiliary Board members began by looking at the list of

believers participating in the institute process, especially those who had com-

pleted Ruhi Institute Books 6 and 7, and by identifying groups of friends living

reasonably close to one another who could form three-or four-member teams.

A potential coordinator for each team was contacted and asked about possible

members, and through such a process of consultation the first teams emerged.

The role of the team coordinators would later prove essential for ensuring the

flow of information, advice, resources, and encouragement between the large

numbers operating on the ground and the cluster agencies—a flow imperative

for this army of intoxicated lovers of Bahá’u’lláh to function properly.

A simple outline of what teaching teams would actually do was produced

and studied, first with the team coordinators and then with all members. The

Auxiliary Board members took the lead in this work, and because there was

little experience operating in teaching teams and only limited experience with

individual teaching, these concepts had to be carefully examined. The materials

aimed at underscoring one point above all else: the expansion phase was a time

to teach, and to teach with an intensity beyond any previous efforts. Of the

30 teams formed in the first cycle, perhaps 12 were effective in engaging their

contacts in core activities. Though concerned about the less effective teams,

the Area Teaching Committee was advised to be confident that the learning

from the most active ones would soon spread to others—an approach that

has been proven by the consistent increase in the number of effective teams

from cycle to cycle.

The stories from the teams during the first week—of overcoming fears,

making successful home visits to share prayers, teaching in small firesides,

[Photograph]

inviting colleagues to devotional meetings—reinforced many of the ideas they

had studied earlier and strengthened their appreciation for the new mode of

working. Excitement was palpable. Inspiring stories were collected and shared

to encourage others. They were also used in later cycles to advance the friends’

understanding through reflection on real experiences.

Confidence to teach the Faith to people the believers already knew was

a key attitudinal change that occurred in the early stages of the programme

and developed into new, more effective, habits over subsequent cycles. Many

believers initially felt inhibited, assuming that people in their immediate circles

would not be receptive. Through experience, however, teachers saw that when

they presented the Faith in a natural way, their friends, family members, neigh-

bours, and co-workers responded positively with remarkable consistency.

As the teams entered the field of action, they experienced the immediate

power of prayer and began to rely on it increasingly—a habit that has been

strongly encouraged by the institutions, as a means both for attracting divine

assistance and for keeping in the forefront the immensely exalted and spiritual

nature of the enterprise. The plan for each cycle of activity continues to include

a special prayer campaign in which all are invited to take part.

With up to 50 teams spread across more than 30 communities in London,

it has been a challenge for the cluster agencies to keep in touch with them

to support their efforts. Yet the ability to work shoulder to shoulder with the

teams has gradually increased throughout the cycles, as the Area Teaching

Committee members have acquired personal experience and have themselves

become more confident in their approach to accompanying the friends in their

efforts. Likewise, the teams’ skills and understanding have also developed as

they have gained experience in the field. By the end of the sixth cycle, there

was a strong culture of inviting friends to Book 1 without hesitation.

## Study circles as environments for teaching

As in other places, study circles have offered a fertile environment for teaching,

but this potential has only gradually been realized as the friends have over-

come inhibitions to teach. Experience has demonstrated that many barriers

are removed by studying Book 6. Several friends have even remarked that their

habits of thought were so ingrained that they did not shed their inhibitions to

share the Message until they had served as tutors of the book a few times.

Further, some tutors have managed to establish a pattern of growth based

on the courses of the institute. These believers form study circles and assist

the seekers after the completion of each course to carry out the relevant core

activity with a growing network of friends of the Faith. By accompanying

participants in this way through the study and practice of Books 1 to 7, they

are able to systematically multiply the number of those who have the capacity

to help others become dynamic teachers of the Cause. The story of one tutor

illustrates the kind of transformation that can occur.

**Vida** facilitated her first study circle as the result of the efforts of a teaching team member who was

not yet enrolled in the Faith. The team member arranged a daytime study circle for eight mothers,

only two of whom were Bahá’ís, offering to take care of the children while Vida facilitated. Quite

nervous at the start, with the new participants looking at her expectantly, Vida later confessed, “I

could hear my own heart beating.” Despite her nervousness, the first sessions went well; the par-

ticipants were enthusiastic and her confidence quickly began to build. Through her own efforts and

those of the auxiliary Board member and the cluster coordinators who accompanied her in the

field, Vida’s skills developed markedly. From her first study circle with mothers, a children’s class

naturally emerged. Several participants were nurtured and embraced the Faith through home visits,

firesides, and devotional gatherings. Other teaching opportunities opened up as these individuals

began to move through the sequence of courses and, in turn, to teach the Faith, so that a pattern

of growth has now emerged. Two years later, Vida is serving as a resource person—even travelling

to other countries where the believers struggle with certain tasks related to growth, accompanying

the friends in making home visits and helping them to confirm souls in the Cause. And the original

teaching team member formally enrolled in the Faith in the seventh cycle!

## Glimpses of growth

As a result of the efforts exerted by the believers in the London cluster, the

tempo of teaching is steadily gathering momentum. The table below provides

relevant statistical information from the first through the eighth cycle of active-

ity, which concluded in January 2008.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cycle | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th |
| No. involved in teaching activities | 156 | 106 | 147 | 115 | 129 | 143 | 114 | 75 |
| No. youth and adults enrolled during cycle | 10 | 9 | 10 | 6 | 8 | 11 | 10 | 8 |
| Total no. individuals enrolled during cycle | 12 | 12 | 12 | 6 | 9 | 12 | 10 | 8 |
| No. new believers entered in institute programme | 10 | 7 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 11 | 10 | 8 |
| No. seekers in core activities at end of cycle | 133 | 124 | 120 | 128 | 150 | 140 | 180 | 131 |

It is noteworthy that 86 per cent of the youth and adult new believers have

entered the training institute process, and nearly half of these are active in the

teaching field. Several became members of teaching teams straight away—in

a few cases before they formally declared—and are regarded as some of the

most natural teachers. Without old habits or attitudes to discard, they see

training as an opportunity to gain skills to effectively share the Message they

have embraced, and so they respond with eagerness to invitations to undertake

further study of the institute courses. On occasion, they even recall fondly the

cycle of activity during which they joined the Faith!

## Decentralizing children’s classes

Before the launch of the intensive programme of growth, many of the children

from Bahá’í families in London attended one of the weekly centralized “com-

munity schools” held in three localities, to which parents living outside the city

brought their children as well. Only one or two children from families where

the parents were not Bahá’ís attended these schools. Following a decision of the

National Spiritual Assembly, such schools were closed so that resources could

be focused on initiating neighbourhood classes that would be open to all.

It has been a slow and sometimes difficult process of transition to a culture

that places importance on extending Bahá’í education to children of all back-

grounds. Yet, with experience, the value of neighbourhood classes has become

more and more apparent, and as the following story shows, the children from

Bahá’í families are not only developing a strong Bahá’í identity through the

classes but are also becoming agents of growth in a completely natural way.

**Florence and Abigail** The openness of children and their natural ability to teach became

clear when Florence, one of the Bahá’í children, said to her friend, “We have no school tomor-

row, because it’s a Holy Day.” Her friend, an eager participant in Bahá’í children’s classes, told her

mother that she, too, would like to observe the Holy Day. Puzzled, the mother called the children’s

class teacher, who explained that the Bahá’í children had permission to stay home from school on

this sacred anniversary of the Birth of the Báb, a manifestation of God. The mother, who was not

a believer or participant in any core activity, then called the school and gave permission for her

daughter to take the Holy Day off, too. Mother and daughter attended the Holy Day commemoration,

and the child continues to be one of the most enthusiastic children in the class, firmly identifying

herself as a Bahá’í.

Abigail, a six-year-old who was also attending Bahá’í children’s classes, decided to conduct a

devotional meeting at home for her parents. She invited them to sit on cushions she had prepared,

and she played some music. When daddy began to read his prayer too soon, she explained that

they must read their prayers in turn, with a pause between each one. Abigail's mother, who was

studying Book 1, was very touched by this experience with her daughter and soon after declared

her faith.

One young mother who was appointed as a children’s class coordinator

during the fifth cycle gained a good deal of experience in inviting neighbour-

hood children to her classes and in taking their parents through the sequence

of institute courses. She has seen the evolution in the friends’ understanding

of the nature of Bahá’í children’s classes and their place in a process of growth.

At first, conversations among Bahá’ís tended to revolve around whether it was

prudent to stop operating the centralized Bahá’í Sunday school. Then, with

the focus on working locally, conversations shifted to learning how to invite

children to classes and what to say to their parents. From there, consultations

moved on to the highly practical question of how to work with the many chil-

dren who were attending the classes. How to invite the parents to core active-

ties was the next stage. The question most pressing before the friends at this

[Photograph]

point is how to invite the receptive souls from among the parents to formally

enrol as Bahá’ís. The story of one mother’s efforts illustrates the tremendous

possibilities that open to those who step forward to teach children.

**Julia** started a regular children’s class with her daughter’s friends, whose mothers were also learning

about the Faith from her, and gradually acquired the capacity to conduct classes themselves,

overcoming obstacles as they arose. One of the most welcome challenges was learning how to invite

her study circle participants to enrol in the Faith. She tells the story of one such experience:

“My friend and I got together after the first session of the Book 1 study circle. She had some

questions and as we consulted about them, she seemed to be trying to articulate something.

‘What makes us different? How is it that you are a Bahá’í and … and I'm not a Bahá’í? What is

the difference between you and me?’ I responded that I understood a Bahá’í to be someone

who accepts that Bahá’u’lláh has God’s message for today, and that being a Bahá’í is a realiza-

tion that comes to our heart. At some point we realize that we believe. She responded, ‘But I

do believe that. I realized it almost the first time we spoke of it together.’

Julia has accompanied several of these mothers through Book 3 and beyond. They are now Bahá’ís,

conducting children’s classes and vigorously contributing to the process of growth.

Of the 15 children’s classes in London, 13 include children from families

that are not Bahá’ís—and those involved are engaged in an intense process of

learning. As experience accumulates in forming junior youth groups, the coor-

dinators for children’s classes and junior youth groups are finding that working

together ensures that these two core activities reinforce one another.

## Looking forward

Eight cycles, spanning two and a half years, have seen the enrolment of 81 new

believers in London. The effect of this accomplishment on the members

of the teaching teams, most of whom had no previous experience with their

friends and families becoming Bahá’ís, has been profound. Yet, even with

intense prayer and effort, it is not proving easy to accelerate further the rate of

enrolments in London. A number of important challenges must now be met:

raising the number of effective teachers; ensuring that teaching in the expan-

sion phase reaches the necessary level of intensity; supporting the work of the

teams adequately; and, above all, enhancing the ability to identify segments of

the general population with heightened receptivity to Bahá’u’lláh’s Message.

Until now the teaching teams have principally reinforced individual ini-

tiatives—albeit on an increasingly larger scale. The next frontier of learning is

collective action in the teaching field. In the eighth cycle, the introduction of

a special teaching effort aimed at receptive populations in selected neighbour-

hoods, engaging a few of the most audacious and experienced teams with a

higher level of organization, coordination, and intensity of action, has opened

up new prospects for growth.

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited London in 1911, He told the friends that it was

the attractive force of their love that had drawn Him to that city. Furthermore,

He said, *“In the world of existence there is no more powerful magnet than*

*the magnet of love ”*[1] Today, as the believers in London strive to share the

Divine Message with the diverse souls who now make up that city, they are

conscious that their success is directly related to the increasing ardour of their

all-encompassing love for their fellow citizens, who come from almost every

[Photograph]

conceivable background. Deep in the hearts and minds of the friends resonate

the Master’s words about the diversity he found among the Bahá’ís in London:

*“You are all, of every race and creed, members of one family. The teaching of*

*Bahá’u’lláh constrains you to realize your brotherhood to one another.”*[2] Yet

they know, too, that goodwill is not enough for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also advised

them, *“These meetings here in London are good, the knowledge and the inten-*

*tions are good, but how can there be a result without action?”*[3] It is through

their unflagging efforts in the Plan’s framework for action that the friends in

this cluster have found effective instruments to convey their ever-growing

measure of love for humankind.

[Photograph]

1 *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London: Addresses and Notes of Conversations* (London: Bahá’í Publishing

Trust, 1987) p. 79.

2 ibid., p. 66.

3 ibid., p. 54.

[Photograph]

**Norte del Cauca**

***Colombia***

At the end of October 2007,

the Bahá’ís in Norte del Cauca

held a reflection meeting that

marked the close of their

cluster’s 10th cycle of activities.

The meeting venue overflowed with some three

hundred adults, youth, junior youth, and chil-

dren who had come to join in joyous celebration

and take part in serious and disciplined consulta-

tion, from all of which they would derive further

spiritual sustenance. As the friends separated into

groups according to the core activities with which

they were involved, the institutions and agencies

serving the cluster felt a deep sense of gratitude

to Bahá’u’lláh not only for the large turnout but

also for the high level of maturity demonstrated

by these active and dedicated souls.

The process of learning about expansion and

consolidation in Norte del Cauca reaches back

to the 1960s, when a small group of Bahá’ís from

other parts of the country started to visit the

area. Teaching methods gradually evolved that

enabled them to bring large numbers into the

Faith, and over time they developed a system-

atic approach to visiting newly enrolled believers

—now reflected in Book 2 of the Ruhi Institute

curriculum—in order to support them. It was

also during these initial years that social and

economic development projects, which would

have a tremendous impact on the region, began

to be established. Of particular note were those

initiated by the Bahá’í-inspired organization

Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las

Ciencias (fundaec) in an effort to elaborate and

implement the concept of a university for inte-

gral development.

In the years that followed, teaching efforts

became increasingly systematic, but the goal of



**Cluster at a glance**

• Located in southwest region of  
Colombia, just south of Cali, the  
country’s third largest city

• Population approximately 235,000

• Majority of inhabitants of African descent

• Dominant religion Catholicism,  
mixed with African traditions, giving  
rise to religious syncretism

• Seven semi-urban towns and several  
dozen rural village communities, divided  
into seven municipalities, ranging in  
population from 5,000 to 50,000

• Region where the Ruhi institute was born

• Long history of learning about large-scale  
expansion, as well as Bahá’í-inspired efforts  
in social and economic development

• Originally five clusters; amalgamated  
into one in late 2004

• One of the first clusters to launch  
an intensive programme of growth  
in Colombia (February 2005)

[Photograph]

sustaining them from within the area itself by the local population remained

elusive. In time, the establishment of the Ruhi Institute would prove crucial

in raising up human resources for this purpose. In its early stages, however, the

Institute focused much of its efforts on bringing youth from all over Colombia

to a central facility for training, most often in the context of a year-of-service

programme, from where they would be dispersed throughout the country

to work in villages, carrying out what are now known as core activities. This

practice began to change at the start of the Four Year Plan in 1996 when the

guidance of the Universal House of Justice shed new light on Bahá’í experi-

ence worldwide with expansion and consolidation. Subsequent years finally

brought the internal development of human resources at the grass roots so

long hoped for. By 2005, 812 people had completed Book 1 in the sequence of

courses, 208 friends had been trained as children’s class teachers, 81 individuals

had completed Book 6, and 45 were actively serving as tutors of study circles.

From such a position of strength, the friends in the cluster launched their

intensive programme of growth, and the years since have ushered in a new

phase in the history of the Faith in the area. More than 1,500 people in Norte

del Cauca have now joined the Bahá’í community, raising the population to

4,300, including children, youth, and adults.

While teaching the Faith has never been difficult in the area, it is the

capacity within the cluster to balance and sustain the complex elements of

a programme of growth that now makes a difference. Through three years

of continuous activity, the believers have acquired a greater consciousness

of their responsibility to contribute to creating the unique features of Bahá’í

community life—a consciousness that is evident in their level of enthusiasm;

in their concern for educating children and junior youth; in their desire to

receive training to carry out acts of service; in the degree of their participation

in the Nineteen Day Feast, Holy Day observances, and devotional meetings;

and in their eagerness to give to the Funds of the Faith. Reaching this point

has not been easy. It has required intense activity, punctuated by as many

moments of struggle as those of joy. Plans and organizational schemes have

often needed adjustment when results fell short of expectations, and the con-

ditions of life in the area have posed persistent challenges to the believers.

## Developing human resources

Despite the long history of teaching in Norte del Cauca, the first cycles of the

intensive programme of growth lacked emphasis on expansion, and attention

focused primarily on involving a higher number of the Bahá’í population in the

institute process. The initial 45 friends available to serve as tutors were able to

attend to close to 400 people studying the sequence of courses, and the ratio

has been maintained throughout subsequent cycles. However, the mobility of

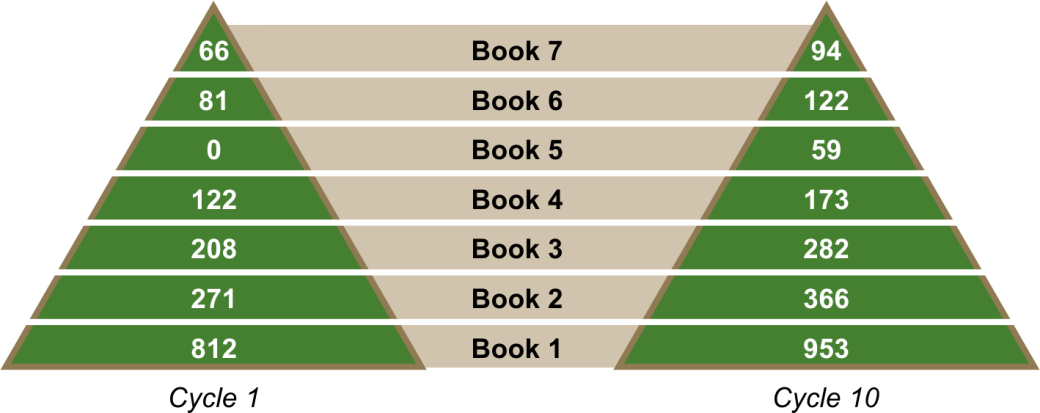
the population in the cluster, especially of the youth, who often migrate to the

cities to find work, has made it difficult to increase the human resources resid-

ing in the area, as indicated by the table below. In fact, a substantial number

of those who have completed the books in the sequence are not reflected in

the table as they have long since left the cluster.



The challenge of working with such a mobile population has required

that the cluster coordinators be flexible in their approach. Most participants

take the courses in study circles, but they also have access to two- or three-day

intensive sessions offered at various sites on the weekends, especially for the

higher courses in the sequence. Those involved in study circles, sometimes in

coordination with other groups working through the same material, are also

encouraged to organize periods of intensive study for an afternoon, a full day,

or a weekend. This combination allows the system of delivery to be adapted

to participants’ availability.

The stories of two young women, Rosa Elena and Monica, illustrate how

the agencies operating in the cluster have learned to systematically identify,

prepare, and mobilize individuals who have become vital human resources.

**Rosa Elena** the cluster’s current coordinator for junior youth groups is Rosa Elena, a young

woman native to the area who participated in Bahá’í children’s classes and then a junior youth group

in Chalo, a small community with a population of 1,200. During the period of the first Five year Plan,

she was studying the sequence of institute courses. By the time the first cycles in Norte del Cauca’s

intensive programme of growth began, Rosa was offering a year of service with a close friend from

her community in a distant part of the country. When they returned, the two started to study rural

education at fundaec’s University Centre. Soon the coordinator for junior youth groups identi-

fied Rosa Elena as someone with the capacity to support the activities of the institute, particularly

junior youth groups. As a first step, the coordinator helped Rosa to start her own group in Chalo,

accompanying her as she invited participants and visited their parents. From there, Rosa began to

accompany others in forming new groups. For months, she worked closely with the coordinator to

learn the skills necessary to coordinate the junior youth activities of the cluster and animator train-

ing. By the time the previous junior youth coordinator left during the seventh cycle, Rosa Elena was

able to take over as the coordinator in addition to pursuing her studies.

**Monica** is a young woman who lives in the small community of Yarumales. She first heard of the

Bahá’í Faith when the children’s class coordinator arrived at her house by mistake, searching for

local Bahá’ís who might be encouraged to start classes. All of the friends the coordinator had set

out to visit had either moved away or were unavailable, but Monica showed interest in her descript-

tion of a Bahá’í children’s class and responded positively to the offer to work with her in starting

one. With the help of the coordinator, Monica was quickly able to study the necessary books in

the institute sequence and gain practical experience in teaching lessons. Weeks later, Monica was

conducting the class in Yarumales by herself. Seeing her strong interest in education, the coordina-

tor encouraged Monica to enrol in the undergraduate programme in rural education at fundaec’s

University Centre. During the first semester of her studies, Monica declared her belief in Bahá’u’lláh

and became actively involved in Bahá’í activities in the cluster. She has continued her study of the

sequence of courses and is now working with the institute, accompanying others in their efforts to

form and sustain children’s classes. Every other Monday, she and a handful of others study with the

institute coordinators and consult on their endeavours to support the growth of institute activities.

The vitality of Monica's faith has spread to those around her, and in recent cycles of activity Monica's

mother and all of her siblings have become Bahá’ís.

## Mobilizing the friends to teach

When the programme of growth was launched in Norte del Cauca in 2005,

some believed that the receptivity of the local population had diminished

since the 1960s and ’70s, and this, they thought, accounted for the slowness

with which expansion gathered momentum. However, as the cycles of activity

progressed and those who were taught the Faith responded enthusiastically,

this misconception dissipated. In fact, experience showed that not only were

people still receptive, but the Bahá’í Faith was viewed with admiration because

of its positive influence in the area over the years.

Although receptivity remained high and past teaching methods were still

effective, the institutions and agencies serving the cluster soon came to the

realization that the magnitude of the work demanded a more focused approach

[Photograph]

than had ever been previously adopted. They would need to learn how the

friends could best be mobilized to carry out regular teaching campaigns dur-

ing the expansion phase of each cycle and how new believers could be rapidly

incorporated into community life

Following a series of adjustments to plans and operations on the basis

of learning on the ground, viable organizational arrangements emerged.

Currently, in every local community where a teaching campaign is scheduled

to take place, one person is selected to organize activities. He or she is assisted

by one or two friends who are appointed for each cycle as cluster-level coordi-

nators for the campaign. These coordinators identify a core group of teachers

for each community, consisting of both active teachers residing in the locality

itself and others from different parts of the cluster. Those who offer to par-

ticipate in the effort during the reflection meeting are added to one such core

group. Information related to the campaign—the names of teachers participat-

ing each day, the number of individuals visited, and the names of those who

declare—is recorded by the coordinators in a notebook that is passed to the

Area Teaching Committee. At the end of the expansion phase, all those who

have participated gather to celebrate the result of the teaching efforts, share

stories, and reflect on their successes and the challenges they encountered. In

the most recent cycle, 90 people were present at this gathering.

With the current approach, a two-to three-member teaching team makes

a pre-arranged visit to a home. Equipped with a visual aid seen as a precursor

to the more extensive presentation in Book 6, the team members take about

thirty minutes to an hour to explain the essential aspects of the Faith to their

hosts. Since they hope to create an intimate spiritual relationship with those

with whom they converse, time is always made available for questions and

discussion. At the end, after having explained what it means to be a Bahá’í,

the teachers ask those present whether they would like to be part of the local

Bahá’í community. Most of the believers in the cluster have come into the

Faith as a result of this invitation.

The individuals visited are not strangers to the Bahá’í community. At the

beginning of each cycle, the coordinators of the expansion phase, working

with the cluster agencies, make a list of the names of individuals suggested by

Bahá’ís in the cluster—many of whom are parents of youngsters who attend

children’s classes or junior youth groups or are friends of the Faith who par-

ticipate in devotional meetings and study circles. On average, one out of every

three individuals who are taught the Faith accepts it, and most others remain

interested. The believers recognize that this success is, to a significant degree,

dependent on the highly charged spiritual atmosphere of the campaign.

The average number of people who currently participate in collective

teaching efforts for more than two days in each cycle is around 90. Others

teach on an individual basis or participate for a shorter period of time.

The immediate task following the expansion phase is to tend to the needs

of the newly enrolled believers. This is done in large part through study cir-

cles, junior youth groups, children’s classes, and devotional meetings, as well

as through systematically organized visits to homes during the consolidation

phase of every cycle. Most such visits are carried out by those studying the

second book of the sequence of courses, and it is generally expected that by

the time new believers have received five home visits, they will begin to feel

integrated into the community. While there is a longstanding tradition of

home visits in the area, the number of families reached per cycle—between

80 and 95—is still not sufficient. Efforts to increase this number are under

way. In each cycle, the Area Teaching Committee sets aside a day dedicated to

visits, encouraging community members to make a personal commitment to

continue calling on families and individuals throughout the rest of the cycle.

[Photograph]

Nevertheless, experience suggests that making such visits a distinct feature of

Bahá’í community life will require time as the friends are gradually assisted in

their efforts to understand better the dynamics of this activity.

Perhaps what has proven most effective are the efforts made to form study

circles with those who enrol during the expansion phase. A new believer,

working with the institute coordinator or with someone who can act as a

tutor, is encouraged to make a list of friends, family members, and neigh-

bours who might be interested in participating in this activity. An invitation is

extended for them to learn about the institute programme, and a study circle

is then formed with those who express a desire to attend. Often a group of this

kind will advance through the study of several courses together. In the Norte

del Cauca cluster, this has become a means both for raising up new human

resources and systematically expanding the list of friends of the Faith, creating

the dynamics that perpetuate growth.

## Multiplying core activities

The emphasis placed on the practice component of the institute courses, as

an integral part of their study, has had a considerable effect on the multiplica-

tion of study circles, devotional meetings, children’s classes, and junior youth

groups. Equally important have been the efforts exerted to accompany the

friends as they begin to consciously walk a path of service to the Cause.

When initial attempts were being made to expand the number of devo-

tional meetings in the cluster, a member of the Area Teaching Committee

systematically visited individuals who had completed the first book of the

sequence and held workshops for all who were interested in starting their own

devotional gatherings. She also provided them with materials, helped them to

develop lists of people they could invite, and worked closely with each host.

As the number of devotional meetings grew beyond the capacity of one person

to coordinate in this way, the Area Teaching Committee began to think about

cluster activities in terms of four routes. Now the hosts of devotional meet-

ings in communities on each route receive visits during one specific week, and

in some communities individuals serve as contact people to assist others in

starting devotional meetings. Regular contact with key people on the routes

has helped to identify believers with the potential to organize activities for the

cluster. And thus, a system is evolving to support individual hosts in various

communities without the direct involvement of the Area Teaching Committee

member in each one. Among the most essential lessons recently learned is that

devotional gatherings formed around families are more regular and long-lasting

than those organized by study circles or junior youth groups. The table below

shows the steady increase in participation in this activity over several cycles.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cycle | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | 9th | 10th |
| No. devotional gatherings | 52 | 68 | 80 | 101 | 131 | 145 | 113 | 135 | 126 | 129 |
| No. participants | 522 | 737 | 776 | 968 | 1,193 | 1,563 | 1,227 | 1,365 | 1,269 | 1,258 |

The number of children’s classes has expanded by working directly with

teachers in their own villages. As shown in Monica’s story, when the children’s

class coordinator identifies individuals with a particular interest or the capac-

ity to teach children’s classes, she makes a special effort to help them advance

quickly through the necessary institute courses. She also accompanies them in

their efforts to identify children to join their classes, to visit their parents, and

to carry out their first few lessons. She then continues to assist by providing

materials, support, and further training to the teachers.

When the classes are first offered in a locality, many begin with large

numbers of children—in fact, too many, in some cases—but this eventually

settles down. The nature of life in the area is such that the number of overall

participants has fluctuated since the beginning of the intensive programme of

growth, as seen in the table below. However, the number of regular participants

is gradually rising, and the Bahá’í community is now able to attend to the

educational needs of around 1,500 children. The current challenge is to reach

a point where there are separate classes for each age group in every village.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cycle | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | 9th | 10th |
| No. children’s classes | 66 | 72 | 79 | 85 | 91 | 81 | 89 | 95 | 97 | 99 |
| No. participants | 1,263 | 1,459 | 1,331 | 1,737 | 1,851 | 1,416 | 1,525 | 1,525 | 1,335 | 1,358 |

Longstanding experience in working with young people aged 12 to 15 in

Norte del Cauca has contributed significantly to their enthusiastic participa-

tion in junior youth groups, and the number of such groups has nearly doubled

since the early cycles of activity. The institutions and agencies in the cluster

have set a goal of having a totality of 1,000 junior youth benefiting from the

spiritual empowerment programme, in one or another of its three levels, at

the time of the close of the current Five Year Plan. Having experimented with

various ways of administering this core activity, the junior youth coordinator

currently works closely with several collaborators who accompany those serving

as animators in different communities in the cluster.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cycle | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | 9th | 10th |
| No. junior youth groups | 24 | 30 | 32 | 35 | 37 | 39 | 38 | 38 | 42 | 44 |
| No. participants | 236 | 312 | 336 | 344 | 378 | 407 | 400 | 400 | 413 | 429 |

## A spiritual enterprise

Back in the joyful atmosphere of the Norte del Cauca reflection meeting, it

is clear that the believers do indeed have something wonderful to celebrate.

It is the achievement of a long-held, deeply cherished dream for their area:

to learn how to systematically develop the capacity of the friends who live

there—the capacity to administer a complex network of coordinators who

accompany hundreds of children’s class teachers, junior youth group anima-

tors, tutors of study circles, and teaching teams; the capacity to make decisions

through a process of action and reflection that gives the cluster’s organizational

structure a high degree of flexibility and enables corrections and adjustments

to be made to plans when difficulties arise; the capacity to translate a vision

of reality into coherent and consistent action that is leading the Bahá’í com-

munity towards substantial, sustainable levels of growth. All of this heralds

further cause for celebration in the years ahead.

But the believers in Norte del Cauca are keenly aware that these devel-

opments, important as they are, represent only the outer manifestations of

a far-reaching spiritual enterprise in which they are engaged—an enterprise

which, through the 30 years they have been walking this path, has gradually

[Photograph]

suffused the culture of their commu-

nity with purpose and united them at

a profound level. They understand all

too well the forces of disintegration

at work in the world. They live them

in the context of Colombian society,

and they plainly see the immense

need for the transformation called

for in the Bahá’í Teachings. Their

spiritual development has moulded

their intellectual advancement to the

point where their analysis and under-

standing of the structures and forces

shaping society are now exerting

influence on the wider community in

which they live. Their conversation is

the spiritual conversation that flows

from the Writings, from the quota- [Photograph to the right]

tions deep in their memories and hearts, from the concepts that the institute

courses elaborate, and from the acts of service in which they engage. They are

aware of the Divine Hand that guides and sustains their efforts. They know

where they are standing. They know where they are going. And they know that

by remaining undeviatingly aligned with the guidance of the Universal House

of Justice, they will get there.

[Photograph]

**Bihar Sharif**

***India***

Responding to an appeal for

friends trained through the

institute process to assist certain

communities in the Bihar Sharif

cluster in India, Shravan decided

to devote his attention to Palni,

a village with virtually no Bahá’í

activity about four kilometres

from his home in Tetrawan.

Shravan, already actively serving as a tutor in his

own community, began visiting Palni weekly, but

he met with a cold response. The people were

suspicious of his intentions, asking him, “What

do you get from this?” and “How will we benefit

from doing what you are asking us to do?” Still,

Shravan persevered, and eventually he was able

to establish a study circle. Though he continued

to be treated with mistrust, he visited the village

regularly and worked with the study circle par-

ticipants. Then the monsoon season arrived. The

stream separating Tetrawan from Palni flooded,

and the only way to cross it was to wade through

chest-deep water—which Shravan did. When the

villagers saw the degree of his commitment, their

attitude softened. The success of the study circle,

together with his spirit of devotion and service,

attracted many people to the Faith in Palni,

which now has a vibrant community with five

devotional gatherings and two children’s classes.

Shravan’s efforts also inspired other Bahá’ís in his

home village to become more involved in core

activities. Such sacrificial and active participa-

tion stands in marked contrast to the apathy that

pervaded the area only a decade and a half ago.

The Bahá’í community in Bihar Sharif has been

transformed from the grass roots up through the

acts of individuals such as Shravan, empowered



**Cluster at a glance**

∎ Located in the state of Bihar,  
in north-eastern India

∎ Population 1.2 million

∎ Predominantly rural

∎ About 1,200 villages, with  
average population of 1,000

∎ Two municipality towns:  
Bihar Sharif and Rajgir

∎ *Panchayat* is basic unit of civil  
administration for groups of 10 villages

∎ Economy primarily based on  
agriculture and farm labour

∎ Bahá’í Faith introduced to  
the area in the 1950s

∎ Early site of large-scale expansion  
and consolidation

∎ Among the early clusters in India  
to launch an intensive programme  
of growth (March 2005)

through the unified efforts of the institutions and agencies in the cluster. But

beyond this, what is most noteworthy is the capacity the community has

developed to administer large numbers of activities and to welcome into its

warm embrace growing numbers of seekers.

## First steps on the path to sustained growth

Bihar Sharif was one of many places that experienced large-scale expansion

in India in the 1960s. The Faith was introduced to the area in the 1950s by a

dynamic woman named Rasoola, who taught and served the Cause steadfastly

even in the face of persecution and social boycott. During those years of intensive

teaching, local efforts were supported by visiting teachers. Successful teaching

projects opened many villages to the Faith, and a youth cultural group travelled

from village to village, proclaiming the Message of Bahá’u’lláh through song

and drama. Summer and winter schools, along with courses at the Permanent

Teaching Institute, served as the primary vehicles for consolidation, and though

they initially generated enthusiasm in the participants, they did not increase the

friends’ capacity to engage in a sustainable process of growth. In the 1990s the

area witnessed a gradual but steady decline in Bahá’í activity. Deepening efforts

did not stimulate or meet the needs of the Bahá’ís; the state-level institutions

were not able to support the communities, which led to a loss of focus; and

many active believers left the area for economic and other reasons.

The reinvigoration of Bihar Sharif was achieved through a series of steps.

In 2000, children’s classes were established by a few youth who had completed

the first three books of the Ruhi Institute in an intensive study. The follow-

ing year, a simple plan to offer institute courses in three communities was

created and implemented, giving the institute process a thrust in the area.

[Photograph]

[Photograph]

The process was further strengthened in 2002 when the first study circles were

started by a group of friends trained to act as tutors in a regional campaign.

The introduction of the reflection meeting came next. The primary instrument

for accelerating growth in Bihar Sharif, reflection meetings provided a venue

for planning institute courses locally and for sharing experiences, especially

among those serving as tutors; they galvanized believers like Shravan to action,

bolstered their enthusiasm, and strengthened their sense of ownership of the

process of growth that had been set in motion.

Soon all of these initiatives began to bear fruit. There was a gradual increase

in the number of children’s classes, and activities directed towards junior youth

were introduced. Devotional gatherings were recognized not only as occasions

for the spiritual upliftment of souls but also as portals to growth, and a special

campaign to multiply their number provided a major impetus to growth in the

cluster. Those attending devotional gatherings began to flow seamlessly into

study circles, and regular visits to the area by the Auxiliary Board members and

institute coordinator helped to maintain a high degree of motivation among

those serving as tutors. Eventually a scheme of cluster-level coordination took

shape, with the appointment of a cluster institute coordinator and an Area

Teaching Committee served by a full-time secretary. This contributed greatly

to a further multiplication in the number of core activities, and there was a

sustained increase in study circles from mid-2003 onwards.

By 2004, conditions seemed propitious for launching an intensive pro-

gramme of growth, with 56 individuals having completed Book 7, 42 devo-

tional meetings, 11 children’s classes, 13 junior youth groups, and 8 study circles.

The initial cycle of activity failed, however, to achieve most of its objectives.

Following reflection and consultation, the friends decided to try again. Their

new plan was more strategic. They identified several communities that would

receive particular focus during the upcoming cycle and categorized them

according to their strengths and potential. Members of the cluster agencies

visited these communities to elicit their participation. The new cycle, which

came to be regarded as the cluster’s first, was then launched through a series

of community-based prayer meetings. While the planning for this cycle had

been better, it was too long—seven months—and little differentiation was

made between the expansion and the consolidation phases.

An acceleration in growth finally occurred in the second official cycle,

when the agencies began to calculate the capacity of the communities in the

cluster, as well as the receptivity of the local population, by reviewing relevant

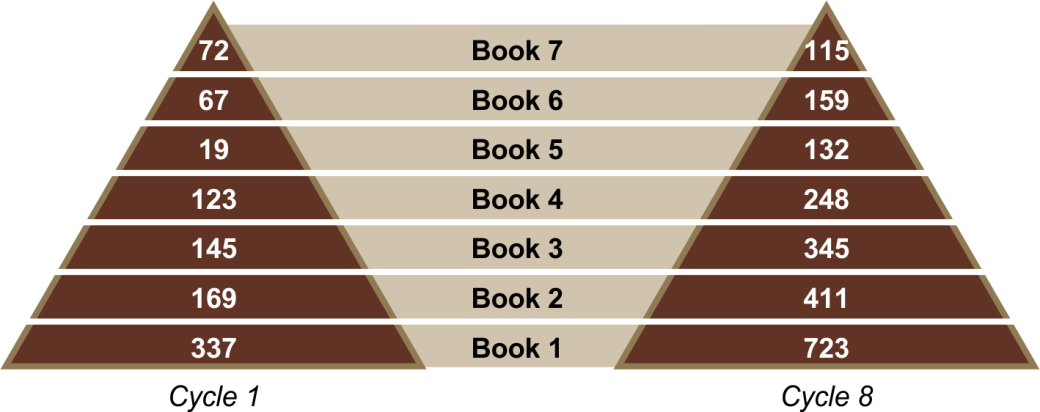
statistical information from the previous cycle. As a result of this kind of

analysis, the friends in the cluster embraced the vision of integrating 1,000

new participants per year into core activities, placing emphasis on raising the

number of children’s classes and junior youth groups—a vision which they are

gradually transforming into reality.



## Building a pattern of sustainable growth

Through eight cycles of an intensive programme of growth, the friends in

Bihar Sharif have consistently advanced in their learning about how to man-

age large-scale expansion and consolidation, as the Bahá’í population in the

cluster has expanded from around 1,200 at the time of the launch to more than

2,100 by December 2007. In the process, the cluster agencies have developed

the capacity to address the challenges associated with administering the affairs

of large numbers.

***Effective teaching teams***. Throughout the cycles, there has been a steady rise

in the number of friends teaching at their own initiative and participating in

teaching teams, as well as in the number of communities opened to the Faith

through their efforts. With the support of the Auxiliary Board members and

cluster agencies, teams now teach intensively and systematically during the

expansion phase, and the increasing alignment of their approaches with skills

acquired through the institute process has boosted confidence. Teams have

become more and more successful at inviting seekers to core activities, and

over 70 per cent of the new believers have now entered the institute process.

Home visits have found a new purpose in addition to deepening: they have

become a potent teaching tool in this rural setting, and individuals and families

who receive home visits from a teaching team usually join a core activity by

the second visit

***Empowering women***. Historically, the percentage of women in the Bahá’í

community in this region of India has been low, at about 10–15 per cent, in

[Photograph]

spite of many programmes conducted through the years to address the imbal-

ance. In the Bihar Sharif cluster, however, efforts to reach out to women

—aided by the formation of a special teaching team—have been very effective.

The proportion of women in the Bahá’í community there has risen to over 40

per cent, and the confidence with which they participate in activities is evident

in the fact that they are directly responsible for about 25 per cent of the core

activities in the cluster. Women now ensure that their children attend Bahá’í

children’s classes, and young women are arising to serve as animators of junior

youth groups, becoming role models for the youngsters with whom they work.

The stories below illustrate the ways in which three women of the cluster have

courageously stepped forward to put into practice the knowledge, skills, and

insights they have acquired through their study of the institute courses.

**Sarita, Anita, and Kiran** To address the challenge of low participation by women in Bahá’í

activities in Bihar Sharif, a small number of them from different parts of the cluster were quickly

prepared to act as tutors and assisted in initiating study circles with other women. One of these was

Sarita, who, after completing the study of Book 7, did something which, given existing cultural and

social practices in Bihar, bordered on the heroic: she went to her paternal village of Daryapur and

started teaching the Faith there. She visited regularly and soon formed a study circle for women,

accompanying 16 of the participants through the sequence of courses. She continues to visit the

community, extending to her new spiritual sisters her loving support as they engage in core active-

ities. Another woman, Anita, was so inspired by the study circle she attended in a nearby village that

she asked the tutor to visit her own village. As she progressed through the sequence of courses,

Anita assisted the tutor in working with a group of women and supporting them in carrying out

core activities—which has led to the growth of a community in which the vast majority of adherents

are women. Kiran, an enthusiastic young woman from Rajgir who has been trained as an animator

of junior youth groups, began a group in a school. It proved popular but brought opposition. She

addressed this challenge by approaching the principal and explaining the nature and the purpose

of the programme, after which the school gave its unqualified support.

***Increasing the number of devotional gatherings***. Devotional gatherings

were identified early on as key to the growth of the Faith in the Bihar Sharif

cluster, and so a campaign to multiply the number of this core activity was

initiated with the aid of 50 friends who had completed Book 1. They received

visits to help them understand the basic elements of devotional gatherings and

encourage their participation in the campaign. Volunteer hosts and supporters

were marshalled, and materials such as audio cassettes of Bahá’í devotionals

were provided. As a result, the number of gatherings rose from 8 to more than

50. This rapid growth had several positive effects: the life of the Bahá’í com-

munity was enriched and seekers were exposed to the Sacred Verses; a system-

atic approach for working with seekers evolved, with many progressing from

participation in devotional meetings to study circles, eventually declaring their

faith; participation of women and children in Bahá’í activities increased; and

the Message of Bahá’u’lláh was spread widely within the cluster. Throughout

the cycles, devotional gatherings in Bihar Sharif have continued to evolve and

expand. Organized in harmony with local culture, such gatherings feature

floral decorations, music, and simple refreshments. They have inspired the

friends, in many cases for the first time, to chant and memorize prayers and

selections from the Bahá’í Writings. By the eighth cycle, there were 190 regular  
devotional meetings being held, with 1,520 participants.

## Building capacity in the next generation

The capacity of the cluster agencies in Bihar Sharif to administer the affairs of

large numbers is perhaps demonstrated best through the programmes for the

spiritual and moral education of children and junior youth, which together

now encompass some 1,600 participants, with about 900 children in 65 classes

[Photograph]

[Photograph]

and nearly 700 junior youth in 55 groups. While the friends in the cluster had

some experience in conducting children’s classes, the junior youth programme

was entirely new.

The conditions of this geographic region create a receptive environment

for the spiritual nourishment the Bahá’ís are offering Bihar is an economically

depressed state, with more than 50 per cent of the population living below

the poverty line, and the illiteracy rate is one of the highest in the country, at

60 per cent. Village schools typically have two or three teachers for 200–300

students in all eight grades, and students who wish to continue their educa-

tion beyond that level must travel elsewhere. The majority of the inhabitants

are Hindu, although 15 per cent of the population is Muslim, living in tightly

concentrated areas, and the strong influence of caste and religious prejudice

often leads to social tension and violence. Women are particularly disadvant-

aged. For example, there are no female teachers in the schools. There are also

issues of safety at stake. With all of these difficulties, it is no surprise that

outmigration is common.

In this milieu, the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme offers,

to growing numbers of participants, a unique framework of hope, in which

they can develop their powers of expression and thought, along with a moral

structure for their lives. And as they engage in this process, they are becoming

highly motivated, thus ensuring the future health and vitality of the Bahá’í

community and augmenting their capacity to transform the wider society in

which they live.

The expressions of hope and change here are simple and concrete but pro-

found in their ramifications. First, groups are not separated by caste, religion,

or economic status. Second, the Bahá’í institutions have encouraged men to

send their daughters to junior youth groups and study circles, which has not

only benefited young women in the area but has created the opportunity

for all family members to become active participants in community life. In

some cases, it has also transformed the way in which parents regard their

children. For example, when one family with four girls accepted the Faith,

the parents became increasingly aware of the need to develop the capacity of

their daughters, and as the story of Kiran illustrates, the programme has been

instrumental in equipping young women with skills to serve as animators of

junior youth groups. Indeed, programme participants of both sexes who have

gone on to study the institute courses often become enthusiastic contributors

to the development of core activities.

**Rajive and Shankar** Rajive was 13 years old when he joined the first junior youth group in

his village of Hargawan in 2003.. His confidence and clarity of expression increased to a remarkable

degree throughout the three years of the programme, following which he moved on to study the

sequence of Ruhi institute courses. After completing Book 5, he formed his own junior youth group

and quickly proved himself to be a very effective animator. Rajive’s spirit of devotion and service

also inspired four of his friends to join the institute process, and they have now established two

children’s classes and four study circles and are among the most enthusiastic, active participants in

the process of growth in their village. Shankar is another youth who took part in the junior youth

programme and went on to complete the sequence of institute courses. He started his own junior

youth group, as well as a study circle, helping the participants to engage in the practices associated

with each book before he accompanies them through the next course. His efforts have contributed

to steady growth of the Faith in his village, which now has nine devotional meetings, four children’s

classes, three junior youth groups, and two study circles.

The objective of sustaining such a large number of participants is pursued

systematically, with the most capable animators raising capacity in others.

Resourceful animators assist junior youth with their homework, reinforcing

the sense of trust that has been established between them. Many junior youth

group participants move naturally into study circles when the animators con-

tinue to work with them as tutors of the institute courses. Strengthening the

service component of the programme for junior youth and integrating the

arts into their endeavours are the current priorities of the coordinator for this

activity. In Bihar Sharif, where the arts have not traditionally flourished, a

drama for each story in *Walking the Straight Path* has now been developed, and

a cultural group has promoted the programme through drama.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cycle | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th |
| No. junior youth groups | 22 | 31 | 44 | 48 | 48 | 53 | 53 | 55 |
| No. participants | 219 | 320 | 547 | 582 | 582 | 632 | 632 | 656 |

## Collaboration and empowerment

The transformation and empowerment of a continually expanding circle of

believers in the Bihar Sharif cluster is facilitated through plans that employ

available resources and encourage intimate collaboration at all levels. The clus-

ter agencies readily adapt their plans to incorporate contributions made by

the friends at reflection meetings and frequently visit communities to evalu-

ate and plan activities. They meet with Auxiliary Board members to share

[Photograph]

up-to-date news, information, and statistics that will help them to integrate

new believers into study circles and assist participants in the institute courses

to carry out acts of service. The close collaboration among the institutions and

agencies in Bihar Sharif has created an environment in which the believers are

empowered to take initiative and act—a significant development in the social

context of the cluster. The shackles of preconceived limitations fall away as

all are called upon to arise and develop their capacities to serve. The potential

of such action is seen through the stories of people such as Shravan, Sarita,

Anita, Kiran, Rajive, and Shankar—and countless others who are receiving

training and stepping into the arena of service. And as they are transformed

individually, so, too, through their actions, is the society in which they live’

Today, the Bahá’í community in Bihar Sharif has developed a sophisticated

capacity to manage and sustain large-scale expansion and consolidation of the

Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, and it stands as a beacon of hope for any soul who wishes

to enter within the ever-widening circle of its radiating light.

[Photograph]

**Tiriki West**

***Kenya***

The seeds of the Faith were

sown in the receptive soil

of Tiriki West as early as

1959. Shortly after the first

believers there embraced the

Faith, intrepid pioneers and

travelling teachers went on

foot from village to village

throughout the area, …

… inviting the local inhabitants to join them

in the celebration of this new Day of God—and

met with a very warm welcome In those first

teaching projects and campaigns, visiting friends

would gather the believers to pray and deepen

in the Writings, directing the joy and energy

generated into door-to-door teaching by teams

of four or five. Newly enrolled believers were

invited to join an evening programme or attend

a conference held at the end of the project or the

campaign. Teaching the Faith has been a main

area of focus for the Bahá’ís of Tiriki West ever

since; another has been the promotion of educa-

tion. The adult literacy classes and pre-schools

that were established in Bahá’í Centres to serve

the population of the area produced two major

effects. First, the Bahá’í community’s encour-

agement of education—particularly of the girl

child—earned it a good reputation in the wider

society, even though most of the early efforts

were not sustained because of a lack of human

resources. Second, the emphasis placed by Bahá’í

schoolteachers and literacy facilitators on main-

taining upright conduct and promoting sound

family life, especially among men, attracted

many women to the Cause. Today, this cluster

has the highest proportion of women believers

in the country.



**Cluster at a glance**

• Located in the Vihiga district of the Western  
Province of Kenya

• Population approximately 76,370; about  
4 percent are Bahá’ís

• largely rural area

• Inhabitants mainly from the Luhya tribe  
(90 percent), followed by the Kalenjin and  
Luo tribes

• Economy based on agriculture—mixed  
farming, livestock, and poultry on small  
plots of land

• Dominant religion Protestantism, with  
Muslim minority

• Bahá’í Faith first introduced in 1959; rapid  
expansion to over 5,000 believers by 1962

• Early focus on education

• First cluster to launch an intensive  
programme of growth in Kenya  
(January 2005)

• Forty-two local Spiritual assemblies

## Developing human resources

Throughout those decades, Tiriki West faced a challenge common to many

other areas where large-scale expansion took place. While the local popula-

tion was very receptive to the Bahá’í Teachings, consolidation became a major

hurdle as the number of believers grew. Pioneers and [Photograph to the left]

travelling teachers could not satisfy the demand, and

many people drifted away from the Faith. Clearly,

dedicated and capable workers needed to be raised up

from within the area, but how could this be done?

When the Universal House of Justice called for

the development of human resources through training

institutes in 1996, efforts were initially made to create

a national course of study, but these efforts did not

bring the desired results. In 1999, after consulting with

the Counsellors, the National Spiritual Assembly of

Kenya decided to adopt the Ruhi Institute materials.

Some three years later, six believers from Tiriki

West attended an intensive session in Uganda to pre-

pare them to act as tutors of these materials. They

returned home and conducted centralized courses throughout the area, while

additional friends were eventually raised up to serve in this capacity through

institute campaigns.

In January 2005, an intensive programme of growth was launched, and the

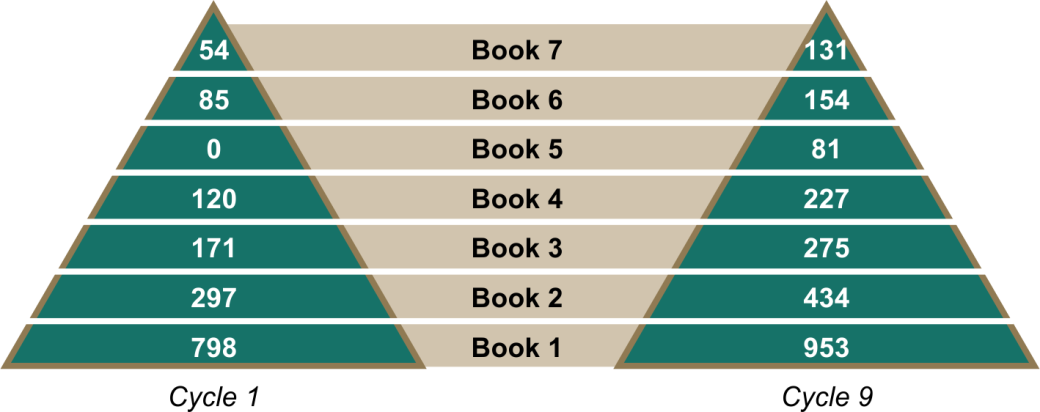
development of human resources has progressed unabated through nine cycles.

One of the greatest indicators of success has been the significant increase in

participation in the higher courses, as shown in the table below. The desire to

raise the number of tutors and junior youth animators, seen as key to sustain-

ing and accelerating growth, was a strong force behind this increase.



Over the course of these cycles, the institute gradually decentralized train-

ing, and at this stage all courses are now offered through local study circles, as

the table below indicates.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cycle | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | 9th |
| No. study circles | 24 | 37 | 31 | 28 | 36 | 29 | 32 | 31 | 44 |
| No. participants | 147 | 202 | 182 | 94 | 125 | 125 | 192 | 153 | 163 |

As in other places, the practice element of the institute courses was over-

looked initially, and efforts directed towards the wider community were lacking

in the cluster. Gradually, this shortcoming was amended, and soon seekers,

friends, and relatives of Bahá’ís were invited to join study circles, as well as

other core activities, making these activities effective instruments for sharing

the Message.

**Gathering together in joy and reverence** The inviting and engaging Holy Day obser-

vances in Tiriki West have had a great effect on the core activities—especially children’s classes and

junior youth groups. The commemorations clearly demonstrate the attractiveness of a vibrant com-

munity life to all who attend and have therefore become a potent teaching tool, at which seekers

have expressed their desire to learn more about the Faith and have invited Bahá’ís to their homes,

subsequently enrolling and/or joining core activities.

With their joyous and welcoming atmosphere, these day-long celebrations are a powerful mag-

net for people from all walks of life. Venues are beautified with flowers to proclaim to everyone the

significance of the day, and friends from outlying areas of the cluster arrive singing praises to God,

attracting large crowds as they approach. Each observance begins with stirring prayers and readings

related to the occasion and then moves on to uplifting and captivating artistic performances. People

of all ages—men and women, youth, junior youth, and children—offer dances and dramatic pieces,

recite from the Holy Writings, narrate stories about the Central Figures of the Faith, and sing original

songs. And although the programme goes on for the whole day, sometimes even then there is not

time for all of the participants who wish to contribute.

To provide an opportunity for the friends to express their faith artistically, an arts festival has

been established in the cluster, at which all performances are based on Bahá’í Writings, and some

of these are then presented at the Holy day observances. Organized by the cluster agencies, the

festival is held on a rotational basis throughout the cluster to give different communities a chance

to host.

## Learning about teaching through cycles of activity

During 2003–2004, Tiriki West underwent pre-launch preparations

for the intensive programme of growth that would soon commence. The Auxiliary

Board members and cluster agencies met to analyse the stage of development

of the cluster and to identify available human resources. Activities were then

initiated to establish a rhythm that would help the institutions and believers

to become systematic in the process of consultation, action, and reflection, so

crucial if they were to adopt the posture of learning needed. Teaching teams

were formed, intensive consultations were held to prepare for the first cycle, and

a core group of believers was put in place. The initial plan was presented at a

reflection meeting, which was attended by well over 300 friends, prompting the

cluster agencies to create three zones so that specific details could be elaborated

by those residing in each one. The first cycle was launched in January 2005, and

the careful preparations bore fruit. Collaboration between the institutions and

agencies in the cluster was close, and there was a high degree of ownership of the

growth process, which no doubt helped to bring about the 151 enrolments.

Nine cycles of activity in the cluster have resulted in an average of 56

enrolments of youth and adults, as shown in the table below. On average 17

new friends have entered the institute programme each cycle, while eight have

completed the current sequence of courses. Wherever possible, new believers

[Photograph]

not participating in study circles have been integrated into other core activities.

Throughout these cycles, much has been learned about the nature of teach-

ing. Challenges have included a lack of intensity during expansion phases; the

scheduling of expansion phases at the same time as traditional festivals, which

proved to be great distractions from teaching activities; and the outmigration

of human resources to urban areas in search of employment. Lessons have also

been learned about direct teaching methods. Notably, an emphasis on the use of

“Anna’s presentation” in Book 6 during the most recent cycles has improved

the effectiveness of teaching efforts.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cycle | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | 9th |
| Number of teams | 31 | 31 | 31 | 31 | 31 | 31 | 31 | 30 | 24 |
| Teachers mobilized | 155 | 120 | 195 | 175 | 210 | 230 | 150 | 150 | 120 |
| Campaign enrolments | 124 | 66 | 22 | 65 | 21 | 25 | 29 | 54 | 38 |
| Total enrolments\* | 151 | 66 | 22 | 76 | 21 | 25 | 29 | 54 | 61 |

\* These figures only account for adults and youth; children and junior youth of new Bahá’í families participating in core activities are

not included.

## Learning about teaching teams

During the initial cycles, three- to five-member teaching teams were formed

in reflection meetings, each led by a friend who had experience in serving as

a tutor and who could convene team meetings to devise systematic teach-

ing plans. Some teams were assigned to visit and teach seekers participating

in core activities as well as parents of children and junior youth involved in

classes and groups, all of whom had been identified by the cluster agencies.

Other teams taught door to door in selected villages; yet others visited schools

and dispensaries. The week before the two-week expansion phase, devotional

meetings and Book 2 and 6 refresher courses were held to inspire the friends.

Then, during the expansion phase, the teams visited their assigned villages on

their own schedules. No specific goals were set.

As a result of these early experiences with the teaching teams, a number of

valuable lessons emerged, leading to certain changes in approach. Among the

most important lessons were the following: 1) the continuity of the teams is

important if connections with the seekers and the newly enrolled believers are

to be maintained; 2) team members should live close to one another and should

include those trained to serve as tutors, children’s class teachers, and junior

youth animators who can start different activities during the consolidation

phase; 3) teaching teams are more effective when they set specific goals before

each phase; and, finally, 4) although refresher courses can help to prepare the

teaching teams, they need to be accompanied and assisted to overcome obsta-

cles encountered during the cycle. Further, as the end of the cycle is too late

to make adjustments, the Auxiliary Board members and cluster agencies have

begun to schedule midpoint meetings with the team leaders during the expan-

sion and consolidation phases to accommodate the learning taking place.

## Children and junior youth

Providing spiritual education to Bahá’í children has long been a strength of

the Kenyan community and has laid a solid foundation for current progress.

When Tiriki West’s programme of growth was launched, there were 171 trained

teachers and 93 classes with 557 children. By the end of the ninth cycle, there

were 131 children’s classes with almost 1,000 participants.

Throughout the cycles of the growth programme, understanding and prac-

tice have advanced on three main points: *inclusiveness*, *regularity*, and *continuity*.

Now the Bahá’í community reaches out confidently to the wider society and

offers classes to children from all backgrounds in the villages scattered across

the cluster. The institute process has given rise to a cluster-wide network of

trained teachers who approach this service more systematically than ever before,

[Photograph]

which has affected the regularity of classes. And the institutions and agencies

operating in the cluster have learned that the progression of participants from

children’s classes to junior youth groups to the study of the main sequence of

courses is smoother when their teacher accompanies them from year to year.

This was evidenced in March 2007 by the graduation of 100 children into the

junior youth programme and 40 junior youth into the sequence of courses

after having been accompanied in this way. Seventeen of these junior youth

have already enrolled in the Faith, while home visits are being made to follow

up with the others.

As the demand for children’s classes has grown, a scheme for accompanying

the teachers at all levels to increase their capacity and to mobilize them has

steadily evolved. The cluster agencies also try to ensure that enough teachers

rise up in each cycle to meet the need for more classes. Junior youth are now

encouraged to work closely with children’s classes while proceeding through

their own programme, in the expectation that they will eventually become

children’s class teachers.

**Parents’ awareness workshops** Since experience has shown that the involvement of

parents in their children’s education is essential if classes are to be sustained, the cluster coordina-

tor for the classes organizes parents’ awareness workshops to familiarize them with the curriculum

and appeal for their assistance by creating a learning environment at home. Home visits are used to

discuss their children’s character and behaviour, and parents are invited to presentations made by

the children. Similar workshops are also conducted for parents of junior youth in the cluster, who

are invited to a central venue where the junior youth make presentations based on what they have

learned in the groups, showing how such learning can help them make concrete decisions in life.

Passages from letters written by the Universal House of Justice, or on its behalf, relevant to children

and junior youth are shared, and questions answered.

[Photograph]

[Photograph]

The designation of junior youth groups as the fourth core activity in

December 2005 focused greater attention on those in this age range, and the

number of animators of junior youth groups in Tiriki West has jumped from

5 to 81. The number of groups and participants, most of whom are from fami-

lies that are not Bahá’ís, has also increased dramatically, as seen below. Many

have been attracted by the acts of service performed by their peers in groups.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cycle | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | 9th |
| No. junior youth groups | 4 | 6 | 9 | 16 | 20 | 22 | 34 | 49 | 53 |
| No. participants | 34 | 57 | 109 | 208 | 232 | 272 | 272 | 613 | 631 |

[Photograph]

[Photograph]

The current coordinators of children’s classes and junior youth groups

grew up attending Bahá’í classes and participating in junior youth groups and

study circles. When the present junior youth coordinator was appointed, other

youth were raised up to conduct his children’s class and assist with his two

well-established junior youth groups when he is away from his community

visiting other animators. The availability of such capable replacements is an

indication of the extent of human resource development among the youth

in the cluster.

**Youth in the vanguard** Wycliffe, Patrick, Vahid, Godfrey, and Linhanda are just a few of

the outstanding youth in the Tiriki West cluster. Raised in Bahá’í families, they have gone through

children’s classes, junior youth groups, and the main sequence of courses, becoming animators,

tutors of study circles, and tutors for a Bahá’í-inspired social and economic development programme

called Preparation for Social action (psa). They have offered service as travelling teachers to other

clusters in Kenya in the early stages of development, assisting new believers to study the institute

courses over a weekend. On the recommendation of institutions of the Faith, they will soon serve  
for two years as homefront pioneers with the goal of opening up certain clusters.

As in the case of tutors of study circles, the migration of animators to

urban centres in search of employment has affected the sustainability of junior

youth groups in Tiriki West. In response to this situation, additional anima-

tors are being trained so that they will be able to step in whenever they are

needed. Some Book 7 participants are being encouraged to enter this field of

service as well.

## Reflecting back, looking ahead

Today Tiriki West is harvesting the fruits of learning about teaching the Cause

and educating children, the seeds of which were sown so many decades ago.

Since 2005, the number of Bahá’ís known to the institutions in the cluster has

grown from 1,955 to 3,056, and the steady expansion of children’s classes and

junior youth groups, in particular, holds the promise of future victories.

Key to the cluster’s progress is the unity of thought and strong collabora-

tion at all levels among the institutions, the agencies, and the friends. Flexibility

has also been crucial, as experience has taught lessons about managing growth,

and the scheme of coordination and functioning of the cluster agencies has

evolved organically with the multiplication of core activities.

The foundation for further progress in this cluster has been solidly laid

through patient, consistent, and unified action, and the receptivity of the

population will surely generate even higher levels of growth. In coming cycles,

attempts will be made to intensify teaching through well-conceived, collective

action that will enhance the community’s capacity to embrace eager souls. The

vibrancy of Tiriki West’s spiritual health grows with each wave of enrolments,

filling the friends with a deep spiritual joy and sense of purpose as they strive to

contribute in ever-increasing measures to the well-being of the wider society.

[Photograph]

**South Tarawa**

***Kiribati***

One Sunday afternoon in

Eita village in the South

Tarawa cluster of Kiribati,

a group of youth gathered

for a devotional meeting

at a Bahá’í home in

the family compound’s

Maneaba, a simple

traditional structure with

a thatched roof supported

on posts with no walls.

As the youth began to sing Bahá’í prayers and read-

ings, the beautiful music wafted to the neighbours

on the warm Pacific breeze. Moved by the beauty

of the words and melodies, they were drawn like

moths to a flame, and the devotional gathering

was transformed into a teaching opportunity.

The I-Kiribati people have been receptive

to the Bahá’í Teachings ever since the Faith was

first introduced to these islands by Knights of

Bahá’u’lláh Roy Fernie and Elena Marsella in

1954. Various teaching campaigns over the years

brought sizeable numbers of enrolments, but

challenges always arose with deepening and

capacity building. In the past, veteran teachers

who knew the Bible well would visit the villages,

bringing the glad tidings of the return of Christ

and the fulfilment of prophecy. However, they

were often not able to revisit and nurture the

many souls who had embraced the Cause, and



**Cluster at a glance**

◆ Located on the southern arm of Tarawa,  
one of 33 atolls forming the nation of  
Kiribati in the South Pacific ocean, about  
halfway between Hawaii and Australia

◆ Official language: English  
local language: I-Kiribati  
(formerly Gilbertese)

◆ Population 40,000–45,000 (about half  
of the total population of Kiribati)

◆ Main villages are Ambo, Bairiki, Betio,  
Bikenibeu West, and Bonriki, all located  
along a 29-kilometre strip of road

◆ Centre for government and main focus  
of trade and commerce in Kiribati

◆ Bahá’í population 1,343

◆ Bahá’í Faith is the fourth largest  
religious community, after Catholic,  
Protestant, and Mormon

◆ Intensive programme of growth  
launched in January 2005

most of the new believers gradually returned to their churches to worship. As

the years passed, many approaches to teaching were tried. In the mid-1990s,

believers in the villages were encouraged to arise and teach using methods

in harmony with I-Kiribati culture and traditional performing arts. But still

the problem remained: How could the believers be deepened in their newly

acquired faith? How could the capacity to carry out the needed deepening be

developed in the local friends?

## Developing human resources

The answer to the all-important question of human resource development

arrived with the institute process. Kiribati’s national institute, established in

1996 and named after Knight of Bahá’u’lláh Elena Marsella, initially offered

intensive courses using its own materials, adding the Ruhi Institute curriculum

in 1999. The following year, seven Bahá’ís from Kiribati, including three from

South Tarawa, travelled to Australia for a one-week session to study Book 1

in English. A few months later, a knowledgeable and experienced individual

from the Philippines came to Kiribati to conduct a second session, providing

South Tarawa with its first contingent of believers able to facilitate the study of

Book 1, and the institute began to focus solely on the Ruhi Institute courses.

It was clear that translation of the books into the I-Kiribati language was

crucial if large numbers of the friends were to proceed through the sequence

of courses. While the translation process had the disadvantage of slowing

down efforts to increase human resources, the institutions knew that it would

eventually bring a much greater advantage: it would make the institute pro-

cess accessible to the majority of the people of Kiribati and foster a sense of

ownership at the grass-roots level of the community.

With this in mind, the institute in Kiribati vigorously began the transla-

tion work. By May 2001, Books 1 and 2 were translated; study circles were

immediately formed. The translation of Book 3, completed in December 2001,

was eagerly awaited by those who wanted to serve as children’s class teachers.

Book 4 was available the following year, Book 6 at Ridván 2003, and Book 7

the next December. Study circles began promptly as each book was translated,

reviewed, and printed. Throughout this effort, the pool of human resources

steadily grew, augmented by widespread study of guidance from the Universal

House of Justice. With the translation of all the available books completed,

the institute was ready to raise up South Tarawa’s first cohort of tutors, which

it did through a series of intensive campaigns. By Riḍván 2004, 48 people had

completed the study of Book 7. As the level of activity increased, the institute’s

national coordinator began to serve full time, while continuing as the coordi-

nator for the South Tarawa cluster, where human resources were developing

[Photograph]

rapidly. By January 2005, when the first cycle of the intensive programme of

growth was launched in the cluster, 74 people had completed the sequence of

courses up to Book 7, and the number of friends capable of acting as tutors

has continued to rise over time.

[Photograph]

## Youth spearheading the teaching work

The vitality and creativity of the youth have been key to the advances made in

the South Tarawa cluster, and more and more of these vibrant souls have moved

to the forefront of the teaching work as the intensive programme of growth

has progressed. By the sixth cycle, many newly enrolled young people who

had studied the sequence of courses in institute campaigns were spearheading

Bahá’í activity. With guidance and encouragement, youth have become adept

teachers who are creative in inviting people to core activities.

An institute campaign launched in August 2006 to assist a group of youth

in studying the seven courses of the institute sequence was instrumental in

galvanizing them. Dignitaries and special guests attended the completion

ceremony, at which one town council member lauded the efforts of the Bahá’ís

in promoting moral and spiritual leadership. He called the programme “the

medicine for the social sickness that is affecting the youth” and encouraged the

Bahá’ís to approach the council for any help they might need. Such recognition

from government officials, seen as an endorsement of the institute’s vigorous

approach to making its programmes available to the wider community, greatly

bolstered the believers.

[Photograph]

**Youth Testimonials** At a reflection meeting in South Tarawa, a number of youth arose to

speak about their experiences in the teaching field as a way of encouraging adults who perhaps

wished to teach the Faith but were hesitant to arise. This is what some of the youth had to say:

◆ “I only declared recently, and during my attendance at the youth conference in Betio during  
which we studied the various Ruhi books, it was like I got a new spirit and new strength. When  
I started to teach in houses, fear and aloneness disappeared.”

◆ “I was afraid when I first ventured out onto the field of teaching, in spite of all my preparations,  
but when I remembered ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's words, *‘Do not look at thy weakness and impotence; nay,  
look at the power of thy Lord, which hath surrounded all regions,’* my fear quickly evaporated  
and I arose to teach.”

◆ “I am just a youth, and I didn’t know what to say. I was afraid. As well, I had never done any  
teaching before, but when I arose to teach, I discovered strength and confidence, and I was  
able to talk to people.”

◆ “I, too, was afraid, and mostly I would not talk to people, but after the training I could arise and  
start my teaching. Now I can speak.”

The involvement of the youth in the teaching work has sparked enthusiasm

among the older generations. Though many veteran believers were at first scep-

tical about the approach to teaching adopted by the young people, attitudes

were transformed as more and more long-standing Bahá’ís studied the sequence

of courses and stepped into the field of service. The story of the shipbuilders

that follows is just one of many that have spurred the friends on.

**The shipbuilders** Two Bahá’ís in South Tarawa were holding a fireside during the lunch break

at the shipyard where they worked. They began in the same way that Bahá’ís have taught the Faith

here for many years: by reading quotations from the Bible to explain the coming of Bahá’u’lláh. A

large crowd of shipbuilders sat listening, and although there were a few questions, the audience

was mostly quiet until the biggest and roughest-looking shipbuilder of them all spoke up. “We have

heard all about the Bible before,” he said. What they really wanted to know about was Bahá’u’lláh.

Who was He? The Bahá’ís looked a bit embarrassed and persisted with their Bible-based explana-

tions. Again the man interrupted them and repeated that they wanted to hear about Bahá’u’lláh.

At this point, a Bahá’í woman who had completed the seven institute courses came forward and

told the story of the dream of Bahá’u’lláh’s [Photograph to the left]

father about the ocean and the fish. She also

talked about the Ruhi institute books and

how people can learn more about the life

of Bahá’u’lláh and His teachings by study-

ing them. The shipbuilders sat and listened

intently, and when she finished, the man

who had spoken smiled and thanked her,

saying that was exactly what he had wanted

to hear. Now, could he please join one of

these Ruhi books?

[Photograph]

As illustrated by the shipbuilders’ story, women have become especially

audacious in their efforts to put the learning acquired from their study of the

institute courses into practice, raising the tempo of teaching further. From

the launch of the intensive programme of growth, the cluster agencies have

focused on encouraging women to form teaching teams and visit homes in

their neighbourhoods. The story of a team of women in Betio, highlighted

here, speaks for itself.

**A life transformed** During the expansion phase of the second cycle, a team of women in

Betio had set out to meet people and teach the Faith. During this endeavour they encountered a

homeless man who was living in degraded circumstances. The women, who were not distracted

by his dishevelled appearance, engaged him in conversation about the Bahá’í teachings. As a

result, he joined a study circle that was working through Book 1. Within four months, he enrolled

as a Bahá’í, studied all the books in the sequence, and became an active teacher of the Faith. One

day he appeared at the National Centre carrying only a pillowcase and a request for 30 copies of

Book 1—one for each person to whom he had taught the Faith and invited to join the study circles

he had established. The contributions of this man, completely transformed in manner and appear-

ance, encouraged and inspired everyone at the reflection meeting that launched the next cycle.

## Reflection meetings

One of the distinctive features of the South Tarawa cluster is the way in

which the institutions and agencies there have learned to use reflection

meetings as an effective tool for mobilizing teachers. Large, extended gath-

erings are a popular feature of village life in Kiribati, so reflection meet-

ings have naturally become important occasions to create unity of vision,

generate enthusiasm, focus attention on priorities, and make short-term

plans of action. By the second cycle, refresher courses on Books 2 and

6, including both study and practice, were integrated into the reflection

meetings—which were extended to two or three days, with entire families

coming and staying for the duration. By the sixth cycle, the programme for

the reflection gathering included a period set aside for teaching. The first

evening was dedicated to celebration. The next day was devoted to review

and analysis of the cycle ending, the presentation and discussion of goals

for the coming cycle, and a workshop focusing on Book 6. On the third

day, the friends formed small teams and visited homes in the village to

practice their teaching skills, reconvening at the meeting house afterwards

to share their experiences and make their own teaching plans. Invariably,

new believers, many of whom enrolled after participating in study circles,

contribute greatly to the consultations at reflection gatherings, testifying to

the effectiveness of study circles in raising consciousness.

Keeping accurate statistics in a cluster with an extremely mobile popu-

lation and many villages where communication is hindered by the lack of

telephones and postal delivery has been a tremendous challenge. However,

cellphones now allow for faster, more frequent, and more reliable communi-

cation among the cluster agencies and institutions, while the introduction of

broadband and voice over Internet connections facilitate improved access to

sources outside the country.

## Involvement of Local Spiritual Assemblies

In Kiribati, the traditional culture places high value on obedience and respect

for a recognized authority, and the support of Local Spiritual Assemblies was,

from the outset, seen as crucial to the achievement of any goals in South

Tarawa. Yet how could individual initiative be exercised in a community in

which the believers looked to the Assemblies to approve every one of their

actions? Individual believers were unsure of the scope of freedom available to

them to take initiative, while Local Assemblies were uncertain of their role in

the new dynamics emerging. It was eventually found that study circle partici-

pants remained active when their efforts were encouraged by a Local Spiritual

Assembly and when there was good collaboration among the institutions and

agencies functioning in the cluster. In villages where Local Assembly members

were involved in the institute process and were gaining experience with core

activities, Assemblies were able to assist in mobilizing participants into insti-

tute campaigns. To encourage such involvement and enhance collaboration,

the National Spiritual Assembly arranged for one of its members, along with

the national institute coordinator, to meet with all of the Local Assemblies in

South Tarawa, which helped them to understand the role of the institute in an

intensive programme of growth and to see how they could support its active-

ities and work effectively with the institute coordinator and Auxiliary Board

members and their assistants.

## Junior youth groups

Reaching junior youth with a programme for their moral and spiritual empow-

erment is without doubt the most dynamic process being systematically pur-

sued in the South Tarawa cluster, and it is becoming increasingly clear that

the programme, launched in 2004, has the potential to contribute to the

empowerment of an entire generation in this tiny archipelago.

The first four junior youth groups were established in the villages by young

people operating under the guidance of the Elena Marsella Institute. One

animator reported, “Most of my group are from Christian households. Before

starting my junior youth group I went to visit all the parents with my books

and I explained to them what their children in the group would be taught.

When they understood what I was teaching, they were happy for their children

to attend my lessons.” Teams of women carried out the same kinds of visits

in another village and met with similar success. Gradually, efforts to expand

the programme extended to places where there were only a few Bahá’ís, none

of whom had advanced through the sequence of institute courses or had been

trained as animators of junior youth groups. As groups were established in

these areas, a number of challenges arose: animators who had to travel from

their own villages were not able to sustain the effort; with widespread interest

in having the course material delivered in English, many animators felt their

language skills were inadequate; and the size of the groups became difficult to

manage, with as many as 40 junior youth turning up for some sessions.

While the first efforts in the villages were being made, three other groups

were formed in junior secondary schools, which meet during periods allo-

cated for religious instruction. Not long after, the Bahá’í community received

a request from government officials to address growing concerns about the

conduct of junior youth, and these groups were re-envisioned as a project of

social and economic development, falling under the aegis of the Otan Marawa

educational Institute (omei), a Bahá’í-inspired development organization.

As with the efforts in the villages, initial expansion of the number of groups

in academic schools proved difficult to sustain. In response, omei decided to

concentrate on one group in order to learn from experience. The following

year, three groups were established and sustained at two schools.

**The junior youth group in the Betio Junior Secondary School** In 2006, a

small junior youth group was formed under the sponsorship of omei to study the materials of the

spiritual empowerment programme in an academic school in South Tarawa. The programme was

offered as a supplement to language studies that would address two pressing needs: to improve

students’ English language skills and to assist in their moral and spiritual development. With the

principal’s agreement, seven participants from the class with the lowest level of English literacy

began meeting at the school on the weekends. By June, the students’ reading skills had improved

so dramatically that some were moved to a higher grade class—though they loved their junior youth

group so much that they did not want to leave it. The programme also had a positive effect on the

participants’ behaviour; one young boy even commented that when he grows up he wants to be

just like his animator.

The aid of a resource person from Australia proved vital in helping the

friends respond to the many opportunities and challenges that were unfold-

ing with junior youth in both the villages and schools. Through a combina-

tion of visits and email contact, she trained animators, helped to expand the

number of junior youth groups, and assisted those working with the schools

to gain a deeper understanding of both the principles of social and economic

development and the conceptual basis of the junior youth programme. She

also systematically developed the capacity of those serving at omei, so that

within a year the organization was run entirely by local believers. She worked

with the cluster agencies to address challenges in the context of coordination,

with an emphasis on providing sustained support for animators in order to

ensure continuity. They examined topics such as the preparation of animators

using Book 5, the importance of holding regular “encounters” with anima-

tors and conducting refresher courses for them, and the need to visit junior

youth groups periodically. The agencies learned what it means to accompany

newly trained animators in their efforts to form and maintain junior youth

groups, what kind of service projects the young people can undertake, and

how to enhance the artistic component of the programme. Because the work

**Marebo Teem,** a youth who was born into a Bahá’í family, attended children’s classes and as

an older child enjoyed helping with the lessons for the younger ones. Encouraged by her parents,

she participated in the institute campaigns organized for the youth and quickly progressed through

the sequence of courses. Marebo was trained as an animator for junior youth groups in 2006 and,

at the age of 16, was invited to assist the coordinator for this activity in South Tarawa in the villages

of Bikenibeu and Causeway, visiting groups every two weeks, conducting animator encounters

every two months, providing refresher courses as needed, and consulting with the other assistant

coordinators.

with this age group was clearly beyond the capacity of the one coordinator

appointed, a number of capable assistants were recruited, one of whom was

Marebo Teem.

The efforts of the believers in Kiribati, with the support of the resource

person, have borne fruit. The number of groups in the villages has con-

sistently been 20 or more since the beginning of 2007, and although par-

ticipation has fluctuated through the cycles of the intensive programme for

growth, it has generally been greater than 250, drawn largely from the wider

community. Further, by October 2007, there were 11 junior youth groups

in local schools.

## Children’s classes

While the Ridván 2000 message provided a strong stimulus for the education

of Bahá’í children, regular children’s classes were only established after a more

systematic approach to child education was adopted following the transla-

tion of Book 3 in the I-Kiribati language. Neighbourhood children’s classes

began when the intensive programme of growth was launched, and by the

end of the first cycle, the number of children’s classes had grown from 12 to

19, with 285 participants. Collaboration between the cluster coordinators for

children’s classes and junior youth groups has greatly facilitated the multiplica-

tion of these activities, as the coordinators visit the homes of seekers together

to explain the material available for both age groups. Parents are invited to

enrol their children in the programmes, and trained animators and children’s

class teachers are assigned to work with the young people. The potential for

the expansion of children’s classes is immense. In October 2007, the number

had grown to 27, with 330 children participating, and in January 2008, the

people of Buota village approached the Bahá’ís asking for someone to come

and teach classes to their children.

[Photograph]

## The way forward

Bahá’u’lláh wrote: *“Should they attempt to conceal His light on the continent,*

*He will assuredly rear His head in the midmost heart of the ocean and, rai-*

*sing His voice, proclaim: ‘I am the lifegiver of the world!’”*[1] The vision of the

growth of the Bahá’í community of Kiribati, the first nation to see the sunrise

at the dawn of the new millennium, has been greatly inspired by these words.

In the South Tarawa cluster, some 30 souls are now entering into the embrace

of their Beloved with each cycle, 40 per cent of whom generally go on to study

the institute courses. Further challenges and opportunities surely lie ahead.

And yet with every step that the friends in South Tarawa take along the path

of growth, with every opportunity they seize and every challenge they meet,

they move closer to the realization of Bahá’u’lláh’s prophetic statement.

[Photograph]

1 *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust,  
1991, 2004 printing), p. 108.

***Acceleration of learning***

The case studies presented in this volume describe the journey that has taken

the friends in five clusters along a path of learning and progress until, in each,

an intensive programme of growth has been well established. In all five, the

elements of the framework for action resulted in a vigorous pattern of growth

only after years of effort. Yet, a most promising feature of the second year

of the current Five Year Plan has been the way in which the transfer of les-

sons and insights from such clusters has accelerated the movement of others

through successive stages of development. When these lessons pertained to

the spiritually charged act of presenting Bahá’u’lláh’s Message “in a manner

both forthcoming and inviting”[1], the rise in the rate of expansion has often

been dramatic.

Much of the acceleration witnessed can be traced back to the creative

impulse which the Riḍván 2007 message of the Universal House of Justice

imparted to the Bahá’í world. The message reminded the believers that with

so firm a foundation in place after 12 years of consecrated exertion, teaching

was to be the foremost thought in all our minds. The expression of longing

by the House of Justice to see teaching become “the dominating passion in

the life of every believer”[2], a state of enkindlement expressed in “unremitting

action”,[3] evoked from the believers a spirited response that has proven to be

as dynamic as it has been systematic.

In the Riḍván message, the House of Justice makes reference to the opera-

tion of clusters “in a robust state of growth”,[4] indicating that in such areas

the means had been found for carrying forward the work of expansion and

consolidation hand in hand. In the months that followed, a number of simple

strategies were adopted to accelerate the propagation of learning from these

stronger clusters to as many others as possible. And as these strategies were

implemented in diverse places, it became increasingly clear that the process of

entry by troops was advancing at a new pace

## Individuals as channels for the propagation of learning

Following the release of the Riḍván message, the surge in the believers’ desire

to enter the teaching field was readily apparent. Equally evident, however, was

the need in many instances for the friends to be accompanied in their efforts

by individuals who could share the experience of their clusters in effective

teaching campaigns, inspire confidence, generate enthusiasm, and demonstrate

how to implement the methods and approaches examined in institute courses.

In the early summer of 2007, the International Teaching Centre identified,

with the help of the Counsellors, a few individuals with proven experience in

their own clusters in applying the elements of the framework of the Five Year

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Plan, particularly in the context of expansion. These friends were then asked

to travel to certain clusters, in all of which conditions were propitious for an

intensive programme of growth but, despite the efforts exerted, the level of

enrolments remained low.

The Bangui cluster in the Central African Republic provides one of the

earliest examples of what movement of this kind can achieve. A believer from

the Lubumbashi cluster in the Democratic Republic of the Congo travelled

to Bangui, where the rate of expansion did not match the clear potential for

growth. The visitor collaborated closely with the Auxiliary Board members and

cluster agencies, who had taken steps to prepare the ground for his arrival.

Together they planned a teaching project for the outlying areas of the clus-

ter, selecting populations on which to focus their efforts, consulting on the

number of teams to be formed, and discussing teaching materials and setting

goals. Because raising capacity among the local friends is integral to the work

of individuals serving as such resource persons, the visitor accompanied the

teaching teams in the field each day, paying particular attention to the func-

tions of the team coordinators.

A total of 72 new souls embraced the Cause during the ninth cycle—12 times

the average number of enrolments of the previous four cycles. Yet, perhaps

more impressive still was the transfer of learning from Lubumbashi to Bangui

about effective practical approaches to organizing the consolidation efforts,

leading to the creation of a detailed schedule for how each believer newly

enrolled was to be nurtured, especially through core activities. A remarkable

58 per cent of the new believers entered the institute process. In a subsequent

visit by this same person to the cluster, there was a further climb in the number

of enrolments, and the capacity and enthusiasm among the friends and agen-

cies in Bangui rose higher still.

By the autumn of 2007, a number of similar initiatives on all continents

had been undertaken with comparable results. Although the exchange of prac-

tical aspects of learning and the concomitant rise in capacity among the local

believers have been vital, it is clear from the sense of enthusiasm generated and

the reception given to the visiting teachers that their travels have exerted a deep

spiritual influence, reminiscent of the words of Bahá’u’lláh: *“The movement*

*itself from place to place, when undertaken for the sake of God, hath always*

*exerted, and can now exert, its influence in the world.”*[5]

## Sites for the dissemination of learning

Another strategy that emerged over the past year, closely related to the deploy-

ment of resource persons, involved the selection of strong clusters as sites for

the dissemination of learning. The agencies working in such clusters, all in

a robust state of growth, were assisted by the Counsellors in developing the

capacity to receive a group of friends from other countries and expose them

to the methods and approaches being successfully employed to sustain the

accelerated expansion and consolidation of the Faith. A group of this kind

may well include those who will draw on the experience to help further the

development of their home clusters, as well as those who will be deployed as

resource persons to assist other areas.

Recognizing the need for individuals who could act as resource persons,

the Counsellors in the Americas identified 17 friends from seven countries in

Central and South America with the potential to serve in this way. Given the

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strength of the process of growth in the Norte del Cauca cluster, Colombia,

these friends were invited there for a workshop which involved them in a

combined process of study and action for one month. The workshop included

study of guidance from the Universal House of Justice and certain concepts

elaborated in the institute courses, practice in analysing available information

to assess the state of a cluster’s progress, and the formulation of plans on that

basis, both for expansion and consolidation. Instruction and practice in direct

teaching approaches and the organization of a teaching project drew on the

content of Ruhi Institute Book 6. Participants also had an opportunity to

visit study circles in action, participate in meetings of cluster agencies and

the reflection gathering, and take part in the expansion phase of the cycle of

activity and several days of the consolidation phase.

These friends then went as resource persons to some of the stronger clus-

ters in different parts of Latin America. Results were immediate. The teaching

work received impetus, and the capacity of the local friends to promote sys-

tematic expansion and consolidation was enhanced considerably. From August

to October 2007, as some 30 clusters benefited from this transfer of learning,

almost 1,700 new believers embraced the Cause, of whom 42 per cent were

brought into the training institute process.

So effective was the approach that the International Teaching Centre

encouraged the Counsellors in every continent to take steps to replicate

the experience, and the development of learning sites in other parts of the

globe is proving to be equally successful in lending impetus to the process of

growth worldwide. In November 2007, for example, the cluster of Almaty

in Kazakhstan was chosen as such a site for Asiatic Russia and several neigh-

bouring countries; 25 friends participated in a specially designed programme

of preparation, following which they were sent to selected clusters across the

region. Working with an outline of how to establish an effective direct teach-

ing campaign, they collaborated with cluster agencies, assisted in formulating

systematic plans of action, and participated in their implementation shoulder

to shoulder with the local believers. After only one month, nearly 420 souls

had entered the Cause, an estimated 65 per cent of whom were immediately

enrolled in the institute programme, many beginning their study of Book 1

while the expansion phase was still in progress. The approach had produced

in that vast landmass of far-flung clusters with sparse Bahá’í populations a

result that otherwise would have taken years to obtain.

Experience has demonstrated that sites for the dissemination of learning

can be used effectively not only to transfer knowledge related to the movement

of clusters in all its dimensions, but to further understanding of some specific

aspect of the process. Work with junior youth is a case in point.

In the Portal da Glória cluster in Brazil, for example, the friends have man-

aged to significantly multiply the number of junior youth groups over the past

year, which currently boasts some 800 participants. The first 21 young people

to complete the three-year programme for their moral and spiritual empower-

ment have all gone on to study the sequence of institute courses, and already

five teach children’s classes. Many of the current junior youth participants

aspire to be animators of groups themselves. The insights gained by the friends

in sustaining such large numbers in groups place the Portal da Glória cluster

in the vanguard of the learning process, making it an ideal site for develop-

ing the capacities of individuals coordinating the work with junior youth

from across the region. In February 2008, at the request of the Counsellors,

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in collaboration with the office of Social and economic Development at the

Bahá’í World Centre, a seminar was held in Portal da Glória for those working

with junior youth in Brazil, mostly cluster coordinators, during which they

reviewed materials, reflected on their own experiences in assisting animators,

and observed an “encounter” for a large number of animators. Visiting sev-

eral junior youth groups in the company of the coordinator for this activity

in Portal da Glória, they were able to see how animators are accompanied in

practice in this cluster.

Today, well over 50 clusters have been identified that can function as sites

for the dissemination of learning. About half of these will have a special focus

on supporting efforts to expand the junior youth programme in the regions

they serve. What will be essential is for the overall process of learning in all of

these sites to be rigorously pursued and the capacity to host groups of visitors

consistently built.

## Homefront pioneers as agents of learning

The settlement of pioneers as a means for spreading the Cause is, of course, a

feature of Bahá’í life that is well understood. What recent experience shows is

that pioneers who operate effectively in the Plan’s framework for action can

lend focus, speed, and direction to the development of a cluster, particularly

one in the early stages of growth, becoming in this way agents for the accel-

eration of learning.

Cambodia offers a notable example of what can be achieved. Experience

in applying the framework for action is rich in that country, and its pool of

human resources continues to swell as the number of those engaged in the

study of institute courses grows. This has made it possible for several strong

clusters to act as seedbeds from which homefront pioneers can be dispatched

and receive ongoing systematic support.

Invariably such pioneers have acquired a heightened sense of service

through participation in the institute process and have proven experience both

in carrying out core activities and working in teaching teams. Most crucial,

however, is their ability to strengthen capacity in others. After settling in an

unopened cluster, they gather together a group of young individuals receptive

to the Message and establish at least one core activity, commonly a study circle.

As these young people deepen their understanding of the Faith in this way, they

become increasingly active protagonists in the process of growth—protagonists

who see the core activities as necessary components for building a community

rich in its spiritual life and socially active in its orientation.

Once this initial cohort of new believers has studied the early books of

the sequence—usually defined as Books 1 and 2—those who show the great-

est interest are invited to attend centralized courses in a strong cluster nearby.

There, they complete the study of Books 3 to 5 with believers of recognized

experience, such as coordinators, and gain practice in teaching children’s classes

and conducting junior youth activities in the context of that cluster’s dynamic

teaching work.

Upon their return home, these relatively new believers can initiate and

multiply children’s classes and junior youth groups, fortifying the pattern of

activity of their emerging community. Only weeks later, some again return

to the established cluster, this time to study Books 6 and 7. Now they are

equipped to significantly augment the strength of the training institute

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process in their cluster, which can quickly reach the stage of self-sufficiency.

Throughout the early stages, teams of travelling teachers sent from stronger

clusters provide assistance to the pioneer in various aspects of the process of

growth and reinforce local efforts.

Through this systematic and now well-proven approach, clusters in

Cambodia not only can generate sufficient human resources for their own

development but also have the capacity to establish a pattern of dynamic

growth in neighbouring clusters within months. For example, in February

2006, a homefront pioneer family moved into the Pursat cluster where there

were few believers at the time. By December 2007, the number of believers had

grown to 610, many of whom were being nurtured in an impressive number

of core activities: 31 study circles, 19 devotional meetings, 14 children’s classes,

and 12 junior youth groups. On the basis of this experience, the institutions in

Cambodia have made plans to ensure that all remaining clusters in that country

establish intensive programmes of growth by the end of the current Plan.

## Learning about reaching receptive populations

The strategies described above have now been employed with considerable suc-

cess in clusters around the world. As already noted, much of the learning that

was propagated was about practical issues, for example, how to administer an

intensive programme of growth, how to organize teaching teams in campaigns,

and how to analyse 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 worldwide this past year.

Reaching large numbers in regions where populations have tradition-

ally shown a high degree of receptivity to the Faith has never been difficult.

However, teaching on a wide scale in these regions had steadily declined over

the years as it did not prove possible to meet the challenges associated with

consolidation. The last few months have seen a reawakening of the spirit of

direct teaching through collective campaigns in clusters with such receptive

populations, but now as one of several elements integrated into a coherent

programme of sustainable growth.

What was even more noteworthy, however, was that the same kind of

forthright presentation of the Faith proved to be equally effective in areas where

populations were thought to be less receptive, generally urban centres. The

spark of teaching had already been reignited in such clusters as the believers

learned to open core activities to family members, friends, co-workers, and

associates. In recent months these believers have taken a significant next step,

anticipated by the Universal House of Justice in its message of 27 December

2005. Emboldened by the receptivity they found in their immediate circles,

and drawing on their experience in individual direct teaching, they carried

out campaigns among receptive populations, typically those residing in a well-

defined part of a city, such as a neighbourhood, a block of apartments, or a

collection of dwellings.

For several years the friends in Toronto, Canada, were striving to under-

stand the dynamics of teaching the Faith to receptive populations. In 2007, an

effort was launched to build on the accumulated experience to date, especially

in presenting the Message in a more direct manner than in the past. Eight

neighbourhoods—principally apartment blocks with large immigrant com-

munities—were selected because of the likely receptivity of their inhabitants.

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And at last the long-cherished goal of the friends in Toronto was realized.

While there were several declarations as a result of this effort, the most striking

outcome was that more than 500 new people started to attend core activities.

Parents were particularly attracted to activities for the spiritual and moral edu-

cation of their children and junior youth—a pressing concern resulting from

cultural and social dislocation. Stirred by the passion for teaching among the

populations they have begun to know, 15 believers, mostly youth and young

adults, have moved into these neighbourhoods to nourish the capacities of

seekers and new believers and to foster the growth of nascent communities,

where already core activities are seen as a natural part of the collective life.

This approach to finding receptive souls is now being employed with

significant results in settings as diverse as the teeming cities of India and the

sprawling urban centres of the United States. Consider the state of Arizona.

For a year the multiplication of classes in neighbourhoods in the Phoenix

cluster had provided a sound spiritual education to a growing number of

children whose parents were not Bahá’ís, especially among the Hispanic popu-

lation. As a natural consequence, when an intensive programme of growth

was launched in December 2007, the parents of such children were found

to be especially receptive to the Message. The outreach to these parents and

others incorporated learning about teaching in urban settings that had taken

friends in other clusters months, even years, to acquire. The expansion phase

employed direct teaching methods in collective action marked by intensity and

high spirits. With the enrolment and registration of 70 individuals in 15 days,

the expansion phase in Phoenix became the most effective one of its kind

in North America, and the friends newly enrolled were integrated with ease

into the pattern of community life that had been emerging gradually over the

years as core activities were established. Only three weeks later, friends in the

neighbouring cluster of Tucson launched their own teaching campaign, which

incorporated lessons learned in Phoenix and took their existing programme of

growth to a new level. But that is not all. Three weeks later still, the believers

in the east Valley cluster launched their programme of growth, now with the

advantage of the learning acquired by the other two. Selected friends from

various regions of the United States came to participate and learn, and again

the results were unprecedented. More than 100 souls embraced the Cause of

God within nine days—and many more expressed interest in continuing to

learn about the Faith. In fact, such was the receptivity and response that the

cluster agencies had to end the expansion phase three days early to ensure

that the consolidation efforts could keep pace with the expansion. The echoes

from these three sister clusters in Arizona are already resounding throughout

the United States.



The foregoing analysis demonstrates, yet again, the value of the learning mode

in which the Bahá’í community increasingly operates. That in a matter of

months the adoption of a few simple strategies has given rise to so remarkable

an acceleration of learning is a testament to the heightened capacity of the

community. The body of knowledge on which the friends can draw in pro-

moting the growth of a cluster has expanded greatly with the insights gained

into the dynamics of direct teaching during the second year of the Plan. In

every cluster, irrespective of its current stage of development, the believers

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can now think in terms of cycles of activity and establish a rhythm of growth

that is distinguished by a recurring surge of expansion followed by a period

of consolidation—a period during which the attention given to the institute

process rapidly increases the human resources needed to raise the level of

intensity. There can be little doubt, then, that the goal of establishing at least

1,500 intensive programmes of growth by the end of the Five Year Plan is well

within reach.

1 Message dated 27 December 2005 written by the Universal House of Justice to the  
Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors.

2 Riḍván 2007 message written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the  
world.

3 ibid.

4 ibid.

5 *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1990, 2006 printing),  
pp. 126–127.