



## Human Rights and Poverty Informal Consultations

In 2006, the UN Human Rights Council requested its (former) Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection on Human Rights to draft a set of "guiding principles" to orient poverty eradication efforts and to strengthen the link between poverty and violations of human rights. Before adopting the guiding principles, the Human Rights Council invited comments from member states, UN agencies and NGOs. The Bahá'í International Community took this opportunity to launch local discussions with Bahá'ís in various countries to get their first-hand perspective on questions of poverty and its link to human rights. [More about the UN's Draft Guiding Principles.](#)



India

Participants identified three different types of poverty: economic, social and spiritual poverty. Social poverty was described as discrimination based on caste and religion and the failure to treat people with dignity.



Namibia

Historical disadvantages, the lack of education, short-term government aid, alcohol abuse, and inadequate family planning are seen as some of the major causes of poverty. Wealth, on the other hand, was seen as the possession of knowledge, contentment, support, and access to opportunities and resources to maintain a desired standard of living.



Guyana

Females were seen as experiencing poverty differently because of the power imbalances between men and women. Justice is a central principle which can help to eradicate poverty.



Haiti

All things that constitute human well-being are human rights and poverty is a violation of those rights. Participants noted that there is a reciprocal responsibility to protect human rights; all are responsible for the eradication of poverty.



Brazil

Poverty is a condition in which human beings are stripped of their dignity and self-esteem. The poor are deprived of the opportunity and the capacity to participate in society.

*The Bahá'í International Community organized discussions with Bahá'í communities in Haiti, Guyana, India, Brazil and Namibia regarding poverty and human rights. Participants were asked the following questions:*

**What is poverty and what causes it? What is wealth?**

**What are human rights? Do you think your rights are protected? Do you think poverty is a violation of human rights? Do females experience poverty different from males? Who is responsible for eradicating poverty?**

**What efforts has the government made to eradicate poverty?**

**How does your religion help you to understand poverty?**

**What effort has the Bahá'í community made to eradicate poverty?**

**What role does justice play in overcoming poverty?**

# Human Rights and Poverty Informal Consultations India



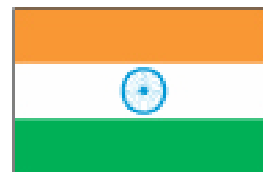
Participants in India identified three different types of poverty: economic, social and spiritual. Social poverty was described as discrimination based on caste and religion and the failure to treat people with dignity.



The main causes of poverty included a growing population, big families, alcohol addiction, gambling, illiteracy, ignorance and the lack of education. Governments and individuals alike share the responsibility to eradicate poverty. Human rights include the freedom of movement and the right to live in one's country.



The local Bahá'í community founded and runs the New Era Development Institute—an organization that provides vocational training. The Bahá'í International Community has also created the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women, which provides skill-based training for those who want to start small businesses or secure other employment.



Locality:  
Indore, India

Number of  
participants: 11

Gender:  
6 female, 5 male

Ages: 18 to 62

# Human Rights and Poverty Informal Consultations Namibia



For Namibians, poverty means being economically challenged and living in a state where “one’s basic needs are not met.” Moreover, the lack of exposure to moral education leads to spiritual poverty, which manifests itself in the form of greed, inequality and the unequal distribution of resources.



Historical disadvantages, the lack of education, short-term government aid, alcohol abuse, and inadequate family planning are seen as some of the major causes of poverty. Wealth, on the other hand, was seen as the possession of knowledge, contentment, support, and access to opportunities and resources to maintain a desired standard of living.



The consensus was that everyone, governments, individuals and the private sector, has the responsibility to eradicate poverty. Human rights include basic rights such as freedom of expression, education, and the right to fulfill one’s potential without threat of discrimination.

The government has helped to eradicate poverty through affirmative action programs by instituting laws that enable women to own property and by giving them access to capital. In turn, the Bahá’í community has helped further poverty eradication efforts by empowering individuals to strive for excellence and through personal transformation.

The eradication of poverty can begin to take place by developing a holistic approach that includes education, entrepreneurship, and promoting a greater awareness of the plight of the poor. Above all, the poor must be involved in all facets of poverty eradication.



Locality:  
Windhoek, Namibia

Number of  
participants: 5

Gender:  
3 female, 2 male

Ages: 31 to 62



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## Guyana



According to participants, most of them youth, poverty is “a state of mind” and “an economic problem”. It manifests in the lack of the availability and access to resources. It is caused by corrupt politicians, racism, discrimination, the oppression of women, broken homes, unemployment and under-employment, reliance on foreign aid— and the lack of a quality education.

Participants described “wealth” as: money, power, medical facilities, education, good jobs, access to science and technology. “It is faithfulness and happiness”, they said.

Women experience poverty differently because of the power imbalances between men and women. Stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination against women all contribute to a higher incidence of poverty among women. Women are particularly vulnerable due to widespread violence in general and sexual violence in particular. “The needs of women are often overlooked to satisfy the needs and wants of men as they are the ones in power.”

Participants noted their government’s effort to eradicate poverty by means of vocational and entrepreneurial training, welfare programs, the diversification of traditional sectors, job creation, the provision of educational facilities, and the provision of affordable credit, among other initiatives.

While every person is entitled to basic human rights, the group felt that their rights were not always protected, noting that while the government is mainly responsible, all must ensure that rights are protected. Justice is a central principle which can help to eradicate poverty if citizens and government fully commit to it.



Locality:  
Guyana

Number of  
participants: 14

Gender:  
11 female, 3 male

Ages: 17 to 25



# Human Rights and Poverty Informal Consultations Haiti



According to Haitians, poverty is primarily a symptom of underlying harmful values that motivate human behavior such as prejudice, cultural attitudes, corruption and greed. Conversely, wealth is seen as a state of physical and mental well-being, equilibrium, and security.



In Haiti, some of the causes of poverty are over-population and the lack of family planning; instability; a lack of agricultural incentives leading to rural exodus; lack of education and skill building; and the absence of the rule of law.

Women and girls experience poverty differently from men and boys due to early pregnancy, domestic violence and the lack of education. Both governments and individuals are seen as responsible for eradicating poverty.

Efforts to eradicate poverty must include access to material and spiritual education, incentives for agriculture in rural areas and adequate work that provides a means to achieve self-subsistence.

“All things that constitute human well-being are human rights” and poverty is a violation of those rights. Participants noted that there is a reciprocal responsibility to protect human rights; all are responsible for the eradication of poverty.



Locality:  
Pétion-Ville, Port au  
Prince, Haiti

Number of  
participants: 18

Gender: 4 female,  
14 male

Ages: 10 to 65



# Human Rights and Poverty Informal Consultations Brazil



For Brazilians, poverty encompassed economic, social and ethical dimensions. The poor suffer from material deprivation; the lack of “basic essential things,” such as food, shelter, education, health and work.



Participants noted another dimension of poverty, namely being stripped of one’s dignity and self-esteem. The poor are deprived of the opportunity and the capacity to participate in society. In the words of one participant, “Poverty isn’t always tied to monetary poverty. Nowadays Brazil is suffering from spiritual poverty. We see thousands of people being put into jail for corruption, etcetera and we perceive that that is poverty of spirit. Today people live a life where we don’t see who is next to us.”



Poverty is caused, on the one hand, by economic and political forces, and by individualism, corruption and indifference on the other. Specifically, participants identified the media as a powerful agent of change because of its far-reaching capacity to disseminate knowledge among the population.

All agreed that poverty is a violation of human rights— a violation that “engenders all other violations.” Participants stated, “It is a question of mobilization of faith, of spirit, of tenacious struggle, that we have rights, human values. Nobody can make us into objects.”



Locality:  
Brasilia, Brazil

No participant  
details available.