



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

Values-Based Education for Rural People

Statement to the

United Nations Food and Agriculture Association (FAO)

June 6, 2007, FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy

FAO's, Sustainable Development Department and UNESCO are inviting member countries, international agencies and civil society to join the partnership on Education for Rural People (ERP) which is part of the International Alliance Against Hunger and of the Education for All (EFA) initiative.

With the increasing effects of a multitude of social problems on communities around the world especially impacting the lives of children, young people, and women, and the resulting lack of respect for themselves, for each other and the world around them, values education offers positive experiences and empowering choices with which to rediscover their dignity, self-confidence, and creativity and to explore and experience a sense of purpose in life. This has particular relevance for disadvantaged people living in the rural communities.

Over a decade ago the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, who holds a general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council carried out a project °Global Cooperation for a Better World° in which people of all backgrounds throughout the world were asked to contribute their vision of a better world. Their visions were summarized in a 12-point global vision statement and featured in a publication: Visions of a Better World. A few years later when the UN celebrated its 50th anniversary, the 12-point statement was used as a catalyst to ask people, again from around the world, to share their values for a better world. The most popular 12 values that emerged were: cooperation, honesty, love, respect, responsibility, freedom, humility, peace, happiness, simplicity, tolerance, and unity. These values are taken up from a spiritual dimension in a publication dedicated to the UN 50: Living Values: A Guidebook. In this Guidebook, values-based education was featured as an essential core of building communities, and it was in this context that the Brahma Kumaris and the Early Childhood Development for the Region of Africa at UNICEF began an initiative called: Living Values Education Program.

The broad objectives of the Living Values Program include:

- To equip individuals with tools to create values-based environments and learning communities.
- To help individuals think about and reflect on different values and the practical implications of expressing them in relation to themselves, others, the family, and the community at large.
- To promote understanding, motivation, and responsibility with regard to making personal and social choices.
- To inspire individuals to choose their own personal, social, moral, and spiritual values, within the context of their cultural and religious settings, and to be aware of practical methods for developing and deepening them.
- To encourage educators, facilitators, parents, and care providers to look at education as providing students with a philosophy of living, thereby facilitating their overall growth, development and choices so that they may be integrated into the community with respect, confidence, and purpose.

The Living Values Program has now grown into its own entity – Association of Living Values Education (ALiVE) with programs in over 80 countries.

Core Principle: To reaffirm faith in dignity and worth of the human person.

The core principle in implementing values-based education is to encourage individuals to explore, experience, and express inherent positive qualities, to think critically and appreciatively about values and to make positive personal and social choices in relation to life issues. Values-based education does not seek to impose values so much as to draw on and revitalise the rich heritage of positive values that exist within every individual and in local culture. Educators and facilitators are welcome to adapt existing materials and activities to ensure relevance to different contexts, cultures, and environments.

Steps in the Development of Training Programs

- Exploratory visit: A team consisting of about 2 or more experienced individuals in values-based education will visit the country. The objectives of the visit include:
 - a. To assess needs, identify local partners, develop sustaining relationships and initiate the creation of a local organizing committee
 - b. To meet with key people in the community in the areas of education, politics, culture and religion to exchange views and experiences regarding education and values, with particular reference to the local culture.
 - c. To develop a greater awareness of local circumstances and conditions, in order to adapt educational activities and materials to meet current needs.
- A group of local educators and facilitators are trained.
- Trained educators and facilitators implement program in local community in pilot phase of 3 months.
- Train-the Trainer programs are offered by those educators and facilitators who emerged from the pilot phase of 3 months.
- Follow-Up support is established through the partnership of the BKs, LVE, UNESCO, and local organizing committee.
- Making materials available in local languages is an ongoing process.

- Implementation, financial and other resources are sought from private donors and foundations to help assist the initial stages of the program with the aim to make them self-sufficient.

Living Values in Africa

Within the Region of Africa special attention is being paid to West and Central Africa by the Swiss Association for Living Values training with the cooperation of UNESCO-BREDA.

The beneficiaries are children, school teachers, street children educators, specialists in early childhood education, curriculum developers and school inspectors. Other beneficiaries include young adults, parents, and members of the local community as a whole. Programs to train teachers in values-based education are presently in a number of countries, including Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo DRC, Ghana, Guinea (Conakry), Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, and Togo.

The BKs Serve Africa Initiative, in partnership with Living Values Program in the Region is proving very effective in reaching people particularly in the rural areas through local facilitators, educators, and NGO's.

Report on the Workshop in Values-Based Education for Street Children, Educators and Carers held in Teshie Nungwa, Ghana in August 2006, and Workshop on Values-Based Education for Educators held in Lagos, Nigeria in March 2007 are available.

Education for Rural People in India

The Rural Service Wing of BK Education & Research Foundation began in 1996. Its aims are:

- to improve cleanliness in villages
- to increase the literacy standards
- to provide free medical camps & bring veterinarian doctors to hold camps
- to educate village people about latest agricultural techniques and make them aware of government schemes and how they can benefit
- to encourage women empowerment – teaching women stitching, embroidery, arts and crafts so that they become financially self-sufficient, creating of Women Groups where they discuss issues and find solutions to common problems etc
- to teach village children moral values by holding singing/story telling competitions
- to support youth Development – imparting of spiritual education along with other basic education
- to conduct De-addiction Camps

Adopt-a-Village Scheme

The village of Virampura (close to Mehsana in the state of Gujarat) was adopted by the Rural Service Wing as the first case study to improve the lifestyle of the villagers. A survey was done on the economical situations, the villagers' problems and concerns, lifestyle etc and then the following was carried out:

- Cleaning and repairing of sewage system

- Establishing a library
- Improving the roads
- Building a medical care centre
- Building a lake
- Adding classrooms in the children's school
- Classes on spirituality and meditation were given to the families regularly, along with guidance on building family and community relationships, with information on de-addiction etc.

Follow-up and Sustenance Programs

A number of conferences and seminars are held in Mount Abu (HQ) as well as different parts of India every year. For example, a conference held in Mehsana in 1996 was attended by 20,000 of village folk from Northern Gujarat (Heads of Villages, farmers etc).

Various Rural Serving Wing Campaigns are held which have yielded positive response. For instance, in the year 2002-2003 the 'All India Golden Village Campaign' served 78,251 villages in different districts of India, reaching out to 5,60,24,489 village people, out of which 15,58,598 took a pledge to give up drugs, smoking and other forms of addictions. During this year long Campaign, a number of activities took place such as programmes at village schools, medical camps, peace rallies, spiritual exhibitions, visit to jails to teach the inmates on reforming their habits and lifestyle etc.

Workers of a well-known milk dairy (Amul Products) send batches of their employees (2500-3000 in number) yearly to the Brahma Kumaris HQ for training programmes in production of pure milk, health, de-addiction, leading productive and spiritual lives. As of 2005, 60,000 employees had undergone this training programme.

Dialogues and Retreats are held yearly in the Brahma Kumaris' Academy for a Better World (Gyan Sarovar) in Rajasthan, India for the main heads of Districts and Villages, where it is shown how a spiritual foundation can become the basis for a clean and developed village lifestyle.

The Next Step

Seeing that the BKWSU is already doing a lot of work in the field of Education for Rural People, as well as supporting the Millennium Development Goals, we feel that it is important to look at our work in relation to ERP particularly within the objectives outlined by FAO and UNESCO. In this respect we seek your guidance of how our contribution could become more effective in this very important work.

The BKWSU is a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and in consultative status with UNICEF.
The University was founded in India in 1937 and has branches in over 100 countries worldwide.
It has been affiliated to the United Nations Department of Public Information since 1980.

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