



# ONE COUNTRY

*"The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens" – Bahá'u'lláh*

## INSIDE

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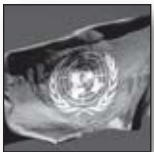
2

Perspective: How literacy is fundamental to development.



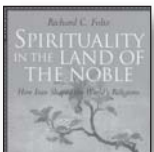
4

In Australia, a conference on bioprospecting examines the indigenous connection.



12

At the United Nations, a panel of "eminent persons" upholds the role of civil society.

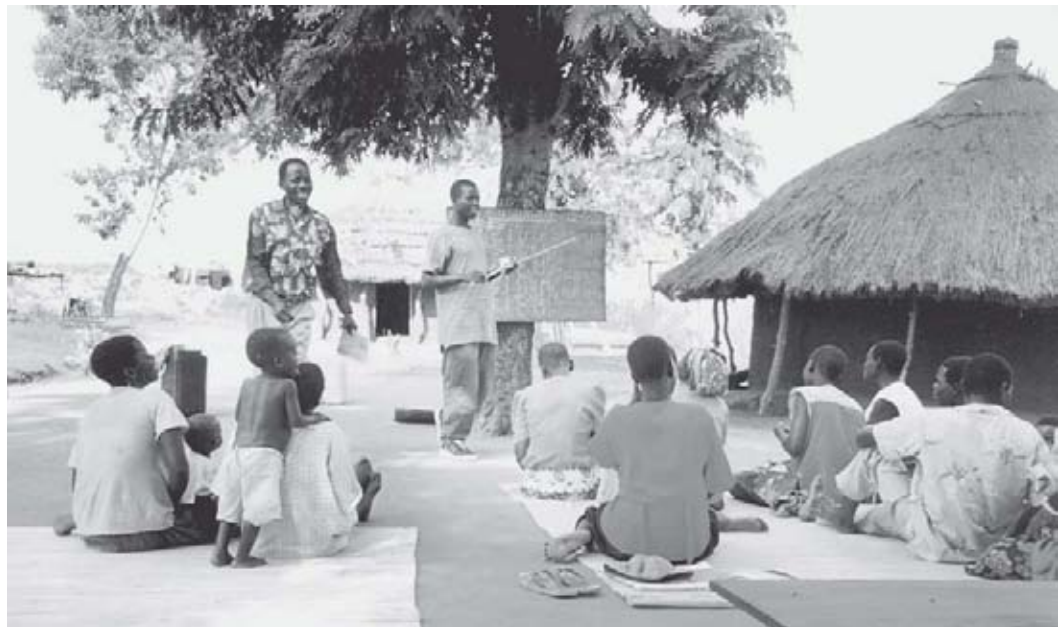


16

Review: *Spirituality in the Land of the Noble* — Richard C. Foltz considers how Iran shaped the world's religions.

## In Uganda, a focus on practical knowledge boosts literacy efforts

*The Uganda Program of Literacy for Transformation (UPLIFT) helps participants acquire the skills, knowledge, and incentive for a "lifelong self-improvement plan" — coupled with an emphasis on moral education and interreligious harmony.*



*A literacy class, under a tree, conducted by UPLIFT in northwest Uganda.*

ONGIDO, Nebbi District, Uganda — In the past, when Judith Kojjo's children had bouts with malaria, she took them to a witchdoctor. But since taking literacy classes offered by the Uganda Program of Literacy for Transformation (UPLIFT), she has learned to quell malarial fevers with a tea made from the leaves of a common tree.

"I don't take the children to the witchdoctor anymore, I first administer traditional medicine made from neem leaves," said Ms. Kojjo, a 53-year-old mother of eight, who lives in this village of some 400 in the West Nile region of Uganda.

"I prepare it by adding one cup of water to the leaves and then boiling it," she said. "I give one small spoonful three times a day to a child suffering from malaria. If there is no improvement after this treatment, then I go to the hospital."

While traditional literacy programs focus mainly on getting adults to read and write, the UPLIFT method incorporates other kinds of knowledge — such as how to combat malaria, how to make compost, and how to obtain better nutrition — into its outreach.

The result is a program that, in addition to teaching literacy, helps participants acquire the skills, knowledge, and incentive that are the basis of what the project calls a "lifelong self-improvement plan." Also fundamental to that process is an emphasis on moral education and interreligious harmony.

These side benefits have not gone unnoticed by local officials, who praise UPLIFT for its integrated approach, the dynamism of its workers, and the effect on participants.

**UPLIFT**, continued on page 8

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## Literacy and Development

Language is fundamental to human consciousness. Without language, higher levels of abstract thought and insight are impossible.

Language is also fundamental to human society. Without language, higher levels of social structure and culture are unattainable.

As an extension of language, the written word likewise makes possible the achievement of ever greater intellectual and social accomplishment. It is the repository of humanity's accumulated knowledge and the building block for innovation, creativity, and social and economic development of every kind.

In today's globalized world, moreover, the written word has become essential to our collective advancement. Not only are those who cannot read or write cut off from their own opportunities for advancement, but society as a whole is also deprived of the potential contributions that individuals can make to the good of all.

It is a crisis of the worst kind, then, that nearly a billion people worldwide cannot read or write.

According to the United Nations, more than 861 million adults are illiterate; in addition, some 113 million children are not in school and risk living out their adult lives as illiterates.

The period from 2003–2013 has been proclaimed as the United Nations Literacy Decade. And the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has adopted a simple but powerful slogan for the Decade: "Literacy as Freedom."

It is a slogan that perceptively encompasses the idea that knowing how to read and write is about more than those simple practical things, such as processing a business transaction, reading a letter, or finding one's way, that are usually given as reasons to banish illiteracy.

The slogan illustrates the way in which illiteracy also prevents an individual from participating in the give and take of democracy and other forms of social interaction that make diverse societies work in the modern world.

The ability to read and write is recog-

nized as a fundamental human right in the Bahá'í teachings. "Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent," wrote Bahá'u'lláh more than 100 years ago. "Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone."

Around the world in recent years, Bahá'í communities have become deeply involved in literacy projects. In recent years, Bahá'í-inspired projects in Bolivia, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, Chile, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guyana, India, Malawi, Mongolia, Nepal, Niger, the Philippines, Russia, and the United States of America, among other countries, have addressed literacy in a variety of ways.

The global experience of Bahá'í communities in promoting literacy can offer much as the world considers how best to promote literacy during the UN Decade.

In particular, Bahá'í efforts to promote literacy generally take an integrated and holistic view of the challenge posed by illiteracy. As described in the cover story for this issue of ONE COUNTRY, for example, the Bahá'í-inspired Uganda Program of Literacy for Transformation (UPLIFT) incorporates elements of community participation, practical self-help, and moral development into its literacy curriculum.

Such concepts are part of a much needed redefinition of education that frees it from the traditional focus on economic results and acknowledges its transformational role in both individual lives and social organization. Basic education, literacy, and vocational education, in other words, should not focus merely on the acquisition of a few skills and the grasp of a few simple facts.

Rather, the direction needed for such programs should stem from an underlying realization that all individuals have the right and capacity "to become conscious subjects of their own growth, and active, responsible participants in a systematic process of building a new world order," as was stated by the Bahá'í International Community in a 1989 position statement on education that was developed for the World Decade for Cultural Development.

One critical aspect of this redefinition of

## In Uganda, a focus on practical knowledge boosts literacy

*UPLIFT literacy classes are often held under a tree. In many villages, as well, local churches or community centers have offered space.*



*UPLIFT, continued from page one*

“First of all there is a change in their attitudes and their lifestyles because now they are able to count, they are able to write, so they are able to keep records and, therefore, able to improve on their trade activities,” said Kakura Joseph, chairperson for Local Council 3 in the sub-county of Parombo, where UPLIFT is active.

“But they are able to farm better using improved seeds and so forth,” said Mr. Joseph. “These learners and the community now will be able to lead healthy lives because now they recognize some of these preventable diseases. Actually sanitation in homes has improved. You find the latrine coverage has increased. Most homes have pit latrines. The environment is being now protected much better.”

### In 100 Communities

Founded by a group of Bahá’ís in Uganda in 2001, UPLIFT operates in more than 100 communities in the Nebbi District of the West Nile Region of Uganda, an isolated and relatively impoverished area in the

northwestern corner of the country.

To the east, across the West Nile River, is the war-torn Gulu District, scene of battles with the infamous Lord’s Resistance Army, a rebel group that makes extensive use of child soldiers. The effects of civil strife there sometimes spill over into Nebbi, and security issues make travel to and from the region difficult.

The economy of the Nebbi District is dependent primarily on subsistence agriculture. Major food crops include cassava, millet, sorghum, maize, beans, and groundnuts. Fishing is also an important activity, providing 20 percent of household income in some areas. More than 90 percent of the population lives in rural areas.

Health standards are generally lower than the national average. There are frequent shortages of medical supplies and equipment partly because of inadequate transport and poor road networks. As well, poverty further reduces access to health care.

The literacy rate in the region is about 58 percent, also somewhat less than the national literacy rate of 68 percent. The rate for women is lower — about 30 to 40 per-

**Founded by a group of Bahá’ís in Uganda in 2001, UPLIFT operates in more than 100 communities in the Nebbi District of the West Nile Region of Uganda, an isolated and relatively impoverished area in the northwestern corner of the country.**

cent — and providing literacy for women is UPLIFT's primary focus. More than 80 percent of the some 2,300 learners who have participated in the UPLIFT program so far are women.

"Development very much depends on women," said Hizzaya Hissani Mwani, UPLIFT's program manager. "For example, where women are literate, they tend to be more likely to send their children to school. They are more aware of hygiene. And if women are educated, they are better able to express themselves."

Beyond its focus on women, the program has been successful because of its innovative approach to teaching literacy in rural environments. This approach includes an initial emphasis on the phonetic elements of the local language instead of the traditional memorization of the alphabet, and the use of highly participatory teaching methods such as singing, skits, and role-playing.

All of this results in a program that enables most participants to learn to read and write in about 100 hours of class time. The norm is from 200 to 300 hours of instruction, according to literacy specialists.

At the core of UPLIFT's success is a methodology, devised by Dr. Mwani, that breaks down the local language, Alur, into easy-to-memorize phonetic units.

"Dr. Mwani has identified five or six code words that give you every letter and sound in the Alur language," said Tom Gossen, an international development consultant who is a member of UPLIFT's management team. "Often working just on a

blackboard under a tree, the literacy educators break these key words down into all of their sounds and letters. The participants memorize those, and soon they are able to put them back together to make word formations and, finally, sentences."

Another important aspect of the project is its emphasis on building the reading and writing curriculum around issues of local concern and interest, giving the program a context that goes beyond simply learning to read and write. Information in literacy workbooks covers issues such as malaria prevention and treatment, composting and other simple agricultural improvement techniques, and basic health and sanitation.

"The approach is to look at the needs of the community as a whole and to relate the content of the program to the lives of the learners," said Dr. Mwani.

Maureen Kendrick, an assistant professor of family literacy at the University of British Columbia who has visited the project twice over the past 12 months, said this emphasis on making the curriculum relevant to the social context of the community should help make the project sustainable in the long run.

"Other adult literacy programs I've seen are not firmly rooted in the cultural and social context," said Dr. Kendrick. "They are often transplanted from another cultural context, and so they don't take root because they are not related to or meaningful to the lives of the people."

"One of the things that really struck me about the project is how much effort

***"Development very much depends on women. For example, where women are literate, they tend to be more likely to send their children to school. They are more aware of hygiene. And if women are educated, they are better able to express themselves."***

**– Hizzaya Hissani Mwani, UPLIFT's program manager**



*An UPLIFT literacy group. Overall, some 80 percent of UPLIFT learners are women.*



*Hizzaya Hissani Mwani, UPLIFT's program manager, played a key role in developing UPLIFT's innovative approach.*

they put into trying to solicit the opinions of the participants. They really try to understand what the people want and what their needs are.

“So it is not just reading and writing for the sake of reading and writing,” said Dr. Kendrick. “They are trying to look at the authentic purposes that the people in these communities would have for reading and writing, in relation to helping with agriculture, for example, such as through composting.”

### Use of resident educators

Like other non-governmental organizations that provide literacy training, UPLIFT relies on a cadre of literacy facilitators, called educators. Typically, they travel to communities in the service area to provide classes.

One distinctive aspect of UPLIFT's model, however, has been its emphasis on using resident educators who live in the communities they serve. Dr. Mwani himself spends more than half his time in the field, at the same standard of living as the local educators.

“This is important — to support the concept that money is not the key to a poor person's development,” said Mr. Gossen. “Instead, what is needed is a self-help program of increased skills, knowledge, and spirituality.”

At UPLIFT's start, most of the literacy educators served as volunteers — and classes were held in the open, often under the branches of a spreading tree. As the project has gained recognition, various buildings such as churches, schools, and community centers have been made available for classes.

Recently, as well, many of the educators

have begun to receive small stipends. And the government has provided a small number of bicycles for transportation.

The use of bicycles, instead of automobiles, also distinguishes UPLIFT educators. “Imagine a man who only wants to use a car to penetrate and go into our villages where you find most of our illiterate people,” said Mr. Joseph of Parombo. “The illiterate people are not within towns. You find them in places where cars cannot pass.”

### Interfaith participation

Another distinctive aspect of UPLIFT's approach has been its emphasis on including members of all religious groups in its classes, a feature that has helped in some cases to soothe tensions between the various communities. The region is predominantly Christian, but a substantial percentage of the population is Muslim. UPLIFT, as a Bahá'í-inspired agency, has sought to include everyone from all religions in the literacy classes, an unusual step in an area where religious communities for the most part keep to themselves.

The reading materials, for example, feature quotations from the Bible, the Quran and the Bahá'í writings. They also include quotations on basic virtues such as honesty, trustworthiness, and service.

“One of things that makes UPLIFT different is its embrace of spirituality,” said Zoe Bakoko Bakoru, Uganda's Minister of Gender, Labor, and Social Development. “The Bahá'ís talk about humanity, oneness, and unity. The majority of people in Uganda have been through a phase of suffering before this Government came into power, during the Idi Amin era, and there is a need for a healing process.

“UPLIFT targets everybody within a community, whether they are Muslim or Christian or none of the above,” said Minister Bakoru, who has visited the project area. “So the UPLIFT program has found a fertile ground where it is able to sow the seeds of unity among the people of different religions and to help them co-exist together.”

Local authorities echo this observation. “UPLIFT has solved very many problems in the community,” said Matthew Ngarombo, a member of the Nebbi District Public Community Service Committee. “There has been a lot of disunity, especially about religious differences, tribal ideologies, and so forth. But these days, people are cooperating. They are coming together as one because of the

**“One of things that makes UPLIFT different is its embrace of spirituality... UPLIFT targets everybody within a community, whether they are Muslim or Christian or none of the above.”**

**– Zoe Bakoko Bakoru, Uganda's Minister of Gender, Labor, and Social Development.**

UPLIFT program, which has made people more friendly through interfaith activities.”

At the core of UPLIFT’s program, of course, is literacy training. And participants who have stayed with the program almost all say it has made an importance difference in their lives.

### Increased self-confidence

“Now I can read and write letters to my friends, unlike when I used to take my letters to my friends to read for me,” said Florence Nyiwege, a 38-year-old farmer in Ongido village. “Now I am proud. I even discuss with my children how the program has made me read and write well.”

Many UPLIFT learners said they appreciate literacy because they are better able to read holy scripture, whether the Bible, the Quran or the Bahá’í writings.

“Before, I was lacking in knowledge because I did not know how to read,” said Judith Nyiwegi, a learner in Panyango subcounty. “Now I can even read the Bible, and it has given me the knowledge of how to keep my family clean and even how to control my children.”

Others speak of the sense of self-confidence that literacy has given them. “It has allowed me to speak with confidence in meetings,” said Kulastika Okwanga, another UPLIFT learner in Panyango subcounty. “I like the knowledge of how to be in a community, how to do things together.”

Many women say they feel better able to run small businesses, now that they can read and write and do simple arithmetic. And newly literate mothers often say how happy they are to be able to help their children with school work.

“We see an increased confidence in which women feel they have improved their status in the home and the community,” said Eliza-



*A graduation ceremony.*

beth Kharono, chairperson of UPLIFT’s board of directors. “They are expressing their views in public, organizing local women’s groups, networking for passing on information, and establishing small businesses to supplement family finances.”

In Punvuga village, Margaret Atho said the knowledge provided by UPLIFT has greatly helped her cassava growing enterprise.

“In UPLIFT, we learned how to plant cassava in rows,” said Ms. Atho, a 46-year-old mother of ten children. “By planting the cassava in rows, it is easy for the farmer to know which plants are not growing well, so you can replant.”

Ms. Atho added that the simple arithmetic that UPLIFT taught her has also helped greatly when she takes her cassava to market. “If you set the price of each row of cassava to be 5000 shillings, and you have 100 rows, you can calculate how much money to expect from the sale of cassava.”\*

***“We see an increased confidence in which women feel they have improved their status in the home and the community.”***

***– Elizabeth Kharono, chairperson, UPLIFT board.***

## Comprehensive catalog of Bahá’í books for sale online

ATLANTA, GEORGIA, USA — A comprehensive catalog of Bahá’í sacred literature, as well as Bahá’í books on history, social teachings, and other aspects of the Bahá’í Faith, is now available on the World Wide Web.

The new e-commerce site also carries Bahá’í-inspired music, videos, calendars, and other materials.

The Bahá’í Distribution Service, an agency of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States, launched

the site. More than 2,000 titles, representing the efforts of hundreds of publishers around the world, are available for purchase through the site.

The Bahá’í Distribution Service is the primary distributor for the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and its agencies; the Bahá’í Publishing Trust of the United States; and Bahá’í World Centre Publications. The site is <http://www.BahaiBookstore.com>\*