Excerpts on Intensive Programs of Growth

Introduction

Ridvan of 2016 will conclude the current Five Year Plan and the goal of 5000 programs of growth evaluated. The process of moving clusters along the continuum of development through milestones will continue. This compilation looks the guidance about moving from the first (programs of growth) to the second milestone (intensive programs of growth). It might be helpful to view the excerpts in light of the illustration below. This illustration shows "the two essential movements which continue to propel the process of growth—the steady flow of participants through the sequence of institute courses and the movement of clusters along a continuum of development" (Ridvan Message 2014).

These movements are at the core of the development and as they progress, many other aspects such as improvement in the quality of the Nineteen Day Feasts, increased donations to the Funds, multiplication of core activities, emerging administrative structures, become manifest. Perhaps the friends will gain a deeper understanding and draw new insights from this compilation on how to contribute to both these movements. This compilation does not include excerpts from "Insights from the Frontiers of
Learning” as most of the document would be included. It is perhaps better to consider this compilation as a warm up before studying “Insights from the Frontiers of Learning”.

Aim of an IPG

Programs initiated in such areas should aim at fostering sustainable growth by building the necessary capacity at the levels of the individual, the institution, and the community.

- The friends who participate in these intensive programs of growth should bear in mind that the purpose is to ensure that the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh reaches the masses of humanity and enables them to achieve spiritual and material progress through the application of the Teachings.
- Vast numbers among the peoples of the world are ready, indeed yearn, for the bounties that Bahá’u’lláh alone can bestow upon them once they have committed themselves to building the new society He has envisioned.

*Universal House of Justice Letter dated 9th of January 2001*

When is a Cluster ready of an IPG?

It is important that national communities not rush into establishing intensive programs in an area before conditions are propitious. These conditions include:

- a high level of enthusiasm among a sizeable group of devoted and capable believers who understand the prerequisites for sustainable growth and can take ownership of the program;
- some basic experience on the part of a few communities in the cluster in holding classes for the spiritual education of children, devotional meetings, and the Nineteen Day Feast;
- the existence of a reasonable degree of administrative capacity in at least a few Local Spiritual Assemblies;
- the active involvement of several assistants to Auxiliary Board members in promoting community life;
- a pronounced spirit of collaboration among the various institutions working in the area;
- and above all, the strong presence of the training institute with a scheme of coordination that supports the systematic multiplication of study circles.

*Universal House of Justice Letter dated 9th of January 2001*

- A high degree of enthusiasm and a strong sense of ownership are also characteristics of clusters ready to embark on an intensive program of growth.
- Reflection meetings are well attended and participation is lively.
• The feeling of ownership of the process has been manifested in, among other ways, greater contributions to the Fund.

**Building Momentum 2003**

A question often asked by the friends is how they will know when their cluster is ready for an intensive program of growth.

• One indicator that cannot be overlooked is **growth** itself—an increase in the number of Bahá’ís in the cluster.
  
  o A vigorous institute process, the multiplication of core activities and their integration, a successful outreach to local inhabitants, an ever-growing number of individual and collective teaching initiatives, a vibrant community life, and a commitment to an ongoing learning process will result in growth.
  
  o This includes new enrollments as well as reactivated Bahá’ís who have been roused by the newfound spirit and activity in their area.
  
  o These elements will also naturally lead to and foster the conditions for intensive programs of growth identified by the House of Justice in its message of 9 January 2001, such as the “pronounced spirit of collaboration” among the institutions and “a reasonable degree of administrative capacity.”

• An intensive program of growth suggests just that—**intensification**—an intensification of activity that contributes to systematic growth.
  
  o The friends in advanced clusters will become aware of a perceptible change in the intensity of activity in their area, and this will be reflected in the growth pattern.
  
  o An intensive program of growth implies a pattern that is progressively accelerated and fully sustained.

**Building Momentum 2003**

• On several occasions we have made reference to the **coherence** that is brought to the process of growth through the establishment of study circles, devotional meetings and children’s classes.

• The steady multiplication of core activities, propelled by the training institute, creates a sustainable pattern of expansion and consolidation that is at once structured and organic.

• As seekers join these activities and declare their faith, individual and collective teaching endeavors gather momentum.

• Through the effort made to ensure that a percentage of the new believers enroll in the institute courses, the pool of human resources required to carry out the work of the Faith swells.

• When strenuously pursued in a cluster, all of this activity eventually brings about conditions favorable for launching an intensive program of growth.

What a close examination of clusters at this threshold confirms is that the coherence thus achieved extends to various aspects of community life.
• The study and application of the teachings become a pervasive habit, and the spirit of communal worship generated by devotional meetings begins to permeate the community's collective endeavors.

• A graceful integration of the arts into diverse activities enhances the surge of energy that mobilizes the believers.

• Classes for the spiritual education of children and junior youth serve to strengthen the roots of the Faith in the local population.

• Even an act of service as simple as visiting the home of a new believer, ..., reinforces ties of fellowship that bind the members of the community together. Conceived as a means for exposing believers to the fundamentals of the Faith, "home visits" are giving rise to an array of deepening efforts, both individual and collective, in which the friends are delving into the Writings and exploring their implications for their lives.

• As the spiritual foundations of the community are fortified in this way, the level of collective discourse is raised, social relations among the friends take on new meaning, and a sense of common purpose inspires their interactions.

• Little wonder, then, that a study carried out by the International Teaching Centre shows that, in some fifty advanced clusters surveyed, the quality of the Nineteen Day Feast has improved.

• Other reports indicate that contributions to the Fund have increased as consciousness of its spiritual significance expands and the need for material means is better understood.

• Reflection meetings at the cluster level are becoming a forum for the discussion of needs and plans, creating a collective identity and strengthening the collective will. Where such advanced clusters are flourishing, the influence they exert begins to spread beyond their own borders to enrich regional events, such as summer and winter schools.

*Universal House of Justice Letter dated 27th of December 2005*

Within this landscape of unfolding processes, emerging structures, and enduring fellowship, that moment which has come to be known as the "launching" of an intensive programme of growth represents

• conscious recognition that all the elements necessary to accelerate the expansion and consolidation of the Faith are not only in place but also functioning with an adequate degree of effectiveness.

• It signals the maturation of an ever-expanding, self-sustaining system for the spiritual edification of a population:

• a steady stream of friends is proceeding through the courses of the training institute and engaging in the corresponding activities, which serves, in turn, to increase the number of fresh recruits into the Faith,

• a significant percentage of whom invariably enters the institute process, guaranteeing the expansion of the system.

• This constitutes another milestone that the friends labouring in every cluster must, in time, reach.

*Universal House of Justice Letter dated 28th of December 2010*
How is an IPG achieved?

• Far from requiring grandiose and elaborate plans, these programs should focus on a few measures that have proven over the years to be indispensable to large-scale expansion and consolidation.
• Success will depend on the manner in which lines of action are integrated and on the attitude of learning that is adopted.
• The implementation of such a program will require the close collaboration of the institute, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, and an Area Teaching Committee.

• Throughout the endeavor, periodic meetings of consultation in the area need to reflect on issues, consider adjustments, and maintain enthusiasm and unity of thought.
• The best approach is to formulate plans for a few months at a time, beginning with one or two lines of action and gradually growing in complexity.
• Those who are actively involved in the implementation of plans, whether members of the institutions or not, should be encouraged to participate fully in the consultations.
• Other area-wide gatherings will also be necessary. Some of these will provide opportunity for the sharing of experience and further training. Others will focus on the use of the arts and the enrichment of culture.
• Together, such gatherings will support an intense process of action, consultation and learning.

*Universal House of Justice Letter dated 9th of January 2001*

As in the case of the individual, learning is the hallmark of this phase of the development of the community. You and your auxiliaries are urged to exert every effort in the coming years to ensure that, in cluster after cluster, learning is woven into the fabric of decision-making.

One of your primary concerns will be to strengthen appreciation for systematic action, already heightened by the successes it has brought.

• To arrive at a unified vision of growth based on a realistic assessment of possibilities and resources, to develop strategies that lend structure to it,
• to devise and implement plans of action commensurate with capacity,
• to make necessary adjustments while maintaining continuity,
• to build on accomplishments—these are some of the requisites of systematization that every community must learn and internalize.

By the same token, desire and willingness to open certain aspects of community life to the wider public should be integrated into a pattern of behavior that attracts souls and confirms them.

• Much has been achieved in this respect as the friends have adopted new ways of thinking and acting at a collective level.
• In welcoming large numbers into its embrace, the community is learning to see more readily the latent potentiality in people and to avoid setting artificial barriers for them based on preconceived notions.
• A nurturing environment is being cultivated in which each individual is encouraged to progress at his or her own pace without the pressure of unreasonable expectations.
• At the heart of such developments is a growing awareness of the implications of the universality and comprehensiveness of the Faith.
• Collective action is governed more and more by the principle that Bahá’u’lláh’s message should be given liberally and unconditionally to humanity.
• Most gratifying are the endeavors being made to reach receptive populations with the teachings of the Faith. As unrelenting social and political forces continue to uproot people from their homelands and sweep them across continents, an uncompromising appreciation for a diversity of backgrounds and for the strength it confers on the whole will prove crucial to the expansion and consolidation of the community.

Perhaps the task that will occupy the attention of you and your auxiliaries above all others is to assist the community in its effort to maintain focus.

• This ability, slowly acquired through successive Plans, represents one of its most valuable assets, hard won through discipline, commitment and foresight as the friends and their institutions have learned to pursue the single aim of advancing the process of entry by troops.
• On the one hand, you will find it necessary to discourage the tendency to confuse focus with uniformity or exclusivity. To maintain focus does not imply that special needs and interests are neglected, much less that essential activities are dropped in order to accommodate others. Clearly, there are a host of elements that comprise Bahá’í community life, shaped over the decades, which must be further refined and developed.
• On the other hand, you will want to take every opportunity to reinforce the disposition to prioritize—one which recognizes that not all activities have the same importance at a given stage of growth, that some must necessarily take precedence over others, that even the most well-intentioned proposals can cause distraction, dissipate energy or impede progress.
• What should be plainly acknowledged is that the time available for the friends to serve the Faith in every community is not without limits. It is only natural to expect that the preponderating share of this limited resource would be expended in meeting the provisions of the Plan.

Universal House of Justice Letter dated 27th of December 2005

Programmes of Growth (1st Milestone)
Invariably, opportunities afforded by the personal circumstances of the believers initially involved—or perhaps a single homefront pioneer—

• to enter into meaningful and distinctive conversation with local residents dictate how the process of growth begins in a cluster.
• A study circle made up of a few friends or colleagues, a class offered for several
neighbourhood children,
• a group formed for junior youth during after-school hours,
• a devotional gathering hosted for family and friends—any one of these can serve
as a stimulus to growth.

What happens next follows no predetermined course. Conditions may justify that
one core activity be given precedence, multiplying at a rate faster than the others. It
is equally possible that all four would advance at a comparable pace. Visiting teams
may be called upon to provide impetus to the fledgling set of activities.

*Universal House of Justice Letter dated 28th of December 2010*

But irrespective of the specifics, the outcome must be the same.

• Within every cluster, the level of cohesion achieved among the core activities
must be such that, in their totality, a nascent programme for the sustained
expansion and consolidation of the Faith can be perceived.
  o That is to say, in whatever combination and however small in number,
devotional gatherings, children's classes and junior youth groups are
being maintained by those progressing through the sequence of institute
courses and committed to the vision of individual and collective
transformation they foster.
  o This initial flow of human resources into the field of systematic action
marks the first of several milestones in a process of sustainable growth.

It is important to note that, as a programme of growth is being brought into existence,
an emergent community spirit begins to exert its influence on the course of events.

• Whether activities are scattered across the cluster or concentrated in one village
or neighbourhood, a sense of common purpose characterizes the endeavours of
the friends.
• Whatever level of organization served to channel the early manifestations of this
spirit, the systematic, coordinated multiplication of core activities necessitates
that higher levels soon be attained.
• Through various measures, greater structure is lent to activity, and initiative,
shaped largely by individual volition before, is now given collective expression.
• A complement of coordinators appointed by the institute moves into place—
those for study circles, for junior youth groups, and for children’s classes. Any
order of appointment is potentially valid.
• Nothing less than an acute awareness of circumstances on the ground should
make this determination, for what is at stake is not compliance with a set of
procedures but the unfoldment of an educational process that has begun to show
its potential to bring about the spiritual empowerment of large numbers.

*Universal House of Justice Letter dated 28th of December 2010*
Summary

A new programme of growth begins as two nascent capacities develop.

• First, one or more friends in a cluster must be able to help individuals study the institute’s sequence of courses and accompany them as they initiate core activities.
  o Then, these individuals must be able to attract others to participate in the core activities.
  o As efforts along these lines have borne fruit in various parts of the world, the institutions concerned set aside exaggerated expectations of what must be achieved before a new programme of growth can be said to have emerged.

• As the reach of core activities continues to expand,
  o a higher level of organization to coordinate efforts emerges, and a distinct rhythm to the cycles of expansion and consolidation becomes apparent.
  o The enthusiasm of the friends grows, their facility with the instruments and methods of the Plan increases, and they become more adept at responding to the unique social conditions around them.
  o With more activity, they put in place the institutional structures needed to channel their energies and deal with added complexity.
  o In time, they advance towards the second milestone, the establishment of an intensive programme of growth.

Excerpts from Insights from Frontiers of Learning 2013