

"Development: Participation in the Generation and Application of Knowledge"

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Bahá'ís around the world are engaged in establishing and strengthening communities that can effectively contribute to the building of a global civilization that embodies the coherence between the physical and the spiritual. Some of the efforts of these communities are focused on one or another aspect of the social and economic development of the villages and towns in which they live.

These social and economic development efforts are carried out within a framework that is shaped by Bahá'í writings and informed by scientific findings from fields such as sociology, economics, and agriculture. At the heart of this framework, which evolves as individuals and communities around the world apply spiritual principles and use methodologies from science to respond to the problems of their surroundings, lies the understanding of development as raising the capacity of human populations to participate in the generation and application of knowledge.

In order to offer some insights in how a coherent socio-economic development strategy can focus on raising the capacity of a population to participate in knowledge generation and application, this paper focuses on one specific endeavor: the Foundation for the Application and Teaching of the Sciences, known as FUNDAEC, a Bahá'í inspired development organization created in the early 1970s in Colombia. Like other Bahá'í inspired endeavors, FUNDAEC's experience is embedded in what has been known for the past five decades as the field of development. To situate these efforts in the larger context of socio-economic development thought, the paper begins by examining the way development thought, strategy, and plans have evolved since the early 1950s when the idea of development became widespread.