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Integrating moral values in rural education and sustainable development in Latin America: the System of Tutorial Learning (SAT)

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Abstract

This paper describes the development of the System of Tutorial Learning (SAT), a Baha'i-inspired rural education programme, in two Latin American countries – Colombia and Honduras. It starts by discussing the conceptual basis of the Baha'i approach to social and economic development, especially the links between education and sustainable development. It then describes how the 'Rural University' and SAT evolved and developed in Colombia, following a profound critique of conventional development and education programmes by the Foundation for the Application and Teaching of Sciences (FUNDAEC). It describes the content and pedagogy of SAT, including, for example, its focus on the development of 'capabilities' rather than academic disciplines; the way disciplines are integrated in SAT; the integration of moral or spiritual values in SAT, especially 'service to the community'; and the participatory agricultural research programme and other livelihood-oriented components. The Colombian experience recently culminated in FUNDAEC being awarded a prestigious international award for the SAT programme.

In Honduras, SAT had to face an acute set of teething problems, partly resulting from its initial implementation in a very difficult and remote area. However, progress has been rapid over the last few years, including increasing government interest and ownership of SAT. A major expansion of SAT is at an advanced planning stage, and funding from several development agencies has been obtained. These experiences show the potential of applying spiritual principles in the arena of social and economic development, especially the importance of integrating moral or spiritual values into educational curricula, and focusing on the 'real purpose of development'. This is the realisation of individual human potential, largely through actions of service to the wider community, to be able to contribute to an 'ever-advancing civilisation'.

Introduction: 'development' and education

The commitment of the Baha'i Faith to social and economic development is firmly rooted in its sacred writings, which state that all human beings 'have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.'[1] Baha'u'llah also wrote, 'Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and

[1] Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh* (trans. by Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1983) 214.

requirements.'[2] Baha'u'llah made it clear that education, in its various forms, is the principal means for developing a just, peaceful and united society. 'Man is the supreme talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess . . . regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.'[3]

From a Baha'i perspective there is therefore a very clear link between education and efforts to promote sustainable development in (materially) poor countries, leading to a Baha'i view that 'the real purpose of development . . . is the cultivation of the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness.'[4] Central to this concept is that individual potential can only be fulfilled through service to humanity.

This contrasts to conventional approaches to 'development', for example, as manifested in bilateral and multilateral development aid programmes. These have tended to emphasize the achievement of material goals like food, health, shelter and employment, although the international development discourse has gradually increased the emphasis on social development concepts. Due to the influence of writers like Armatya Sen,[5] the Nobel prize-winning economist, concepts such as community, family, self-esteem and 'social inclusion' have become important elements of sustainability, together with an increased emphasis on poverty reduction, participatory approaches, and governance. But from a Baha'i perspective, a major shortcoming of conventional development thinking and programmes is that they do not tap into the spiritual dimension of human nature, and therefore are unable to generate the levels of sustained motivation and service needed to tackle complex and deeply-rooted development problems – especially those associated with materialistic value systems. This is brought out in the following quotation from the *Promise of World Peace* by the Universal House of Justice, sent to world leaders in 1985:

> there are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitates the discovery and implementation of practical measures.[6]

Thus the Baha'i position is that any serious attempt to tackle development requires an educational process with a strong spiritual or moral element. At the same time, the importance of a sound 'material' and scientifically-based education, and the commitment in Baha'i social and economic development projects to improve the material welfare of humanity, should not be underestimated. A recent Baha'i statement asserts that:

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2 Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings* 214.

3 Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings* 258–9.

4 Bahā'ī International Community, *Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development*. A concept paper written by the Bahā'ī International Community for The World Faiths and Development Dialogue, Lambeth Palace, London, 18–19 February 1998 (London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust) 20.

5 Armatya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

6 Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*. A Statement by The Universal House of Justice (London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1985) 15–16.

> throughout recorded history, human consciousness has depended upon two basic knowledge systems through which its potentialities have progressively been expressed: science and religion. Through these two agencies, the race's experience has been organized, its environment interpreted, its latent powers explored, and its moral and intellectual life disciplined.[7]

While conventional development views of 'development' and the role of education may appear limited from a spiritual perspective, there is at least a broad appreciation of the links between education and sustainable development; for example, we are just entering the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014). It is also widely agreed that a lack of rural education, or its poor quality, is a key cause of rural poverty; for example, the 2001 World Development Report identified education as the most important factor in improving rural welfare.[8] But cash-strapped developing country governments have been unable to respond to this need: state education coverage is low in rural areas, is of a generally poor quality, and is not oriented to rural life and its problems. Most poor families cannot afford to send their children to formal state schools anyway, as the children are needed for farm work or to earn cash. At the same time rural communities in most of the 'developing' world are undergoing a process of moral and social disintegration. To respond to such problems, it is widely accepted that innovative new approaches to education in poor rural areas are needed.

What is SAT?

The Tutorial Learning System or, in Spanish, the Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT), is a non-formal secondary school education programme for rural areas. One definition of the objective of the SAT programme is to provide a 'social learning space' in which rural youth, with their own life experience, are able to participate by generating and applying knowledge in their own social and cultural contexts, and for the benefit of the wider community.[9] More simply, SAT aims to develop the (service-oriented) attitudes, knowledge and skills so that young people are better prepared to lead a socially useful and more productive rural life. It is hoped that in any community the SAT programme will leave behind a core group of better educated youth who become effective participants or leaders in various community development processes, including agricultural production, health, pre-school and primary education, community organisation and the development of small businesses. This human resource base becomes the real basis for 'sustainable' rural development, in contrast to many development programmes that undermine the basis of sustainability by increasing the dependency on outside resources and expertise.

SAT was originally developed in Colombia in the second half of the 1970s by a Baha'i-inspired non-government organisation (NGO) called the Foundation for the Application and

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7 Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*. A statement prepared by the Bahá'í International Community Office of Public Information, first distributed at the United Nations World Summit on Social Development, Copenhagen, Denmark (Haifa: Bahá'í International Community, 1995) 17.

8 World Bank, *World Development Report 2000/01* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

9 Francia Valcárcel and Gustavo Correa, *Para Salvar las Barreras, El Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial*. (Cali, Colombia: Editorial Feriva, 1995) 5.

Teaching of Sciences (FUNDAEC). FUNDAEC was established in 1974 by a group of university lecturers, both Baha'is and others, working at the University of Valle in the city of Cali. The SAT programme has since been extended to Honduras, Guatemala, Ecuador, Venezuela, Panama, Costa Rica, Brazil, Nicaragua and, in the first experience out of Latin America, Zambia. This paper looks particularly at how SAT evolved and developed in Colombia, and its more recent application in Honduras.

FUNDAEC's critique of development and formal education

The SAT programme has its origins in a lengthy diagnosis of rural development problems in the Cauca Valley region of Colombia by FUNDAEC. The latter observed that development was defined largely in terms of modernisation and industrialisation, and that development projects promoted by aid agencies were making little or no contribution to the welfare of the vast majority of rural people.[10] In fact most development projects were observed to have a damaging impact on sustainable development; they were increasing the gap between the relatively wealthier and poorer families, and were making the communities more dependent on outside support. FUNDAEC also noted that 'development' was being promoted more as a product than a process.[11]

A particular focus of FUNDAEC was on the concepts of 'participation' and 'education'. It was noted that in conventional development projects, 'participation' was limited to elaborate methods of inducing villagers to participate in projects designed by outsiders. FUNDAEC, on the other hand, defined participation in terms of people taking control of their own development process: 'it could be claimed that a people were in charge of their own development only if they were learning systematically about the changes that occurred in their society, and were consciously incorporating in their continuous learning process appropriate elements from the universe of knowledge.'[12] This definition implied that rural people had to take a central role in the generation, verification and diffusion of knowledge, and that a local or regional learning process was needed. The 'universe of knowledge' was seen to include rural people's own knowledge and that of other peoples and groups in the world facing similar problems, as well as 'northern' or urban-based scientific and technological advances.

Another key reason why people were unable to 'take charge of their own development' was that these development programmes were not resulting in structures and institutions which belonged to the people themselves. FUNDAEC was convinced that rural change would be impossible without the latter.[13]

Meanwhile the formal education curriculum was observed to be inappropriate for developing the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes for sustainable development. Rather it promoted negative attitudes to rural life; for example, farming was portrayed as a low prestige occupation, and negative social attitudes of teachers and students were seen to

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10 Farzam Arbab, *Universidad Rural: Aprendizaje sobre Educación y Desarrollo* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1984) 9.

11 *Ibid*.

12 Ruhi Foundation, 'Strengthening and Systematizing the Efforts of Core Groups of the Rural University.' Proposal submitted to the Office of Social and Economic Development, Baha'i World Centre (Cali, Colombia: Ruhi Foundation, unpublished mimeo, 1989) 6.

13 Francia Valcárcel, 'The Rural University belongs to the people', *ILEIA Newsletter* (Information Centre for Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture, Netherlands) October 1991:14–15, see 14.

be contributing to the social and moral disintegration of rural areas.[14] The urban bias of the education systems and these negative attitudes were (and still are) stimulating a continuous exodus of young people from the countryside to big cities like Cali and Bogota in search of the 'good life' and better employment prospects. However, much of this migration only served to increase urban unemployment, crime and other social problems in the big cities, as well as increasing the pressures on public services and accelerating family and community breakdown.

FUNDAEC also observed that the formal education system ignored the need for moral development, but that this was felt to be at the heart of equitable and sustainable community development. The omission of values in education, or its treatment as a discreet subject matter separated from everyday life, was seen to be reinforcing the prevailing materialistic and self-centred value system, and contributing to negative social attitudes.[15] These undermined the 'social cohesion' and institutions necessary for sustainable community development. Another observation was that the traditional rote-learning pedagogic system did not help students develop their conceptual thinking skills and critical faculties, but only resulted in the memorisation of facts. This was seen to promote or reinforce unquestioning attitudes to the problems of society, and formed a barrier to the 'independent investigation of truth' and to the capacity for solving problems.[16] It should however be noted that it is not intended that the SAT programme substitutes or competes with the formal education system. It is targeted at communities without any secondary education coverage, due to, for example, problems of distance, accessibility, and the limited national education budget.

Having observed the lack of a suitable institution to support a regional learning process, FUNDAEC initially dedicated itself to establishing a learning institution for the Cauca Valley region of Colombia. This was called the Rural University, the name chosen partly to question the standard urban university model.[17] The main objectives of the Rural University were to develop the human resources necessary to support a continuous regional learning process, and set in motion a series of community development learning processes, for example, in the areas of agriculture, health, education, institutional development, micro-enterprise development, credit and marketing.[18]

The main elements and pedagogy of SAT

The SAT curriculum programme gradually emerged from the initial attempts of the Rural University to nurture these community learning processes. It was rapidly realised that the focus needed to be on developing a set of capacities or capabilities in rural people (and especially the young) so that they could effectively 'participate' in the development process. Therefore an essential aspect of SAT is the development by each student of a set of 'capabilities', a capability being defined as a 'capacity to think and act in a well-defined

14 Arbab, *Universidad Rural*, 30.
15 *Ibid* 30.
16 *Ibid* 13.
17 *Ibid* 12.
18 *Ibid* 14.

sphere of activity and according to a well-defined purpose.'[19] Each capability in turn requires a number of skills and abilities.

For example, social capabilities include the ability to consult effectively, take part in collective enterprises, serve on institutions, and build unity among diverse people. Individual capabilities include the ability for systematic reflection on one's actions, to be able to manage personal affairs and responsibilities with rectitude of conduct, to be able to think systematically about solutions, and to infuse daily actions with love. A more specific language or communication capability is to be able to describe what can be observed in a wider context, for example, people's behaviour in the context of a social system.[20]

Reflection on the importance given to service and sacrifice in the Baha'i writings led to the adoption of 'service to the community' as the core value to be developed in SAT, as well as an emphasis on developing moral values like honesty, compassion and trustworthiness. These concepts were integrated into all the teaching materials (SAT texts), and service to the community was built into the practical activities of SAT students. The latter, as part of their course, have to carry out service projects with neighbouring families in the areas of literacy, health and organisation. The SAT programme also emphasizes the development of community identity, since it was felt that the replacement of traditional values and community-based identity structures by more competitive or market-based values were behind the process of moral and social disintegration in rural communities.[21]

One of the key problems of the formal education system identified by FUNDAEC was the sub-division of knowledge and science into separate specialized branches. It was felt that this resulted in students developing a 'fragmented' view of reality, which in turn prevented the development of the more holistic thinking needed for solving complex and multi-dimensional development problems. It was also diagnosed that there were severe problems in converting scientific theory into practical knowledge and action.[22] Therefore FUNDAEC decided to integrate the disciplines as much as possible, and to adopt a 'learning-by-doing' approach.

Thus when SAT students learn about animal nutrition, they also learn about and practice the economics of running a chicken farm, develop statistical skills, and are introduced to business accounting concepts. Another example is in the course unit on 'insect populations'; as well as learning about the principles and concepts of entomology, epidemiology and statistics, the students learn basic principles of integrated pest management, which they are then encouraged to apply to their agricultural crops. This can be seen as the practical application of the Baha'i principle of 'unity in diversity', as well as showing the importance of how the learning process is more effective when it takes place in a practical context which the students can easily relate to. A further key element of SAT is the emphasis on a continuous 'action-reflection-learning' cycle, including the use of 'consultation' and discussions (following the action part of the cycle) to explore concepts and deepen understanding.

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19 Farzam Arbab, 'Promoting a Discourse on Science, Religion and Development', in S. Harper, *The Lab, the Temple, and the Market. Reflections at the Intersection of Science, Religion, and Development,* Canada: Kumarian Press, 2000, 149–237.

20 Arbab, 'Promoting a Discourse'; Valcárcel and Correa, *Para Salvar las Barreras* 18.

21 Pascal Molineaux, 'Strengthening Local Economies and Community Identity', *LEISA Magazine* (previously ILEIA Newsletter) July 2001:22–23, see 23.

22 Arbab, *Universidad Rural* 29.

The SAT secondary education programme has three levels, each of which lasts about two years. The first level is 'Impulsor of Rural Well-being'. At this level, 28 courses and 'interactive' textbooks are studied in six main areas, as detailed in Table 1. Each course unit has an interactive workbook (SAT text). These have been developed by some of Colombia's leading educationalists, who became interested in the programme. The second and third stages of SAT are called the 'Practitioner' and 'Bachelor' levels of Rural Well-being'.

Table 1 SAT '*impulsor*' level study areas and course units

Study area	Course units
Mathematics	1. Groups and numbers 2. Adding and subtracting 3. Decimal system 4. Multiplication and division 5. Application of arithmetic operations 6. Fractions and percentages 7. Epidemiology and demography
Sciences	1. Growth of a population of insects 2. Calorific processes 3. Plant growth 4. Utilisation of electric energy 5. Photosynthesis
Service to the community	1. Health 2. Literacy 3. Community processes
Readings and Comprehension	Consists of 20 sections of readings about society, culture, the environment, values and the analysis of social processes
Descriptions	1. Properties 2. Systems and processes 3. Description of a family
Agriculture and livestock technology	1. The productive process 2. Subsystems 3. Poultry rearing

As far as possible the teachers of SAT (called tutors) are from the community, rather than brought in from outside as in the state education system. They usually have a degree or are already trained teachers, and in order to ensure their acceptability, the community is involved in selecting them. The tutors receive intensive training in regular short courses at the rural university, and in synchronisation with the course units they have to teach. SAT classes take place at times chosen by the students, often in the late afternoons and at weekends. The flexible timing of the classes means that the SAT students can largely continue their essential livelihood and household activities – thereby removing one of the main constraints to secondary education in rural areas.

The agricultural technology and credit programmes

Science and technology play a major role in the SAT curriculum. In SAT, technology is defined simply as the application of science, and the objective of technological development is to help transform a struggling subsistence economy into a viable and more self-reliant rural economy.[23] The main focus of technology development in SAT has been on farming and small-scale agro-industrial development, since the vast majority of SAT students are from farming families. Therefore a very important component of SAT is the development of agricultural 'subsystems' through a kind of participatory agricultural research process.

The main objectives of the agricultural subsystems component are to develop more diversified farming systems which reduce the risks of crop failure, minimise the use of expensive chemical inputs, are profitable, and improve and diversify family nutrition.

Each SAT group of students has a 'learning plot', which usually belongs to one of the students, but may be land loaned by the community. The students help the SAT agronomist design the experiments, unlike in many 'participatory research' projects in which farmers merely provide their labour in researcher-designed experiments. This reflects another important principle - respect for farmers' traditional knowledge and rationality. The experiments have mainly involved testing out and 'validating' various combinations of crops which complement each other in the use of the soil and release of nutrients (for example, by using nitrogen-producing cover crops like green manures), in the biological control of pests, control of soil erosion, retention of soil moisture, complementary use of labour, and so on.[24] Each crop and agricultural technology combination is a 'subsystem'. Here we can observe the principle of unity in diversity tied in with ecologically sound farming practices.[25]

Another key element in the process of appropriate agricultural technological development is the 'socialising' of agricultural knowledge in the wider community. As part of this socialisation process, the need emerged for credit or small loans to enable farmers to take up improved agricultural technology. The credit programme is an example of the way FUNDAEC has strengthened traditional or community values of reciprocity, interdependence and trust.[26] The credit has been an important vehicle for developing small 'solidarity groups' of (usually) three to five farmers. Each group receives training, both in the technical aspects of the proposed agricultural project, and in the development of moral values. The group members share and exchange resources, knowledge and labour, and there is joint responsibility for the repayment of loans. Solidarity credit groups are also obliged to establish 'solidarity funds' from a small percentage of profits; these are used to meet urgent individual or community needs, for example, hiring a teacher, day-care for small children, or starting a reforestation project.[27]

A very important aspect of these more 'livelihood-oriented' components of SAT is that they encourage the students to remain in the rural areas. One of the goals of SAT is that some proportion of the educated youth remain in the countryside and act as 'agents of change', although this is not easy given the economic realities facing rural areas, including depressed agricultural prices, poor social services and lack of infrastructure. Even with SAT,

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23 Arbab, *Universidad Rural* 38.

24 Valcárcel, 'Rural University' 15.

25 *Ibid* 15.

26 Molineaux, 'Strengthening Local Economies' 23.

27 Valcárcel, 'Rural University' 15.

it is inevitable that a large proportion of students will leave the countryside. But there are some important qualifications to this. One is that many of the 'migrants' have ended up in influential government, NGO or private sector jobs, and have made important contributions to rural development in Colombia.[28] A second is that they often return after a number of years, and with increased skills as a result of higher education qualifications and professional experiences. Also, a large proportion of SAT students have been women with children (particularly in Honduras), who tend to stay in their communities.

Achievements in Colombia

By 2003 over 50,000 rural people had studied SAT in Colombia, and there are currently about 30,000 ongoing SAT students. SAT had been implemented in some 2,300 villages, 500 municipalities and 19 Departments corresponding to about a third of rural Colombia.[29] The Ministry of Education in Colombia has recognized the three educational levels as equivalent to the entire secondary or high school syllabus, giving SAT students the same opportunities for employment and higher education as those from the state system. The Ministry of Education also pays for most of the running costs of SAT, so that it can be claimed that the SAT programme is financially sustainable and nationally owned.

The Rural University of FUNDAEC also runs a five year degree course in rural education, again recognized by the Ministry of Education. Many of the undergraduates are SAT graduates, and many of these go on to become SAT tutors or 'coordinators'. The latter assume a monitoring and support role for the tutors in a specific area, take on tutor training tasks, assist in project management and planning tasks, etc. There is therefore a built-in sustainability in SAT and the Rural University in terms of its human resource requirements.

An important strategy of FUNDAEC has been to work through other organisations, which implement SAT with FUNDAEC's technical assistance and supervision. Some 50 organisations, both public and non-governmental organisations, have been involved in the implementation of SAT in Colombia.[30] A postgraduate programme at the University (now re-named the University for Integral Development) trains the human resources from these organisations, so that they are able to implement SAT.[31]

In October 2002 FUNDAEC was fêted with a prestigious Club of Budapest 'Change the World – Best Practice' award given to 'education projects which empower people to take control of their development'.[32] This award, one of four given for outstanding 'education for sustainable development' projects, was presented in a special ceremony held in Germany, and attended by Peter Ustinov, Paulo Coelho and other representatives of the Club of Budapest, as well as a representative of the Hungarian Prime Minister. The Club of Budapest jury that chose SAT included Maurice Strong (the Secretary-General of the 1992 Earth Summit), Mikhail Gorbachev, Mary Robinson and Klaus Töpfer (Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme).

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28 Valcárcel and Correa, *Para Salvar las Barreras*.

29 Gustavo Correa (Director of FUNDAEC), Personal communication.

30 Gustavo Correo, personal communication.

31 Baha'i International Community, *For the Betterment of the World: The Worldwide Baha'i Community's Approach to Social and Economic Development* (New York: Office of Social and Economic Development, Baha'i International Community, 2003) 24.

32 Bahá'í World News Service, 'Baha'i inspired educational system for the poor of the world honoured by the Club of Budapest' (http://www.uga.edu/bahai/2002/021222–2.html, 22 December 2002).

The development of SAT in Honduras[33]

Following the experience in Colombia, pilot SAT programmes have been started in several other Latin America countries, and most recently by the William Mmutle Masethla Foundation in Zambia, known as the 'Capstone' project.[34] The best-established programme outside Colombia has been in Honduras. A requirement for developing SAT is a strong Baha'i-inspired development organisation. The Bayan Association for Indigenous Social and Economic Development was established in 1985 in a very remote area on the north coast of Honduras called 'Mosquitia'. Bayan established its field office at the meeting point of two ethnic groups: the Garifuna people, of mixed Black Carib and West African descent, and the Miskito Indians. At the time SAT was introduced, the only access to the area was by sea or light aircraft, and the main form of transport in the area remains the dug-out canoe. Most of the area is in the buffer zone of the UNESCO-declared Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve, which contains one of the largest remaining areas of tropical rain forest in Central America. This is a very difficult area for development programmes, characterized by severe poverty and governance problems. As with other remote areas, it is vulnerable to the growth of what has been called the 'uncivil society', including drug traffickers, illegal loggers, and corrupt local politicians.

Following a decade running a small rural hospital and health clinic, and having carried out some health and educational outreach work, the Bayan Association started to implement SAT in 1996 with technical assistance support from FUNDAEC and small grants from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Kellogg Foundation.[35] Around the same time, the UK registered charity, the Baha'i Agency for Social and Economic Development (BASED-UK), was asked by the Office for Social and Economic Development (OSED) at the Baha'i World Centre to assist Bayan by helping it raise funds for its development efforts. In close consultation with Bayan, a proposal to support the establishment of SAT in Honduras was successfully submitted by BASED-UK to the Joint Funding Scheme of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in 1997. This involved a grant of about a quarter of a million pounds over a five year period. The main aim of the pilot project was to convince the Honduran government to adopt SAT as an effective education system for rural areas which the state secondary education system found difficult to reach.

The first few years of SAT in Honduras proved very difficult, largely due to having chosen a very backward and remote area, to the prejudices confronting a new and innovative non-formal education system, and also to the impact of Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Among the problems were:

- identifying and retaining good quality local tutors;
- high drop-out levels, especially as a result of the social and economic devastation which followed Hurricane Mitch – many SAT students were forced by family circumstances to abandon their studies and seek out alternative income sources;

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33 This section is based on the author's personal knowledge of the area and project.

34 BIC, *For the Betterment of the World* 27.

35 BIC, *For the Betterment of the World* 21.

- severe transport and communication difficulties which prevented effective support for the SAT tutors – for example, a rough sea would often prevent the movement of the SAT coordinators;
- opposition from some local religious leaders and state education system teachers, either due to religious prejudice (although there is no religious content in SAT) or because some teachers saw SAT as competing with the formal education system;
- initial community prejudices against a non-formal education system, for example, based on the fact that the students did not have uniforms or a fixed classroom, and because the qualification was not at first recognized by the government;
- difficulties surrounding the slow or inadequate adaptation of the Colombian SAT texts to a completely different cultural and ecological context;
- the occupational structure in which most young men worked in the off-shore fishing industry, which prevented them attending SAT classes on a regular basis. On the other hand this has provided the opportunity for women to become future community leaders – about three quarters of the students in the Mosquitia area were girls or women; and,
- the pressures of poverty which often prevented the students continuing their studies.[36]

There was therefore a very high drop out rate, which meant that the DFID project was unable to fully achieve its quantitative goals (in terms of the number of SAT students and groups). But as against this, the surviving SAT groups showed great enthusiasm in their studies, generally received strong support from parents and the wider community, and carried out a wide range of community service activities, including in the areas of health, literacy, primary and pre-school education, organising cultural events, and environmental projects (such as reforestation, refuse collection, and organising community 'clean-ups'). One community held a competition for designing the best signs to encourage local people and visitors to respect the Biosphere Reserve.

And in spite of the above-mentioned problems, the national and regional educational and political authorities gradually perceived the value of SAT as a relatively high quality, flexible and lower cost education programme (compared to what the government could offer). Academic tests carried out by the Ministry of Education in mathematics and Spanish writing found that the SAT students scored consistently higher than students in the state secondary system. Bayan has invested considerable time in nurturing strong relationships with the national and regional educational authorities. Two Ministers of Education, as well as vice-ministers, have visited the SAT project. A study tour to FUNDAEC for Honduran Ministry of Education officials was also undertaken.

A very important development in 2001 was the signing of agreements between Bayan and the educational authorities of three regional government Departments for the expansion of SAT, as a result of grass-roots demands from communities which had heard about SAT. Under these agreements, 35 new SAT groups with about 900 students were started in 2001 and 2002. The decentralised Ministry of Education offices took over paying for the SAT

[36] These problems are documented in a series of annual reports of BASED-UK to the UK Department For International Development (DFID) compiled by the author, as well as in the final evaluation report of the DFID project: Erin Murphy-Graham, Ada Leticia Vega, Filippo Del Gatto, Ineke Gijsbers and Sarah Richards, 'Final Evaluation of DFID Tutorial Learning System (SAT) Rural Education Project on the North Coast of Honduras 1997–2002 (JFS 1353),' Baha'i Agency for Social and Economic Development, 2002.

tutor and field coordinator salaries, and some of the running costs. At least initially, while the Ministry of Education funding was coming through, some of the SAT costs were paid for by local government, church groups and the communities themselves, which shows how much SAT was valued.

In March 2002, the Ministry of Education officially recognized SAT as fully equivalent to the state secondary education qualification. Shortly after this, Bayan was requested by the Ministry of Education to present a national expansion plan for SAT focusing on the highest poverty areas. With limited funding, the SAT programme had expanded (by late 2004) to about 2,800 students divided between about 140 SAT groups. Part of this expansion involved a consortium of five non-government organisations in western Honduras, supported by Ireland Aid.

The SAT programme in Honduras is now set for rapid expansion, following the approval of funding from the Inter-American Development Bank, the Ford Foundation, the Canadian International Development Agency, and a Swiss-based children's charity called Pestalozzi. The current expansion plan involves a target of 17,500 students by 2009, and the opening up of several new areas, especially in the poorest areas of western Honduras. One reason for the donors' increased interest in SAT is that in the current development dialogue, the development of 'human capital' (mainly through education and health programmes) is a major priority in the fight against poverty. For example, a strategy paper on rural development by the Inter-American Development Bank stated that 'investing in human capital . . . is unquestionably the main priority for permanently reducing rural poverty.'[37] The SAT programme is now included as a key component of Honduras' Poverty Reduction Strategy, regarded as the most important policy instrument for sustainable development.

The next five years will be crucial as SAT is scaled up from a relatively small regional project to become a national education programme in the same way as has happened in Colombia. In view of the scale of the expansion, Bayan has been in close consultation with the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Baha'i World Centre as to how best to proceed. An important future step is to establish the Bayan University, so that it can fulfil a similar role to the Rural University in Colombia; to this end a legal and feasibility study has been carried out with a small grant from DFID's Central America office.

Conclusion

In a world littered with the failure of development projects and strategies, the SAT education programme stands out as an innovative and durable response to the huge problems facing developing countries, especially in how to tackle rural poverty. By integrating the development of necessary skills and knowledge with service-oriented values, and promoting a regional learning process that tackles local development problems, SAT has now demonstrated its potential for promoting sustainable development. What really marks SAT out from conventional approaches to development is that it responds to the need for a values-based approach to education and development, and is therefore able to contribute to the 'real purpose' of development – the realisation of human potential, a potential that can only be fulfilled by serving others.

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[37] Inter-American Development Bank, *Rural Poverty Reduction: Bank Strategy Paper* (Washington, DC: Sustainable Development Department, Inter-American Development Bank, 1998) 15.

But while appropriate education is a necessary condition for sustainable development, it is not a sufficient one. This is because it does not, at least in the short term, counter the 'macro' problems and limitations facing poor rural communities. These are problems which stem from an inequitable world economic order (for example, a system of international trade and farm subsidies in industrialised countries which means there is not a 'level playing field', and developing country farmers are unable to compete with cheap imported food), as well as a range of national governance and policy problems stemming from corruption, political graft and national political economy problems which protect the vested interests in the status quo. This is why, ultimately, the purpose of SAT is seen as contributing to the development of a new civilization (or 'new world order' in Baha'i terminology) in which such inequities and injustices would not be permitted, as is apparent in the following quotation:

> Education is seen not simply as the acquisition of knowledge and development of skills, but also in terms of the development of vast and powerful potentialities and talents, inherent in the very nature of every human being. The development of these potentialities and talents is considered as a God given right and responsibility of the individual, and attains fruition when it is pursued in the spirit of service to humanity within the context of creating a new world order.[38]

[38] Ruhi Foundation, 'Strengthening and Systematizing' 4.