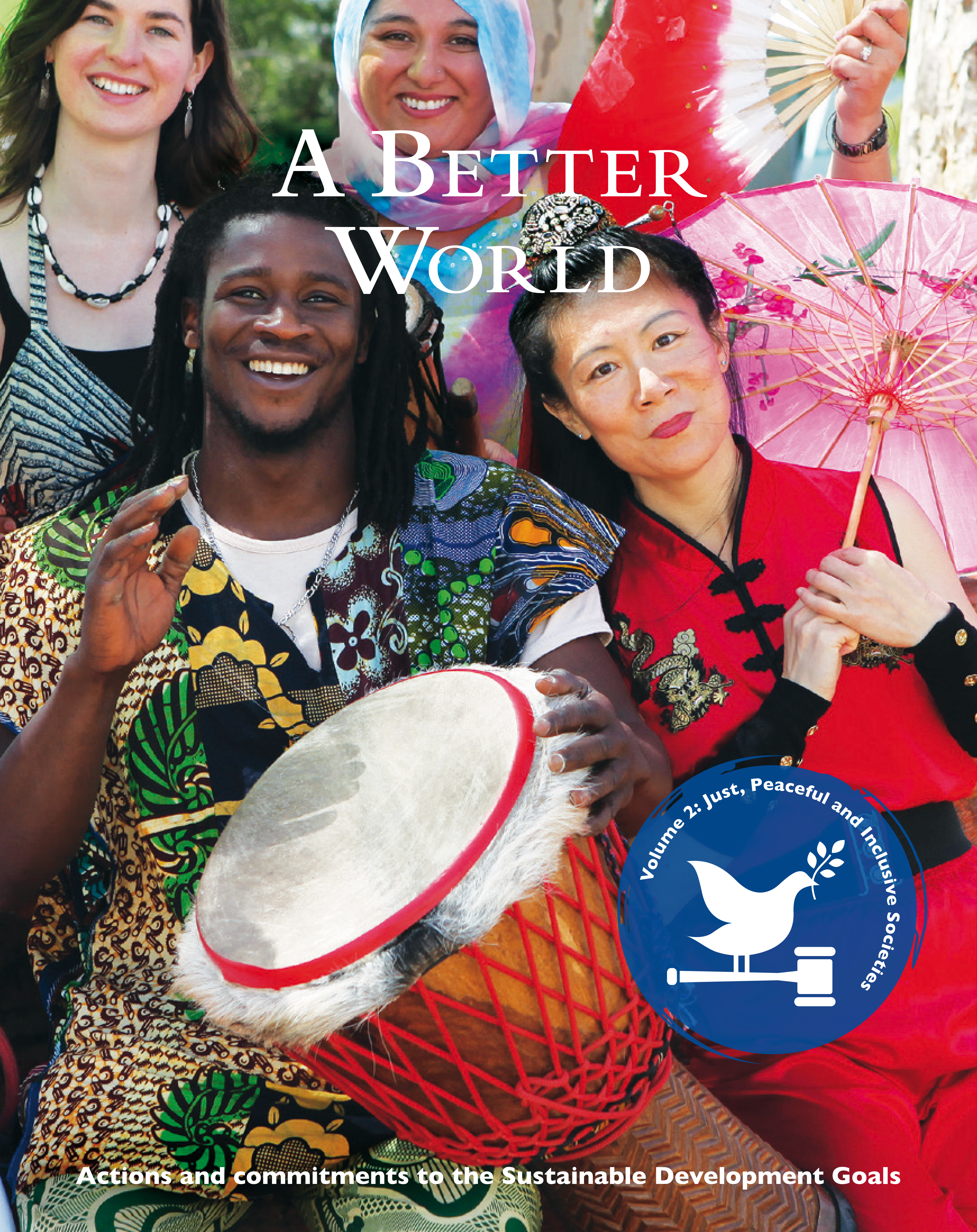
A Better World



Volume 2: Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies

Actions and commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals

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the Sustainable Development Goals

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Cover photo: Experts have identified training in intercultural understanding as an effective social-cognitive intervention to reduce violence. Australian organization, Cultural Infusion, has developed the *Multicultural All Day* programme to build intercultural understanding as a core value and key competency of global citizenship, employing the arts, education and digital technologies as vehicles to foster social cohesion and realise the possibilities of innovation and progress for society. © Cultural Infusion

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Foreword

SEAN NICKLIN, GENERAL COORDINATOR OF THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT FORUM FOR TUDOR ROSE

With the establishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, Tudor Rose and its Human Development Forum has accepted the challenge to expand its human development publishing with the creation of a series of volumes, each dedicated to one or more of the 17 SDGs. Entitled A Better World, this volume published in May 2017 covers Goal 16: Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies. Peaceful, just and inclusive societies are necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). People everywhere need to be free of fear from all forms of violence and feel safe as they go about their lives whatever their ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation.

In order to advance the SDGs we need effective and inclusive public institutions that can deliver quality education and healthcare, fair economic policies and inclusive environmental protection.it is important that governments, civil society and communities work together to implement lasting solutions to reduce violence, deliver justice, combat corruption and ensure inclusive participation at all times. Freedom to express views, in private and in public, must be guaranteed. People must be able to contribute to decisions that affect their lives. Laws and policies must be applied without any form of discrimination.

Disputes need to be resolved through functioning political and justice systems. National and local institutions must be accountable and need to be in place to deliver basic services to families and communities equitably and without the need for bribes. This volume reflects the progress and challenges in this essential topic, highlighting good practices in a wide variety of societies and disciplines. By focusing on the experiences and livelihoods of people, especially those in vulnerable human habitats, the book will show the benefits of best policy and practices, and how these may develop further as we come to terms with a changing and more turbulent world. This innovative endeavour is a striking example of sharing respective resources to engage the many official governmental, international organisations, institutional and professional interests in displaying the extent and variety of their efforts to make the world a better place.

Since 1999 Tudor Rose has published 27 books in partnership with the United Nations and its agencies, covering a diverse range of subjects from disaster reduction, water management and climate science to intercultural dialogue and humanitarian assistance. The books are read extensively by the human development sector and especially by community leaders in vulnerable regions around the globe. The books are close collaborations between individual UN agencies, UN member states and civil sector organisations, committed to a better future for the world. They have widened the knowledge of people in vulnerable communities and given them inspiration and knowledge to better their lives in a sustainable way.

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MEHRIBAN ALIYEVA, FIRST VICE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN, UNESCO AND ISESCO GOODWILL AMBASSADOR

Each of us cherishes the hope to see a world that would bring a better life for all. The world needs to safeguard and promote those values that should coexist in harmony – respect for diversity and the desire to enrich and support one another.

Tremendous responsibilities fall on the shoulders of governments, politicians and international organizations. Such responsibilities have long surpassed national boundaries, and have become elevated to the level of universal obligation. This state of affairs abounds with numerous difficulties and misconceptions when considered against the backdrop of current developments. In some cases, one can see a lack of respect of the norms of international law as well as the sacrifice of those norms to double standards. The issues underpinning the right to a safe life for everybody should be upheld as a supreme principle. Dialogue and cooperation between cultures and religions, as well as the principles of understanding and respect, stand as the core of civil development.

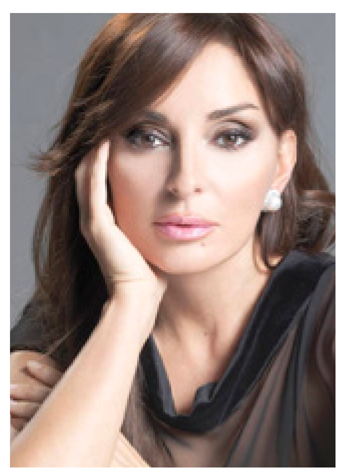
In the period of such turbulence for the international community, our country, Azerbaijan, has sought to become a successful model of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, demonstrated at national, regional and global levels by its way of life. The people of Azerbaijan, as guardians of an ancient civilization and rich culture, have played a significant role in enriching universal values over many centuries. Although this light emanates from our long history of national tolerance, it is also kindled by the current environment formed by our multicultural communities and state policies.

As a consequence of its geography, Azerbaijan, lying between East and West, North and South, has assumed the responsibility of promoting its specific quality of tolerance and the stability of its multicultural lifestyle during a period of deepening national and religious discord. Communities of different national and religious groups, together with the representatives of various minorities, have, in our country, historically lived and continue to live in conditions of mutual cooperation and friendship. Although these values comprise our historical identity, we organize events at an international level in order to share them with the world.

We understand that it is necessary to globalize security values to fight globalizing threats. These values provide the inspiration for making our internal and foreign policies stronger and sustainable.

Finally, I wish once again to state that there is no alternative to understanding and friendly coexistence between cultures and religions, and only this can guarantee the security of mankind and stability in the world.

I believe that this book will deliver a strong and effective message in celebrating the solidarity of people who represent various cultures and religions, for the sake of a safe and sustainable future of humanity.



Mehriban Aliyeva
First Vice President of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
UNESCO and ISESCO Goodwill Ambassador

Promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies: An essential goal for progress towards a better world for all

Magdy Martinez- Soliman, UNDP Assistant Secretary General and Director of the Bureau of Policy and Programme Support (UNDP)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[1] requires all stakeholders, through Sustainable Development Goal 16, to 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.' Of course, this can only be achieved if the other SDGs are met, and poverty (SDG1) and hunger (SDG2) are eradicated, children enjoy quality education (SDG4), inequalities are reduced (SDG10), climate action reduced the stress on our planet (SDG13) as the Goals represent an indivisible agenda.

Why is SDG16 so important?

In recent years violence and armed conflicts have forced more and more people worldwide to flee their homes,[2] looking for a safer place within their countries or across international borders as asylum seekers or refugees – as many as 65 million are now forcibly displaced and the average length of such displacement is 17 years. More than 1 million refugees arrived in Europe across the Mediterranean in 2015, but thousands taking the same route did not make it, their lives ending tragically in the search for a better future.[3] Where safety is routinely under threat, and where people are systematically excluded from economic and political opportunities, or denied justice when facing outright violation of their human rights, it will be impossible to achieve sustainable development for all and honor the pledge of leaving no-one behind.

To address these priorities, SDG16 requires specific action in areas like arms trafficking, corruption and illicit financial flows, access to justice and legal identity, exploitation and violence against children, organized crime, participation and access to public information. The targets of SDG16 are deliberately ambitious and challenging because a failure to address one or more of the main drivers of violence, injustice and exclusion will undermine efforts to overcome others. Thus, a systematic focus on the targets of SDG16 will help to make a discernible difference to the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable people in all countries.

Image: UNDP Sri Lanka

Youth participants of UNDP Sri Lanka's Twinning Schools Programme caught in action whilst doing a music video for the song 'Colours'

Image: UNDP

A woman greets Members of the Technical Committee of the TSC during their field visit to Mugunga IDP camp near Goma, May 2014

Importantly, SDG16 requires action to establish the effective, transparent, and inclusive institutions needed to enable all people to access the services and public goods they need to live better lives, make informed choices and contribute to their communities.

SDG16 is thus not only a valuable and important aspiration in its own right, it is also an important enabling goal for the entire sustainable development agenda: "if SDG16 were universally achieved, the conflicts we see destroying lives and hopes and driving so many desperate and dangerous journeys to other lands could become a challenge of the past."[4]

Focusing on SDG16 and its relations to other goals is therefore an important strategy for achieving progress on the whole SDG Agenda, and this for four reasons:

First, governance issues related to peaceful, just and inclusive societies are woven throughout the 2030 Agenda. They also appear, explicitly or implicitly in a further 24 targets, from seven other goals.[5] SDG16 thus offers an opportunity to make significant progress as part of a truly integrated agenda that considers not only the social, economic and environmental aspects of development, but also its political dimensions, recognizing that "good governance" and institutional performance do matter for human development.

Second, without peace, there will be no progress on many of the other goals and targets in the agenda. Peace enables progress on all aspects of human development, from education and health, to infrastructure and decent jobs.

Third, to achieve each goal of the agenda we need institutions that can provide quality public goods and services. Whether it relates to land tenure under SDG 1, provision of vaccines under SDG 3, universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water under SDG 6, energy under SDG 7, making cities resilient, safe and sustainable through SDG11, or women's equal opportunities for leadership under SDG 5, it is evident that achievement of these targets will be difficult without the presence of effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels (Goal 16.6).

Fourth, when asked what it will take to create the "World we Want", many governments and people all over the world identified the cluster of issues included in peaceful, just and inclusive societies as being critical to creating the transformative change that the 2030 Agenda calls for.[6] Countries as diverse as El Salvador, Georgia, Qatar, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia or Uruguay give a high priority to SDG 16 within their SDG roadmaps and strategies.

How does UNDP promote and support progress on SDG 16?
Many of the Goal 16 targets are directly related to the work UNDP has been undertaking over the years as part of its democratic governance, gender, conflict prevention, rule of law and peacebuilding mandate. For example, UNDP's support to parliamentary capacity development on the SDGs resulted in MPs more than doubling India's 2020 renewable energy target[7] and expenditure on renewables[8].

In Tunisia, support to the National Constituent Assembly and Parliament resulted in a constitutional amendment on environmental protection (SDG 13). In Colombia, UNDP supported a draft bill to promote women's political participation (SDG 5). In Moldova, UNDP supported a gender audit of parliament, a parliamentary action plan, and a cross-party caucus to ensure that women are adequately represented at the highest levels of government – and other institutions, at all levels. UNDP's support to anticorruption – including through the development and implementation of corruption risk mitigation methodologies, training programmes, and methodologies to measure progress in reducing corruption – helps to address the graft that is a major barrier to progress in nearly every sector. And in countries like Nepal, and Sierra Leone, UNDP supported the establishment of community-driven legal aid networks through which local people can better understand and claim their rights. These networks provide legal literacy training, and the practical support services which vulnerable people need to be able to claim their rights: transport to police, courts and local government offices, legal representation, help to fill in forms, make calls, and navigate complex legal and bureaucratic processes to obtain their entitlements.[9]

The inclusion of SDG 16 in the development agenda has important consequences. It is no longer only about the kind of services that are delivered, but also how they are delivered and for whom so that all people can benefit from sustainable development and that no one is left behind.

The presence of SDG16 in the 2030 Agenda is thus a recognition of the importance of good governance and respect for human rights that were explicitly mentioned in the Millennium declaration but weren't translated into a specific MDG. Since September 2015, promoting inclusive and peaceful societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and transparent institutions are recognized as cornerstones of an integrated and universal approach to achieving sustainable development in all its facets. The universality of the agenda is also an important new feature in the theory and practice of sustainable development. It means that the goals and targets in the agenda no longer only apply to developing countries – as was the case with 7 of the 8 MDGs, while MDG8 fundamentally applied to the developed nations – but that the entire 2030 agenda, including SDG 16, matters for all people, including those living in the most advanced economies.

UNDP has been one of the main convening partners behind the policy debates that have shaped the 2030 agenda – and SDG 16 in particular – and is now actively engaged in promoting broader partnerships to support Member States and national and local development actors in the implementation of the SDGs.

For example, UNDP has been one of the driving forces, within the UN Development Group, behind the "MAPS" approach to guide implementation of the SDGs.[10] MAPS is designed to assist countries to "mainstream" the agenda into national plans for development and subsequently into budget

Image: UNDP

The citizens of Dashoguz met to take important decisions for the development of their province

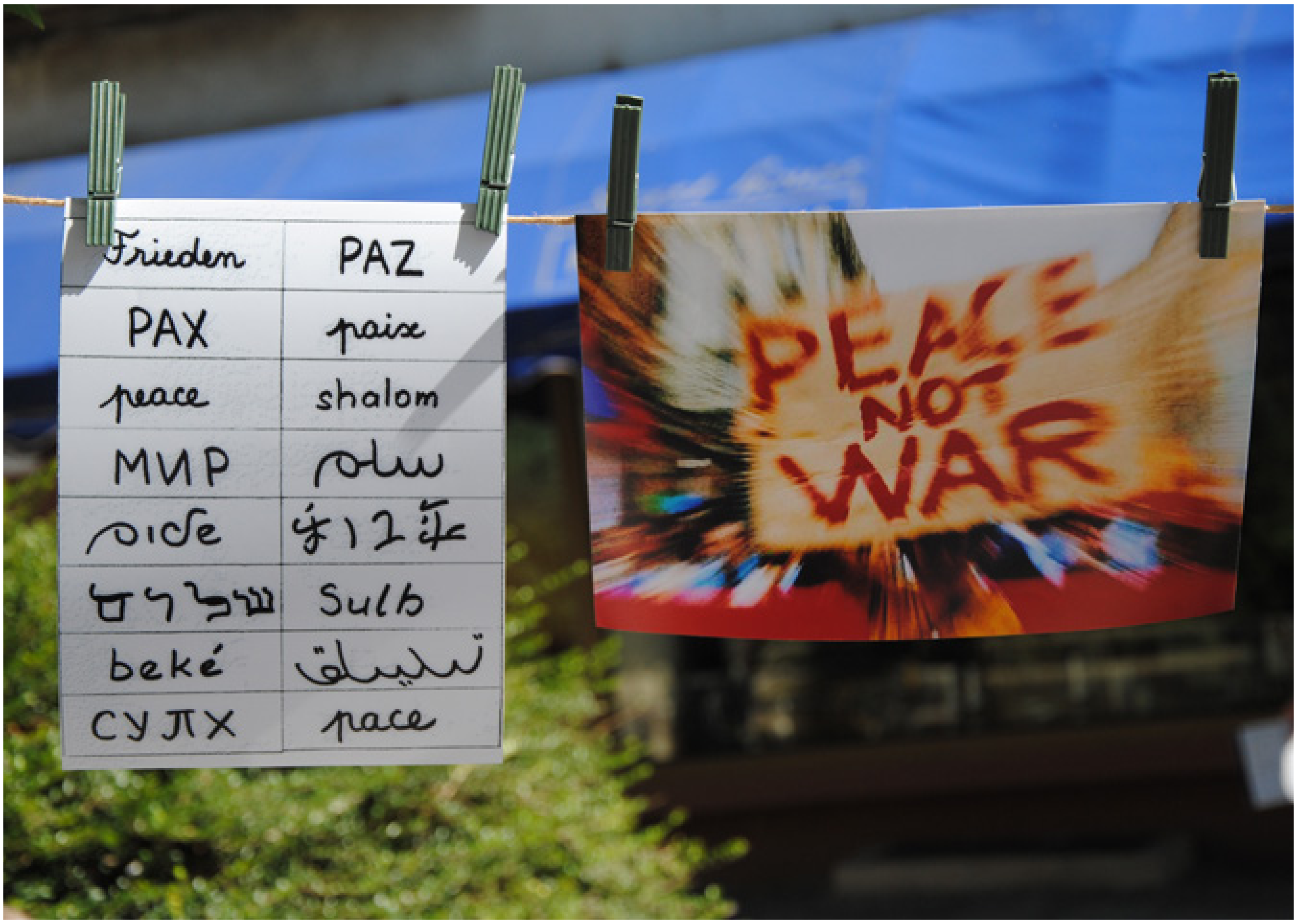


Image: UNDP

Peace Day, Serbia, 2010

allocations, to "accelerate" progress by clearing bottlenecks that hamper progress and focusing resources on priority areas for maximum impact, and to draw on "policy support" to place the skills and expertise available from the different parts of the UN system at the disposal of national actors in developing countries.

The current international development framework reflects the need to have effective and resilient institutions, but also to empower people, in every part of society, to engage with both state and non-state institutions, to understand and claim their rights, and obtain the services that vindicate them.

Achieving the extremely ambitious 2030 Agenda requires a massive and coordinated effort on the part of all people, in every part of society and involving communities and development actors in both the public and private sectors and civil society. UNDP's focus has always been on empowering those most at risk of being left behind – women, youth, persons with disabilities, indigenous persons and other vulnerable and marginalized groups – so that they may participate in development processes, influence the decisions that affect their lives, articulate their needs, hold governments accountable for delivering services which meet those needs and contribute to the collective wealth of their societies.

For example, UNDP worked with UNV to launch a '2030 Youth Force' in the Asia-Pacific: a regional network to empower young people to engage with the SDGs, and to advocate for a stronger role for young people in formulating national policies. In Morocco, UNDP facilitated a national consultation which enabled digital entrepreneurs, youth, civil society activists, celebrities, and journalists to jointly define a vision for their society, and their respective roles in supporting its realisation. In Viet Nam, UNDP supported the development of the Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) to enable people and the government to measure progress towards the SDGs.[11] In Brazil, UNDP partners with the National Confederation of Municipalities (NCM) to raise awareness of the SDGs, integrate them into local plans, and develop monitoring and accountability systems to ensure that they are implemented.[12]

Conclusion

The inclusion of a Goal on peaceful, just and inclusive societies is timely and necessary to address the root causes of poverty, violence, inequality and exclusion that exist in all societies to varying degrees and that affect particularly the poorest and most vulnerable people in our communities.

The more a society provides opportunities for different groups to peacefully exchange their views, the greater the chance of enjoying trust in institutions and respect for diversity in opinion, faith, culture and lifestyles.

Canada's international assistance contributes to increasing access to justice – efforts in Mali and Ukraine

Meghan Watkinson, Deputy Director, Governance, Global Affairs Canada and Co-Chair of the OECD-DAC Network on Governance

Respect for the rule of law and access to justice are essential to achieving peace and security, poverty reduction and longer term sustainable development. They also influence the capacity of countries to attract and host foreign investment, create a predictable base for domestic business growth, lower environmental and political risk, and help provide people with the power to exercise their rights.

In their 2013 working paper, *2015 and beyond: the governance solution for development*, Transparency International demonstrates that in countries that are more open, accountable, and respectful of the rule of law, there is better education, health, and access to clean water and sanitation.

Yet sadly, around the world approximately four billion people do not have access to justice. Many of these people are the poorest and most marginalized in their communities, including people with disabilities, indigenous people, LGBTQ2 persons, and women. When the rule of law is not effective and predictable, people and their livelihoods are vulnerable to insecurity, to abuses of power, and to violations of human rights, which threaten their well-being and hinder their social and economic opportunities to improve their lives. This lack of access to justice often means that the poorest and most marginalized are unable to seek redress and compensation and are therefore disproportionately impacted by human rights violations, corruption, and other injustices in their communities.

The *World Development Report 2017 on Governance and the Law* acknowledges that although laws may exist in many countries that could address these injustices, in practise they are often not implemented. This is particularly the case for injustices against women. Despite progress that has expanded the scope of women's legal entitlements around the world, for most of the world's women these laws do not always translate into equality and justice. Gender based violence persists in many regions, particularly in situations of conflict and fragility, and is a major barrier to women's equality, and efforts for justice and peace in these societies.

The international community has recognized the importance of the rule of law and access to justice for sustainable development in target 3 of SDG 16 which *aims to promote the*

Image: Lawyers Without Borders Canada

Long live JUPREC (the project), we want peace in Mali: field partners and members of the project team in Mali *rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.* Canada was a strong supporter of including access to justice and rule of law in the SDGs, and we are actively engaged in helping to achieve this target at home and abroad.

Canada has a unique judicial experience to share with the world, rooted in diverse traditions. Our dual legal system with common law used throughout the country, a civil law tradition in Quebec, and Aboriginal law all inform our international assistance for judicial reform. Canada not only has a keen understanding of both common and civil law systems, but a nuanced appreciation for the challenges in both. We are also aware of the advantages to creating a justice system uniquely responsive to the historical and linguistic needs of a diverse and pluralistic population.

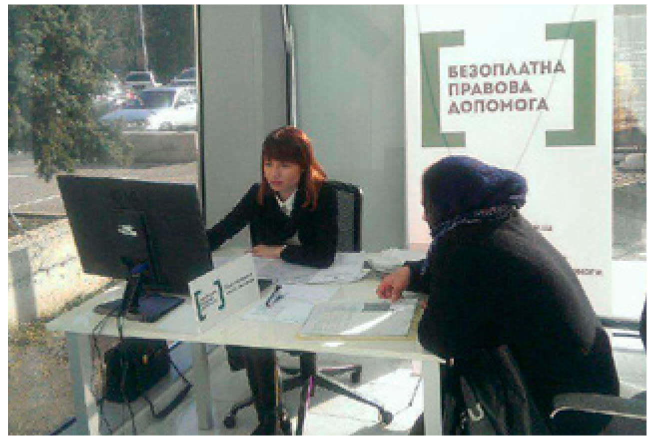


Image: Coordination Centre for Legal Aid Provision (CCLAP)

Provision of legal aid at the Odesa office

Project examples

Canada is building on this experience to help improve the rule of law and access to justice in many countries around the world. We undertake context-specific approaches, with the effect that improving people's access to justice can look very different from one country to the next, even in the same region. This case study highlights two very different, but equally important examples of Canada's efforts to improve marginalized people's access to justice in Mali and Ukraine. Despite divergent local circumstances and very different project objectives, these two initiatives demonstrate the value of partnerships at all levels and the indispensable role of civil society in helping to promote greater access to justice in their societies.

In Mali, Canada is supporting a consortium of partners including Lawyers without Borders Canada, the Center for International Studies and Cooperation, and the National School of Public Administration of Quebec to help foster justice, conflict prevention, and reconciliation. These efforts are in direct response to the causes and consequences of the crisis which has shaken Mali since January 2012. In this particular context, improving access to justice requires a multidimensional response to a complex situation that combines justice, social dialogue, and efforts to promote human rights. The focus of this work is targeting people directly affected by the crisis, particularly, women and children, with a view to ensuring that their rights are fully respected within broader efforts to restore peace and stability in Mali.

In particular, the Canadian partners are supporting Malian civil society organizations to raise awareness about gender based violence, provide legal services, foster a social dialogue among Malians on ways to collectively prevent and resolve local conflicts, and select appropriate community transitional justice mechanisms that are sensitive to the victims of the conflict.

In Ukraine, efforts to improve people's access to justice have led to the creation of a new system of legal aid, which focuses on the needs of marginalized Ukrainians, including but not limited to persons with low-income, persons with disabilities, orphaned children, and internally displaced persons. Prior to the passing of the law on Free Legal Aid in June 2011 all Ukrainian citizens were obliged to pay privately for legal advice and representation, which often rendered it out of reach for the most marginalized. Canada is supporting the Canadian Bureau for International Education to work closely with the Government of Ukraine and Ukrainian civil society organizations to help in the progressive launch of this new legal aid system. The Ukrainian government's long-term strategic agenda includes development of the legal aid system as a priority, as does the Judicial Reform Strategy and the Human Rights Protection Strategy, demonstrating the political will to make legal aid available to vulnerable Ukrainians.

The first phase of the roll out of this new system began in 2012 with the establishment of the Coordination Center for Legal Aid Provision (CCLAP), an arms-length agency of the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine. CCLAP's mandate is to improve social justice and the rule of law in Ukraine by making equitable access to quality legal aid services for all Ukrainians, in particular individuals from marginalized groups, a reality. Subsequent phases focused on the provision of free legal representation in criminal cases, extending the right to free legal representation in civil (family) and administrative cases, and extending access to legal aid to the grassroots level. These activities aimed to offer a mix of legal information and consultation, as well as legal representation before the courts.

Partnerships

One of the key underlying factors for success in each of these initiatives has been the partnerships with governments and civil society – in the capitals, but also in smaller, more remote communities.

In Mali, a partnership approach has permitted a wide range of activities to be carried out in several regions of the country, including the northern regions, which are highly insecure. The Canadian consortium of partners has partnered with nearly 20 Malian civil society organizations from across the country. These organizations have solid expertise and knowledge of the local context that are essential for the promotion and defence of human rights in the more insecure regions. In particular, these partnerships have enabled efforts to be undertaken in some regions earlier than expected. A reflection and analysis of the partnerships developed with these organizations is currently under way to better understand their needs and to further strengthen their capacity, building on the lessons and experiences to date.

Image: Coordination Centre for Legal Aid Provision (CCLAP)

Judicial training for young Malian jurists

Throughout the project in Ukraine, the Coordination Center for Legal Aid Provision (CCLAP) has been able to draw on relevant Canadian technical support and expertise in such fields as: legal aid system design; administration and oversight; decentralized service delivery; training; awareness raising; and, stakeholder engagement. The project is also working closely with civil society organizations across Ukraine through a Community Engagement Fund that supports non-governmental organizations in building partnerships and linkages among various legal aid service providers to improve their effectiveness in responding to the legal needs of vulnerable groups and in addressing barriers to access.

Results

Canadian support and partnerships through these two initiatives have led to some very real improvements in marginalized people's access to justice.

In Mali, awareness and communication activities have reached thousands of people in several regions of the country. For example:

- More than 8,000 people have participated in awareness-raising activities on gender-based violence
- Some 19,000 people have been reached by activities aimed at disseminating legal information and the availability of legal services
- Efforts to adopt a law against gender-based violence have included mobilization of approximately 40 Malian civil society organizations to support the law.

The participation of victims and civil society organizations in reconciliation and dialogue has also been an important component of this work. For example:

- 672 women across the country were trained and accompanied in prevention, conflict management and leadership, mediation, and advocacy in order to strengthen their representativeness in the communities;
- Training was provided to 497 community leaders, including 170 women and 249 youth, who are core agents of change in their communities;
- Efforts to achieve social reconciliation and conflict prevention have led to the establishment of eight peace committees, made up of community leaders and 120 members (30 per cent of whom are women) who contribute to dialogue and reconciliation in communities affected by the conflict.

In Ukraine, the new system of legal aid has had considerable success since its creation in 2012, and today, the system features over 540 points of service, deploys over 5,000 lawyers and has over 2,240 employees.

In terms of legal aid provision in criminal proceedings and for detained, arrested or imprisoned individuals, the system has:

- Recorded over 76,480 cases of legal aid provision to detained criminal suspects
- Recorded 41,803 cases of legal aid provision to those under administrative detention or arrest
- Managed over 191,594 defence cases.

Since the system began offering legal aid support for civil and administrative proceedings it has:

- Processed over 409,420 applications
- Provided consultation services to 348,413 individuals
- Represented over 54,714 clients in court proceedings
- Referred another 13,124 to partner institutions and organizations for assistance.

Of the broad spectrum of clients seeking support in civil and administrative cases, the large majority, 57.4 per cent, are women.

One major success, based on estimates from local human rights organizations, is that in 2013, early access to legal aid was guaranteed to all detained persons within two hours following detention and prior to the first interrogation by police. As a result, since then, the number of human rights violations of detainees committed by police has decreased by at least 50 per cent.

Lessons learned

Canadian efforts in Mali and Ukraine have helped us learn some key lessons. In Mali, the role of local partners has been essential to increase the scope of the project and adapt to the insecure environment, which remains a key challenge despite the 2015 peace accord.

In Ukraine, we have seen the importance of embedding legal aid within a broader community context to be successful and sustainable. There is a growing recognition of the need for a new curriculum in law schools and professional development within the legal profession to reflect the new legal aid regime. Efforts are also underway to develop training for police officers on what the new legal aid system means for them and for Ukraine's most marginalized citizens.

Canadian efforts to improve access to justice in Mali and Ukraine, and many other countries around the world, are helping to strengthen the work of governments and civil society organizations, and build the capacity of women to represent their communities and collectively address the challenges they face. These efforts are also contributing to the achievement of SDG 16 in these countries. For more information on these and other international assistance projects funded by Canada, please consult the Government of Canada's Project Browser.[1]

Development assistance for peaceful and just societies – the need for orientation

Nils Rosemann, Senior Policy Advisor for Conflict and Human Rights, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)[1]

Switzerland's development mandate is threefold and based on its constitutional objective which states that: "The Confederation […] shall in particular assist in the alleviation of need and poverty in the world and promote respect for human rights and democracy, the peaceful co-existence of peoples as well as the conservation of natural resources."[2]

For the period 2017 – 2020 the CHF11 bn Swiss development budget is committed to combating poverty, discrimination, exclusion and vulnerability in its partner countries. The ultimate objective of these efforts is to create better prospects for the future and to reduce inequality. In this regard, Switzerland contributes to the search for political solutions to conflicts and promotes respect for human rights.

In order to achieve these long term goals, the Swiss parliament assigned four out of seven of its strategic development assistance goals to UN Sustainable Development Goal 16, namely: "[to] prevent and manage the consequences of crisis and disaster, and of fragility [and to] promote conflict transformation; [to] support sustainable access to resources and services for all; development [contributes to] an international framework for responding to global challenges, [to] strengthen the rule of law and democratic participation; support institutions serving society and [… to] ensure respect for human rights and fundamental liberties, and support efforts to advance their cause."[3]

In order to avoid the pitfalls of offering purely technical solutions to political problems, a development agency such as SDC, working either multilaterally or bilaterally, needed to embark on a mission to become more political, addressing the root causes of fragility, structural poverty and exclusion.

SDC's view on peace and development: The fragility lens

SDC's core mandate rests with the reduction of poverty and humanitarian needs. Gender equality, good governance and respect for human rights are essential values, but our experience shows that: "in achieving the sustainable development goals, progress in reducing fragility will play a critical role in the fight against poverty."[4]

SDC's resolution regarding peace, resilience to withstand violence and the enjoyment of human rights is that political and structural obstacles cannot be removed by technical proposals but by political means. In 2012 an evaluation of the performance of SDC instruments in fragile and conflict-affected contexts in 2012 highlighted that: "There was little clear evidence of the impact that SDC and other aspects of Swiss assistance are having on fragility and conflict as a whole. SDC programmes in fragile contexts tend to be focused on the symptoms of fragility rather than the root causes."[5]

This misplacced policy focus was diagnosed as being rooted in a lack of appreciation of change at programme level and lack of policy guidance at strategic and international levels.

Image: © SDC

SDC's support for local governance is contributing to a decentralisation reform agenda in Kyrgyzstan

Image: © SDC

Sustainable cotton project in Kyrgyzstan where small holder and family farmers are prone to child labour and exploitation

Image: © SDC

Provision of psychosocial care for the women and men affected by sexual and psychological violence in Burundi

Image: © SDC

Land rights and titles are a main source of conflict and violence in Burundi. SDC supports a system of acknowledgment and certification of land use

The policy gap was filled in 2015 with SDC's peacebuilding and statebuilding strategy, taking at its core the idea that: "the concept of fragility thus encompasses missing or insufficient statebuilding and peacebuilding efforts on national as well as local levels. If these are not integrated as an overall objective into development and humanitarian efforts of SDC, poverty cannot be sustainably reduced."[6]

SDC therefore departed from the somewhat state-centred OECD model of fragility given at that time and, instead, included in its approaches: governance and community related resiliencies to withstand all forms of violence, the support of conflict transformation, and respect for human rights and rule of law. In order to communicate this concept to its decentralized operations, SDC used the OECD Ten Principles for Engagement in Fragile States[7] and its main objective to "take the context as a starting point". This prepared SDC to be better positioned to complement its technical skills with political understanding, bringing programmes from different branches together in order to address the root causes of conflict and fragility, and to increase flexibility so that it could respond to opportunities or risks more quickly.

Adopting a long term perspective in fragile and conflict affected contexts made it possible for SDC to commit – in addition to its humanitarian spending – an increase from 44 per cent of bilateral development spending in 2016 toward the target of 50 per cent by the end of 2020.

Fit for purpose with comprehensive risk management

Switzerland's commitment to work in fragile, conflict affected and hostile environments is based on its own experience and mandate as well as on international consensus. Countries affected by conflict and fragility were among those left furthest behind by the Millennium Development Agenda. By 2030, poverty will become increasingly concentrated in fragile states and the OECD predicts, even under the best case scenario, that more than 60 per cent of the global poor will be located in these contexts.[8] While reducing fragility and conflict causes are the largest opportunity for reducing structural poverty and exposure to humanitarian needs, there are associated risks. "International engagement in fragile and conflict-affected states […] poses considerable risks for donors and implementing partners, who must contend with high levels of insecurity, political instability, weak institutions, and the failure of basic state functions that typically characterize such states […] outcomes are hard to foresee and control, and the possibility of returning to violent conflict is always present."[9]

For SDC, comprehensive risk management demands becoming fit for purpose and staying engaged even where other donors have given up field work and shifted from development to humanitarian or even military assistance. Cases such as SDC's engagement in Nepal, Mali and Burundi showed that comprehensive risk management – developed on the basis of OECD's Copenhagen Principles[10] – helped best in addressing context, programme and institutional risk. For SDC this is part of context specific and conflict sensitive management such that, instead of developing new instruments, we prioritised conflict sensitivity, human rights based approaches and good governance principles as well as a gender perspective on operational instruments for project management, strategic planning and reporting.

If peace, conflict issues, human rights and rule of law become commonplace, the impact on societies and systems of governance is not great. The challenge is to balance the contextualized theories of impact with coherent programming and reporting. In doing so, SDC has developed a range of operation-based reference indicators, helping to frame technical programmes – such as water, food security or employment – as its contribution towards the reduction of fragility.

Agenda 2030 Goal 16: Aid4Peace or a mix between Millennium Goals and New Deal on Peace Building

Goal 16 reflects much of why Switzerland actively promotes and participates in the New Deal for Engagement in fragile states and the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and State building. For Switzerland, the New Deal filled the gap left open by the Millenium Development Goals and the Millenium Declaration. It is the key agreement between fragile and conflict-affected states, development partners, and civil society to improve the current development policy and practice in fragile and conflict-affected states. It was developed through the forum of the International Dialogue and signed by more than 40 countries, including Switzerland, and organizations at the fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness on November 30th 2011 at Busan, Korea.

Knowing the shortcomings of any policy agreement, that is to implement it successfully on a national, but preferably local level, Switzerland has sought to anchor this "Aid4Peace" perspective internationally by taking over responsibility as Co-Chair – together with UNDP – of the DAC International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF). INCAF's focus is on delivering the SDGs in states affected by fragility and conflict, using the lens of the New Deal for engagement in fragile states. A major achievement in this regard was the 2016 Stockholm Declaration[11] as a way of ensuring that no one is left behind in preventing and addressing the root causes of conflict and fragility.

Furthermore, Switzerland supports the inclusion of the stakeholder structure, ensuring cooperation between affected countries, donor countries and civil society, in Goal 16 implementation. In this regard Switzerland engages with the Pathfinder Initiative for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies,[12] aiming to foster an integrated approach in order to strengthen Goal 16's universality, focus on inequalities, apply a gender and human rights based approach, include regional and global dimensions of peace and ensure collaboration between all relevant actors and sectors.

In, around or on fragility: more explicit theories of change and better monitoring

As explained above, SDC's operational experience in fragile and conflict affected contexts showed that development and humanitarian assistance will be sustainable only if the root causes of conflict are addressed, structural issues of violence, exclusion and discrimination are tackled and a culture of human rights is promoted. However, Switzerland, as a small bilateral donor agency, is not always able to solve problems of fragility and human rights and thus finds itself working around these issues rather than focusing on the central problems. Risks are higher in these contexts requiring quick wins and tangible results especially to satisfy public opinion.

In order to maintain a long term perspective, Switzerland introduced a fragility-focused mindset for its results-based management in 2013, with additional mandatory reference indicators in 2017. The reference indicator system will help SDC to coherently report on results as well as to steer programmes and enhance their contribution to fragility reduction.

The case of governance in the security and justice sectors: the case for rule of law

SDC's focus on governance, especially within the justice and security sector might illustrate how to better work on the reduction of fragility. Accountability of public and private security forces, mutual respect of the law and access to justice are preconditions of a fair, predictable and just system, free from corruption and arbitration. Conflicts and fragility, violence and destruction, are based on factual as well as perceived injustices. Enabling development must focus on freedom from fear. Governance, access to justice and rule of law programmes – which are at the core of Goal 16 – must therefore be people-oriented and focus on "good enough" rather than perfect systems.[13]

SDC is substantially engaged in the justice sector and spends approximately CHF35m per year on projects and programmes that deal either exclusively or partly with justice sector reform. But international criticism of rule of law and justice sector programming[14] is significant such that these interventions must recognise the deeply political process in which they engage; that a sole focus on form instead of function and the replication and import of models and laws does not meet local realities and needs; and that the realities of the political economy and structural poverty must be addressed.

Thus, rule of law and access to justice become synonymous with reduction of fragility and reestablishing trust among communities, people and institutions. Internal assessments showed that SDC is not immune to quick-win, solution driven and top down approaches. In order to reorient its justice and rule of law portfolio, SDC has strengthened its analytical tools, recognized the politicised nature of these programmes and will systematically take legal pluralism into account. In other words, SDC realigns its programmes by taking the context as a starting point and putting instances of perceived or actual injustices at the corner of its interventions.

Again, the above mentioned system of reference indicators in relation to the support of governmental functions, the strengthening of independence and oversight and the protection of rights and perception of legal services, will help SDC to improve theories of change with better monitoring and reporting.

Conclusions

Goal 16 objectives in fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies are, for SDC, both a precondition and a result of fulfilling its mandate of poverty reduction and humanitarian assistance. There is no sustainability without a focus on context-rooted power relations, causes and effects of exclusion, discrimination and reoccurring human rights violations. In order to end poverty we have to end ignorance of economic, social and political realities that impede development, inclusion and peace. "Fragility" is one description of these obstacles, as "just and peaceful societies" is another phrase for a set of solutions. But what matters is not the wording, but a tangible change for people. The discussion around goal 16 already provides a platform for discussion. In 2030, Goal 16 will be the litmus test for the success of the Sustainable Development Agenda. Emerging conditions for peace will enable sustainable development only if our contribution and shared responsibility can address the root causes of violent conflict and war.

Image: © SDC

IFC and Swiss microfinance project in Kyrgyzstan

The Baku Process – sharing cultures for shared security

Abulfas Garayev, Chair of the WFID National Organizing Committee, Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan; Mike Hardy, Professor and Executive Director, Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, Member of the Baku Process International Task Force; Vasif Eyvazzade, Head of the International Cooperation Department , Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Secretary of the Baku Process International Task Force

Azerbaijan sits at the crossroads of global cultures and civilisations, with a history, culture and economy that over the centuries have helped form a tradition of respect for different cultures and nationalities and a rejection of intolerance to the 'other'. Azerbaijan society embodies the Eurasian idea of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, an harmonic approach to identity through embracing diversity.

The Country took a major step in 2008 when President Aliyev initiated the *Baku Process* for the promotion of intercultural dialogue. The *Baku Process* comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, living on different continents, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. The *Baku Process* thrives through partnership and through convening influential and powerful dialogue between leaders from international organisations, national governments, civil society and the private sector.

The World Forums on Intercultural Dialogue (WFID), held biannually in Baku, are an important and continuing part of the Baku Process, and the fourth World Forum, 04–06 May 2017 with the theme of "Advancing Intercultural Dialogue: New avenues for human security, peace and sustainable development"[1], further consolidates this international platform. WFID enables and encourages people, countries and organizations around the globe to take concrete actions to support diversity, dialogue and mutual understanding among nations by raising awareness on the importance of intercultural dialogue worldwide.

The Baku Process helps place intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity higher on the international agenda as a critical element for achieving human security and as a prime responsibility of our time. WFIDs organised to date have brought together heads of governments, ministers, heads of various international organisations, senior policy makers, cultural professionals, goodwill ambassadors, experts, journalists, practitioners, prominent intellectuals and activists.

Following the development of the Sustainable Development Goals, discussion at WFID 2017 will place side by side intercultural dialogue, human security, peace and sustainable economic development, highlighting the interdependence of these and, importantly, the centrality of dialogue for peaceful relations and sustainable development, and hence human security.

Image: MCT, Azerbaijan

UNAOC 7th Global Forum, 25–27 April 2016, Baku, Azerbaijan


Image: MCT, Azerbaijan

The Old City of Baku, Azerbaijan

Looking back: World forums for intercultural dialogue

A core assumption of WFID has been the recognition that dialogue with those who are not perceived to be from the same cultural background is far from straightforward. In past forums, discussions on intercultural dialogue has enabled discussion about uneven relationships: minority-majority, rich-poor, newcomers-residents or powerful-vulnerable. Even within a framework of mutual respect and without an emphasis on consensus, it has been understood that the very platform upon which we ask others to come and engage with each other is often, and for the most part, uneven. Whether intentional or not, a dichotomy of advantage and disadvantage cannot simply be willed away, as well-intentioned as intercultural dialogue practitioners may be.

So, as WFID has evolved, the requirement for the field of intercultural dialogue to draw from disciplines outside of dialogue and communication studies and from a variety of global, local, public and private contexts, as a way of engaging with the challenges, has become more important. The forums have also recognised and acknowledged that the utility of intercultural dialogue, as both a concept and a toolkit, is yet to be fully measured and assessed. As such, applying intercultural dialogue as a strategy for managing conflict in an increasingly globalised and connected world still requires much planning and consideration.

As diversity and the consequences of global conflicts have become more diffuse, strategies for cultural relationships have developed and spread. New experiences of cultural engagement in all walks of life have to be crafted to help us to cope with what is now a permanently diverse and connected world. Culture connects people of difference, and connection enables encounter and exchange. By enabling people to live together peacefully and constructively in a multi-cultured world, with a sense of global community and belonging, dialogue between and within cultures can become a powerful antidote to rejection and violence.

The WFID platform is a unique experience because it ensures, by its design and implementation, that key stakeholders – who might be referred to as the global connectors – are engaged. The presence of Ministers of Culture in Baku is also a great asset, and many of these by participating actively in the break-out discussions, give speakers and participants an opportunity for interaction. WFID reflects also that many participants, from all parts of the world, are developing meaningful projects to promote intercultural dialogue and diversity. WFID encourages enables many of these to be shared and showcased during the Forum.

2017: The Fourth World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue

After three successful editions that mobilised major organizations and individuals involved in the promotion of intercultural dialogue and diversity, the fourth edition of the Baku Forum is an important step forward.

It builds on the accomplishments of the previous editions, and will be an opportunity to deepen the reflections and to feature new ideas and experiences. It takes into account the new political context in many countries around the world, with the rise of populism and polarisation and the emergence of a 'new nationalism'[2] This changed context affects the nature of the discussions and the programme of WFID 2017. Peace, stability and economic development in all parts of the world may be profoundly harmed by the emergence of this growing national introversion, which is also a threat for the SDGs agenda. Hence, it is more important than ever to increase efforts to promote cultural diversity and inclusive societies.

New dimensions: The First High Level Meeting of International Organisations

Intercultural tensions and conflicts are not caused by the differences between or the natures of cultures themselves, but more by the reality that societies are not well equipped to manage effectively and overcome challenges. While promoting dialogue and co-operation between the world's cultures and peoples and aiming to address existing problems and increase joint efforts in this field, the Government of Azerbaijan is introducing an initiative to organize the First High Level Meeting of International Organizations in the framework of the Fourth World Forum.

The goal in realising this High Level Meeting is to bring together the world's political, cultural, military, economic, social, financial and other international organizations to debate human security, sustainable development and inclusive society issues and trace joint actions to settle tensions between cultures and civilizations often stemming from religious, cultural and social constraints. This fresh initiative establishes an additional platform to mobilise resources and conduct shared activities notwithstanding the universality of international organizations or regional status and area of responsibility.

New entrants and global connectors

The WFID Programme for 2017 recognises the changing global political context and will seek to include all so-called Global Connectors and reach out directly to new entrants to WFID – notably the private sector, such as global, local and technology based companies, particularly those committed to social impact and broader human security goals, and the international financial institutions (Banks, IMF, World Bank etc.,) and other development agencies such as UK DfID, CIDA, USAID, ASEAN.

These new global connectors are placing fresh emphases within their research, policy and flagship events on the urgent need to build Inclusive Societies. The private sector is another important actor, and a somewhat untapped potential in the promotion of inclusive societies and trust building among people and cultures. Huge financial resources and experience can be mobilised through Corporate Social Responsibility budgets, philanthropy and corporate engagement, and breakout group discussions at WFID 2017 will explore these potentials. The Baku Forum provides a unique opportunity to bring together the global connectors and the leading CSR organizations and to discuss concrete opportunities of collaboration to promote dialogue and inclusive societies.

Such new entrants help WFID grow its influence towards building more inclusive societies – and promoting the commitment to new avenues for human security that is central to the WFID 2017 theme.

New regional focus: Asia Pacific

So far, the debate on intercultural dialogue and peaceful coexistence has been focused mostly on the western world

Image: MCT, Azerbaijan

Heydar Aliyev Center, Baku, Azerbaijan

Image: MCT, Azerbaijan

2nd World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, 29 May–1 June 2013, Baku, Azerbaijan

and the Middle East. However, it is increasingly becoming an issue in the Asia Pacific region where more than half of the world's population lives, a population that is extremely diverse. Innovative cooperation mechanisms are in place in that region to prevent tensions and mitigate the risk of radicalisation and conflict. It will be interesting to hear from the Asia-Pacific perspective and to discuss possible exchange of experience.

New focus: Towards a more broadly defined human security

The new and changing global political context, together with the importance of finding practical ways to build and reinforce trust and promote economic development, are prerequisites of a dialogue that creates a sustainable improvement in people's quality of life. The focus on human security has renewed attention to the consequence of both natural and human-driven insecurity, the strong relationship between violent conflict and poverty, as well as the importance of food security. Overall human security is threatened by both violent conflict and natural disasters. We are pleased to be joined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in this regard, and to devote more time at the Forum to these issues.

2017: Towards a more comprehensive conceptualisation of intercultural dialogue

At its best, dialogue is the essential toolkit, helping people to cope with unprecedented challenges and conflicts and the pace of change within our modern world. Dialogue can support and help sustain peaceful relations. But, too often, the prerequisite of dialogue to remain an open process of exchange and respect between individuals and groups of different cultures, points of view and aspirations, built on a foundation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, is overlooked and not met.

As we know, effective dialogue between people of difference and with different needs and agendas is vital for real and sustained peace. And we appear to engage with it a lot. On the global stage, world forums are convened to bring together heads of governments, ministers, heads of various international organizations, senior policy makers, cultural professionals, goodwill ambassadors, experts, journalists, practitioners, prominent intellectuals and activists. These platforms enable us to take concrete actions to support diversity, strengthen mutual understanding among and between nations and communities, and raise awareness of the importance of dialogue.

Intercultural dialogue in the post-2015 era is important due to the sheer compression of the world, as people and their cultures have been brought into the same space with intense speed, creating new levels and forms of human interaction and interdependence. Mutual respect – not the same as mutual approval – will be crucial. Reasoned disagreement builds stronger, more authentic and lasting relationships. Avoiding difficult questions, such as political conflict or differences in values, will be counterproductive, whereas addressing them directly and with respect will build trust.

At a time when the world's efforts are focused on sustainable development for all, the challenges are often multidimensional and interrelated, with the needs of the most vulnerable being compounded by prejudice and stereotypes that must be challenged holistically.

A final thought: Intercultural dialogue is important because it allows long-term and intensive engagement with people from other cultures. This can help people see their own culture from a different perspective, which leads to re-evaluating their own views and ideas. At the same time dialogue re-introduces some of the detail – the diversity – into our perception of others.

Building global harmony through intercultural action

Willow Neilson, Development and Education Technology, Cultural Infusion; Cameron Magusic, Executive Assistant and Project Coordinator, Cultural Infusion

Experts have identified training in intercultural understanding as an effective social-cognitive intervention to reduce violence. The task is therefore to go beyond teaching young people to tolerate difference and to see others' points of view.

Australian organization, Cultural Infusion, has developed many programmes to build intercultural understanding as a core value and key competency of global citizenship, employing the arts, education and digital technologies as vehicles to foster social cohesion and realise the possibilities of innovation and progress for society. The organization's range of programmes is designed to engage with K-12 education[1], existing community programmes, tertiary institutions and special events.

These interactive live and online programmes provide students with real-life, intercultural experiences such as the national in-school incursion programme, *Discovering Diversity* that promotes cultures of the world. It encourages intercultural dialogue through the fun and inspirational medium of performing arts and storytelling. Culture bearers and presenters from wide-ranging backgrounds attend schools to display their art and convey its relevance to their nation. The message of cultural harmony and inclusiveness is emphasized, with students' active participation encouraged. These education programmes reach over 300,000 students a year.

Cultural Infusion's first digital offering, *Sound Infusion*, began in 2013. It is a free online music studio allowing users to create their own tracks by combining thousands of cultural music samples from around the world. The samples were specially recorded and designed for a person with no musical training to combine a wide range of musical cultures, inspiring curiosity through experiential learning and exploration. The accompanying website contains detailed cultural information on over 100 cultures represented within the music samples.

The Sound Infusion project has gained international recognition and awards including the United Nation's Alliance of Civilisations' (UNAOC) Intercultural innovation Award (2013), Second Runner Up at the Australasian Learning

Image: Cultural Infusion

The ICAP programme, recognised and endorsed by the UNESCO Chair for Intercultural and Inter-religious Relations, Asia-Pacific, develops intercultural understanding competencies in students

Image: Cultural Infusion

The *Multicultural All Day* programme offers students a one day global experience

Image: Cultural Infusion

The *Kinder Dreaming* programme gives pre-school students a new understanding of the rich traditions of Australia's first inhabitants

Image: Cultural Infusion

Cultural Infusion's *Joko's World* comprises interactive educational apps that blend music, geography and culture in a unique way

Impact Awards, and Highly Commended at the Australia and New Zealand Internet Awards (ANZIAs) in 2012 and 2013.

Patricia Shehan Campbell, an academic committed to the importance of showing the music of the world in schools says: "In three studies of children in the upper elementary school grades, the student's learning of musical culture and context resulted in improved attitudes toward music and people of Chinese culture, Native American Indian culture, and a spectrum of other cultures that were previously unfamiliar to them."

Cultural Infusion's approach to children's education has always leveraged the power of this type of discovery with an integrative and interdisciplinary approach to education. In *Discovering Diversity* and *Sound Infusion,* music and performance opens the door to conversations and inquiry around the history, customs, beliefs and practices of other cultures.

To deepen the learning impact of the *Discovering Diversity* programmes, an easy to implement curriculum tool was created that could be part of preparatory and follow up lessons that would expand intercultural understanding within the student's curriculum. The *Joko's World* suite of learning apps for mobile devices is the result of that development.

The first programmes were virtual instrument apps that leveraged the kinesthetic power of touchscreen devices. *Joko's Flute*, *Joko's Tambourine* and *Joko's Balafon* allow students to tap, shake and blow on their devices while playing games that incrementally teach folk songs and rhythms from a multitude of cultures.

The significance of these songs and instruments are connected to history and social studies through our interactive guidebooks and accompanying lesson plans, contextualizing them within each culture. This has been expanded further with *Joko's World of Instruments* which teaches students about 100 instruments from around the world from the accordion to the zither. The use of musical instruments as a focal point provides a useful hub around which many aspects of cultures and civilizations revolve.

The range of learning apps has been extended to include *Joko's Splatfest* which leads students through cultural celebrations around the world, and the geography game, *Pocket Planet*, which turns the world map into a puzzle, helping to build knowledge of our planet to provide a context for everything learnt. The cultural significance of landmarks, flags and cultural practices are tied to the significance of place. The linking of people to place is further explored within another learning activity, the *Ancestry Atlas* which allows organizations to map their linguistic, national and religious diversity.

Another development is the Intercultural Citizenship Ambassador Program (ICAP) which is instructor-led over 16 sessions and guides students through conflict resolution communication, providing the opportunity to learn about their own and one another's culture, including empathy-building exercises and leadership development. One experiential activity places students within the context of needing to leave their home and seek refuge in another place, a powerful method for developing children's perspective-taking potential.

ICAP incorporates leadership-building by guiding students in arranging school-wide cultural celebrations that involve a wider community. The culminating celebration involves parents, local community leaders such as clerics from a diverse range of religions, and performers from the *Discovering Diversity* programme. In reviewing ICAP, Mr B. Dellal OAM, executive director of the Australian Multicultural Foundation commented: "I am pleased to see such professional and competent initiatives. Programmes of this sort serve to educate students in the intricacies of cultural diversity and, of course, the importance of respect and acceptance of all cultures."

14 year old ICAP participant, Isabella of Upwey High School said: "I would recommend the ICAP programme to other students because most students, like me, before the ICAP programme don't know much about the thousands of cultures living right under our noses." 13 year old Megan from Upwey remarked: "I think it is important to interact with other cultures because it shows us how others live and it reduces conflict."

The ICAP programme has been successfully implemented numerous times, but the cost of training and placing facilitators for the entirety of the programme made it prohibitive to many schools. In the interest of scaling efforts and providing more inclusive opportunity, aspects of the programmes have been expanded and trialled. Many of the teachers requested the use of the curriculum for use in other grade levels so ICAP has been restructured as an online curriculum with teacher professional development coupled with instructional coaching and support.

Ancestry Atlas is the digitization of an activity that occurs early in the ICAP course. Students place markers on a world map to indicate their birthplace and that of their parents and grandparents on both sides. For a society such as Australia with a high level of immigration, it was always impactful for students to see the cultural diversity of their class encapsulated in a single image. For many students it was the first time they discovered this information about one another, generating discussions and questions.

The objective of *Ancestry Atlas* was to begin these conversations with a wider number of schools and organisations. It allows classes to share their images by email or social media and for classes to combine data into whole school images. It also captures more demographic information such as religious and linguistic diversity. Accompanying the *Ancestry Atlas* are educational materials that focus on the difference between country, nation and state, three distinctions that are often the source of international conflict. We reveal that country borders are not regarded in the same way by all, and that we form our identities in a multiplicity of ways.

This interdisciplinary approach to programme development integrates the arts and culture into school curriculums while employing techniques to involve the wider community to make intergenerational connection and impact. This interconnection has recently been expanded internationally to include two new programmes that continue their commitment to preserving and disseminating intangible cultural heritage.

The *Rescuing Heritage Arts* programmes provide funding and support to place master musicians and dancers in villages to teach children. The aim is to help revitalize art forms and provide employment pathways for regional artists. The first two locations chosen are India and Cambodia with imminent expansion planned in both countries and new locations.

Cultural Infusion's vision is for a world that is culturally and socially cohesive and that values the richness of a collective cultural heritage. CEO and founder Peter Mousaferiadis says: "We believe culture is a way for communities to assert their own identity. If people can express themselves they're going to feel good, they're going to feel a sense of belonging. They're also going to feel a sense of allegiance to an empire or state which is accepting and recognizing of their cultural identity."

Cultural education programmes are a powerful tool for bringing people from different backgrounds together. "A lot of people say peace means everything; they talk about these intangible concepts. What is peace exactly?" asks Mousaferiadis. "We need to work at peace and the only way you can really cultivate peace is through grassroots initiatives, providing people something they can actively participate in together."

Image: Cultural Infusion

The *Aboriginal for a Day* programme immerses students in Australian indigenous culture

Protecting and defending the vulnerable – direct action and legislation on domestic violence and child maltreatment

Dr Maha Almuneef, Executive Director; Ms Sarah S. Inam, Project Manager, National Family Safety Program

The National Family Safety Program (NFSP) was set up to become a leading institution in the combat of domestic violence (DV) and child maltreatment (CM). It was initiated in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by a royal decree in 2005 and began its work with four employees, blossoming over the years into a thriving organization with over 60 employees. Its main focus is prevention, differentiating it from other organizations in the kingdom that are more focused on providing protection services to victims of abuse. While the NFSP recognizes the significance of providing services to victims, it believes strongly that prevention is as important in combating the problem of DV.

The history of child abuse and neglect (CAN) in Saudi Arabia can be divided into five eras: the first extends from 1990 to 2000 and may be referred to as early detection of maltreatment cases. The second era spans from 2000–2004 and saw the national recognition of CM become a public health issue. The third era, 2005–2010, marks the flourishing of governmental and non-governmental organizations. The fourth era, 2011–2015, is characterized by the enactment of laws, and the fifth, from 2016 onwards, sees the implementation of prevention programmes.

It could be argued that the official development of child protection started in the year 1990 when the first case report from Saudi Arabia was published in medical literature.[1] Despite child abuse and neglect recognition and the ratification of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1996, the true scope of the problem in Saudi Arabia remained unknown in the absence of accurate and reliable statistics.[2] By the year 2000, the national media started to focus on CM, which was recognized as a public health issue, and emphasized the importance of enactment of legislation and provision of services. It was not until 2004 that national efforts were geared towards the preservation of children's rights and the prevention of CM and DM, when the first Child Protection Act and Law of Prevention from Abuse was drafted. Moreover, public health professionals began to engage in the struggle to combat violence, forming multi-disciplinary teams in major hospitals to serve children and adults who were victims of abuse.[3]

Between 2005 and 2010, many NGOs and governmental agencies concerned with CM and DV were established, among them the NFSP, the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and Human Rights Society (HRS), which were very active in promoting human rights issues and the implementation of the CRC and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in different governmental agencies.

Following the increased awareness of the public of the importance of preventing violence against children and women, the 2011 to 2015 period was characterized by the passage of two significant laws: The Law of protection from Abuse issued in

Timeline for child maltreatment milestones in KSA

2013 and the Child Protection law issued in 2014. These laws regulated the work of involved parties in child abuse and DV prevention policies and protected the safety and wellbeing of children and adults suffering from abuse.

Since 2005, the NFSP has invested in multidisciplinary training for professionals dealing with cases of CM and DV, conducting nationwide research studies in collaboration with the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, among others. The NFSP has also contributed to legislation that protects children and has hosted conferences on both national and international levels. Below are examples of NFSP building capacities at all levels over the last decade.

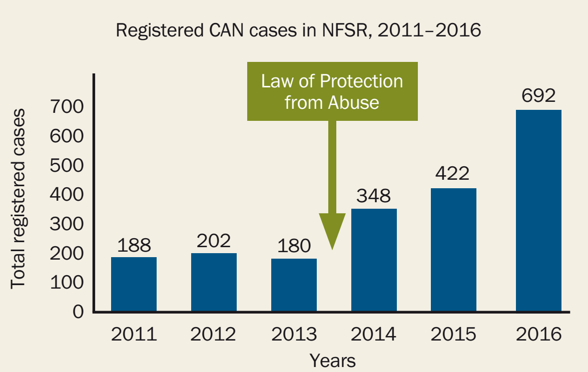
Advocacy and Legislation

In 2007, the King Khalid Foundation presented the NFSP with a study on the current state of DV in the country, and the NFSP took the initiative to pass this study to the Al Shura Council (Saudi Parliament) for approval. The NFSP then took the study to lobby at the ministerial cabinet for enactment's expert panel, playing a significant role in all stages from disseminating the study to the approval process and the passage of the legislation in 2014. The legislation comprises various articles such as mandated reporting that ensures that professionals working with cases of DV and CM report cases of abuse to the authorities. Other articles pertain to response and intervention; these are subjective for each case depending on the severity and level of threat to the victim. Depending on the case it would either fall under the jurisdiction of the police and law enforcement officials or the health sector and will be followed up by the Ministry of Labor and Social Development. There are articles referring to rehabilitation of victims and ensuring punitive measures for perpetrators.

Hospital based Child Protection Centers

In 2007, the NFSP initiated a national project to establish a Child Protection Center (CPC) within major hospitals of the kingdom, aiming at the evaluation of CM cases on a 24-hour basis by qualified multidisciplinary Child Protection Teams (CPT). The majority of these centers work together under one protection committee in designated hospitals. All these centers were established under the directives of the National Health Council (NHC) representing all health sectors in the country. The council accredited 48 hospitals across the country as CPCs. The population densities and geographical breadth of these provinces were taken into account in the establishment of these centers to enable better service coverage. All suspected CM cases are now referred to the nearest CPC and evaluated by a CPT to substantiate abuse allegation. Confirmed cases are referred to law enforcement officials for investigation and possible prosecution. CPT members receive regular training by joint IPSCAN and NFSP programmes.

Child Abuse and Neglect Cases from the National Family Safety Registry, 2011–2016



National Family Safety Registry

Under the umbrella of the CPC project comes the establishment of the National Family Safety Registry (NFSR) which is currently maintained by the NFSP. Data is collected by the CPCs and entered into a web- based centralized registry by CPT members. Collected data enables the determination of prevalence, demographics, and recurrence of CM or DV, in addition to the short term services provided. The case registration form was adapted from the WHO definitions for various forms of CM.[4] The electronic form has bilingual entries, Arabic and English, and includes information on victim, perpetrator, form of abuse, risk factors, investigation, disposition, consequences, notifications and follow up plan. The data from this registry is often used for research and as evidence for advocacy purposes.

Saudi Child Helpline (116-111)

In 2010, the NFSP established the Saudi Child Helpline, providing children, adolescents (until the age of 18) and their care givers with counselling and referral services. The helpline was established with the support of 14 governmental, non-governmental and international agencies including UNICEF and the Arab Gulf Program for Development (AGFUND). Several governmental entities support the work of the helpline including Ministry of Labor and Social Development, Ministry of Education, Police, Human Rights Commission, National Society for Human Rights, National Childhood Council, and others. Having such a wide network of support allows the helpline to adequately assist the child and caregiver's needs, particularly when the problem is beyond counselling and requires more severe action. All calls are answered by trained social workers, psychologists and a legal advisors. The Saudi Child Helpline was launched officially in 2012 and operates from 7:00am to 11:00pm throughout the week and through all holidays. Currently the NFSP is working to operate the line 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with a specialized team of call agents.

Awareness campaigns

Major efforts in Saudi Arabia have focused on providing national awareness on CM and DV through organizing local, regional and international human rights conferences, by issuing publications, brochures and books on the subject and educating adults and children about their rights. There have been various lectures given at schools and universities addressing topics of child abuse, DV and elderly abuse in addition to various media campaigns, events, conferences and expert meetings on these subjects. In addition, there are several national awareness and media campaigns promoting awareness against childhood violence in Saudi Arabia; examples include the White Campaign, dedicated to raising awareness about sexual abuse; the Shaken Baby Syndrome Awareness Campaign for new mothers and the Anti-Bullying Campaign during which the NFSP worked closely with the Childhood Council from the Ministry of Education and with UNICEF to devise a training package to be delivered to teachers and supervisors in schools on how to deal with cases of bullying and how to promote awareness on how detrimental bullying can be, both long- and short-term. This campaign also won an award at the World Women Summit Forum (WWSF) in 2009.

Research studies

Research is an integral part of the NFSP's commitment to carry out its mission. Through this evidence-based approach, it aims to reform national policy and programme development. The NFSP has carried out several large-scale, national population-based research studies that allow for identification of the magnitude of the problems of child abuse, neglect, violence and injury in the country. Examples are the ICAST (ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tool, CH version) study in collaboration with the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN), and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and their associations with Chronic Disease and Health Risk Behaviors Study in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO). The NFSP was on the committee that developed the ACE questionnaire. Both studies have been published in journals and are considered to be amongst the bigger national studies carried out in the country.

Addressing the needs of different groups of the Saudi population is necessary to ensure the well-being and safety of all. Adolescence is often a forgotten age group, even though adolescents constitute 20 per cent of the kingdom's population. There is a lack of indicators specifically addressing adolescents, not only in the kingdom but in the region. In order to be able to provide the necessary apparatus to promote the wellbeing of adolescents and youth, a national study, "Our Generation" (*Jeeluna*) has been carried out in which violence, injury and many other health risk behaviours have been addressed.

Image: NFSP

The Protect Us campaign led by the NFSP

Training of professionals

It is important to focus on providing state of the art multi-disciplinary training for professionals dealing with cases of abuse. The NFSP therefore set out to become one of the leading institutions in the country to provide this training. Courses are offered for medical professionals, mental health professionals, social workers and law enforcement officials on how to deal with cases of child abuse and neglect. There are also and multidisciplinary courses. The aim is to build the capacity of professionals from different disciplines and increase their knowledge and skills in this field. The courses also allow for better detection of cases, the lack of which can often be the sole reason for children enduring abuse or living under dire circumstances due to neglect.

Nationwide evidence based prevention programmes

Building on the training initiative, it seemed vital to provide training courses, not only to professionals dealing with cases of abuse, but to the victims themselves who had endured abuse as part of a rehabilitation programme. 2016 marked the first provision of this training in collaboration with the British Council to provide the "Spring Board" women's empowerment training to victims of abuse. The first training was conducted with 26 women who were either self-referred or referred from shelters. Currently, the NFSP is working on a Train the Trainer course and will graduate trainees who will become certified in offering this Spring Board training course in order to help the biggest number of victims on their journey of recovery and self-betterment.

Image: NFSP

Dr Maha with children at the Saudi Child Helpline conference

Parenting programmes

The Mother and Child Education Program (MOCEP) is an early childhood development parenting education programme for caregivers with children between the ages of three and nine. MOCEP was initiated by The Mother Child Education Foundation (AÇEV) in Turkey with the aim of equipping mothers with skills to enhance their parenting styles. The long term effect of this training will be the reduction of unnecessary hospital admissions and health conditions due to poor parenting skills. The benefits have proved to be tangible and successful based on AÇEV's many years of implementing the programme over the world. Due to its success, the NFSP adopted it as one of its national projects and is currently carrying it out across the country.

Global consultations

The NFSP's work in the field has transcended local outreach, not only through conferences, but through partaking in training workshops in the Gulf as well as making visits to the helplines in the region. In addition, it led a regional project on Child Maltreatment Prevention Readiness (CMPR) in all Gulf Council Countries (GCC), in an effort to assess gaps in the field of prevention and to ultimately develop prevention programmes that are suitable for the region. The NFSP has been invited on many occasions to global meetings to devise international toolkits and guidelines. In many of these meetings, the NFSP represents countries from the region and has contributed to drafting questionnaires such as the ACE-International Questionnaire.

The NFSP is also integral in the collection of indicators for adolescents – an age group largely missing from data in the Middle East. This project will pave the way for other counties in the region to collect data on their respective adolescent groups and contribute to global findings.

The NFSP is an example of what dedication, passion and political support can do. The organization came to life at a time where DV and child abuse were still considered taboo topics. It has faced much criticism because of the nature of its work and the sensitive matters it deals with, but perseverance and support have prevailed. Today children are more aware of their rights, families are learning more about the negative consequences of abuse and perpetrators know that there is a governing body that will ensure they are punished for their crimes. It is important to note the vital role played by inter-sectoral collaboration in ensuring a multidisciplinary approach to combating violence on a national level. It is also important to reference partnerships on an international level, and how beneficial it is to share knowledge and best practices to help bridge gaps and provide services of high standards. The issue of CM is one that affects us all, in every corner in the world, and we are all jointly responsible to provide children with healthy and safe homes to contribute to building prosperous societies.

Towards the safety of children

PI Anuradha, Lecturer, Department of Public Administration, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

Every child has the right to grow up in a safe environment. Despite that, many cases of child abuse are reported continually. It is a very serious social issue everywhere in the world and it affects millions of children each year. We must take a look at how child abuse has grown and become a part of society. It has precedents in history, for example in early Rome, the father had power to sell or kill his children. In Hawaii, Japan and China children with disabilities were killed to maintain a strong race while avoiding overpopulation.

Child abuse can be defined as any action by another person that causes significant harm to a child. It may take many forms; sexual, physical, and emotional. A child is sexually abused when they are forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities. Physical abuse is the deliberate hurting of a child, causing injuries. A child who is emotionally abused suffers emotional maltreatment or neglect. The National Child Protection Authority in Sri Lanka received 10,732 complaints of different forms of child abuse during 2015. 2,327 of those reported cruelty; 735 sexual harassment; 433 rape; 365 grave sexual abuse. 1,463 reports were received concerning children not receiving compulsory education and there were 885 reports of neglect. The total number has increased by 417 compared to 2014. This shows how severe the problem is.

Signs of child abuse are not always obvious, and a child might not tell anyone what has happened to them because of being afraid of the consequences. Some parents know nothing of what has happened to their children. Sometimes children don't understand that they are abused. The effects might last a long time, sometimes into adulthood. If someone has been abused as a child, it is more likely that they will suffer again, facing emotional difficulties such as anger, anxiety or sadness and also suffering from mental health problems like depression. Further, they are more likely to use alcohol which could result in struggling with parenting or relationships and they may refuse to attend school ultimately delaying the reaching of development milestones. Recent research has found that a loving, caring and stimulating environment during the first three years of a child's life is important for proper brain development while children who receive maltreatment in the early years may actually have suboptimal brain development.

Among different forms of child abuses, child sexual abuse is a very serious phenomenon. Surveys by rape crisis centres and sexual assault centres showed that one out of three girls and one out of seven boys are sexually abused before they reach the age of eighteen. The World Health Organization also asserts that an estimated 20 per cent of all women are victims of sexual abuse.

Seya Sadewmi's story is one among many cases of child sex abuse. Seya was a four year old Sri Lankan child who was kidnapped, raped and murdered. She went missing from her house while sleeping with her mother, her father being not at home. When the father returned and asked where the girl was, the mother told him that she assumed that she had gone to sleep in her grandmother's bed. They made no further investigation before going to sleep and discovered that the child was missing the next morning. The naked body of Seya was discovered near a canal that morning. The subsequent investigation found that she had been sexually assaulted.

Like little Seya, the same incident can happen to other children. We have a responsibility to do all that we can for these children. Some of us promote awareness, some donate time and money while some enforce laws protecting children from all kinds of abuse. Child abuse is not always easy to stop, but it is preventable. The majority of sexual abuse happens at the hands of an adult well known to the child, but that's what makes it harder to notice.

Efforts at prevention should start at home. Through activities such as parent education and parent support groups, many families will receive support in caring for their children within their homes. Parents may lack in understanding of their children's developmental stages and hold unreasonable expectations of their abilities. They may also be unaware of how to discipline their children most effectively at each age, resulting in harm. Prevention efforts can also enable parents to understand their child's emotional, physical and developmental needs.

Every child needs a strong relationship with parents and they often learn by example. Parental behaviour, values and attitudes have a strong influence on children. The family is the first and most immediate social environment to which a child is exposed and where a child develops its basic attitudes. Hence, family members can also play a valuable role in reducing violence – many cases have been reported where girls were sexually abused by their brother's friends. So, it is a responsibility of parents and other family members to keep violence away from their homes and to care for, rather than punish, their children.

It is very important for parents to keep an open line of communication between themselves and their children. For many, disclosure of sexual abuse is difficult to accept. Children who do disclose sexual abuse often tell a trusted adult or friend other than a parent. Therefore, training people who work with children in any capacity is very important.

Unfortunately, the advancement of technology can create a distance between child and parent. So, it is also a responsibility of parents to decide on the extent of their children's usage of technological devices.

Media also can play a pivotal role in preventing child abuse. It is the medium through which it can reach the attention of relevant authorities. Most importantly, media play a role as a provider of information and awareness. It is the responsibility of media to draw attention to child abuse and to present actions against child abuse worldwide. But, sometimes it is not good to show everything through the media, as it could lead people to try to perpetrate it themselves. The media should therefore present cases while keeping some restrictions on the content. To date, media campaigns on child abuse prevention have tended to be of limited duration and frequency. So, it is the responsibility of media to allocate more time for those campaigns. The government should allow the media to act independently in this regard.

The government also acts as a guardian of children from abuses by imposing laws against child abuse. The age of consent in Sri Lanka is sixteen, and a person engaging in sexual relations with someone aged sixteen or below is a recognized crime. Punishment is rigorous, with imprisonment of at least seven years which can be extended to twenty years. Since the number of child abuse cases are increasing it should further strengthen the law.

The government can also take preventive action. Most of the time, children are vulnerable to abuses because of their unawareness, but it is possible to educate children about sexual threats. The best way to start is the inclusion of sexual education in the school curriculum, making it a familiar topic, enabling children to look after themselves. Further, it is the responsibility of the government to intervene to help those who have already been abused, with the aim of preventing its recurrence and providing services to cater for the needs of those children and their families.

Society as a whole should protect children, because they are the future of the country. It should recognize that we all are members of a family. Attitudinal change should take place within the community to develop the feeling of 'ours', because every life is important. The community should initiate some family support programmes to reduce child abuses. One good example we can take from the US is the provision of nurse home visiting. This has been remarkably successful in bringing about a reduction in child abuse among women bearing their first children, who were either teenagers or unmarried and of low socioeconomic status.

Working individually may not generate the results as expected. So an integrated approach is needed in which all the parties take part in reducing the number of child abuse incidences, otherwise the price is too high. Unless children and families have adequate housing, health, education and income security, efforts to prevent child abuse will be hindered. The government, community and individual attitudes also need to reflect the value and importance of children in society. Equally important to the success of child abuse prevention is the coordination of programs and activities by different actors. This has the potential to strengthen the role of both the local community and the family, creating greater impact. The creation of a more caring and safer environment for children must therefore assume universal priority as we approach a better world.

Image: Prasad Thuduwage

Many children are afraid to come forward and speak out about abuse

Championing the voice of youth

Ediola Pashollari, Secretary General, World Assembly of Youth

The World Assembly of Youth (WAY) exists to help both youth and youth leaders to reach their full potential at a global level. WAY fully recognizes that young people need support via a strong youth community to achieve a better education and to maintain good health and wellbeing. Young people are concerned about study, work, health and their future and they also want opportunities to have fun and get engaged in culture, sports and recreation.

WAY was founded to bring the youth population from different societies, communities and countries together so that they can share ideas, thoughts and actions on how to improve cooperation among young people. Since its formation in 1949, WAY's pivotal approaches have been considered and participatory, with the aim of representing young people in the many situations where they have to make important decisions.

We bring people from different societies, communities and countries together so that they can share ideas, thoughts and actions on how to improve cooperation among young people, wherever they are in the world. As an international non-governmental organization, WAY not only promotes the interchange of ideas between youth from all countries, but also facilitates the collection of information about the needs and problems of youth. It also disseminates information about the methods, techniques and activities of youth organizations.

To give young people a pertinent voice, WAY holds a variety of activities and programmes that provide the platforms that young people need to be able to speak up. We also provide training to help the youth population develop their reasoning skills and express their thoughts, ideas and opinions responsibly and effectively.

Showcasing educational information on SDGs, MIYD, Youth issues celebrating the National Youth Day of Melaka

WAY never stops in it endeavours to make this world and today's society more youth-friendly. It is doing this by ensuring that young people are included in decision-making processes and that they have active participation in political, social, economic, cultural and environmental matters at all levels of society. As a result, WAY has helped to build a stronger partnership between youth, society and all key stakeholders.

The importance of active participation

The terms 'youth participation' and 'youth involvement' can be used interchangeably. Essentially they describe the ability for young people to have active and meaningful involvement in various activities within their communities, impacting their wellbeing in a positive way. The very definition of participation means that they should be free to involve themselves in the social and development process in a way that is active, voluntary and informed. A form of youth participation is youth adult partnership, in which adults work in full partnership with young people on issues facing youth and or on programmes and policies affecting youth.

Only through active participation and empowerment will young people be able to make safe, informed and responsible decisions regarding their reproductive health and to contribute effectively to programmes. The capacity for our societies to progress is based, among other elements, on their ability to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of the future. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilise support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account.

Youth organisations create important platforms for developing the skills necessary for young people to have effective participation in society, promoting tolerance and increased cooperation. Youth involvement on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is crucial. Young people are the leaders of tomorrow and therefore pivotal players in tackling global development issues.

Preparing for the future

It is imperative that youth from all parts of the world actively participate in all relevant levels of decision-making processes because it affects their lives today and has implications for their futures. Numerous actions and recommendations within the international community have been proposed by WAY to ensure that young people have a secure and healthy future. We want them to thrive in a high quality environment with improved standards of living and access to education and employment.

Educational Campaign conducted by World Assembly of Youth in order to maximize youth potential through Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The National Youth Day of Melaka #youth #leadership #speakup #youthissues #YouthNow #SDGs #HBN #BubleParade #WAY #MIYD

Young people have a stronger voice and they could be better served by local and national institutions, with more robust youth-friendly policies. They also should have access to economic and social opportunities in order for them to share economic growth, live healthy lives, and contribute to household, community and national wellbeing.

In order to accomplish the SDGs, youth related organisations are also required to contribute actively. They should be able to encourage and help young people to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to promote sustainable development and tackle youth issues. They should also encourage youth involvement in conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, supporting them to recycle and avoid unsustainable consumptions, including overconsumption. They should educate young people with the right skills to implement resilient agricultural practices to eradicate hunger in their communities.

The National Youth Councils should promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation and entrepreneurship, apprenticeship, creativity and innovation. In partnership with all stakeholders, they should organise programmes that can equip young people with the right skills and knowledge to eradicate poverty in their communities and society.

The National Youth Councils should form partnerships, share resources and knowledge with all stakeholders in order to foster their approach in tackling youth issues. They should also value and take action on the inputs and ideas brought forward by the young people and promote the participation of young people in community service and encourage voluntary work in the community development.

A platform for growth

WAY has developed a strategic plan that acts as a roadmap for its activities. The Millennium Plan of Action (MPAC) has been developed every year during the General Assembly. The fourth MPAC aims to achieve inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels, proactively improving the legal enabling environment for all young people. We request all members to value and accommodate the inputs and ideas brought forward by the young people.

Therefore, we encourage all stakeholders to involve young people in decision-making processes and also allow them to be part of the planning, monitoring, implementation and evaluation of national youth policies. Our members organise innovative programmes that would enhance the right knowledge and other policy-related youth issues.

WAY also has volunteers which are the ultimate renewable resource for SDGs' delivery across all thematic areas. WAY's vision is the progressive participation of young people at all levels (locally, nationally, regionally and internationally) in order to promote sustainable development and ensure that the interests of youth are taken into account.

At the moment, various stakeholders across the globe are developing and revising youth strategies and policies, hence there is a need for young people and relevant stakeholders to collaborate together and make the necessary changes. We all want a world where youth could fully participate in development processes, and play active roles in peace building and community development. Studies and statistics show that youth are falling short. It is the time to get beyond lofty rhetoric and ensure that young people are explicitly part of the inclusive development agenda and well-intended consultation.

It is critical that youth are addressed in a more wide-ranging and concrete manner than in the current proposal. Young people must be seen as serious partners in the soon to be adopted sustainable development goals.

As the Secretary General of WAY I stand for young people and believe that the nurturing of young minds is about giving them hope through compelling personal stories shared by experts from various walks of life or professions, and have been able to achieve that through strategic partnerships, platforms and volunteers.

Young people should be given the opportunity to have their leadership, interpersonal and entrepreneurship skills polished through four different skills models:

- Life skills: It's important to create a platform that supports the learning of life skills that will build a good base for self-development
- Career development skills: Provide young people with the necessary strategies that will facilitate career awareness and appropriate career selection tools that will inform their intended fields of study
- Entrepreneurship skills: Educate young people about the business skills they need and offer them real and practical experience in running small businesses of their own
- Leadership skills: Young people need skills and knowledge necessary to lead in any environment and understand the importance of this competency (that involves working in a team and decision making).

The South Mararikulam model – a women-friendly panchayat project

Dr Neena Joseph, Former Professor, Institute of Management in Government

Kerala state in India is unique, in relation to the whole of the country, in its exemplary achievements towards gender parity within the health and education sectors. But its record of safety and security of women against sexual assaults is dismal, considering the density of crimes. When Mr NP Snehajan became president of South Mararikulam panchayat, he vowed to combat violence after an extensive tour of the panchayat revealed strong evidence of cases of brutality.

South Mararikuam panchayat is an elected local body (*grama panchayats*) in the Alappuzha district of Kerala, India. With the 73rd and 74th Amendment of Indian Constitution, local bodies in the country, were given statutory power as local self governments with the funds, functionaries and functions devolved to grassroots level. Each grama panchayat is divided into wards and in each ward there are elected representatives or ward members. At the grama panchayat level, there is a committee which is constituted by the elected members from each ward. In Kerala, the government had initiated and supported community based organisations at the level of panchayats, wards and neighbourhoods through Kudumbasree – the Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission launched in 1998 and inaugurated by the then prime minister.

Mr Snehajan, believed that unless the safety of women can be guaranteed within the panchayat, they could not participate effectively in its affairs and, unless this 50 per cent of the population could participate effectively, then social development is impossible. His first initiative as president was to ensure a sexual abuse-free environment for women. He adopted a multi-pronged strategy of preventive, curative, rehabilitative and ameliorative initiatives. He strongly believed in lobbying and networking for the fulfilment of his dream. He knew that he could utilize the existing structure and system as well as the human power to accomplish the objective. He sought the help of the then member of legislative assembly, Mr Thomas Isaac and also consulted the essential professionals. All of the existing strengths of the system were utilised and opportunities offered by the system were exploited.

The grama panchayats had to make their own plans and budgets. The first step was to legitimise the initiatives and to incorporate them into the panchayat plan and budget. Gender budgeting was paramount, with ample provision for women oriented projects.

Image: South Mararikulam Grama Panchayat, Alappuzha District, Kerala, India

Enthusiastic public participation in the photo exhibition *Highlights of the Research and Actions Thus Far*, 4–5 March 2012

Image: South Mararikulam Grama Panchayat, Alappuzha District, Kerala, India

Sugatha Kumari, poet, social activist and former chairperson of Kerala State Women's Commission at the workshop *On the Way Forward*, 4 March 2012

A massive plan of conscientisation was also required. Mr Snehajan sought the help of psychiatrists and public health officials to assist him in the task of organizing a series of classes on gender based violence and the scope and potential of panchayats to combat it. Trainers were themselves trained who then conducted their training programmes at ward level. At the end of the programmes, a professionally designed questionnaire was distributed to a total of 4,881 women and girls seeking information on the prevalence of sexual assault; the type, timing and frequency of assault; the specific spaces in the panchayats where the incidents took place; the relationship of perpetrator to victim; the justice-seeking behaviour of the victim; the reasons for not seeking justice; and the impact of violence on the victim and family. The information generated was used to design projects which had the legitimate back up of the study which extended over three months in 2011. 60 per cent of respondents reported sexual harassment. Crime mapping was carried out and the danger zones within the panchayat were identified.

The *Jagratha samithies* (a voluntary vigilant group of citizens which act as the eyes and ears of the Kerala Women's Commission) were revived and revitalised. Unsafe areas were made safe, for example by clearing wildly grown vegetation and planting tapioca. The panchayat set up a Women Resource Centre with a library. A psychologist regularly visited the centre and gave counselling to women. A legal aid clinic was set up to give free legal aid and legal counselling. Lawyers from an approved panel visited the centre regularly. Thus, women were given a public space to nurture their social capital which would be useful, especially in cases where they had to stand up against violence.

In Kerala, schools (except high schools) were handed over to the grama panchayats. The panchayat launched an extensive scheme of Taekwondo training for the mothers of girls in the school who in turn trained the girls for self defence. Wherever there was a gap, they sought help from the state government in Trivandrum and even from central government in Delhi using their political connections.

Autonomy was given to ward members to conduct experiments in their own ward. One ward member declared her ward as alcohol free with the participation of the citizens. The formal launching of the project was marked with a candle lit procession with beating of drums. The message of zero tolerance of violence against women was transmitted loudly and clearly. The network of police, lawyers and the elected representatives materialized in the course of various training programmes and activities. There were incidents where this network and the newly constituted mechanisms were beneficially used to detect and eradicate practices such as the illegal brewing and serving of liquor. The crime rate declined steadily. The model attracted the attention of central government, researchers and the international community, including UNICEF. BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) delegates visited the panchayat. Citizen ownership and wide acclaim sustained the project through the political changes. Out of the total plan allocation in the panchayat, 63 per cent are women-orientated.

To summarise, the model has shown the following to be the necessary ingredients for success and sustainability: inspired and visionary leadership at local level; research-backed project planning; the gathering of appropriate professional help; political support from the top especially up to the stabilization stage; prudent networking; ownership and participation of the community, from problem identification through to the implementation of solutions; integration of the project into plans budget at local level; gender budgeting; winning the attention and approval at top level including that of central government. This is a model that is replicable, scalabale and adaptable.

One planet, one family – the Sikh path to a just, peaceful and inclusive world

Dr Birendra Kaur, Vice President, Institute of Sikh Studies

The Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib,[1] states: "The world is like a garden (of flowers) and God is the Gardener.[2] Not a single leaf or branch is outside His care."[3] His love is universal; unconditional and all-encompassing.[4] Guru Granth Sahib itself is an embodiment of an all-inclusive worldview as, apart from divine hymns of Sikh Gurus, it also enshrines selected hymns of Hindu and Muslim pious souls, irrespective of their religion, caste or place of origin. The core message is the parenthood of God and siblinghood of humankind.

Guru Nanak (1469–1539 CE), the founder of Sikh Faith, dedicated his entire life to bringing humanity under the umbrella of One Supreme Being. His opening words in Guru Granth Sahib are "One God" (*Ek Oankar*). The numeral '1' prefixed to *Oankar* emphasizes the singularity of the creator of the entire creation. Its corollary is the uncompromising oneness of the whole human race. This message echoes throughout Guru Granth Sahib: "God of all is One and the Only One.[5] From the One Light has welled up the entire universe, then who is good and who is bad?[6] All creatures are noble; none low, as One Sole Maker has fashioned all vessels."[7]

The Guru claims no exclusivity for the path laid down, the prayer being: "O Lord, the world is on fire; shower Thy benediction to save it; deliver it through whatever way possible."[8] The Guru envisions a world where everyone enjoys equality and dignity, and where harmonious coexistence is the order of the day.[9] Guru Nanak not only recorded his message for humanity but also put in place institutions, which would serve and propagate his ideals for posterity, and bring about sustainable transformation in society.

People, in his times, were either oppressors or the oppressed. The natives were not only tormented by foreign rulers but also agonized by the local religious elite. They were categorized within a social order by birth, and blinded by superstitious beliefs. Thus, while the inhuman brutality

Image: www.goldentempleamritsar.org

Emperor Akbar partaking of langar before meeting the third Guru, Guru Amar Das, 1479–1574

Guru Gobind Singh seeking initiation from the *panj pyaras*

of the invaders needed to be confronted, the centuries-old slavish mentality of the natives also had to be addressed. The Guru's goal of ensuring justice and harmony in society thus warranted emboldening the frightened, liberating the superstitious, and equating the lowly. To execute his vision, the Guru toured the country of his birth (pre-partition India) and beyond its boundaries in what is now Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Muscat, Oman, Tibet, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, to interact with religious leaders and their followers. He was deeply revered by all for his message of love and equality. No wonder that when he passed away, both Hindus and Muslims asserted their claim to perform his last rites in the way of their respective customs. A popular adage from the times says: "Nanak, the rich indeed, unconcerned for worldly riches, he is the spiritual guide of Hindus as well as Muslims" (*Nanak shah faqir, hindu ka guru, musalman ka pir.*)

The Guru defines a new level of existence for the masses – to rise above social, religious, racial, caste and gender denominations. People had to be made aware that equality is a birthright; the concept of superiority and inferiority had to be purged; misogynistic frames of mind had to be negated. As one of the measures, Guru Nanak introduced free food to be partaken by all together, irrespective of caste, status, gender, religion (*langar* and *pangat*) which, though a simple practice, had far-reaching ramifications. It not only catered for the needy but also ended the dehumanising prejudices and discrimination practised in society. Even the then emperor had to partake *langar*, before he was granted an audience with the Guru. The Guru not only awakened the people to lead a life of dignity, but also instilled in them fearlessness and fortitude to safeguard the same. He exhorts his followers thus: "If you want to play the game of love, then come unto my path with thy head placed on thy palm. Once on this path, then waiver not."[10]

The Guru respects diversity of cultures and religions as the right of people to follow a religious path of their choosing. The ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–1675), in an unparalleled precedent, guarded this right when he chose to embrace martyrdom for the sake of a people professing a religion other than his own, who were being forcefully converted to Islam by the Mughals. He thus affirmed this right to choose with his life. India fittingly honours the Guru by the title: "Protector of the Hindu nation" (*Hind di chaddar*). The role of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), towards the right to freedom to religion can be gauged from what Jogi Allah Yaar Khan, a renowned Muslim poet, writes about him: "But for Guru Gobind Singh, all would have been circumcised" (*Agar na hotey guru gobind singh, tau sunnat hoti sab ki*).

Guru Gobind Singh practically carried the vision of Guru Nanak to its culmination on the first of *Vaisakh* in 1699, when he created the Khalsa – a people who are saint-soldiers in the service of Almighty. For this, he invited the devout from across the length and breadth of the vast regions to assemble at Anandpur Sahib, Punjab, India. Of them he asked, wielding his unsheathed sword (*kirpan*), for one to rise who was ready to give his head for the Guru's cause. One rose and came forward. The Guru took him behind a tent and re-emerged with his blood-soaked *kirpan* to ask for another head. People were aghast, yet one more rose and offered his head. He repeated the call five times, and five individuals responded. To everyone's surprise, the Guru then presented all five to the congregation, in a new outfit. He initiated them by a special ceremony (*khande di pahul*)[11] into the Khalsa brotherhood, and bestowed the title "The five beloved ones" (*panj pyaras*) on them. Common surnames were given – Lion (*Singh*) to men and Crown Prince (*Kaur*) to women. The Khalsa consider themselves siblings, as children of Guru Gobind Singh and Mata Sahib Kaur, and their place of birth as Sri Anandpur Sahib. Thus was created a brotherhood in the true sense, which everyone was welcome to join by committing to its value-system. Taking equality to its height, the Guru merged his own status into the *panj pyaras*, as he bowed before them and sought initiation for himself, symbolising equality of not only different peoples but also of the Guru with the *panj pyaras*. Guru Gobind Singh is the prophet who is hailed with: "Wow! Wow! Guru Gobind Singh! He is himself the Guru, himself the disciple!" (*Wah! Wah! Guru Gobind Singh, aapey gur chela*).

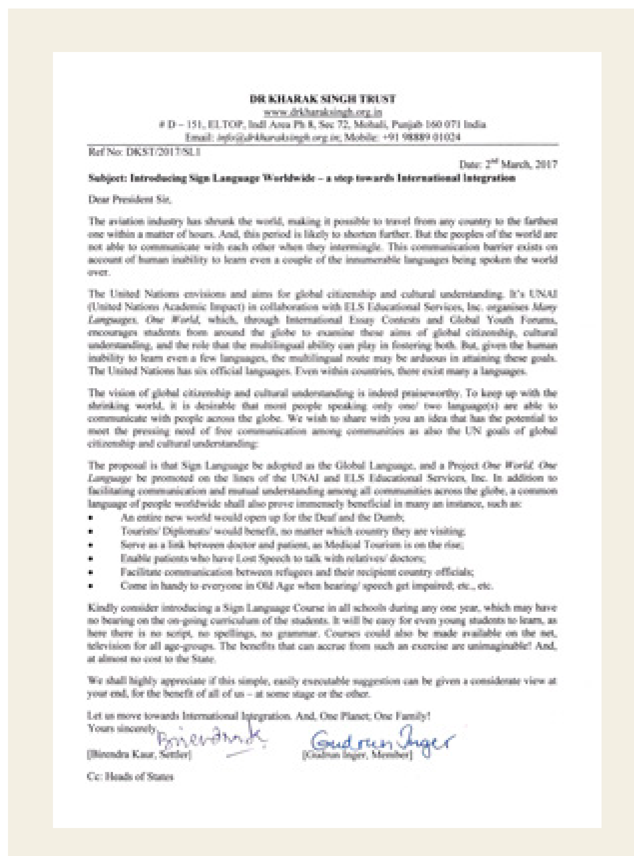
A society beyond caste, region, religion and race was born, dedicated to justice, righteousness, inclusiveness for all – all people, all equal. Thousands joined the Guru's new order on the same day. The Guru also bestowed five freedoms (*nash*), upon his followers and liberated them from the shackles of oppressive and derogatory practices and notions: hierarchy through lineage (*kul nash*); subjugation by religions and traditions (*dharma nash*); superstitions, prejudices (*bharam nash*); restrictions in choice of trade or profession (*kirt nash*); and burden of previous deeds, births (*karam nash*). The Guru, thus, created a people who are physically fearless, mentally enlightened, and spiritually elevated, who see the entire human race as one. "None is a stranger, nor an enemy.[12] None is alien, all are equal partners."[13]

A Sikh sees God in all, and his love for the Almighty finds expression in acts of service and love for His creation. "Selfless service to the people of the world is the route to earn pleasure of God."[14] Altruistic service, therefore, manifests itself in Sikh practices. A gurdwara is the place of refuge for one and all, where food and shelter is available to whosoever seeks it. The daily prayer in all gurdwaras across the globe is for the welfare of all (*sarbat da bhala*). Whether friend or foe, none is discriminated against, and nothing in return is expected – neither in cash nor in kind. To cite a recent instance, during the cash crunch and the hardships that followed demonetisation in India on the 8th November, 2016, some stranded tourists commented: "Thank God India has Sikhs." Even though Sikhs comprise less than 2% of India's population and less than 0.4% of the world's population, they are always at the forefront of reaching out to the hungry and the needy, especially in times of emergency or natural calamity and in terror-struck or war-torn regions.

The diaspora Sikhs, too, have made their presence felt in their new homelands, as their value-system and contributions to society are acknowledged and appreciated by the highest offices. The Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, issued the following statement on the occasion of Vaisakhi, 13th April, 2016: "Sikhism is rooted in teachings of equality, unity, selfless service and social justice – the very values which we all strive to incorporate in our daily lives. Canada is proud to be home to one of the largest Sikh populations in the world, and we thank the community for the immense contributions it makes to our country." The British Prime Minister, Theresa May, on the occasion of the 350th anniversary of the birth of Guru Gobind Singh, 5th January, 2017, mentioned: "…the establishment of the Khalsa, and what it represents – people standing up for equality, respect and fairness, and helping those less fortunate than themselves. Time and again I have seen these values put into practice, from visiting Gurdwaras to attending the Sikh war memorial in Derby. Indeed, when we celebrate Vaisakhi soon, we will be reminded once again how the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh ji enrich our wider society."

"Air is guru, water the father, earth the mother, and day and night the two nurses – female and male, in whose lap the entire world plays."[15] When nature nurtures all alike, and we all play in the same lap, we undeniably are, by an innate design – one planet, one family. However, the recent trend, even within democracies, is marked by separatism and elitism. Borders may shut out peoples, but these will prove ineffective against ever increasing incidences of disease, ever rising levels of pollution, ever advancing means of warfare. No country would be able to isolate or insulate itself indefinitely. Vision demands that we see our inevitable future, and configure our approach accordingly, and in time.

One planet, one family is the only way forward for humankind. We need to embrace globalisation as working towards welfare for all, where none is discriminated against or exploited, so the garden of God may be created on earth.



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Ref No: DKST/2017/SL1

Date: 2nd March, 2017

Subject: Introducing Sign Language Worldwide – a step towards International Integration

Dear President Sir,

The aviation industry has shrunk the world, making it possible to travel from any country to the farthest one within a matter of hours. And, this period is likely to shorten further. But the peoples of the world are not able to communicate with each other when they intermingle. This communication barrier exists on account of human inability to learn even a couple of the innumerable languages being spoken the world over.

The United Nations envisions and aims for global citizenship and cultural understanding. It's UNAI (United Nations Academic Impact) in collaboration with ELS Educational Services, Inc. organises *Many Languages, One World*, which, through International Essay Contests and Global Youth Forums, encourages students from around the globe to examine these aims of global citizenship, cultural understanding, and the role that the multilingual ability can play in fostering both. But, given the human inability to learn even a few languages, the multilingual route may be arduous in attaining these goals. The United Nations has six official languages. Even within countries, there exist many a languages.

The vision of global citizenship and cultural understanding is indeed praiseworthy. To keep up with the shrinking world, it is desirable that most people speaking only one/ two language(s) are able to communicate with people across the globe. We wish to share with you an idea that has the potential to meet the pressing need of free communication among communities as also the UN goals of global citizenship and cultural understanding.

The proposal is that Sign Language be adopted as the Global Language, and a Project *One World, One Language* be promoted on the lines of the UNAI and ELS Educational Services, Inc. In addition to facilitating communication and mutual understanding among all communities across the globe, a common language of people worldwide shall also prove immensely beneficial in many an instance, such as:

- An entire new world would open up for the Deaf and the Dumb;
- Tourists/ Diplomats/ would benefit, no matter which country they are visiting;
- Serve as a link between doctor and patient, as Medical Tourism is on the rise;
- Enable patients who have Lost Speech to talk with relatives/ doctors;
- Facilitate communication between refugees and their recipient country officials;
- Come in handy to everyone in Old Age when hearing/ speech get impaired; etc., etc.

Kindly consider introducing a Sign Language Course in all schools during any one year, which may have no bearing on the on-going curriculum of the students. It will be easy for even young students to learn, as here there is no script, no spellings, no grammar. Courses could also be made available on the net, television for all age-groups. The benefits that can accrue from such an exercise are unimaginable! And, at almost no cost to the State.

We shall highly appreciate if this simple, easily executable suggestion can be given a considerate view at your end, for the benefit of all of us – at some stage or the other.

Let us move towards International Integration. And, One Planet; One Family!
Yours sincerely,

Birendra Kaur | Gudrun Inger

[Birendra Kaur, Settler] [Gudrun Inger, Member]

Cc: Heads of States

Letter for promoting intercultural and international understanding, sent from Birendra Kaur to heads of state and to UNAI and ELS Educational Services

Pictured overleaf: Letter from Birendra Kaur to Ban Ki-moon, sent in December 2016, while he was in office as Secretary General, UN, before Antonio Guterres took office in January 2017

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Date: 13th December, 2016

***Observing International Day for Freedom of Faith/ Religion On the Martyrdom Day of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru* (24th November)**

Respected Mr Ban Ki-moon,

The Right to Freedom of Religion is a well-accepted statute in this day and age. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations proclaimed, in its Article 18, the Right to Freedom of Religion. In 1950, the Constitution of India, in its Article 25, conferred the Right to Freedom of Religion to all citizens.

However, four centuries ago, in 1675, this Right and Freedom were highlighted and established by Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru. He made the ultimate sacrifice of his life for protecting the rights of Hindus, who were being forcibly converted to Islam. The only choice offered to them was: conversion or death.

The fact that the *Pandits* (the highest in the hierarchy of castes in Hinduism) came to the Guru all the way from Kashmir to Sri Anandpur Sahib, approx 500 kms away, seeking his help, points to the Guru's benevolent disposition towards the oppressed, irrespective of their religion. The Guru declared that if the Emperor could convert him, all the others would convert too.

The Guru practised what he preached: Frighten not; Fear not (page 1427, Guru Granth Sahib, the Eternal, Word Guru of Sikhs). Through his deep conviction and unparalleled courage, he upheld the freedom and right of everyone to practice one's own Faith.

The Guru's martyrdom is *the* only of its kind in the entire history of mankind, in that:

- The Guru sacrificed his life for a people who professed a religion other than his own. Rather, this was the religion, whose symbols his predecessor, Guru Nanak, the founder Sikhism, had refused to wear. And now, he was protecting the right of the Hindus to wear their symbols, with his life. His cause was for humanity.
- The Guru volunteered to make the ultimate sacrifice of his life; he was not asked or forced to appear before the then Emperor. He headed, on foot, with three followers – Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das and Bhai Dyal Das, to the Emperor at Delhi about 300 kms away, with no means of communication, given the times to which he belonged. This indicates the importance he attached to the issue of Freedom of Religion.
- The Guru chose martyrdom in spite of the fact that he was a great warrior. In fact, his name is the title (*Tegh Bahadur – brave wielder of sword*) his father, Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh Guru, bestowed upon him for his performance in the battles he fought against oppression, injustice. The Guru pit unarmed individual against the might of an Emperor, and put across the utter failure/ helplessness of even an army at the hands of a man of God in this regard.
- The Guru's companions were tortured and martyred in front of him to weaken, frighten him so he may give up his Faith and convert to Islam. But the Guru was a man of God!

The exceptional nature of this ultimate sacrifice for humankind by Guru Tegh Bahadur and his companions needs to be shared with all, the world over. This shall advance understanding and promote peaceful co-existence amongst all religions across the globe.

It would be most befitting for the United Nations to mark and observe the martyrdom day of Guru Tegh Bahadur (24th November) as the International Day for Freedom of Faith/ Religion.

Kindly realize this noble task for the sake of brotherhood of mankind.

With best regards,
Yours sincerely, Birendra K. Gudrun Inger

(Birendra Kaur, Settler) (Gudrun Sumit Kaur, Member)

Sustainable development in the Islamic world through social finance

Dr Mohammed Obaidullah, Senior Economist, Islamic Research and Training Institute, Islamic Development Bank Group

The Islamic world is enormous, with over 1.6 billion people, or 23 per cent of the global population, according to the Pew Report, 2015. It stretches from Senegal to the Philippines, and comprises six regions: North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Except for several countries in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, there are high and rising poverty levels in both urban and rural parts of most Muslim countries. It is estimated that just five of the member countries of the OIC and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group account for over half a billion of the world's poor. Poverty levels have also been associated with high inequality alongside low productivity.

The Islamic world also faces grave challenges from climate and environment changes. For example, a sizable number, nineteen of the member countries of OIC and IsDB Group from Sub-Saharan Africa, are dependent on agriculture, and are affected most by climate change. It is estimated that in Sub-Saharan Africa, a one-degree rise in global temperature causes a 1.9 percent reduction in annual growth. Further, the most vulnerable countries have historically been low carbon emitters although these have also experienced steady emissions growth. Emissions in these countries have more than trebled over the last two decades. The sustainable development goals (SDGs) that set an agenda or a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity and target extreme poverty as well as climate change risk, therefore, assume grave significance for the Islamic world.

The SDGs and Shariah-driven finance

While poverty is widespread, access to financial services in the Islamic world is either inadequate or exclusive. In as many as 17 countries only one-fifth or less of their adult population has access. Among other things, a factor contributing to financial exclusion in the Islamic world is the incompatibility of conventional finance with belief systems in these societies. A CGAP survey undertaken in several countries with a signif-

Small vendors at Dushanbe

icant Muslim population in 2007 interestingly observed that 20–40 per cent of respondents cited religious reasons for not accessing conventional microloans and suggested Shariah-compliant microfinance as a way "to expand access to finance to unprecedented levels throughout the Muslim world."

Islamic economists invoke the framework of Maqasid al-Shariah (MaS), or the objectives of Shariah, to chart the trajectory for finance in the Islamic world. It is interesting to note that many SDGs clearly align with the objectives of Shariah. According to Shariah, human beings, as vicegerents of God, have the mission of faithfully observing the values given by their creator. They may utilize the scarce resources of the planet as trustees and must interact with each other in accordance with rules with a view to not only ensuring the well-being of all humans but also, protecting the environment, including animals, birds and insects. A clearly articulated objective of the Shariah is preservation of wealth (*maal*) that includes natural resources and the environment and it calls for avoidance of excess (*israf*) and balanced use of resources. Pioneering research by the Islamic Research and Training Institute (IRTI) has demonstrated the alignment of the SDGs with the MaS framework, and argued that MaS-driven Islamic finance, therefore, would work towards achieving the SDGs.

Contemporary Islamic finance as it has evolved over the last four decades has focused on the commercial banking, insurance and capital markets. The emphasis on the for-profit modes and institutions has led to an increasing concern that the sector may be experiencing a mission drift. This has led to calls for responsible finance as well as reversion to Maqasid-driven Islamic finance. This would imply greater concern for alleviation of poverty and hunger as well as environmental stewardship.

The IsDB Group as a development finance institution is perhaps an exception that has incorporated social and environmental themes as the basis for many of its strategic priorities, which include:

- Inclusiveness and solidarity focus in addressing the needs of poorer and marginalized communities
- Connectivity for growth-promoting cooperation among its member countries
- Promoting the development of the Islamic financial sector.

For the purpose of climate change management, IsDB has, in the past, funded a mix of both adaptation and mitigation projects. Investments in such projects, e.g. climate-smart agriculture, and clean and renewable energy, have increased exponentially over the years. It has employed a mix of grants, not-for-profit and for-profit mechanisms to finance such projects. The Islamic Research and Training Institute, a member of the IsDB Group, recognized early that the Islamic social finance sector comprising *zakah*, *awqaf*, mutual and not-for-profit components needs a strong fillip and must not lag behind the mainstream Islamic banking, insurance and capital markets. To this end, IRTI has embarked on producing periodic reports on the sector focusing on specific regions. So far, it has covered over twenty countries in three regions – South and South East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia – and the annual Islamic Social Finance Reports offer significant insights into the status and challenges facing the Islamic social finance sector.

SDGs and role of Islamic social finance

Islamic social finance refers to institutions and instruments of Islamic philanthropy, e.g. *zakah*, *sadaqah* and *awqaf*, as well as those of not-for-profit Islamic finance, e.g. *qard* and *kafala*. These occupy a central position in the Islamic scheme of poverty alleviation. The broad term for philanthropy in Islam is *sadaqah*, and when compulsorily mandated on an eligible Muslim, it is called *zakah*. When *sadaqa* results in a flow of benefits that are expected to be stable and permanent (such as, through endowment of a physical property), it is called *sadaqa jariya* or *waqf*. *Zakah* is the third among five pillars of Islam and its payment is an obligation on the wealth of every Muslim based on clear-cut criteria. Rules of Shariah are fairly clear and elaborate in defining the nature of who are liable to pay *zakah*, at what rate it must be paid and who can benefit. There is total flexibility with respect to beneficiaries of voluntary *sadaqa* and *waqf*.

Qard refers to interest-free loans while *kafala* refers to uncompensated guarantee. Islamic microfinance that advocates use of such cost-less funds to absorb high administrative and operational costs associated with financing the poor is widely believed to resolve the issue of affordability in microfinance and bring financial services within the reach of the poorest of the poor.

In the area of climate finance, *zakat* can play a similar role in absorbing the incremental costs with clean technologies where subsidies are not forthcoming to absorb the same. For *zakat* funds to be used for the purpose, an additional condition has to be met, i.e. the beneficiaries must be poor.

The institution of *waqf* can play a major role in climate finance. Along with *zakat* and *sadaqa* it can certainly help in coping with humanitarian crises resulting from climate change. *Awqaf*-like foundations may directly engage in the

Use of Zakat for a guarantee institution

The concept of guarantee is well-established in Islamic law. In the contract of *kafala*, a party accepts to guarantee or take responsibility for a liability of another party. However, it is an uncompensated contract in Islamic law and the capital needed for creating a *kafala*-based institution cannot be sourced from mainstream for-profit modes. Theoretically, *zakat* funds may be used to clear the liability of an indebted party. Indeed, the law of *zakat* identifies eight categories as potential beneficiaries. Of these, the indebted (*gharimeen)*, have traditionally received an insignificant part of *zakat* proceeds, with the bulk being directed at the poor and the needy.

In perhaps the first documented example of the organized utilization of *zakat* for the *gharimeen*, a security portfolio was created through a partnership between the body for *zakah* management in Sudan (*Diwan zakah*) and the Sudanese commercial banks engaged in microfinance. The portfolio has a capital of GBP 200m with 25 per cent contributed by the *Diwan zakah* and the balance by the banks. The portfolio provides an insurance to the microfinance programme against genuine defaults by clients at the second level. At the first level, the default is covered by individual personal guarantor(s) brought in by the client. The portfolio covers all productive sectors, commercial, agricultural and vocational, across Sudan.

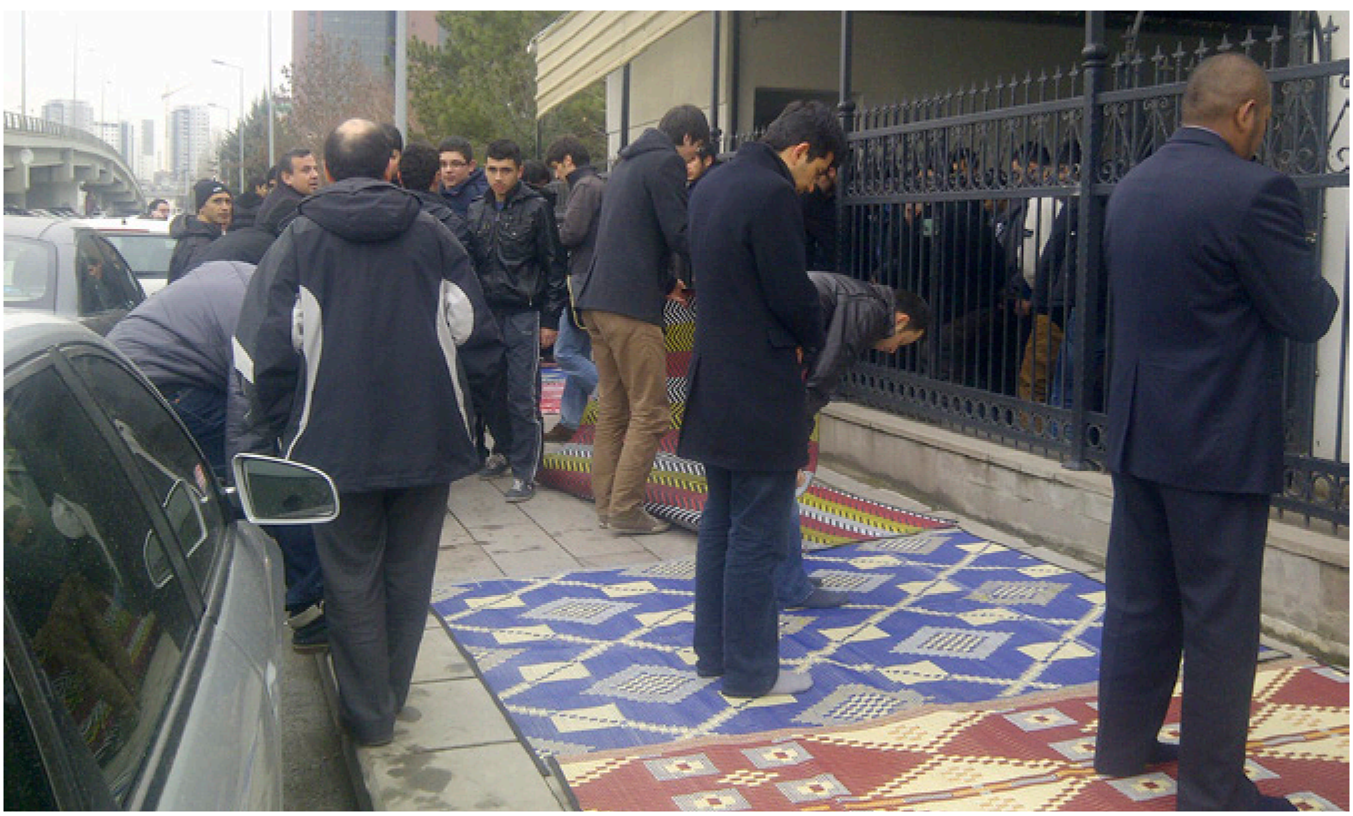
provision of goods and services related to mitigation and adaptation. Such green *awqaf* may be established as dedicated entities for the conservation of soil, water, plants, and waste disposal. *Awqaf* may also be dedicated to research and development that induce a movement along the learning curve and fall in clean technology prices. *Awqaf* may be dedicated towards increasing consumer awareness and a stronger support of action to mitigate climate change.

Zakat is also increasingly being seen as a tool of humanitarian finance. An interesting 2015 document: *An Act of Faith: Humanitarian Financing and Zakat*, echoes the concerns expressed by the UN Humanitarian Summit at the ever-increasing demand and supply gap for humanitarian funds and suggests mainstreaming of the *zakat* sector to meet the resource gap.

The primary issue with a philanthropy-based solution to multiple development challenges is one of sustainability. Funds mobilized through donation-based tools tend to fluctuate from time to time and may not lend themselves to careful planning and implementation. Conceptually, this is not true in case of *zakat*, which is a compulsory annual levy on eligible Muslims. Therefore, *zakat* should result in regular and recurring cash flows. Benefits from *waqf* or endowed assets are meant to flow, also on a sustainable basis. Empirical evidence from the IRTI reports corroborate this possibility. Most of the countries where the Islamic social finance sector has witnessed proactive and progressive regulation and other enabling measures, e.g. Malaysia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Sudan, are also characterized by exponential growth in the flow of Islamic social funds over time. Case studies of successful Islamic social finance institutions at a micro level have demonstrated that *zakat* is sustainable, dependable and could be a growing source of funds for institutions that acquire the necessary professionalism in fund-raising and seek continued betterment in their social credibility through integrity, transparency and good governance. Endowments (*awqaf*) – physical as well as cash – have successfully been developed with the infusion of private capital in an enabling regulatory, fiscal and progressive Shariah environment such as, in Singapore, Malaysia and Sudan, resulting in a steady enhancement of benefits to the intended beneficiaries. Success stories of *qard*-based financing of the poor, such as in Pakistan and Iran, have also been well-documented.

Islamic social funds, especially *zakah* and *awqaf*, can potentially meet resource shortfalls to alleviate widespread poverty. Recent studies by IRTI as well as by the World Bank have estimated the potential *zakat* collection in their member countries and concluded that such funds by themselves can meet the entire resources shortfall to lift every single poor out of extreme poverty. However, the potential remains unrealized as actual *zakah* mobilized and returns of *awqaf* assets fall far short of their potential in most countries.

Despite overarching goals of social justice and equity, Islamic banking, *takaful* and the Islamic capital market are for-profit sectors that have been criticized for not doing enough to help the poor and unbankable. Islamic social finance has a significant role to play in alleviating poverty. A sustained flow of social funds demands high degrees of social acceptance and credibility, which in turn, are influenced by levels of integrity, transparency and professionalism in the management of these funds.



Students praying on the pavement in Ankara, Turkey

The key to empowering sustainable development

Ambassador Ramil Hasanov, Secretary General; Pelin Musabay Baki, Project Director; Yedil Myrzakhanov, Project Director, Turkic Council

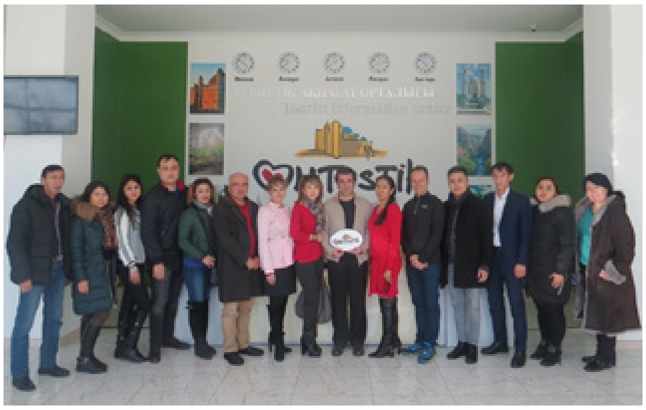
The year 2016 was a testing time for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted at the historic United Nations Summit held in September 2015. Capacity building constitutes one of the fundamental methods to achieve these goals and this loaded global agenda in a timely and duly manner. Capacity building is one of the most used terms within the SDG and the 2030 Agenda, so it is necessary to fully understand its meaning in order to implement it in the most effective way.

The Turkic Council is the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States – Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey. It attributes the utmost importance to supporting capacity building in different areas of cooperation in the region. The Council operates within a wide range of sectors, from economy, tourism, education, media, transport and customs to information and communication technologies, renewable energy, youth and sports. It believes that capacity building is the key instrument used in maintaining sustainable development.

As an observer of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and within the scope of its deepening relations with international organizations such as UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), World Customs Organization (WCO), Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council emphasizes the significance of capacity building in improving the effectiveness of cooperation in our region and beyond.

In each area where it operates as a regional intergovernmental organization, the Council aims to strengthen multilateralism with an action-oriented, comprehensive and cooperative approach to development challenges. Aware of the complex features of regional challenges, the Council has identified the hurdles to overcome in order to achieve the SDGs, and frames its projects to produce solutions with a tailored-made approach. While implementing

The Turkic Council Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package will provide a unique adventure for tourists to rediscover the famous trail



The Republic of Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism continuously provides service sector training for the other Turkic Council Member States

The Turkic Council Business Council web portal provides a platform for collaboration between Eurasian businesses

these projects with the firm support of its Member States, the Council attributes utmost importance to strong, genuine, broad-based partnership and solidarity as well as experience sharing, technical assistance and exchange of good practices in designing and implementing its activities.

An example of this cooperation among council members is in the field of tourism. Since December 2013, with the initiative of the Turkic Council, the Turkish Ministry of Culture was able to share its vast experience of the services sector through vocational training programmes run for tourism employees of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Through these programmes, Turkey's rich know-how and experience have been transferred to other Member States. More than 1000 tourism employees benefited from the training. Almost 50% of trainees were female. The training was instrumental in developing skills for high-quality hospitality services and contributed to generating good jobs in the Turkic Council Member States, addressing SDG 8 – promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

The training empowered the Turkic Council Member States, making a success of the implementation of the Turkic Council Modern Silk Road Tour Package Project that offers a unique journey along the traditional Silk Road. This project will also contribute to rural development in the Turkic Council Member States through various means.

Joint training programmes for junior diplomats present another remarkable example of the efforts of the Turkic Council for capacity building through exchange of experience and best practices. These programmes have been implemented annually in accordance with the Cooperation Protocol among the Ministries of Foreign Affairs signed at the Third Summit of the Turkic Council.

The main purpose of this exercise is to acquaint young diplomats with the foreign policies and commonalities of history, culture and language of the Member States, as well as to establish friendly ties. The content of the training is generated annually by the Secretariat of the Turkic Council taking into consideration the priorities of the Council and the host country, based on the experience and comments of the participants of the previous programmes. One of the Member States hosts the two-week training which consists of lectures by academicians, top government officials and high ranking diplomats; cultural tours to historical places and official visits. The Third Junior Diplomats Joint Training Programme was held from 25 May to 5 June 2016 in Kazakhstan. Hungary, as the first non-member country, also took part in the Programme. The next training programme is planned to be held in Kyrgyzstan in 2017.

For the Turkic Council, capacity building has a special stake in the field of economics. The Council prioritizes development and enhancement of SMEs, empowerment of human capital through capacity building and use of effective tools for research. Hence, the Turkic Business Forums regularly convened by the Council, and the Turkic Business Portal (www.turkicbusiness.com) where more than 220 companies have been registered to enhance capacity of Member States in different segments of the economy. The Fourth Turkic Council Business Forum convened on 28 April 2016, in Bishkek was attended by more than 100 business people from Member States representing the fields of the mining industry, energy, tourism, agriculture, food processing and light industry. Also, an initiative of the Turkic Council, in cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank, has been to create a mapping study of the resource centres of Azerbaijan. The Council believes that, through this and similar projects, it will contribute to identification, matching and exchange of solutions for further fostering development cooperation in and around the region.

Customs cooperation is another area where the Council focuses on capacity building. Through field visits, the Council analyses the needs of Member States to bolster collaboration in this area. For instance, in order to promote joint actions and projects to strengthen customs cooperation among the Silk Road countries, visits by delegations from Azerbaijan, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the Turkic Council Secretariat were made between 27 and 29 September 2016 to Kyrgyz-Chinese Torugart and Kazakh-Chinese Altynkol border crossing points as well as to the Khorgoz Free Trade Zone located on the Kazakh-Chinese border. These field visits were instrumental in making needs assessments and tailoring capacity building solutions.

Another important element of capacity building is education. In 2016, the Council launched the student exchange

Cooperation in the area of customs and transport are one of the key areas on the agenda of the Turkic Council, ensuring uninterrupted and secure transportation through the central corridor via the Caspian Sea

The World Nomadic Games brings sportsmen from all over the world to revive the traditional sports of the Turkic speaking people

Co-hosted by the Turkic Council and the UNAOC in October 2016, Istanbul, the international conference on the Role of Youth in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism was attended by more than 300 young leaders and experts from 40 countries, Africa to Asia

programme at high and secondary school levels. The First Turkic Council Student Exchange Programme was successfully implemented by the National Ministry of Education of the Republic of Turkey from 4 to 14 April 2016. Hosted by Turkey, the programme provided students with the opportunity to learn each other's traditions, culture, history and educational processes, as well as to develop a sense of brotherhood and friendship. The Turkic Student Council that is a subcommittee of the Turkic University Union comprising 16 universities from the Member States also carries out activities and exchange visits for the region's youth. The exchange programmes for students and academic staff is named the Orkhun Process and focuses on capacity development through experience sharing.

Sports constitute another area for capacity building among the Turkic Council Member States. As was the case for the First World Nomadic Games held in 2014, the Turkic Council co-organized, along with the Kyrgyz Government, the Second World Nomadic Games held from 3 to 8 September 2016 which constituted a remarkable celebration of diversity, culture and intercultural dialogue with the participation of over 1,400 athletes from 62 countries.

The next Turkic Council's Heads of States Summit is dedicated to youth and sports and so, throughout 2016, the Turkic Council attributed a special emphasis to capacity development in these areas within its Member States.

The 2030 Development Agenda stands at the heart of the fruitful relations of the Turkic Council with UN and its specialized agencies and offices, including UNDP, UNOSSC, UNWTO and UNAOC with which the Council has Memoranda of Understanding that focus on cooperating for capacity building in our Member States and in the region.

The international conference, co-hosted by the Turkic Council with the UNAOC, and held from 20 to 21 October 2016 in Istanbul, focused on the role of youth in preventing and countering violent extremism. Here, the importance of capacity building was strongly emphasised. UNDP, UNOSSC and the International Center for Sport Security were among the conference partners of the event that was attended by more than 300 participants and speakers from 40 countries from Africa to Asia. An outcome of the conference was the decision to launch a train-the-trainers programme to empower youth in preventing and countering violent extremism with the involvement of our Member States, partner countries and relevant international organizations. Topically and institutionally, the conference was a testimony to the effective collaboration between the regional and international actors working hand in hand to prepare a better future for the next generations. The Council believes that young people are the game-changers in helping achieve the SDGs, boosting South-South cooperation and preparing a better future for all of us, leaving no one behind.

As far as the Council is concerned, capacity building is not just about facilitating or conducting training or exchanging experiences. It is a true investment to ensure sustainable development in the region of the Turkic Speaking States and beyond. It requires a tailored-made approach together with innovative and sustainable methods. The Turkic Council is committed to think regionally and act globally in this direction.

Public participation and sustainable development – unleashing the power of common people

Tevita G Boseiwaqa Taginavulau, Director General; M H Kawsar Rudro, Assistant Information and Communication Officer, Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP)

It is unfortunate, but clearly evident, that many of our development efforts, despite our sincere commitment, often fall short of achieving long-term impact. This is largely down to the lens we see projects through and the approach we take to address certain challenges. Instead of 'enabling' people, we often try to 'help' them without realizing that helping sometimes can do the opposite of enabling. In other words, when we enable people, we don't help people by getting things done for them; rather we help them, with a little push, so that they become able to help themselves and address their challenges on their own with the least possible external support. One of the most effective ways to enable people is to engage people in the process, and let them take ownership. Without participation and taking ownership, people are likely to become passive beneficiaries – dependent on others and less productive.

Stakeholders involved with policymaking should note that ensuring public participation is not an easy task. The poor and marginalized are often entrapped in certain inherited structural arrangements where their capacity to participate remains restricted due to undemocratic access to political power and productive assets, limited capacity to participate at different levels, and lack of incentives for involvement. Consequently, these structural obstacles reduce the scope and scale of participation, and thus exclude the poor from reaping the benefits of development.

Participation is also key to transferring ownership to the people. If we ask why numerous projects by government and development agencies fail to achieve long-term impact, it is because many of those projects and initiatives didn't chalk out the strategy for transferring ownership to the people. Consequently, many initiatives simply finish once the project

Image: Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP)

Participatory agricultural extension services for farmers in Myanmar

Semi-literate rural women turned solar engineers installing solar panels, Rajsthan, India

comes to an end. And yet, when people own a social problem and feel compelled to solve it, the possibility of developing lasting solutions increases manifold.

Inequality is now a major global concern that is threatening the peace and social justice. According to the Global Wealth Databook 2016, the richest 1% of the population holds more wealth than the rest of the world combined, while the recently published Oxfam report, An Economy for the 99%, states that "only eight men own the same amount of wealth as the poorest half of the world."

Inclusive society, a society in which everyone has an active role to play and has the opportunity to reach their maximum potential, is one effective way of addressing rising inequality. This is also an important prerequisite for sustainable development. An inclusive society benefits not only the marginalized and poor but everyone, as we can see that social exclusion breeds crime, conflict and social instability. Moreover, when certain groups or classes feel excluded and marginalized from the rest of society, they are more likely to lose intrinsic values like kindness, empathy and togetherness.

Indeed, by integrating everyone, inclusive society promotes social values and develops institutions that create platforms for people to participate in political, social, economic, cultural and civic activities. Participation also plays a major role in building mutual trust, which shapes how social responsibilities will be shared. Such society embraces everyone, regardless of their race, caste, ethnicity and gender. In this instance, diversity is considered as a strength, not a ground for discrimination.

It is important that people are given proper motivation to participate, and this participation should be across all phases. Additionally, people should have easy access to public information so that they are connected by common understanding. Media has a significant role to play in bridging the information gap between different groups and classes. Similarly, digital divides also need to be addressed. As Eric Schmidt Jared Cohen (2013) warned, a "digital caste system" may emerge since people's experience with technology will be greatly determined by where they fall in the structure and the connectivity experience will not be uniform as there will be technological elite and proletariat, privileged and marginalized.

Positive engagements encourage people to think critically and act rationally, and thus develop a sense of responsible citizenship at both local and national level. Importantly, social inclusion is a cross-sectional and multi-dimensional concept, which should be mainstream across all different areas and levels.

Take the example of the Village Level Child Protection Committee (VLCPC), a community-based child protection unit formed by Village Panchayat (village council) in different states of India for the protection of children's rights. Each committee includes two children representatives, which are led by the Panchayat President. In some villages, Junior Panchayat – the village's child representatives – hold meetings with the Senior Panchayat once a month to discuss the issues concerning children's rights. VLCPCs are now actively participating in community governance, and addressing social issues like prevention of child marriage. The impact is noteworthy: National Family Health Survey (NFHS) IV findings show that child marriage in West Bengal, for example, has declined from 53% to 40%.

Citizen engagement should be considered the backbone of good governance. Corruption and lack of transparency are evident when the public has limited involvement in the process.

Over the last few decades, many countries, especially in Asia, have made impressive progress in reducing poverty and improving other key development indicators. To sustain momentum, the greatest challenge for these emerging countries will be to institutionalize the democracy and instil good governance.

Building strong institutions should be a top priority. For this to happen, it is important that along with key state actors, non-state actors like civil society, advocacy groups, development organizations and media act together.

Instead of rampant consumerism and looking to maximize growth at any cost, world leaders have committed to 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will be integrated by a set of six essential elements: people, planet, prosperity, partnership, dignity and justice. By setting these ambitious goals and targets, we have given ourselves an enormous task that aims to develop our world in a more sustainable way, leaving no one behind.

Despite making impressive progress towards the previous global goals – the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – considerable disparities remain across countries and within them. The issue of urban-rural divide has been acknowledged as a key area which requires careful attention from policy makers.

Rural development seems to get inadequate attention, largely because of the global shift in focus towards growth and industrialization. But if we look closely, it is evident that integrated rural development can be connected with 8 out of the 17 goals. Moreover, sustainable urbanisation cannot be achieved in isolation from rural development; they complement, rather than contradict, each other.

If we address the symptoms rather than the sources of a particular problem, solutions will not work. For example, while addressing inequality, if we overlook the sources of inequality and concentrate on providing a social safety net, we are unlikely to solve the main issue. Similarly, we won't succeed in addressing the structural problems of the urban-rural divide if we only offer incentives to some sectors like agriculture. What is required is multi-sectoral and holistic intervention supported by adequate investment.

People's needs are different too, which is why it's important to involve the local community and key stakeholders in the policy making process. Public participation enhances the quality and credibility of the policy making process and, most importantly, it creates a sense of ownership. As a result, street-level bureaucrats[1] get an opportunity to manipulate the policy outcome.

Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz rightly pointed out that "participation does not refer simply to voting, but requires that individuals have a voice in the decisions that affect them." Countries can encourage public participation through different means, including promoting inclusive policies and legislation, ensuring people's access to resources and information, broadening public spaces, ensuring transparent and accountable decision-making processes, and developing a knowledge-based society.

One distinct characteristic of the SDGs is that they value partnership. Their agendas are significant in terms of scope and depth as the goals didn't simply come about from closed-door discussion between diplomats at the UN Secretariat, but rather they were shaped by numerous stakeholders, including non-government organizations and civil society from different parts of the world. Similarly, unlike the previous MDGs, which were targeted at 'developing' countries, SDGs are applicable universally. Their success depends on collective global actions. Here, no country is on the sideline anymore. Whether they are developing, developed or least developed, every country is expected to help achieve these common goals.

For peaceful, inclusive and just societies, we need to look beyond crude economic growth but focus on the intrinsic value of every individual, so that everyone feels that they are playing a role and their voices are heard. Similarly, at a regional and international level, it is important that the international community helps less-developed countries, particularly through capacity building, technology transfer, trade facilitation and resource sharing.

Keeping this philosophy in mind, CIRDAP – a regional intergovernmental organisation working for integrated rural development in the Asia-Pacific region, has already integrated SDGs into its action plans for partnering with other regional and international organisations.

Progress of any sort will be impossible in the absence of love, peace and cooperation between and within different countries. Robust regional and global cooperation is critical for achieving our global goals. We need to identify everyone's local, national and regional strengths and weaknesses, and put in place a strategy for collective progress, making room for each and everyone.

Bringing people together at Barefoot College

Barefoot College is an impressive example on how ordinary people living in one of the most remote areas can be turned into powerful changemakers. The college, which was established in Tilonia – a small village in rural Rajasthan, India in 1972, takes a holistic approach to nurturing people and empowering one village at a time, helping inhabitants address key areas like energy, education, clean water and advocacy.

It is guided by its core belief that communities are capable of identifying and addressing their own needs, without depending on external intervention. The initiative's approach is to work, learn, unlearn and share through practical training and learning-by-doing processes. By handing over leadership to the local community, it promotes a community-driven approach, which values social capital. Based on this philosophy, all activities are planned, implemented and monitored by the local people.

The Barefoot approach challenges the concept of 'formal' education, and democratizes knowledge and learning by training illiterate and semi-literate men and women to work as solar engineers, dentists, health workers, hand pump mechanics, architects, designers and so on.

Here, technologies like solar energy are decentralized and demystified because they are put into the hands of the rural poor. The result is self-sufficient, inclusive and sustainable development. One of the initiative's core programmes is to train rural women as solar engineers, popularly known as 'Solar Mamas', so that they can return to their village and introduce solar power. The programmes are having a huge impact. More than three million women from more than 77 countries were trained and more than 14,500 households were solar electrified by these 'semi-illiterate' solar engineers.

By enabling people to take care of themselves, Barefoot College has made the marginalized part of the solution. They can take ownership of their community problem, and address each challenge by exploring the power of 'common and ordinary' people who are typically left behind otherwise.

Actions and commitments to sustainable development goals

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Bangladesh on an annual basis is battered by floods, tidal surges and earthquakes that have become more frequent in the recent past. The combination of over 300 rivers, alluvial soil, annual siltation of land and low lying areas has become a natural resource boon. The adoption of modern technology and research has placed Bangladesh as one the highest per hectare output food grain producing country in the world, surpassing India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Per capita income has risen to USD 1,386 and has become a lower middle income country although the population is as high as 160 million. Despite natural calamities, the highly resilient people are motivated to move ahead, facing all odds, rebuilding their homes and continuing with farming activities.

Standards of living of the general masses have improved considerably. Health care systems in Bangladesh have expanded to the rural areas with hospitals and clinics for mother and child. Education up to degree level is free for girls and free up to high school level for boys. The GDP growth has been over 6 per cent for a decade and is now projected at 7.2 per cent for the fiscal year 2016–17. The country influences the overall macroeconomic position of the nation, namely: poverty alleviation, health improvement food security and employment generation.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. These 17 Goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, while including new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among other priorities. The SDGs work in the spirit of partnership and pragmatism to make the right choices to improve life in a sustainable way for future generations. They provide clear guidelines and targets for all countries to adopt in accordance with their own priorities and the environmental challenges of the world at large.

The SDGs are an inclusive agenda. They tackle the root causes of poverty and unite us to make a positive change for both people and planet. The SDGs came into effect in January 2016, and they will continue to guide UNDP policy. Achieving the SDGs requires the partnership of governments, private sector, civil society and citizens alike to make sure that we leave a better planet for future generations. The concept of SDGs formed the basis of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. According to The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development's Report in 1987: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development is a pattern of resource use, that aims to meet human needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come" (sometimes taught as ELF-Environment, Local people, Future). It contains within it two key concepts: firstly, the concept of need, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given, and secondly, the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

Bangladesh has maintained an average annual growth rate of about 6 per cent for more than a decade with the growth rate exceeding 6 per cent in three consecutive years – FY10, 11 and 12. The fact that this growth has been achieved in the face of natural disasters, a world food price crisis and global recession indicates the resilience of the economy supported by good economic management and favourable external factors. Sustained growth has contributed to faster reduction in poverty from 48.9 per cent in 2000 to 31.5 per cent in 2010, implying an average annual rate of decline of 4.3 per cent over the period.

Growth has also been associated with improvement in social indicators such as education, health and nutrition, and housing and sanitation. However, the recent progress has been facing fundamental challenges including maintaining macroeconomic stability, increasing energy supply to meet growing demand, lifting investment rates from years of stagnancy, improving competitiveness of the economy and achieving sustainable development. The challenge to environmental sustainability in Bangladesh originates from two sources – internal and external. Long term acceleration in the growth rate has rested on improved growth of agriculture, stable growth of services and a faster growth of industry, especially manufacturing.

Growth of these sectors coupled with increasing population pressure has been associated with a degraded agro-ecosystem including rivers, wetlands, and coastal and urban environments as well as the degradation and depletion of ground water, deforestation and desertification, affecting livelihoods and quality of life. The other challenge to sustainability stems from climate-induced changes caused by greenhouse gases in the atmosphere which is growing at an unprecedented rate and magnitude. The manifestation of climate change is very much evident in Bangladesh. The coastal region in the South and South Western part of Bangladesh is already faced with frequent high tide episodes, induced inundation and salinity intrusion, reduced livelihood opportunities and so on. More frequent and severe floods, tropical cyclones, storm surges and droughts pose multiple threats to growth and the achievement of Vision 2021 targets. There is also a regional challenge to sustainability – a decline in water flow in trans-boundary rivers has resulted in siltation, with desertification in the north west and salinity intrusion in the south west areas of the country with consequent adverse effects on the environment and livelihoods.

Sustainable development is thus a constitutional obligation in Bangladesh. The state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to preserve and safeguard natural resources, biodiversity, wetlands, forests and wildlife for the present and future citizens. Bangladesh began preparing the national sustainable development strategy in 2009. Later, it was decided to revise and update the NSDS in light of the Sixth Five Year Plan (SFYP), the Perspective Plan (2010–2021), and other recent plans, policies and strategies formulated by the government. In pursuant of the outline agreed in the Rio+20 declarations, the NSDS (2010–2021) was finalized in 2013. The principle of sustainable development is living within environmental limits, achieving a sustainable economy, promoting good governance, using sound science responsibility, ensuring a strong, healthy and just society. Bangladesh has one of the most fertile lands, and so agriculture is the main livelihood. The country has a rich water system and biodiversity which includes rivers, canals, ponds and wetlands. Having many natural resources like oil and gas both onshore and offshore, and coal in the north of the country, there is also an industrious and creative work force but it is trapped in cycle of poverty and vulnerability.

Bangladesh is one of the largest deltas in the world which is highly vulnerable to natural disasters because of its geographical location, its flat and low-lying landscape, population density, poverty, illiteracy, and lack of institutional infrastructure. In other words, the country's physical, social and economic conditions are typical of any of the countries most vulnerable to natural disaster in the world.

So, Bangladesh is a country of potential and of poverty. The population is more than 160 million with a density of more than 1,300 per sq. km. The 147,570 sq. km. land area consists mostly of flood plains (almost 80 per cent) leaving a major part of the country – with the exception of the north-western highlands – prone to flooding during the rainy season. Moreover, the adverse affects of climate change – especially high temperatures, rising sea-levels, cyclones and storm surges, salinity intrusion, and heavy monsoon downpours – has aggravated the overall economic development to a great extent. Life expectancy in Bangladesh is around 63 years, and the adult literacy rate is 47.5 per cent. The recent Human Development Report ranks Bangladesh number 140 of 177 nations. The country has an average annual population growth rate of around 2 per cent (4.6 per cent in urban areas), almost 75 per cent of the population lives in rural areas with two thirds of those engaged mainly in farming or agro-based industrial activity. Bangladesh is one of developing countries of south-east Asia but is visited by natural calamities almost every year, rendering a life of great challenge.

Touhid Alam, PRC. bd

Man-made environmental degradation in the capital city Dhaka, Bangladesh. The polluted water is a serious health hazard

The environmental problems are partly a consequence of the country's development activities and largely a consequence of global production and consumption activities. Bangladesh will need to make appropriate responses to degradation in a number of areas such as water resources, forest and biodiversity, land and soil, coastal and marine resources and natural disasters and climate change. The priority sectors which are important to sustainable development are agriculture, industry, energy, transport and human resource development. The strategies suggested under these sectors will remain the engine for overall economic growth and will support further development.

Bangladesh needs to balance the economic, social and environmental requirements of development in order to ensure that "the needs of the present generation are met without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs." Despite past achievements, a large population is still in poverty and the unemployment and underemployment rates are still high. The achievement of high growth so urgent that it is easy to downplay the right of the next generation to natural resources. But a large and growing population living in a relatively small geographical area which is increasingly pressurizing our environment – air, water and soil – dictates the urgency of sustainable development in the country. NSDS fulfils the twin objectives of formulating strategies to meet the challenges of economic, social and environmental sustainability faced by the economy as well as meeting international obligation of the country to global sustainable development principles and agenda.

Meeting the sustainable development challenges will require raising awareness and understanding of the challenges and coordinated efforts at local, regional, national and global levels. The timeframe of NSDS coincides with the Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010–2021 which guides the economy towards its transition to a middle income economy by early next decade. The Bangladesh government has implemented the Sixth Five Year Plan FY 2011–FY2015 which, together with The Perspective Plan and other existing government plans, policies and strategies are in line with the SDGs. The strategies highlight the need for population planning to maintain a balance between population, development and environment. This has been prioritized because slowing the growth of population will contribute to the health of the environment and efforts to increase the standards of living not just for the present generation, but also for the future. The strategy document has been prepared through extensive consultation with ministries, development partners, academia, researchers, civil societies, think tanks and NGOs. The National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) has been prepared to meet the formidable environmental challenges that Bangladesh faces on the way to development.

The Institutional Framework is one of the key elements of implementation and monitoring progress of the NSDS. It will maintain coherence between and among different strategic priority areas and sectors as well as existing national and sectoral policies during implementation of the strategy and the monitoring progress.

The objective of a good governance sector strategy is to ensure an effective parliamentary process, sound law and order, pro-people public services, an improved legal and judicial system, strengthened local governance, and a corruption-free society with social justice. The strategies focus on strengthening institutional capacity, reforming key institutions, controlling corruption, enhancing efficiency of planning and budgeting, promoting e-governance, ensuring access to information, and reviving values and ethics in society.

The Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010–2021 has provided the road map for realization of the national goals enshrined in The Vision 2021 which embodies a dream that Bangladesh, on the eve of its 50th anniversary of independence, will cross into the middle income country threshold, with citizens enjoying a higher standard of living, better access to education, improved social justice, and a more equitable socio-economic environment. These milestones will be achieved in a political climate that is in line with core democratic principles of human rights, freedom of expression, the rule of law, equality of citizens irrespective of race, religion and creed, and equality in opportunities.

The Perspective Plan acknowledges that, in order to meet the desired outcomes by 2021, the country needs better governance that provides improved incentive mechanisms for the public sector to deliver results. This improvement requires enhanced public administration capacity, lower levels of corruption from increased transparency and stronger prevalence of the rule of law.

For Bangladesh to qualify as a middle income country, the government must adopt a prudent macroeconomic framework that ensures macroeconomic stability for the long term. This necessitates that the policy ensures external and internal stability through an effective exchange rate policy, low inflation, and adequate resource mobilization to generate an optimal level of public and private investment. The goal is to accelerate real GDP growth to 10 per cent by 2021, and reduce head count poverty rate to about 14 per cent of 2021 population. It begins with a focus on explicit goals, challenges, and strategies for the agricultural and rural sectors which account for a significant proportion of the country's GDP and employment. The primary goal is to eliminate food deficiency by improving production that will enable citizens to meet their nutritional requirement. More specifically, for ensuring food security by 2021, strategic goals need to be addressed in the crop sector, fisheries, livestock and poultry, and forestry.

In order to enhance employment generation and rural development, adequate policy attention must be given to rural non-farm activities. The industrialization process must play a central role in accelerating growth and achieving real GDP growth of 10 per cent by 2021. This means that, in an era of increasing globalization, the only mantra for survival and progress is to facilitate the competitive strength of our industrial sector. In terms of broader goal, the industrial sector will continue to account for a much larger share of GDP, reaching 37 per cent in 2021. The Bangladesh economy today is more integrated with the global market, largely due to the rapid growth in trade, substantial out-migration of labour and remittance inflows, financial sector reform, and creation of favourable FDI regimes. The Perspective Plan emphasizes that it is very important for Bangladesh to make use of the complementary resources shared with countries like India, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar. This makes a case for greater regional cooperation on trade and trade facilitation, regional transport, energy trade and water management, FDI and joint ventures, and cooperation on rail and road projects.

The Vision 2021 also constitutes a goal that is eloquently described by the Bangladesh Prime Minister as 'Digital Bangladesh' to rapidly address the lack of capacity to generate productivity improvements from technological progress, which has long been undermining Bangladesh's growth potential.

Lastly, the Perspective Plan reiterates that accelerating economic growth without paying attention to the concepts of inclusiveness and sustainability holds no meaning. As a result, the Plan intends to achieve pro-poor growth with adequate attention to social protection that promotes participation of the excluded groups – such as poor women, people from ethnic groups, and socially excluded groups – in the process of development. The growth experience so far has also brought chronic environmental degradation. Consequently, the plan document accepts that the present decade holds a window of opportunity for halting the process of environmental degradation through pursuing strategic actions that generate green growth, and also minimize the adverse effects of climate change. In sum, the Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010–2021 articulates the means and ends that Bangladesh wants to adopt and reach on the eve of its 50th anniversary of independence. It highlights a pragmatic multidimensional approach in producing an economy that is innovative and competitive, and the opportunity it creates allows us to achieve a socially just society.

Hope for justice – the readiness of Sri Lanka to uphold the rule of law

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Sri Lanka is renowned as the pearl of the Indian Ocean, with a sustained history of justice over centuries. However, recent incidents of ethnic conflicts have tarnished the country's reputation and branded it the tear drop in the Indian Ocean. However, these dark clouds have passed. The initiations of the present national unity government including the restoration of the constitutional council, the creation of an independent human rights commission, ratification of the convention for the protection of all persons from enforced disappearance, and a new act of right to information are milestones that offer hopes of justice. People have begun to enjoy the fruits of democracy. The Keppapulavu land issue has indicated that the people are able to fight for their rights. People have demanded the return of land occupied by the armed forces and the government has resolved the issue by assuring release of the land. The present government has promised to ensure justice for all. Today, the Rule of Law, previously a technical term, becomes the layman's buzzword.

The rule of law asserts that countries are governed by law, not by rulers. Everybody, including the lawmakers themselves, are therefore subject to the law. No politician, government official or institution is free to exercise arbitrary power. In a broader sense, the rule of law implies the absence of injustice, non-discrimination, respect for human rights, transparency, accountability, fair trials, the independence of the judiciary, and equality before the law. All of these areas play significant roles in achieving a more efficient economy and enabling a happy and contented life for the people.

Image: © 2016 Dinuka Liyanawatte/Reuters

Women conduct a silent protest to commemorate the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances in Colombo, 30 August 2016

It is generally acknowledged in academic literature that sustainable development and justice – or in broader terms the rule of law – are hand in glove. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) declares sustainable development to be a universal hope to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure peace and prosperity for all. Sustainable development means not only material, but economic, social and environmental growth.

Effective enforcement of the rule of law helps to sustain development in all aspects. Economic development can be enhanced by reducing corruption, ensuring property rights, and building investors' trust in the legal system. Social development can also be enhanced through broadening access to justice and empowering marginalized groups to fight against injustice. Also, it improves the lives of ordinary people and upholds their rights, allowing them to live in dignity. Environmental development can be enhanced with a legal system that is concerned with environmental deprivation. Therefore, the rule of law is an important cornerstone of sustainable development. The inclusion of 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions' as a new goal for the post-2015 development agenda is timely. It urges all governments to value the rule of law in achieving their development goals.

The government of Sri Lanka, elected to power in 2015, presented a mandate to inculcate good governance practices and rule of law. The public has waited for almost two years to realize the results of the new government's initiatives, but its gradual slip in the Rule of Law Index – published by the World Justice Project (WJP) – invites Sri Lanka to rethink its readiness to protect justice. Sri Lanka's score had been dropping since 2012 and was ranked 68th among 113 nations in 2016. However, the country has managed to retain its rank in third place among other South Asian countries.

The Rule of Law Index is a valuable annual review which gives a comprehensive picture of the extent to which countries adhere to the rule of law in practice. The index has been designed based on eight factors, including absence of corruption; order and security; fundamental rights; open government; regulatory enforcement; civil justice; and criminal justice. The index is the reflection of the perceptions of citizens and experts in each country.

Sri Lanka's highest score – 0.68 for order and security – implies that the nation assures the security of persons and property. The absence of civil conflicts and a smaller crime rate (34 per cent) contributed to this attainment. Thirty years of civil war ended in 2009, promising reconciliation among the country's diverse ethnicities. The country's safety index (65.61) indicates a safer society. Relatively high scores were given to other factors including regulatory enforcement (0.5), constraints on government powers (0.53) and fundamental rights (0.52). The absence of improper influence due to a high level of scrutiny and effective execution might be the reason for high scores in regulatory enforcement. The score of constraints on government powers is remarkably high due to the legal transition of power. The sovereign power of the people has been transferred to the rulers through timely elections. The independent auditing procedures, including Parliamentary Committees on Public Enterprises (COPE) and Public Accounts (COPA), are actively contributing to this. Further, comprehensive and secure labour rights and a recognition of certain rights as fundamental, such as freedom of thought, religion, expression, and association and the right to equality under the constitution have also contributed to ensuring democracy.

In contrast, civil justice, criminal justice, absence of corruption and open government are areas in which the country's performance is unsatisfactory. Civil justice measures the capacity of ordinary people to resolve their grievances peacefully, impartially and effectively through the civil justice system. The Minister of Justice pointed out that delays in land, property and marital cases are barriers to economic development. Delays in prosecutions and pending investigations related to civil cases are major issues in Sri Lanka. The number of pending cases generally exceeds 65,000. It is the common experience of ordinary people to wait years for the resolution of court cases pertaining to land issues, personal relations, or business. Criminal suspects are jailed and wait for the completion of preliminary legal proceedings to prove their innocence or guilt. Administration of justice in Sri Lanka is ineffective due to the accumulation of unheard cases and overcrowded prisons. This leads to loss of faith in the legal system and social turmoil. Incorporation of information technological tools will enable a speedy resolution to such backlogs. The revisions of country's Civil Procedure Code and Criminal Procedure Code would possibly contribute to minimizing these delays. Protection of witnesses' and accused persons' rights is another aspect where legal provisions have to be enacted. The government should set up mechanisms to ensure due process of law and timely, effective adjudication in delivering criminal justice.

Corruption is an ailment that holds back the effective delivery of public service. The WJP Rule of Law Index reveals that the legislature is the most corrupt institution in Sri Lanka. The descending trend of the country's score for absence of corruption since 2012 indicates the continuation of bribery, improper influences, and misappropriations of public funds and resources. The pathetic truth is that the rulers are corrupt. Waiving rules and bending regulations for private gain is common.

The Sri Lankan constitution identified the fundamental right to equality as "all persons are equal before law". But other laws create immunity for the president, parliamentarians and higher officials. Presidential immunity is the most controversial element in the present constitution. The recent amendment to the constitution has perpetuated this immunity in a mild form as shown in Article 35(1) as: "While any person holds office as President of the Republic of Sri Lanka, no civil or criminal proceedings shall be instituted or continued against the President in respect of anything done or omitted to be done by the President, either in his official or private capacity."

Further, the lack of independence of the judiciary is extremely destructive to the general public's value of the rule of law. The present constitution enables extensive executive powers to the president including the authority to appoint the prime minister, cabinet of ministers, the chief justice and other judges of the supreme court, as well as the president and other judges of the court of appeal. The separation of power is widely recognized as the core principle of a democratic state. Safeguarding an independent judiciary that is free from undue political influence to impartiality is a key concern in protecting the rule of law in a constitutional democracy. The International Bar Association suggests that appointments of judges should be executed through an independent process of assessment, based on merit, with names being forwarded to the president or minister of justice for final appointment. Matters related to the appointment, transfer, discipline, dismissal or retirement of judges are necessarily determined by a transparent and accountable system.

The openness of government is another dimension of the Rule of Law Index in which Sri Lanka does not score so highly. It measures the degree to which the government shares information, empowers citizens, is accountable for results, and fosters public participation in policy making and implementation processes. However, the Right to Information Act of 2017 leaves hope for new opportunities for citizens' active participation in governance and in promoting government accountability.

At this juncture, the present government simply cannot disregard the trend in the Rule of Law Index scores. The government has given hope for the guarantee of good governance and justice. The constitutional revision in progress is a promising initiative. It is high time to incorporate necessary revisions to the new constitution to uphold the rule of law and justice in the country which can only promise a better world.

Image: Ishara S.Kodikara/AFP/Getty Images

Sri Lankan lawyers protest outside the high court in Colombo

Image: Lakruwan Wanniarachchi/AFP/Getty Images

Candlelight vigil in Colombo, marking International Day of the Disappeared

Fostering closer engagement with NGOs – networking in the development process

Ndinda Kioko, Communications and Advocacy Consultant, Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR)

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the consensus towards the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been that local and national communities, civil society, and governments must be at the centre of all efforts. The UN Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs states: "while the SDGs are global, their achievement will depend on our ability to make them a reality in our cities and regions." This statement echoes the vision of the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR), a platform for local and national NGOs in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, who are working to reshape the top-down humanitarian and development system to one that is locally driven and owned, and is built around equitable, dignified and accountable partnerships.

For NEAR, a sustainable future is one that is imagined first by recognizing the failures of the current system. Countries like Nepal and Liberia are glaring reminders that a top-down approach is unfit if the growing, complex humanitarian and development needs of the 21st century are to be effectively met. The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) recognized the need for a shift towards a localized approach, affirming that "national and local actors, including women and women's groups, should be engaged, capacitated and funded," and that "people affected by crises or living in situations of risk are rights-holders who must be put at the centre of decision-making processes."

While there is unfailing support for roadmaps that recognize the need for this shift, there is a danger of 'localization' becoming nothing but an abstraction. The onus is therefore on all actors – local, national and international – to not only commit to reshaping the aid system, but also define what a different future looks like, actively put in place mechanisms that prioritize local communities, and earnestly monitor the progress towards this future.

For NEAR, this future is one where equitable and dignified partnerships exist, and where local communities have the capacity, resources, and agency to address the challenges they

Members of local and national NGOs during a consultation meeting in Hargeisa, Somaliland face. Before any frameworks are put in place, the roadmap towards sustainable human development begins with recognizing the innovation and capacity that already exists within local communities, civil societies and governments. With or without the help of the international community and donors, local actors continue to play a significant role as innovators and entrepreneurs, finding timely and effective solutions to the challenges that only they best understand. The architecture of all efforts towards global sustainable development must therefore be inclusive of these local voices.

So how does the system develop a sustainable future? How does the system ensure it is indeed the person in need who ultimately inhabits this space of sustainability? How does the system ensure local communities have the capacity, resources and agency to address the challenges they face? While the network does not claim to have all the solutions, because of its members – who have worked directly with communities, have an intimate knowledge and understanding of their communities, and have been directly affected by crises – NEAR is certainly better placed to design a locally-led roadmap towards a sustainable future.

NEAR has already identified specific areas of work, including advocacy, funding, organizational development, and research in order to address the problems echoed by many local and national organizations during its pre-launch consultations. Of these, lack of direct funding and sustained, long-term investment in the institutional capacity of local and national actors, and representation at international decision-making forums emerged as some of the main challenges.

The issue of financing is key, and one that has been talked about for a long time. It is intrinsically linked with the rest, specifically capacity strengthening. While local and national organizations are almost always the ones better situated to respond in times of need, the bulk of global humanitarian funding does not go to them. Currently, the system is centralized and dominated by UN agencies and international NGOs, with multiple levels of subcontracting and intermediaries. This means the amount trickling down to the person in need is alarmingly low. If local and national organizations do not have adequate and timely resources, it becomes difficult for them to meet the needs of their communities. It is essential to invert the way the system works so the person in need gets the bulk of the resources.

During the 2016 WHS, commitments were made to address the problem of financing. More specifically, the Grand Bargain promised that by 2020, 25% of the global humanitarian funding would be directed to local organizations (5% more than what NEAR was advocating for before the WHS). This was indeed a win for NEAR, and for local and national organizations.

Despite these commitments, the heavy lifting still has to be done. There is the large responsibility of putting in place mechanisms that ensure these commitments are implemented, and there is also the responsibility of tracking these commitments. How are the donors going to make sure this 25% moves from commitment to action? How are they going to make sure this 25% is going directly from donors to local and national NGOs, and not through UN agencies and INGOs as intermediaries? Of course, this raises the question of who qualifies as a 'local' or 'national' NGO, and what 'as direct as possible' means. It is important to address these definitions in order to ensure the system does not fall into the same vicious cycle it has been in, and that in the process of addressing these current problems, it does not also perpetuate the existing dynamics of power which continue to mute the voices of those mostly affected. For this reason, it is hoped that the people most impacted by these decisions will lead the process of agreeing on these definitions and measurements. For there to be truly a shift, these definitions need to come from local and national organisations. The process of naming southern NGOs cannot be led by northern NGOs and donors.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Executive Director of COAST Trust Bangladesh and NEAR's treasurer, delivering the closing speech during the launch of NEAR at the 2016 WHS, Istanbul, Turkey

Additionally, progress towards the Grand Bargain's 25% by 2020 cannot be made through UN and INGO managed pooled funds. They are not directly accessible to local and national organisations. NEAR has proposed redesigning these pooled funding mechanisms from those that are northern managed and driven, to ones that are managed by and exclusively for local and national NGOs.

In this new model, not only will organisations have access to financing, but they will also support capacity strengthening and due diligence. The amount allocated to each organization will depend on how much it can absorb. A long-term capacity strengthening strategy will be developed to make sure the organization can absorb ever-increasing amounts. This will ensure local and national NGOs have the

Members of local and national NGOs during a consultation meeting, Hargeisa, Somaliland

organizational capacity, skills and accountability required to engage with key stakeholders. It is essential that local and national NGOs have this pathway for graduation where they can meet donors' due diligence requirements, and access funding directly without any intermediaries. No such pathway for graduation and eventual independence exists in both the humanitarian and development systems.

Other than organizational development and financing, the network plans to enhance collaboration between local and national organizations through advocacy, networking and communication. Opportunities for south-to-south learning and networking need to be created without a northern intermediary. It is important to NEAR for such a space to exist, one where members can find solidarity, fellowship, a platform that provides opportunities for knowledge sharing and learning from peer organizations in the global south who understand and can relate intimately to the challenges they all share.

Meeting the needs of millions of people affected by the failure of institutions is at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and it resounds with the philosophy of NEAR. All frameworks towards a sustainable future need to recognize vulnerable individuals not just as recipients of aid or beneficiaries, but also as people who must be included in decisions that affect their lives. They are capable of leading response with their own ideas, values, abilities, desires and needs.

Finally, while the network is clear on its demands and how the future of the system must look, it also acknowledges the challenges ahead. Time, a willingness to abandon old ways of doing things, and a willingness to fail are all required. However, with dignified partnerships between international actors, communities, civil societies, local governments, national governments, and donors, a realistic way forward can, and should, be negotiated.

Making a difference in times of local crisis

Between 2014-2016, Ebola devastated thousands of lives in Liberia. As the country plunged into a health crisis, many other services, including schools, were crippled. To ensure her children continued with their education, Brenda Moore of Kids Educations Engagement Project (KEEP) started home schooling her two children. She then saw a need in the community and decided to tutor other schoolchildren in her neighborhood in Monrovia.

"I would print free worksheets and coloring pages per grade level and place them in a plastic folder with crayons, pencils sharpeners, and then distribute them free of charge," says Brenda, whose organization is now a member of NEAR Network. Every week, accompanied by a team of volunteers, they would visit the children in their homes to check on progress. If the homework had been completed, the team would provide a new set of worksheets. Brenda and her team of volunteers reached 19 communities and impacted around 3,000 children without any support from the local government or international organizations.

Like many other local and national organizations working in Liberia during the Ebola epidemic, KEEP had challenges in securing support from donors and international NGOs, who frequently cited short operation time and lack of track record or capacity as their reasons for not offering support. The organization eventually secured support from Action Aid Liberia, consequently extending their education program to the 52 communities. Through this partnership, they reached about 6,000 children.

Even with this support, there was still a gap needing to be filled in administering aid – the involvement of local actors. As Brenda states: "Local actors serve as first responders. They are also keenly aware of the cultural setting. They know the geographical settings and terrain. Because local actors are usually locals themselves, they inspire the trust of the affected people." She believes the international humanitarian system is bureaucratic and sometimes slow in responding to situations. Additionally, the nature of policies sometimes restricts the ability for larger organizations to move and respond speedily in crisis and disaster situations.

"They have a lot of resources available but sometimes they are brought in too late to help and make meaningful impact."

Brenda hopes NEAR will form a database to help local organizations through capacity building, networking, experience sharing, and directly linking them to funding, enabling them to work more effectively.

Revisiting the controls over civil society organizations in Asia

Mst Marzina Begum, Associate Professor; Md Nurul Momen, Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration, Rajshahi University

Since the expansion of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the 1980s and 1990s, the bringing of anti-corruption struggles to the campaign programme has led to a growing visibility of anticorruption fights. With the call for promoting good governance, which emphasizes transparency and accountability of the government and awareness of public sector corruption, this has become a major agenda for civil society actors.

Since the mid 1980s, the term civil society has been "dusted off and deodorized to suit a variety of ideological, intellectual and practical needs."[1] In the broader term, civil society refers to public space which is independent from the influence of the state; however, different forms of association may exist. It has also been used to refer to all activities outside the state, and those activities could be either spontaneous or organized efforts. However, many political scientists saw the protest movements that emerged to facilitate transformation in the political regimes of Eastern Europe in the 1980s as a success story of the CSOs. Since then, the notion of civil society has been very much linked with opposition to state activities.

The concept "civil society" has been developed within the discipline of social sciences, but it goes back to Aristotle, albeit with a very different definition of the term. While the contemporary debate is, to a large extent, concerned with the division between state and civil society, early social theories considered the existence of a powerful state to be a necessary precondition for all forms of social life that constitutes civil society.[2] On the other hand, contract theorists, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, differed in their opinions on both state and civil society, but agreed that a functioning civil society would be impossible without protection from the state. However, in the many transitional democratic countries in Asia, the recent debate on civil society has been strongly influenced by democratization theories emphasizing the importance of an independent civil society. The term "civil society" has, over time, coincided with a strong dominance of liberal social theory and with the consolidation of the neo-liberal regime. But, in the last decade, the debate and discussion over civil society is now an important part of the dominant models or agenda designed and developed by the World Bank and the IMF.

The environment in which CSOs operate are likely to have an impact on their size, capacities and operations. In 1994 Salamon and Anheier's international survey of nonprofit sectors presents that the nature of the sector is heavily influenced by some factors and issues such as the legal provisions under which it operates, the extent of the centralized nature of the state, and the degree of social and economic development in a country.[3] Furthermore, it is also perceived that, in the countries where there is a long history or tradition of public acceptance of CSOs, their activities in society are widely respected. In many countries in Asia, however, there is relatively little understanding or recognition of the legitimacy of civil society organizations. Without such acceptance from common citizens, CSOs may be very vulnerable to be attacked from the state as external challenges or from within CSOs itself as internal challenges. In the annual report published by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Freedom House, it states that civil society groups are directly or indirectly intimidated, violently harassed or even killed in many parts of Asia, either internally or externally.

Theoretically, public legitimacy is often associated with the existence of legal systems that establish rights of assembly and freedom of speech, and systems of regulation that support CSOs. A lack of legal framework to support CSOs can be exacerbated by problems of accountability. In many countries, support of CSOs through national and international organizations is "limited by the lack of clear, coherent, and supportive regulations".[4] In the absence of government recognition and established regulations, CSOs may be defenceless against arbitrary interference by the state actor.

Relations between CSOs and the state often give rise to serious challenges. In many countries, state actors are deeply suspicious that CSOs will be potential competitors as deliverers of services in electoral constituencies, shifting resources from international donors, and acting as watchdogs and challengers of state policies and actions.[5] However, CSOs may initiate a wide range of programmes for dealing with government actions and policies, albeit with suspicions arising, particularly in transitional democratic countries and where state power is highly centralized. It could also be said that CSO's activities are seen as potential threats to the power of the state as they are potential critics of government inefficiency in the delivery of services.

Another paradox of control over the CSOs is the restrictive implementation and wide discretion of the state that exists in many Asian countries. However, in all of these countries, CSOs are protected in their respective constitution, but when translated into further detailed laws and regulations,

Image: International Journal of Socialist Renewal

Image: ODHIKAR and the Asian Legal Resource Centre

the freedom of CSOs is maintained with state discretion, and restrictive executive implementation. Apart from that, in some countries, the written constitution itself provides implicit or explicit rationales for limiting associational freedoms. This problem can be seen in many Asian countries. In the cases below, constitutions make freedom of association in compliance of national law. For example:

a The Afghan constitution on 26 January 2004 (ratified) protects the right to form associations and political parties "in accordance with the provisions of the law." (Article 35).
b Cambodia's constitution of 1993, with amendments through 2008, enshrines the right to establish associations and political parties, but the responsibility is taken by the state: "These rights shall be determined by law." (Article 42).

The constitution in some Asian countries restricts freedom of association in favour of national security, public order, or public morality:

a The constitution of Bangladesh through Article 38 affirms the freedom of association or union, "subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of morality or public order."
b Paragraph 354 of the 2008 Constitution of Myanmar protects fundamental freedoms, including freedom of association and organization, and the holding of processions, "if not contrary to the laws, enacted for Union security, prevalence of law and order, community peace and tranquillity or public order and morality..."
c Article 17 of the constitution of Pakistan reads that every citizen shall have the right to form associations or unions, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of sovereignty or the integrity of Pakistan, public order or morality.
d The Singaporean constitution allows restrictions on fundamental rights where "necessary or expedient" for the "security of Singapore..., public order or morality" (Article 14), and the Singapore parliament enjoys the right to impose restrictions on the right to form associations to labour and education laws.
e The constitution of Qatar provides for freedom of association, public assembly, and worship, within limits based on public order and morality concerns.
f Part 3 (17) of the Nepal constitution enshrines freedom to engage in any occupation or be engaged in employment, establish and operate industry, trade and business in any part of Nepal. However, the state shall be deemed to prevent the making of an Act to impose reasonable restrictions on it.
g China's Constitution (Article 35) guarantees freedoms of association and of assembly, but it is up to state discretion to implement these freedoms. Apart from that, there is also a lack of mechanisms to enforce these constitutional guarantees that undermines the constitutional protection.
h Article 10 of the Malaysian constitution allows citizens the right to freedom of association, assembly and speech, but restrictions can be imposed in the interest of the security of the Federation or any part thereof or public order.

When CSOs criticize the policy and actions of the government, they are often considered to be anti-national, and/or politically motivated organizations. Consequently, this undermines the legitimacy of CSOs and their ability to operate independently. However, many countries have already put restrictions on political activities, and such limitations can discourage CSOs from engaging in a wide range of advocacy activities that could possibly be considered political in nature. Furthermore, some laws also include certain substantive limitations on organizations if more than one organization in the same geographical area intends to operate in the same programmes:

a Afghan law bars NGOs and associations from engaging in political activities. While not defined in the law, this is generally understood as election engineering rather than as advocacy.
b Cambodia's Law on Foreign Associations and NGOs, in Article 24 of 2015, states that both foreign and domestic organizations must "maintain their neutrality towards political parties in the Kingdom of Cambodia."
c Indonesia's Law No. 17 of 2013 (Law on Societal Organizations) bars all societal organizations from propagating an ideology which contradicts state principles (*Pancasila*). This indicates a clear restriction on freedom of expression.
d China and Vietnam prohibit nonprofit organizations from operating in a geographic area where another organization is already functioning in the same programme.

To summarise, Asia presents a paradox of control over civil society activities. Many countries in Asia are home to a vibrant civil society that is engaged in a wide range of activities from social services to advocacy and other pursuits. But based on the analysis of the constitution in many countries of Asia, government regulatory controls over civil society are restrictive, particularly for advocacy programs which are labelled as 'politically motivated'.

The Al-Mesbar Center: advancing peace and coexistence through scholarship and action

Turki Aldakhil, Chairman of the Al-Mesbar Center for Studies and Research, Dubai, and General Manager of Al-Arabiya News Channel

In any region torn by civil strife, extremist discourse is both a reflection and a driver of polarization and violence. Decent people everywhere intuitively grasp this phenomenon when they observe, for example, a religious figure of any faith teaching children to hate the Other. They know that as these young people grow, saturated in poison, they will come to see the world only in terms of dark and light. They will welcome overtures to annihilate their perceived enemies. Those who understand and lament this tragedy are many. Too few, however, feel optimistic about finding an antidote to the poison – that is, promoting a humane alternative view of the world, counselling openness and driven by love.

My thought partners and I, keenly aware of the power of words to do good as well as bad, are guided by the conviction that we can make the world a better place by spreading a culture of brotherhood, sisterhood, amity, and coexistence. The power to do so lies in all forms of expression – ranging from enlightened religion, to egalitarian education, to the harmony of diversity as expressed in the universal language of music. But success in employing these tools depends on bridging the gap between forward-thinking intellectuals on the one hand and popular culture on the other. These beliefs lie at the heart of Al-Mesbar Center for Research and Studies, which I founded in 2007 in cooperation with distinguished friends and colleagues. It was born of the spirit of tolerance that is shared by millions in my native land, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It was nurtured by the system of tolerance that permeates the United Arab Emirates, where Al-Mesbar maintains its headquarters. A decade since its founding, the Center has grown into a regional hub for inquiry and action, and now aims to engage the world writ large.

I will share some remarks about our experiences and the lessons we have learned, both to relay our message to others and to extend a hand in partnership – for indeed, there is so much work to be done.

Since Al-Mesbar's beginnings, we have been a research institution at heart – a home to scholars and writers of differing backgrounds and viewpoints who come together in a desire for incremental, positive reform in their societies. Our team spans five continents. They speak over a dozen languages. They include adherents to all three monotheistic faiths, as well as other faith systems, in addition to people who harbour the kind of ambivalent feelings about religion which sometimes come to us all. Our forum is the *Monthly Book* in which a range of scholars – now over 122 in number – come together to explore, in depth, an issue of urgent social importance. Hailing as we do from the Gulf states, we began by exploring primarily Islamist movements on our native soil, as well as those of its periphery: the larger Arab world, followed by neighbouring Turkey and Iran. Regardless of a given Islamist movement's humanity or lack thereof, our

Image: Al Mesbar

Speech made by Bahar, an Iraqi Yazidi woman abducted by ISIS in August 2014 before miraculously escaping. Event hosted by Al Mesbar

Image: Al Mesbar

Iraqi Yazidi human rights activist and scholar, Mr. Khidr Domle, discusses Bahar's ordeal with France 24 which covered the event

Image: Al Mesbar

Al-Mesbar hosted a Turkish choir to sing psalms and nashids in English, Aramaic, Arabic, and Hebrew to celebrate tolerance between Abrahamic faiths

team sought to understand it empathetically. We refused to regard the groups as monoliths. If in some cases, an Islamist leadership figure harboured incurable hostility, his followers might nonetheless include many fundamentally decent people, drawn to the organization by fear, lack of education, or confusion. We also searched for evidence of elements within a given Islamist movement that might be open to positive change from within. The methodology which our *Monthly Books* have employed in scrutinizing their respective topics is outlined below.

At a time of lethal sectarian and ideological conflict in the Arab world, even some of the region's finest scholars feel compelled to pick a side. Once they have, the tone and substance of their work becomes politically and emotionally inflected. In our view, the inflection does not negate its value. Rather than attempt to steer clear of partisan scholarship, Al-Mesbar Center acknowledges and engages it. On any given subject, we have published studies from a wide range of viewpoints, and strived to achieve a larger balance by setting them down side by side in a single volume, curating the texts along the way. At the same time, we have been proud to nurture scholarship that has risen high above the fray, approaching the most heated subjects as close to dispassionately as any vested party can. Viewed together, the diverse studies we have supported are both a rare source of information and analysis and an intellectual barometer of Arab and Islamic politics today.

Over time, we began to move beyond Islamist movements, to broader social issues in the region, as well as alternative teachings about Islam from the wider Muslim world which we felt might offer inspiration to the Arab heartlands. We studied the status of women in our region – whether in individual Arab countries, or, in the case of our *Monthly Book*, Women After the Arab Spring, in the region as a whole following a season of upheaval. We also pivoted from Islamist movements to the study of Sufi movements, and the wisdom and pathos they have brought to bear over the centuries and to this day. In two volumes on Indonesia, we exposed Arab readers to the beautiful syncretism of Islam and its spiritual antecedents that has been forged and institutionalized on that storied archipelago. In an analytical segment in the Indonesia series, we suggested, in the broadest brush strokes, that the Indonesian experience could offer some lessons to Arab societies, particularly those that have always been a mosaic of identities and sects.

In a similar vein, we also studied and celebrated the mosaics themselves: the diversity of Islamic sects and practice in the Gulf and other Arab countries; the history of Jewish communities in Kuwait and Bahrain; the living history of the Copts in Egypt. In other volumes we asked how a few states in the Arab world as well as the West have successfully managed diversity. In doing so, we found exemplary models to inspire our own local leaderships. Finally, we have also taken on some of the lapses in humanity and human decency that

Image: Al Mesbar

Al-Mesbar Chairman, Mr. Turki Al-Dakhil receiving an award from American Abroad Media for his lifetime dedication to advancing women and minority rights in the Middle East. He is awarded by Dina Powell, currently US Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategy, and Aaron Lobel, founder of American Abroad Media

mar our region and the rest of the world. Our recent publication *Contemporary Slavery As Instituted by Terrorist Groups in Iraq and Syria* challenges all of its readers. It exposes not only the use of slavery as a recruitment tool by ISIS, but also the ambient socio-religious factors that made a resurgence of slavery possible on Arab soil. We looked beyond our region to learn about the scourge of slavery the world over, as well as the means by which abolitionists in many countries managed to overcome it. This volume, like so many others, sought not only to expose a challenging problem but also to lay the groundwork for its solution.

Publishing books about these topics was not always easy, as some are controversial in our region. But we did not allow objections from retrograde elements to prevent us from pursuing our passions. Our resolve to persevere was continually strengthened by our host country, the United Arab Emirates – both its leadership and its people – perhaps the greatest bastion of tolerance in the Arab world today. And in addition to distributing the books locally and among our paid subscribers, we have taken them to book fairs all over the Middle East. We have translated some into English and other languages. In approaching future volumes, we continually seek out new scholarly voices, far beyond the core group of researchers who have been with us since the beginning.

As a natural outgrowth of our publication of books and papers, Al-Mesbar Center saw fit to convene conferences and workshops, first in our offices and subsequently with partnering institutions in Europe and the United States. The number of public events has grown into the dozens. Among the sessions of which I am proudest is one we convened in our offices in Dubai last year. We hosted Behar, a Yazidi woman who was abducted and abused by ISIS. In telling her harrowing story, she not only evoked the tears and compassion of our community; she also challenged us to confront the legacy of sectarian chauvinism in our region which did not begin with ISIS – and ask, all over again, what we can do to combat it.

One of the reasons why these initiatives have courted controversy is that they have echoed far beyond the walls of Al-Mesbar. Through our network of friends and supporters, the books and workshops are often covered, excerpted, or debated in some of the most popular broadcasts and publications in the Arabic language. When we achieve this level of attention, at times reaching tens of millions, we feel that we are succeeding in one of our core missions, as mentioned earlier – to migrate the values of tolerance from intellectual elites to people of all walks of life and every level of literacy. Extremists want to keep reformist intellectuals isolated from the broader society. We must not let them succeed.

On numerous occasions I have been heartened and humbled to receive an award for my role at Al-Mesbar Center, not just in the Arab world but also in the West. In travelling overseas for these special events, whether to Europe or the United States, I am sadly reminded that the problems of intolerance and extremism are not limited to a single part of the world. I am sometimes confronted by hostility toward the society into which I was born – a feeling in some Western quarters that all Gulf Arabs, or all Muslims, are extremists. So when I receive an award, I try to use it as an opportunity to creatively address these misperceptions, by bringing the Al-Mesbar message to a new audience. A case in point: In November 2014, I had the honour of accepting a lifetime achievement award from America Abroad Media, a Washington institution devoted to promoting international understanding through public communications. When I came to the gala event, I brought along some friends: the 30-member Antakya Choir from Turkey, which had been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize only a few years earlier. Composed of Turkish Muslims, Christians, and Jews and embodying the best values of their native land, they performed searing music and lyrics from their respective faith traditions. In an especially poignant moment, they dedicated a Christian song of God to families of the victims of the September 11 tragedy who were in the audience. I will never forget the experience of sharing tears, sadness, and love with my brothers and sisters in humanity that night. No song can soothe the pain they will forever feel, but in our music, our language, our prayers, and our ideals, we can conjure a world in which these tragedies do not happen again. Through our hard work each day, we can begin to realize that vision. It is an unending task. We are but a ship in a mighty sea. Yet even in the dead of night, we see a house of light in the distance, we set our course, and we move ahead.

Image: Al Mesbar

The Al-Mesbar team met with Mr. Abe Radkin of UNESCO's Project Alladin to discuss potential cooperation in the fields of tolerance, coexistence and peace that align with UNESCO's Decade for Cultural Rapprochement

Towards an effective and accountable public service delivery for rebuilding in the war-affected area in Sri Lanka

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Sustainable development is considered as the main path to a desirable and better world. An effective public service delivery is a prime condition in achieving sustainable goals set by the United Nations in 2016. Among those goals, the sixteenth goal concerns Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. The main focus of this article is to examine how to restore effective and efficient public service delivery in the war-affected area in Sri Lanka where people experienced a civil war for more than 26 years.

Even though eight years have passed since the end of the war, many people still stay at welfare camps in Sri Lanka. This article is based on a field survey in Valikamam North Divisional Secretariat, Jaffna, Sri Lanka in March 2016. After the end of the war in 2009, the government of Sri Lanka has taken several efforts to resettle people and reconstruct the affected areas. Despite the interventions, several families still live in welfare camps and feel unhappy with the government and public service delivery. The divisional secretariat in the selected area also faces several challenges in meeting the expectations of the people. This paper proposes policy measures as best practices for improving the effectiveness and responsive public service to promote peaceful and inclusive societies in the light of managerial innovation.

Konatkulam is one of welfare camps situated in Valikamam north divisional secretariat in the northern part of Jaffna. This division has a wealth of land, water and human resources, with an area of nearly 55.8 sq. km. and sea, limestone and fertile soil as the chief resources which lend a unique status to the region. But its uniqueness has been affected by the displacement of its people and by the establishment of high security zones constructed as a result of the war. The people seek rehabilitation and hope they will be resettled in their original villages. Using available resources, people engage in fishing and farming for their livelihood. Most families have been living in camps for 26 years with access to very limited welfare facilities. Their income level has decreased drastically since the war. The displaced families were not the recipients of Samurdhi programme which is the main welfare initiative operating at national level by the central government, aiming to increase the income level of poor families. Moreover, people who live in neighbouring villages treat those displaced families as strangers as they were perceived as refugees in the society.

The data in the table below shows that the living conditions of most of the families have gradually decreased and finally they have become labourers. Even though the government promises better places for the people, it has not yet been realized.

"We need our land back, we were living in our villages with a dignity. We lost our dignity and are now displaced. We became daily wage earners. So, we need to build up our lives and need our lands back."[1]

The majority of the people's expectation is to go back to their previous residences, restart previous jobs in their own areas and reunite with friends and relatives. In terms of the resettlement, they expect government assistance to build houses in their old lands and get back to the usual job opportunities as they are unhappy with life in the camps. Their human rights are violated as they are not living a respectful life. Even though some families are unaware of it, they are very sensitive when talking about their previous lives.

Socio economic status of people in Konatkulam welfare camp

		Status before coming to the welfare camps	Present status at welfare camps
Average monthly income of a family (Rs.)		19,375/-	16,000/-
Main sources of income generation(%)	Fishery	70%	10%
	Agriculture	10%	10%
	Self Employment	11%	11%
	Labour and Other	I9%	60%

(Source : survey data,2016)

People live with only minimum living conditions. Their temporary houses are visible in the background

"There is no decision made to improve our lives. The government should take decisions immediately for us. We need to resettle in our own lands."[1]

It seems that people are unhappy with the government services and expect an immediate response to the rebuilding and rehabilitation. The government has provided basic services such as water, electricity, sanitary facilities and other related services, however, the divisional secretariat in this area mentions that they face various difficulties in delivery services.

The government has already provided necessary services such as electricity, sanitary facilities, garbage collection, and water – every family gets tap line water provided by the water utility and the drainage board. The government collects garbage from the village once a month. People can get the services of midwives at the government hospital. The villagers use the bus provided by the Sri Lanka Transport Board to visit to the nearest village.

According to the villagers, they are receiving some monetary subsidies from the government, for instance, a fund of 3000 rupees to the widows. It has been observed that several houses were constructed, most with funds provided by UNHCR.

However, there are more things to be done for improving living standards, completing resettlement and fulfilling other expectations. There are various ways to change the situation in the region but a lack of support from the ministries and dependence on central government does not supply solutions. Alternatively, managerial innovation could be applied to build strong, responsive and effective public service delivery. Innovation can be defined as a view to a change or doing something in a different way. Yin[2] defines organizational innovation as originating predominantly from the motive of improving goods and services provided by the organization. Through managerial innovation, existing working patterns, systems, procedures and styles could be changed leading to more efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of public services that help to reduce costs, generate income and increase the peoples' satisfaction towards the public service[3].

The chief role of a divisional secretariat is to solve issues relating to lands in that region. It is possible to arrange awareness programmes to explain the difficulties faced in giving back the original lands. The people should be reminded that they are no longer the victims of war, but have the capacity to expand their livelihoods.

As the income level of a family directly affects their living standards, a suitable mechanism could be developed to increase the level of income. People in the area should be given lands to cultivate as it is suitable for the cultivation of grapes, mango, rubber and many other crops. This action will increase household income levels as well as economic productivity. If facilities are provided for cultivation with the support of the private sector, it will bring several benefits for the people. For example, a leading private sector company in Sri Lanka has developed links with farmers, helping the harvest to be sent direct to the market. Hence, the company

Image: Third year undergraduates of the department of public administration reading for B.Sc. Public Management (Special) Degree

A water well and tank were built by the divisional secretariat with the help of various parties in the resettled areas

helps to increase family income levels. These lessons could equally apply to farmers in the selected areas.

Most children in these families have not received even a primary education. Parents do not have the ability to spend adequate funds on their education so the government must provide the facilities enjoyed by other students in the country. There is a possibility of getting support from the private sector and other donor agencies for building new schools, introducing scholarship programmes, providing text books, uniforms and other required resources under corporate social responsibility activities.

People's participation is another approach for making the public sector more effective. This can be enhanced by involving field work, interaction between public officials and the people. The public officials can arrange mobile offices within the area to understand the real problems of the people and solve them.

The most serious issue faced by the divisional secretary in these areas is that people are reluctant to go to new lands, rather they still hope to retrieve their previously owned lands. With the support of central government, private sector and donor agencies, attractive financial benefits could be offered to those who have expressed an interest to move to new lands. Another option is that foreign aid could be deposited directly in a household's bank account so that they could rebuild their own houses rather than have government officials handling foreign aid. If the government can fund more money for the people who are willing to move to new lands, it will encourage the move from the welfare camps.

Government officials could invite new business investors to invest in these areas and start new industries, helping to generate job opportunities for people living in the camps.

It could be simply concluded that, due to the lack of resources, one could not stop public service delivery. There are various ways to create effective, accountable and transparent government organizations. Managerial innovation is considered as another alternative in restoring effective public service delivery to promote peaceful and inclusive societies.

Image: Third year undergraduates of the department of public administration reading for B.Sc. Public Management (Special) Degree

A house was constructed by the divisional secretariat with the help of various parties in the resettled areas

The right to information for a better world with special reference to Sri Lanka

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The right to information is considered to be the foundation of good governance and the principle by which sustainable development becomes reality. This article examines the possibility of achieving good governance and sustainable development in Sri Lanka through the recent establishment of the Right to Information Act. The Global Right to Information Rating in 2016 has opined this act to be one of the best practices for a better world.

Sustainable development is a pathway to a better world. Governance is identified as a means of steering the process of sustainable development which can be seen as a collection of rules, stakeholder involvement and processes to realize a common goal.[1] Transparency, accountability, responsiveness, participation and responsibility are the key attributes of good governance that contribute to establishing a sustainable environment. In the process of establishing good governance, there should be a proper mechanism to ensure its integrity. When a country has successfully ensured its right to information, it creates a more open government.

Recently, Sri Lanka has given its highest consideration to ensure the right to information. The county faced many challenges with the civil war for more than 30 years and, after the war, the country experienced many pressures internationally as well as from within. Under these pressures, the present government came to power in 2015 with an election campaign that gave the highest consideration to the establishment of good governance. As a result, the government introduced the Right to Information Act, No. 12 in 2016.

In the Global Right to Information Rating (RTI Rating) of 2016, the new Act was ranked in third place, scoring 131 out of 150, while Mexico and Serbia were placed in first and second place, respectively. The rating assesses the strength of the legal framework around the right to information according to 61 indicators among seven categories, namely: right of access, scope, requesting procedures, exceptions, appeals, sanctions, and promotional measures.

Under this ranking and among the selected criteria, only the sanctions were somewhat low for Sri Lanka, with other categories scoring higher. The central idea behind the RTI Rating is to provide RTI advocates, reformers, legislators and others with a reliable tool for comparatively assessing the overall strength of a legal framework. It also indicates weaknesses in the legal framework and provides a convenient means of pinpointing areas in need of improvement.[2]

However, it is important to analyse how the Act has been developed to identify its strengths and weaknesses. This act is established with the purpose of guaranteeing the right to information enacted by the constitution of the country. The Act indicated that it fosters a culture of transparency and accountability in public authorities and thereby promotes a society in which the people of Sri Lanka would be able to more fully participate in public life through combating corruption and promoting accountability to establish good governance.

The Act provides the right of access to information to specify grounds on which access may be denied, to establish the Right to Information Commission, to appoint information officers, and to set out the procedure of reaching the purposes for establishing such an Act. The minister of parliamentary reforms and mass media was assigned the responsibilty for the effective implementation of the provision of this Act.[3]

The Act is considered to be well-established and formalized, providing the required instructions and regulations which need to be implemented effectively by providing specific definitions for the wording and avoiding confusion or contradiction when implementing it.

Sri Lankan status in the Global Right to Information Rating in 2016

Category	Maximum Score	Score by country
Right of Access	6	5
Scope	30	28
Requesting procedures	30	26
Exceptions	30	23
Appeals	30	29
Sanctions	8	4
Promotional measures	16	16
Total	150	131

Source: www.rti-rating.org

According to the Act, every citizen shall have the right of access to information which is in the possession, custody or control of a public authority, except some limited information that relates to highly confidential personal information which may be a threat to personal security and to human rights; information that relates to defence of the State or poses a threat to its territorial integrity or national security; confidential information which is seriously prejudicial to the country's relations with any state, or in relation to international agreements or under international law; information that would cause serious prejudice to the economy; the premature disclosure of decisions to change or continue government economic or financial policies; information including commercial confidence, trade secrets or intellectual property, protected under the country's Intellectual Property Act.

Further limits include highly confidential information that would be in contempt of court or prejudicial to the maintenance of the authority and impartiality of the judiciary, where the disclosure of such information would infringe the privileges of Parliament or of a Provincial Council as provided by Law; and confidential information which will be harmful for future decisions relating to the legal, financial and economic status of the country.

Nevertheless, a request for information shall not be refused where the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the harm that would result from its disclosure. All information can be requested by writing or orally. Also, if the right to information of any person is denied unfairly, that person can appeal against the rejection of the request. According to the act, to align with the regulations, every public authority and ministry has the responsibility to maintain all of its records duly catalogued and indexed so that every citizen is made aware and has access to it in the official languages of Sinhala and Tamil.

The Act provides an implementing procedure to provide information with a minimum time period. The public authorities are liable to respond to information requests within a maximum of 28 days. Thus, Sri Lanka's Right to Information (RTI) Act ensures open government, citizens' active participation in governance, and accountability. It overrides all other written law where there may be contradiction. All information should be available if the greater public interest is served by its disclosure.

The Act restricts the opportunity for corruption since it is compulsory for each and every ministry and public authority to declare all the information relating to their activities. Furthermore, all public authorities, information officers, and ministers are responsible for and accountable to provide information while increasing responsiveness. This process encourages public participation in decision making.

Also the Act states that it protects human rights through the right to information without harming any citizen's privacy and security to access information, maximizing society's welfare while minimizing its cost. Furthermore, it protects national security, the economy, and territorial integrity. Any citizen can gain access to information such as why certain people receive benefits; what criteria are used to give people jobs; rating scores at job interviews; why a child didn't get into school; departmental regulations: and future projects and their progress. The Act also increases the efficiency of the information acquisition process while minimizing cost and time.

The Act has very few weakness. It allows access only to information related to public authorities and ministries but not to other information. Also, there is not much information on free trade agreements.

As the Act is a new experience for Sri Lanka, it is still at the experimental level. In order to gain experience in effective and efficient implementation, the country held the International Conference on RTI Sri Lanka and Media Reforms in 2016 with two main objectives.[4] One is the exchange of regional and international experience and technical knowledge which could be used to implement the Act more efficiently and effectively. Also the conference facilitated learning through the discussion of necessary mass media reforms for the establishment of a reliable political culture based on democracy and good governance. Here, practical experience was gained from media veterans from South Asia, Canada and Europe.

Today, the right to information is of paramount importance as it strengthens the democracy and the informed citizenery. It is essential to provide complete awareness and overall knowledge about the Act to all ministers, government officers and citizens. As this is an initial step to establish right to information in Sri Lanka as a developing country, the effort is highly appreciated. The Act has to be reviewed regularly while identifying weaknesses, loopholes, and making further improvements to create beneficial actions. It is also a responsibility of citizens to acquire awareness and reap the benefits of access to information and to participate more in the governance of the country as active citizens.

The Act can be identified as a tool for restoring good governance, although it is too early to evaluate its success. But, as a developing country, Sri Lanka believes that it is a solid foundation for ensuring good governance into the future.

Image: www.rtiwatch.lk (2016)

International Conference on RTI Sri Lanka and Media Reforms 2016. Speeches were delivered by the former Chief Justice of Delhi, the President of Sri Lanka, the Speaker, and the Minister of Parliamentary Reforms and Mass Media

Harnessing the Africa Mining Vision to capture the developmental benefits of mineral resources

Dr Kojo Busia, Coordinator, African Minerals Development Centre; John Robert Sloan, Economist, African Minerals Development Centre

The structural transformation of African countries, from economies characterized as low-income and vulnerable to boom-bust cycles due to commodity dependence, into more diversified and industrialized economies creating higher-income jobs, is a top priority for policy makers. The goal of transformation is not new, but the volatility of mineral and oil prices over the past ten years – having fed both the Africa Rising narrative as well as exposing the fragility of record growth and revenues to global events – has shed light on the importance of a practical and implementable roadmap to transformation by more productively harnessing the continent's natural resource assets.

The Africa Mining Vision (AMV), adopted by African Heads of State in 2009, showcases the potential of Africa's mineral sector to be a central pillar of structural change and transformation on the continent. It represents a sustainable development paradigm aiming to re-align the view of mineral resources as a driver for growth and development across all of Africa's economic sectors. The AMV shares the vision for a productive, inclusive and sustainable future for Africa as envisaged by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and indeed, strategies to implement the AMV will also help countries work towards each of the 17 goals.

It is clear that an inclusive approach to the use of minerals to spur economic linkages and social benefits, as advocated by the AMV, is an approach that can help Africa turn the corner in its role in the global economy, and that an institutional arrangement with mineral-based transformation at its centre is necessary to usher in this strategy.

The importance of mineral-based development

The role of minerals in Africa's economic landscape is clear. Minerals and metals contribute over 20 per cent of Africa's total economic output, and several countries' export and foreign exchange earnings rely greatly on minerals, accounting in many cases for over half of national export flows.[1] Indeed, for many mineral producing countries, these resources are of far greater proportional importance for exports than overall output (see table on opposite page). Record high global commodity prices, peaking in 2011, attracted investment from new partners such as China, filled government coffers and provided funding for developmental spending, particularly on infrastructure. The outlook for Africa's future role in the global commodity industry is also strong. It is estimated that the continent holds roughly one-third of global mineral reserves, including over half of reserves of platinum group metals, diamonds, phosphates and other mineral groups.

Yet despite these assets and the principal role of mineral-based growth, it is clear that a long history of mining, extraction and export has failed to spur the development of related manufacturing, value-added services and other sectors that are vital for stable income and jobs. Indeed, whereas mining in commodity-dependent Chile, Australia and elsewhere has fostered national and regional linkages in higher value activities, the majority of African mineral producers remain stuck in low-value extraction with few employment-creating externalities. Despite record mineral revenue collection, fiscal leakages – illicit and otherwise – have robbed the continent of funds for development, and such leakages occuring along mineral value chains further disincentivizes value addition. Recent infrastructure investments in the mineral sector tend to resemble those during the colonial era, with transport, energy and communication grids serving resource extraction but doing little for the population at large and failing to strategically link with agriculture and other vital sectors. Inequality and growing problems surrounding artisanal and small-scale mining point to persisting lack of access and shared benefits from national resources.

Guidance provided by the Africa Mining Vision

A strong framework does exist that deals with these very challenges and foresees a diversified, inclusive and integrated African economy built around a more responsible use of

The Africa Mining Vision – fundamental pillars

The AMV is organized according to seven fundamental pillars, on which an inclusive and transformative approach to harnessing mineral endowments will be based. These include:

- Optimizing knowledge and benefits of finite mineral resources
- Harnessing the potential of small scale mining to improve rural livelihoods
- Fostering sustainable development principles based on environmentally and socially responsible mining
- Building human and institutional capacities towards a knowledge economy
- Developing a diversified and globally competitive African mineral industry
- Fostering a transparent and accountable mineral sector
- Promoting good governance of the mineral sector in which communities and citizens participate in mineral assets.

natural resources. The AMV has at its heart the goal to bring about a "transparent, equitable and optimal exploitation of mineral resources to underpin broad-based sustainable growth and socio-economic development."[2] The AMV provides an implementable path for countries to onboard its fundamental pillars into their approach to mining (see box on opposite page). Importantly, the AMV represents a paradigm shift as the only African-owned agenda for mineral use that puts cooperation, development, linkages and positive spillover effects above simple extraction and revenue.

As African countries emulate the AMV in their national policy environment, the consistencies between this and other development frameworks provide policy makers with opportunities to streamline their efforts towards mutually beneficial and reinforcing goals. For example, the many shared traits between the AMV and the SDGs include: SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth through linkages and diversification; SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure; and SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions to address mineral governance, Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs) and rights for local communities. The elements of domestic financial resource mobilization and illicit flows from the mineral sector inherent in the AMV also overlap with the mandate of the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action and outcomes of the Mbeki High Level Panel on IFFs. Indeed, in highlighting the importance of responsible, nationally-owned and inclusive use of natural resources to spur transformation, the AMV served as a precursor to many of these frameworks.

Minerals as a percentage of GDP and exports, select African countries

Country	Series	2014 value
Madagascar	Mineral rents (% of GDP)	3.51
	Ores and metals exports (% of merchandise exports)	36.82
Mauritania	Mineral rents (% of GDP)	27.58
	Ores and metals exports (% of merchandise exports)	59.51
Morocco	Mineral rents (% of GDP)	1.92
	Ores and metals exports (% of merchandise exports)	7.88
Mozambique	Mineral rents (% of GDP)	0.03
	Ores and metals exports (% of merchandise exports)	34.43
Tanzania	Mineral rents (% of GDP)	2.39
	Ores and metals exports (% of merchandise exports)	17.36
Zambia	Mineral rents (% of GDP)	12.81
	Ores and metals exports (% of merchandise exports)	78.16
Zimbabwe	Mineral rents (% of GDP)	3.83
	Ores and metals exports (% of merchandise exports)	24.5

Source: Authors' Calculations based on World Bank WDI 2017

AMV progress realized with coordination from the African Minerals Development Centre

The African Minerals Development Centre (AMDC) was established in 2013 as custodian of the AMV, in order to assist African member states with implementation and mainstreaming in national frameworks. AMDC support is demand-driven based on requests and needs of member states and thus takes many forms in response to context specificities. This can include technical support, capacity building, assistance with political and governance aspects of the AMV, and other areas. This variety of flexible support in adopting the AMV is coordinated as a comprehensive Country Mining Vision (CMV) for each country with which the AMDC engages. AMDC operates along a structure of seven workstreams, directly relating to the pillars of the AMV, and has worked in over half of all AU member States. AMDC support is resulting in practical implementation of the AMV and, by extension, progress towards the SDGs in a number of specific initiatives, a snapshot of which are detailed here:

Identifying opportunities for economic linkages, value addition and regional value chains

While the need for mineral-based industrialization is well acknowledged, the specific means to build this requires thorough empirical analysis and recognition of the political economy of the sector, country and region in question. Indeed, a delicate coordination is needed of all the activities that will foster such linkages, including infrastructure investments, skilling of labour, agglomeration of producers through economic clusters, facilitation of business connections and incentivizing of production and investment flows, amongst others. In recognition of this, AMDC is increasingly providing analysis and identification of linkage and production potential as a part of its CMV guidance. One example of this is support to Ghana to establish a supplier development programme which will identify upstream inputs that can be produced domestically to service both the well-established mining sector and other established and rising industries, and the investments needed to enable local suppliers to produce these. Given the scale and history of gold extraction in Ghana, and the mostly untapped potential in bauxite, manganese and iron ore, AMDC is advocating a transformation of the vicious cycle wherein mining activities yield raw exports and consume manufactured imports into a virtuous circle of mineral outputs being harnessed for use in construction, industry, metal working and other activities, the outputs of which can then serve as local inputs into domestic and regional mining. Regarding this regional lens, ongoing consultations with the government are also addressing the role of regional integration and trade in linking with neighbouring markets throughout ECOWAS. Indeed, domestic demand for and production of such items may be too small to incentivize investments and reach efficient economies of scale, but pooling national markets can allow for this critical mass of consumers and producers. AMDC has adopted this regional value chain approach in work in SADC as well, and will involve it as a key tenet of future CMV engagements.

Identifying and addressing IFFs in the mineral sector

AMDC has been enhancing the groundbreaking Mbeki High Level Panel work on IFFs, which noted the more than USD 50bn which illicitly leaves Africa annually. Work by AMDC notes that over half of these IFFs are driven by the extractives sector. Specifically, two recent reports have shed light on the types of fiscal regimes across Africa, how these contribute to IFF and transfer mispricing issues, and solutions including regional fiscal harmonization. Many African countries continue to employ contractual approaches to mineral taxation, wherein tax measures imposed can vary contract-to-contract. Rather, licensing systems should be pursued in which tax and royalty laws are uniformally applied, reducing chances for undue exceptions and exemptions. Fiscal regimes across countries remain incoherent and inconsistent, allowing multinational corporations to exploit these disparities, triggering a race-to-the-bottom through overly compensatory contracts. Fiscal harmonization, particularly through alignment and streamlining of policies, allows African countries to coordinate while recognizing the specificities of their own fiscal regimes which might be glossed over by complete uniformity. While regimes have largely relied on mineral-specific ad-valorem royalties due to the ease of implementation, these can be regressive and not sensitive to market conditions, as opposed to profit-based regimes which, while complex to administer, do capture the state of profits. In order to assist member states in onboarding these recommendations, AMDC has taken part in hosting training workshops, for example on identifying and addressing transfer pricing issues as well as on contract negotiation.

Cross-sector institutional harmonization for AMV onboarding

In engaging with and supporting member states, a key issue that has emerged is the need to define or, in some cases, re-structure the institutional framework governing economic transformation. While mineral policy may be narrowly interpreted as applying only to the mining sector, the approach of the AMV encourages government and non-government stakeholders in mining, industry, trade, environment, labour and other sectors to come together and find realizable solutions and ideas. Indeed, transformation can be achieved by no one actor alone. In this regard, efforts towards transformation, compliance with the SDGs, AU Agenda 2063 and other initiatives can be harmonized. Only through concerted efforts from the highest level of policy making can resources be galvanized and coordinated in order to finally make the major push towards a socioeconomic transformation of the role of minerals in Africa.

A mining excavation site

Ensuring participatory and representative decision-making at grassroots level in Sri Lanka

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People's Participation can be defined as the active participation in political decision making.[1] It can also be defined as people's involvement in the formulation and implementation of public policies, or as community participation. In this process, individuals and families take responsibility by becoming agents of their own development without being passive beneficiaries of development aids. The participation process is one of the principles of good governance as well as an essential ingredient for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

As a third world country, the Sri Lankan government carries out various kinds of development projects to enhance social welfare. Those projects have drawbacks as well as beneficial outcomes, but it is better to practice participatory decision-making at grassroots level as those involved are the ones who will finally benefit from these projects. Through the following examples, the importance of effective participation and representation in decision making by the people becomes obvious. This article discusses two successful stories.

With the desire for good governance, the Sri Lankan government has launched many participatory enhancement programmes at grassroots level. One of the projects was introduced by the Sri Lanka National Youth Service Council, established under the ministry of national policies and economic affairs, to target island-wide youth clubs. The project, *GamataKotiyak*, is being successfully implemented, with the government-owned Independent Television Network (ITN) as the main media sponsor. More than 1,500 youth clubs were involved, the government having initially granted LKR 75,000 for each youth club with the delegated authority to implement a suitable development project for their village. As a result, nearly 1,500 development projects were completed during the year 2016 with the collaboration of particular villagers. Those projects included building community wells, agro wells, rural roads and bridges, water supply projects, schools and other facility developments. The projects were implemented by the villagers by themselves.

The government evaluated the projects, selected one outstanding example and awarded a *crore* for that village. The youth club that won first place had built a bridge for their village which they have named *Ridi Tharu Bridge* (Silver Star Bridge). The total cost of that project was around LKR 5,000,000, although the government provided only 75,000 for each youth club, even though all of the projects were valued at more than LKR 1,000,000. This shows the power of people's participation.

Most of the developing countries have failed to achieve the intended development goals because of inefficient use of public money and corruption. The above example demonstrates how peoples' participation can help reduce corruption and other financial issues. If this project was implemented by the government sector, there would be money wastage in commission and bribery. But the above programmes carried out by village youth clubs with the participation of villagers and other interested parties have used the limited funds in an efficient manner without wastage or corruption.

Another example is the *Gammadda* (middle of the village) programme launched by Sirasa Television network, one of the leading television channels in Sri Lanka. This initiative, the first of its kind done by a media organization in Sri Lanka, will get underway as a result of issues identified during a door-to-door campaign which revealed a number of challenges faced by rural Sri Lanka where there are geographically isolated and less educated people who do not have a stage to voice their needs

Sirasa TV has been at the forefront of media innovation in Sri Lanka with particular emphasis on social responsibility. The network initiated the *Gammadda* programme as its social service offering in which "News 1st" has re-invigorated the village council by taking it to the masses and strengthening the fundamentals of democracy through instilling the ideal that even the highest echelons of government are directly responsible to the people.

Under this programme, Sirasa TV created a platform to reveal to the country the living conditions of rural people and their real needs. They conduct village group discussions and gather villagers' ideas, prioritizing them to identify their most critical needs. Finally, they initiate a project to solve a chosen problem by using their private funds and participants' labour. The general public can also contribute to these projects by sending money or materials. Some have sent a small amount of money such as LKR 100. The platform also provides access to help people help each other within the country.

Under the participatory development programmes, a number of projects have been carried out such as community halls; water purifying; drainage systems, drinking water projects, and the installation of a guiding signal lamp at the fisheries pier.

More than 100 projects have been completed so far. A project in Mahawilachchiya, a rural village, involved the renovation of the community hall which was in a dire state of repair. Another project involved water distribution in Ampara, a very rural district. The project was inaugurated under Phase Two of the *Gammadda* movement for the people who did not enjoy the simple privilege of consuming drinking water. The project will include the installation of two tube wells to facilitate drinking water.

The *Gammadda* brought relief to the development of educational infrastructure in Yaya-26, a rural village in Polonnaruwa that has been neglected for years. The dilapidated main hall of the Mahasen Vidyalaya village was renovated. The hall was built over 40 years ago and was the third building of the school and the only place where students could practice their skills. The project was carried out with the participation of accomplished architects, builders, and engineers who provided advice free of charge, and was completed within two months. Its main sponsor was one of the regional monks associations.

These programmes are very important for the country's development. Even though these are not initiated by the government, they are worthy examples of people's participation in the decision-making process in Sri Lanka. It proves that even private sector organizations can carry out this kind of participatory enhancement for the hope of a better world and that it does not have to be a responsibility of government.

The *Gammadda* programme has been introduced to raise a rural voice in the decision making processes but it also draws the attention of government policy makers towards people's comments and ideas when making and implementing policies. This is the best way of stimulating awareness of rural villagers' problems and issues in order to make decisions to fulfil their needs and wants. Those problems may be common to everyone but some issues might differ from one person to another according to geography, nationality, religion and gender. Therefore, when the government makes a decision, there should be a proper mechanism to fulfil the relevant parties' expectations in a successful manner.

The group director of the Capital Maharaja Organisation, Chevaan Daniel, reminded us that the *Gammadda* programme is made possible only with the help of the people and other institutions that have joined hands with News 1st to take the projects forward. Mr Daniel comments: "We did not commence this as a result of being influenced by any political notion in mind. There was initially a need to find out about the issues faced by the people and their day to day life. Thereafter, we filed reports of the people's accounts. The grievances of the people were later compiled and shared with the state and international community. We decided not to reiterate about what we don't have but to work towards it."[2]

The importance of peoples' participation in the government decision making and project implementation stages is evident. Engaging the public in decision making serves to educate both citizen and policy makers about the various factors of a particular decision or issues from a variety of perspectives. It also makes the successful implementation of a decision or policy more likely and builds trust among them as well as helps to build accountability for both policy makers (politicians and administrators) and beneficiaries (citizens). Finally It helps to achieve the best outcomes of the decision making process for a better world.

Image: Sirasa Tv gammadda programme and News 1st team

A village council conducted by a Gammadda programme to gather people's ideas and problems

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Promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies: An essential goal for progress towards a better world for all

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5 4.7 on a culture of peace, nonviolence and global citizenship; 5.2 on violence against women and girls; 5.3 on child marriage and female genital mutilation; 5.5 on women's participation and leadership; 8.7 on child labour and soldiers, on forced and modern slavery and human trafficking; 10.7 on safe migration; 10.2 on political, social and economic inclusion; 11.1, 11.2, 11.7, 8.8 and 4a on safe public spaces, housing, transport, workplaces and education facilities; 11.3 on inclusive urbanisation; 8.5 on equal pay for equal work; 8.8 on labour rights; 10.3 on equal opportunities, laws, policies and practices; 10.4 on policies for greater equality; 5c on policies and legislation for gender equality; 5.1 on discrimination against women and girls; 4.5 on all forms of discrimination in education; 1b on institutions and policies for poverty reduction; 17.3 on tax collection; 10.5 and 10.6 on global financial and economic institutions; 17.10 on an equitable trade system. (For more detail, see the discussion paper on the roadmap for delivering the Agenda 2030 targets for peaceful, just and inclusive societies (SDG16+) prepared by the New York University, Centre for International Cooperation, March 2017): http://cic.nyu.edu/publications/peaceful-just-and-inclusive-societies-call-action-change-our-world
6 The worldwide survey "MY World" provided an opportunity for millions of people to vote on their priorities for the post-2015 agenda. http://vote.myworld2015.org/ and for more info on data: http://data.myworld2015.org/
7 To 15% in the new national five-year plan.
8 To 1% of the national budget.
9 Those entitlements promote peace and development. For example, when vulnerable people can successfully assert their rights to livelihoods - enhancing entitlements like pensions and social welfare payments, inheritance, business development services, or school enrollment - their own lives, and that of their families and communities, are often transformed.
10 https://undg.org/document/maps-mainstreaming-acceleration-and-policy-support-for-the-2030-agenda/
11 The Provincial Governance and Public Administrative Index (PAPI) captures/reflects citizens' experiences of public service provision. The PAPI reveals how nearly 75,000 citizens use and experience public services, providing the information needed to strengthen institutional performance, and a practical mechanism for citizens to get the services they need. http://papi.org.vn/eng/
12 To help to achieve this, UNDP facilitates the exchange of knowledge between local governments and their associations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean with the Global Taskforce of the Global Network of Cities, Local and Regional Government

Canada's international assistance contributes to increasing access to justice – efforts in Mali and Ukraine

1 http://w05.international.gc.ca/projectbrowser-banqueprojets/?lang=eng

Development assistance for peaceful and just societies – the need for orientation

1 This article is written in the capacity of senior policy advisor at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland (FDFA). The opinions expressed in this article focus on SDCs bilateral development cooperation and are the author's own and do not reflect the view of the FDFA, Swiss Federal Services or the Swiss government.
2 Swiss Constitution, Article 42, Para. 2
3 Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation 2017–20, Chapter 1.6.2, p. 2373
4 SDC: SDC Contribution: Report on the results of the Swiss International Cooperation 2013–2016, Bern, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, p. 17
5 SDC: Evaluation of the performance of SDC instruments in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, Evaluation 2012/1, p. 26
6 SDC: Peace and Statebuilding Strategy, 2014, p. 2
7 OECD: Ministeral Declaration 2007, available at: http://www.oecd.org/countries/democraticrepublicofthecongo/aboutthefragilestatesprinciples.htm
8 OECD: States of Fragility Report 2016, p. 137
9 World Bank, World Development Report, Risks and Opportunities – Managing Risk for Development, 2014, p. 264
10 OECD: Managing Risks in Fragile and Transitional Contexts – The Price of Success, 2012, p. 16
11 OECD: Stockholm Declaration, available at https://www.pbsbdialogue.org/media/filer_public/1e/23/1e237c73-5518-4a03-9a87-b1aa6d914d20/stockholm_declaration.pdf
12 Centre on Internal Cooperation (CIC) New York / Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (Geneva): https://www.admin.ch/gov/en/start/documentation/media-releases.msg-id-63845.html
13 Kaplan, Seth: Identifying Truly Fragile States, Washington Quarterly 37:1 (Spring 2014), p. 51
14 World Bank Group: World Development Report 2017 – Governance and the Law.

The Baku Process – sharing cultures for shared security

1 The title Advancing Intercultural Dialogue: New avenues for human security, peace and sustainable development has been adopted following helpful suggestions by UNESCO (UNESCO, Paris, 05 December 2016).
2 See The Economist 19 November 2016

Building global harmony through intercultural action

1 K–12 comprises the sum of primary and secondary education in many countries including the US, Canada, Australia, South Korea, Turkey, Philippines, India.

Protecting and defending the vulnerable – direct action and legislation on domestic violence and child maltreatment

1 Al Mugeiren, M, & Ganelin, R S (1990). A suspected case of Munchusen syndrome by proxy in a Saudi child. Annals of Saudi Medicine, 10, 662–665.

2 Almuneef, M & Al Eissa, M (2011). Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect, Are we Ready?. Annals of Saudi Medicine, 2011, 635-640.

3 Almuneef MA, et al (2014) Multidimensional model to assess the readiness of Saudi Arabia to implement evidence based child maltreatment prevention programs at a large scale. Child Abuse Negl. 2014 Mar;38(3):527-32.

4 World Health Organization (WHO), International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN). (2006). Preventing child maltreatment: A guide to taking action and generating evidence. Geneva, Switzerland.

One planet, one family – the Sikh path to a just, peaceful and inclusive world

1 Guru Granth Sahib: The word guru means, literally, the one who dispels the darkness of ignorance. In Sikh parlance, Guru is the ultimate spiritual guide, the one who enlightens. The last of the ten Sikh Gurus, Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708CE), ended the line of succession, and ordained the Adi Granth (primal pothi, book), compiled by earlier Gurus, to be the Guru Eternal – Guru Granth Sahib. This is the Sikh Gurus' gift to humanity. The message, being in the written word, and recorded and authenticated by the Gurus themselves, shall exist for eternity in its untouched, pristine form. Some attributes of the Divine Being herein are: God is Beyond Time, Beyond Form, Self-Created, Eternal, Omnipresent, Transcendental, Impartial, Benevolent, is realized through His Grace.
2 Guru Granth Sahib, p 118
3 Ibid., p 385
4 Ibid., p 898; p 47
5 Ibid., p 350
6 Ibid., p 1349
7 Ibid., p 62
8 Ibid., p 853
9 Ibid., p 345
10 Ibid., p 1412
11 Khande di pahul (initiation ceremony): administering amrit (elixir of immortality) to seekers from the same bata (bowl). The Guru prepared amrit by stirring water with a khanda (double-edged sword) with simultaneous recitation of specific hymns. Mata Sahib Kaur added patashas (sugar cakes) therein. The Khalsa are ordained to keep five kakkars (5 Ks) on their person: katchh (specific undergarment), kara (iron bangle), kirpan (lit. sword), kangha (wooden comb), kes (unshorn hair).
12 Guru Granth Sahib, p 1299; p 1147
13 Ibid., p 97
14 Ibid., p 26
15 Ibid., p.8

Public participation and sustainable development – unleashing the power of common people

1 Street-level bureaucrats are the frontline workers or policy implementers in government agencies such as local government officials, nurses, doctors, policemen and teachers. See Lipsky, M. (2010). Street-level bureaucracy, 30th ann. Ed.: dilemmas of the individual in public service. Russell Sage Foundation.

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- Bangladesh Country Assistance Strategy, 2011–2014, The World Bank.
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- Fourth Assessment Report, UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
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- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
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- United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Convention (IPCCC).
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Bangladesh.
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Revisiting the controls over civil society organizations in Asia

1 White 1996:178, cited by Bush, 2004, p. 3
2 Berglund, 2009, p. 2-3
3 Waddell, 1997; World Bank, 1997; Brown and Ashman, 1996, cited by Brown, 1999
4 CIVICUS, 1997, cited by Brown, 1999
5 Bratton, 1989; Bebbington, 1997, cited by Brown, 1999, p. 5

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2 Yin, Robert K. 1977. Production Efficiency versus Bureaucratic Self-interest: Two Innovative Processes? Policy Sciences. 8, 4:381-399.
3 Fernando Lalitha S. 2006. Managerial Innovation in Delivery Service in Public Sector Organizations in Sri Lanka, Governance and Development edited by Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman, Shrabon Printing Press, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

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2 AUC (2009). The Africa Mining Vision. Addis Ababa: The African Union Commission.

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1 Paul, 1987
2 News First article, "UPDATE: Gammedda 100 days: Towards a better nation – history in the making", http://newsfirst.lk/english/2016/07/gammadda-100-days-towards-better-nation-history-making/142116