

DIHAD 2022: Special Session on “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions”(SDG 16)
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Partnership is the new buzz word. Any aspiring politician, business tycoon, or organisational leader advancing their agenda must, at the very least, envelope their message in the soft language of partnership. This creates the nice gooey mood that is useful to any enterprise – good or bad.

So, for inherently noble objectives such as the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is obvious that doing good necessitates the mobilisation of collective resources, knowledge, and skills because there are not enough individual capacities to do sufficient good at large scale.

Partnering for good needs no further justification. Many examples exist in all human development sectors of the SDGs i.e. health, water, education etc. It is then mostly a matter of technical debate to figure out the processes and mechanisms for making strong and efficient partnerships.

Of course, there is still work to do because do-gooders are only human i.e. they are also self-seeking, jealous and competitive. And when do-gooders herd together in good-making institutions such as NGOs, UN agencies, and the Red Cross Red Crescent, the human ego problem is consolidated and magnified. That is why coordination is such a complicated affair in international humanitarianism and development. I can vouch for this having held senior positions with the word coordinator in them.

Anyone in this business has long since learnt that partnerships can't rely on good faith alone. They need rules and regulations. Someone has to produce the tips, tools and manuals to be used to control or re-direct the selfish sides of our instincts. That is why partnership punditry is a thriving endeavour with courses and conferences dedicated to its art and science. Like here in this year's DIHAD.

If partnering for good is difficult, what then about partnering for bad? Looking back at history, we see that the most successful partnerships were criminal ones. After all, there is no need to invoke higher morality if your motivation is just to make money. The Mafias of many countries understand this very well. Also Hollywood and Bollywood. We even romanticise and fantasise criminal partnerships in block-busters such as [Bonnie and Clyde](#) and [The Godfather](#).

Nowadays, highly lucrative partnerships exist in people trafficking, drugs peddling, trading in fake medicine, gambling, selling arms, and countless other enterprises that prey on human vulnerability and greed or insecurity. Indeed, the partnership gurus and business schools should make case studies of them so that the do-gooding partnerships can learn about ruthlessness and efficiency from them

But criminal partnerships are generally restricted to a coterie of thugs and their foot soldiers. In fact, such partnerships must be limited by design. They need to be exclusive – like those special membership clubs we see in major cities where ordinary people are not admitted. That is because profit-sharing can then be maximised among like-minded elites while risks to discovery and closedown are reduced. Hence criminal partnerships are highly sustainable – they are difficult to close down. They are also very adaptable to changing operational environments, technologies, and new markets. Perhaps, the good-making partnerships can learn something here.

But, even more informative than criminal partnerships are the evil ones. Here I talk about those leaders and countries that mobilised their populations en masse towards whole-scale destructive ends. The classic example is, of course, Hitler's Holocaust. How else could you kill 6 million Jews and 3 million others except through getting most of Germany's population to be your partners? And then making partners out of conquered territories such as Vichy France or neighbours such as Mussolini's Italy and even developing a partnership with far-away Imperial Japan. The tactics for that are detailed in Hitler's *Mein Kampf* which could also be studied by partnership gurus.

Similar proven "whole of society" partnerships are exemplified by the genocides in Rwanda, Cambodia, by the Bosnian Serbs in Srebrenica and the Sudanese against Darfur. Also Islamic State partnership against the Yazidis in Iraq, the Myanmar state against Rohingya, the Chinese state itself against its Uyghurs minority, or the Ethiopian state and institutions against Tigray. The massive conflict in Yemen is also a well-known multinational partnership effort.

The Soviet Union used ruthless partnership tactics to trigger catastrophic famine in 1930s Ukraine, as did Mao of China in his Great Leap Forward which would have been impossible without a vast orchestration of civil society partnering. Unsurprisingly, modern Russia has learnt all such partnership lessons and applied them in Syria, and now on Ukraine. As have many dictators in Africa where there has been a rash of recent coups.

What is the mechanism for generating evil partnerships? It is always the same: using the latest technology of the day – such as drones, nowadays – and potent communication outreach – internet and social media - in our age. They meld to target the vulnerabilities of potential partners through withholding true and generating false information that breeds insecurity, fear, and the "othering" of the enemy. We fall for this methodology, again and again, in all cultures and continents.

I have talked about criminal and evil partnerships – and what we can learn from them – so as to introduce the SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions. It is the direct reverse counterpart of criminality and evil.

The wording of this goal – which takes time to discover as it needs scrolling down to Number 16 - is not particularly cohesive. It is as if the three dimensions – peace, justice, and institutions – got married together because there was no space left in the extensive overall SDG framework to give them their own goals. Having been involved somewhat in the design of the SDGs, that was indeed the case.

Of course, peace, justice, and strong institutions are inter-related but the array of their underlying 12 targets and 23 indicators take the classic silo approach. The unifying vision and energy behind this SDG are missing – apart from the platitudes. And, while many good organisations struggle on these topics, genuine and significant cross-domain partnerships are elusive.

For example, the trade-offs between justice and peace are well known. If we look at crimes against humanity including the genocides referenced earlier, we can see that the desperation for peace always trumps justice and accountability, although we know that there can be no sustainable peace without justice being done. Time and time again, we sell the victims down the road. Or console them with humanitarian aid – which is usually too little and too late. We have seen that in numerous conflicts in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. The same is true for the crime of aggression – as we currently observe in the Ukraine- Russia war.

Thus, how do we expect the scores of fragile countries affected in this way to navigate SDG 16. Especially, when even the global organisations dealing with political, humanitarian, human rights, security and development issues are in creative tension with each other. To be sure they are, in principle, pointed towards the same vision – so-eloquently touted in the UN Charter, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, of course, the SDGs. But while a shared vision is essential to create partnerships, it is often just a blanket to fudge or alibi fundamental differences which seem un-bridgeable at the current time of broken globalisation, divisive multilateralism, or rabid nationalism.

My scepticism should not be taken as a criticism of the values of partnership. Working together to achieve a collective good is self-evidently a good ideal. My concern is that, as far as SDG16 is concerned, it is very hard because of the contradictions and tensions that are in-built into this rag-bag of a goal. This also makes it difficult to determine if we have made any progress on its numerous targets.

I doubt that we have progressed much, if only for the reason of externalities. In other words, the factors that influence whether or not we get peaceful and just societies served by effective, accountable institutions that are, too often, inert to influence. How can partnership approaches shift that?

That then is the challenge to our distinguished special panel who, I hope, will prove my pessimism to be unfounded and explain, from their experience, how partnership approaches add value in advancing SDG16. I hope we shall also have time for debate and discussion. Please get your own questions ready for that.

So now, I am honoured to introduce, in their order of speaking – (you can read about their wonderful life and achievements in the bios in the programme documentation):

- Ms Aida Robbana who heads the Tunisia office of UN-Habitat
- Ms Ann Encontre who directs the Ethics Office of UNHCR in Geneva
- Mr Claus Sorensen who is senior adviser on resilience, humanitarian aid and crisis response at the Norwegian Refugee Council

- Ms Anne-Marie Buzatu who is vice president and chief operations officer at the ICT4Peace Foundation; and
- Ms Alice Laughher who is the CEO of Committed to Good.